

JULIE

NOVEL EXCERPT BY NATE STOVALL (SCIENCE FICTION)

18th generation?
year?

Seems too casual

Summary: Bob Alabama and Julia Oregon are part of the eighteenth generation of descendants from a group of scientists who sealed themselves away from the coming wars. The Community, and their AI caretaker Mother, was never designed to last that long. Can Bob break free of his fatal attraction to Julia? Has Mother's source code been compromised?

Most celestial orbits encircled a luminous entity, but Bob Alabama was trapped in the gravity well of someone much darker: Julia Oregon. The source of his space-time distortion stood a scant meter away, trapped with him in Lift Three by his sabotage. He tried to avoid eye contact, fearful his will would buckle under the pressure from her cyan gaze. His mind free, for the moment, he drank in the rest of her like a Halfer guzzled homebrew. The crust of dirt on her knees marked her as a farmer just as effectively as the brown coveralls with green epaulets. A belt of woven human hair rode low on her hips, cinched with a simple knot over her flat stomach. She had a half dozen service ribbons over her left breast pocket, far fewer than he did. To be fair, he earned more than any soul since Gen02. The knotted loop of a section chief ran under her right epaulet and around her bared arm.

word choice

cinched?

careful!

Halfer?

Why?

indent

I hope to avoid that as long as I can get away with it, Bob thought to himself.

punct.

Why?

Italics for thought.

He smoothed his grey coveralls and verified his epaulets had their seams hidden.

You could not see the event horizon of a black hole. To cross that invisible demarcation was to fall forever as time stretched to infinity.

I could escape. It wasn't too late. Unbidden, his mind rendered the distortion of space-time around a black hole, and charted a course to escape.

Why would he?
Didn't he
trap her
in lift?

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She alternated between yelling at the disabled camera and banging on the sealed elevator doors.

An Oregon of all things. The thought rolled through his mind like a Panzer column through the low countries.

Silence cuffed his ears not unlike how Grandfather Genghis did.

That's it?
No elaboration?

He risked a glance up. Her calloused thumbs were hooked behind her belt. His gaze followed the curve of her wiry arms. Her skin was the same shade as his, the color of soycoff with a splash of goat's milk. Clan tattoos covered her arms from wrist to past her square shoulders. The sleeves of her coveralls were hacked off, another custom of the Oregons. He could feel it, the draw of her darkness pulling him to oblivion. Her expressive mouth was twisted into pursed lips, above which a constellation of freckles splashed on each cheek. He was lost now, his vector set to fall forever.

soycoffee?

word
choice

Her freckles were a bizarre mutation in the Community. She was the only one to have them in the last three generations. Those alone would be enough for her courtship to fill the fight card for Variety Night for months.

He took a deep breath, and looked into her eyes. They were a rich blue, the color of glaciers and tropical seas. Tides of gravity tore his will to ribbons.

But, he tried to avoid eye contact in #1

You mentioned
her blue
eyes on p. 1.

Her impossible eyes narrowed. "What kind of Engineer are you? Fix the bunking elevator!"

Those blue orbs ^{had} haunted his dreams for the ^Past two months. They were sapphires in the genetic sameness of the Community. His own eyes were lighter than most, but still within the brown boundaries of normal.

Again?

Julie

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"Too much social interaction?" She leaned forward, her half-open coveralls more than an invitation.

He resisted with the help of cobalt nails pinning his eyes to the back of his skull.

Her freckles twitched in disappointment. She poked him in the chest with each word.

"Fix. The. Bunking. Elevator."

With a snort she turned her attention to the control panel. Her slim finger repeatedly stabbed the ten deck buttons at random. He watched the tendons in her wrist jump with each impact, like a second circulatory system pumping fury into nonfunctional machinery. Eighteen generations of fingers had worn the buttons smooth, obliterating any trace of the Greek letters that once adorned them. Their lift was stuck between Epsilon and Zeta levels, precisely where Bob had planned.

"I do not have my toolkit with me, and the problem might be with the power coupling at the top of the shaft. I'm sure another engineer will get a BFR ticket soon."

She caught him staring. "Why don't you take a picture so you can go bunk yourself. What's a BFR?"

"Break-Fix Request."

She muttered something to herself in her Clan's language and went back to punching buttons.

Was that it? Was that the reason she had not paired up with a Montana.

Competition for one of the four prospective mates from your designated Clan was always fierce. Mother announced the breeding plan on the Generation's Firstborn's twenty-fifth birthday. His birthday.

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That was just over two years ago. His parents waited a respectful six months before the hints and innuendo began. Over the next eighteen months they had alternated between threats, feigned apathy, arranged dates, and even bribery. Last Friday his Mother prostrated herself on the deck and begged him to marry one of the Dakota girls while his Father screamed at him in Klingon, his Clan tongue. It was an epic shouting match that must have sounded like a well-oiled transmission with a handful of spanners and several cats dropped into the works to his Clan Cambridge Mother.

