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Launch Day
(Love Stories From the Year 2108)

By
MICHAEL HIGGINS

Dramatic Publishing Company
Woodstock, Illinois • Australia • New Zealand • South Africa

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MICHAEL HIGGINS

Printed in the United States of America
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(LAUNCH DAY [LOVE STORIES FROM THE YEAR 2108])

ISBN: 978-1-61959-319-0

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“*Launch Day (Love Stories From the Year 2108)* was premiered in the American Association of Community Theatre’s AACT NewPlayFest by Theatre Tuscaloosa in Tuscaloosa, Ala.”

Launch Day (Love Stories From the Year 2108) received its world premier production at Theatre Tuscaloosa in partnership with Shelton State Community College, Tuscaloosa, Ala., on Oct. 21, 2022.

CAST:

JADA.....Margaret Carr
ZEGGGabriel Carden
GARALAmaria Jackson
QUILLNEY Ebony Wesley
REBISSAJessica Briana Kelly
VANDER.....DeAnthony Mays
DARGE Sam Hodo
KEERA.....Brandy Johnson
BRYLO Kazarious Brown
TAZ..... Mileidy Crespo-Jones
BRITTLEY Hallie Grace Hamner
GREVIN..... Steven Yates
VOICE OVERS..... Ava Buchanan,
Charles Prosser, Tina Turley

PRODUCTION:

Executive Producer/Director..... Tina Turley
Managing DirectorAdam Miller
DramaturgKathy Pingel, David A. VanCleave
Technical Director..... Wheeler Kincaid
Stage Manager Ashlyn Lambert
Movement Coach.....Rebecca Kling
Scenic Design..... Jameson Sanford
Costume Design..... Jeanette Waterman
Lighting Design Lyndell McDonald
Sound and Props Design Charles Prosser
Hair and Make-Up Design..... Ava Buchanan

Launch Day

(Love Stories From the Year 2108)

CHARACTERS

JADA (w): 20s to early 30s. A brilliant engineer. Disillusioned with life on Earth.

ZEGG (m): 20s to early 30s. Junior assistant at a large military contractor. JADA's ex-boyfriend.

LOUDSPEAKER (a): A lifelike computerized voice broadcast from offstage.

GARAL (a): Late 20s. An unemployed computer geek.

QUILLNEY (w): Late 20s. A police officer.

REBISSA (w): 20s to early 30s. A struggling artist.

VANDER (m): 20s to early 30s. A man who screens potential astronauts.

DARGE (m): Late 20s to 30s. A construction worker.

KEERA (w): Late 20s to 30s. A high-tech product designer.

TAZ (a): 20s to 40s. A working-class bartender.

BRYLO (m): 30s to 40s. An astrophysicist.

BRITTLEY (w): 20s. A zookeeper.

GREVIN (m): Late 20s to 30s. The manager of a zoological research facility.

TIME: Various times during a single day in the year 2108.

PLACE: Six locations in and around the Jarkus Bass Spaceport, a rocket launching facility.

PRODUCTION NOTES

CASTING: All characters can be played by actors of any ethnicity. Diverse casting is recommended. Gendered references to gender neutral characters may be updated as needed.

SETTING: The sets, which can be minimally suggested, include an outdoor break area on the grounds of the spaceport, a gravel road outside the spaceport's perimeter fence, a small apartment, a strip club, a bar that serves intoxicants and a zoological research facility.

COSTUMES: Although the play is set in the future, costumes need not be overly futuristic. A slight variation on current styles with thought given to each character's job and status will work best.

THE LAUNCH TEAM: During scene transitions, while lights are down for set changes, the voices of The Launch Team can be heard running through final checks before liftoff. The voice of the Launch Director is crisp and professional. The four other voices also suggest competence, but can be various personalities (e.g., confident, apprehensive, nerdy, excited).

THE VOICE STIMULATOR: The voice stimulator, introduced in Scene 3, is a device that causes a person to slip preloaded advertising copy into conversations. When an ad plays, it should not be blatantly obvious. Instead, the ad should sound like normal human speech, but in the slightly artificial way that TV and radio commercials portray "normal human speech."

