

SPACE: 1999

What Lies Beneath

Set during Year One of the Spectacular Science Fiction Series.



Michael Farries

Fan fiction inspired by the universe of the 1970s TV show *Space: 1999*

"Helena, you're telling me those Alphans had their memories erased?"

"Not erased, John, but suppressed. And unless we figure out how to recover them... and soon... we may all be in grave danger."

The Future was supposed to be Fantastic... until the events of September 13th, 1999 sent Earth's moon adrift into interstellar space.

As unlikely as the cataclysmic nuclear reactions of Disposal Area number two could have rocketed the moon into the furthest reaches of space, seemingly impossible alien encounters and deadly phenomena have constantly challenged the survivors of Moonbase Alpha.

Now Ty Adair, Eagle flight technician and pilot-in-training, may be accidentally uncovering the causes behind the moon's tragic fate. And a fate that from within the lunar body, *and within Alpha's own ranks*, may lead to its ultimate destruction.

SPACE: 1999



Fan fiction based on the 1970s science fiction series.

A Space1999.org imprint.



Previous episode:

"Space Brain"

The Moon encounters a space-borne cosmic intelligence... and the living creature's immune system might unintentionally destroy Moonbase Alpha unless contact can be made.

Currently:

"What Lies Beneath"

Dangerous legacies, leading back to the construction of Moonbase Alpha, resurface under the lunar soil... and within the minds of some Alphans.

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Any similarity between the characters contained herein and individuals living or dead is purely coincidental.

<http://www.space1999.org>

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WHAT LIES BENEATH

By Michael Faries

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*For my Dad,
The creative spirit blessed with unconditional love and support
for my efforts over the years,
and the inspiration that fuels me to this day,
This novel is dedicated to you.*

In the year 1999, the 311 inhabitants of Moonbase Alpha are stranded when the Moon is hurled from Earth's orbit when nuclear waste is ignited by magnetic radiation.

Under the leadership of Commander John Koenig, the Alphans continue their fight for survival against random encounters with hostile lifeforms and deadly circumstances.

During the first series of events in space, designated Year One, the wayward moon has journeyed deep into the ecumenical wilderness. Unpredictable, unexplained trajectories have propelled the lunar body into brief rendezvous with numerous planets and phenomena on an odyssey without end.

The seemingly impossible meetings appear to some as part of a larger celestial puzzle. A mysterious unknown force may be guiding the Alphans' destiny amongst the stars, whether by chance, fate or some intelligence beyond their comprehension...

"We trample grasses into dirt, we strip the land with bulldozers and caterpillar treads, we cover it with concrete and hot asphalt. Disposing of wastes from our infernal industrial machines we dump upon it crude oil, rubbish, acids, alkalis, and other poisons. But is there that much grass? I, for one, can imagine man in a boundless, grassless wilderness, the product of a cosmic, or perhaps humanly noncosmic, catastrophe."

- Vladimir Alekseevich Soloukhin, *Trava* (Grass), 1972

CHAPTER ONE

Ten.

The Alphan leaned forward, hurriedly tugging the white-colored glove over his left hand, locking it tight into his orange-colored spacesuit's wrist unit. Alarm klaxons blared loudly; red lights flashed with near-distracting intensity. His body's adrenaline surges didn't quicken his actions, nor did they calm the cacophonous anxieties that flooded his senses. His brain, however, kept him on auto-pilot, focused on every step towards survival as the clock ticked down.

Nine.

In a fraction of a second, he maneuvered with near-robotic precision to pull his helmet from the storage locker.

Eight.

As he moved away from the locker and raised the helmet above his head, he caught a fleeting glimpse of his colleague struggling with his own spacesuit's boots.

Seven.

The adrenaline rush intensified, driving his already rapid heartbeat and increased blood pressure into overdrive. His hands nearly fumbled the helmet as he scrambled to seat it with both hands onto the collar seal.

Six.

Unseen clamps locked onto the yellow-colored metal from within the silver ring seal. A familiar clicking sound could be heard.

Five.

His right arm continued downwards, reaching across his backside to grab the air hose tether from his life support backpack.

Four.

With his right hand, he quickly connected the hose coupling to the rear of his helmet, as he had done many hundreds of times before. The new magnetic lock had eliminated the need to screw the connector into place. The clicking sound was all he wanted to hear. He didn't give a second thought to re-checking it.

Three.

His right hand swept back over the top of the helmet, then down across the visor shield with incredible speed, instinctively sliding the covering downwards into its closed, locked position.

Two.

Continuing the same graceful, sweeping motion, he pulled his hand downwards to the front life support pack. Two of his outstretched fingers which, despite the constraints of his gloved hand, expertly tapped a specific sequence on the activation controls.

One.

With a familiar soft audio signal and the rushing of precious life support gases, his suit began to fill and expand. Within microseconds, dozens of invisible suit functions had been activated, from communications to safety diagnostic power-ups. His environmental controls surged to life, bringing a slight drop in temperature to cool his body down.

"Time!"

Through the helmet, the voice was muffled, but audible. "Adair, that was slower than usual! Johnson, *you're dead!*"

Ty Adair stood fully upright in his spacesuit, reducing the interior pressure enough to unseal the faceplate. He swiveled it upwards, bending slightly to see Ian Johnson sprawled across the floor, shaking his head and holding one of his yellow-hued spacesuit boots in the air. His grimaced face was met by the howls of laughter from the various techs standing on the sides of the corridor. The alarm klaxons ended; the lights subsided.

Adair beamed a bright smile at his competitor. "Next time, you might want to start with the boots."

Johnson grimaced, tossing his mustard yellow-colored boot forward against the wall in a huff. “You’ve had years of practice, mate. Don’t rub it in.”

One of the section’s technicians spoke up. “Whether or not he’s rubbing it in or not, he still holds Moonbase Alpha’s record. No one suits up faster than Ty.”

The techs had seen this contest held for the past number of months and it never ceased to amaze. Since Breakaway from Earth on September 13, 1999, Main Mission—the command center of Moonbase Alpha—had become something of an ivory tower amongst the populace. It’s commander, John Koenig, had slowly turned from closely guarded thoughts and internalized introspection, to seeking inspiration and morale boosting amongst the Alphans. Koenig had reason to govern with strict authority, particularly in the face of seemingly endless dangers that threatened the wayward moon and its travelers. But the Alphans were only human—and they needed their spirits lifted.

Adair’s uncanny ability had been known for years by the flight techs and pilots. Eventually chief pilot Alan Carter regaled Main Mission with the ever-growing legend of Adair’s lightning quick suit-up skills. In turn, Koenig turned the story into something more: A healthy competition amongst crewmembers—and a chance to safeguard lives. After all, Adair had managed to single-handedly re-write the spacesuit operations manual. His suit-up process during emergency situations became the new standard. He had even introduced some design improvements years before—life-saving improvements that were now part of every Alphan spacesuit.

One of the techs knelt next to Johnson. “I think you’d be wise to listen and learn. Think about the encounter with the ‘Space Brain’ last month? You had plenty of time to suit up. When section 88-A had that small atmospheric leak last week, you put on your spacesuit with hours to spare. This contest, however, had a time limit of five minutes.”

Another tech quickly chimed in, boasting proudly of his section’s chief. “Keep this in mind: the astrophysics lab staff had less than seven minutes yesterday when that meteor storm slammed into the base. The bulkheads were sealed and that section was compromised. *All* of them made it, though.”

“And Ty here can do it in five minutes flat. Sometimes faster.”

Ty smiled again. His calm, focused demeanor was the envy of his colleagues, as were his clean cut, charismatic looks. His assignment to Moonbase Alpha had not surprised anyone. The tall, brown-haired, U.S.-born astronaut was an academic whiz, a genius astromechanic and pilot section support tech, and a seemingly well-rounded, outgoing personality—when he wasn’t heads-down in some technological task.

Adair's primary role was working on the ever-expanding Eagle transporter fleet, the workhorse spacecraft of Moonbase Alpha. Like his pilot section colleagues, he proudly wore the Services uniform, designated by the yellow sleeve and collar. In record time, he found himself promoted as one of Alpha's three Chief Engineers within the large flight tech section. The promotion hadn't inflated his ego; rather, he took the rank as an opportunity—an excuse—to both experiment and push the envelope of technology developments where possible.

The first of his three tours of duty on Alpha started before permanent construction was completed in the mid-1990s. The decade-long devotion to the lunar base had provided him with unprecedented career challenges. And while he was popular among his team members, and among various Alpha women, the greatest love he had known was the dream job he performed each day.

Since his birth in 1966, Adair had witnessed humanity's ascension to the moon. His earliest memories of the Apollo lunar landings had served as his never-ending inspiration. He had also sworn the utmost professional focus to his work. He had no intention of seeing another Apollo 1—or Apollo 21—fatal accident occur. His attention to detail and safety had been flawless over the years. By all counts, he was the model astronaut, the model worker, the model innovator, the model—and ever-modest—over-achiever, and just perhaps one of Alpha's model citizens.

Perhaps too much of a model Alphan, he reckoned.

Johnson stood to face Adair. Pangs of jealousy, frustration and embarrassment swirled through his thoughts. On a whim, he had challenged Adair earlier today, just hours before as they entered one of Alpha's mess halls for lunch. Now he was regretting the decision.

The suit-up competition was open to everyone. And there hadn't been a shortage of challengers, either. The one condition Adair mandated: Every contender had to make their challenge *in-person* during the day shift lunch hour. No messages on Computer. No commlock transmissions. No notes dropped off at his workbench or living quarters. It was his hope to meet new people, perhaps make a new friend or two. After all, his work as a flight technician kept him sequestered to the subterranean levels of Alpha's hangar decks, away from the general populace. Most of his friends were technicians, engineers and pilots within his section. He knew he needed more friends around Alpha—save that most cliques had already formed. New friends weren't easy to make.

Some of his challengers would join him for lunch; most didn't, including Ian Johnson. And Adair understood why.

In his two years on Alpha, Johnson had never met the man. Their assignments kept them on opposite sides of the base. And despite the three hundred people that inhabited the moonbase, most had formed into cliques, or remained self-isolated and alone. The harsh reality of being stranded in deep space proved to be an ongoing trauma that Dr. Russell and her medical staff had no cure for. Work seemed to be the sole comfort. And some relished the chance to apply their space science expertises to the ever-changing void around them, to the exclusion of interfacing with their fellow Alphans.

Whereas the deep space telescopes on the moon's far side had peered into the galactic expanse, the moon was actually traveled—often via wormholes and warped space phenomena—closer to those mysterious places. But despite the wonders of the universe around them, people like Ian Johnson were depressed, devastated, even damaged from the events of Breakaway. Contests like these may have been good for morale, but moreso to the winner. The losers remained the underdogs, reminded of their failings, their “place” within the ranks of Moonbase Alpha. And despite housing some of Earth's best and brightest, the base was a mélange of personal chaos and hurt within the ranks, bound more by duty and survival than outpourings of emotion and release.

And while Ian Johnson might have believed a challenge to Adair's throne could indulge some inward need for attention, it brought him more resentment and ill-will.

Any more deep, overly analytical thinking like this and I'm going to switch professions... Adair thought to himself. He wanted to say something to Johnson. But technician Bette Salzgitter beat him to the punch. She had been biting her lip during Johnson's sore loser outbursts.

She chided him playfully, “What do you say, Johnson? Do you want an autographed copy of Ty's suit-up checklist as a runner-up prize?”

He snapped back at the tall, dark brown haired, Austrian woman without hesitation, shooting her a smirky glare as his answer. He walked over to Adair.

“That was impressive,” Johnson said, holding out his hand. “You won fair and square.” Adair moved closer, meeting the handshake with a firm, friendly grip. Johnson spoke again, leaning forward. “The Commander might regard this as a friendly competition, but I *don't*.”

Johnson maintained the grip for an uncomfortable moment longer than he should have. “I used to play collegiate sports, mainly football when I attended Oxford. You might say I chose a career as an astronaut instead of moving into the professional leagues. I was damn good, too. But show me a football field around here; there isn't one. No grassy fields to run around on, no nets to kick the ball into, no trophies to be won.”

The last sentence uttered by Johnson was dripping with despair.

“I'm sorry to have wasted your time.”

The point was stinging clear to Adair. Some of the Alphans in the corridor would regard Johnson's comments as flagrantly immature or full of self-loathing and pity. But Adair was more sensitive to the subtext. Everyone has special gifts... and it was apparent that Johnson would never be able to showcase—or reclaim—his own within Alpha's environment.

This was yet another painful reminder that his old life on Earth was lost forever. Johnson was still in his prime; he could probably outplay any Alphan on the soccer green if one existed. It wasn't like Alan Carter's Aussie Rules Football scrimmages on the Eagle hangar decks. Even those matches were relegated to tossing the "footy" high above the unforgiving, bone-bruising flooring. For those that had problems understanding the Australian pilot's enthusiasm for his favorite sport, they had a harder time recovering from tackles into the dense deck plates. "Football" had instead turned into games of catch, not rugby-style play. And even Carter retired his childhood love, namely his prized leather footy, to his quarters to reminisce in private instead of recapturing glory days long past.

Adair's silent contemplations were quickly ended by Salzgitter.

"So, Ty, has anyone ever raced you to take *off* their spacesuit?" she teased. "Maybe Johnson still has a chance."

Salzgitter's good natured comment was, again, ill-timed. However it broke Adair's concentration at the right time. He knew Johnson was literally crying out for attention, something that most Alphans were probably bottling up and nearing their own explosive limits. There had been a handful of fights amongst the crew, often over inane accusations or petty jealousies. But even the most professional, mature and reserved of Moonbase Alpha were only human. A person could only throw themselves into work duties for so long before their dire situation amongst the stars would surface anew. Particularly when it seemed the Universe itself was aiming for Alpha's continual destruction, between alien attacks and overwhelming cosmic events.

"Not today, Bette. But that's a novel idea," said Adair, noting that Johnson had turned away and continued to remove his spacesuit. The other techs had begun to disband and leave the corridor. Tomorrow would bring another suit-up challenge, probably another win—and more resentments. *All of this had started because Commander Koenig sought ways to boost morale.* The challenges hadn't made one single new friend for Adair. In fact, it only bonded him closer to his technical colleagues who cheering him on during each contest with increased fervor and zeal. All of this was only strengthening the clique mentality amongst his peers.

And people like Johnson might continue to feel as outcasts.

Adair decided he would try something different, something even... desperate.

"Johnson, I... *I could use your help.*"

Every Alphan in the corridor stopped in their tracks. Even those whom had rounded the corner had returned to see what drama ensued.

The air became still. Johnson looked puzzled, but ever-curious. “You need *my* help? How’s that?”

Time froze momentarily for Adair. He had blurted out the words without consideration for what he would say next. In a Sisyphus-like way, he was about to fail right before he succeeded.—right before he could start a potential new beginning, a possible friendship with the man. Everyone’s gaze burned into Adair. He felt like stepping into the airlock and quickly escaping onto the lunar surface. He was, after all, suited up and ready to go.

Like all Alphans, Adair had been sent to his Moonbase Alpha assignment based on his qualifications, namely solid IQ points and having a wide range of superlative skill sets and abilities. But nary a single brain cell fired off any answers; instead he felt like he had achieved *tabla rasa*—a blank state of mind. There was some primal need within him to convey an invitation of friendship without insinuations of pity or overzealous overtures. He thought to himself, *Maybe I do feel sorry for Johnson. Damn, this isn’t about saving lost souls one at a time—this is about pulling together a community.*

“Yes. I *do* need your help,” Adair said, keenly aware of every Alphan listening in. “You mentioned during lunch that today was a good day to do the contest—because your duty shift was over, right?”

Johnson felt himself being reeled in, although he went with it. “I’m off-duty,” he stated dryly.

Numerous Alphans stood transfixed in the corridors, wondering where the drama might lead.

The calm focus returned to Ty Adair. He turned to pick up his space helmet. “Suit up. We’re going on the surface.”

Johnson seemed bemused. “Oh? And why?”

“Because we’re going to kick around a few moon rocks.”

Ty Adair seated the helmet onto his ring collar, then snapped the visor seal downwards, completing his suit-up.

“And by the way, I just beat you again.”

CHAPTER TWO

"I'm not going to be the bearer of bad news!"

Bette Salzgitter eyed her raven-haired, svelte Spaniard colleague, Marisa Solas, with a wink. "Don't shoot the messenger, eh?"

"Not unless you're using the stun setting."

Both women looked at the paper printout delivered from Main Mission. They, in turn, were assigned to deliver it to the addressee: *Ty Adair*.

"If this had been delivered twenty minutes ago, while Ty was standing here, we wouldn't be having this discussion," Salzgitter said. "You don't even know if it's bad news."

Both women had returned to their posts after the competition to find a missive waiting for Adair. It wasn't often that such messages were sent to their section. Not like this one, anyways. Chief Engineer Pete Garforth had asked Solas to deliver the message to his peer; Salzgitter decided to tag along. They were equally curious about the content. Enough so that they dashed back to the airlock area in hopes of catching their section chief before he ventured out. And as fast as he could suit up, both he and Johnson were long gone from Alpha.

Solas eyed the paper nervously. "Well, it looks serious. It came down from Paul Morrow in Main Mission. It's a special duty assignment."

She paused and looked again down the hallway to the airlock, then back to Salzgitter. "We can't wait around all day. Should we leave it in his uniform locker?"

"As long as you ask him later what it's about."

...

Both men stood outside Moonbase Alpha, their eyes drinking deeply of the inky darkness above them.

High above, streaks of stellar gas loomed nearby, reminders of their recent encounter with the mysterious Space Brain—a colossal space-borne entity which the moon had collided with. Within the span of a few hours, the wayward moon had survived the alien creature's anti-body bombardments and emerged from a direct collision with minimal harm. The cosmic intelligence, however, had been mortally wounded. The now-lifeless pseudo-organic/energy-composited matter began to break apart in space. The foamy anti-bodies had disintegrated even faster.

As Professor Bergman had noted in the weeks since the encounter, the residues from the entity were active and “alive” when in close proximity to the Space Brain. But, given the ever-increasing distances away from the deceased Brain, the residues had vaporized and disappeared with little trace, save for the loss of astronaut Kelly, whom the anti-bodies had smothered to death when the base was impacted. His presence hadn’t escaped the thoughts of most Alphans.

“I was thinking about Kelly,” Johnson reminisced. It was an unusual comment from someone who had kept quiet since he and Adair stepped out of launch pad number two’s airlock ten minutes ago.

Adair asked, “Did you know him?”

“Him and his wife, yes,” Johnson replied grimly. He offered no further details.

Adair shifted his view to other stars high above. “We’re really going to miss Kelly on the flight deck. Wayland and Cousteau, too.”

The latter two had been Eagle spacecraft crewmembers who were sent to investigate the Space Brain. Both had been returned to Alpha in their ship, all of which had been crushed and compacted by the Space Brain’s glutinous substances. Both were novice pilots, recruited soon after Breakaway to fill the roster of pilots killed when Nuclear Waste Disposal Area number two exploded. But not even an expert pilot’s abilities would have saved them from the Space Brain. Nevertheless, it posed a grim reminder that three Alphans were deceased—and the moonbase populace continued to decline in numbers.

“We’re losing far too many Eagle pilots,” Johnson said, looking across at Adair. Even through the dark-hued visor plate, the frown upon Johnson’s face was evident.

Adair nodded, then replied, “That reminds me. I have more cross-training classes to take.” He paused, adding, “Go figure. I started pilot training a few weeks ago.”

His eyes scanned the moonscape, reconnecting with familiar buildings nearby, then looking towards launch pad number two. “I was supposed to start next month, but the pilot section wanted to get started right away. Better sooner than later, I suppose.”

Johnson looked disconnected and uninterested. He took a few steps in another direction, kicking a loose rock. The jagged, dark gray piece of basalt arced upwards for several meters before returning to the surface.

While both men stood on the low-gravity lunar surface, they remained within the envelope of Alpha’s gravity towers. Unlike various expeditionary teams, like Greg Sanderson’s, neither Adair nor Johnson had permission to traverse the lunar distance very far away from the base. While Alpha permitted the occasional moonwalk, it also kept procedural tabs on whomever departed the base.

“Alpha Monitor Seven to Adair and Johnson. Status check of 1430 hours. You’re due back in thirty.”

“Copy that, Alpha Seven,” Johnson replied.

“Alpha Seven, shifting to band Z-30,” Adair added. “Back in five.”

“Acknowledged. Alpha Seven out.”

Adair waved to Johnson, hand-gesturing that he was changing audio frequencies. He shifted his suit’s internal communications channel to Z-30: a private connection. Taking the cue from Adair, Johnson did the same, eventually matching the same channel within his own suit.

Since the Apollo lunar landings began, astronauts were accorded the ability to break from normal communications traffic whenever needed. They could do so briefly, although operations needed to be apprised. If a threat loomed, such as meteoroid shower or solar radiation spike, they would need to cut into the connection without delay.

“Why the privacy?” Johnson asked curiously.

“Not quite sure how to say this, but have you ever replaced an RS-104 explosive bolt on an Eagle’s horizontal space frame brace?” Adair inquired.

“Is it easier than juggling that 500kg rock over there?” Johnson said, smiling weakly, making a thinly-veiled reference to the sport he missed so much.

“Seriously, remember when I mentioned cross-training? I think it would be good if you joined us for a few hours this week for some of the hangar deck work. We have a new engine booster that needs to be saddled onto a laboratory Eagle. We’re supposed to run some analyses, do some protocol workups. Call it a change of pace if you will.”

Johnson paused and turned to Adair. “You couldn’t ask that on an open channel?” he asked.

Adair retorted calmly, “I’d prefer that it looked like *you* came up with the idea. If you hadn’t noticed, I seem to be one of the poster children for boosting spirits around Alpha these days. When people are too gung-ho, it seems to turn off or discourage people from trying. I hate to say it, too... but I could use a new friend.”

