

Just A Little Itchy

A Short Story in the
Straite Family Chronicles

Verse

by

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Someone once said that what this tired old world needed most was a few Heroes...

...Or perhaps a little Inspiration II?

Born and raised in the moon following the demise of Keeper Force administration, and creation of independent Luna, Rory Ishima "*Little Itchy*" Blackwoods didn't think about being a Hero. He just wanted to go to space.

He wanted space for everyone; space to live and space to choose.

Rory was born the son of a British physicist father, a scientist studying electromagnetic propulsion system effects at a dark-side facility, and a Japanese musical prodigy mother, herself a *Transportee* at thirteen.

It wasn't considered mannerly to enquire into the legal aspects of why someone got *Transported* to *K1*, and interred.

Rumor had it Kimie Amaterasu had, one day, finally become tired of listening to her pompous no-talent Master rant. Apparently, so the tale went, she wacked him up the side of the head with her portasonic board, crying out, "Go join Salieri in Hell!"

Thus saving the world from mediocrity on one hand, and creating the intro chords to her most famous symphony on the other.

A prodigy in physics and music himself, and teamed with a band of like - minded young Loonies, Little Itchy grew up playing music and designing better propulsion and communication systems. Rory mostly thought of what he did as puttering around or fiddlin' about, passing time simplifying the design of odd little gizmos used for life in space which, just incidentally, had made him on the lean side of being wealthy as an individual.



Work was going on late one night in the Team lab complex built into the wall of the Street, with the band set up and playing a pre-space era Helen Morgan classic, *I See Two Lovers*, in the background. There were a couple of orphaned slices of Hawaiian in a zapbox awaiting attention on the counter, low-gee drink containers scattered about.

Hoping to enhance the capture of imagery, and speed communication, the Team was aiming a look at the southern constellation towards Alpha Cent AB, a mere 4.37 lights away.

The primary search test would be to verify all known Alpha Cent system information, before moving the search onto B and Proxima. The Team agreed it would be a total bonus if they were able to confirm an *E*-type planetary body, and capture high-def 3D ground images of planet-sites fit for the near future Land-taking.

And maybe create a reinforced 2-way vocoder/vid-com channel.

The great-sail colony ships were already on their way; had been since before he was born. Little Itchy considered the recorded communication method now in use to be Unsatisfying in the Extreme; it being measured in years.

Little Itchy considered it might be just a bit of cool to set up a comm system allowing real time contact with the Intrepid Explorers. The colonial ships had decades left to travel. But given accurate detailed information, the ships would be able to shape their orbits early, shaving time, saving juice ... and potentially saving generations.

Rory had created a technology which utilized sound generated in complex wave forms produced by modifying his mother's concert-grade grand synthesizer, albeit without her knowledge. The test today would zip it through a high frequency oscillation accelerator module,

digitize it into his high-powered telescope vidi-cam, and set it to fire off in 360 seconds, all by the timer.

“Better pictures... or maybe the Music of the Spheres,” he said to himself. “Whatever! Play on, MacDuff!”

Expecting good results, but not immediately, or even very soon, Little Itchy scratched his chin. This was on the way-out-there-edge of I-wonder-if-this-will-really-work type research. Shrugging, he wandered off through the lab, stopping for a look out the armor-glass wall.

The lunar landscape lay beautiful under light reflected from Earth, stark shadows across an unforgiving world.

Rory smiled, listening as the band played. He had to admit the kids were alright! Waco, sportin’ his signature porkpie hat, was tinklin’ the keyboards; Shemp Jr smooched out on the bass while AbnerJ Pettibone synth’d the strings section. And PattiAngel had a beautiful voice.

Rory thought about stepping in with some soft guitar but decided listening was good, too. Throwing Patti a kiss, he danced a sliding step across the floor into the adjacent lab complex to check status on a particle chamber test the Team was also running.

Grabbing a set of goggles he went to stand at the view port and... as the vidi-cam timetick went to zero... the particle accelerator fired.

Light flashed purple haze, the band’s amps blew out and the telescope’s vidi-cam receiver went SPUNNNGGG!

