

MYLON SINCLAIR:

Space Cowboy

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This book is dedicated to my wife, Carol, for all her years of loving patience with me. 😊 XOXO!

Mylon Sinclair: Space Cowboy

I

It all started early one morning. As if it were part of the routine, Mylon Sinclair was his usual cranky self.

He was an early riser - a habit of spending a lifetime in Naval Service. He was also used to being at the ready on the flight line in a moment's notice. The problem was he wasn't the nicest person at that hour.

This morning wasn't going to be any different. He had had a bad dream which woke him suddenly with numb hands. He had dreamt he couldn't move. He was being abducted by white slavers and sold to a sleazy South American: a filthy rich, power hungry, corrupt official. He remembered his hands had gone numb from the tightness of the duct tape securing them. He also realized that in order to be sold into white slavery, he had to be a woman.

It scared the sweat out of him that his abductors had mistakenly taken him - thinking he was a woman! He shivered, which was what awoke him suddenly.

Getting up and sitting on the edge of the bed, he had been sleeping with his hands underneath him - thus the restricted blood flow that caused the numbness. He rubbed his hands together as he sat for a moment to allow the blood to flow back into them. The tingling feeling of numbness was as close to pain as it was to pleasure.

Still, he didn't like the thought of not being in control of his motor functions - even in his dreams.

Looking at the clock, it read 4:13 a.m.; too early to be up, too late to go back to bed. He decided he was thirsty.

Slowly making his way to the kitchen, he poured himself a glass of ice water from the refrigerator dispenser.

Sitting at the kitchen table, his hands felt as if they were beginning to come back to life.

As he took a drink, his son Jason, eight years old, appeared from the dark of the house.

He was a tall, thin, gangling looking youth - showing signs of confusion over his ever growing body.

"Dad, can I have a drink?" he asked.

"Sure," Mylon replied, thinking his son would go to the cabinet, get a glass and pour a drink the same way he had. But to Mylon's surprise, Jason took his water glass and drank himself a big drink. Mylon said nothing as he watched his son have a satisfying gulp. Then, the boy leaned into Mylon and sighed deeply.

"Thanks, Dad."

"No problem, son," Mylon said as he put his arm around his son's shoulders and their heads touched in a form of a hug with as much fatherly affection as Mylon could muster.

Affection wasn't something that he could reveal easily. His dad hadn't been that affectionate toward him. And with the macho attitudes of his fellow naval pilot officers, he had grown accustomed to acting hardened and firm. Showing emotion was still considered soft. And Mylon felt that this ingrown attitude about father-son relations distanced him even further from his son emotionally.

He began thinking of all that he was missing. Here in his arms was the very baby boy he had held just after Jason's birth. He regretted missing the actual delivery, but *things* happened. That's what he told himself then. He knew the baby was due but he was told that his duty to God, Country and the Navy was more important than his personal life.

That's what his superiors had reiterated over and

over. So, that's what Mylon told himself.

He regretted missing that special day. He probably never would forgive himself.

Looking into the bottom of the near empty glass, he told Jason they needed to get back to bed. Mylon had a very important day at the office today.

And with his looming retirement, he didn't want to miss a beat. The military had a funny way of disciplining potential retirees. It was their way of getting out of paying them their due retirement.

* * *

The alarm rang as it usually did. But Mylon still wasn't ready for it as the electric buzz set for 6 a.m. came early.

Shutting it off and climbing out of bed, Mylon moved his aching 40 year-old body to the bathroom. As he climbed into the shower, he spoke to it.

"Mylon. Warm. Full."

The shower head came alive as water rushed out, spraying Mylon, who reacted to the first cold rush.

"Ah! Warmer! Warmer!" The water started steaming. Mylon relaxed. "Damn shower."

* * *

Emily and Jason were eating breakfast when the Com-Link rang. Emily, Mylon's long loving wife answered it.

"Hello? Sure. I'll tell him." She called to Mylon, "Honey, it's for you!"

Mylon, in his Navy aviator jumpsuit uniform,

picked up his Com-Link extension.

"Captain Sinclair." He listened intently to the other voice for a moment through his ear piece.

"Tell Admiral Panzi, I'll be there." He hung up.

"Alright!" Mylon exclaimed as he gave a fist pump.

Entering the kitchen, Mylon was excited.

"Honey! You are not going to believe this! I got it!"

"Got what?"

"The Alcubierre Warp Drive Metric Test flight!"

Emily was unsure how to react. She was, but wasn't, prepared for this.

"I thought Captain Wilson was going to pilot that?"