Johnson was surprised by the declaration, but nodded in agreement. Adair was known as Mr. Popular within his section. His staff would work around the clock without a single complaint if he asked. And sometimes he did.

Even Johnson’s section chief had been asked to pay closer attention to Adair’s management style. But few others could match the loyalty that he instilled in his people. Johnson worked around some intense personalities, including fellow geologist Dave O’Reilly, the abrasive Irish cowboy who was a walking, talking billboard for the late, great state of Texas. And seeing how most of his friends had rotated off of Alpha before Breakaway, Johnson had become withdrawn and introverted. In hindsight, it was a miracle that he was able to force himself to enter Adair’s contest.

Too many deaths, too much trauma over the past year had weighed heavily upon him and others.

Adair added, "Have you noticed the malaise around the base? People haven't been motivated lately to try new things, including the cross-training programs."

"I think most of us have other things on our minds, like survival... not training for some other job," said Johnson.

"Maybe so," Adair replied, looking into the distance, taking note of Alpha's Medical Center building nearby. "However, if we lose a few more Kellys, for example, it's going to be tough to evacuate when a suitable planet comes along and there aren't enough Eagle pilots. Or people that know how to keep these birds operational."

"Point taken."

Both men looked skyward again. And a subtle reminder of a renewed purpose—and a new destiny—permeated each of their thoughts. *Change is good*, Adair thought.

CHAPTER THREE

"John, I want you to see this."

Dr. Helena Russell stood outside Commander John Koenig's office with several folders under arm, speaking into her commlock unit. Koenig's door slid open; the familiar, audible electronic hum announced the unsealing of the entryway's magnetic locks.

She entered, showcasing her professional, focused demeanor—much to the contrast of Koenig's and Professor Victor Bergman's Cheshire cat-like grins. Both men had been sharing a series of warm, jovial conversations. They radiated bright smiles, something which brought a brief glow of happiness to her. The daily routines and responsibilities of Alpha's well-being had fallen to the command staff, particularly the three individuals in this office. She was quickly reminded how the weight of such responsibilities bore upon their appearances: Seemingly detached, clinical, analytical, and worried. The good spirits shared by these men was infectious; and she found herself cracking an ever-growing smile.

"John was reminding me of a lab mishap years ago," Victor quipped.

Helena asked, "Oh really? It must be memorable if you're still discussing it."

Koenig gestured for Bergman to continue.

"One of the lab mice had managed to escape in our office," Bergman said. "He was a pet, nothing more. No cause for alarm. But we could not find the creature anywhere."

"And I had come by to discuss one of your assignments..." Koenig added.

"So, John had come by to talk," Victor said, "and he sat upon the corner of my desk, enthusiastic and curious about something or other, when he knocked a book onto the floor."

"I think it was a book by George Bernard Shaw," Koenig quickly injected.

"Yes, yes, I quite remember the tome falling squarely upon the animal."

Helena winced with an all-knowing subtle smile. Her career had seen the birth—and death—of many, many rodents throughout her academic and professional years. But never a gory demise by literature.

Koenig firmed up in his chair, retaining his own whimsical grin. "You mentioned you wanted me to see something?"

"Yes, John, right here," Helena said, placing one of the folders onto the command desk. Two sets of pictures were fastened atop a series of notes, both of the same man.

"Ty Adair."

Koenig focused on the images. "He's upholding Alpha's spacesuit-up speed record. He's 17-0, I believe."

Helena corrected him. "That's 18-0 as of today."

“Impressive,” Victor said.

Helena continued, “Impressive, yes. But there’s something more to this.”

She sat on John’s desk, placing another of her other folders onto the shiny ebony surface. “We’re seeing an increase in depression, anxiety, even mistrust across the base.”

The mood shifted. “You shan’t worry,” Victor noted with familiar knowingness. “Everyone has been dealing with our unfortunate condition. Everyone is pulling together.”

“Maybe so, for a select few, but the tide is changing,” Helena answered.

Koenig jumped in, ever the cautious, inquisitive leader. “Should I be concerned about civil unrest?”

“Not yet,” Helena said. “I don’t see anyone specific bucking the trend—not anytime soon.”

She swung around the desk, standing before both men. It was apparent that she had key points that she wanted to be firmly understood.

“I’ve had Ulu Zainabu working on reports for the past two weeks, since our encounter with the Space Brain.”

Victor rambled, “She had been working on her fifth degree in both social and industrial psychology before we left Earth. I’ve talked with her since. She should be encouraged to pursue those studies. We don’t have anyone formally trained on Alpha. We had Juliana Gonçalvo. Very knowledgeable, top of her field. But she rotated back to Earth before Breakaway.”

Helena nodded. “John, when you designated various morale booster programs around Alpha, you asked my staff to quietly observe them. Only a couple of programs are taking root.”

She walked around the room, gesturing with her hands. “Everyone on Alpha, and I mean everyone, is looking to Main Mission—and specifically *you*, John, to guide them. In many cases, to help them figure out how to feel *important*... and how to be part of the larger community. They need more... hand holding.”

“I’m not a cruise ship activity director, nor a wet nurse, if that’s what they’re seeking—”

“John,” Victor said, “I think Helena is saying there needs to be more leadership from within... from within the ranks.”

“Adair?”

“Possibly.”

Helena paused, then crossed her arms. “Adair agreed to the suit-up competition a couple of months ago to help you boost Alphan morale. That’s step one of a natural leader: Leading by example. He managed to turn the event into a pseudo-training exercise. And he’s well-known for keeping his ego checked at the door. He’s modest to a fault.”

“All true,” Victor added. “You know, the astrophysics lab staff may have survived that breach on Saturday because of the extra training they received.”

“And Adair inspires others,” Helena responded. “Only one person in that lab had done the suit-up contest with him. Statistically speaking, only *that person* should have survived. But she took the knowledge back to her co-workers.” Helena drew her breath. “I don’t know if he realizes the impact he’s having around the base.”

“Leadership by design, John?” Victor half-joked, raising his eyebrow.

Koenig paused, then looked to Helena again. “I’ll keep a closer eye on him. Anything else?”

Helena nodded, unveiling the last folder onto Koenig’s desk with a sullen look. In the process, her hand managed to knock one of the other folders to the floor.

“One of our Alphans is dying.”

•••

“What’s that you’re reading?”

Ty Adair bore a whimsical, amused look upon his face as Ian Johnson asked the question. Adair stood before his open storage locker, still suited from his moonwalk, holding a somewhat crumpled piece of paper in his hands. The printout had come down from Main Mission, more specifically from controller Paul Morrow. If this had been an April Fools’ prank, he would have laughed. But since it was August, he read, then re-read, the contents carefully. He understood the text wasn’t a trivial message—it contained orders.

“It looks like I have... *janitorial duties*,” he said.

“Come again?” Johnson asked.

“I hit the jackpot: I’ve won a janitorial assignment,” Adair spoke, running his hands through his hair. He felt somewhat bewildered.

“Lucky you,” Johnson teased.

“I don’t get this. Aren’t the maintenance crews tasked for these jobs?” Adair asked.

Johnson replied, “Someone in Main Mission is using Computer as a lottery system, to determine special duty assignments. It’s some algorithm that Main Mission’s computer techs decided to impress the Commander with. You hadn’t heard about it?”

“Nope.”

“I guess you should be paying more attention to the daily Alpha News Service,” Johnson chided. He felt momentarily empowered that the seemingly all-knowing, super-achieving flight tech had a crack in his armor.

Adair retorted, resuming the removal of his orange-colored spacesuit. “I thought we were done with such assignments after the Space Brain cleanup.”

"I guess someone forgot to turn off that algorithm," Johnson replied.

"In any case, I'm supposed to make time *in additional to my regular duty schedule* to do this," Adair quipped. "I don't mind. We're at full operational status. No alien threats on the horizon, right?"

Johnson glanced at the note, which Adair had set on the ledge of his locker. "Is that... lipstick?"

Adair hung his spacesuit into the locker cabinet, then began to remove the protective inner body suit. "Maybe."

Johnson peered closer at the overturned note, seeing the large imprint of lips on the backside. "Someone has a secret admirer," Johnson taunted.

"It's not the first time," Adair smiled, feeling an uneasy mix of humility and ego. "I think it's one of three women in my section. They've been teasing me to figure out which one it is."

"And how long has this been going on?" Johnson asked, ever-curious.

"Since that encounter with the Tritons," he replied.

Johnson looked directly at Adair. "You know, some Alphans are starting to settle down. It sounds like you're being scoped out. Maybe you should settle for one. It sounds like you have a harem in the making," he added.

"I'm already in a committed relationship... to those thirty-plus Eagle spacecraft on the hangar decks," Adair joked, "But seriously, it's a bit unnerving. They're all attractive, intelligent women in my section. You'd swear someone in the Lunar Commission candidacy offices maintained a casting couch. Heck, all Alphan women *are* gorgeous."

"Then pick one of them and send the others my way," Johnson said. He began to suit up in his brown sleeved duty uniform. "So, back to the assignment. Where are you supposed to work?"

Adair zipped up his regular duty uniform. "Over in section 196. Outer wing of the Alien Life Sciences building. Living quarters area."

"Who's quarters?" Johnson asked.

"Someone whose name hasn't been mentioned in quite a while."

Commissioner Gerald Simmonds.

CHAPTER FOUR

Moonbase Alpha had withstood hostile forces and cosmic events which shook the outpost to its innermost, subterranean foundations.

But nothing had braced anyone for the horrific, seemingly inhuman concoctions from security officer Tony Verdeschi's first forays into beer making.

"I'm not cleaning that up!" Ty Adair announced.

"Me, neither!" Bette Salzgitter followed, feeling humored by what had transpired.

Marisa Solas sat petrified on the edge of her turned chair within their section's mess hall, refusing to gaze downwards at the floor. Tony patted her back, feeling uncomfortable that his beverage had evoked such an... explosive reaction.

"Buck up, kid," he said unapologetically. "Some people just can't hold their alcohol."

"THAT was alcohol?" Solas coughed out, continuing to hold still, praying the waves of nausea would subside. "Antiseptics would be an more apt description."

He reached for the cup clutched in Solas's hand. "Well, I need to have some sort of distilled... spirits... in the mixture. Maybe we'll try this again... later..." Tony bore a vexed look upon his face as he walked off, leaving the table of assorted Alpha flight techs to wonder why he had chose them as their test subjects.

Adair moved next to Solas. "Next time, I'll just drain off some Eagle coolants. They might be less painful than Verdeschi's brew."

"Eagle One Ale," Bill Fraser wisecracked. "That has a nice ring to it."

"Call it Verdeschi's Revenge," Ian Johnson added, walking with his plate of food towards the troubled table. "Mind if I join you?"

"Only if you're accepting my dinner invitation from earlier," Adair answered. Johnson took position next to Fraser, avoiding the now-empty chairs around Solas. She sat back, regaining her composure, as Adair and Salzgitter knelt beside her, helping to clean up. Fraser moved his items so Johnson could sit closer.

Salzgitter razed the tall chief engineer. "So, are you two dating now or something?"

"Jealous?" Adair coyly responded.

"I imagine one of us is," she replied slyly, avoiding any hints or cues if the statement had been personal or not.

"Take a number and wait your turn," Johnson mocked, lifting his food-filled fork. "Then again, I don't like waiting."

He twirled his utensil in faux disgust. "Not until the next hydroponics yield." He continued to hold his fork in the air. "I want to eat something *fresh*, not this processed brick of... protein, or whatever it is."

"Don't knock it until you try it. It's the best way to lose weight," Fraser joked, with an edge of seriousness. Emergency rations had been stockpiled in the emergency deep shelters within Alpha's catacombs. Other forms of sustenance were being served, in an effort to conserve food stores, until hydroponics came back online.

The Space Brain's destructive presence was felt daily. Most of Alpha's agricultural section had been spared. Unfortunately, there had been contaminations during the encounter. Various food lockers had not been properly secured. Rebuilding the stores to their original levels would take another month, possibly longer. In the meantime, Alphans dined on surrogate contrivances of nutrient-enriched "food." Every one bemoaned the unusual blends of synthetic proteins, carbohydrates, fats, vitamins and minerals.

"It tastes better when you wash it down with Tony's beer," Solas clowned. Laughter filled the mess hall.

"Ty, tell us," Salzgitter implored, sitting back in her chair. "You've been quiet about that communique. We want to know what it said."

"Yes, please," Solas added.

Adair raised his head in a gesture of authority. "Sorry Bette, Marisa. That's classified. Commander's orders."

"No, really, what did it say?" Solas pushed, thinking Adair might be kidding.

"He won the lottery," Johnson announced, setting his unused fork back onto his plate.

"I have... housekeeping duties," Adair said grimly, "Main Mission sent marching orders, courtesy of Computer. I won the dubious honor of cleaning out Commissioner Simmonds's former quarters."

Some dropped their utensils to the table tops. Others did double-takes. Nearby tables, where ever-curious Alphans had paused to listen, were completely silent.

"Did you say 'clean' or expose the room to the vacuum of space?" Salzgitter said.

"*Clean*," Adair emphasized. "More likely recycle his belongings, his clothing." He paused.

"Why?" Salzgitter argued, continuing her passionate contempt for the former Alphan.

"I'm very curious myself," Solas added, leaning closer.

Adair replied without skipping a beat, "Who knows? Maybe we're finally building a nursery. I haven't a clue."

The mood turned quickly from curiosity to gossip to ugliness.

“Torch the room, I say. No trace of that son of a bitch should remain,” smirked Stuart Parks from the next table. The dark-haired Eagle pilot was known for having strong opinions, but he wasn’t alone.

“He was a goddamn Judas, selling out our futures for his own glory,” uttered another male Alphan, continuing the negative rhetoric, “and he used to hover over my operations desk, always asking how far away from Earth we were. Over and over and over again... He thought HE was the commander, since he appointed Koenig as Gorski’s replacement. What an arrogant man.”

“He was a troubled soul,” a German-accented female voice spoke out. It came from a red-sleeved, voluptuous woman who had stood, plate and glass in hand, ready to depart the hall. “He should be pitied. Unless you heard his screams from the Kaldorian spaceship, you would *never* understand.” With those words, Tanya Alexander left the mess hall, bringing a momentary silence to the large dining room in her wake.

Other Alphans stood up and ended their meals abruptly. The mere mention of the former Space Commission member brought decisive judgments and anguish from every Alphan. Every person had an opinion of the man, whether blaming him for the moon’s predicament, or feeling saddened by his loss.

“I think I lost my appetite,” Salzgitter added, “like everyone else here.”

Adair rose from the table, feeling enveloped by the dark stain of his pending assignment. He wondered if the job assignment had been given to Computer, so no one could be blamed for dishing out such a despised task.

“I’m... going to the hangar for a while, to wrap up some paperwork,” Adair said with a low-key voice. “Maybe I should get this assignment done after that. Better sooner than later.” He wandered off, feeling remorse for the anguish that had been created. He returned his dinnerware to the recycling receptacles before heading alone down the main section corridor.

CHAPTER FIVE

"I missed you at dinner today."

Molly Cranston stood outside of Ty Adair's office, pressing a clipboard against her orange jumpsuit. The tall blonde technician aimed her question at her fellow Alphan with a certain playful flirtation.

"That's because you're assigned to third shift," Adair replied. "Your dinnertime is my breakfast time." He continued to collate various papers from around his messy workspace. "Give me a minute. I need to get these reports gathered up."

Cranston entered into the office, focused on Adair's movements. Her blue eyes wandered across his form. An interested smile perked up across her lips. "Ty, I thought you were one of the Chief Engineers. Don't you have people to assign this work to?" she teased, setting the clipboard on one of the many crowded counter tops.

Adair stayed in motion, sweeping paperwork into poorly-formed piles. "Maybe I should ask your section lead to transfer you over here, then I could make it a direct order."

"Hmmm..." she wondered aloud with a playful tone. "That might not be a good idea. Subordinates shouldn't be sleeping with their bosses." She stood next to Adair, leaning intimately over his shoulder. He stood silent, feeling simultaneously aroused and amused.

"And it's not like we're sleeping together anyways," she continued.

"Not since Stoyanovski changed the work shift schedule you mean," he added, turning to face her. "I meant to come by earlier. I'm sorry."

She demurred slightly. "Next time, lover, don't wait two days. At least we can see each other in the evening, before I start work." She paused, looking at him squarely in the eyes. "Are you having any second thoughts?"

Adair shook his head slightly. *Things have moved fast*, he thought, *but you are remarkable. So beautiful, so bright and loving...*

Had they moved too quickly?

Cranston wasn't alone in sharing her affections, her interest in Adair. He had thought himself careful to show his interests in others; some women, like Cranston, were too aggressive to wait. And both Bette Salzgitter and Marisa Solas had also made enough overtures to send his senses into red alert.

And those lipstick imprinted notes of late were still something of a mystery.

This was Moonbase Alpha: a small community of almost 300 people. Any social missteps weren't easily dismissed, forgotten or forgiven. There were aspects of each woman that he was keenly drawn to; he had been attracted to Salzgitter, Solas and Cranston. And since consummating with Cranston, unbeknownst to the other women, he was closing the door on any new romances. *But was she the right one for him?*

He often remembered Dr. Ben Vincent's ruminations about genetic legacies. The Alphan gene pool was indeed limited. Successive generations would need diversity to avoid deleterious genes from becoming widespread. Immuno-depressed genetic disorders, among others, might become prevalent within a few generations.

Monogamy wasn't the issue, rather the much-needed acceptance that Alphan women might need to diversify their pregnancies to more than one father, whether within polyamorous relationships/couplings or surrogate pregnancies. Commander Koenig and Chief Medical Officer Helena Russell avoided such discussions, maintaining Moonbase Alpha's limited life support systems could not sustain an increased population. Not yet, anyways.

But the clock was ticking away.

And some couples were anxious to break that rule. And some unattached Alphans were realizing their choice of mates would dwindle quickly when the go-ahead was given. Still, Ty Adair wasn't certain of what he wanted. And that was a luxury ill-afforded as Molly Cranston wrapped her arms around him.

"*Moon to Adair...*" she spoke, trying to re-capture his attention. "Ty, are you having second thoughts? Maybe third thoughts by now?"

He returned the embrace. "You know, Molly, with regular duties—and now Eagle flight training—I'm going to have even less free time..."

"I'm not worried about that. As long as you're flying my assigned Eagle during Operation Exodus, what's a few more weeks of training?" she purred. Cranston leaned upwards, kissing him softly, then firmly. The connection ignited something all-knowing within Adair's soul. He returned the kiss with renewed passion.

"Just be patient with me, Molly. That's all I ask."

"Oh, I'll be patient," she said, pulling away slowly. "I can't guarantee that others won't be, but I'll do my best." Cranston was a harmless flirt by nature; however, her magnetic charm brought her and Adair together weeks ago. He remained convinced that "her siren songs had seduced her" while she claimed she couldn't resist "the most handsome Alphan on the hangar deck"—something that brought a brief ego-bruising to the charismatic Alan Carter, among others.

Adair finished gathering his papers, combining the small stacks into an overflowing folder which he carried towards the open office door. Cranston joined him, moving out into the adjacent hallway.

He looked to her, although his body language indicated he was going in the opposite direction. "I have a temporary duty assignment, courtesy of Main Mission. Can I swing by later tonight? I'll fill you in."

Cranston looked disappointed, even puzzled. "O-okay," she responded.

Adair continued down the corridor, then stopped mid-way and returned to her.

"Hey, I'm a commlock message away," he said, trying to get her full attention. "Are you feeling alright?"

She smiled weakly. She had worried about others within his section, other women that might be interested in her new lover. Was he brushing her off?

"You go," Cranston said, "I'm going to the solarium, then the gym before my shift starts."

They kissed again. It was brief, but reaffirming. Both Alphans went their opposite ways within the hallway, neither looking back.

CHAPTER SIX

The term “living quarters” gave Ty Adair a slight chill.

He stood outside the former occupant’s door, hesitating to raise his commlock to de-activate the door seal.

In the many months since Commissioner Gerald Simmonds’s departure from Moonbase Alpha, his assigned quarters lay vacant. There were no replacements checking in, no special guests to accord the room to.

The room assignment itself was located far, far away from other Alphan quarters. When Commander Koenig learned of Simmonds’s cavalier actions, followed by his unwelcomed appearance on the moonbase, the commander made certain he was housed far away from Main Mission, even outside of Accommodations Unit, in the distant Alien Life Sciences building by Launch Pad Three. Unfortunately for Paul Morrow, among other operations staff, the Commissioner spent ample time in the command area when he wasn’t sulking in his quarters, where he had been recovering from the mild concussion received during Breakaway. He remained alone during Alpha’s first, post-Breakaway alien encounter with the resurrected astronaut, Lee Russell. But he made more frequent—and vocal—appearances after that.

Simmonds’s self-imposed isolation was further fueled by self-pity. He had failed with the Meta probe launch. He had failed to prevent the explosive nuclear waste chain reactions that hurled the moon into deep space. And his over-inflated ego would not accept full responsibility. It had been easier to embrace denial as the basis of his pending salvation and redemption. *In time, people will understand*, he thought. *It wasn't my fault. They will come to understand when their anger, their rage, their grief lessens. It was for the greater good!*

That day of redemption never came for Commissioner Simmonds.

The bearded technocrat had the dubious honor of being Moonbase Alpha’s last visitor before Breakaway occurred. At the height of his glory, he stood in Main Mission, pompous and arrogant as ever, to watch over the dismantling of Nuclear Waste Disposal Area Two... and to witness the area’s thermonuclear explosions first-hand.

