

# **REVELATIONS FAR FROM EARTH**

Robert J Hamilton

This novel is a work of fiction. The characters are the product of the author's imagination, and any resemblance to any actual persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental

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# PREFACE

More than fifteen years ago, I penned the first words that would soon become *Revelations—Far From Earth*. Many things have changed since I began this story. At the time, Pluto was still considered to be a planet. NASA’s Cassini spacecraft was still *en route* to Saturn and the long-running Mars rovers Spirit and Opportunity hadn’t even been built yet.

After reading Arthur C. Clarke’s *A Fall of Moondust*, I was inspired to write a story of my own. I only intended to do it as a hobby; I never thought I could write an actual novel, let alone publish it. Yet fifteen years later, here I am, releasing the first of a planned trilogy.

My thanks are due to my family and friends, who have been supportive and patient throughout this journey, and to you, my reader, for your interest in exploring this imagined world.



*To all who have a story to tell.*

*Take the plunge.*



# CHAPTER ONE

## **COMMANDER JOHN RUSSELL BREATHED**

a sigh of relief as the shuttle touched down and the engines whirred to a near-silent hum. This was the first time in almost twelve months that he would set foot on Earth; his vacation from the Sol System Alliance was long overdue. John had never been to Australia, and he was looking forward to spending time in Tasmania's pristine forests and various beaches. He couldn't wait to see the exotic wildlife, which could be found nowhere else on Earth, and to enjoy being under the command of no one but himself.

After paying his fare to the pilot, John stepped off the shuttle at the continental transport station in Hobart, to breathe the air for which he'd so longed. He looked up; thick blankets of clouds shielded the night sky and the smell of a recent rain shower lingered.

Off on the horizon, John could see there was a storm approaching, with lighting streaking across the sky, flashing and dancing. Eyes closed, feeling the cool breeze on his face, John's shoulders jerked when the rear compartment of the shuttle's doors begun to open. It revealed John's pride and joy—a burgundy, Z32 model Nissan 300ZX. John's father had reconstructed this car over thirty years ago, with a few modifications, but it was still in pristine condition. The shuttle pilot handed the keys over to John. 'Thank you for arranging the pick-up', John said, and slipped him a little extra cash.

John left the transport station and headed for the Spring Plaza hotel, which was a short but leisurely drive away. He noticed that the storm was slowly intensifying, and hoped that he wouldn't get caught in the thick of it. Fortunately, he found the brightly-lit sign of the Spring Plaza hotel just a few minutes later. The parking lot for patrons and guests had a bright electronic sign shining out over it, advertising that no parking spots were left. He approached the front bay, hoping to find a spot close to the hotel's entrance. A few splatters of rain splashed against his windshield. When he found an empty space, he quickly nosed his car in. Then he saw the signpost: 'Staff parking only'.

'Not tonight', John thought. 'I will just move it in the morning.'

After unlocking his seatbelt, John took out from his pocket the hotel brochure. He saw the shining, newly-painted hotel and its beaches, sun-dappled paths through lush, tropical forests, and brightly coloured birds and lizards. Then he looked up at the dour, grey-sided building before him. A light patter of rain had begun to fall.

'My first vacation in years is ruined', John said to himself. The rain began to pour down in a torrent, so John hopped out from the car and dashed with his luggage to the entrance of the hotel.

The lobby was crowded with people who, tired of being cooped up in their rooms, had headed down for a change of scenery. John felt immediately warmed by the royal red room, which had over a dozen recessed lights shining brightly above and an exquisite chandelier in the centre. Along the floor and through the hallways, the dark red carpets gave off a faint whiff of lemon verbena deodoriser. Green neon lighting raced above the skirting

boards, but a small section of the neon tubing flickering near the exit doors had caught John's eye. He stood for a moment, listening to the soft piano music that played through the inset speakers, and his gaze found a couple dressed in a tuxedo and fancy dress, sipping on champagne and speaking with strong British accents. John felt a little underdressed in his plain blue jumper and light brown pants. After sighting the desk clerk, he strolled up to the front desk.

The young blonde woman smiled as she flicked her hair back. 'Hello and welcome, sir, to the Royal Spring Plaza hotel. My name is Amanda. Have you come to confirm a booking?'

'Ah, yes', John said, distracted by her deep blue eyes. As she placed John's details on her computer, he awkwardly thumbed the hotel business cards, which he'd noticed were printed with her name. Finally, he managed to pull the card from its holder.

Amanda handed John his key.

'Enjoy your stay here', she said warmly. 'And enjoy the penthouse.'

