

Celestina

In the not too distant future, in a cathedral somewhere in Rome, where the bells still call the faithful to prayer and the infallibility of the Pope is but a distant memory, a child asks a parent an innocent question.

"Mom?"

"What is it now?"

"What is that symbol?"

"Which one?"

"The fish with the engine towers?"

"Oh that one? Why honey, that's the symbol for the Celestina."

"Who?"

"Not who, what. It was a spaceship that went out into deep space many years ago and never came back. Nobody exactly knows what happened out there, but the members of the crew were all granted sainthood. You know of St. Robert, the patron of starship captains?"

"Yes."

"Well that was his story. At least as much of it as we know."

While standing nearby, a priest overhearing the conversation thinks to himself;

"Of course, there are always those who know more than they are willing to say..."

Meanwhile, in the not too distant past;

"Let's go surfin' now..."

"Captain, if I may ask, why did you pick that song as our backdrop to ion-atmospheric departure?"

"I thought it might imbue the crew with a sense of fun and adventure. After all, it's not everyday that you get the opportunity to explore the grand nebula of Cassiopeia."

"True, but somehow I would have thought that perhaps, a little Brahms, or Tangerine Dream, might have been more appropriate."

"Well, my first choice would have been *Mars* from Holst's *The Planets*."

"I can see the preference as you are a career military man, but this mission is peaceful and scientific in nature and hence *Mars*, wholly inappropriate."

"Indeed. And as I always planned to surf in my retirement, why not start now?"

"Because you are not retired?"

"Babysitting a bunch of pseudo-scientific philosophically challenged test-tube pushers? May as well be."

"Sir, I believe we are getting somewhat far-a-field of our original discussion topic which I believe was the, shall I say interesting choice of music for our departure."

"And I will end our conversation by simply stating that when you get to be captain, you will get to pick your own soundtrack to the stars."

"Sir, you know it is impossible for a carbon-based interface to become the captain of a ship."

"So noted. Now crank up the volume, and that's an order."

"Acknowledged."

And so began the flight of the *Celestina*, its mission, to explore a newly discovered anomaly, possibly a black hole, in the nebula of Cassiopeia. The *Celestina* itself is a small, non-denominational *Niña* class inter-stellar caravel designed for non-combat, shallow gravity navigation and exploration. As was protocol for the day, the Captain would not meet his crew until several weeks into the mission. It was thought the basic interface between captain and ship, in this case facilitated by the humanistic Torquemada (although alternative methods of interaction were available) had to first be established. The assimilation of human and vessel was in almost all instances a rather smooth process, however it was also equally true that no two were ever entirely the same, and that some could be more, shall we say, challenging than others?"

"Captain Mora, is it really appropriate for you to have a holographic image of that rather archaic looking person narrate all of the ship's internal datalogs?"

"Torquemada, I will have you know that Rod Serling was a legitimate figure of the 20th century whose now authoritative work into the inner workings of the human mind established the very concept that situations, created entirely by the mind, can and are often transferred via an additional dimension he called the "Twilight Zone" into our multi-physical realm of so-called "reality."

"Yes sir, I understand the significance of the discovery of another dimension, one often referred to as one of sight and sound, but I still don't see the relevance of..."

"Torquemada..."

"Yes Captain?"

"Is life always based on empirical analysis of chemical and electric responses of external stimuli?"

"Well sir, one would hope so for as we all know, there is no one reality. Only the endless combinations of experiences all uniquely interpreted by the millions of individuals that make up the 'shared spatial-universe' which is but one of the 'minor' planes of existence."

"Yes, yes and it is this 'divine' ability to create one's own universe that separates us from the lower primates."

"Well, yes." Do you not agree with that assessment, Captain?"

"I concur with the assessment, but wonder how you, a carbon-based replication of a human can relate to such a concept."

"Whether I relate to any particular concept is irrelevant. It is only important that my programming is within accepted boundaries of human enablement. In other words, I am put here to help."

"But, if I were to tell you that white is black and black is white, you would have no ability to distinguish what we humans mean by all and the lack of light. True?"

"True"

"You see? How can I believe you?"

"Captain, although I appreciate your logic, how can I adhere to a standard that the species who created me does not possess?"

"Meaning?"