His arrival on the moon was politically-charged. The Meta probe mission had been delayed, no thanks to ever-increasing problems on the moon. Astronauts had fallen mysteriously ill during training, savaged by a unknown malady which brought madness, then death. The launch schedule continued to lag. And his office installed John Robert Koenig as the moonbase’s ninth leader, replace veteran cosmonaut Commander Anton Gorski. It was a highly-charged political railroading that few could ignore.

As Simmonds once declared, “Nothing must stop us. *Nothing.*”

Simmonds had felt the unrelenting pressure from colleagues and government leaders alike, all of whom wanted humanity's next quantum leap into the universe to proceed without delay. The signal from planet Meta had proved intelligent life may have existed amongst the stars. And untold expenses and resources had been poured into the Meta probe mission to justify another crowning achievement amongst the stars. As with the Ultra probe mission, why travel to one of the planets within our own solar system when mankind could soar amongst the stars themselves?

Ironically, Simmonds saw his office's dream realized. The thermonuclear explosions of Nuclear Waste Disposal Area Two had hurled the Moon from Earth's orbit. The 311 men and women of Moonbase Alpha had been unwillingly drafted into a generational ship, cast adrift amongst the stars.

"*Damn him,*" Adair thought aloud.

He keyed a special numeric combination into his commlock unit. The familiar activation sound rang out from the small handheld unit, accompanying the unsealing of the door. He shuddered, shaking in pain as the door retracted in the corridor wall.

"C-cold!" he shouted, quickly turning away from the doorway. The freakish blast of frozen air continued to assault him.

He should have remembered: The quarters had been vacant for months. Life support had been reduced in this section. No one, including himself, had the foresight to increase the room's heat. He stood back in the corridor, shivering and hunched over, pointing his commlock again to close the room. Life support services would need to increase the temperature remotely; he had no intention of re-entering to find the manual thermostat.

•••

Commissioner Simmonds and *cold* were synonymous. His actions, particularly during September 1999, spoke volumes. He hadn't a single care in the world for the astronaut crews who risked life and limb. Progress had been his singular focus. But it was progress—with an allegiance to the world powers that would govern and guide humanity into the new frontier—that tempered his resolve. Since the first moon missions of the 1960s, the space race morphed into a technological marathon without end. Successive space missions in the 1970s and 1980s downplayed the armaments race, causing nations to focus their national pride on the next discovery, the next achievement in outer space... with little care for growing problems on their own planet.

Simmonds was a product of that era.

The thermonuclear conflicts of 1987 nearly ended everything. Nations, small and large, faced new beginnings. The changing tide brought the global community together as never before.

And while the space race had been a catalyst to the conflict, it served a greater purpose: To rid the world of nuclear weaponry. To unite nations as never before. To avoid such destructive conflict ever again. And to ensure the survival of the human race itself.

Many felt the discarded atomics should be rocketed into the ultimate nuclear furnace: the Sun.

However, the scientific and political communities had forged a silent, contrarian alliance. They wanted to preserve and grow their space program budgets. The moon was the key. With a renewed mission statement, the fledgling lunar output known as Moonbase Alpha would be the gateway to Earth's salvation. Nuclear waste, whether from dissembled armaments or processing plants, would be stored off-planet. The multi-national space settlement would oversee the ongoing, mass disposals of materials in special dump sites. With a touch of irony, as mankind turned it's back on its atomic past, the waste was stored on the moon's far side, away from anyone's view.

Countries stepped forward to eliminate their stockpiles under the World Nuclear Elimination Treaty. The act was sweetened by several major nations who bore the brunt of the disposal costs... All of whom were the primary supporters of Moonbase Alpha.

And Simmonds made certain it stayed that way. *Progress depended on it.*

•••

Adair stood quietly in the hallway, finishing a follow-up commlock communication with Life Support. Normal temperatures were almost restored.

From the end of the desolate hallway, voices echoed. Adair already felt jumpy with his duty assignment; he felt a tinge of anxiety and fear. *Wasn't this particular section vacant?*

From the distance, the voices grew in clarity.

"It's spooky over here."

"I think he's nearby... there he is!"

Both Bette Salzgitter and Ian Johnson approached, stopping short of the doorway.

"Are you sure that's not Simmonds's ghost?" joked Salzgitter, looking straight through Adair as though it were his astral presence was fading from view.

"I seriously hope you brought hot coffee or hot tea," Adair quipped.

"I thought you were supposed to be cleaning," Johnson replied sarcastically, eyeing the closed door.

Adair gestured to the former Commissioner's quarters. "I was about to. No one warned me that life support had been reduced in this section. Life Support services is working on it, though. The room was freezing cold!"

“Almost like Death warmed over?” Salzgitter winked.

“Is nothing sacred?” Adair said, shaking his head in a dual display of disgust and acceptance for the morbid situation. “What brings you two over here?”

“Well, Ian here decided to be a gentleman and stick around the mess hall until Marisa felt better,” Salzgitter smiled. She looked towards the door. “We were also... curious... about all of this.”

“I’d rather get this over with,” Adair sighed. “You know, three people working together could make this go faster...”

“Speak for yourself, mate. I’m just a casual observer,” Johnson replied, half-serious.

Adair pointed his commlock at the door controls again. He re-entered the special code into the wall unit; the unlocking mechanism came to life again. The door slid back open with a blast of newly heated, warm air greeting them. Adair stepped forward, peering cautiously into the dark room. He entered, trying to make out the outlines of uncertain forms, all of which were lit by the soft glow of starlight coming through the row of windows. Several large magnitude stars were nearby, although the moon’s trajectory lay in another direction. The muted light brought an eerie luminosity to the environs.

“If these are executive-level quarters, I can understand why he was so cranky all the time,” Adair said.

“Maybe Simmonds’s ghost is in here,” Salzgitter said, pushing Adair deeper into the room. She withdrew her hands from Adair’s back and noticed the assortment of standard Alphan furniture. More importantly, she noted the lack of many personal belongings. “He certainly lived... spartan.”

“Well, that makes my job easier,” Adair noted. “Anyone up for dusting?”

Johnson walked back into the corridor where a box of cleaning supplies awaited. “I’m used to dirt and dust. I’m a geologist.”

•••

Far away from Moonbase Alpha, across the southeastern portion of the moon’s so-called “dark side”, unseen muons of carbon matter and imperceptible plasma peppered the lunar surface without abatement. The assault continued in waves, most of which barely registered with numerous geological and orbital sensors that kept constant watch over assorted astronomical activities.

The moon had no atmosphere to shield it from such barrages. The planetoid was rocky, barren and exposed. But since Breakaway on September 13, 1999, numerous incidents had changed landmarks across the surface, from the explosion-scarred regions from the former nuclear waste disposal areas one and two, to minor space debris impacts that reshaped much of the Vallis Rheita, among other maria, craters and mountain ranges.

What hadn't changed was the moon's rotational cycle. It had remained virtually unchanged since Earth orbit, something which Alpha's scientific community had no rational explanation for. Had the lunar body slowed its rotation, Alpha's gravity towers could have helped to compensate with the lighter weight, although lunar excursions would become more dangerous. If the rotation increased, crushing gravimetric forces would have ended the Alphan's journey.

Yet *something* kept the moon safe in the face of ever-present cosmic forces, both tangible and unseen. The moon continued to rotate at almost precisely the same speed as when it orbited Earth, no matter what cosmic influences arose.

Something mysterious and unknown.

CHAPTER SEVEN

"I could use a beer about now."

Johnson turned from the bathroom entrance to see how his colleagues were doing. His comment was ignored as Salzgitter and Adair finished lifting the large desk unit against the wall. It had been twenty minutes since they began and they were almost finished.

"You two are taking this assignment seriously," Johnson added.

"It would be nice, Ian, if you went ahead and cleaned while you were in there," Adair fired back while lifting the desk chair to the top of the unit, "Don't tell me Simmonds actually knew how to scrub out the head."

"Funny, I always thought he was full of sh!t," Salzgitter improvised.

Johnson laughed. "Actually, it looks spotless in here. As much as he complained and caused headaches, he kept the place in excellent shape. I'd classify him as a neat freak," he said. "I could probably get some of my geology analyses tools in here and not find even the tinniest speck."

Adair stood close to the wall, catching his breath. He drew his gaze across the row of wall panels which lit the room. This outermost section of Alpha was relatively new compared to the rest of the base. Having been constructed back in 1997, none of the lighting panels should have reached their operational lifespan for another ten years. But yet again, he noted a subtle shadow behind the wall. A small darkened patch which was partially visible to the naked eye; more visible due to the odd lighting within the room.

The shadow had caught his attention when they began moving the Alphan furniture. Subconsciously, he had guided the furniture stacks close to the affected wall section. Consciously, he was starting to take a closer look, now that the cleaning was done.

The flight technician drew a long stare, then pressed his hands against the plastic wall coverings. "Well, forget the analyzing tools in there, Ian." He shifted the partitions slightly inwards.

"I found something out here..."

Both Bette Salzgitter and Ian Johnson stood side-by-side, entranced by Ty Adair's declaration. They watched as he moved closer to the wall, pushing on the seams of the plate coverings. Normally, these sections of wall were removable, as they housed large-sized L.E.D. illumination units. But something *else* was placed within this serviceable wall unit.

It was a book.

Adair's hands pushed aside the plastic veneer of the plating to pull out the tome. The cover bore the initials "G.S." in the lower right corner while the seal of the Space Commission had been embossed into the leathery sheen.

A small metallic lock kept the book from opening. He cradled it in his hands as Salzgitter and Johnson looked on.

"I know this is a bit cliché, but what do you think is in there?" Johnson pondered.

"It certainly isn't his little black address book," Salzgitter quipped.

Johnson volleyed back, "You know, this humor of yours..."

"Quiet, you two!" Adair snapped.

"*Commander Koenig will need to see this,*" he thought aloud. His mind raced. When he got this assignment, he wasn't sure what might be found within Simmonds's former lodgings. Had they found the book in the desk or table drawer, he might be less suspicious, less inquisitive. However, this had been blatantly hidden. Simmonds didn't want anyone to find it.

And that made him even more curious than ever.

Adair fussed with the lock for a moment, then withdrew. Then, with more determination he dug in again, trying to wrench the book open.

"C'mon," Johnson muttered in soft tones, almost goading Adair. "C'mon, man..."

His fingers burned; his fingernails bordered on cracking.

The lock won. It wouldn't relent.

"Dammit!" Adair roared.

He turned, fueled by the adrenalin of the startling discovery, the frustration of the infernal lock and the fury over dealing with Simmonds's legacy. He slammed the book down onto the desktop.

And the lock sprung open.

"Saints above..." Salzgitter whispered.

"Or devils below," Adair finished. He picked the book up. An object from within the pages fell to the ground, shattering the silence within the room. All three jumped slightly as it impacted with a loud thud.

Simmonds's pen.

All three looked in unison away from the floor and back to the book within Adair's hands. He opened it wide, skipping the protocol of starting with page one. The book lay exposed around the middle section, visible to everyone. Handwriting filled the page, much of it in elegant cursive, mingled with intermittent scribbled notes.

"That bastard," Johnson cursed. "He didn't trust anything to our computer system."

"Maybe not. But I don't know that he would have typed in or recorded anything on Alpha during this entry," Salzgitter noted. "Look at the date."

"My God," Adair uttered, "April 30..."

"...1994."

This wasn't a recent compilation. Simmonds carried secrets from his past, secrets which were important enough to carry with him on his fateful trip to Alpha, secrets that he kept well-hidden.

"Are you sure that belonged to Simmonds? There was a Gene S—something that used to work in this section about a year ago—" Salzgitter said.

"No, not unless Gene went by the name Gerald," Adair added. He had flipped the book to the first page.

With Warmest Regards on a new position well-earned, Commissioner.

Congratulations, Gerald. May the Truth set you and Mankind free to a destiny amongst the stars.

- McDermott

Johnson shook his head. "Well, this McDermott fellow's well-wishes certainly came true, didn't they?"

Salzgitter knelt down to retrieve the fallen pen. *Aristocratic and ostentatious, like it's owner*, she thought. She couldn't tell if it was Mont Blanc, Michel Perchin, Cartier or another high-end brand. And she didn't know whether to admire the fallen writing tool or discard it in disgust.

"Look here. The first entry is dated April 20, 1994. Whatever he wrote about filled up a lot of pages during the following ten days—" Adair said. His eyes widened as he scanned the first page for various keywords and phrases.

"My God..." Adair whispered dramatically. "*What did the heavens deliver to us?*"

Both Salzgitter and Johnson leaned closer as Adair held the book wide open. Hand-drawn diagrams depicted "the dark side of the moon" by Simmonds's own description. Everyone knew the lunar far side was never permanently dark; it was a common misnomer. But the Commissioner knew better. And his notation took an equally dark and sinister tone when compared to the detailed drawings.

"Latitude 41.0° N. Longitude 121.7° W. Landau crater. Object A-1 identified."

To the three Alphans, selenographic coordinates and lunar landmark designations were the two most often used means to specify locations on the surface. The coordinates were comparable to the latitude and longitude of Earth. Every Alphan had memorized many of these items as part of their astronaut training. And every Alphan pilot and surface explorer had to eat, breathe and sleep the information.

These were the coordinates of the former Nuclear Waste Area number two.

But that wasn't the surprise that slammed into the minds of the Alphans.

"No life signs."

"No life signs?" Salzgitter asked.

"Mate, I think you cut the proverbial Gordian knot when you opened that book," Johnson replied. He walked away, gesturing with his hands in the air, then turned back to the other two. *"Bollocks!* I think we're getting in way over our heads here."

Adair gripped the book, never once looking up. Johnson lowered his head, shaking it slowly side to side.

A screeching sound broke the silence. Salzgitter dragged two chairs behind her.

"Have a seat, boys."

Johnson shook his head again, sitting down first. "Maybe we should have brought hot coffee with us after all."

"Whatever we discuss stays in this room. Agreed?" Adair asked.

"Yes."

"Yeah."

And with that, the newest chapter of Moonbase Alpha's saga started with a revisionistic change of history...

CHAPTER EIGHT

Bette Salzgitter sat forward in her chair, rubbing her eyes, “I never understood why the Lunar Commission shifted the nuclear dumps from the Dyson crater to Landau crater in the first place.”

The question made Ian Johnson perk up with a quick reply.

“Here’s the unofficial answer: Because they did poor planning. NWDA-1 may have been on the far side—and close enough for Alpha to maintain—but crews used to dump the waste in large stacks, then cover it with mountains lunar soil. Cheap economics, quick results. However the entire crater was filling up faster than planned. Up to 70% in less than a decade.”

He continued, “Did you know for the longest time, geophysicists and geologists were debating about using Hertzprung or Korolev for a second nuclear waste disposal site—regions tucked nicely away on the far side. But they chose Landau crater instead.”

“Strange location,” Salzgitter said.

Adair interrupted, “I remember the preliminary studies for Moonbase Beta years ago, until budgets shifted to exploration vehicles, like the Ultra probe. Everyone was betting on Clavius crater for the second base.”

Salzgitter agreed. “That sounds familiar. The rumors were: somewhere in the southern hemisphere so nuclear disposal duties could be equally shared with Alpha.”

“I remember that, too. Some politicians wanted twice as much waste removal from Earth. Alpha couldn’t support increased operations,” Adair said.

“It must have been during an election year. All promises, no action,” Salzgitter said wryly.

“Well, Alpha is located in Plato crater, in the northern hemisphere. Hertzprung or Korolev would have been fairly equi-distant between two bases, if Beta had gone online in or near Clavius. But Landau is close to Dyson,” Johnson said, “and that’s *really* far away from Clavius.”

Adair thumbed through the next two pages, taking more time to read the scribbled notes and drawings. Neither Salzgitter nor Johnson interrupted; they waited patiently for new nuggets of information to be revealed.

“It speaks of ‘Project Sekhmet’ in late April 1994,” Adair said.

“Sekhmet?” Johnson asked.

“We’ll look it up later. Keep reading,” Salzgitter urged.

“Simmonds talks about the features of Landau,” Adair said. “The outer rim is heavily eroded with multiple smaller craters and craterlets. The crater floor is mostly hilly and irregular. And... multiple impacts... fresh impacts... are registered in the northeastern quadrant.”

Adair continued, "He has satellite codes and telemetry report numbers written here. I... recognize the format from Alpha's orbital sensors."

"Not much has changed in six years," Salzgitter added, looking again over Adair's shoulder. "Same data stylings, same code outputs."

Adair noted, "Each page gives more information than the next. It's hard to follow. Most of this must have been in Simmonds's head... Look here, I can't make heads nor tails of this."

Johnson and Salzgitter leaned closer, seeing hundreds of words written tightly and frantically by Simmonds within his journal. Some were keywords, some was written as shorthand. But it was the sketch of the moon that drew Salzgitter's focus. More specifically, crossing lines that he had drawn across representations of the Landau crater.

"I think you both need to see this," she said. She moved to the now-active comm-post within the room, using her commlock to activate her access into Alpha's main library records. She clicked again on her commlock, speaking directives to Computer. "Show me blueprint overlay for Nuclear Waste Disposal Area Two, anytime before September 13, 1999."

The Computer spoke with its dry, digitized female voice, "Access denied. Lunar Commission Command authorization required."

"Damn and double damn... *wait*—" Salzgitter said, "show me Meta probe training course number one. Photographic reference, one to three kilometers altitude."

The small comm-post screen displayed a colorless topographic map outlining the entire lunar course taken by Meta probe astronaut trainees, dated August 23, 1999. Salzgitter pointed to one section of the detailed map.

"See? Right here."

Adair stood to look, "Bette, move your hand, we can't... oh my... *is that...*"

"Yup," she answered wryly. "X marks the spot."

Someone had a perverse sense of humor, Adair thought. While Nuclear Waste Disposal Area One had consisted of numerous haystack-like mounds on the lunar surface, the newer disposal site was designed with an automated system to place the waste cannisters deep under the lunar surface. The large processing station was considerably more high-tech. And the overall criss-crossed design looked like a gigantic "X" from high above.

"*X marks the spot...*" Adair repeated softly, echoing Salzgitter's words.

"All of this is making sense," Salzgitter replied. "Something lands—or crash-lands—on Landau crater. Since it's on the far side of the moon, Earth doesn't witness the crash. There's a cover-up, a blackout of any information. And the site is covered up with the construction of Nuclear Waste Disposal Area number two just weeks later."

“Wait, wait... You’re saying something... alien... crashed on the moon back in ‘94?” Johnson asked, trying to absorb everything that was being said, “and no one, not a single person, ever came forward to disclose it? Assuming any of this is true...”

“Ty, weren’t you stationed on Alpha in ‘94?” Salzgitter asked.

“Briefly,” Adair said, blinking repeatedly, trying to recall the past.

“Where you here when this happened?” Johnson asked.

Adair thought aloud. “I had my first rotation on Alpha in January 1994. That was about six months. Then I came back again in 1996, then again in 1998 and never went back to Earth after that. I don’t recall seeing anything. And being on the hangar deck you see most everything coming and going from the base.”

“And I didn’t rotate into Alpha duty until late 1998,” said Johnson.

“I came aboard in ‘99. Lucky me, eh?” said Salzgitter. “That reminds me...” She spoke into her commlock unit again, “Computer, display orbital sensor data for Landau crater region, timeframe April 1994.”

The methodical female computer voice responded slowly after a momentary pause, “Data not found.”

“Of course not, Bette,” Johnson said. “Those records wouldn’t exist.”

“Why not? Did someone purge the record banks?”

“Nope.”

“And how would you know?” she asked.

“Because,” Johnson said coldly, “selenological data isn’t kept. The moon’s surface doesn’t change. There’s no atmosphere, no surface dynamics like volcanoes and rivers. It isn’t like tracking a planetary weather system. The moon is... dead. Yesterday’s photos are the same as today’s.”

“Unless we’re caught in a meteor shower or storm,” Adair added, “then you’d want to record the surface changes.”

“Moot point. Computer tracks changes, comparing the last scans with the most recent ones, then purges the data banks. It’s too much data to store in the archives. Especially when we’re storing every byte of information on our interstellar encounters,” Johnson replied, pointing his own commlock towards the comm-post. “Computer, geologic survey data bank, subject Landau crater region, 1994.”

“Data not found,” the voice responded, with accompanying text on the small screen.

“Well, someone was thorough,” Salzgitter quipped.

“Computer, geologic survey data bank, subject Moon. Show any and all locations, 1994,” Johnson asked.

“Data not found.”

“I hoped something might be there. Each year, geo-sciences creates compilations of the entire year’s worth of surveys,” Johnson said. “There should be *something* there for ‘94. But nothing exists. *Nothing.*”

Salzgitter interrupted, holding up her commlock again. "Computer, geologic survey data bank, subject Landau crater," she queried, "anything during or before 1999."

The voice responded: "Options: 1965 through 1977: U.S.A., U.S.S.R. and European spacecraft entries. 1999: Moonbase Alpha post-Breakaway."

"This was one heck of a cover-up," Adair said coldly. "Generic spacecraft maps and images from early moon missions. Enough for computer queries to show relevant data for general searches. And nothing else."

"What about the 1999 entries?" Salzgitter asked.

"What about them?" Johnson said, looking to the floor. "It's sensor data since we broke away from the Earth. Surface pictures that we've seen hundreds of times. And pictures of the far side. After NWDA-2 went up. We've seen those pictures a thousand times over."

"I know. *I remember*," Salzgitter said, holding back tears. She was quickly reminded of the first time she saw the massive cratering caused by the thermonuclear explosions, the exotic texturing on the lunar landscape, and the reality that quickly set in of an explosion that didn't fragment the moon, nor decimate the lunar outpost. These images were reminders of a blessing... and a curse. They were images that evoked strong, dire emotions no matter how many times they were viewed.

"Forget Computer and listen to this," Adair announced, turning pages rapidly back and forth. "Project Sekhmet was involved in search and recovery operations. There's a detailed overview of operations planning, of certain... things... they found. And a roster of people that were involved."

