

Another genesis

by

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Chapter One

For almost a year after I bailed out of my old career things went as smoothly as one might expect. The new career was proving adequate for survival and showing promise of better things to come. I had a hideaway in the Sovereign Republic of California, a stolen United Americas naval yacht powered by a Willis translator, and a girlfriend powered by lust. I was busily sharpening my skills in the time-honored profession of smuggling. I was finally starting to beat the odds in a world gone bleak until one day James Friendly found out about the United Americas yacht and located where I was hiding it.

For some very good reasons, I had to protect my little hideaway in Friendly Valley. As always, the reasons were things that I'd probably do differently if I had them to do again. Some of them went back over 20 years. For most of those years, I'd filled positions in the United Americas Department of Demography and Security. For the last 10 of those years, I'd been an Administrative Specialist counting on a pension after retirement. Things hadn't worked out that way.

It happened because I have a tendency to read too much and because I began to read the wrong things. I started out with pretty much the same education as everybody else but, while I was at the Security Enforcement Facility in Veracruz, I had a lot of time for reading. In a Veracruz bar one evening I met an Administrative Service worker named Peggy Miranda. It turned out that her billet was in the Mexico State Liberty Library where she was a Comptroller of Information for the United Americas Department of Education. One of her responsibilities was something the DepEd called uncorrected records. They were kept, apparently, for historical purposes. My curiosity got the best of me. Peg's pass card and an Access Control Specialist with an addiction got me into those records.

You can learn a lot by reading records that haven't been corrected. There was a wealth of uncorrected historical information in the records but one of the more useful books that I discovered was an uncorrected dictionary. One of the more useful things that I learned was what it means for records to be corrected. . After that, the uncorrected historical information began to make a lot more sense. I learned a lot. I learned that people in my job used to be called bureaucrats, not Administrative Specialists. Administrations used to be called governments. Access Control Specialists used to be called several things: security guards, border patrol, military police. Today, they're all ACS. There are lots of other words that don't mean what they used to mean. I learned that language is a tool of manipulation. In retrospect, I suppose that it always has been.

I also learned that when the old United States of America had liberated the American hemisphere, from Pole to Shining Pole as they sing in the song, the previous Administrations (governments, if you want to be historically accurate) hadn't viewed it as the Great Liberation, like we've all been taught. They called it imperi-

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alist aggression. Of course, they didn't get to correct the records. Our side got to do that.

A career change hadn't been in my plans but one day the addicted Access Control Specialist was unexpectedly replaced while I was in the uncorrected records, which of course was a restricted area. When I tried to walk out, the face on Peg's pass card didn't match the one between my ears. The new Specialist turned to the phone, I suppose to call for backup. I beaned him with his visitor's log. Unfortunately, his buddy, who I'd neglected to notice coming through the door behind me, interrupted my grab for Peg's card. I almost didn't get away and I had to leave the card.

I went straight to Peg's complex, but the street was already full of Access Control Specialists by the time that I got there. I didn't hang around. I knew that Peg would end up in Retraining but, since they had her card and not mine, they wouldn't immediately know who'd been in their uncorrected records. I had to get away before they could teach her to identify me so I went to the nearest personnel booth and translated myself to the Boston Complex. There I did a little bit of liberating of my own. That's how I got The Yacht. I took the best one that I could get to in the time available. Since I didn't have time to correct the base records I was sure that they'd notice that it was missing. The base records turned out to be irrelevant but I wasn't aware of that until a few hours later.

To get on with my story, when I liberated (uncorrected terminology: stole) the yacht, which I later named The Yacht, I didn't realize how foolish I was being. I didn't have any more chance of learning to fly the thing than you'd have given to a baboon. I just flipped up the safety cover and pushed the Go button. The destination computer took me to wherever it was set for. That turned out to be some rendezvous point way off in space somewhere. In retrospect, I suppose that it's a little surprising that there weren't any safety interlocks to prevent what I did. I understand that interlocks have now been retrofitted but, at the time, I suppose that no one had ever guessed that anyone would ever be so stupid as to push a Go button with a vehicle sitting on the ground. Understand, I was an Administrator, not a Pilot. I had a lot to learn. The problem was that I didn't jet up to a safe altitude first, in the normal fashion. I just translated from right there on the ground. I was in a hurry and I didn't know any better. The Yacht occupies more than ten thousand cubic feet of volume. I've never been back there but I'm told that ten thousand cubic feet of instantaneous vacuum in hangar B wrecked most of the Boston Complex, that a lot of people died, and that the Noriega Naval Facility wasn't fully functional again for more than two years.

Fortunately, at the time that I liberated The Yacht, there was a technician in the matter bay of the automat, finishing up some routine maintenance. Otherwise, I'd probably have died before I figured out how to run the thing. I don't like to recall the scene when we discovered each other. When I told her what I'd done she was

horrified. She called it mass murder and cried real tears. I didn't feel any too good, myself. After some discussion, I suggested dropping her somewhere in the U.A. but she declined. She figured that, if she returned, then she'd be invited into custody and retrained or maybe worse. I considered forming a permanent liaison with her but I still wanted to rescue Peg so I sort of held back. Besides that, this particular lady wasn't cut out for a life of romance and adventure. Instead, we worked out an agreement. I'd been moving in panic mode when I'd taken The Yacht, not thinking much about where I was headed or what I was doing. I was just getting away. Although I was in a hurry to get back to Peg, I couldn't do anything until I knew how to fly The Yacht. I needed instruction. The technician taught me what she could, which wasn't much but it made the difference. With that, the on-board manuals, and the on-line system tutorials, I was on my way. We had all of space to work in and we taught me to navigate, pilot, and care for The Yacht. In return, I dropped her off at Brandon, a little place in the opposite spiral arm, about 50 thousand light years from the retribution of the United Americas. I hope she's having a happy life there.

I could have gone just about anywhere but for one reason or another I wanted to stay on Earth. At first, of course, I wanted to rescue Peg. As soon as I could manage it, I touched down in the Sovereign Republic of California and tried to locate her from there. I was too late. When I finally tracked her down, I found that she'd died a few months earlier at the Alamos Retraining Facility, in the Texican Administrative Region. According to the official obit list, she was a victim of one of the second generation Vaccine Viruses. I suppose that's possible. More likely it was an allergic reaction to retraining. Language being what it is today, I probably wouldn't be able to argue with you about it if you wanted to paraphrase that as death under torture. An invitation had been issued for me to volunteer for retraining so I suppose that she must have learned how to identify me before she died.

After I learned of Peg's death, I felt a certain grudge against the United Americas but I still didn't want to leave Earth. That left me with three choices. I could surrender to the United Americas and be retrained. I could try to start over again in a different administration. I could continue my new career as a criminal. Retraining didn't appeal to me. I like me the way I am. Besides that, with retraining there's always the risk of catching the Vaccine Virus, most likely from the straps on a rack or from the big end of a bludgeon. Starting a new career in another Administration didn't appeal to me. By then I knew too much about administrations, what they stood for, and how they behaved. They were all the same, no matter how they criticized one another. Each one of them portrayed the others as dangerous enemies and used that threat as a weapon to keep its own people frightened, submissive, and under control. Besides that, I'd probably just be extradited. After that, I'd be retrained. And I had certain things going for me that gave considerable appeal to the third, and shadier, of my options. One big plus was that, as a career AdSpec, I knew every nook and cranny of administration. I knew what was in short supply,

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who needed it, and how to sell it. I had a pretty good idea of who to trust and who not to trust. But most important, I was the sole owner of a United States naval yacht, one of the finest pieces of smuggling technology ever devised. My choices might have been limited but the best of them was clear. All that I needed was to stay out of sight, and especially outside of the jurisdiction of the United States. Since I was already in the Sovereign Republic of California anyway, I decided that it would be a good place to stay.

Chapter Two

Within a matter of weeks, I found a home at Friendly Farms with Louise. It seemed like a good situation in a good location. The valley ran, mostly in a sort of straight line, from the Pacific Ocean a good many miles up into the hills. It had an abundance of little box canyons off the sides that were just about the right size to land The Yacht, if I was careful. Naval yachts can land almost anywhere and most of those little valleys were almost never visited. Friendly Farms, a huge establishment that occupied most of the valley, and from which the valley got its name, appeared to be a handy base of operations. It was near the head of the valley, a good distance from other centers of population. There was an old highway between Friendly Farms and the coastal highway, by which I could obtain the services and supplies that I needed. I moved in and began to establish contacts, locate sources of supplies, and research markets. I was on my way.

