

JOE DEXTER
PRISONER ZERO

STEVE SCHILD

Special thanks to:

**Andrea Rohpeter
Kay Radzik - Mars 100 Candidate
Leo Kopka**

**And of course, to the best girls in my life:
Corinna - Elvira - Yanika**

Thank you to all my fans and followers. You are the best.

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My dear daughter Elvira,

Since I was a little boy, I have been dreaming of two things, the colonization of the universe with spaceships, and a girl who changes my life forever and makes me happy.

For years these dreams grow up in me; I did not know what I would find and how I could progress. Then in 2012, I accidentally discovered the Mars One project and immediately knew that this was my way.

Even now that I'm writing these lines, the project is up to date and I'm one of only a handful of applicants worldwide. This year, it will decide how the mission will continue.

The second dream is about a mysterious girl. Today I know that this is you, my wonderful daughter. My dear companion Corinna gave birth to you, a source of great joy.

It took me years to realize what was going on inside me. In 2016, I met a master who introduced me to mystical rituals and showed me how to find myself. Unfortunately he can not physically read these lines anymore. But he will always be close to me.

Prior to that, a friend had explained to me how to create an imaginary world in which one has access to his subconscious: In my personal mystical world lived a great dragon. I entrusted my secrets, fears and desires to this dragon. One day an egg lay in its nest. A few months later a dragon baby had hatched from the egg. At that time, I began to hear in my dreams a voice that kept calling me. And it was this call that I will never forget: "I want to go to Earth, Steve! It is time for me to arrive. I am a soul that

wants to incarnate and you will be my physical father. I am the Dragon Warrior."

You must know that at first I was unsure. For such intensive messages from the realm of the unconscious often have a violent effect on people. But after a lengthy period of testing, going in and out, Corinna and I agreed that motherhood was the right decision.

On the 6th of November, in 2016, you, my beloved Dragon Warrior, were born. Your birth, which was not easy to start, was such a touching moment for me as I had never experienced it before. Not without reason are birth and death the most important events in a person's life. In between lies life, which can be so unique for everyone, as long as you become aware of it.

Another friend had contacted me. He is a member of a centuries-old order in the background and has encouraged me that this kind of humanistic work is also the right path for me. Members of this community have always closely followed and logged world affairs. It is also revealed to those who want to know this: Over the next decades, political, economic and social systems will change globally. This new order involves the establishment of three competing world powers. These three large blocks will also have colonialism unprecedented in order to meet their peoples' huge resource needs. This especially in inhospitable areas, such as in desert areas and in lonely mountain heights. But these efforts will also reach the deep-sea regions and the interior of the earth.

In particular, however, the advance into space will be massively forced.

Such colonies are usually populated by people who for some reason can not cope or are no longer welcome in their hometowns. Often they can then escape reprisals and persecutions only because they declare themselves ready for colonization and the concomitant exploitation of foreign territories. Over time, former colonies gradually develop into independent social structures. This story is full of examples.

I am not a clairvoyant, but I still maintain visions. That's why I can well imagine that the Mars One project is an important part of this future. As a result, I try to contribute to this development through my work. For all visible difficulties and always for the benefit of the people.

My first novel certainly does not claim to be included in the canon of world literature. The story should be entertaining in the first place. Importantly, I wish that the issues raised in the story also give reason to think seriously.

Of course I do not see the future as gloomy as it is described in this novel. But it is true that on our planet there are destructive groups at work, which strive to promote only the materialistic and thus the control over the power. Joy, compassion, empathy, charity and tolerance are values that mean nothing to them.

But as always, goodness tries to defend itself against evil. So the world is not a vale of tears, it always offers individuals the opportunity to reform themselves in order to take the constructive path.

In this novel quite stereotypical assignments are made. But I do not blame anyone. It's all about showing that history repeats itself if you do not stay vigilant and handle resources carefully. What happened in the past can not be reversed. But we must no longer blame today's generations

for what had been. On the contrary, we should primarily work on ourselves to lead a meaningful life. A blessed existence, which is loving, appreciative and constructive.

