

Phantom Orbits

Main Notes: June 2021

On Ghosts:

When people die in space, they don't go on; they are trapped. Not entirely correct; if someone dies in Low Earth Orbit, they will either reach the beyond unguided or do so once they make planetfall -- which will occur as souls are attracted to objects with mass, therefore, the Earth will draw them. However, for middle and high Earth orbits, this may not happen -- reaching the beyond unguided -- and souls remain trapped within the outer Van Allen belt or pushed outside of it into interplanetary space. For those who die in interplanetary space or near other planetary bodies find themselves either adrift or pulled toward a moon or planet that has few or no other souls. The fact is, you don't want to die in space, and if you do, you are probably going to find yourself trapped and alone. When ghosts encounter the living in space, such as on a station or spacecraft, they will attempt to possess someone. Those people working in space, in regions that are ghost infested, take precautions to reduce the probability of possession and/or hire a ghost drover to forcibly drive ghosts into the beyond.

The crowning technological achievement of the mid-21st century was the opening of the Macapá (2063) and Singapore (2065) beanstalks (orbital elevators). A testament to the growing global unity and the slow reduction of the world population, as the whole world began to move through the demographic transition. In 2080 Christian Fundamentalist terrorists from the former-USA (Dominionist States, Christian Reconstructionist America) destroyed both beanstalks. The recorded number of dead in this attack was 35,718 people. Most of the deaths took place MEO (Medium Earth Orbit - 2,000 35,800 km) and within the Outer Van Allen Belt. Thus, the Outer Van Allen Belt is a heavily ghost infected region and require ghost drovers as part of any crew compliment operating in that region of space.

Ghost Drovers are those people who can perceive and manipulate ghosts. In an earlier time, they would be said to have psychic powers or possess magic; this is not the modern understanding of the phenomenon. The human soul or spirit is an actual entity, a form of energy that persists after the body dies. The nature of that energy is not yet understood -- it is called metaphysical energy - but it is being thoroughly researched. It is only after the 2046 GEO Station disaster

that it became evident that ghosts and souls were not psychological phenomena (delusions and misperceptions) but metaphysical phenomena that could manifest physical events. It was the Chinese Moon Base 1 accident of 2063 and the ghost-related deaths that killed all the remaining personnel on the two bases, which cemented the need for ghost drovers beyond LEO. Ghost drovers cannot tell the future, or manipulate the physical world, or read minds, but, they can detect ghosts, and manipulate ghosts, and push them into the Beyond (the afterlife; whatever that is, the ghost drovers only perceive that it is there, not what it is like). Ghost drovers are NOT ghost whisperers, they are ghost bouncers.

When people die on Earth, most spirits enter into the Beyond unaided. Some don't, hence the legends of ghosts throughout the millennia across all cultures. Based on the most current research, a gravity well of at least .10 g and in that gravity a minimum population density (of living persons) of 400 people per square kilometre is required for souls to enter the beyond unaided. If that is not present, and it is not on any space station or interplanetary settlement, the ghosts will remain. This is definitely the case in the MEO; not only is it full of ghosts, it is full of ghosts that have been trapped there for seventeen years -- many of these spirits are angry and desperate.

Types of Ghost:

Level 5: distraction, possession, physical manipulations

Level 4: distraction, physical manipulations, weak possession

Level 3: distraction, weak physical manipulations

Level 2: minor distraction

Level 1: no distraction

[illegible]

35,800 km to GEO @ 200 km/hr = 7.46 days
360 cars travelling each direction with up to 50 - 70 passengers per car, on each of the two beanstalks -- total recorded deaths 35,718 in the 2080 terrorist attacks.

Since 2080, the major spacefaring nations that continue to engage in human spaceflight operate stations in molniya orbits and tundra orbits, as well as a presence in low Earth orbit. Those nations are Canada, the EAU (EurAsian Union) and the E.U. (European Union). The E.U. is only involved in human spaceflight within LEO and the Inner Van Allen Belt, in partnership with the Space Consortium, Canada and the EAU. Canada and the EAU co-operatively participate in human spaceflight in Earth orbit, the Moon, and Mars. There are two large LEO stations; Gagarin (Canada & EAU) and Dordain (EU & Space Consortium, EAU, and Canada). Canada and the EAU operate three molniya stations (Chelomei, Mishin, and Chamberlin) and two tundra stations (Tsiolkovsky and Aikenhead), as well as their settlements on the Moon and Mars. Major launch facilities are Chapman Cosmodrome, Churchill, Manitoba, Canada & Plesetsk Cosmodrome, Mirny, EAU -- Molniya and Tundra. Vostochny Cosmodrome, Svobodny, EAU & Guiana Space Centre, Kourou, French Guiana, EU - LEO. The other spacefaring nations that engage in some human spaceflight are part of the Space Consortium (China, the Indian Federation, the Oceanic League, the South African Confederacy, and the South American Union) and all of these countries restrict human spaceflight to within LEO and all operations outside of LEO are performed by robots/drones.

