Reflections

A Lost in Space Challenge Story for the Sci-fi Forever Forum

Written by Matthew R. White

© January 22, 2012

Based on the characters and series created by Irwin Allen

Historians Note: This story takes place a few months after the last episode of the series.

A Difficult Decision:

November 15, 2000:
In the tiny cabin he shared with his wife, Professor John Robinson composed his thoughts into his journal. With all the events that had recently transpired, this was the first entry in several days.

After several weeks of uninterrupted space flight, we once again find ourselves wrecked and marooned on another alien world. While it is still in one piece, Don and I estimate it will be several months before the Jupiter 2 can be made space worthy. Both the astrogator and the inertial dampening system were heavily damaged in the emergency landing. Besides the horrific crash after the escape from the cyborg planet, the Jupiter has not seen such damage in a very long time. As is usually the case, our reluctant stowaway, Doctor Smith, and his propensity for causing trouble, has left us to face an uncertain future. By the grace of God we all somehow managed to survive the ordeal, although Will suffered a concussion during the landing. He stayed on the upper deck to help fight the fires that had broken out. I should have ordered him below sooner, but he has contributed so much to our continued survival that I sometimes find myself forgetting that he is still only a boy. All
of our children have had to grow up much faster than they would have if we were still on Earth. As for Doctor Smith...

Maureen Robinson entered the cabin and sat down next to her husband, her head resting on his shoulders as she read his entry. John put down his pen and took his wife’s hand, kissing the top of her head.

“Poor Doctor Smith, he hasn’t eaten in two days...” she began.

“Poor Doctor Smith?” her husband interjected. “How about, poor us? Maureen, if I had one capful of deutronium for every time that Smith caused us grief with one of his back to Earth or get rich quick schemes, we’d have enough fuel to fly from Earth to Alpha Centauri three times over.”

“I know, John, he certainly does have his moments. But the last time I saw him this despondent, was when we couldn’t get that platinum ring off his neck. Will being seriously injured has shaken him to his core.”
“How is Will feeling today? I was going to look in on him earlier, but Penny said he had just gotten to sleep. I didn’t want to wake him.”

“Oh, I think he is out of the woods now,” said Maureen, with a smile. “The headache has passed, and the gash in his head seems to be healing. I think it’s safe to let him sleep through the night.”

“He’s lucky. We all were. We may not be so lucky the next time,” the Professor said, contemplating the events over the past few days. He finished the passage he was writing.

As for Doctor Smith, if it were not for the fact that this planet is still largely unknown to us, I would consider banishing him from the spaceship. Still, of all the worlds that we have visited since our departure from Earth, this one reminds us most of home.

“John, you don’t really mean that, do you?” asked his wife, as he closed the journal.

“I just don’t know, Maureen. I’m tired of making excuses for Smith’s selfish behavior. So is Don.”
“I know. I heard him discussing it with Judy when I brought them some coffee. Right now, Don would march Doctor Smith into oblivion.”

Robinson took his wife into his arms. “Maybe Don is right this time. Smith has to realize that he is going to be held accountable for his actions.”

“Don’t let Judy hear you say that,” Maureen said, wryly. “She and Don had words over the subject. In fact, it’s the first time in quite a while since I’ve seen them argue.”

Professor Robinson was torn over what to do next. He knew that Smith was not capable of surviving on his own and regardless of what he had done, his wife and family would somehow find it in their hearts to forgive him.

“I’m not going to make this decision without a family meeting on the subject. I do, however, intend to make Smith accept responsibility for his actions. If he stays, his days of goldbricking are over. Our dear Doctor Smith is going to have to start pulling his weight around here.”

Maureen drew her husband closer and looked up into his hazel eyes. “John, in twenty three years of
marriage, I’ve never known you to be unfair to anyone. I’ll support whatever decision you make.”

John tightened his embrace, thinking how blessed he was. “Have I ever told you how lucky I am to have to have such a caring and supportive partner?”

“I think you may have mentioned it once or twice, but it’s okay if you tell me again,” she said, reaching to hug his neck.

“I could just show you,” he replied, drawing her into a deep kiss.

**Love on the Rocks:**

On the upper deck of the *Jupiter 2*, Major Donald West was verifying the hand written damage report with the main computer readout. It had taken him and John most of the day to get the auxiliary power units running, providing heat, light, and electricity to the crippled spaceship. As he read the damage assessment, Penny ascended the elevator and walked onto the upper deck.

“How’s it going, Don?”
West looked up from his work at the pilot’s seat. “Oh, hi Penny, I didn’t hear you come in. To answer your question, it’s still going slow. The Jupiter took quite a beating. I’m afraid it’s going to be a while before we can lift off.”

Penny looked out the main viewport at the open field where the ship had landed. In the foreground, a grove of trees that could pass for oaks could be seen within a few hundred yards of the spaceship. A snow covered mountain range rose behind the tree line, adding a dramatic flair to the already picturesque vista. Penny could have easily believed that she was somewhere in the Midwest, if not for some of the strange animal life they had encountered.

“At least this planet isn’t as barren as some of the worlds we have visited. In fact, it’s very beautiful, almost like Earth.”

Outside the ship, Penny saw her sister, Judy, working in the hydroponic garden. Her mother had not yet been able to test the native soil for planting suitability, but Penny was sure that they would soon be able to grow a real garden, just like home.
“I’m surprised Judy isn’t helping you, Don. I could take over for her in the garden if you like to spend some time with her?”

“Thanks, Penny, but Judy isn’t speaking to me right now,” said Don, the frustration evident in his voice.

“Mom said that the two of you had a fight.”

West nodded, “Your sister thinks I’m being too hard on Doctor Smith. She heard me when I told your father that I was going to march him into exile.”

Penny looked at him, questioningly, “You wouldn’t really do that to him, Don. I know you wouldn’t.”

“You know, Penny, this time I think I would. Your brother could have been killed,” he said, looking out the viewport. “We all could have.”

Penny noticed that he was watching Judy’s every move. When Judy turned back to the ship, he looked down, but when Penny looked back outside, she could see tears in her sister’s eyes.

“You should go out and talk to her, Don,” she added.

“What’s the point? She’ll just defend Smith again.”
“This really isn’t about Doctor Smith, is it,” Penny said, a statement rather than a question.

Don was used to the forthrightness of the younger Robinson daughter, but her insight caught him off guard.

“What makes you say that?”

“Everyone knows that you and Judy are in love,” she answered. “Since the two of you haven’t done anything about it yet, there has to be a reason.”

When Don didn’t answer, Penny continued, “Judy told me that you both were going to wait until we reached Alpha Centauri before you got married.”

“Yeah, that’s right,” said Don. “But there’s more. I probably shouldn’t tell you this, but I think I can trust you to keep a secret. There is a reason Judy and I promised your Mom and Dad that we would wait until we settled on Alpha Prime. They were afraid that if we got married now, Judy would end up pregnant and they have enough to worry about without having to worry about space travel affecting their unborn grandchild.”
“I thought so,” she said. “You and Judy want to be together, and every time Doctor Smith causes a problem, it pushes that day even further away. It’s easy to see why you are so frustrated with him.”

“I wish Judy could see that.”

“Maybe she needs to hear it from you.”

“You know, Penny, you could be...hey, where is she?” asked Don, concern evident in his voice. Out the viewport, Judy was nowhere to be seen.

“She was just there a few minutes ago.”

“Go get your father, I’ll check around the back of the ship.”

While Penny went below, Don quickly searched the immediate area surrounding the Jupiter. But Judy was nowhere to be found and his concern deepened.

As he rounded the front of the ship, John, Maureen, and Penny, trotted out the hatch and down the ramp.

“Did you find her, Don?” asked Maureen.
West shook his head, “I don’t get it. She was just in the garden five minutes ago.”

“Judy knows better than to just run off without telling us,” said Maureen. “This isn’t like her at all.”

“Break out the lasers, and get Smith,” said John. He turned to his wife. “Don’t worry, darling. She couldn’t have gone too far, we’ll find her.”

As inviting as the serine vista seemed to be, John knew that they were still on an unexplored and potentially hostile planet. They would all have to be extra vigilant.

“Self recrimination is counterproductive, Doctor Smith,” the Robot said, in another effort to pull him out of his deepening depression. “Will Robinson is going to make a full recovery. He even asked about you earlier.”

In his cabin, Zachary Smith had isolated himself from the rest of the crew, fully expecting that Major West would soon make good on his threat to march him into exile. The meal that Maureen Robinson had left him was hardly touched.
“Oh, spare me your pointless platitudes, the Major is right,” said Smith. “I’ve been nothing but a burden to this expedition. I almost caused the demise of my beloved friend, William.”

“Come now, Doctor Smith. You have made some positive contributions to the well being of the Robinson family...”

“Give me just one example, you nameless ninny.”

Before the Robot could answer, the cabin door slid open and Don appeared in the doorway. He had a laser rifle slung over his shoulder.

“I see you are here to march me into oblivion, Major. The weapon is unnecessary. I will go by my own accord. As you can see, I am packed and ready to go,” said Smith, pointing to the duffle on the floor.

“Never mind that now, Smith, Judy is missing and we’ve only got an hour of daylight left to find her. We need you to help with the search.”

When the weight of what Don had said hit him, Doctor Smith became even more despondent.

“Oh dear, what have I done. Poor Judith, devoured by monsters, it’s all my fault...”
“Knock it off, Smith,” said West. “Get up to the control room and report to John.”

“Yes, yes, of course. Never fear, Smith is here,” he said, but his statement lacked the usual flair.

“Robot, we’ll probably need your tracking sensors.”

“Affirmative, Major West,” replied the Robot as he joined Smith at the elevator.

Don would never admit it, but Doctor Smith had unwittingly vocalized his worse fears.

When they had assembled on the upper deck, John quickly briefed the search team.

“We’ll split up,” he began. “Smith, you and the robot will take the wooded area just west of the ship. Don and I will check the foothills to the east. We all stay in radio contact with the ship. Robot, if you find anything on your sensors, let us know by radio.”

“Understood, Professor Robinson.”

Robinson turned to face his wife, “Maureen, once we are clear, activate the force field, just to be safe.”

“All right, John. Be careful.”
She reached up and briefly met his lips with hers.

“Let’s go,” he said, as he led them out the hatch.

Maureen watched them trudge off and switched on the power to the force field. The low hum served as a reminder that, in spite of the peaceful surroundings, both she and the ones she cared about were very much at the mercy of whatever hidden dangers this alien planet held.

Twenty minutes later, the Robot stopped, his Plexiglas sensor dome, snapping to attention. “My sensors indicate that Miss Judy passed through this area within the hour.”

“Are you sure?” asked Smith.

“Affirmative, Doctor Smith. I would suggest that you call Professor Robinson on the radio and notify him.”

“Yes, of course.”

Smith ineptly extended the antenna and fumbled with the tuning dial. “Professor Robinson, Professor Robinson, please come in. This is Doctor Smith.”
Robinson and West had climbed to a ridge that overlooked the shallow valley that was to be their home for the next several months. From that vantage point, he scanned the area with a pair of high power field glasses.

“I don’t think she came this way, John. That was a rough climb,” said West. “See anything?”

“No, nothing. This ridge runs to the north of the ship. There is a small lake south of the Jupiter, just beyond that grove of trees. Let’s try searching down there.”

“All right, but we’re losing the light fast, John. It will be dark by the time we get down there.”

“I know, I wonder how Smith is making out...”

The radio on John’s belt began to beep.

“Speak the Devil’s name,” said West.

Professor Robinson extended the antenna and opened the receiver.

“...please come in. This is Doctor Smith.”

“Smith, this is Robinson. Send your message.”
“Oh, Professor, thank goodness. Miss Judy has been through this way.”

“What is your position?”

There was a brief pause and the voice of the Robot came over the radio.

“We are approximately two miles west of the Jupiter 2, bearing 265 degrees. My sensors indicate that Judy Robinson passed this way less than an hour ago.”

“All right, we’re about forty minutes from your position. Continue searching the area.”

John retracted the antenna, “We can stop by the ship and grab a pair of flashlights on the way. It will be dark soon.”

Judy found herself mesmerized by the alien sunset as it was, by far, the most beautiful she had seen in almost four years. The sun was bisected by the tree line and the last vestiges of full sun reflected off the stream that ran across the open field, winding its way from the cliffs to the north. It flowed southwestward, eventually joining the natural lake to
the south of the Jupiter. *I wish Don was here to share this with me.* She shook the thought from her head when she remembered that she was still angry with the volatile Major West.

She took one last look at the view before she turned to head back to the ship.

“I’ve been gone way too long,” she said to herself. “Mom and Dad are going to be very upset.”

Judy quickened her pace as she reached the thick wooded area that separated her from the camp. It was much darker in the thickness of the forest and Judy found herself wishing for a flashlight.

*I hope I can find my way back...*

Her thoughts were interrupted when she ran headlong into a sticky web like structure. “This wasn’t here earlier,” she said aloud, as she tried to free herself from the entanglement. She felt, rather than heard a presence behind her. When she turned to look, she let out a blood curdling scream.

Never Fear, Smith is Here:
Smith and the Robot had continued to follow the path through the woods, although he had stopped to rest at a fallen tree. “I simply must rest for a moment.”

“Very well, Doctor Smith,” the Robot answered. “But only for a moment. Until we have surveyed the area, we should exercise...”

The rest of the Robot’s sentence was drowned out by a desperate scream.

“Good Heavens! That sounded like Judy,” said Smith.

“It was! Warning, warning! My sensors indicate that Miss Judy is in extreme danger! This way Doctor Smith,” said the Robot, as he moved down the path at full tilt.

“Wait for me, you bumbling bird brain!”

Ignoring Doctor Smith’s insults, the Robot rounded the corner made by a large tree trunk and spotted Judy Robinson caught in a giant spider web. Behind her, the large, arachnid like creature was slowly approaching. At four feet across, it was nowhere near the size of the giant spider, once held by the Keeper,
but the Robot knew that this specimen could easily kill a human with its venom.

“Miss Judy, don’t struggle. Any movement will draw the spider’s attention. Quickly Doctor Smith, your laser pistol. I cannot engage my defensive systems without hitting Miss Judy.”

Smith ran up next to the Robot, “I can’t do it. I’ll hit poor Judy...”

“Yes, you can,” the Robot encouraged. “Take the weapon in both hands, aim, and fire. Hurry, Doctor Smith, the spider is getting closer.”

Smith took up the weapon, remembering that he wasn’t always so inept. He took careful aim at the creature as it raised up on its hind legs to strike.

“Now, Doctor Smith!”

Smith pulled the trigger and the laser caught the spider in the thorax. The large arachnid fell over, on its back, a few feet from the web.

“Good shooting, Doctor Smith. I didn’t know you had it in you,” said the Robot.

Smith holstered the weapon and rounded the tree.
“Judy, my dear, are you all right?”

“Yes, thank you, Doctor Smith. I’m so glad to see you,” said the visibly relieved young woman. “And you too, Robot.”

“You’re quite welcome, Miss Judy. I too, am greatly relieved to see you safe. Your family as well as Major West, have been very worried about you,” the Robot replied.

While they chatted, Doctor Smith managed to free her arms and torso from the web. He was working on getting her legs free when John and Don arrived.

“Judy!” said Professor Robinson, as he took his oldest daughter in his arms.

“Oh Daddy, it was horrible. If it wasn’t for Doctor Smith and the Robot, I would have been a meal for the spider.”

Professor Robinson looked down at the arachnid that Smith had dispatched with the laser. He barely managed to repress a shudder.

“Doctor Smith?” asked West. The sarcasm in his voice was not lost on Judy. Her anger with the Major resurfaced. “Yes, Doctor Smith. He saved my life,
Don. Do you still want to banish him from the camp?”

“Never mind that now, Judy,” her father interjected. “Let’s get you freed so we can get back to the ship. You’re mother is worried sick.”

“I’m sorry Daddy...”

“We’ll talk about it later. Smith, radio the *Jupiter 2* and tell Maureen that we found Judy, and we will be returning to camp shortly.”

As Smith spoke to Mrs. Robinson, John and Don freed Judy from the web. Although she was still upset with Don, she whole-heartedly returned his embrace when he took her in his arms.

“Not mad at me anymore?” he asked.

“I’m still upset about this afternoon. But I’ll talk to you later. I promise.”

Judy took her father’s side on the trek back to the ship. Bringing up the rear, Don watched the two of them converse. *Guess I’m still in the doghouse*, he thought. *Just like Smith.*
“You’re angry with me, aren’t you?” she asked her father, as they walked back to the ship.

“No, Judy, I’m not angry,” said Professor Robinson. “Surprised, and disappointed would be more precise.”

*Disappointed*, she thought, “I think I’d rather you be angry,” she said aloud.

They walked in silence for a bit. Behind them, Doctor Smith had begun to complain about his delicate back, but the barbs from Major West were noticeably absent.

“Judy, I expect things like this from Will, and sometimes even Penny, but you? I would have never imagined you running off like this. What were you thinking?”

“Dad, I never meant to make anyone worry. Don and I had an argument early this afternoon while I was helping him in the control room.”

“Yes, your mother told me. It seems that the curse of Doctor Smith has struck again.”
“It’s not his fault, Dad. Don threatened to march him into exile. Regardless of what he has done, he’s still a human being.”

“We’ll talk about Doctor Smith, later. Tell me why you ran off without telling us you were leaving.”

“I went out to work in the garden and every time I’d look up, Don would be watching me. It was either run to him, or take a walk, so, I took a walk. I never intended to stray this far from the ship.”

John remembered a few arguments he had with Maureen over the years, and how it affected him. He understood what his daughter was dealing with.

“I know better than this, Dad, I should have told someone where I was going. It’s just,” she paused to gather her thoughts. “It’s just that...I didn’t want to face Don. Besides, this planet is so much like home.”

“The woods of home aren’t infested with four foot spiders. We have to be careful or we could all be lulled into a false sense of security. I think we learned that lesson this evening.” The Professor paused for a beat. “Don was really worried about you.”
“I know, the way he hugged me back there said more than words could ever express. I promised him we’d talk later.”

When they arrived back at the campsite Maureen looked as if she was ready to read out her oldest daughter, but after exchanging an unreadable glance with her husband, she softened her look.

“Judy, I’m so glad that you’re safe,” she said, embracing her daughter.

As her mother and sister listened, Judy recounted the tale of her encounter with the giant spider. Residue from the web was still adhered to her hair and clothing.

“Mother, I’m so sorry for making you worry,” she finished.

“Well, you’re safe now. Come on inside, I’ll help you get cleaned up. Come on Penny, I could use your help too.”

“Okay, Mom,” she answered, as they strode up the ramp to the interior of the ship.
Professor Robinson watched them walk away before he turned to Smith.

“You saved my daughter’s life this evening, Doctor Smith. For that, I’m very grateful.”

“Believe me, Professor Robinson. I would never want to see anything happen to your children...”

“Then why do you insist on...” Robinson stopped himself, realizing that he was raising his voice. “Forgive me. I’m not acting very grateful, now am I?”

“I know that I’ve caused you and your family nothing but trouble. Whatever punishment you have in mind for me is more than justified, Professor,” said the despondent Doctor Smith.

“That’s the first true statement I’ve ever heard you make, Smith,” quipped the Major.

“Knock it off, Don,” said the Professor, obviously irritated. “To be honest with you, Doctor Smith, I don’t know what to do with you. But I won’t forget what you did tonight when I do make my decision.”

“You are a fair man, Professor,” Smith said, as he retreated into the ship.
Robinson watched the hapless man walk into the *Jupiter*, still very much torn about what he should about the situation.

“Wait a minute, John. Don’t tell me that you’re going to let Smith slide again, are you?”

John turned to face his friend, “Maybe you weren’t listening, Don.” There was both anger and frustration in his voice. Before he said something that he would regret, John turned and walked up the ramp into the ship. West shrugged his shoulders and went back to work on the force field.

Later that evening, after they had eaten, Professor Robinson gathered his family, and Major West, around the outdoor table to discuss the problem of Doctor Smith. Will, who had not left his bed in three days, was getting his first look at their new, albeit, temporary home.

“... and there is a stream that flows into a lake, just south of the ship,” Penny was telling her brother. “We can go swimming, and fishing and...”
“Now just hold on, you two,” interjected the Professor. “We still need to determine if it is safe. And until Don and I finish that task, nobody, and I mean nobody, is to go near the water. Besides, we still have a lot of work to do here. Tomorrow, I want to start drilling the artesian well and pipe it into the ship’s water purification system. The hole also needs to be dug for the septic system...”

“I can do that, Dad,” said Will. He had dug the hole on the first two planets that they had been stranded on.

“No, Son,” interjected John. “You suffered a moderate concussion during the crash. You are to consider yourself on light duty for the next few weeks. Don has some circuit boards from the navigation system that need to be reworked. If your mother approves, and if you are feeling up to it, you can help Don in the control room.”

“But Dad, I’m fine. It won’t...”

“You heard me, William.”

Will knew that arguing further would be pointless. “Yes, sir,” he said, in resignation.
John stood from the table and faced his family.

“While we are on the subject of orders, I have another, and this goes for everyone. No one is to leave the camp area alone, for any reason. If we need to venture beyond the immediate area, we will do so in pairs. Robot, that will be your responsibility.”

“Understood, Professor Robinson, I will make sure that all personnel comply with your instructions.”

“Now, until we have a better idea of the hidden dangers this planet has to offer, no one leaves the camp unarmed. Will, Penny, that includes both of you as well. I think you are both old enough to handle a weapon safely.”

“I don’t like guns, besides, Will has much more experience with the lasers than I do,” Penny said.

“Yes, Penny, I know,” said the Professor. “If we were on Earth, this wouldn’t be a problem. But regardless of how much this planet may remind us of home, this isn’t Earth. Peril could be lurking around every corner, just like Judy found out this evening.”
“John, aren’t you going a little overboard here?” asked Don. “I mean, we’ve survived on planets much more hostile than this one.”

“Yes, we have. But until now, every planet we have spent any amount of time on has been very alien in appearance. The flora, the landscape, the smells, everything that assailed our senses reminded us that we were in uncharted territory. Now, we find ourselves in a valley that could easily be somewhere in the American Midwest. The trees, the grass, even some of the animal life we’ve seen could be found on Earth.”

“I suppose you’re right,” said the Major. “Being up on that ridge today, it reminded me of Colorado.”

“Exactly my point,” continued Robinson. “Until we learn our environment, we need to be extra careful. Judy, tomorrow, I want you to familiarize your sister with the hand lasers. Make sure that she is comfortable handling and firing the weapon.”

“I will, Dad. Don’t worry, Penny. I’ll have you outshooting Will in no time,” said Judy, giving her brother a wink.

“That ‘ill be the day,” responded Will, playing along.
“Oh yeah, I’ll see you on the shooting range, Will Robinson,” Penny said, defiantly.

“Before we get into that,” interjected the Professor, “we need to discuss Doctor Smith.”

“Oh, Dad, you’re not really considering banishing him, are you?” asked Penny.

Robinson lowered his eyes, “As much as I’m ashamed to admit it, I did seriously consider it. But your mother and Judy are right. Regardless of what he has done, he is still a human being.”

“I see where this is going,” said Don. “Smith skates away scot-free, again. You know, once, just once, I’d like to see him answer for his actions.”

“Don!” Judy cried out.

“Oh, Don, you can’t stay angry with him forever,” said Maureen, in her voice of reason. “In fact, I think you still haven’t thanked him for saving Judy’s life. It seems to me that you owe Doctor Smith just as much as she does.”

Don deflated, “You’ve got a point, Maureen. I guess I do owe him for that.”
“Trust me, Don. Doctor Smith is not going to skate from this one,” continued the Professor.

“What did you have in mind, John?”

It was Maureen that asked the question, for once uncharacteristically unable to read her husband. The warmth in his smile gave her much needed reassurance. While the group listened, Professor Robinson laid out his plan.

Forgiveness:

“Doctor Smith, a responsible member of the Jupiter 2 crew? You’re joking, right, John?”

“No, I’m not. You see, Don, Smith’s life, as he knew it, ended the day the Jupiter took off from Earth. He’s become a man without a purpose. I intend to give him a purpose.”

“I don’t know. I’m still convinced that Smith was behind the Robot going berserk just after lift-off. He told Will that he went below to adjust the helium/nitrogen mixture, but that valve is on the upper deck. Just before we ran into that derelict ship, I had pulled the mission records. Smith’s name
wasn’t on the authorized checkout list. He had no business even being aboard.”

“Well, that may be, but that was over three years ago. As they say, Major, a lot of water has passed under the dam since then.”

“I hope you are right about this, John.”

“Time will tell,” said the Professor. He looked around the table, seeing nods of approval from his family. “Well, it’s late and we all have a lot of work to do tomorrow. I suggest we turn in.”


“I’ll be along in a bit, Mother. I need to talk to Don for a few minutes.”

“Well, don’t stay up too late.”

Judy sat back down at the table across from Don.

“Are you still angry with me?” he finally asked.

“Don, I was never really angry with you, but I was upset. I still am.” She paused for a few moments to collect her thoughts. “I can’t believe that you would
turn Doctor Smith out, especially after he saved your life last year. Maybe that didn’t mean anything to you, but it meant a hell of lot to me.”

“But Judy…”

“Maybe that’s the problem with us, Don, maybe I don’t mean that much to you.”

“How can you say that?” asked Don, clearly upset. “How could you even think it?”

Judy knew that her words had hurt him, and she didn’t want to hurt him. But she was no longer sure where they stood. It was time to force the issue.

“All I can tell you, is I wouldn’t treat someone who had saved the love of my life, like you treat Doctor Smith.”

Don went to speak again, but stopped himself as he realized the point she was trying to make. Judy had practically waited on Smith hand and foot for a week when they returned from capping the volcano. When questioned about it, she told him that she was grateful to Smith for saving the one she loved. And I haven’t as much as thanked him, he thought. Don lowered his eyes in shame.
“I think I’m beginning to see your point. I did owe Smith my life that day and I guess I do again. I love you, Judy, I couldn’t live without you. This afternoon, I didn’t want to let you go.”

She reached out and took his hand, “I know. It’s been a long time since you held me like that. I was beginning to wonder if you still cared.”

“You know that I do.”

She squeezed his hand, “I just wish you wouldn’t get so angry with Doctor Smith. It scares me, Don.”

He looked up at her in shock. It had never crossed his mind that she would ever be afraid of him.

“Judy, you don’t think for a moment that I would…”

“No, I’m not afraid of you ever hurting me. But one day you are going to lose your temper with him and do something you’ll regret later. I am afraid of what that will do to you, or to us.”

“It’s not even about Smith,” he added. “Every time it seems like we are finally back on course and on our way to our new life together, someone throws a monkey wrench in the works...”
“And that someone is usually, Doctor Smith,” Judy finished for him. “It frustrates me as well, Don. Promise me that you won’t allow your anger with him dictate your actions.”

“You’re asking a lot, but, I’ll try.”

They sat in silence for a while, holding hands and looking up at the stars. Without industrial or light pollution, the band of the Milky Way could be very clearly seen, but the stars and constellations were all out of place from the way they would be seen on Earth. He rose from the table, never letting go of her hand and sat down beside her. She leaned back into his chest and he wrapped his arms around her, both of them continuing to look up at the stars.

“Judy, we’re going to be on this planet for quite a while. Your father told us all at least six months, but the truth is, with the damage I found today, we have at least year’s worth of work ahead of us.”

“Do my parents know, yet?” she asked.

“No, I was going to tell John in the morning. Your mother and he were so relieved to find you safe. I didn’t want to spoil it for them.”
“God, another year, plus two more to get to Alpha Centauri, by the time we get there, I’ll be twenty five. And that’s assuming that we don’t run into anymore mishaps.”

“With Smith onboard...sorry, I shouldn’t have said that,” he said. She squeezed his hand, letting him know that she understood. “Well, I have two things to do tomorrow morning, apologize to Smith, and ask your father to marry us...”

Judy sat up and spun around, “Oh, Don, are you sure?”

“I don’t want to wait anymore for a day that might never come, that is, if you’ll still have this hot-headed space pilot.”

“There was never any question about that, Major West.” She threw her arms around him and kissed him deeply.

The couple rose from the table and walked into the ship, hand in hand, the hatch closing behind them.

“My place, tonight,” said Don as they walked onto the elevator.

“All right, as soon as I’m sure that Penny is asleep.”
It had been some time since she and Don had cuddled together. Privacy was a premium on the Jupiter 2 and the only time they could be truly alone was after everyone else had gone to sleep. She was looking forward to reconnecting with him.

The middle aged USAF Colonel, removed the programming tape from the environmental control robot and replaced it with the one he had in the pocket of his jump suit. Once the tape was installed, he walked over to the programming station and retrieved the automated being’s power pack.

Quickly he returned to the robot and installed the power pack into the slot on the side of the mechanical man. The Colonel pushed the buttons on the front panel, loading the new programming into the robot’s memory banks.

Walking back to the programming panel, he waited for the program load complete indicator to light. With a show of flourish, he activated the robot power circuit, bringing the mechanical being online.
“At exactly launch plus eight hours, inertial navigation system, destroy. Cabin pressure control system, destroy. Radio transmitter, destroy.”

Colonel Zachary Smith nodded in satisfaction as the robot correctly recited its change in programming. Smith turned from the programming panel and started towards the elevator when a light shined in his face, blinding him.

“No.....”

Doctor Smith bolted up in bed, screaming from the nightmare he had just experienced. He soon realized that he was in the safety of his cabin aboard the Jupiter 2.

“Oh good heavens,” he said to himself. “What a dreadful nightmare.”

A knock on his door caused him to jump, “I’m innocent!”

“Doctor Smith?” The cabin door opened revealing a worried Professor Robinson. “Maureen and I heard you scream out. Are you all right?”
“Yes, thank you, and your dear wife, for your concern. It was a nightmare, nothing more, I assure you. I apologize if I woke you.”

“That’s quite all right. I’ll see you in the morning.”

“Thank you, Professor.”

As the Professor closed the door the Smith’s cabin, Don and Judy met him in the common area.

“Everything okay, John?”

“I think so. It looks like Smith had a nightmare. What are you two doing up?”

“We heard Doctor Smith scream,” said Judy. “It was enough to wake the dead.”

“Is Penny still asleep?” asked John, noticing that their cabin door was still closed.

“I think so.”

“Well, I’m going back to bed, good night.”

“Good night, Dad.”

“Good night, John.”
Professor Robinson retreated to his cabin and closed the door. Judy and Don walked back to the open door but Judy stopped at the cabin she shared with her sister.

“I’d better say good night too, Don. See you in the morning?”

“Of course. Good night, Judy. I love you,” said Don, just before he gently kissed her.

Judy hugged him briefly before entering her cabin. To her surprise, and relief, her sister was still fast asleep. As much as she wanted to stay with Don, she suspected that her father had surmised that she had been in his cabin.

Outside the door, Don returned to his own room saying quietly to himself, “Smith must hate me. That’s all there is to it.”

John and Maureen were up early, that morning. After making coffee, they sat in the galley, engaged in serious conversation.
“All right, John, talk to me. After you came back to bed last night, you tossed and turned all night. What’s bothering you?”

“I’m not sure, darling, but I think Judy was with Don in his cabin last night.”

“What leads you to think that?” she asked, seeming more curious than concerned.

“When Smith cried out, she showed up at the same time Don did. I asked her if Penny was still asleep and she said that she thought so, but the way she responded seemed evasive.”

“I still have trouble thinking of Judy as anything but a child, but the truth is, dear, she’s a grown woman.”

“Yes, I know, both her and Don are adults, but I was under the impression that they were going to wait until we settled on Alpha Prime.”

“Could it be that you are still an over protective father who’s not ready to lose his little girl?”

“That’s highly possible,” John admitted. “If we had returned to Earth, two years ago, she and Don would be already married.”
“And we’d probably be grandparents,” Maureen added. “Maybe that’s what you’re worried about.”

“I’ll have you know, my dear, that you look much too young to be a grandmother.”

“Why, Professor Robinson,” she said, with a southern flair. “I do declare, was that a compliment?”

“Absolutely,” he said, reaching to kiss her.

“While Judy and I are cleaning up the galley later, I’ll ask her about last night,” Maureen said.

“I’d like to be there…”

“Sorry, John, this will be girl talk. No men allowed,” she said, giving her husband a wry grin.

Don West sat up in his bunk after a night of restless sleep. After he and Judy had parted company, he found that he could not quiet his mind. The events, of the previous day, left him troubled and sleep would not come. I still have to thank Smith, he thought.
Steeling himself, he exited his cabin and made his way to the good Doctor’s cabin. In the galley, John and Maureen were engaged in quiet conversation.

“Morning,” he said, as he knocked on Smith’s door.

“Yes,” spoke the disembodied voice.

“Smith, it’s West. May I see you a moment.”

“Come in, Major.”

When Don opened the door, he expected to see Smith still in bed. But much to Don’s surprise, Smith was fully dressed, sitting up on his bunk. From the look on his face, the Major was sure that Smith had not slept any better than he did.

“I’m ready when you are,” Smith said.

“That’s not why I’m here, Doctor Smith.” West paused, collecting his thoughts. “Once again, it seems that I find myself in your debt.”

“Whatever do you mean, Major?”

“Yesterday afternoon, well, you...you saved Judy’s life. I never thanked you for that.”

Smith seemed unmoved, “Trust me, Major. I was not thinking of you when I came to the aid of that sweet
young lady. I would not have been able to live with myself, had not tried to prevent her demise in such a horrible way.”