At the first flash of light, Rory had pushed himself away from the viewport HARD! He sailed back into the main lab, took a flip and bounced lightly off the far wall, grabbing a roofing stanchion to stabilize his flight track. He spun about the stanchion a couple of times before

coming to rest, sucking in hard breaths. In spite of the protection goggles it took long moments to blink away the painful black spots from his eyes.

After a quick visual check on the security board showing all green for dome seal security, Rory managed a look about the lab. What he saw was debris, smoking amplifiers and downed Team members groaning and shaking their hands and heads.

Overhead, by the telescope platform, the digital message board blinked **** RECEIVED **** *RECEIVED* **** RECEIVED **** over and over in bright red letters.

Shaking his head wasn't such a good idea. He floated a moment, hands to head, as he muttered, "Great Klono's Brass Balls! Wha'the hell was that?"

Little Itchy pushed lightly off his hold and dropped slowly to the floor to where PattiAngel lay moaning softly, hanging off the stage-front. Taking her gently in his arms, Rory lifted her clear of the debris and sat with her head in his lap. He stroked a finger lightly across her forehead, and caught a faint smile as her eyes opened; a summer's sky of azure.

She murmured, "I hurt. I think that mic almost took my head off, lover."

Shemp Jr lifted himself slowly, wiping at a bloody lip. He stared down at a hand which still held the blown-out body of his upright bass by the neck. Slurring words, "Wooh baby, now thash wah ya call truly remarkable, Chief!"

"Hey Boss, this ol' style 'quipment makes for some seriously groovin' sounds, don'cha know, but man oh man, tha's a bit much," came a mumble from AbnerJ's direction, where he sat head in hands.

Waco just stared at the collapsed body of his piano and said very little, not being much of a conversationalist. He could make machines sit up and beg, but people-talk had never been one of his strongpoints.

“You’re correct, Shemp. The timing is off—way off! I need to see what’s happened. Can I let you up, Patticake?”

“A quick kiss please, Rory,” came the reply behind a tremulous smile.

Bouncing up to the telescope vidi-cam receiver platform, Rory shut off the received warning. He slipped on his controller gloves while checking the bank of dials, frowned and *dl’d* the received package to the holosphere. Air-guitaring in a few commands, he set the picture scroll to play...

And there, in the air, was *WONDER!*

“Wha’cha got there, Boss?”

“I shouldn’t have anything yet,” Rory grunted, shaking his head. “Not for days—or weeks. The most likely result being that I wouldn’t get any result ever.”

Pointing, “But that there appears to be a planet—a *NEW* planet,” he breathed.

They all stood and watched as the holosphere circled astounding.

Pictures showing fields and mountains, rivers and small oceans or lakes, what appeared at first glance to be herds of beasts grazing, massive herds; blue green sky overhead and dark green and red flora, low and tall. Over it all were the sounds of surf and breeze, low thunder as the hooves of uncountable beasts struck the ground.

“Hmmm, kinda looks like Earth, but doesn’t look like Earth,” mused Shemp Jr, doubt in his voice, worry in his eyes. “Hey Itchy? Ya know the timer on the vidi-cam receiver? Doesn’t show more’n welllll, I mean looks like maybe at most a couple of microseconds passed. You know, from procedure initiation to received status? That’s kinda scary, brother. I’m mean that signal went out, and those pics came back. Coverin’ ‘bout fifty-two trillion miles round trip, or thereabouts! And the time count measures nix, nein, nada. How the heck is that possible?”

“Good question, Shemp! I don’t know the answer. When I put this rig together I was hopin’ to get some kinda results; hopin’ maybe even good results. And hopin’ not months from now; but maybe in days. I sure wasn’t thinkin’ results NOW!

“Of course, no one’s ever played a rig like this before, either!”

Little Itchy stood in silent contemplation for a moment, looking about. The Team knew that look. It usually meant revelations were forthcoming.

