

Journey To The Year 1,000,000,000



GARY L.M. MARTIN

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By Gary L.M. Martin

Captain's Log, Stardate 1,000,000,000

It is a billion years in the future, and mankind is about to become extinct.

I know this for a fact, because I am the last man in existence, and I am about to meet my end.

A giant "Black Box", 400 miles to a side, appeared above the Earth. It sent a series of devastating shockwaves into our planet. We needed to find out the origins of this phenomenon, and the Survey Service sent my ship in. We discovered the Black Box was an entrance to a time tunnel. We were hurled into the distant future, nearly one billion years later.

We can barely comprehend the life that exists now. They view us as little more than bacteria. They killed what's left of my crew without a trace of remorse. And when they come back, they are going to do the same to me.

Mankind is extinct in the year 1,000,000,000, and when I am gone, so will the entire human race.

So why do I make this log entry? I know, with a near certainty, that when I am wiped into nothingness, that this record will face the same fate. I cannot honestly say I have any realistic hope that this entry will ever be seen by anyone else.

I guess, in my final moments, that I feel comfort in fulfilling a duty, a routine I am familiar with, one last task to give me the feeling that I am still a living, breathing member of the United Survey Service, however futile this final act may be.

For when the aliens return, I will be gone, and with me goes the fate of humanity.

Lieutenant Commander Michael Taylor, last surviving crewmember,
USS Devonshire.

The Black Box

The planet Earth was about to be destroyed, but Lieutenant Commander Michael Taylor had bigger problems.

For four years the Survey Service had tried to drive him into resigning.

Four years ago, Michael Taylor had been a junior lieutenant on the ill-fated USS *Asgard*, which had crashed on a primitive planet. Almost all the crew had been killed, but the passengers had survived. The natives on the planet threatened to kill all of them, until Taylor convinced them that they were their gods. And so Taylor, and the rest of the passengers, impersonated their gods. Overall things went reasonably well, (as well as things could go when one was impersonating a god), until three of the passengers, the brothers Chaka, Ahmed, and Khalid, stirred their followers on a holy jihad to go out and kill everyone who had alternative theological perspectives.

Taylor mustered an army to fight them, but he was overmatched. So he took the crippled *Asgard* up, and hovered low over Khalid's armies, and activated his reactor drive. It was like turning on a blow torch on a piece of meat. Thousands were killed. But as a result, many thousands more who would have been butchered or enslaved were saved.

Later, when they were rescued by the Survey Service, Taylor was put on trial. For a time it looked as if he would face the death penalty, but ultimately, he was acquitted. For his valiant efforts in saving the lives of the passengers of the *Asgard*, as well as the inhabitants of PR-52981, he was even promoted to Lieutenant Commander.

But that wasn't the end of his story. Many elements in the Survey Service didn't approve of Taylor's performance, to put it mildly. They wanted him drummed out of the service.

So when the time came for Taylor to be assigned, no one wanted him on their ships. Normally, a Lieutenant Commander would serve as a first officer on a frigate, or a mid ranking officer on a destroyer or cruiser. But no one wanted Taylor to serve on *their* ship.

He was given a few short term, temporary assignments on Survey Service vessels. But somehow, he would only seem to wind up in bigger trouble. Controversy followed him everywhere. Eventually, he was dumped back on Earth at Survey Service Headquarters in Perth, a spaceman without a spaceship.

After two months on Earth, when he was seriously thinking of resigning his commission, Taylor was called into Rear Admiral Johann Von Windhoek's office. The admiral drummed his fingers on his desk. "It seems you're not very popular, Lieutenant Commander," said Von Windhoek.

Taylor said nothing.

"So what are we to do with you? Some want you assigned to a desk job. They think after six months of sitting at a desk in Perth, that you'll be ready to quit."

He looked at Taylor, trying to sense a reaction.

They were probably right, Taylor thought. He was almost ready to resign right now.

"Or, you could be assigned to the *Westerner*," said Von Windhoek.

"The *Westerner*?" said Taylor. He was unfamiliar with that ship.

"A cargo ship."

Taylor's face fell. He knew that the transport branch was where the Survey Service sent its officers that it had no great use for.

"But...." Von Windhoek let the words hang in the air. "You'd be Captain."

Taylor looked surprised. Even cargo ships were helmed by more senior officers. He had never heard of a Lieutenant Commander in charge of any ship, except perhaps tiny scoutships-

"I would be Captain, sir?" said Taylor.

"Unusual, I agree," said Von Windhoek. "Usually ships such as that are helmed by full Commanders, or even Captains. But I have some influence in the transport branch." He looked at Taylor. "What do you say, Mister?"

