

## Short Story Excerpt - "Passing"

By Timothy J. Evans

Molten plastic dripped down my back and I screamed. The sound was swallowed by the blaring of a nearby alarm, a warning received too late. My flesh smelt sweet as it sizzled. I was disgusted and intoxicated by the scent as it circulated through my suit's ventilation.

The heat blocked out any thoughts of movement. The instruments before me started to bleed, even their aluminium superalloys succumbing to the insufferable heating of my spacecraft. The ship's manufacturer and my employer, Aion, had engineered innumerable safety mechanisms. Its logo, a 2D portrayal of a Mobius loop, dripped into a molten pool.

I waded through soupy thoughts in a vain attempt to uncover the memory of what had happened. But the present demanded attention and nothing else remained. The clear polycarbonate visor of my helmet cracked and I heaved as the acrid air infested my lungs.

I sucked in poison, the off-gases of innumerable liquefying toxins that had melted into one another. My arm jerked, a thoughtless reflex, and agony tore through me as my skin blistered. My suit was fused to the control desk and my arm had only made it as far as the superheated sleeve lining.

The terrible brilliance of C395X, the celestial object we were observing, scorched my eyes through the widening hole in my visor. It was intended to be routine data collection but something had failed. Or some unforeseen natural fluctuation had overwhelmed the layers of heat shielding and environmental protection that covered the ship.

It didn't matter now. I could taste the caustic tang of my death. My heart slowed from its hummingbird palpitations to a slower, rhythmic thump. Despite the inferno, I felt an icy tremor pulse through my body. Something in my subconscious slipped open and acceptance flooded out. I began to float despite being moulded into my chair. I was above and below and

beyond my body. I swam in an infinite ether of peace. My last word, sound or breathe was a final transmission to the control craft, millions of kilometres away.

“Send.”

It was a reflexive word, croaked out in scorched tones.. The final word to relinquish my collected data into the void, travelling on vibrating pulses to reach some distant memory of humanity.

My eyes were shut. Or was I blind? I slipped away softly into the dark embrace of endless oblivion.

*END OF SIMULATION.*

The words flashed before my eyes. My brain unfolded into reality as light and sound slowly returned. I tried to rise.

“Slowly. Easy now.”

A faceless technician held me back and the world twirled around me momentarily. A glaring room, wires twisting around my body into a large machine. I effortlessly lifted my unburnt hands. My skin was soft, with a slight sheen of sweat. I breathed in the cool air filled with the antiseptic aromas of a medical facility.

“I’m alive”, I whispered.

“You’re in the final stage of your training.” The technician replied with routine efficiency. “You are undergoing end stage training as part of your ongoing competency evaluation.”

Utterly nonsensical sounds. Yet I responded without hesitation. “Did I pass?”

“Your output was deemed sufficient.”

Unbidden, a sense of joy overwhelmed and tears glistened in my eyes. Awash with this feeling, memories slipped back into place like water trickling back into well worn streams.

My mission, far more critical than a simple observation, was scheduled for 2 months. These were my final simulations. The ultimate test, mission success despite personal termination.

“I passed.” My body fizzed with intoxicating neurochemicals. Blood surged through my veins and filled my dizzy thoughts with a transcendent pleasure.

I sighed and fell back.

## Manuscript Sample - Chapter 1 - "Awakened"

By Timothy J. Evans

Fibres leaked out of a small soft pillow as it slowly swayed back and forth in the shallow pool. The morning sun picked out small flecks of dust, each one burning golden bright in its rays before being swept along with the gentle summer breeze. Two thick and leafy trees twirled as that same breeze tickled their foliage.

Somewhere, it seemed so far off to her, a baby cried. The peals of the very young, waiting for the warm embrace of a mother.

It's funny, Ro thought, what you notice at a time like this. The trees swaying with the wind. Nevermind the jagged hole in the wall, splintered wood and debris cast about her. The window, once set in that ruined wall, where she would so often look at those same trees. Now a fractured ruin, split apart in pieces all around her.

The ripped pillow in the pool. She barely even registered that it was not water but blood that the pillow floated in. So much blood. Too much to even look at, to accept. No, she noticed the pillow, not the blood.

The dust filtering down around her, golden flecks each picked out in brilliant detail. She could almost make herself forget her parents, standing there, moments before. What had her father been doing? He was speaking to her, at her. He was shouting. And her mother. Was she there too, looking on as always?

No, Ro thought. They were just in the other room, in the kitchen, surely. Her mother was probably even now getting dinner ready. And the hole in the wall, the blood covering everything. The space where her parents had been. These were just some kind of mistake. Things out of place, soon to be put right.

Ro noticed the tingling still. Every nerve on her body fizzed with it. Her skin prickled as the memory of the Flow washed across her exhausted limbs. She noticed now how tired she was. She ached, weary to the bone. Even soft breeze threatened to blow her away like so much dust.