“Not only that, Team. No one’s ever had this scope rig design running, with a band plugged in doing music (by the way Patti, sweet vocals), and set off a light-speed synchrotron at the same time. Not that I planned the timing or anything. That test was just going along, since I’d upgraded to those new super-conducting magnets in the tighter sync-formation, and changed to the new alloy narrow-gauge beam pipe.”

Rory paused in thought again. Then he smiled, “I’ve got a feeling we may have shot the copper steam-bath out the window on this one, kids.”

AbnerJ’s head started bobbin’ up and down as he watched the holo in awe. “Tell ya’ll one thing guys. This is gonna be some kind o’ super cool to figure out!”

Hands high-fived as the laughter rolled out and they all started dancing about in glee. Little Itchy Blackwoods picked PattiAngel up, gave her a big kiss, and bounced her at the ceiling with a shout.

Whooping loudly, the Team took off playing rebound tag.

It was 2166 *AD* and Little Itchy had just celebrated his birthday.

He was 17.



Not only could she sing, but PattiAngel was the hottest spacecraft pilot from Venus to Ganymede; at least in Little Itchy's opinion, and that not far wrong either.

Patti could run the board solo on anything smaller than the big passenger liners plying space across the solar system; and was rated Master Pilot's Senior Apprentice there only due to an minimum age qualification, having met all other requirements. She was a hot pilot; and seriously cute too, all 5'2" of her, short blonde curls at both ends, blue eyes shining and smiling to dare the Gods.

Right now she was sitting at the main pilot board, strapped in and relaxed back in her self-designed, form fitting p-seat. Her fingers danced over the keys shaping the final orbit blast. The rest of the Team was in position; Shemp Jr on life-support/ comm, AbnerJ and Waco down in the engine room as engineers for the *arcjet* drive, and Little Itchy nursing the damned *whatcha-ma-callit* machine.

Knowing it could be done, that had been the thing; it just meant refining and building a workable unit in a usable size. They'd worked themselves to near exhaustion over long months, enjoying every minute. Keeping the work secret from the world, too; except for parental permission of course. All the M and D's had sat project oversight, scrutinizing and signing off on the small details. They were making sure, as much as could be planned for, that no shortcuts were being taken in retrofitting the craft their kids would be using in their adventure.

Being of a frontiering and tech building bent themselves, the M and D's were at heart basically all for it. Even if Little Itchy's invention came a crocker this time, the kids were having fun designing new and useful tech and, as the parental units concurred, the team building was a very good thing indeed.

After all, worst case was they had a nice tour studying the solar system.

Meanwhile, Rory had used nearly his whole personal fortune to get this far.

After inspecting available ships, the Team had found, and Rory had purchased, a well-used and more than somewhat battered cargo transport hull large enough for their purpose. First steps were to upgrade structural integrity, comp systems, life support and hydroponics, gyros and any other subsystem they could think of to tweak. The prototype *whatcha-ma-callit* machine filled most of the main cargo hold, along with any tools and spare parts the Team thought necessary.

Dried and frozen supplies for a year were laid in, with no idea if this was wishful thinking or over-kill. And, of course, they designed in secured environmental storage for their band instruments. No life without music, after all!

The final craft readiness tests were done in lunar orbit. After completing their last prep EVA, installing a hi-gain parabolic comm broadcast/ receiver antennae upgrade, Rory had everyone gather to the bow of the craft.

“This is truly a solemn occasion, my friends,” he said, chuckling over the secure Team inter-suit comm, “and your hard work has made it all possible.

“We go tomorrow!”

The Team let out a round of cheers!

“Hey Chief?”

“What’s up, Shemp?”

“Ship needs a name! Hey, we all know what we’re doin’ is MORE than a bit crazy, but still, the ship needs a name. We’ve all been thinkin’ ‘bout it.”

“Right you are! Patticake, got any ideas?”

“*INSPIRATION*, Rory!”

AbnerJ laughed, “We all know that *ONE*’s been taken.”

Floating in space in a circle, safety lines clipped to hull clamps, the whole group began laughing and pumping their suited hands at the faraway stars. In most circles, what they were about to attempt would be considered just as silly a stunt as that historical event had been.