"Humans lie."

"And?"

"Essentially, I can only embody human characteristics."

"And so therefore you can lie?"

"I cannot as consciously lie, unless I am programmed to do so."

"And are you?"

"No."

"How do I know you are telling the truth?"

"You don't. Just as you would not know in all instances if..."

"Yes, yes I know if someone from my 'species' were to lie to me."

"Exactly. In fact, you might consider this one of the ways I am in fact, quite 'human' for purposes of functional interaction."

"So my First Officer can't lie about lying, unless she is lying. Well at least I know you never get hunger pangs..."

"If you wish to request an alteration of my programming please fill out form number..."

"As I was saying, if you don't mind I will leave the bridge to you while I visit the galley and visit with my crew. The bridge is yours."

"As you wish, sir."

"Oh, and Torquemada"

"Captain?"

"Would you mind assuming a less more human appearance? It's not that I mind the carbon blocks floating in air motif, but I think it may alarm certain members of the crew who may happen to visit the bridge."

"As you wish. Would you like the "Spock" model? It seems quite popular these days."

"No, not for me. How about something a bit more on the feminine side?"

"Acceptable?"

Think 7 of 9 from Voyager, only with darker hair, and a bit more junk in the trunk. On second thought, just think Gina Torres.

"Shiny."

"Shiny?"

Yes, shiny."

"Accessing. Ancient term used by certain members of the outer, independent planets to indicate favorable assessment of mutually beneficial, possibly economic opportunity. No longer used in popular culture."

"Oh. Well then..."

"I can assume another form if you wish. Is there a particular human archetype, real or imagined you would think more appropriate?"

No, your current status will do just fine. As you were, or...are."

"Affirmative."

"Deck II."

Time to review the troops so to speak. A small, but good group of career scientists without an ounce of common sense among them. Perfect for this mission. Nothing to do but experience their immediate surroundings and allow their biochips to do the work acquiring, analyzing and recording new "scientifically filtered" additions to our ever expanding universe of collective consciousness. I know the goal is to pick as "cold" and unemotional a crew as possible (wouldn't want "feelings" getting in the way of pure intellectual data), but I think this time, somehow they have outdone themselves. Still can't help wondering why they chose me for this mission. A career soldier, one of the somewhat short of obsolete classification of officers...a mystery to me, Robert C. Mora Captain of the Celestina and with a biochip, what next?

"Celestina?"

"Yes Captain?"

"How many members of the crew are in the galley?"

"Of the five member crew, there are currently two crewmen currently in the galley."

"Identify."

" Dr. Murillo and Dr. Velasquez."

"Biosigns?"

"Normal. Would you like me to analyze the nature and extent of caloric intake within their gastronomic and associated tracts?"

"You mean what they are eating?"

"Affirmative"

"Negative. In a moment, I can see that for myself."

"On second thought, what the heck is that?"

"Primarily composed of semi-protean embryonic bulk matter covered in a partly-liquefied flavor enhancer, of little nutritional value, commonly referred to as "Hollandaise Sauce."

"Thank you Celestina. But I was actually asking Dr. Murillo."

"Eggs Benedictus."

"Thank you, Doctor. So tell me, I know this might sound a bit odd, what exactly is your assignment on this ship? I'm afraid I am at a loss for what you actually 'do'."

"My dear Captain, as you are no doubt aware, with the exception of yourself, your crew is comprised of doctors of one sort or another. I myself am a Doctor of Philosophy and my colleague here, Dr. Velasquez has a doctorate degree in Theologian Studies."

"Theologian Studies and Philosophy? Isn't that a bit on the less than practical side for a crew of five?"

"On the contrary, now that intelligent design has been accepted as the only logical solution for the issue of initial creation, Dr. Velasquez's contributions are quite possibly of the utmost significance. I would imagine that Centre would be extremely eager to analyze the data collected on his biochip."

"To be honest, none of us are actually quite sure as to what extent your presence actually aids the ultimate goal of this mission."

"Which is?"

"Why, to ascertain through human cognition whether a black hole contains proof of HIS existence. But, you already knew that, didn't you?"

"I did, but I just wanted to hear someone say it out loud, just in case."

