

*Thao*

She placed her hand on a type of 'medallion' I had noticed earlier 'attached' at the height of her left breast, and with the other hand, she held what resembled a large biro which she unclasped from her belt.

She pointed the 'biro' above our heads and in the direction of the sphere. I thought I saw a green beam of light flash from it but I couldn't be sure. She then pointed the 'biro' at me, her other hand still on the 'medallion' and quite simply, we rose, simultaneously, towards the wall of the machine. Just when I was sure we were going to collide with it, a portion of the hull retracted like an enormous piston in the core of a cylinder, revealing an opening, oval in shape, of about three metres in height.

We regained our feet, Thao and I, on a type of landing inside the craft. She let go of her 'medallion' and with a dexterity that suggested she had done it often, she refastened her 'biro'.

'Come. We can touch each other now,' she said.

Taking me by the shoulder, she guided me towards a small blue light, so intense that I had almost to half close my eyes. I had never seen a colour like it on Earth. When we were almost below the light, the wall on which it was located 'let us pass'. That is the only way to describe it. From the way in which my mentor was leading me, I could have sworn I was going to have a handsome lump on my forehead, *but we passed through the walls - like ghosts!* Thao laughed heartily at the shocked expression on my face. That did me good. I remember that laugh - like a refreshing breeze and reassuring at a time when I was not feeling at ease.

I had often spoken with friends of 'flying saucers' and was persuaded that they did, in fact, exist - but when you are actually faced with the reality, so many questions cloud your brain that

you think it will burst. Of course, deep down I was delighted. From Thao's manner towards me, I sensed that I had nothing to fear. However, she was not alone: I wondered what the others were going to be like. In spite of my fascination with this adventure, I still doubted if I would see my family again. Already, they seemed so far away, when only several minutes earlier I was in my own garden.

We were now 'gliding' at ground level along a tunnel-shaped corridor that led to a small room, the walls of which were of a yellow so intense that I had to close my eyes. The walls formed a vault - exactly as if we were inside an upturned bowl.

Thao covered my head with a helmet made from a transparent material and I found, by opening one eye, that this enabled me to tolerate the light.

'How do you feel?' she asked.

'Better, thank you, but that light - how can you stand it?'

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'It is not a light. It is just the present colour of the walls in this room.'

'Why 'present'? Have you brought me here to repaint them?' I joked.

'There is no paint. There are only vibrations, Michel. You still believe that you are in your Earthly universe, when you are *not*. You are now in one of our super long-range spacecraft, capable of travelling at several times the speed of light. We will be leaving soon, if you will lie down on this bunk..?'

There, in the centre of the room were two boxes - rather like coffins without lids. I stretched out in one of them and Thao in the other. I heard her speak in a language unfamiliar to me, but very harmonious. I wanted to lift myself up a little but couldn't, being held by an unknown and invisible force. The yellow colour progressively disappeared from the walls, to be replaced by a blue that was certainly no less intense. The 'paintwork' had been redone...

One third of the room suddenly became dark and I noticed minute lights sparkling like stars.

Thao's voice was clear in the darkness. 'These are stars, Michel. We have left Earth's parallel universe and will be leaving your planet further and further behind, to take you to visit ours. We know you are going to be greatly interested in the journey, but also in our departure that will be quite slow, for your benefit.

'We can watch on the screen you see in front of you.'

'Where is Earth?'

'We still can't see it, being almost directly above it, at approximately 10 000 metres altitude...'

Suddenly, a voice could be heard, speaking what seemed to be the same language Thao had used moments earlier. Thao answered briefly and then the voice spoke to me in *French* - excellent French (although the tone was more melodic than is typical) welcoming me aboard. It was very much the 'welcome aboard' of our airline companies, and I recall being quite amused by that - in spite of the unique situation in which I found myself.

At the same instant, I felt a very light movement of the air and it became cool, as though air-conditioned. Things began to happen quickly. On the screen, appeared what could only have been the sun. At first, it seemed to touch the edge of the Earth or, more precisely, South America, as I later learned. Again, I wondered if I could be dreaming. Second by second America was shrinking. Australia couldn't be seen, as the sun's rays had not yet reached it. Now the contours of the planet could be distinguished, and we seemed to move around the globe, to a position above the North Pole. There, we changed direction, drawing away from

Earth at an incredible speed.

*Thao*

Our poor Earth became a basketball, then a billiard ball until it finally disappeared - or almost - from the screen. Instead, my vision was filled with the sombre blue of space. I turned my head in Thao's direction hoping for further explanation.

'Did you like that?'

'It was wonderful, but so fast - is it possible to travel at such a high speed?'

'That was nothing, my dear friend. We 'took off' very gently. Only now are we travelling at full speed.'