This isn’t easy, thought West. Baring his soul, to the likes of Smith, was not something that he relished, especially when it concerned his feelings towards Judy Robinson.

“I don’t think you understand, Doctor Smith, Judy means a great deal to me. I can’t even think about my life without her in it.”

“I see,” Smith replied. “If it is any consolation, Major, the young lady’s life seems to be brightened by your presence as well. For the life of me, I have no idea why. Love is truly blind, but who am I to argue. Clearly, should the two of you ever decide to wed, you will be getting the better part of the bargain.”

“I won’t argue with you there, Doctor Smith. Maybe John is right after all. This is twice in one week that you and I have agreed. It’s scary, isn’t it?”

“Ghastly, would be more accurate,” said Smith.

“Look, Smith, you and I will probably never see, eye to eye, but I wanted you to know that I am grateful to
you for what you did.” Major West extended his hand.

Zachary Smith softened his look as he shook hands with West. “You’re welcome, Major West.”

“John and Maureen, would like to see you before breakfast,” said Don, as he turned to leave.

“Of course, please tell them that I will be along in a few minutes.”

A New Beginning:

Outside of Smith’s cabin, Judy waited for Don to emerge. When he exited, she pulled him into her embrace and gently kissed him on the lips.

“Good morning,” said Don, somewhat uncomfortable with the open display of affection in front of her parents. “What was that for?”

“I heard most of what you said to Doctor Smith. I’m very proud of you, Don. I know that wasn’t easy for you.”

“No, it wasn’t. What you said last night, it got me thinking. I do owe Smith my life, and even though I
can’t guarantee that he won’t get under my skin on occasion, for your sake I should try to be decent to him.”

“Donald West, I love you,” said Judy, pulling him in for a long deep kiss.

“Judy…your parents…”

“I don’t care,” she said, opening the distance between them a tad. “I’m tired of hiding how I feel about you, Don. I’ve decided I’m not doing it anymore.”

“In that case, we should have a talk with them.”

Across the deck, John and Maureen had witnessed the exchange between the Major and their oldest daughter. As they approached the table, John turned to his wife saying, “Here it comes.”

John Robinson found his feelings very much in conflict as Donald West had become a trusted confidant and close friend. In the three year odyssey they had endured together, the two men had saved each other’s lives, several times over. He would trust him with his life, or the life of his family without
reservation or question. Professor Robinson knew that he could not ask for a better life mate to care for his first born daughter.

As a father, he saw a man who was going to take his little girl away, and somehow that fact seemed to mitigate all of the good qualities that Don possessed. It was the bane of any man who had been blessed with daughters.

“John, Maureen? Judy and I have something we would like to discuss with you.”

Before Robinson could answer, the door opened to Smith’s cabin and the good Doctor made a beeline towards the group.

Saved, by Doctor Smith, thought Robinson, privately amused by the irony.

“I have a feeling that I know where this is going. Why don’t we sit down after breakfast?” asked John.

Don and Judy exchanged an unreadable look, but offered no resistance.

“Sure, John,” said West.
“Oh, Don, while Maureen and I are talking to Doctor Smith, would you grab the damage report? I’d like to go over it with you while we eat.”

“All right.”

“I’ll walk up with you, Don,” Judy added.

As Don and Judy walked to the elevator, Smith sat down across from the Robinsons.

“Coffee, Doctor Smith?” asked Maureen.

“Yes, please, dear lady.”

“Well, Doctor Smith,” began the Professor. “It seems, despite your propensity for causing trouble, my family and I can’t find it in our hearts to turn you out. I think Megazor once called it, a human defect.”

Smith’s façade brightened, “You mean...you’re not going to send me away?”

“No, Doctor Smith,” Maureen said, her voice filled with sincerity. “We’re not.”

“But,” the Professor added, “That doesn’t mean that things are going to stay the way they were. There are going to be some changes around here, beginning with your status.”
“I’m afraid I don’t follow you, Professor Robinson.”

“In my mission logs, I had you listed as a stowaway. And, for the most part, that is the way Major West and I have treated you. As of today, that is going to change. Now, how you came to be trapped on board is still somewhat of a mystery, and the explanation you gave Don and I, about the helium/nitrogen valve adjustment, doesn’t add up. Nevertheless, our encounter with the time merchant proved that your presence onboard saved all our lives.”

Smith smiled wanly, “It would seem, Professor, any contribution I have given to this mission has been by accident.”

“Now, Doctor Smith, don’t be so hard on yourself,” said Maureen. “As difficult as it has been, you have become part of our family, just like Don and the Robot.”

Smith seemed to be genuinely moved, “Do you really mean that? Oh, dear, I think I’m going to cry.”

“You might want to wait until you hear the rest,” said John. “As a full-fledged member of this crew, you are going to have responsibilities. The Jupiter 2 sustained very heavy damage in the crash landing.
To get her space worthy is going to take the combined effort of her entire crew. I don’t have to tell you what that means.”

“Yes, manual labor,” said Smith. “My delicate back will never be the same, but, manual labor is much more preferable than the alternative.”

“Not everything that needs to be done is back breaking work,” said John. “Maureen and the girls could use your help in the garden, as well as the galley. And you have a unique talent that we seemed to have overlooked. You are a trained physician, are you not?”

Smith recalled his shady past and his grades in medical school that had been less than stellar. But, despite his mediocre classroom performance, his skills in the surgical suite had been praised by his peers. Had he not chosen to pursue psychiatry, he had been told that he would have made an excellent surgeon.

“I am Professor Robinson, although, my specialty was space psychiatry. My medical skills are somewhat rusty.”
“In that case, I would suggest that you spend some of your free time in medical study. Maureen is trained as a paramedic, but we both would be more comfortable letting a trained surgeon handle any real medical emergencies.”

“I understand,” said Smith. “Professor Robinson, Mrs. Robinson, I do appreciate the second chance you have given me, but the cold truth is, I am a greedy and selfish individual. In a few weeks, the memory of Will being injured will fade away. I can see myself going back to the miserable wretch of a person that I truly am.”

This time Maureen spoke, “Oh, Doctor Smith, our faith teaches us that we are all imperfect and not one of us is worthy of standing before God.”

“And I am the least worthy of all...”

“Now, wait a second, Doctor Smith,” interjected the Professor. “For a man to admit his flaws to others takes a lot of courage. To want to institute a change for the better, takes even more. But a journey of a thousand miles begins with the first step. I think you took the first step today.”
“Professor Robinson, you and your lovely wife have much more faith in me than I deserve, and for your sakes, I will try to mend my ways.”

The cabin doors began to open, and Will and Penny joined the group at the table.

“There you are, my dears,” said Maureen, to the two children. “Breakfast is ready. Penny, would you run up to the flight deck and get Don and Judy?”

“Sure Mom.”

As they finished their breakfast, Major West reviewed the damage report with the Professor.

“The portside thruster controls are damaged, John. We are going to have to tear each one of them down and rebuild them. That’s six week’s worth of work alone.”

John shook his head, “So we are stuck here for at least eight months. How’s the fuel status?”

“That is the good news. We still have sixty percent of our reserves. If I had to guess, I’d say we are coming into late spring on this planet, which should
minimize the drain on the systems, that is, until the warm weather comes.”

“Well, it could be worse. At least we have water and food close by…”

“There is one other item, John. The ATD Field Generator was severely damaged. I don’t need to remind you about the last time it failed, do I?”

“I remember it well, Major West. We ended up on Earth in the year 1947.”

The ATD, or Anti-Time Dilation Field Generator, allowed the *Jupiter 2* to travel at relativistic speeds, without suffering the effects of time dilation. Without it, time passage aboard the ship would slow to a stop, as the ship approached the speed of light, effectively causing the ship to travel forward in time. Exceeding the speed of light would have the opposite effect.

“How long will it take to repair, Don?” asked Maureen.

“Three months, that is assuming we can repair the damaged components. If we have to fabricate new parts, it could take over a year.”
A hush fell over the group as they all came to grips with the idea that they weren’t going anywhere for a while. It was Penny, who broke the silence.

“I could get used to living here. It’s the most beautiful planet that we have seen since leaving Earth.”

“Sure, Penny is right,” added Will. “This planet is very much like Alpha Centauri is supposed to be. Maybe we should just settle here.”


“Yeah, Dad, I think I do. It means that we will be alone, and on our own. But we’ve gotten along well on our own for the past three years.”

“Will,” interjected Maureen. “Other families are supposed to follow us to the Alpha Centauri system, and together we are supposed to build a new world. You and Penny would meet children your own age and eventually you would each find someone to start your own family with. If we stay here...”
“I know what you are saying, Mom, but how do we know that the Jupiter Program was even continued. With the loss of the first two ships, the program may have been canceled. We could make it to Alpha Centauri and find out that no one else is coming.”

“As much as I hate to say it, Will may have a point,” said Don.

“Are you suggesting that we abandon the idea of repairing the ship and set down roots here, Don?”

It was clear that the professor was not keen on the idea of staying and Don chose his next words carefully.

“Absolutely not, John, I’m all for repairing the ship and getting it space worthy again. Heaven knows, we’ve had our share of emergency lift-offs in the past. But I’m not opposed to staying here long enough to catch our breath.”

Robinson looked to his eldest daughter, “Judy, do you have any thoughts on the subject?”

“I’m tired of putting our lives on hold, Dad,” she said, as she reached for Don’s hand. “I want to start
living again. If Will is right, then staying here is no worse than settling on Alpha Prime.”

“If Alpha Control kept to the schedule, John, there would be about twenty families settled on Alpha Prime by now,” said Don. “Unfortunately, unless we get there ourselves, we have no way of knowing.”

The Professor looked at Doctor Smith, who had been notably quiet.

“Doctor Smith, I’d like to hear your opinion, even though I’m sure I know what it is.”

“Yes, of course. Even though I have pledged my cooperation, I still would very much like to return to Earth. But, if I may state the obvious, it would appear that we aren’t going anywhere for quite some time.”

Robinson turned to his wife, the woman who had been his anchor in the years of stormy seas. “Darling, what are your thoughts?”

“I think Doctor Smith is right, we are putting the cart before the horse. We are looking at a year or two of repair work before we can go anywhere. Where we go, is not a decision that has to be made today.”
“You’re right, as usual,” he said. “We’ll table the discussion on our destination for a later time. Right now, we have a lot of work to do, so let’s get to it.”

Lost in Love:

Doctor Smith had been assigned the mundane task of digging the hole for the septic system. Knowing that Professor Robinson would be joining him shortly, Smith steeled himself to at least make an effort to put a dent in the project.

“It does not compute,” the Robot said, as he rolled behind the ship. “Doctor Smith doing manual labor, my sensors must be malfunctioning.”

“Malfunctioning, my foot,” said Smith, indignantly. “You transistorized tin plated trash heap. This is all your fault!”

Smith dropped the shovel and crossed his arms in contempt, “Go pester Major West, can’t you see that I’m busy?”

“Major West and Miss Judy are having a private conversation with Professor and Mrs. Robinson,”
replied the Robot. “The Professor asked me to bring you this.”

The Robot lowered a container to the ground.

“What is that?” asked Smith.

“A liquid compound comprised of hydrogen, two parts, and oxygen.”

“Hydrogen, two... H₂O, bah,” said Smith. “Your attempt at cybernetic comedy is despicable, you clumsy clod!”

“Professor Robinson asked me to remind you to stay hydrated, as the temperature is expected to reach eighty degrees in the next few hours.”

“Oh, dear, I’ll melt for sure.”

“Hardly, Doctor Smith,” prodded the Robot. “Physical exertion builds muscle and burns fat, something that you can afford to lose.”

“How dare you! Be gone, ninny!”

As the Robot left, imitating laughter, Smith said, “Just you wait.”

He picked up the shovel and continued to dig.
In the galley, Don and Judy sat across from her parents as an uncomfortable silence came over them. West found his voice and began, “John, Maureen, as I remember, we weren’t on the best of terms when we first met. My relationship with Judy only added to the tension. More than once, I expected to be cut from the running.”

“It was a difficult time for all of us,” said John. “But I chose you because you were the best man for the job. To this day, I have no regrets about that decision. As for you and Judy, well, it took Maureen and I quite a while to come to terms with it. When we realized that the two of you were serious, we realized that we needed to accept things as they were.”

“I’ll be honest, John, It wasn’t until a few weeks before the launch that I felt comfortable around you. But since leaving Earth, you and Maureen have made me feel like part of your family.”

“You are part of our family, Don,” said Maureen. “Do you remember when John’s parajets failed before we crashed on that first planet?”
“How could I forget? I didn’t tell you then, but I was sure we had lost him.”

“It was your strength which kept me from falling over the abyss,” she continued. “While in my heart, I still believed that John was alive, my practical side was trying to cope with keeping my family alive and well on an unknown and hostile planet. Will was much too young to be the man of the family, so I looked to you. On that day, you became my oldest son.”

Judy had tears streaming down her cheeks as her mother had never shared those thoughts before. Don looked as if he was struggling with his own emotions.

“It’s funny you put it that way,” he said. “In essence, that is what I’m asking for.”

Don turned to look at Judy, “I love Judy, I knew I loved her from the day I met her. Almost losing her, last night, made me realize that I don’t want to squander any of the time we have together.”

“Judy?” asked John.

“I love him, Dad,” she replied. “I want to build a life with him, it doesn’t matter whether it’s here, on
Alpha Prime, back on Earth, or flying through space, I want to be with him.”

West turned back to face Judy’s parents, “Professor, Mrs. Robinson,” he began, formally, “I would like to ask your permission to take your daughter’s hand in marriage. You have my solemn promise that I will love, honor, and never forsake her.”

Maureen took her husband’s hand as she could sense the emotional turmoil he was dealing with.

“John?” she asked, the rest of her question was unspoken.

John Robinson looked to his wife’s eyes for support and, as always, her steady gaze and knowing smile kept him grounded. For what seemed like an eternity, the wordless conversation continued. When Maureen finally nodded, Robinson knew that they had reached to point of no return. He turned to face his daughter and soon to be son-in-law.

“If you had asked us a week ago, we would have tried to convince you to wait. But in light of recent events, that would not be fair to either one of you.” He turned back to his wife. “Maureen?”
“John and I have known that this day was coming for some time now. To be honest, we expected the two of you to ask when we were still on Priplanus.”

“Major West,” John began, as formal as Don had been. “You have our permission, and our blessings, on one condition.”

“That is?” Don replied, warily.

“Give us two weeks to make the preparations. After all, Maureen and I would like the engagement announcement to at least make the local paper before the wedding.”

John’s quick wit broke the tension and brought them all to laughter. They stood from the table and John took Don’s hand, “You’ve always been part of the family, Don. I guess this makes it official. Congratulations, to both of you.”

A short time later, Don led Judy to the open field in the front of the Jupiter 2.

“Don, what are you up to?” she asked. “I’m supposed to be helping Penny, and I thought you were going to help Dad with the drill rig?”
“It’s okay, Judy, I told your father we’d be back in ten minutes.” He paused for a few seconds before continuing. “I had something much more romantic in mind for this moment. It’s just that...darn. I had wanted to do this right, but with everything that is going on, we may not get time.”

Don pulled a small box out of his pocket and opened it in front of her. Judy’s eyes lit up when she saw the contents.

“The ring we had picked out! You went back for it?”

“Yeah, a couple of days before lift-off, you see, I figured it would be some years before any jewelry stores exist on Alpha Prime.”

“Oh, Don...”

West held up a finger and took her by the hand. Dropping to one knee, he looked into her blue eyes.

“Judith Elana Robinson, will you marry me?”

“Yes, oh, yes. Of course I will!”

From the viewport of the spaceship, John and Maureen watched as Don dropped to one knee. As
they witnessed the scene play out, John pulled his wife closer.

“Do you remember the day you proposed to me?” she asked.

“It’s a day I’ll never forget. I was so nervous that I dropped the ring in the spaghetti plate. I had always figured it to mean that our lives would take more than a few unexpected turns.”

“We certainly have had our share,” she said.

“Regrets?”

Maureen turned to him, “No, not one. I look at our lives and I can’t think of one thing that I would change. We’ve raised three beautiful children together. We’ve survived, in three years, more than most couples do in a lifetime. And now, our oldest daughter is going to marry a wonderful man. No, John, I’ve no regrets at all.”

They looked back out the viewport. Don and Judy were standing in the field entangled in a passionate embrace.
“It looks like Don managed to get the ring on her finger without dropping it. I’d say that bodes well for them.”

A few minutes later, Don and Judy were walking back to the camp site and John and Maureen walked down the ramp to greet them. Off to the right side of the ship, Will and Penny were setting up the laser targets.

Maureen picked up one of the laser pistols on the table.

“Will, did you adjust the output power on these yet?”

“Yes, Mom, don’t worry, Penny won’t be able to shoot her foot off.”

“Very funny, Will Robinson,” said his sister.

“Now that’s enough of that. Both of you,” Maureen said, chastising them.

“I’m sorry, Penny, I was kidding,” said Will.

“Will, would you go around back and get Doctor Smith?” asked Maureen. “Your father and I have an announcement.”
“Sure, Mom.”

Maureen strode back to her husband’s side. Behind Don and Judy, a glint of light in the grove of trees caught her eye.

“John, I just saw something move in the trees.”

Professor Robinson shifted his attention to the woods where his wife had spotted the movement. A few seconds later, four beings, humanoid in appearance emerged from the grove of trees and began walking towards the Robinson camp.

A Joining of Thoughts:

Don didn’t wait for orders. He rushed into the ship and re-emerged with three laser pistols. As Doctor Smith and Will rounded the ship, the Major handed him a laser.

“Strap this on, Smith. We’ve got company.”

“Oh good heavens, more monsters…”

“Not this time,” said West. “They look human, but I don’t want to take any chances.”
“I’ll turn the power back up on the other two pistols, Don,” Will said. “It will only take a minute.”

West stepped beside John and handed him the weapon. The Professor strapped it on but turned to the Major and Smith, “Keep your weapons holstered unless I give the word.”

Reluctantly, Don complied, but Doctor Smith still had his pistol drawn.

“Judy, stand by the force field.”

The eldest Robinson daughter took her place behind the field generator.

“Ready, Dad.”

Maureen looked to her husband, “John? Do you really think they mean us any harm?”

“I don’t know yet, darling. Let’s see what they do.”

Slowly, Doctor Smith raised his weapon, “I have a clear shot, I can hit them from here...”

“Easy Smith,” said John. “We don’t know their intentions. They may not be hostile.”

Robinson turned to see Smith, drawing a bead on the visitors.
“Smith! I told you to holster it!”

Doctor Smith deflated somewhat, “Of course, Professor. As you wish,” he said, as he returned the weapon to its sheath.

“Dad, look at their clothing,” said Penny. “It looks like something that the Native American Indians used to wear.”

Two more of the strangers emerged from the woods. One of them was no taller than Will.

Two of the first group, a man and a woman, dropped what appeared to be primitive weapons on the ground. Leaving the others behind, they continued walking to the Robinson camp.

“I’ve seen this before,” said John. “I think I know what they want.”

He unstrapped the laser pistol and handed it to Don, “Maureen and I are going out there to meet them. Now, Don, I know you won’t like this, but if they do attack, I don’t want you to return fire. Activate the force field instead.”

“You’re right. I don’t like this, John. Let me go with you...”
“No. I think this is similar to a Native American custom. The two people approaching are probably the leader and his wife. We’ll meet in the open, unarmed.”

John took his wife’s hand, thinking that if he was wrong, he was placing her in jeopardy, but through a squeeze of her hand, she assured him that she trusted him implicitly.

At the force field generator Penny looked at her sister, “Do you think they’ll be all right?”

“I think so,” Judy said, not quite convinced herself.

“Dad usually knows what he’s doing,” Will added.

*Thanks, little brother,* thought Judy, *I needed that.*

“Will is right,” Judy said. “He wouldn’t take Mother out there unless he was sure it was safe.”

As they approached each other, Professor Robinson took a mental assessment of his male counterpart. He looked to be in his mid forties with a rugged build and dark blonde hair. His complexion, while darker than his own, was much lighter than the
Native Americans that had inhabited the plains, of his home planet, over two hundred years ago. His slate grey eyes looked ancient and Robinson could sense wisdom in them.

Maureen’s counterpart was about her height but she could have been anywhere from twenty five to fifty. John couldn’t tell. Her slender figure was topped with long ash blonde hair. By human standards, she would be considered very attractive. They both wore clothing made of tanned animal hides and the woman sported a jewel pendant that held a two carat stone which appeared to be a diamond.

The male spoke first, his voice having a resounding baritone timbre.

“Jarrock,” he said, placing his hand on his chest.

The Professor followed suit, “John.”

“Lana,” said the woman, her voice was midrange and musical.

“Maureen,” said Mrs. Robinson.

Jarrock spread his arms and indicated to the ground, and the two couples sat across from each other on the grass.
“Well, what now?” Maureen asked, not unkindly.

Lana and Jarrock joined hands, extending their free hands out to the Robinsons.

“John?”

“It’s all right, Maureen,” he said, assuring her as he took her hand. Together they joined hands with the other couple.

Jarrock and Lana closed their eyes, and for a moment John and Maureen felt nothing but peace. A warm euphoric feeling began to sweep over them and they realized that they could hear each other’s thoughts.

In his mind, John heard his wife call his name and she appeared before him.

*John, where are we?*

Robinson could physically feel his wife’s concern, but before he could speak, he felt that she had been reassured by his own thoughts.
I don’t know, darling, I think we are still sitting in the field. Jarrock and Lana must have created a mind tree.

As he held her, he could feel the love that she felt for him. The raw intensity and strength of her love was overpowering.

*John, I can feel everything, the love you have for me, the children. I knew that you loved me, but I had no idea...*

*Professor, Mrs. Robinson, do not be alarmed. It is I, Jarrock. Your supposition is correct. Lana and I have created a joining of our minds.*

*For communications?* Maureen asked in her thoughts.

*Yes Maureen, Jarrock and I have damped down the effect for you and your husband. Your love for each other runs very deep. It is seldom that we find a couple so in tuned to one another without the benefit of the joining.*

*It’s a telepathic link, John.*
When we break the joining, Lana and I will be able to speak with you. Your language is a difficult one, John Robinson.

Do you already know everything about us?

Only what you would choose to reveal, Professor Robinson. We know that you have no hostile intent, and you now know the same of us. May I suggest that we return to the real world so we may all be introduced to the others?

Of course.

Having left Will to tend to the force field, Judy walked over to Don. She could see that he was getting restless.

“I don’t like this, Judy,” said the Major.

“Easy, Don,” she said, in an effort to assuage his fear. “I’m concerned as well. But, like Will just pointed out, Dad usually knows what he’s doing. As long as they seem to be okay, I say we wait it out.”

“All right, but if it looks like they are being hurt...”
“If it looks like they are being hurt, I’ll lead the charge with you.”

Don looked at her, seeing that she had strapped on the laser that Will had retuned. The look on her face said that she would broach no argument on the subject.

“Hey, look,” said Penny. “They’re standing up. Dad is shaking hands with one of them.”

Visibly relieved, Don turned to his fiancée, taking her in his arms, “It looks like you were right.”

She returned his embrace, “I could have just as easily been wrong. I’m glad you were here.”

Don looked over his shoulder, “Smith, put the weapons away. It looks like we might have some new neighbors.”

While John, Jarrock, and Lana, taught the Robinson’s language to the rest of Lamotia Clan, Maureen returned to the camp to tell the others about their new found friends.
“It was like nothing I have ever experienced in my life,” said Maureen, as she described the extraordinary encounter. “Jarrock and Lana created a mind tree. Your father and I communicated to them with just our thoughts.”

“Mother, you’re glowing,” said Judy. “It must have been an incredible experience.”

“There’s more. John and I were able to feel each other’s emotions. It was overpowering, for both of us. I don’t think I’ve ever felt as close to your father as I do right now.

“Maybe we should give this mind tree a try,” Don said to Judy. “What do you say?”

“Do you think they’d let us, Mother?” asked Judy.

“From what I gather from Lana, the joining across the sexes is only done within the bonds of marriage. Unless you are a family member, it is considered taboo for a man to touch the mind of a woman.” Maureen quietly said to Judy, “After experiencing it with your father, I can understand why.”

Judy and Don exchanged an unreadable look as John returned.
“How are you feeling, darling,” said John, as he sat down next to his wife.

“Never better,” she said. “I wonder if this will eventually wear off.”

Jarrock had told the Professor that the aphrodisiac effect of the joining would indeed fade in time, but the memory of their encounter would endure forever.

“Jarrock says it will. Speaking of Jarrock,” said John, addressing everyone. “He and his family will be joining us in a few minutes, so before they arrive, Maureen and I, have an announcement. After breakfast, Judy and Don came to see us. They would like, very much, to be married and this morning, we gave them our permission and our blessings…”

The cheers and applause had started before the Professor could finish. He rapped on the table for attention.

“Don, Judy, we wish you a long and happy life together.”

“Mom, Dad, they’re here,” said Will, as Jarrock and his family approached.
Neighbors:

John and Maureen, once again greeted Jarrock and Lana, warmly, as they entered the campsite. The couple introduced the rest of their party. The younger woman, Selana, turned out to be Jarrock and Lana’s oldest daughter. As tall as her mother, she had the same ash blonde hair and appeared to be about Judy’s age. The man with her was her husband, Teral, who was as tall as John. His jet black hair topped a powerfully built frame.

The younger man with them was Jarrock and Lana’s son, T’lan. He appeared to be maybe a year or two older than Penny and he had a slender but still muscular build. His sandy blonde hair reached the middle of his back. Maureen watched with interest as his warm smile reduced her younger daughter to a puddle.

The small girl, Brina, was their youngest, a year or two behind Will. Her hair was a very light blonde, lighter than Judy’s, and her eyes were an intense hue of blue. She carried a flute which she was quite
talented with. She and Will soon became involved in their own conversation.

After the introductions were made, the adults sat down at the table, while T’lan showed Penny one of the horse-like animals they had ridden on.

“Mom, can I go riding with him?”

“Well, I don’t know, John?” she asked, looking to her husband.

Robinson turned to Jarrock, his expression asking an unspoken question.

“She will not be in any danger, Professor Robinson, I give you my word.”

“I think it will be all right,” said John, squeezing his wife’s hand in assurance.

“T’lan,” called Jarrock.”

“Yes Father.”

“Professor Robinson, is trusting you with the care of his daughter. You will see that no harm comes to her. Stay within the boundaries of the field.”

“I understand. Fear not, Professor Robinson, I will watch over her and keep her safe.”
“I’m sure that you will. You two have a good time.”

John and Maureen watched the two of them ride off. When they faced each other, they exchanged an unreadable look.

“How did you find us,” asked the Professor, turning his attention back to Jarrock and Lana.

“Several nights ago, we saw a fire light in the sky,” Jarrock was saying. “Two days ago, our scouting party climbed the ridge that overlooks this valley. We expected to find a sky stone, but instead, we found your ship. We surmised that you fell from the void between the stars.”

“For a culture that has no technology, you seem to have a good understanding of the concept of space flight. During our joining of minds, I sensed that you have a keen knowledge of the sciences.”

“Indeed, Professor Robinson, tens of thousands of cycles ago, our ancestors sailed through the dark void of the heavens. Their world had been destroyed by their own doing, war, pestilence, desecration of the air and water. Over the millennium, the sky clouded, the water turned dark, and all life perished. The wisest, of our ancestors knew that our
civilization was doomed, so they built an ark and left our dying world. For generations, the ark sailed through the heavens. Two thousand cycles ago, they found this world.”

“We were in orbit of this planet before we ran into trouble,” said Don, involuntarily casting a sidelong glance at Smith. “We didn’t see any remains of your vessel. What happened to your technology?”

“As our people prepared to come down, something went wrong and none of us are certain exactly what. The great ship was torn to the winds, and those who were saved fell from the sky in small containers.”

“Escape pods,” said Judy. “The ship must have broke-up in orbit.”

“Perhaps,” Lana said. “It was so long ago. But the one thing we do know is out of fifty thousand souls, only two thousand remained to settle this world.”

“That’s so sad,” Maureen said. “How did you survive?”

Selana spoke next, “Those who survived the fire ride, soon found each other wandering the plains. The containers had very little food, water, or clothing so
the survivors banded together to try to tame this world. Technology failed and was soon abandoned, in favor of a simpler life. It was then that the Clans were formed. Each one was about one hundred strong. They separated and began to repopulate of people in the hope at least some of us would survive. Today, the clans are spread over most of this continent. The largest is over one thousand people. Our Clan is about three hundred strong.”

“It seems as if your people are thriving, once again,” said the Professor.

“It was not always this way, Professor Robinson,” said Jarrock. “The first few years, many of our people fell prey to the Macktu. It prowls the forests in the early morning as well as the late afternoon. Its venom will kill a grown man in a very few heartbeats. There are other predators on this world, but none are more feared than the Macktu. Only a poison laced arrow will kill it. If you become ensnared in its web, you have very little hope of escape.”

“Judy was caught in a web yesterday,” said John. “She had cut through that grove of trees to sit by the
stream. Fortunately, Doctor Smith and the Robot found her before the spider, a, Macktu could attack.”

“You are a very fortunate woman, Miss Robinson,” said Lana. “With the exception of the attack on our village last year, only one person in the history of our Clan has ever lived to tell of a Macktu attack.”

Judy shuddered at the thought of the spider coming toward her. She snuggled closer to Don.

With Penny sitting in front of him, T’lan spurred the animal into a full run. They circled the *Jupiter 2* camp several times and finally came to a stop in the middle of the field.

“I had forgotten how much fun it was to ride,” said Penny.

“I’m pleased that you found it enjoyable. Would you like to sit down?”

“No, that’s okay, I think I’m fine right here,” she replied, patting his arm.

T’lan was content to stay on the back of the animal with his arms around the young woman.
“May I ask how many cycles you have seen since the day of your birth,” he asked.

“The day of my...oh, you mean how old I am. It’s not polite to ask a lady her age,” Penny responded, coyly.

“Forgive me...I meant no offense...”

“It’s okay, T’lan, I was teasing you. I turned fifteen in August. How about you?”

“With the season of the high sun, I will be eighteen cycles.”

Penny did a quick mental calculation, *two and a half years, Mom and Dad can’t complain about that.*

T’lan urged the horse like animal into motion, guiding it to the cliffs behind the ship.

“Do you have a girlfriend, T’lan?”

“Girlfriend? I do not understand.”

“You know, a young woman, who is about your age, someone to spend time with, talk to, do things together.”

“Ah, in our culture, a male of my age has usually found the young woman that he will join with. When they both reach the age of enlightenment, the Clan
allows them to perform the bonding of their hearts and minds.”

“I see,” said Penny, as her heart sank. “You have someone.”

“No, she, who I would have joined with, was killed when a nest of Macktu invaded our camp.”

“I’m sorry T’lan, I didn’t mean to pry.”

“I am not offended, Penny. I was just as curious about you. I assumed that you also have no one to share with.”

“No,” she sighed. “When we got to Alpha Centauri, other families were supposed to follow us, but with our ship damaged, we can’t leave for quite some time. We are considering settling here, but I don’t think Dad has decided yet.”

“It is the desire of my heart to see you stay, Penny Robinson.”

She sighed again, thinking the same thing. The idea of getting to know this young man both excited and terrified her. *Is this what happens when you fall in love,* she thought.
“I think we should head back to camp, T’lan. I don’t want Mom and Dad to worry.”

“Of course,” he said, only a slight indication of disappointment was evident in his voice.

“Will you come visit again?”

“If that is your desire,” he said, brightened by the notion.

“I think I’d like that.”

The village of the Lamotia Clan was located several miles west of the Robinson campsite. Before they left, Jarrock and his wife invited the Robinsons to the village for a feast of friendship. Not wanting to offend their new neighbors, they agreed, even though there was still much work to do. When told of Don and Judy’s upcoming nuptials, Jarrock and Lana offered to help with the arrangements as well as offering to host the event.

“Well, Don, Judy? What do you think,” asked John, at the evening meal.
“Judy and I are okay with it, that is, as long as all of you are there.”

“Just try to keep any of us away,” said Maureen. “We will all be there, Don.”

“We still want you to perform the ceremony, Dad,” said Judy.

Smith threw his napkin down in disgust.

“Bah! If I were you, Miss Judy, I would want a nice private ceremony, without the likes of these savages.”

“Come on, Smith,” chided West. “Just once, can’t you say something nice?”

“Don’s right, Smith,” added the Professor. “For the first time since leaving Earth, we found a group of people that seem to share our core values and beliefs.”

“Really, Doctor Smith, I can’t possibly see what you could have against these people,” said Maureen.

Even in the minority, Smith stubbornly refused to relent.
“Professor Robinson, I don’t trust them. How do you know that they didn’t bend your minds in some cruel and savage way?”

“That is always a possibility, I suppose, but, until they do something that I find suspicious, I have no reason not to trust them.”

“You may trust them, I do not. Tomorrow evening, I will stay here with the ship where it’s safe and sound. Now, if you will all excuse me, I’m ready to turn in. After a day of hard labor, my delicate back will never be the same. Good night.”

“Don’t forget to set your alarm,” quipped Major West. “You’re coming with John and I tomorrow morning to set up the weather and relay stations.”

“Zachary Smith, reduced to being a beast of burden, oh, the pain.”

Smith turned on his heel and stalked into the ship.

“Don shook his head in disgust, “Just what in the world is his problem…”

“Now, Don,” interjected Judy, “Don’t let him ruin our day, please.”
“You’re right, I’m sorry.” He drew close to her and kissed her.