He looked up from the journal.

"And my name is right here."

CHAPTER NINE

"Excuse me?" Ian Johnson asked, befuddled and perplexed.

Ty Adair grew despondent as he looked again at the handwritten pages. "My name... my name is, is..."

Bette Salzgitter took hold of Simmonds's journal, trying to find the entry herself. Her fingers fumbled the pages to find the entry, her eyes scanning the thick mess of writings.

"Oh my God. Ty, your name... *it's right here.*"

Johnson walked away from the comm-post, reattaching his commlock to his belt. "I don't get it. Were you involved or not, Ty?"

Adair looked lost and confused. He stared at the far wall while Johnson knelt down to see the entry for himself.

"What are these markings?" Johnson asked. Most names had numbers next to them. But there was no legend, no index to clarify what they meant. And worse yet, a page had been ripped out from the book. It was an ominous sign of information that no one, not even Simmonds, should ever see again.

"Did you notice?" Johnson asked. "There's a missing page here. Maybe two."

Salzgitter spoke up. "We could always do that thing you see in the spy thriller vids. You know, rub the paper to see if there's an imprint on the next sheet of paper."

"You're forgetting something: They use pencils. We don't have those on Alpha," Johnson joked. "Look at the pages—the paper stock is thick. It didn't go through."

"*My name is in that book...*" Adair kept repeating to himself.

"Ty! Shake it off, man! We'll figure this out," Johnson said. "Maybe someone was just keeping tabs on who's who on the flight decks. If they were moving things in and out of Alpha, your section would have seen a lot of traffic, cargo containers, and crews coming through. Do you remember anything?"

Adair shook his head. "No! I wish I did..."

"One thing is certain: If you're acting, you deserve an award," Salzgitter said, walking away from Ty. "Ian, he doesn't know anything."

"Ty, what about the other names? Anyone you recognize?" Johnson inquired.

"Yeah," Adair answered, "Everyone in my section during 1994 is listed there. In this column here."

Johnson looked at the journal. "All of these names have those numbers next to them. They're the same numbers, too."

Salzgitter wondered aloud, "Are any of those people still on Alpha?"

Adair scanned the page again. "No, none of them."

He paused. “Just me.”

“Maybe you’re a sleeper agent, waiting to be re-activated,” Salzgitter said in a low voice, raising her arms to mimic the Frankenstein monster.

“Can you recall anything, Ty? C’mon, man,” Johnson asked anew.

Adair looked at Johnson blankly, “My first tour of Alpha was 1994. I spent most of my time keeping machinery running. The base wasn’t even completed at the time—most of my memories consist of constantly moving things around the hangar decks, pulling and stripping down rocket engines, and trying to score the occasional moonwalk with a survey team. I can remember when we had first generation Eagles up here, about six total, along with those Mark IX Hawk ships. We used to joke the only reason those military ships were—“

Adair drew a long breath, pausing to soak in the self-realization that had set in.

“—because we thought they were actually defending us against any alien invasions,” he said. “My God. Rumors do start for a reason, you know?”

“But those Hawks were relics of the 1980s,” Johnson said.

“And you have a valid reason why armed spacecraft were housed on Alpha?” Salzgitter asked. “Don’t forget Alpha’s laser tanks, either.”

“Yes, I do,” Adair said. “If you were building a large space base on the moon, and other nations were threatening your security, wouldn’t you safeguard with a show of force?”

“I guess I’m blissfully naive about such things,” Salzgitter confessed.

“Much healthier that way, much less stressful to be in denial, right?” Adair admonished.

“Look who’s talking, Ty,” Salzgitter fired back.

“Hey! That’s *enough*,” Johnson interrupted. “We’re drawing conclusions when we have a book full of answers right here.” Johnson pointed his commlock again at the comm-post. “Computer, identify keyword Sekhmet, spelled s-e-k-h-m-e-t.”

Computer replied with more data than the trio had expected.

Johnson narrowed Computer’s search parameters and got a concise entry:

Sekhmet

Earth: A Egyptian sun goddess, one of the most ancient Deities known to the human race. She represents the scorching, burning, destructive heat of the sun. She was a fierce goddess of war, the destroyer of the enemies of Ra and Osiris. Her temper was uncontrollable. In the ancient legend of Ra and Hathor, Sekhmet’s anger became so great, she would have destroyed all of mankind if Ra had not taken pity on us. He tricked her by dyeing beer blood-red which she drank believing it to be human blood and became drunk.

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She soon forgot her anger and humanity was saved from destruction. She was known as "Lady of the Place of the Beginning of Time," and "One Who Was Before the Gods Were."

What is known of her by most people is a single myth called "The Myth of the Destruction of Mankind." In this myth humans entered into a conspiracy to overthrow the gods. Sekhmet is Protectress of the Divine Order and, as such, protects the gods against evil forces. Like the lioness she fiercely protects what she loves and that for which she is responsible. She has never been known to initiate an attack, but welcomes the opportunity to respond to aggression; her power is dedicated to righteous ends. All of her actions stem from loyalty and love. Sekhmet symbolised power, grandeur and wildness.

"There's a treasure trove of metaphors to draw on," Adair said, intrigued by the text. "Computer, is there an entry for 'Project Sekhmut'?"

Computer responded: "No data found."

"Definitely a covert operation," Johnson said. "Keep reading the journal, Ty."

...

"Sorry for the delay. I had to dodge two scientists in the main corridor."

Ian Johnson came through the entryway bearing three small cups and a pitcher of steaming coffee. The smell of the java blend stood out against the sterilized environment of Commissioner Simmonds's former living quarters.

Interestingly, Moonbase Alpha's life support depended heavily upon numerous scrubbing filters. Dust and gases, such as carbon dioxide, were concerns, although bacteria removal remained a primary one. Most surfaces, such as walls, floors and ceilings, were treated and embedded with germ-killing substances, a special nanoparticle coating that absorbed ultraviolet light below a certain wavelength which, in turn, gave the particles an oxidizing quality stronger than any commercial bleach. Even the common cold had little place to hide on Alpha. Or the scent of fresh-brewed coffee which permeated the air. The scrubbers were already working both silently and ultra-efficiently to cleanse the environment.

Johnson stood near Salzgitter and Adair, both of whom sat together on a couch. A long table sat between them and another couch pulled close-by. They had re-arranged the furniture since Johnson left for the closest Alphan mess hall. His errand had given them plenty of time to read through Simmonds's journal.

"I guess you didn't hear me: I hoped you could grab some tea," Adair said, reaching for one of the cup. "I'm not sure I want to use what Simmonds left behind."

“A few sealed packets of English Breakfast, unfortunately.”

“Give me a cup of Darjeeling and I’m happy, thank you very much,” Adair said. “Simmonds lacked taste.”

Salzgitter grinned. “If I didn’t know better, Ty, I’d say you were raised English by the number of cups you drink each day. Where tea is concerned, anyways.”

“The champagne of teas indeed. Hydroponics has *Thea sinensis* growing. You might volunteer to help them harvest and prepare it,” Johnson said. “You’d get first rights to using it.”

“Are you leading a double life, Mr. Johnson?” Salzgitter asked. “‘*Thea sinensis*’?”

“I donate time here and there to hydroponics. Being a geologist and all, I have fun with the soil monitoring,” Johnson responded, feeling slightly embarrassed by the admission. “And I’m British. So sue me for being a stereotype.”

“Snob,” Salzgitter admonished teasingly.

“Forget what I said about cross-training, Ian. I’m beginning to regret it,” Adair said in a wisecracking tone. “So, do you want to hear what we found?”

“Go ahead, Mr. Expert,” Johnson replied, sporting a wry smile as he sat across from his colleagues.

Salzgitter spoke up. “We couldn’t find anything else about Ty mentioned in the journal, but there’s a gold mine of secrets here. You may want to have a seat.”

Adair began, “In the last week of April 1994, seismic monitors registered a major quake in the Landau crater region. No telescopes or sensor arrays, even on the moon’s far side, had tracked any objects.” He flipped through a number of pages, re-scanning various entries. “Alpha dispatched a survey team... Commander Sabatini ordered an immediate quarantine, including a news blackout.”

Johnson exclaimed, “I remember when that happened! The media went gangbusters over that one.”

Adair nodded, then continued. “The command staff knew what was happening; the rest of the base was told there was a possible viral outbreak. A couple of people from the survey team returned with an unknown fatal illness—it wasn’t a cover story. The bodies were cremated immediately ‘to destroy any chance of further infection.’ But command kept us in the dark about specifics. If you wanted to keep your career in astro services, you didn’t ask.”

“Apparently no one did,” Salzgitter added. “The Lunar Commission eventually reported radiation sickness was the cause, not an alien virus.”

“And they were right: it was a form of magnetic radiation sickness that afflicted some of the first survey team members. And by reading Simmonds’s notes in August and September 1999, he believed it was accelerated version of the illness that killed those disposal area workers and Meta probe astronauts in 1999,” Adair said. “The bastard knew what was killing those people. If he revealed anything, it would have blown the entire facade behind Nuclear Waste Disposal Area Two.”

“That ‘quake’ was the impact of a spacecraft—an alien starship of ancient origin which crashed into the moon. There are some drawings here. It doesn’t look like anything we’ve encountered since Breakaway.”

Salzgitter injected, “So, we were about to have extraterrestrial visitors long before the Kaldorians would reach Earth.”

Adair interrupted, “Yes. And Simmonds believed the ship may have had hostile intentions, had it reached Earth. Those were his paranoid conclusions anyways.”

Johnson peered at the drawings. “That ship—it’s bizarre! That’s the truest definition of an ‘alien’ ship I’ve seen yet. No linear lines along the hull, almost an organic shape and texture. Makes me wonder if that was the actual design, or if the crash completely wrecked it.”

Adair nodded in agreement. “That ship was badly damaged by the impact. There was no way it would ever fly again.” He turned more pages within the book. “There were a series of quick salvage operations begun under the control of this ‘Project Sekhmut’... essentially by Commissioner Simmonds. They had concerns about some countries trying to secure the ship for themselves.”

“Then they had a masterstroke idea: The next nuclear waste disposal area would be opened in Landau crater. Funding for Moonbase Beta was delayed, which ensured the construction could take place. It was a massive cover-up. Literally.”

“I always wondered why such a huge budget was spent on NWDA-2,” Johnson said. “The high-tech underground disposal construction work, the laser fences... *that* I never understood. Until now.”

“Speaking of high tech, did you think it was a coincidence that Moonbase Alpha got its first anti-gravity towers a year later? Or that a new advanced spacecraft dubbed ‘Eagle’ was equipped with anti-gravity shields and generators?” Adair said. “Some scientific geniuses managed some of their own amazing breakthroughs. Their legacy is all around us. But we had ‘alien’ assistance after April 1994. If you thought all of the economics funded into R&D generated it, you’re mistaken.”

“According to various entries, the ship was cannibalized, but various technologies such as the massive drive units couldn’t be. They were too big, too heavy to move without being detected. And they were considered inoperable after the crash. Or so Simmonds’s operatives believed.”

“The drives derived their energy from spacial radiation: Literally soaking up various spectrums of energies and storing them by some unknown means as ‘fuel.’ Maybe in 4th dimensional tesseract, maybe in some quantum energizer... Simmonds never knew. He has a number of theoretical analyses listed which he assigned to various people for further research. I’m sure someone like Professor Bergman, Dr. Kodai or Dr. Jänönen could make sense of it. It’s pure gibberish to me.”

“Some of the drive elements had been stripped away during the first investigations, then considered too dangerous to continue analyzing. Instead of returning the parts back to NWDA-2, they were stored somewhere else that no one—no one in their right mind—would ever look.”

“Nuclear Waste Disposal Area One,” Johnson answered.

“NWDA-1, yes,” Adair continued, “And essentially putting a dry sponge next to water. And worse yet, burying the ship—including the large drive units—under *140 times more nuclear waste* within NWDA-2.”

Adair drew his breath. “When NWDA-1 went up, it was caused by a few meager pieces of alien technology, saturated with energies that eventually manifested into magnetic radiation. Then NWDA-2 exploded two days later, super-charged from built-up energies. Whether Area One or Area Two caused the other to detonate, it doesn’t say. But this explains why a thermonuclear explosion didn’t knock the moon on an impossible trajectory away from Earth, or into interstellar space. Something... mysterious... was involved. Something beyond explanation or mortal comprehension. Something unknown that still affects us all.”

“Maybe something metaphysical occurred, something drawn or fueled by those unknown energies. Maybe some cosmic gateway opened, maybe some Higher Power took notice of us—something that takes an occasional interest in us. Maybe some unfathomable alien experiment beyond our comprehension, maybe divinity, maybe simple fate in the universal order of things. *I don’t know.* The theories in this journal are outlandish... although after some of our encounters last year, maybe they aren’t.”

Johnson asked, “So, why hasn’t anyone ever come forward about this?”

“That’s the true mystery. Until now.”

Salzgitter beamed her commlock at the distant comm-post. “Computer, requesting data record for Project Dayea.”

“Two entries: One: Phillipine mythology: Goddess of Secrets. Two: Access requires command override.”

“So Simmonds didn’t purge everything?”

“Maybe he forgot. Maybe some backup was restored with the data still encrypted. The good part is: Commander Koenig should be able to open it.”

CHAPTER TEN

"You're telling me that Simmonds was part of a six year-long conspiracy to cover up an alien landing on the moon?"

Commander John Koenig paced the length of his large office as Ty Adair sat quietly in the lower conference area with Professor Victor Bergman. Adair felt the violent stings of disbelief and betrayal caused by the former Commissioner upon Koenig. The emotions ran even higher given the ungodly time of night that he had called upon both men to meet.

Koenig paused by the large Earth globe in the upper level of the office. Before Simmonds left Alpha with the earthbound Kaldorians, he said, "*I got to be Commissioner by doing what was necessary, not what was right.*" Those words continued to haunt Koenig's thoughts as the present discussion deepened. In due time, Koenig would likely find himself following unwillingly into the same mindset to keep his people safe. There would be more "human decisions required"—as Alpha's Computer might say—which would test the upper limits of his command, his character. And those he had been charged with safeguarding.

"I might wonder if this subject is too weighty to discuss at this hour," Bergman added.

Koenig frowned. "It's... 0346 hours. You're probably right." His gaze was unfocused, frustrated. "Ty, you said only two other people know about this journal?"

"Yes, Commander."

"We'll talk later today when we're better rested," Koenig said. Simmonds's book lay atop the stark white table across from Adair and Bergman as both men rose to leave. "Assuming I can sleep, Commander. The contents were... rather disturbing," Adair said.

"See if you can get some extra sleep," Koenig said. "I'll message your section before I turn in. Make it a late duty shift, okay?"

"Instant karma for sacrificing your free time for this cleaning assignment, right?" Bergman added.

Adair nodded, "Thank you, sir. Good night." He looked to the sage scientist. "Professor."

Bergman smiled and patted him on the shoulder. Koenig opened the side door with his commlock for Adair to depart. He closed it right away.

"John," Bergman uttered in a soft tone, "do you recall when Simmonds once said 'Hope is the key to morale'? New revelations like these aren't going to help boost spirits."

"We need to lock this down. And fast," Koenig replied. "This is only going to bring despair, not hope to Alpha."

“Um-hmm,” the aged professor murmured. “To wit, ‘Thy throne is darkness in the abyss of light, a blaze of glory that forbids the sight.’”

“It would seem that something went out in blaze of glory in 1994...” Koenig grimaced.

“And 1999, too.”

•••

The Medical Center was quiet, given the early morning hour. And Moonbase Alpha itself was undergoing a silent transformation as third shift was ending and first shift was about to begin.

Doctor Helena Russell stood alongside Doctor Ben Vincent, studying a robust set of reports on the desk before them. She hoped—even prayed—that her fellow physician might have helpful ideas she hadn’t considered. She dreaded the thought of returning to her private office where their patient waited.

“Is she taking it well?” Vincent asked.

“Considering she’s known for a few days, yes,” Russell said softly. “Do you see anything that might contradict the medical data? Anything that we’re misreading here?”

“If you mean any miracle cures, then no,” Vincent responded, maintaining a low-key voice. “If circumstances were different, I would have already transferred her back to Earth. She needs specialized care.”

“I wish we had that option, Ben. We don’t. There’s no way to synthesize the pharmaceuticals we need.”

Vincent nodded. “It’s too advanced at this point. I’d say one week, maybe two at best. She wants to keep working, though.”

Russell turned away from Vincent, looking to the private office. “I’ve already cleared it with Commander Koenig. He’s agreed. At least until she becomes too ill.”

Vincent walked alongside her. “Helena, I’d like to help with the procedure she requested.”

“She needs to abstain from eating and drinking for eight more hours than we can start.”

“I’ll make sure the cryobanks are ready to receive.”

“What bothers me most: If she had her physical a few months ago, we would have detected this. We could have actually prevented this with other treatments,” Russell lamented.

Vincent acknowledged with sorrow in his voice. “I know. I think about that all the time. I may start ordering more physicals around the base.”

Russell looked towards her office where the afflicted female Alphan sat. “Ben, one other thing. Make sure our staff maintains the utmost confidentiality. She wants to keep all of this quiet, even from her section chiefs. For now, anyways.”

“That’s good,” Vincent said, surprising Russell. “I think she needs a positive atmosphere around her, not people feeling sorry or pessimistic.”

“I don’t know that I could be optimistic,” Russell said sorrowfully, “with a terminal illness.”

Vincent agreed and added, “Maybe the procedure won’t save her, but it could save Alpha in the long run. There’s optimism for you.”

CHAPTER ELEVEN

“Wake up, sunshine.”

Marisa Solas and Bette Salzgitter hovered over Ty Adair’s bedside.

“Wakey, wakey, sleepyhead.”

“Not unless you brought breakfast with you,” he retorted, turning over to bury his exhaustion-filled head firmly into his pillows. He rolled back over, asking, “What time is it anyways?”

“0934 hours. You overslept your duty shift. That’s why we’re here,” Solas said, poking his shoulder playfully.

“Main Mission cleared entrance for us. We wanted to see if you were alright,” Salzgitter said.

“You weren’t answering our commlock or comm-post calls,” Solas added.

Remembering that Salzgitter knew about the recovered journal—and Solas might not—Adair phrased his words carefully. *He wanted to say, “The Commander actually ordered me to sleep in and report to work when rested.”* Instead, he pulled his punches.

“I’m feeling.. under the weather.”

“Well, time to get up,” Solas smiled. She sat on the edge of the bed. He exhaled hard, knowing his day was about to start whether he liked it or not.

“He’s not budging,” Salzgitter added dryly, gripping the loose bedsheets. She, too, had been woken earlier with very little sleep since last night’s discovery. “Rise and shine...”

Adair smiled sleepily, instead of snapping with a burst of exhaustion-induced anger, as Salzgitter stood red-faced at the end of the bed. He sat up, gracefully curling himself into a ball.

“Yes, I sleep in the nude.”

“Sign me up for more wake-up duties,” Solas winked playfully, turning her head with an embarrassed blush. “I don’t believe this...”

Salzgitter regained her composure, placing the sheet back onto the bed near Adair. “I, um... yeah... we’ll wait for you in the corridor. Marisa, you coming?”

Both women fumbled for their commlocks and practically pushed one another into the hallway. Adair shook his head, realizing he was now very much awake.

...

The yellow-sleeved uniform bore some grit and grime from last night’s cleaning session, but Ty Adair ignored it. Shortly, he would be risking far worse stains from the maintenance cycle of engines that awaited him in hanger area two.

It was a failing of the uniform designers: Neutral, somewhat bright colors which drew attention to the wearer's face, rather than fancy ornamentation or broader color spectrums. It also meant that a technician like himself would dress for duty, then dress again in another outfit for the daily tasks. He thought Molly Cranston filled her orange tech jumpsuit perfectly. He wasn't especially keen of the color, nor the tight nature of the clothing. Especially after years and years of wearing the same style.

He hoped Main Mission would consider the petition circulating for uniform changes.

The door to his quarters hummed and slid open. Salzgitter and Solas waited patiently for their workmate. They began their long walk towards the closest travel tube hub.

Adair asked Salzgitter softly, "Did Koenig talk with you?"

"Yes. At 0355 this morning, then again in a private message left for me," Salzgitter whispered. "I imagine Ian was told the same thing."

"You didn't tell Marisa, right?" he asked.

"No. Absolutely not."

"Are you two gossiping again?" Solas inquired loudly, turning back to look at her colleagues. "At least let me in on the details."

"I think Ty likes you, Marisa," Salzgitter teased.

"Huh? Where did that... oh..." Adair fumbled with his words, briefly forgetting she was downplaying their private discussion. "Real cute, Bette."

The technician blushed. "Whatever you're talking about, just fill me in later. I have to go over to astrometrics," Solas said, turning in the corridor. "Be seeing you."

"And you," Adair said, brushing off Salzgitter's unfortunate comment from earlier. He turned to address her directly. "You really know how to embarrass a guy."

"Call me sly," Salzgitter said, then changed subjects without pause. "You're due on launch pad three right now. Captain Carter's orders."

Adair and Salzgitter reached the entrance to their travel tube and waited as other Alphans disembarked. "Assuming we have any spare time to eat today, we should talk during lunch or dinner. Johnson, too."

They entered the automated, tube-shaped car, sitting near the entrance. The door sealed shut behind them. They were alone.

"What did Koenig say?" Salzgitter probed, double-checking that they were truly by themselves. The travel tube hummed to life, speeding towards their destination.

"Nothing specific. Both he and Professor Bergman wanted to talk at length later. I shared some of the basics, but they're going to read the journal for themselves." Adair sighed. "I should have waited. I never should have summoned them at 0300 hours."

"Did they say anything about your name being in the book?"

