

The Eternity

A short story

By

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As Regis Taylor stood at the eastern end of the huge Barnaby Space Dock that was in high orbit around planet Earth he could not help but feel deeply impressed by the magnificent sight that sprawled out in front of his eyes.

Stretching out majestically before him and the hundreds of impressed onlookers sat the gigantic spaceship that had become his life's work. Spanning almost the full length of Barnaby Space Dock the six-kilometre ship was the largest vehicle so far conceived by human endeavour, it was also a one-off and a privately-owned craft.

While it was true he had seen this very view on numerous occasions during the construction this was the first time his enormous space ship was visible as a fully fitted, equipped and ready for launch vehicle. Now at last with all of the construction gantries removed the gigantic craft was fully visible in all of its true glory. As he looked out of the viewing platform at the construction and the view of planet Earth beyond he could not help but feel in awe of his creation

The Eternity, as he had christened it, was a single purpose starship that would very soon begin its maiden and only voyage. The ship was essentially a large cigar-shaped vehicle with a small, almost hidden living capsule situated at the centre of the topside of the vehicle.

Within the capsule, there was room for one person and no more, the remaining areas of the ship were made up of the huge drive engines, fuel, supplies and automation systems for life support and repairs during the forthcoming voyage.

Regis had once been a very rich man due to his business skills and his insatiable desire to succeed at everything he undertook. Just four years previous he had been listed as the solar systems third-richest person but now he was down to his last few million credits. His vast wealth had been spent on the design and construction of Eternity but he did not regret a single cent, this was his life's ambition and tomorrow he would finally set sail and head out into the unknown and whatever destiny awaited him.

With a smile Regis turned to his long-time assistant and held out his hand.

Samantha had worked with Regis for just under twenty years. It was the only life she had known and it was with more than a little sadness she took his hand and shook it gently.

"Everything left in the bank is for you Sammy, I no longer need it"

Tears appeared in Samantha's eyes, she had loved Regis for many years and she had always hoped that one day they would become a couple, settle down and raise a family.

When Regis had finally confided in her about his planned space flight she knew her dream would never be fulfilled. That had been five years ago, but as they stood together looking out at the Eternity finally the full reality now hit in.

"I wish I could come with you," she sobbed gently

Regis shook his head.

"You are still a young, beautiful woman," He replied "where I am going is no place for you. I want you to find a good man, settle down and raise a family, okay?"

"I have found a good man, you"

Regis blushed slightly, he had known of her feelings for many years now but he was a middle aged seventy-year-old man and she was a forty-two-year-old woman, still a young woman in the year thirty forty-two.

"I have always been fond of you, you know that," He responded with a smile "but you also know my life has been building up to this moment in time and tomorrows launch"

Samantha looked down at the marble floor sadly and then out of the huge window. In front of her stood the Eternity and beyond that the planet Earth and its single moon. It was a truly impressive sight but it did little to temper her sadness.

Also docked at the spaceport within close vicinity was a further dozen space ships of various sizes and shapes. Impressive and advanced they may have been but they were all dwarfed by the Eternity. At this point in humanities evolution, the milky way galaxy had

been explored and over one hundred planets had been colonised and still the desire to learn, explore and understand more continued at a fast pace. Not only that but the human race had also ventured out into the neighbouring galaxies, therefore the journey Regis had planned was in his mind, the next logical step in humanities desire to explore, learn and evolve.

Regis was no different in this respect and tomorrow his very own journey into the unknown would begin, but first there was this evening and dinner.

“Please join me for one last meal,” He said while taking Samantha’s hand.

Samantha smiled and nodded, if she could not keep the man she loved so very much then one final dinner date would have to do.

The following morning found Regis sitting in his ships only chair on the small but well-equipped flight deck.

Slowly but surely he was stepping through a very long checklist with the ship's computer. It was a list that had been checked and re-checked countless times over the past year and for good reason. Regis did not know how long his journey would take and how long he would be in suspended animation but his shortest prediction had been a staggering two thousand years while the longest was four million years.

With such staggering time scales to consider every piece of equipment on the Eternity had been built to the very highest standard and everything had been fitted with quadruple redundancy. He understood that things would eventually break down and the self-repair units simply had to be the best available.

Regis also accepted that his chances of completing his voyage were at best fifty-fifty. He had been told this on numerous occasions by friends and colleagues but still he persevered, this was his dream and his destiny. Two possibilities awaited him. One was the truth the other was oblivion, only time would tell which would await him.

Finally with all system checks complete he powered up the gigantic ship's manoeuvring engines and released the docking clamps.

“Barnaby space dock,” He then said over the ship to shore intercom “this is Eternity setting sail, so long and thanks”

“Eternity, this is Barnaby, good luck buddy and remember to wave”

Regis turned to look out of his starboard viewport towards the space dock viewing gantries, he was shocked to see thousands of well-wishers waving and cheering him on his way.