“Speaking of turning in,” said John. “Maureen and I are doing the same. Good night, everyone.”

Judy watched her parents walk up the ramp into the ship. Her father had his arm around her waist and they were looking starry-eyed at each other. She leaned back into the arms of her fiancé.

“Ah...I think love is in the air,” she said.

“Yeah, I think you’re right,” said Don, before he changed the subject. “Will, Penny, it looks like the two of you found some friends as well.”

“Brina is pretty cool,” said Will. “She has a great ear for music. Tomorrow night, I’m bringing my guitar and we are going to work on some songs together.”

Penny seemed to be day dreaming, she didn’t hear the Major’s question right away.

“...about you...Penny?”

“Oh...I’m sorry, Don. What did you ask?”

“How did you and T’lan get along?”
“Oh, just fine, he’s a good rider. We had fun together.”

Judy watched her sister carefully. Her body language was telling a much more detailed story than her words. She wondered if Don had picked up on it. *I’ll have to ask him later*, she thought.

**Secrets:**

While everyone else was asleep, Doctor Smith quietly exited his cabin and strode over to the Robot’s programming station. The nightmare, he had suffered the night before, reminded him of a piece of damning evidence which he still had in his possession. Smith placed the programming cassette into the console and activated the unit.

On the display, the commands instructing the Robot to sabotage the *Jupiter 2* came up on the screen. Smith typed in the instructions to format the media, erasing the evidence of his duplicity. *Be exorcized, ghost of my wretched past*, he thought.
Smith’s mood sobered, when he read the error message; INVAILD COMMAND, MEDIA READ-ONLY.

“Invalid command indeed,” he muttered. “Well, there is more than one way to skin a cat.”

Smith removed the data cassette and switched off the station. He wandered into the lab area and opened the waste disposal. With a flick of his wrist, he tossed the cassette into the garbage.

Satisfied that he had buried the evidence, Smith returned to his cabin, looking forward to a good night’s sleep. Unbeknownst to him, his show of flourish had altered the path of the data tape, causing it to land behind the waste container.

The next morning, John and Maureen sat in the galley quietly talking over their morning coffee. The rest of the family was still asleep.

“Darling, you never told me how your conversation with Judy went, yesterday,” said John.

“I almost forgot about it,” Maureen responded. “I think we can relax. Judy told me that she has been
saving herself for their wedding night, but she admitted to cuddling with him in his bed.”

“So she was in Don’s cabin...”

“Yes, she was, and that wasn’t the first time.”

They looked at each other for a moment before she continued, “No, John, I don’t really approve, but, they are adults and they have been discreet about it. This is the first time in almost three years that we suspected anything. Besides, in a couple weeks, they are going to be sharing the same bed, as husband and wife. We had better get used to the idea. The Jupiter 2 is just as much their home as it is ours.”

“I suppose you’re right. I’m just glad it was you and I who met with Jarrock and Lana, and not Don and Judy,” he said. “They wouldn’t be able to keep their hands off of each other.”

“You mean, like us,” Maureen quipped.

“That’s different.”

“You know, John, I would never have thought that our marriage needed a shot in the arm, but between Judy’s comment and joining with you yesterday, I feel more alive than I have since our honeymoon. It
seems that we spend all our time just trying to survive. It felt good to just live again.”

“Do you want to settle here, Maureen?”

“Will, brought up a very good point. We could get back into space, find Alpha Centauri, and end up being the only inhabitants. I just don’t know if that is the right decision anymore.”

“And the Jupiter 2?” he asked.

“I know it’s a lot of work, but, I think we should finish repairing the ship, even if we decide to stay. Being able to leave in a hurry has saved all of our lives, more than once.”

“I wasn’t going to tell you this right now, sweetheart, but Don and I found another problem yesterday. It’s very serious, Maureen. Much worse than I thought.”

“Oh, John...”

“The truth is we may not be able to leave for a very long time, if at all. The main drive unit underneath the ship is showing signs of stress fractures. To repair it, Don and I are going to have to get the ship off its belly...”
“And the only way to do that, is to engage the drive,” Maureen finished for him.

“Or manually jack the ship up. Either way, it’s risky. We won’t know for certain until we can do a load power test and that’s months away.”

“Does Judy know?”

“Don was going to tell her last night,” said John. “I think they are leaning towards settling here anyway, and to be honest, in light of recent events, so am I.”

“Then let’s make it unanimous, because, I was thinking the same thing.”

After breakfast, the family met outside the ship. John, Don, and Doctor Smith all had backpacks with the relay station components.

“We are going to have to wait until the chariot has been assembled to bring up the weather station equipment. It’s too heavy to carry all at once,” said John.

“The girls and I were going to assemble it this morning,” said Maureen. “With the auxiliary power
units functioning now, we can open the bay doors automatically.”

“Good idea. Why don’t you bring the weather equipment to the site when you finish? By the time we get the relay station installed, it will be late morning and if the gear is delivered, we can finish up by early this afternoon.”

“All right,” said Maureen. “I’ll send Will and Judy up with the equipment once we finish. Don’t forget, we have a dinner engagement this evening.”

“I won’t, darling,” said John, as he kissed his wife.

“Will and I are going to bring lunch,” Judy said to Don, mirroring her parents.

“Who’s going to be driving?”

“I need the practice more than Will does. Dad will let him drive on the way back. You and I can sit in the back seat and snuggle,” Judy said, with an impish grin.

“Miss Robinson, I like the way you think.”

“Let’s go, Don,” said the Professor.
He kissed Judy one last time and the three men set out for the foot hills east of the ship.

Maureen made her way to her daughter’s side.

“Mother, do you ever get over worrying, anytime Dad goes off?”

“It gets easier over time, but no, I never stop worrying. We just learn to deal with it, just like you and Don will.”

Judy took comfort in the fact that her mother understood.

Maureen stood with her daughter as they both watched their significant others march towards the hillside.

“Well, let’s get this chariot assembled. I want to show our men that we aren’t a group of helpless women.”

“Okay, Mother, I’m coming.”

On the way up the ridge, John and Don were discussing the Lamotia Clan.
“Maureen ran the tests, yesterday afternoon, after they returned to their village. There is no question, they’re human,” said John.”


“Or, we all came from one origin. The only difference in the base pairs, was the genes that control ESP or in their case telepathy.”

“What made Maureen decide to run the test?”

“After watching the children interact yesterday, she and Lana started talking about the future. You know, Don, I’ve always admired Maureen’s practical side. It gives her strength of character that I would be lost without.”

“The two of you complement each other so well. I only hope Judy and I can do half as well...”

“You will, Don. Trust me.”

Doctor Smith chose that moment to chime in.

“Am I to understand that these people are human?”
Robinson stopped and turned to face him, “That’s right, Doctor Smith, they are just as human as you or I.”

“But, how is that possible, Professor,” Smith retorted. “We have no idea where we are in relation to Earth, and there are certainly no records or evidence of a mass exodus in our history.”

“I’m not suggesting that they are from Earth, Doctor Smith. As I’m sure you are aware, there are many theories as to the origin of mankind. How do we know that our planet wasn’t colonized by their ancestors, just like we are now beginning to colonize other worlds?”

“You make an interesting argument, Professor, however, I still do not trust them.”

“You don’t trust anybody, Smith, because you can’t be trusted yourself,” added Don.

“Spare me, the poisonous barbs, Major, I expected you, of all people, to be more sensible on the subject. Or has Miss Judy removed your fangs?”
Don turned to lunge at Smith, but John stopped him, “Easy, Don, he’s trying to goad you. It’s not worth getting upset over.”

“I quite agree, Professor. Please tell Major West to control his Neanderthal behavior.”

“That’s enough out of you too, Smith, and you keep my daughter out of this.”

“Of course, Professor, forgive me...”

“And one more thing, I didn’t much care for your opinion of our guests, but what you think about them, is your business. I expect you to keep your opinions to yourself. So help me God, if you do anything to upset the mutual trust that we’ve established, like you did with the Taurons, I’ll clap you in irons and let Don, skin you alive. Do we understand each other?”

“I assure you, Professor Robinson, violence is unnecessary,” Smith said, indignantly.

Starting back up the hill, Don said quietly to John, “Sorry, he still knows how to get under my skin.”

“That makes two of us, Don.”
“You know, John, even though he’s been helping by pulling his weight, he’s still the same old Smith.”

By mid morning, Mrs. Robinson and her children had completed the assembly of the chariot. In the driver’s seat, Maureen revved the engine while Will made a few final adjustments to the power units.

“That should do it, Mom.”

Maureen turned off the engine and praised her son, “Thanks, Will. I know you wanted to go with your father, but it is nice to have a man around the house.”

“Aw, Mom, you’re just trying to make me feel good...”

“No, it’s not that at all. There are quite a few things that you are able to do that your sisters and I aren’t capable of. I depend on you much more than you know.”

“Thanks.”
The gear was already loaded and Judy climbed into the driver’s seat just vacated by her mother. She handed Will a laser pistol.

“Thanks Judy,” he said, sliding into the passenger seat next to his sister.

Maureen climbed out of the chariot and spoke to them before closing the door, “Now, you two be careful. Your father said that the terrain is rough as you climb the ridge.”

“We will, Mother,” said Judy, rolling her eyes. Will caught her and had to suppress a grin.

Maureen closed the door and Judy started the engine and put the vehicle in gear. Slowly, she depressed the accelerator and the chariot lumbered forward. In a few minutes, she had reacquainted herself with the vehicle and she increased the chariot’s speed.

“In three years, I’ve only gotten to drive this twice,” she said.

“Judging from Mom’s reaction, you would think you’ve never driven before. Gosh, Judy, you and Don
are going to be married soon and sometimes Mom still treats you like a child.”

“Tell me about it,” she said.

They rode in silence for a while as she considered what her younger brother had said. At twenty two, her mother still sometimes treated her like she was still only twelve. *Although, your behavior the other day wasn’t very mature, was it?*

“Maybe we shouldn’t be so hard on her, Will. At least we know that she cares about us. When I was in high school, so many of my classmates got to do whatever they wanted to. I used to be so jealous of them, until they ended up in trouble. Looking back now, I’m glad Mother and Dad were strict.”

“I wish I had a little more freedom,” said Will. “I know Mom needs my help with things, but lately it seems that I always get stuck with the girls.”

“Oh, I see,” Judy said, feigning hurt.

“I’m sorry, Judy. I don’t mean you.”

“You didn’t seem to mind spending time with Brina, yesterday. She’s a girl.”
“Yeah, I guess you’re right, but we had fun together,” said Will. “Judy, can I tell you something?”

“Of course, Will.”

“Do you remember when we went back in time and landed on Earth?”

“Yes, I do,” said Judy, wistfully. She and Don had planned on getting married soon after they landed. Finding out that they were out of their own time had ruined their plans, and broken her heart.

“I met one of the girls from Manitou Junction, her name was Stacey. Please don’t tell Penny this, I’ll never hear the end of it, but, after we left, I found out that I missed her. If we decide to leave here, I’m think I’m going to miss Brina.”

Judy smiled, “Your growing up, Will. It’s nothing to be ashamed of. Besides, I think Penny is a bit preoccupied right now.”

“That won’t stop her from teasing me,” Will added.

“Maybe, but your secret is safe with me. But you have to promise me something in return.”

“Sure, Judy.”
“Leaving camp without telling anyone was very irresponsible of me. I came very close to losing my life. I want you to promise me that you won’t make the same mistake. Will, since leaving Earth, we’ve all had to grow up fast and in some ways, you’ve surpassed Penny and I.”

“You really think so?”

“Before we crashed here, Don taught me some of the basics of flying the Jupiter. I can make it fly a straight course, make some simple course corrections, make and break orbit. With Mom’s help, I could handle an emergency lift-off. But you can really fly it, almost as well as Dad and Don. Not to mention being able to fly the space pod. That’s quite an accomplishment for a thirteen year old. I haven’t contributed nearly as much to our survival. Even Penny has much more aptitude in the sciences than I do…”

“You shouldn’t sell yourself short, Judy. If we had to depend on me to try to grow food to eat, we’d all starve. We’ve had to all work together to survive.”

Judy pulled hard on the right stick and the chariot rounded the tight corner. The hill was a twelve
degree pitch and the engine labored as the vehicle negotiated the rough terrain.

Maneuvering the chariot had given her a chance to consider what her brother had said.

“Just promise me that you’ll think before you act, okay, Will?”

“I promise.”

An Evening Out:

By mid afternoon, both the weather and relay stations had been set up and tested and, much to Doctor Smith’s delight, they rode back to the Jupiter 2 in the chariot. Soon before the Robinsons were due to leave for the Lamotia camp, Will sat with Doctor Smith in front of the viewport and tried to convince him to accompany them.

“I don’t understand why you won’t come along, Doctor Smith. You’ll have a great time.”

“William, my dear boy,” Smith began, making another attempt to sway the young lad to his way of thinking. “In this life there are those who meet
certain standards, and those who do not. Unfortunately for you, this planet lacks the pomp and circumstance of cultured and aristocratic individuals. Back on Earth, I was always in the circles of diplomats and royalty, well removed from the likes of people with such lowly stature.”

“What does that got to do with anything, Doctor Smith?” asked Will, for once, not going along with what he was being told. “Brina’s father is the leader of their clan. That seems pretty aristocratic to me.”

“These people are beneath you, William. Just look at the way they dress. Uncultured and savage, I tell you.”

“That’s not a very nice thing to say, Doctor Smith. Brina is my friend, she’s not a savage and I don’t care how she dresses. Brina and her family are just as intelligent as we are. They dress in skins, because that’s all they have,” said Will, frustration and hurt evident in his voice. “Maybe Don is right. All you seem to care about is how others make you look, or what you can get from them.”

Without another word, the young teen grabbed his guitar and stomped out of the ship.
“William, I...”

“You really know how to make friends and influence people,” quipped the Major. He and Judy had just ascended in the elevator and had witnessed most of what had just transpired. Don had chosen to wear his Air Force dress blues and Judy had on a gown that Maureen had made her last year which closely resembled the dress she had asked for with the wishing machine.

“Spare me your irrelevant observations, Major. I was just concerned for the boy’s reputation as a gentleman.”

“You know what I find refreshing about this?” asked West, clearly enjoying himself. “Will has grown up enough to see you for what you really are.”

“Indeed, Major! Miss Judy, clearly you are a person with culture and exquisite taste, are you going to allow your future husband to behave in such a rude and callous way?”

“I’m sorry Doctor Smith, I don’t mean to seem ungrateful to you, for saving my life the other day, but I agree with Don. I was appalled of what you had
to say about our new friends. And if my fiancé and I disagree on something, we will discuss it privately."

The elevator rose again and Maureen, Penny, and John stepped into the control room. They too, were dressed to the nines.

“Are you sure you won’t accompany us, Doctor Smith?” asked Maureen, still feeling very guilty about leaving him behind.

“No thank you, dear lady,” responded Smith. “I’m going to sit here and finish reading my book. I do hope you all don’t end up as the main course.”

“I don’t think you have to worry about that, Doctor Smith. But I’ll have the Robot standing guard outside,” said John. He mischievously added, “Just in case the Lamotias want dessert.”

Robinson’s comment brought on the laughs, at Smith’s expense.

“Just wait! You’ll see...”

“I’m sure we will,” added Don. “Oh, by the way, don’t wait up.”

“Bah!”
As the chariot pulled away, Smith watched until the vehicle was out of sight. *They never listen,* he thought, as he lost himself in the pages of his novel.

As John Robinson focused on the task of negotiating the terrain, he considered the surreal nature of the situation. *Here we are, maybe a hundred light-years from Earth, on an unknown and potentially hostile planet, and my family and I are going to a dinner party.* He couldn’t help but chuckle over the irony.

“Penny for your thoughts,” his wife asked, sitting in the seat next to him.

“I was just thinking about the kind of reaction Alpha Control would have if they knew what we were doing.”

“It would certainly make the front page,” she replied. “I do hope we are not over dressed.”

“Jarrock was very specific when he said that everyone would be wearing their best. We don’t want to insult our hosts, do we?”
“Absolutely not, the tabloids would plaster the scandal across the galaxy.”

A few seconds later, she added, “John, it feels good to live again. For the first time in years, I feel like we’re home.”

He turned to her and smiled, reaching for her hand.

In the second row of seats, Don and Judy were also sharing a private moment.

“I guess I should apologize now,” said Don. “It just burns me to see Smith twisting the facts. Seeing Will put him in his place was breath of fresh air.”

“You don’t have to apologize. I was just as upset about it as you were,” she replied. “Doctor Smith is going to find out that Will isn’t a naïve little boy anymore. He’s growing up, a lot faster than most of us realize.”

“When you had commented about us discussing things in private, I thought I might have said too much. I’m glad that you understand.”
“I was letting him know, in my own little way, that he isn’t going to be able to come between us anymore. Now, let’s talk about something other than Doctor Smith,” said Judy.

“You don’t have to ask me twice.”

Penny looked out the window, watching the sun begin to hit the tree line. Often, she found that she could lose herself in the sheer beauty of the picturesque landscape of the new planet. It was a welcome distraction from the emotional confusion she was facing in her heart.

Out of the corner of her eye, she saw Don and Judy share a tender kiss. *I wonder what it would be like if T’lan kissed me like that?* Again, she felt both excitement and fear rise up within her.

Beside her, Will had not said anything since they had left camp. She had heard enough of the conversation between Don Judy to know that Doctor Smith had somehow upset Will. Penny felt as if she should say something to him, but she was struggling with her own emotions. *Maybe seeing Brina will cheer him up, I know they like each other.*
Up front, Maureen pointed to a well lit area to their right. “That must be it, John.”

“I think you are right.”

The Lamotia village turned out to be mostly wood framed construction, not unlike what the early American settlers would have erected. The paths were too narrow for the chariot to navigate, so John parked the vehicle just short of the entrance.

As the Robinsons and Major West climbed out of the vehicle, Jarrock and his wife approached them.

“Greetings my friends,” he began. “Our village is honored by your presence.”

John took his hand firmly, “We are honored by your invitation.”

Unlike the loose garments they wore when they first met, the attire chosen by the Lamotia clan was well fitted and adorned with beads and symbols. The men wore animal skin trousers that were full length and a vest with leather ties to hold it closed. A skin jacket completed that outfit.

The women’s attire was a full length animal skin dress, cinched at the waist and flared slightly below
the knees. It too was decorated in the same manner as the men’s attire.

“Come, the Council of the Guardians awaits your arrival.”

The Lamotia government consisted of ten council members called Guardians of the Clan. Jarrock’s full title was the Prime Guardian; at least that is how it translated into English. Several rows of tables were arranged in the village common area with the Robinsons and Major West seated with Jarrock and his family.

The dinner consisted of a roasted native bird that reminded Maureen of a Thanksgiving turkey. Corn, carrots, peas and potatoes, or what would pass for them on Earth, completed the picture.

“How appropriate, John,” Maureen said, to her husband. “If there was any doubt in my mind, it’s gone now.”

“I agree,” he said, as he stood to address the group.

Jarrock stood with him and raised his hands, quieting the crowd.
“Professor Robinson would like to speak to the people of our village.”

Robinson nodded, “Thank you, Jarrock.”

In his career as a researcher, and lecturer, John had always been comfortable speaking in public. It had been a gift he discovered, quite by accident, while he was still in high school. It had been that same gift that brought him in touch with the woman whom he would marry just one short year later, during his junior year in college. But the awesome responsibility of speaking for his kind overwhelmed him and he found himself lost for words. Looking to his wife for focus and support, like he did so many years ago, he composed his thoughts and began to speak.

“My friends, forty cycles ago, my people took to the stars, in a series of space missions that eventually culminated with the mission that I was granted the monumental responsibility of commanding, the flight of the Jupiter 2.

As her husband spoke, Maureen also remembered the first time she had seen him address a crowd. She didn’t even know who he was at the time, and a
classmate had begged her to attend the lecture about interplanetary space travel. While she found the topic to be interesting, her major was biochemistry. When she finally relented, it was just to satisfy her friend and as she waited in the lecture hall for the guest speaker to arrive, she found herself totally unprepared for the dashingly handsome man who took the lectern. His dark locks topped a statuesque six foot three slender yet powerfully built frame. She was in the second row and his hazel eyes had met her blue ones, almost in recognition.

She had been just as memorized by his speech as she was by his appearance. His words that day painted a beautiful picture of colonizing other worlds and she knew that one day he would lead the charge. It was then Maureen decided she wanted to be part of his dream.

“Like your forefathers, we also met with unexpected problems in our journey. Our spacecraft was heavily damaged when it crashed here and it may take many months, or even years to repair the damage. Today, my beloved wife and I reached a decision, regardless of whether we can repair the Jupiter 2, we have decided to stay, and make this planet our home.”
Cheers went up, not only from the Robinsons, but the entire village. The celebration continued until Jarrock signaled for quiet.

“Professor Robinson,” he began. “As the Prime Guardian of the Lamotia Clan, I welcome you and your family to this world. It is my belief that the friendship that has been forged this day will last to the end of time.”

Maureen stood and John took her in his arms, “Welcome home, darling.”

**Fire in the Sky:**

The Professor’s announcement had a jubilant effect on his family. Don and Judy cuddled closely at the table, happier than John had ever seen them. They had waited so long, and sacrificed so much for the mission and seeing them together made him misty. John turned to find the blue pools of serenity and strength that were his wife’s eyes.

“I think we made the right decision,” he said to her.

“I know we have, John.”
When dinner had ended, John and Don sat with Jarrock and the council to discuss the problems the clan was having with the Macktu. Maureen and Lana discussed family, as well as Don and Judy’s upcoming nuptials. Will, Brina, and Judy were showing off their musical talents with the two siblings singing a duet.

Penny and T’lan had found a quiet spot nearby to gaze up at the heavens. Their conversation had flowed from the joy they both felt about her father’s decision to her interest in Lamotia literature.

“For thy sweet love remembered such wealth brings, Penny said, wistfully.

“Those words are so pleasing,” said T’lan. “A small phrase, yet the words mean so much. Are they yours?”

Penny broke into a smile, “I only wish. They come from William Shakespeare’s sonnets. He was an English playwright and poet who lived during the late sixteenth century.”

“You enjoy poetry?”
“Yes, but my first love has always been animals. I’ve always had a special connection with them.”

T’lan looked out over the plain, “I have never considered them for anything but food and clothing. Does this disturb you, Penny?”

“I haven’t given it much thought, until now. Back on Earth, we raise livestock for food and I try not to think about it. But I don’t know if I could bring myself to kill.”

“My clan has lived off the land for many cycles,” said T’lan. “When a hunting party goes out, it kills only what is needed to feed and clothe our people. Nothing is left to waste, not even the bones...”

“That’s all right. I don’t want to know the details,” she said. “Your people do what they must to survive.”

The strains of the song *Fly Away* drifted over them. Penny hummed along with the harmony part that Judy was singing.

“You and your family are very talented. In ours, only Brina was so gifted.”

“She plays the flute so beautifully.”
“Yet the beauty of her music pales in comparison to the radiance of the young woman who has blessed me with her presence.”

Penny felt herself flush as her heart did a back flip. She had been told that she was beautiful before, by her parents, Don, Doctor Smith, and even Will. But, somehow this was different, special. She tingled in anticipation as she looked up at him.

“You really think I’m beautiful?” she asked, her voice quavering.

“More beautiful than the sunrise, or the night sky, or the colored bow after the rains...”

T’lan slowly reached his hand behind her neck and she mirrored his motions as her heart beat wildly in her chest. Their lips met in a tender kiss that, from her point of view, seemed to last forever.

At the table, John and Maureen were chatting with Lana and Jarrock when Maureen noticed T’lan and Penny. She nudged her husband and pointed.

“John, I think we might need to have a talk with Penny.”
“You may be right.”

Professor Robinson watched his daughter and her new boyfriend separate. After answering his wife he turned to Jarrock, “I know, Maureen has talked with Lana about our children, but we never asked about your pairing customs.”

Jarrock, who had also seen the exchange chuckled, as he said, “I understand your concern, Professor Robinson. A young man in the clan begins to search for his life mate when he is the age of fifteen. He will most often pick a young woman about two cycles younger so they will reach the age of enlightenment around the same time.”

“Is this a prearrangement?” asked Maureen.

“No, Mrs. Robinson, our children are free to follow their hearts and they intermingle in clan activities until the two eventually find each other.”

“It’s like dating, John,” Maureen said. “Although I think thirteen is much too young.”

“Our ancestors once clung to those notions, Maureen,” said Lana. “It became a matter of
survival. If we didn’t procreate as soon as possible, our clan, and our race would have perished.”

“She’s right, darling,” John interjected. “It was the same on Earth not all that long ago. Jarrock, it’s obvious to all of us, that Penny and T’lan have made an emotional connection, and I don’t want to try to separate them. Even though our children have grown up much quicker than their counterparts on Earth, the idea of marriage at such an early age is quite a jump for them.”

“I completely understand, Professor Robinson. Your love for your family is very deep. By tradition, T’lan will be required to meet with you to ask your permission to call on your daughter’s heart. If you approve of their, courtship, I think you call it, then you set the terms and conditions of their interaction. A calling will normally last about one to one and a half cycles.”

“John, I don’t know...”

“Don’t worry, darling. We’ll discuss it later, after we talk with Penny. What happens after the calling?”
Lana answered, “Once they have found each other’s hearts, the man will, again, go to the woman’s father and ask permission to have the pre-joining…”

Before she could finish, a loud boom shook the ground and a bright object appeared, streaking across the sky.

“A meteor?” asked Judy, as she ran to the table with Don.

“I don’t think so,” said the Professor, pausing to listen to the sound. “Do you hear that, Don. It sounds like a fusion engine.”

“It sure does, and if it is, they are out of control.”

By now the entire Robinson family had gathered around the table to look up at the object as it dropped below the horizon. The disappearance was followed by a dull thud.

“Whatver it was, it crashed beyond the ridge, north of the ship,” said Don.

“Your craft appeared very much the same to us, Professor Robinson,” said T’lan. “The loud boom, the bright object tearing through the sky, and the humming sound, all of it was the same.”
“John, we should go out there,” said Maureen. “Someone could be hurt...”

“No, I don’t think so, darling. The terrain beyond the ridge is difficult to navigate, even in the daytime. I’m not going to risk it. We can head out at daybreak.”

“Professor Robinson, Teral and I would like to accompany you,” said Jarrock. “We know the area well.”

“Very well, meet us at the Jupiter 2 in the morning. We’ll all ride out in the chariot. In the mean time, it’s getting late. We should head back to camp.”

The Robinsons and Major West bid farewell to their hosts and started the twenty minute trek back to the ship. By the time they had returned, it was almost midnight.

“John, you and Maureen can go on in,” said Don, as he switched on the force field. “Judy and I will lock up.”

“All right, Don. Don’t stay up too late. We’ve got a busy day tomorrow.”
When they were alone, Don took Judy in his arms.

“Alone at last,” he said. “I’ve been trying to get you in my arms all night.”

“Yeah, well now that you’ve got me, what are you going to do with me?”

Don pulled her in for a gentle kiss and she reached her arms under his and around his shoulders. Their kiss deepened and their breathing became heavy as they lost themselves in each other. Before they go too carried away, they surfaced for air.

“I love you, Judy Robinson,” he said, staring into her eyes.

“I love you too, Donald West.”

“I want to go with you and Dad, tomorrow,” she said, unexpectedly.

Her sudden request surprised him and he gently took her by her shoulders.

“Why? Are you afraid something is going to happen?”

Judy turned to look at the ridge behind the ship, “I was going to help you in the control room anyway.
I...I just have this feeling that I should be with you tomorrow. Besides, Mom has been training me as a paramedic, someone may need medical attention.”

“I’d love to have your company, Judy, but convincing your father might be another matter.”

“Just promise me that you’ll support me when I ask him.”

“All right, I will. But remember, your father can be pretty stubborn, almost has stubborn as his daughter...”

She wacked him playfully on the shoulder, “And don’t you forget it, Major West.”

Arm in arm, the young couple walked into the ship and closed the door behind them.

The next morning, after a quick breakfast, John and Don prepped the chariot for the trip up the ridge. While they were working, Judy approached her father. “Dad, I’d like to come with you and Don today.”
“Judy, this isn’t a field trip. We don’t know what we are heading into. I don’t think so darling...”

“Dad, I’m not a child anymore, there may be people hurt. Besides, I can handle a laser rifle as well as you or Don.”

John saw his wife’s resolve in his daughter’s eyes.

“You need me, Dad.”

“All right, join the party,” he relented.

“Thanks, Dad. I’ll grab some medical supplies from the ship.”

As John watched her walk back to the Jupiter, he turned to Don. “Did you know about this?”

“She mentioned last night that she wanted to come with us...”

“I suppose you didn’t discourage her?”

“I know better than to argue with her when she’s made her mind up.”

Lost Flight:
While most of the family was outside, Penny helped her mother in the galley. When they were finished, Penny turned to her mother, “Mom, can I talk to you about something?”

Although she loved all of her children equally, Maureen was closest to Penny, where Judy and Will seemed to favor her husband. Penny was also the most outspoken of the three, a trait she shared with her mother, although Maureen had mellowed considerably over the years.

“Of course, Penny, why don’t we sit down?”

Mother and daughter sat across from each other at the table and Maureen could sense that her daughter was pensive about what was bothering her, and she was already sure she knew the reason.

“Now, dear, what seems to be troubling you?” she asked.

“Mom, when did you first realize that you were in love with Dad?”

_I was right_, she thought to herself. Maureen considered her words carefully.
“Well, let’s see. As you know, I met your father when we were in college, so we both had dated other people, but to be honest, I knew we were going to be together when our eyes first met. We hadn’t even been introduced.”

Penny seemed to weigh what she had been told.

“Does this have anything to do with T’lan? Your father and I saw him kiss you last night.”

“I’m very confused,” she said. “I really like him a lot, and I feel comfortable around him, yet I’m scared at the same time. I mean...I know he would never hurt me. It doesn’t make any sense. I’m still trying to figure it out.”

_Oh, yes, Penny, it makes perfect sense_, Maureen thought.

“Penny, you, and Will, have had to grow up much quicker than you would have had we stayed on Earth. But in matters of the heart, neither of you have had the benefit of interacting with children...no...with young adults in your age group. With our decision to settle here, that’s going to change, but the Lamotia’s pairing customs are somewhat different than ours. The women are often
married when they turn sixteen. How do you feel about that?”

“T’lan already told me about that. Don’t worry, Mom. I’m not ready to take a big step like marriage even though I know he already loves me.”

“How do you know that, Penny? Did he tell you?” asked Maureen, careful to hide the concern that she felt.

“No, not in so many words, it’s more like...a feeling. Kind of like the feeling I had when Will found that robitoid, or how I felt about Mr. Keema.”

Maureen remembered that Penny didn’t leave her room the week Will had activated the alien robot and she hadn’t been taken in by the charm of the golden alien they had encountered a year later. Over the years, she had learned to listen to her daughter’s insight. It had saved their lives on more than one occasion.

“I see,” said Maureen. “You always have had good intuition.” She paused for a moment. “Penny, even though your father and I knew we were going to be together, it was almost eight months before he
proposed, and we were married a year after we met. I was nineteen by then.”

“Like I said, Mom, I know I’m not ready to take that step, but, a year from now, I might feel differently.”

“Penny, you’ll only be sixteen. Don’t you think that is way too young?”

“Yes, if we were on Earth. But we are not on Earth, Mom. Every girl in the Lamotia Clan, close to my age, is pre-joined as T’lan called it. It’s kind of like an engagement.” Penny paused to collect her thoughts.

“Mom, I’m still not sure where I’m at with all this, but when I do figure it out, I’d like to discuss it with you, if you’ll promise me that you’ll keep an open mind.”

The last thing that Maureen wanted to do was close the line of communications with her daughter although she knew convincing her husband was going to be an uphill battle. Still, she had to admit that Penny had raised a valid point.

“I’ll be honest, Penny, I’m not keen on the idea, and convincing your father is going to be a problem, but, I am willing to discuss it with you, without prejudice.”
A set of boots clicked on the ladder drawing Maureen’s attention.

“Here comes Will. We can talk about this later, all right?”

“Sure, thanks Mom.”

“Mom,” began Will. “Jarrock is here with Teral and Selana. T’lan and Brina are here as well. Dad is getting ready to leave.”

“All right, come along,” Maureen said to her children. “Let’s go say goodbye to your father.”

Just before he boarded the chariot, John took his wife in his arms.

“How long do you think you’ll be gone, John?”

Robinson looked to the north, “It depends on what we find. We’ll be back as soon as we can, darling. Don’t worry.”

“I spoke to Penny, this morning, or what I should say is she spoke with me.”

John looked at his wife, knowingly, “About T’lan?”
Maureen nodded, “About T’lan. I don’t think we have anything to worry about right now, Penny has a good head on her shoulders, but I do need to discuss this with you later.”

“She takes after her mother,” said John. “We’ll talk about it tonight, after the children are asleep.”

“All right...John...be careful.”

“I will, darling, I love you.”

He kissed her tenderly and jumped into the waiting vehicle. As they drove off, T’lan approached Maureen.

“Mrs. Robinson?”

“Oh, yes, T’lan?”

“My father instructed me to remain here to help keep watch on your camp. I was going to patrol the perimeter of the field. Would you mind if Penny accompanies me?”

Maureen could not help but smile as she remembered Judy’s first boyfriend, a stark contrast to the young gentleman who stood before her.
“I still have chores to finish, T’lan,” interjected Penny, who had just joined them.

