



Sample chapter from Jump Gate III - ROADMAKER –

Second in command, Crew Chief Randi's crew was preparing to leave via teleporter for a 6-hour watch aboard the RoadMaker. Gravity on the continuously accelerating RoadMaker is 1/16 Earth gravity. Crew Captain, Reggie, always mustered his crew fifteen minutes before transfer to review the mission. As they stand on the Porter discussing task assignments, they are unexpectedly transferred aboard the RoadMaker when the on-duty crew transfers off in a panic, abandoning ship.

Chapter 37

Randi...

...found herself on a shaking deck surrounded by chaos. She was thrown off her feet. Reggie flew past, desperately scrabbling for something on which to secure himself. One arm hooked the deck rail, but it was immediately jerked from the Crew Captain's hand as his shoulder dislocated.

“Ship's computer informs me there is a high-energy packet surrounding the vessel,” Randi's personal AI announced to her. To this point, she had refused to give it a name.

Reggie screamed and let go. The deck above came down as his body was thrust up. His head impacted the underside of the upper deck, and blood erupted from the wound. Randi launched herself to Reggie who was drifting to the floor as the room jumped and dodged around them.

She grabbed the unconscious Reggie and pushed him towards Arnie.

“A-Arnie! T-Take Reggie! You all g-get b-back to b-base. I'll b-be along in a m-minute! I'm g-going to the b-bridge!”

There was no argument.

Arnie grabbed Reggie by the collar as he flew toward him, drawing him back onto the Porter. Prudence helped get Reggie flat on the deck so they would not fall when gravity reappeared upon their arrival.

“G-Got him, R-Randi!”

“D-Doc! Energize!” The rest of the crew disappeared.

Randi pulled herself through the hatch to the bridge. No displays were attached to the bulkhead, and they all bounced and vibrated against the deck. The chief’s chair had come loose and was hanging onto the deck by the two screws on the rear of the base plate. The chair rocked back and forth with the ship. Randi took the captain’s chair.

It was still fastened securely.

“Damn! Doc! S-status!” Randi put on the VR, slamming it against the bridge of her nose while wrestling with the vibrations. *“I’ll worry about that later,”* she thought.

“We are caught in the current of a high-speed stream of high-energy particles, Chief.”

“C-Crew has b-been t-transferred, Doc. C-Captain was injured. I’m ass-assuming command as a-acting C-Captain.” She maintained the same name and personality her mother had used for the AI.

“Aye, Captain. Orders?”

“R-Recommendations, Doc?”

The surging and vibrating lessened but did not completely disappear. “What did you do, Doc?”

“I’ve turned into the current. We are riding the surge. Captain, we have increased speed. We are no longer headed towards target.”

Randi thought of her lifesaving class, a prerequisite before beginning crew training in the deep tank. All crew were qualified lifesavers. “Reverse aspect, Doc. Face into the current.”

“I don’t recommend this, Captain. Turning into the stream will stress the ship during the turn.”

“We don’t have any choice, Doc. I know we can’t swim upstream against this, but we should be able to fly across the stream like getting out of a rip current. We can’t fight it, but we can move to an edge and try to exit.

“Besides, we’re going way too fast right now.”

“Captain, I recommend we fly with the current and push toward the far-outside edge. I do not believe the integrity of the structure will survive the stress of a battle with the current during a turn.”

She considered the recommendation. “Ok, Doc. Keep surfing the current and do your thing. Get us out of here.” The vibration began again, much subdued.

Images from the exterior did not reveal the current in which they were immersed, but the toll on the ship was obvious. An accelerator spun past the camera and disappeared into the distance. The surface of the ship appeared to be peeling away. If they did not get out of the stream soon, there would be nothing left of the ship.

“I’ll be peeled like a grape if this thing comes apart and I’m thrust into that stream,” she thought. *“Besides, Dad’s ship and our planet’s hope for salvation will be for nothing. I am not losing Dad’s ship!”* Her face hardened. Eyes narrowed; determination reflected in her expression.

“Doc, status!”

“Structural stresses are within specified limits. We are wearing our exterior plating off, and some exterior components have been compromised.”

“Do you know how wide this current is?”

“Sensors are unable to detect the width of this stream, Captain.”

“Crap! How deep into the current have we gone? Is there any chance of backing out and going around?”

“No, Captain. Our speed at the time of contact was substantial enough that we were completely submerged before we were aware of the obstruction.”

“Is there-”

“Captain, I have recalibrated some of our exterior sensors that remain undamaged. It appears there is a minor thinning in the current ahead of us.”

“Okay, Doc. Let’s see if we can take advantage of that. Suggestions?”

“It appears, Captain, that a nuclear source is ahead, fighting the current and causing an eddy to the source’s rear. The radioactive exhaust is instantly dispersed into the stream, so it will not cause a threat.

“Meaning?”

“There is a slight drop in the concentration of particles, Captain.

“We may be able to ride their wake long enough to build a reasonable amount of angular momentum. That may allow us to slingshot through to the edge. I

have modified sensors, and they indicate the outer wall is not far from that source.”

