

Travis McMaster

Word count: ~1350

4323 Eagle Rock Blvd  
Apt 216  
Los Angeles, CA 90041

HUMANITY

Travis McMaster

A cruise ship is docked between the Earth and the Moon. A ship so complex in its design and concept that everyone who understood it believed perhaps God was conceit. Everyone who built it though, knew better. They knew they were God. They had built a ship that somehow, would take them all into the very distant future, and after making a few adjustments, could travel again to the same time and place but reality has been affected totally. The true marvel, and perhaps the reason that maybe the engineers were truly God, is after seeing all the different possible futures for us and Earth, after all the awe and celebration and bovahee, everyone on board would get to vote on which future fate, which End humanity would finally meet.

## Humanity

The passengers have finally boarded. Drunk and laughing already, if anyone has a thought to humility no one voices it. The cruise ship is filled, crew and compliment somehow not fully aware of the weight of what follows. Most are here legitimately; some wealthy and powerful, the rest are not. A few have cheated fate for the chance to change it. Two sisters snuck aboard just for a story to tell. One family wasn't quite rich enough to buy passage, but knew enough to trade secrets for a cabin. At least one steward was killed so another could assume his role, but no one would ever know who. It was a one-time voyage, the ship would sail for a week and return home to applause and obscene opulence. The consequences of the trip would be well documented, and unchangeable. Champaign flowed, pictures were taken that would dust over in history books for centuries. The captain made a speech in the largest ball room opening and closing with a joke. Both were met with laughter underserved. At the final end of an order the crew shoveled fuel and pushed the controls with youthful vigor. The maiden and final voyage of humanities only timeship began with a burst, a jolt, and a bleary eyed, mechanical sigh.

The first End they visited was all spectacle. Flash and lava, eye candy and exhilaration, the perfect way to start off a grisly task with a grin and a wink. The ship traveled farther and faster than any human effort before or since, and arrived at the same port it left behind. Sol was burning hotter and heavier than it ever had or ever would. On screens and portholes throughout the ship fat and sweaty faces hungrily took in what Earth would look like

Humanity

millennia from now. Unrecognizable! Dinosauria, or some impossible descendants once again had domain. Agile mountain creatures, slow, dull eyed swamp giants, all gnashing and howling and chaos. The children squealed in the conditioned air, not comprehending. The adults laughed again. This first End, this fate for humanity and Earth itself, was clearly an amusement. Surely every child aboard would vote, whatever the other Ends they saw, for this fantastic fate. Yes, even the children get to vote on this cruise. This cruise would decide the ultimate fate for us and our planet. Everyone votes.

The second End they travelled to was inversely disappointing. There was nothing everywhere. No life, not even in what's left of the seas. No rubble of dead, dark cities, no plants, no mountains, just dust and sand and a wind 'that screamed so sallincivley that you could almost hear it without instruments' the captain claimed. The only remarkable feature of this End was how almost uniformly unremarkable it was. Colder at the poles and warmer at the equator but it was agreed upon by passenger and crew alike that there was little need to spend the full day here. Drinks and dinner was served early and the band only played up-tempo in the ball rooms to keep spirits high and hopeful.

The third End finally gave the people what they wanted. Earth had become peopled by beings who looked horrifying. Each description by the passengers was varied and very soon it became an amusement of

## Humanity

descriptive one-upsmanship. The captain, not a very imaginative woman, described them simply as “algae monsters, possibly with sticks for bones dressed as common men and women.” What hooked into everyone’s excited clamor and conversation was that they appeared to be living side-by-side with humans! Co-mingling as friends and neighbors. Everyone, human or algae, was dressed and living anachronistically. The clothes, the buildings, the vices, the customs, all very clearly coded as *démodé* nearly on the cusp of being ancient. When the terminator crossed day into night, quietly and quizzically, every human man, woman, and child stepped naked out of their homes and the algae creatures, in full dress and hats, consumed the last of humanity. The images were disturbing to the children, and the adults were now more confused than when they had arrived. “Take your notes to dinner with you tonight, converse easily with your shipmates, but make certain you have come to a conclusion by the time you’re having coffee. Who knows what tomorrow’s END will be?”

The next days were evocative and boring. An END where Earth was covered in salinated seas and populated by hulking creatures and minisculing swarms, with almost no beasts in between. There was an End that was possibly pure peace, what was left of humanity on what was left of Earth was plugged into a vast computer powered by the heat of the core. Excitement and chatter rippled through the full complement when the ship roared to a stop in a potential END where Earth was absent entirely! She had almost no reaction to the velvet darkness where everything she knew once

## Humanity

lay until she heard the laughter. Every passenger on board thought it was the highest end of hilarity that someone the entire planet was misplaced. The captain began to sweat silently. By the end of her sixth day, after an END whence Earth had long ago entered into a union of solar systems and humanity had moved long past her mother planet and it was unceremoniously swallowed by the sun, she considered the full scope of their selfish task...

It was too big. Everything they were doing, it was overwhelming. She couldn't quite grasp it, couldn't put it into words, but something was there, inside her, surrounding her, making it difficult to breathe. It's not quite that it was wrong, but everyone was reacting wrong. It wasn't fear she was feeling, but some ancestral feeling? Something that fear had evolved from? Something old, something the first humans might have felt when they looked at the moon. The captain wasn't watching this final END, their last stop. She was looking at the laughing, decadent faces of the passengers. The uncomprehending children, the flirting men, the glass-eyed women, none of them really seeing what was happening. After taking the ship on a tour of this reality, seeing what could become of our universal history and what punctuating mark would come, the captain ordered a return home.

There was a grand party on every deck. The press was present now and interviewing the more charismatic or famous of the passengers; trying to get whatever drunken descriptions they could give of the fantastic futures

## Humanity

they had seen. The time came and the captain rang out the ships' bell. She gave no interviews and made no speeches. She watched from the bridge as everyone laughed and danced and drank and when the bell rang everyone got out their voting devices. How quickly they turned the knobs, barely giving it half a thought. She saw the children asking their parents how to vote, or often just cranking it up to a random point on the dial. With tears in her eyes that she didn't understand she picked up her dial and made her choice. She no longer wanted the responsibility, didn't want to be on the jury which decided how billions would live or die. But she was the captain. She had to decide. Everyone votes.