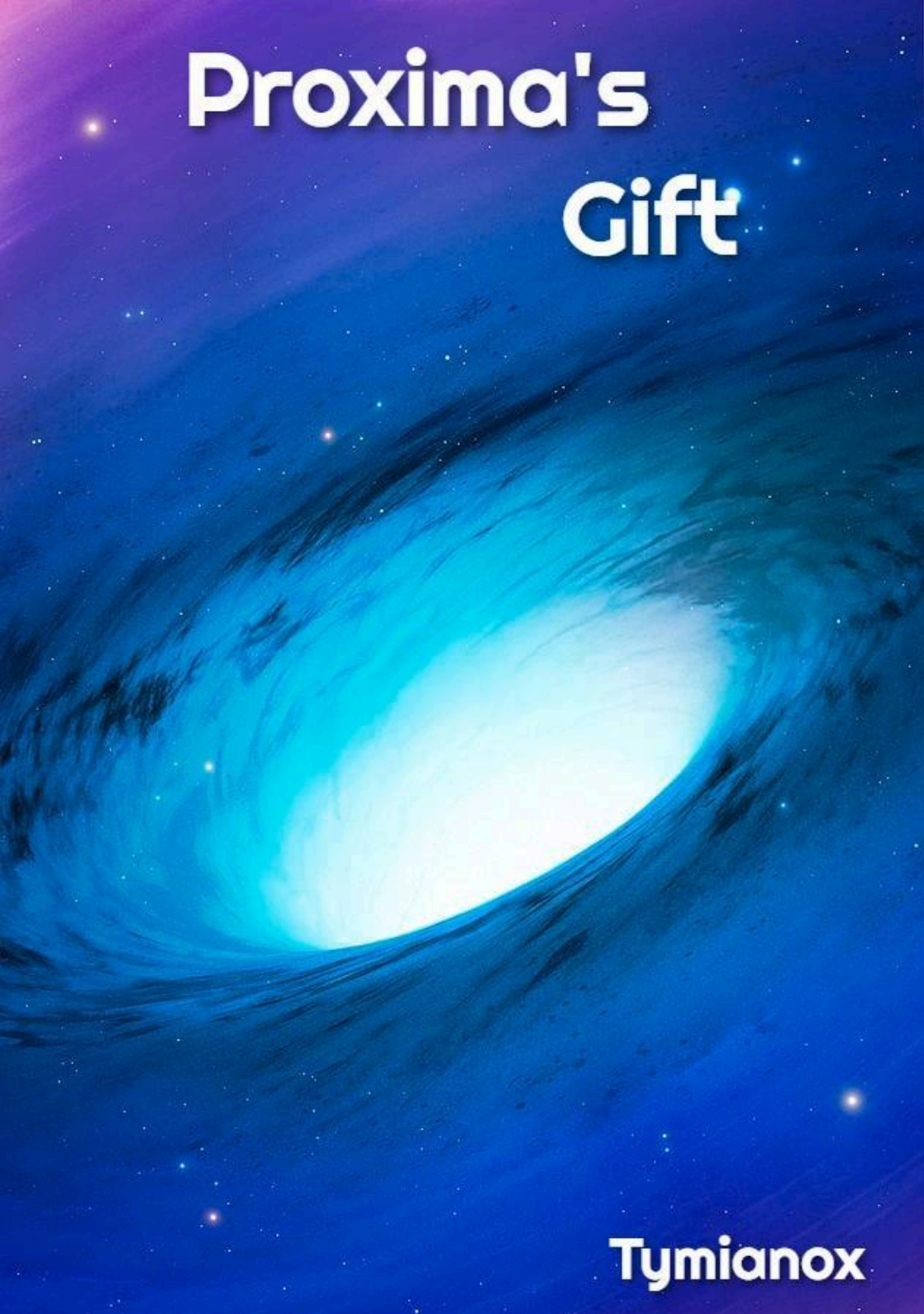
Proxima's Gift



Tymianox

"O Space and Time and stars at strife,

How dreadful your infinity!"

- George Sterling, 'The Testimony Of The Suns'

1 | The discovery

01/04/3042
OKRP "Chopin"
Interstellar space
01:30 ST[1]

Disoriented, I woke up in my cabin and looked at the clock. *It's only been an hour since I ended my shift. What could have made the captain call me up to the bridge.* I quickly put on my uniform and headed there.

As I enter, one of the technicians says: "Sir, we're detecting a large deformation in spacetime, however according to the EG[2] there shouldn't be any objects in this area."

