

SAMPLE CHAPTERS

THRIVING IN THE DAYS OF COVID-19



A Retired NASA Space Life Scientist's
Guide to Surviving and Thriving
During the 21st Century
Pandemic and Beyond



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THE LONG MISSION



The exploration of space is not for the faint-hearted. Living the astronaut's life is all about commitment. First, you must commit to a program of grueling training. Then to a life characterized by commitment to a mission when the preparation for that one specific event may take years. But the real commitment comes when you, the astronaut, sit in a vertically inclined seat, and a white-suited technician places their foot on your chest and pulls your seat restraints tight. Then they exit and lock the door, leaving you alone atop a cylinder that is comprised mostly of highly explosive fuels. At T minus 0, those fuels are ignited in a controlled explosion just a few feet behind you, and you race out of Earth's atmosphere toward space at 25 times the speed of sound.

The velocity is so great that it pushes you down against your seat at several times the pull of gravity, making it difficult to breathe. Yet it is your most fervent prayer that you actually achieve the velocity of MACH 25 because, if you do not – if you are short even a relatively few miles per hour – you will inevitably fall back into the atmosphere. All that energy that was spent to get you almost to the edge of space will then be expressed as heat on the outside shell of

your thin spacecraft walls, and you will burn to an agonizing death as you hurtle back to Earth. So, as you fly, you wait expectantly to hear the precious words, “Single Engine Press to MECO.”

That phrase has a very critical meaning to you. It indicates that even if all but one of your engines now fail, you can still press on and make it safely to orbit with but a single engine remaining. With that special announcement from Mission Control, you are now assured that at the moment of MECO (Main Engines Cut Off), you will be safe, free from Earth’s gravity, and be in a stable orbit – even if all but one engine fail.

In your astronaut life, you are always able to back out of a commitment at any time until the moment that the technician closes the door on the spacecraft. Up until the moment of launch, you can simply call down to the Launch Control Center and tell them that you have changed your mind and that you no longer wish to fly in space. NASA would send out a van to pick you up – and your crew would be plenty pissed, I can assure you.

But once the rockets are ignited, there is no turning back or changing your mind. Nothing can stop you now. Except for a lot of bad luck or a fiery death, you are now committed to space, whether you change your mind or not – or whether you like it or not.

But that scenario of commitment is comparatively elementary child’s play. Even after achieving orbit, any astronaut can return home in a matter of less than an hour if an emergency arises or the entire crew change their minds together. Home, and their normal lives, are right there just below them – so close they can almost touch it from low-Earth orbit. Thus, their actual commitment is merely measured in minutes.

No astronaut has yet made the ultimate commitment to deep space, not even the Apollo astronauts. But, someday soon, astronauts will board a Mars-bound rocket, fly into low-Earth orbit, and – when the moment is right – they will ignite their interplanetary rocket engines.

The commitment is now far more significant. At the second those rockets are ignited, there is no possible way to return back to Earth until the end of the three-year mission. That commitment is not measured in mere minutes, hours, or a few days. It does not matter what the condition is, the nature of the emergency, or whatever life-and-death situation arises, they are committed to *three years* away from home – and turning around is not even possible. Because of the rotation of the Earth and Mars around the Sun, these astronauts are flying on ballistic trajectories that rely entirely on rare planetary alignments that only happen on a specific cyclic basis. Thus, once the rockets fire and the spacecraft departs the gravity of Earth, there is no turning around. They are wholly and totally committed.

Currently, on spaceship Earth, we are all bound together on a similar mission that absolutely none of us volunteered or trained for. On our Mission COVID-19, all 8 billion of us are riding this planet together, whether we like it or not, agree with each other, or whether we even play well together. The mission began officially on 11 March 2020 when the World Health Organization (WHO) formally declared the global COVID-19 pandemic. At that moment, we were all committed together – and none of us are able to get off this spaceship and go back to the Earth that existed before the pandemic, regardless of how much any of us would like to.

The response of the world scientific community and medical care professionals have been stunningly heroic and sacrificial, representing the very best and brightest of humanity. There are not enough kudos, not enough trophies or awards that could possibly recompense them for their sacrifices to date.

But, in stark contrast, the reaction from some other people to the mission has been totally humiliating to our species. The behavior of a few cohorts of fellow humans has been underwhelmingly disconcerting. There are meandering bands of folks who believe the mission does not exist at all, others who are blaming the mission on any political ideology they do not like, some who are conjuring up a myriad of conspiracy theories that will undoubtedly soon include

Bigfoot himself, and others who are banging their fists on the spacecraft windows wanting off good ship Earth right now.

