

# The High Ground

by David Crilley

## *BREAKING NEWS FROM THE DEPARTMENT OF TRUTH*

*Today the new Space Transit and Research Station (known as STAR), the largest orbital platform ever built, achieved operational status. Billions around the world cheered as NASA's live video feed showed the station's enormous outer ring accelerate to a constant 2 revolutions per minute, generating near-Earth gravity for the comfort and safety of its future occupants. Soon, STAR will enable hundreds of on-board scientists to conduct experiments never before possible, while eliminating the harmful effects of long-term weightlessness.*

*Speaking from Nathan Bedford Forrest Space Force Base, Reverend President Fenton proclaimed, "Today we have extended mankind's dominion over God's creation into the pagan darkness of outer space."*

## CHAPTER ONE: MISSION SPECIALIST CLAIR YANG

Shall I tell you everything?

Alright. This is what I remember.

Sam cleared his throat, and turned to face me, as far as his harness allowed.

“They say you git used to it,” he said.

“Sorry?”

“Gettin’ shot up into space, Clair. They say you git used to it.”

A space capsule is too small a space, I was thinking, its occupants too close and too familiar. A metal confessional with a door you can’t open. And I was thinking how different Sam used to be.

What I said was, “They say a lot of things, Sam.”

“Ain’t no way. Thought I’d fill up mah barf bag!” And he laughed, a phlegmy, bubbling cackle.

In the white light of the ship’s cabin, Sam looked to me like a man-sized mound of grey putty, sprinkled liberally with brown age spots and white stubble, and poured into a pressure suit. It had been red hair, once.

“Wanna snort, Clair?” Sam had produced a small squeeze bottle from somewhere in his suit, and he held it out to me, an invitation to conspiracy.

“No thanks, Sam. I might need to use my brains today.”

“Suit yerself.”

Sam sucked amber fluid, and coughed. Tiny golden globes of whiskey floated in the space before his watering eyes.

By all appearances, Sam was not a qualifying candidate for space duty, in any capacity, let alone Station Commander. But I knew: he had friends in high places, friends who found his incurious type of loyalty to be useful.

The space station came into view, a giant four-spoked wheel, gently spinning in Earth's reflected glow. Clusters of antennae sprouted from the steel skin of the center drum. Some sent and received messages from Earth. Others faced into the void, listening.

In a few moments, the ship and station had completed their automated dance, the vid/control panel swung up and out of the way, and the hatch in front of us opened into the docking chamber of the Big Wheel. That's what we called the station: the Big Wheel.

Sam went first. He extricated his bulk from the seat, pushed off too hard for zero gravity, struck his head on the cabin wall and bounced toward the hatch. He floated through the opening and crashed to the station's deck in slow motion.

## *BREAKING NEWS FROM THE DEPARTMENT OF TRUTH*

*Today, Reverend President David Fenton decreed a fundamental restructuring of the National Aeronautical and Space Administration (NASA), reducing it with the stroke of a pen from an independent civilian agency dedicated to space exploration and research, into a logistical support arm of the United States Space Force.*

*Speaking from his golf resort in American Greenland, the Reverend President said, “Recent events have made it clear that the Godless Elite have taken over NASA, wasting American money on so-called science projects and disrespecting our fighting men in space. But no more. Today, we clean out the waste and corruption. From now on, we will tame the frontiers of outer space with military discipline.”*

## David Crilley

David Crilley is a high-tech marketer turned speculative fiction explorer, trading spreadsheets for storylines in pursuit of something deeper (and probably far less lucrative). His mission? To write entertaining, thought-provoking tales that linger long after the last page—stories that give us a frightening glimpse into a dark and all-too-plausible near future. But even in the shadow of dystopia, hope and love endure. So buckle up for a rocket ride through the best and worst of what makes us human, set against the limitless backdrop of what comes next.



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