"He came down with food poisoning yesterday. They scratched him. I have to meet Panzi this morning for a briefing."

"But isn't that flight supposed to last a month?"

"Yeah. So?"

"What about your retirement?"

"Who wants to retire now?" Mylon replied excitedly, before realizing by Emily's facial expression that she was disappointed.

"Oh, Emily. This is just what I need. Now, I can retire with something great under my belt." He went to her and took her in his arms.

"Don't you see? This is the opportunity of a life time: the first manned Alcubierre Warp Drive Metric Test Flight. I'll be known forever as the pilot of that flight and they'll never be able to take that away from me."

"But it changes our plans. I..." she stopped, looked at Jason, and then took Mylon aside.

In a lower voice, "There are things we were count-

ing on that now, with you gone for at least a month - God knows... it's going to be difficult."

"I know. I'm sorry. But I really want this."

Mylon looked at the clock, it read 06:30. "I have to go. We'll talk when I get home."

Mylon grabbed his gear and went to Jason.

"Son, we'll talk when I get home. Okay?"

"Okay, Dad," Jason responded sadly.

Mylon gave Jason a kiss on the head, went to Emily and gave her a quick peck on the lips, then left quickly.

Emily was not at all happy.

"It's all right, Mom," Jason spoke up, "I'd really like to see Dad be the first to pilot a ship at warp speed."

"So would I, Hun," she sighed.

* * *

Mylon entered a pedestrian Gate to the NASA complex where a Military Police Officer was at a security post. The MP looked up at Mylon.

"Admiral Panzi, please," said Mylon.

The MP touched his com-link ear piece.

The Admiral, a rough old-timer with a lot of chest medal ribbons, was on his com-link.

"Tell Captain Sinclair I want to see him immediately." He hit the button disconnecting the link. "This keeps the test flight on schedule."

"I just hope he's fit for it," said Dr. Ashton Barry, a civilian doctor, dressed in a tweed jacket with mismatched slacks.

* * *

Mylon rode in the shuttle cart which drove along by itself.

"You sure you know where you're going?" Mylon asked the cart.

"Affirmative," responded the vehicle.

"How about stepping on it?"

"I cannot step. I am a vehicular device only capable of rolling on wheels," droned the cart's speaker.

Mylon smirked at its explanation. "Can't you go any faster?"

"I am designed to travel at the pre-set speed limit designated for this zone. The speed limit is 15 miles per hour."

"I can run faster than that."

"I cannot run. I am a vehicular device...."

"Okay! Yacky, yack!" Mylon interrupted the machine as he tried to enjoy the ride.

He couldn't believe that he was about to command and pilot the first manned flight that engulfs a ship in a warp field and instantly sends the ship to a preset point in space. This type of travel made light speed antiquated.

And he was currently reduced to being dependant on a robot travelling at 15 mph. He felt it was ironic.

* * *

Finally, he arrived at Base Operations, the cart chirped, "Base Operations. Have a nice day." Mylon climbed out of the Shuttle cart.

"Remind me not to tip you," Mylon said sarcastically to the cart as it continued along its pre-set route.

Mylon entered the building where inside he found

another security check point with another Military Police Officer manning it. To one side, several Warder Robots were standing by at the ready.

The Warder Robots appeared to be disengaged.

Mylon was wary of man's ever growing reliance on machines to supplement human abilities.

"Sir, your ID please," the MP said as he indicated to the device on the counter top.

Mylon held out his right arm under the scanner device. The MP operated a computer and it scanned the area on the back of Mylon's wrist.

"I'm here to see Admiral Panzi," Mylon said as the scan was quickly completed and approved.

"The Admiral is expecting you, sir. Alfa will escort you." Turning to the group of Warder Robots, the Military Police officer called out, "Alfa!"

"Alfa, reporting for duty," responded one of the machines as it perked up and chirped to life as it began to hover about a foot off the ground. It sputtered slightly, tilting one way, then the other, but regained its balance.

Mylon was uneasy.

"Can I just go by myself? I know the way," Mylon asked.

"Sorry, sir, regulations," replied the MP, who turned toward the assembled Warder Robots.

The MP commanded, "Alfa! Take Captain Sinclair to Admiral Panzi's office, pronto."

"Yes, sir," stated the robot in its computer simulated voice. "This way, sir," it addressed Mylon. It began to leave without Mylon, and then stopped, waiting for him.

Mylon followed cautiously.

As a kid, he remembered the first time he learned

about the Warder Robots. They were designed to ensure humans obeyed proper procedures.

And trying to get away with anything not covered by regulations was risky. The Warder Robots were always watching and recording you. They never left their post; nor could they be bribed to look the other way.