Rory unclipped a long tube from his suit side-rack. Gripping the tube at one end by the Kevlar handle and facing them, he flicked on a switch.

The glow coming from the long *blade* caused chuckles, with high-5’s all around.

Banging the lightsaber wand three times on the ship’s prow Rory called out, “I dub thee the *Lunar Space Ship Inspiration II*. May our flight be long—and of much greater consequence!”

Team cheers echoed all around.

“We go where no man has gone before!”



Leaving lunar orbit, and swinging the ship past Earth in slingshot maneuver, Patti had rotated the gyros to roll the ship. Through the viewports, Earth in all its glory filled their vision; clouds white with sea land blue and green under the sun.

It was autumn and the day was beautiful over North America. The Team took full advantage of the view to fill their minds with memories.

They were ready to go.

Patti had shaped their course below the ecliptic, outside the regular space lanes travelled by between-planets shipping, wanting to be well away from traffic and not endanger anyone.

FomalHaut, the Lonely One, was their target, a staggering twenty-five light years or one hundred forty-seven and a half trillion miles away. Now days away from the Moon, Patti achieved their final course orbit and said, “Gyros set. Neutral on the guns now, Engineer.”

“Neutral it is, Pilot,” was the crisp reply.

Rory and Shemp Jr worked together to set the sight line, manually cranking the gyros to turn ship a few degrees, centering the star within the ‘scope sights. Green lighting the jury-rigged auxiliary board for the *whatcha-ma-callit* machine, Rory was ready.

“We need another name for this thing,” he said quietly to himself. The dry nervous chuckles all around let him know the others heard.

“Okay, the verniers are set to automatically bring us out after a jump of five lights, so we can recalibrate and look around.” Rory grinned. “I hope.

“We’ll want to map as we go. Diagram, map, document and log everything. If this works I see no way others can follow, unless we do. Just like Captain Cook sailing voyages of discovery to the Pacific. Plus, everything that happens and all we say will be recorded and sealed in d-cube, just in case.”

“I’m just glad we’re pointing away from anything,” Patti said softly. “I need a kiss, Rory.”

Un-strapping quickly to float across the control room to her pilot chair, Rory stopped his motion head-to-head with Patti, looking out the main viewport.

They both felt overwhelmed by the enormity of stars before them. Tears in their eyes they looked at each other and kissed softly.

“I love you,” and smiles passed between them.

Strapped back down Rory said, “Okay Team, this is it. Cue music please, Maestro!”

PattiAngel smiled, and flicked a switch.

With a finger poised over the GO button and his other hand pointing out the viewport towards FomalHaut, Rory smiled and spoke aloud, “Hey, Hey, Hey now Princess Murie, here we come!”

With the music playing softly in the background, Little Itchy pushed GO—and the stars went away.



The *LSS Inspiration II* floated in space.

Patti had a quarter gee spin on to make down-be-down; so not everything floated away.

Now a parsec from Earth on line to Alpha Centauri the crew worked at calibrating and scanning the sky, across degrees of the optimal Earth transit trajectory, looking for sight of the colony ships.

The three colonial generation vessels should be visible with their light sails deployed, square kilometers across. Even if as non-reflective black voids blocking out the star field. The ships had been on their way for decades now and would soon be decelerating over the next eight billion miles to achieve maneuvering orbit in the Alpha Centauri system.

Collapsing the solar sails should be visible as well, showing a rippling light to shadow to light effect against the backdrop stars.

Ship comm was set to auto-broadcast a contact signal—

“Welcome, Welcome, Welcome... Lunar Star Ship Inspiration II in transit line to Alpha Cent bids Welcome.” Over and over. *“Please respond... Calling Earth colony ships Constellation, Kiev and Tianzi... Please respond.”*

“This is Captain, and Owner aboard, Rory Blackwoods of the LSS Inspiration II calling to Earth colony ships... Please respond.” The broadcast continued.

Shemp Jr cleared his throat before mumbling, “We’re really gonna piss some people off, Chief.”

“How so?” Rory replied, pre-occupied.