Randi shook her head and wondered how a nuclear-sourced vehicle could be in the area. *“The disappeared Russian Generation Ship,”* she thought.

“Okay, Doc. Let’s do it.” She recaptured her professional calm.

“Aye, Captain.”

“What’s our speed now, Doc?”

“The stream accelerated us to 12% light speed, Captain.”

“Hmm, 12%. So, you would say there’s been a substantial increase.”

“Yes, Captain. Per mission orders, we have surpassed our target speed by 4.75%.”

“No shit!”

“Pardon me, Captain?”

“Never mind, Doc. How close are we-”

The shaking and vibrations stopped abruptly.” **We’re through, Captain.”**

“Praise the Lord.”

“Pardon me, Captain? What is lord?”

“Never mind, Doc. Any chance of running into any more of those?”

“No, Captain.”

“Doc, get us realigned and headed to target.”

“Aye, Captain.”

Randi sighed in relief then wondered, “Doc, do you have any video of the nuclear-powered craft?” She wanted to confirm the Russian Generation Ship and report the location.

“Yes, Captain.”

“View, Doc.”

“Aye, Captain.”

An exotic-looking craft appeared on the VR. With no frame of reference or anything to compare the craft to it was difficult to estimate the size but it appeared to be humongous. It was not a Timely-made sphere or a generation ship. It was not of Russian make.

She had seen video of both Russian and Chinese generation ships, both made at the Russian Moon Assembly Base.

“What the hell is that?” She thought.

“Doc, is this craft recognizable? Can you tell if it was built on Earth?”

“I have no record of any vessel of these parameters, Captain.”

“Try to raise them on video and voice channels.”

“Aye, Captain.” There was a pause for thirty seconds. **“No response, Captain.”**

“Did you record any emissions of any kind coming from the vehicle?”

“Captain, I am equipped to monitor radio and video bands as well as safety bands dedicated to external cameras, navigational threat detection, and star locators that track the ship’s location. Until I created the energy sensor a few minutes ago, the ship was restricted to those senses. Ship found no emission of any kind from those bands except the radiation sensors, with which I located the foreign vessel and maneuvered to shelter in its wake.”

Randi ruminated, her brows reflecting the deep concentration. She gestured at the image, “Does that look like an alien craft, Doc?”

“I have no information regarding alien craft, Captain.”

“Can you tell anything about it?”

“It contains an unshielded nuclear source, Captain. From the sensed data, which is the extent of my knowledge regarding the source.”

Randi nodded, “Okay, Doc. Thanks.”

“You are welcome, Captain.”

The opportunity to examine the foreign vessel was past. Randi monitored her ship’s route and had the AI perform an inspection of the exterior. **“Inspection complete, Captain.”**

Randi sighed and nodded, “Give me the bad news, Doc.”

“The plating on the surface of the ship has ablated 30%. Structural integrity remains secure. We have lost three accelerators and the static heliosphere off the intended nose.”

“The external transfer deck appears undamaged. Status?”

“There has been some loosening of the deck to the ship. It continues to remain attached and is operational.”

Randi nodded. “Is it repairable?”

“It will require some repair. The stresses of deceleration may cause a catastrophic failure.”

Her head tipped and she nodded to herself. “You can’t secure it can you.” It was a statement, not a question, but the structure of the sentence required an answer.

“No, Captain. The external crawler is gone. Repair for accelerators, static heliosphere, and deck will require an external repair by the crew.”

“The heliosphere is completely gone?”

“The plug-in has been removed and lost to the current, Captain.”

“Great! How much extra radiation am I taking on right now?”

“Sensors are indicating the only reduction in cosmic energy is performed by the outer shielding, Captain. Your exposure is four times greater than recommended.”

“Okay, Doc.”

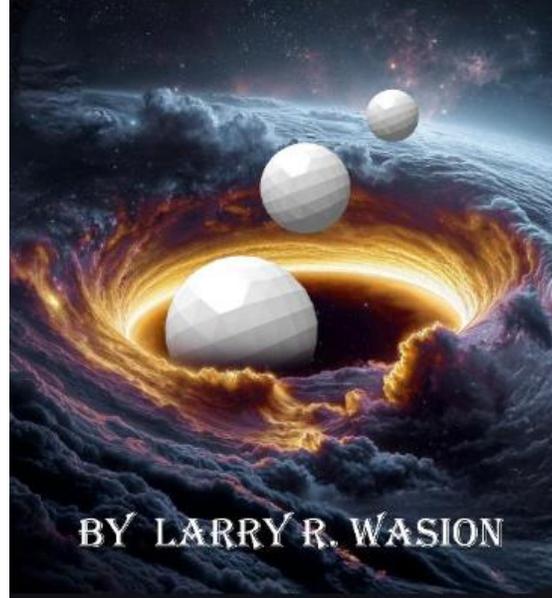
Not good news. Randi sent a status via Porter burst, the latest method of communicating with Earth Base, and climbed into her coffin with the VR. Someone still needed to keep watch until she could be relieved. She was self-elected.

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JUMP GATE III ROADMAKER

A HIGH-TECH EVOLUTION SERIES



BY LARRY R. WASION