The half a meter tall Warders were the latest in stealth technology.

They were designed to replace unreliable Human Guards. They could function longer, better, and with more consistency - even with squeaking gears whirling inside of them.

Not only could they travel across a variety of terrain, they could go up or down stairs, open and close doors, and "secure" individuals in need of restraint. And, they were harder to avoid than the human guards; and didn't require breaks or down time - except for regular maintenance or a re-charge of their power cells.

They always maintained a vigil over their charges, never letting anything escape their detection. It was as if George Orwell's Big Brother had finally arrived - for good - in the 23rd century.

* * *

The two reached the Admiral's office.

"We have arrived at Admiral Panzi's office. Please enter," the Warder requested.

Mylon hesitated to see if the Warder would react to his stall. It just stood its ground and waited patiently.

Mylon stood a second longer...

"Come in, Sinclair," rang the Admiral's voice from within. "We haven't got all day."

Mylon entered the office and the door automatically closed behind him. His first impression was that he was trapped.

Behind the conference table sat Dr. Ashton Barry, a.k.a. "The Shrink." Admiral Woody Panzi was standing behind the Doc. He was all spit and polish in his flight jump suit. Mylon tried to recall the last time the Admiral was in a cockpit.

But he tossed that thought aside when the Admiral continued speaking.

"Nice to see you again, Captain," the Admiral said, "Let's get this meeting over with."

Mylon suddenly remembered it was proper military etiquette to salute a senior officer.

"Mylon Sinclair, reporting, sir," Mylon said as he snapped a salute. The Admiral returned it as he commanded Mylon, "Have a seat."

Mylon noticed the single chair on the long side of the conference table opposite the Doc and the Admiral.

"We have a very short time frame, Captain," said the Doc. "The Admiral would like to keep this meeting on schedule."

Mylon moved to and sat down in the chair. All three eyed each other as Mylon got the feeling this was going to be a rough session.

"The Admiral's been inquiring about your readiness," the Doc began, adding, "I have to be honest. With you missing a lot of the pre-flight training, I don't think you're ready to command a flight of this magnitude. Besides, there are a lot of indiscretions in your file which I feel are too serious for you to be considered for this task."

Mylon held his breath, letting it out slowly as the Admiral just stood and looked at him blankly. Mylon had

always wished he could read others thoughts in tense situations. In the cockpit of a fighter jet, his training had evolved him to the point where he could nearly predict an enemy's next move - or panic. Only recently with the decision of his impending retirement did he begin to flinch. It agitated him.

"What's your feeling on that?" the Doc asked matter-of-factly.

Mylon looked at Dr. Barry. "That depends on what you mean by ready, sir?"

The Doc thought for a moment. Then, replied, "I don't think you're ready to accept the responsibility of commanding this flight. Even now, you're showing me signs of unwarranted indecision."

"I don't know what you want me to say, Doc. I'm a pilot - a damn good fighter pilot. I don't play political games. Do you, Admiral?"

Admiral Woody "the Wanzi" Panzi eyed Mylon for just a second before he sat down in the chair next to the Shrink. The Admiral was a cool cucumber when it came to tense situations.

Often in the heat of battle, Panzi had applied military tricks that were not in the military regulations, which in turn brought enemy aggression to a halt.

Many battles were won because of his battle time scheming. Mylon hadn't lost any respect for the leader - even if his nickname was earned from his political posturing. Mylon sort of felt sorry for the Admiral.

Here's one of the great warriors, he thought, having to ride the bench as an "assistant coach." It did not make sense to him.

"What I want to hear, Sinclair, is that you're up to taking on this delicate task," the Admiral replied. "Be-

cause, if you're not, there are several others in the wings," his voice trailed off.

Mylon knew he had to prove Admiral Panzi correct in his decision to allow him to command this monumental experiment. Mylon had been through all the testing with the "others" being considered, too. He passed every test except one: the Political Connection Test.

But the decision to select Captain Wilson was a result of his relation to a Senator. It was the reason he received the nod in the first place.

However, with this untimely illness, Mylon was right for the job. And it all came down to proving he was the right choice, right here, right now, in front of the Admiral. The good old Doc was only window dressing.

"Admiral," Mylon began, "as a Naval Officer, I feel the obligation to the Navy, and to NASA's Space Exploration effort as a team endeavour. I've proven myself physically, mentally and you know my war record. You've seen me in action. You know what I can do when under fire. Besides, I've seen you take matters into your own hands when it was necessary and things worked out."

The Admiral glared at him with eyes of steel.