On Geopolitics:

EAU and EU mostly co-operate and along with Canada, the Oceanic League, and the South African Confederacy have been instrumental in the establishment of the UN Parliamentary Assembly and the Transition - effective as of January 2, 2101, the UN will be a fully functional planetary government. Even though global tensions are reduced in comparison to the first quarter of the 21st century, there still are some armed conflicts. Also, certain nation-states continue to jostle for territorial position, prior to the end of the Transition. The major culprits are China and the Indian Federation, Texas and the South American Union (in essence Brazil). The three former USA theocracies are problematic for planetary government. As is the "basket case" that is north Africa and the Middle East which are the home to small, tribalist, often theocratic, warring states following the small scale nuclear war in this region that was initiated by the USA in its final years; this region is referred to as Unorganised Territory.

Canada, the EAU, the EU, China, and the Oceanic League currently act co-operatively as the global mediators who step in to diffuse conflict. The EAU, China, and the EU are global superpowers and Canada and the Oceanic League are regional superpowers. Texas, the Indian Federation, the South American Union, and the South African Confederacy are all middle powers.

Canada and China have cool to hostile relations (China was behind the Alaska Incident and has attempted to manipulate domestic politics in Pacifica) both the EU and the EAU aid to diffuse these tensions. The Oceanic League has good relations with the EU, the South African Confederacy, the Indian Federation, Brazil, and Canada. The South African Confederacy is on good terms with everyone, except for the multitude of minor Islamic nations to the north of their borders. As a region, the Middle East is no longer important for two reasons, nobody burns petroleum as fuel anymore, and the minor nuclear war fought in the region during the final days of the USA. Brazil occupies most of South America and is the major power there; sometimes this places it in conflict with Canada, but most of the time the two nations work together.

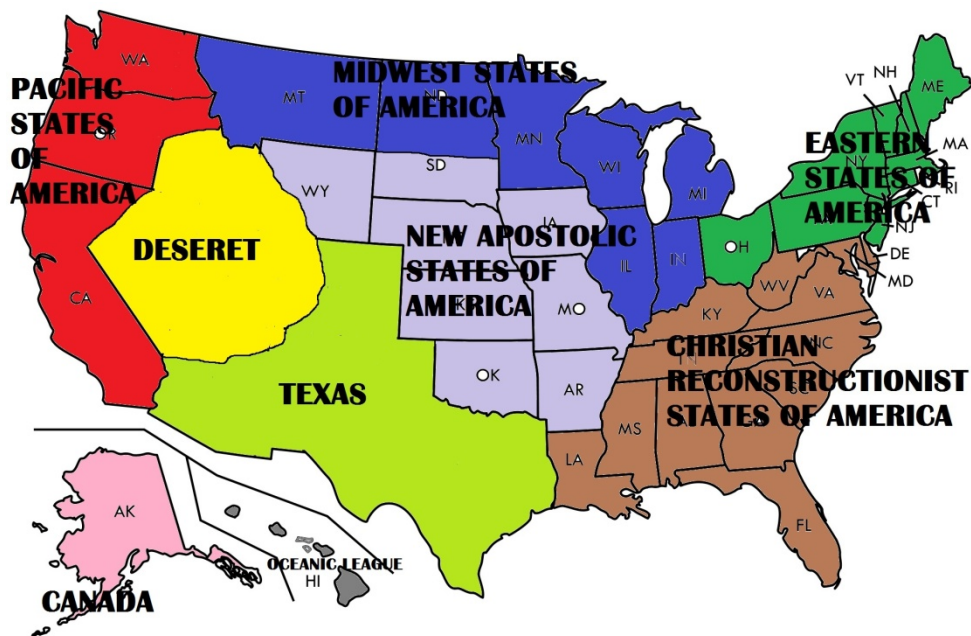
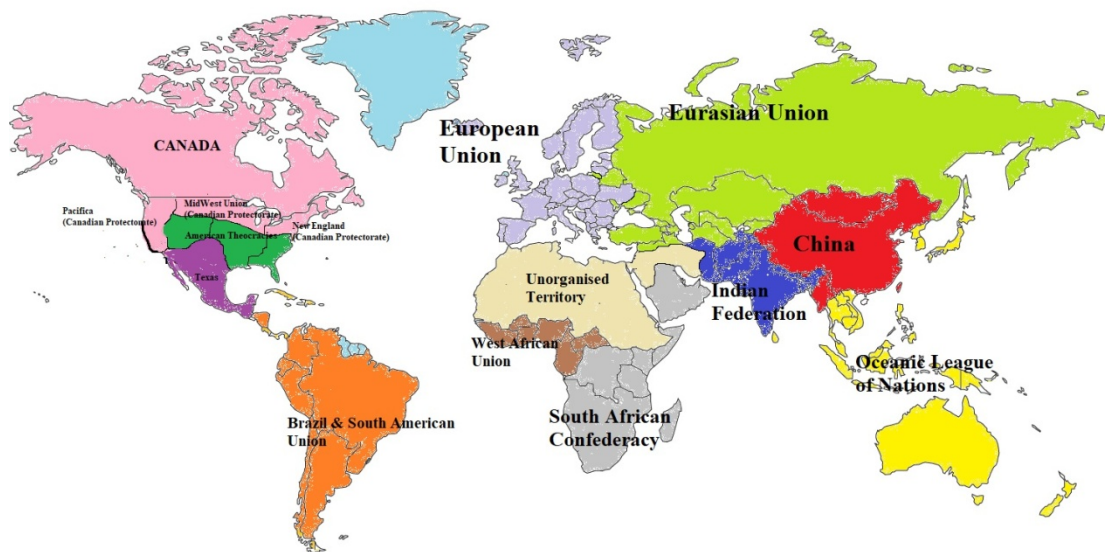
Canada, was forced to become a regional superpower due to the collapse of the United States of America which began in the 2030s. As the trend toward disintegration was apparent in the mid 2020s, Canada had made alliances with the EAU and EU and had acquired nuclear weapons in

