

AWAY

A message to the stars.

BY DEBBIE URBANSKI

Hi Mom. So this is kind of weird! It's kind of like talking to myself, only in a closet! I'm joking, they make it nicer than a closet, there's a great chair, and a mirror so I can look in the mirror when I talk and pretend I'm you. The audio guys here are really great. They made me a free cap (soy) because of the wait as security has to iris scan now after last week's mob scene. Or else I bet the whole country would be here too! (Well, I know, the whole country can actually talk to you, they just have to go to their local mall booth and practically sell their kidney for some time.)

What do all those strangers say to you? In episode 2, remember, you were sitting starboard listening to messages and there was one from Idaho that made you blush? You sure have some fans down here! Dad says it's because of your outfits. He threw a fit because marriage doesn't end when you leave the planet blah blah (in the previews for next season, there is a wedding on ship!?! Will it be you?! I won't tell Dad). I have to watch what I say though because they could use this convo on the show or wherever if they feel like it. "I'll be honest. We probably won't feel like it," the audio guy said, giving me this weird look, but he made me sign the paperwork anyway. It wouldn't be fair to viewers if you had secret messages right?

Anyhow school is good, the sun came out. That was my day! Can't wait to see you tonight!

Hi. It looked like you were having this really nice time up there last night. Or is that just the editing? Do you talk about me lots and they leave those parts out? I looked at the show stats and there are mostly male viewers so maybe they think mother/daughter sappy talk (I love you I love you) would bore everybody to death (I love you). I wouldn't mind though, hint hint! I think it's gruesome how the cameras are programmed to run until the end, when everybody's, you know, dead, or even after, but I bet the producers are thinking big ratings for that. Maybe they can make it tasteful through special effects. (Sorry to be gruesome!)

I turned on every picture of you in the house. They are so old school and funny! Every time I enter a room you say: "Turn off the lights, pitch in!" Then you give a little wave like you really can see me.



At school, do you remember Larry Fields? He pushed a mike in my face and asked how does it feel to be left behind. I told him what the heck, I wasn't left. He said actually I was. He said I'm the definition of being left then he zoomed in close on my face. He asked other questions and I told him my Mom isn't really responding to me so I have no idea. He called that angle "not very interesting" so the segment probably won't run on student news tonight. It would have been fun to be on TV, too. Bye!

Hey Mom. Haven't heard from you. Are you sending me lots of messages only they get erased? Dad says you might be busy with the songs they want you to learn.

Last night we watched your application as the show

wasn't on. Okay, so we watched it ten times through. Do you still believe everything you said? The world is doomed blah blah all my potential going to waste blah let's give people some hope and find alternatives up

there blah blah. If that's true about the world, why did you leave me here? People don't think like that anymore, by the way. I mean we're all still around, right? There are still a lot of animals, at least a lot of squirrels, for sure. Dad changed all of our light bulbs over to solar too. The new thing is being hopeful.

Do you feel small up there? I'm kind of jealous of my voice, which gets to chase after you through space.

Hello again! I asked the guy who does audio is my Mom getting this? He wiggled his eyebrows and said: "Oh sure she is." Who knows what that means. The guy thinks it's sweet I come here every day. He asked am I going to do this my entire life and I said yes. They better not go out of business, especially as ratings aren't so hot. Dad took the batteries out of your pictures. He said your voice was going funny. Maybe it's better to buy nicer talkie frames next time? At least we can afford it now.

Did you know you weren't coming back when you applied? I'm guessing you forgot to read over the details, there was a lot of paper-

work, and when you got on the ship in that fancy gold outfit, doing your special kick-and-wave, the one we practised — it looked good, Mom — maybe you didn't realize you couldn't get back to us. I guess you are living your dream now, being famous etc.

I wonder if you will meet anything out there. Is there a bonus if you do? Or if you find a planet to land on? Dad won't show me the contract. I guess that's all for now. I miss you. Maybe someone will develop faster ships so in a year or two I can get on one and catch up with you. I wouldn't want to come back either then. Oops, 8.05, time to tune in. ■

Debbie Urbanski is a writer living in Syracuse, New York. Her stories have appeared in Arc (from New Scientist), Interzone, The Kenyon Review and the New England Review. debbieurbanski.com.

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