



# A POSTCARD FROM SPACE

By Paul Mitting and Lee Sheppard

"When those heavy boosters kick in, the G-force will really hit you. I'd like to tell you that it won't hurt, but that'd be a lie.

It hurts like a bitch, choomba - you'll swear some drek-head is trying to push the top of your head out through your butt while your kidneys try and work their way up through your body and out of your nose."

Subspace Message Transfer  
08:45:24:07:2037

To: Christopher Taylor  
Bjelke-Petersen Residential Block  
Brisbane Arcology  
Republic of Australia

From: Nathan Taylor  
PSV Sirocco  
Thru Ceres Transmit Station  
Asteroid Belt

Message Reads: Yo, Groundsider! It's your old Uncle Nathan here again, from my floating workstation somewhere in the greater Asteroid Belt. Your Dad contacted me the other month and told me you'd got some damn fool idea in your head to leave Earth and come out into the Dark. I'm glad to see that you stuck at your

work and managed to save up your uplift fare - I'm proud of you for that. But you should have told your Dad earlier about undertaking the acclimatisation program. I have to tell you that your Dad was really pissed, chombatta, what with every-thing that happened to your Mum and all, and he's asked me to try and have a talk to you to put you off the idea.

I think I know you pretty well though, Chris, and anything I say is not going to put you off one bit. I suppose the only way you're finally going to make up your mind about whether you really belong out here is to come and have a look for yourself. "Experiential Learning" is what my old University lecturer would have called it - I'd just call it the School of Hard Knocks. I won't kid you, Christopher - it's hard out here, damned hard. There aren't any second chances either - you screw up, no matter how small, and you're dead, pure and

simple.

Your Dad isn't going to like me for what I'm about to do for you, but hey, that's *my* problem now isn't it? Seems that if you've truly made your mind up about coming out here, the very least I can do is give you a few survival pointers to make sure you last longer than a few minutes once you get here.

If you haven't made your transit booking yet, you might want to consider by-passing Cape York Spaceport and scooting over to one of the European spaceports. You'll save a fair bit of money on your uplift, especially if you go via one of the Soviet heavy lifters. They often have stand-by passenger seats available, and you should be able to get on one for about half of what you'd pay for one of the British Space Commission or ESA shuttles. Yeah, I know what you're thinking, I've heard the rumours too, but the Sov Rocket Corps has really got its act together over the past few years. Many of the guys I've worked with out here travelled with the SRC and had no complaints at all (apart from the stewardesses, but then they've always had that problem).

I wish your Dad had let you take that school trip to the moon after your mother died. I suppose it was only natural to have overreacted like he did, but her death was just a freak accident - one of the only Gateway accidents ever to have resulted in fatalities. I've talked to a few people in the know out here since the accident, and some have told me that the *Perseus* was probably fitted with a dodgy Theodorsen Field Modulator, one of the early counterfeit models, before code encryption was fully operational. I'd really like to get my hands on the bastards that were responsible for fitting that faulty TFM, I'd soon show them the perils of space travel. But anyway, I'm wandering off the track a bit here. What I really wanted to say was that if you'd taken that trip to the moon, then at least you'd have experienced lift-off and zero-grav.

It'll still come as a bit of a shock to your system, regardless of having undergone acclimatisation training. If you've taken my advice, you'll be travelling in one of the Soviet heavy lifter rockets. Now these guys are principally designed for transporting cargo, so you won't be travelling in the most luxurious comfort. When those heavy boosters kick in, the G-force will really hit you. I'd like to tell you that it won't hurt, but that'd be a lie. It hurts like a bitch, choomba - you'll swear some drek-head is trying to push the top of your head out through your butt while your kidneys try and work their way up through your body and out of your nose. Fortunately, that feeling is only going to last for about fifteen minutes (ha ha - I remember your mother telling me how pleased she was that someone had finally invented a way that men could experience the pain of child-birth).

Once you're up, you'll get your first taste of zero-gravity - and if you're like me, you won't enjoy it one bit. It gives you one hell of a

headache the first time, and if you don't heed the warnings and have a big lunch instead of the dry crackers the stewardesses issue you before takeoff, then you're going to be seeing that lunch again *real* quick. So don't be embarrassed when you do "pull a Kranston", just make sure you get it all into the bag - 'nuff said?