secret from the EAU. During the fragmentation of the USA, Canada was able to exert military influence on the new collection of independent states now on its southern border. Canada, with pressure from China, the EAU, and EU, was able to manipulate the new states on its border to create the buffer states of Pacifica, the Midwest Union, and New England. Canada is the major trade partner with these three small powers, uses its military influence to maintain democratic government in these countries. With the aid of the EAU and EU, Canada was able to obtain all of the former-USA nuclear weapons stationed in these nations. Canada supports these three buffer states militarily and assists to maintain a high level of technology and standard of living in these nations. Originally the Republic of Alaska had a similar arrangement with Canada, until they acquired nuclear weapons from China and attempted to sell one of these weapons to Christian Reconstructionist America in 2044; Canada invaded and annexed Alaska.

Bordering the buffer states are the theocracies of Deseret, New Apostolic States, and Christian Reconstructionist America. In all three countries, the level of technology and the standard of living has dropped since the collapse of the USA. After the destruction of the beanstalks in 2080, these three nations have become global pariahs and only Texas has any trade with them. Texas does have active nuclear weapons and a high level of technology and is expansionist. Texas has invaded and annexed Mexico, Belize, Guatamala, El Salvador, and Honduras. Canada and the South American Union (which includes the Caribbean, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, and Panama) have an uneasy agreement to control Texas expansion; most of the time Canada and the South American Union work together, sometimes the South American Union acts rogue - as in their invasion of Cuba in 2077.

While on Earth, Canada is a regional superpower that only exerts influence within its region -- and mostly to contain and control the nations that were once part of the former USA - they are a respected minor global superpower (they have two thirds the same number of nuclear weapons as the EAU). It is in space where Canada truly exerts influence and although Canada is strongly allied with the EAU, they are also competitors - they are the true spacefaring superpowers. While both nations do work together, Canada has made it very clear that its lunar and martian bases are Canadian territory, regardless of the 1967 Outer Space Treaty.

World Mercator Projection Map with Country Outlines



Pacifica, MidWest Union, New England are Canadian Protectorates.

On Settings:

Chapman Cosmodrome, Churchill, Manitoba, Canada -- Molniya and Tundra
Plesetsk Cosmodrome, Mirny, EurAsian Union (EAU) -- Molniya and Tundra
Vostochny Cosmodrome, Svobodny, EurAsian Union (EAU) -- LEO
Guiana Space Centre, Kourou, French Guiana, European Union (EU) -- LEO

Gagarin Station	LEO	450 km	EAU/Canada/EU
Dordain Station	LEO	460 km	EU/Space Consortium/EAU/Canada

Chelomei Station	Molniya	EAU/Canada
Chamberlin Station	Molniya	EAU/Canada
Glushko Station	Molniya	EAU/Canada

Molniya Orbit: Perigee 500 km Apogee 39,850 km orbital period 717 minutes (11 hours, 57 minutes)

Tsiolkovsky Station	Tundra	EAU/Canada
Aikenhead Station	Tundra	EAU/Canada

Tundra Orbit: Perigee 1,000 km Apogee 52,000 km orbital period 24 hours

Chelomei Station

Novyy Soyuz (spacecraft) - third generation Orel (8 to 10 crew)
Stykovka (docking module communications)
Robototekhnika (robotics and assembly module)
Moshchnost' (solar array and radiators)
Uzrel (active shielding device)
Kabina (crew quarters)
Sodruzhestvo/Commonwealth
Habitant Module (crew quarters)
Junction module (active shielding device)
Thunderbird module (solar array and radiators)
Raven module (docking, communications, and robotics)
Voyageur (spacecraft) - based on Crew Dragon 4 (8 crew)

Murray's Quarters:

Most ghost drovers have a "habit" or a peculiarity. Murray smokes tobacco, in particular Russian cigarette tobacco. Murray's quarters are slightly smaller than average; that is because it is its very own room, with an airlock connecting it to the rest of the station. Essentially, it is a mini-module attached to Chelomei Station.

