Sasha Mendel

Prologue - Text Message (received within the last hour)
Age: 24

> TEXT FROM UEC REEDUCATION: You are hereby ordered to report to Reeducation Camp 12, where you will join your family and relatives for mandatory political reeducation. Failure to report will result in the harshest penalties to your family and relatives. This is all for the best. You can become a fully productive, harmonious, and legitimate member of society - or you can suffer the penalties due a traitor to the planet.

End of Prologue

Scene 1 - Upward Momentum
Age: 24

The world is cold and uncaring. This was a lesson you learned quickly growing up in Russia, hiding your face from the biting winds and begging for scraps of food. Your family tried to get work, but it was hard to come by for unskilled laborers. You swore that when you grew up, you would learn a talent that would guarantee you jobs for life.

The talents that matter seem to change ever more quickly as time goes on. Blacksmithing doesn't matter, tailors are out of fashion, and coding is the newest talent that will last for some time before eventually succumbing to something better. Learning how things work and how to make them better, though, never seems to go out of style. You started by learning how to patch and insulate your house for warmth, and progressed to fixing up old automobiles for collectors. This sometimes involved some percussive maintenance, but hitting things with wrenches can do wonders to straighten them out.

Engineering was a profession that allowed you to fix what was broken and create what should exist - and you had a talent for taking a crazy idea and capturing it in machinery. It was perfect for you. As a Russian Jew, the world always seemed like it was against you in some way. Why shouldn't you make the world line up with your needs?

You worked hard, made connections, built clever gadgets, and eventually got hired on at a prestigious contracting company at the age of 21. Many of your fellow workers had family in the business, went to better schools, had more money. Their work never seemed quite up to snuff, maybe because they didn't have the same drive.

Your supervisors made note of this, and you were the one to get the best job that had ever come to the company. You were chosen to go into space, to work on the orbital space dock that was the site of *Alexandria*, an extremely advanced ship. Finally, you had a coworker up to your standards. **Santos Rojas** was originally from Cuba, and never felt like that country worked out for their family either. **Santos** was a strange kid, but spoke mathematics and physics like no one you'd ever known. You struck up a good camaraderie, and discovered you understood how to translate **Santos**-speak into something that actually invokes his physics. He speaks in the language of the Universe, not like all those idiots and their technobabble.

If you understand **Santos** correctly, the engines you built will break Einstein's light speed barrier. They are fussy engines, and sometimes you have to encourage them to work correctly, whacking them with your wrench and swearing at them in Russian. How will they learn to behave if you don't teach them to? **Santos** doesn't like it when you do that.

One day you got a text. Your family loves you very much, but communication into space is not so cheap, so you generally only wish each other a happy birthday. It wasn't your birthday. You had a message from your government, informing you that your family had been taken into a reeducation camp, and you were to join them if you wanted to spare your family suffering.

Leaving the station isn't exactly easy. Reentering the atmosphere is very difficult, and aiming for a particular location just makes things worse. It would take a couple of days of calculations. You never got a chance.

You were working on the logistics when the acceleration klaxons rang out. You've gained a certain understanding of machines in your time, so you didn't need to be told twice. You sprinted to an acceleration couch and strapped in. The ship began to move, giving announcements as it went, including informing you that a particular maneuver was to evade nuclear missiles. Then someone flipped a switch, and your engines made the kid's physics happen. You were going faster than the speed of light itself, something impossible! Then the ship announced that everyone was to go to the bridge at their earliest convenience. You wonder who everyone is.

End of Scene 1