

Jamie Whitlow [after Aiken's death]

Year of birth: 4362



It feels weird to be back at the office. Six years ago, you were the top test pilot at Blue Phoenix. Everyone (including you) thought you were a shoo-in as Lead Astronaut when the position came up for grabs. You'd come from nothing - a working-class town in a desperately poor part of the country, public schools with truant teachers and ridiculously low graduation rates - but you made it by toughing it out and getting a whole bunch of lucky breaks. (If everyone could advance by toughing it out, there would hardly be any poor people around.) You became a commercial pilot, and then a test pilot, and got married at 23 and started having kids at 24. You had it all.

Then your luck ended. Your partner, Nat, got sick. Deathly sick. It broke your heart, but you quit your job to be with Nat, who thankfully pulled through, and made full recovery. You still manage consult for Blue Phoenix, but on support projects from home, with an occasional promotional appearance to bank on your past glories. It was a good life, and you had no regrets. Or did you?

Now, with the tragedy, you've been called back up to the mission, but as a member of Mission Control. With your experience, you will be advising **Taylor Orkney** (or, as everyone knows the mission control chief, **Junior**, since the elder **C. J. Orkney** is the boss) and carrying out any plan of action. This could actually be the best thing. You won't be on a dangerous space mission, where you could end up like **Harper Aiken** did, so you won't have to worry about leaving Nat alone. It's kind of a rotten deal, though, in a sense - it just reminds you of what you could have been, *for better or for worse*. But currently, you are in the place you need to be.

You're working with the last remaining astronaut from all those years ago, **Avery Bissel**. Bissel and you didn't always hit it off, possibly because your spouse lived while, Bissel's, unfortunately, died years long before you ever met. It might just have been a sore spot.

The Orkneys, Senior and Junior, still work here. Orkney Senior is still a *reth*, a supposedly self-made billionaire who still went to private school, but Junior at least recognizes where the family comes from and makes an effort to see other people's point of view. After all... it's Junior who made that decision to burn the capsule up in the atmosphere, killing Aiken. It was that or potentially unleashing a deadly virus on everyone. That was, of course, the right decision, one that not everyone is capable of. But still... you get uncomfortable whenever you see someone who got their job through nepotism.

Also, **Dr. Riley Eckhart** is still advising. Excellent. Doc has always been quick on the uptake, and can stand up to C. J. Orkney when it's necessary. Working with such a pillar of the company helps take a load off your shoulders.

Well, time to start another workday. Hopefully there will be some sort of progress made on the space program's recovery.

Short bio:

Born 4362 in Carbell

Educated in public schools, graduated in 4380

Pilot Trainee, Air Emera, 4380-4382

Pilot, Air Emera, 4380-4388

Test Pilot, Air Emera, 4388-4391

Test Pilot, Blue Phoenix, 4391-4392

Consultant, Blue Phoenix, 4392-