On Characters:

Murray Patterson is a ghost drover (призрак - пастух or prizrak - pastukh) on Chelomei Station which is jointly operated by the EurAsian Union (EAU) and Canada. Patterson is Canadian. Patterson is not a very nice guy; he is moody, argumentative, reclusive, and wants things his own way -- but he is good at his job. Chelomei is in a molniya orbit which means that most of each day, the station is within the ghost infested outer Van Allen belt. Although the station is well shielded -- to protect those onboard -- there is no shielding to block out ghosts. However, the station is moving at roughly 3 km per second; most of the ghosts that it encounters are random encounters -- but some are planned (by the ghost itself). Whether the encounter is initiated or random, that is where Murray Patterson comes in and it is why the station maintains a ghost drover on staff. Patterson may not be likeable, but he is just the right type of asshole to keep ghosts at bay. As an explanation for his social behaviour, or lack thereof, his "gift" is that he can see ghosts, interact with ghosts, and move them into the beyond -- he is able to see and communicate with that which most people are unaware even exists and that makes him seem like

he is a crazy person. The fact that all his encounters are with space ghosts, who are really unpleasant and nasty, is another mitigating factor. This is not to say that he couldn't do better to be a nicer person, it just provides the context. While his job title is ghost drover, don't think of him as a ghost whisperer, think of him as a ghost bouncer.

Patterson does not like his Russian counterpart, Darya Tretyakova, who he rarely has to interact with, anyway. Patterson tolerates most of his co-workers, though he is close friends with Lewis Cooper (who is a imaging technician and from the same region -- southwestern Ontario -- of Canada) and Galina Mironova (IT). Patterson tends to socialise perhaps more with Cooper when they are on the same tour, than he does with Galina, though he socialises with Galina both at work and when planetside and they are also sexual partners; i.e. they are in, albeit an odd one, a relationship. Patterson doesn't realise this yet, or he if he has he hasn't consciously acknowledged it, but he is in love with Galina.

Galina, is a high-functioning alcoholic -- a binge-drinker -- and subject to depression and agoraphobia (home is perfect, spacecraft okay, station is good, any large public spaces or a spacecraft where she doesn't know anyone are very bad for her. Galina lost her husband (Nikolay) and her five year old daughter (Veronika) in the terrorist attack that destroyed the Singapore beanstalk. She was supposed to be with them, but was delayed -- she was four days behind them but far enough down that her climber-car was rescued -- and she blames herself for not being there with them and for surviving. For the past seventeen years, that is all that she has done -- survive. She is in love with Murray, but is afraid; both of making a commitment, of failing, and of Murray's bitterness.

Characters:

Murray Patterson
Erin Fairhurst
Collette Roquelaure
Thomas Candau
Galina Mironova
Asya Letkova
Lewis Cooper
Anton Novikov
Svetlana Vlaskalic
Veronika Simka Mironova

2097 Galina = 42 Murray = 51
2080 Destruction of Singapore beanstalk (Nikolay & Veronika killed)
2075 Veronika born
2074 Galina & Nikolay Mironov married
2055 Galina born
2046 Murray born

60.5 minutes to outer Van Allen belt 121 minutes per orbit (2hrs, 1 min)
4 hours and 3 minutes per day

597 = 9hrs, 57 min in outer Van Allen belt per orbit
19 hours and 57 minutes per day

Apogee: 36,800 km 3.04 km/s
Perigee: 1,504 km 7.11 km/s

Molniya stations are third generation modular stations based on the first High-Latitude Orbital Station, also known by its Russian abbreviation as VShOS, built and launched in the 2030s.

Murray: 7 days on, one day off, 7 days on, rotation Earthside (28 days), then back.

On Plot: Phantom Orbits Novella

Galina has been possessed; Murray Patterson has to save her. He only has nine hours to do so. And Galina also has a tough decision to make...