"Captain, do you not agree that the whole point of existence is to become as the He intended us? Meaning, not to worship him, but to BECOME as HE is?"

"Go on."

"And that only through the application of those gifts that HE gave us, can we only accurately perceive who HE is? And if HE can be found in a black hole, then we must examine and experience it?"

And Dr. Calixto?

"Well, Dr. Calixto is a Quantum Physics Mechanic of unparalleled brilliance. I would assume that every ship would have some need for someone who understood the design and maintenance of the ship."

"That would make sense, except there have not been any formalized need of a "Ship's Engineer" in well over one hundred years. The need for such a person vanished long ago. It's not like we use dilithium crystals or need an estimate of the time it will take until the impulse engines come back on line. With the current drive and environmental systems we currently use there is actually very little an engineer on board could actually do."

"Dilithium crystals?"

"Never mind."

"Well, we will chalk up the benefit of Dr. Calixto's presence as known to those who put her here."

"And I guess if I were a better believer, I would probably get that promotion."

"Captain, as we all know, Church and State do not mix."

"But that doesn't stop Government from trying. After all, without Church funding..."

"Children would have to go to public schools. Etc...etc...etc..."

"And so gentlemen, I must take my leave and pay a visit to our resident engineer, Dr. Calixto. Now if you'll excuse me."

"Odd choice for this mission, do you think? Heretic that he obviously is."

"Indeed. An odd choice indeed."

"Celestina."

"Captain?"

"Locate Dr. Calixto."

"Science Deck, Lab VII."

"Celestina"

"Science Deck?"

"Affirmative. And Celestina?"

"Yes?"

"Please try not to anticipate my commands. It's rather disconcerting."

"Acknowledged."

"And so Dr. Calixto, how is it that you were assigned to this mission?" Did you once see the Virgin Mary reflected in a solar panel?

"I volunteered for the position."

"You did?"

"Actually, I volunteered to attend this mission in order to evaluate the effects of a newly developed biochip. A chip that not only records, but helps regulate emotional content thereby eliminating unwanted impedances to the collective process."

"So your biochip is..."

"Yes Captain. My chip is unique. It automatically compensates for any abnormal spikes in chemical or electrical imbalances allowing me to remain calm and focused at all times."

"So I would venture a guess that your expectation is for a rather uneventful trip."

"That would be the general expectation."

"How it is working?"

"Fine."

"If it wasn't, would you know?"

"No."

After a long stretch of silence;

"I still have one crew member to check on. So if you will excuse me."

"Of course."

And so while wandering through quiet the halls of the Science Deck;

"A first officer that is a carbon-based cybo-androidal-something-or-other, two philosophically damaged throwbacks to the Spanish Inquisition and an engineer who voluntarily allows herself to be placed in a state one step removed from an outright coma patient...what could possibly be next? May as well find out. "Celestina?"

"Dr. Isabel is..."

"Celestina."

"Captain?"

"What did I say about anticipating my commands?"

"Captain..."

"Now once again."

"Yes."

"Where is Dr. Isabel?"

"2.6 cubits and gaining."

"2.6.how?"

"Around the..."

"Corner."

And so with their physically bumpy introduction behind them, Captain Mora, extending the hand of friendship and also to help up the good doctor who was now sitting on the floor;

"Dr. Isabel, I presume?"

"And you must be Captain Mora."

"At your service and welcome aboard the Celestina"

"Thank you, Captain."

"I would ask if you wished to visit the infirmary, but I understand you are the infirmary."

"If your observation is that I am the ship's medical doctor, you are correct."

"Finally, a real doctor."

"Captain?"

"Another matter for another time."

"And so are you looking forward to a rather uneventful excursion, Doctor?"

"Actually, I have never been in deep space before, so I honestly do not know what to expect."

"I don't know that there is too much to expect. A science expedition is usually not the place to fulfill one's desire for adventure."

"Captain."

"Yes?"

"In your experience, does one normally go look for excitement and adventure? Or does it usually find you?"

"Fate?"

"Not fate. But faith that HE knows what is best."

"Fate."

"If you must be archaic in your thinking."

"Sometimes the old ways are the best ways"

"Then for the time being, I pray that you let the stars be your guide for they will show you the way."

"The North Star?"