I hope for this for my Elvira as well as for all other children in the world. My thanks for the past, ongoing, or future support therefore applies to my partners and friends, my family, and in particular my parents, who enabled me to have a beautiful youth. For their trust and their encouraging confidence, I especially thank my partner Corinna.

My dear daughter, I hope that one day you will read this book and understand why I do it all. I also hope that you will be a little proud of me.

Thanks Corinna, Kevin and Felix

Steve Schild

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At Home

The morning was dark. Even before Vivianne could look out of the window, she knew it was raining. Shortly before, she had roused to the terribly shrill ringing of the alarm clock. Joe, who was lying next to her, had not been bothered by the alarm clock. Calmly he slept on, he did not have until 09:00 to drive to work.

Half sleepy and with glued eyes Vivianne ran into the bathroom. She was still too tired to notice the puddle on the floor, and when she stood in front of the mirror and felt something thick between her toes, the smell of fresh dog feces hit her. Matador had once again made a mess. Diarrhea.

"What a day!" She thought. "It can hardly come any worse."

Vivianne washed her feet, fetched a rag to cleanse the floor, and opened the windows wide enough for the smell to escape. Then she washed her face and put on fresh clothes. What was missing was a coffee. While the coffee was out of the machine, she heard internet radio on her cell phone. Another attack in Israel, the weather misty and cold. A start of the day like any other. With a few swallows she drank the pick-me-up. That was good. But now to work quickly.

Vivianne was a computer scientist. Only recently she had completed her education and found a good job by luck or chance. Working as an IT-Support at a well-known fiduciary office was fun and the working atmosphere was very pleasant. Nevertheless, she did not feel the need to go to

work that day. Fortunately, it was Friday and the weekend was not far in coming.

Vivianne hopped down the stairs to her car, an old Toyota Carina that had 250,000 Kilometers on the speedometer but behaved like a new car. No rust, no bumps and dents, no other problems. Joe, her husband, who enjoyed making things, had converted the interior into a high-tech cockpit, and even had a DVD player and rear view cameras. But that did not impress Vivianne, she just wanted to get the car to work. On the way she realized that people were driving once more, as if a rhino were after them. Besides, at the roundabout she would almost have been rammed from the left by a guy who seemed to be sleeping. When Vivianne turned on the radio, she realized she was not getting to work on time. It was reported there was a more than three kilometers long traffic jam.

It was now 08:00 am. Joe crawled out of bed and looked into the same rainy sky that his wife had seen before. After putting on some old shorts and a T-shirt, he went to the office where he started his computer and checked his e-mail account. There was not a single E-Mail. Apparently, there was no one in the big world who thought of him. Well, what should it be, he was used to getting only a few e-mails. Joe was playing some music, it was a group from the 1980s: Kraftwerk. How beautiful these sounds came from the six loudspeakers. He enjoyed the music, he was fine today.

At the same time, he logged into his online shop, where he offered science fiction figures, games and merchandise, and went through the new order entries. The e-shop went well, soon he wanted to open his own shop with Vivi, as he called his love. After processing the orders, he switched off the device and got ready for work.

Joe was employed as an electrician at the company Megatron Robots. The company was only five minutes on foot down the street, so he had no stress and could enjoy the morning. He was even fine with the fact that it was raining, it always raised his mood, it just was missing that it was thundering. Lightning and thunder fascinated him so much that he had hung pictures of weather lights and thunderstorms all over the office. How impressive these huge energies were. Joe jogged to his desk, drank a hot Ovomaltine there, and then went to the lab.

When Vivi came home in the evening, it smelled delicious of fish and spinach. As soon as she closed the door behind her, the dog came rolling up, a mixture of Appenzell Mountain Dog and German Shepherd. Vivi had long disliked dogs, but when, on a Sunday morning, a stray, slightly limping dog had run into her. she had immediately enclosed him into her heart, given him the name Matador, and taken him home. He was a sweet, old, dorky guy, and Vivi liked him immensely. Shortly after the welcome by Matador Joe came and hugged her. Finally they were together again. Such a day could last forever; every minute they were without each other was like an eternity to them.