The big weak spot in my plan, of course, was my almost inevitable visibility. The fact is that a naval yacht can be a difficult thing to hide. It's pretty obvious when it flies over and it's even more obvious when it's landing, if anybody happens to be within a mile or so of the landing location. Jet propulsion tends to be noisy, even compressed air jet propulsion, which is what The Yacht used. The air that ran The Yacht's jets was compressed almost to degenerate matter by Willis compressors and stored in nanocarbonfiber tanks. They were almost unbreakable. Of course, the compressors couldn't keep up with normal use but they filled the tanks while The Yacht was parked. The fuel was free and limitless and, once the tanks were recharged, The Yacht was always ready to go. However, the process of maintaining something like a naval yacht tends to attract attention, even without the need to buy jet fuel.

I wasn't too worried when I discovered that everything in Friendly Valley was owned by Gertrude Friendly. In itself, that wouldn't have been a problem. It was her grandson, James, who became the problem. He was into everything, an incorrigible little hellion. It wasn't possible to keep him from finding out about The Yacht. After that, his grandmother insisted that I teach him to operate the thing. Actually James insisted, but that's the same thing. It was a really stupid idea and I tried to talk them out of it, but there wasn't any way. If I wanted to stay in Friendly Valley, then I had to appease Gertrude Friendly. She insisted and dropped a hint to Louise about rent. Then Louise insisted. What was I to do? We agreed upon a day to start and, all too soon, that day arrived.

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Chapter Three

On the morning of the fateful day, the sky was completely overcast. The day was gray, with a brisk and chilly breeze. The drizzle that began at sunrise slowly turned into a steady rain. In the kitchen, I watched out the window as the weather darkened. Louise and I were having our standard argument.

“But Louise, Willis technology is uniquely useful, and a little discreet smuggling of the right things can go a long way toward building a secure future. For us,” I added a little too late. It was an unfortunate little slip, but it indicated the second thoughts that I was beginning to have about our relationship.

She ignored my little blunder and pursued the standard argument. “Sure,” she replied, predictably, “Until you get caught!”

“I won’t get caught. Trust me, I know what I’m doing.”

“Right Adam, you won’t get caught. You’ve got every Access Control Specialist in the hemisphere on your tail, and you won’t get caught! And you **don’t** know what you’re doing! You’ve only been at it for a few months!”

“Almost a year. And they’re not on my tail. Officially, the United Americas doesn’t even know I’m here. And California hasn’t extradited me. They haven’t actually refused to do it, but they haven’t officially been asked, have they?”

“Officially! Officially! You really love that word, don’t you!? What does that mean!? What about that U.A. creep asking questions last week!? What about him?”

“We made a deal, didn’t we? He wanted his family taken to New Austin, didn’t he? OK, no problem. They’re on New Austin and he couldn’t find any sign of me hereabouts. Officially, the Administrations of Earth oppose smuggling but smugglers almost never get caught because everybody needs us for something. The administrations officially want us caught but even the people who work for the administrations break the rules. They all want something done. Smugglers are a good way for them to get what they want. Even if I didn’t know what I was doing I’d have a decent chance. Better than most folks nowadays. And I do know what I’m doing.” Louise made a gloomy face and continued to wash the dishes. The discussion never got us anywhere. I sat watching her for a few more minutes but I couldn’t really think of anything to say. I sighed, got into my slicker, and wandered out to The Yacht.

After James Friendly had found The Yacht, there didn’t seem to be much point in hiding it anymore. Instead of putting it all the way out in the box canyon, I’d started landing it in a little meadow several hundred yards back of the barn. One advantage of compressed air jets is that they get cold, not hot. In fact, the nozzles have to be heated to keep them from freezing. Anyway, I didn’t need to worry about starting a fire in the meadow where I parked The Yacht. Of course, the jets had a tendency to freeze things. I parked it in a different location every time.

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That morning, The Yacht gleamed under a thin film of water as the rain fell softly on it and flowed down its sides. It's made of plastic, steel, and glass but I have the kind of affinity toward it that most people would feel toward something alive. To me, it feels alive in a way that few people understand.

The Yacht and all of the various other Willis technology devices are the legacy of Dr. Amos Willis, who inadvertently invented the technology while investigating FTL communication theory, quite some time ago. It turned out that his radical new theory didn't predict signal transmission at all. It predicted transmitter transmission. When he activated his first experimental setup, he and several cubic yards of his laboratory suddenly disappeared, leaving behind a very high grade vacuum. It's a good thing that he was using a small experimental apparatus, and not a large one. Nobody ever figured out where he went. The vacuum didn't last long of course, nor did most of his lab. Work was resumed by the survivors in a new location and, in a couple of years, the first working (and controllable) Willis translator was demonstrated.

Willis technology is surprisingly simple but its consequences are far reaching and its theory is murky. In practice, a Willis translator is a peculiar device. It obeys the laws of the conservation of kinetic energy, the energy of motion. It apparently ignores the laws of the conservation of potential energy, the energy of position, in all of its various forms. It will transmit itself or anything else uphill as easily as down and the gravitational potential energy acquired in the process is real and can be used. The same thing is true of magnetic gradients. It will translate magnets toward each other. The acceleration that results when they repel one another is energy that seems to come from nowhere. To this day, no one has figured out where it comes from.

Naturally, the inventors didn't see all of the possibilities. While they were playing around with transportation, The New Whole Earth Catalog began selling plans for small portable Willis power generators. Just as naturally, it wasn't long before Willis power generators of all types and sizes began to appear. Let me explain a Willis power generator, very briefly. In its simplest form, a Willis power generator has some sort of magnet, called a shuttle, that moves through some windings, propelled by another magnet. At the end of the shuttle's travel, it moves into a little Willis translator from which it's translated back to its starting point. From there, it again moves through the windings. The shuttle keeps moving through the windings, generating electricity. It seems like magic, or like the hypothetical perpetual motion machine. Nobody has ever figured out the source of the energy that's used to translate the shuttle back to its starting point but the electricity that's generated as the shuttle moves through the windings is real and it can be used. Electrical generators are only one of the many uses that have been discovered for Willis technology. There doesn't seem to be any limit to the kinds of gadgets that are possible.

Attempts by the inventors to patent the technology were unsuccessful. One reason was that, by the time that they applied for a patent, so many people were using Willis technology for power generation that it was pretty much public domain. Another reason was that some other important things were happening at the time. The Manifest Destiny Party was busy consolidating the remnants of the old U.S. two party system. The first Temporary Emergency Authority Mandate had just been issued and lots of people were hiding from the TEAM cops. They were still calling them cops, back then, except by people who called them worse things. Also, the last USA Congress was preoccupied with the proposed liberation of Mexico and unaware of its own imminent demise. On the west coast, resistance to Manifest Destiny was building to secession and the eventual establishment of the Sovereign Republic of California. World resources were dwindling, energy was getting expensive, and the fight over what was left was shaping up. The political situation was ugly and most people were very nervous. To violate some hypothetical patent right in return for unlimited energy that you didn't have to fight somebody else to get seemed like a pretty good deal. Everybody who could buy, build, or steal a Willis power generator did so. The devices became very plentiful.

Willis power generators were moderately easy to build. They created almost no pollution except, of course, for thermal pollution. At the time, nobody was in the mood to worry about that. It was a step in the right direction with regard to replacing lost resources. That's why smuggling is now so big, so illegal, and so tacitly ignored, all at the same time. Administrations don't like things that they can't control, but (unofficially) nobody can ignore or disrupt the material benefits of uncontrolled access to the resources of the universe. Besides providing cheap energy and resources, Willis technology also made it feasible to escape from brutal political authority. Such authority was world-wide but Willis technology raised the possibility of actually leaving the planet. Not everybody could do it. You still needed an environmental enclosure of some kind but, given that, just leaving wasn't a problem any more. A lot of people began to leave it.

