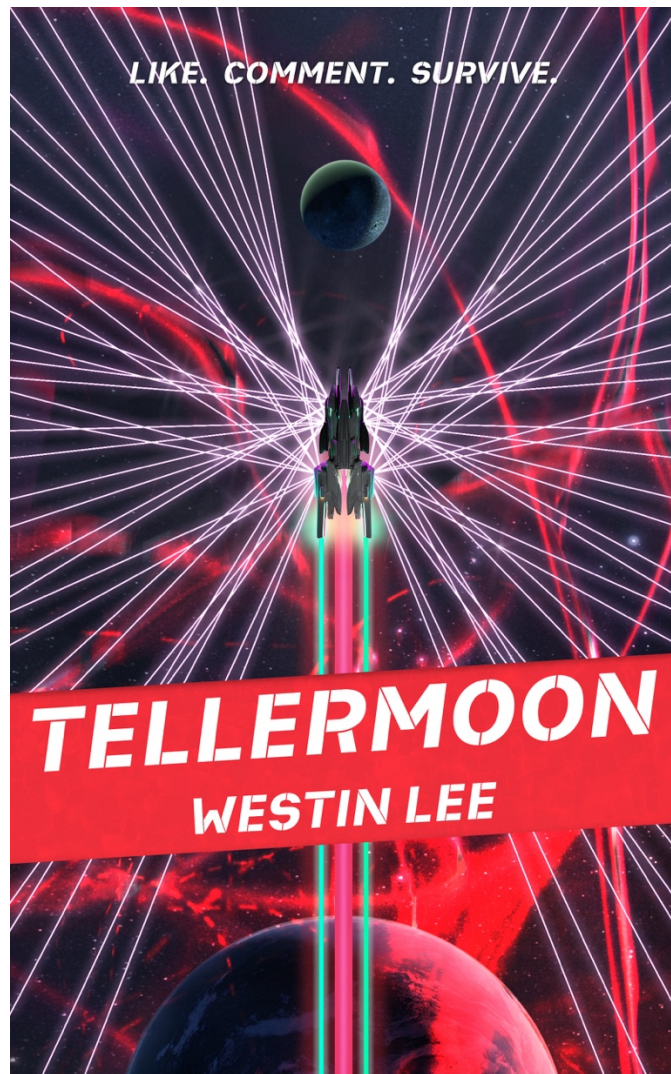


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prose writing sample
Tellermoon | space opera novel | 2022



"...an entertaining, swashbuckling, futuristic coming-of-age adventure." - Amazon Review

This excerpt reintroduces an antagonist character we met earlier in the story.

It took Satya Carter three weeks before he could call a day back on Luna “normal” again. But there he was at last, awake in bed on a Sunday at a normal hour, looking out the UV-treated wall window in his room onto the sun-bleached plains of Mare Imbrium. The decor around him matched the monochromatic minimalist beauty of the barren landscape (minus some visible habitats—other condominiums in the ridge on the right side of the view). The only splash of color in his domain were the exquisitely comfortable blue silk pajama pants on his legs. He pushed up on his arms and felt strong. His physique had returned once he was back in UNa space and far away from the unpleasant chaos of Eden. The six-pack and hip V looked satisfactory from this angle.

He opted for a full hour’s cycling class for the first time since his return, pushed through the urge to quit that came hard at minute twenty, even opted to take inspiration from the instructor projected into the room, used the other participants to push him for once, and ended the class wiped and thoroughly glad he’d made the effort. The rest of the day felt like a reset as he worked his way through a backlog of bills and messages and little chores he’d put off, as drones crawled over the condo and scrubbed it pristine around him.

Monday brought work, and he found himself excited to be on the tube to the head office in Iridium Under. The previous weeks had been filled with debriefs and damage control around the Twenty-two project. Was he okay physically and mentally? Where was Nathan Brimfont’s phone? Was the data secure? Did anyone have access to their multi-factor-authentication data?

Did the LunaDyn engineering team survive the attack? If yes, where were they now? And (“We realize this is not as important, but we need to address it now”) was the new Eden Authority going to finish paying the outstanding invoices for the project? Would this incident interfere with ongoing contracts with the Xanta Conglomerate? Was the Trail Ballistic Weapon System destroyed, or did Xanta have it? What about the dozens of other UNaS-regulated technologies implemented on the Twenty-two?