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Special thanks to the talented artists at Chicago Dramatists, Capital Stage in Sacramento and Benchmark Theatre in Denver for staged readings and other help in the development of this play. Much appreciation, also, to everyone at Theatre Tuscaloosa and the AACT's NewPlayFest 2022 for launching *Launch Day* out into the world. And finally, unending gratitude to my wife, Lisa, for her love and encouragement, for reading every draft, and for saving the life of the pandaroo.

To all the good people who don't yet exist.

Launch Day

(Love Stories From the Year 2108)

Scene 1: The Basstronaut

(Lights up on JADA and ZEGG sitting on a bench. They're in an outdoor break area on the grounds of the Jarkus Bass Spaceport, a rocket launching facility. ZEGG wears a long-sleeve shirt with the right sleeve pushed up to his elbow. JADA examines ZEGG's right forearm and hand, very impressed.)

JADA. So this is the future.

ZEGG. Awesome, huh?

JADA. Two generations ahead of anything I've seen.

ZEGG. That's my own skin. They grew it in a lab.

JADA *(touching his hand briefly to her cheek)*. It's even warm.

ZEGG. Ninety-eight degrees. Unless I turn it down to save battery.

JADA *(stroking his right forearm)*. How's that feel?

ZEGG. Nice. *(Pause.)* I mean, like it should.

(JADA pushes up his left sleeve and looks at his forearms side-by-side, holding him by the wrists.)

ZEGG *(cont'd)*. If you didn't know, could you tell which was real?

JADA. The one with the pulse?

ZEGG. Jada Giles, engineering genius.

JADA. Squeeze my hand.

(ZEGG squeezes. JADA is impressed.)

ZEGG. So how have you been?

JADA *(laughs, not sure where to start)*. Me? Busy. Thrilled. Terrified. *(Notices he is still squeezing.)* You can let go.

ZEGG. Sorry. *(Releases her hand.)* I missed you.

JADA. Let's not ...

ZEGG. What?

JADA. Zegg, I'm glad you're here. But I just want a nice goodbye.

ZEGG. It's true. I've thought about you every day for the past ten months.

JADA *(indicating his arm)*. How did it happen?

ZEGG. In battle.

JADA. *Battle?* I thought you had a desk job.

ZEGG. I got up from my desk.

JADA. You're supposed to be a businessman.

ZEGG. For a military contractor. We're kinda in the war business.

JADA. Well, this contractor—

ZEGG. Global Power Solutions. Third biggest in the world.

JADA. They should not be putting you in harm's way.

ZEGG. It was one little training class—at our office in Turkmenistan. While I'm there, the client calls in for laser drones. They launch clean. But two clicks up, we lose them. The techs think it's a radar glitch. But I run outside, look up and the drones are coming *back at us*.

JADA. You got hacked through the guidance satellite.

ZEGG. *Jada ...*

JADA. What?

ZEGG. That took us two days to figure out. *(Pause.)* Anyway, I yell “incoming” in time for the tech guys to take cover.

JADA. But not in time for you.

ZEGG. Laser hit my arm. It kind of exploded, but also evaporated. I lost eight pints of blood.

JADA. *Eight*. How?

ZEGG (*points outward from his shoulder*). Out this way. Mostly.

JADA. I mean how'd you live?

ZEGG. That's what my boss wanted to know. We promise clients a perfect kill shot within two thousand meters.

JADA. Saved by marketing hype.

ZEGG (*uncomfortable for a short beat*). Yeah. Anyway it turns out Glo Pow (*Pronounced "glow pow."*) is also working on this awesome prosthetic arm. Way secret. They had to raise my security clearance just to give it to me.

JADA. So that's how you got in here.

ZEGG. I'm a trusted guy now. (*His right arm twitches a little.*) So trust me when I say I've been thinking about—

JADA. Your arm just moved.

ZEGG. It's thought-controlled. I must've had a stray thought.

JADA. Interesting.

