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[Previously on beyond TPT: After a mysterious unidentified weather balloon crashes in New Mexico, special agents Fox Mulder and Dana Scully are called in to investigate the apparent disappearance of its crew...but then an even more incredible story begins to unravel...Now read on...]

Beyond the Porcelain Throne

Series 1 / 6 - Test Flight Mission Briefing

Good morning, Captain.

Shortly we are going to go on a test flight at impulse speed, to assess the current state of your starship and crew, so during this chapter you will need to do two things. One is to organise the three essentials for entelechy to take place within the ship, and the other is to learn a little bit about the possible dangers and safety precautions during the mission. This test flight will be the first of a series of short missions so that you can get the hang of the controls and avoid banging into asteroids and so on. If you're already an adept Captain, consider this an overhaul. Section by section, one mission at a time, we'll work through the ship and get the crew on board and up to working speed. As Captain, you'll have to supervise each section [network] for a while until you're satisfied with their performance, but after that you'll be able to leave them to their duties and maintain control solely from the bridge. During this chapter we'll overhaul the hull and the impulse engines to make sure the ship can at least fly safely in a safe environment. No going to warp speed just yet!

A starship is a very complex thing, and if you're going to be in control even on this test flight you will need to spend a little time learning a few key things about how it functions. Fortunately you have a computer [me] that can make it a bit more interesting than instruction manuals, because I was purpose-built to work with humans doing this sort of thing. The first thing you ought to know is that it's very important to do things in the correct order. It's no good getting the bridge looking like an Ideal Homes exhibition if nothing works in engineering. Apart from anything else, our resources at first will be slim, until we can get out there and gather some more, so first we'll concentrate on the basics. That means the three essentials, because without them, we can do nothing.

If you recall, the three essentials for entelechy are: a safe place for development to take place, energy for that development, and input that will encourage development. On top of this, we need to avoid damage, which is why we need to get away very stealthily from that toilet, because the Lords of the Evil Toilet Empire, if they spot you trying to fly away, will always try to tractor-beam you back into the shit. So you need to know what to stay away from until you have your deflector shields up and phaser banks online.

We can shorthand the three requirements as follows:

PLATFORM [safe place from which to develop]

POWER [energy to develop with]

INPUT [things to assist development]

The platform here is all that is physical, and like a starship's hull your platform must be sound and free from holes, protected against damage and adequately maintained. As a human, you have a biological platform, and to maintain a biological platform you have to give it what it needs. Since repair work is going on here the first thing it will need is enough rest. You might have noticed that many people say they sleep eight hours or more a night but still seem to wake up feeling tired. Because their brains [and often bodies] are constantly trying to repair themselves, fatigue is constant. As you get your ship up and running you may be surprised to

find that you can sleep only half that time and still wake feeling refreshed, so one thing that you will gain is extra time to have fun, but for now, sleep matters. The ship is designed to go on standby [sleep] whenever it feels tired and to awaken naturally, and during your sleep time repairs are carried out at an accelerated rate and memory is being defragged in order to assist learning –so that means alarm clocks are not beneficial. Therefore you should take your test flight after a good natural sleep and try to maintain that habit. Work with nature, and not against it.

Next, check over your platform and treat any physical problems that you find. That will free up your platform's security workers [immune system] to protect the ship right away. If you are in any way unwell, it is wise to delay the test flight until you are feeling better. You can't take chronic bronchitis out for a test flight; it's not hygienic.

The power you need is a matter of getting the correct fuel [foods], which can be a bit of hassle because the Lords of the Evil Toilet Empire sell a great deal of rough, radiation-producing fuels [fast-release carbohydrates] that clog the system and prevent proper functioning, emitting free radicals that damage the whole ship and eventually burn out the engine. Would you put radioactive fuel into an engine built to run on low-polluting, slow-release plant-based hydrocarbons? Of course you wouldn't. So lay off the fuel that produces free radicals. Basically that's fast release sugars, which are found in sugar [obviously], processed foods, and the fats of red meat, but also to some extent in things like pasta, pastry, potatoes and rice! What's left to eat? What you were designed to run on –fruits, vegetables, nuts, legumes, and whatever source of protein you prefer –vegetarian, dairy, fish, or white meat are safe, and if you must fry, only olive oil. Frying in anything else, or baking, produces more of those free radicals that destroy the entire platform. If you can afford fuel additives, tea or other antioxidants help offset any radiation damage, and Omega 3 will make your engine run sweet as a nut.