The evening was spent with reading and meaningless discussions about the food. Vivi thought again that she was too fat and Joe just did not want to have a salad for lunch the next day. Vivi constantly complained that she was too fat, but in actuality her body was so well-formed that you could not even say the word "fat" Joe had other worries, as usual. After reading his book, he tried to install a new program, but it did not work. Hammering against the keyboard, he almost knocked the new flat screen to the floor. It was enough for him, Vivi just had to look at it! She took care of the problem and quickly solved it. Joe had forgotten to set the compatibility properly, so it was no

wonder that the program had not run. Normally, Joe could not be upset so fast and Vivi was the one with the fury, but today it was the other way around. After everything was installed and running properly, Vivi turned off the PC. She wanted to watch another movie with him, and the next day they both could sleep in. They chose "Virus", a blockbuster that was about an alien computer virus that infected all the PCs on a research vessel. The virus was so advanced that it made the entire crew their own by killing all members and providing their bodies with electronics, turning them into bio-mechanical robots. The movie was already running for an hour when Vivi turned to Joe and realized he was sound asleep. So She watched it alone, until only trash was on the screen Then she woke him up, so they could go to bed.

Joe woke up early the next day. He could not help it and tried to wake up ~~woke~~ his wife. Instead of a "good morning", however, her only answer was a mumble He knew how he could get her to open her eyes. In the kitchen he prepared breakfast to bring her in bed. As Vivi smelled the coffee and the baked rolls, she was immediately wide awake and began to eat heartily. Now the day was saved, it only needed feeding the dog and walking it. Breakfast overtook Vivi, so Joe was forced to get up and go out with Matador. But it was a wonderful day. Joe sang to himself while the dog played with stones out in front. Again and again he came to his master and urged Joe to play along. Every now and then, Joe was persuaded and threw the stone somewhere in the bushes, where Matador could not find them so fast.

Meanwhile, Vivi was at home and ironing the laundry. In the background was a radio station with modern, bland music. In the evening, she and Joe planned to go to a special 80s festival and she was really happy because she had never been to such a big event. In Nesslauen, an insignificant

village in Germany, where they lived in a house on the edge of the forest, there had never been a similar event. At 8:00p.m. the spectacle would start.

When evening came Vivi was in the bathroom, getting ready for the festival, while Joe, who had already taken a shower, was impatiently waiting for her.

The Party

In their old car, Joe and Vivi set off. They had agreed that Joe would drive today and not drink alcohol. The journey took only about ten minutes. The marquee was set up outside the village, on the opposite side of the village from Joe's and Vivi's house. For the relationship of the 2000-soul community, the tent was very big. It seemed that the visitors had come from far away. Old cars parked around the grounds, including Pontiac's and Dodges. Their eyes immediately fell on an 80's Pontiac Fire bird Trans Am, her dream car. Vivi shot a few dozen photos of the cars and Joe meanwhile got the tickets. 40 Euros were more than enough, but it was not something to see every night. And once a year they could afford it, because the couple lived thrifty. Joe and Vivi entered the tent and they were surrounded by freaks with fancy hairstyles and suits. The band Kraftwerk just started their show on stage and thrilled the audience with the song »Wir sind die Roboter«. (we are the robot`s) The crowd began to dance, moving monotonously to the rhythm of the music as if on drugs. It looked amusing, no one danced out of line.

But the couple wanted to first have a drink and sat down at a table. Vivi had long been enjoying an Irish whiskey, Joe was drinking a mineral water. Rocking, they let themselves be carried away by the sound of the music and enjoyed the show. When the concert was over, they moved to the bar and ordered drinks again. As much as it was possible in the roar of loudspeaker music, they talked. As always, her main topics were computer and the future. What would happen if in 50 Years, all raw materials would have been used up and there would be no oil left? There were theories about

