

First Step for Apotheosis

By rolandlytle

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The sky is the limit only for those who aren't afraid to fly!

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The Earth Alliance explorer class ship EAS Apotheosis cruised through the endless void at speeds unimaginable only a decade ago. The mark III PNP drive (pumped neutrino propulsion) moved the ship almost one million two hundred thousand miles per second, or six point four times the speed of light. With the realization of the PNP drive, humankind had entered a completely new realm of exploration and discovery. Space is vast. After nearly two centuries of space flight, it was still a dangerous profession. It was the time of the explorer. Humankind exploded outward from Sol, equivalent in many ways with the old west or European expansion into the new world. The men and women pushing the boundaries were smart and courageous. They believed we were destined to move out into the galaxy. Even with the most modern engine available, it has taken them nearly twenty-nine months to reach their destination, Gliese 674. The Ships may keep getting more advanced, more majestic and more powerful, but it is the intrepid spirit of the people controlling the EAS Apotheosis that epitomize the future of our species. Captain Rea Arkin entered the bridge. Today the weight of destiny was heavy on her and the crew. Her second in command, Commander Tim Kassikov, was on the bridge. He always seemed to be on duty. It was a bit annoying, but his dedication was a welcome commodity. They nodded and together turned to view the large forward display screen. Capt. Arkin was larger than average at 5'10" tall, but seemed even larger with her straightforward posture and charismatic personality. She had the stereotypical 'girl-next-door' looks. Dirty blond hair cut to an inch above her shoulders and her blue eyes had a gray tint to them. She was slim and fit, but very feminine. She projected confidence, strength and competence; showing intelligence and curiosity second to none. She was an experienced officer with twenty years as a ship's captain. Arkin was 62 years old. She knew only twenty to thirty years remained for shipboard duty before she was permanently anchored to a desk. The executive officer was very big, especially for shipboard life. Cmdr. Kassikov stood 6'1" and 220 pounds. He was barrel chested with muscular broad shoulders. Huge hands hung at his side while his sleeves and pants legs strained from bulging muscles. He was ruggedly handsome with short dark hair and a chiseled jaw. His burnt umber eyes possessed an intensity of knowledge and power. Cmdr. Kassikov was the quintessential alpha male. The Captain was proud of her ship. She felt the near limitless power thrumming through the deck. The EAS Apotheosis was the first of the long-range explorers, the most elite ships in the Earth