Taylor considered quickly. The merchant marine was the least desirable branch of the service. But to be a Captain! It was more than he could reasonably expect, given the circumstances. He looked up at Von Windhoek, and realized that he had at least one ally in the Admiralty.

"I'll take it, sir."

"Good."

And so for two years, Lieutenant Commander Michael Taylor had plied the stars, delivering materials from planet to planet, from starbase to starbase, or sometimes, from planet to starbase or from starbase to planet. At first he had been elated to have his own ship, and his

own crew; but soon the tedium of his work caught up with him. His tasks were always the same. Move this here. Transport that there.

He loved having his own command for the first six months.

He enjoyed plying the *Westerner* across the stars the second six months.

He was reasonably content commanding his own vessel the following six months after that.

But by the end of the second year, he was increasingly restless.

Admiral Von Windhoek had been hinting increasingly that his exile to the transport branch would end someday, and he would get, if not a real command, a posting to a ship that was doing important work. But Taylor didn't know when or if that day would come, or whether Admiral Von Windhoek really had the influence to make that happen.

And then he met Pam.

It was about a year after he had taken command of the *Westerner*. His ship was assigned a regular route, Earth to Vega, Vega to Earth, and back to Vega again, and so on and so forth. It was during a layover on Earth when he was awaiting his cargo that he met her.

She was an exoanthropologist, lecturing on the development of cultures on foreign worlds. Taylor had gone to her lecture because he was bored, and also, to be honest, he had seen her holo and she looked really cute. Taylor's love life had gone downhill since he had stopped being a god, and now the only opportunity he had with women was to look at them.

But when he attended the lecture, something sparked within him. Pamela Nesbitt was not simply beautiful, she was *gorgeous*. She had beautiful straight blonde hair that curved inwards. She had stunning green eyes, and high cheekbones, and a pert little nose. Pam had sexy red lips that formed an easy smile. She was thin, but had large breasts for a woman her size, large as in long, projection wise, rather than wide, more like eggplants than melons, that classic teardrop shape that every man who ever loved large breasts absolutely loved.

As he listened to the lecture, sitting in the third row, he looked up at her. She saw him looking at her and she smiled. This happened more than once.

After the lecture, Taylor went up to her. He introduced himself, and held his breath. Would she be repulsed? Would she turn away, like so many other-

"You're that Michael Taylor? The Michael Taylor of PR-52981?"

She even knew the numerical designation of the-

"Yes," said Taylor, hoping beyond hope.

Pam's eyes widened, and she broke out into a smile. "I've been so eager to meet you."

And eager she was. Eager enough to be taken out to dinner, and eager enough to go out on another date, and another after that, and very soon Taylor's dry spell ended in a torrential thunderstorm.

Pam's initial interest in Taylor had been his experience interacting with and altering the culture on PR-52981; but very quickly she became as interested in the man as much as his experiences.

Michael was tall, and handsome, and dark haired; and to her he was the very model of a fine, young dashing Survey Service officer. The fact that he was Captain of a lowly cargo ship didn't seem to diminish his luster in her eyes. When he spoke defensively about it she responded thusly:

"Still, to be in charge of an entire starship, with a crew that jumps at your every command, that's really impressive!" Pam grinned. She gazed at him adoringly as she lay naked in his lap, totally stripped of her vaginal inhibitions. This was their fifth date. It had been the third date when they reached that stage in their relationship where the emotional translated into the physical, right on schedule. Having seen rockets aborted shortly before takeoff, over and over, Taylor knew from experience that if things didn't develop by the third or fourth attempt, they never would.

And so it had been on the third date when Pam shyly invited him up to her apartment, since Michael was still sleeping on the *Westerner*. And then she poured them some wine, and they sat on the couch, and neither needed much convincing to let nature take its course.

Taylor found he was smitten with her; she was as pretty without clothes as she was with them. As he pounded into her and watched her breasts jostling around, and saw her blonde face smile appreciatively at him, he reflected how good life was.

As one date blended into another, Taylor could quickly feel himself falling in love with Pam. She was smart, and cute, and had a wonderful laugh, and, just as important, she was also in love with *him*. For the first time in his life, Taylor started to wonder if Pamela could be *the one*.

But however strongly their feelings for each other, theirs was to be a long distance relationship. Taylor was gone for three weeks, sometimes four, before returning for a few days, and then the vicious cycle would start all over again. He spent every scrap of vacation time he

had with her, but he could see with his own eyes, that their relationship had started to deteriorate, like a crack in the engine manifold chamber that was growing by the day. Trying to keep the relationship alive by talking by holochat just wasn't the same as being physically together.