nuclear fusion generators, which released a tremendous amount of energy. Maybe there would be lightning generators that could store all the energy of a thunderstorm for years. Vivi was talking confusedly, the whiskey seemed to work, because she told of flying saucers, of which she had read. She said that the Germans built some of them during the Second World War, then she talked about their whiskey and how good it was. Joe smiled and listened to her gibberish. Since Vivi almost never drank alcohol, two glasses were enough to make her drunk. They continued to talk and some interested young people sat down to talk with them eagerly. Vivi was the highlight of the evening. She talked incessantly about her experience as a computer scientist, and that she had read that in the Arctic there would be a civilization that had settled there towards the end of the war in 1945. She claimed that the Illuminati ruled the world, and from then on they could no longer be taken seriously. Joe had also read into those books that lay around their homes, but he did not like that, for him it was all nonsense and mental spin. He preferred books about Arthur and his Knights of the Round Table. Everything old had done to him, the Middle Ages fascinated him.

However, the listeners at their side also turned out to be mentally disturbed persons who had something to report about UFOs and aliens. Joe tried to touch on another topic because it became so absurd that he could not stand it any longer, because once Vivi got drunk, it was no pleasure to argue with her. No one spoke and Vivi talked so fast that one hardly understood anything.

Time passed and Joe gave up giving the conversation a different direction. Gradually they got tired. Their conversation partners had said goodbye and the two strolled once again on the festival grounds. Finally, Joe had to drag his wife to the car. She was still able to stand on her

feet, but the mixture of fatigue and alcohol had got to her. As they sat in the car, Joe put a DVD in the player and played a movie to distract Vivi, who was too upset. After a few minutes she fell asleep. Joe started the engine and slowly rolled down the compound to the road. The night sky was clear, no clouds could be seen. Joe decided to drive over the highway that passed by the edge of the village. That was the shortest way to the other side of the village. When the short news came on the radio, it was reported that an unusually big storm front approached and could be expected with rapid weather change. Hail was predicted and it was advised not to take the highway. Joe was on the exact highway at that time. No cars were visible, and it was ghostly quiet out there. His gaze wandered to the dark, cloudless starry sky. There was no sign of a storm front. Which direction would she come from? Joe drove on. It was only a few minutes to the exit. As the radio began to rustle, he turned it off angrily and blamed the high-voltage lines that stretched on either side of the road.

Just before the highway exit, Joe looked up into the sky again. He tilted his head and peered up from the windshield, where he actually saw a storm coming up. It was pitch black within a few seconds, the moon, which had been so bright before, was suddenly covered by a black cloud cover. Joe turned on the fog lights so he had extra light and massively slowed down the speed. And then - completely unexpected a first lightning strike lit up the area. It was followed by a second, a third and finally a dozen. Lightning hissed past them everywhere. The surroundings were lit as bright as day and now Joe also saw why he should have avoided this road. In the car, which could serve as a Faraday cage, they were safe from electrical discharges, but what should they do if a power pole were hit or the wind was to buckle one of the isolated trees and throw it onto the road? The lightning whipped more and more furiously through the air, but this

did not seem to bother Vivi. Snoring softly, she leaned her head against the windowpane.

The Lightning Strike

Shortly after Joe left the highway, it started to hail. He watched the storm with increasing displeasure. Such a storm could be very dangerous if you drove. He wanted to get home as soon as possible to bring himself and his sleeping wife to safety. Joe accelerated, concentrating on the lane, which was almost swallowed by the darkness. There it happened: an inconceivably bright light shone and a terrifying roar, a hiss and a humming, a drone as loud as 1,000 aircraft that started at the same time were heard. Joe was blinded. He hit the brakes and came to a halt on the curb. Lightning flashed simultaneously, the pylons some distance seemed to burst, the road wobbled as if the world were ending. Sparks flew through the air and a few bushes on the roadside blazed in flames. The air around the old Carina was burning hot, the warmth seemed to scorch her. At that moment, a stone broke through the right-hand window, like a tennis ball, and hit Vivianne's head. She was bleeding and Joe was horrified tried to wake her, but had no success.

"My God, is she dead or just passed out?"