"I told them. I even showed them. 'Ty Adair' isn't a common name, y'know? It's not like there's a dozen of us walking around Moonbase Alpha."

"What's next then?"

"They'll probably talk to you, swear you to more secrecy and try to keep this quiet until they figure out the whole story. I have an appointment with them this afternoon. They'll probably have Doc Russell or Mathias check me over."

"You know, Ty," Salzgitter said, pausing dramatically, then looking to him. "I'm really worried about this... about you."

She moved closer, putting her head on his shoulders. "If you hadn't changed your door lock, it would have been a lot easier to wake you up this morning..."

"Didn't we go through this last year?" Adair asked.

"We tried."

The teasing struck a nerve with Adair.

"You tried. I didn't," he spoke. "And you still are."

She stayed against his shoulder, putting her arm around his. "But you're not pushing me away this time," she observed. Her hand slid against his, holding it firmly.

"You know, Bette, as if things weren't screwy enough..."

"Just think about it, Ty."

At times, that's all he had done. Maintenance work was tedious at times; it left plenty of time for daydreaming, or worse, contemplating, analyzing, re-analyzing and over-analyzing one's thoughts.

"When did you start feeling this strongly again?" he asked shyly.

"Weeks ago, when the Space Brain had invaded Alpha. Do you remember when you were running through the maintenance hallways, making sure all of us were evacuated?"

"I remember pulling you out of there... and into a hallway full of that foamy stuff."

She smiled. "My hero."

The travel tube slowed as it reached the transfer point. Adair rose to activate the door; Salzgitter kept her arm tucked around his. Both disembarked, heading diagonally across the small section to another travel tube doorway. Adair pointed his commlock to unseal the entrance. Both boarded together; and yet again they were alone.

The door sealed shut and the car sped forward. Adair separated from Salzgitter, sitting adjacent to her, so he could look at her directly.

"Bette..." Adair said, looking long and hard into her eyes, "Bette, this is really uncomfortable."

"Why, Ty? Is it about working in the same section together? I never bought into that excuse."

“Because... there’s someone else. Someone I met a couple of weeks ago.”
Salzgitter sat unfazed by the revelation.

“Molly Cranston. In the Technical section,” Adair said.

“It doesn’t matter, Ty,” Salzgitter said, withdrawing slightly in her seat. “It could be *anyone* on Alpha. That doesn’t mean my feelings would change because of that other person.”

Adair nodded silently.

“When you started delivering those messages with the lipstick, I had a feeling you were getting serious again,” he said.

“*Anyone* on Alpha, Ty. Any... lipstick?” Salzgitter was stunned. “What do you mean by *lipstick*?”

Adair reinforced with a stronger tone, “The lipstick kisses on those messages. The one earlier today that you delivered from Main Mission. The launch pad four maintenance downtime message last week. Before that, the inventory message from Technical. It’s your color, Bette.”

“No, it’s not. Or not mine, anyways,” she responded, feeling simultaneously perplexed and curious. “Who then would...?”

Oh my, she thought. Her heart raced. *Same lipstick, same person with access to those messages as her.*

“Ty, this isn’t some love triangle. It’s more like a love... rectangle.”

Adair frowned. “Then who’s the fourth point?”

Salzgitter was overwhelmed with a sense of irony.

“It’s Marisa.”

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

"How do you know it's Marisa?" Adair asked.

He stood up in the tube, feeling uncomfortable and edgy. The cramped travel tube car added to the growing claustrophobic feeling within his conscience. There was nowhere to go, nowhere to escape these revelations that kept surfacing. In less than a year, there had been hostile alien encounters, numerous incidents with dangerous cosmic phenomena, shortages of various supplies and worst of all, fatalities within Alpha's ranks.

And nowhere to run to. *No escape.*

"Hey, did you hear me?"

Salzgitter pointed to her lips. "Marisa? She uses the same lipstick that I do. She uses *my lipstick*. It's not like we have a cosmetics counter out here."

The realization brought waves of deeper emotions. Her eyes welled with tears, although nary a drop emerged. "You have so much... love... around you. Don't shut everyone out, like you tend to do."

Adair turned to hug her, to hold her ever so briefly. And seconds turned into seeming eternity before he finally pulled back. "I guess you're a hot commodity," Salzgitter said.

"Dazed and confused is more apt," Adair responded.

She nodded silently as the tube car stopped outside of launch pad three.

Adair continued, gesturing to the door. "I'll meet up with Alan Carter right now. Later on, I think you, me and Ian need to continue last night's talks." He raised his commlock to signal the door open. "You know I care about you. This is just..."

"Overwhelming?" Salzgitter injected.

He nodded vigorously. "1930 hours. Simmonds's former quarters. We may as well return to the scene of the crime."

He turned, heading for the elevator leading to the lower sections. He winked at Salzgitter. "Besides, we still have more cleaning to do."

...

The mood in Commander John Koenig's office matched the surroundings of the bright light panel units within each wall. Intense. Illuminating.

Both Koenig and Professor Bergman had continued to burn the proverbial midnight oil since meeting with Ty Adair. Neither man could adjourn to his quarters. The discovery of Gerald Simmonds's personal journal filled their every thought. And where sleep crept into their exhausted bodies, a steady flow of caffeinated drinks kept both their minds jolted awake.

In some ways, Koenig wished he had slept before delving deeper into the book. Some entries would have appeared less hallucinatory, despite being true. There was an overwhelming amount of information to digest, much of which wasn't palatable.

"John?" the comm-post sounded out. Doctor Helena Russell stood outside the locked office doors again, waiting to be granted entry. Koenig pointed his commlock to the side entry door to allow her in. In the past few days, it might have been possible to gauge the pulse of Moonbase Alpha by observing who came and left through the Commander's side entrance.

"You wanted my weekly status reports delivered right now?" she asked, entering the room.

"No, not quite Helena," Koenig said, gesturing to one of the couches for her to take a seat. "I needed something non-descript to excuse you from Medical."

"How about a simple, 'Could you join me for lunch?'" Russell said playfully.

Koenig smiled, "That might have worked."

"If you had a clearer mind," Russell said, noting the exhaustion in Koenig's face. "You know better than to stay up all night. The dark circles around your eyes say it all."

Koenig dismissed the observation, quickly shifting gears into the reason he asked her to come. "Helena, something was found last night, something that has incredible repercussions across all of Alpha. I know I have Victor's confidence—and yours—to remain quiet. I'm... reminding you of how important that privacy needs to be."

"Of course," she replied, growing concerned although retaining her calm exterior.

"A private diary from Simmonds's quarters was recovered last night," Koenig said. "It... explains why he was crazed enough to hijack his ride with the Kaldorians back to Earth."

Berman circled the room, holding the journal open in his hands. "Not in so many words, but we've pieced together some fascinating stories... magnificent, seemingly impossible stories that he documented. All true."

"I don't understand," Russell replied. "What did you find?"

Koenig continued, "In 1994, a spacecraft of alien origin crash-landed on the far side of the moon. Nuclear Waste Disposal Area Two was constructed over it to hide the truth." He drew a beat. "And it may have been the trigger that exploded the waste dumps."

Doctor Russell blinked repeatedly, looking befuddled. "You're saying that Simmonds was part of a cover-up to—"

"Part of a large-scale cover-up to keep alien technologies in the hands of certain Earth governments, yes."

She shook her head slightly, looking directly at Koenig. "This is a bit too much to take in."

"We're leaving out the details," he said.

"Now I understand why you and Victor have been up all night long," she acknowledged.

Berman interrupted. "Look here, John. There's a few journal entries here for Douglass crater which sits next to... *sat next to...* Landau crater."

"I saw, Victor," Koenig replied, rubbing his eyes. "Where the sub-surface station resided."

Russell grew further confused. "A sub-surface station?"

"When you're ready, we can debrief you on everything. Apparently, Alpha wasn't the only operational lunar outpost during the 1990s."

"Another moonbase?"

"Not quite," Bergman injected. "More like a small safe house or bunker. Somewhere to study alien technology without raising suspicions. And not using Alpha's Alien Life Experimentation Unit either."

"And not a single orbital photograph shows anything. Either it's well-hidden, or never existed."

"I imagine it's real," Russell argued. "He was desperate to get off of Alpha. A guilt-filled conscience would have driven him to the extreme measures he took."

Koenig retorted, "Extreme? Helena, it gets far worse than you might imagine. Simmonds involved a number of Alphans over the years, most unwittingly. Most of whom were hypnotized, brainwashed—something to forget their involvement."

He aimed his comm-lock at his office's comm-post. "Computer, display Project Dayea specifics. Command authorization."

"Voice identification accepted. Command access granted. Decrypting."

"Dayea was the Phillipine goddess of secrets," Bergman said, "Simmonds kept quite a number of secrets underfoot. We've researched the available data throughly, though."

Koenig nodded, "Helena, Simmonds kept a list of who was affected, but not a means for reversing the hypnosis, or whatever means of programming was done. There's a couple of Alphans who are still with us that were affected. I need you to quietly figure out a way of clearing their heads. No one else can know about this. Not yet."

"Who, John?"

"Ty Adair."

"And me," Bergman said.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Over thirty minutes had passed since Ty Adair arrived at Moonbase Alpha's launch pad number three. Approximately five of them had been spent suiting up alongside chief pilot Captain Alan Carter. And both stood on the launch lift as the large chamber began to depressurize.

The blonde Australian was originally slated for the Meta probe assignment, serving as the leader of the backup team. Before the chain reactions at Nuclear Waste Disposal Area Two occurred, Commander Koenig had ordered him in Simmonds's transport Eagle to monitor from orbit. And when the site detonated, Carter chose to return to the moon, rather than rocket back to Earth. For that selfless loyalty, he had unknowingly and unintentionally endeared himself to all of Alpha. And Koenig was quick to assign him to command the flight sections.

His outgoing, friendly demeanor was already legendary amongst the entire pilot section, although he still maintained a certain detachment from his workmates. Between the numerous deaths of Eagle pilots on September 13, 1999 and the pilots who died since then, Carter was careful to keep his distance from anyone on the hangar deck, including Ty Adair.

"Alright, pressure check complete," Carter said, looking upwards. "Make sure your boots are sticking."

Sticking was a loose term used by the Alphans for the magnetic grips within the spacesuit gloves and boots. They were enough to give adhesion to some metal-laced surfaces. There were no worries about being propelled off of the moon itself. But without them, a small step might turn into an unintended large leap under the lunar gravity, or an unfortunate collision with a wall, object or person.

Moonbase Alpha's launch pads had reduced gravity. As a result, less energy was required to lift and lower the Eagle spacecraft. As the lift would be activated while they stood on it, Carter wanted to make sure they wouldn't be hurled upwards.

"Captain," Adair addressed Carter, "I'm ready when you are."

"Good. Samuels? Activate the lift," Carter instructed.

Within the launch pad's control section, Jason Samuels activated a series of controls. The moon dust-tarnished, ruddy-hued launch platform surged to life, moving upwards at a rapid rate.

And it jolted to a sudden stop almost as quickly.

"See?" Carter said. "Samuels, shut it down. But don't lower the lift."

"Yes, sir. Shutting down now..."

Adair knelt down, opening a toolbox that he had brought with him. He placed a small device on the pad floor, then pushed a button on the unit's topside. Unseen, low-energy laser beams began to fire from numerous emitters. Adair picked up a separate device; a small screen filled with various numbers and characters.

"Alignment's off in the northeastern corner," Adair said, punching buttons to transmit the device's data flow to Alpha main computer.

"I guess the warranty ran out," Carter joked.

"I can assign four engineers to re-align the gimbals," Adair said. "But rest assured we'll have this repaired soon. I'll oversee the work personally."

Carter understood Adair's calm assurances. His team had been responsible for keeping the Eagle fleet operational, especially when no relief crew would ever arrive. He didn't want to demand too much of them. He knew, though, that the lifts had to be 100% operational at all times. Whether a sudden evacuation or an alien encounter occurred, Alpha needed every launch pad ready for action. "Try to give me a status report later today. And put the booster attachment tests on hold for now. This has top priority."

Carter looked up to the launch pad monitoring window. "Samuels, bring it down. Then deactivate the pad." Samuels responded, bringing the lift back to the bottom of the hangar level. The protective doors above sealed shut. Pressurization initiated when Carter signaled again. Both men moved to the towering airlock doors, waiting for them to open.

"Captain, I'm concerned that we're getting too many work requests," Adair said. He was unsure whether it was appropriate to raise such an issue with the lead Eagle pilot at the moment. He felt compelled to speak out.

"You'll always have too much work to do," Carter replied, brushing off the question.

"Maybe I should rephrase that," Adair said. "You know I'm taking Eagle pilot training. If I keep getting more work heaped on, I'll never be able to continue it."

Carter paused as the large olive-green colored door raised. He was the man of action, the fearless pilot, the charismatic achiever whom Commander Koenig had put in charge of Alpha's Eagles. But he quietly despised the bureaucracy. He had little patience for the management aspects.

Since his arrival on Alpha, he watched as highly-efficient maintenance and technical crews slaved tirelessly over a fleet of thirty-plus Eagle spacecraft. Robotics accounted for some of the workload, but three shifts of hard-working Alphans delivered the majority of the workload twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week... and often working double shifts. There had been a few accidents since Breakaway and a few instances of malfunctioning Eagles, including an incident during the Space Brain encounter. But Carter relied heavily on the three Chief Engineers to keep everything running smoothly.

He wasn't comfortable with complaints or issues. When Commander Koenig issued orders, they were expected to be obeyed, regardless of the insurmountable difficulties they might pose. Carter felt more comfort in following Main Mission's directives. Adair's issue touched a nerve within him.

"You'll need to make the time, Chief," Carter replied, beginning a brisk pace across the hangar deck after unsealing his helmet. Adair removed his as well, beginning to give chase.

"Whoa, sir... with all due respect, that's easier said than done!" Adair spoke out. "Between the paperwork and playing jack of all trades down here, I'm asking for some leeway. Just a re-evaluation of the project lists."

Carter kept walking, encumbered by the spacesuit. He raised his helmet upwards, as if to brush off the comments.

Adair stopped, yelling, "Garforth and Xu feel the same!"

I really need to stop with the histrionics, Adair thought to himself. First, towards Ian Johnson. And now, aimed at Alan Carter. *What has gotten into me lately?*

Whether pride, machismo or stubborn rejection, Carter kept walking. Like Koenig's stern issuances of orders, the Aussie expected his mandates to be followed, too. Adair's mention of the other two Chief Engineers within the flight tech section may have sounded like a threat to some, even the seeds of a strike, or worse, mutiny. But Carter knew it wasn't. They would do whatever was asked of them. And right now, he needed his launch pads fully operational moreso than training any new Eagle pilots.

...

"Victor? *You?*"

"Yes, me," Professor Bergman replied to Helena Russell without skipping a beat. "My name's in the book. Apparently I was part of Project Dayea. And Project Sekhmut, too. That's more details I shan't get into right now. And I don't remember a thing about either."

"My God, Victor," Russell exclaimed softly, "Is it possible some memories are already re-surfacing?"

"Why?"

"You brainstormed that force field over Alpha when we encountered the black sun. You've postulated new equations and theorems that may eventually put Einstein and others to shame. You managed to locate planet Ultra where no other astronomer had..."

"That was 1994," Bergman gently reminded her. "And you're quite right."

"I see where you're going, Helena," Koenig said, "and it makes sense. You've done a number of miraculous things over the years, Victor—not to take away from your keen mind..."

"Thank you."

"...but it's conceivable that whatever you experienced may open the doors to greater possibilities, greater revelations."

"Well, if not for me, then young Adair, too."

"Has anyone told him yet?" Russell asked.

Koenig replied, "He's the one that discovered the book, along with two others. He pulled the cleaning assignment with Simmonds's quarters. They're all sworn to secrecy. Adair doesn't know about the hypnosis, though. Just that his name was in the journal."

"It's interesting that we were just discussing him the other day," Bergman added.

"I'll need time to work up something," Russell said. "Victor, you and Adair seem to be fine, so I'm not worried about any medical issues right now. I would like to do the reversal on you first, though. Assuming I can figure out how to make it happen."

"We have plenty of time, sad to say," Bergman quipped.

"Helena, have David Kano assign whatever computer record access you need. I'll make sure it's approved. Maybe there's something in the libraries about this. I don't want the master librarians involved, though. Keep it top secret."

"Okay, John. I have more rounds to do, then I'll start the work."

Everyone nodded to one another, with Doctor Russell leaving the office. Bergman returned his focus to the journal.

"John, I think we're wrong about what triggered the waste dumps. It wasn't the alien spaceship, really. It was our *Eagles*."

...

"You're grasping at straws there."

"Well maybe we should draw straws instead," Ty Adair said, unsuited across from Alan Carter's storage locker. "I'm serious. If you can suit up faster than me, I'll pull double-shifts for the next month. It'll probably kill that new romance of mine. But if I win, you reduce the project load enough so I can do my training."

Carter smirked, almost in mock defiance of his usual jovial self. "Are you trying for a career change, Adair? I need you working where you are. Besides, if you do Eagle flight training, you'll probably lose your girl anyways. Taking a crash course—no pun intended—in Eagle flight is no easy task."

Adair finished removing the last of his orange-hued spacesuit. He stowed it into his locker, then faced Carter. "I've worked with you for the past year. Even longer, when you consider your trainings up here on the moon. I could no sooner walk away from astromechanics work than you could ground yourself from flight duty."

Carter listened.

"We let you down when that robot Eagle malfunctioned... During that aborted attack mission on the Space Brain last month," Adair said grudgingly.

"Yeah, I know. The Commander almost bought the farm on that one," Carter noted.

"And almost crash-landed an Eagle full of nukes into the base," Adair added. "But our techs had been working double-shifts for days, even a few triple-shifts. We've been *exhausted*, Captain. And we keep going anyways, staying the course, knowing that we have to... for the sake of Alpha's survival."

"And training you as an Eagle pilot would help the cause, right?" Carter finished.

"Yes, I believe it would. Frankly, too many men are dying," Adair said, "and more people than just me need to be trained. Some people have rusty flight skills; they need to bone-up a bit, don't you think?"

"Look," he continued, "I'm not looking to be an Eagle jockey. I work on these birds every day. I could probably assemble one from spare parts while blindfolded. But I want to fly one. Or at least have the training if you ever need to call upon spare pilots in an emergency. Will you at least consider that?"

Carter gestured Adair to stop. "When you said too many are dying, I got it." He walked down the length of the hallway, finding a clipboard. "I'll send the same to Xu, Garforth and the deputy section chiefs. It'll be a revised list. The lift takes priority, but I'll reduce some other tasks." Carter winked. "Maybe your crews do need a rest."

"Thank you," Adair said, realizing the opportunity that had been granted.

"Just remember, Chief," Carter fired back, returning to his jovial self, "this means I might put you on active duty for an occasional mission. Assuming, of course, you pass muster with flying colors."

Adair cracked a smile, restraining the joy that flooded his senses. "Thank you, Captain."

...

"How could our Eagles have ignited thermonuclear blasts?" Koenig asked loudly, with a resonance of disbelief.

Bergman drew his hand to his mouth, then gestured broadly. "No, really, think about it. According to these notes, there are over 44 different components derived from alien technologies within our Eagles. All adapted during the mid-1990s and rolled into Eagle spacecraft production over time. Even the Ultra probe! And did you notice the quantum leap in advancement with the Swift ships?"

“Did this have anything to do with Ernst Queller’s neutron drive?” Koenig asked with suspicion. The late engineer’s propulsion drive for the Voyager spacecraft had marked humanity’s rise as a star-faring race as the robotic Voyager ships were sent out to explore the galaxy. Sadly, the drive itself caused devastation and destruction wherever the probe traversed, including the decimation of entire planets and their populations. Both Queller and his self-named drive were now gone, during an encounter with the vengeance-seeking Sidons.

“No, not a thing. That was his own doing,” Bergman retorted, repeating, “Sadly, all his doing.”

“But why the Eagles?”

“It makes such sense! Look at Simmonds’s timeline: New anti-gravity screens installed aboard Eagles in August 1999, some upgrades to the existing systems. Same aerospace contractors. All listed here. John, the Meta probe astronauts started to become afflicted in August 1999 while doing their training runs over the nuclear waste areas. Workers become afflicted. Remote controlled Eagles are brought in to transfer nuclear waste to area two. All carrying the newest technological upgrades to their screens.”

Bergman continued, “When area one was about to go up, there was heat, but no radiation. Yet some... force... was cooking the waste sites into a complete explosive meltdown. And the same occurred in area two, resulting in a thermonuclear blast.”

“You’re saying something in the Eagles caused the buried alien technologies to blow up?” Koenig asked.

“Maybe not ‘blow up’ but triggered something greater: An expansion of the energies within the alien ship. Simmonds, by his own notes, said they never figured out what energies empowered or drove the ship. Who knows how those energies might have reacted!”

Bergman brought the book over to Koenig. “Look here, John. There are diagrams and measurements denoting energy transfers to the very core of this moon! There are energies swirling all around us! Miles above the moon, miles below. It’s as if the moon itself was infused or imbued with something.”

“And Simmonds mentions here ‘a gateway’—whatever that means,” Koenig said, disapprovingly.

“John, I once told you, ‘the line between science and mysticism... is just a line.’” Bergman recanted. “Maybe some higher power was made aware of our presence when the door was opened. Maybe these energies opened something and never closed it. Maybe something, *maybe God*, is truly taking note of us.”

“Man in the moon,” Koenig pondered. He reminded himself, *Bergman is a mystic, a believer and a scientist*. Since the episode with the black sun, both men realized their fate was based on impossible, improbable cosmic events which tested the Alphan populace, but miraculously never exterminated it. Something *greater* had indeed watched over them.

He couldn't accept that a few pieces of alien machinery were the sole catalyst, though.