1: Murray and Ghosts	(Chelomei Station)
2: Murray and Galina	(Chelomei Station)
3: Murray and the Ghost Girl	(Chelomei Station)
4: Anton Possessed	(Chelomei Station)
5: Anniversary Binge	(Moscow)
6: Ghost Girl Makes a Threat	(Chelomei Station)
7: Festival Fun	(Dundas)
8: Ghost Girl Re-Appears	(Chelomei Station)
9: Us?	(Chelomei Station)
10: I Know Something	(Chelomei Station)
11: Wasted in Bar London	(Sochi)
12: Galina Possessed	(Chelomei Station)
13: A Mother's Love	(Chelomei Station)
14: The L Word	(Chelomei Station)
15: Galina Chooses	(Chelomei Station)
16: Residence Patterns	(St. Lambert)

PHANTOM ORBITS - novel

Composed of three novellas and two short stories

The Day the Canadians Came

Date: 2051 (protagonist is recalling events of 2041 as a mature adult)

Protagonist: Thomas Griffin (trained Brittany Keeper)

Setting: Cario, Midwest Union

Plot: The liberation of Cario by Canadian Forces

2,550 words

An Absent Whiff of Shade

Date: 2065

Protagonist: Brittany Keeper (trained Elena Kolesnikova & Murray Patterson)

Setting: LRB-4 (Chinese Lunar Research Base)

Plot: hostile ghosts that manipulate smell...

3,500 to 4,500 words estimated

Terminal Steward

Date: 2082

Protagonist: Elena Sergeevna Kolesnikova

Setting: Dordain Station (LEO)

Plot: a friendly ghost that shouldn't be...

10,000 to 17,500 words estimated

Phantom Orbits

Date: 2097

Protagonist: Murray Patterson

Setting: Chelomei Station (Molniya)

Plot: Murray is a ghost drover who encounters a ghost he cannot handle...

45,000 to 50,000 words

Marooned (With Assorted Spectres)

Date: 2099

Protagonists: Main - Elena Sergeevna Kolesnikova, Minor - Murray Patterson, Brittany Keeper, Thomas Griffin

Settings: Main - Chamberlin Station (Molniya), Minor - Chelomei Station (Molniya), Glushko Station (Molniya)

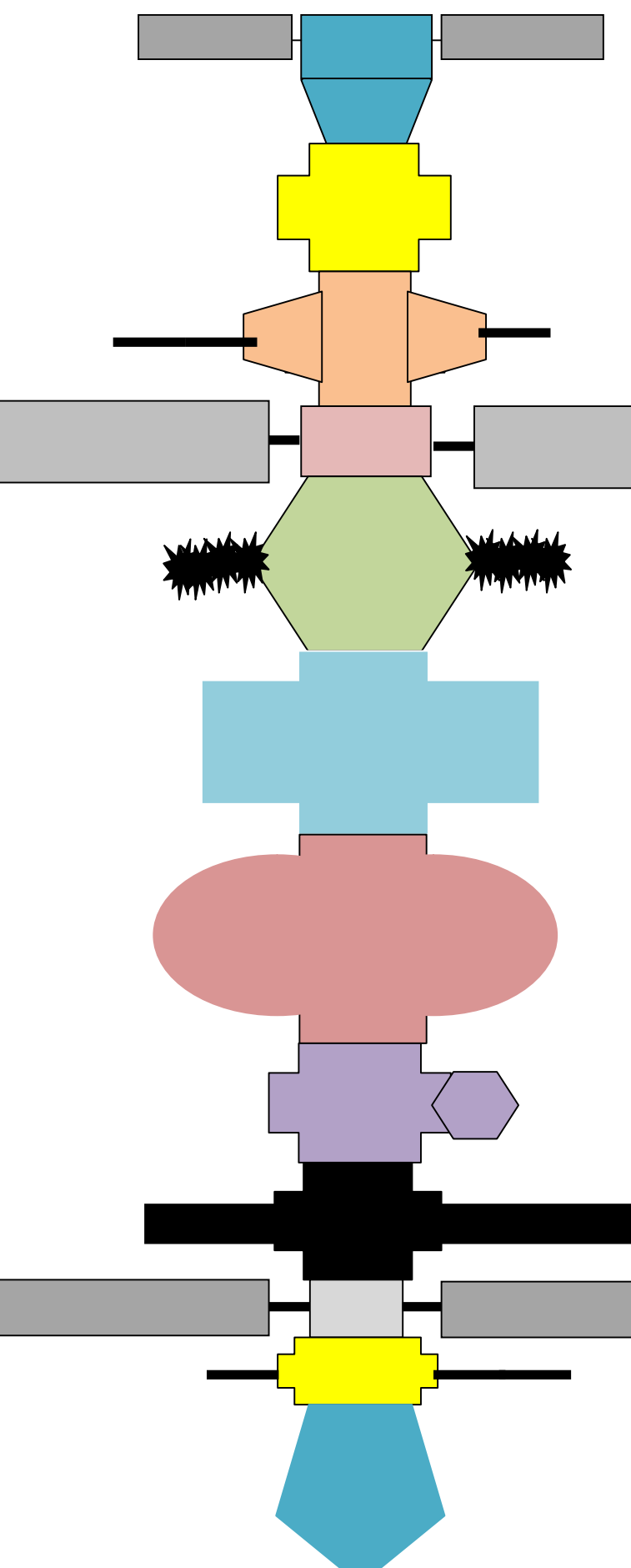
Plot: Station evacuated as ghost* threatens to destroy it

25,000 to 30,000 words

*Earl Calhoun, one of the Christian Reconstructionists American suicide bombers who destroyed the Singapore Beanstalk.