Alliance fleet. The ship had been designed for maximum efficiency and carried the best the Alliance had. It was fast, lean and mean. Captain Arkin marveled at its capabilities. Apotheosis was her ship. "Approaching the system, Captain. We are ready to drop out of FTL." Kassikov's voice rumbled deeply. "Very well XO. Helmsman, disengage the PNP drive." Arkin ordered. She watched Ensign Ai Yua's petite hands dancing across the control panel. Ensign Yua was the typical Japanese beauty. 5'2" tall and 100 pounds, with just the right amount of curves. Despite being 29 years old, she looked like a cross between a college student and a sexy gravure model. She had beautiful brown eyes and pixie cut dark brown hair. The helmsman was probably the smartest person on board the Apotheosis, which had eight more certified geniuses onboard. Ens. Yua was also the personal defense instructor for the crew and the only one able to give Cmdr. Kassikov a run for his money in hand-to-hand. As the ship dropped out of FTL (faster than light), Capt. Arkin looked over her shoulder to the science station and said, "Professor Okudan, scan the system and forward the data to the helm. Are the drones prepared for deployment?" Professor Mike Okudan replied, "It should take about ten minutes to get all the long range data to make our finale approach to Gliese Prime. The full drone package has been checked and then checked again. Santa would be proud. I would like a few minutes to inspect them one last time before launch. It will only take fifteen to twenty minutes." "Ok Mike, I'll give you time for a final check." Arkin conceded. Professor Okudan and his wife Dr. Demi Okudan were two of the three civilians aboard. He was the Science Advisor and Dr. D was the ship's doctor. The Captain hit the intercom button for aft engineering to talk to the chief engineer Lieutenant Maxwell Scott, "Max, do a quick check of the PNP while its offline. You have fifteen minutes before we need the engine again." "Aye Captain." Was the response from the intercom. "Ensign Yua, how long will it take us to reach the planet once you get the navigational data?" Arkin asked. "Approximately thirty eight minutes, ma'am. We are about thirty AUs out from the planet." Cmdr. Kassikov went to the ship's flight officer, Ensign Katsulas Gakari, and said, "Ensign make sure the repulser assembly is at full charge. I want to limit the chances of any micro-dust damage as we pass through the system." "Yes sir, as we approach twenty AUs, the particle density of space should begin increasing. I'll adjust the standard fifteen gigajoules up to the full twenty-five gigajoules at that time. We will be running at full for about twenty-five minutes. That shouldn't tax the system." Gakari replied. "Very well Ensign Gakari." Kassikov responded. Then to the engineering chief, "Chief Torres, bring four more micro fusion reactors online; just in case we need the extra power." Capt. Arkin activated the full ship intercom, "This is the Captain. We have reached the outer waypoint of the Gliese 674 system. As soon as we make final preparations, we will continue on to Gliese Prime, the main planet in the system. Everyone maintain maximum alert status as we transit the system, be prepared to handle any surprises the universe decides to throw our way." For the next fifteen minutes, the bridge was a flurry of activity. After all stations had reported their readiness, the Captain stood next to Cmdr. Kassikov and said good naturedly, "I hope we haven't forgotten anything. It would be a shame to screw this up after such a long journey, Tim." She continued with a wry grin, "Did you feed Rover this morning?" "Rea, you don't have a dog. What a foolish idea it would be to have a pet onboard." Kassikov said. "Fleet headquarters would call it a mascot. It is only a recommendation. The

psychological brain trust believes it would be good for the crew to have a mascot. Besides I would get a cat if they forced the issue.” Cmdr. Kassikov returned her smile with his own evil version, “The only eating in the captain’s quarters is by you and Max, and from what I hear, Ensign Yua also.” They both turned to glance at the helmsman and watched her blush at the commander’s friendly jab. Arkin said, “What my husband and I do in our personal time is outside your purview, as well as any guests we may have. You’re just jealous.” They looked at each other. The smiles and fun disappeared as their professional demeanor took over. Their tenure together as Captain and XO was almost two decades and their friendship was even longer. They were a team. The best the Alliance had. That’s why they were here. Capt. Arkin moved up behind the helmsman and placed a supportive hand on her shoulder, “Ensign Yua, take us in at standard FTL.” “Aye, Captain. Initiating PNP drive, ma’am.” The ship surged forward into the unexplored star system. As the EAS Apotheosis dove deeper into the system, the crew implemented their duties admirably. The craft entered orbit around Gliese Prime on schedule. On the bridge the mood was cheerful and morale high. “We have dropped out of FTL and are entering a high orbit Captain.” stated Yua. “Very well helmsman. Professor, initiate your scans of the planet. Ensign Gakari, deploy the drones. Chief Torres, maintain power at current levels and keep the engine online.” Arkin commanded. A chorus of 'Aye, Captain' sounded around the bridge. Cmdr. Kassikov moved through the bridge overseeing the ongoing tasks as Capt. Arkin moved to Professor Okudan's station. He observed the professor making the final adjustments to the assemblage of scientific drones to be directed to investigate the planet. Arkin said, “Mike, you have done a superlative job preparing the drones. This drone launch is the culmination of seven years of preparations and challenging work. No one could have done a better job than you have.” Without turning his head, Okudan said, “Did you say something Captain? I should be finished with the final check in five minutes.” Shaking her head and smiling Arkin replied, “Very well, professor. Notify me when we are clear to launch.” Within minutes, Cmdr. Kassikov informed the Captain when all preparations were finalized. They were ready to initiate the drone launch. “Can I have your attention?” Arkin began. “We began this expedition twenty nine months ago from the Earth Alliance Martian spaceyards. We had been training for this mission for eight months before we began this foray into unknown space. We are the first people to enter the Gliese 674 system. We have traveled more than fifteen trillion miles to get here and our journey is only half over. Sending our drones to investigate Gliese Prime is the reason we have invested so much time, effort and money. I am proud to be a part of this historic mission and honored to have served with all of you. Now stay alert and enjoy creating galactic history.” Capt. Arkin nodded to the XO and Cmdr. Kassikov called out in a gruff commanding voice, “All stations commence deployment of drones A1 through C25. Ensign Gakari, open the forward bay door and initiate launch procedures. Chief Torres, assist the professor receiving and recording the data. Ensign Yua, as the data comes in duplicate, and then transmit it to Alliance headquarters.” Cmdr. Kassikov shifted over to the Captain and quietly told her, “Rea, when the primary wave has been launched, I would like to wait fifteen minutes before the secondary group is deployed. I would like to follow that procedure for tertiary and then final group of drones.” She replied, “Sounds good, Tim. Keep a close eye on the store. I am going to engineering to check with Max. I’ll