Females felt the urge to pair up far more acutely ^{than} then the males, the artificial one^s most of all. As the Firstborn, he had a special relationship with the Community's AI. His whole life he was pushed to excel by two biological parents, and an omniscient artificial one. He was not some parental sadist. There was no bunking way his kid was going to suffer the way he did. Whether his first contribution to Gen19 was second or thirty-sixth was fine by him. Mother, and her breeding program, was an obstacle he would have to deal with later.

She stopped her button mashing to give him a wicked glare. He basked in it like a lizard with a belly full of bugs. One of her eyebrows quirked up.

"I will see if there is anything I can do."

"You do that." She spat. "Keep your clothes on this time."

He pretended to work on the Lift. What would a farmer know about a professional appearance?

Julia began to pace, but the size of the elevator only allowed two strides from wall to wall. Her plastic shoes made a soothing rhythm of clomp clomp swish, on the polished steel decking. Remnants of the adhesive clung in the corners where the linoleum tile long since worn away from a multitude of feet.

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Bob pulled out his ancient multitool from a pocket and removed the screws to the service panel. He poked and prodded the wiring inside while his mind turned inward.

The loss of her parents in the fire of MY513 had turned her bitter. He was eleven when it happened, and the Community had paid their respects to the six empty coffins that terrible year.

Her brother, Carl Friedrich Gauss, was a Utah who had embraced faith. The other Gen17 losses were not paired, only Julia and Carl suffered alone.

He pulled the control interface card, and made a show of checking the chips and caps. I should bunk her and move on. Not for the first time he wished he could hack his own source code. Why was he attracted to an Oregon Farmer with the personality of a bench grinder? It would zazz Mother to no end.

DESCRIBE THE SETTING. THE READER HAS NO IDEA WHERE OR WHEN THE STORY TAKES PLACE.

IS THIS EARTH? IF NOT, WHEN AND WHY DID THEY LEAVE AND COLONIZE HERE?

WHERE IS THE LIFT? IN A HEAVILY-TRAFFICKED AREA?

SHE SEEMS PRETTY SAVVY.

HOW DID HE LURE HER INTO AN ELEVATOR?

FOR WHAT PURPOSE?

IS THERE ROMANCE? ANIMOSITY THAT TURNS TO AFFECTION LATER?

TOO MANY CLANS - ONE FOR EACH U.S. STATE?

EXPLAIN DIFFERENT TRAITS, GIFTS, ETC.

WHY ARE CLANS TO INTER-MARRY? ARRANGED?

THIS SCENE MOVES TOO SLOWLY.

YOU MAY HAVE A GOOD STORY HERE, BUT FOR NOW IT'S STALLED - JUST LIKE THE "LIFT".

WHO ARE YOUR SCI-FI INFLUENCES? DRAW ON THEM.

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Most celestial orbits encircled a luminous entity, but Bob Alabama was trapped in the gravity well of someone much darker: Julia Oregon. The source of his space-time distortion stood a scant meter away, trapped with him in Lift Three by his sabotage. He tried to avoid eye contact, fearful his will would buckle under the pressure from her cyan gaze. His mind free, for the moment, he drank in the rest of her like a Halfer guzzled homebrew. The crust of dirt on her knees marked her as a farmer just as effectively as the brown coveralls with green epaulets. A belt of woven human hair rode low on her hips, cinched with a simple knot over her flat stomach. She had a half-dozen service ribbons over her left breast pocket, far fewer than he did. To be fair, he earned more than any soul since Gen02. The knotted loop of a section chief ran under her right epaulet and around her bared arm.

I hope to avoid that as long as I can get away with it, Bob thought to himself.

He smoothed his grey coveralls and verified his epaulets had their seams hidden.

You could not see the event horizon of a black hole. To cross that invisible demarcation was to fall forever as time stretched to infinity.

I could escape. It wasn't too late. Unbidden, his mind rendered the distortion of space-time around a black hole, and charted a course to escape.

- lots of description, not much action
- watch your tenses. your story is told in past tense therefore, anything before the present moment is past perfect ("had" + "n").

She alternated between yelling at the disabled camera and banging on the sealed elevator doors.

An Oregon of all things. The thought rolled through his mind like a Panzer column through the low countries.

Silence cuffed his ears not unlike how Grandfather Genghis did.

He risked a glance up. Her calloused thumbs were hooked behind her belt. His gaze followed the curve of her wiry arms. Her skin was the same shade as his, the color of soycoff with a splash of goat's milk. Clan tattoos covered her arms from wrist to past her square shoulders. The sleeves of her coveralls were hacked off, another custom of the Oregons. He could feel it, the draw of her darkness pulling him to oblivion. Her expressive mouth was twisted into pursed lips, above which a constellation of freckles splashed on each cheek. He was lost now, his vector set to fall forever.