John went to wait for an elevator, but two were currently sitting between the thirtieth and fortieth floors, and the third was out of order. After a few minutes, a chime rang out as one of the elevators arrived to the ground floor. John saw that it could only fit five to six people with luggage, and there were about twenty people waiting to cram in. He decided it might be faster taking the stairs.

Halfway up to his suite, and already feeling out of breath, John saw two police officers dragging a man—bald, perhaps forty-years-old—down the stairs in handcuffs. He kept shouting, 'Sinners!' to the officers, and John realised that he must be from the Dawn of Revelations, a terrorist group that believed they

would bring about the apocalypse and cleanse the world of evil. Their leader was believed to be the former head of the religion of Scientology, but the Scientologists fiercely denied any links to the group.

After finally reaching the forty-seventh floor, John paused for a moment to catch his breath. Then he walked over to his room and held his card next to the control panel. Following a delicate click, the automatic door opened.

John smiled. The room contained everything he could want: digital, three-dimensional wall screen TVs, his own virtual reality room, luxury spa baths, views of the ocean, and a 2158 vintage bottle of red on a king size bed. John switched on the weather station. As he'd suspected, the rain would continue through the week. It was certainly not ideal. The sound of the rainfall pounding against the windows started to draw John's attention, so he walked across the white marbled floor for a closer look. People the size of ants skittered and raced from shelter to shelter, with most taking refuge inside the movie theatre across the street.

John dialled down a knob that was mounted next to the window's edge, and the windows gradually tinted to a smoky black. Another knob muffled the sounds of the battering rain, until all was silent. Looking over at his bed, John noticed a digital wall clock above the headboard reading a little after eleven. 'It's been a long day', John thought. He didn't feel much like socialising in the packed lobby downstairs, so he decided to call it a night.

John couldn't have been asleep for an hour when the communication panel started beeping right beside him. After a moment, John decided that the noise was insufferable.

‘Activate comm system’, John said, turning over to his side, his eyes still closed. There was a high-pitched beep to confirm the connection.

‘Commander, this is Admiral Koemans.’

‘Admiral’, John croaked. ‘What’s up?’

‘Sorry to disturb you, but can you make it to the SSA headquarters in Florida?’

‘I’m on vacation. Is it really important?’

‘Well, in fact, it is.’

John let out a heavy sigh. ‘What’s this about?’

‘You are to be promoted to captain, and placed in command of the starship Destiny.’

That grabbed John’s attention. Destiny was a brand new ship. There was a moment of silence. He grunted as he rolled over to hit the lights by the bedside table, but he knocked over the bottle of red instead. It smashed to the floor. John found that he didn’t care much about the wine—thoughts of commanding a new starship far outweighed the cost of the bottle.

‘Promote me?’

‘If you want me to give the job to Captain Quinn, so you can remain on your holiday. . . .’

‘No’, John interrupted. He’d never liked Quinn. ‘I’ll be right there. Hell—it’s raining in Tasmania, anyway.’

After grabbing his luggage and taking the lift down, John stepped outside the hotel, pausing under the shelter of the porch as he watched the patters of rain dance and splash against the roofs of parked cars. The whirring sound of the downpour began to intensify, so John dashed to his car and threw his bags in the back seat. Once he started up the engine, he blew into his hands and rubbed them to warm them up. A flashing green light

indicated that he had a message; he pressed the green button next to the comm screen on the dashboard to read it.

One point has been deducted from your licence.  
Cause: illegal parking.

'By the flares of the sun!' John said as he smacked the steering wheel. Who knew there were parking inspectors at all times of the night?

You have nine points remaining.

John left the hotel, passing by Long Beach before getting back onto the old Tasman highway. He soon approached a large billboard, which showed the sun shining down on a beach, edged with koalas and kangaroos. The board read, Tasmania—Another Perfect Day. John scoffed.

John tuned through several radio stations before settling on Classic FM's Music of Last Millennia; the song 'Have You Ever Seen the Rain' by Creedence Clearwater Revival had just started to play. The song blared through the speakers as John dialled the volume up, and he soon began to bop his head to the beat of the music.

As John listened to the chorus, he smiled as a sense of appreciation washed over him. It had been almost a year since he'd last seen any rainfall. It was good to be back on Earth. His eye then caught a dazzling light in his rear-view mirror, and noticed that another car was speeding up right behind him. John suspected trouble, and sped up a little, but the car was still gaining on him.

John wondered, 'Are these police?' He lowered the volume of the music and put his car on autopilot, switching the dashcam

over to display the car behind him. The autopilot system was salvaged from a Nissan Yūrei from the year 2125, and his father had installed it. It was never intended to be retrofitted to a car that couldn't fly, but John's father had been an exceptionally skilled mechanic and engineer, and could make almost anything work.