ZEGG. I would've come sooner, but I was technically dead. Then unconscious for the surgery. Then dead some more. Then—

JADA. Well, you just made it. We launch in five hours.

ZEGG. So where's Professor Mendicott?

JADA. I don't know. Where should he be?

ZEGG. Saying goodbye to his star protege. I half-expected him to be going with you. To mentor you across the galaxy.

JADA. That's not how it was.

ZEGG. Jada, why are you doing this?

JADA. Why am I taking part in humanity's greatest adventure?

ZEGG. It may *not* be great. It may be terrible.

JADA. That's the adventure.

ZEGG. I'm serious.

JADA. I am, too. Look at that ship. (*Points in the far distance, toward the audience.*) Anti-matter propulsion. Simulated gravity. The most expensive machine ever built.

ZEGG. All I see is an egomaniac looking for the flashiest way to spend his money. (*News reader voice.*) "Jarkus Bass announced today that his new spaceship, the *Jarkus Bass*, will carry six hundred so-called 'Basstronauts' to a planet light-years from Earth to found the first interstellar colony, Jarkus Bass City."

JADA. When you're a trillionaire, you can be more modest.

ZEGG. You'll be old by the time you get there.

JADA. *You'll* be old. At the speed I'm going, my aging slows down.

ZEGG. You'll be sixty-five at best.

JADA. But if I'm standing on the surface of another planet? Watching a new sun rise in the morning sky?

ZEGG. I don't trust this new planet.

JADA. Confirmed liquid water. Earth gravity. We're gambling a little on the atmosphere, but—

ZEGG. What if it's inhospitable?

JADA. You mean like ours?

ZEGG. Ours is going to be OK.

JADA. Who's going to save it? Global Power Solutions?

ZEGG. What if you can't find food?

JADA. We're bringing our own. Genetically modified to live in harsh conditions.

ZEGG (*unimpressed*). The buffadillo.

JADA. The buffadillo is genius. Half buffalo. Half armadillo.

It can survive heat, dust storms, radiation. Its milk is an acquired taste. But—

ZEGG. Those things are creepy.

JADA. The babies are cute. I got to pet one of the cubs—or pups, or whatever.

ZEGG. What about all the pee?!

JADA. The pee?

ZEGG. The whole ship seems to run on pee. The drinking water comes from pee. The oxygen comes from pee.

JADA. It's called recycling, Zegg. Urine is mostly water. And water is one-third oxygen, so—

ZEGG. You're breathing pee!

JADA. We're not.

ZEGG. You're breathing oxygen, whose former main purpose was to be part of pee.

JADA. OK. Yes. We are.

(ZEGG's right hand twitches again. JADA notices.)

ZEGG. Jada, you can bail out. You're not flight crew. You're just a colonist.

JADA. We are as important as the crew.

ZEGG. You're not the person who should do this.

JADA. I'm exactly the person. No family. No kids. Nothing to leave behind.

ZEGG. You're leaving the world behind.

JADA. Good.

ZEGG. All these people—all trying to make it work, all part of the same human struggle.

JADA. I'll wave at them from the ship.

ZEGG. You're leaving me.

JADA. Don't even. You left *me*, OK? It's nice you're here. But—

ZEGG. I messed up. I know. But this isn't you.

JADA. It is me.

ZEGG. *You* care about the world. This one. That's why you signed up for Mendicott's big project, worked all those sixteen-hour days. (*Puts his right hand on her shoulder.*) When I found out you volunteered for this, I was just ... I mean ... there's twelve billion people on this planet. But you ... to me, you're—

(His right hand twitches suddenly and smacks JADA on the side of the head. It's a firm whack, but she's more surprised than hurt.)

JADA. Ah!

ZEGG. Shit!

(ZEGG's right arm jerks about wildly. He tries to grab it with his left hand but misses. The arm smacks him hard in the face.)

ZEGG (*cont'd*). Ah!

(They both grab at ZEGG's flailing right arm but miss.)

JADA. *Think.*

ZEGG. I am. It's not listening.

JADA. You've been hacked.