Like all new technologies, Willis technology is a mixed bag. There are some significant dangers in the technology that people at first tended to overlook. One is that of a runaway shuttle falling ever faster through whatever potential gradient is used to accelerate it. That's a very real danger. When a shuttle accelerates without limit eventually something has to give and it's usually the translator. Eventually the shuttle will be moving so fast that translator will fail to catch it. When that happens, the shuttle zips through the translator on its merry way at whatever velocity it has accumulated. In spite of a lot of accidents with the little units that constituted the first generation of Willis power generators, everybody still wanted one. Small Willis power generators were only the beginning and, if a small shuttle can be dangerous, then a big one staggers the imagination. Chicago Bay comes to mind. It didn't take long for the power companies to decide that Willis technology was just the thing to have. Chicago Power and Light built a generator that apparently lost

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its load during startup testing, although nobody knows for sure. Understandably, a certain amount of mystery surrounds the event. It's known that the shuttle in the CP&L generator was of the gravity enhanced magnetically driven variety. That means that the shuttle was magnetically propelled but that it also fell toward the translator under the influence of gravity. The shuttle probably didn't run freely for more than a few minutes. It didn't come even close to relativistic velocity but the facility was intended to replace most of CP&L's obsolete capacity. Consequently, the shuttle was rather a large one. When it got past the translator, it hit the ground at a very high velocity. Chicago Bay is the result. Nowadays, people tend to forego gravity enhancement and make magnetic shuttles that move up to their translators. They start more gradually. Sometimes they have to be started from an external power source. At least they miss the ground if they run away.

Another of the risks inherent in Willis technology is adequately illustrated by my unintended destruction at the Boston Complex. The military and terrorist potential of Willis technology hasn't made the world any easier to live in. That was demonstrated quite recently in Nebraska. When people worry about "the bomb" nowadays, they mean the "W bomb." Here's what happened. A small group of fanatics with a grudge of some kind took a small boat into the Pacific Ocean to the antipodes of Grand Island, Nebraska. Why they chose Grand Island is a mystery to me. What the hell, maybe it was random. Anyway, they had on board a Willis translator that they used to accelerate a small rock to a very high velocity, falling up. Then they translated it to Grand Island where, of course, it was falling down. A piece of Nebraska isn't there any more. No one would even have known who threw the damned rock if the perpetrators hadn't proudly claimed responsibility and broadcast a description of their device. They called it a "nigger-shooter". Archaic and in poor taste, about what you'd expect from such a gang of thugs. However, they weren't quite as clever as they thought themselves to be. UA military forces triangulated the location of the little boat and, not to be outdone by mere hooligans, they accelerated a rock of their own. They weren't exactly at the antipodes of the location of the little boat when they released the rock but that didn't make much difference. The little boat, everything and everybody on it, and a lot of water in the local part of the ocean disappeared into a great big cloud of steam. Now we'll never really know for sure why the perpetrators chose Grand Island. The really surprising thing is that it took so long for that particular strategy to be used. The possibility has been obvious for a long time. I expect that now that the ice has been broken, so to speak, it will become all too common.

Anyway, back to my story. As I sat in The Yacht that morning pondering the state of the world, I left the hatch open and the lights off. The soft light of a rainy morning and the fresh chill smell of rain caressed my senses. Down the valley, the ocean was invisible through the trees. To the south were mountains, hiding the desolation beyond. I would gladly have stayed there all day but, just then, Ol' Dog gave his 'snake' bark. I went to see what he'd found. It was a little green garter snake, but

Ol' Dog can never tell the difference. To him, a snake is a snake. The chilly weather had slowed the snake so much that it couldn't escape from Ol' Dog. I'm surprised that it was even out. I was trying again to explain to him about snakes when I saw, from my hilltop vantage point, James and his grandmother coming up the Valley Road. I ruffled Ol' Dog's neck, gently placed the snake near a rock in a thick patch of nettles, and went back to the house. I forgot to close the hatch on The Yacht.

Louise was in the kitchen and I helped her straighten things out for a few minutes until —

CRASH BANGIDYSLAM — “WHOOOOPEEEEE!!!!!!!!!!”

— Mrs. Friendly and James arrived. I snarled and hunched into a chair in the far corner. Not only was teaching that kid to operate a translator pointless, it was dangerous!

Oddly enough, James Friendly, who I disliked immensely, always reminded me of Peg, who I had loved. It was Peg who, while reading some old poetry book one evening, had found the poem:

“Little Jimmy strangled sister.
She was gone before we missed her.
Little Jimmy's full of tricks.
Ain't he cute? He's only six.”

She'd chuckled and said “Ain't it the truth.” Peg had always shown a sense of economy with words.

Later, when I met James Friendly, the poem sprang instantly to mind. I immediately began to think of him as “Little Jimmy, Full of Tricks.” He was eight years old, but the poem fitted him anyway. He was a brat. A nuisance. Teaching him to use The Yacht was insane. In fact, there'd been times that I would have delighted in using a translator on him. Just translate him off to nowhere and say that a wild pig had carried him off. It was a delightful thought and I smiled at it just as Mrs. Friendly walked in.

“Good morning Adam, and you do look happy this morning!”

I mumbled something inconsequential.

“And a good morning to you Louise!”

“Good morning Mrs. Friendly. My! What a lovely hat. Did you make it yourself?”

“Why yes I did, Dear, and you just wouldn't believe the work that goes into such a simple thing as just a hat. Why mercy sakes alive if I didn't spend at least a week on this hat, and nearly full time mind you except of course for taking care of James — “

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James, of course, proceeded at once to be a pest. First, he tried to remove a window from its slides, and put a crack in the pane. He saw me watching him and wandered away looking innocent. He came back a few minutes later with a mouse trap that he'd found somewhere and purloined a chunk of stew meat from the refrigerator. I pretended to ignore him to see what he had in mind. He baited the trap with the stew meat and then quietly placed it in front of Cat, who was asleep near the stove. Cat smelled the meat, woke up to investigate, and got snapped on the nose. When Cat screamed and hissed, Mrs. Friendly intervened.

“ — excuse me a minute Louise, James, if you're not a sweet boy I won't let you ride Clyde in the Patriot's Parade.”

“But Gramma! You promised!”

“Never mind that, if you're not a sweet boy I'll just take back my promise!”

“Aw, Gramma — “

Little Jimmy got quiet and stood around shuffling his feet while Mrs. Friendly chattered.

“ — but then he's such an active child, taking after his dear grandfather Thurber and all, why no matter how bad it got, that man was never without work, in spite of the economy, excepting Sunday of course, him being a Methodist and all, poor Thurber never worked a Sabbath in his life, God rest his dear soul — “

Mrs. Friendly, like myself, was a transplant from the city, although we came from different cities, and for different reasons. She'd left because she could afford to go someplace better. Thurber Friendly had been wealthy and Mrs. Friendly owned most of our valley.

“ — which reminds me of that terrible Eldritch girl, you know, the awful hussy from down the valley, well I have it on good authority although I won't mention any names and with a girl like her you can always tell just by looking without being told, living at the ocean like she does, good old family's turned into nothing but wet-backs, but at any rate I heard from someone who ought to know — “

I'd never met Evelyn Eldritch but I'd heard of her. I wondered again about my future with Louise.

“ — the girl is nothing more than a, well, a capitalist barbarian, if you get my meaning, the way she carries on, I mean she'll do anything for money, the things she does are positively a disgrace and although the Eldritchs are a good old family, with much to be proud of, been in the valley since before Sovereignty — “

“Hey, Gramma! I know alla bout Sovernty! We had it in school! An' we saw a movie where the PALs **kicked ass!**”

“James, such language!”

I never learn. I had to open my mouth. “What do you expect from the Freedom Schools, Mrs. Friendly? Proper grammar?”

“Why Adam, I expect the students to learn of their obligation to our Republic, and of their debt to the Patriots Against Liberation.”

“The PALs? You’re kidding.”

“Well Adam, even you must admit that they freed us from the capitalist treachery of the old USA and protected us from liberation by the United Americas.”

“They made a deal with Japasia and grabbed some power when nobody was looking. California wouldn’t last a day without donated Japasian troops.”

