

The group slowly began to move away from Danny sitting in his chair. They went back to their menial tasks of maintaining The Matrix, which included numerous reboots and some code rewriting. There were cans and cans of Mountain Dew strewn about, most of it very old and flat, but it was the most plentiful source of liquid. There were also a lot of McDonald's wrappers on the ground. Danny guessed that Mountain Dew and McDonald's double cheeseburgers were mostly all that was left of their major food stores. Like all computer geeks, they were using those foods up at an alarming rate.

"Shouldn't we be getting back to that nuclear heist?" asked Danny. He tried to ask his brother, but Gerald was too busy making out with Caspian. Soon they stood and retired elsewhere out of sight. Danny rolled his eyes.

Kazaa turned to Danny from his gigantic computer console. "Uh, well, we don't have to worry about that so much right now."

"Why's that?" replied Danny.

"Well, because we paused it. We're restarting an app server, again. We seem to have nothing but trouble with this stuff. If you ever get asked to host The Matrix, just say 'no'. It's too much work for very very little reward. Really, really pointless..." answered Kazaa. His voice trailed off as he hit more keys and watched the screen with a frowning face.

"Why does that even matter?" pressed Danny.

"Well, the problem," said Ratz, coming forward wearing an anime t-shirt, "is that it's not ours."

"What?" puzzled Danny with a frown.

"It's not ours. We write or program everything into The Matrix: every person, every atom, every cell. This nuclear weapon, whatever it really is, we didn't write. We're not sure where it came from, who made it, or what it's capable of."

"But," said Danny, looking over the screens of streaming computer code, "you said it would destroy the universe."

"Yeah," said Ratz, "we say a lot of things. But, honestly, you guys are the only hope. You and Gerald."

“What about Kazaa?” asked Danny, gesturing toward the large, bald-headed leader in front of him. “Why can’t he take care of it? I bet he’s a really good person at The Matrix.”

“Oh, he’s retired,” answered Ratz. “He used to be really good at it, but he gave it up for this IT job.”

“He’s retired?! How can he be retired?! Shouldn’t everyone be working on getting this nuclear thing back and figuring out how it works?” cried Danny.

“I’m right here, you know,” said Kazaa, standing up to face Danny. “Yes, I retired. I used to be a very prominent member of The Matrix. I was Abraham Lincoln, ever heard of me? I died and so I can’t reappear.”

“How were you Abraham Lincoln- oh, yeah, the slaves.”

“Well, more than the slaves! But, you can’t really change your identity very well in The Matrix. You have to wait until you can’t be recognized anymore, which used to be a lot easier before photography and paintings and all that jazz. So, trust me, Danny. If I wasn’t already on a piece of American currency, I’d be in there,” said Kazaa, edging in on Danny with fierce eyes.

“Fine. Let’s get back in there, then, and deal with it,” offered Danny. He walked back and sat in his chair, trying to get his straps on, but there were no straps. “Let’s go. Strap me in or whatever. Send me back in and let’s do this.”

Kazaa walked over to Danny, sitting in his chair, and put his hand on Danny’s shoulder. “Well, you can’t leave from here. We’ve had a number of power problems, and extracting you took much longer than we planned, and it’s drained our power cells. We have to wait until we can recharge them.”

“And how do you do that?” asked Danny.

“We have solar panels around, but…” his voice trailed off as he gestured toward the sky. Danny looked up and noticed that the entire sky was overcast and had been his entire time there. And, thinking back to the movies, it was always overcast there, too.

“So, how long does it usually take for the sun to come out around here?” questioned Danny.

“Well, I’ve been out of The Matrix for something like sixty years, and I haven’t seen the sun yet,” answered Kazaa. He stared at Danny with a knowing look. “We do have a possible solutions for this situation. If... if you’ll accept.”

Danny frowned. Another mission? “What is it? Let’s just do it so we can get this plot going again.” Kazaa agreed.

Kazaaa said, “Okay. You and Gerald will need to fly, by the old way, to Earth. Right now we’re on Mars, yes, Mars. So, to get to the Earth, you have to slingshot around the Moon to get enough momentum to get to Earth.”

“Like in Armageddon?” asked Danny. “That one movie with the asteroid that’s going to destroy Earth.”