Scene 2: The Emotilizer

(Lights up on a gravel road outside the perimeter fence at the Jarkus Bass Spaceport. GARAL enters, looking over her shoulder. She's hurrying, but trying to appear not to hurry. Her clothes are well-worn, and she carries a backpack.)

QUILLNEY *(offstage)*. You with the backpack—stop!

(GARAL stops. Her back is to QUILLNEY [pronounced KWILL-nee] as QUILLNEY enters, wearing a security guard uniform.)

QUILLNEY *(cont'd)*. Drop the pack.

(GARAL reluctantly drops her pack.)

QUILLNEY *(cont'd)*. Raise your hands and turn around.

(GARAL raises her hands and turns to face QUILLNEY. QUILLNEY stares for a beat.)

QUILLNEY *(cont'd)*. Garal?

GARAL. *Quillney*. Haven't seen you since high school. You look good.

QUILLNEY *(all business)*. What are you doing here?

GARAL. Glad it's you. I was worried this might be a shakedown.

QUILLNEY. What are you doing here, Garal?

GARAL. I'm here for the launch, man! Jarkus Bass, kickin' ass.

(GARAL lowers her hands.)

QUILLNEY. Keep your hands up.

(GARAL raises her hands again as QUILLNEY starts patting her down.)

GARAL. Come on. It's me. We hung out every day senior year. Remember when we drank that hyper-alc at Yatha's party?

(QUILLNEY finds nothing and steps back. GARAL lowers her hands.)

QUILLNEY *(skeptical)*. So you're just here to admire the greatness of Jarkus Bass?

GARAL. Hell, yeah. You know when he was twenty, he told everybody: "I'm going to be the world's first trillionaire." And they laughed. Because what did he have then? Nothing. Like three hundred billion. But look at him now.

QUILLNEY. The viewing area is six miles from here.

GARAL. You used to be more laid back.

QUILLNEY. I get uptight when people climb the security fence.

GARAL. Wasn't me. And who cares? Somebody wanted a closer look.

QUILLNEY. You wouldn't know anything about the Heartless Army of Coders, would you, Garal?

Scene 3: The Chip

(Lights up on REBISSA in a small apartment, standing behind a painter's easel. A thin sheet of metal sits on the easel like a canvas, facing away from the audience. REBISSA wears thrift-store clothes in a stylish way. She holds a device called a "laser brush" that looks like a laser pointer. Her necklace contains a tiny cellphone.)

REBISSA *(on the phone)*. I don't have time. The painting is due tomorrow. *(A pause as she listens. She looks at the painting with pride.)* Honestly, I think it's the best thing I've done. If I win the fellowship, we'll go to lunch. Real lunch. No synthetic tuna. *(A pause as she listens.)* Please. Tracy, you're not fat. And if you want to eat healthy, try the Smart Plate from Tech Products. They put sensors in the plate that measure calories, carbs, everything. Then the plate sends diet tips to your mobile device. *(Small laugh.)* You brought it up. Hey, I gotta go.

(She taps her necklace, ending the call. She looks at the painting and carefully moves the laser brush above the surface of the canvas.)

A door buzzer sounds. REBISSA taps her necklace.)

REBISSA *(cont'd, answering the phone)*. Who is it? *(She pauses—a little embarrassed.)* I'll get the door.

(REBISSA taps her necklace again. A pause, and VANDER enters uncertainly. It's awkward.)

VANDER. Hi.

REBISSA. Hi, Vander.

VANDER. If I shouldn't have come ... I can go.

REBISSA. No. It's ... how have you been?

VANDER. OK, I guess. *(Awkward pause.)* So you're painting?

REBISSA. It's the one I told you about. My grandmother?

VANDER. Oh, wow. Can I see it?

REBISSA. It's ... it's not finished.

VANDER. I'm sorry to just show up like this. But I thought our dates went so well and ...

REBISSA *(sincere)*. They did. They were great. I just ...

VANDER. What?

REBISSA. I've been busy. And I thought *you'd* be busy. Aren't you working on the launch?

VANDER. I was, but today is Launch Day. Our work is done.

REBISSA. Oh.