"Well... We probably should check it out and add it to the EG," I said, "shouldn't we?"

"You know we're on a strict schedule," the captain remarked.

"Yeah..." I agreed, "But thee know that probably some halfwit won't notice it and he'll ram into it. And 'tis our moral duty to keep others safe."

"Fine," she sighed. "But if we're behind time I'll deduct from your pay."

"Sure."

"You can always tug at my heartstrings," she muttered under her nose.

She approached the intercom, "Declaring a level 3 state of emergency. We are approaching an unknown object with strong gravitational force."

* * *

01/04/3042
OKRP "Chopin"
Interstellar space
02:42 ST

"We're half a light-year from the object," announced one of the pilots.

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[1] Ship Time

[2] Encyclopedia Galactica

"10,000AU[3]"

"5000AU"

"Do we have contact?" asked the captain.

"Yes Sir! But it doesn't match anything in the EG," replied one of the technicians.

"Sir! Fuel efficiency has decreased by 7.44%," said another.

"What!?" The captain exclaimed, "What could be causing this?"

"Let me see." I said, walking towards the control panel. The gravitizer[4] was showing a visualization of spacetime deformations in the vicinity. "Can thee switch it to show numeric values?" I asked him. *Well, that's weird.* "It's displayin' a negative readin'." I turned around to the captain, "We *have* to get the Department of Space Exploration on this."

"I'm not talking to eggheads even someone's life depends on it," the captain said.

"I'll get on a call with them."

"Kay, good luck with that."

As I was walking out, I heard her giving out orders to gather some more readings. Although I could use my implant to call the Department, I prefer to have the physical phone in my hand, so I can be at least this tiny bit closer to the other person. But before going to communications, I went to the cafeteria for some arabica café au lait cause there was no way I was going to sleep after something like that. In comms I opened a communication channel with Earth and dialed the Department.

"Hello?" I heard a hoarse male voice.

"Skylar Scrowen, first officer on OKRP 'Chopin'" "What do you want?" He sounded irritated.

"We've found an unknown object with negative gravity between Sol and Lacaille 9352 it's 6,3 light-years from Sol."

"We'll look into it. Anything else?" Now his voice was filled with excitement.

"No, I'll send a data paquet with our readings. Have a good day."

He disconnected without answering. *Scientists are such jerks sometimes.*

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[3] Astronomical unit

[4] Gravity visualizer

2 | First Day

01/01/3041
OKRP "Chopin"
"Hades" space station dock
10:48 LT[5]

"Welcome aboard 'Chopin', I'm Lara Baxter, the captain." I was greeted by a stubby woman in her late 50s with arms covered in tattoos who apparently was my new captain.

"I suppose you're Skylar, my new first officer. You probably didn't read the ships documentation?"

"No, I did not."

"Thought so, no one ever does. Okay, I'll summarize it for ya. The main computer is equipped with the newest AI - the Nexus-6 type - with personality type 3 and machine learning. For propulsion it obviously has an modified Alcubierre drive for FTL[6] and Yhprum's jump drive. It's also equipped with 4 laser cannons, 12 close-distance EMP projectors, a spinally mounted black hole cannon, 4 railguns fed with depleted uranium warheads, and 2 Gatling turrets also fed depleted uranium. The ship also has the capacity for producing AI controlled drones equipped with a laser canon and 2 close-distance EMP projectors."

"Okay..."

"Reggie c'mere." A meter-high robot rolled over to us. He moved on two tracks, had a humanoid-like torso, two manipulators for arms and something that looked like a pair of binoculars for his head. "Reggie is our navigator; he's the older W-4 type AI; however, he's decked out with the best quantum computing chips out there. We also use it as a tour guide for newbs, he'll show you around the ship."

Reggie rolled over to the door and I went behind him. We entered the main corridor. Along it I could see 4 pairs of steel doors.

"To the right we've got navigation, CIC[7], infirmary and the captain's cabin, to the left, there's the caboose, cafeteria, Sir's cabin, and storage" screeched the robot.

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[5] Local Time
[6] Faster Than Light (Travel)
[7] Combat Information Center

The robot's voice was really annoying me. *It's only been a couple of seconds, and I already hate it. How are they living with it?* I thought. *Although it's from navigation, so they probably don't see him too often.*

"The lower levels are the gun deck as well as the 'fire' and engine room, upwards we have crew quarters, shields center and more storage." He said while showing me the elevator. "You can see the rest for yourself."