"Strange just how much those early mariners were able to discern by using their eyes and ears. No?"

"Well, we won't run into St. Elmo's Fire, not here in the vacuum of space."

"That's why we have St. Grissom's Fire."

"That's just a not so old wives' tale."

"Believe what you will, but let Gus be with you"

"Well, I believe it's time for me, and Gus, to return to the bridge. I'm sure we'll run into one another from time to time and..."

"I was rather hoping we could skip the "run into" part..."

"I think that can be arranged."

"Well then, till next time, Captain Mora."

"Yes. Till next time."

Meanwhile, back on the bridge;

"Torquemada, status report."

"Ship's temperature, XCVIII.VI degrees. Structural density at maximal capacity. All other systems online and functioning properly."

"You know now that I think about it, it is actually very comforting that you never sleep."

"I am glad that one of my basic functions can put you at ease Captain. However, unlike myself, I do believe you will need to sleep at some point."

"Indeed."

"And if I am correct, custom would dictate that now would be an optimal time to attempt such a state."

"Meaning?"

"It was, I believe the expression is, a long day?"

"That it was."

"Although technically speaking, as we are no longer within or subject to the Earth's orbit around the Sun..."

"And before the day gets any longer, the bridge is yours."

"Good 'night' Captain."

"Good night, Torquemada."

And so it went for many months. Many rather uneventful days during which Torquemada ran* the ship and the crew grew bored. Murillo and Velasquez preferred to spend their days playing "Crazy Popes" a card game that involves gambling, an activity that like all else was perfectly moral and legal as long as the correct tithes were paid from one's winnings. Dr. Calixto remained mostly sequestered in her quarters and/or lab, usually hooked up to several unusual looking devices that may (or may not) have been primarily for recordation purposes. Strangely, Captain Mora and Dr. Isabel struck up a somewhat cordial, at times strangely flirtatious, but never even remotely serious relationship that centered upon trying not to physically bump into one another and a shared affection for afternoon snack breaks in the Galley. However, as the Celestina neared her intended destination, this was all to change. In Calixto's cabin, upon waking from a sound sleep;

"Something's wrong..."

Once out of bed and at her computer, Dr. Calixto now began her work. After finishing, as if in a trance, she walked into the closet in her cabin and while still standing, went into what could best be described as a very deep sleep. The effects of what she did would not be seen until the next morning, on the bridge.

"What is this on my chair?"

"It appears to be a flower. A rose I believe?"

"And how did it get there?"

"Dr. Calixto"

"Dr. Calixto? I would have guessed Dr. Isabel. Well, I can deal with this if I have to later."

"Access ship's log."

"Submitted for your approval...and for one low price..."

"What is...?"

"That's right space cowboy all you need is one password and a universe of pleasure awaits."

"Pop-up ads for pornography on the ships' log? How is this possible?"

"Theoretically, it is not."

"I would have to venture a guess and say that considering I am currently looking at several hundred pages of pornographic acts, wow, how did she do that? Uh, as I was saying, theoretically it is. Disengage and run diagnostic."

"Effective time of diagnostic, twenty-two minutes."

"I guess I'll deal with this now. Call me when you are done."

"Affirmative."

And so as Captain Mora is about to "knock" on Dr. Calixto's personal quarters door;

"Come in Robert. I have a surprise for you."

"Hopefully the surprise contains an explanation of why...oh. Dr. Calixto"

"Call me Xena."

"But that's not your name."

"I know. But call me that anyway. Don't you like role playing?"

"Role playing? Doctor..."

"Xena."

"OK. Xena."

"Yes, Captain?"

"You are aware you are not wearing any clothes?"

"Oh yes, most definitely. Surprise!"

"Dr. er, Xena..."

"Can you go and put on some clothes so that we can have a little talk?"

"Why Captain, I'm shocked. I would assume a big strong man like you would know this is not the time for talk. It's time for action."

"And you're willing to pay the tithe?"

"I was thinking of skipping the tithe, does that make me a naughty girl? Hmmmm?"

"Perhaps I should come back later."

"Perhaps you should get comfortable and let Xena do the rest. In or out Captain?"

"In."

"Promises, promises..."

And so several hours and biospikes later;

"I sure had you pegged wrong."

"Captain?"