Her freckles were a bizarre mutation in the Community. She was the only one to have them in the last three generations. Those alone would be enough for her courtship to fill the fight card for Variety Night for months.

He took a deep breath, and looked into her eyes. They were a rich blue, the color of glaciers and tropical seas. Tides of gravity tore his will to ribbons.

Her impossible eyes narrowed. "What kind of Engineer are you? Fix the bunking elevator!"

Those blue orbs had haunted his dreams for the last two months. They were sapphires in the genetic sameness of the Community. His own eyes were lighter than most, but still within the brown boundaries of normal.

"Too much social interaction?" She leaned forward, her half-open coveralls more than an invitation.

He resisted with the help of cobalt nails pinning his eyes to the back of his skull.

Her freckles twitched in disappointment. She poked him in the chest with each word.

"Fix. The. Bunking. Elevator."

With a snort she turned her attention to the control panel. Her slim finger repeatedly stabbed the ten deck buttons at random. He watched the tendons in her wrist jump with each impact, like a second circulatory system pumping fury into nonfunctional machinery. Eighteen generations of fingers had worn the buttons smooth, obliterating any trace of the Greek letters that once adorned them. Their lift was stuck between Epsilon and Zeta levels, precisely where Bob had planned.

"I do not have my toolkit with me, and the problem might be with the power coupling at the top of the shaft. I'm sure another engineer will get a BFR ticket soon."

She caught him staring. "Why don't you take a picture so you can go bunk yourself. What's a BFR?"

"Break-Fix Request."

She muttered something to herself in her Clan's language and went back to punching buttons.

Was that it? Was that the reason she had not paired up with a Montana?

I don't get it [Competition for one of the four prospective mates from your designated Clan was always fierce.] Mother announced the breeding plan on the Generation's Firstborn's twenty-fifth birthday. His birthday.

That was just over two years ago. His parents ^{had} waited a respectful six months before their ^{had been} hints and innuendo ^{as} began. Over the next eighteen months they had alternated between threats, feigned apathy, arranged dates, and even bribery. Last Friday his Mother ^{had} prostrated herself on the deck and begged him to marry one of the Dakota girls while his Father screamed at him in Klingon, his Clan tongue. It was an epic shouting match ^{did he shout too?} that must have sounded like a well-oiled transmission with a handful of spanners and several cats dropped into the works to his Clan Cambridge Mother.

Females felt the urge to pair up far more acutely than the males, ^{the artificial one?} most of all. As the Firstborn, he had a special relationship with the Community's AI. His whole life he ^{had been} was pushed to excel by two biological parents, and an omniscient artificial one. He was not some parental sadist. There was no bunking way his kid was going to suffer the way he did. Whether ^{had} his first contribution to Gen19 ^{I don't get this} was second or thirty-sixth was fine by him. Mother, and her breeding program, was an obstacle he would have to deal with later.

^{Julia} She stopped her button mashing to give him a wicked glare. He basked in it like a lizard with a belly full of bugs. One of her eyebrows quirked up.

"I will see if there is anything I can do."

"You do that," ^{what does this mean?} She spat. "Keep your clothes on this time."

He pretended to work on the Lift. What would a farmer know about a professional appearance?

Julia began to pace, but the size of the elevator only allowed two strides from wall to wall. Her plastic shoes made a soothing rhythm of clomp clomp swish, on the polished steel decking. Remnants of ^{the} adhesive clung in the corners where the linoleum tile long since worn away from a multitude of feet.

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Bob pulled out his ancient multitool from a pocket and removed the screws to the service panel. He poked and prodded the wiring inside while his mind turned inward.

He knew that
The loss of her parents in the fire of MY513 had turned her bitter. He was eleven when it *had been* happened, and the Community had paid their respects to the six empty coffins that terrible year.

Her brother, Carl Friedrich Gauss, was a Utah who had embraced faith. *?* [The other Gen17 losses were not paired, only Julia and Carl suffered alone.

He pulled the control interface card, and made a show of checking the chips and caps. I should bunk her and move on. Not for the first time *?* he wished he could hack his own source code. Why was he attracted to an Oregon Farmer with the personality of a bench grinder? It would zazz Mother to no end.

which one?
why does he have a last name that isn't a state?

NOVEL EXCERPT BY NATE STOVALL (SCIENCE FICTION)

Nate-

You've placed the reader in a very specific situation and have given descriptions that suggest we have some understanding of the situation or are willing to just go along with the confusing descriptions and we'll catch up later. The latter is a dangerous choice. It would take a master story teller to keep the reader interested but confused. I'd suggest that you slow down and tell the story in increments that allows the reader to keep up with the story while you introduce new elements with some structure around them.