'How fast?' I interrupted.

'Several times the speed of light.'

'Of *light*? But how many times? It's incredible! What about the light barrier?'

'I can well understand that it appears incredible to you. Not even your experts would believe it - it is, however, the *truth*.'

'You say several times the speed of light, but how many times?'

'Michel, during this journey many things will be intentionally revealed to you - many things, but there will also be details to which you will not have access. The precise speed of our spacecraft is one such detail. I'm sorry, for I know it will disappoint you not to have your great curiosity for all things satisfied, but there will be so many new and interesting things for you to see and learn, that you must not mind too much when information is withheld from you.'

Her manner indicated that the matter was closed and I didn't insist further, sensing that to do so would have been rude.

'Look' she said to me. On the screen a coloured dot had appeared and was growing rapidly.

'What is it?'

'Saturn.'

The reader must forgive me if the descriptions I give are not as detailed as he/she might wish, but it must be understood that I had not yet recovered all my senses. I had seen so much in so short a time, and was somewhat 'disoriented.'

As we approached, the famous Saturn grew rapidly larger on the screen. Its colours were wonderful - incomparable to anything I had ever seen on Earth. There were yellows, reds, greens, blues, oranges - within each colour, an infinite range of nuances mingled, separated, grew stronger then weaker, creating the famous rings and confined within them...

It was an amazing spectacle, which filled more and more of our screen.

Realising I was no longer restrained by the force field, I wanted to remove my mask so as to see the colours better, but Thao signalled that I should do nothing.

'Where are the satellites?' I asked.

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'You can see two, almost side by side towards the right of the screen.'

'How far away are we?'

'We must be approximately 6 000 000 kilometres or perhaps more. They know exactly on the flight deck of course, but to give you a more precise estimate, I'd have to know whether our 'camera' is on full zoom or not.'

Saturn suddenly disappeared from the left side of the screen, which filled again with the 'colour' of space.

I believe it was at that moment I felt exalted, as I never had before. It hit me that I was in the process of living an extraordinary adventure - and why? I had asked for nothing and had never contemplated the possibility (who would have dared?) of experiencing such an adventure.

Thao got up. 'You can do the same now, Michel.' I obeyed and we found ourselves again, side by side in the centre of the cabin. It was only then, I noticed Thao no longer wore her helmet.

'Can you explain to me,' I asked, 'why just now, you were still wearing a helmet while I was able to accompany you without one, and yet now I have one while you don't?'

'It is very simple. We come from a planet bacteriologically different from Earth, which, for us, is a veritable culture medium. Thus, in order to contact you, I was obliged to take this basic precaution. You, yourself, were a danger to me but you are no longer.'

'I don't follow you.'

'When you entered this cabin, the colour was too intense for you and I gave you the helmet you are now wearing, which was specially designed for you. Indeed, we were able to anticipate your reaction.

'During the very short time the cabin was yellow and then blue, eighty per cent of the dangerous bacteria in you was destroyed. Then perhaps you felt a coolness in the air, similar to when an air conditioner is working; this was another form of disinfection by ... let's call it radiation, although that is not the correct word - it cannot be translated into any Earth language. In this way, I have been disinfected one hundred per cent, but you still have enough bacteria to harm us considerably. I am going to give you these two pills, and in three hours you will be able to consider yourself as 'pure' as one of us.' As she spoke, she took a little box from beside her bunk, removed the pills and held them out to me, along with a test tube containing a liquid that I supposed to be water. I swallowed them both, lifting the base of my helmet to do so. Next ... well, everything happened very quickly and it was all very strange.

Thao took me in her arms, put me on the bunk and removed my mask. *I saw that happen from two or three metres from my body!*

I imagine that certain things in this book will seem incomprehensible to the unwarned reader, but I saw my body from a distance and I was able to move about in the room just by thought.

*Thao11*

Thao spoke. 'Michel, I know that you see me and hear me, but I am not able to see you myself, therefore I cannot look at you when I speak to you. Your Astral being has left your body. There is no danger in this - you needn't worry. I know that this is the first time this has happened to you, and there are people who panic...

'I have given you a special drug in order to cleanse your body of all bacteria that is dangerous to us. I have also given you another drug that has caused your Astral being to leave your body - this will last three hours, the time it will take to purify you. In this way, you will be able to visit our spacecraft, without danger of contamination to us and without wasting time.'

As strange as it seems, I found this quite natural - and I followed her. It was fascinating. She arrived in front of a panel that slid open to let us pass into one chamber after another. I was following at some distance and each time, *if* the panel had already closed by the time I reached it - I quite simply passed *through* it.