Suddenly, the car was set in motion without his intervention and Joe saw something indefinable. Starting from a point in front of them, the whole environment gradually became a viscous, sticky mass, not solid, but not liquid, and they moved right to the center. Reflexively Joe put the reverse gear in and accelerated. All attempts to get away from the disaster, however, were unsuccessful, the car was sucked faster and faster forward, although the engine was no longer running. Joe flowed down the sweat on his body, his

hands clinging to the steering wheel and the noise did not stop. But the lightning storm had dried up and the surrounding darkness had enveloped them like a black cloth.

A jolt - and Joe fainted.

"Am I dreaming or am I dead?" Joe thought as he slowly came to himself. Through the car window he saw strangely glowing, white, red, violet, and yellow bullets that flashed past them at a furious speed.

With horror he suddenly remembered what had happened to his wife. "Vivi!" He turned to her. Still she leaned asleep at the car window. A fine, red trickle flowed from her long, brown hair and slowly dripped on her pink top, which she had put on for the 80s festival. He tried to wake her up, but once again was unsuccessful. At least she was not dead, he felt her breathing.

"What happened? Where are we?" He thought desperately. Slightly hysterical, Joe laughed. The festival! Now he remembered clearly the incidents events of the night. They had been on the way home from the 80s festival. Interestingly enough, this seemed endlessly far away now. As if it were 100 years before It had not been more than half an hour since they had left.

If one believed the accounts of many people, he would probably soon have to see a white light at the end of a tunnel. But he saw nothing. He heard strange noises. Maybe someone had dumped something in the mineral water and he went crazy. Nothing seemed normal to him and again he fainted.

When Joe awoke, the car had come to a halt. The colored bullets of light had said goodbye and made room for a

yawning black emptiness. Vivi was still unconscious beside him. He undid his seat belt and tried to get out of the car. The door was easy to open, but when he carefully put his foot on the ground, he did not feel it. The light inside the car was not enough to break the dense darkness that prevailed outside, so Joe decided to stay in the car until his thoughts cleared. Confused, he rubbed his eyes, then looked at his watch and noticed that it was not working anymore. There was only a black thing left on his wrist, completely burnt. Strangely enough, the interior of the car was not damaged at all. Only on the bonnet did he see a few black stripes in the spotlight and the window on Vivi's side that was broken by the stone. Joe tried to turn on the radio, but only biting noises came from the speakers. The device searched for frequencies and for a short while Joe saw MF on the screen 215.0 light up, a frequency he did not know, then the display went out and the radio gave up the ghost. "World class," he sighed.

The Awakening

Gradually it became light and outlines of the surroundings became visible. But everything was covered in a strange haze, so Joe could not get a clear picture. He felt as if he was slowly awakening from a deep dream. Had he just imagined everything? Had he passed out? He saw the contours of hills and shrubs begin to emerge and everything became sharp again. At that moment, Vivi woke up from her impotent sleep. Irritated, she looked around and held her head, which hurt.

"Where are we?" She asked. "What's happening?"

"I have not the slightest idea! You missed the best of the movie," Joe said ironically. Vivi looked at him questioningly.

"Sorry for the stupid saying. Honestly, I'm glad you're alive!" He leaned over and took Vivi in his arms. After that he described to her as well as he could the events that had occurred, even though he himself could scarcely believe what he was telling. But the strange environment was proof enough that something incredible had happened.

The street they were on was gone. Only a few concrete places between the stones testified that here - a very long time ago - once had to have been a paved road. The entire landscape was littered with these rocks. They were overgrown with moss and between them some small bushes kept themselves. The horizon was swallowed up by a hazy soup, and there were no elevations in the landscape except for small, moss-covered hills in the area. The sky was gray and foggy. Here and there were cable remains in the stone

columns. The landscape looked completely impassable, abandoned and neglected. Now Joe also realized why he had not been able to feel any ground before: the left front wheel jutted into the air, as the car was stuck on a large chunk of stone.

Hesitantly, they hopped out of the car. Although the landscape looked rugged and craggy, they sank into a soft moss rug. The plants made a comfortable pad over the rocks.

