

3C: Blind Faith

Ginger was mopping the sweat from her temples with the end of her lab coat sleeve while she waited, tense and watching. The director finished speaking to Pod 2 through the radio and hung up the receiver.

“They’re understandably nervous,” the director said, speaking to the whole control room though his eyes were focused on Ginger. All were quiet, listening intently. “But they’re running out of air, and we’re out of options. We’re going to shut down all surveillance and monitoring equipment on this side of the portal, but we can still maintain radio contact during the blackout. Pod 2 has to work through the hard part of this operation. They’re going to set the pod’s trajectory as accurately as they can toward the center of the portal, and shut off all capacity to see where they’re going before they come within four meters of contact. They will remain blind for a minimum of two solid minutes, and we will not power up our equipment until after they make it through and reactivate theirs.”

The director took a breath, and wore a hard expression. “Not everyone aboard Pod 2 is familiar with quantum mechanics. The whole crew isn’t convinced, but they’re willing to try. Your classmate, Mister Jones, called this an act of faith. He suggested that the crew all close their eyes in addition to blinding their equipment during the passage.”

Something spasmed across Ginger’s face, and she turned away. While she wiped something wet from her eyes, the control room rustled with fresh activity. People were turning off the cameras and deactivating monitoring equipment. The two projection screens on the wall went black. Any minute now Pod 2 would dive blindly into a shrinking wormhole, gambling their survival on waves of quantum probability. They would cast the dice with their eyes closed tight, unable to see where they fell.

It was almost midnight when Malachi and the expedition teams returned to Lemuria. Malachi was met at the top of the South Biome docking ramp by Ginger and Doctor Tom. Ginger surprise both Malachi and herself when she held her arms out in greeting, offering a hug. He accepted it automatically with a bemused grin.

“I didn’t think you were the hugging type,” he said.

“I’m not. I was just worried about you,” she admitted. “The more I learned about the portal today, the more I learned how much we don’t actually know. Glad you made it.”

“It was a close call,” he granted.

Once they broke apart Doctor Tom shook Malachi’s hand firmly with welcome. They moved out of the way while the rest of the crew climbed up the ramp. Others climbed down to process Pod 2’s data and check it for new maintenance needs.

“You should have seen it,” Malachi told Ginger with awe after Doctor Tom had left to speak to the director. Malachi’s brilliant smile was lit with something new and reverent in his eyes. “We saw the sun set in an orange sky. We saw a sunset *billions* of years before human beings even evolved! It was amazing. The water was so *green*.”

The two were on their way to pass through the decompression chambers and return to the West biome for some much needed rest, when Doctor Tom called after them. He was puffing as though he’d jogged back to the docking room to catch them, something that wasn’t easy anymore at his age.

“Ginger,” he puffed once he’d caught up, cheeks flushed. “I just thought I’d let you know that you were right about the portal. Your hypothesis about the time travel was spot on.”

“What do you mean?”

“The team processing the expedition data were studying the star maps captured from the night sky on the other side. The portal leads through space, not backward in time. Malachi,” Doctor Tom grinned cheekily. “You just returned from visiting an alien planet.”

“Hey, Ginger... do you think it really worked? Just closing our eyes and praying, and that made the portal grow?”

The two students were walking through the quiet halls, lit dimly in the late hour. They had almost reached their bunk rooms. Their footsteps had grown slow and dragging with fatigue not long after they’d finally reached the West Biome again. They walked closely together and spoke in murmured voices that echoed softly through the white halls.

“I’m not so sure about the praying part,” she replied, eyes drooping as she glanced up at

Malachi's creased dark face in the low light. "But I think that stopping observation probably did *something* on a quantum level. We can't prove it, though. Maybe you were just lucky, and the portal grew big enough at the right time regardless of whether we were watching. Either way you made it, though. More experiments in the future might help us understand what really happened."

They'd reached Ginger's door. She was about to push inside when she stopped and groaned abruptly with dread. Malachi startled and leaned closer, concerned.

"What? What is it?" he asked.

"I just realized... this is only week two. We've barely even *started* the quarter, and I'm already exhausted." She looked up with a pleading expression. "You've been here longer. Please tell me things won't be this crazy for the whole term."

Malachi grinned tiredly and shook his head. "No promises."

Thanks for reading.

Remember to write your story's title on the front cover page.