As one of the crew of Mission COVID-19, on my ship, I have seriously locked down and securely welded the doors shut to *all* the compartments except for the scientific and medical branches. At least these guys are still sane.

The fact is, this mission has begun, and there is only one way out – at its conclusion, when we successfully complete our journey at the other end of the vaccination line. Just be aware, the Earth we “return” to will not be like the Earth that we departed on 11 March 2020. It is as though we have all been abducted against our will and assigned to an extended mission on a spaceship that looks a lot like the old Earth. Riding in the interstellar void on this version of Spaceship Earth, we are zipping along through the outer arms of the Milky Way galaxy at 514,000 miles per hour – covering 12.3 million miles per day. If the pandemic lasts 18 months until its final end, we will have traveled more than 6.7 billion miles from the old Earth that we once knew – a place that exists no more, and one to which we can never return. Even if some generous NASA guy gave us access to their fastest spacecraft, with our current technology, it would take 22 years just to get back to where Earth was on 11 March 2020. And when we got there, Earth and our Solar System would be long gone.

The train has left the station, and it is never coming back.

That is the very first truth that each of us must wholly assimilate before this mission can successfully, safely, and sanely commence for any of us.

As we are clearly witnessing, abductees are typically poor candidates for crewmembers. Eventually, some people will get the message, fully cooperate, assure their successful survival, and contribute to rebuilding the new Earth at the end of the lengthy mission. But, as some humans are wont to be, many would sooner strike out to return to a place that no longer exists rather than strive to remake the new

home better than the last. Others would rather die than admit to an unpleasant reality beyond their comprehension and fully adapt to the challenge. Sadly, many of these will certainly get their wish.

We have each had this monumental responsibility foisted upon us without notice or consent – and we are now faced with the task of keeping ourselves and our families safe for the duration of the extended mission. Almost none of us have had any training whatsoever in maintaining our safety in the daily preservation of our homes and lives during a global pandemic. Nor have we any level of understanding about the enemy that is out to kill us – silently and invisibly stalking us each day across the entire planet.

Meanwhile, as is to be expected, an uncomfortable percentage of our fellow travelers have made the full transition into batshit-crazy mode and are making it difficult for the rest of us to finish our on-the-job training while fending off the nasty, invisible little critters that are always out-there-somewhere looking for us.

But at least a few of us are not just abductees, after all. Mission COVID-19 may not have been one that we selected – leaving us stranded on a new, quite unforgiving, and rather annoying planet – but here we are. As we step inside the four walls of our homes, we are the Mission Commanders and retain full command and control over our own safe zones. There is no one else in charge of your life except for that bewildered individual staring back at you from the mirror. Meet your Commander. That individual *is the one in charge*, like it or not. And that individual can easily run the ship into the nearest asteroid and let the little aliens inside to kill and destroy.

Or, you, Mission COVID-19 Commander, can take control of the operation and live an intelligent life filled with foresight and understanding, dedicated to doing everything in your power not to lose a single one of your crew on the way to the end of the mission. IMPORTANT NOTE: Your very first task is to scour your home and immediately destroy any red shirts you find. You do not have any expendable crew members to wear them!

Finally – with just a tiny bit of forethought and careful analysis of where we are, how we got here, and where we are inevitably going to wind up – it is clear that while we are busy surviving, we also need to get prepared for end-of-mission. Our world will not come out of this quite the same as it was before – no more than medieval Europe emerged from the plagues the same as it was before. As we struggle to fulfill our mission responsibilities each day, we have not only the opportunity to understand, learn, and excel in our new tasks, but we likewise may fully seize the simultaneous occasion to thrive and become ready to lead in the new world that will exist after Mission COVID-19 has ended.

We are not here just to survive, fellow traveler. We are here to learn about making all things new at the end of this ordeal-turned-magnificent-opportunity. We are here to discover how to thrive during adversity, and even flourish – beginning right now, today.

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CRYING IN YOUR SPACE HELMET



Learning how to live in space is not always easy. There are just certain things you do not do after you make the transition into space from the surface of Earth, particularly while buttoned up in a spacesuit. Two of those items are crying and throwing up in a space helmet. While the two events may seem intuitively bad ideas, they are things that, in the absence of gravity, are especially annoying – and even dangerous.

