



THE PILGRIMAGE

1 According to the old calendar, today was Moriah's twelfth birthday. Excitement launched her out of bed before her alarm clock had a chance to buzz at her. Outside, the corridors of the *Hyperion 3* hummed with the golden warmth of dawn. In an hour the globes would switch to a bluer daylight setting. Moriah bounded through the fake dawn, counting each side passage as they blurred past. At the fourth she took a sharp left and gave the familiar whistle. Cassie had taught it to her. She called it a *birdcall*.

Right on command, Cassie appeared at her bedroom door, already washed and dressed. They shared a giggle before running off to the kitchens.

2 Moriah was one of the first children to be born aboard the starship, *Hyperion 3*. Her proud parents announced that she would receive an

amazing gift for her twelfth birthday — setting foot on the planet Earth. *Hyperion 3's* success would end three thousand years of exile, making Moriah one of the first humans to breathe real Earth air in living memory. The wondrous echo of that beautiful moment had lived in Moriah's dreams since her birth. Indeed, the siren call of Earth beckoned to all aboard *Hyperion 3*, filling their nights and days with visions of a world none had ever experienced.

3 Twenty years earlier, the *Hyperion 3* had fled from the Exile System — humanity's home for three millennia — and into the alien depths of hyperspace. Her passengers had come together from all walks of life, united by their same recurring dream: watching the sun rise on ancient Earth. The risks were immense and there was no doubt that they might be travelling towards their deaths. Hurtling faster than the speed of light, their vessel

was all that protected them on their pilgrimage across the galaxy.

4 While other children had been born aboard *Hyperion 3*, Moriah did not spend a lot of time with any of them, except for Cassie. Cassie was a year younger, and without a doubt, Moriah's best friend. Her parents were historians, and Cassie knew a lot about the ancient times on Earth. Every night, Moriah sat on the observation deck, fascinated by her friend's descriptions of forests, oceans and deserts. She even knew about the Last Days, the period before the Time of Exile. War after war had destroyed Earth's atmosphere, and the world was burning up. Other habitable planets, as close as twenty light years away, had been found and the last Earth-born humans launched themselves towards this Exile System. It was a journey that had taken them almost six hundred years. That had been the final time humans were in the Solar System — until last night, when *Hyperion 3* dropped out of hyperspace to reach its hallowed destination.

5 Following their clockwork routine, the girls fetched themselves a breakfast of algae, bean protein and glucose. Moriah was busy chewing through a brown, rubbery cube when she noticed the flashing red light. It blinked from the kitchen's information console, a silent shout announcing that something was wrong. Moriah's chin quivered. A second later, their spoons clattered to the table, forsaken by two pairs of running feet.

6 The observation deck was the highest point of *Hyperion 3*, and all pilgrims were taught to gather here in case of an emergency. Already it was crowded with parents whispering words of reassurance into their children's ears. Moriah caught sight of her mother and father, their faces blooming into relief as soon as they locked eyes on her. The trio held together tightly as Moriah's mother spoke.

7 Switching from hyperspace to normal space was a very dangerous process. It needed numerous complex calculations for it to work. One set of those calculations had been incorrect. Last night, while Moriah and most of the passengers slept, *Hyperion 3* smashed straight through the tail of a passing comet. Disaster had struck in the blink of an eye, so sudden that no one was disturbed by the slight shudder it caused. Frozen stardust had perforated the ship's outer hull, damaging the main engine and its life support systems.

"The journey from here to Earth was only going to take a few more hours ... but now, with the engine damaged — "Moriah's mother was almost sobbing " — it'll take five years."

8 Five years. That was more than a third of her life and, while twelve had been fine in the rushing blur of hyperspace, five years of slow drifting bordered on cruelty. Still, on the other hand, it was not five hundred years, or even five thousand; patience was a deeply bred virtue amongst her people.

"There's something else, sweetheart." It was her father speaking now, his voice trembling as he did so. "We can no longer regenerate oxygen. We ... there's not enough oxygen to keep us all alive for longer than a year."

