

Teleporter

Written by Sam McDonald
Performed by Hannah Preisinger

Teleportation is a relatively simple process. Your atoms are disassembled, beamed to another location, and then reassembled. At least, that's what everyone says anyway. If you think about it, teleporters are basically just cloning machines. Suppose the teleporter malfunctioned and didn't disassemble you, but it reassembled you at the other end anyway. Then there would be two of you. That would, of course, mean that teleporters are also murder machines. Yeah, I know, you probably heard that one before.

I always avoided the teleporters no matter how much of an inconvenience it caused. The teleporter has never tempted, well, at least til now.

I'm serving as a medic on Asimov 5 as part of the Orion Arm interplanetary relief effort to address the ongoing Umanarei Civil War. My camp just got hit by a raid from one of the rebel factions. Don't ask which, it would take too long to explain. Seriously, the map of the Umanarei Civil War looks like a Jackson Pollock painting. Well, that and I still don't know exactly what it's all about. All I know is that there are people who need healing, and lives needing saving. Let the politicians decide who's right and who's wrong; I'm here to help the injured.

Anyway, our security forces held the attackers off, but we took more than a few casualties. More importantly, our shuttles and ground transport are completely shot. That in and of itself is pretty bad, especially since, from what the spotters tell me, another raid is in-coming. What makes it a damn tragedy is that a High Storm is on its way. Imagine a hurricane the size of a continent, and that's what a High Storm is like. They don't last as long as you might think, but they pack one hell of a punch.

The Umanarei have developed several means to survive a High Storm. For example, vast underground storm shelters surround most Umanarei settlements. Unfortunately, we have no means of getting to any of these in a timely manner. Our best option is to evacuate to the orbital ships. With the shuttles out of commission that leaves only one option: the teleporters. The closest storm shelter is twelve kilometers from camp. If I hoof it, I might get halfway there before the High Storm turns my internal organs to jelly.

How do I want to die, that is the question. Like I said, everyone always insists that teleportation is harmless, but I know better. Well, I've still got a few minutes to decide. I notice an Umanarei pinned beneath some rubble. Umanarei are about six feet tall, with the general body plan of a velociraptor, but a head and hands more like a praying mantis. The controls are located inside the teleporter, naturally. The Umanarei is too weak to operate the controls on its own. That much is obvious when I dig it out of the rubble. There's a look of fear within its compound eyes. It knows that the High Storm is coming.

All my life I've wanted to be part of something greater than the daily grind. Maybe that is selfish, but I've helped hundreds of people across countless planets. In the end, does that make it really so bad? The Umanarei makes a series of chittering and clicking sounds. Its translation collar has been damaged, but I get the general gist of its words, especially as it gestures to the teleporter with its one good arm.

Above all else, do no harm, and respect the choices of your patient. That's what they drill into your head in medical school. If I chose to die in the High Storm, I'll be taking that choice from the Umanarei. The teleporter will kill me, but a version of me will still survive. I came here to help people, even if it meant I might lose my own life. I guess that settles it then.

I load into the teleporter with the Umanarei. I'm about to press the send button when the Umanarei stops me. It needs a moment to compose itself. Glad I'm not the only one with butterflies in my stomach. I take its hand and give what I hope is a reassuring squeeze. Sometimes, when you can't save a patient, the best you can do is to hold their hand. That way, they won't have to feel alone when they die. The Umanarei seems to understand my intent and coos softly. I press the send button. In the next instant we're on one of the orbital ships.

It's a strange feeling to be dead and alive at the same time. I have all of my memories, including pressing the send button. Yet I know I'm just a copy of the original me. The

Umanarei looks just as disoriented, but it gives my hand what feels like a reassuring squeeze as personnel load it onto a stretcher. I guess we'll both figure out our strange new existence together. I know I said holding hands is for the comfort of the patient, and I stand by that. All the same, sometimes doctors need a hand to squeeze too.