Sadly, here, I'm lost in a lot of your structural elements. If I'm confused, I'll stop reading sooner than later.

I've imbedded many places where the story becomes blurred for me. It wouldn't take too much to highlight the specifics and help the reader along.

It's clear, there are different plot points that you're working on: the setting. Where are we – and the characters. The plot – the characters are trapped in a shaft of some kind and have to escape. There doesn't seem to be any real threat or time element – like they have to escape by a certain time or else. Characters – you spend an inordinate time describing the girl. We get it early on. No description of the male character. Conflict might come up later, but that would be a mistake. Get the real problem out early on to give the reader some reason to continue.

Lots to think about.

Good luck

Dave.

Society
characters
setting } all over
too
Break it into
segments that
explain each

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Most celestial orbits encircled a luminous entity (*a sun? Just say it.*), but Bob Alabama was trapped in the gravity well of *with* someone much darker: Julia Oregon. (*This is a really difficult opening.*) The source of his space-time distortion stood a scant meter away, trapped with him in Lift Three by his sabotage. He tried to avoid eye contact, fearful his will would buckle

under the pressure from her cyan gaze. His mind free, for the moment, he drank in the rest of her like a Halfer guzzled homebrew. The crust of dirt on her knees marked her as a farmer just as effectively as the brown coveralls with green epaulets. A belt of woven human hair rode low on her hips, cinched (*cinched?*) with a simple knot over her flat stomach. She had a half dozen service ribbons over her left breast pocket, far fewer than (*than*) he did. To be fair, he earned more than any soul since Gen02. The knotted loop of a section chief ran under her right epaulet and around her bared arm. (*You're expecting a lot from the reader. You have a clear understanding of the story. There is some static in the transmission.*)

I hope to avoid that as long as I can get away with it. Bob thought to himself.

He smoothed his grey coveralls and verified his epaulets *had their seams hidden.*(*passive.*

Read -epaulets' seams were hidden. Not clear the importance of the epaulets.))

POV -> You could not see the event horizon of a black hole. To cross that invisible demarcation was to fall forever as time stretched to infinity. (*This comes out of nowhere. Seems out of place. Why is this important?))*

I (*first person*) could escape. It wasn't too late. Unbidden, his(*third person*) mind rendered the distortion of space-time around a black hole, and charted a course to escape. (*You have to decide if you're going to tell the story in first or third person.*)

She alternated between yelling at the disabled camera and banging on the sealed elevator doors. (*This, too, has come from out of the blue. Try to connect descriptions to actions in the proper order.*)

An Oregon of all things. The thought rolled through his mind like a Panzer column through the low countries.

Silence cuffed his ears not unlike how Grandfather Genghis did. *(Grandfather Genghis? Where did he come from/)*

He risked a glance up. *(change character description, begin a new paragraph.)**(New paragraph)* Her calloused thumbs were hooked behind her belt. *(New paragraph)* His gaze followed the curve of her wiry arms. *(Tell it all from his point of view. For instance, he noticed that her skin was the same... .)* Her skin was the same shade as his, the color of soycoff *(Soy coffee?)* with a splash of goat's milk. Clan tattoos covered her arms from wrist to past her square shoulders. The sleeves of her coveralls were hacked off, another custom of the Oregons. *He could feel it, the draw of her darkness pulling him to oblivion. Her expressive mouth was twisted into pursed lips, above which a constellation of freckles splashed on each cheek. He was lost now, his vector set to fall forever. (Very busy description, but I'm not sure what I'm supposed to imagine.)*

Her freckles were a bizarre mutation in the Community. She was the only one to have them ~~in~~ *for* the last three generations. *Those alone would be enough for her courtship to fill the fight card for Variety Night for months. (Again, references that serve to confuse. We need some previous reference or more explanation here.)*

He took a deep breath, and looked into her eyes. They were a rich blue, the color of glaciers and tropical seas. *Tides of gravity tore his will to ribbons. (More than love here. What is the reference?)*

Her impossible eyes narrowed. "What kind of Engineer are you? Fix the bunking elevator!"

Those blue orbs *had* haunted his dreams for the last two months. They were sapphires in the genetic sameness of the Community. His own eyes were lighter than most, but still within the brown boundaries of normal.

“Too much social interaction?” She leaned forward, her half-open coveralls more than an invitation.

He resisted *with the help of cobalt nails pinning his eyes to the back of his skull. (huh?)*

Her freckles twitched in disappointment. *She poked him in the chest with each word.*

“Fix. The. Bunking. Elevator.” (Good)

With a snort, she turned her attention to the control panel. Her slim finger repeatedly stabbed the ten deck buttons at random. He watched the tendons in her wrist jump with each impact, like a second circulatory system pumping fury into nonfunctional machinery. Eighteen generations of fingers had worn the buttons smooth, obliterating any trace of the Greek letters that once adorned them. Their lift was stuck between Epsilon and Zeta levels, precisely where Bob had planned.