“Now Adam, you don’t know that.”

“I’ve seen United Americas troops, Mrs. Friendly, I worked around them for almost 20 years. They’ve got California out numbered, out classed, and out gunned!”

“That isn’t true!”

“California wouldn’t even have seceded if the old U.S. hadn’t been busy invading Mexico at the time, and if the Japasians hadn’t been scared shitless of American aggression, and looking for friends in this hemisphere!”

“Well, I don’t think that’s — “

“California’s nothing but a Japasian buffer zone, Mrs. Friendly!”

“That’s a myth! Don’t you know any history at all? And if that’s the way you feel, why don’t you just go back where you came from?”

She had me there, and she knew it. In the United Americas I was badly wanted. In California, I was only badly ignored. I remembered where I was and what I was doing, and I shut my mouth.

“And besides that, Adam, now that the Allodial Council has finally passed the property taxation bill, we can afford better soldiers and give them better incentives, and it’ll be for the good of the People! How can we defend ourselves against the UA aggressors without controls and taxes? Next thing you know, the UA will be trying to liberate us again! And now that the People’s Treasurer is collecting our gold and passing out Sovereign Certificates, and guarding the gold for us in the Treasury, so those rascally Japas can’t get their hands on it, our economy can expand. And since he’s keeping our gold under lock and key, our Sovereign Certificates will always be good!”

There’s nothing like a good Patriot party line to set me to simmering but about then I noticed that Little Jimmy was gone. With a shock, I suddenly remembered that, when Ol’ Dog had barked, I’d left The Yacht’s hatch open.

“Excuse me, Mrs. Friendly, but have you heard anything from your grandson for the past few minutes?”

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“Why, no, I don’t believe I have! And isn’t that strange! I mean with the little dear so active and all, and I’d have sworn that he was right here just this minute. Speaking of which reminds me of what happened just last week playing Bingo — why where EVER are you off to in such a hurry, Adam?”

By the time I got to The Yacht, he’d powered up the console and then (God only knows why) lifted the back off and wiggled in. I tried to drag him out without completely destroying my console or electrocuting myself, and received some ugly bruises in the process. I wrestled him kicking and screaming to the hatch and was on the point of pitching him out when Mrs. Friendly arrived.

“Gramma! Gramma! Makim putme down Gramma! I didn do nuthin Gramma I was jus lookin aroun an I didn touch nuthin an hes hurtin me cause he doesn like me anyway an besides — “

“What **are** you doing to James? Turn him loose, right now!”

I turned him loose and, leaving Mrs. Friendly fussing over him by the hatch, I went back to my console. Mrs. Friendly followed me in, still bitching, while I crawled behind the console and began plugging things back together. I tried to keep an eye on Little Jimmy while I worked but, from behind the console, I couldn’t see very much so I kept popping in and out, grabbing a quick look at him and then plugging together a few more connections. He’d undone about a dozen of them and most of them will plug together only one way. As I was sorting out the last few of the identical ones, the ones that could be incorrectly assembled, I glanced up just in time to see the dawning of the light of inspiration in his eyes.

“No!” I shouted as he headed for the console. I grabbed at him, but my shirt hung on a projecting bracket and I couldn’t reach far enough, fast enough, to stop him. I knew what he was going to do. When he flipped up the safety cover, I gripped the console and took a deep breath. The translator Go button is big and bright red. He couldn’t resist it. I don’t know why he hadn’t seen it sooner. I squeezed my eyes shut, tightened my grip, and prayed for Louise. I began exhaling as he pushed the button.

Chapter Four

There was a “whoosh” and a lot of thuds and slams, during which I was hanging on. My ears popped and I started to feel uncomfortable but the tanks were dumping new air into The Yacht. The tanks for the jets, at that moment, were fully charged. So far as filling The Yacht was concerned, they had a limitless supply of air. Little Jimmy and Mrs. Friendly were both ominously quiet. When I opened my eyes, I saw that she was unconscious. She’d apparently bounced off of the inside of the hatch an instant after the wind had slammed it closed. Little Jimmy was standing in the center of the floor, looking startled and a little pleased. What had happened, of course, was that we had translated to some location in the universe where there was little or no atmosphere. The rush of air through the hatch had thrown Mrs. Friendly toward the hatch and slammed it just ahead of her. If she’d been standing a few steps closer, then she’d have been outside when the hatch closed. Or worse yet, caught in it. I screamed something at Little Jimmy, scrambled around the console, and backhanded him so hard that he bounced against the wall and slid slowly down onto his butt. Mrs. Friendly moaned. I turned quickly to the console, and the readouts. Nothing showed on the external detectors except radar, which indicated that we were in the center of a tenuous cloud of something. It didn’t seem to be an immediate threat so I ignored it. I went over and dogged the hatch, thinking that even internal pressure wouldn’t keep it closed if Little Jimmy really wanted to open it. Even dogging it wouldn’t keep it closed if he wanted it open but it was the best that I could do at the moment. Mrs. Friendly was starting to move a little, and whimper, but I had more important things on my mind just then. I stepped over her and went again to my readouts. Outside pressure, zero. Outside temperature, no reading. I switched the radiation detector through its entire range. Nothing. The mass compass told me that I was at the exact center of mass of the universe, whatever that meant. The visual 3V was blank. Mrs. Friendly rolled over and moaned and tried to focus her eyes. I told her to go back to sleep. Inside, we were fine. Temperature, 65° F and the heaters running. Pressure just under 1 atmosphere and climbing slowly. I didn’t smell any smoke and the lights all seemed to be working. I glanced at the Time At Destination clock and at the location computer readout. I hadn’t bothered with them before because they hadn’t seemed important. Up until then I’d been looking for hazards to avoid, nearby stars to not fall into, air leaks to plug, fires to extinguish, that sort of thing. When I looked at the location computer readout, all of that other stuff just didn’t matter anymore. The location computer didn’t know where we were. The readout for all three coordinates was all dashes.

I turned toward Little Jimmy and I’d have murdered him then and there if Mrs. Friendly hadn’t sat up just at that moment. Her movement distracted me. It reminded me that she was possibly injured and certainly battered. Not only that, she

Another genesis

was a witness. She seemed on the verge of hysteria when she glanced at Little Jimmy and his presence seemed to strengthen her.

“Why did you do that?”

“Huh?”

“Whatever it was that hit me and made the boy’s nose bleed like that!”

I hadn’t even noticed that his nose was bleeding. I confess to wishing that he was in worse condition.

“What was it? Something hit me and I have a terrible headache. And I’m cold. And James has blood on him.”

“HE HIT ME!!” Announced Little Jimmy in a quivering wail, “He hit me hard, Gramma! An I wasn dooin nuthin jus standin there an he up an whopped me against tha wall with is hand, Gramma!” Little Jimmy began to cry miserably now that he had Mrs. Friendly’s attention, and she quickly forgot her own bruises. She took Little Jimmy into her arms and bundled him toward the hatch, cooing about bandages and ice cream. I almost felt sorry for them. Almost, but not quite. The hatch, of course, wouldn’t open.

“Adam, why is this door locked! What’s going on here!? I need to get James into the house and tend to his wounds!” Little Jimmy, sobbing pitifully, positively radiated angelic innocence and undeserved injury. “You let us out this instant, I demand it! Darling James said you HIT him! Now you just let us out immediately, brutalizing innocent children indeed, you son o — uh, scoundrel, or I’ll have you in jail so long your cobwebs will have cobwebs!”

“Now Mrs. Friendly,” I tried to interrupt.

“Don’t you ‘now Mrs. Friendly’ me, you capitalist pig, I’ll just show you how friendly I can be when I’ve a mind to! If you think you can push me and James around I’ll just remind you who it is that owns the land you’re on, the house you live in, the —
“

I sat down at the console and tried to ignore her. Pretty quickly, she ran down a little, enough at least to stop accusing and threatening and ask again what had happened.

“What happened is that the little asshole pushed the Go button!”

Mrs. Friendly was shocked speechless, but only for a moment.