"Believe what you want, John," Bergman said, pointing to him, then pointing upwards. "Sometimes truth is stranger than fiction."

...

"I'm ready, Doctor Russell."

Both Doctors Helena Russell and Bob Mathias shifted around the surgical table, triple-checking various machine hook-ups and medical monitors. Both had asked Nurse Järvinen to join them, given his ability to be trusted with confidential matters. The remainder of the staff was given various duties around the medical complex. Rumors might surface, but Russell had wanted to keep any specifics from being known. Her patient had requested the utmost privacy. One slipped word and most or all of Moonbase Alpha would know. And she strove to ensure her patient's wishes of secrecy.

"She's responding well to the anesthesia."

The patient's lower abdomen lay bare and exposed; the surgical theater lighting focused upon it. "We'll start with one small incision here, Bob."

"We've never done anything like this... with a living patient that is."

"Let's begin."

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

The eons-old starlight reflected across the dimly-lit lunar surface. And eons-old radiation accompanied the photonic energy, increasing in intensity by the hour.

The Astrometrics section had noted a number of B-class super-giant stars a mere thousand light-years away. Fortunately, the unspeakably gigantic gas bodies posed no direct threat to the moon. The lunar body's trajectory hurled it on a parallel track. All calculations and projections had assured Commander Koenig that Moonbase Alpha would remain safe.

Safe from capture or collision by the stars. But not necessarily from expelled plasma, particles and radiation that traveled unimpeded through the void.

It was something John Koenig hadn't ignored.

"Paul," Koenig said, looking to Main Mission's master controller as he entered the large control room, "can you tell me if our orbital sensors are relaying data? These latest reports are... lacking."

"Commander, we're in a virtual dead zone," Morrow replied.

"A dead zone?" Professor Bergman wondered aloud. "Not the choice of words I'd use."

"Sorry, Professor," Morrow said stiffly. "It's... just that we're adrift in a large expanse of space, no solar systems in our path. It's... dead out here. No life, no activity."

"Work with Technical," Koenig ordered. "Between the various space warps and... visitors we've encountered, I want to make sure we're staying alert."

"Aren't we always, Commander?" Morrow smiled. The rare grin from his mustached face bore a subtext that Main Mission's entire staff understood all too well. Time and time again, their alertness had given way to somber, sullen duty shifts. They had come to rely upon technology to signal them of any new issues.

"I'm concerned," Bergman said, walking back to Koenig's office by his side. The elder scientist was a trusted confidant of the moonbase leader. If he was genuinely perturbed, the commander would listen. Koenig wasn't well-regarded for his open door policy; he didn't have one. He trusted what he heard from the seasoned command staff around him. It fueled the ivory tower mythos that had grown around the base.

"John, the last time we traveled through a large expanse like this, we encountered a space warp. Not like the black sun, but something that carried us just the same across incredible distances."

"And before that, and before that again..." Koenig added.

Victor tapped Koenig's desk then motioned towards the closed wall that led to Main Mission's interior. "And almost every time Computer manages to figure out where our position has shifted to, we're catapulted somewhere else."

Koenig smiled, knowing that David Kano was growing tired of computer cycles being consumed on such Herculean calculations. It forced the increasingly-cranky master computer technician to push back against a growing list of computing projects sought by the Alphan community at large.

"Sometimes light years ahead of our position, other times parsecs in reverse," Koenig waxed aloud, finishing Bergman's thoughts. "Cosmic pinball."

"Yes, but it makes me wonder who's pulling the plunger... or punching the flippers," Bergman said, smiling broadly.

"Maybe we should have asked that when we were in the black sun," Koenig finished.

Both men nodded silently. In the short time since Breakaway, the moon had encountered one solar system, then intercepted a small-sized, pseudo-black hole. Instead of being crushed within the stellar phenomenon, the moon passed through impossibly unharmed. And both Koenig and Bergman encountered a disembodied voice—a cosmic intelligence—which revealed herself as a higher power sans specifics... but insinuated the fate of the Alphans had been part of a pre-ordained destiny. And given their implausible survival through the black sun, Bergman had felt justified to ask her if she was God.

But more questions remained than answers were given.

Both men continued from time to time to discuss the past encounter at length, drawing solace that it hadn't been a hallucination. Each one remembered the exact nature of the meeting, the precise words that were used. And each pondered the metaphysical and spiritual content. Only Doctor Helena Russell had been privy to their secret. Koenig felt uncomfortable leading a command structure with visions and communications borne from an unknown universal entity... perhaps even God itself.

And if all of this was God's will, then all three Alphans drew muted comfort that their odyssey without end, their journey amongst the stars, had a greater purpose. They only hoped that purpose included a future for all Alphans. After all, the stars themselves continued to bring despair and death to Moonbase Alpha, including their latest velitation with the Space Brain. And now Simmonds's secret journal.

And that had increased Koenig's paranoia of the uncaring universe around them.

"Victor, make sure Technical follows up. I don't want any more surprises... or loss of life," Koenig said.

“Right, John,” he replied. “But surprises, among other things, are inevitable.”

•••

Ty Adair paced the length of Commissioner Simmonds's former quarters. “Tell me again what Koenig told you?”

Ian Johnson was studying each wall plate, trying to determine whether more items or objects had been hidden from view. “He said the same thing he told you and Bette: He wanted another day to digest the contents of the journal before talking with us.” He pushed on a section of wall, thinking it would give way. It didn't budge. “Where is she, by the way?”

Adair shrugged. “I haven't a clue. She agreed to 1930 hours. She didn't say anything about changing her mind when we saw her at dinner.”

He looked intently at the white wall before him. “By chance, did you know Macon Knebbet?”

Johnson winced, then ran his hand unconsciously through his hair. “The name sounds vaguely familiar. Then again, I can't remember the name of the second guy to walk on the moon.”

He felt that twinge of inferiority again. He reminded himself that Adair wasn't trying to be superior or dominating. Adair simply enjoyed sharing stories. One might have thought that Professor Bergman's joy of storytelling had rubbed off on him. Both shared the same infectious zeal when dramatizing their lore.

“Fabrication facilities... the Knebbet formulas...you know. Macon Knebbet was the alchemy mastermind that ‘put a roof over Alpha.’ He's the one that invented the manufacturing processes that created these synthcrete walls, the flooring, the roofing... the building materials,” said Adair, gesturing all around them. “I had a chance to learn a bit about him when my section did cross-training last month with the fab team.”

“More cross-training, yes,” Johnson chided aloud. “You're going to be a jack-of-all-trades someday soon. Any interest in geology, by chance?”

Adair trailed his fingers off the wall, ignoring the sarcastic comment, and continued. “Ian, when Alpha was under construction as a permanent lunar colony in the 1980s, the original structures were buried under the moon's soil—to protect against solar radiation and micro-meteorites. Mounds of dirt and dust covered the first buildings. If you recall the original nuclear waste sites on the far side, they used the same technique.”

He continued, “Knebbet had worked for decades in advanced materials design, mostly private sector work. Instead of jumping aboard one of the large consortiums for Moonbase Alpha construction work, he started his own private venture. Keep in mind, his formulas and processes were intellectual property that he retained sole ownership of. And he worked solely for himself.”

Adair's enthusiasm increased. "Amazingly, his postulations were so accurate that it didn't require grand-scale economics to do the research and development! Within months of being on his own, he delivered the Knebbet formulas: processes to synthesize various super-durable exo-materials, utilizing metals and elements common to the moon," Adair said, "along with heavier metals from captured asteroids that were towed to near-Earth orbit, then mined."

"So, toss some moon dust into a smelter and voilà! You have mooncrete!" Johnson joked.

Adair grinned. "You, the professional geologist, know it's vastly more complex than mixing raw moon materials together."

"I couldn't resist," Johnson retorted. "Do continue, Mr. Expert,"

"So, the machinery used to forge the material moldings was crafted by the same government outfits that he used to work for. He held the 'key' to making it all work."

"Very nice. He must have been a rich man after that."

Adair looked amused as he faced the wall again. "No, he wasn't. Apparently, he had planned something all along. He sold the formula rights to one of the conglomerates with ties to the moonbase's construction... with the condition that he would supervise the materials work on Alpha itself. All of the materials—all of the machines—are still being used on Alpha even today. It's part of Alpha's self-sufficiency model."

He continued, "Keep in mind, he was pushing into his seventies. He wasn't astronaut material whatsoever. But he was single, no children, no ties... and realizing his life's ambition to walk where Armstrong and Aldrin had. It was a ticket to the moon."

"The obvious question you're building up to: What happened to him? Why mention him now?" Johnson asked.

Adair nodded, "Do you remember the unprecedented solar flare activity of '95? Back then, the Knebbet formula succeeded beyond anyone's wildest dreams. The building materials safeguarded the base from intense solar radiation bombardments... if you were inside the base. Knebbet wasn't. He didn't evacuate the surface when the emergency alerts came."

Adair paused, then continued. "Why, you might ask? His colleagues said it best: *Because he had accomplished what he wanted.* Think about it. He achieved his dream of going to the moon. He had no intention of returning home. And despite his contributions to Alpha, everyone was on a rotational tour of duty. He couldn't stay here forever," he grimaced. "Not in the living sense anyways."

Adair's eyes pierced out the shadows. "If you ever want to visit him, just drop by section 197. He's still here."

Johnson was surprised. "I don't understand. I thought he was dead?"

“He is, Ian,” Adair said somberly. “That’s the point of my story. The techs took his cremated remains to his second home away from home—the fabrication facilities.” He trailed his hand back over the cold surface next to him. “You never know what you’ll find within these walls.”

...

The stark white-colored door into Adair’s living quarters vibrated from repeated poundings. He walked both sleepily and slowly towards it, having forgotten his commlock to unlock the entryway. He activated the door seal manually.

Bette Salzgitter stood slightly hunched, grasping her throbbing left hand. The red-sleeved technician looked upwards at Adair with an almost equally red-colored face.

“Bette?”

“These doors... are really made of hard materials.”

Adair squinted while trying to see the distant comm-post’s chronometer. He was almost impossible to make out the time.

“0523 hours,” Salzgitter replied. “Early, I know.” Her head poked into the entryway. “Is she here?”

Adair gripped the back of his head, shaking slightly to wake himself up. “No, Molly’s not here. She’s on third shift.”

“Not Molly,” Salzgitter said. “Marisa.”

Adair felt his head surge with a renewed headache that overcame him during the pounding wake-up call. He had turned off his commlock in an effort to get sleep. Even his comm-post had been actuated with a privacy message that only his fellow section chiefs or Main Mission could override. He hadn’t counted on tenacious people like Bette Salzgitter to simply knock.

“No... no, she’s not here. I haven’t seen her since dinner two nights ago.”

She pursed her lips. “I didn’t know if she would come talk to you.” She stood back. “She asked me to wake her up this morning. She wasn’t in her quarters. I thought she might have come to talk with you.”

“At five in the morning?”

“Sorry, Ty. Long story.”

“We missed you last night. I thought you were coming by Simmonds’s place to talk?”

“Can we discuss that later? I... really need to find Marisa.”

Adair remained groggy, but waved to Salzgitter as she left, closing the door via the manual controls. He yawned, restraining himself from doing so loudly. *Can't a man get any sleep around here?* he thought to himself. Fortunately he had finished his cleaning duties of Simmonds's former quarters before midnight. The roughly five hours of sleep accorded to him—making a total of ten in the last 72 hours—was better than none.

I forgot. She's on walkabout right now, he remembered. Sleep overcame him before he could ponder the thought any further.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

“RED ALERT” flashed the small computer screen.

Controller Paul Morrow’s focused voice followed, “Attention all sections Alpha! Operation Exodus at T-minus 12 minutes. Eagles 6, 7 and 8—lift off when ready! Eagles designated 9 through 12—stand-by for launchpad availability.”

Background chattered filled the speakers from numerous Alphans, adding to the chaos. A meteor swarm had been tracked with less than 30 minutes to spare, heading directly for Mare Frigoris, a plain north of Moonbase Alpha’s location. Half of Alpha would evacuate in Eagles; the other half would retreat to the underground shelters.

And Ty Adair found himself behind the controls of Eagle Eight.

And this was no dream.

“Pre-flight cycle complete. Punch up one through eight and pull back on the stick.”

The Eagle began to scream like it’s namesake, with assorted chemical accelerants firing up as fuels rushed through the assorted propulsion systems.

“She’s shaking...”

“Then you’re good. Keep pulling.”

The systems poured ample thrust into the bottom exhaust jets, sending the craft in a steady upwards motion while remaining horizontal.

“Starboard thrusters to 10%, correcting... Engaging main motors.”

“Good, good!” Bill Fraser cheered wide-eyed, then noted the sensor screen in front of him blinking numerous warnings. “Except Eagle Six just crashed into us.”

“Keep going?” Adair asked.

“No, stop,” Fraser said, tapping the communications controls with his nimble fingers. “Eagle Six, anyone awake in there?”

The speakers revealed a disheartened voice. “*Six here. Sorry about that, Eight.*”

“Alright, back to the classroom, people,” Fraser said loudly, standing up in his pilot chair. “Shut your systems down, please.”

“So much for Operation Exodus,” Adair joked. “Damn, that was a lousy way to start our simulator training.”

Fraser shook his head, wondering how pilot Tom Graham had failed to keep his own student focused during this flight simulator exercise. It was one thing to master the controls of the most advanced spacecraft ever-designed by Earth technology. But a pilot couldn’t ignore his surroundings. It was obvious they needed more classroom time. They had rushed their novice pilots too quickly.

“*We spent much time on the main motor switchover than watching where we were driving,*” said Graham, his voice crackling slightly over the audio-only

channel.

"Affirmative, Six," Fraser said, exiting the cabin. Adair rushed to unbuckle and follow his new mentor out of the ship.

Four Eagle forward command modules lay virtually side by side, elevated slightly under steel braces and gyros, with rows of cables connected to portable power supplies and a single mobile server unit. Both Fraser and Adair emerged from their Eagle mock-ups as Graham and his dejected student, Bhanu Vidyaranya, climbed from theirs to the hangar floor below.

"I miss the real training mock-ups. The ones where the nose does cartwheels if you jack the thrusters into a roll," Graham said. The New Zealander winked at Adair. "You guys had a chance to fix it yet?"

"Not since your last student lost control," Adair fired back with a smirk. He was referring to an unfortunate incident not long ago where a severe case of motion sickness afflicted another student pilot.

Moonbase Alpha had one advanced trainer and three older ones. The advanced training module had been cleaned up, but the wild spins that caused the accident had also overtaxed the simulator. All three section chiefs, including Adair, had agreed to keep the advanced trainer off-line for the time being. Tom Graham had a bad habit of pushing his ships hard. *Too hard.*

Launch pad three was the latest testimonial to another of his landings. Carter ignored the obvious, believing Graham was more of a professional than a weak link in the pilot crew chain. Whether in trainings or actual flights, Eagle Six became Graham's trademark assignment. Adair's crews has become used to triple-checking his landing struts for micro-fractures, among other things.

"Eagle Six will be the death of you, Tom, I swear," Fraser said wryly.

Graham brushed off the comment with false bravado. "Fly with me sometime, Bill. We can go out in a blaze of glory together."

"And you wonder why you fly solo most of the time," Fraser replied dryly.

Graham ignored the dig, turning to Vidyaranya. "I'll meet you upstairs."

"Aye, sir," the Indian astronomer said, heading towards the hangar exit. "Sorry, sir."

"Let's call it for today," Fraser said, speaking to Adair. "We're off to a good start."

"Not bad for a first timer," Graham directed to Fraser, then gesturing towards the departing Vidyaranya. "I think he'll will eventually catch on. Flying isn't for everyone, though. Over 90% of all pilot candidates washed out during trainings back on Earth."

Fraser ignored the comment, turning to Adair. "So, what do you call the guy who graduates at the bottom of his flight training class?"

"Do tell," Adair said coyly.

"A *pilot*," Fraser grinned, looking at Graham.

Graham downplayed the jab, looking back at his fellow pilot. "I hope you have better luck with this one than I am." He followed his student's path towards the hangar deck exit. He raised his hand high into the air while continuing to walk away. "*Cheers, Adair.*"

"Well, I'll be! I believe he gave you a compliment," Fraser said with amazement, looking over at his protégé. Both men moved to the simulator equipment to power down the training modules.

Adair flipped a series of switches on one of the two portable nuclear generators, as Fraser powered down the server unit. "He's being generous. I have a long ways to go."

"Actually, you did better than most students do," Fraser said. "Now, I've been meaning to ask you about that suit-up contest."

"Trying to impress a girl?" Adair joked. He finished preparing the portable generators for transport into their storage bays.

"Maybe. *Maybe,*" Fraser smiled.

Adair wheeled the first generator while Fraser followed with the second one. The server could remain where it was. The generators, however, had to be locked down. Despite their protective casings, the Alphans weren't keen on leaving nuclear power units out in the open. Protocols demanded they had to be secured.

"Bill, I'm thankful you're training me," Adair admonished Fraser, straining to pull the heavy, wheeled unit across the tarmac.

"I'm glad you're making progress. Alan was having some second thoughts."

"Really?"

"Don't think anything less of it. He's going through a lot right now: Ryan, Donovan, Baxter, Wayland, Cousteau, Kelly—too many others," Fraser said, reminded of the numerous deaths that had occurred since Breakaway. He paused. "That's sad, actually. We've lost so many that I'm forgetting names."

Adair hesitated, but added, "When I talked with him, he didn't want to hear anything about the training."

"Carter's a good man, Ty. He's just bottling it up inside, like most of us. It leaks from time to time."

Adair scanned the hangar for signs of anyone else, then kept his voice low. "I don't know, Bill. Between you and me, with all of the pilot deaths, I'm beginning to think Commander Koenig will put Tony Cellini into his spot."

"I'll take that bet, if you're offering one," Fraser retorted. "Cellini is a great pilot, but he's not command material. Not anymore, anyways."

Adair and Fraser reached the storage compartment where a series of punched numbers on the doorplate released the locking mechanism. "It's not a bet, believe me. He's actually a close friend. And close to the Commander, too. I wouldn't want to take your money," Adair winked. "Don't buy into those rumors from the Ultra probe disaster. He's a capable astronaut. And a capable leader."

Fraser smiled; Adair couldn't tell if he was being polite, or silently disagreeing with him.

Adair continued, "You should know. Between Xu Sun Shui, Pete Garforth and myself, we're working our crews overtime because of Carter. But it's not what you think," Adair said, struggling to pivot the unit into its resting place. "We're busting our humps because we respect Alan Carter. We have a lot of respect for *all* of you pilots, Bill."

Fraser nodded, moving his generator into place. "That's good, because it's probably the worst career choice on Alpha right now." He strained to get the unit maneuvered without tipping over; Adair was quick to assist him.

"I'll take what I can get. No relief crews in sight, no pay raises, constant danger, and a mortality rate that keeps growing," Fraser said matter-of-factly. "But I wouldn't give up my pilot wings, not unless we found our way back to Earth, or some planet that suited us."

Fraser stood upright, looking straight at Adair. "Speaking of Earth, how did that assignment go with Simmonds's quarters? You haven't said a thing."

Adair almost bit his lip, reminded of the Commander's orders to stay mum. It was one thing to withhold information; it was another matter to do so without drawing more attention. "Fine. Just fine," Adair said, almost sheepishly. "It didn't take much work. Simmonds was a bit of a neat freak."

"That's funny. Rumor has it you took two days to clean up."

Adair felt a tinge of red coloration across his face. "Alright, maybe he wasn't *that* tidy."

Fraser gestured with his fist, "I figure he might have trashed his quarters or something. He always seemed resentful of being trapped on Alpha."

"Like Tom Graham?" Adair added.

"Yeah, like Tom," Fraser finished.

"It's easy to notice: He doesn't seem like he's fitting into the pilot section. You guys are always at odds with him, or trying to ignore his faults. And he isn't the best pilot."

"We're trying to be professionals, Ty."

"That's the impression the Captain gave. I have four people trying to fix pad number three, courtesy of another infamous 'Graham landing.'"

"Alan put him on report, you know."

He did? Adair thought to himself. And here he had assumed the chief pilot was protecting his own, given their exchange the other day.

"You do know how Graham wound up on Alpha, right?" Fraser asked.

Adair signaled with a nod. "He was delivered supplies before Breakaway occurred. He was marooned with us."

Fraser sported a dour look, "No, not quite. He was the pilot assigned to courier Simmonds to and from Alpha. *He delivered Simmonds to Alpha.*"

Adair's face emoted bewilderment. "He... *he flew Simmonds?*"

"Amazing, isn't it? I probably shouldn't have told you. We were asked to keep quiet about it," Fraser said. "Simmonds's bad behavior—and his reputation—made Graham even more secretive about the assignment. He didn't want any association with the man. Nor did his stewardess." He stood tall to look directly at Adair. "I thought you knew?"

"Knew what?" Adair quickly asked.

Fraser replied, "Commander Koenig moved quickly to assimilate them into the Alpha populace. Man, I shouldn't even be saying this. You're a section chief; I assumed you would have heard."

"Not a single word. The Commander obviously made it happen fast," Adair said.

"As he tends to do," Fraser added.

Adair exited the storage room. "We always thought it was weird that Graham owned one item, a book he brought with him."

Fraser smiled, following behind him. "Ironic that it was Robert Heinlein's 'The Moon is a Harsh Mistress.' Talk about weird coincidences."

Adair countered, "Bill, there are no such thing as coincidence. Not in my experience, anyways."

Fraser shifted the subject back. "I hear quite a few people have bartered for a chance to read it."

Adair's thoughts raced as he shifted subjects again. "Bill, do you know? Did the Lunar Commission assign Graham as Simmonds's designated pilot? Or was it a routine run?"

