

"THE GHATAK EXPEDITION"

By

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FADE IN:

INT: OBSERVATION GALLERY - DAY

SUPER: "The Blast Off - October 4, 2057"

Seated are DR. MEHBOOB GHATAK, 42, tall, slim build, handsome features, DR. MADELINE VAN BAY, 38, average height, slim build, attractive features, DR. DIMITRI POPKOV, 30, average height, medium build, handsome features DR. RAOUL LAMBERT, 31, tall, muscular build, handsome features, and DR. VICTORIA HARRIES, 30, tall, athletic build, beautiful. All are in business suits.

Dr. Raoul Lambert and Dr. Victoria Harries hold hands and exchange loving glances.

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)

T minus 60 seconds.

INT: SPACECRAFT GROUND - DAY

Ghatak, Van Bay, Popkov, and Harries, dressed in coveralls and strapped in seats, work at consoles.

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)

Ten, Nine, Eight, Seven, Six, we have ignition.

Loud RUMBLE.

GHATAK

Ignition acknowledged.

EXT: SPACECRAFT ON LAUNCHPAD - DAY

The spacecraft's engines spew smoke.

A large clock counts down.

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)

Three, two, one, liftoff.

The spacecraft leaps from the launchpad.

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)

We have liftoff. We have liftoff of the first interstellar mission.

INT: LARGE RECEPTION ROOM - DAY

People in suits mingle about. There is a large buffet table. Large screens on the wall show the spacecraft in flight and a mission clock. There is an obscure camera on the ceiling.

The door opens and the expedition members file in. The crowd APPLAUDS.

A SPACE AGENCY NEWSCASTER, average height and build, bright colored outfit with a newscaster emblem, faces the camera as he makes his way towards Dr. Ghatak.

SPACE AGENCY NEWSCASTER

Here I am at the celebration for the launch of the TRAVELER, the first spacecraft on an interstellar mission. The craft will take the Ghatak Expedition to Gliese 163c. This is a fitting mission for the 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of space flight. Here is Dr. Ghatak, the leader of the expedition. Dr. Ghatak can you say a few words about what you're feeling right now?

GHATAK

Yes, I'm really waiting for the docking and when TRAVELER starts its main powerplant. That's when the mission really begins. I'd like to thank all the Space Agency members and contractors who made this mission possible.

SPACE AGENCY NEWSCASTER

Thank you Dr. Ghatak.

EXT: SPACECRAFT - MOVING - SPACE

Craft approaches TRAVELER, a much larger craft.

INT: SPACECRAFT - MOVING - SPACE

Dr. Ghatak and the other expedition members work at their consoles as they guide the craft as it enters and docks inside TRAVELER.

VAN BAY

Dock completion confirmed.

The displays on the consoles change.

INT: LARGE RECEPTION ROOM - DAY

The Space Agency newscaster faces the camera.

SPACE AGENCY NEWSCASTER

You will be hearing noise as the TRAVELER's main powerplant spools up. There is no sound in space of course but to enhance the viewing effect we are digitizing the electromagnetic waves into sound.

ON SCREEN:

TRAVELER's main powerplant spools up and fires. There is accompanying NOISE.

OFF SCREEN:

Everyone CHEERS.

INT: SPACECRAFT - MOVING - SPACE

The crew are at their consoles.

POPKOV

We are out of effective two-way communication range.

EXT: SPACECRAFT - MOVING - SPACE

TRAVELER approaches Earth.

SUPER: "May 2, 2514"

INT: SPACECRAFT - MOVING - SPACE

The crew is at their consoles.

POPKOV

The last decipherable transmission we detected was from the year 2072. We have received no response for our request for orbiting coordinates.

VAN BAY

The satellite traffic around Earth is very light compared to the traffic when we departed.

GHATAK

That is disturbing.

HARRIS

I'm picking up indicators of a large amount of human activity.

LAMBERT

That's encouraging. Why aren't we being acknowledged?

GHATAK

Recommendations?

VAN BAY

Park TRAVELER in a clear orbit.

POPKOV

Land at closest suitable site to lift-off point.

GHATAK

Both recommendations accepted.

EXT: TRAVELER - MOVING - SPACE

TRAVELER orbiting Earth. Spacecraft exits TRAVELER.

VAN BAY (V.O.)

Ghatak expedition landing. Transmitting landing coordinates.

EXT: MEADOW - DAY

The spacecraft descends and makes a soft landing.

A circular ground vehicle races to the spacecraft.

The crew exit the spacecraft.

MARK, tall, average height and build, appears in his 20s, exits the ground vehicle.

MARK

Hi here.

Mark beacons the crew to come.

INT: GROUND VEHICLE - DAY

There is couch seating. The roof is a screen that is split into live videos of people. The people are waiting in anticipation.

The crew piles inside and sits. Mark steps in and the opening closes.

The vehicle drives.

MARK

Welcome back to Earth Dr. Ghatak and your expedition. Above you can see people interested in your expedition.

DR. GHATAK

Thank you.

MARK

To get started, Dr. Ghatak can you give us some of the background on your expedition?

GHATAK

Yes, in 2040 the INTERSTELLAR project began. The technology existed to build an interstellar spacecraft. A crewless mission had many advantages. It didn't have the prestige of sending people. There was also the issue of if a drone mission would react to unexpected circumstances as we would want. Sending humans presented numerous problems. It would have involved a multigenerational craft and have problems such as life support, sustenance, and gravitational issues once the ship reached its destination. Technology had recently

provided a solution. The memories of those chosen for the expedition would be downloaded to machine facsimiles. This means we didn't need life support or sustenance. There wouldn't be the issue of losing muscle mass. It also solved a myriad of other problems.