“That’s all right, dear. Why don’t you go ahead? I can finish up here. Just make sure you take your laser pistol.”

“Thanks, Mom,” said Penny. She quickly ducked into the ship to retrieve a weapon.

“T’lan,” said Maureen, turning back to face him. “Will you be staying within sight of the camp?”

She had worded it as a question, but T’lan deliberately took it as a directive.

“Of course, Mrs. Robinson, it will be as you say.”

I like this young man, thought Maureen.

Penny joined them and T’lan helped her onto the horse’s back. He climbed up behind her and they took off towards the field.

By mid morning, the chariot had reached the northern part of the ridge and was descending the slope. The northern exposure was covered with crevasses and punctuated by a large ravine.
“I glad we waited,” said John, as he struggled to maintain control of the vehicle. “This is much worse than I thought it would be.”

The rocky ledge was barely wide enough for the chariot to traverse and the ravine was several hundred feet deep.

“Look, there,” said Jarrock, pointing to an object a few hundred yards beyond.

The saucer shaped craft had crashed just beyond the base of the ravine in another shallow valley. Unlike the *Jupiter 2*, the hull of this craft was severely scorched from the heat of reentry.

Don leaned forward to speak, “John, is that what I think it is...”

“Whatever it is, it looks like they had a rough ride down.”

“Do you think it is another Earth ship, Professor Robinson?” asked Jarrock.

“It certainly seems to be. By the way, my friends call me John.”

“I am honored by your friendship, John.”
In the second row, Don and Judy were also watching the saucer like craft.

“Don, do you think that the Jupiter Project was continued?” asked Judy. “There could be another whole family down there.”

“It’s possible, Judy. I guess we’ll find out shortly.”

Twenty minutes later the chariot pulled up to a craft that, externally, resembled the Jupiter 2 in every aspect. Before they disembarked, John ordered the Robot to run a radiation scan.

“My sensors indicate a slightly elevated level of radiation emanating from the spacecraft, but the levels are well within safe limits. I show no indication of deutronium leakage.”

“Life signs?” asked Don.

“Life signs are indeterminate, Major West.”

As they exited the chariot, Jarrock spoke to Teral and Selana, “Scout out the surrounding area, but stay within sight of the ship.”
“Yes, Jarrock,” said Teral. He and his wife disappeared around the back of the space vehicle.

While Judy grabbed the first aid kit, Don and John went to work on getting the hatch open.

“Either the APUs are out, or the hatch is jammed,” said Don. He shouted over his shoulder, “Judy, would you grab me the manual release tool?”

“Alright, Don.”

She reached into the chariot and removed the equipment and joined the three men at the hatch. Don had already opened the lock release keypad and had already tried several release codes, to no avail.

“The combinations must have been changed. The code for this year isn’t working. Come to think of it, this panel seems to have some defective digits. It’s flashing 2010, instead of 2000.”

Professor Robinson thought for a moment, “Don, do we have the code for 2010?”

“Yeah, I’ll have to get the book,” said Don, as he jogged back to the chariot.
“Robot, scan this vessel for tachyon radiation,” ordered Robinson.

“My sensors indicate significantly elevated levels of tachyon radiation, consistent with a vessel that has experienced travel at superluminal speeds without the protection of an Anti-Time Dilation Field.”

Don had just rejoined the group, “Did I just hear right? This thing came from the future?”

“It’s very possible, Major West. We’ll find out once we open it.”

Don found the emergency access code for 2010 and punched it into the keypad. The lock indicator went from red to green and they all heard the lock latch snap open. West inserted the hatch tool and extended the handle to crank the outer hatch open. A few minutes later he repeated the procedure for the inner hatch.

With the main viewport closed, the interior was pitch-black and even the emergency lights were dark. Don rushed over to the power sub panel and tried to engage the emergency lighting. While similar to the Jupiter 2, this ship’s instrumentation was much more modern than he had seen.
“Any luck?” asked John.

“No. This sub panel is dead. I’ll have to go down to the power core and check the mains.”

“I’m surprised that the locking mechanism was still working.”

“It has its own power supply,” said West. “The battery has a shelf life of twenty years.”

While her fiancé and her father were trying to get power to the ship, Judy looked around the flight deck. The layout was the same as she was used to on the Jupiter, but the controls had all been modernized with glass cockpit displays of the type she had seen on the training jets they had all flown in. Judy knew that older technology had been utilized in the design and construction of the Jupiter 2 because of its reliability. *That means that this technology is already out of date,* she thought.

She came upon the freezing tubes and shined the flashlight into one of them. A silver spacesuit filled the tube but what she saw when the light illuminated
the head caused her throat to close up. When she found her voice she shrieked, “Don!”

Both West and her father were by her side in a second. She clung to her fiancé and buried her head in his shoulder.

“The freezing tubes,” she said her voice just above a whisper.

Don brought his light up to the tube to illuminate its contents. When the beam reached the head, he saw the decomposing remains of one of the crew, a woman with pale blonde hair.

**Second Guesses:**

While John and Jarrock went below to get power to the damaged ship, Don stood outside, holding his fiancée close. John was going to check the ship’s manifest, but Don and Judy both knew that the first two tubes contained their future selves.

“Judy, are you okay?” he quietly asked her, as he lovingly stroked her hair.

“Just hold me, Don. Don’t let me go.”
She could have dealt with seeing herself, but the shock of seeing her future husband sharing the same fate, had pushed her over the edge. Knowing the two children in the other tubes were probably theirs, only added to her consternation.

Don was also having trouble holding things together. His tears flowed openly and the only thing keeping him from breaking down was Judy’s presence. He held her tighter and she returned the gesture.

She gradually loosened her embrace and drew away just enough to look at him.

“It’s not every day that you get to see your own end,” she said, brushing the tears from his face.

“I’m sorry you had to see that, but I’m glad that you’re here with me,” Don replied. “Are you all right?”

“I think so...Don, how did we get on that ship? We must have left, or will leave this planet at some point in the future, but why?”

“I wish I knew...maybe the mission logs will give us some answers. At least we were...together.”
Judy pulled him back into her embrace, “Yeah, at least there is that.”

The couple remained silent for a while, finding solace and strength in each other’s arms.

“Don, I’m almost afraid to ask, but, do you think the other two...are they our children?”

“I...I don’t know, Judy. I just don’t know.”

He looked over her shoulder and said, “It looks like your father got the power working...”

Judy turned and saw light coming from inside the spacecraft.

“Let’s go see if we can give him a hand.”

“Judy, you don’t have to go back...”

“No, Don,” she said, drawing from her own resolve as well as her fiancé’s steadying support. “Regardless of anything else, that ship has equipment and supplies that we need. It will take all of us to get them back to camp.”

Don had always felt that her parents had grossly underestimated her inner strength. He didn’t realize just how much until now.
“All right.”

When they walked back into the ship, they saw that John and Jarrock had covered the freezing tubes with blankets. Don noticed the ship’s environmental control robot lying on the floor near the space suit storage locker.

Don checked the Astrogator and could see that the control panel had been damaged by something other than a short circuit.

“Judy, check the radio transmitter.”

She went over to the radio console and looked at the radio controls. Like the Astrogator, the control panel had been physically smashed.

“Don, it looks like someone took a sledge hammer to the transmitter control panel.”

Looking over at the Cabin Pressure control system, Don saw that it had also been subjected to physical damage.

“This is the same type of damage that our Robot did to the Jupiter,” he said.
Jarrock and John ascended in the elevator. They each carried a case of deutronium fuel.

“Is that what I think it is, John?”

“Oh, yeah. There’s enough deutronium here to fill our tanks with three canisters to spare.”

“Well, we won’t have to worry about power for about ten or so years.”

John and Don made a list of vital equipment that they wanted to retrieve immediately. While Judy helped Jarrock, and his family, load the chariot, Robinson and West pulled the recording tapes and memory core from the computer. Don knew that one of the pieces of information in the memory core was the identity of his and Judy’s two children.

Sensing what Don was thinking, John said, “We still don’t know if that’s you and Judy in those tubes, Don...”

“It’s us,” Don replied. “Did you see that chain around Judy’s neck? I gave her that the night before we lifted off. It’s a locket with our picture in it. She never takes it off.”
“How in the world did you get back to Earth, and more importantly, why did you leave here?”

It was a rhetorical question and they both knew it.

“Something must have happened, John. Maybe these records will tell us something.”

“Jarrock has offered to come back with us tomorrow to arrange burial for...”

“If they are our children, John, Judy and I should be there.”

“If the two of you are up to it...”

“I’ll talk with her about it, but I think I know what her answer will be.

Professor Robinson felt like he should say something else, but none of this seemed real to any of them.

“I found one other oddity,” said the Professor. “The space pod is missing.”

“The saboteur probably took it and bailed before the ship left orbit,” said Don, somewhat perturbed. “I’d bet a year’s salary that Aeolis Umbra is behind this. In fact, this whole thing has Smith written all over it.”
“Let’s not jump to conclusions. We still don’t know that Smith was involved with the Robot going berserk. Speaking of the Robot, I pulled this one’s programming cartridge. It might give us another clue as to what happened here.”

Don looked over the data tape that the Professor had handed him.

“It looks like it’s damaged, John. We might have trouble reading it.”

“I’ll let Will take a crack at it. He might be able to discover some useful information.” The Professor slapped his friend on the arm. “Come on, Don Let’s get the rest of this equipment loaded. I want to get back before dark.”

Penny had come in from the field to help her mother with dinner as they were going to have guests. Behind the ship, Will, Doctor Smith and T’lan were laying the last section of pipeline for the artesian well. By nightfall they would have an unlimited water supply.

“Just think, Mom. No more navy showers.”
“I know, I can hardly wait,” said Maureen.
The Robinsons had been limiting water for all but potable use as even with the nearby water source, it was labor intensive to transport, filter, and fill the *Jupiter 2’s* storage tanks.

Maureen was having trouble with the trash compactor and she sighed in frustration.

“I guess this is another item for your father’s *Honey Do* list.”

Penny opened the waste chute and pulled out the waste container and looked behind it.

“Here is the problem, Mom. A piece of trash landed behind the container.”

Penny picked up the data cartridge and went to throw it out when her mother stopped her.

“Let me see that, Penny?” she asked.

“Sure, Mom, what is it?”

Maureen Robinson examined the data cartridge carefully. It had been slightly disfigured by the compactor but the interface pins seemed to be intact.
“I’m not sure, but it looks like one of the Robot’s programming cartridges. Your father would never throw this away.”

“Maybe it’s burned out.”

“Maybe, I’ll ask him just to be safe.”

Maureen walked to her cabin and placed the object on John’s desk so he would notice it. She closed the door and walked back to the galley.

While they were preparing dinner, John had called in and told Maureen that they were on their way back. When she asked if everything was fine, he told her not to worry, but something in his voice told her all was not well.

“Did Dad say that anything was wrong?” asked Penny.

Maureen was caught off guard, “Why do you ask, dear?”

“It’s just a feeling, Mom. Forget I said anything...”

“No, that’s all right, Penny. Tell me what you’re feeling.”
“I feel like, they found something out there, something terrible.”

Maureen looked into her daughter’s eyes and could see genuine fear and her own intuition was telling her the same thing.

“Who was it that said we have nothing to fear, but fear itself?” she asked.

“Franklin Roosevelt, but he was never marooned on a strange planet,” replied Penny.

“Well, whatever it is, we will all get through it. Now, let’s get this stuff to the table, we are going to have some hungry people to feed tonight.”

“Okay, Mom.”

Outside the ship, Will and Brina were working on setting up his telescope. It was supposed to be another clear night and Will had spotted a star, the previous night, that he was sure would turn out to be Betelgeuse. Tonight, he planned on getting a spectrograph image and comparing it with the one he had on file. If he was correct, and he could identify at least two more stars, he would have
enough information to calculate their exact position in relation to Earth.

“Brina, could you hand me the screwdriver, please?”

“Certainly,” replied the young girl.

Much to Will’s delight, he found that she shared his love for astronomy, and to his surprise, her people had developed a primitive, yet quite useful refractor telescope. Brina had brought a set of star maps with her and they had compared them to the charts that Will had brought from Earth.

“Will I be able to see through this as well as the one in the village?” she asked.

“You’re not going to believe the difference,” Will replied. “But many of Earth’s greatest astronomers had equipment less sophisticated than the scope that your people are using.”

“I hope my father will let me stay,” she said. “He doesn’t like to travel at dusk because of the Macktu.”

“Don’t worry, Brina. I’ll take some live video and pictures for you.”
The giant spiders, of the planet, known as the Macktu, had caused the clans many problems throughout the years. On Earth, agricultural specialists had been experimenting with high frequency sound waves to repel, rodents, insects, and arachnids.

“I might have an idea to solve the problem with the Macktu, Brina. I’ll have to talk to my Dad about it.”

“Our clan would be greatly in your debt, Will.”

As Maureen and Penny set the table, the chariot rolled up to the campsite. Maureen needed only one glance from her husband to know that something was dreadfully wrong.

“Penny, would you finish this for me? I need to talk to your father.”

“Okay, Mom.”

“Will, would you and Brina help Penny with dinner?”

“Sure, Mom.”

With the children safely out of earshot, Maureen ran to meet her husband.
“John, what’s wrong?” she asked, as her took her in his arms and guided her away from the others.

“The ship we saw last night, well, we found it and it is from Earth.”

“Survivors?”

“None, Don and I think the ship was sabotaged.”

Maureen laid her head into his chest.

“I had hoped...”

“There’s more, darling.”

She looked up into his hazel eyes, and for the first time that she could remember, she could see genuine fear. Whatever was out there had shaken her husband to his very core.

“Tell me...” he voice trailed off, afraid to ask.

“The ship is from the future, Maureen,” he said, his voice cracking as he spoke. “...and...and on board...were...Judy...Don...and we believe their two children.

Maureen clung to her husband, having felt like she had been kicked in the gut.
“Oh, John...”

The reality of what he had seen had finally hit him. In the arms of his wife, his body quaking, he wept over the loss of his first born, his future son-in-law, and the grandchildren that he may never know.

**Unwelcome Stranger:**

With the news of the sobering discovery at the new crash site, dinner had turned into a somber affair. John and Maureen had contemplated not telling Penny and Will, but in the end, they decided that their two younger children needed to know that sometime in the future, Don and Judy would return to Earth.

“John,” began Jarrock. “Tomorrow, Teral and I will return to assist you with the removal and burial of your loved ones. All of you are in mourning, and you should not have to face this alone.”

“I appreciate this, Jarrock,” said Robinson. He would have to instruct them both in the use of a decontamination suit, as he didn’t know the cause, or, what will be the cause of their death.
Don and Judy hadn’t said a word as they both seemed to still be in shock although Maureen had noticed that they were sitting much closer together than they usually did.

“I don’t understand,” said Penny. “How could that be Don and Judy in the ship? Wouldn’t their coming back in time create a paradox?”

“There is so much about time travel that we don’t know, Penny,” answered her father. “Is the landing we made in Manitou Junction now in our history books? Or did we cross into a parallel dimension were the Jupiter 2 was supposed to be there.”

“Or maybe there is only one outcome and our fates are already sealed,” Judy added quietly, leaning into her fiancé for support.

“Now, Judy, please don’t talk like that...” Maureen began to say, but Judy cut her off in anger.

“That’s easy for you to say, Mother. It wasn’t you and Dad in those tubes.”

She stood from the table and rushed behind the ship, trying in vain to hold back the tears.
“Judy...” Maureen went to go after her but John stopped her.

“Let her go, darling,” he said. “She needed to work through this herself.”

Don stood from the table, “If you will excuse me.”

“Certainly,” said the Professor. He knew that Don was going after Judy and at this moment he was the only one who could help her.

“Oh, John, I didn’t mean to upset her.”

“Of course you didn’t, darling,” John said to his wife. “I was surprised that they held things together while we were at the ship. It was bound to take its toll.”

“How did they get back to Earth, John?” asked his wife. “Even if the Jupiter could lift-off, we have no idea where we are.”

“Mom, Dad,” said Will, who had been following the conversation. “I think I might know how we find Earth.”

“How’s that, Will?” asked his father.

“Last night, at the party, Brina showed me the telescope they use in the village for star mapping. In
fact, she brought the charts that her people have drawn.”

“Go on,” said the professor, his interest piqued.

“One of the stars she showed me is called *Aurora*, but, through the telescope, it looks a lot like *Betelgeuse*. If I’m right, and I can identify two more stars, I should be able to find our position in relation to Earth.”

The procedure that his son was describing was an exercise in three dimensional trigonometry, difficult, but not impossible. The trick was correctly identifying the three stars.

“How do you intend on verifying the stellar identity?” asked John.

“Tonight, I was going to run a spectrograph of the star and have the Robot compare it to the ones we have on record.”

“It’s a good idea, Will,” the professor said admiringly, once again surprised by his son’s ingenuity.

“Dad, if it’s okay with Jarrock, I’d like to ask Brina to stay over tonight. I could really use her help to
decipher the village charts. She can have my room and I’ll roll out my sleeping bag near the viewport.”

“Maureen?” John asked, looking to his wife.

“As long as it is all right with Jarrock,” she said, as she turned to their guest.

“I have no objections, John.” He looked over to his daughter, “Brina, you will be a guest of the Robinsons this night. You will show the Professor and his wife the same respect that you show your mother and I.”

“I understand, Father.”

Jarrock looked to the west and stood from the table.

“The sun hangs low in the sky, my friends. We must return to our village. I offer my gratitude for the food you have provided. Please give my farewells to Judy and Don.”

“I will, and it has been our pleasure.”

As the clan rode away, John stood and watched with his arm around his wife. They both noticed the sun start to touch the tree line and in another forty
minutes it would be below and the Macktu would be prowling the forests.

As Don rounded the ship, he saw Judy sitting on one of the rocks, still crying uncontrollably.

“Judy?”

She glanced up and jumped to her feet. She was in his arms in less than a second, clinging to him for dear life. Don gently stroked her hair and let her cry for as long as she needed.

“I guess I made a real fool of myself,” she said, pulling herself together. “I shouldn’t have snapped at Mom like that.”

“I’m sure she understands,” he said.

Judy pulled away just enough to look at him, “Don, I want to stay here, on this planet, build a life with you and raise a family together. Why would we throw that away to go back to Earth, only to get back on another ship and go into space again? It doesn’t make any sense.”
“I know, Judy. I want the same thing. If we did, in fact, go back to Earth, there has to be a very good reason for it, although I can’t think of a good one right now.”

“Don, I have to know, why were we there, and are those our children. Would you help me sort through the memory core we pulled from the ship?”

“Tonight?” he asked.

“Please, Don,” she pleaded with him.

“All right, I was going to set up the interface tonight anyway. Will was going to download the information into our mainframe while we are at the crash site tomorrow.”

She pulled him back into her embrace, and clung tightly to him. “I don’t want to be alone tonight,” she said. “Do you mind if I stay with you till morning?”

“I don’t mind, Judy, but your parents may not like the idea...”

“Mom already knows that we’ve cuddled together. I promised her that we would keep it from going any further than that.”
“No wonder she gave me a wry grin the other morning,” said Don, as he turned bright red.

Judy laughed for the first time since they found the other ship, “Come on. Let’s go find Mother so I can apologize to her.”

The landing was not something that his instructors in Houston would have been proud of, but he had managed to get the tiny craft down in one piece. *Which is more than I can say for the Jupiter 6, he thought.*

The middle aged Lieutenant Colonel collected his belongings from the tiny space pod and opened the hatch. As he set foot on the surface of this alien world he thought of the words uttered by the first man to set foot on the moon. *One giant leap, backward, for mankind, would be more appropriate.*

He glanced back at the space pod noting the damage to the landing pads. It was wedged in a rocky outcropping with the canyon wall keeping it from tipping onto its nose. The ship would not be visible unless someone was directly overhead.
Checking his compass and map, he set out over the small rise that led to a small field where the Jupiter 6 should have crashed. Sure enough, the silhouette of the saucer shaped spacecraft could be seen in the moonlight. By the scorched appearance of the hull, he was sure that the first part of his mission had gone according to plan.

According to the records, he would find his quarry in a shallow valley south of the ridge which he was approaching. In his pack, were the instruments needed to carry out the second part of his mission. He found it ironic that the weapons were so small that one needed an electron microscope to see them, yet they held the destructive power of a thousand H-bombs.

_The Robinson Family is going to wish they had stayed, Lost in Space._

**Questions and Answers:**

The upper deck of the _Jupiter 2_ was a flurry of activity that evening. Will and Brina had verified that the star called _Aurora_ by the Lamotia Clan was, in fact, the star _Betelgeuse_, in the constellation of
Orion. Using the chart drawn by Brina’s people, Will was able to identify both Sirius and Procyon. The Robot was busy comparing the spectrographs taken by the young friends, to the data stored in his memory banks.

While the trio of astronomers attempted to find their position in relation to Earth, the soon to be newlyweds were trying to piece together a puzzle of their own. The data tapes from the wrecked ship, that the dedication plaque had named the Jupiter 6, contained a large amount of news and information from Earth, some of it, still years into the future.

“Are you two having any luck?” asked Will, as he approached the couple.

“I’m afraid not, Will,” his sister said. “Although we have found that the entertainment files are still intact.”

“Just think, Will. We’ll be able to watch next year’s World Series, as it happens,” added Don. He was trying to make light of the situation, but Will knew his heart wasn’t in it.

“That’s okay, Don, I’d much rather find out if and when I become an uncle.”
Judy gave her brother a grateful smile. “How are you and Brina coming along with your project?” she asked.

“The Robot is still checking the spectrographs, but my preliminary measurements are very close. We should have an answer in a few minutes.”

When Will returned to the table where Brina was working, Judy turned to Don, “I almost wish that we don’t find out where Earth is, Don. I don’t want to discourage Will, but maybe it’s better if we don’t find out where we are.”

“I was thinking the same thing. But even if we do find out where we are, we still can’t go anywhere. Maybe someone from Earth finds us, Judy.”

“I never thought of that, but that still doesn’t answer the question as to why we leave,” she said.

Don thought of something and he took her in his arms, “Judy, maybe I was ordered back to Earth. By rights, I’m still an officer in the United States Space Corps.”

“They can’t do that...” she started to say.

“Yeah, they can,” he said as gently as he could.
It’s the one thing that makes sense, she thought. They both had expressed their desire to stay on this planet and raise a family together, but if Don were ordered back to Earth, she knew that there was no question. She was going to be his wife, and she would have gone with him, regardless of where his duty took him.

“I have completed the spectral analysis of the stars in question,” said the Robot. “With a confidence factor of ninety nine point nine, nine, nine, nine, the stars have been correctly identified as, Betelgeuse, Sirius, and Procyon.”

“That’s great, Robot,” said Will. “Can you calculate our position in relation to Earth?”

“Affirmative,” responded the Robot. “It will take a few minutes to compensate for the luminal propagation delay.”

“What does that mean,” asked Brina.

Will picked up a note pad and started to draw as he explained, “The speed of light, in a vacuum is measured at one hundred eighty six thousand miles
per second. Because of the vast distances in space, we’ve adopted a system of measurement called the light year. As an example, Alpha Centauri, which was our destination, is four point three light years from Earth. That means it takes light, which is leaving the star today, almost four and a half years to reach Earth.”

“I understand,” said Brina. “In the time that it takes the light to reach your home world, the star has moved from its original position.”

Will was impressed with his friend’s understanding of the concept.

“That’s right,” he said. “The Robot has information on stellar movement and with that he should be able to plot our position, relative to Earth, within a couple of hundred AU. With any luck, we should be able to find out which star this planet orbits.”

“I have finished my calculations, Will,” said the Robot. “From Earth, our location is on a Right Ascension of zero hours, twenty five minutes, and forty five seconds, and a declination of minus seventy seven degrees, fifteen minutes, and fifteen
seconds, with a range of approximately twenty four point three light years.”

Don and Judy walked over and joined them, “Did you find something, Will?”

“The Robot has a course heading and approximate distance from Earth,” said Will. He turned back to the mechanical being.

“What is the nearest star system to our calculated position?”

“The nearest star to our position would be Beta Hydri, a class G2IV star in the constellation of Hydrus. It is slightly larger than Sol, and has an absolute magnitude of three point four, five. The Sol system should be on a reciprocal bearing with a visual magnitude value between four and five.”

The Robot rolled over to the chart that Brina had provided and pointed to a small star on the map.

“There,” said the Robot. “This star should be Sol, and it is visible right now.”

Will and Brina looked down at the star chart. The Lamotia clan had named this star, Belrhu.
The five of them rushed out to Will’s telescope and he turned the scope to the small star. While he was running another spectrograph, each of them looked at the object through the viewing lens. They were much too far away to resolve any details of their solar system but seeing their home somehow brought them comfort.

After they had all had a turn at the scope, Don glanced at his watch.

“I think it’s time for the two of you to get to bed,” he said to Brina and Will, who were already beginning to yawn.

“I am getting kind of tired,” said Will. “Come on, Brina. I’ll show you where you’re sleeping tonight.”

“Thank you, Will,” she answered. “Good night, Major West, good night Miss Judy.”

“Good night, Brina, good night, Will,” Judy replied.

As the two young friends strolled into the space ship, Judy turned back to Don.
“I told you he was growing up,” she said. “Last year, he would have put up an argument about going to bed.”

Don nodded, “I see what you mean. He also seems to be quite taken by Brina, don’t you think?”

“Yeah, but I think they have at least another year before Dad has to have a father-son talk with him.”

“Oh. That talk,” said Don. “I remember it well. As you know, my father was career military and tarnishing the family honor is not something he would have taken kindly to.”

Judy snuggled up closer to him, “He was just trying to make a gentleman out of you. Sometimes I think it worked too well.”

“Oh yeah,” he said as he started kissing her neck and shoulder.

“Don,” she said, playfully. “You’re getting me all hot and bothered. Save it for later.”

He drew away to look in her eyes, wanting to say so much to her, to reassure her that he would be there for her.
“I do love you, Judy. Regardless of what life brings, or what the future holds for us, I will always love you.”

Their lips met again, this time in a long gentle kiss in which they both found solace and mutual support.

They strolled up the ramp, still holding each other close.

As Don went to the console to kill the lights, he noticed that the recovery routine had finished on the crew manifest. The file had been ninety eight percent restored.

“Judy, Take a look at this,” he said.

“Did the file recovery work?” she asked, as she came up behind him.

“Yeah, I think so. We should be able to read the crew manifest.”

Don typed in the command to open the mission file, and the information scrolled up the screen as a hard copy was being printed.
Jupiter 6, Mission statistics:

Launch date: 30-December-2009

Mission objective: Colonization, Beta Hydri 4

Crew compliment: Family of four, and Pilot/Mission specialist

Colonel Donald M. West Sr. Mission Commander

Dr. Judith Robinson West Chief Medical Officer

Kathryn Ann West DOB: 30-September-2001

Donald M. West Jr. DOB 16-March-2003

Lt. Col &%^&^& (*)&^%^ $%#$^ot/Mission Specialist

Mission Summary:

Continued colonization of planet Beta Hydri 4, following reinstatement of Jupiter Program and successful flight of Jupiter 5. Estimated flight time, six months.
Don and Judy stared at the readout in disbelief.

“Don, if we had a boy, I wanted to name him after you...”

“Kathryn Ann was my great grandmother,” he interjected. Don pointed to Judy’s title. “My mother always told me to marry a doctor,” he added.

“Don, how is this possible? Medical school is four years, not counting residency and internship. I hadn’t even entertained the notion of health care until Mother started training me as a paramedic.”

“You are in your third year of college with your studies. Maybe you found your calling?”

“And what about you?” she asked. “Colonel? We must have spent at least six years on Earth. Could you have made that rank in that amount of time?”

“It is possible, with accelerated promotion. The time in grade requirements would be tight, but doable. I’m beginning to think I was ordered back to Earth.”

Don paused as he read the mission summary.

“Did you see the mission time? The propulsion and navigation systems must have been radically
changed to allow extended travel at speeds beyond the speed of light. Even though the Jupiter 2 was capable of light speed, it was designed to travel at sub-light.”

Judy was hugging herself as the information was overwhelming her.

“Don, let’s just sleep on all this, okay?”

“All right,” he said as he reached to switch off the main lights.

Judy held on to him as they stepped onto the elevator.

“Did you notice our children’s birthdays?” she asked.

“I know. We didn’t waste any time, did we?”

It was then that the reality hit both of them. Tomorrow they would be burying their family. They cried silently in the comfort of each other’s arms.

Looking through his field glasses, he noticed that the lights had just been extinguished in the spacecraft below. *Right where it is supposed to be,* he thought.
Lt. Colonel Richard Tyler, set to pitching his tent. He would wait until dawn before approaching the Robinson camp site. In less than a month, the Robinson expedition would launch a message rocket to Earth, announcing their intention to abort the Alpha Centauri mission and colonize this world instead.

His secondary mission was to prevent that from happening, at any cost.

**Cold Feet:**

The next morning Judy awoke with a start. The vividness of the dream was overpowering and she would have cried out had she not found herself still cradled in Don’s arms. For a few minutes, she allowed herself to take in his peaceful expression. *I can’t let him be killed on my account,* she thought. Ever so gently she extracted herself from his embrace and rose from the bed. She could hear sounds from the galley and she knew that her mother was probably up.

Throwing on her robe, she picked up the printout that they had recovered from the data banks and she
quietly opened the door. Don was still sound asleep she noticed, as she slipped out of his room. To her surprise, both of her parents were sitting at the galley table. She was sure that they had seen her come out of Don’s cabin and she steeled herself for a reprimand.

“Good morning, Mother, Dad,” she said, slightly embarrassed.

“Good morning, dear,” her mother answered.

She turned to her father, “Dad, I need to talk to Mom for a few minutes. Do you mind?”

“Of course not, sweetheart. I’ll be up on the flight deck. Call me when breakfast is ready,” he said as he stood to leave.

While her father strode to the elevator, she noticed Will, still sound asleep in front of the lower viewport. Judy sat across from her mother and unfolded the printout.

“I expected Dad to read me out,” she began.

“Your father and I discussed this the other day, Judy. You and Don are adults, and we would rather have you safely within the confines of the ship than trying
to find privacy somewhere outside. In another week, it won’t matter…”

“That’s what I want to talk to you about, Mom. I’m thinking about calling off the wedding,” she stated. Maureen looked shocked and Judy could no longer hold back the tears.

“Judy...why? Did you and Don have a fight?”

Judy slid the paper across the table as she began to shake, trying in vain to choke back the sobs. Maureen looked down to read the printout and her eyes went wide as she took in the information.

“The two of you found this last night, I take it,” said Maureen. “Judy, does he know that you want to cancel the wedding?”

Judy shook her head, still unable to speak. Maureen stood and came around to sit next to her daughter, and pulled her close, intent on letting her cry for as long as she needed. Between sobs, she managed to say, “If I tell him, I don’t love him anymore, he won’t try to come back. He’ll marry someone back on Earth and his children won’t have to die...”
Judy started crying again, in earnest this time. As she continued to weep, the cabin door opened and Don came running across the deck.

“Judy? What’s wrong?” he asked, as he reached the table.

Maureen stood, allowing Don to comfort his fiancée. Judy lifted her head to gaze up at him, determined to convince him that she no longer cared, but as she looked into his hazel eyes, she could see his unconditional love. She couldn’t bring herself to follow through. Instead, she pulled him down next to her, wrapped her arms around him, and held on for dear life.

“I can’t do it,” she said to him.

While Judy cried in his arms, Maureen reached for the microphone.

“John?”

“Yes, darling?”

“I think you had better come back down here.”

“I’ll be right there.”

“Can’t do what,” Don asked his fiancée, gently.
Judy managed to compose herself and she looked straight at Don. By now, John had joined them at the table.

“I was going to call off the wedding...”


“If we didn’t get married, you wouldn’t have a reason to come back to this planet, and you wouldn’t have died on that ship...”

She buried her face into his shoulder and he held her tightly. As Don comforted his future wife, Maureen showed her husband the printout from the *Jupiter 6* records.

“Judy?” her father spoke. “Do you believe that this future is set in stone?”

She simply nodded, still clinging tightly to Don.

“I don’t believe that it is,” said the Professor. “Think of this as only one possible future. Having this ship come back in time changes everything. There is a very good chance that we can find out what happened, and prevent it.”

Judy pulled away from Don and turned to her father.
“Do you think so?” she asked.

“Life never gives us any guarantees, sweetheart. We go through it and make the best decisions we possibly can, at the time, and we live with the results. If we try to second guess about what might happen, we would drive ourselves crazy. Judy, darling, there are some things that are simply beyond our control. But I’m a firm believer in the concept that our future is never set in stone.”

“Your father is right, dear,” Maureen interjected. “The other day, he asked me if I had any regrets, and I told him, no. But today, I can think of one thing we should have done different.”

“What’s that, Mother?” asked Judy.

“We should have welcomed Don to the family, before we left Earth.”

“I agree,” said the Professor. “Don, I hope that you have forgiven us for the way we treated you, back then.”

“There was never anything to forgive, John,” he replied. “I never took it personally. I knew that you and Maureen loved Judy, very much, and you would
do anything to protect her. I respected you for that, and I knew that I was going to have to win your trust the old fashioned way.”

“Well you certainly have done that,” said Maureen.

“So, Judy,” her father began, lightly. “Are you still going to call things off and break this poor man’s heart?”

“No, Daddy, of course not,” she said, in better spirits. She leaned into her fiancé as he held one arm around her.