Stunned and very touched by the send-off Regis simply stood and waved back as the autopilot guided his ship out of the dock and into free space. Once clear of the dock the ship changed course and slowly picked up speed as they sped away from the planet Earth.

Regis watched as the beautiful planet quickly receded from his view and within a matter of minutes they were clearing the orbit of Neptune.

“So long,” he said quietly with a hint of sadness. Regis knew that he would never return to this part of the universe and a lump appeared in his throat. For a brief instant, there was doubt and hesitation but he soon recovered and brushed them away.

Five minutes later and the Eternity was in interstellar space and still accelerating fast towards the edge of the galaxy.

“All checks complete,” Announced the computer “you may enter the sleep chamber when you are ready”

“Thanks” Replied Regis as he looked at the cryogenic chamber. It was a large coffin-shaped device that would be his place of rest for thousands of years.

The chamber was the most advanced ever designed or built and for good reason. Even the slightest fault while Regis was in cryogenic sleep would almost certainly result in his death, as a result no expense had been spared with its design or build.

“Nothing else left to do” He muttered to himself while removing his clothing.

Once naked Regis slid into his complex cryogenic suit and then checked all of the connections. The suit was nearly as complex as the chamber. It was designed to keep him clean, fed and healthy for a very long time.

Eventually, as he sped out of the milky-way galaxy, Regis decided that every function was working as required and it was time to sleep.

He carefully stepped into the chamber and closed the lid.

“Goodnight computer, wake me with a coffee and biscuits when the time is right please”

Seconds later Regis was asleep and the Eternity continued to accelerate as it chased the edge of creation itself.

And so the aeons passed.

Regis opened his eyes and glanced to the monitor that was positioned in front of his prone position. The journey appeared to be complete and he had survived.

A feeling of both elation and trepidation swept over him as he pressed a button which opened the lid of his cryogenic chamber. Was he truly there? Was he actually about to discover the ultimate secret? From his perspective he had only just fallen asleep, so how long had passed?

First, he considered his welfare.

Was he hungry or thirsty? No.

Did his body ache or did he feel weak? No.

Could he sit up with little effort? Yes.

Next a question he had to ask.

“Computer, in Earth years how long have I been asleep?”

“One million, four hundred and twenty thousand and sixty-four years”

“Wow,” muttered Regis “that is one hell of a long time”

Then he noticed the critical readouts of the main console. Seventy-four per cent of the ship's systems had failed but thanks to the high level of redundancy built into the ship all critical systems were still operating and as a consequence, he was still alive. One thing was certain though, there was no going home, the ship would not survive another million years.

He also knew that in all probability there would be nothing left to go home for. If humanity had survived it would certainly have evolved into something very different to what Regis was.

“So,” he continued “where am I?”

“This is the destination you asked for” Responded the computer.

“Please show me”

The console switched to external view and Regis found himself staring at the very edge of the universe itself.

He stared at the image and then at the sensor readings for the local area.

“That has to be wrong, that is just not possible. Computer please re-check and confirm this data”

“The data is correct” Responded the computer almost immediately.

Meanwhile, Garras stared angrily at the computer readout and then back to the sphere that was suspended on her workbench.

It was a large, deluxe version of the universe globe which had been introduced just over seven years previous.

Being the most expensive model within her company's product range just under one hundred had been sold and this was the first to show any indication of being faulty.

Garras was not impressed by the returned item, she had created this particular model to last for twenty-five years and in her mind the design had been perfect.

Yet here it was for all to see, a faulty unit.

Angrily she re-checked the computer readouts but there was no doubt, something had gone badly wrong. The globe was useless and would need to be replaced, the question in her mind was, what was the root cause?

Carefully Garras re-checked the readouts and then turned her most powerful microscope to the origin of the fault within the globe.

At a magnification level of one million, she could see nothing wrong.

She got the same reason at ten million and then one hundred million.

Feeling frustrated Garras muttered under her breath and then tried one more time. With the magnification now set at one thousand million she could just make out a minute object floating at the very edge of the sphere.

“Got you” she muttered.

While the image was very small it was just enough to fix a marker and this she did. Next, she typed in the commands which would remove the object and send it to the nearest suitable location.

She allowed the computer to select the transfer destination, while Garras could sense the object was very large she could not yet visualise the actual size, this would soon change.

Regis had by now double-checked every computer record available to him and now the truth was clear. He was completely stunned by the reality that beheld him and what it meant to him, humankind and every other race that had or still existed in the universe.

“So this is it,” he muttered with a dejected tone “this is the meaning of life, the entire universe held in a very large but simple..”