“I ~~do not~~ *don't* have my toolkit with me, and the problem might be with the power coupling at the top of the shaft. I'm sure another engineer will get a BFR ticket soon.”

She caught him staring. “Why don't you take a picture so you can go *bunk (?)* yourself. What's a BFR?”

“Break-Fix Request.”

She muttered something to herself in her Clan's language and went back to punching buttons.

Was that it? *(Was what it?)* Was that the reason she had not paired up with a Montana.

Competition for one of the four prospective mates from your designated Clan was always fierce. Mother announced the breeding plan on the Generation's Firstborn's twenty-fifth birthday. His birthday. *(today?)*

That was just over two years ago. His parents waited *(for him to select a mate?) if so, let us know what the problem is.)* a respectful six months before the hints and innuendo began. Over the next eighteen months they had alternated between threats, feigned apathy, arranged dates, and even bribery. Last Friday his Mother *(his real mother? Or the Mother?)* prostrated herself on the deck and begged him to marry one of the Dakota girls while his Father screamed at him in Klingon *(Is this a Star Trek story? If not, you might want to change the name of the language or race.)*, his Clan tongue. It was an epic shouting match that must have sounded like a well-oiled transmission with a handful of spanners and several cats dropped into the works to his Clan Cambridge Mother.

Females felt the urge to pair up far more acutely than the males, the artificial one most of all. As the Firstborn, he had a special relationship with the Community's AI. His whole life he was pushed to excel by two biological parents, and an omniscient artificial one. He was not some parental sadist. There was no bunking way his kid was going to suffer ~~they~~ *the* way he did. Whether his first contribution to Gen19 was second or thirty-sixth was fine by him. Mother, and her breeding program, was an obstacle he would have to deal with later.

She stopped her button mashing to give him a wicked glare. He basked in it like a lizard with a belly full of bugs. One of her eyebrows quirked up.

"I will see if there is anything I can do."

"You do that." ~~She spat.~~ *, " she spat.* "Keep your clothes on this time." *(Really?)*

He pretended to work on the Lift. What would a farmer know about a professional appearance?

Julia began to pace, but the size of the elevator only allowed two strides from wall to wall. Her plastic shoes made a soothing rhythm of clomp clomp swish, on the polished steel decking. Remnants of the adhesive clung in the corners where the linoleum tile long since worn away from a multitude of feet. *people walking in and out.*

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~~The loss of her parents in the fire of MY513 had turned her bitter. He was eleven when it happened, and~~ *He was eleven when Julia lost her parents to the fire on MY513. The loss had turned her bitter.* The Community had paid their respects to the six empty coffins that terrible year.

Her brother, Carl Friedrich Gauss was a Utah who had embraced faith. The other Gen17 losses were not paired, only Julia and Carl suffered alone.

He pulled the control interface card, and made a show of checking the chips and caps. I should bunk her and move on. Not for the first time he wished he could hack his own source code. Why was he attracted to an Oregon Farmer with the personality of a bench grinder? It would zazz Mother to no end.

Susan

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Comment [s1]: Are they human?

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Comment [s2]: Perhaps too much of a play on words; too flowery.

I hope to avoid that as long as I can get away with it. Bob thought to himself.

Formatted: Indent: First line: 0.5"

He smoothed his grey coveralls and verified his epaulets had their seams hidden.

You could not see the event horizon of a black hole. To cross that invisible demarcation was to fall forever as time stretched to infinity.

Comment [s3]: Is Julia the black hole?

I could escape. It wasn't too late. Unbidden, his mind rendered the distortion of space-time around a black hole, and charted a course to escape.

Comment [s4]: Two points of view. Either "I could escape; it's not too late" or "He could escape; it wasn't too late."

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He risked a glance up. Her calloused thumbs were hooked behind her belt. His gaze followed the curve of her wiry arms. Her skin was the same shade as his, the color of soycoff with a splash of goat's milk. Clan tattoos covered her arms from wrists to past-her-square shoulders. The sleeves of her coveralls were hacked off, another custom of the Oregons. He could feel it, the draw of her darkness pulling him to oblivion. Her expressive mouth was twisted into pursed lips, above which a constellation of freckles splashed on each cheek. He was lost now, his vector set to fall forever.

Her freckles were a bizarre mutation in the Community. She was the only one to have them in the last three generations. Those alone would be enough for her courtship to fill the fight card for Variety Night for months.

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Her impossible eyes narrowed. "What kind of Engineer are you? Fix the bunking elevator!"