While Maureen and Judy set out the place setting for breakfast, Jarrock, Teral, and T’lan rode up to the camp. As they dismounted from their horses, Penny ran up to meet T’lan.

“I have a gift for your mother, Penny,” said T’lan, as he pulled two sacks off of the animal. “Fresh eggs, meat, and vegetables.”

“Oh, Mom will be so excited,” she said.

Professor Robinson shook hands with his new friend, “We appreciate the provisions, Jarrock, but
that really wasn’t necessary. I don’t want to take food out of the mouths of your people.”

“Our bounty has been exceedingly plentiful this cycle, John. We have more than enough to spare. Set your mind at ease on this.”

“Well, we do appreciate it, Jarrock,” Maureen said. “Don’t we, John?”

“Of course,” said the Professor.

“Penny, would you take the food down to the galley and put the meat and eggs in to cold storage?”

“Sure, Mom,” she answered. “Come on, T’lan, you can help me.”

As the young couple strode up the ramp into the ship, Jarrock turned to address the Professor and his wife.

“T’lan has informed me that he wishes to speak to you, about the calling of her heart. I will, of course, intervene if you object to this.”

“I don’t think that will be necessary,” said John. “Maureen and I would be happy to sit with him and discuss the matter. As I understand the custom, they
aren’t going to be doing much more than they are already.”

“It’s the joining that has us concerned,” said Maureen. “Penny has been brought up with the notion that the age of sixteen is much too young to be committed in marriage. By her own admission, she isn’t ready right now, she may not be ready a year from now. And to be perfectly honest, John and I wouldn’t be comfortable with her joining at sixteen.”

“I understand, Maureen,” answered Jarrock. “I have spoken, at length, with T’lan. He understands that your customs are different than ours, and he has pledged to abide by the limits that you set forth.”

“I have to admit,” Maureen added, “I find that I trust him to respect her and watch over her. I know when she is with him, she is safe, and I don’t worry about them being together.”

“Family honor is something my people take very seriously,” said Jarrock.

“It’s a value we share,” said John. “Maureen and I will speak with T’lan, before we leave.”
Doctor Smith was about to open his cabin door when he heard Penny and her new friend speaking in the galley. He cracked the door just enough to listen in.

“You can set the food out on the table, T’lan. I just need to get the meat and eggs into the refrigerator so they don’t spoil.”

While Penny vacuum sealed the slices of meat for freezing, T’lan had set out all the vegetables.

“Penny?” he began. “I need to speak to your mother and father.”

“About what?”

“Our tradition requires that I ask your father’s permission before I call on your heart,” he said.

“Oh, that,” she answered. “Some cultures on Earth are restrictive in that manner, but who I date is my business, not my father’s. Besides, Mom really likes you. I know she’ll say yes.”

“My father told me that I should ask to speak to both of them. Our traditions are very important to me. I have no wish to dishonor our families.”
“Well you had better talk to them now. Dad plans on leaving soon after breakfast.”

“I will,” he said. He kissed her briefly and turned to climb the ladder.

As T’lan ascended to the upper deck, Smith opened his door and strode into the galley.

“Ah Penny, dear, what do we have here?” he asked.

“T’lan’s family sent us some supplies,” she said. “There is enough food here to last a week.”

“I see, carrots, peas, potatoes, corn, green beans…”

“There is some fresh meat and eggs as well,” she added, as she strolled over to the elevator. Before she stepped onto the platform, she looked back at Smith.

“Doctor Smith, can I ask you something?”

“Of course, my dear Penny, anything at all,” he said.

“Will told me that you think our new friends are a bunch of savages, is that true?”

Smith felt himself flush. While he had no reservations about arguing with Major West about the cultural attributes of the Lamotia Clan, he had no desire to hurt either Penny or Will. He found
himself ashamed of his actions after Will had stormed out of the spaceship the night the Robinsons went to the village.

“In all honesty, my dear, I might have been somewhat harsh in my initial assessment of our friends. Your new friend, T’lan, Is that his name?”

Penny nodded, and Smith continued.

“Ah, yes. Perhaps I was wrong about them. You and Will seem to be happier than I can ever remember. If they have brought such joy into your lives, than they can’t be what I originally thought, now can they?”

“I knew you’d come around, Doctor Smith. Are you coming up for breakfast?”

“Yes of course, and Penny dear?”

“Yes, Doctor Smith?”

“Please don’t tell Major West what I just told you. He’ll never let me live it down.”

“I won’t,” she said as she pushed the button to close the elevator guard.
As they ate breakfast, John went over the assignments for the day.

“Doctor Smith, I could use your help at the crash site today,” said the Professor. “That is, unless you have something more important to do.”

“I am at your disposal, Professor, although I did promise Mrs. Robinson that I would help her with the soil analysis.”

“Professor Robinson, I could accompany you,” said T’lan. “That is, if Penny doesn’t mind.”

“I don’t mind if you go with them,” she said. “I’m behind on my chores anyway.”

“All right, it’s settled. Maureen, I’m going to leave the Robot with you as well.”

“Will you be gone long, John?”

“Don and I want to salvage some more equipment from the wrecked ship. We’ll probably be gone the better part of the day. I want to bring back the chariot and the force field generator, as well as the lasers.”
“I guess that means we’ll be a two car family again,” she added lightly.

“I suppose your right...”

“Attention, Attention,” called out the Robot. “Humanoid life form, approaching from the north.”

“Someone you know, Jarrock?” asked the Professor.

“Not from that direction, John. The nearest clan is well to the south.”

“Don, let’s go with Jarrock and find out who it is. The rest of you, stay here.”

The three men rounded the spaceship and spotted a silver clad figure approaching the camp, on foot. The man seemed to be carrying a backpack.

“Don, that looks like...”

“Yeah, a *Jupiter* spacesuit,” interjected the Major. “We just might have found our missing crew member.”

The unidentified man stopped a few yards from the three friends. He was indeed dressed in the typical silver space suit with red trim that was a staple of the *Jupiter* missions.
“Hello there,” he said. “Professor Robinson, I presume.”

“That’s right,” answered John. “And you are?”

“Oh, forgive me, Lt. Colonel Richard Tyler, United States Space Corps. I’m the pilot of, well, I was the pilot of the Jupiter 6.”

Tyler stepped forward and extended his hand which Robinson accepted.

“Forgive me for saying so, Professor, but you look well for someone in his mid fifties...” he stopped when he spotted Don. “Colonel West?”

“No, well, not yet, anyway. It’s Major West,” said Don.

“I don’t know how to tell you this, Colonel, but you have come back in time by almost ten years,” said John.

“The ATD field?” asked Tyler.

“Yes, it was damaged. We found your ship. Why don’t you join us? I have some questions which I’d like some answers to.”
“Yes, of course, Professor,” said Tyler. He seemed to be in shock with the news that he was ten years in his own past.

John gauged Tyler’s reaction about his predicament, to his own reaction about seeing Earth, ten years before he was born. In all, he seemed to take the information as well as could be expected. At this moment in time, Lt. Colonel Tyler existed as two people. *This will drive the causality students insane*, John thought.

**Litmus Test:**

“After the *Jupiter 2* left Earth, and was presumed lost, two more flights were scheduled. The *Jupiter 3* was launched six months later on 11-April-1999 but the flight was aborted when the ship developed a problem with the freezing tubes.”

John sat at the table with the rest of the family and listened, as Lt. Colonel Tyler filled them in on the history of the *Jupiter Project*. At the end of the table, Doctor Smith was noticeably quiet, and John wasn’t sure if it was because of the presence of Jarrock and his family, or their new arrival.
“Sabotage,” said the Professor.

Tyler nodded, “That is what we suspected.”

“Were there any survivors?” asked Don.

“Alpha Control was able to revive the crew, via telemetry stream, but with the radio delay it was a close call,” said Tyler. “Had they passed beyond the orbit of Neptune, the crew would have been lost. General Bowers decided to pull the plug on the colonization aspect of the program until a successful manned flight had been completed.”

“I can understand why, even though I don’t agree with the decision,” said John. “So Alpha Centauri was never colonized?”

Colonel Tyler looked down as he answered, “It was colonized, but not by humans. The *Jupiter 4* flight was the first of the series designed for extended FTL travel. The entire journey, round trip, could be made in three months. The first super luminal flight was launched on 7-September-2000.”

“So the flight hasn’t returned to Earth yet,” stated Judy.
“No Dr. West...I’m sorry, Miss Robinson, by your reckoning, it hasn’t. *Jupiter 4* was manned by a military crew, all USSC astronauts. When the ship approached Alpha Prime, it encountered other space vessels also heading for the planet. The crew followed them in, landing a short distance away from the main body. They didn’t have time to get unstrapped from their couches before they were attacked. Two of the crew were killed, one seriously injured. If it hadn’t been for General Bryce...”

“Wait a second,” interjected Don. “General Bryce? Are you talking about Thomas Bryce?”

“One in the same, Col...Major West. Bryce received his first star when he returned from the *Jupiter 4* mission two years later. The ship had been declared lost and the *Jupiter Program* was subsequently canceled. Even though the ship did finally return to Earth, discovering that Alpha Prime was hostile became the final nail in the coffin.”

“Colonel Tyler, we were going to head out to the *Jupiter 6* today to bury the crew,” said John, with a twinge of color in his voice. “I was also going to
salvage whatever we could from the wreck, unless you intend on trying to get her space worthy again?”

“I’d be surprised if you could salvage anything, but I’d be glad to go out there with you.”

“I was going to ask you to join us. I’d like to hear how my daughter and future son-in-law ended up on that ship.”

Robinson stood from the table, “Let’s get moving, I want to be back before dark.”

Before boarding the chariot, Don pulled Doctor Smith aside.

“You were pretty quiet at breakfast this morning.”

“I had nothing of any significance to add to the conversation,” said Smith, somewhat subdued.

“Do you remember this guy, Smith?” he asked, confidentially. “He wasn’t in the first batch of pilots that I trained with.”

“Vaguely, Major West, but as I recall he wasn’t a pilot back then. He was in the cybernetics division.”

“Cybernetics, was he under your command?”
“No, at least, not directly,” said Smith. “My involvement with the cybernetics division was in a superficial capacity, in short, they needed help, and I was available.”

“I don’t trust him, Doctor Smith.”

“Nor should you,” Smith added. “As much as you and I have disagreed over the years, you would never have abandoned your post like this man seems to have done.”

“He said the Robot went berserk and started smashing the instruments...”

“Tyler could have easily disabled the Robot with his laser and regained control of the ship.”

“You’ve got a point,” said West.

Doctor Smith watched him climb into the chariot. As the vehicle drove away, Smith considered a piece of his past that he thought he had escaped from. As much as he wanted to, Zachary Smith found himself unable to tell his friends that they were in grave danger at the hands of this *Aeolis Umbra* agent. *I only hope Major West can read between the lines.*
Professor Robinson found himself struggling to maintain his composure, as he recited the passage for the funeral ceremony. It was only the presence of his daughter and future son-in-law that allowed him to complete the reading without breaking into tears.

“...and so we commit these bodies to the earth, and we wait on the promise of the resurrection, and the gift of everlasting life. Amen.”

Judy had buried her face into Don’s shoulder, and John knew that the only thing that was holding him together was the need to stay strong for her. I wish Maureen was here, he thought.

As he struggled to maintain his composure, he felt a hand on his shoulder and a steadying presence entered his thoughts. You are a resilient man, John Robinson, you and your family will survive this trial. Jarrock had touched his mind and set him at peace with himself.

Thank you, Jarrock. I’m truly honored to call you a friend.

When John opened his eyes, Don was walking into the ship and Judy stepped up beside him.
“Where is Don going,” he asked.

“He thought you might need to spend a few minutes with your daughter.”

Judy reached for him and he took her in his embrace, remembering the first time that he had held her as a child. To him, it seemed like only yesterday.

“No matter how old you are or how many children you have, you’ll always be my little girl,” he said.

On the flight deck of the Jupiter 6, Don began making a list of the components which he planned on salvaging this trip. His mind wandered to the story Lt. Colonel Tyler had given them on the way.

Tyler had told them that, in 2002, a crew replacement and replenishment mission had been or will be sent to Lightstation F-12. Upon returning to Earth, Colonel Fogey, who was really only the maintenance man, informed Alpha Control, that the members of the Jupiter 2 expedition were alive and well.
Fogey had given them the last known course heading when the \textit{Jupiter 2} had left the Lightstation, and Alpha Control extrapolated their position assuming they had missed Alpha Centauri altogether. The \textit{Jupiter 4} had been re-commissioned and slightly less than a year later, the missing \textit{Jupiter 2} expedition and crew had been located. \textit{Or so we’ve been told}, thought Don.

The time table given by Tyler meant he and Judy will travel back to Earth sometime in 2004, and that meant that their children would be born on this planet. And there was Judy’s medical degree, she could possibly finish medical school in four years, but it would take her another four years to finish her internship and residency. \textit{She could have excelled in her studies}, he thought. \textit{Her entire family has been blessed with stratospheric IQs and Judy may simply be a late bloomer}.

As to why, he and his bride to be had returned to Earth, Tyler could offer little or no insight, another aspect that troubled West greatly. As his co-pilot, they would have trained together for many months prior to the launch, and Tyler was treating him almost like a total stranger. Even a last minute
replacement would have come from a team that had gotten to know each other very well.

Don’s thoughts were interrupted with the fall of footsteps behind him.

“How do you like the new readouts for the flight console?” asked Tyler, as he sat down in the co-pilots chair.

“They are more intuitive than the original displays and indicators,” agreed West.

“The control modules are self contained, drop in, replacements for the original consoles, not that it’s going to matter much.”

“What do you mean by that, Colonel Tyler?”

“Soon after you and Miss Robinson wed, the Professor decides to suspend the repairs on the Jupiter 2. She never flies in space again.”

“We’ll see about that,” said Don, somewhat perturbed.

Lt. Colonel Tyler stood as Judy walked into the ship, “Colonel Tyler, my father is looking for you.”
“Of course, I promised him I would help off load this ship’s chariot. If you will excuse me, Miss Robinson, Major.”

Judy took the seat that Tyler had just vacated and she watched her fiancé, in silence, as his eyes followed Tyler walking by the viewport. Judy, all too well, recognized that particular expression on her future husband’s face.

“What’s bothering you, Don,” she asked, seeing if he would open up to her.

“I don’t even know where to begin,” he said. He tossed the clipboard aside and rubbed his temples.

Judy could see that he was stressed. She stood from the chair and started massaging his shoulders.

“Oh, that feels so good. I could fall asleep right here.”

“You don’t trust him, do you,” she asked, redirecting the conversation.

“Does it really show?”

“Yeah, it shows.”

“Too much of his story just doesn’t add up,” said Don, as he took her hand and guided her into his lap.
“I can accept us traveling back to Earth, you becoming a doctor, my promotion, but what could have made us risk space travel with such young children? Kathryn would have only been three, and Don Jr. would still be a toddler.”

“We probably didn’t use the freezing tubes when we left, Don. With the new drive system, the trip would have taken less than a year,” she replied. “We may never know why we chose to return to Earth. If only the memory core was still intact.”

“I haven’t given up on that, yet. We still might be able to pull some information from it.”

“I hope so, Don,” she said leaning against him. “I hope so.”

Back at the Jupiter 2, Doctor Smith was so engrossed in what he was doing that he didn’t hear Maureen approach.

“Doctor Smi...”

“Oh! Good heavens, Mrs. Robinson. You startled me.”
Maureen was holding a fresh pot of coffee, “I’m sorry, I thought you might like some more coffee.”

“Bless you, dear lady. Please?”

She poured him a fresh cup and glanced at his notes.

“How are the tests coming along?”

Smith finished his last notes before he answered, “I only have one more test to run and it will require a twenty four hour incubation period.”

“That sounds like the bacteria culture. Do you need help setting it up?” she asked.

“The sample has been prepared, dear lady. If you could put it in the test chamber and set the timer.”

“Certainly,” she said.

While Smith and Maureen reviewed his notes, Penny walked into the lab.

“Is there anything I can do to help?” she asked.

“Doctor Smith and I are just finishing up these tests, Penny. I take it all your chores are caught up.”
“An hour ago,” she said. “I wish I had asked T’lan to stay. Me and my bright ideas.”

“Ah, Penny dear,” Smith began. “As a student in the literary disciplines, I’m sure you are aware of the notion that parting is such sweet sorrow…”

“…that I shall say good night till it be morrow,” Penny finished, her spirits raised by the exchange.

“Penny, I’m sure they will be back before supper. Why don’t you see what Will and Brina are doing, maybe the three of you can get a game going,” suggested Maureen.

“They are still working on the new star chart and I don’t know enough about astronomy to be of any help.”

“I’ll tell you what,” said Doctor Smith. “Your mother and I are almost finished here. Why don’t you set up the chessboard and I’ll join you in a few minutes.”

“All right, Doctor Smith, thanks,” she said, eagerly as she trotted to the elevator.

Maureen turned back to Smith with a grateful smile on her face.
“Thank you, Doctor Smith,” she said.

“It is my pleasure, dear lady. I must say that her young gentleman friend has been a very positive force in her life, just as Will’s young friend has had the same effect on him.”

“It seems like you are warming up to our new neighbors, Doctor Smith. They are good people, you know.”

“As I told Penny this morning, my initial assessment may have been somewhat harsh. Seeing your children interact with peers close to their own age is quite, heartwarming.”

“You have changed,” said Maureen. “You’re not the same person that you were even a month ago.”

“I assure you, dear madam. It is a daily battle with the lesser angels of my nature.”

As Smith strode to the elevator, he reached a decision to confront Lt. Colonel Tyler later that evening. I’m going to find out what his intentions are, and if he intends to bring harm to my family, I will expose him.
A Case of Extortion:

Sleeping arrangements on the Jupiter 2 seemed as if they were going to be problematic, with the additional crew member, that is, until Doctor Smith offered the spare bunk in his cabin.

“I’m grateful that you offered, Doctor Smith,” John said to him privately. “I know that you value your privacy…”

“There was really no choice in the matter, Professor Robinson,” Smith interjected. “With their upcoming nuptials, Miss Judy will no doubt, be moving in with Major West, and Penny and Will both need their own space. As you can see, there is little alternative.”

_Besides, I can keep a closer watch on him this way_, Smith thought to himself.

In their cabin, while Penny was reading, Judy was going through her nightly ritual of combing out her hair. Knowing that she was going to see Don again tonight, she spent more time than normal fussing with herself.
When she had finished, Judy pulled back the blanket and slid into her bed.

“Good night, Penny. You can kill the light when you’re finished.”

Penny closed her book and placed it on her nightstand. She reached up to switch off her cabin lights.

“Good night, Judy. You don’t have to wait for me to fall asleep to go see Don. I won’t say anything.”

Judy sat up in bed and reached for the night light, “I didn’t realize you knew,” she said. “How did you find out?”

Penny too, sat up and gazed at her sister sheepishly.

“I woke up from a dream last night and you weren’t in your bed. When you didn’t come back in a few minutes, I checked the lavatory and the flight deck. The Robot told me that no one had come up on deck, or left the ship, so I assumed that you were with Don.”

“Why did you go searching for me?”
“I wanted to talk to you about my dream,” said Penny.

“Well, you can talk to me now, if you still want to. Was it a bad dream?”

“Oh no, it was…it was beautiful. T’lan and I were...well...you know.”

Penny began to turn bright red.

“Oh, I see,” said Judy, “that kind of a dream. In your dream, did you actually...”

“No,” Penny said quickly. “But I think we were going to.”

Judy remembered back to the first time she had been awakened by an erotic dream. She had just turned seventeen and her lack of experience with such matters made the event disconcerting. As the oldest, Judy had only her mother to discuss her dream with, and considering that it was about Don, she wasn’t going to breach the subject with her, knowing full well, that at the time, Don was not on her list of favorite people.

By circumstance, Penny was making the journey through adolescence much quicker than she did, and
it didn’t surprise her that her sister’s subconscious was leading her in this direction.

“Penny, how do you feel about T’lan?”

“You mean do I love him?”

“Is it love that you are feeling?” asked Judy.

Penny leaned back against the wall. “I don’t know, I enjoy being with him, and I miss him when he isn’t here, but I’m afraid at the same time. It’s so confusing. In my dream, when he was passionately kissing me, part of me wanted more, and part of me wanted to run away and hide.”

*This sounds serious,* thought Judy.

“Penny, you’ve only known T’lan for a very short time. I can only tell you this. If it’s real, the feelings will get stronger with time, and the anxiety will become anticipation. That’s how it was with Don and me.”

“I thought it was love at first sight, with the two of you, just like Mom and Dad,” said Penny.
“I’m not saying that it wasn’t. But I didn’t recognize it for what it was until a while later, neither did Mom.”

“I see. I guess I have a lot to think about.”

“Life isn’t a race, Penny,” Judy added. “Enjoy the time that you and T’lan are spending together. If it is true love, you will know it soon enough.”

“I do know that if Mom and Dad had not decided to settle here, I would be faced with a very hard decision to make when they left.”

Judy didn’t know how to respond to that, thinking about what she would have done had Don not been named as the pilot for their mission.

“Judy, may I ask you a personal question?”

“Of course, I’ll answer it if I can.”

“I know you were with him last night. Have you and Don, well...already been together?”

“Not in the sense that you’re asking. I still have my virginity. I want that to be a gift to my husband on our wedding night.”
Judy paused before continuing her thoughts. “For Don and I to find ourselves in those freezing tubes was a shock to both of us. The only way we are dealing with it is staying connected with each other. We are both having nightmares and waking up in each other’s arms to comfort each other is the only thing that is helping us get through it.”

“I can’t even imagine how the two of you must feel,” said Penny. “Don is probably waiting for you. You should go to him.”

“Are you sure?”

“Yeah, I’m sure, and thank you for talking with me, Judy.”

“Hey, what are big sisters for? Good night, Penny. Sweet dreams.”

“Good night, Judy. Give Don a hug for me.”

“All right, I will.”

Outside the ship, the Robot was making his rounds when he came upon Lt. Colonel Tyler.
“Good evening, Colonel Tyler. It’s very late, should you not be asleep?”

“The Professor told me that you had developed a sense of self awareness, incredible. To answer your question, I couldn’t sleep.”

Before the Robot could react, Tyler removed his power pack. He was about to open his tape drive door when Doctor Smith strode down the ramp.

“You can forget trying to reprogram him,” said Smith. “Professor Robinson and his son installed a new encryption algorithm in his memory banks some years ago. Without the keys, you are wasting your time. Believe me, I’ve tried.”

“Zachary Smith. I’ve been waiting to talk with you in private. It’s been a very long time. Have you told the others who I really work for?”

“Not yet, I thought I would inquire as to your intentions, now that you seem to be marooned, just as we are.”

“I intend on completing my mission, the one that you botched. Did you know that *Aeolis Umbra* has placed a million dollar price tag on your head?”
“As far as they are concerned, this mission was lost with all hands, including me,” said Smith, somewhat smugly.

“You are forgetting something, Smith. I’m from the future and my being here, is by design, not by accident.”

“Then you are responsible for the murder of the crew. I intend to inform the Robinsons and Major West of your duplicity...”

“Not so fast, Smith,” said Tyler. “You’re just as guilty as I am. It’s obvious to me that they don’t know of your involvement with Aeolis Umbra otherwise, you would have informed them immediately who I work for. You’re a coward, Smith loyal to no one but yourself.”

“What is it that you want?” asked Smith.

“It’s really quite simple, the Jupiter 2 mission was considered to be lost in space. My assignment is to make sure they stay that way. A month from now, Will Robinson fabricates a message drone, capable of FTL travel. The buoy reaches Earth, two years from now. The rescue ship from Earth arrives six months later. Thanks to the testimony of Donald and
Judith West, the *Jupiter Program* is reestablished. You are going to help me stop them.”

“I won’t go along with this. I don’t care if you expose me...”

“Oh, yes you will,” said Tyler, as he pulled a vial out of his pocket. “Do you know what this is?”

“A vial of colored liquid, so what?” asked Smith, indigently.

“It’s much more than a vial of colored liquid. Have you ever heard of the Ebola Virus?”

Doctor Smith blanched, “Good Heavens. What are you going to do with it?”

“Well now, that depends on you. This version of the virus has been weaponized. It spreads very quickly and it is one hundred percent lethal. One word from you about my mission and I’ll release it.”

Smith was paled and he sat in one of the chairs. Before returning to the ship, Tyler spun around to face him.

“One more thing, Smith, I’ve planted an automatic release device nearby, with enough of this virus to
kill every human in this valley. So don’t get any bright ideas about attacking me in my sleep.”

“What if it is released by accident? Is there an antidote?”

“I do have the antidote, but it’s not with me, and I don’t have nearly enough for everyone. A lot of people will die, quite horribly I might add. Sweet dreams, Doctor Smith, and don’t forget to plug the Robot back in.”

A despondent Doctor Smith sat at the table, considering waking the Professor, but his fear of the virus and being exposed as an enemy agent himself was giving him pause. He picked up the Robot’s power pack and trudged over to plug it in.

When the Robot was re-energized it straightened out and turned around.

“Doctor Smith, what are you doing here, and where is Colonel Tyler?”

“Asleep by now, as you seemed to have been. Have you no robotic pride, you clumsy clod.”
“Tyler must have removed my power pack,” said the Robot. “The last thing my memory banks recall, was conversing with him.”

“Your power pack was loose. You obviously bumped into something and jarred it free. I reseated it, a moment ago.”

“And Tyler was not here?”

“No, I spoke with him briefly, before he retired for the evening, which is what I intend to do.”

“Good night, Doctor Smith.”

“Good night, ninny. And try to be more careful next time.

The Robot dropped his sensor dome, seemingly embarrassed.

“I have to bring Tyler with us when we go back to the Jupiter 6 wreck, tomorrow,” said Don, as they cuddled closely in his bed.

Beside him, Judy had rested her head on his chest, “I was hoping that we were going to be alone, for a change. Why does he have to come?”
“He said that he wants to inspect the freezing units, something about feeling guilty about being to only survivor.”

“It’s got to be hard for him, Don. I would probably feel guilty too...”

“Something else is bothering me, something that Smith said...”

“Remember, Don, we don’t let Doctor Smith come between us,” she admonished him ever so lightly.

“No, it’s not like that. This time, I think Smith may be right.”

Judy propped herself up on her elbow. Don almost never agrees with Doctor Smith.

“Tell me,” she said.

“Remember when Tyler told us about his robot smashing the instruments?”

“Yeah, it was like déjà vu. I thought we were all going to die, right then and there. If it wasn’t for you and Dad, we would have all been killed.”
“We got lucky. What Smith said, was, Tyler had a laser pistol with him in the space pod. Why didn’t he just shoot the robot?”

Judy wondered about it for a moment. When their robot had smashed the astrogator, the ship immediately went out of control, the propulsion system engaged at maximum thrust sending them into a hyper drive. The ship was pitching and rolling so bad that it had been next to impossible to stand. Even after Don had engaged the auto-stabilizers and tried to help her father disable the robot, it took several minutes for the ship to stop its gyrations.

“If he already had the gun, maybe he could have stopped the robot. I don’t know.”

“The thing that really bothers me, Judy, is it would be almost impossible to launch the space pod with the ship out of control like that. He has to be the luckiest pilot alive to have pulled that off.”

“Hey,” she said suggestively. “I thought you were the luckiest pilot alive?”

“Well, that goes without saying,” he said as he brought her lips to his.
When they pulled apart, Judy glanced at the clock, “We should get some sleep, Don. I don’t want you to be tired driving on that ridge tomorrow.”

They kissed each other once more and soon dozed off in each other’s arms.

**Truth and Consequences:**

John was surprised when Doctor Smith volunteered to assist the Major at the crash site, but the fact that West did not object left him even more perplexed.

Seated in his cabin, just before he and his wife were about to turn in, he fingered the two data modules on his desk. One of them had been removed from the robot aboard the *Jupiter 6*, but the other, had been found by his wife and daughter in the waste disposal system. As if she was sensing his thoughts, Maureen strode over and sat next to her husband.

“John, you’ve been toying with that module since I gave it to you. Why don’t you just plug it in and see what is on it?”

Professor Robinson sighed, “To be honest, Maureen, I’m afraid of what I might find if I examine this
cartridge. After our Robot malfunctioned, Don and I pulled the programming tape from him to see if he had been tampered with. The cartridge was encrypted. We couldn’t read what was on it.”

John pointed to a number on the side of the unit, 8014.

“You see this serial number?” he asked.

“Yes,” said his wife, nodding her assent.

“This is the same cartridge that I removed from the Robot when Don and I secured him below. Later that day, I caught Smith fooling around with some of the Robot’s components, but I became distracted when we came across the derelict ship, and until yesterday, I had completely forgotten about this tape.”

“John, does it really matter now what you find on that tape? Trust me, dear. No one was angrier with Doctor Smith than I was the night that the Robot turned on Will. But a few weeks later, Doctor Smith did save all of our lives, by warning us about the orbit of the planet.”

“You’re right about that, darling,” agreed the Professor. “Had we continued any further south, we
wouldn’t have had time to build the shelter. We would have all been killed. I just wish Smith would have owned up to his involvement.”

“He is probably afraid, John, I mean, how many times has he been banished from the camp before. Besides, the Robot simply may have malfunctioned. Doctor Smith may have had absolutely nothing to do with it.”

“No, I don’t think so, Maureen. Earlier tonight, I dug out the pre-launch checkout procedure for the Robot. He was supposed to have been locked on his pedestal, with his power pack removed, and the power circuits deactivated. This procedure was to be double checked just prior to lift off, and Smith was the last person on board. I quite sure that I’m not going to like what I find on this tape.”

Robinson knew that he would be angry if the tape revealed what he suspected to be true. He was a very protective and passionate man who deeply loved his wife and children. Knowing, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that Smith had intended to cause the demise of his family would tax the very limits of his patience.
“Does it really matter now, John,” she asked him again.

John could not help but be moved by her propensity to see the good in everything. It was one of the traits that he dearly loved about her. It was an attribute that she had passed on to their children. Her trusting nature struck a balance to the suspicious disposition of Major West, often allowing him to find a middle ground when dealing with Smith.

“If Doctor Smith truly wants to be free of his past, he needs to be confronted by it. Otherwise, he’ll continue to live in denial.”

“I suppose you are right,” said Maureen. “But promise me you will remember that Doctor Smith has saved all of our lives, on more than one occasion. He is not the same person that he once was, John.”

“I’m not likely to forget, darling. You’ll make sure of that,” he said, pulling his wife close to him.

The next morning, after the chariot had left, Will was up on the flight deck, hard at work in an attempt to recover the rest of the corrupted files, still lost in the
memory core of the *Jupiter 6*. He had managed to restore some of the news reports that were dated late next year. The images of an attack on United States had left him in a pensive mood. As he was about to start the next set of files, T’lan and Brina strode into the ship.

“Hello, Will,” said Brina. “What are you working on?”

“Oh, hi Brina, hi T’lan,” said Will. “I promised Don that I would try to recover some more of the information in the computer core from the wreck. You can me help if you like.”

“I do not know what help I could be, Will. Maybe I can continue working on the star chart while you finish.”

“Is Penny here?” inquired T’lan.

“She’s in the galley helping my mother. You can go on down to see her if you want.”

“Thank you, Will.”

As T’lan went below, Brina sat down next to Will.

“Will, you seem troubled,” she said.
Will stopped what he was doing and turned his chair to face her.

“I just found a news file that had some bad news, or what will be bad news from Earth,” he said. He was still trying to come to grips with the horrific images that he had seen.

“I’m sorry, Will.”

An uneasy silence fell between them and Brina decided to change the subject.

“I brought some more star information with me today. It might help us identify some of the ones we were not sure of.”

“That sounds great. Just give me a minute to save these files and I’ll give you a hand.”

Brina smiled, “All right.”

By now, Don was negotiating the narrow ledge that descended the cliff wall and the task was every bit as difficult as Professor Robinson had described. The previous day, Don had traversed the ledge on the
way up, but going down required more skill and concentration.

Beside him, Judy had been very quiet, and Don wasn’t sure if it was due to their unexpected passengers, or she was reluctant to distract him from the task at hand. *Or maybe returning to our own graves has her disquieted.*

“Judy, are you, okay?” he asked, not taking his eyes off the trail.

She responded placing her hand on his shoulder.

“You’ve got your hands full. I’ll talk to you once we get off this ledge,” she said.

She had stated the obvious answer, but Don knew, from the tone of her voice, that something other than the trip was occupying her thoughts.

“All right,” he said, glancing very briefly at her smile.

Professor Robinson had been working at the programming station for over two hours when Maureen brought him a coffee.

“Thank you, darling, you are truly an angel.”
“Judging from what you were mumbling, under your breath, I thought you could use a break,” she said. John blushed. He had made it a habit never to curse in front of his family.

“You weren’t supposed to hear that,” he said, embarrassed.

“I know, dear,” she said. “You must really be frustrated.”

She took his arm and led him to the galley, and they sat down at the table beside each other.

“There is data on both of those cartridges,” he said. “But it’s encoded. Without the access code, I can’t read the program.”

Maureen tilted her head, knowingly.

“Well, I may be just a lowly biochemist, who knows nothing about cybernetics, but it seems to me, that in order for the Robot to read and execute the instructions, he would have the ability to decipher the coding.”
“Darling, that makes perfect sense,” he said, gazing at her in admiration. “Now why didn’t I think of that?”

