

Alone - Christian, Year 7, NSW

Transmission Started

I have been drifting through desolate space for months now.

I just reached Saturn's rings, and in a few weeks, I will arrive at the Anomaly. I'm going crazy by myself on this ship, surviving off bland astronaut rations and canned fruit.

Transmission Ended

I left the communication chair, drifting past the dusty picture of my family. The silence of the ship was deafening. I thrust myself away from the black handrails that contrasted with the ship's cobalt-white interior and propelled myself into the utility room. The room was filled with a plethora of different tools. I unlocked the fuel cabinet; and the screen, in bold font, read: *Fuel Capacity: 59%*.

I sat there, floating, dreaming about my family. I propelled myself towards a metal table littered with old dishes from my last meal. I grabbed a can of peaches and scoffed it down. Looking out the window, I was mesmerised by the sight of the icy blue rings and wondered how I even got here.

Exhausted by my ever-ticking mind, I strapped myself into bed, settling for the night.

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"Solus, Solus! Wake up! Get the girls ready for school." My wife's voice echoed in my head.

I remember this place... my bedroom, my wife, the kids downstairs. A familiar warmth engulfed me as I stepped down the stairs. The girls were playing with a model of a rocket.

"Wait... This is a dream," I mumbled limply.

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An ear-piercing siren rang out through the ship. Flinging myself out of bed, to my horror, I saw that the all-important fuel tank had been mysteriously ejected. I looked out the window and spotted a tank illuminated by the goliath of a planet.

Desperately propelling myself to the communication room, I called to base.

Transmission Started

We have a problem! The fuel tank has been ejected into space. I'm going to retrieve it.

Transmission Ended

Twenty minutes later, I received a response. Static and screaming. The only thing I could make out was “You're on your own!” Then, there was a loud crash and the audio abruptly cut out.

Ignoring whatever that was, I slid quickly into my white astronaut suit, tethered myself to the ship and released the airlock. The empty void of space swallowed me whole as I left the metal confines of the ship.

I ignited my jetpack and soared towards the fuel tank. Meteoroids flew past me. The rings of Saturn were like an eerie icy light casting hues of light blue onto the tank. The metallic tank was within my grasp as I reached my trembling hands towards it.

Suddenly, a meteoroid knocked the fuel tank, sending it spiralling further into space. I was so close yet so far. I turned on the jets, the tether jerking me back as I ran out of line.

Snatching the grappling arm on the side of the airlock, I flew back out. The long metal rod was equipped with a claw at the end. I was once again close to the gleaming tank. Stretching my arm out as far as I could, I extended the rod, grabbing the fuel tank and reeled it back in. I pulled myself back to the ship and closed the airlock, securing the vital fuel tank back into place.

Back in the communications room, I attempted to report back to Earth, but there was no response. Thankfully the engine restarted and I continued my journey to the Anomaly.

The only thing I knew about the Anomaly was that it was a gravitational disruption that mysteriously appeared close to Saturn and it was my mission to ascertain as much information as possible.

Letting the auto-pilot handle it, I floated back into bed.

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I woke up a few hours later when I arrived at where the Anomaly should have been. The empty void of space was all I could see, but in the distance, a green and purple mysterious glimmer appeared, flickering periodically, almost beckoning me to it.

I climbed into my suit, to recover the blinking light, and discovered it was a purple tesseract, collapsing into itself over and over again, and releasing a green light that dissipated like steam.

On closer inspection, I saw a transparent ring surrounding it with indecipherable runes and symbols inscribed in it. It spun rapidly before stopping at English. It read. "*Behold the cube of time, relic from the beginning. The power to travel through spacetime to where one desires. Welcome Solus.*"

In a flash, I was sucked into a vision. An advanced civilisation. Aliens evacuating. A black sentient ink enveloping the world. Suddenly, everything was black. An incessant dripping noise echoed eerily in the back of my mind.

I started awake, the anomaly in my hand. I could feel time itself, all the ages of the world, resting in my palm. I hastily began heading home.

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Months later...

I looked in the mirror. A messy beard and dark bags under my eyes stared back at me. Would my family even recognise me? I had missed them so much, their smiles, the warm hugs, but the weight of my mission was not lost on me. I had been studying the tesseract this entire journey home, convinced it was a time travel device.

I washed my face in the sink, cleared the old dishes and the notebook I had on the metallic table, and then glanced out the window. A silvery ball of rock came into view. The moon.

I quickly made my way to the front of the ship and took control of it, engaging the thrusters, on this final leg of my journey home. Within mere seconds, and to my horror Earth came into view, covered black ooze.

It was destroyed.

With the enhanced boosters on, I entered the atmosphere. The planned landing spot was completely destroyed, unrecognisable to any person... if there were any left.

I landed on a flat strip of charred land, sliding the mysterious tesseract into my pocket. I surveyed the carnage around me. The trees gone, buildings collapsed, life erased.

Grabbing the hand-held communication beacon, I activated it. No answer. I treaded through the deserted wasteland, puddles of black sludge smothering the landscape. I recognised this place, the jagged peaks, the scarce fields. I was in the Rocky Mountains. That's when I remembered. There was a bunker close by.

A flicker of hope. What if my family had managed to seek refuge there?

An hour later, I reached the large entrance. The thick doors had been blasted off the hinges. All I could hear was an eerie dripping, the same sound I had heard in space. Odd!

I traversed deeper into the bunker. Trickle of black sludge oozed down the wall. There had to be a chance my family was still alive. I reached a central control room with a long list of all the inhabitants of the bunker. I scrolled through it, looking desperately for the last name Choros. I saw it. Their names.

Relieved, I travelled deeper into the bunker in search of them.

“Is anyone there?” I called desperately into the darkness.

No response. The further I got, the more carnage and devastation I was met with. A river of black, inky sludge had smothered every living thing in the bunker, their last frantic moments clawing for air preserved for eternity like a macabre jelly. And that's when it hit me. My family was gone.

Wailing in pain, I raced out of the bunker onto a cliff. The horizon was empty. I was truly alone. I knelt down in defeat, tears streaming down my eyes. “Why? Why? Why did I leave them?”

Images of their delicate, innocent faces fill my mind. *Dad! Dad! Get up!*

In that moment, I remembered the tesseract. What if, just maybe, I could time travel to before I left and see my family? It was my last hope. I pulled out the tesseract and focused my mind onto it.

Nothing happened.

“Why isn't it working?” I shouted.

Despair and anger filled me. I snatched the tesseract and violently smashed it onto a rock. A purple orb lifted out of the broken pieces and entered my body. Time seemed to stop. Flashes of green and purple light surrounded me, and warm laughter rang through my ears.

Then, it all went black.

I opened my eyes and found myself familiarly leaning on the porch of my cherished home, clutching a box of keepsakes in my hand.

“Solus, honey, when are you leaving for the base?”

I turned to my wife and leaped into her arms.

“I’m never leaving again. I just want to spend the rest of my time with you!”

Confused, she hugged me and called the girls over. I crouched down to their level, tears streaming down my face as I embraced them.

Out of the corner of my eye, on the edge of the windowsill, I spotted rivulets of black ooze dripping ominously. It began to fall like death ribbons from the sky...