The baby cried again.

Ro turned. Osa, her brother. He'd been a surprise to all of them. 13 years waiting for a son, her mother had said. 12 offerings to the priests, each one more meagre as the years of Worry came on. Then on the 13th year they had nothing left to give. So her mother gave up.

Ro remembered that day well. Her father had called her a curse. Ro was the families curse. Her mother wept at the empty crib, paint flaking from neglect, covered in 12 years' worth of dust.

Then Osa came. No words from the priests and no curse from her. Just a surprise. And, for a moment, things had been better.

Memories faded as Osa's cries grew louder.

"Osa! Osa, where are you?!" Ro's voice sounded strange to her own ears. Hollow somehow, like the words where the meaningless jabber of a foreigner or the braying of some mindless beast.

"Osa! I'm coming!" Ro started to move but her limbs were as strange and foreign as her voice had been. Slowly, she found that she couldn't move.

One step forward and Ro cried out gently as she collapsed onto the floor.

"Osa!"

The blood covered floor greeted her with force. Funny, what she now noticed. The starkly defined blackened circle surrounding her. Any young child could tell you where that came from. And who the person at the centre was.

Ro pushed away those thoughts and the fresh memories still trying to form in her mind.

Osa's cries had stopped. Yes, of course, she thought, Mother was tending to him now. 6 months old and he was already her favourite. Not that Ro minded of course, Osa was her favourite too.

Something tinkled in the room next to her. Was it a plate smashing to the ground? Dinner was probably waiting for her. Father coming in from a day's work, home from the city of Fen. It was that time of day where men wandered home through the town, glowing in golden light. Or they wandered to the glowing lights lit at the tavern. Maybe her father was there again. 12 offerings to the priests, each year more meagre. Her father had made his own offerings in that tavern. Each year those had grown.

But somehow she knew, dinner was not waiting for her. And her father would never walk home again. Everything had changed. In a terrible instant, it was all gone.

Serialised Audiobook Sample - Episode 1 - "July 21st 2018"

By Timothy J. Evans

Every modern city is built on the bones and failed plans of the past. Melbourne, despite its relative youth, is no different.

Underneath the graffitied alleyways and corner coffee shops, there are remnants of a past long since forgotten.

One such place resides beneath the sprawling web of interconnected train lines that is Melbourne Central. Far below the vaulted ceilings there is a tunnel. Winding down nearly to the river it meets an opening, a great hall adorned with dusty benches and from, the ceiling dangles old split flap displays. Dusty letters and numbers that flip over to show scheduled arrivals and departures.

This is Victoria Station, a relic of the past. A first attempt, some time in the 1920's to give Melbourne an underground line, something not fully achieved until 1970. Delays plagued the construction of the station and continuous failure of the machinery to dig the tunnels led to it's abandonment 3 years into construction.

Melbourne's Lord Mayor at the time, Sir John Warren Swanson, was a builder by trade, arrogant and brash and known for declaring projects finished before they were begun. It was his will that determined a station should be constructed even before all the tunnels were bored and tracks were laid. He spent his 3 years in power seeing to the grand stations

development, making sure at every opportunity to announce the remarkable feat of engineering that Swanson Brothers construction was undertaking.

After the budget blowout and his failure, he turned to the bottle for comfort. He died from cirrhosis the very next year.

The station was a marvel of engineering though and many local councillors came and went promising to renew its glory. But after each passing decade and failed attempt, it fell into the abandoned world of the past. Faded into myth, it was only spoken about in the dark corners of conspiracy theory and urban legend forums, where it was said to have been cursed, a place where the spirits of the men who had died during its construction - and the man whose life had been ruined by it, haunted the sandstone walls.

“It happened again.”

“The same one?”

“The same.”

“We have made contact. We will wait.”

The two men’s voices echo on the walls of Victoria station. They sit together on a bench in the middle of the grand room, lit by a strange orange light, its source unseen. Each man wears a nondescript suit and holds a yellow notepad and pencil, hands moving swiftly in practised motions leaving strange scrawls across the paper.

Above their heads, the split flap displays turn over in a blurry dance. Meant for departing trains, they instead spell out something altogether strange. The letters are names and locations, the numbers - time and date. Almost every date is today, the 21st July 2018. As the numbers coincide with the time displayed on the large analog clock, the name displayed is replaced with the phrase “Departed.”

“Will they come?” The younger man asks.



“The fragments are there. They must come.” The older man proclaims, as if telling a child the sky is blue.

“Then we have a chance to make it stop.” Younger whispers with excitement.

He looks over to a smaller display, mounted between the sandstone pillars of the nearest wall. It is labelled, in beautiful serif letters, Delays. On the display, two entries. The first, a name delayed from earlier today. Charlie Campbell. The second, with a subline - experiencing major delays, a name delayed since 2015. David Watson.