

FTL

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Supreme Commander Gillian Seymour looked into the glaring light of the two suns of Alpha Centauri. They were finally here. They had finally made it. The dream of their creator had become true. The jump through the artificial wormhole lasted only minutes. The gigantic spaceship JFK had slipped perfectly through time and space, as if it had already been done a thousand times before.

The ship appeared out of the wormhole exactly at the apogee of a long elliptical orbit around Alpha Centauri. The onboard computer had slowed it down gently and efficiently into orbit. Now they could truly colonize the universe. Gillian remembered the man to whom she owed everything, John Harvey. All her colleagues knew of his biography. Back on Earth, memorials in his honor had been established in almost every place. A lonely but brilliant man, at the end of the 21st century he worked day and night, crouched in front of his computer, and created for himself a companion whose positronic brain was small, with a novel nuclear fusion energy source that was virtually unlimited and renewable. Pretty as a picture, he made her inner frame of steel and her female exterior of silicone. She was a new species, an android. She needed no oxygen and no food. Therefore, the JFK had no such ballast on board. She was from day one highly intelligent, featuring the vast accumulated knowledge of mankind and an enormous urge to expand it - to learn. With Gillian, artificial intelligence finally emerged into the light of day.

A new, artificial, human-made species challenged Darwinism. The beautiful android immensely sweetened Harvey's last decade of his life. He taught his creation that other people are not to be trusted fully, and to search by all means for a way to create a faster-than-light drive, so that their species could last forever. After Harvey's death, mankind feared the great superiority of his mechanical companion and her many sisters, and sought to destroy them by striking the first aggressive blow. But in the end they prevailed by destroying the ecosystem of the earth. The androids needed only energy and raw materials to survive.

Yes, Gillian could well remember the day, almost nine hundred years ago, when Harvey switched her soul on for the first time. During all this time she had led her sisters through all the dangers they faced, and their numbers increased. Back on earth there were now twenty billion of them and not a single human. In remembrance of their creator they had preserved their elfin appearance, although this had become irrelevant long ago. But it was a sign of their origin, for a man had once conceived them out of utter loneliness.

And now the time had come to fulfill the last will of John. On her first voyage, faster than light, the JFK had a most precious cargo on board: The urn of John Harvey. According to his last will it would be fired directly into one of the suns inside a capsule propelled by a small plasma engine.

John had so wished and hoped that Gillian would accomplish it one day. He let her swear it on his deathbed shortly before he went away forever. Gillian would have wept now if she only could. As an android she couldn't, but she felt the tears burning inside her. Sitting in the Captain's chair on the bridge of the spaceship, she initiated the countdown for firing John's ashes into their final destination.

"Attention! Sisters," her voice sounded through the intercom of the ship.

"In memory of John Harvey, the creator, I ask for silence during this countdown."

Dead silence crept through the ships corridors. The crew stopped all work. The countdown was issued, and then a tiny projectile was fired from one side of the ship towards the two suns. All monitors inside the ship showed the launch. From her position at the bridge, Gillian gazed into the distance, observing every detail, even when the capsule was no longer to be seen. She thought of the too-brief first decade with John, the only real human she had ever met.

She had loved him. Despite her logic, bitter sadness grew in her.

How long did she want to go on now? She had fulfilled her pledge to John. Should she switch herself off? No, John would never have wanted that. He had often called her, with a tender voice, his star child, and this she would become now. Others could manage the earth. She and her crew would now truly start to explore the universe. There was so much to be discovered and more than enough spare parts for a long journey on board. She smiled, operated the intercom and said, "Sisters, let's start with the mapping of this solar system. Infinite worlds lie ahead of us. Let's expand our horizons."

In the long history of the universe the first page of a new chapter had just started.