

Locomotion

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They didn't know what caused the accident. Naturally with his luck it happened the day before they were scheduled to leave orbit. It was a routine survey stop, achieve orbit of the sun, take some measurements, and get out. Four days tops. These sorts of structural failures were not supposed to happen anymore. Supposed to or not, that sun was getting bigger and bigger on the viewscreen by the minute.

He knew how these things ended. You would fight it, maybe ride it out, improvise, but in the end, you would rapidly burn up as the sun's orbit pulled you in. Best to enjoy the way down, he supposed, firing up the ship's intercom. His crew did not love his music and would grumble to each other when he got in these moods, but they were all dead, so it didn't really matter now. Poor bastards, he thought, though he got a dejected chuckle from choosing the soundtrack to their funerals.

*Baduh-duhdub-duhdubbab-ba-ba-da-buhdumdu-dadadadada
blubblubblub bududududubu*

The opening drums drowned out the explosions ringing throughout the ship, signaling his final descent, no going back now. He strapped himself in and absorbed the music as he careened towards the surface, its excited energy keeping him centered and giving him meaning as he futilely tried every countermeasure he knew.

And that sax seemed the sun to him. Its notes were a sort of searching, grasping for him. They were warm, Trane's piercing vision wrapping around him as if the sun's rays. They carried him forward like the waves of sunlight that his ship rode on, buoyed him as if at sea. That sun light, sun heat, would find him in those moments of darkness, and he could do nothing but stare into its awful beauty.

The tinny clang of those symbols,
Tat-tat rat-a-tat tat-tat ta-ta-ta
near constant, seemed in step with the rattling and shaking of the ship as it descended deeper into the sun's corona, tools or parts falling into its metal chasms or bits of metal or bolts tearing off, the ship being torn apart by the bulkheads. He figured it would keep him sane in the moments he had left to focus on the symbols, rather than the metal bastion that protected him from the vacuum coming apart at the seams.

That hypnotic sound off to his right,
Ba-ba dub-dub ba-dub ba-dub dub-dub-dub-dub...
too, bothered him. He couldn't tell if it was Chambers on bass, the water
tanks or life support systems bursting open by the bolts, or the cabin rending
off from the main hull.
He should probably turn the music up.

The 'bone was the hardest for him to pick out.

La-da-da la-da-da-da-da-da da...

It seemed more transient to him, a voice at arm's length that you sense but
might only truly feel once or twice. That trombone made him feel weightless
in a way, like things were smoother and nicer under the surface, where we
couldn't always see. He wasn't initially concerned when Fuller signaled that he
actually was becoming weightless, as the gravity generators began to fail and
the air in the hull began to seep into the cold vacuum through the tiny
breaches appearing across the ship.

That shrill horn with no warning woke him from that trance.

Wap! Pfa-da-da-la-ba-da-da-fa-BA-ba-ba-ba...

That trumpet reminded him that he had things to do and somewhere to be, as
Morgan's ascension matched his frantic attempts to seal off breached decks
and reroute power to the gravity generators, to keep the music playing and the
distress call running. He may be doomed to die, but he still had a job to do.
This was still his ship.

The keys always balanced him, though,

Lee-tee-dee-da la-ta-da-da-da-da-la...

That real peace, real understanding, came in those quiet moments, in the
interim. Those keys felt like what it should feel like to pull that which is
cosmic and always outside yourself into yourself. The space around him,
Drew's melody seemed, or maybe that magnetic field that pulled him in. A
constant force that kept him centered on that sun, journeyed with him
towards the sun, in many ways was the power of that sun.

Each of Jones' short drum interludes made him jump an inch or so out of his
chair, *Bu-du-bu-du-bu-du-bu-du-bu-du bub-bub-dub bub-dub-dub...*
as it tore his focus from the oddly comforting, if at least distracting, duet of
instruments and cosmic destruction, marking in time some massive series of
explosions in the engine compartment. The explosions would return to
normal volume after a few seconds and he wasn't killed instantly, so it didn't
seem that bad.

And again,

Boo-doo-do-lab-da-da-nab-nab-nab-nab-ab

that sun returned to him, its warm and probing notes keeping him company as he raced to the center of the solar system, the bookends of his travels, piloting the sweet requiem of his final voyage. Trane kept him focused, fixated, on his destination. He felt like he had a friend here, needing him to join it at the same time that he needed it to guide him.

He knew that to reach that object of his fixation would preclude his ability to ever see or appreciate it, or indeed hear it, again. And yet he continued to stare and to hear and to feel it as he hurtled through its orbit ever downward. As he began to vaporize, he was at least happy to have helped pilot this sun ship one last time.

Reference:

Coltrane, John. "Locomotion." Recorded 1957.
Track 3 on *Blue Train*. Blue Note, vinyl LP.