

**Generations**

**by**

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Paris Michaels could not have been angrier, or more disoriented. He wasn't angry about where he was, nor was he disoriented by how he got there. He was virtually bred to handle both of those. It was the fact that he had been left behind and now had no means of returning home that angered him, and it was the sheer strangeness of this new country that left him feeling disoriented. For nearly a month he wandered the streets of his infuriating new home, angrier than he had ever been in his life and would ever be. By the end of these weeks he would come to terms with his situation, and grow to accept his life in this country.

In time he found employment. Because he was so unfamiliar with his surroundings he lacked the means to find a job in his area of expertise, and though this frustrated Paris greatly, in the time he spent coming to terms with his new lot in life he had learned to settle. At some point when the passing of months became the passing of years Paris had actually begun to enjoy not only his new career, but the people he was working with. He found particular joy in working with Michelle. She seemed to have a freshness and relevance to her that the others lacked. They began dating soon and they quickly became very very close. They would spend days exploring the city and he would learn everything he needed to know from her. In return he told her stories from his childhood and the things he remembered from home and she would listen intently, believing every word. She made him happier than being home ever could, and he married her without hesitation.

The first few years of their marriage were happy ones. She relished in the novelty of marriage and he felt steadied by her quaint beauty, and mannerisms he thought were long lost. The infatuation of new matrimony settled just in time for Michelle to grow pregnant. As soon as he learned he was going to have a son, Paris began to write everything he remembered from home. He wrote stories of his family, the things he learned from his schooling, how he lived as a boy, who he looked up to as a child, and anything else he could remember.

Paris died far younger than he had planned to live, though no one around him was surprised.

He died happily, however. He had told his son everything he had told his wife, and the boy hung onto his every word. After his death, Paris left his writings to him, and the boy cherished the gift even more than the daughters his wife would give him when he grew older. It became something very important to him and with every success he found in his life as he grew he was reminded of his father, a man who found happiness far from home.

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Jacob Michaels found himself in a delicate situation. While he couldn't imagine a situation where he would run out of money, he could easily conceive himself ruining the company his grandfather had effectively built while America watched him ruin the lives of hundreds of thousands of employees. His grandfather quickly worked his way up the ladder of project development in less than three years with innovative theories on engineering and electro-chemical infrastructure, while Jacob's father followed up by launching to the head of the company with an incredibly precise understanding of trends and culture, which allowed him not only to guide the company to incredible new advances in technology, but to work the stock market fantastically in his favor.

Jacob had neither his grandfather's technical brilliance or his father's sociological finesse. To get to the position Jacob was he needed only his father and grandfather's lineage. With his grandfather long dead and his father's health failing, he found himself head of a fortune 500 company with barely the ability to operate the equipment he sold. He distracted himself from this fact in much the same way he distracted himself from the inevitability of this situation in years past. The frivolous spending of a bottomless supply of money easily does wonders for a wavering conscience. While most of the market sat nervously waiting to see what direction his company would take, Jacob entertained himself and a flurry of guests on a private cruise in the Caribbean.

Amongst a number of people he couldn't count and a sea of faces he couldn't name he received word that his father's condition had worsened, and was guaranteed to do so until his death. Before the

end of the day he had returned to the States to see his father on his deathbed. His father, long unable to keep track of the passing of time asked of the condition of the company and Jacob lied to him. They exchanged the standard pleasantries of death, and Jacob's father's life ended a few days later. He was buried in the same graveyard as Jacob's grandfather and the two men that came before him. Talk of doubt and misfortune to the company was widespread, more so from within.

Time passed quickly after the death of Jacob's father, the way time often does during exciting moments. The time for grieving passed, Jacob began making wild speculation and ordering daring risks, far more than either of his previous had ever made. The loss of staff and talent brought on by the company's recession was a problem soon solved with wild promises that couldn't yet be delivered on. Members of the board who had been with the company decades evoked prophecies of doom and were quickly dispensed of when their fears were proven unfounded.

Jacob's gambits began to pay off slowly at first, with public opinion still against them. However, soon stocks were climbing, profits were growing at near-exponential rates and industry leaders were being shoved to the side. Jacob found himself finally following the the footsteps of his father, appearing on magazine covers and being hailed as both a late bloomer and a textbook golden boy. Though it could hardly have affected his living style, his worth was tripled as the company climbed higher and higher. Jacob relished the attention and felt a greater relief than he thought he ever could, though in his quietest moments he would unwittingly allow himself to understand that everything good he had or would ever have in his life he owed to the men who had come before him.