be back before you begin the tertiary deployment.” The bow of the craft slowly opened and drones of numerous shapes and sizes disgorged into space. Drones began moving towards the planet. They had many different functions. Some would land, some would glide into the atmosphere to circle the planet like small aircraft, and others would maneuver into orbit around the planet as satellites. Capt. Arkin exited the bridge and proceeded down to engineering. As she passed the doctor’s office, the Captain saw Dr. Okudan observing the launches using the exterior hull cameras. Arkin said, “Hi Demi, how is the deployment progressing?” “It looks as though everything is proceeding as intended. The planet is beautiful.” Demi answered. As Demi Okudan leaned back, Capt. Arkin noticed another woman seated with Demi. It was the other civilian Ms. Denise Roberts. Denise Roberts was well past middle age. Her short curly hair was almost completely grey except for a few streaks of its original brown coloring. Denise had wrinkles on her face around her mouth and eyes. Her complexion had a pale ashen appearance. The Captain knew, from Roberts’ records, she was over one hundred years old. She was 5’ tall and weighed about 120 pounds. She looked like the stereotypical little old grandmother, except for the flight suit she was wearing and a strange looking device on her head. The device looked like a complex headset held in place by straps across her forehead and the lower back of her head. It was slightly luminescent similar to an amber nightlight. The apparatus was a neuroscrambler. Denise Roberts was one of the most powerful telepaths on Earth and the neuroscrambler generated an AMIE (pronounced Amy – an acronym for Aureole Metastatic Ionization Energy) field that prevented telepathic powers. It helped her stay sane by blocking other’s thoughts out and kept her from going into anyone’s mind. The luminescent ruddiness indicated it was functional. Ms. Roberts always remained shielded by a neuroscrambler field at all times, unless she received command authorization. “Ms. Roberts, why aren’t you in your cabin?” Arkin asked. With her visage blank of emotion, Roberts replied, “You mean cell, don’t you Captain?” Before Capt. Arkin could respond, Dr. Okudan said, “Captain, I asked Denise if she could help me in medical. I’m sorry if I overstepped my authority, but I didn’t think it mattered.” Arkin wasn’t going to overreact, even though she was uneasy with a telepath, a peep as some called them, aboard the EAS Apotheosis. After all this time, she still didn’t trust her. “No problem Dr. Okudan. Please contact me next time you require additional assistance. I’m always happy to help you.” Arkin said pleasantly. Glancing at Ms. Roberts as said, “Telepaths are required to follow a rigid protocol aboard Earth Alliance crafts.” Capt. Arkin moved on down the passage and continued to engineering. She saw Lt. Scott and two engineering chiefs hurriedly moving about monitoring the panels in engineering. Lt. Scott was on one knee reassembling a backup life-support panel. He saw her and smiled as he regained his feet. She waved him over. “Yes Captain, what can I do for you?” Scott said as he planted himself in front of the Captain. Scott is a British/Scottish name, but it was obvious that the lieutenant’s ancestry was Mediterranean. His olive tinted skin, dark brown shaggy hair and brown eyes were characteristic of his Italian heritage. He was just an inch taller than Capt. Arkin, at 5’11”, but much broader. His wide oval face with its narrow lips and prominent nose was always smiling. He knew the ship like the back of his hand. Lt. Scott had even been deeply involved in the final refit of the Apotheosis. He had also been Capt. Arkin’s husband for the last twenty-two years. When he was close enough, the Captain