At that very moment his universe was engulfed in blinding white light and the feeling of nausea. Unable to see, stand or breathe Regis fell into blackness as his universe evaporated around him.

Garras watched the huge spacecraft appear on her largest video screen. The location of the materialisation was a nearby valley, it was the closest open space that could accommodate the Eternity and even then over one hundred trees were crushed in the process.

“Wow,” she exclaimed “one of my creations built that, I certainly do need to change some programs they are getting far too clever”

Then she noticed from the readouts that there was one living being aboard the huge spacecraft. A flush of anger swept through her as Garras realised she could meet one of the creatures that had ruined her perfect universe and damaged her reputation.

“Computer,” she demanded “transport that creature to me now”

Almost instantly a dazed and confused Regis appeared in the office and fell to the floor in shock.

Garras looked down in disgust at the prone figure.

“What are you?” she growled.

Shocked by the voice Regis looked up to see himself face to face with a two-metre tall, reptilian creature which had two legs, four arms and a head twice the size of the average human. The hairless face consisted of a lipless mouth, flat nose and two large round eyes which were a dull glowing red. The voice was a rasping, hiss and Regis was unable to determine the gender of the creature.

“Who are you?” he stammered weakly while struggling to his feet.

“My name is Garras, and I am your creator”

Regis stared at the creature in shock, was it serious? His creator!

“What do you mean by that?”

Garras pointed at the computer monitor which displayed the Eternity and then at the large universe globe that was being held on her worktop.

Regis noticed the globe for the first time and realised immediately what it was.

“That ship and you,” explained Garras “are both from that universe globe. That is nothing more than a very expensive toy designed by me and built by the company I work for. Therefore you are nothing more than a glitch in the design and I am your creator”

Now Regis began to pick up on the anger in her voice and a feeling of unease started to rise in him.

“You do realise there are billions of galaxies in there and each has billions of races which means trillions of living creatures”

Garras glanced at the globe and back to Regis.

“Irrelevant,” she snapped “none of them means a thing here. That is a toy, not a real universe”

“How can you say that,” protested Regis “when you designed that globe did you not realise that you would be creating trillions of sentient beings on billions of worlds. You owe them all a level of respect and a duty of care”

“I owe them nothing, while I knew that life would exist within the globe I never considered the fact that it would be sentient”

“Well it is and you need to consider it”

Garras glared at Regis coldly before replying

“All of these beings, are they as disgusting as you?”

“No, some are like you. Also, in what way am I disgusting?”

“You are so fleshy and soft,” spat Garras “there used to be creatures like you in our galaxy but we exterminated them all a long time ago”

Regis was stunned by this reply, it was now very obvious to him that this creature considered him on the same level he would have considered an ant back on planet Earth. To her all life within the globe was meaningless and completely worthless, everything that had been his universe was doomed.

Garras appeared to sense his feelings and she picked up what was apparently a weapon and pointed it at Regis.

“There is nothing you can do about it” She added.

“So now what?”

Garras shrugged and then glanced at the Eternity.

“Computer,” she ordered “returned that ship back to its universe”

Instantly the gigantic ship disappeared and Regis began to feel very alone and extremely trapped.

“What about me?” he asked.

Garras ignored the question and barked out the order that Regis was dreading.

“Computer, turn off the globe”

Without any hesitation all of the light within the globe dimmed and within a matter of seconds billions of galaxies died. Within those galaxies billions of stars also died and trillions of living beings faded into nothing.

“Oh my god,” cried Regis as he slumped to the floor “you have murdered so many beings. Do you understand how many trillions of beings have just died?”

His thoughts raced back in time and the image of Samantha came to his thoughts. Although she had passed away millions of years ago he still loved her dearly and suddenly he also missed her so much.

“They do not exist in my universe so who will judge me?”

Regis looked up into the cold, red eyes of Garras. He could see no sign of pity, remorse or feeling.

“Have you ever considered that one day this could happen to you?” He asked

“What do you mean?”

“I am from a universe that you created as an expensive toy. Who is to say your universe is not simply the same”

“Impossible,” responded Garras angrily “we are too intelligent, we have explored our galaxy, we would know”

“We had also explored our galaxy and even a few of the neighbouring ones, therefore in my universe we were also very intelligent and we did not know about this. Let’s face reality here, I reached the edge of our universe, has your race done that in your universe?”

“Not yet”

“Then I would say my race was more intelligent than yours, so how sure are you that your universe is also not in a globe similar to that one?”

Garras did not respond, she could not prove Regis was wrong and she wanted the conversation to end.

“Not my problem” she replied while raising her weapon and fired.

Regis did not flinch as the weapon's projectile hit him in the chest, he was a man without a universe and lost in time. The only thought that went through his mind as his life faded was *what would happen to his soul*.