Those blue orbs had haunted his dreams for the last two months. They were sapphires in the genetic sameness of the Community. His own eyes were lighter than most, but still within the brown boundaries of normal.

Comment [s5]: ?

Comment [s6]: Too many metaphors to here, none of which I understand.

Comment [s7]: Probably too much description of her-also, it almost seems like this should've come earlier with the rest of the description, yet you don't want too much description up front

Comment [s8]: I think this is the first interesting fact we learn about her. Not that you can't have somewhat of a description besides this, but this stands out

Comment [s9]:

Comment [s10]: ?

Comment [s11]: Already told us the color of her eyes

Comment [s12]: So was most of this so far about his crush on Julia? I think everything before this needs to be summarized into 1-2 sentences, and then disperse the rest as you move forward.

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Her freckles twitched in disappointment. She poked him in the chest with each word.

"Fix. The. Bunking. Elevator."

With a snort, she turned her attention to the control panel. Her slim finger repeatedly stabbed the ten deck buttons at random. He watched the tendons in her wrist jump with each impact, like a second circulatory system pumping fury into nonfunctional machinery. Eighteen generations of fingers had worn the buttons smooth, obliterating any trace of the Greek letters that once adorned them. Their lift was stuck between Epsilon and Zeta levels, precisely where Bob had planned.

Comment [s13]: Good.

"I ~~do not~~ don't have my toolkit with me, and the problem might be with the power coupling at the top of the shaft. I'm sure another engineer will get a BFR ticket soon."

She caught him staring. "Why don't you take a picture so you can go bunk yourself. What's a BFR?"

"Break-Fix Request."

She muttered something to herself in her Clan's language and went back to punching buttons.

Was that it? Was that the reason she had not paired up with a Montana?

Comment [s14]: What's "that"?

Competition for one of the four prospective mates from your designated Clan was always fierce. Mother announced the breeding plan on the Generation's Firstborn's twenty-fifth birthday. His birthday.

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That was just over two years ago. His parents waited a respectful six months before the hints and innuendo began. Over the next eighteen months they had alternated between threats, feigned apathy, arranged dates, and even bribery. Last Friday his Mother ^{had} prostrated herself on the deck and begged him to marry one of the Dakota girls while his Father screamed at him in Klingon, his Clan tongue. It was an epic shouting match that must have sounded like a well-oiled transmission with a handful of spanners and several cats dropped into the works to his Clan Cambridge Mother.

Comment [s15]: As in Star Trek?

Comment [s16]: ?

Comment [s17]: I'm sorry, I'm honestly lost here.

Females felt the urge to pair up far more acutely than the males, the artificial ones most of all. As the Firstborn, he had a special relationship with the Community's AI. His whole life ~~he~~ ^{was} he'd been pushed to excel by two biological parents, and an omniscient artificial one. He was not some parental sadist. There was no bunking way his kid was going to suffer ~~they~~ way he did. Whether his first contribution to Gen19 was second or thirty-sixth was fine by him. Mother, and her breeding program, ~~was an~~ were obstacles ~~he would~~ ^{he'd} have to deal with later.

> explanation probably
can wait and can be
1 or more scenes w/
his parents

~~She~~ Julia stopped her button mashing to give him a wicked glare. He basked in it like a lizard with a belly full of bugs. One of her eyebrows ~~quirked~~ ^{shot} up.

"I will see if there ~~is~~ ^s anything I can do."

"You do that." She spat. "Keep your clothes on this time."

Comment [s18]: ?

He pretended to work on the Lift. What would a farmer know about a professional appearance?

Julia began to pace, but the size of the elevator only allowed two strides from wall to wall. Her plastic shoes made a soothing rhythm of ~~elomp-clomp-elomp-clomp~~ ^{clomp-clomp-clomp-clomp} swish, on the polished steel decking. Remnants of the adhesive clung in the corners where the linoleum tile ~~had~~ long since worn away from a multitude of feet.

NOVEL EXCERPT BY NATE STOVALL (SCIENCE FICTION)

Bob pulled out his ancient multi-tool from a pocket and removed the screws to the service panel. He poked and prodded the wiring inside while his mind turned inward.

The loss of her parents in the fire of MY513 ^{Mission Year} had turned her bitter. He was eleven when it ^{so he's known her a long time?} happened, and the Community had paid their respects to the six empty coffins that terrible year.

Her brother, Carl Friedrich Gauss, was a Utah who had embraced faith. The other Gen17 losses were not paired, only Julia and Carl suffered alone.

He pulled the control interface card, and made a show of checking the chips and caps. I should bunk her and move on. Not for the first time, he wished he could hack his own source code. Why was he attracted to an Oregon Farmer with the personality of a bench grinder? It would zazz Mother to no end.