Fraser locked the door behind them. "If you mean, did he report directly to Simmonds, then the answer was *yes*. But Koenig made sure he was reassigned to Alan. He wasn't a flight risk, if that's what you mean. He's shown complete loyalty. Did you know Simmonds tried to enlist him to fly them off the base before we passed Mars orbit? They might have survived long enough in space, if a rescue ship from Earth was sent for them, but Graham *refused*. He even reported it to Koenig."

"Interesting. I didn't know that," Adair said, somewhat shocked. "I was just curious. We spend a lot of time prepping Eagles for flight. And when we talk with you pilots, it's always shop talk. I think we really need to spend more time getting to know all of you."

"Before we buy the farm?" Fraser chuckled.

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“Maybe so,” Adair replied. “But hopefully not. I don’t plan to fix and fly Eagles all the time. Someone needs to stay alive to fly them full-time.”

“And someone needs to stay alive to fix them full-time, too,” Fraser pointed out. “Let’s get out of here.”

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

“Victor, just hold completely still and we’ll be done in a few minutes.”

Helena Russell stood beside the medical scanning monitors, determined to get additional deep brain tissue analyses. The non-invasive electronics began to silently map sections of the elder scientist’s cranium. The advanced scanners had yielded unparalleled discoveries over the years, although they had served different purposes since 1999, from helping Koenig to free Russell and others from the Guardian of Piri, to revealing Regina Kesslan’s dual brains, to studying the physiologic ‘infections’ inflicted upon the Meta probe astronauts before Breakaway. Never had the equipment been used to identify blocked memories, let alone interpret a solution... or cure.

The good doctor realized a tremendous amount of research awaited her. She prayed Alpha’s extensive medical research archives contained references. As she told Koenig earlier, “You’re asking me to understand medical conditions that I’ve never mastered.” She subconsciously held back from any discussion of Ultra probe pilot Tony Cellini and her involvement in his medical evaluation. She felt strongly she had failed in diagnosing him thoroughly, or recovering his “true” memories of the failed Ultra mission. And she knew Koenig didn’t want to hear about *past* failures, but what she could do to solve the *current* problem. She did, however, want his patience.

“Should I be thinking of anything? Any particular thoughts to stimulate those neural pathways?”

“No, Victor. Just lie there.”

Bergman smiled knowingly. “I have been living a lie, Helena. I’m hoping you can uncover the truth.” He glanced up at the wall of monitors. “For me and Mister Adair.”

Helena stroked his arm, conveying her concern for the terrible revelations that Simmonds’s journal had brought upon them. Both Russell and Bergman had become good friends and colleagues before September 1999. When Alphans began dying near Nuclear Waste Disposal Area Two, Bergman was quick to champion her efforts and support her actions. He had become a trusted confidant and a valued second opinion for her. Now it was her turn to help him.

“Maybe I should concentrate on the journal,” Bergman said aloud. “Your scans should detect activities, pathways, reactions that might help map the problem.”

Russell nodded. *There’s so much knowledge teeming within that brain of his...* she thought to herself. The good doctor had worked alongside some of the best minds in the scientific field. Few possessed the warmth, the endearing humanity of Victor Bergman.

“We’re getting good data. Just a bit longer. We may yet find those hidden memories.”

“Helena,” Bergman said, placing his hand on hers, “This is doing little good. We need to be more aggressive. What alternatives do we have?”

Russell looked across to a nearby trolley bearing additional equipment.

“I’m worried if your mechanical heart can bear the strain, Victor.”

“I shan’t worry, just do whatever you can.”

Use whatever means will work—that’s what he means, Russell pondered privately.

“Alright, Victor. We have other options, although you need to understand—”

Bergman’s smile spoke volumes.

Russell ended her explanations and wheeled the rarely-used equipment closer. She connected a series of wires to the existing setup.

“Is this electro-shock therapy?” Bergman asked, alluding to the methods used on Russell herself back during an earlier adventure. Koenig had resorted to using such means when she had been affected by the Guardian of Piri. Repeated shocks had snapped her out of the Guardian’s control.

“No, but equally experimental. I want to start with this method first. We may resort to the symbiosis techniques used on John and Kelly last month if this doesn’t work.” Russell referred to a medical process used to link two human minds together during the Space Brain encounter. It had proved successful, although it remained an exceptionally dangerous practice—one she intended to avoid again, if possible.

Russell finished double-checking the numerous connector wires. “I’m ready.”

Bergman agreed. “Right. Let’s begin.”

Dials were rotated. The machinery hummed to life, surging untold energy wavelengths into the connected machines—then into the Professor.

And instead of the Professor’s nod of acknowledgment, his face winced from unimaginable waves of pain.

•••

John Koenig sat silently in his quarters, hands drawn upwards to support his head as he pondered recent events. His large cushioned chair was something of a luxury afforded to the base commander and he made no apology for enjoying its comforts during his off-hours. The supreme irony was, as Alpha’s commander, he was never off-duty. He, like the rest of the lunar outpost, kept constant vigilance over his work assignments. Sleep was one of the few pleasures that relaxed his mind; meditating and contemplating in his chair was another.

A familiar tone broke the silence. He swiveled to look towards his comm-post, signaling with his commlock.

“John, I have some results back. Are you alone?”

Koenig smiled, moreso inwardly than he showed. “Would you expect anyone else to be here?”

Russell stayed focused and professional, as she often did, although revealing a brief smile, the subtext of unspoken understanding and acknowledgment between them. “I thought you should know: I don’t know if Victor’s memories can be recovered.”

Koenig launched himself from his chair and moved to the video monitor. “Helena, you’re telling me that some Alphans had their memories erased?” Koenig has hoped Victor Bergman and Ty Adair were merely hypnotized—something that they could recover from.

“Not erased, John, but suppressed. And unless we figure out who was affected... and soon... we may all be in grave danger.”

Koenig felt stunned by the dramatic announcement. “What do you mean, ‘who was affected’—I thought only Victor and Adair were brainwashed, hypnotized, whatever was done to them.”

“During the procedure, Victor had a small seizure. Small, not life-threatening. He’s sedated right now. I think we triggered something in him by investigating and asking questions.”

“Call security if you need...”

“No, he wasn’t violent, just suddenly overcome with pain, then increasingly confused. Part of it may have been the medication I gave him for the test, or some mental safeguard we tripped. I just don’t know.”

She continued, “We could regress him and resurface his memories—if we exposed him to something that happened in Simmonds’s journal. A person or maybe a specific place. I want him to rest for now.”

Koenig asked bluntly, “Why did you say ‘grave danger’ Helena?”

Russell paused to fully recollect Victor’s words.

“Because he looked at me... the terror in his eyes... and said, ‘The others will be activated soon.’”

...

“Marisa, it’s Bette. Are you there?”

The tall brunette had finished her duties and now stood outside Marisa Solas’s living quarters, paging her via commlock. In the many months since Breakaway, the command staff endeavored to give each Alphan a larger living space. Sadly, with the handful of deaths since Breakaway, more private quarters had become available. Some junior staff members had been bunked up two or three per room. Now they enjoyed the comfort of their own quarters.

Some actually opted to remain together. Roommates Solas and Salzgitter had opted for the former, moving into separate rooms.

Damn, Salzgitter thought. *Where is she?*

Some Alphans had the luxury of taking time off if stresses became overwhelming. Loosely termed “walkabouts” after the Australian Aboriginal sojourns to find one’s self, an Alphan could temporarily remove them self from active duty. Marisa Solas had done just that. And without discussing the matter to our co-workers or friends.

Walkabouts were a private affair. No questions asked, no demands unless an emergency occurred. Doctor Bob Matthias had promoted the program months ago after the Moon had been given temporary, Earth-like conditions by the planet Ariel. The time spent outside in the sunshine and artificial atmosphere reminded him—and others—of their understated need for personal time-off. Only twenty Alphans had taken advantage of the program; the other three hundred were either too stubborn or too busy to participate. Most chose to stay in their quarters, lacking the ability to venture far off-base.

“Fine time to take your walkabout,” Salzgitter grumbled. “I need to talk to you about something. Actually, I *really* need to talk with you about something.”

Salzgitter walked away.

The door slid opened.

“I really need to talk with you, too,” said a weak, raspy female voice via Salzgitter’s commlock. “Close the door behind you.”

•••

Within his thoughts, John Koenig stood on the precipice of another disaster. *Aliens and cosmic forces conspire to our detriment*, he thought, *but the cruel irony is, man is still his own worst enemy.*

“Should Adair be brought to Medical?” he asked.

“If you’re worried about Victor’s comments, then no. He may have been delusional when he said that.”

Russell paused.

“But I would like to find a different way to trigger their memories.”

“What do you have in mind, Doctor?”

“Remember a couple of days ago when I said there needs to be more leadership from within?”

Koenig nodded, trying to follow her line of thought.

“Send Ty Adair on a mission to the far side, to explore those co-ordinates in the journal. Maybe something there, something under the moon in that safe house, or in the region could trigger specific memories. You said only two others know about the journal?”

Koenig was quick to respond. "Yes. Technician Bette Salzgitter and geologist Ian Johnson."

"Even better," Russell said. "Send out a lunar expedition. You've kept waste area two off-limits due to radiation."

"And keeping Alphans focused on the present, not their past, yes," he added, staying in-sync with Russell's thoughts.

"It's time to break the moratorium."

•••

"I'm puzzled," Ty Adair said, turning from the computer screen while sporting a silly grin.

"Puzzled? Bad choice of puns," Fraser fired back, standing behind the astrotech. Eagle pilots Stuart Parks, Pierre Danielle, Pete Irving and Ed Davis had come to watch Adair's training in Launch Pad Three's dimly-lit Ready Room. Adair had requested that they do classwork in this section, as he needed to follow-up on his team's repairs of the damaged lift. Instead of multi-tasking, though, he was sequestered to playing an electronic *game* as senior pilots watched.

"No, really, it's quite simple," chided Irving. He pointed to the screen. "Keep your red square moving away from the blue ones while staying inside the large box. If you touch the box borders... or the moving blue ones... you lose."

"And how do I win?" Adair asked.

"Don't make a mistake," Fraser replied.

Adair shrugged his shoulders. "Fair enough. Let's do it."

He placed his fingers on the trackball and punched one of the buttons.

The alarm sounded abruptly.

BING!

Computer sounded out: "2.014 seconds"

Adair punched the reset again. The end came even faster at 1.2 seconds.

"What the...?" Adair exclaimed. "How can I possibly pass training with scores like that?"

"Are you admitting there's something you're not good at, Ty?" Davis playfully teased.

Adair frowned. "This is a set-up. You guys are looking to get even."

Weeks before, the four pilots, excluding Bill Fraser, had accepted the spacesuit-up challenge. And all of them had embarrassing results. Embarrassing, as these men depended on getting into their suits quickly should a disaster strike during flight. And embarrassing as potential love interests watched their progress—and failings. These men had reason to hold a grudge, albeit a friendly one.

Parks folded his arms, looking to his comrades. "It's just an algorithm guiding the movements. You should see David Kano do this. He's something of a savant; when he plays this, he keeps going and going until the blue squares are moving too fast for any person to dodge."

"I don't buy into that," Davis commented. "There's no substitute for instinct. If I could program Computer, I'd change that algorithm. *Then* see how Kano performs."

Danielle smirked. "Non," he replied with his heavy French-laced accent, "Kano's not much of a pilot, n'est pas? He doesn't have that edge. Try again, Ty."

Davis patted Adair on the shoulder, "What you're forgetting, Ty, is that we all make mistakes. Try again."

A voice sounded from the back of the room. "Failure is not an option."

Tom Graham stood near the ready room's doorway, looking down on the hangar deck through one of the room's windows. The tall Kiwi tapped the glass, waiving to work crews many stories below, then turned to the others. "Or so Gene Krantz used to say."

"*Dramatique*, Thomas. Like your landings," Danielle said.

Graham stood in place, gesturing to the screen from afar. "Vidyaranya managed 19 seconds. That's why I took a chance with him in the trainer today."

He strolled across the room, staying away from the other pilots. He threw himself onto one of the red-colored couches along the side of the room, propping his legs on the nearest table.

"Looking to redeem yourself?" Irving asked. The other pilots had treated Graham as something of an outcast. Like Ian Johnson, he chose to bury himself in his work, keeping personal attachments to a minimum. Most of the pilots in the room couldn't they knew anything about the man.

"Nah, just watching Adair here. I shouldn't say it... I really shouldn't," Graham said,

"Say what?" Fraser asked, moving forward slightly.

Graham spoke frankly. "That you're training the better man, Bill."

Stunned silence swept the room.

"Moyen ce que vous dites," Danielle said sternly. *Mean what you say.*

"Je comprends, Pierre," Graham said. "And yeah I do mean it. I think most of you flyboys are jealous. That game is like the dozen other ones that we've trained with. One second or thirty seconds... it doesn't matter. Having super-human dexterity doesn't mean you're going to escape a meteoroid shower any safer than knowing you should adjust speed, calculate a new trajectory and crank up the anti-gravity shields to full power—and, of course, suit up fast in advance in case of hull breaches. You need to think of the bigger picture. You need to understand the Eagle itself: How it works, what it's capable of, what its limits are."

Adair stayed silent.

Graham pointed to the novice pilot, "These 'games' are important, don't get me wrong. But someone thinks you need more real world training." He pulled a crumpled piece of paper from his uniform pocket and read it aloud. "This Thursday, 1500 hours. Launch Pad Four. Per Commander Koenig."

Adair felt immediately awkward. Wasn't Bill Fraser training him?

"What are you pulling, Tom? He's mine to train," Fraser defended.

"Relax, mother hen," Graham retorted, slapping the paper printout onto the table. "The marching orders are for you, too. It would seem you're both taking a trip to the far side of the moon."

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

"I don't understand why you can't share the mission details?"

In the main hangar deck machine workshop, Alan Carter looked across at Bill Fraser and Ty Adair, frustrated by the duty assignment and even more frustrated that John Koenig and Victor Bergman were withholding information. He felt he was part of Alpha's inner circle; he commanded the pilot section. He wasn't fond of being kept in the dark—and even more upset that his pilots were being assigned without his consultation.

"How do you think we feel? Graham relayed the orders in front of other pilots! Now *everyone* is curious," Fraser defended. "Furthermore, our mission specifics are encrypted to our Computer log-ins. Only a few details were shared on the message. The rest is top secret, by order of Koenig himself."

Carter fumed. "That's not right. I need to talk with the Commander."

The Aussie pilot's concern stemmed from deeper issues. He had been notified with a duplicate set of orders; a customary, standard procedure. He was privy to knowing about any flights on or off the base. Whether it was a major mission or a supply run to a lunar expedition, Alan Carter was always notified. What bothered him most was that the base commander had chosen pilots for an obvious special mission... and not consulted him.

"Alright, dismissed. Thank you both."

Carter turned for the door. Adair and Fraser waited for him to depart.

"What do you think this is about? And don't tell me it's Cellini replacing Carter. I still don't buy that."

Adair looked red-faced and confused, as though some omen of his own doing had transpired. "I think I know, but I shouldn't discuss it."

"It's bad enough that Carter had to pull us down here to talk privately," Fraser continued. "I think you owe me something. *Anything*. Alpha's too small to keep secrets."

"Not when it might concern the well-being of Alpha itself," Adair replied. "Look, Bill, I know this may cause some sleepless nights, but orders are orders. And 'top secret' means exactly that. I'm guessing you have navigation data, mission directives, fuel reports—essentially the bare bone basics to work from."

Fraser turned, shaking his head *yes*, but abandoned hope of learning anything from his protégé. "Why did I ever think Alpha was such a great assignment?"

"Because," Adair said convincingly, "you wanted the 'adventure of a lifetime.' We all did."

Fraser nodded.

Adair gestured to his mentor. "You know what they say, Bill: 'Be careful what you ask the Universe for. You'll usually get it. We got it in spades.'"

"If you mean God, then I understand," Fraser said.

Adair acquiesced, "Something like that."

"Well, that 'something' has a very strange, twisted sense of humor."

THOOM!

From the rear of the workshop, large metal parts struck the floor with a deafening thunder. Both men were caught completely off-guard as silence turned to jarring cacophony.

"What the hell was that?!" Adair yelled.

"Anyone there?" Fraser asked, moving to the nearby workbench in anticipation of any further surprises. He picked up a meter-long titanium pipe, circling around Adair as both men moved towards the storage shelves. *What I would give for a hand laser right now*, Fraser thought.

"IS ANYONE THERE?!" Fraser shouted again, implying fair warning that he would make good with his makeshift staff if he were surprised.

Both men peered into the expansive storage section. In one aisle, four large curved rounds of motionless, shiny metal glistened on the ground. The shelving was intact. No other parts had fallen.

"Maybe a moon quake," Adair wondered.

"I didn't feel anything," Fraser said, looking upward, then all around for signs of an intruder. None was to be found.

Adair pointed forward. "There's another exit around the bend, but I didn't hear the door activate."

"We'll... assume it was a moon quake," Fraser said, lowering the pipe. "I'm going to have enough restless nights over this mysterious mission."

"I know what you mean. I don't need anything else to worry about either."

•••

Alan Carter stood defiantly in John Koenig's office. "Commander, this is wrong and you know it!"

Koenig was expecting a reaction from Carter, although not the passionate, argumentative one he displayed. Recent issues with one of Alpha's main water reclamation plants had kept him from talking with the pilot section leader about his recent orders to Adair and Fraser. Instead of asking questions, Carter hammered the moonbase leader from the start, displaying dismay and hurt over Koenig's decision to withhold details.

"Captain, this is not open for debate. I'm asking you to obey my orders."

Koenig was reminded of previous heated exchanges, from Carter's emotional outbursts over piloting the escape Eagle away from the black sun, to his hesitation during the first encounter with the Tritons. Koenig knew he made the right choice in Alan Carter as the pilot section leader. His natural charisma, his acumen and his experience made him the natural candidate. He had no intention of rewarding Carter's loyalty with a demotion. Other candidates, including Tony Cellini and Stuart Parks, had come to mind. But no one could—or should—fill Carter's shoes.

"John, why shouldn't I be involved? These are my men... my section."

"Alan, I have my reasons. *Please*. I need you to respect that."

Carter abruptly stopped his tirade, calming slightly. He knew he needed a cooler head to prevail.

"I just realized that's the first time I've called you John."

Koenig smiled. "Probably so."

"I'm sorry," Carter resigned.

Koenig stood, pointing to the closed wall unit between his office and Main Mission's command area. "Alan, no one in there—*no one*—is aware of the specifics."

He felt extraordinarily awkward in withholding information from his command staff, especially Carter. During Alpha's collision course with the planet Astheria, he bet his command—his very life—on Carter's loyalty. Before the moon collided with the planet, nuclear mines had been strewn ahead of the moon's trajectory. Called Operation Shockwave, a series of pre-planned explosions would have shifted the lunar body to safety. But following a meeting with Astheria's queen, Arra, Koenig and Carter worked together to prevent the detonation. *Blind faith*, they felt. *Pure insanity*, the rest of Alpha agreed. And in the end, Koenig and Carter won. And the impossible happened as Astheria disappeared, transcending to somewhere else, when the celestial bodies touched.

Koenig walked over to the blonde-haired Eagle pilot. "Can I count on you?"

"You can always count on me, Commander. Even when I disagree, I'll still respect what you have to say. Yours is the final word."

Koenig looked him squarely in the eyes, placing a hand upon Carter's yellow-sleeved shoulder. "I promise, when the time is right—and hopefully soon—you'll be the first person to hear the whole story."

"Alright, Commander... *John*."

Alan Carter demurred with a smile of his own, then turned to leave.

Later that evening, Commander Koenig stood again at the top level of his office. The collective of Ty Adair, Ian Johnson, Bette Salzgitter and Bill Fraser sat in the furniture below, wondering why this assemblage was brought together. Adair wondered if the Commander had doubted their ability to keep the news of Simmonds's journal to themselves.

"Commander, I may be jumping the gun here, but I want you to know I've kept my word about recent events," Adair volunteered.

Koenig nodded agreeably, folding his arms and directing his comments to the entire group.

"Ty, I've chosen you to head a mission on Thursday. Bette, Ian—you understand that you're involved for the same reasons as Ty." He looked at Fraser. "Bill, I'm sorry you're being pulled into this, but you've been mentoring Ty with his flight training. I think it's a good idea to keep the 'team' together."

Koenig gestured to his conference table. Everyone moved over, intrigued by several selenographic maps of the lunar far side.

"We're overdue to conduct field work on the far side. I want your team to evaluate a few different areas. Radiation spacesuits will need to be worn."

"Radiation suits?"

"Yes, Bill. You're going to the former nuclear waste disposal areas."

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

"You weren't kidding about 'top secret', Ty. I'm just dropping you off to retrieve core samples?"

Bill Fraser and Ty Adair walked ahead of Ian Johnson and Bette Salzgitter. The emptiness of Alpha's corridors was only an illusion. Both men kept their voices to whispers as they discussed the meeting in Koenig's office.

"Yup. You're playing courier."

"Should I worry about going sterile from your shopping trip?"

"Not at all. Johnson is the geologist. Both Bette and I will be assisting with surface work. You'll be safe and sound in the cockpit," Adair said, pausing to add, "Then again, I'll be your co-pilot, too. You better hope I keep my suit clean."

"I'll have onboard rad detectors working at 110%, of that you can be sure."

As the two men laughed, Salzgitter raced ahead to get Adair's attention. Her outstretched arm reached for his shoulder.

"Ty, can we talk?"

Adair looked back at her as they went around a corner, ready to answer.

They didn't see the rows of heavy equipment stacked precariously high.

"Watch out there!"

Both Salzgitter and Adair rolled to the side; Fraser wasn't so lucky. An avalanche of bulky items tumbled downwards as they walked smack into the uneven stacks. Salzgitter gave a slight shriek while Johnson froze in place. Fraser raised his arm instinctively to block the falling impedimenta.