“Young man! I will not tolerate anyone referring to James in such a derogatory fashion, even if he was a naughty boy, which all boys will be on occasion, even such innocent babes as James, and anyway, what makes you think it was his fault? After all, you were fooling around and messing with all those wires and things back there, mightn’t you have done it yourself? I mean nobody’s perfect, Adam, least of all you if you don’t mind my saying so and I know you’re a proud man and all but

James is only a baby, sweet little thing, and if you want to go around doing your maintenance on our time and leaving pretty things just right out in his way, well—”

“YOU DON’T UNDERSTAND!” I interrupted her, “The little bastard pushed the Go button with a bunch of wires unplugged!”

“Really, Adam, that sort of language is entirely — “

“Without a destination entry, Mrs. Friendly. Translators don’t work that way! You’ve got to have a destination entry to tell it where to go! That’s why there are destination computers! The little shitass must have — “

“Really, Adam!”

“ — unplugged an interlock or something! How the hell do I know!”

“James, you were a NAUGHTY boy.” Then turning to me, she said, “And as for you, Adam, I will not tolerate anyone, even you, pilot that you are, and a smuggler and all, and of course I respect you for it, and it being an emergency and such, referring to my James in such unflattering terms as — well, as things you’ve mentioned these last few minutes. Now, I am known far and wide and by all as — “

“Mrs. Friendly, I’m trying to tell you that the only other person who ever translated without a destination entry was Dr. Willis himself, when he invented the thing! And he didn’t know any better! Didn’t realize what he was doing! God knows where we are, I sure as Hell don’t!”

I turned again to my instruments. Radar had at first shown us to be surrounded by a spherical cloud of extremely tenuous something but now that didn’t seem to be the case. It appeared instead to be some sort of shell that was apparently spreading away from us at a very high speed, a significant fraction of lightspeed, I guessed about half of lightspeed. Radar doesn’t work very well on stuff moving away that fast but, extrapolating backward in my head, I figured that it would have been very nearly a point, just about where we were, at just about the time of our arrival. Where had the mass come from, assuming that it was mass? We hadn’t lost that much air and, even if we had, it wouldn’t be moving away at half of lightspeed. I also wondered why there weren’t any field effects. Even tenuous matter, again assuming that it was matter, should produce some gravity and my instruments should have been able to detect it.

“ — your responsibility to see to our welfare while we’re in your machine, and I’m not at all sure that I’m just totally satisfied with the irresponsible way you’ve been acting since we started this silly trip, and I don’t see why you had to insist that Darling James should learn to drive something as obviously vulgar as a Willis translator, of all things, when there are so many more absolutely civilized ways to go places, not that there’s anyplace a dignified lady would want to go nowadays, what with the world the way it is, poor and all, but even so one must travel and see what there is left of the poor old world to see, don’t you agree? I mean James must be

Another genesis

given a proper education and all and what's an education nowadays without a good knowledge of Willis technology? Uh, what was I saying?"

I clenched my fists and tried to be calm. "Mrs. Friendly, that damned — darling — of yours has put us in very serious danger! The location computer readout is all dashes! That means the location computer doesn't know where we are, and neither do I!!! Nor how to get us back home, either!!!"

"Well, I'm sure that's your job, not mine, and I'm sure you'll think of something. Why, I know! Why don't you simply call the Triple C! Surely this thing has a telephone, and the California Cruisers Club can help you, no matter where you are, or WHAT your problem! You are a member, aren't you?"

"No, Mrs. Friendly."

"WHAT!?! You're not a member!!!"

"No, I mean yes Mrs. Friendly. I mean it doesn't matter if I'm a member! I can't call them."

"Well that's the most preposterous thing I ever heard! Can't call them indeed! I mean, after all, and all that, they DO have a toll free number and all, certainly! Of course you can call them! And if you can't, I can!"

Mrs. Friendly marched over to the console, picked up the intercom phone, and said "Hellohello? What's the matter here? Why is there no dial tone? Where are the buttons on this thing? Adam, what's wrong with your telephone?"

"Gramma! Gramma! there's somebody talkin onna radio inna kitchen an she sounds jus like you, Gramma!"

"Shush, Hon, I'm trying to call for help."

"But Gramma — "

"Hello? Hello? Are you there? What's wrong with that ding-butt of an operator, anyway?"

"There's no ding-butt there, Mrs. Friendly. It isn't a telephone. It's the intercom."

"Intercom?"

"It isn't a telephone. It's only an intercom. It goes from here to the galley, and the stateroom, and the head. Besides that, you don't need a telephone. You need a transphone. They don't have dial tones. You have to enter coordinates and establish the pseudolink first."

"Oh," she said looking confused, and put the intercom phone down.

Mrs. Friendly and Little Jimmy went to the galley and I sat down at the console to think.

The view screen showed zilch in all directions and the radar readouts were all slowly falling back to zero. My mysterious spherical shell, or boundary, was deserting me in all directions. It was a few light-minutes away but, the best that I could tell from the radar, it was moving somewhat more slowly than had previously been the case.

I thought about the readouts.

There had been radar bounce, indicating matter, or something that looked like matter to the radar, but there hadn't been any detectable field of any sort. No gravity, no electromagnetism, nothing. Of course. It was simple, when I stopped to think about it. There wouldn't be any detectable field inside of a uniform spherical source.

I crawled behind the console and finished plugging in the destination computer and a couple of other odds and ends, and crawled back out.

The instruments weren't picking up anything. I couldn't see anything. Therefore, there wasn't anything out there. Anywhere in the universe there should have been something, even if it was just the music of some far off, lonely quasar. This was something I'd never seen or even heard of before.

I sat for a while and just stared at nothing.

The intercom buzzed. "Yes, Mrs. Friendly?"

"Why is there nothing on the 3V?"

"Maybe it's turned off."

"Why mercy sakes! Do you think we have no brains? Of course it isn't turned off. Even if I didn't know how to make it work, James would figure it out! I must say, that I'm starting to get just a little tired of this trip, and I think it's high time that you stopped all this silly shilly-shallying and got us home! The least you could do is to give a poor soul something amusing to look at."

"There's a mirror in the head, Mrs. Friendly."

silence

"Mrs. Friendly?"

"Are you being a smart ass with me?"

"Why Mrs. Friendly! Such language!"

Very excited. "You ARE trying to make fun of me and I want you to know that I don't care for it even one little bit, I think you are an uncouth, lowdown, underhanded, no-good —"

I hung up the intercom. A few minutes later, it buzzed again.

"Did you hang up on me?"

Another genesis

“Yes.”

“Why is the 3V blank?”

“Because it’s monitoring an external scanner and there’s nothing out there.”

“Why not?”

“I don’t know, Mrs. Friendly, we just seem to be someplace where there isn’t anything. Would you like for me to switch it over to the fun files?”

“Maybe it’s busted.”

“Mrs. Friendly, it isn’t just the 3V. All my instruments indicate that there isn’t anything out there.”

“Well that just shows how good YOUR instruments are. James just flushed the water closet, so there’s got to be something out there.

I didn’t have the heart to tell her that it was recycled.

“Mrs. Friendly, there’s no way I can check my instruments except against each other. If they all have identical malfunctions, there’s nothing I can do and no way to detect it. Whole system checks are done with simulator computers, at the factory, at a Naval Base, or at a service station.”

“If you don’t know where we are, what are we going to do?”

“Starve to death, maybe.”

“The way this automat is working, you could be right.” She was peeved.

“There’s nothing wrong with the automat!” I said, with a sudden tingling feeling in my stomach. “Is there? It was serviced just before I stole - uh, it was serviced recently!” In a cold sweat, with the tingling feeling spreading up my back to my shoulders, I recalled that Little Jimmy had enjoyed full access to the galley for nearly an hour, unsupervised, and with nothing to do.

“Well, if this green goo is all your automat can make, we might as well starve as eat!”

In growing panic, I rushed into the galley.

Chapter Five

An automat doesn't replace a galley and The Yacht had both. However, I'd been living at the farm and just travelling in The Yacht. I didn't have much in the galley. Mostly, I just depended on the automat for survival on the road, so to speak, and ate real food when I was at home. An automat has a somewhat limited repertoire. It can't make things by magic. It can't make steak and potatoes. It doesn't do apple pie. An automat can provide a variety of flavors and consistencies but they're all things like liquids, pastes, and so forth. It can make pudding. It can make soup. That sort of thing. Sadly, the brat had removed the cover from the automat's selector panel, jury rigged a wire from a power outlet, and connected it to the selector's memory chip. The automat's memory was totally zapped. It had defaulted to what must be the average of all of the things that an automat can possibly produce. It was a gooey, pale green liquid, laced through with pulpy yellowish lumps, of various sizes. It tasted bland.