Finally, we reached a circular room, about 20 metres in diameter, in which there were at least a dozen 'astronauts' - all women and all about Thao's size. Thao approached a group of four who were seated in enormous, comfortable looking armchairs, arranged in a circle. When she sat down in a vacant seat, the four heads turned towards her questioningly. She almost seemed to take delight in making them wait: finally she spoke.

I was again charmed to hear that language - the assonance was quite new to me, and the intonations so harmonious that one would have thought they were singing. They all seemed to be greatly interested in Thao's report. I supposed they were speaking of me, believing correctly that I was the main purpose of their mission.

When Thao stopped, the questions streamed forth, and two other astronauts joined the group. The discussion swelled and developed a tone of increased excitement.

Not understanding a word of what was being said, and having noticed on entering three people positioned in front of screens displaying 3-dimensional images, more or less vividly coloured, I approached to discover that this must certainly be the control room of the spacecraft. Being invisible made it even much more interesting since each person was performing her duties without being disturbed, or even distracted, by my presence.

On a screen bigger than the rest, I was able to discern dots - some larger than others and some brighter, which moved steadily and without interruption in their prescribed directions,

several towards the left of the screen and others towards the right.

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Their speed increased as they grew on the screen and finally exited from it. Their colours were often brilliant and extraordinarily beautiful, ranging from subtle tones to a blinding yellow, like the light from our sun.

I soon realised that these were the planets and suns among which we were navigating, and I was absolutely fascinated by their silent progression across the screen. I can't say how long I had been watching them, when suddenly a strange sound filled the cabin - a sound which was soft and at the same time, insistent, and which was accompanied by many flashing lights.

The effect was immediate. The astronauts who had been talking with Thao, now approached the control post and each took a seat that seemed to be personally assigned to her. Everyone's eyes were fixed attentively on the screens.

Right in the middle of these large monitors, I began to distinguish an enormous mass that is difficult to describe. Let me say only that it was round in form and blue-grey in colour. It remained immobile in the centre of each screen.

In the room, all was silent. The general attention was focused on three astronauts in command of oblong-shaped pieces of equipment resembling in some ways, our computers.

Suddenly, covering a huge area of what I believed was a wall of the cabin I was stupefied to see an image of New York - no! That's Sydney, I said to myself, and yet the bridge is different ... was it even a bridge?

My surprise was such I had to ask Thao, at whose side I was standing. I had forgotten

however, that I was no longer *in my physical body* and no one could hear me. I was able to hear Thao and others commenting on what they were seeing but, not understanding their language, it didn't get me far. I was convinced though, that Thao had not lied to me and therefore we had well and truly left Earth behind. My mentor had explained we were travelling at several times the speed of light ... and I had seen Saturn pass by and later, what I took to be planets and suns - so had we come back, and why?

Thao spoke aloud and in French, which caused all heads to turn in her direction.

'Michel, we are stationed above the planet Aremo X3 which is almost twice the size of planet Earth, and as you can see on the screen, quite similar to your world.

'I can't explain at any length our current mission as I am required to participate in the operation, but I will do so later. To put you on the right track, I will tell you that our mission concerns atomic radiation such as you know on Earth'.

*Thao13*

Everyone seemed preoccupied: each knew exactly what to do and when to do it. We were stationary. The large panel projected an image of the centre of a town. The reader should understand that this large panel was in fact, no more than an immense television screen, projecting an image in relief so real, we could have been looking out the window of a tall building.

My attention turned to another smaller screen being monitored by two of my 'hostesses'. On this panel I could see our spacecraft, as I had already seen it in our parallel universe. As I watched, I was surprised to see, slightly below the middle of our vessel, a small sphere ejected, like an egg from a hen. Once outside, this sphere accelerated rapidly towards the planet below. As it disappeared from view, another sphere emerged in the same manner, and then a third. I noticed each sphere was being monitored on separate screens by different groups of astronauts.

The descent of the spheres could now be easily followed on the large panel. The distance should have made them invisible in quite a short time but they remained in sight and I deduced that the camera had to have an extraordinarily powerful 'zoom'. Indeed, the effect of the zoom was so strong that the first sphere disappeared from the right of the panel and the second from the left. We could now only see the middle one and followed its descent to the ground quite clearly. It stopped in the centre of an immense square, situated among apartment buildings. There it hovered, as though suspended several metres from the ground. The other spheres were monitored in the same detail. One was above a river that flowed through the town, and the other hovered above a hill, near the city.

Unexpectedly, the panel projected a new image. I could now distinctly see the doors of the apartment buildings, or rather, the doorways, for where doors should have been, were gaping openings.

I remember clearly that, until then, I had not realised how odd this town was...

*Nothing had moved...*