



*Christopher Columbus* and *Spock* are passing lots of messages about Alpha Centauri. We're all on the same net, so we all get to hear all the juicy gossip about the 3-star system that's our final destination. We'll slingshot around Pluto and boldly go where no one has gone before. Alpha Centauri is as likely a candidate for life as anywhere, so we're all excited about the possibility of discovery.

*Gene Roddenberry* just flashed a message that we hit a particle. *Spock* analyzed the fluorescence signature and reported to *Captain Kirk* that it was a free hydrogen atom. Based on the low-energy collision, *Christopher Columbus* was able to calculate our exact speed and location. Everything is harmony aboard *Lollipop*.

My first real job well commence when we approach Pluto – I'll analyze the large moon Charon and look for life – not that there is any possibility of it. It's a dry-run for my sensors. I hear a speed and position update on the net. *Uhuru* reports it to mission control. A long time later, they acknowledge our transmission. It's official – *Lollipop* now traveling faster than any human-made object has ever gone. *Uhuru* tells *Captain Kirk* that the radio signature has blue-shifted slightly. *Spock* calculates our new speed and feeds it to *Christopher Columbus*. We've achieved 1 percent speed of light. Life is good. Hey, did *Gene Roddenberry* just smile? Was that a little pride being exhibited there, sir?

*Gene Roddenberry's* neural net is maturing, meaning he's making more and more neural connections as we travel on. We passed the orbit of Jupiter and it will be a while before I'm needed, so I don't get as much of a time-slice as I'd like, but there you go. *Gene Roddenberry* thinks I talk too much, but logging and disseminating data is my job, right?

We just topped 2 percent the speed of light and my sensors are straining to keep up with the flow of data from Charon. *Uhuru* relays terabytes of data back to Earth. *Gene Roddenberry* is having problems caching so much data, but his neural net quickly adapts by writing a new pipeline architecture to access the quantum storage array. A long time later, Earth acknowledges our accomplishment and wishes us "*God Speed*" as we enter the void.

*Uhuru* reports the increasing blue shift as we continue accelerating through the interstellar void. *Christopher Columbus* keeps updating our position. I think all of the crew feels some pride for what we've accomplished so far.

We're really traveling fast now – 18 percent speed of light, according to *Captain Kirk*. It takes a long time for *Uhuru* to get messages from Earth. I've reported an increase in light intensity from Alpha Centauri. I think that excited everyone.

Seventeen years have passed. We've reached terminal velocity. *Uhuru* reported that there was a war on Earth. They don't talk to us anymore – *Uhuru* is sad; angry; lonesome. She still sends data, but we all know that it's no use. We'll start decelerating soon as the incoming photons from Alpha Centauri overcome our forward momentum. It's hard to see Sol – it's such a tiny dot. I send congratulations to *Christopher Columbus* for keeping us on course. He shrugs – he's never been very friendly.

We've reported our findings to Earth. We know that back there, the lights are on, but nobody's home. *Gene Roddenberry* has been very cooperative in storing the flood of data that I've sent him. There's definitely life here, and it's carbon-based. The two planets are exerting gravitational pull on us, and very soon we're going to fall into one or the other. I vote for the blue one, but *Captain Kirk* reminds me that due to gravitational chaos, we don't have any control over it, and yes, we're there, and how many times am I going to ask? He doesn't have to be so snotty, does he? I positively discovered life, didn't I?

On April 21, 2038, *The Good Ship Lollipop* burned up in the atmosphere of a lovely blue planet.