



EXCERPT 2:
Meditating In Space

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Author website: www.ArnieBenn.com

Excerpt from...
CHAPTER 09:
Sensors

Jo-Leigh Elias is in the medical cabin, taking inventory as quietly as she can. She is trying not to disturb Tana Suco, who is meditating. It is not too difficult to be quiet in zero-G, you just have to be careful when putting things into containers or shutting cabinets. The cabin door is closed to provide a modicum of privacy.

Suco is in a cross-legged lotus position, her eyes closed, and she is floating just above one of the examination tables. It is funny, thinks Elias, that Suco looks like she is levitating. Well, she kind of is, really. Levitation had always been the unspoken goal of all the stereotypical eastern meditators of Elias's imagination, and she smiles as she now imagines it conferring on Tana Suco an air of mystical gravitas. Hopefully she will not drift into a cabinet or bulkhead, only to be pulled from her guru-esque trance by an unceremonious bump on the head.

Elias reflects on the fact that she is watching a friend meditating in the middle of deep space. This feels like a lifetime away from the reality she remembers leaving so recently. Time — or as Rudiger likes to call it, upside-down frequency — is such a funny thing.

It seems like only a moment ago that she was that twelve year-old space geek, watching the footage of the lunar base under construction, and dreaming of being a doctor on the Moon. Up there in the night sky it had seemed so unattainably far away from her Perth, Australia, home. But then again, everywhere felt far away from Perth. She is now well beyond not just the Moon but all the other planets of the solar system as well, pioneering in deep space. Her parents must have had prophetic insight, because they named her after a space pioneer. She had been born during the same week that the first manned mission landed on Mars in 2034. It was a

truly exciting achievement for humanity, and her inspired parents named her after the mission's commander, Captain Joanne-Leigh Marcus. But she has always preferred to go by Jo-Leigh.

She glances over at Suco and notices that her eyes are open.

"Hey," Elias says, "feeling better?"

"So much better," sighs Suco. "Thanks for letting me do this in here."

"Of course. I should really meditate more myself. I don't know, my brain always distracts me. It doesn't shut off." Elias is aware of feeling unsettled in the moment, and the prospect of a grounding meditation is certainly an appealing one.

"I hear you," Suco commiserates. "It can be a struggle."

"I should get some suggestions from you."

"It depends what you want. You can meditate just to relax, or to figure out a problem, or to empty your mind — the zen state thing — or for healing, or even to try and astro-travel or astro-communicate."

"Astro-communicate? That sounds intriguing."

Suco is not sure if she should get into this with Elias, but the doctor does seem sincere, and she is asking.

"Well," Suco begins, "if you want to be a diplomat to the stars — I mean other civilizations, not celebrities — you have to be prepared that not everyone is guaranteed to have vocal cords."

Elias pauses, considering this. "That's true. I never thought about that. Makes sense, I suppose."

"Astro-communicating means trying to plug into that non-verbal layer of mind-communication."

"Telepathy," Elias nods. "A metaphysical walkabout. Don't people use psilocybin for that type of thing? Like vision quests?"

"Yes, but I prefer the pure meditative approach. I want to be able to control the experience without having to be in a chemically-induced state. I want it to be a *language*."

"Fair enough," says Elias.

"I figure I should at least try to be practiced in as many forms of communication as I can, right? Some people who claim to have

had encounters with extra-terrestrials say that they communicated telepathically. Not just with each other but also with the humans.”

While Elias does not think about aliens that much, she has to concede that, scientifically, it does make sense for there to be other life out there. Given the scale of the universe, there must invariably be a lot of it. As a geneticist, she had always marveled at the incredibly complex genetic machinery constantly at work within each of our cells. But how unique and impossible is our DNA code really? Our molecules are just clusters of atoms, after all — particles self-organizing due to their positive and negative charges and magnetic fields. Somehow, that self-organizing evolved into sophisticated molecular nano machines with electricity running up and down their spiral double-helix, controlling their activities in ways we are only now beginning to understand.

So if atoms and molecules could self organize in that way on Earth, the same types of atoms should be able to self-organize in similar ways in other places too, as long as the conditions are similar. So there should be other life out there. Most of it is probably rudimentary, on the level of plants, fungi, or possibly simple aquatic or insect species, but then there should also be at least a few places that have evolved more advanced life forms. If so, there is no reason that some of those species should not be more intelligent than human beings, and with older and more advanced civilizations. There certainly is a well-established lore about it on Earth, whether or not you believe the claims, and you can hardly avoid the subject entering your mind at least once when going on an interstellar journey.

“So if those accounts are true,” Suco continues, “it would mean that our brains are actually capable of real telepathy *already*.”

“I suppose so,” ponders Elias. “What’s always bothered me is, if there’s that much anecdotal evidence, if it’s really happened so much, wouldn’t the truth about aliens have come out already?”

“Maybe people don’t really want to hear it, which makes it easier for governments to sow doubt and spin stories.”

“But why wouldn’t the aliens just reveal themselves to us then? People have been telling alien stories for centuries. I think an

advanced species would be able to figure out a good way to do it that wouldn't be harmful to us."

Suco has thought about this same question many times. At first she had felt that an advanced species would not want to interfere with our development by revealing themselves, but later she began to feel that there might be more to it than that.

"Maybe it's too dangerous for us to know what they know." Suco suggests. She lets that thought settle before she adds, "But if intelligent aliens have visited or *are* visiting Earth, maybe they also visited the nearest star system to us. Maybe we'll find evidence of it, or maybe it'll give us a closer vantage point to collect better data. Who knows? Maybe if they're there when we get there, I'll get to ask them. If my telepathy's up to it."

"Is it? Can you do it?"

"No. Not yet." She concedes a half-embarrassed smile, "but I *so* want to. I actually feel kind of silly even trying it. I mean, if I was psychic, I would know by now, right? But, I don't know... I just get a sense that it feels right to keep trying. I'm not sure I can explain it better."

Elias nods, considering the idea.

"What's always bothered *me*," Suco continues, "is that so many of the really great statesmen, well, to become one it's like you have to risk your life for a cause or go through danger, or prison, or war. I don't know if I would be ready for that part."

Elias thinks about that. "This trip is dangerous."

"Yes, but that's not what I mean. Anyway, it shouldn't have to be hard, right? Diplomats should be able to sit down over a cup of tea and agree to make things better, you know?"

"You'd like to think so."

"Anyway. Don't tell the others about... all this, ok? Because then I'll definitely never hear the end of it."

"Doctor-therapist confidentiality," Elias assures her.

"Thanks." Suco closes her eyes again and says, "Ok, just doing a quick sensor sweep of the area, see if anyone's communicating in this part of space..."

Elias likes this more flippant side of Suco, a side she does not let out often enough. “And?”

“No.” Suco sighs. “Just some humans, it feels like. Bit of a soldier vibe actually,” she says, pointing in the direction of their travel, “somewhere over there.”

Elias smiles, but Suco’s reference to the unexplained military ship reminds her of her lingering uneasiness, and also highlights its most probable cause.