I enjoy reading science fiction. For me, I'm having a hard time with what's happening so far. I know that Carl has a crush on Julia, that he's 27 years old, that his mother wants him to get married. Bu I don't know where they are, and I'm clueless on a lot of the terminology. It's okay I don't understand what everything means, but I do need more of this to be clearer. I think starting with a clearer sense of setting and concentrating on what's going on in the elevator (via play by play) and then having his thoughts interject a bit might work better here. When too much is indecipherable to the reader, it becomes frustrating.



Jenn's comments

Summary: Bob Alabama and Julia Oregon are part of the eighteenth generation of descendants from a group of scientists who sealed themselves away from the coming wars. The Community, and their AI caretaker Mother, was never designed to last that long. Can Bob break free of his fatal attraction to Julia? Has Mother's source code been compromised?

Comment [PHS IS1]: Why is his attraction to Julia bad?

Most celestial orbits encircled a luminous entity, but Bob Alabama was trapped in the gravity well of someone much darker: Julia Oregon. The source of his space-time distortion stood a scant meter away, trapped with him in Lift Three by his sabotage. He tried to avoid eye contact, fearful his will would buckle under the pressure from her cyan gaze. His mind free, for the moment, he drank in the rest of her like a Halfer guzzled homebrew. The crust of dirt on her knees marked her as a farmer just as effectively as the brown coveralls with green epaulets. A belt of woven human hair rode low on her hips, clinched with a simple knot over her flat stomach. She had a half dozen service ribbons over her left breast pocket, far fewer ~~then~~than he did. To be fair, he earned more than any soul since Gen02. The knotted loop of a section chief ran under her right epaulet and around her bared arm.

Comment [PHS IS2]: Does this mean they are in danger because he sabotaged something purposefully?

I hope to avoid that as long as I can get away with it. Bob thought to himself.

He smoothed his grey coveralls and verified his epaulets had their seams hidden.

You could not see the event horizon of a black hole. To cross that invisible demarcation was to fall forever as time stretched to infinity.

I could escape. It wasn't too late.

Comment [PHS IS3]: What is he referring to? Avoid what? Being a section chief? Why is that bad?

Comment [PHS IS4]: Italicize internal thought. And you usually don't have to say "s/he thought"

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Comment [PHS IS5]: If they are being pulled into a black hole then I'd suggest saying that in the first paragraph. Or are you using it as a metaphor? It's confusing since I know nothing about this world yet.

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NOVEL EXCERPT BY NATE STOVALL (SCIENCE FICTION)

Unbidden, his mind rendered the distortion of space-time around a black hole, and charted a course to escape.

Comment [PHS IS6]: If the black hole is a metaphor for Julia. Then why is he trying to escape when he's the one who sabotaged the lift to be alone with her?

She alternated between yelling at the disabled camera and banging on the sealed elevator doors.

Comment [PHS IS7]: I'd move his up to the first paragraph too. What she's doing is more important/interesting than what she is wearing.

An Oregon of all things. The thought rolled through his mind like a Panzer column through the ~~H~~Low ~~e~~Countries.

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Silence cuffed his ears not unlike how Grandfather Genghis did.

He risked a glance up. Her calloused thumbs were hooked behind her belt. His gaze followed the curve of her wiry arms. Her skin was the same shade as his, the color of soycoff with a splash of goat's milk. Clan tattoos covered her arms from wrist to past her square shoulders. The sleeves of her coveralls were hacked off, another custom of the Oregons. He could feel it, the draw of her darkness pulling him to oblivion. Her expressive mouth was twisted into pursed lips, above which a constellation of freckles splashed on each cheek. He was lost now, his vector set to fall forever.

Comment [PHS IS8]: I had to look up "soycoff" and when I did I found the phrase on reddit "Their skin was the color of **soycoff** with a dollop of milk." Be careful using cliches. Comparing people's skin color to food is a cliché.

Her freckles were a bizarre mutation in the Community. She was the only one to have them in the last three generations. Those alone would be enough for her courtship to fill the fight card for Variety Night for months.

He took a deep breath, and looked into her eyes. They were a rich blue, the color of glaciers and tropical seas. Tides of gravity tore his will to ribbons.

Her impossible eyes narrowed. "What kind of Engineer are you? Fix the bunking elevator!"

NOVEL EXCERPT BY NATE STOVALL (SCIENCE FICTION)

Those blue orbs haunted his dreams for the last two months. They were sapphires in the genetic sameness of the Community. His own eyes were lighter than most, but still within the brown boundaries of normal.

“Too much social interaction?” She leaned forward, her half-open coveralls **more than an invitation.**

Comment [PHS IS9]: An invitation for what? Was she flirting? because she seems mad?

He resisted with the help of cobalt nails pinning his eyes to the back of his skull.

