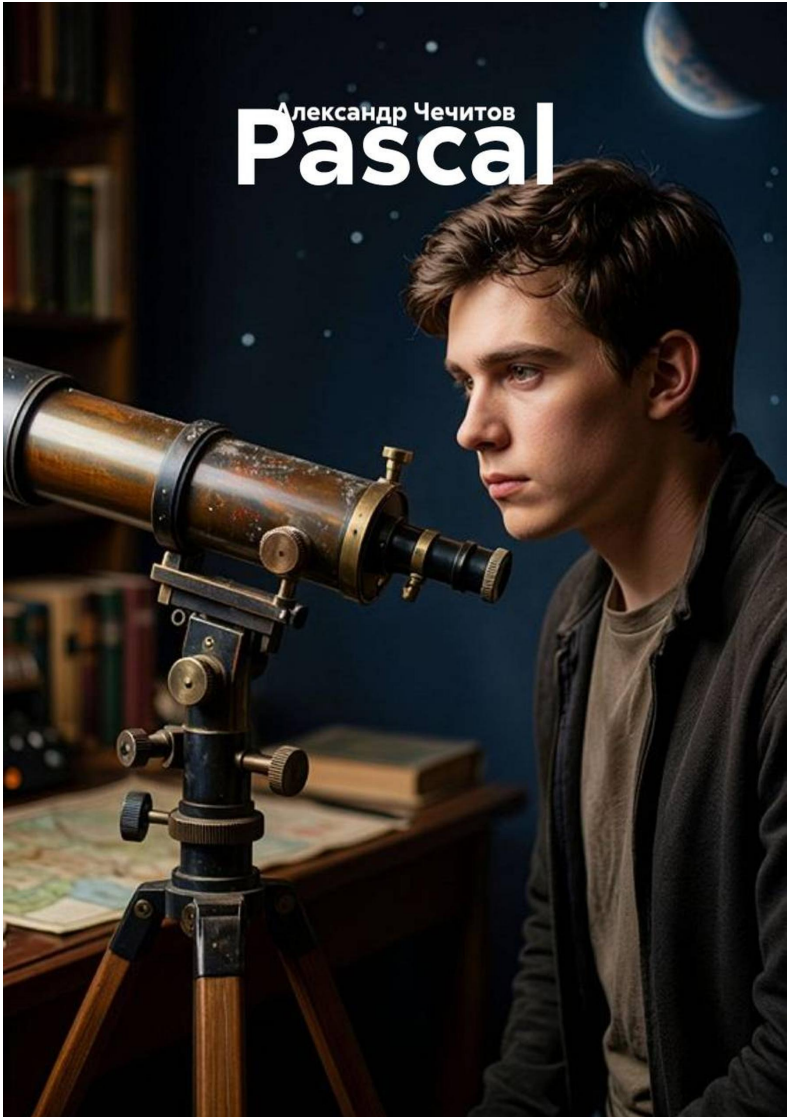
Александр Чечитов

Pascal



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Аннотация

For almost his entire life, George lived side by side with his mother, unable to leave her or build a relationship with a girl. His cherished dream was to go into space, and he would have spared nothing to make it happen. A powerful telescope reveals the existence of a planet potentially similar in conditions to Earth, named after the scientist who discovered it — Pascal. The costly project is gaining momentum, and George, whose profession is programming, is among those selected for the mission to the planet called Pascal. During the flight, George encounters circumstances that could drive him to the brink of madness.

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The computing machine, named after the scientist Vincent Dexter who created its prototype, calculated the distance to the planet Pascal as five thousand light-years — a journey the likes of which no Earth ship had ever undertaken before that day. Programmer George Carlyle was selected from twenty thousand volunteers and considered himself almost the luckiest man in the world — until the day when everything that had given his existence deep meaning suddenly lost all form and purpose. At times, his conviction in the uniqueness of his mission would return, only to be followed by feverish bouts of depression and a crushing sense of insignificance. According to scientists calculations, planet Pascal might possess an atmosphere suitable for organisms similar to those found on Earth. The only significant caveat was the impossibility of the crew returning home. The ship built for the space voyage simply could not withstand the return journey. Those were the calculations.Hanging his jacket on the coat rack, George entered the living room, where his mother, Roberta Carlyle, was sitting by the television. She was a woman whose final years had unfolded entirely within the confines of her hometown, a place with a population of a thousand. Breaking into an obsequious smile, Roberta handed her son a bucket of chicken wings.

Mom, I told you, George said in a wounded tone, I get indigestion from your wings. Theyre not mine — theyre chicken! Yes, not yours — chicken, George repeated, thoroughly disliking his elderly mothers remarks. The woman casually wiped her greasy mouth with the back of her hand. You dont love me at all, little bear! George sat down on the large, worn-out bed-couch, long sagged by Mrs. Carlyles heavy frame, and tried to touch his mothers hand. Mrs. Carlyle jerked her hand away nervously and started breathing rapidly.Of course I love you, George replied, pressing his mothers broad, massive hand against him. He tried to speak louder than the TV, but it was hard. Taking the remote, George tried to lower the volume but only changed the channel.

Order our miracle oven right now, a pleasant, melodic voice announced from the paper-thin TV, and get a simulator capsule as a gift. Any fantasy…How can you watch this nonsense, Mom? George said distantly, finally turning off the TV. Mrs. Carlyle popped another piece of crispy chicken into her mouth. She chewed continuously, completely ignoring Georges words. He patiently waited for his mothers fit of displeasure to pass, as it usually did.

George, why cant you come back? Why do you have to go? What does any of this even mean? Mrs. Carlyle bombarded her son with questions after he told her hed decided to join the crew that would fly to planet Pascal. Broad-faced Roberta Carlyle was used to her son working from eight in the morning to six in the evening, five days a week. She and George would take their

old pickup truck and drive to their country house on weekends, watching old, familiar movies and occasionally sipping small amounts of cheap mulled wine.Little George came into the world when Roberta was already the mother of two rosy-cheeked twin girls, Holly and Ollie. Their family life resembled a scene from a good, wholesome movie, with Collin, the father and a model family man, completing the happy picture. The idyll shattered when the twin sisters disappeared. That day, Collin and Roberta set out early in the morning for a picnic at Desl Crack Park, located five miles from their town. One-year-old George could barely stand on his feet, so they decided to leave him with his grandmother — Robertas mother.

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