The disadvantage of taking one of the Soviet Rockets is that you won't get an outside view, but that won't really matter, because the view from one of the orbiting space platforms (probably Edinburgh, although you might transit through the older Johnson Space Platform) is well worth the wait. My advice is to take a day or two to get used to the lighter gravity and use some of the money you saved on your uplift to secure a decent trip on an OTV (Orbital Transfer Vessel to you dirt-sniffers). If you can, try and get on one of the French-crewed OTVs out of Edinburgh (or any of the Qantas OTVs out of Johnson) - they have far better facilities and the stewardesses are much better looking (if you're going to see a girl in a skin-suit for the first time, make sure the experience is worth it, I always say). All kidding aside, they also operate the fastest OTVs - Low Earth Orbit to the Theodorsen Gateway Transit Station (Heathrow) in 16 hours, the fastest non-military trip possible at present.

If you leave from Edinburgh Space Platform, make sure you get a seat on the starboard side of the OTV. If you're lucky, and the orbits are right, you'll have a real good chance of seeing New Buckingham Palace as you pull out for your trip to Heathrow. That's where Queen Victoria II and her Parliament now live - right above the old one in London. I shouldn't have to tell you about her though should I, wasn't she technically your "Boss" when you were working for the Government last year? Good luck to her I say, as long as her RUK Marine boys keep those fracking pirates off our back out here in the Belt, she can rule forever as far as I'm concerned.

Which brings me to one important point, Christopher - and one you'd better listen to pretty carefully. It's not the Gold Coast up here, boy. I'm sure you already know that from my previous letters and vids, but don't get any drek-head ideas about getting yourself chipped up with a smart gun or buying one of those fancy gyrojets to protect yourself. You'll be passing through some pretty heavy security before they'll let you board one of the Gateway Liners, and the penalties are tough if you get caught carrying a piece. So don't try anything stupid - you'd hate to spend the first 12 months of your time in the Dark in one of the Belt Prison Mines.

If things do get heavy when you eventually settle down somewhere, I can always put you in contact with a few individuals who can help you out. Just leave the heavy stuff to the professionals - if you can keep your nose out of where it doesn't belong, then you'll be fine -

it's only when you start poking your nose into other people's business, or you choose a lifestyle that invites danger (like mine) that you'll run into the sort of situations that need a more direct approach, if you know what I mean.

And while we're talking safety, don't *ever* forget the Triad - Atmosphere, Radiation and Gravity. Acclimatisation Training covers the basics for you, but you *must* practice the principles - I honestly can't stress that enough. Check your suit every day, check the Use By dates on your Goop Balls and listen to the Daily Radiation Warnings - they could all make the difference between survival and death.

Woah! - enough of the heavy stuff for the moment. If I'm not careful I'll end up doing just what your Dad asked me to do - put you off taking the trip. OK, by now you've booked yourself on to one of the better OTVs and you're making your way to Heathrow Transit Station at 25,000 kms/hr. It's certainly a sight to behold as you draw closer, all four rings and massive solar panels. Given that the station is over 4 kilometres in diameter, it's really hard to believe that it rotates at 2 complete revolutions a second!

You won't get to see the actual Theodorsen Gateway from Heathrow, as that's over 3,000 kilometres away at one of the Luna LaGrange stationary points, just in case of accidents and the like. What you *will* be able to see is the dozens of military ships, deep space cruisers and interplanetary cargo and passenger ships that use Heathrow as a transit/repair station. Who would have believed that just 10 years ago that modest collection of ships would have represented the entire combined Deep Space fleets? Shows what a quantum leap in technology the Theodorsen Gateways were, huh?

As for the station itself, if you thought the Space Platforms were amazing, you just honestly won't believe Heathrow. What is it about airports, spaceports and bus stations (a form of transport before your time, kiddo) that seems to attract all the wackos? I suppose it's the fact that most people heading to the outer colonies have to pass through Heathrow that makes it such a magnet for all of the religious freaks, pickpockets, commen, salesmen, hookers, fixers, solos and other detritus that always seem to be there, but the place still continues to freak me out every time I visit it. The last time I was there, some guy actually tried to sell me a Persian Rug! For my Zero-G work station! Can you believe it?

Seriously though, if you know the right people to talk to, you can make some really good deals on your equipment. If you haven't bought your space-suit yet, make do with a rental until you get to Heathrow. Look for Delta Designs on Level 3 of the Mercantile deck. Ask for Jenny M'Zinga and tell her how you know me - she'll do you a real good deal on your first space-suit, and it won't run out of

warranty the first time you head into zero pressure atmosphere.