In microgravity, liquids take on a life of their own. While on Earth, we are very used to tears sparkling in our eyelashes, spilling from our eyes, and running down our cheeks in little sensitive rivulets. But in space, they do not run anywhere. On our home planet, gravity pulls the tears down away from your eyes, for the most part. But in space, the relatively unknown but nonetheless significant power of liquid surface tension will ball those tears up all across your eyes and virtually blind you. And, of course, you will not be able to remove

your helmet and dry them off until you get back inside the spacecraft – which you may not be able to accomplish safely while blinded by your tears. The whole vomit mess in microgravity inside a space helmet is much, much worse, and needs no amplification here.

When the little COVID-19 alien invaders showed up on our home planet, our lives changed just as suddenly and radically as the astronauts' who depart Earth's atmosphere and enter the microgravity of space. The significant difference between the astronauts and us is profound indeed. They have been exhaustively trained. But we morons on the ground, trapped by gravity's heavy, capricious hand while we are left down here, are literally on our own, receiving fatally flawed instructions from an endless troupe of idiot meme-makers and clueless talking heads on various biased media outlets. God help the space mission that must rely on the babble that passes for training that we are expected to endure.

Again, I remind you that life is not the same here on the surface of Earth as it was before. How we live has been as radically altered for us as an astronaut floating around in orbit has for them. There are new rules, new expectations, and whole new processes of living that we must get right every time – or risk the same sudden and unpleasant end as the astronaut who forgets to follow the new procedures that define their safety in a precise and detailed manner.

Assuming that we can finally, intelligently tune out the lame, insipidly disingenuous blather, successfully locate the coherently intelligent and accurate training and information sources, and then actually listen to them and follow procedures – then we have a much better chance of completing our mission alive and well. If we do not, there is an excellent probability that we will throw up and cry in our space helmets simultaneously – and in very short order.

But they Promised us a Zombie Apocalypse

A little training and preparation for Mission COVID-19 would have been just great! Looking back, every few years, as regular as

clockwork, a media-driven frenzy is generated over some doomsday prophecy that is just around the corner. There is no shortage of ideas about the inevitable event that is positively going to ruin the planet and the rest of everyone's lives. Each of these is always linked to mass death, economic collapse, social breakdown, starvation, civil war, anarchy, and general chaos. Here are a few of the top contenders for this singular honor: global nuclear war, return of several deities per their prophecies, a huge meteor strike, a massive solar flare or storm, climate breakdown, planetary famine, and so on and so forth. Also relatively high up on the list of contenders is a global pandemic. But at least the pandemic apocalypse has a true history.

There have been at least 11 recorded pandemics since the time of Christ that have swept the planet, including the COVID-19 disaster. These epidemics crop up in greater frequency as the population of the world increases and undisturbed ecosystems decrease. They are:

- 1) COVID-19 Pandemic 2019-present (over 413,000 deaths in the first half of 2020)
- 2) AIDS Pandemic 1981-present (over 32 million people lost so far)
- 3) Hong Kong Flu Pandemic of 1968 (1 million deaths)
- 4) The Asian Flu Pandemic 1956-1958 (2 million global deaths)
- 5) The Spanish Flu Pandemic 1918-1920 (between 20 to 50 million people lost)
- 6) The Cholera Pandemic 1910-1911 (800,000 deaths globally)
- 7) The Asiatic or Russian Flu Pandemic 1889-1890 (killed 1 million people)
- 8) The Cholera Pandemic 1852-1860 (1 million died)
- 9) The Black Death Pandemic 1346-1453 (killed 75-200 million in Europe, Africa, and Asia)
- 10) The Plague of Justinian 541-542 AD (25 million died, about half the population of Europe)
- 11) The Antonine Plague of 165 AD (killed 1 million in Asia Minor, Egypt, Greece, and Italy)

As I write, the COVID-19 pandemic is just getting started. The majority of epidemiologists are predicting a multi-year run with an

end hopefully culminating in a vaccine. By initiating serious planetwide lockdowns and social distancing requirements, the pandemic was slowed down significantly. But when what some view as draconian government orders are relaxed, particularly in the northern hemisphere's summer, there will be a significant amount of social mixing, and consequent inevitable spreading of the disease will be renewed. This will, reflexively, cause a new spike in cases as the illness mixes anew in its non-linear phase that is characteristic of a virulent disease working its way through any population. This will inevitably lead to more regional shutdowns to once again try and get another handle on the curve, followed by more relaxed restrictions, and so forth as the government tries to keep a lid on the social and economic balances until the vaccine eventually shows up.

Even without any advanced preparation, your task is relatively simple: not to participate in any of the mortality curves! What is truly mind-bending is that the restrictions on movement are designed to prevent infections. Yet when the restrictions are lifted, millions of people rush out to participate as willing volunteers in the next death curve. This cultural death wish is infinitely complex, so let us agree together on one thing – no more volunteering to be a part of that very undesirable curve!