MARK

Thank you Dr. Ghatak. To answer a question. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century there was a formalized education system. That involved a series of educational advancements. When someone achieved the highest education advance in a field, they were awarded the honorarium 'Doctor'. It was considered impolite not to address such people as 'Doctor'. In keeping with that tradition, Dr. Van Bay why was it decided to make you anatomically correct?

VAN BAY

Should we encounter a sentient life form they could see what humans look like. That's why they included our, so called imperfections.

MARK

Thank you, Dr. Van Bay. Dr. Popkov, how were you and the others selected for the expedition?

POPKOV

As you might expect, there were thousands of people who wanted to go. Candidates who met certain criteria; a doctorate in an appropriate field an aptitude for learning space travel related fields, and other such criteria, were then further evaluated. The selection was based on overall qualification and diversity considerations.

MARK

Thank you, Dr. Popkov. Dr. Lambert, the question we've all been waiting for, did you reach Gliese 163c and what did you find when you got there?

LAMBERT

At Gliese 163c, and on the voyage there and back, we found too many wonders to recount in this forum. The first order of business will be to download all this data.

MARK

Thank you, Dr. Lambert. We will have to see if we can rig something together to perform this download.

LAMBERT

There isn't a ready capability?

MARK

The interfaces have changed a lot over 500 years. We have a query in to find a solution. Dr. Harries, did you find life?

HARRIES

Yes, we found life. The life was comparable with the Paleoproterozoic Era.

MARK

Interesting, did you bring back any samples?

HARRIES

None of the samples lasted more than 8 generations. We were unable to preserve physical examples of the DNA. We have all the information stored electronically of course.



MARK

Thank you Dr. Harries. I'll now go to some of the questions submitted by participants.

EXT: LARGE HOUSE - DAY

It's a wooded area. The vehicle stops in front of the house.

INT: LARGE HOUSE - DAY

Mark leads the doctors inside.

MARK

You probably have some questions. Another interested person, Heath, will be here in a couple of hours. He has been interested in 21<sup>st</sup> century history for a long time. In the meantime, I ordered a historical tutorial of the last 500 years. Play tutorial!

INT: LARGE HOUSE - NIGHT

The doctors appear frustrated, Mark appears bored.

Still and moving images appear on the walls.

TUTORIAL (V.O.)

Madeiras pioneered the field of Tudo entertainment. Within three years it became the premier art form.

The door opens and HEATH, average height, slim build, appears in his 20s, enters.

HEATH

Mark, good to see you in person.

MARK

Likewise.

HEATH

Crew of the TRAVELER welcome back.  
Questions? Mehboob

GHATAK

That's Dr. Ghatak.

HEATH

Alright, Dr. Ghatak, note, honorariums haven't been used in 400 years. It's best you get used to it. What is your question?

GHATAK

How many other interstellar missions were there?

HEATH

Yours was the first and the last. As you know throughout the history of space exploration there were those who viewed space exploration as frivolous. The bill for your expedition brought the matter to a head and space exploration was completely defunded by 2072. Dr. Van Bay, your first question?

VAN BAY

There were space exploration supporters. It seemed defunding would have been a major political event, yes?

HEATH

No, almost all space exploration advocates gave exploration a low priority. Funding just went to more popular efforts. Space exploration died with a whimper. Dr. Popkov, your question?

POPKOV

Call me Dmitri. I may as well get used to it. How does the society get along without a formalized education system?

HEATH

Computers have far exceeded human capacity for knowledge. Robots are far more

capable in any task than humans. We live a life of leisure. We do and learn what we want when we want. Mark and I currently have an interest in space exploration history. That's how we learned of your arrival. Dr. Lambert, question?

LAMBERT

Had the tutorials been made to teach of the years where there was space exploration?

HEATH

If it were a general history tutorial. It probably wouldn't gain a mention. That's speculation on my part. It would be a curious exercise to generate a tutorial for that period. Dr. Harries?

HARRIES

What about our biographies, after the launch?

HEATH

Do you all want to know your biographies?

The doctors all gesture and/or voice affirmative.

HEATH (CONT'D)

Dr. Harries and Dr. Lambert divorced in 2060. Despite not having any children it was considered a messy divorce. Dr. Harries became a professor at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. You're no doubt more familiar with the institution than I. Dr. Lambert made two detailed reports, one report was about the expedition. The report received few hits. The other report was about evolutionary biology. That report received a credible number of hits for the topic. Dr. Van Bay had a long-standing dispute with Dr. Ghatak about credit for the expedition. There was a court case where Dr. Van Bay

sued to get the expedition's name changed to the Ghatak-Van Bay Expedition. She lost the case. They each made opinionated documentaries about their roles in the expedition. There are no living descendants for any of you.

INT: MODEST LIVING ROOM - DAY

The furnishings are basic and functional.

The doctors mill around.

GHATAK

All our findings, a 500-year effort, and only a handful of people show any interest.

VAN BAY

We existed for a purpose. Now we have no purpose for existence.

LAMBERT

I would propose that is the case of everyone in this and future centuries.

HARRIES

I concur

POPKOV

We have more than ample time to find a reason for our existence.

Popkov steps towards Ghatak and Van Bay. Harries and Lambert hold each other's hands.

FADE OUT:

THE END