"Where are we?" Vivi repeated.

Joe shook his head in disbelief. "Hit me as hard as you can. I think we only dream that."

Vivi responded to his request.

"Too hard," Joe said, rubbing his cheek, "I never thought you dare."

Vivi could not believe that she had just rocked Joe with full force. Apparently she was in shock. So it really was not a dream; it was reality. But where were they? Still on the highway, or what was left of it...? Had this storm destroyed the whole landscape or were they somehow catapulted into another dimension with their car? Only, how was that possible? And how on earth would they come back to their normal life? By no means with the car, the Carina could not cover a meter on this rough terrain. Here you would have needed a bulldozer.

"We can stay here," Joe said hopefully. "At some point, the rescuers will search the area. There is not such a storm every day, sweetheart. Someone's coming. Someone will come"

Both looked instinctively at the sky to see if they could see or at least hear a helicopter, but in vain. Not even birds were seen in the gray haze, which surprised her. It was dead quiet. Vivi started to move restlessly. She did not want to wait for someone to come. In addition, she was hungry. Determined, she headed for one of the higher hills. "I'll be back soon," she called to Joe. "Wait in the car for so long!"

When she reached the top, the sight took her breath away: in front of her was the circular rim of a huge crater that looked as if a meteorite had hit where the little village once stood. But there was something else that caught Vivi's eye, something as bizarre and unexpected. On the horizon, she noticed the diffused image of several metallic-looking objects, which were almost swallowed by the fog. It seemed as if flying saucers the size of a soccer field were floating in the sky. This evoked a picture in her, she thought of old science-fiction movies from the 1950s and was even more confused than before. In vain she looked for the sun. She would like to approximately know what time it was ~~about~~. But the whole sky lay under this strange veil of mist that dipped everything in a gray twilight.

"My God, how long have we been unconscious?" Vivi thought as she staggered down the slope back to the car.

Joe had run the heater to warm up the interior of the car. Fortunately, he had found remnants of the last purchase in the trunk. He was waiting for Vivi grinning with two 1.5-liter bottles of sweet drink and a bag of nacho chips with cheese flavor.

"Welcome to lunch, sweetheart," he greeted her as she returned from her trip after over an hour. This instantly lifted Vivi's mood and hungrily made their way over the chips.

With the drink they were more cautious, who knew how long they had to endure far from civilization.?

Vivi told Joe everything she had seen up on the hill, and how absurdly the situation seemed to her, so strong was the tiredness that overcame her while discussing ~~her~~ their situation.

While they slept for a long time, the dim light outside became weaker and was replaced by the deep darkness. Towards morning, the dim light of the gray haze slowly reappeared.

Joe woke up first and everything was just as it was the day before: they were trapped in the same dimension, at the same time, in the same post-apocalyptic place. They had no food left and only about 2.5 liters of liquid left.

"Let's go," Joe announced, "I do not think anyone is looking for us here" So they set off on foot.

On the way they came across a smashed billboard made of plastic. It read "Tel Community for Live. Reserve your new iPhone Quantum now. For only 300 euros you are in the future! Offer valid until December 2050."

Without a word they exchanged a look. As they walked on, they saw the wreckage of an indefinable vehicle in front of them. It was also covered in moss like the boulders that lay everywhere, and with this camouflage integrated perfectly into the environment.

They did not discover it until they were very close.

The vehicle resembled a car, but this form was unknown to them. At most in In sci-fiction magazines, they had seen such futuristic designs. The wreck had wheels that were

stored in the fuselage. It looked like they were only released when needed. The cabin looked very battered. Vivi walked over to the part of the vehicle that looked like a door and clawed at the joints. She squeezed and pulled and heard a faint hiss and humming - and suddenly something moved. Part of the outer shell disappeared and you could see the interior.

Vivi screamed.

"Oh, God!" She called, turning her face away.

Joe pushed her aside to catch a glimpse. In the driver's cabin, in a decayed chair, perched a crooked skeleton. It bore a uniform with the inscription "New Germany, No. 1202," and on its right arm was a symbol that bore a strong resemblance to the swastika from Hitler's time. But they could not precisely define or classify the sign, it was too abstract, too unfamiliar.