By six months into their relationship, Michael could see the strain starting to build; after a year, which was two years after Michael had taken command of the *Westerner*, he could see it was at a breaking point.

And now, here it was. Out of malice or kindness, Michael wasn't sure which, Pam broke the news to him right after they had sex. The *Westerner* had been called back to Earth on short notice, breaking from its established trade route, and Taylor had been ordered to report to Admiral Von Windhoek the first thing in the morning.

That left him with a few precious hours with Pam.

They were more than familiar with each other's bodies. But after having been away for nearly two months, it felt all like the very first time again. Staring into Pam's lovely green eyes. Watching her smile framed by her lovely blonde hair. Listening to her make those little "ah... ah... ah..." sounds as Taylor balled her furiously. And then, thrust, thrust, thrust, and then, "aaaaaaah", and he collapsed on top of her, so very pleased once again to have filled her with his essence.

As they lay together, Pam held his hand and said, "Did you like that?"

What an odd question.

"Yes," said Taylor.

"Good. I'm glad," said Pam. She smiled at him.

"Why?"

"I wanted to give you a good sendoff," she said. She got up and reached for her panties. Taylor watched with alarm as her brown-blond pubic hair disappeared behind a thin layer of triangular shiny clothing.

"What do you mean?"

"We're over, Michael," she said. As Pam stretched to put on her bra, Taylor got one last magnificent view of her breasts, momentarily thrust out at him as she leaned forward to strap herself in from behind. Then they too, were tragically covered up. Matters were getting worse by the minute.

Soon Pam was completely dressed. The final indignity was when she tossed him his own clothes.

"Why, Pam?" Taylor asked, hurrying to get dressed. He felt at a distinct disadvantage being nude when she was clothed, and she knew it.

"I want a man, not an empty bed," Pam said simply. Even with her shirt on, Taylor admired the curves. That was one of the things he loved most about her, that and her-

"But you knew I was an officer in the Survey Service when we started seeing each other," said Taylor. He felt like he was whining now, and regretted it.

"Knowing and experiencing are two different things. I was taken in by your..." she looked at him as he dressed, at his strong, handsome chest and broad shoulders. "...by your charm."

"And now?"

"I need a man in my life more than once in a blue sun," said Pam.

"Pam, wherever are you going to find a man you like-"

"Doug Weathers," she said promptly.

"What?" said Taylor.

"Doug Weathers. The anthropologist in my lab. You met him at a party three months ago, though you may not recall it."

Taylor did recall it, vaguely, though he had to work at it. Doug.... Tall. Blonde haired. Broad shoulders. Taylor remembered thinking he didn't look like an anthropologist. More like a male model.

Realization flooded into his mind. "You've already....."

"Well, it was kind of obvious that our relationship wasn't going anywhere," said Pam. "Is it?"

Was it? Was she giving him some kind of choice?

"What is it you're asking me, Pam?"

"Resign your commission," said Pam immediately. "Resign, and get a job on Earth."

"Pam... I'm an astronaut," said Taylor.

"The door is that way," said Pam, pointing.

"Pam!"

"That way," said Pam. "I'll miss you." She went and hurriedly kissed his cheek.

"Goodbye." She smacked him on the ass. "You'd better get going."

She looked at him intently. Her message was clear.

And so Taylor, walking on the streets of Perth in the rain in the middle of the night, realized he had a choice to make: The Survey Service, or Pam.

And then there was the matter of the imminent destruction of the planet Earth.

They called it the Black Box. It had appeared suddenly above the Earth, some four months ago. It was a black spatial vortex, in a rectangular shape. Unmanned probes were sent in. They didn't come out. Telemetry was cut off the moment they entered.

And then, several months after it first appeared, the Black Box sent out its first shock wave, causing earthquakes all over the Earth. More shockwaves followed, typically once every week or two.

And the shockwaves were getting more severe. The first shockwave shook up the planet a bit. The second even more. By the third shockwave, hundreds were getting injured, and dozens were dying. The most recent shockwave, the fifth, caused damage all over the globe, killing over 400 people and injuring thousands.

People clamored for action.

After the third shockwave, the Survey Service sent in one of its top science ships, the *USS Aurora*.

It never reported back.

After the fourth shockwave, the Service sent in the *USS Judicator*, a modern, top of the line battle cruiser, literally the most powerful ship in the Survey Service's fleet.

The *Judicator* was never heard from again.

A week after that, the *USS Exeter*, a deep space cruiser, was dispatched. It failed to report in, too.

And then the fifth shockwave hit, and five days later a very tired and distressed looking Lieutenant Commander Michael Taylor reported to Rear Admiral Johann Von Windhoek's office at Survey Service's Auburn Field in Perth.