I suppose a man can take only so much. I looked around and there stood Little Jimmy, looking smugly innocent. I looked at Jimmy, I looked at the bowl of green goo that I was holding, and I just couldn't help myself. I plopped it right in his face. He gasped in surprise (so did Mrs. Friendly) and accidentally sucked a little goo into his throat, and began coughing. Mrs. Friendly, of course, began yelling. My memory of the next few minutes isn't entirely clear. I vaguely remember me and Little Jimmy in the head, with him kicking and screaming under the shower, and Mrs. Friendly kicking and screaming at the door. I never did get around to apologizing.

Later, after everyone had calmed down a little and I was at the console again, Mrs. Friendly stalked in.

"I've had enough of this ridiculous trip. I wish to be taken home, at once!"

I sighed. "Mrs. Friendly, I've been trying to tell you ever since this fiasco got under way that I don't know where we are. Your grandson pushed the translator Go button with the destination computer unplugged. We translated without a destination input. That's never been done before or, if it has, whoever did it didn't get back to tell the story. And probably we won't either."

Mrs. Friendly seemed unconvinced, but uncertain what to do about it. I think that she'd never before had to deal with the real world on its own terms. She was probably about 50 years old and, therefore, too young to have a clear memory of the Secession itself. Yet, somehow the years of People's Reeducation and indeed the whole sickening process of making the Republic forever safe from capitalist treachery had passed her by. This was her first encounter with the cold, cruel world.

She wandered back toward the galley looking lost and lonesome, and suddenly old. My thoughts drifted. As I sat and looked at the vacant 3V, I realized that if I was ever going to see home again then I'd better shake myself loose and get to thinking

Another genesis

of something to do. I checked on Mrs. Friendly and Little Jimmy. They were curled up asleep on the foldout in the stateroom. I went back to the console and locked myself in.

I felt more helpless than I have ever felt either before or since. I was an unknown distance, maybe an infinite distance, from any known or even faintly recognizable part of the universe. Maybe I wasn't even in our universe. I have a favorite definition of the universe: "that region of space and time wherein the same set of operative principles is continuously applicable." Maybe we'd crossed a boundary somewhere in that definition. If we had, then the crossing might have been irreversible. Maybe we couldn't go back even if I knew which way to go, and how far. And that was a real clincher. Even if I knew which direction, the distance looked insurmountable. There just wasn't anything detectable within what appeared to be all of infinity and eternity. I couldn't see any way of covering that distance, however big the steps.

I established a zero reference in the location computer and put out a buoy. Then I spent some time moving around a little in the local region of space, enough to determine that both the destination and location computer would work in the space that we were in. I couldn't detect the boundary any more but I estimated the distance to it and translated to just within its boundary. It was there, very faint, and its radius so large that it appeared flat to my radar. I translated a few million miles beyond the boundary and the location computer went back to all dashes. The radar again showed us to be surrounded by an expanding spherical cloud of tenuous matter, moving out at about half of lightspeed. Almost immediately, a bright blue flash of some sort occurred from the direction of my previous location. All I saw was a flash but by translating outside of the expanding boundaries, I was able to reproduce it. All that I could see was a bright blue flash but by capturing data as fast as my recorders could run and then playing it back on the 3V as slowly as I could, I discovered that it was a circle of blue light expanding outward very rapidly. I could see it very quickly if I replayed it at the slowest playback speed. It happened where one expanding boundary encountered another one. I sat and stared for a while at those dashes on the location computer readout. I had gone, altogether, only a few light-hours. The destination computer got me where I wanted to go but the location computer lost count. Why would one computer work but not the other? I don't know. Apparently I was in fact crossing some kind of a boundary in my definition of the universe. I really was moving across a discontinuity in the operative principles.

Today, I have a different opinion of existence than I had then. I now believe that we've misunderstood physics in some very fundamental ways. Physics is only a consequence. Our formulation of the physical laws is only a description of that consequence. Most people think that the behavior of matter and energy is dictated by the laws of physics, but that's wrong. Physics behaves the way that it does because of the presence of matter and energy. In a universe where matter and energy had

never existed physics would be very different. Different operative principles would apply. Maybe there wouldn't be any operative principles.

When I translated blindly and entered a new universe, something profound happened. I carried my own universe with me. When I arrived, instantaneously and literally out of nowhere, creation occurred. From the point of view of the universe that I entered, it was creation every bit as literal and as profound as any Biblical version. The expanding boundary probably wasn't matter at all but some disturbance that coincidentally appeared to my radar as matter. Maybe my arrival annihilated vast, invisible civilizations. When I arrived bringing matter and energy with me, the old operative principles, if there were any, didn't stand a chance. When I arrived in a new universe, I created myself out of nothing and the new universe would never be the same again.

I set a few more buoys and translated in and around the effected volumes of space, if I may call it space, enough to conclude that the change was permanent. Translating out of an effected volume didn't reverse or reduce the process that I'd started. Every time that I crossed the boundary going out, the location computer lost count of the distance traveled. Fortunately, I was made of sterner stuff. The first time that I translated back into an affected volume, I was damned glad to see that it could be done. It meant that I could get us back home again, if I could find the way. It wasn't an irreversible boundary that I'd crossed. I jumped around for a while near the growing number of overlapping affected volumes, just making bright blue rings and watching them flash. After all, it was the only light that the universe had ever seen.

One observation that I should have made much sooner than I did was that the boundaries disappeared when one expanding volume intersected another. That is, there weren't any boundaries between the different regions that I'd changed, only between those regions and the unchanged universe. The blue flash was probably a requirement of some conservation law that I'd set into motion, converting the pseudo-matter boundary into energy. Maybe that's why the boundary slowed down. A check with the original boundary revealed that its velocity was still decreasing. At first, I'd thought that the change was linear but I decided finally that it was logarithmic. The change expanded more slowly as it grew, but it would never stop growing.

I was still playing with the blue flashes when Mrs. Friendly started pounding on the door. When I let her in she was groggy and looked like the wreck of the Willis Lab.

"What're you doing?"

"Playing," I smiled.

"Huh?"

Another genesis

“I’m God. I just created a new universe. Several, in fact.”

I had just finished programming in a series of 50 translations in the same direction and all into “virgin” territory, each a distance of a few light seconds from the last and the final one about a light minute, just so I wouldn’t have to crane my neck. I punched the go button and watched the fireworks. Mrs. Friendly went back to the galley. I tried a few more variations and tried again to measure the deceleration of the boundary. I wasn’t really scientist enough for that sort of thing but it still appeared that the decrease in speed was logarithmic. I cruised around the universe retrieving the buoys that I’d set out. I might need them again. I was pondering whether the natural logarithm is the only truly universal number when the disposer indicator lit up and I decided that I’d better go see what Jimmy was dumping.

Chapter Six

At first, I was at a loss for words. Then, “Why’d you do that?”

“Wanted to,” said the brat.

“And do you think that was a good reason?” I asked, edging toward him.

He began to back away. “It’s cause I waned ta, you coundn stop me anyway Gramma HELP ! !”

I got him by the scruff of the neck and the seat of the pants. I stuffed him into a storage cabinet and locked it.

Mrs. Friendly was appalled.

“You brute!” she screeched. “You release James this instant — “

I dropped the key into the disposer.

The disposer is a small translator that operates automatically whenever something falls into it. I should mention here that, using some obscure feature of Willis technology, somebody figured out how to simulate gravity. It’s something like a low grade continuous translation process applied to the entire yacht. It’s a complete mystery to me how it works but there’s a switch on the console that turns it on and off. I always keep it turned on. Anyway, back to the disposer. Its a piece of equipment that’s almost never used because most things on a yacht get recycled. I hadn’t even thought about the thing for months. Normally, it won’t operate with the lid open. You could lose a hand that way but safety devices were never a problem for Little Jimmy.