And don't worry - Heathrow is not as dangerous as you might think it first looks. Regardless of all of the loonies you might run into while you're visiting, the RUK Space Marines based there maintain a very high level of law and order, and as long as you keep your credit cards close to your body and don't make any deals that you can't cover financially - you'll be fine. If you have the time, take a couple of days to have a look around Heathrow. They have a great tour that lasts a half day that takes you to all but the highest security areas of the station - well worth the time for a groundsider like you!

Now the actual amount of time you'll end up having to spend at Heathrow Transit Station will depend on a number of factors - where you eventually want to go, how long the delays are in getting through the Gateway backlog (any current military actions get first priority for access) and the general availability of empty seats on the passenger ships. Big word of advice here, Christopher - don't take the cheap option when it comes to travelling through the Gateways. Always travel with one of the big three - BSC, ESA or NASA - you'll not only stand a far greater chance of getting to where you want to go, but you'll have a far more enjoyable time getting there. A week in the hyperspatial realm between the Gateways sure beats a year iced and brandancing, but it's still a week.

Remember, you can't look out of the windows when you're in transit through the Gateways or you'll fry your brains, so you'll just have to sit back and enjoy the in-flight virtual entertainment. Me, I always spend a lot of time in the Zero-Gee gymnasium, keeping my body toned for the many months of Zero-G I spend in my workstation out here in the Belt. If you find you get on well with the crew, ask them to run the VirtualNet™ simulation disc I sent with this message disc - a friend of mine says it's a pirate copy of one of the RUK Space Marine training simulators from the DreamPark™ training facility in Bournemouth. Knock yourself out, kid - literally.

I must admit that through all of this I have been assuming that you were always intending to miss the Luna colonies altogether, and make your way out to one of the new planetary colonies. Obviously, if it's your intention to spend some time on one of the dozens of Luna mining or residential colonies to "test the waters", then you don't really need to worry about making your way to Heathrow Transit Station at all. Knowing you though, I can't see you settling for the monotony of the Luna colonies. Geez, if they keep moving entire city populations to the moon the way they have been recently, it won't be long before it becomes as overcrowded as the Earth already is - and that won't be fun for anybody. Why move straight back into what you're trying to

get away from by heading out into the Dark in the first place?

My suggestion is for you to make your way out to Mars - the Big Red One. It has some pretty large cities to hang out in nowadays, and there are plenty of employment opportunities for people with your particular skills. It's also the most popular jumping off point for trips to the Asteroid Belt or the Jovian system, if Mars turns out to be a no-go for you. Besides, you shouldn't have any problem getting on a ship heading out to Mars, as 3 out of every 4 ships making the jump through the Gateways seem to hit Mars first. As it stands at present, if you wanted to head straight out to the Belt or Jupiter from Heathrow, you might end up having to wait a week or two until a ship that was headed that way put in an appearance. That's why it's far better to head out to Mars - at least you're half way to where you might eventually want to go, and you get to check out Big Red while you make your final decision.

If you do make your way to Mars, even if it's only for a few months while you finally make up your mind, there's really only two choices when it comes to finding casual work - only Olympus Base and the Carter Colony are big enough to support an itinerant workforce. All the other bases are either too small or exclusively Corporately staffed, so you probably won't be able to get work in any of those unless you've already arranged it before leaving Earth. That doesn't mean you can't have a good look around while you're there though, as all of the bases and colonies are open to visitors.

Mind you - Mars isn't without it's problems. I don't know how much news gets past the political and military censors about what's going on in the Mars colonies at present, but there's certainly a lot more going on there than you'd probably be aware of on Earth. The best that I can do is to tell you what I've picked up from the crews of the supply ships that make their way out here, bearing in mind that any news I pass on will already be three to six months out of date (even with the number of new colonists coming through Belt Gateway I really only manage to get news updates when I make my quarterly trip to Ceres).

I suppose the biggest news concerning Mars at the moment is the secessionist movement. I've been told that many of the colonists are keen for Mars to declare it's independence, and while that view isn't a new one, I've also heard that some of the members of the Martian Assembly are now being swayed towards popular opinion. I can't see the Earth giving in too easily though, and many of the colonists remember what happened as a result of the attempted coup at Isidis Base in 2025, so both sides will be wanting to tread very carefully.