“Well, let’s see now. These people ridin’ the colony ships put their lives on the line to challenge the universe and serious boredom; on a trip lasting generations. They left when they was kids! Now they’ll be grans and gramps. We,” Shemp grinned and pointed at each Team member, “have been sittin’ here for nearly a WEEK keepin’ an eye out for the colony ships. It took us a whole MONTH just to get here, and we spent most of that time sightseein’ as we surveyed the *Fomalhaut* system; and then booted over here to survey the *Alpha Cent* system. We’re still kids! And we’re here to welcome them.”

Patti frowned in thought; then smiled big-time. “But SJ, we’re here to welcome them HOME!”

AbnerJ Pettibone called out, “Yeah man, that’s one nice *E*-type planet we found there in the Alpha Cent system AND we can guide them right into the orbit track, baby! No wasted time, no wasted juice!

“And before they know it, we’ll have ‘em talking to Earth ‘bout the next colonists and supplies. Now that should sweeten things up.”

The whole Team smiled and shook their heads. “Straight on trajectory!”

“Just one little thing, Rory,” said Patticake as she snuggled into Little Itchy’s lap. “It sure would be nice if we didn’t have to spin ship to get constant gravity.”

Closing his eyes and giving his head a shake, Rory figured there was going to be no resting on his laurels allowed.

He was interrupted from making a snappy reply as the red beacon light on the comm began flashing, “*Incoming Message... Incoming Message...*”

AbnerJ cried out from the ‘scope bay, “Avast ye hardies, thar bay sails o’er the yardarm, Captain!”

And of course Shemp Jr jumped right into it, “Whar away, matey?”

Waco laughed and played the external navlights through changing spacecode patterns ... loud hurrahs and blinding applause.

Little Itchy shook his head again and sighed. It’s always something. *Lunatics!* Each and every one of them!



“No matter where you go, there you are,” he muttered to himself.

The ship was quiet as Rory sat alone in the dark, staring out the forward viewport. A magnificent harvest of stars glowed against the midnight backdrop.

He was thinking hard thoughts, contemplating the future.

The kids could have fun for now, he knew. But what would happen when they returned to Luna? From what he could see, the consequences of their accomplishment would be really far reaching; even life changing for Earth’s people and cultures.

This transportation mode, transmittal device, whatever—it wasn’t that space was ignored exactly just—drat, words just didn’t work well. The bottom line was the *whatcha-ma-callit* machine worked. The math was solid.

Sure the tech needed to be fine-tuned, so to speak, but it worked; which was just-so, and hugely satisfying.

So it transmitted us from one point in space to another, without seeing what went on between. That sounded a lot like Magic, but; Rory shrugged *whatever* to himself.

The 5-lights transition plan had worked a treat. Tweaking the vernier controls as they went had provided additional levels of precision letting him define any distance, so mapping and exploration had been possible. The voyage so far was very well documented.

They'd had such fun. Sightseeing new stars, new worlds, new adventures!

"It's not an engine. It needs no fuel. It's just a device, a transmittal device.

Soooo, let's just call it what it is then. A spatial transmittal device," he decided.

A thought crossed Rory's mind and the fun memories slammed to a halt.

He contemplated what might occur when the national governments on Earth and Luna, colonial governments on Mars and Venus got involved?

They're likely to go totally batshite when word gets out some private citizen has tech like this. And it won't take very long either. Geez, we could be disappeared and locked away until such time as ... well until forever, depending on which government gets their hands on us first.

"Wait-a-bit old son, yer soundin' a tad paranoid," Rory muttered. "Or perhaps not?"

After all, technically we're just kids and the old Pols running the world aren't likely to be very impressed by anything we have to say. Heck, they're never impressed with anything they have to say to each other, so why would they listen to a bunch of snotty-nosed brats like us.

They'll just want to grab the tech and keep it for themselves.

Governments'd been making war over a stupid barrel of oil for a couple hundred years now, a power resource that's basically run out on Earth. Just imagine what'll happen when one government thinks another has some far-out tech like this. It'll be taken way out of proportion. It's huge, but it's not *manhattanproject* battle-tech, is it?