The disposer is set into the same bulkhead as the automat dispenser, just below it. I’m sure that the arrangement had never been intended for the use that James had found for it. He’d disarmed the safety switch, constructed a crude funnel of paper and Neverleak, glued the automat’s dispense button down, (again with Neverleak) and left the automat dispensing green goo into the disposer, via the funnel. It was a sloppy job, but it was good enough to work. The automat was steadily dispensing its entire matter store into the disposer.

Mrs. Friendly was still furious, but she couldn’t help asking, peevishly, “What’s this stuff?”

“Neverleak” I muttered. “It’s used to patch hull holes. It dries hard and fast.”

“I see,” she said. “And when are you going to release James?”

“Never,” I said, and pushed experimentally on the lump of Neverleak that was hiding the dispense button.

“Why not? And what EVER are you doing?”

Another genesis

“For now, I’ve got more important problems. I’ve got to get this Neverleak off so I can turn off the automat. Then I’ve got to retrieve the green goo.”

“Why, whatever for?!” She was really beginning to feel harassed. “Heavens! Just let the stuff go! There’s lots more where it came from! The automat can make all you want! Mercy Sakes Alive, Adam! Sometimes I wonder about you!”

“The automat’s depleting the food matter stores, Mrs. Friendly.”

“What’s the matter with the food stores?”

“No, Mrs. Friendly. This yacht has three main matter stores, one of which is for food. It’s partitioned into basic food types, with nooks and crannies for vitamins, trace nutrients, flavor enhancers, and so forth. The automat selects from those according to its memory, when you make a selection. When they’re empty, the automat won’t work anymore.”

“So, why do you want to get the green goo back?”

“I can put it in the main food store. Since our automat doesn’t have a memory anyway, it won’t matter where I put the stuff.”

“I don’t understand, Adam! With this yacht, you can get to Safeway in an instant! Why do you need to store this stuff, and why all this recycling business? It doesn’t matter! Just let James out, and I’ll buy you a new bag of matter!”

I ignored her.

While the automat was busily depleting our food supply into the disposer, Mrs. Friendly went over and started fiddling with the storage locker, trying to get James out. Inside, he screamed and kicked.

I tried to dissolve the Neverleak, but nothing close at hand worked. I didn’t have that much in the way of chemicals, mostly just things in the head. I learned that Neverleak doesn’t dissolve in mouthwash. The Yacht had some basic hand tools and, eventually, I dug out a screwdriver and the biggest crescent hammer I could find. Neverleak chips pretty fast, so that you can get it off to make a permanent patch but, even so, the automat was dry by the time I finished.

“Will you let James out now?”

“No.”

“Well! I want you to know that in my opinion, and I know you don’t care what I think, you being the kind of man you are and all, if you get my meaning, but anyway where was I, oh yes, in my opinion, you are mistreating Darling James. You **MUST** expect an active boy to explore new things! And James is — now wait — you can’t walk out when I’m — “

I went back to the console, locked the door, and drove around in little circles for a while retrieving green goo. That was tricky. I had to open the aft hatch on the aft

cargo hold and back The Yacht around the local area, using the maneuvering jets. I had to be careful that I didn't deplete our compressed air supply or we wouldn't be able to land, if we ever found a place to land. Those tanks hold a lot of air but not an infinite amount. In vacuum, the compressors don't have anything to compress, so the supply in the tanks is all you have.

The green goo had tended to de-gas in the vacuum, but what was left could be used by the automat. It's a good thing that the stuff was sticky or I might never have retrieved any at all. When the cargo hold was full, I had to manually scoop the stuff into a cup and dump it through an inspection opening in the matter tank. It took a long time before the messy job was done.

While I was involved in that sticky job I tried to ignore Mrs. Friendly. When I was finished, I went back to the console and locked myself in again. Mrs. Friendly knocked on the door a couple of times but I ignored her. After a while I heard Little Jimmy bitching about something so I assumed she'd gotten him out of the storage cabinet somehow. I went back to the galley, put him back in the cabinet, and glued it closed with Neverleak.

It took Mrs. Friendly about two days to knock loose enough Neverleak to get James out of the storage cabinet. By then he was thankful for all the green goo that he could get. He was also a filthy mess. I couldn't stand the smell so I took him into the head and showered him for about 30 minutes under the coldest water that The Yacht could produce. I used cold water only to save energy.

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Chapter Seven

Eventually, I realized that the only way to get back was the way that we'd gotten lost in the first place, so I unplugged the destination computer. Then I sat up a scheduled routine. I was determined that my sanity would outlast The Yacht's life support ability, which is considerable even with partially depleted food matter stores. Up at seven. Eat, shave, shower. To work at eight, pushing the Go button. Thirty minutes lunch, then work 'til five thirty. Calisthenics 'til seven thirty. Shower, shave and eat. Into the fun files for books, movies, or music 'til ten, then to bed. I kept Little Jimmy continuously shackled. I accomplished this by contriving a set of hand-cuffs from padlocks and quarter-inch stainless cable. Much of the time, I locked us together and clobbered him whenever he tried to separate us. When I was working at the console, I locked him to a cleat that I welded to the bulkhead, just out of reach of the controls but within sight of where I was working. Gradually, he became withdrawn. He eventually reached a state where he did little more than sit, moving only when I moved him. I had to remember to take him to the bathroom, and to feed him. I'd let him shower occasionally.

At first Mrs. Friendly tried to follow us around, complaining about the way that I was treating James. Trips to the head were a real problem for her and, eventually, I got tired of the nagging and threatened to tie her to a wall. She didn't believe me until I picked up another length of stainless cable and, after that, she was quiet for a while. A few days later, she began to chatter constantly to herself. She'd evidently converted The Yacht into a palatial estate, peopled with all of the wealthiest socialites that her imagination could contrive. There was always a bridge party, or a dinner party, or something. The butler served every kind of wine, elaborate hors d'oeuvres, pheasant under glass, you get the idea. Maybe it was all just her way of dealing with green goo.

I followed my schedule successfully for over six months before I began to slip away. I must have pushed the go button thousands of times per day, translating blindly, as Little Jimmy had done. As far as I could tell, each translation took me to a completely new place. The only break in the monotony was when one translation landed me a few hundred million miles from the advancing front of a recent creation. I didn't know if it was one of mine, or if there are other lost souls out there seeking home and dying in the dark. The brilliant blue flash made me positively nostalgic.

Eventually, my schedule began to slip. I gradually forgot about calisthenics, then showering and shaving. It was during that period of time that I discovered the old video flicks, 2D things. I'd been watching the holos but the 3V can display a flat screen with moving pictures. I hadn't known it, but The Yacht's fun files had hundreds of ancient relics going all the way back to the days of silent films and running all the way up to about the time of the Great Liberation. Tom Mix and Theda Bara

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seem to have been among the favorites of whatever Midshipman had originally stocked them, but there were dozens of others. Laurel and Hardy, the Little Rascals, Flash Gordon, Citizen Kane, Star Wars, Babylon 5, Xenon Warriors, Willis Patrol, and PAL Scouts. And cartoons. Betty Boop. Mickey Mouse. Felix the Cat. Rocky and Bullwinkle. Tom Slick. Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles. Jane and the Dragon. Willis Cadets. Liberation Warriors. I suspect that I spent days at a time at the tube and I saw cinematic classics that I hadn't known existed. None of them were 3V's. Many were monochrome and the ones that weren't silent were monaural. Classics. Amazing relics.

In spite of my deteriorated condition, I still occasionally worked at translating and one day I translated and detected a very low frequency electromagnetic signal. Also, the universe didn't react to me; there wasn't a spherical boundary. When I finally calmed down enough to go scream the good news to Mrs. Friendly, she was only vaguely interested and continued to chatter about that terrible Eldritch hussy. I couldn't get anything at all out of Little Jimmy. He was secured to the automat with a piece of stainless cable but I couldn't remember putting him there. I couldn't remember taking him to the head, either, but his cable was long enough to reach so maybe I'd trained him to go himself, and then forgotten about it. For the first time in weeks, I noticed how thin he was. I wondered if he'd been eating. He smelled awful.