VANDER. We just do psych tests on the Basstronauts. Make sure they're stable enough for the mission ... but still crazy enough to go. Sorry. It's a joke around the office.

REBISSA. Did you know Blue Marble Tours offers low-cost weekends in Earth orbit? You can see every continent and the northern lights—all with twenty percent less nausea. But you need to book soon.

VANDER. I—I don't want to go to space.

REBISSA. Right. Sorry. *(Pause.)* Vander, you're the best guy I've met since I moved here. But ... I can't be in a relationship right now.

VANDER. Why not?

Scene 5: Ready, Aim

(Lights up on DARGE, sitting alone with a drink in a dingy strip club. He wears a dirty work shirt with three stripes on the sleeve. Music plays, then stops. We hear scattered applause.)

KEERA enters wearing nice office clothes—too classy for this place. She carries a drink and clutches her purse. She looks troubled. KEERA sits next to DARGE. He sees her and is startled by her good looks.)

KEERA. I'm sorry. Were you sitting here?

DARGE. No. I—I was ... *(Points at his chair.)* sittin' here.

KEERA. Oh. Of course. Can I sit here?

DARGE. Sure. *(Awkward pause.)* You missed the girls.

KEERA. The girls?

DARGE. The strip—the dancing girls.

KEERA. Right.

DARGE. I'm just here with the guys from work. I'm not into it. I mean, I'm into girls. And dancing, I guess. But this place is ... kinda sad.

(KEERA looks around the bar, warily.)

DARGE *(cont'd)*. I don't mean to ruin it for you, if you like dancing girls. I'm just saying, it can be a little sad.

(KEERA begins to cry.)

DARGE *(cont'd)*. Wow. That hit you fast.

KEERA *(recovering)*. It's not this place. It's ... my job.

DARGE. Oh, *job* troubles. Me too. I work construction at the spaceport. Down in the tunnels. All damn day, underground, just us and the robots. *(Pointing.)* You know what might help is that drink.

(KEERA picks up her drink but recoils at the smell.)

KEERA. Is this all they serve?

DARGE. Drink that, you don't need much else.

(KEERA smiles a little at this. She sets down the glass without drinking.)

KEERA. I'm Keera.

DARGE. Darge. Good to meet ya.

KEERA. It's my boss. He works us a hundred hours a week. He tracks every keystroke we type. He records our eye movements. If we look away from the screen, it's "distracted time" and we don't get paid.

DARGE. Holy crap ...

KEERA. I'm a single mom. I never see my daughter. At school, they asked, "Where's your mom, Jess?" She said, "Grandma is my mommy."

DARGE. What's your job?

KEERA. I design toilets.

DARGE. Toilets?

KEERA. For spacecraft. It's very high-tech. All the waste has to be recycled. I've won awards. But yesterday, he said, *(Slightly formal voice.)* "Keera, it's supposed to hold shit, not be shit."

DARGE. What a horrible guy.

KEERA. He's not.

DARGE. He's not horrible?

KEERA. He's not a guy. He's an A-I-M—Artificially Intelligent Manager.

DARGE. Your boss is a computer?

Scene 7: Potentialities

(Lights up on the back bar of an “intox cafe”—where intoxicating substances are served. BRYLO [pronounced BRY-low] enters timidly, carrying a futuristic twelve-ounce bottle. He sits at the bar, takes a swig from the bottle and grimaces. TAZ, friendly, enters and walks behind the bar.)

TAZ. Sorry, I had to check inventory. You want another?

BRYLO (*indicating the bottle*). Of this? No. The hostess sent me back here because I ... I want something more.

TAZ. No problem. (*Sliding a menu in front of BRYLO.*) Tell me what looks good.

BRYLO. I—I don't know. I've never done this.

TAZ. You've never been intoxicated?

BRYLO. I'm a—well, I used to be—a rather cautious person. Taking drugs seemed ... dangerous.

TAZ. Back in the old days, maybe. It's much safer now.

BRYLO. It doesn't matter. I'm no longer cautious. (*Takes a swig, grimaces.*) I just want to party.

TAZ. You're in the right place. I'm Taz.