Comment [PHS IS10]: I have no idea what this means.

Her freckles twitched **in disappointment.** She poked him in the chest with each word.
“Fix. The. Bunking. Elevator.”

Comment [PHS IS11]: I don't know what she's disappointed about.

With a snort, she turned her attention to the control panel. Her slim finger repeatedly stabbed the ten deck buttons at random. ~~He watched~~ The tendons in her wrist jumped with each impact, like a second circulatory system pumping fury into nonfunctional machinery. Eighteen generations of fingers had worn the buttons smooth, obliterating any trace of the Greek letters that once adorned them. Their lift was stuck between Epsilon and Zeta levels, precisely where Bob had planned.

"I ~~don't~~ ~~do not~~ have my toolkit with me, and the problem might be with the power coupling at the top of the shaft. I'm sure another engineer will get a BFR ticket soon."

She caught him staring. “Why don’t you take a picture so you can go bunk yourself. What’s a BFR?”

“Break-Fix Request.”

She muttered something to herself in her Clan’s language and went back to punching buttons.

Was that it? **Was that the reason she had not paired up with a Montana?**

Comment [PHS IS12]: Why would she pair up with a Montana when she's an Oregon?

NOVEL EXCERPT BY NATE STOVALL (SCIENCE FICTION)

Competition for one of the four prospective mates from your designated Clan was always fierce. Mother announced the breeding plan on the Generation's Firstborn's twenty-fifth birthday. His birthday.

Comment [PHS IS13]: You only get 4 to choose from?

That was just over two years ago. His parents waited a respectful six months before the hints and innuendo began. Over the next eighteen months they had alternated between threats, feigned apathy, arranged dates, and even bribery. Last Friday his Mother prostrated herself on the deck and begged him to marry one of the Dakota girls while his Father screamed at him in Klingon, his Clan tongue. It was an epic shouting match that must have sounded like a well-oiled transmission with a handful of spanners and several cats dropped into the works to his Clan Cambridge Mother.

Comment [PHS IS14]: Clarify. Not positive what this means. Is he the first born of an entire generation for the entire clan? Or just for his immediate family?

Comment [PHS IS15]: How old is Julia?

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Comment [PHS IS16]: Is this Star Trek fan fiction?

Comment [PHS IS17]: I'm confused by all of the different Mothers. There's the AI Mother, his mother, and the Cambridge Clan Mother.

Comment [PHS IS18]: Do you mean the AI Mother? Or do you mean that are AI people in the community that could also reproduce?

She stopped her button mashing to give him a wicked glare. He basked in it like a lizard with a belly full of bugs. One of her eyebrows quirked up.

Comment [PHS IS19]: Maybe move this paragraph up to help clarify how couples are paired up and what the significance of birth order is.

"I will see if there is anything I can do."

Comment [PHS IS20]: Does he not use contractions? If not then be consistent. He uses "I'm" above.

"You do that." She spat. "Keep your clothes on this time."

Comment [PHS IS21]: Are you saying she spat the words out? Or did she actually spit at him?

He pretended to work on the Lift. What would a farmer know about a professional appearance?

Comment [PHS IS22]: Huh? When was he naked?

NOVEL EXCERPT BY NATE STOVALL (SCIENCE FICTION)

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I think your world-building is great. I'm intrigued by this setting and this society. You write beautifully and have a great command of the language. I can feel Bob's attraction to Julia, you did a nice job building that up.

I think you have too much backstory in the beginning here. I like where you started the story with him sabotaging the elevator to be alone with Julia. I'd suggest taking out the part about the fire killing her parents. You can go into that later in the story. All of the info about the mechanics of how people are paired up is confusing. Maybe show scenes later of the pairing-up

Comment [PHS IS23]: What's the significance of being paired? Does that mean the others who died did not have kids?

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Comment [PHS IS24]: Is he talking about raping her or is sex a very casual thing in this society?

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Comment [PHS IS25]: Is he AI or bio?

NOVEL EXCERPT BY NATE STOVALL (SCIENCE FICTION)

ceremony – is that the Variety Night? Showing how it happens rather than telling us about it will help clarify. I got confused. I had to read it twice and I'm not sure if I really understand it.

I got confused why Bob or Julia did certain things. They are in my comments above. You don't)and shouldn't) have to lay every detail out. But if you say she is disappointed, I need to understand why. Otherwise you lose me because you break the spell by pulling me out of the story to try to figure it out, thinking I missed something. The reference the Klingon jarred me too because your Summary doesn't mention this is Star Trek fan fiction, and there's nothing else that resembles the Star Trek world.

Tighten up these first pages by focusing on the present. Leave in some of the small details about the society because that adds intrigue. But save the backstory for when it's relevant to the story. I'm not sure we need to know about the pairing up in the first 5 pages. Although I like the concept.