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Teddy shifted the crates of oranges from one side of his body to the other, being careful not to let anything roll out. As he walked, he watched the soldiers on either side of him busy themselves. Some bustled about, preoccupied with the orders they had been given, while others stood idly, resting against whatever hard surface stood near them. Teddy began to feel tired, but didn't mention anything

to his father, who walked in front of him carrying four crates stacked on top of each other.

“We're not too much farther,” his father told him, not looking back. He nodded his head forward. “It's that building there up ahead.”

Teddy couldn't figure out which of the buildings his father was talking about, but kept walking anyway. He shifted the two crates so that he was holding them over his head, like he saw the African women carry pots in his family's old National Geographic magazines. He began watching the surrounding military again, finding more interest in those that were relaxing than those who were running around getting things done. Two men took weak punches at each other, taunting one another with large grins on their faces. A woman pulled adjusted her drabs after kissing the man she was walking with. A younger man walked out of one of the sheet metal buildings, drawing attention from his friends who began hassling him and rubbing his short hair.

“Here we go, we're bringing them around back,” his father told him.

He followed his father behind a larger building made from wood where they met a large smiling man wearing white. He made small talk with Teddy's father, and gave Teddy a few compliments before slapping him on the back. He led them through the back door and navigated them into a large refrigerator where they laid down their crop. Teddy gave his arms a solid stretch while his father chatted with the man some more. Barely noticing his father's warning not to wander off too far, Teddy walked out of the refrigerator and looked around the mess hall.

“Come on, we got another stop to make.”

Teddy followed his father around the camp to one of the sheet metal buildings that made up the military village. His father knocked on the door and a man wearing an olive tee under his overalls answered the door and welcomed his father with a hearty smile and hug. The man gave an affectionate grunt as he knelt down to Teddy's height.

“Well look at this guy. How're you doing there, kiddo?”

Teddy noticed the metal bird pinned onto his overalls.

“Just fine, Major.”

The Major laughed loudly, with the smell of a cigar stuck in in breath. “Well, you read rank better than I'd expect from a boy your age, but I see you don't remember me, do you?” He groaned slightly as he rose to Teddy's father. “Come on, let's get you inside so we can start talking.”

Teddy followed his father into the building. It was only one room, like most of the huts on the base, but Teddy couldn't help treating it like a museum. His eyes darted from the bound books on the shelves to the computer sitting on the desk. He was most fascinated by the east and west walls, which held maps of the United States on one side and a map of the United American Settlements on the other. Teddy remembered the United States map from when he had started Kindergarten in Monterey before everybody moved.

“I got another call from up north,” the Major said, pouring himself a glass of scotch. “They want to know if there's any more fighting going on southeast of here.”

“Why don't they call them and find out, what are we going to know that they don't?” He turned down the offer of a glass as the Major sat in his chair.

“Well, you're beating me to the punch there, Mike. They're still convinced that we do know something they don't.”

“Are they basing that on anything except for the move?”

“No,” the Major replied, “They're just that damn convinced, and they decided they're going to get something out of that conclusion. You can go ahead and have a seat if you like.”

Teddy looked up from the book he was thumbing through and watched his father steady himself in the wooden chair. The major shifted in his seat and placed his elbows on the desk.

“Now Mike, you saved my life back then, and you gave me the opportunity to save a lot more. I've always been damn grateful for that, and you can believe me that I'm always going to be. But the

bottom line is that I'm starting to get a bit of heat for not asking a lot of questions I should have asked. Now I need to ask you right now and frankly I don't care what you tell me. Did you know the Presidio base was going to be a target?"

"No." Teddy's father spoke quickly, and without hesitation.

"What convinced you we needed to move?"

"I didn't tell you you needed to move. I told you I was leaving the county."

"Right, but why? What was so damn important?"

"I got spooked, the tension out East got bad enough I just wanted out of the big cities. I just called you so someone would know where I was."

The Major leaned back, not taking his eyes off Teddy's father.

"Alright, I guess that's the end of it then." There was enough of a pause for the boy to take notice when the Major stood up out of his chair. "Well, you've got a road ahead of you, and I've got a full plate today." The Major put his arm on Teddy's shoulder before shaking his father's hand. "You two take care of yourselves, you hear me?"

Teddy found things to look at as the two men said goodbyes through jokes and one-liners. As he walked back to the truck with his father, he was no longer distracted by the noise and bustle of the base around him, and instead noticed the focused eyes of his father, staring intently at whatever happened to be in front of him. The two of them made their way silently back to the car. When they got there, Teddy spoke up.

"Daddy, is there going to be another attack?" he asked.