My advice, if you do end up staying on Mars for more than a few months, is to try and keep out of the secessionist movement

altogether. I'm told that there are a lot of lunatic fringes popping up on both sides, and given your strong political views (I still remember our arguments over the Jovian fiasco when you first started University) I could just see you joining up with the wrong group and getting yourself fragged over some stupid "Freedom for Martian Rocks" movement. I reckon it could get pretty dirty over the next twelve months - why else would the UN be taking such a big interest in procedures? They've even taken two UN Marshalls out of Ceres and re-located them on Mars, and trust me, you don't take any lawmen out of the Belt unless you've got a damned good reason.

Speaking of the Belt, you might be thinking of coming out to visit your favourite Uncle. Hey, I'd certainly love to see you, but I really can't recommend it at the moment, especially while the pirate raids have picked up again. Most of the supply ships that make it out this way are now forming convoys for protection, with a couple of RUK or Commonwealth gunships riding shotgun. I was speaking to a Dan Dare the other month and she let slip that the Archies might be behind some of the pirate raids, as they had picked up a couple of Borgs in a ship they had recently captured. Now what would the Borgs be doing out here attacking supply ships and kidnapping or killing their passengers? Besides, it's one hell of a way from Mercury to the Belt. If the Mercury colony is involved, were talking about a five to ten year plan being put into effect here. Can they really be that far thinking when their brains are that close to the Sun all the time?

Pirates aren't the only problem out in the Belt mind you. Some of the various Rover clans are getting a bit brazen when it comes to claim jumping and squatting in temporarily vacated workstations. A fellow workganger on an asteroid claim near me came back from a supply trip the other month to find his workstation completely stripped. No doubt about it being Rovers, everyone else out here usually obeys the unwritten laws when it comes to being allowed to work a claim unmolested. The frightening thing is that I've picked up rumours of a vigilante movement taking shape to take on the Rovers. I can't see the UN Marshalls letting that go on for too long without stepping in. Looks like there's going to be more popsicles floating about before things calm down again.

I suppose that what I'm really trying to say is that I think the best and safest option for you at present would be to try and pick up some fill-in work on Mars, and then contact me by Subspace Message Transfer when you get settled. Then, if things have finally calmed down out here in the Belt, you can book passage on a Belt-bound supply ship and come and check out my humble workstation.

Anyway, enough for now. Say hello to your Dad for me, and tell him I'll be in contact again soon. Look forward to seeing you soon,

chombatta.

Stay happy, groundsider.

## And so it begins...

...**Australian Realms'** brilliant new role-playing campaign setting, **SolSpace** is officially approved by R.Talsorian Games as an alternative **Cyberpunk™** campaign setting. Join us in issue 25 as **SolSpace** is launched into deep space with the first of the background articles.

In **SolSpace** there are a million stories to be told. Come with us on an exciting and intriguing journey through the Solar System of 2037. See how man has adapted to entire new environments... and trashed them. Read more about the RUK, the space colonies of Mars, Jupiter and the Asteroid Belt and the people that inhabit them. In space the streets are even deadlier!

So, swap your 'punk characters' street-cred for a dose of space-cred and come join us in The Dark, as we continue to bring you the best our talented team of authors and artists can deliver, every two months.

## SolSpace:

### A Whole New Attitude

**OTV** - Orbital Transfer Vessel. Spacecraft designed for transferring cargo and/or passengers from Low Earth Orbit (LEO) to higher orbits, such as the Space Stations or Luna.

**Queen Victoria II** - current ruler of the RUK and the Commonwealth.

**RUK** - The Re-United Kingdoms. After the bloody civil wars of the late 2020s, England, Wales, Scotland and Ireland reformed as the Re-United Kingdoms under the rule of Her Majesty Queen Victoria the second.

**TFM** - Theodorsen Field Modulator. Spaceships can only use the Gateways if they are fitted with a TFM, a device that effectively acts as a "key" to the entrances to the hyperspatial realm.

**Theodorsen Gateway** - in 2025 Professor P. Theodorsen discovered the existence of a "hyperspatial" realm, theorising that this could eventually be used as a "short-cut" to significantly reduce travel time between the planets in our solar system and beyond. Theodorsen, with financial and scientific assistance from the BSC, then created the technology to provide access to this hyperspatial realm. Theodorsen Gateways are now the principal method of transportation for interplanetary travel.

**Transit Stations** - large space stations built to provide accommodation and facilities for Gateway crews, RUK Space Marine Detachments and passengers waiting for flights through the nearest Gateway.

**United Nations** - the UN has official mandate across the solar system, acting to preserve law and order (through UN Marshalls), uphold civil rights and promote free trade among the various colonies and Earth.