John locked onto the target. As the early morning was yet too dark to see anything but headlights, he switched the camera's night vision on. These were no police—they were the Dawn of Revelations. He was just able to make out the Dawn emblem on the flags attached on either side of the bonnet. They flapped violently in the wind. The emblem comprised the acronym DOR, with the O in the shape of a fireball, streaking downward. John slammed his foot on the accelerator and the car picked up speed, the needle racing toward two hundred kilometres per hour. But the pursuing car was still fast closing the gap. John knew his car could not outrace theirs, so he decided to ease off. He would be safer being chased at slow speed in this rain.

John's eyes glanced back down to the camera on the dashboard and saw a figure—a man—leaning through the window of their car, something small and black in his hand. Moments later, a bullet shrieked past John's ear after piercing through the back windshield. It winged the front windscreen as well, leaving a hole surrounded by cracked glass. John's heart jumped. He instinctively ducked before a barrage of metallic pops filled the back of his car, and then the rear window gave in and shattered. One of the bullets pierced his radio, bringing the rain song to a sudden end.

John carefully lifted his head as he heard the hum from his pursuers' engine pass beside his car. His eyes briefly met his

assailant's, and he ducked once more when he caught a glimpse of the rifle the man brandished. The side windows exploded in a cascade of glass shards. John clenched his teeth as another hail of bullets echoed tinnily against the car's side panels.

'My father's car!' John shouted, thumping his fist on the steering wheel and then smacking the rear-view mirror, knocking it to the floor. Adrenaline surging, John opened up one of his bags and secured a laser gun—far superior to the bullets they were shooting. As he inched his head out from the smashed window, the man fired another barrage of bullets, taking out one of the headlights. John looked out once more and took aim, and then fired at their left back tyre. After the tyre exploded with a thunderous sound, the car began to swerve and slow down. John shot the car again, and fired right through the front window and on through the back, shattering both into a thousand pieces.

Checking the dashcam, John saw the man leap back inside his car. The driver extended the retractable wings, taking the car upwards and into the air. As they flew past John's Nissan, his gaze found a dome-shaped weapon affixed to the rear of the car. It started firing a series of acoustic pulses from above, which flashed blue in rapid succession. John had heard about this new type of weapon, although he'd never before seen it in action.

Before he could react, an almost deafening obliteration of the windshield forced John to slam his foot on the brake pedal as he held a hand over his face to block the flying shards of glass. After he had skidded and swerved to a stop on the soaked, bitumen road, the other car plunged ahead, and then swerved back around. John sat calmly as he lined up his shot to the area right underneath the car's headlights. As the vehicle flew toward him, he fired a direct shot at the undercarriage of the car, causing a

massive fireball explosion that sent it whirling to the ground. John stared at the fiery rubble for a brief moment, and was glad they were not going to get up in any hurry.

The wind gusting through the blown-out windows was now freezing, and the rain didn't help, either. After twenty minutes, he reached the continental transport station located at the old international airport. By this time, the car was squealing. Smoke began to rise out from the bonnet.

One of the pilots walked over to John, all the while staring at his car with a smirk. 'Destination?' He smacked a small bubble of gum.

'Sol System Alliance headquarters, in Florida', John said, wiping his now-drenched hair back through his fingers. The pilot looked rather young—he probably hadn't even reached his twenties yet.

'Certainly', he replied. 'You will be on my ship, Bluebird Theta 010. You may proceed to board.' As John parked his car in the rear compartment of the ship, the pilot hollered something unintelligible to one of his mates across the station before spitting his gum out on the ground. John thought to himself, 'How professional' as the pilot entered the compartment and closed the door.

As the engines roared to life, John opened up his bag to retrieve a towel.

'What kind of music you into?' the pilot asked, tapping buttons on his touch screen.

'Hmm', John thought. 'Play something from . . . Mozart, please.' The pilot turned to John and tilted his head with a puzzled look.

‘Mozart? Never heard of it . . . or him. Someone new on the scene?’ John threw his head back and sighed, while the pilot checked his computer. ‘Titan’s grass! He’s . . . pretty old. I’ll just play from the first symphony listed here, if that’s all right?’ John nodded his head before rolling his eyes.

After procuring his towel and rubbing himself dry, John used the on-board computer to log in to his Alliance account. There was one message from Admiral Koemans, which stated that he would meet his pilot, Sergei Yakov, and his medical officer, Angela Elexis, at SSA headquarters. He also viewed a listing of a partial crew manifest, which consisted of the senior positions filled so far. John held his breath when he saw that Megan Knight had taken on the role as the first officer. He’d met her at the SSA Academy almost fifteen years ago, and they’d become fast friends. After reading a little through her profile and seeing some recent images of her, John realised that his mouth had become bone dry. He fumbled through his bag for a bottle of water.