“Perhaps you’ve been preoccupied,” she said, her voice of reason forming an anchor for his soul. “After all, we do have a wedding coming up shortly.”

“I’ve made my peace with that, Maureen. I know Don will take care of her. Any doubts I might have carried, were swept away when I saw the family portrait they brought from Earth. Maybe I’m just tired.”

“John, you haven’t stopped since we left Earth, and every day has been a struggle just to survive. You have taken that weight all on your shoulders. Yesterday had to have been just as hard for you, as it was for Don and Judy...”

“It was difficult, Maureen,” he replied, gently taking her by the shoulders. “But I never have felt like I was facing our difficulties alone. Darling, you don’t know how many times I was ready to give up, and it was only your strength that kept me pushing forward.”

“And here I was, depending on you to keep me strong,” she replied.
They drew together in a long gentle kiss, comforted by the knowledge that they needed and depended on each other.

Robinson reached for the microphone and called to the upper deck.

“Will?”

“Yes, Dad?”

“Would you send the Robot down here? I have an assignment for him.”

“Right away, Dad.”

West pulled the chariot in front of the wrecked *Jupiter 6* and they disembarked from the vehicle.

“Don, I’d like to check our cabin below,” said Judy. “There has to be a clue, as to why we left for Earth, down there. Maybe one of us kept a journal.”

The previous day, they had gathered a couple of pictures from their room, but they found it too emotionally draining to search any further.
“All right, I’ll join you in a few minutes,” he replied. He hoped that they had marshaled up enough courage to face the future.

Don turned to the others, “Smith, bring up the damage report, and double check the spare parts inventory. I suspect that we might have brought extra supplies from Earth.”

“Of course, Major West,” he said, hurrying into the ship.

“Colonel Tyler, you said that you wanted to check the suspended animation subsystem?” asked Don, as they entered the control room.

“Yeah, maybe I can figure out what happened. I’m going to have a look at that robot as well.”

“Whatever you do, don’t reactivate it. Ours turned on us and we had to wipe and reprogram it.”

“Don’t worry, Major. I’m sure the power pack is quite dead. I want to pull its programming cartridge and find out what might have caused it to malfunction.”

“Way ahead of you,” replied Don. “Professor Robinson and I pulled the tape a couple days ago.
The professor was supposed to be reading it this morning.”

“Oh...I see,” said Tyler. Well then, let’s hope he can find some answers.”

After Don and Judy descended in the elevator, Tyler rushed to Smith’s side.

“What did you do with the programming cartridge that you had for the original B-9 robot?”

“I disposed of it some time ago,” Smith lied. “Professor Robinson never had a chance to examine it.”

Tyler strode over to the radio console and noted, with satisfaction, that it was still in a state of disrepair. He ran out of the ship and climbed into the chariot. Quickly he found the main control for the radio relay and switched it off.

In the cabin they shared together, as husband and wife, Don and Judy rummaged through their personal belongings. They found more pictures of their children as well as photos that had been taken while they were on Earth. There was a picture of
Judy and her cousin Joan, taken when Judy had graduated from medical school. Don could see by the date, that the photo was several years into the future, but Judy didn’t seem to have changed all that much, with one notable exception. Her eyes seemed to exude an air of confidence that could only have been gained through life’s experience.

They also found a shot of Don and his father, both of them wearing the full bird insignia of an Air Force Colonel.

“This must have been taken just before we leave, or will leave,” she said.

Judy opened one of the drawers and found some of her night wear. She took one of them out and held it up to herself so Don could see.

“Whoa!” he said.

“It’s nice to know that we kept some spice in our marriage,” she said suggestively. “At least I’ll have something nice to wear on our wedding night.”

Judy came across a large notebook at the bottom of her drawer.

“Don, look,” she said.
Don turned to her as she flipped through the pages of the notebook. It had all been written in her handwriting, and the journal had been started soon after she found out she was pregnant with their first child. Reading through it, she realized that it parts of it had been written before they left for Earth.

“I wrote this before we left,” she added. Quickly she flipped through the pages and found a passage that had been penned while they were en-route to Earth.

“Our answers are all in here, Don. They have to be!”

“That’s quite a bit of reading...”

“We can start tonight. We’ll each take a section and read through it...”

“Wait a second, Judy,” he said. “Are you sure about this? Some of what is in here might be personal, I mean, maybe I shouldn’t be reading it.”

Judy considered his objection and she had to admit, he did have a point. But when she glanced at one of the pictures of her and Don gazing into each other’s eyes, a shot that had been taken after he had made colonel, she was sure that no force in the universe would quench the fire of love between them.
“I don’t think there is anything in here that I wouldn’t have shared with you. I’m willing to risk it, Don.”

“Well, as long as you are comfortable with it,” he said. “I’m going to find the spare parts for the radio system. I’m curious what John found with that tape.”

“Professor Robinson, I have successfully decrypted the instruction set,” said the Robot. It had taken him less than twenty minutes to decrypt the tape.

“Good work, Robot.”

Robinson punched up the file and the instructions scrolled up on the screen. Whoever had programmed this environmental control robot had only one thing on their mind, sabotage.

The robot had been programmed to destroy only three systems on the ship, but the three systems chosen, navigation, communications, and cabin pressurization, were the three systems that would have doomed the mission.
John’s heart froze when he saw the name of the programmer, without a word he dashed to the ladder, leading to the upper deck.

“John? What’s wrong?” Maureen called, but her husband was already on the flight deck.

Ascending the ladder as quickly as he did, she found him at the radio.

“Jupiter 2 to chariot, come in, chariot,” he called fervently.

“John?”

“Jupiter 2 to chariot! Don! Judy!”

He turned to his wife, and for the second time in her life, she saw a look of dread in her husband’s eyes.

“John, tell me, what’s wrong?”

“Don and Judy are in danger. Lt. Colonel Tyler programmed that robot. He has to be the saboteur.”

“What about Doctor Smith? Surly he won’t go along with this?”

“I don’t know, darling. I just don’t know.”


**Hostage Situation:**

Repairing the communications system on the *Jupiter 6* took Don less than twenty minutes. When he was sure that everything was working, he tuned in the frequency for the *Jupiter 2* and hailed them.

“*Jupiter 2, Jupiter 2*, this is *Jupiter 6*. How do you read? Over.”

“Don!” the Professor’s voice came through the speaker. “I’ve been calling you for the past ten minutes. Are you all right?”

Professor Robinson sounded more than just a bit troubled.

“Yeah, John, we’re fine. We never heard your call. What’s wrong?”

“I want all of you to return to the *Jupiter 2* immediately,” said Robinson.

“John, I found a stockpile of components we need to repair the ship. It will only take me about an hour to load the chariot.”
“Negative, Don. We can get the equipment later. I want you all to return right now. That is an order, Major.”

“Understood, Jupiter 6 out.”

“Don? What could be wrong?” Judy asked. “The last time Dad spoke to you in that tone of voice was years ago.”

West remembered the incident on Priplanus when John had snapped at him out of anger. At the time, Don assumed he was being impulsive and stubborn, but after seeing what the blazing sun had done to the shelter, he had learned to give her father much more respect and consideration. John also learned a lesson in leadership that day, his hasty decision to leave without allowing Don to re-align the solar batteries had almost cost West his life.

“All the more reason to listen to him,” said Don, coming out of his reverie.

Judy had an armful of belongings which came from their cabin.

“You better put that stuff in the chariot. I’ll get Smith and Tyler.”
As Judy strode outside, Don climbed down the ladder to the lower deck.

“Doctor Smith, Colonel Tyler, drop what you’re doing and let’s go. John just ordered us back to the ship.”

“Did he say why, Major?” asked Tyler.

“No, and I didn’t question his order. Now move it.”

“Coming, Major,” said Smith, seemingly eager to leave.

Lt Colonel Tyler knew that Robinson must have found a way to access the robot’s programming tape, and the information contained on the cartridge would implicate him as a saboteur. Unbeknownst to Smith, he had been ordered to eliminate West and his wife by making it look like an accident, and the indigenous arachnids of Beta Hydri 4 seemed like an ideal way to accomplish his goal.

Now that he had been discovered, he could have simply killed them outright, but Tyler had a sadistic sense of revenge to satisfy. West had embarrassed him numerous times during training, and he had
sworn that the Major would have his day of reckoning, by watching his beloved die before his very eyes. If Smith cooperated, then he would live, if not, he would share the fate of the Major and his intended.

Don, Judy, and Doctor Smith were waiting for Tyler at the chariot, when he came trotting down the ramp. Don climbed up into the waiting vehicle and had turned to help his fiancée, when Tyler pulled a semiautomatic pistol and grabbed Judy from behind. He held the gun to her head.

“Judy...” cried Don.

“Don’t try it, West. Unless you’d like to see what’s inside her pretty little head splattered on the glass,” said Tyler.

“Please, you’re hurting me,” Judy pleaded, but Tyler only tightened his grip.

“Quit struggling, or I’ll blow your head off right now,” threatened Tyler.

“This is absurd, Colonel Tyler,” said Smith. “Release her, this instant, I say.”
“I should have known you wouldn’t have the stomach for this, Smith. Now get in the chariot, both of you. Toss your weapons in the back, and don’t get cute. I can snap her neck just as easy.”

“All right,” said West. “Just don’t hurt her.”

Smith and West reluctantly complied and Tyler, not so gently, pulled Judy into the vehicle with him.

West started the chariot and put it in gear.

“Drive north, Major, leave the radio and the transponder off,” said Tyler.

West depressed the accelerator and the chariot lumbered towards the ridge in the distance.

Back at the Jupiter 2, John strapped on his laser pistol and dug for an item that he never expected to use, a pair of handcuffs.

“I didn’t know that we had those, on board,” said Maureen. “What do you intend to do with him?”

“Once I know Judy and Don are safe, I intend to take Lt. Colonel Tyler into custody.”
“What then, John? Do we keep him locked up until the first ship from Earth arrives, if it ever arrives?” she asked. “Even a man who is obviously guilty deserves a fair trial.”

“I agree, Maureen,” he said, gently. “There is another option. The Lamotia Clan does have a judicial system, and surprisingly, it isn’t all that different from our own. I intend to turn Tyler over to them with a list of charges and specifications. The judicial code followed by the Lamotia Clan is very straightforward.”

“John? Tyler is most likely guilty of murder. Murder of our daughter and son-in-law, and our two grandchildren, on Earth these would be considered capital offenses. What are the consequences if he is convicted?”

John took his wife in his arms. Capital punishment was one of the very few things that they disagreed on. John had always considered the death penalty to be justice, while Maureen believed that life was sacred, and the taking of a life, except in self defense, was much too close to playing God.
“If convicted, Tyler could be sentenced to death. But that will be up to the judicial council,” he replied.

“Will they listen to a plea for leniency?” she asked.

“They just might,” said John. “If you really feel that this is what you need to do. I won’t argue against you.”

Maureen leaned into her husband in gratitude knowing how strongly John held to his own beliefs.

“Don and Judy may not be so easy to convince,” he added.

John released his wife and stepped over to the radar screen. He switched on the unit and tied it into the relay station at the top of the ridge. A blip appeared on the screen north of where the Jupiter 6 crash site was, but it was not transmitting the transponder code for the chariot, and the target was heading in the wrong direction.

Disturbed, Robinson walked back to the communications station. He snapped on the equipment and picked up the microphone.

“Jupiter 2 to chariot, come in, Don.”
“Jupiter 2 to chariot, Don, Judy, please answer.”
The radio received nothing but static.

“John? What’s wrong?”

John pointed to the blip on the radar screen, “I’m sure that is the chariot, but they are heading in the wrong direction. Not only that, the transponder is turned off.”

“Oh, John, you don’t think...”

“I don’t know what to think, Maureen,” he interjected. “I’m going out there.”

“I’ll come with you...”

“No darling, I’m flying out with the jet pack. I can be out there in twenty minutes. The chariot will take much too long.”

“All right, I’ll get your coat,” she said.

While Maureen went below to retrieve the Professor’s flight jacket, John hauled the jet pack outside. He had just finished fueling the unit when his wife returned, carrying his jacket and what looked like an envelope.
“John, I found this on your desk,” she said as she handed him the envelope. “That’s Doctor Smith’s handwriting.”

John opened the letter and quickly read its contents, his heart stopping as he realized the implications.

“John, you’re as white as a ghost...”

John handed the letter to his wife and shouted across the field.

“T’lan! Penny!”

While John rounded up the children, Maureen read the letter.

Dear Professor Robinson,

By the time you read this letter, you may already know that Lt. Colonel Tyler is the saboteur responsible for the loss of the Jupiter 6 and her crew. Tyler is a member of the organization you know as Aeolis Umbra.

What you may not know, and must now be told, is I was also once a member of this misguided nefarious
organization. The sabotage of the Robot that almost cost us our lives was my doing.

Tyler worked in cybernetics and was one of my two contacts. The other, Major Frank Killian, was assigned to security in Houston.

I was going to inform you of Tyler’s duplicity, until I learned that he has, in his possession, a weaponized strain of the Ebola Virus, a biotoxin which he has preprogrammed to release, somewhere in this valley. Unless he restarts the timer at least once a day, the entire valley will become contaminated with the virus. Be aware, he also carries a vial of the toxin on his person.

I fully expect to be held accountable for my actions now that you know, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that I was responsible for the failure of the Jupiter 2 expedition.

Yours truly,

Dr. Zachary Smith

“Oh, Doctor Smith...” said Maureen.
John had gathered the children and sent them into the ship. He turned back to his wife.

“Maureen, I have Will closing all of the outside vents and engaging the life support systems on the ship. Once you’re inside, stay inside. Once we return, don’t open the door until the Robot has done a bio sweep the atmosphere...”

“John, I...”

“You know I’m right, darling,” he said.

Maureen was on the verge of tears, but she knew she needed to call on some of her inner strength for her husband’s benefit as he was about to head into the whirlwind.

“Be safe, my love,” she said.

John kissed her passionately, as if he wasn’t going to see her again. He broke free and strapped into the rocket belt. Firing the thrusters, he rose from the ground and flew to the north, nursing as much speed as he could out of the unit.
As they approached the cliff, Don saw a small cave opening in the side of the formation.

“That cave is where we are going,” said Tyler. “Pull up in front of the opening and kill the engine. The two of you are going to get out slowly and lie face down on the ground. Remember, any funny business and your fiancée is going to lose her mind, literally.”

“Don, he’s going to kill us anyway...”

Tyler tightened his grip on Judy’s throat cutting off what she was going to say. He could see the rage building up in West’s face and he cocked the hammer back on the pistol.

“This is a hair trigger, Major. Don’t push your luck.”

West and Smith climbed out and Tyler released his grip allowing Judy to breathe.

“Don’t try that again, Miss Robinson. It will be that last thing you ever do.”

Don was going to try to jump him as he was getting out with Judy, but with the hammer cocked on the weapon, he couldn’t risk it. They both laid face down on the ground, as they were instructed.
West knew that his fiancée was right. Tyler planned on killing them and he was going to use the cave to hide their bodies. As soon as he let’s go of Judy, I’m going to jump him, consequences be damned.

**Acts of Courage:**

As soon as John had left, Maureen gathered the children on the upper deck and explained the situation to them. She and her husband had decided that Will and Penny were both old enough to no longer be sheltered from the dangers that they may face. As John had put it, *their very survival may depend on them knowing the truth.*

Her children were no longer children, they were young adults and Maureen found the notion of letting them go a difficult pill to swallow. But several months earlier, Will had, almost single-handedly, saved all of their lives when a group of aliens had captured the *Jupiter 2*. Doctor Smith had been with him, but it was Will’s technical knowledge of the ship that allowed him to return and rescue his family.

“I knew I didn’t like him for some reason,” Penny said. “When he left the ship, I had the feeling that
Colonel Tyler was thinking about something he had to do, but...it’s gone now. But I can’t shake the feeling that we are all in danger.”

“We already know that Tyler planted a device somewhere nearby,” said Will.

“I know that, but this is different. Do you remember how you used to feel when you would walk into a dark cave?”

“Come on, Penny, you don’t really think...”

“Now just wait a minute, Will,” interjected Maureen. “You know that your sister has gifted intuition. I think we should listen to her.”

“Excuse me, Mrs. Robinson,” said T’lan. “Penny has had precognitive thoughts before?”

“Yes, she has, T’lan, several times before,” said Maureen.

“This is considered a great gift by my people,” T’lan began. “The minds of all sentient beings emanate mental energy. This is how we are able to perform the joining of minds through physical contact. Every so often, one of us is born with the ability to sense beyond our physical world and touch another. Ages
ago, our scientists also experimented with the travel to other ages. One of our greatest philosophers, Delvar the Wise, postulated an idea that all of time, past, present, and future are somehow intertwined and exist, simultaneously in the same space.”

“He’s describing one aspect of inter-dimensional theory,” said Will.

“All right, how does all of this help us with our current situation?” asked Maureen.

“Forgive me, Mrs. Robinson, I’ll explain. Penny, through no fault of her own, lacks the mental discipline to harness the gift that she has been blessed with. Without the mental control learned by mastering the art of touch telepathy, she is unable to focus her mind on the doorway that she has been given.”

“T’lan is right,” Penny suddenly said. “It’s like hearing voices through a closed door. You can make out bits and pieces, but you can never hear the entire conversation.”

Maureen knew right away where T’lan was going with this.
“T’lan, as I understand your customs, it is taboo, for you to join minds with a woman, outside the bonds of marriage. Can Brina join with Penny?”

“I truly wish she could, Mrs. Robinson, but Brina has just begun to develop, and her telepathic abilities have not yet reached their full potential. In addition, she has yet to complete the training required to discipline her mind.”

As they discussed the problem, Penny was being assailed by a foreboding feeling of dread.

“Mom, if T’lan can help us find this device by touching my mind, we don’t have a choice. The lives of everyone outside the ship might just depend on this.”

Maureen was torn, knowing full well that if this strain of virus were released, it would cause the death of everyone in the valley. While the Jupiter 2 would protect them from the initial outbreak, there was no guarantee that the strain would be destroyed by the lack of living hosts. As a biochemist she was well aware of the dangers associated with weaponized biotoxins.
As a mother, she was also divided. The possibility of saving husband and family outside was tempered by the desire to keep her daughter innocent for as long as possible. She also felt responsible for T’lan. The solution he proposed would dishonor him and his family.

“Is there no other way, T’lan?” she asked.

“I fear not, Mrs. Robinson. I have no concern for myself, but for your daughter.”

“T’lan, I’m not afraid,” said Penny.

“Penny, you must be sure that you understand the magnitude of the decision that you make today,” began T’lan. “Once done, it is done. You and I will be as one heart and one mind. This is not a step to be taken lightly.”

Maureen had already decided that she liked and trusted T’lan. His genuine concern for Penny’s well being convinced her that he would be as true to her as Don was to Judy.

“Penny, my dear,” Maureen said, tears streaming down her cheek. “You are old enough to understand the ramifications. This decision is yours and T’lan’s.”
The cave was one of several which were carved into the wall of the sheer cliff and Judy forced herself to study her surroundings, a trait she had learned from Don. At one time, an underground river must have carved its way out of the rock face as there was evidence of the ancient riverbed leading down into the valley. *Dad would love to study this.*

As Tyler forced her along, behind the others, and as she considered the fate that was about to befall her, and her fiancé, her thoughts drifted to her childhood.

Judy had resented the fact that her parents had seemed too busy for her when she was born, and she had found herself jealous when her mother decided to stay home to care for Penny upon her birth. *Why didn’t she stay home with me?* Judy had pondered that very question as a young child.

In time, she grew to understand that her parent’s actions were out of necessity and by the time Will came along, she had adjusted to her new life. As with most young girls, she saw her father as the greatest
man alive and she had formed a special connection with him.

Entering adolescence, she found herself comparing her potential suitors to her father. Not that she had all that many, thanks to her mother’s strict oversight. With only one exception, none of them measured up to the man her mother had married. That all changed, the day she met a dark haired, hazel eyed, Air Force Captain, named Donald West.

Almost five years her senior, her parents had done everything to discourage the relationship from blossoming, but the chemistry between her and Don was simply too strong to ignore. A few months after they met, and the day she turned seventeen, Judy informed her parents that she and Don were going to start seeing each other. Her mother and father had considered forbidding them to date, but knew that there would be little they could do to stop them. They instead, chose to allow them to see each other under certain restrictions, which they hoped the older West would soon grow tired of and move on.

The plan backfired. Her parents had grossly underestimated his commitment and love for their
daughter. In addition, Don had been a hit with the other two Robinson children, being one of the very few pilots who took an interest in the younger siblings. Those factors, along with West’s stellar performance in the training aspect of the mission, eventually led to Captain West being chosen as the Jupiter 2 pilot.

By the time she had turned nineteen, roughly six months before the Jupiter 2 left Earth, John and Maureen had begun to warm up to West, who was now a major. But the training and launch preparation, as well as a credible security threat, allowed her and Don very little time away from the base. A week before the launch, they seriously discussed marriage. While they joked about eloping, they never really considered it, as Judy wanted her family present at her wedding.

Judy was long over the notion that she had been a disappointment to parents, but she wanted and needed their approval of the man she had chosen to be her husband. She and Don decided to wait until they landed on Alpha Prime to ask her father to marry them. Neither of them had foreseen the trials
and difficulties that they would face over the next three years.

*We were so close*, Judy thought. It suddenly hit her that they were both really going to die, and she found herself wishing that they had eloped, or at least made love. Silently her tears burst forth. She closed her eyes tightly and the image of her and Don, gazing into each other’s eyes, burned itself into her conscious. The woman in the picture, her future self, had become everything that she had ever wanted to be and her image held an air of poise and confidence that Judy had never known. Reaching deep within her soul she found the inner strength that had been inside all along and she made peace with what was to come. *This is the woman I want my husband to remember.*

Doctor Smith noticed the evidence of residual spider web on the walls of the cave. Knowing that some species of arachnid were known to nest in ground borrows, did not sit well with him. From the size of the strands, he knew that these spiders would not be
the typical garden variety found back home. *I don’t like this one bit.*

Smith knew that he was no kind of hero. Even the stern hand of his Aunt Maude, had done little to instill pride into his psyche. All his life, he had looked for the easy way out. As Zachary Smith proceeded towards what he knew would be his doom, he considered how his selfishness and affinity for vanity had cost so many others. Was he afraid? Oh, yes, he was terrified. But his fear was being tempered by the anger and rage he was feeling towards the man who was hurting someone he truly cared about.

All three of the Robinson children had at one time or another defended him, often when he didn’t deserve it. They had openly accepted him into their family and shown him more kindness than he had even known. Judy, as the oldest, had often been the most vocal of the three, at times risking her relationship with the volatile Major West. Even Major West, who Smith considered an adversary at times, had pulled him back into the ship when a green skinned Lorelei lured him out of his bed and into the blackness of space.
No, Smith wasn’t a hero, but he was not going to allow this sadistic excuse for a man to harm those he truly cared about. Smith glanced over at Major West, noting, with some satisfaction, that he too was enraged. *Good, this might work to our advantage.*

John circled the crash site of the *Jupiter 6*. The hatch was still open so the Professor set down to take a quick look inside.

“Don! Judy!” he called as he rushed up the ramp and into the control room.

Very quickly, he searched the interior and was soon, back in the air. The tracks of the chariot were heading in the direction of the cliff formation north of the crash site. It would take him another ten minutes to reach them.

The tunnel opened into a small chamber with a light shaft shining down from the ceiling. The room had been formed eons ago by water that had eroded the softer stone eventually forming the tunnel and the river bed outside. In one corner of the room attached
to the cave wall, were what appeared to be spider egg sacks. But they were much larger than Judy had ever seen.

Without warning, her abductor pushed her away and she fell to the ground a few feet ahead of him.

“Get up,” he spat. “Stand over there with the others.”

Tyler had drawn a combat stance, two handing the weapon, holding Smith and West at bay.

Judy stood and quickly rushed into Don’s arms.

“Are you all right?”

She pulled back so she could face him.

“I’m okay, Don,” she said, an air of assurance in her voice.

She could see that he didn’t expect her reaction and couldn’t keep herself from smiling. *Surprised, Don?*

West glanced briefly at Smith, who was standing several feet away. He was stone faced, as he glared at their captor. Looking back into his fiancée’s eyes, he saw a self-confidence that he had only seen in their
picture from the future. *At least I lived long enough to see you come into your own.*

“All right, Colonel Tyler,” Smith bellowed. “What is the meaning of all this? Explain yourself.”

Don could hardly believe his ears. Normally by now, Smith would be begging for mercy, or conniving to save his own skin.

“Well Zachary, you finally decided to grow a pair, eh?” asked Tyler, very smugly.

“Indeed, I can see that you still cling to your crass behavior. You would have thought that in ten years you might have matured a tad,” Smith countered.

Tyler stepped back a step.

“Don’t think for a moment, that I won’t kill all three of you where you stand, if you try anything. Now, walk over to the webbing near the egg sack.”

Don wasn’t sure why he had released Judy, not that he minded, but Tyler had given up his hole card. Without a gun to his fiancée’s head, West had no intention of doing what he was ordered to.
“Now why would I do that,” Don said, in his most abrasive tone.

“It’s clearly obvious that you intend to kill us all,” said Smith. “Why would you think that we would assist you?”

Don could see sweat on Tyler’s brow and his hands were not steady on the weapon. Both he and Smith had managed to separate enough where Tyler could not cover them both with his weapon. A trickle of blood appeared below his nose.

“He’s infected,” said Smith. “Tyler brought a supply of weaponized Ebola from Earth. He had a vial on his person. It must have been damaged.”

Colonel Tyler wiped the blood from his nose in disgust.

“Say goodbye to your wife, West,” he said, shifting his aim towards Judy.

**Critical Condition:**

“Close your eyes, and focus on something peaceful,” said T’lan, as he joined hands with Penny.
Maureen, ever aware of protocol, had sent Will and Brina below, believing that even this form of intimacy was a private and personal affair. She would have left as well had she not been worried how Penny would handle the encounter. Her youngest daughter was about to open her heart and mind to the young man beside her.

When her husband’s thoughts first touched her mind, Maureen had experienced a peace that she had never known. As the layers of their thoughts intertwined, she found herself caught in a wave of fervor and desire, as she drank in John’s deep intense love for her. The experience had been stronger and more stimulating than the height of passion in their most intimate physical encounter. Jarrock had told them the deep feelings they shared were unusually strong. But John had always been her first love. And she was sure that T’lan was Penny’s.

As they met in their minds, T’lan and Penny found themselves at the dinner party a few nights ago.
I wondered if you were going to bring us back to this place, he said, in their thoughts.

This place was comfortable for me, T’lan. This is where you kissed me for the first time.

As Penny remember her confusion, she felt T’lan’s gentle strength and temperament comforting her. She had never known such serenity and all of her confusion over the past few days faded away as she allowed herself to be taken by his love.

Penny held back nothing from him, from her initial fear of the Jupiter 2 mission, the heart retching fear of losing her parents outside the ship, her uncontrollable dread over the robitoid, to her unshakable belief in the alien that was battling Keema. All of her dreams, fears, memories, secrets, she revealed willingly to the young man she now knew that she was in love with.

T’lan also openly shared his life with her. He shared his fear as a child of not being worthy of his father, the deep sense of loss and grief when he lost Lyria, his first love, in a Macktu attack, and the pain and loneliness and the depression that overcame him, after her death. He also shared the fear of what
would become of him, now that he had dishonored his family.

*Listen to me T’lan, this is necessary, to save my family, and your people. Our parents will understand.*

*I am not in fear of our parents, Penny. I know they will understand. My father will have to step down from the council and our family will be banished from the village.*

*They would do this even if we are doing this to save all of their lives, T’lan? I can’t believe that your people would be so cruel.*

*It is not a matter of being cruel, Penny. It is a very strong respect for our traditions. My father will step down willingly and the exile will be self imposed.*

*My parents will think of something, T’lan. Your family can always stay with us.*

*We shall see what comes to pass.*

Penny and T’lan found their peace with the situation and began to concentrate on the device that Tyler
had planted nearby. With T’lan’s guidance, Penny could soon see and describe the object.

*It’s a small box, with a digital timer, T’lan. Protruding out of the box is a long tube with an atomizer at the end. The timer was counting down from twenty-four hours.*

*Can you see the sun, Penny?*

*Yes, it’s still a ways above the tree line to the west and if I look to the south, I see the spaceship! T’lan! I know where it is. But we have to hurry!*

T’lan and Penny opened their eyes. For a moment they took in the image of each other and Penny reached to touch his face.

“We have to hurry,” she said.

“Penny, T’lan, are you all right?” asked Maureen.

T’lan quickly recovered, “Yes, Mrs. Robinson, we are fine. But, as Penny said, we must hurry. We don’t have much time.”

Maureen had brought a containment box up from the lab and T’lan reached to grab it. The three of
them exited the ship and Penny led the way to where she was sure the device had been planted.

As Tyler moved his weapon to take aim at Judy, the cave became a flurry of movement. Knowing she was the target Judy dove to the ground, while Smith yelled and dodged towards Tyler. As the nefarious Lt. Colonel pulled the trigger, Don had stepped into his line of fire.

The gunshot was echoing through the cave when Smith had reached Tyler. As they fought, the gun was wedged between them and they both struggled to wrestle it free. In the ensuing mêlée, the firearm discharged a second time.

To Smith’s surprise, Tyler suddenly stopped his thrashing and the life seemed to drain from his face. When Smith stood he could see that the weapon had been aimed at Tyler’s mid section. In a scant few seconds, Tyler was dead. It was over.

“Miss Judy, are you hurt?” asked Smith.

“No, I’m all right,” she answered, standing up and hurrying to her fiancé’s side. “Don?”
Smith looked to Major West who had just stood up next to him. He was holding his abdomen and Smith could see him begin to pale. Blood was trickling between his fingers.

“Major! You’ve been hit!” he said.

“It’s a scratch. I’ll be...”

West never had a chance to finish his sentence before he fell back to the ground.

“Don!” cried Judy, as she rushed to his side.

“Let’s get him onto his back so I can examine the wound,” said Smith.

While Smith examined the gunshot, Judy started taking his vitals.

“Pulse is eighty five and thready,” she said. “Respiration is twelve.”

“He’s losing too much blood. We have to staunch the bleeding, or he’ll go into shock,” said Smith.

Tearing a piece of cloth to use as a pressure bandage, Smith placed it over the wound.

“I want you to apply pressure here,” he told her. “I’m going to the chariot for the first aid and the lab kit.”
Outside the cave, Professor Robinson had just touched down. He was removing the jet pack when Smith came running out of the cave.

“Smith! What the hell is going on! And where is my daughter?”

“She is attending to Major West. He has suffered a gunshot wound,” said Smith as he pulled the two boxes out of the vehicle.

“Tyler?” asked Robinson.

“Dead, Professor,” said Smith. “Can you help me with this?”

The two men quickly returned to the cave as the Professor informed Smith of the situation at the camp. When they arrived in the chamber, Smith knelt down next to West and began to unpack the med kit. He handed the sphygmomanometer to Judy.

While she checked his blood pressure, Smith cut the Major’s clothes away from the wound.
“Blood pressure is one ten over sixty,” she said. Judy had some red marks and scratches around her neck where Tyler had choked her.

“Judy! You’ve been hurt as well,” said her father.

“I’ll be all right, Dad. It’s Don I’m worried about.”

“Let’s roll him on his side while I check for an exit wound,” interjected Smith. “On three, one, two, three.”

Smith cut away the rest of Don’s garment that had been blood stained to get a clear view of his back. Looking him over carefully, Smith only found the single wound in his abdomen. Smith assumed that the bullet had been a low velocity safety shell, as a larger or more powerful load would have exited his body.

“I don’t see an exit wound, the bullet must still be inside,” he said.

They rolled him onto his back and Smith opened a bottle of disinfectant. Removing the crude cloth bandage, he liberally poured the contents over the wound. He then set to applying a clean pressure bandage to the area.
“Professor Robinson, We’ll need the stretcher from the chariot.”

“All right,” said John.

“Miss Judy, I need you to keep a watch on his vital signs and make sure the bandage doesn’t come lose. I’m going to make sure that Tyler isn’t infectious.”

“What do you mean?”

“He was carrying a vial of Ebola virus. If it was damaged we’ve all been exposed.”

“Ebola, oh my God!” she said.

Smith opened the lab kit and grabbed a sampling package. Quickly, he swabbed a sample of blood from Tyler’s nose and placed it on the slide. He set it aside and set up the portable electron microscope. By this time, John had returned.

“Doctor Smith, is he contagious?”

“I’m just getting ready to check his blood.”

Looking at the slide, Smith found no evidence of the Ebola virus, or any other kind of virus, for that matter, but there was evidence of cellular degradation. That is very peculiar.
“Professor, I need another opinion. Would you have a look at this?”

As Robinson examined the slide, Smith checked Tyler’s pockets for the vial of Ebola. He found a small protective case that housed the glass vial.

“The container is undamaged,” said Smith.

“This looks like radiation sickness, Doctor Smith,” said Robinson. “The Robot checked him for radioactive contamination. I wonder if the damage was caused by time distortion.”

“An interesting hypothesis, Professor,” said Smith.

“Doctor Smith, his blood pressure is dropping,” said Judy.

“We must get him back to the ship, and soon,” said Smith. “But first, we have to stop at the crash site of his space pod. He has a small supply of the antidote for the virus.”

“You’re right, Smith. With Tyler dead, we’ll never find that device he planted.”