“Um... no. Not really... kinda...” sputtered Kazaa. “Look, first, do you know how to drill for oil?”

“No, I don’t,” Danny answered. “I’ve never done anything like that.”

“Well... okay. Suit up! They’re launching in ten minutes, Mars Time!” called Kazaa. Suddenly everyone was in view, all of the people, and they were busily collecting items for the upcoming rocket launch. Danny and Gerald were escorted to a launch pad some thirty feet away from the dentist chairs. There was assembled a large rocket, much in the same fashion of ancient American Earth space shuttles of the days of yore. It appeared to be functioning, at least a little bit, but it looked like the pictures Danny had seen on tour to help him know what it felt like to make a difference slightly smaller than the one he had been making with his fanatically popular band, YasBM.

They made their way into the pit of the rocket, which looked a bit like an airplane, now that Danny thought about it. “We have it fully loaded with gallons of rocket fuel. You should be able to make it all the way to Earth within the span of the next two hours. During that time, we’ll probably have The Matrix working again. You will, hopefully, land on or near the rocket pad for the Earth Real Thingy base. There you’ll find five or six survivors. They will probably be French or French-born. The French always seem to survive nearly every conflict with minimal blood loss. This goes for the famous battle with the Robot Machines,” explained Kazaa.

Danny and Gerald took their spots, strapped into the rocket. They heard the random murmuring and banging of their other Real Thingy friends adjusting the rocket's different gages and inner workings. They simply sat in the cockpit like monkeys waiting for their launch date and their banana.

"10.. 9..." shouted Kazaa, somewhere on the ground around them. "8... 7... 6... 5... 4... 3... 2... 1..." Then after saying "1", there was a loud roar behind them. Then all they saw was thick white smoke clouding the windshield. Then the roar started to shake the entire rocket body. Then they heard a faint "0", and it felt like an apron of lead had been thrust upon both of them as the rocket pushed up off the ground. They continued to see smoke for a while, and then, suddenly, the smoke cleared away, and Danny and Gerald saw black space and stars.

The rocket was rocketing through the thin atmosphere of Mars and into the space beyond. Danny felt his chest constricted, like it was hard to breath. His eyes fought to stay in his eye sockets, and focused. He didn't have much of a space suit, and they seemed to have even less expertise in running a rocket. "A-are we... going to-to-to... be able to stee-ee-r this... thing?" Danny tried to talk to his brother.

Gerald just closed his eyes and meditated, trying to transport his soul back to Caspian, his long-time lover. Soon they were beyond Mars and simply staring into the stars. A long way off they saw the Moon and beyond that they saw the Earth. They felt a bump and the two booster rockets came off the shuttle. Then there was a second bump, and suddenly the vehicle was going at eighteen times the speed it was going before. Danny closed his eyes against it, the force was so great.

When he opened his eyes again he saw the Moon. It flew past them like a great, grey, spotted billiard ball. At that moment, Gerald hit a button on the console and a large grappling hook flew from the front of the rocket and attached itself to the surface. The rocket continued to go straight ahead, past the Moon and past the Earth.

"What's going on?" yelled Danny, being wholly unable to move his jaw much, it came out as "Waaa guuhh ahhh!" Then he couldn't even close his jaw to swallow or breath normally, so he just let it hang open and his saliva

dribbled down his chin and onto his chest.

Suddenly the rope snapped taut and the rocket whipped around like an inner tube on the ocean water snapped by the strong rope attached to the boat. They came flying back around the Moon and they were suddenly facing the Earth, going faster than they had been. With another button on the dashboard, Gerald hit, and the rope severed and flew off. The rocket continued at its target, Earth, on a dead course. Danny had no idea where they would land. How could they even steer this thing, he thought.

Then the rocket stopped. Well the rocket continued in a straight line, but the rocket boosters stopped with a spurt. They had run out of fuel. Danny was able to close his jaw, finally, and wiped his chin. "We're floating," Danny said.

"Yes we are," answered his brother. "And we're still six thousand miles from our destination."

Danny peered out the window looking around at the beauty of space and the Earth and he thought, in his mind, that dying in space would be the worst way to die.