Appendix 1: Chelomei Station

Novyy Soyuz (spacecraft) - third generation Orel (8 to 10 crew)
Stykovka (docking module communications)
Robototekhnika (robotics and assembly module)
Moshchnost' (solar array and radiators)
Uzrel (active shielding device)
Kabina (crew quarters)
Sodruzhestvo/Commonwealth
Habitant Module (crew quarters)
Junction module (active shielding device)
Thunderbird module (solar array and radiators)
Raven module (docking, communications, and robotics)
Voyageur (spacecraft) - based on Crew Dragon 4 (8 crew)



Novyy Soyuz

Stykovka (docking module)

Robototekhnik
(robotics and assembly)

Moshchnost'
Solar array and radiators

Uzel
(active shielding device)

Kabina (crew quarters)

Sodruzhestvo/Commonwealth

Habitant (crew quarters
and Murray's module)

Junction
(active shielding device)

Thunderbird
(solar array and radiators)

Raven
(docking, communications, and
robotics)

Voyageur

Appendix 2: Phantom Orbits Novella Outline

1: Murray and ghosts

- 1.1 Murray and Ghost
- 1.2 Ghost Typology
- 1.3 Into the Beyond
- 1.4 Quickies
- 1.5 Morning
- 1.6 On Ghosts

2: Murray and Galina – station

- 2.1 Girlfriends Past
- 2.2 Dinner
- 2.3 Sex and Cigarettes
- 2.4 Sleeping in and Lunch
- 2.5 Midnight Hour

3: Murray and ghost girl

- 3.1 Darya Tretyakova
- 3.2 Someone's There
- 3.3 Ghost Girl

4: Anton Possessed

- 4.1 Murray and Anton
- 4.2 The Ghost
- 4.3 Pushing Into the Beyond
- 4.4 Ghost Girl Watching
- 4.5 Countdown

5: Murray and Galina -- Earthside (Moscow)

- 5.1 Anniversary Binge
- 5.2 Aftermath

6: Ghost girl makes a threat

- 6.1 Just Another Day
- 6.2 Ghost Girl Again
- 6.3 I Will Follow You...

7: Murray and Galina -- Earthside (Dundas)

- 7.1 Festival Fun
- 7.2 The Future

8: Ghost girl appears and re-appears during tour

- 8.1 I'm Back
- 8.2 Not Going Away

9: Murray and Galina -- Chelomei Station

- 9.1 Us?
- 9.2 Shit or Get Off...
- 10: Ghost girl penetrates Murray's block
 - 10.1 Collette possessed
 - 10.2 Violation
 - 10.3 I Know Something...
 - 10.4 I'm Going to Take Something From You
- 11: Murray and Galina -- Earthside (Sochi)
 - 11.1 Wasted in Bar London
 - 11.2 Hotel Agreement
 - 11.3 Stalin Says
- 12: Galina possessed
 - 12.1 Ghost Girl Returns
 - 12.2 Galina Possessed
- 13: Murray and ghost girl -- ticking clock
 - 13.1 A Mother's Love
 - 13.2 90 Minutes...
 - 13.3 Willing Sacrifice
 - 13.4 What Do I Want...
- 14: Murray forces issue
 - 14.1 Holding Veronika at Bay
 - 14.2 The L Word
- 15: Galina makes her choice
 - 15.1 No Longer My Daughter
 - 15.2 I Choose Life
- 16: Murray and Galina -- Earthside (St Lambert, Quebec)
 - 16.1 Residence Patterns
 - 16.2 Next Steps...

Appendix 3: The Day the Canadians Came

The Day the Canadians Came

by

Neil Williams

The tenth anniversary is fast approaching and I will be in geosynchronous orbit when that date arrives. So, my bosses in Administration and the Social Media Relations people want me to make a record of my recollections of that event. I have tried to tell them that I was extensively interviewed back in 2041, but they want my own feelings and thoughts as an adult. So here it comes, a monologue.

Grant tells me not to be boring.

Grant Edmundsen was, or is, my best friend. He is now forever, age eight. He is about 127 cm tall, with light brown hair (in a bowl-cut), and grey-green eyes. He doesn't age. No ghosts age. And, as my best friend, Grant follows me everywhere.

I am not a ghost whisperer, a person who coaxes or guides spirits of the departed to enter into the Beyond, the Afterlife, or whatever you want to call it. For the vast majority of people, when they die, their spirit slips easily into the Beyond. Only those souls that believe that they have "unfinished business", actual or imagined, remain. And those ghosts need to be gently prodded or shown the path into the Beyond.

But, if you die in space, especially from Middle Earth Orbit and out, you cannot enter into the Beyond yourself. We do not know why yet. This has only recently become a subject of scientific and empirical study.