While Judy packed the lab and med kits, John and Smith carried the Major out to the chariot. Smith
returned to the cave to help Judy as Robinson stowed the jetpack for the trip back.

“Is he going to be all right, Doctor Smith?” she asked as they hauled the gear outside.

“He has internal bleeding, Miss Judy. When we get back to the ship, I’m going to have to operate. I’ll need help from both you and your mother.”

“All right,” she said. “I’ll be ready.”

To Smith’s surprise, Judy seemed to be handling the situation well. He wasn’t going to tell her that Major West’s prognosis for recovery was not good, and the longer it took them to get back to the ship, the less likely it was that he would survive.

Smith helped her into the chariot and handed up the equipment. John started the engine and pushed the vehicle for all it was worth.

Penny led T’lan and her mother to a small outcropping of rocks in the field behind the Jupiter 2. As it appeared in her vision, the device was tucked into a small crevasse in the rock formation.
Maureen carefully examined the device, noting they had about ten minutes before it was set to release its cargo of doom. She placed the unit into the containment chamber and sealed the latches. The containment unit had a glove like attachment on one side allowing a person to manipulate the contents of the chamber without risking exposure.

After several attempts, Maureen was able to disarm the timer.

“There,” she said. “Once we get this back to the safety of the ship, we can defuse it in the vacuum chamber.”

She looked to her daughter and her boyfriend, “Are you sure that you two are okay?”

“We’re fine now, Mom. Thank you for trusting us,” said Penny.

“I’ll carry the unit back to the ship for you, Mrs. Robinson,” said T’lan.

“Thank you.”

Maureen looked up at the young man that she knew was destined to marry Penny, and smiled. I’m not
losing another daughter, I’m gaining another son. Now, if I can only convince John.

On the Edge:
In the cave, thinking that she and her future husband were going to die together, Judy had made peace with herself. Even after Don had been shot, the paramedic training that her mother had provided, kicked in, allowing her to assist Doctor Smith in the treatment of the man that she loved.

On the long ride back to the ship, with nothing to do but think, her newfound courage was showing signs of weakening.

As if he sensed that she needed to keep busy, Doctor Smith asked her to take another set of vitals.

“His blood pressure is still dropping, Doctor Smith,” she said, her voice now betraying her anxiety. “His pulse is getting weaker, as well.”

West had not regained consciousness since he collapsed in the cave and Judy knew enough from her mother’s instructions that his condition was worsening. Up front, her father was negotiating the
narrow ledge, that led up the ridge, as fast has he could safely push the chariot. Once they reached the top, they would still be about twenty minutes from the *Jupiter 2*.

Her father had radioed back to the ship after they had located the antidote for the biotoxin. By some miracle, T’lan and Penny had found the device, Tyler had rigged. Her mother disarmed it a few minutes before it had been set to release the toxin into the atmosphere. Although they were all greatly relieved, Judy knew that her father was not happy to learn that the three of them had risked their lives.

“Let me have a look,” said Smith, knocking her out of her thoughts.

Smith examined Don’s pupils and listened in several places with the stethoscope.

“The internal bleeding is getting worse,” he said. “And he is going into shock. We have to keep him warm.”

Smith dug into the med kit and produced several hot packs. With Judy’s help, the Doctor placed the packs around his body and they covered the injured Major with a thermal blanket. Judy draped herself over his
covered torso, carefully avoiding the area where he was wounded. She knew that this last action was more for her benefit than it was for Don.

Maureen and Penny had just finished preparing the lower level, turning it into an emergency surgery suite, when the chariot pulled up to the campsite. It was well after dark. While Smith and Maureen scrubbed for surgery, T’lan and Professor Robinson brought Don into the ship and set him down on the operating table that had been erected. They removed his soiled clothing and covered him with surgical sheets.

Once she had scrubbed up, Maureen came into the curtained off area and immediately took charge.

“All right, I want everyone except Judy and the Robot to leave the lower deck. I’ll let you all know how he is doing when we finish.”

She turned to Judy after everyone else had left, “Judy, if you are feeling up to this, Doctor Smith and I could use your help.”
“I’ll help,” Judy said, immediately. Staying busy was the only thing that was keeping her from falling off the emotional abyss.

“All right, go scrub up. You can assist with the instruments.”

On the flight deck, T’lan informed Professor Robinson of the events that had transpired despite earlier protests from Penny.

“So let me get this straight,” said John. “By joining with Penny, you were able to enhance her natural psychic abilities to locate the device.”

“Not exactly, Professor Robinson. Yesterday afternoon, after returning from the crash site, Lt. Colonel Tyler must have set the device and placed it in the outcropping. Penny was able to perceive his mental energy, but because she lacked the mental discipline to focus on what she had sensed, her conscious mind interpreted what she had seen as an unknown danger.”

“But the information was there all along, in her subconscious?”
“Correct, Professor. That is why many people’s dreams are often precognitive. In our dreams, the subconscious takes over, and it is the subconscious that acts as the receptor for the thoughts of others.”

“T’lan, I don’t understand something. I thought that your people had to be in physical contact with each other to discern and share your thoughts?”

“That is true, Professor Robinson, for our conscious thoughts. But the subconscious operates on a different thought wave pattern. We have found that almost all forms of life can sense the thoughts of others in the subconscious domain. It is the basis for instinct in non sentient life, and considered intuition for a sentient species.”

John was not happy to learn that T’lan and Penny had joined thoughts. Remembering how intimate the experience was with his wife, he was not at all thrilled with the idea of his fifteen year old daughter having had such an intimate experience with the young man in front of him. It was only his deep respect for his father, and the regret and shame he saw in T’lan that was holding his temper in check.

“Maureen agreed to this?” he asked.
“Mrs. Robinson was just as apprehensive about the prospect as you, Professor. In the end, she allowed the decision to rest with Penny and I. My actions have brought dishonor to both our families. I beg your forgiveness.”

Professor Robinson sighed and softened his air. Maureen would never have allowed this unless she was absolutely sure that there was no choice. In all honesty, he had to admit that the action taken by his daughter and her boyfriend had saved the lives of everyone in the valley. In his wife’s position, John realized that he would have done the same thing.

“You and Penny did what you thought was right. There is no dishonor in that. Whatever happens because of this, we will face it as a family.”

“You are not angry, Professor?” asked T’lan.

“I am very angry, but not with anyone here. I told your father that I would be proud to have you as a son. Nothing that happened today changes that.”

John could see both relief and gratitude in the young man’s eye’s as they shook hands.
“Suction,” called Doctor Smith, as he closely examined the area where the bullet was lodged.

The bullet had nicked an artery on the way in, but had mushroomed in a way that would damage two major organs if it was not removed in a skillful fashion.

“Clamp, here and here,” instructed Smith, pointing to either end of the damaged artery.

Maureen closed off the artery in the places that he had directed.

“Blood pressure?” asked Smith.

“Ninety over sixty,” said Judy. “It appears to be holding steady.”

Smith admired her cool. Not only was she beyond being queasy about seeing blood, but she was able to function despite that fact that her fiancé was the subject on the table. If her future self had mastered these aspects, he had no doubt that she could pursue a career in medicine.

“Good, the bleeding is under control. Now, let us see about getting this bullet out of here, shall we? Scalpel.”
Judy handed him the instrument and he went to work. Very carefully, Smith cut away just enough tissue to allow him to remove the projectile without causing more damage. A few minutes later, he rotated the bullet out of the spot where it had come to rest and tossed it into the pan.

“Suture,” he called.

The damage caused by the bullet was significant, yet fairly straightforward to repair. Ten minutes later, he was suturing up the damaged artery. After inspecting his work, Smith looked up to Maureen.

“All right, Mrs. Robinson. Remove the clamps.”

As she removed the surgical clamps, Smith examined the artery for tearing or leakage. The suture work seemed to be holding well and the leakage was minimal.

“Prepare to close. Increase infusion rate.”

The Robot, who had also been assisting with the transfusion and anesthesia, increased the volume of blood that was being transfused back into the Major’s bloodstream. Smith knew that they had just
enough to replenish his system with the minimum blood volume. West wasn’t out of the woods, yet.

As the last packet of blood plasma had been drained, Doctor Smith had just finished closing the wound.

“Be sure to disinfect the area around the incision before bandaging it. I will inform the rest of the family that we are finished.”

“Will he be all right,” asked Judy.

“He lost a lot of blood, Miss Judy, but the Major has a very strong will to live. If he regains consciousness, he will be all right. It is in his hands now.”

After they finished bandaging the incision, Maureen and Judy moved Don into his cabin. When they got him situated in his bed, Maureen turned to Judy.

“I know you are not going to want to hear this, but you should go to your cabin and try to get some sleep.”

“I’m staying with Don, tonight. I want to be here when he wakes up. Besides, Doctor Smith said we need to keep him warm.”
“Judy, I don’t know if this is such a...”

“Please, Mother. Let me do this. I need to be with him, whatever happens.”

Maureen had been told in private, by Doctor Smith, that Don’s prognosis was not good. She was worried about how her daughter might react if she woke up and found that he had passed. But knowing that if it were John lying there, and she would feel the same as her daughter, Maureen relented.

“Thank you,” said Judy, as she hugged her mother.

When she left Don’s cabin and closed the door, she heard the lock click.

_M. Smith looks exhausted_, thought John, as he was explaining the Major’s condition to the rest of the family.

“Major West lost a considerable amount of blood, mostly due to internal bleeding. The delay in getting him into surgery did not help matters. The good news is, the Major has a very strong will to live, and, dare I say, has a lot to live for. As I told Miss Judy, if he regains consciousness, he will be all right.”
“I see. I guess, all we can do now, is wait.”

“Professor Robinson, there is another matter. May we speak privately?” asked Smith.

John knew what Smith wanted to see him about. He gestured to the open storage room, out of earshot of the rest of the family.

“I assume that you received my letter, Professor.”

“I did,” said Robinson, careful to conceal his anger. “Doctor Smith, Don and I had already suspected that it was you who had sabotaged the Robot before liftoff. In spite of that, my family and I had taken you in, as one of our own. So I have to ask you, why?”

“At the time, Professor, I cared for no one but myself. You and your family were little to me except for names on a sheet...”

“I don’t mean that, Smith. Why didn’t you tell me about Tyler right away?”

“Professor Robinson, I was going to tell you last night, that is, until I found out that Tyler had set the virus to be released. I had hoped that I could find out where he had planted the device. The letter was an insurance policy.”
“Doctor Smith, do you realize that by not telling me right away that Tyler was a threat, you put all of our lives in terrible danger? Do you have any idea what it cost Penny and T’lan to find out where the device was hidden?”

“Penny? T’lan?” Smith said, clearly troubled. “Mrs. Robinson assured me that they had not been exposed.”

“They weren’t. But in order to find out where that device was located, it cost Penny her innocence, and T’lan his family honor.”

John explained the Lamotia traditions and the effect of the joining. “Had you told us right away that Tyler was a threat, Jarrock could have forced him to tell us where the virus was hidden,” he finished.

Maureen had just stepped off the elevator. She warily approached the two men.

“Am I interrupting?” she asked.

“Of course not, darling. Where is Judy?”

“She’s at Don’s side, and she’s determined to stay there until he regains consciousness. I think it’s best that we give her some privacy.”
John picked up on the hidden message his wife had given him. Judy was, quite literally, at Don’s side. John turned his attention back to Smith.

“Doctor Smith, all things aside, I appreciate you taking care of Don, but if we are going to work together, as a family, we need to be able to depend on each member to be open and honest. We have to be able to trust each other.”

Smith looked down, and it was obvious to John that he was wrought with guilt.

“You must be tired,” he continued, in a softer voice. “Why don’t you get yourself cleaned up? We can talk about this later.”

“Oh course, Professor,” said Smith. “Mrs. Robinson.”

John and Maureen watched him step onto the elevator and descend to the lower level. He turned back to his wife.

“John, I couldn’t have handled that operation alone. The damage was too extensive, and Don was hemorrhaging far too much for me to keep up. Had Doctor Smith not been here today, Don would have died.”
John took her in his arms and held her for a long time. The very thought of her risking her life today had troubled him. With all that had taken place, this was the first moment they had to reconnect.

“Are you angry with me, John,” she asked.

He drew away just enough to face her.


“I was referring to my decision about Penny and T’lan. John, I didn’t know what else to do. I wish I could have spoken to you about it.”

“It’s all right, darling. You did what you thought was right. To be honest, I probably would have made the same decision.”

After locking the door, Judy removed her robe and climbed into the bed next to her fiancé. The last fragment of her newfound self assurance was slipping away and as she held onto him, the emotional pressure began to take its toll.

**Dreams:**
November 20, 2000:

As I write these words, my heart goes out to my daughter, Judy, as we all hope and pray that Don will come out of the coma. The sole survivor of the Jupiter 6, Lt. Colonel Richard Tyler, turned out to be an agent of the organization we know as Aeolis Umbra. It was his intention to take the life of my daughter, and my future son-in-law. In the struggle at the cave, Don was wounded by a gunshot and was very close to death when we arrived back at the ship. Doctor Smith has done all that he can for him, and my wife and I can only wait for the outcome.

John put down his pen, no longer able to continue his journal entry. He and his family had been through so much over that past few days, and the strain had begun to take its toll. Ready for bed, Maureen sat down next to him and welcomed him into her arms.

“Maureen,” he said, his voice colored with worry.

“I know, John. It’s out of our hands. If Don doesn’t pull through, we have to be strong...”
Maureen couldn’t finish her thought. Instead she clung tighter to her husband. They stayed in each other’s arms for a very long time.

Don found himself alone in a subterranean chamber that could have been the blueprint for the underworld. The smell of brimstone and the fire erupting through the floor, completed the imagery, but he was so cold, colder than he had ever been.

“Judy! Smith! Where are you?” he called.

The place reminded him of the inter-dimensional prison that once held the alien they knew as Morbus.

“No, it can’t be,” he said aloud. “This place was destroyed when Judy broke the harp.”

In the distance, he heard a voice, a woman’s voice. He started walking towards it.

“Judy!”

He walked for what seemed like hours, but the voice didn’t seem to get any closer.

“Judy! Smith!” he called, again.
“She can’t hear you, Major West,” said a familiar voice behind him.

Don spun around and for a moment couldn’t believe his eyes. A demonic apparition was standing behind him and his facial features bore a striking resemblance to Zachary Smith.

“Don!”

Judy awoke with a start, and for a moment she didn’t know where she was. She reached for the night light and flicked it on.

As she looked down at her fiancé, she remembered, it wasn’t just a bad dream. Don had really been shot. Quickly she checked his vital signs, both pulse and respiration. She was about to check his blood pressure when she heard a knock on the door. She threw on her robe and unlocked the door.

“Judy, are you all right?” asked her mother, as she stepped into the room. “Your father and I heard you call out.”

“It was just a dream, Mother. I’m sorry I woke you.”
Maureen looked over to Don and noticed the blood pressure cuff.

“Is there any change?” she asked.

“I was just about to check,” said Judy.

She put the stethoscope to her ears and wrapped the cuff on Don’s forearm and pumped up the pressure. As she slowly released the air, she made note of the two readings.

“One ten over sixty two,” she said. “The diastolic is still a bit low.”

“It’s much better than it was when he came out of surgery, Judy. I’d take that as a good sign.”

“I hope so, Mother,” she said. Judy looked to her mother and felt her façade beginning to crack. “I can’t live without him...”

Maureen took her daughter in her arms, “Judy, no matter how this turns out, your father and I will be with you, as will Penny and Will. You’re not going to face this alone.”

After her mother had returned to her cabin, Judy removed her robe and climbed into bed next to Don.
She whispered into his ear, “Don, wake up. Please don’t leave me alone...”

“Smith is this some kind of a joke?” asked West, as he carefully watched the demon like creature next to him.

“I would hardly call death a joke, Major West. Don’t you remember what happened to you?”

“I was in the cave. Tyler was going to kill Judy and I...”

“You jumped into the line of fire. Now, had you been paying attention, you would have noticed that Judy dove for cover. Tyler would have missed and you would have been able to disarm him. Instead, you are quite dead, and alas, Miss Judy is destined to be alone for the remainder of her life.”

The voices in the background seemed to be getting louder, and Don could almost make out what was being said.

“For the past three years, she has been waiting for you to show her some affection,” said the Smith apparition. “But you’ve always been too busy. And
now, it is too late. Tell me, Major, how does that make you feel?”

“You don’t know what you’re talking about,” said Don, as he stepped towards the creature, his anger evident in his voice. “Ever since we left Earth, her father and I have struggled just to keep us all alive.”

“Ah, yes. One day it’s the force field needs alignment, or the next day the chariot needs repair, or the day after there is work to be done at the drill site. Why is it that her father finds time to spend with her mother, but you couldn’t spare the time to even take her for a walk unless of course she asked you? And then you have the audacity to blame it all on Smith.”

“That’s not true...”

“Isn’t it, Major? When was the last time you asked her to take a walk, or planned something special with her? By her own admission, she didn’t know if she still meant anything to you. You promised her parents that you would never forsake her, but you have forsaken her for the past three years!”

Don dropped to his knees. He couldn’t deny it. Having his faults spread out in front of him was too much. The Smith apparition was right. It was only
recently that he had started paying attention to her again. He had wasted all of that time, and now there was no more time. West could not hold back the sorrow, and he began to weep.

“I’m sorry Judy,” he said, through his tears. “I’m so sorry...”

“Don, wake up. Please don’t leave me alone...” said her voice. He could hear it clearly now.

“Judy! I’m sorry!” he cried. “Forgive me, I’m so sorry!”

Judy jumped when he answered.

“Don, Don, please wake up,” she said, slapping him gently into consciousness.

Slowly his eyes fluttered open and he called, “Judy, please forgive me.” He reached to hold her but the pain from the gunshot wound kept him from moving.

“Oh, what happened?” he asked, now fully awake.

“You were shot, Don. Don’t you remember?”

“Vaguely,” he said. “Tyler?”
“He’s dead. Doctor Smith was wrestling the gun from him when it went off. Speaking of Doctor Smith, he wanted to see you as soon as you were awake.”

“What do you mean?”

“You were bleeding internally and Doctor Smith operated on you. He saved your life, Don.”

Judy stood and threw on her robe and left the cabin. In a few minutes, Smith was at Don’s bedside, examining him, and John and Maureen were standing in the doorway. Judy stood next to Smith, waiting for his prognoses.

“Now that you have regained consciousness, Major, I can give you something for the pain.”

“Let me get up...” said Don, but as he tried to sit up he collapsed back into the bed.

“Now, let that be a lesson to you, Major. Just lie there and be thankful that you are still alive. Had the bullet hit you half an inch to the left, you and I would not be having this conversation. You are going to be here for the next few days, so I suggest that you make yourself comfortable.”
“Wait a second...”

“Doctor’s orders, Major,” said Smith.

Smith prepared the injection and administered it into Don’s forearm. Smith looked up to face Judy.

“He is out of the woods now, Miss Judy. Although I suspect that he is going to be a difficult patient.”

“Not if he knows what is good for him,” said Judy, in a voice that would broach no argument.

Once they were alone, Judy asked him, “Don, why were you apologizing?”

Don told her about the dream he had just experienced, breaking down to tears as he shared what he perceived to be his failure.

“It seemed so real,” he said. “The demon even sounded like Smith. And to make things worse, he was right. Judy, I’ve wasted the last three years. If I had paid more attention to you, maybe we would have been married by now...”

West couldn’t continue. Between the medication and the rawness of his emotions, his throat closed up
preventing him from speaking. He turned away in shame.

“Don, don’t beat yourself up. The past three years have been hard on all of us. I’m just as much to blame. I’ve been sending you mixed signals by trying to be the perfect daughter for my parents benefit. I should have been concentrating on us.”

Judy could see that he was still fighting with self doubt and guilt.

“Look at me, Don.”

He turned his head to see her smiling her beautiful smile and her love for him emanating from her deep blue eyes. Judy took his hand and held it to her heart.

“Judy, you deserved so much more than I...” he said.

“Shhh, it’s all right,” she interrupted. “Right now, I’m just thankful that you’re alive, and we have the rest of our lives to set things right with each other.”

She paused for a moment and started giggling.

“What?”
“I was just thinking, Don. For you, to have to listen to Doctor Smith, for all of eternity, that would have been hell.”

“Boy, you can say that again,” said Don, his mood lightening.

Judy reached over and gently kissed him, “Goodnight my love. Sweet dreams.”

“I love you, Judy Robinson.”

For the first time, since finding the wrecked spacecraft, Judy was able to relax into a peaceful sleep.

The Onus of Liability:

“Did you look in on Don and Judy this morning?” John asked his wife, as they sat out at the breakfast table.

“I heard them quietly talking, and decided to just let them be, John. With all they have been through this past week, I think they need some time alone. Besides, Doctor Smith was going to check on him in a few minutes anyway.”
John and Maureen were soon joined by Penny and Will, as well as T’lan and Brina.

“T’lan, when are your parents due back from their trip to the Murock Clan?” asked the Professor.

“Later today, Professor Robinson,” said T’lan. “Since Brina and I did not return to camp last night, even though Teral and Selana knew we might stay, our parents will want to see that we are well.”

Before the Professor could answer, Judy came strolling out of the ship. John noticed right away that she somehow looked different. An air of self assurance seemed to emanate from her person, and, as her father, he felt a mixture of pride and sadness.

“Good morning, everyone,” she said, taking the seat next to her mother.

“How is Don feeling this morning?” asked Maureen.

“Better. His stubbornness is starting to show. He wanted to join us for breakfast, until Doctor Smith gave him another shot. He’s sleeping now...”

“And he’ll remain that way for several hours,” interjected Smith, as he joined them at the table.
“Let me guess,” said the Professor. “You slipped him a Mickey Finn.”

“In a manner of speaking, Professor Robinson. Along with the pain medication, I did administer a mild sedative. He needs his rest and we all know how obstinately difficult the Major can be,” said Smith.

The Doctor’s remark brought a round of laughter to the table.

“Judy, you look rested, this morning,” said John.

“I am,” she said. “After Don awoke from the coma, and I knew he was going to be all right. I didn’t have any more nightmares. I think we are both going to be okay.”

Later that day, John found Doctor Smith, on the upper deck, buried in a medical textbook. He took the seat across from him.

Outside, Penny and T’lan were riding, Judy and Maureen were working in the garden, and Will and Brina were finishing their star map. Robinson knew he would be able to speak to Smith privately.
“Do you have a moment, Doctor Smith?”

Smith marked his place and put the book aside, “Of course, Professor.”

“I don’t think I expressed my gratitude very well last night. You saved the life of my daughter, and her fiancé, who also happens to be my best friend. My words are hardly adequate, next to the burden of my heart.”

“I should have told you right away, that Tyler was a traitor, Professor Robinson. I might have saved us all a great deal of pain.”

“Maybe,” said John, “or maybe Tyler had already set the virus to be released before he approached the camp. We might all be dead or dying by now. You made a judgment call, and under the circumstances I can understand your reasons.”

Smith, obviously remorseful, lowered his gaze to the floor.

“Do the others know of my treachery concerning the mission?”

“Maureen knows, and I’ll have to tell Don and Judy. He has the right to know, and I don’t want him to
have to keep this from his wife. But I don’t see any reason to tell Penny or Will,” said John.

“I appreciate this, Professor, but…”

“Make no mistake, Doctor Smith. Had I found out about this before we set down on Priplanus, I would have blown you out the airlock myself,” John said, somewhat sharply.

“But, in retrospect, I think Maureen would have had a very difficult time trying to forgive me, and for that, she would have been justified,” he finished, in a much softer tone.

“I rather suspect that Major West will not be quite so forgiving, Professor.”

“Well, Doctor Smith, I don’t think that you give Don enough credit,” said Robinson. “Come to think of it, neither did I.”

“I don’t think I understand.”

Robinson recalled his reaction when Judy had informed Maureen and him that she and Don intended on dating. Reluctantly he continued.
“Maureen and I have always been very protective of Judy. When she told us that she was going to start seeing Major West, our first thought was to forbid it, but instead, we allowed them to see each other under rather strict conditions. We didn’t realize just how much they loved each other.”

“I see,” began Smith. “Although the Major and I have had our differences, and I find him, on occasion, to be brash, impulsive, judgmental, I have always known that he worships the very ground Miss Judy walks upon. I know that much of the strife and conflict, they have endured, was a direct result of my actions. Because of her caring and sensitive nature, she would rush to defend my actions, often at the expense of her relationship with the Major.”

“I won’t argue with you on that point, Doctor Smith. Judy inherits that trait from her mother, and to be quite honest, I wouldn’t change either one of them, which brings us back to you. Sometime before the Jupiter 2 left Earth, you made a decision to betray the mission, and your country. Maureen and I have chosen to forgive you, and I suspect Don and Judy will do the same. You are going to have to live with
the fact that, three years ago, you tried to murder those you, by your own admission, consider family.”

Smith shamefully looked away. Professor Robinson had put what the Doctor was feeling into words.

“Perhaps you should tell Penny and Will. At some point in our future, we know that we are going to be found by an Earth ship. When I am led away as a traitor, I don’t want it to come as a shock to the children. They are old enough to know the truth.”

“The way I see it, Doctor Smith, there is no reason to tell the crew that finds us, that is, assuming that we were found to begin with.”

Doctor Smith stood and stepped closer to the viewport. Will and Brina seemed engrossed in drawing their new star map.

“A month from now, Professor, your brilliant son will design, build, and launch, a message buoy. It will reach Earth about two years from now. It is my intention to include a full confession and disclosure of my involvement and knowledge of the *Aeolus Umbra* organization. It is my suspicion that I will be taken into custody when the Earth ship arrives.”
“I thought Tyler said that it would be…”

“One of the first rules in deceit,” interjected Smith. “Always wrap a lie inside a bit of truth. It makes the deception much more palatable. As much as I have rambled on about family honor, the unvarnished truth is, I had none. That is, until I was adopted by your family and as part of your family, I now have a duty to uphold the family name. The actions taken were mine, and the responsibility will be mine.”

“And if Tyler lied to you?” asked the Professor.

“Then he lied. The truth will attend to itself, one way or another. We already know that the Major and Miss Judy return to Earth at some point in the future, and since they have both indicated their desire to remain here to start a family, something will change their minds.”

“Then you believe that history is going to repeat itself, Doctor Smith? That my daughter and son-in-law, as well as their children, are destined to die on board the Jupiter 6?”

“Quite the contrary, Professor,” said Smith. “I wouldn’t pretend to even try to understand the complexities of temporal mechanics, but it is my
belief that by returning to the past, Tyler will undo almost everything he set out to accomplish.”


“Perhaps, or the idea of parallel co-existing timelines, as I said, I’m well out of my element. The one thing I do know is that I will do everything in my power to prevent that monster from harming my family.”

Professor Robinson stood and turned to face Smith. He extended his hand which Smith took in a firm grip. The rest of the conversation was unspoken, as the two men found a new understanding of each other.

It was mid afternoon when Jarrock and Lana rode into the Robinson camp. After greeting them, John and Maureen invited them to the table, along with Penny and T’lan. It took almost an hour to cover everything that had transpired over the past two days. John found himself amazed by how well Jarrock and his wife took what they had been told. His heart also went out to T’lan, who sat at the table
with his eyes downcast in shame. The sight of his youngest daughter comforting her boyfriend left him with mixed feelings.

“Am I to understand, John, that this disease would have killed everyone in the valley?” asked Jarrock.

“I’m certain of it, Jarrock. Because this particular strain of the virus is both weaponized and airborne, it is possible for it to have spread beyond the valley.”

“Based on my study of your physiology,” added Maureen, “your people would have been just as susceptible to the virus as we would be.”

“And Penny has been blessed with the gift of precognition?” asked Jarrock.

“Penny has always had a good sense of intuition,” said Maureen. “I’ve learned to trust it as much as I would my own. It was T’lan, who recognized it for what it was.”

Jarrock turned to face his son, “T’lan?”

“Yes, Father,” he answered, his eyes still lowered.

“Face me, my son.”
“I have dishonored our family, Father. I am no longer worthy to face you...”

“T’lan, face me!”

Slowly the young man raised his eyes to his father.

“By tradition, what you have done disgraces our family,” began Jarrock. “But in reality, your actions saved the lives of our new friends, our village, and countless other lives. You and Penny faced a very difficult decision. You sacrificed honor to save lives, and I am proud, very proud, to call you my son.”

“I am grateful, Father. But, what of the people in the village...”

“Do not concern yourself, my son. Leave that to me. Your mother and I must speak with the Professor and Mrs. Robinson, in private.”

“Yes, Father,” said T’lan.

He stood alongside Penny and they turned to leave the table. John saw tears in his daughter’s eyes.

“Penny?”

“Dad?”

“Don’t worry, darling,” he said.
Penny nodded, “I’m okay, Dad.”

When they were alone, John spoke, “Jarrock, T’lan told my wife that you will be forced off the council and your family will be banished from the village. Is this true?”

“I am afraid so, John. It is an unfortunate truth that tradition is held in higher consideration than the greater good. But our traditions have shaped our civilization for over two thousand years, and in general, the benefits outweigh the inconvenience.”

“I would call displacing an entire family more than an inconvenience,” said Maureen. “What will become of your children?”

“Our oldest daughter, Selana, is covered by her husband. She will not share in our dishonor,” said Lana. “T’lan will bear the dishonor until he properly joins with Penny, something they cannot do until they both reach the age of enlightenment. In addition, he can never be appointed to the council. Brina will share the same fate as her brother, although she will be cleansed on the day she joins with her future husband.”
“When Lana and I return to the village, tradition requires that I step down immediately,” said Jarrock. “We will be given a week to put our affairs in order and leave the village.”

“What would happen if you refused to leave?” asked John.

“After a week, we would become nonentities to the people of the clan. The council would pass a resolution to call for us to leave as required by tradition. This is little more than a written decree posted to the door of our home.”

“This is wrong, John,” said Maureen. “Isn’t there something we can do? Maybe appear before the council...”

“No, Maureen,” said Jarrock. “The council would listen to and acknowledge the circumstances, but would cling to the fact that our traditions allow for no exceptions.”

“Jarrock, you and your family are welcome to stay with us,” said John. “We don’t have a lot of room in the ship, but we would gladly share until we could help you build a new home nearby.”
“I am afraid that is not possible,” said Jarrock. “This entire valley is claimed by the Lamotia Clan. We must leave the valley or deepen our dishonor. I do have a request of you, my friends.”

“Maureen and I will do whatever we can,” said the Professor.

“By tradition, the children of a dishonored couple can be claimed by one of the other families in the village. Once claimed, the children become members of the new household and are covered from their parents dishonor. The only stipulation is there can be no blood relation between the families. By example, Teral and Selana cannot make a claim because; Selana, T’lan, and Brina are blood related.”

“You want John and I to take Brina and T’lan?” asked Maureen.

“We would be forever in your debt, Maureen,” said Lana. “You see, Jarrock and I will be forever banished from the village, and the journey to the Murock Clan is a long and dangerous one. In addition, by separating Penny and T’lan, we would be putting them both in pain. They are already of
one heart and one mind. The joining ceremony and consummation of their union is a formality.”

John and Maureen looked to each other in an unspoken conversation. A nod of her head indicated to John that they were in agreement.

“Tell us what we need to do,” said John.

Severed Ties:

The next day, John and Maureen went to the Lamotia village with Jarrock and Lana. In his entire life, John had never felt so helpless; as he watched his new friends endure the hardship of dishonor. As he watched the people around him, he sensed everything from great sadness, to barely veiled animosity. Seeing Jarrock, stripped of his office and escorted out of the chambers was more than Robinson would have been able to handle, without the steadying presence of his wife.

With Teral’s help, as Jarrock and his wife were no longer permitted in the council hall, John and Maureen petitioned the council for guardianship of Brina and T’lan. Never, in the history of the clan, had
there ever been an objection to a petition that was sanctified by the dishonored parents, until now.

The new Prime Guardian, M’lar, was many years older than Jarrock, and had served on the council longer than his predecessor had been alive. He listened to the words of Tevan, a newly elected member of the council. Tevan was only a few years older than John, but the Professor was sure that his objection had nothing to do with his words, and everything to do with forwarding his own agenda.

“M’lar. I implore you. Jarrock wishes to hand his children to outworlders, a move that will dilute our very culture. I say to all of you, they are unsuited to stand as guardians. It was Professor Robinson’s daughter that lured T’lan into dishonor to begin...”

Tevan did not have a chance to finish as John stood in anger.

“How dare you make such an accusation against my daughter, sir! Might I remind you that the actions taken by Penny and T’lan saved the lives of everyone in this valley!”

“Enough!” interjected M’lar. “We will have order! Tevan, you will refrain from mentioning anything
concerning the act of dishonor. It has no relevance in these proceedings.”

“Forgive me, M’lar,” said Tevan.

“Professor Robinson, since you are unfamiliar with our customs, the council chooses to overlook your outburst,” said M’lar. “Consider this your one and only warning.”

“My apologies, M’lar,” said John. As he returned to his seat, Teral stood.

“Teral, come forward and speak,” said M’lar.

“Thank you, M’lar. My fellows, the issue before us is a simple one. Do we, or do we not, honor the traditions handed down by our ancestors? Tevan speaks of preserving our culture, yet he proposes that we ignore a tradition that we have honored for almost two thousand cycles. As is our custom, Jarrock and Lana have made their wishes known, and by tradition, the only objection the council can entertain is if the guardians selected are either ill or infirm. Unless, of course, it is our intention to abandon our traditions, and if that is the case, Jarrock and Lana need not be dishonored.”
Teral’s words brought a silence over the hall. After a moment, M’lar stood.