Mylon felt as if they were stabbing him. He noticed a slightly yellowish glint reflecting light in the pupils of the admiral's eyes that seemed to be stabbing into him like lasers penetrating his soul. He didn't like the feeling he just got. But the yellowish glint seemed to come and fade quickly.

Mylon knew he had taken a long shot. He felt that the worst that could happen would be that he would continue his retirement process.

He thought how boring it was going to be to just fade away from what he felt was a good career.

"The difference between me and you, Sinclair," the Admiral suddenly said, "...is that I'm an Admiral - one step from the Commander and Chief herself. I *can* take matters into my own hands and change orders as I see fit -- for the good of the mission."

What a double standard, thought Mylon. He was beginning to hate this whole military process.

"Doc, would you allow us a moment - alone?" the Admiral ordered more than asked.

Taken aback - but knowing better than to question the Admiral - the Shrink stood up to leave.

"Of course, Admiral, but I'll need to continue my examination..."

"After the Captain and I have finished our discussion," the Admiral cut him off.

The Doc hesitated as if he was going to respond, then quickly and quietly left the room.

Admiral Panzi stood and went to a Reprocessor, a food re-creation mechanism on an adjacent wall. Mylon had vast experience with them. He had also tasted the food: 'Yuck,' in the words of his young son, Jason.

"Coffee?" he asked Mylon.

"I hear it's lousy, sir."

The Admiral looked at him, "I was told it's been improved."

"Okay, black," he replied, trying to be diplomatic, "with two sugars," Mylon added.

The Admiral punched a few buttons, directing the Reprocessor into action and a few seconds later, retrieved two cups of coffee and brought them to the table.

As they sipped, Mylon broke the silence, "Not bad. It is better than the last time."

"It's still needs work, though," the Admiral added.

Mylon placed his cup on the table in front of him.

"I appreciate the nod to command this mission, Admiral, but why is the time frame so important?"

The Admiral didn't answer at first. He just stirred his coffee and glared at Mylon - not really in anger or in frustration at his question - he was measuring him.

"As you know, Earth's resources have been depleting, rapidly, over the years. It's now up to NASA to find replacement minerals, not only on other planets within our own solar system, but we're interested in seeing what else is out there beyond it. That's why we're going to the Horse Head Nebula. Our scientists believe that exploring the nebula is the best way to get an up close look at how stars are formed. And, it's positioned properly for a future Space Station - which could be a relay point for further deep space explorations - if NASA and the Federal Government feel it's worth the cost - no matter what the consequences or risks."

The Admiral reached for the console behind him and pushed a button on a panel.

A hologram of the Orion star system appeared above the conference table in between them. Mylon looked up to study it.

"As you can see, the Horse Head Nebula is situated along an orbital belt. This will give us access to other further deep space systems like these." The Admiral pointed to several star systems using a pen light he took from his jumpsuit pocket to direct Mylon's attention to an orbital rotation of various stars which appeared in the spinning hologram.

"The Horse Head Nebula is located just to the south of the star Alnitak - which is the furthest starboard on Orion's Belt. It is approximately 1,500 light years from

Earth. By heading to this Nebula, you'll arrive approximately...here," the Admiral pointed with his pen light to a site near a cluster.

"While there, your crew will deploy monitoring devices throughout the nebula," the Admiral pointed to the cluster.

"Wow. Travelling 1,500 light years in an instant," Mylon said.

"It's actually 1,481.4 light years away," the Admiral corrected him.

"And the Alcubierre Drive will allow us to almost instantaneously get to the Nebula; then, when the monitoring devices are placed, it should get us back almost instantaneously? Is that right?"

"That's correct. The mission could be shortened depending on the deployment strategy of the monitors, Mylon," the Admiral responded.

Mylon was excited and concerned at the same time.

NASA had established travel at light speed several decades earlier.

But the scientist's knew even before that, that travelling through space at light speed was a wasted effort. And since the Alcubierre Drive Metric warp theory had since been proved feasible, travelling to a distant galaxy was instantaneous.

"When Doctors Ema and Catherine Shon proved Miguel Alcubierre's theory, that convinced us to go full ahead on developing the ADM concept," the Admiral revealed.

"Apparently, Catherine was able to answer the question of how to warp the space between two points which the Alcubierre theory said was necessary in order to

work," the Admiral revealed.

Mylon was astonished. "It's amazing how far human technology has come: to be able to warp the fabric of space?"

"For about a year now," the Admiral replied as if answering the unasked question, "we've been sending probes out using the ADM system. Then, finally, two of the last three drones proved to be successful enough to warrant a test run with humans onboard.