John reclined his seat back and shut his eyes to better appreciate the music. He conjured visions of actually being in Vienna, watching Mozart play in concert.

After arriving outside the SSA five hours later, John paid his fare, removed his car from the rear compartment, and drove over to the main gates of the SSA building.

The spectacle was a massive, dome-shaped structure, silvery-white and over one hundred and fifty stories high. The Sol System Alliance’s emblem adorned the face of the dome near the top, displaying ‘SSA’ in large, navy blue letters, with a planetary ring encircling the ‘A’.

A security guard greeted John as he handed over his access card. The man rubbed his chin, switching his eyes between the card and John's face. 'Commander Russell? I thought you were taking holidays! I wasn't expecting you for at least a month more.'

John smirked as the guard returned his card. 'That will be Captain Russell, now!' He drove into the parking lot and headed toward his designated parking spot at the front. Crawling past the filled parking spaces, he soon noticed a woman standing beside her car. She looked familiar. . . . John slowed to a stop and looked back. 'That's Angela!' He recognised her from the photo he'd seen from the crew dossiers. He then shifted the car into reverse.

Angela leaned against the rear of her boxy, white Buzz Winsor; her gaze drifted toward the Nissan as it swung into an empty spot beside her. As John unbuckled his seatbelt, she walked over and scratched her head, her short, clean fingernails threading through her long, jet-black hair.

John stepped out and saw she was already dressed in the black pants and a top of the SSA uniform. Her rank had the light blue collar and cuffs. The embroidery of the SSA insignia, sewn just over her heart, was also coloured in the same light blue.

Glass shards clinked and fell from the broken window as John shut the door of his car. She raised an eyebrow.

'Angela', John said as he shook her hand.

'Mr Russell', she replied. 'Nice car you have. I too like classic twentieth-century cars, but prefer them without bullet holes.'

'Well, your car is pretty new.'

‘My little Buzz? It’s a 2160 model, so it’s obviously not a classic.’ Just over her shoulder, John noticed a car flying down toward them.

‘Who’s that?’

‘That flyboy is your pilot, Sergei Yakov.’

John recognised the car. It was a concept prototype for the 2175 Cosmic Thunder, which was to be released next year. It shined a bright red, with black tinted windows and two thrusters on each wing. Sergei began to slow down, and then performed a reverse parallel manoeuvre while still airborne before touching down on the other side of Angela’s car. The wings of his car retracted as he shut the engine down.

He walked up to John, and then noticed the wreck that stood before him. ‘What is this fossil you’ve unearthed from the scrapheap?’ he asked, his voice strongly accented. Russian, John supposed. After the man brushed his hand over the car’s bullet-scarred panels, he dusted his hands together and held out his right palm. ‘Hi, I’m Sergei Yakov, your pilot.’ Sergei stood over six feet tall and was exceptionally broad around the shoulders. He had short, dark brown hair, and he, too, was in uniform. In place of Angela’s blue collar, cuffs, and emblem, Sergei had yellow. John felt a little odd, being the only one in street clothes.

‘So, where is the admiral?’ John asked.

‘He’s at the Pegasus Station—left about an hour ago’, Sergei said. ‘I’m looking forward to some dinner later tonight, and then straight to bed. I haven’t slept in two days. Pills and potions can’t replace good sleep, you know?’ He tapped on the roof of John’s Nissan. ‘Hey, are we taking your car?’

After a good meal paired with French wine at the Exquisi Pari restaurant (and a real French waiter, to boot), they headed over to their quarters at the SSA.

As John reached for the door, Sergei hollered across the hallway, ‘We lift off at six—don’t be late!’

‘Got it’, John acknowledged.

As he stepped into his room, he found somewhat tight quarters for a single bed, kitchenette, and study nook. This was no Spring Plaza hotel. It was, however, adequate for a simple night’s rest.

He walked over to the drapes and drew them open, revealing a large, black screen embedded on the plain wall. John touched the screen, and a holographic image of a lush tropical rainforest sprung to life, the leaves swaying gently in the breeze. A swooshing noise sounded as he swiped his hand across the screen, selecting different backdrops. A lot of them were space themed. But he’d had enough of space, of late, so he kept swiping. John paused as he came to what appeared to be a hellish planet. It had a surface of molten lava, and fire tornadoes swirled from lightning riddled clouds above. Acid rain poured down, fast and heavy.