“It would seem that the respect for tradition can get in the way of more than just the greater good,” said M’lar. “Teral speaks well, if we cannot consider one exception to our customs, we should not consider any. I call the council to a vote.”

Six, of the council of ten, stood in support of the petition, John and Maureen had submitted. Four, including Tevan, remained seated.

“The vote is cast, the petition is granted,” said M’lar. As the rest of the council sat down, M’lar remained standing.

“John and Maureen Robinson, step forward, please.” John took his wife’s hand and, together, they approached the council table.

“As the Prime Guardian of the Lamotia Clan, I hereby bestow the guardianship of T’lan and Brina upon you both. Do you both pledge to nurture and protect them until they reach the age of enlightenment?”

John and Maureen answered in unison, “We do.”
“Then it is done.”

M’lar sat down and stamped the parchment. He handed it to the Professor and his wife. They took the document and met Teral outside the council hall.

“Teral,” began John. “If you and Selana ever decide to travel to Earth, let me know. I happen to know a few New York law firms that would hire you in an instant. That was a very impressive argument.”

“It was my hope that my words would have accomplished much more. But the truth is where it needs to be. It sits on the hearts of all who attended today,” said Teral.

As they walked toward the chariot, Maureen noticed that it was not only Jarrock and Lana that were being shunned.

“John, I don’t think we are welcome here, anymore.”

“I know, darling. I see it too.”

When they reached the chariot, the Robinsons turned to take their leave of Teral.

“Take care, Teral,” said John. “Words are not enough to express my gratitude.”
“You and Selana are always welcome,” said Maureen. “Don’t forget, Don and Judy, are getting married in a few more days. I know we were going to have the ceremony here, but under the circumstances I think it would be best if we held it at the ship.”

“As much as I dislike what I see happening, I find myself in agreement, Mrs. Robinson. But have no fear, Selana and I will be there.”

The three of them joined hands for a moment before Teral turned to go.

The chariot had been loaded with the few things that Jarrock and his wife planned on taking with them, as well as the items belonging to Brina and T’lan. Jarrock and Lana had ridden on ahead and would meet them back at camp. John intended to give them a set of laser pistols as well as some other provisions for the long journey.

John helped his wife up, and then climbed in behind her. He started the vehicle and they lumbered off towards their camp.
Back at the *Jupiter 2*, Don was able to stand without getting dizzy, so Doctor Smith, reluctantly, allowed him to continue with his damage assessment of the upper deck, providing he remained seated and allowed others to do the running around. He was in the middle of running another diagnostic when Judy sat down in the co-pilot’s chair. She had the journal that was written by her future self.

“Are you ready to do some exploring?” he asked.

Judy didn’t answer right away. Instead she looked out the main viewport and Don knew that something was on her mind.

“Judy? What’s wrong?”

She turned back to him and smiled wanly, “I’ve been thinking, Don. I don’t know if it is such a good idea to read this,” she said.

“Why, Judy? Don’t you want to know why we went back to Earth?”

“Yes, I do,” she said. “But...is it...I mean...”

She shook her head and paused for a moment to collect her thoughts.
“Don, would you rather go to a movie that you had already seen, or one that you hadn’t seen, and you were really excited about?”

“The one I hadn’t seen,” said Don.

“Me too,” she agreed. “This book is our life together, all our hopes, all our dreams, and all of those special moments. There is a lot inside here. To be honest with you, I didn’t know I could be such a prolific writer. What I’m trying to say, is, the moments are most special because they are transitory. We don’t have any preconceived notion or ideas about how our lives will unfold. Our life together is supposed to be two souls on a journey into the unknown. If we read the journal, our lives might end up like watching a movie we have already seen. Some aspects of life are best lived in the moment.”

“I think I see your point. So we don’t read it.”

“It might not be that easy,” said Judy. “As it is, we already know too much about our future. What happens if one of us gets sick or injured? I can see us now, running to the journal to see how it works out. The temptation is simply too great.”
Don looked down at the console, unsure of what they should do. He really wanted to know why they left for Earth, but Judy had raised some valid points. He wanted their marriage to be exciting, and spontaneous, something that would be impossible if they had a play by play description of the action.

“What do you want to do, Judy?”

“I think we should burn it and bury the ashes with our future selves.”

“Are you sure,” he asked.

“Yes, I am, and I’d like to do it before our wedding day, if you are feeling up to it.”

“All right, as long as it’s okay with my doctor. Somehow, I don’t think he is going to be too keen on me bouncing around in the chariot for another couple of days.”

Jarrock and Lana had planned to begin their journey the next morning, but John and Maureen insisted that they stay for the wedding. It really did not take much prodding to convince them.
Later that evening, John and Maureen were sitting at the table admiring the stars. Don and Judy had taken a midnight stroll and everyone else was asleep, or so they thought.

“Mom, Dad? Can I talk to you for a few minutes?”

They turned to the ship and saw Penny coming down the ramp.

“Of course, Penny, please, sit down,” said Maureen.

“T’lan told me what happened in the village today,” said Penny. “I don’t understand. Why can’t they make an exception to the rule, just this once? Wasn’t saving everyone’s lives more important than keeping to a tradition?”

John pondered how to answer his daughter’s question. How can I explain it to her, when I don’t understand it myself? This was a hard lesson which John and Maureen were still coming to grips with.

“Penny,” began John. “If I were to tell you that I completely understood the decision of the council, I’d be lying to you. I don’t understand it either. What I can tell you is that you and T’lan were forced to make a very difficult decision, a decision that a
young teenage couple should never have had to make. For what it is worth, I agree with you, saving everyone’s lives was more important than abiding by tradition. Your mother and I are very proud of you, and T’lan.”

“It’s just not fair, T’lan’s parents did nothing wrong and they are being punished for something that T’lan and I did,” said Penny. She was on the verge of tears. Maureen stood and rounded the table to sit next to her daughter. She took Penny in her arms.

“What isn’t fair,” said Maureen, “is you feeling guilty for doing the right thing. Sometimes, life puts choices in our path that are going to cause pain regardless of what decision we make. This was one of those choices, and both of you are going to have to make your peace with it.”

“I know,” said Penny. She was still tearing, but had managed to keep herself from breaking down. “Dad, would it be all right with you if I talk with Mom for a few minutes?”

“Of course, sweetheart,” said her father. “I’ll be in our cabin, Maureen.”
John kissed his wife and his daughter goodnight and strolled up the ramp into the ship.

“All right, dear, what is on your mind?” asked Maureen, once they were alone.

“Last week, you asked me how I felt about the Lamotia custom of being married at sixteen.”

“I remember that you said that you weren’t ready. Have you changed your mind?”

“Mom, you and Dad experienced the joining for yourselves, so I don’t have to explain what it is like. All of the confusion I had last week, disappeared when T’lan and I met in our minds. I now know that I love him.”

Maureen knew that this was going to be the other consequence of the joining. In her heart, she knew that there was no force in the universe that could come between two people who had given themselves in this fashion, but her motherly instincts were still getting in the way of reason.

“I’m going to be honest with you, Penny. I still believe that sixteen is far too young for you to be married, even knowing that you do love each other.”
Maureen paused to collect her thoughts, “Marriage is a very serious commitment, dear, and it isn’t something you should jump into without giving yourselves time to grow as a couple. Look at Don and Judy...”

“If I was Judy, I would have married Don before we left Earth,” interjected Penny. “Why did you and Dad give Don such a hard time?”

Maureen was taken back slightly, not expecting her daughter to be so forthright. But she knew that Penny was not questioning her judgment, but looking for understanding and she held her temper.

“It’s a fair question,” said Maureen, allowing herself to calm down. “Your father and I didn’t care for Don, at first. He was much older than Judy and he had a reputation as a...well...let’s just say that everyone thought he moved to quickly.”

“It’s less than five years, Mom. And you didn’t really believe all that stuff about him, did you?”

“At the time, your father and I weren’t sure. It took us a while to warm up to him, and to the idea of Judy dating a man so much older. Five years at their age was quite significant. But we didn’t realize how
committed they were to each other. I’m thankful that Don and Judy waited to get married. I think they will have a stronger marriage because of it.”

“Are you worried that T’lan is not committed to me?” asked Penny.

“No, dear, I do believe that you are committed to each other, and in case you haven’t noticed, I like him, very much.”

“Yes, I have noticed, and I appreciate it. It means a lot to me.”

“Penny, you have ten months before you turn sixteen. By T’lan’s customs, you can’t be married at least until then. That gives us all some time to see where things go. Besides, your father is still trying to come to grips with losing Judy. Right now would not be a good time to discuss this with him.”

“Mom, Judy is almost twenty three…”

“It doesn’t matter how old she is,” interjected Maureen. “Your father has always been her provider, and protector. And now he has to hand that role off to another man. It’s a hard pill to swallow, Penny.
When you and T’lan have children of your own, you’ll understand.”

Penny saw Don and Judy returning from their walk, “I’d better get to bed, thanks for talking with me, Mom.”

“Good night, dear. We can finish discussing this later.”

As she walked into the ship, Penny considered what her mother had shared with her. While she had hoped to get a more definitive answer, at least the door was still open for discussion.

Reflections:

Thanksgiving, had fallen on the 23rd of November, the day after John and Maureen had appeared before the council. With Don still on the mend and the lack of time to prepare for the feast, the family postponed the event until the following Thursday. Don and Judy had set their wedding day for Saturday December 2nd, two days later.
The Robinson’s celebration of Thanksgiving had always taken on a special meaning, but this year’s observance would eclipse all the other’s combined. Teral and Selana provided the vegetables leaving the main course to Jarrock and John. They took one bird a piece, more than enough to feed their combined families.

John knew he was going to miss Jarrock’s company. Even though Don was and always would be his best friend, he found that he and the former leader of the Lamotia Clan were kindred spirits. The space pod that Tyler had crash landed, showed promise of being repaired and John planned on taking a sabbatical with his wife to visit Jarrock and Lana. Having the space pod functional would shorten the trip considerably.

After much consideration, Don and Judy decided that their need for privacy and solitude, on their wedding night, trumped any feelings of unease and they chose the *Jupiter 6* crash site to celebrate their honeymoon. They had traveled to the site a few days prior to burn and bury the journal. With Judy’s wedding dress finished Maureen and her husband, along with Penny and T’lan, drove up to the site the
next day to clean and prepare the ship for the newlyweds. The task involved mostly stocking the ship with provisions and decorating.

Before sunrise, on the morning of his eldest daughter’s wedding, John found he could not get back to sleep. Rather than fighting his thoughts, he rose to put them on paper.

December 2\textsuperscript{nd}, 2000:

The day is finally here, a day which holds both great joy and sadness for me. Today, I give my little girl away in marriage. Maureen and I knew that this day would be coming soon after we landed on Alpha Prime. In retrospect, I’m grateful that we had the extra time to get to know Donald West. He has proven, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that he will love and care for our dear Judy. I couldn’t ask for a better son-in-law, or a truer friend. It is ironic how my feelings now compare with my first impressions of the young Air Force Captain who caught the eye of our daughter, over five years ago. This brings my thoughts to our youngest daughter, Penny. Maureen and I trust T’lan as much as we trust Don,
but we still can’t come to grips with the notion of the two of them being married so young, regardless of the local customs. Yet, is it right for us to make them wait until she is eighteen, knowing that, by all rights, they are already, as one. I am finding it much more difficult to decide, knowing T’lan as I do.

“It is a difficult decision, isn’t it?” asked Maureen. She had joined her husband at the desk, reading along as was often her habit.

“It would be much easier if we didn’t like T’lan,” said John. “I can only imagine how Don would feel if we gave our blessings so early.”

“It’s always hardest with the first, I think Don would understand.”

Maureen was holding a small box which she opened and placed on the desk.

“What’s this?” asked John.

“My parents wedding set and my mother’s engagement ring. I was saving them for Judy, but
she and Don had already bought rings before we left Earth. I thought Penny might like to have them, they are family heirlooms.”

“I still think sixteen is much too young, Maureen.”

“I agree, John. But, under the circumstances, I think we should consider a compromise.”

“What did you have in mind?”

“T’lan turns eighteen next month. Since we already know that he is going to be married to Penny sooner or later, I suggest we give them permission for an engagement, the pre-joining as his people call it, providing that they wait until T’lan turns twenty to be married. By then, Penny will be seventeen and a half.”

John knew he would have to think about it and today was not the best day to be considering this.

“Have you mentioned this to Penny?”

“No, of course not. I wanted to talk with you first,” said Maureen. “John, I’ve always been able to keep an open dialogue with Penny. Right now, she knows that you and I are discussing the situation, nothing
more. It’s a big decision and I want to give us both some time to think about this.”

“You know, Maureen, of our three children, Penny has changed the most. I remember her reaction when she saw Don kissing Judy’s hand back on Priplanus. That was only three years ago and she was still a child. Now, she is becoming a beautiful young woman, where does the time go?”

Maureen closed the ring box and put it back on the shelf.

“It keeps slipping into the future, John. How about some coffee?”

“Now that sounds like a good idea.”

Judy awoke early that morning in the cabin that she would share with her soon to be husband. She reached across the bed and was startled at first not to find him there. Then she remembered that Don had stayed at the crash site last night, along with Jarrock, Lana, and Doctor Smith, to simplify the sleeping arrangements.
She had always been irritated at the animosity between Smith and her fiancé, but over the past two weeks she began to understand the mechanics of the seemingly tenuous relationship the two men carried out. Judy had seen the determination on Smith’s face as he fought to save the Major’s life. His concern had been genuine as was Don’s appreciation for what the Doctor had done. So, when Don asked Smith to be his best man, it came as no surprise to Judy. *They would be miserable if they didn’t have each other to verbally spar with,* she thought.

She threw on her robe and exited the cabin. Her parents were sitting in the galley and she could smell the fresh aroma of coffee.

“Good morning,” said her mother. “You’re up early.”

“Morning, Mom, Dad. I can’t get back to sleep, not now.”

“Nervous?” asked her father.

“A little, but in a good way,” said Judy.

“Well, you have a few hours before you have to get ready,” said Maureen.
“I think I’m going to sit up on deck for a while. The sun will be up shortly, I think I’d like to watch it come up.”

Judy took her coffee cup and stepped onto the elevator. Once on deck, she wandered to Don’s chair and sat down, pulling her knees to her chin. Being in his chair brought her comfort as she pondered their future together. One of the things that they had learned from the records of their future lives was their wedding date. It was supposed to have been November 25, the week prior. With Don being injured, they chose the following Saturday. Judy still held out hope that their future wasn’t set in stone, but if the pictures brought along by their futures were any indication, they were going to have a happy marriage and a full life.

Outside, the sun was just starting to crest the ridge and it looked like it was going to be a beautiful day. Judy made up her mind that she was going to live each day they had together to its fullest, regardless of what the future may hold.
At the *Jupiter 6* site, Don was up early as well, unknowingly mirroring his future wife’s actions. Sitting in the pilot’s chair he watched the sunlight fill the valley as the sun rose over the eastern ridge. He looked up and saw that the sky was a deep Bristol blue and there wasn’t a cloud to be seen.

West had already decided that he was going to build a small home, close to the *Jupiter 2*. He had drawn up the plans and even though the interior would have an Early American appearance, the dwelling would include electricity and indoor plumbing. Don planned on salvaging certain components from the *Jupiter 6* to accomplish his goal. While some of the amenities would take longer to install, he hoped to have their new home livable by late fall.

Don had been worried that with the recent change in their relationship with the Lamotia Clan, that his idea of building a permanent dwelling would draw objections from the new leadership, but Jarrock assured him that M’lar was a man of honor and he would abide by the decree made by his predecessor.

The sound of foot fall behind drew his attention from the viewport.
“Doctor Smith. You’re up early.”

“Good morning, Major. How are you feeling?”

“Better. I’m not nearly as sore as I was a few days ago,” said Don.

Doctor Smith sat down in the chair next to Don. He gazed out the window at the vista beyond.

“The view here is not quite as pleasing as it is back at the Jupiter 2,” said Smith.

“I think it’s just fine,” quipped West. “Besides, I don’t think the outside scenery is going to be at the top of our priority list.”

“Yes, of course.”

The two men sat in an uneasy silence for a while, just staring out the window.

“You surprised me, back in the cave, Zachary. I never expected you to jump Tyler. By doing so, you saved all of our lives, including Judy’s.”

“Trust me, Major West, my actions were just as much about self preservation as they were heroism.”

“No, I don’t think so. You were just as angry with Tyler as I was, maybe more so. For the first time
since I’ve known you, you took a stand for something. Maybe Judy saw that trait in you all along.”

“I will tell you a true fact, Major. All my life, I have been a coward. I’ve always taken the easy way out, and could be counted on to do whatever was in my own best interests. In spite of that the Robinsons, especially Judy, have treated me more like family and shown more compassion to me than my own kin.”

“I know. It’s one of the things that I dearly love about Judy, her propensity for forgiveness. Without it, I doubt we would still be together.”

“My point, Major, is I knew you would jump Tyler at some point. All I had to do was wait for you to act. So, you see Major, I am no kind of a hero. The Robinson’s acceptance of me was out of the goodness of their hearts.”

“And if I hadn’t been there?”

“I guess we will never know, Major.”

Smith stood and strolled back to the elevator.
Somehow, Zachary, I think I do know what you would have done, and I thank you for it, Don thought to himself.

**With this Ring...:**

Standing at the altar, Don found it next to impossible to keep still. Even being surrounded by close friends and family, and knowing beyond any doubt that his bride loved him dearly, he couldn’t shake the case of nerves.

“Major, if you don’t stop fidgeting, I’m going to have to give you another sedative,” said Smith, as he stood next to him.

“Oh, no you don’t, Zach. The last time you did that, I was out for the whole day.”

“Zach indeed,” said Smith, indigently. “Have you no respect for the uniform?”

“Sorry, Colonel,” said Don, with only a trace of irony in his voice.

Since Don was wearing his dress blues, Smith had decided to wear his own uniform. He was pleasantly
surprised to find out that it still fit, for the most part, seeing he hadn’t worn it since liftoff.

The field in front of the ship had been covered by prefab tiles, forming a smooth surface for the ceremony. It would double as a dance floor later. Stanchions and ropes with floral arrangements formed the aisle that Judy would walk down.

“Relax, Major, the Professor is coming out now.”

John Robinson walked out of the ship and down the ramp to the aisle formed by the ropes. With a prayer book in hand he solemnly made his way to the altar and took his place behind it. On the small table, that formed the altar, stood three candles and the rings Don and Judy would exchange.

“You okay, Don?”

“Yeah, I don’t know why I’m so nervous.”

“Don’t worry about it. Trust me, it’s normal,” said John, knowingly.

Inside the ship, Maureen had closed the main viewport and the outer hatch so no one would see
the bride until she stepped outside. Judy was dealing with her own case of butterflies.

“Mother, I’m marrying the man of my dreams, why am I so nervous?” she asked.

“It’s perfectly normal, dear. Once you get to the altar with Don, you’ll be fine.”

“Judy, you look absolutely beautiful,” said Penny. “Don isn’t going to be able to take his eyes off you.”

“Thanks,” said Judy. She paused for a moment to catch her breath. “I guess I’m ready.”

Will and Brina waited patiently for the hatch to open, which was the signal to begin the music. The young friends had rehearsed two musical pieces that they were going to perform live for the ceremony. As the hatch opened they began to play the intro.

The sounds of Will’s acoustic guitar and Brina’s flute filled the air. As Penny walked slowly down the ramp, Will began to sing.

“He is now to be among you at the calling of your hearts
Rest assured this troubadour is acting on His part. The union of your spirits, here, has caused Him to remain. For whenever two or more of you are gathered in His name, There is Love, There is Love.”

As Penny walked to the base of the ramp, Judy appeared just outside the hatch with Maureen standing to her left. But Don saw only Judy. Her satin white dress was strapless, baring her shoulders and while the dress lacked the traditional train, it was still elegant. A tradition veil completed the outfit. She was wearing her hair up and even though Don preferred it down, she never looked more beautiful to him than she did right now.

“Well a man shall leave his mother and a woman leave her home. They shall travel on to where the two shall be as one. As it was in the beginning is now and ‘til the end
Woman draws her life from man and gives it back again.
There is Love,
There is Love.”

Judy kept her eyes on Don as she slowly made her way to the altar. In his eyes she found undying love and support and strength. Oh, she needed his strength right now, as her tears of joy were right on the edge. As she approached the altar she could see that his eyes were glistened with moisture as well and her own tears began to fall freely.

“Well then what's to be the reason for becoming man and wife?
Is it love that brings you here or love that brings you life?
For if loving is the answer, then who's the giving for?
Do you believe in something that you've never seen before?
Oh there is Love,
There is Love.”
Maureen flipped Judy’s veil and kissed her on the cheek and produced a handkerchief to dab away her daughter’s tears. Reaching to Don, she kissed him on the cheek as well and joined their hands. Before leaving to sit, she reached to take her husband’s hand, and held it for a moment and she spoke to him with her eyes.

“Oh the marriage of your spirits here has caused Him to remain
For whenever two or more of you are gathered in His name
There is Love,
There is Love.”

As John looked at his daughter and soon to be son-in-law, he too felt overcome with emotion. They were both tearing and John felt like he was going to join them when he felt a steadying presence enter his mind. Jarrock had stepped beside him for a moment, just long enough to help him order his thoughts.
Without a word, he returned to his seat. With renewed strength, John began the ceremony.

“Since the earliest days of sailing vessels, shipmasters have been granted the privilege, and the honor, of joining two people in one of our most hallowed institutions, and so we are gathered here today, in the sight of our friends and family, and in the presence of Almighty God, to join these two people, in the bonds of marriage. This most sacred union is not to be entered into, frivolously, or carelessly, but, reverently, and wisely.”

“For the past five years, I have watched Don and Judy stand the test of time, and their love for each other has never once wavered. In the past three years, they have endured more than most couples do in a lifetime. Through it all, their love has endured, and it is my belief that a love and commitment as strong as the love Don and Judy have for each other, can never, and will never fail to carry them through the difficulties life can bring.”

Professor Robinson paused for a moment to smile at his daughter and his best friend. He turned to Don.
“Donald Michael West, do you take this woman, Judith Elana Robinson, to be your lawfully wedded wife, to have and to hold from this day forward?”

“I do.”

“Will you promise to love honor and cherish her, in sickness and in health, for richer or for poorer, to keep above all others, for as long as you both shall live?”

“I will.”

Robinson turned to his daughter. For a brief moment he felt as if he would break down, but the strength Jarrock had given him held firm.

“Judith Elana Robinson, do you take this man, Donald Michael West, to be your lawfully wedded husband, to have and to hold from this day forward?”

“I do.”

“Will you promise to love honor and cherish him, in sickness and in health, for richer or for poorer, to keep above all others, for as long as you both shall live?”
“I will.”

“Don and Judy have some things they would like to say to each other,” said the Professor. He motioned for Judy to begin.

“Don, since we left Earth, we have been through so much together. There were times that I didn’t know if we would survive to see this day. But through all that, I’ve always known that you love me. And as we start our lives as husband and wife, I want you to know that you were my first love, you will be my last love, and you are my everything.”

John could see that his friend was about to break down.

“Judy, I...” She smiled at his misstep and Don paused to collect himself. “I knew I should have gone first.”

His remark brought a chuckle from everyone and the distraction gave him a few minutes to order his thoughts.

“Judy, I knew that I loved you from the day that we met. You have a trusting gentleness that makes me look at the world through better eyes, your eyes. And
you have always had an inner strength that leaves me in awe. I don’t know what the future holds for us but I know we can face it together. I love you, Judy, and I always will.”

John picked up the smaller of the two rings and handed it to Don. He took Judy’s left hand and placed the ring on her finger saying, “With this ring, I thee wed, promising all of my love and faithfulness, forevermore.”

Taking the remaining ring, John handed it to his daughter. She took Don’s left hand and placed the ring on his finger saying, “With this ring, I thee wed, promising all of my love and faithfulness, forevermore.”

Professor Robinson lit the candles on either end of the table. Don and Judy each took one of the candles and joined the flames just above the unlit candle. They lowered them together to light the middle candle.

“The candle flame signifies life. By joining the flames to light the middle candle, Don and Judy have shown that they are now one heart, one soul, and one life.”
“In the giving and receiving of rings, and by reciting their sacred vows, Don and Judy have pledged their love, honor, and commitment, in the presence of their fellows, and in the sight of God and what He has joined together, let no man put asunder. By the power vested in me, as the Commander of the Jupiter 2, I now pronounce you, husband and wife. Don, you may kiss your bride.”

Don took his new wife into his arms, kissing her gently at first. Judy reciprocated, reaching around his neck and drawing him deeper into the kiss. As the kiss deepened, the world around them fell away and they became lost in the moment. They didn’t come up for air until John cleared his throat.

“Ladies and Gentlemen, may I present to you, Major and Mrs. Donald West,” said a slightly amused John Robinson.

Brina and Will began playing the intro to their next piece. This time, it was Brina who began to sing as Don and Judy walked down the aisle, now as husband and wife.

“I will pledge my heart, to the love we share, Through the good and bad times too.
I'll forsake my rest for your happiness:
'Til my death I will stand by you.

Will joined in with Brina singing in harmony, as Doctor Smith escorted Penny down the aisle.

With God as my witness, this vow I will make;
To have and to hold you, no other to take.
For rich or for poor, under skies grey or blue,
'Til my death I will stand by you.”

Brina’s voice dropped off and Will picked up the next verse.

There are wars and there are rumors, of wars yet to come.
Temptations we'll have to walk through.
Though others may tremble, I will not run.
'Til my death I will stand by you.

The pair sang the remainder of the song in harmony with each other. Maureen followed the wedding party, planning on getting some pictures for Judy’s wedding album.

I will put on the armor of faithfulness,
To fight for a heart that is true.
'Til the battle is won, I will not rest.
'Til my death I will stand by you.

With God as my witness, this vow I will make;
To have and to hold you, no other to take.
For rich or for poor, under skies grey or blue,
'Til my death I will stand by you.

'Til the battle is won, I will not run.
'Til my death I will stand by you.

While his wife was taking pictures of the newlyweds, John stood at the altar, contemplating the events of the day. Jarrock soon joined him.

“I don’t know if I would have gotten through the ceremony without your support, Jarrock. Maureen and I are going to miss both you and Lana.”

“You underestimate yourself, John. The strength you found was yours. All I did was helped you set your mind at ease. When we are settled, I will send word by messenger of our safe arrival.”

“When do you have leave?”

“Tomorrow, at sunrise, it is a long journey.”
John and Maureen had offered to take them in the chariot but transporting their horses would be a problem.

“Once you have established yourselves, Maureen and I would like to visit. We might even surprise you by flying in, once we get the space pod repaired.

“Lana and I will look forward to that, John.”

A short time later the family and friends were gathered around the table. Just before they started to eat, John, Maureen, Penny, and Doctor Smith started tapping on their glasses with their utensils. Looks of confusion could be seen from Jarrock’s family. Don and Judy finally smiled and turned to kiss each other.

“What is the significance of this tapping?” Lana asked Maureen.

“It started as an old medieval tradition. In medieval times, the wine was often poisoned so the host would take a sample of the wine served to the guests and drink it himself. After that, the guests would tap their glasses indicating that they trusted their host.
The clinking of the glass signifies trust, honesty, and good health. At a wedding, it is a way for the guests to get the bride and groom to express their love by kissing.”

“Oh, in that case...” Lana picked up a fork and started tapping. She was soon joined by everyone else at the table.

As Don and Judy kissed again, Doctor Smith stood with his glass in hand.

“May I have your attention?” he asked, waiting until it was quiet. “As best man, the responsibility of the wedding toast falls to me, dare I say, much to the Major’s chagrin.”

Smith’s remark brought a round of laughter from the table.

“In all seriousness, I cannot tell you how happy it makes me to see the two of you starting your journey as husband and wife. Donald, Judith, I wish you both joy, happiness, and a long life together.”

“Hear, hear.”
A few days before leaving Houston, and a week before the launch, Don and Judy had managed to get away for a night of dinner and dancing. They both knew that this night would probably be the last time they would spend any quality time before the mission left Earth. They so enjoyed the evening that it was over before they knew it. When the band leader announced the last song of the night, Don took Judy’s hand and led her onto the dance floor.

The song was a rock ballad that Don remembered from his early days at the academy. As he held her close, the words of the song spoke to his heart and he lost himself in Judy’s deep blue eyes.

*I see forever, when I look in your eyes,*

*You're all I ever wanted,*

*I always want you to be mine.*

*Let's make a promise till the end of time,*

*We'll always be together,*

*And our love will never die.*

That was over four years ago, and now, as their song was played, he found himself reliving that special night, as he clung tight to his new bride on the dance floor.
So here we are face to face,
And heart to heart.
I want you to know we will never be apart,
Now I believe that wishes can come true,
'Cause I see my whole world, I see only you.

When I look into your eyes,
I can see how much I love you,
And it makes me realize.
When I look into your eyes,
I see all my dreams come true,
When I look into your eyes.

As she twirled around the dance floor with her new husband, Judy too, recalled the events of that evening in Houston. At the end of the song they had shared a long deep kiss, and she knew that she had found her life mate, and now, four year later, she was finally going to start a life with him.

I've looked for you all of my life
Now that I've found you
We will never say goodbye
I can't stop this feeling
There's nothing I can do
'Cause I see everything when I look at you.
While Don and Judy were distracted on the dance floor, Penny, T’lan, Will, and Brina were planning a little mission of their own. The chariot that the newlyweds would use to travel to the *Jupiter 6* was getting a new exterior design.

“Will, are you sure this stuff will come off after?” asked Penny, as she spelled out *Just Married* on the back window.

“Sure Penny, it’s just white shoe polish,” he said, as he finished tying the last streamer to the top rung of the ladder. “Boy, are they going to be surprised.”

“I do not understand,” T’lan began. “What is the purpose of altering the appearance of the vehicle?”

“It’s tradition,” said Penny. “Although, it would be much more fun to see them driving down Main Street USA,” she finished as she drew a heart with newlywed’s names inside.

When Don and Judy were ready to leave, they started laughing when they saw the gussied up chariot.
“Jupiter 6 or bust, who’s idea was this?” asked Don, in a good natured way. He looked towards Smith.

“I assure you Major, I’m innocent.”

“I’ll bet,” said West, but he said it with a smile.

John and Maureen approached their daughter and son-in-law. John took his eldest daughter in his arms. “You will always be my little girl.”

While John and Judy shared a moment, Maureen gathered Don into her embrace. “Don, you have been my oldest son, long before you married Judy. You two take care of each other, okay?”

“I promise, Maureen...Mom.”

Maureen’s face brightened with a beautiful smile. She stepped back to allow her husband a chance to say his goodbyes.

John took Don’s hand in a firm grip which West responded in kind. “I know I don’t have to say this, but, take care of her.”

“I will, John with every fiber of my being.”

Robinson pulled his son-in-law into a bear hug, “Take care of yourself too,” said the Professor.
When John released him, Don turned to help his wife into the waiting chariot. He climbed in behind her and took his place in the driver’s seat. The engine started and the newlyweds were on their way.

While the rest of the family went back to the party, John and Maureen stood there, arm in arm, for a long while after the chariot was out of sight.

**Epilogue:**

The four younger siblings had taken care of putting away the leftovers, allowing their parents to relax and enjoy the evening. Teral and Selana had returned to the village soon after the guests of honor had embarked on their journey.

Jarrock and Lana had turned in early as they were leaving for the Murock Clan at first light, and even Doctor Smith had retired for the evening.

Penny and T’lan had gone off for an evening stroll under the stars while Will and Brina were doing some scientific stargazing of their own.

John and Maureen sat at the table sharing one of the chairs also finding themselves looking up at the sky.
In the background, the music loop for the wedding was still playing.

Nestled in her husband’s arms, Maureen could sense that he was in a contemplative mood.

“Penny for your thoughts?” she asked.

“It’s funny that you put it that way, seeing it is Penny that I’m thinking about. It isn’t going to be much longer before we are giving her away in marriage.”

“Are your thinking of letting them get married sooner than we discussed?” asked Maureen.

“No, but in the grand scheme of things, two years really isn’t all that far away. It seems like only yesterday that we were teaching her to walk. And Judy was so cute trying to help...” he said, his voice colored with emotion.

Maureen knew her husband was still coming to terms with the loss of his little girl. She held him closer and reached up to kiss him.

“We were very lucky that Judy found a man like Don, especially when you consider some of the boys that were chasing her in school. Can you imagine...”
“No. I don’t even want to think about it,” John said. “But you’re right, we are lucky, for so many things.”

As they held each other the strains of Always and Forever filled the air and Maureen sat up and turned to her husband, “I think they are playing our song.”

John stood and led his wife to the dance floor. As the very much in love couple swayed to the music, John considered all that they had been through. By rights, had the mission gone as planned, they would have all been killed when the Jupiter 2 collided with an uncharted asteroid, four months after leaving Earth. But fate had intervened, when Smith became trapped aboard just before liftoff. Nor should have they survived the first year on Priplanus, or the missile attack by the cyborg planet, or any one of the other misadventures that they had seen in the years since leaving home.

As a man of faith, Robinson believed that divine intervention had saved his family’s lives on more than one occasion, and with that belief, he finally found solace. If I can trust God to get us through the major issues, then I should trust him to guide us through the little things.
“I think we’re going to be okay, Maureen,” he said, as he held his wife close.

“I know we are, John. I know we are.”

END