9 An airlock opened inside Moriah's mind, flooding her thoughts with a sharp wailing. The *Hyperion 3* was doomed, a floating coffin and, worst of all, it was happening on her twelfth birthday. Overwhelmed, Moriah dropped into her father's arms, blackness covering her with its blanket.

10 When Moriah awoke, it was as if no time had passed — her parents were still by her side, their faces still grave. Her mother held her hand tightly. They explained to her that a decision had been made while she was unconscious. Moriah's parents used sacred words, such as dream and

pilgrim, as they spoke, telling her that she had to make a decision that would involve the entire fate of *Hyperion 3*.

11 "Darling, we've filled the escape ship with as much fuel as we can," her father explained. "Its engines are fine, so it will take you to Earth in a matter of hours."

Moriah saw that painful look in her parents' eyes. Not everyone would be travelling on board.

"We're only sending children. It's vital that you all survive to walk on Earth. But," as he spoke, Moriah's father looked to her mother, biting his lower lip for a second, "we want you to choose. No one will force you to leave."

12 The dream or her family. Two words had never felt heavier on a child's shoulders, and here they were, pressing down upon Moriah. She closed her eyes tight, her mind conjuring up images of Earth's

sun and the cities of Cassie's late night stories. In each vision she saw her parents: alive, happy and holding her. At no point though, did she see an image of herself dying aboard the *Hyperion 3*. Moriah opened her eyes, took a deep breath and made her decision.

13 In the hours after its departure, the children aboard the escape ship christened it *The Dream*. Their parents gone, floating behind in the heavens, Earth dreams were all the children had to guide them now. Moriah and Cassie huddled together, shivering in silent companionship. In her mind, all Moriah could hear was the thundering of three words; the last she would ever hear from her parents, branded in blazing memory across the landscape of her mind.

"Happy birthday, darling."

Questions

- Cassie lived
 - in the same corridor as Moriah.
 - down the fourth side passage from Moriah's room.
 - on the observation deck.
- Who had dreams about Earth?
 - just Moriah
 - Cassie and Moriah
 - everyone on board *Hyperion 3*
- What had destroyed Earth's atmosphere?
 - war
 - the Exile System
 - the Last Days
- How long would it take to reach Earth after the comet accident?
 - five thousand years
 - five hundred years
 - five years
- What two words weighed heavily on Moriah's shoulders?
 - family and pilgrimage
 - dream and family
 - Earth and Exile
- What convinced Moriah to leave her parents?
 - She couldn't imagine dying on *Hyperion 3*, but she could imagine being on Earth.
 - She could never imagine leaving Cassie, but she could imagine leaving her parents.
 - She had dreamt about Earth all her life, and didn't care about leaving her parents behind.

Vocabulary

Find words in the text that match the meanings below. The word is in the section shown in brackets.

- Something that is well known (1)
- Called upon or summoned (2)
- A journey to a sacred place (3)
- Regarded as holy or sacred (4)
- A piercing or high-pitched sound (9)

Grammar

A **suffix** is a letter or letters added to the end of a word to change its meaning. E.g. *care/careless*. Add a suffix from the box to make words from the text.

th ed n ment

- excite
- warm
- appear
- take

Back To The Text...

- Moriah's parents were historians.
 - true
 - false
- Other habitable planets had been found.
 - true
 - false
- In which part of the library would you find this text?
 - astronomy
 - science fiction

Sequencing

Look back through the card to find what happened first. Choose **a** or **b**.

- The girls raced to the observation deck.
 - The girls raced to the kitchen.
- Cassie taught Moriah a birdcall.
 - Moriah saw the flashing red light.
- Moriah's mother held her hand.
 - Moriah fainted into her father's arms.

Think About This

- How do we know that the adults didn't want to alarm the children after the ship had hit the comet?
 - They lied to them about the severity of the problem.
 - They let them sleep on into the 'morning'.
 - They pretended that they hadn't hit a comet.
- Why do you think the rest of the people remained in the Exile System?
 - There wasn't enough room on board to fit them.
 - They knew the calculations were wrong.
 - They didn't share the same dream.

Challenge Option

Research: List 5 famous science fiction movies, books or TV series about space travel.