I went forward to the console, established a new zero reference in the location computer, VERY CAREFULLY plugged in the destination computer, locked the console, locked the door, and went back to the head for a shower and a shave. Then I ate some green goo. It was heavenly.

Following the compass, it took three days of translating to reach the first faint fringes of interstellar dust. Three days of running the location computer readouts up to maximum capacity (which is considerable), re-establishing zero reference coordinates and doing it all again. Once within the populated part to the universe, it was another couple of months before The Yacht's computers recognized anything. What it recognized was the distinctive NGC 6027 galaxy. Thank God for something big and distinctive in the universe. By then, I was really tired of reruns. After locating ourselves approximately relative to NGC 6027, I used the destination computer to calculate, as nearly as I could, the coordinates that would put us in the neighborhood of Sol. Incredibly, we popped out less than 100 million miles from Sol itself and scant tens of miles above the Earth! I had to hit the jets quick to keep from falling into the ocean. A few miles lower and we'd have appeared in atmosphere. I'm not sure but I think that would have been a bad thing. I was incredibly lucky to have ever blundered my way back at all but even Flash Gordon couldn't have been that precise.

Chapter Eight

We'd been gone almost a year. We'd all been given up for dead. Our sudden departure had destroyed the house and the barn, and killed poor Ol' Dog. Cat had headed for parts unknown and never returned. Louise had been in the cellar and the rainy day had prevented the rubble from burning so she was rescued. She escaped with broken bones, lots of bruises, a permanent loss of hearing, and a serious grudge against me. The surviving livestock had been confiscated by the Allodial Council, for the People.

Mrs. Friendly was a total loss. It's almost as if she was catatonic, except that she was active. She didn't have any sense of reality at all but functioned normally in certain limited ways. She could do things like eat, but her perception of the process was totally fictional. She never saw what she was actually eating but only what was in her mind. One day she chattered happily about eggs Benedict while sprinkling rat poison on some sliced peaches and nobody noticed what she was doing. I attended her funeral as a formality, but I felt only a mild regret.

After we returned, Little Jimmy underwent extensive therapy at a local clinic under the auspices of the Department of Information Control and Education, a new California institution that seemed to be modeled on the United Americas Department of Education. He did better than his grandmother but he never got completely back into focus. I occasionally heard tales of wonder from the locals about his lack of mischief. He had a strong tendency to be unaware of his surroundings and he spent a lot of time wandering around with his head in a cloud. One day he disappeared and was next seen several days later on the rails in front of the Coast Starlight, which was bound for Anchorage. I don't know if we really need trains anymore, with Willis technology, but we still have them. Willis power generators make them cheap to run and some people still prefer them to other means of transportation. Anyway, I suppose that you could say that Little Jimmy died the same way that he'd lived, upsetting people. Caltrak named a few miles of track after him and put up a sign with his name on it, a lonely memorial in the middle of nowhere.

Since James was the only living heir of Mrs. Friendly's property, the Allodial Council confiscated everything in the valley, for the People. Friendly Valley is now a proud part of that large and growing collection of real estate owned by the People and managed for their benefit by the Allodial Council.

That ties off the loose ends for everybody except me, and I'm not quite out of the picture yet. After we returned, I tried to re-establish something with Louise but she was cold and unforgiving during our only conversation, a conversation that was made more difficult by her loss of hearing. After that, I tried to develop a meaningful relationship with Evelyn Eldritch. Actually, I'd have settled for any kind of relationship at all. That didn't work out either because she had decided to enter a con-

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vent. Almost everybody in Friendly Valley blamed me for the Allodial Council being the new landlord. It looked like time to move on.

Shortly after Evelyn entered the convent, something else happened that seemed like a good reason to leave, but not just Friendly Valley. It seemed like a good reason to leave the planet. That was the incident that I mentioned earlier in which the morons used a translator at the antipodes of Grand Island, Nebraska to destroy the place. It's another good reason to leave the planet. People just aren't very bright and I'm not sure that the human race could even pass an objective test for intelligence. The world has almost as many fools and fanatics as it has small rocks, and now the fools and fanatics have a real good way to throw the rocks. You just can't dodge anymore.

I'd been thinking a lot about things anyway and that prank nudged my thinking. Frankly, I've had enough. For some reason that's a mystery even to me, I decided to sit down and write this manuscript first. I could have done it after I left but I decided to do it first. Now that it's up-to-date, I'm ready to leave.

Here's what I'm going to do. I'm going to pack The Yacht as full as I can get it of good California soil, unplug the destination computer, and push the Go button. Maybe I'll get back again and maybe I won't. While I'm gone I'll appear in a lot of new universes. I've arranged a little remote switch on the disposer and, in each new universe, just as I arrive, I'll dump a handful of soil into the disposer and seed a new universe with life. California soil must contain some of the toughest spores and viruses available and some of them might survive. Maybe I'll have enough soil to last me the trip. Maybe I won't. If I get back, then I'll see how things are going here and maybe I'll do it again. For all of the years that men have been using Willis technology to travel around the universe, nobody has ever come back with a report of other civilizations. It seems that we're alone. So, I'll carry life with me wherever I go and maybe someday in a far universe, the descendants of my adventuring will achieve a wisdom that has always eluded humans. Maybe in one of those universes, intelligent life will evolve. Meanwhile, I'll leave a copy of the manuscript with Evelyn, at her convent. Who knows? Maybe they'll survive.

Postscript

I'm adding this real fast, because I don't have long to do it. Very briefly, here's what's happened. I packed The Yacht full of dirt and seeded a good many hundred thousand new universes. I must have been lucky getting back from that first trip, the one with James and Mrs. Friendly, because this trip took over five years. Anyway, I was prepared this time and I didn't have too much trouble dealing with it. Solitude grows on you. When I got back, the big news was the Blue Streak, which is why I'm in such a hell of a hurry to leave again.

Some damned fool has built two of the most God awful enormous translators that anybody ever imagined and he's using them to drop two stars at each other. Nobody seems interested in trying to stop the lunatic, me included. I'm not going anywhere near those things. He started a little over a year ago, so they've been falling for just over a year now and they've accumulated quite a velocity. Nobody knows how fast he wants them to go or what he plans to eventually do with them, but people are bailing out of this galaxy like rats from a sinking ship. Me too, just as soon as we finish stocking The Yacht for a nice long trip.

That *we* implies the good news, which is about Evelyn Eldritch. Her Order has been praying for the Blue Streak to extinguish itself but Evelyn lacks faith. She's decided to leave the convent and come with me. I have more faith in the Order than she does, so I'm planning to leave a copy of this updated manuscript with them, before we leave. Maybe it'll be safer with them than it is with us. You know the craziest surprise in this whole situation? After all of those malicious rumors about Evelyn's rowdy behavior, she was still a virgin. Amazing.

On my way back from the trip, just inside the edge of the most remote fringe of galactic dust, I discovered a lone solar system. It's all by itself out there. I don't know why it's there but it is. I just happened to stumble across it on my way back. Anyway, I stopped and explored the place. It has several planets, not sure how many, but one of them's so much like Earth that you'd have to look close to tell the difference. I don't mean the same continents or anything like that. I mean the climate and the wildlife are very much the same. I explored the place for several months, needed some time off of The Yacht. I ate the local plants. There are things very much like oranges, and so forth. I trapped some of the game and cooked it. Some of it's a lot like pork. I drank the water. Nothing caused me any harm. People can live there. Here's the thing. In all of the time that I was exploring the place, I never saw any sign of anything even remotely human. So far as people are concerned, the place is empty. That's where Evelyn and I are going.

Before I leave Earth for the last time, I have one last job to do. I still have a grudge to settle and this will my last chance to do it. On my way out, I'm gonna jet over the Staff Complex at the Alamos Retraining Facility, where those bastards reeducated Peg. I'm going to fly over the place at about an elevation of 50 feet and push the Go

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button, right over their heads. I'll send them to that big retraining session in the sky. I'm going to do it for Peg, just in case the lunatic with the Blue Streak doesn't use this part of the galaxy as a target. After that, me and Evelyn are heading for our new home, at the very fringe of the universe. We'll do just fine there. As the Vulcan said in one of those old flicks, we hope to "live long and prosper."