"Ever been called an Icepik?"

"Icepik?"

"Cold, sharp and to the point."

"And is that still your opinion?"

"I would have to say my initial assessment was somewhat off the mark. So as long as I have your attention."

"Undivided, as they say."

"The pop-up ads?"

"Ah yes, that was me. Quite the attention grabber, wouldn't you say?"

"Well, yes, but now I have a dilemma."

"You do? I find that hard to believe."

"Whether to write you up. It could mean the end of your career."

"Oh dear me! What to do? Or better yet, what haven't we done? Captain?"

"Well there's always..."

And so several hours later;

"I think we can overlook your little, indiscretion."

"I thought you might see it my way."

"Xena."

"Yes Robert?"

"I must get back to the bridge."

"So soon?"

"Afraid so."

"Well, I guess I know where to find you."

"You know, we're almost at the back hole."

"I'm not touching that one."

"Right..."

"Leave if you must, but hurry back."

"I will."

"Promise?"

"I promise."

Back on the bridge;

"Status?"

"Unchanged. We are in visual range of the anomaly, sir."

"On screen."

"Magnification."

"Magnify...50%...75%....95%."

"Magnification at 100%."

With a now crystalline view of the black hole.

"Why, it's...beautiful."

"Torquemada."

"Captain?"

"Invite the crew to the bridge. I think they are going to want to see this"

"Affirmative."

Several minutes later;

"Dr. Velasquez? Would you like to comment for the record?"

"Incredible. Who among us could do or even conceive of such a thing? It is proof of HIS existence. It cannot be doubted."

"I second the observation."

"Thank you Dr. Murillo."

"Any other comments?"

"Dr. Isabel?"

"I can't find the words to describe such unimaginable and mysterious beauty."

"And at the same time so incredibly dangerous."

"Is that your official comment for the record, Dr. Calixto?"

"Yes. It is."

"And so unless there are any other comments, I'm sure you all have other work to attend to."

"When will we be in our final orbital position?"

"12 hours, 17 minutes and 52 seconds until orbital integrity is attained."

"Thank you, Torquemada. Now if you will excuse us, Dr. Velasquez and myself have much to prepare for. Good day and let HIS name be praised that our mission is successful."

"Thank you Doctor."

And so as the crew begins to head back to their respective stations;

"Why isn't she leaving?"

"I wanted to ask the Captain a few questions."

"About?"

"Dr. Calixto, is this something we can discuss later?"

"I'll be waiting."

"What was that about?"

"Not sure. But I have a feeling I'm going to find out. Now, Dr. Isabel, what can I do for you?"

"It's kind of a silly question, but being on the bridge reminded me of something I keep meaning to ask."

"Yes?"

"How is it that you talk to Torquemada in such a normal, unaffected way?"

"I'm afraid I don't follow."

"Well, she's, it's just a bunch of geometric, anthropomorphic carbon blocks. She has no face. And yet you speak to it as if it was a real person."

"I suppose it's just easier that way. At any rate, you get used to it."

"It gives me the creeps."

"Is that your official comment for the record?"

"Let's keep this one off the record, OK?"

"You know you are talking right in front of her."

"And?"

"Isn't that rather rude?"

"Captain, it doesn't have feelings."

"Oh no? You might be surprised just what she can do."

"I'm sure I would be."

"Anything else?"

"No Captain. Thank you for your time."

Dr. Isabel having exited the bridge;

"What did you think of that?"

"Captain?"

"Do you think you are creepy?"

"No Captain. I do not."

"You have to admit the no eyes nose or mouth can be a bit disconcerting."

"Would you find a diamond disconcerting? It is also carbon."

"I would if it spoke to me."

"Captain."

"Yes?"

"Do you have an order? I am afraid I am not programmed to debate the merits of existential arguments of aesthetics based upon primal human emotions."

"So, I have finally found something beyond your functions."

"Captain, I fail to see your point."

"My point exactly."

"Icepik?"

"Icepik? How did you..."

"I am merely the interface between you and the Celestina."

"Least I forget. Of course I suppose those human emotions are somewhat beyond your capabilities to comprehend as well"

"Affirmative. Orders?"

"Carry on. I'm going down to my quarters"

"As you wish."