And then, in moments when certain Luna Dynamics people were alone with him, there was that question that kept coming up: was their company admin lock still in place on the ship?

What an absurd, untrusting question!

Yes, he would lie, with studied ease and a smile that read as winning. He and Nathan certainly hadn’t given it to them. The officers had their codes live on the ship, of course, but the company codes were with Carter when he left the ship, and had died with Brimfont, respectively.

Over and over, the question came up, and Carter lied. Sometimes repeatedly, until the person asking allowed themselves the simple release of accepting the answer. He didn’t dare ask why this one detail was so important. Not yet, anyway.

And on the grilling went. LunaDyn C level, the board (their appearances masked by algorithmic projectors that randomized their voices and faces at each meeting), legal and public-relations liaisons, more comically serious UNa Spacy and federal types. Carrie had been there through all the meetings, by his side and eager to mitigate or redirect and generally be a good manager. They sat there, reading information on their glasses in stoic silence, straight as a rail in their chair. Their close-cropped brown hair and long, thin neck gave them a regal, birdlike appearance. Even the burliest, angriest feds paused their aggressive questioning when Carrie wanted them to.

But now, at last, all that was blessedly behind him. Today his calendar showed a single (regularly scheduled!) meeting with the sales team, and the rest of the week was filled with generals where he would touch base with R&D and marketing and the engineers (at long last), who collectively owed him many, many prototypes.

The first days really were the old times anew. More projects in the works. More possible clients. The moment of excitement when it was clear a certain breakthrough guaranteed a meeting with the Spacy or some lesser military entity.

And then on Wednesday he awoke to find himself back on the Eden ship.

He was desperate. It was the overwhelmed familiar *desperate* the mind yearns for, that created his panicked dreams of being late for a grade school, even though he was nearly thirty. This time, though, it wasn't a distant childhood place; it was a recent memory.

He was on the ship, and those battered cadets were begging for the codes to unlock the ship. Dead and dying.

"If you don't, they're going to kill us!"

And unlike in the memory, he found himself apologizing. A practiced, brief apology about why he couldn't do it. The trouble he would be in if he gave them full access to all the technology his code would unlock. And their faces on his phone—the boy's face—went quiet and he nodded. They understood.

He was at the escape pod. The attractive cadet was there, hand out, offering the trade. *Licht* was the name on his jacket.

Carter was in the pod, seconds later, dropping away from the ship as the railgun burst hit the hull exactly where he'd been. A mass shower of armor-piercing shards, exactly where the cadet was. A thousand little slivers of depleted uranium perforating purple hull plating. Gel and

bits of ship leapt out over the silhouette of the hull in concentric waves of debris, and the pod sped down toward the planet. The ship was framed on all sides by beams that rapid-fired and fanned in unnatural staccato machine patterns. Their pods, firing patented LunaDyn algorithms, that searched and destroyed and protected his ship. Mostly protected it.

He was back at the escape pod, with Licht, hand out. He felt the impossible choice tear at him. Commit the crime, the *only* crime he could really commit, potentially commit treason, or don't and die with this mess of a backwater's overengineered navy ship. He saw the hand and saw the cadet's bright blue eyes.

He made his choice. Life.

He swiped the code at him; the cadet swiped the pod access back.

Carter went to Licht, grabbed the fabric at his jacket chest, pulled him into the pod with him, and held him on the cold little hexagonal tiles as they launched and the burst hit the ship. Arms draped around him, comforting him. The weight of Licht's back pressed into him.

Carter awoke before his view of the lunar surface, his arms hugged tightly over his chest, hands gripping opposite shoulders. Sweat draped the silk pajama pants on his legs. He felt tears collect at the corner of his eye. He wiped them away with the pillowcase and looked out over the silent monochrome beauty of Mare Imbrium.

As he went through his morning grooming routine, he stood back, saw the gray finished walls and white bar lights framing the mirror and vestigial drifts of shower steam, and felt lucky to be alive. By the time he'd put on boots and walked for the tunnel station, he'd forgotten the dream.