But that's not what I need from you," the Admiral continued, "in order for this to be successful; I need someone in that cockpit who's strong enough to command and to stick to the mission parameters. Especially since the two sister scientists who invented the ADM engine insist on going along."

"That's unusual." Mylon said.

"It's so they will be able to monitor the effects on the engine, the crew, and the ship from inside the created warp bubble," the Admiral explained.

"They consider the ADM engine to be their baby. And, first hand results from the actual flight can be compared to the drone flights. They just want to make sure it goes off without a hitch."

"The inventing scientists usually don't go on missions like this. It's too risky. What if something goes wrong? Did they lose a couple of drones?"

The Admiral quickly changed the subject.

"Ema Shon, the lead scientist, is a bright woman but very head strong," the Admiral said.

"I have also assigned them the task of setting up the mineral detection monitors and running other required tests while inside of the Nebula. Ema didn't want to do it, but it was a condition of their travel."

Mylon sipped his coffee, which was getting cold.

He didn't like the idea of going into space under the watchful eyes of civilians - especially scientists. They tended to muck things up.

But, it was becoming apparent that NASA was under the control of political bureaucrats anyway.

Mylon was deep in thought as he looked Admiral Panzi straight in the eye. "Who else is on the crew?" he asked.

"Lieutenant Commander James 'Jimma' Ward. He's your co-pilot and navigator. You run into trouble, Jimma will help you out. He is also a whiz at computers and all that analytical navigating stuff."

"I know him," Mylon replied. "He's a good man. It is to the mission's benefit he never made it as a fighter pilot."

"I was blessed he never made it. He's one of the top naval navigators and tacticians. He was instrumental in some of my decisions in the war with China."

Mylon wasn't aware of that. The Admiral stood up. "You'd better go get caught up on the mission. You have to be at Cape Canaveral for launch to Space Station 1 at 04:00 hours tomorrow morning," the Admiral said.

"Oh, be sure to give Emily and Jason my best."

Mylon realized he was being dismissed. He stood up and saluted.

"Thank you, sir. I won't let you down," Mylon said.

Admiral Panzi gave a wave salute in return. Mylon then left.

Mylon exited from the Admiral's office. The Doc was lingering with the Warder Robot. Noticing Mylon, "Captain, we need to finish..." the Doc said.

"We are all done, Doc," the Admiral barked from inside his office. "Come in here."

The Doc, slightly confused, entered the office.

"Don't you ever get bored?" Mylon asked Alfa.

"My programming does not allow for such inactivity," the Warder Robot droned.

"Let's get out of here," Mylon instructed as he headed back for the security point.

The Warder, almost caught off guard, followed him.

* * *

Mylon entered his house through the kitchen door with a rush of excitement running through his veins.

Emily was in the kitchen and had already decided that dinner was going to be at the Harvest Restaurant.

Jason was growing fast and his appetite was getting bigger every day. So an all you can eat restaurant was a bargain.

"So?" Emily asked.

"You wouldn't believe it. But I'm officially the captain and pilot of the ADM test flight."

Emily approached him and hugged him.

"Congratulations," was Emily's terse response. "I hope it's what you want."

"It is. And 30 days will be over before you know it."

"I know," she said, responding as if she'd been through this all before. "Now, go and explain that to your son."

She let Mylon go from her hug.

Mylon knew Jason would understand. But Jason was really looking forward to Mylon coaching his baseball team. Even Mylon was looking forward to it. But he wasn't looking forward to telling him coaching was going to be delayed. He wasn't into telling him that at all.

As he entered Jason's room, Mylon found his son playing a computer game.

"Hey, guy!" Mylon addressed Jason.

"Hi, Dad," Jason droned. "Are you going into space again?"

"Yes," Mylon bravely admitted, adding, "But it's only for thirty days."

"Why can't it wait until after baseball?"

"Because the window of opportunity would delay...," Mylon realized he was talking over his son's head.

Mylon sat next to Jason on the bed.

"The system that we're heading for is in the right position, right now. If we delay, we'd have to wait until next year. And we'd be right back in baseball season again. If we go now, next year I'll be retired and we'll be able to spend more time together. Isn't that what we planned?"

"I suppose," Jason replied sorrowfully.

"Hey! This will be it for me. After this, I'm through. The Admiral and I hashed it all out. He needs me because I'm the best. Thirty days will go by in a flick of an eye. Just wait. And, I'll be back in time for the second half of the season. Just you wait and see. Okay?"

"I suppose," Jason said, more enthusiastically. Mylon gave Jason a hug.

"I'll be back, son. Nothing's going to stop me, okay?"

"Okay."