‘Who would have this?’ John wondered. The next image he came upon was of a moonlit beach, with the sounds of waves gently crashing on sandy shores. John nodded his head and climbed into bed, laying his head down on the pillow.

The thought of assuming his role as captain kept him awake for some time.

Finally, it was morning. John left his room and walked into the bathroom across the hall, which was illuminated in blue lights. He pressed a button to show that the room was now

occupied, and undressed. Then he opened the doors to the showers, pressed the start button, and set the water temperature to forty degrees Celsius.

After a short time, he stopped the shower and went to the changing room to start the drying sequence. The whole room turned red, and a gushing of hot air billowed into the chamber. He was dry in thirty seconds. After dressing back into his uniform, he pressed the button to indicate that the room was vacant, and passed Angela on her way in as he left.

‘Last time you’ll be wearing that uniform, won’t it?’ she said.

‘Yes’, he replied, looking at himself in the mirror. He pinched his fingers over the SSA insignia, pulling off a red coloured thread that had come loose in the embroidery. ‘Four years I’ve worn this.’

John went to Sergei’s room and turned on the lights.

Sergei moaned, rubbing his eyes. ‘Time already, is it?’

‘Angela has just started her shower. I’ll be waiting in the shuttle.’

The shuttle was parked on the 141st floor, which was one of nine floors that served as parking bays for small ships and shuttles. John set the environmental controls to twenty degrees, as he felt the cabin was a little chilly. He turned on the television, where a news breakfast show hosted a debate on global cooling. Angela soon joined him.

Sergei slipped in at five to six, and commenced the pre-launch sequence.

‘So, soon-to-be Captain,’ Sergei started, ‘what’s the furthest place you’ve been to in the solar system?’

‘I’ve been to Pluto, actually. I had an expedition four years ago, mapping out Pluto’s heart in preparation to set up the Clyde

Tombaugh research facility and the new hundred-metre telescope.'

'Angela?'

'I was on Luna, touring Armstrong hospital last year.'

'Well, I top you all', Sergei boasted. 'I've been all the way up to Quaoar.'

'Quaoar? What did you do there?' John asked as Sergei steered the shuttle to the central chamber and opened the roof.

'It was actually just a test run for a new engine. I came under fire from the Dawn of Revelations cult—apparently, they had staked a claim to Quaoar and I was trespassing. Those bastards.' With the roof now fully opened and cleared for launch, he began to ascend, keeping an eye on the other space ships and shuttles parked on the upper levels. He soon cleared the roof of the building, and then took off into space for the Pegasus Station.

'Lovely morning, isn't it?' John commented. 'Nothing but wind and rain in Tasmania.'

'Don't tell me you read the brochure that's been floating around the Pegasus station?' Sergei said. 'Is it the one with the Spring Plaza hotel?'

'Yeah, that's the one. What's wrong with it?'

'Nothing, nothing', he quickly responded, staring back at the controls.

Moments later, they broke out of Earth's atmosphere and reached the depths of space. Behind them now was Earth—a gigantic blue ball with swirling white clouds and red and green continents. No matter how many times he looked at it from space, it always fascinated John.

'There's the station', Sergei said. 'We'll be docking with it in a few minutes.' John watched as the dark grey station grew closer.

It resembled a spinning top, and had solar panels and windows running in parallel orbits. At the base of the construct was the station's docking belt, which was shaped like a large, flattened ring.

'I've always thought that station looked ugly', Angela said. 'The one at Mars looks better.'

'I agree', John replied. Sergei was now circling the docking belt to find the starship he would be piloting. There were lots of other shuttles and a few cruisers. Destiny was supposed to be the biggest one on the dock. Then they saw it—the silver-grey starship Destiny. Equipped with the new Quinan drive system, it was faster than any other ship and capable of reaching Mars in roughly forty hours. Luis Quinan had discovered the raw, new element when surveying underground lava tubes on Jupiter's volcanic moon, Io, back in 2098, and named the element after himself.

Sergei was able to back the shuttle in to the space station and dock right next to Destiny, which had its head and body in the shape of a trapezoid, with a bulky head and nose. Small, subtle wings protruded from the sides, which housed two thrusters on each wing, and two more thrusters at the bottom centre of the ship. John could hardly believe that he would be the captain to take the ship on its maiden voyage.

'Not many windows', Angela remarked. 'None for the bridge? I've only seen that on war frigates.'

'Windows are actually a structural weakness', John informed her. 'There are some windows in less essential areas of the ship, but visibility in the bridge will come from cameras mounted over the exterior of the ship.'

‘Disengaging artificial gravity’, Sergei said, inputting commands in his console. ‘Powering down the engines. We are docked and ready to go.’