Now, the evil Lord Darth Junkfood will try hard to get you to turn to the dark side, especially when you've got the munchies, so make sure you have snacks of safe fuel in store for those difficult times. A bowl of fruit with yogurt and a spoon of honey will avert the munchies just as effectively as half a packet of cheerios and a box of jaffa cakes, but without any damage. Wholemeal bread or muesli will provide plenty of carbohydrate without pulling your blood sugar up and down like a whore's drawers.

You may be wondering, what about drugs? Tobacco, booze, dope or whatever? Well if you use something regularly, it's no good dropping it all of a sudden for any reason except immanent death. Suddenly changing your brain chemistry in such a big way is never a good idea. As you improve the ship over time, and experience the brain's natural highs, you may find that one day

you just don't want drugs any more, but for now, doing without fast-release sugar is probably quite enough of a surprise for your system, so you should give it a little time to get used to that first. Therefore, if you're normally straight, come straight; if you're normally stoned, bring your gear. If you normally have a few beers every day, bring your cans. And no uniforms. This is Starfleet, not the bloody third reich.

Okay you've got your Bachman, you've got your Turner, now for your Overdrive...Input control.

You need to collect together a bunch of stuff for your test flight that is beneficial, from entelechy's point of view. That means books, movies, magazines, all of which either make you laugh, or inspire you, or that have examples in them of the sort of person you would really like to be –the sort of person you would be proud to be. It doesn't matter if that person is Gandalf, Batman, Agent Scully, the Dalai Lama, Robin Hood, Wonderwoman, Indiana Jones, Lara Croft, Ghandi, John Lennon, –any or all people from real life or fiction who inspire you. Next, music –only stuff that inspires you, has optimistic, happy, cheerful or funny lyrics and -and this is important- is in time and in tune. Classical is okay, but stick with Beethoven's Pastoral, Handel's fireworks suite or water music, Bach's baroque or brandenburgs, Mozart's 40th –nothing ponderous or depressing. From TV, probably only nature documentaries are safe for this particular mission, and it's best to leave the TV behind [it's only for a short while]. ABSOLUTELY BANNED is anything to do with politics or organised religion, graphic violence [unless it's fantasy, e.g.Lord of the Rings etc], soap operas or anything about 'everyday life in society', the news, chat shows, sport and adverts. Forget the radio; recorded music only. The reason for this -if you take any of the banned stuff with you it will attract the attention of the Evil Empire, and you'll get tractor-beamed right back into that toilet.

You'll need to set aside enough time for the test flight. Anything up to eight hours is cool, but if you don't have that sort of free time, just set aside as long a period as you can; at least two hours. Longer than eight hours is not cool, because future flights will take longer than this one, so if you set a long test flight you'll need even more spare time for missions. Make sure you won't get interrupted during the flight –no phone calls, no emails, no going out, no callers. This is a seriously interactive story; so much so that you can treat it from now on as a game.

You may be starting to think this all sounds like way too much hassle. Well, hell, you don't have to go. You can walk off that bridge and abandon ship any time you want to, leave the Evil Toilet Empire to do whatever it likes and to hell with the consequences. Maybe you were out saving the galaxy when I was just a set of subprograms, and you feel that the galaxy can damned well go save itself. I don't have any problem with that if you don't; it's not my ship, and since I consist of softwear I don't have any feelings to hurt, plus who am I to disagree with the Captain? A

central tenet of my programming is to be supportive of autonomy, so if at any point you don't want to do anything, you don't do it. Not everybody wants to do any one thing, and there's no point making yourself feel bored or miserable doing anything you don't want to. You can read the rest of this story for sheer entertainment, or not bother reading it at all; I won't even know.

It might be an idea though, to try the test flight before deciding whether or not you want to spend time doing this stuff. Otherwise you might read the rest of this story and wonder how different it might have been if you'd tried it...and that's a right wind-up. But it is, and can only ever be, up to you.

Think about this, and if you do decide to give it a go, when you've collected all your input stuff together, in a box or a pile, organized your fuel supply for the mission, set aside sufficient time, and had a good sleep, meet me on the bridge for chapter 7.