Not only is he annoying, but also lazy which is quite unique for a robot. I did a quick circle around the ship to associate where what is and spent the rest of the day enjoying the joys of life in a pub.

3 | Realization

01/04/3042
Department of Space Exploration
Earth, Sol
3:13 LT

Edgar Hansen was walking down the hallway to the conference room. He stops to look through the window, taking in the view. *Every time I look, the Smokies seem to look more and more beautiful. Its endlessness always inspires me.* His thoughts soon drifted from the view, and to the call he received. *Of course, that idiot had to call when I finally got my inspiration. I'll never get to finish that poem if it goes on like this.* He looked at his watch. *10 minutes, I better get going.*

Everyone else was already there. He walked to the front and sat in his chair.

He cleared his throat and said, "I received a call notifying me about a discovery of an unknown object with negative gravity." He twiddled with the pilot to the projector.

"Here is all the information we've got from them," he said, pointing at the spreadsheet displayed behind him. "Any suggestions?" A murmur went through the room.

"Maybe we've finally found a wormhole?" Someone said.

"Could it be a rubidium planet?" Suggested another person.

"It could be a collision point with another universe." Said one old professor.

A young professor stood up and said, "I think it's a white hole. Just look at the data, would a wormhole have negative gravity? I don't think so.

Rubidium reacts in the opposite direction to the force, but it doesn't have negative mass per se. And Mr. Wilde could you please stop trying to use everything to prove your Multiverse theory?" A laugh went through the room. Wilde stood up and walked out of the room complaining to himself about the youth. "A white hole would be pushing everything away from it so it's highly probable it has negative mass and gravity."

"Thank you, Mr. Blake," said Hansen. "Any other ideas? No? OK, we're going to send a research team to the object. Who will volunteer?"

Blake was first, after him a few more people reluctantly rose their hands.

"Great, your departing on the ship which discovered the object as soon as they arrive, and load required equipment."

* * *

03/04/3042
OKRP "Chopin"
Orbital station "Gdańsk", Sol
15:27 LT

We were gathered in the CIC around a conference table [TKTK]

4 | Setting the Bar high

01/01/3041
Pub "Neutron Life"
"Hades" space station
11:53 LT

"Ay wassup Sky!" I heard as I entered the pub. I looked around to see who it was.

"Oh, hi Jared." I walked to the table he was sitting at.

"Have a seat pal. Ay! Table, two times double rum and cran on the rocks."

From the table emerged an apparatus similar to the primitive coffee machine, which quickly made our drinks. I personally still prefer going to the bartender at least when I'm alone. Although even that isn't as it used to 'cause they too were replaced by robots. Still you can at least try to have a conversation with them.

"I see thee had a big hit, eh?"

"Yeah, I found some new security company and asked them for 5k but they didn't give it to me, so I just took 500k from them."

"Thee told them who thee are?"

"Course I did."

"And they didn't give thee the money?"

"Nope."

"Wow, hopefully they learned their lesson."

"Hah! I hope they didn't. And how's it going for you?"

"I got demoted fer The Incident. Now I'm servin' on 'Chopin'."

"Wait. Wait. Wait. Isn't that Lara Baxter's ship?"

"Yes 'tis"

"Wow! Dude! She utterly *decimated* the French at the battle of Ordynia."

"Huh, I've never heard of her."

"Just wow."

"À propos the war, have you ever thought why we're not dead yet? And I don't mean we as you and me but as a species. By all accounts we shouldn't have survived for so long.

"It could be of course thanks to a god, but who believes in that anymore? Everyone lost hope in the great creator, constructor or whatever.

"But what else could be responsible for that? Aliens? If so it'd be nice if they gave any sign of life, 'cause right now it looks like they 'birthed' us and then just died.

"I guess there's also the simulation theory - no one believes in that either and scientists already proved that it would require so much processing power it simply wouldn't be worth it."

"Man... how many times do I have to tell you I don't have the brains to even understand what you're talking about? Never mind adding anything to it."

"Ah.. sorry, I got lost in my digression."

? | [TKTK]

[TKTK]
Downtown Detroit
Earth, Sol
[TKTK]

Jared is laying on a sofa in one of his hideouts wondering. He snaps out of it as he hears someone banging on the door.

"This is the police! Open the door!"

"Shit! The fuzz's here. I have to scram." He muttered to himself. "Oup, just a sec!" he says as he grabs his bag and jumps out the window landing on the rooftop of another block just as the door is busted open.

"Catch 'im!" He hears behind himself as he starts running.