It was the Singapore Station Massacre in 2046 that changed everything. An accident occurred, in which 127 people died; then the ghosts of those who had perished, killed every other

person on the station. This was all recorded on the security cameras, persons murdered by invisible forces. Documented and analysed. And so, new controls were created.

People like me are part of those controls. Ghost drovers are "ghost bouncers". Metaphysically, we grab the ghost, open a portal into the Beyond, toss the ghost through the portal, and then close it. We don't know a lot yet in this field, but this we do know; ghosts are real. Some people can see ghosts. A small number of those people who can perceive ghosts are also able to manipulate ghosts. I am one of those people. And I am a Mission Specialist with the Canadian Space Agency.

Grant says I have to tell my story. He says that they will show this on a big holo in St. Mary's Park by the Gazebo. And I tell Grant that the Gazebo and park were destroyed by the tanks of the Little Egypt Righteousness Army back in '32. Grant says that the town has rebuilt the park and the Gazebo, better than it was.

I was born in 2025, in Cairo Illinois. And should my hometown come up in conversation, I still correctly call it 'CARE-oh'; instead of the Canadian pronunciation of 'KYE-row'. I don't recall much from the time before, when there was the United States of America. I guess I started noticing how things were falling apart when I was around age five. The electricity was no longer a constant. It would be on for weeks and then off for days. Then those days became weeks, eventually months. Everyone had a gas generator for the fridge and freezer. Cooking was done on the barbeque. Solar power panels collected electricity to charge the portable power station, so that we could watch TV and charge phones. But the mobile phones could find a network less and less. Dad wasn't working anymore. My parents argued more. But, that was the same for many of my friends too. There was rationing at the supermarket. My favorite cereal, Froot Loops was no longer available. Things were getting worse. But the adults just called it the "new normal" and so we didn't worry. But even if we did worry, there was nothing, as kids, we could do about it."

Grant says I am wrong. Grant was worried. He didn't believe that this was a "new normal". He knew that it would be an "end of everything". It wasn't, the end of everything. It would be, unfortunately, the end of Grant. And the end of many others too.

I don't know why I can see ghosts. I do know when this talent first emerged. That was the day that I saw my Uncle Mike

die in October of 2031. I was almost age six when he died. Cairo had been occupied by the Illinois Apostolic Crusade. This was the first army to occupy Cairo during The Chaos. It wouldn't be the last. We were under strict curfew, but the town, newly occupied, did not know how strict. Mom didn't allow smoking in the house, or on the front porch, so Uncle Mike had gone out onto the front lawn to smoke a cigarette.

Then a military patrol turned the corner onto our street. As they passed our home, they opened fire on Uncle Mike. There was blood and he crumpled to the ground on the lawn. And didn't. He was dead on the ground and also still standing. Standing on the lawn, as if nothing had happened, but you could sort of see through him and he had a faint glow about him.

He turned to me and put his left index finger to his lips. "Shhh! Don't say a word, Tommy." He turned to face the street and the departing military patrol. "Good boy, Tommy", I heard him say in my mind. Uncle Mike finished his cigarette, tossed the butt into the street, and then walked toward the sidewalk. Some sort of oval doorway appeared out of nothing. In my field, we now call that a portal. Uncle Mike, walked to the doorway. He waved to me. "See you later, Tommy." And he and the doorway vanished together.

After that, I saw ghosts. And not all ghosts are nice. And not all people are nice, either.

Dad died in 2032. That is when the army of the Illinois Apostolic Crusade was pushed out by that of the Little Egypt Righteousness Army. This bunch was more Christian Dominionist, and they didn't consider Roman Catholics or Eastern Orthodox to be Christians. I will never understand the supposed logic of how the two founding churches of Christianity are somehow not Christian, but this is the sort of shit that most of the Christian Nationalist crazies believed in. They also believe that they have the God-given right to enforce their beliefs on others, at gunpoint.

The army of the Little Egypt Christian Republic came for my sisters. Jenny was age twelve and Lexi was fourteen. As my sisters were both "Catholic heathens" the Military Authority informed us that they were taking the girls into their custody to "save their souls". They would be forcibly converted and married to military officers. My father refused and was shot dead in the front doorway. The military took Jenny and Lexi away. I never saw them again.

Grant says that Jenny was sold by the military of the Little Egypt Christian Republic to Deseret; she is still alive and a sister-wife with six children. Lexi he can find no trace of. That means that she is neither alive nor a ghost, so she is probably dead and her spirit has entered the Beyond.

Mom just disappeared the following year. She went to work at the warehouse and never came home. Other people also vanished without a trace. It had become almost "normal", not common, but not uncommon. A kind of background hum to the '30s...