Joe gently grabbed the skeleton by the arm and pulled it out of the vehicle. He dragged it behind a bush and left it there. They breathed deeply.

Vivi muttered, "Out of sight, out of mind."

Reluctantly, they sat down inside the vehicle. If they could get the thing going, this would be their chance to finally leave this endless rocky desert. At the point where the steering wheel would have been, there was an elongated keyboard with several buttons and switches. Suddenly the doors closed. The hologram of a woman's face appeared on the darkened windshield and a voice asked if the pilots wanted to activate the emergency program and send out an SOS message. Helpless, Joe looked at his wife. The moment he said to her, "I'm trying to activate it somehow," the computer recognized the speaker's intention by modulating

the voice and confirmed, "SOS is being sparked. Emergency program is activated."

Something happened. The vehicle rumbled and in front of them, where the black windshield had previously been, a display appeared depicting the external environment. The inner part of the vehicle was very solidly equipped, even the largest crash could damage the capsule and the controller. Once the main power source failed, it seemed, an emergency generator automatically started. A note on the display showed Joe and Vivi that this was the case. Likewise, they saw on the control display that two drive nozzles were activated. Slowly the vehicle rose into the air and hovered slightly above the surface of the earth.

Impressed, Joe and Vivi glanced at each other. This technique fascinated her very much. You could only control the vehicle with your voice. Vivi asked the computer for the time and the answer was: "Current time: 12:07 noon." Next she asked for the date and other stored on-board data.

"Today's date: July the 21st of 2150. Launching of the Hovercars: 2110. Mileage: 1,380,024. Use: police cars. Current status of the emergency generators: 100 % charged. Emergency signal status: on air."

"We're in 2150?!?" Joe almost dropped his eyes out nearly as he looked at Vivi. This swallowed only empty.

"Give us general information about the year 2150!" Joe demanded.

"Average level of radioactivity: 0.4 Sievert. World population: 4.12 billion. Acute danger from C17 pandemic on the southern hemisphere. World power: New Germany."

"There are only 4 billion people left?" Joe asked Vivi questioningly.

Immediately the computer commented: "World population drastically reduced towards the end of the 2070s. Up to then, the world population had increased exponentially to its capacity limit. System collapsed. Acute scarcity of resources and food as well as epidemics, fueled by overpopulation, led to mass extinctions. Re-decimation of the world population in 2079, caused by global explosions of nuclear fusion reactors, sabotage is suspected."

"Stop!" Joe said, asking the computer, "How far back is your personal database?"

"Year of enumeration: 1900. All human beings have been recorded since January 1, 1900."

"Looking for Joe and Vivianne Dexter."

"Please specify."

"Joe Dexter, born in 1984, and Vivianne Dexter, born in 1986. Living in Nesslerau. No children, no criminal record. Parents Peter and Miriam Dexter. Died January 2023 in a car accident."

"Joe and Vivianne Dexter, disappeared in 2016. Wanted by New Germany, unauthorized experiments with time are suspected."

"Wow!" That overwhelmed Joe, so they were being searched on suspicion of having built a time machine? And sometime in the future, you noticed that? The situation was paradoxical.

"Search for Nesslerau!" Joe ordered.

"Village in Old Germany Population in 2052: 3212. Destroyed by a meteorite in 2053."

So that was the crater Vivi had seen from the hill. Curious, Joe continued, "Since when is it known that Joe and Vivianne Dexter have done time experiments?"

"First Findings: 01 August 2021. Unfortunately, the necessary technology to locate the two persons was missing."

"What's to happen if Joe and Vivianne are found?"
"Deportation to New Berlin. Subsequent interrogation. Death penalty."

"Death penalty?" Vivi stood up in horror.

"The whole thing is getting weirder," thought Joe.
"We're looking for a time crime in the future!"

Stunned, the couple stared at each other. They were sentenced to death and did not even know what had happened. Or else might happen...