Nope, this wasn't city destroyer battle-tech; but it might be the most powerful change since. This will be about Cultures and Societies. This will be about new, wide-open frontiers.

History told the tale Rory knew, and some of the cultures on Earth just weren't real big on their people learning new thoughts.

Matter of fact, some of those cultures weren't too big on anyone else learning anything either, and had been slowly trying to conquer the world, neighborhood by neighborhood for centuries, to achieve that end; with no one but the Mullahs smiling.

And the lash-back against that failed social experiment fondly called Multiculturalism over a century ago had been making for interesting times since, what with everyone being stranded on one little home world.

When would people learn Ism's were mostly a crock?

The only place multiculturalism had truly worked was in *KI*. There, life had been real simple. There, if you weren't polite and neighborly, you learned to breathe vacuum. Early on there were plenty o' floaters out on the moon's surface.

People got the hint fast.

Keeper Force personnel had never cared. They were uniformed bullyboys, abandoned. Assignment in Luna had been a one way trip. They too learned to be polite, or died.

But that was history.

Here and now, this radically new space tech could mean governments losing control of their populations; losing control of their Power. Rory'd never heard of any old Pols who appreciated someone taking away their toys, or their meal ticket. Rory thought it was important to make certain no one government had any special advantage!

So, it came to reason him and the Team were going to be REAL unpopular!

Okay, it's huge; and it's my responsibility and its decision time. I have to keep Patti safe; keep the Team safe. And, let's face it, w are going to have so much FUN!

We can get ourselves a bigger ship (he looked around). We can get a much bigger ship, with some really nice stuff onboard, and we can go exploring for planets. We can start our own Firm, be first-in Explorers, find planets and sell the Settlement Rights!

Coolio, Julio. What a good ideeeeahhh!

"Our mission, to explore strange new worlds," he chuckled to himself.

The air moved softly past.

"A penny for your thoughts, lover," Patti whispered in his ear.

Rory pulled her onto his lap, gave her a hug and smiled quietly. "You know—I'm just doin' the usual."

"What, solving the world's problems?"

"Yup, pretty much!"

"What now?"

"We're gonna to be back in cisLunar orbit in a few days, after we settle with the sail-ships. There's no way to keep this hidden now."

"Okay. And?"

“If I remember correctly, under the old outer space treaty, when we land we’ll be immediately subject to government control and supervision.”

“Sounds ‘bout right, Rory. Hey, what’s that old saying? Oh yes, seems like we have a Tiger by the Tail.”

Chuckling softly and giving Patti a light kiss on the cheek, he said, “I know what we’re going to do, Love.

“We’ll take all the math and engineering plans for the *whatcha-ma-callit* machine—by-the-way we’ll call it a spatial transmittal device. Plus we take all the data, maps and pics and, well everything. We can slingshot an orbit around Earth. We’ll boost our data signal into the world social netLink and *dl* all of it to the whole wide world.

“And we’ll do it all for free!”

PattiAngel grinned a huge grin. “If you build it, they will come?”

Chuckling Rory replied, “More like if we build it, they will go... to Space. ALL Mankind will go to space, building new colonies with new opportunities, everywhere and for everyone.”

“It’s a good idea, Rory, and you’re a good man to think of it. What about us?”

“Hey, we go to space, too. *Planets-R-Us*, or some-such. You pilot, I’ll work the machine and cook! Ought to be amazing fun, and make us a bundle.”

“No, I mean us, as in you and me, Rory?”

“Babies, Patti-cake. Planets and babies! How’s that sound to you? If I give you the glowing Rings of Saturn for a wedding band, will you marry me?”

“Yes, Rory, oh yes please!”

She snuggled into him, smiling, “We ARE going to have such FUN!

“Oh, and Rory?”

“Yeah?”

“Call it the Blackwoods Spatial Transmittal Device! You will be INFAMOUS! This is going to be the most superduperous, tremendously itchy *STD* the W.H.O. has ever seen—and they won’t EVER find a cure for it!”

Laughter rang out across star-filled horizons.



The End