But, COVID-19 is here. The long-anticipated planetary disaster has finally arrived – and no one seems even remotely pleased that the zombie apocalypse they awaited for so long has turned out to be this. Instead of roaming the streets with shotguns to blow the brains out of the wicked monsters from hell, the actual monsters we get, although non-living, are sub-microscopically tiny. And instead of roaming the streets to kill them, they make us all stay home.

The good news is that we can game the apocalypse by our intimate knowledge of the infectious agent and how to defeat it, and keep it the hell out of our safe zones. The very, very good news is that during our times of solitude, we can focus on things which the former lives we lived forced us to put off. And during the time of the apocalypse that is actually happening, we can game the reality revealed by time

and space itself to turn disaster into our distinct short- and long-term advantage!

The Really Good News

If you have made it to Section 5 of this book and have not consigned me to the legions of unwashed sheeple who do not believe in the grand suite of COVID-19 conspiracies, then you may, in fact, actually make it all the way to the end of the vaccination lines! And there is some really, really good news in this assurance.

When an astronaut finally makes it into space, they each discover something extraordinary. They understand what few others know – what it is like to travel at 25 times or more the speed of sound, depart the Earth, ride out to the very edge of infinity, and see our home planet in its delicate magnificence slowly spinning as it floats against the backdrop of the deepest and purest blackness possible. They have journeyed to a vast and unforgiving place, one that is absolutely inimical to life, one that is alien in every sense, and one that will, with no hesitation, claim their life in more than just a handful of unspeakably terrible ways. Each one has sacrificed much to get here. And after their experience, they will return home changed in such profound ways that they will never be the same.

Were you aware that you, at this truly remarkable time, have much in common with these space travelers? Think about it. The planet you now live on – this Earth in the days of COVID-19 – is absolutely alien to the one we lived on during the first few weeks of 2020. We have been invaded by a deadly enemy that wants to kill many of us, who is fully capable of doing so, and who has been wholly engaged in doing just that. The end effect is that the virus has created an alien space as immense as the Earth itself. To successfully accomplish our mission, we have carved out safe zones that mimic spacecraft located in an alien environment. We have awakened in 2020 altogether surprised to find ourselves caught up in a vast and unforgiving location, one that is absolutely inimical to life, one that is alien in

every sense, and one that will, with no hesitation, claim our lives in more than just a handful of unspeakably terrible ways.

And I'm saying that this is really, really good news?!

Absolutely.

And that assurance is spoken by an authentic explorer – one who has thrived in every sense of the word living and working in alien environments that will claim your life in a single heartbeat. As an explorer to these truly alien places that I love, I can promise you that I have never once returned unchanged. Sure, it is always risky. But it also infuses life in so many ways to those of us who have dared to venture there.

Said Admiral Richard Byrd, as he visited those same kinds of locations, “I watched the sky a long time, concluding that such beauty was reserved for distant, dangerous places, and that nature has good reason for exacting her own special sacrifices from those determined to witness them.”

In many ways, the COVID-19 pandemic promises each of us an extraordinary chance to understand the invasion as an opportunity. Whether we like it or not – whether we accept it or not – the pandemic is here. And, until the vaccination line, we are all along for the ride on a spacecraft that is utterly dissimilar from what it was before. As a passenger on this far different world, you have four clear choices:

1) Deny that any of it is happening, blame others for the mess, and give up for the short ride that many like-minded individuals will take to the mass graves.

2) Accept the reality fully but grow tired of the constant situational awareness and begin to exchange your vigilance for premature shortcuts in an attempt to resume your comfortable life the way it used to be. You may not fall as early as the first group, but the easing up of your attention to the invasion will prove tragic to many.

3) Maintain your system of safety but become bitter, isolated, and alone. You will emerge alive at the end of the vaccination line, but your change will not be for the good at all. The invasion will have injured your emotional life forever, and you will never be the same. Change is not always good.

4) Never give up your attentive caution. You maintain your training gleaned from many reliable sources, stay the course, and utilize the extraordinary opportunity to use the invasion as a time to thrive and grow better in countless different ways, becoming stronger as an individual.

Choice number four, dear reader, is the very, very good news! And, as we consider that epic opportunity, let us understand that our first and most important line of defense comes from within. If you think a virus is nasty, what lives inside each of us is far more deadly to the virus and any other microscopic invaders that would dare cross over and threaten us from inside. Our number one task, therefore, is to safeguard and take precious care of that which protects and maintains us, as we shall explore in the next chapter.

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