BRYLO (*hesitates, then shakes hands*). Brylo.

TAZ. So what do you do, Brylo?

BRYLO. I'm ... I'm an astrophysicist.

TAZ. Really? You work at the spaceport?

BRYLO. I did. But I was a total failure, so I quit.

TAZ. Ah, no worries. I quit my last job. Best decision I ever made.

BRYLO. I'm glad. But actually—

TAZ. Old Tyme Family Restaurant. They made me push this cart with plastic models of all the desserts.

BRYLO. Yes, well—

TAZ. But the models were super cheap. The apple pie had a crack in it. The ice cream was filthy. Then they'd blame me when no one ordered dessert! My crazy boss used to throw stuff. Nailed me right here ... (*Pointing near her eye.*) plastic tiramisu.

BRYLO. If you don't mind, I would like to become intoxicated.

TAZ. Let's do it. (*Pointing to the menu.*) All these drinks are made with hyper-alcohol. Intense buzz, but no hangover. Great if you have work in the morning.

BRYLO. I quit my job.

TAZ. Right. How about Healthy Choice Synthetic Canniboid? Marijuana high, but it won't make you hungry. Perfect if you're on a diet.

BRYLO. I'm not.

TAZ. Goldstar Opiate Free. Just like opioids, but now they can make it nonaddictive.

BRYLO. And do they?

TAZ. Says so on the label. (*Pause.*) But they are a drug company, so use your own judgment.

BRYLO. I don't want any of these.

TAZ. Honestly? Good call. You don't seem like a guy who ought to be—

BRYLO. I want to go "off the menu."

Scene 8: The Pandaroo

(Lights up on BRITTLEY, standing on the grounds of a private zoo at an animal research facility. She wears a zookeeper uniform and holds a tablet computer. On a bench next to her is a bag of vegetables and a medical kit.

BRITTLEY speaks to the audience with affection, as if speaking to a favorite animal.)

BRITTLEY. You're going to be my audience, OK? *(Laughs.)* You don't care. You just want a treat. Tell you what, listen to my speech and when I'm done, you might get ... *(Pulls an odd, bright-green banana from the bag.)* a banana-cumber. *(Laughs.)* Now I've got your attention. OK, here goes. *(Begins a tour guide-type speech.)* Good morning, everyone. And welcome to the Center for High-Speed Evolution, where we help animals keep pace with our fast-changing world. Now, I know the idea of—

(GREVIN enters, irritated.)

GREVIN. Brittley, what are you doing?

BRITTLEY *(uncomfortable)*. Hi, Grevin.

GREVIN. Who are you talking to?

BRITTLEY. No one. Just Sandy. I'm practicing for the tour.

GREVIN. The tour?

BRITTLEY. For the politicians. They're coming today to watch the launch and—

GREVIN. I know what tour. Since when are you giving it?

BRITTLEY. Zanna said you had a meeting with the investors and since I know the animals ... *(Off GREVIN's irritated look.)* Is there a problem?

GREVIN. Let's hear your speech.

BRITTLEY. It's not ready.

GREVIN. You were just giving it.

BRITTLEY. It's only a draft. It's not—

GREVIN. Do it.

(BRITTLEY hesitates, then continues her speech.)

BRITTLEY. I know the idea of genetic engineering can sound scary. But humans have been altering animals for a long time. We've bred dogs for thousands of years. Today, we're just more skilled. We can make new animals, designed to cope with pollution and global warming. *(Quickly checks her notes on the tablet.)* When the colonists on the Jarkus Bass lift off today, they'll be carrying embryos of our award-winning buffadillo. But let's start with my favorite animal. *(Gesturing toward the audience.)* This is Sandy, and she is a pandaroo. Part giant panda. Part kangaroo. Two years old. Isn't she adorable?

(GREVIN rolls his eyes—not impressed.)

BRITTLEY *(cont'd)*. But Sandy is also a reminder that we don't always get things right. As you can see—

GREVIN. That's enough.

BRITTLEY. I'm going to practice during lunch.

GREVIN. You're not giving the tour.