"Someday," his father replied. "But that's okay. You'll be ready by then, and you'll be good to get everyone else ready, won't you?"

"Yes, sir."

"Glad to hear it. Don't worry about it, though. You'll be okay for a good long while. You just

worry about what you have to do when we get home, alright?”

“Yes, sir.”

The two rode home in the car in silence, their minds filled with what lied ahead of them.

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The press was having a field day with the event but the public couldn't be happier. The country's reunification was a shaky one and tensions overseas were still very high. More than anything people needed something they could rally behind and by God this was something magnificent. Three men stood smiling as light popped all around them. Two of them prepared for the fact that the other wasn't coming back.

“Our world,” the President told the public, standing tall at the podium with the proud young men behind him, “seems faced with problems that seem unsolvable, but so has it seemed at every point in history. When man had conquered his land he set out to the sea to find what it had to offer. When man had filled the world he set himself to the stars to see what they had to teach; and now, when man is faced with his most daunting future to date he will overcome all that nature and life has laid before him and set out to his very past,” he added a pregnant pause to allow the idea to steady itself in the mind of everyone listening, “to plant the seeds of solution for his future.” The crowd erupted in applause as the world's first Chrononauts rose from their chairs to have their handshake and photo with the president.

The Major came first. He stood proudly and smiled as he looked the president squarely in the eye, shaking his hand firmly. He turned with the president to face the flashing cameras and smiled. His jaw betrayed his down-home roots and his smile betrayed the public relation department's merit. He was a strong, natural leader for the group. The jack-of-all-trades finished his pictures and handshake and moved on.

The Colonel followed him. He beamed with pride as the years of intensive study and diligent research all paid off for this moment. The teams engineer, anyone who looked at him would guess his

role despite the body given to him through his intensive physical training and the uniform worn by his fellow explorers. His thick glasses and insecure smile were a fantastic contrast to the man who preceded him. He finished his photo-op, and took a quick look back as he walked off-stage.

Finally came the Lieutenant. The mission was said to have no contact with the indigenous people but fate would have it that this man will be trapped to spend the rest of their lives with them. He walked with a confidence and fearlessness to him. He approached the president with neither caution nor excitement, choosing to meet him as an equal. The cameras filmed and photographed the man standing calmly and strongly, and he left the stage with the same sense of dignity with which he entered.

Two days later the world watched from the eye of a single camera, in the quiet, underground room of an undisclosed location. At six hours before final ignition the three pilots ran tests and checked off the pieces of equipment that would bend light in on itself and create a hole in time into which the crew's small, cramped vehicle would fall. Four hours before final ignition the equipment was green lighted, and systems were given their individual run troughs. The crew and command talked back and forth producing formulas and naming equipment sequences that read as gibberish to the common viewer.

At one hour before final ignition the cabin of the vehicle fell silent. The three men sat terrified. All three wondered if the devices would actually work in final, full conjunction with each other. Two prayed silently that they would be forgiven for abandoning one of their own. One questioned what waited for him when he got home.

Time eventually rolled itself down to the half-hour mark. Then the ten-minute mark. Five minutes, then three, then one. The crew prepared itself as the automated sequences counted down the final seconds, and the Major hoped desperately he would remember the line he was given for benefit of the broadcast.

“We have twenty seconds, Khronos-One, we hope to see you in three minutes.”

“Roger that, ConCom, we'll see you in three days.”

Ten seconds.

Seven.

Five.

Four.

Three.

Two.

One.

The room distorted itself and seemed to bend inward. The room grew darker as light fell into the hole in gravity prepared for the vehicle and its occupants. The world watched as the room grew warped and dull. Light returned and the room was empty, a hollow metal box, waiting for its previous occupancy to return. The view remained constant for thirty seconds. Thirty seconds after that there was no change, nor was there thirty seconds after that.

As time approached the two minute mark since ignition, the room began to warp again. It ballooned around itself, the view becoming brighter and brighter. People across the world averted their eyes until the blinding light settled, and the craft was there again, sitting exactly where it had. The doors opened and two of the men stepped out and waved to the single camera in the corner of the room. The two men left the room to be decontaminated and debriefed. The next day the President addressed the nation, declaring the mission a “majoritive success,” a term that would eventually become legitimate. Three days later he addressed the nation again.

“Today is an endlessly bittersweet day.” he said, sincere regret in his voice. “We have proven that there is nothing beyond our grasp and that man will not be dictated to by the forces around him. However, we have also been reminded of the cost of progress.

“Today we celebrate the life and mourn the loss of Lieutenant Paris Michaels.” he paused as those in attendance bowed their heads. “A man who gave his life to sow the seeds of our future.”