

“THE SELECTION”

TUESDAY, Oct 5, 2486 EARTH TIME: 09:00. Zephyr was unusually nervous today.

Beads of sweat were forming on her upper lip. Today was the day she would formally begin her mandatory retirement. The Organization had given everyone 3 retirement choices due to the overpopulation of planet Earth:

Option 1--One time ---Time travel to anywhere she chose prior to the 21st century.

Option 2--One way ticket to Mars where a trial colony had just been established.

Option 3--Assisted suicide—the preferred choice of The Organization.

Zephyr had spent a long time considering the pros and cons of each of these.

Unlike her parents, she flatly refused Option 3, the idea of assisted suicide. Not because of religion, since this no longer existed, but because she was still too young and had much to do in this life. After all, she was only 92, and people nowadays live to be at least 136.

Option 1--- time travel to another century had intrigued her briefly. She thought of meeting some of the pioneers of space travel, or the men and women who had founded The Organization. That would only be briefly exciting while it was new, she thought. Also, she would also have to forego the conveniences of the last four centuries, including her personal robot Golan. Besides, her 92 years of age would be very old to endure the hardships of those primitive centuries.

Only Option 2, the trip to Mars, seemed to make sense to Zephyr.

She wouldn't be too old nor too young, she reasoned, but living in a community of her peers.

The Organization had devoted much time and publicity to the colony on Mars.

It displayed architect's renderings of colorful plans for housing, recreational areas, as well as greenspaces. Supposedly, some of these were currently under construction, and as one of the first, you could help shape the colony. However, so much was still unknown since no voyage to Mars had ever been attempted. This would be the first.

Today she and several hundred others would be embarking upon the journey, Selection Day as it was called. Standing in the Great Hall, along with 232 others who had chosen the 7 month trip to Mars. Zephyr took a deep breath and gave a long sigh. She was about to leave the only home she had ever known, never to return.

She could only faintly hear a voice giving an order. Everyone born after the 22nd century was nearly deaf due to the harsh sounds their ancestors had subjected themselves to in previous centuries. She adjusted her PSAD, Personal Sound Amplification Device, to hear what was said. "It is now time to all proceed to your assigned ship," the disembodied voice announced.

The ship she was assigned to was state-of-the art, an innovation in 25th century technology. Quickly seated and now anxiously awaiting to take off for the 7-month voyage, the passengers remained silent, not daring to speak for fear of disrupting the launch.

The captain assured everyone that this maiden voyage was safe and, above all,

NOT TO PANIC!

These words echoed in her PSAD as the ship took off in a perfect launch. This would be a landmark long remembered by the people on Earth and just the first of many more.

Only 270 km. up the spacecraft began to rattle. This became more tumultuous as each minute passed by. Zephyr's pod began to rock back and forth. She wondered if it was supposed to do that, but the captain's words kept reminding her that the journey was a safe one. With that in mind, she closed her eyes and imagined how beautiful Mars must be. The pod settled down, and she dozed off.

She was sound asleep when the rocking jarred her awake. The pod shook so hard it detached itself from the bolts that held it in place. It started to roll around wildly, and with that an escape hatch opened, and she and the pod were ejected. Only seconds had elapsed, yet the ship was already fading out of range.

TOTAL PANIC ENGULFED HER!

Unable to say what happened in the days that followed, Zephyr drifted in and out of consciousness. Adrift in space with no way to direct the pod, she finally realized she could do nothing. Out of consciousness again! It wasn't until she headed towards a small planet, attracted by its gravitational pull that the pod crashed downward. The abrupt impact awakened her.

She could see from the screen that this barren wasteland wasn't Mars. No one else was there.

She was all alone! Or was she? There had to be someone because the outside meter registered favorable air quality. The unanswered question ping-ponged in her head, where was she?

If she was ever to find out, Zephyr realized that she would have to leave the pod.

She had to be brave no matter what was out there. The stillness gave her reassurance that no wild animals were nearby. Finally, she cautiously climbed out of her refuge. The soil beneath her feet was luminescent sand that changed colors like a chameleon. The sky was dark, nearly devoid of stars, but with 2 moons illuminating the landscape. Her wristband registered the temperature as -8.9 Knocks. That was cold!

OCTOBER 20, 2486 EARTH TIME: 03:00

Are they gone,” asked the Director?

“Yes, Sir, ” answered the Commander, “All 232 pods ejected at 1,000km intervals to promote isolation and avoid fraternization.”

“And control subject number 233, where is she?” the Director queried.

“I can assure you, Sir, we are keeping an eye on her. She has safely landed on a small uncharted planet in the Nya Galaxy. Zephyr, as well as the others, have no idea that the ejection was planned. She will have to endure the harsh elements and adjust to her new environment in order to survive. “What about the ships, Commander?”

“Taken care of, Sir. Once the ships are devoid of passengers and the holographic crew, they will head straight for the sun where they will be incinerated by the intense heat.” “Very good!” said the Director nodding his head. The Director continued, “The Overseer will want to know that the computer has programmed the algorithm for the ‘Fake News.’ ” Yes, Sir, at 0900 of April 5, 2487, exactly seven months from departure, stimulation will be applied to the brain’s visual cortex of the masses. This will create the image of the ships landing on Mars.

The populace will be entranced by the beauty of the moment, enveloped in a soothing aura of calm, well-being, trust and allegiance to the Our World Organization, as each perceives his own

version of ships safely landing on Mars.” “Excellent, Commander,” said the Director, as he threw back a shot of his favorite opioid cocktail and gave a maniacal yet mechanical laugh!