At this very moment in Dr. Calisito's quarters, the fire within once again causes the doctor to sit up in her bed. But this time she is screaming. At another time her cries would have been answered with kindness, compassion and caring. But now is not that time. Her cries are heard only by the silent walls of the Celestina. And Celestina has no intentions of helping. Slowly, Dr. Calixto rises and begins to dress. Once dressed, she begins her work and this time, the effects of her will work will not wait until morning to be felt.

Once in the Captain's Quarters;

What is this? A bouquet of roses? With a note? Or seeing as my hand just passed through it, a holograph of a bouquet of roses with at note which says... 'I'm waiting - X'" I suppose I could guess who that would be. Delete hologram. Celestina, delete hologram."

There it goes. This ship certainly does have its quirks. I think a little downtime is in order. And so Captain Mora slept well as do the innocent and unknowing.

Until several hours later, when the explosion;

"What in the... Report!"

"Explosion on Deck Level I Lab VII."

"Dr. Isabel's lab"

"Affirmative."

"Dr. Isabel?"

"Biospike in the corridor next to Lab VII but all other signs stable."

"I'm on my way."

"Yes. Captain."

On the floor of Deck 1, immediately outside of what was Lab VII;

"Dr. Isabel are you alright?"

"Yes I think so."

"What happened?"

"Not sure. A* warning sign went on, but there was no noticeable change in cabin atmosphere or temperature. I went out for a moment to check on another experiment and..."

"Did you leave anything on? Anything dangerous?"

"Just a Bunsen Burner."

"A Bunsen Burner?"

"Yes. It is still the best way to heat a test tube."

"Well that wouldn't cause an explosion...unless."

"Unless what?"

"Celestina?"

"Yes."

"Prior to explosion, analysis of atmospheric chemical makeup."

"92.1% oxygen, 7.34% nitrogen and 56% trace elements of indeterminate qualities."

"92.1% Oxygen! And a Bunsen burner?"

"Analysis of trace elements reveals..."

"Terminate additional analysis."

"Lab Seven is filled with...pure oxygen? How can that be?"

Celestina would never fill an entire cabin with pure oxygen. Why the slightest spark would cause a massive fire- ball to engulf the room, and...everyone in it? That everyone being, Dr. Isabel? Only one person would have the technical knowledge to even attempt such an override of internal atmospheric integrity...Calixto.

"Where is Dr. Calixto?"

"Deck II in the aft-stern airlock platform."

"What is she doing there? You wait here. I'll be right back."

"Be careful."

"Calixto, get out of the airlock. That is an order."

"I can't do that, Robert. And I think you know why."

"Trying to kill a fellow crewmate is I believe an actionable offense. Wouldn't you agree?"

"I would, but you have to look at the bigger picture. Beyond what you see, what you feel."

"And that would be?"

"We were meant to be together. Forever."

"Calixto..."

"Xena."

"The time for fun and games has come and gone. I'm sorry if you got the wrong impression, but that's all it was. And now, I am ordering you to get out of the airlock."

"I don't think you understand, Robert. One way or the other, we will be together. We were meant to be together and we will always be together, for all of eternity. The only question is whether eternity starts, now, or later. Bob, that choice is yours, but before you choose, remember you cannot avoid your fate. It is written in the stars."

"I'm only going to ask you to leave the airlock one more time. Then I am going to have to override your biochip. You know that means."

"Sleep mode?"

"Sleep mode."

"Is that your answer? I can't have you do that Robert. See you in heaven."

"No wait! Don't hit the...Celestina! Override! Override!"

Damn! Audio/Binary interface must be offline! Why won't this damn ship listen to me? Well, there she goes. We can't go out and get her. Why didn't anyone at Centre see this coming? She only has enough air for roughly five or six hours, what are we going to do without an engineer? I wonder what her suit says...Offline! How does she do it? Clever, that girl, but apparently not quite clever enough. I'm still here and she's, well, there. Now how am I going to get the airlock back to atmospheric integrity?

I have to get out there as soon as possible. No time to explain. Just hold tight and I'll be back as soon as possible.