placed her hand on his arm and quietly said, "How is everything going back here, Max?" "The ship is operating well above specification. The engine is purring like a kitten. The inertial field, life-support and artificial gravity are performing magnificently. I checked with the reactor room and everything is operating excellently." Scott reported. "We are going to remain in orbit for approximately four weeks before using the ion ram-scoop engine to explore the other three main planetary bodies. How long will a level two maintenance check take?" She asked. He replied, "About three weeks." "Once that is completed, begin a level two check on the PNP..." The intercom calling, "Captain to the bridge", interrupts her. Capt. Arkin quickly turned and began a fast jog to the bridge. Upon entering the bridge, she found everyone occupied and Cmdr. Kassikov at the science station with the professor. "What is our status, XO?" Arkin asked. Kassikov replied, "Captain, we have an anomalous energy reading moving through the planet's atmosphere. It's not one of our drones and doesn't appear to be an atmospheric phenomenon. We are ready to begin the tertiary drone deployment." "Put a hold on the deployment. Send a scanner drone toward the phenomenon and we'll get more information." Arkin said. "Yes ma'am." Kassikov said as he moved to the center of the bridge. "Flight officer, discontinue tertiary deployment and launch a type-3 scanner at the contact. Helmsman, bring us about to put the contact on our bow." Kassikov activated the intercom and said, "Ensign Morrison and Chief West report to the armory immediately and bring all systems online." Arkin asked the professor, "What do you make of this, Mike?" Okudan continued monitoring his instruments and said, "I'm not sure Captain. I've never seen anything like it. It's completely composed of an unknown energy, like a plasma charge, but several times more powerful. The energy disturbance is increasing attitude and bearing toward us. Whatever it is, it's coming to us." The Captain used the intercom and called, "All hands, set alert condition throughout the ship. All stations report status to the bridge." Chief Timothy entered the bridge and took his position at the damage control station. Over the next five minutes, all personnel had reported manned and ready. All systems were online. The unknown energy field phenomenon continued to advance on the Apotheosis. Yua reported, "Captain, at its present speed we will make contact with the energy field in eight minutes." "Gakari, redirect a nearby drone into the energy phenomenon. Yua keep us aligned with the contact, but be prepared to bring the initiate the PNP drive," Arkin commanded. Gakari reported, "The drone will contact the energy field in twenty seconds... fifteen... ten... five seconds... contact. The drone just went offline ma'am. Its power reading is zero. It's dead in space captain." "The energy field has increased speed, Captain. It will reach us in forty seconds." The professor called out. Arkin ordered, "Gakari bring repulsers to maximum power. Armory, fire the EMP array at the contact." From the speaker Morrison said, "Aye Captain, EMP online. Power to full, now firing EMP." Aboard the Apotheosis, everyone felt a tingling like a static electricity as the array released a massive pulse of energy at the oncoming phenomenon. Gakari excitedly said, "Direct hit, ma'am." "The EMP had no effect on the field, Captain." Professor Okudan called out. The Captain said, "Yua, initiate PNP drive. Get us out of here at a right angle vector past the contact." It takes approximately three seconds for the PNP drive to build the energy to burst into FTL flight. As the PNP began its build up, the energy field sprinted forward at a greatly increased speed and struck the vessel before it could leave. Everyone onboard the Apotheosis fell to

the decks and then started floating as all power on the ship went inactive. No backups energized. The ship drifted in space, powerless in the void. Thirty minutes later, a small oval pod moved into the forward bay where the doors were still open. They docked at the hatchway.