We were invaded by the New Apostolic States of America in late June of 2033. They were worse than the Little Egypt Christian Republic. Under their Occupation the schools were re-opened. But, the boys and girls were separated. The girls were taught how to cook and clean, perform first aid, and religion. We boys were taught how to use a rifle, use grenades and grenade launchers, signals, and religion. Most of the religion was propaganda bullshit and unlike any form of Christianity I had ever heard of at the time or even since. It was just "batshit crazy" stuff.

And the bastards killed Grant. By then, Grant and I were eight years old. We knew little about sex and nothing about sexual orientation. But we did know abuse, and Pastor Leyton was a master in providing abuse. And he engaged in special forms of abuse with his favourites. Julian Harrison, who was eleven years old, was one of the "special favourites" of Pastor Leyton.

One afternoon, Julian was dragged into the schoolyard by the military. He was badly beaten and could barely stand. They tied him to the flagpole and called him an "abomination". They handed out rifles to us boys and we were ordered to line up, facing Julian. We were ordered to fire, on the officer's signal, at Julian. We did. We all shot him dead. Well, not all. Grant didn't. So the military took Grant away.

The next morning when we arrived at school and Grant's severely beaten body was hanging from the arch of the front gate.

I could go on, and on. The New Apostolic States of America were overrun by the Christian Reconstructionalist States of America. Then the New Apostolic States were conquered by the Christian Dominionist States. And then began the endless war, from our point of view, between the Christian Dominionists and the Christian Reconstructionalists. As our town went back and

forth as territory, between these two damned theocracies. And each time, each new turnover, only brought more death.

People got by, but we were not really a town anymore. Not a community. Everyone hid. Stayed home with the doors locked and the windows boarded. They would only go out to buy food when there was no military presence on the Byway. Rise Market was open Tuesdays and Food Mart on Thursdays. I was living in an abandoned partially burnt out house on Commerce Avenue near 28th Street. The whole living room had been destroyed by fire, but the back bedrooms and kitchen were okay. I made sort of "blackout curtains" for the back part of the home, so it looked uninhabited.

Grant tells me he liked that place. It has been demolished and new homes have been built on 28th Street. They look nice.

Then there were rumours of Canadian activity up north in Carbondale and in West Frankfort. News sources were scant. Judy Chester had a ham radio, but the Christian Reconstructionalists seized that when they killed the whole Chester family. There were people in town who had rebuilt old desktop computers from spare parts. They had revived some of the old 1990s Bulletin Board Systems software, were making use active landline connections. Ava Hopkins had a node on Fidonet and when the militaries were busy fighting each other she would use it. So news of what was happening outside of town did filter in, though it would almost always be dated and the reliability questionable.

But we knew that the Canadians had liberated the Pacific Northwest from Deseret, the Texas Republic, and the Christian Dominionists. The Canadians were fighting the Christian Reconstructionalists in Ohio, and Indiana, and in northern Illinois. We also heard that the European Union, the Russian Federation, and China had requested that Canada attempt to stabilise the situation; to contain the warring successor states of the former United States of America. Canada accepted the task, and received support from these major powers and the United Nations, both financially and militarily, to accomplish the job. So, we were aware that the Canadians may be coming, eventually. And we hoped that they would come to Cairo.

However, nobody expected them to arrive from the south, across the Cairo Mississippi River Bridge, and coming up Highway 60.

I remember May 14, 2041. That memory is as clear now as it was a decade ago. The night of May 13 was a dangerous one. It

was a night to stay in and have the lights off. And people with any sense did just that. You could hear the chaos and panic, and last minute retributions, as the Christian Reconstructionalists were pulling out. We were expecting that the army of the Christian Dominionists would be arriving soon to occupy us, once again.

So the whole town was quiet that Tuesday morning. It was cool, only about 12 degrees; sorry, 54 degrees Fahrenheit. And, it was pouring rain. I was waiting for Rise Market to open, so I could stock up on some food before it was all requisitioned by the Christian Dominionists. And that is when I saw the convoy.

Okay, it was Grant who first saw the convoy, and told me.

My first thought was, shit. Because I would not be able to purchase or trade for any food. As I watched the approaching drone swarms, I noticed that there was something off about them. They were swarms of reconnaissance drones, not attack drones. And then, squinting at the convoy vehicles, I could see that these were LUAV 7 vehicle drones followed by the LAV 8s. That was when I knew that it was the Canadians. The reconnaissance drones were now overhead and dropping leaflets. I snagged one out of the air as it drifted past me.

It was brief and stated: 'You have been LIBERATED. You are now part of the MidWest Union, a Protectorate of Canada. Civil administration will be restored over the next three months. Elections are to be held next year. Legislative Assembly of the MidWest Union'.

I didn't understand most of the words. But, I did understand that we were now part of Canada, and that we had been liberated, and that things were going to go back to some sort of normal. Even though the rain was falling heavier and I was getting soaked through, I felt something that I had not felt for a long time in my fifteen year-old life; I felt hope.

END