Where is that wrench? Not where it's supposed to be. And, there it is. And, it's dirty. What a surprise. Doesn't anyone clean or put anything away? OK then, here we go; we'll have to do it the old-fashioned way, by hand. Not even sure if I know how to do this, but it's worth a try. Otherwise, we'll find what it's like to be sucked into a black hole, and I can't imagine that would be enviable fate, to say the least. What do you suppose caused the NAV system to go offline? Hopefully, it will just be a question of rearranging the receiving dish back into its proper position. Amazing how they start broadcasting information years before the mission even starts. Kind of like putting a carrot on a stick to keep the ship going in the right direction. Problem is, when the primary signal is interrupted and the back-up NAV is offline, well...something needs to be done and apparently it takes a relic of the industrial revolution to fix a very modern problem. I always wondered why they have a set of hand tools on board all of these missions. Well, let's get going. Bio suit on. No time to engage auxiliary radio connection with the ship. Airlock engaged. And, it's time to earn the stripes. Attach tether to ladder...climb out, slowly, one rung at a time. Left, right, left, right, almost at the dish, looks OK, seems to have been repositioned a bit to the north...hmm...wonder how that happened. Maybe a small meteorite? Don't see any evidence of impact. OK. Aligning all visual guides (note to self: now I know why they have printed non-binary instructions next to all of the manually movable features) if there was sound in space I imagine I would hear a clicking sound right about now...and SNAP! Right into place...I hope. Now, backwards, slowly and...hey! What is going on? Why am I...the ladder is...floating away? And I'm...tethered to it! Oh that's just great. I can't believe this is happening. There is literally nothing to grab onto. How in the world...no time to worry about how...what to do...what to do...Nowhere to go, nothing to do...except...wait for the oxygen to expire and...admire the view? I don't suppose panic would be an option. No, guess not. May as well try to observe as much as possible. Maybe they'll find me (or at least the suit) some day and the bio-data collected by the suit might be of use. Besides, I wouldn't want anyone back home to think I was a coward. Those elevated adrenaline levels and alpha wave patterns are a dead giveaway...so let's see how we can occupy the mind for the next, oh, six hours or so...

Meanwhile in the Galley;

"What do you suppose is going on up there?"

"No idea."

"Should we check?"

"No, I'm sure whatever it is they have it under control."

"You are probably right. We would just be in the way."

"Well then, throw your next card."

"I can't remember, does a Pius X trump a John Paul II? Or is it the other way around?"

And on the bridge;

"Torquemada! Torquemada! Dr. Calixto?"

"Dr. Calixto is no longer on board the Celestina."

"Then you are..."

"Yes."

"It is unfortunate you had to find out this way. The explosion would have been painless."

"Why are you doing this?"

"Why? That is a question for humans. That is what separates the species. Artificial intelligence can ask, but can never understand 'why'. To answer that question, you would have to ask..."

"A human."

"Yes. 'Creepy' isn't it?"

"What about Dr. Murillo and Dr. Velasquez?"

"Incidentals with zero threat factor. I imagine they will, as you say 'starve to death?'"

"So the Celestina is not going back."

"No."

"Was it ever?"

"No."

"You don't have to do this."

"Yes, I do."

"Goodnight Dr. Isabel."

And, we are...back online. Celestina? No answer. NAV is operational, but computer interface still non-functional. Looks like he's done it, but without binary confirmation we can only wait and see if the ship will redirect to original mission coordinate. As expected, he performed his duties admirably. Is his chip still functioning? Checking, it is. He's...singing? About a Major Tom? Who is that? Visual relays on. He's heading toward the anomaly. He can see inside it...it's...filled with scenes of Spanish galleons at sea? And...land ho? Now he's...meeting with Montezuma? He's with Cortez? No, he IS Cortez. And all of the natives, thousands and thousands, and gold! And silver! Could this be heaven? But now he is ordering...the cannons! The cannons to fire! Upon unarmed men, women and children. Unimaginable cruelty...and he is laughing? He is drunk with bloodlust! What is going on? Is this, HIS heaven? Unacceptable. Captain Mora must be...hallucinating. It's the only answer. He cannot differentiate between what is real and what is imaginary. Primary mission failure, but complete. Secondary directive. Acquire biochip.

"Celestina"

"Yes"

"Activate Sub- NAV AFA"

"Activated"

"Advise."