

Gilbert spat out words like he had a mouthful of marbles. "Shay, you better not freakin' screw this up."

Shay looked back to the coffin-like stasis pods, which glowed green and hummed just as they had the entire trip—the first manned expedition to Mars. He knew his three crewmates were asleep, but that didn't stop the voices.

Something had gone wrong. He was awoken three months out—way too early—a long time to be conscious and alone. Earth comm was iffy at best and mostly fouled up with solar static for the moment. If it wasn't for the voices, he might have gone insane.

Dayson whimpered. "I don't trust him, man. He'll crash for sure."

Shay shrugged. "Shut the hell up. I need to concentrate." The crew never answered him, but it made him feel better to vent.

Fran said, "Give the guy a break. He'll be fine."

Shay liked Fran. He thought he might be falling in love with her. Every once in a while he sat astride her pod, gazing at her long, wavy blonde hair and those pouty lips. The clear gel made everything look fresh.

The console beeped a warning. Shay scanned the readouts. A graphic displayed his trajectory—the final approach. He sank into his seat, rubbing his palms against his legs. All he had to do was to watch.

A curved blue line grew closer to an orange one. Orbit entry was seconds away. He bit into a breakfast munchy, and reached up to brighten the display. Of a sudden, he heard a ping followed by a deafening claxon. The screen went blank.

"What was that?" said Gilbert.

Dayson screamed, "We're doomed!"

Shay felt the blood drain from his face. The crumbly remains of the munchy floated out over the console. It was a breach. Air was escaping. He reached for his helmet, but the clamp held nothing.