And the crashing sounds contained more than the snapping of mere metal and plastic parts.

...

John Koenig had done something uncharacteristic: He had walked the length of his office to open his side entrance door personally. Not with the distant pointing of his commlock, not with the click of a button on his desk. Instead, he worked his way to the wall panel next to the door and activated the door release. He had expected his guest to join him long after the others left. He felt it best that the Alphan wasn't seen by anyone, especially by his previous guests.

"Commander, I apologize for my attire..."

"Please, come in. I wish we had talked sooner."

Koenig escorted the Alphan to the lower level of the office area. "Dr. Russell gave me a good overview of your condition. I don't... quite know what to say."

"There aren't any words, sir. There really aren't."

Koenig sat next to his guest, wanting to provide comfort, wanting to bring some happiness or joy. His job was usually the anti-thesis of that: He maintained Moonbase Alpha's command structure, security and general well-being with rigid orders and minimal compromises. His leadership had saved the base many times over. It had also sent fellow Alphans to their untimely deaths. And faced with the waning mortality of his guest, he felt despair crawl into the depths of his soul. No order, no action could prevent the inevitable: Death was coming. Koenig could tangibly feel the darkness as it descended upon the room.

"I don't have a family history of anything, no genetic legacies, nothing to pin this on."

"Dr. Vincent said you came to Alpha without a physical—"

"My routine physical was scheduled for another few months back home. I don't know if it would have changed anything..."

Koenig knew better. He had read the reports delivered by Dr. Russell a couple of days ago. Had treatments been started even a few weeks ago when the condition was discovered, Earth-based hospitals could have cured the illness. His thoughts strained quietly about Alpha's self-sufficiency model. *We can reclaim and recycle an entire Eagle transporter with hundreds of thousands of parts, but we can't manufacture most medicines.*

It was inescapable. The spectre of darkness lingered nearby, reveling in the gloom, feeding on the despair.

"Commander, I had wanted to see you, to ask you..."

Koenig leaned forward, unprepared.

"Make my life meaningful. Find me something—*anything*—that I can contribute to in my last days."

Tears flowed from her eyes.

Koenig held her hand; he wished he had talked with her sooner. The delays caused by her surgery had wasted precious time. Now was the time to get answers.

"I need you to tell me everything you can about Gerald Simmonds—including your involvement with him."

...

"A sprained wrist, multiple deep tissue bruises, and further injury to your left arm, bordering on a simple break of the ulna."

Doctor Ben Vincent stood alongside one of the attending nurses to help dress Bill Fraser's arm. The meds had kicked in, giving the pilot mild relief from the painful incident. "You're very lucky, Bill."

"But I'm grounded, you mean. Remind me to break those technicians' arms when I'm better."

“Considering one of them is a kendo champion, I’m not sure that’s a good idea,” Bette Salzgitter said, making a fist and swinging it through the air, “but I’ll hold him down if you like, or rip off that mustache of his. He’s an arrogant—”

“Let it go, Salzgitter,” Johnson said disapprovingly.

“Why?”

“I work with him on the weekends. You remember. Those hydroponics projects.”

“Alright, but let him know I’ll be watching him and his workmate. That equipment should never have been stacked there without floor signs or warning tape.”

“Ever the scrapper, Bette?” Adair humored. He knew from personal experience how protective she was about those close to her. Whether by virtue of training/mentoring him, eating at their table or being assigned to Thursday’s mission, Bill Fraser unknowingly found himself adopted by the ever-loyal Austrian.

But his mind was thinking of other things.

“I guess I’m not flying on Thursday, Ty.”

The tension in the room shifted considerably.

“And I’m not rated to fly yet,” Adair added. “What now?”

“I’ll fly.”

Tom Graham stood in the doorway, leaning to one side. He wore a sly grin and winked at the group. Johnson was instantly reminded of his fellow geologist, Dave O’Reilly. All that Graham was missing was O’Reilly’s hat.

“I was in the neighborhood. Nasty break there.”

Adair walked towards the Kiwi pilot. “Talk with Commander Koenig about flight assignments.” He led Graham out into the hallway.

“Already did,” Graham answered. “Someone had to report the accident to Main Mission. I went ahead while you folks were getting Fraser to medical.”

Adair was taken aback by Graham’s pro-activeness. “Mind if I ask why you’re so interested?”

“I’m stir crazy, pure and simple. My mission rotation won’t come up again for a few months. That’s why I’m doing training. That’s how I’m getting flight time.”

“And Koenig approved this?”

“He’s reviewing it.”

Adair nodded. “Alright then, we’ll see what develops.”

Graham pursed his lips and gestured to the Alphans with an informal salute as he proceeded to leave. The others followed suit, saying their goodbyes to Fraser and moving to the main corridor. There was little else they could do to help their friend.

"I am exhausted!" Adair declared, charting a course back to the living section. Johnson nodded vigorously in agreement, waiving his hand as he silently headed down another hallway.

Salzgitter leaned into Adair, following his lead, and spoke softly. "Ty, we really should talk."

Adair rubbed his finger tips, hoping to minimize the headache that was quickly growing. "I thought we had that conversation yesterday."

"Not exactly. I want to discuss Marisa."

"Can it wait?"

"This isn't a hallway conversation. We need to talk in private."

Adair saw the look in her eyes; there was something unspoken, something serious that needed to be discussed. "As long as it's only about Marisa. My quarters are closer," he said quietly.

Both headed down the passageway. Unseen by Adair, Salzgitter's fingers tapped a series of buttons silently on her commlock as they walked on.

•••

"Yes, I know Marisa took time off. She's doing the walkabout program."

Adair stood far apart from Salzgitter, who cradled a cup of cold water and paced the floor of his living quarters. He wasn't sure how comfortable he felt alone with her, given the recent episode in the travel tube. As he learned during their walk to the living section, she had been trying to talk with him earlier. With all of the chaos, there had never been a good time. Now she had his focus.

"Didn't she schedule it?" Salzgitter asked, almost insinuating in her tone that she knew the answer.

"It was a quick decision," Adair answered. "I didn't have much time to find someone to cover for her. Jason Samuels was kind enough to help."

"You don't remember me asking you the other morning where she was?"

Adair searched his thoughts. "Barely."

"Did you know she's been hospitalized?"

Had Adair been holding the cup, he might have dropped it.

"No! I didn't know..."

"Neither did I. She kept mum to everyone about it. I... visited her yesterday."

Adair reacted strongly. "You know you're supposed to honor the privacy of anyone on walkabout unless they contact you! That's the number one mandate of the program, Bette!"

"Number two, actually."

A series of knocks rapped at Adair's door.

"You seem to know a lot about the program, Ty."

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Adair moved to the nearby doorway, staying focused on Salzgitter. "I'm a section chief. I have to know specifics. If you recall, Atu Kamau had made his request a couple of months ago. I read up again when Marisa made the request, too."

"I'm curious about the hospitalization."

Adair gestured his commlock at the entryway. The door slid wide open.

"Is that my cue?"

Marisa Solas, pale and weak, stood before them.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

"I summoned her," Salzgitter declared. "This is her story to tell, not mine."

Solas walked past Adair, taking a seat on one of the four large chairs within the room. He hadn't motioned her into the room; she invited herself in, just as Salzgitter had. His curiosity was piqued. He was tired of any new mysteries, too.

She curled up, trembling slightly. "Could you turn up the heat? I should have dressed better." Her silky, light blue robe and pajamas were standard issue on Moonbase Alpha. The designers, however, should have chosen better heat-retaining fabrics. It was a common complaints amongst Alphans.

Another item to add to the petition circulating for uniform changes, he thought. Then again, spare fabrics were in short supply. Maybe Solas needed a jacket instead.

"The thermostat is regulated to 20 degrees Celsius. I'll have to ask Life Support for extra allocations..."

"Or a blanket will do. I'm really cold."

"Hurry, Ty. Marisa... had surgery. She's still recovering."

Adair bolted across the room as though her life depended on it, snatching one of the thermal covers. *Surgery?* He brought it to her as she began to shiver violently.

"Are you okay? Should I call Medical?" he asked, tucking it around her.

"No, there's not much they can do."

Adair stood dumbfounded.

"Ty, really... do sit down."

He turned to sit across from her as Salzgitter circled behind her, seemingly protective of Solas with her body language.

"I'm your section chief," Adair spoke gently, "and you'd think I would know something about my staff having an operation..."

Solas reached out, placing her hand on his chest. Adair found himself frozen in time, feeling her presence pressed against him, almost conveying her entire story in unspoken terms. "I'm dying, Ty."

Adair drew a worried stare, still caught in the moment of her hand upon him. "I'm dying and I have so much I need to share. So much I need to do."

Salzgitter knelt behind her, putting her arms on Solas's shoulders.

"The whys and hows aren't important. I just found out recently. It wasn't something I wanted the entire section to know about. People tend to treat you differently when they know. That was Dr. Russell's experience, anyways."

She withdrew the hand from his chest as he felt tears edge into the corner of his eyes. "It's inoperable. If we were still in Earth orbit, I would probably be recovering in some well-equipped hospital with a staff of experts. But Alphan resources are limited."

"And just when we thought Alpha's doctors were capable of almost anything..." Salzgitter said, choking back tears of her own.

"They are. *They are*, Bette," Solas said, "but not without the right medicines."

"I-I'm sorry, Marisa," Adair stammered softly, "I don't understand. If you're inoperable, why did you have surgery?"

Solas nodded, pausing to pull her blanket back. Salzgitter stood up, moving her hands away as Solas bared her midriff through her light blue robe. A series of bandages were firmly adhered across her lower abdomen.

"Because I won't be around to see my children grow. I won't be alive to have any children of my own. But... I want you—you and Bette—to be the parents of my children."

Adair was speechless.

Solas covered back up, beginning to tear up as well. "It doesn't have to be you or Bette. I did want it to be from two people I care about, but..."

Salzgitter placed her hands back upon Solas's shoulders to comfort. "Do you remember when Dr. Vincent had spoke about the Alphan gene pool some time ago? While we can't have children yet, there needs to be genetic diversity for future generations. Vincent, Russell and others... it may sound ghoulish, but they've stored genetic samples from some Alphans—mainly deceased Alphans. And Marisa put her own eggs into cryogenic freeze for the day that others can bear children."

Adair felt sick to his stomach with numerous realizations. His world consisted of astromechanical work: Salvaging parts, assembling and repairing, keeping Alpha's Eagle fleet aloft. He hadn't considered that other sections would have implemented "salvage operations" of their own.

"I'm really sorry, Marisa. Really, I am. This is a lot to process right now," Adair said, staying seated, but staring elsewhere. His mind felt overtaxed by what he'd heard.

"I wouldn't have asked," Solas replied, "It's just that I... I feel very close to you."

Adair continued to avert his eyes. "The notes with the lipstick?"

"Yes. Please, Ty—I didn't know how else to reach out to you. You're usually all business."

Adair's eyes met hers. "I'm your section chief, your boss. What else would I be?" he said, smiling weakly. He was still absorbing the harsh reality that Alpha's very survival relied upon paradigm shifts of various morals and values. His pre-Breakaway world consisted of one man, one woman, one union producing their own off-spring. Had Russell and others been making secret contingency plans? Were his fundamental core beliefs damned in the new Alphan order of things? Was there even a new order being created, or was his imagination getting the best of him?

Adair felt anger grow. "All business—yeah. Seems the doctors are all business, too. Am I going to have to donate, too?"

"No, *no*, Ty," Solas retorted. "That's not true. I think you're forgetting something. Since the nuclear war of 1987, there have been genetic banks on the moon. I gave my eggs willingly. It's the only legacy I have, Ty. There's no way I could have bear a child, even if I started right now."

"But why me, Marisa?"

Solas looked shyly at Adair.

"I think I might be in love with you."

•••

Molly Cranston stepped into Ty Adair's darkened quarters, re-attaching her commlock unit to her belt. Only the sound of the door activation had alerted him to her presence. She found her lover sitting upright on his couch, surrounded by a discarded blanket.

"I came by during my lunchtime for a visit. More accurately, for a midnight snack..." she said playfully. "I didn't expect you to be awake, though."

Adair didn't move. "It's been quite a day..."

Cranston moved to sit next to him, placing her head against her.

"Anything worth sharing?"

He drew a long pause. "Do you want children, Molly?"

"No," she replied. "Actually, yes. But right now, no."

Adair shifted so she laid back across his lap. He began stroking her hair lightly, looking deeply into her eyes.

"You know I love you," he said.

"*I know*. You have a funny way of showing it sometimes, but I know."

Adair looked longingly at his lover. "Maybe if I switched to third shift, I could show you more often."

Cranston sat up, wrapping her arms around him. "So, what happened to you today? Really?"

Adair drew a deep breath.

"This is really going to kill the mood."

"Try me."

“One of my technicians—Bette—still has feelings for me. Another is dying, says she loves me and wants me to father her child.”

Cranston maintained her composure, but inwardly wondered—and worried—what she was getting into.

“Ty, if you’re trying to make me jealous, you don’t—“

“No, I’m serious. I swear, I couldn’t make this up if I tried.”

Cranston held onto Adair a bit tighter.

He continued, “On top of that, something... *big*... happened a couple of days ago that I can’t talk about. Koenig’s orders.”

Cranston blinked in disbelief.

“You’re right. You killed the mood.”

Adair stroked her hair again, hoping she would stay. “I’m overwhelmed, Molly. You can’t imagine—“

Cranston interrupted, “Well, in any other situation, I’d probably wonder why two women felt so strongly about you and throw some jealous tirade. That’s not my style. I’m really concerned about the ‘something big,’ though.”

“I can’t say. It’s *that* sensitive. I need you to understand.”

Cranston leaned away from Adair. “Let’s see, you’ve been distant from me for a couple of days, unavailable to talk. The rumor mill says you, Bette Salzgitter and someone else were coming and going from Simmonds’s quarters. Shall I go on?”

“I—“

“You’ve buried yourself in Eagle pilot training without so much as saying one word to me.”

Adair was speechless.

“I chose one person to be with, Ty. *One person*. That’s you.”

Adair grew increasingly uncomfortable.

“Did I make the right choice?”

Adair looked away, remembering the three sentences he shared with his fellow section chief, Xu Sun Shui, after meeting Molly Cranston: *The door opened. She stepped inside. My life changed.*

Three simple sentences which carried profound unspoken subtext.

Subtext that couldn’t possibly convey the depths of love that had grown from that day forward.

As Sun had responded with equally concise words of her own: *Fate. Embrace it.*

Adair looked her squarely in the face. “I need you to come with me. We need to talk with someone.”

Cranston stood up. “Ty, I’m on my duty shift right now. If I’m ever going to get out of third shift, then I can’t be away too long.”

“I wouldn’t worry about that,” Adair finished.

Cranston nodded.

“Trust me, Molly. You made the right choice.”

•••

Victor Bergman slept quietly in the Medical Section while Dr. Ben Vincent stood nearby. The elder Alphan looked content; his eyes moved rapidly under their lids as he slept deeply. The casual observer wouldn't be able to tell if he was in the clutches of a blissful dream, the successful outcome of a solved calculation or looking intently at something intriguing. His face bore no signs of distress; only an occasional smile graced his lips.

“May I come in?”

The voice came from the dimly-lit entryway to the ward. The short-haired form of a red-sleeved, female Alphan stood in wait, clutching something in her hands.

Vincent moved away from Bergman's bedside, motioning his hand to leave the recovery unit. Both Alphas stepped in an empty side office where the Jamaican-born physician was quick to close the door.

“Commander Koenig told me about the Professor's condition. I'm supposed to tell you ‘I am a typical Irishman; my family came from Yorkshire.’”

“Pure cloak and dagger,” Vincent uttered aloud, “but given the secrecy around this, I understand why he's doing it. Yes, he said you were coming down here with something important.”

The woman handed him a piece of paper, torn on one side, with the ink handwriting smudged slightly on the lightly-rumpled surface. “This has already been scanned into Computer's data banks, but I thought you might want to have the actual copy. There's a set of pharmaceuticals listed that might help... unlock... whatever is affecting his mind.”

Marisa Solas held the paper in her outstretched hand. Vincent took it from her, bowing slightly in the exchange.

“It's... ironic that we might have the materials to help him, but none to help me.”

The doctor reviewed the crumpled paper. “These medications—They're potentially damaging to the body. Even toxic.”

“I figure it's a last resort. Given Professor Bergman's state, you should probably use them.”

The doctor nodded quietly as the Spaniard turned to leave.

“There's a few keywords listed, too,” Solas added. “Try using them during the treatments. I'm guessing they might trigger partial, maybe even total recall with the medications.”

“Wait...” Vincent hurriedly asked. “Where did you ever get this paper?”

Solas pursed her lips, hesitant to say more. "From a very distraught... very selfish man many months ago. A very foolish little man who got what he deserved."

Vincent looked puzzled, wondering if he had been given an actual answer, or more information to decipher. His lips silently mouthed the name: *Commissioner Simmonds*.

Solas finished, "Desperation drives people to do strange things. He gave this to me some time ago... probably as a final safe harbor, in case anyone discovered his secrets. A last linchpin to hold onto his power, should anything be revealed. Help Professor Bergman find his truths, Doctor." She hesitated to say Ty Adair's name, too.

Vincent began to open the door for Solas. "I am curious about that password Koenig gave you. Where exactly did that quote come from?"

Solas smiled, "The Commander said it was written by one of the Professor's favorite authors."

...

"You were right to come talk with me."

Commander John Koenig sat back in the lower office level with Adair and Cranston. The pilot section chief had assumed correctly it was another near-sleepless night for Alpha's leader when he took his bewildered lover to the Main Mission complex. And the bewilderment grew to unabashed disbelief, then understanding, as Koenig agreed to enlighten Cranston with the details of the recent, highly-sensitive happenings. As Adair asked the commander in a brash, strikingly forward manner, *if Molly were Doctor Russell, would you want the details withheld from her?* It wasn't the best argument, but it reminded Koenig about the preciousness of relationships on Alpha. Partnerships were forming, couples were making commitments to one another, and even marriages were in the works by some.

There was no way Cranston could have understood the magnitude of the past week's happenings without a third party's involvement. And she now understood why her lover had been distant in recent times. Koenig accepted their sworn loyalty to secrecy. She also understood that one word of these secrets leaking out would result in a permanent assignment to third shift, maybe worse.

"I don't think anyone would believe me, Commander. Thank you... *thank you for sharing this*," Cranston said humbly.

"This meeting never occurred, understood?" Koenig retorted, gesturing to the side entrance.

"Yes, sir," she replied, standing up with Adair.

"Commander, if I may..." Adair asked, turning to his lover. "Molly, I'll join you shortly."

Cranston nodded agreeably. "I'm actually going to head back to the Technical section right now."

With the door closed behind her, Adair turned back to the commander.

"I'd like to request a roster change for Thursday's mission."

"And what did you have in mind?"

"Give Marisa Solas the assignment. Replace Bette Salzgitter with her."

Koenig didn't flinch; the suggestion only piqued his interest. "Why Solas?"

"I know about her condition. She came to me to discuss it."

Koenig responded candidly, "That doesn't demonstrate why she needs to join the mission."

"Maybe not," Adair continued, "but this mission might be something of a legacy that she needs to leave behind, or help to heal."

The commander nodded solemnly. "There's no need to change the roster. I've already added her to the mission. She will be replacing Bette Salzgitter."

Adair nodded. "Thank you, sir."

"There two things you need to know: One, I'm assigning Tom Graham as the replacement pilot. And two, if you find anything that can be retrieved—and if the radiation levels are too hazardous—Marisa Solas is to be considered expendable."

"Considered—?"

"Yes. Considered expendable. Those were *her* wishes, Ty."

Adair felt his headaches surge back to life, hammering at his exhausted body. "Very well, sir."

The astromech turned to leave, carrying far more burden than any Alphan should have bore. But Koenig had one more thing to say.

"Ty, you may not be aware. When we assigned Marisa to your section months ago, she wasn't a transfer from Earth command."

Adair stood alert again, trying hopelessly to brace himself for whatever revelation awaited.

"She was Commissioner Simmonds's assistant."

Adair felt the weight of a metaphoric second-to-last straw dropped upon the camel's back. He felt close to his breaking point.

"She was on that Eagle flight with Simmonds—the one that arrived shortly before Breakaway. She wasn't privy to everything Simmonds's knew. But she knew about far side lunar operations—information she kept to herself. Until recently." Koenig looked down, then back up again, collecting his thoughts. "She knows about the journal."

Adair looked at Koenig. "Is there any chance she knows why I'm mentioned in the book?"

Koenig shook his head in the negative. "No, not a clue. Not about you, nor any others—not even about Professor Bergman."

"Professor Bergman?"

Adair searched his thoughts. *Bergman... Bergman...* he thought to himself. *Did he—could he—recall any instances of Bergman from the past?*

Koenig's expression betrayed him. At this late hour, the openness and candor of their previous talk had dropped his mental guard.

"I don't know how to say this. You weren't the only Alphan currently serving who was mentioned in Simmonds's journal. Professor Bergman was, too."

"I should talk with the Professor—"

No, Koenig shook his head. "Something happened, something... triggered for him. He's in Medical right now."

"I didn't—"

"Ty, at this point, you may be the only one who may have the answers."

"Isn't anyone worried that whatever affected the Professor might affect me as well?"

Koenig drew a beat, then struggled whether to divulge more information.

"Dr. Russell was using experimental techniques to help him remember. They did more harm than good. He's recovering."

"Then there's hope for me—"

"No, Ty. I said he's recovering. The prognosis isn't very good."

Adair felt badly for the man. Victor Bergman had become a living legend around the base: a scientist, educator and keen intellect with few equals. His accomplishments had been record-setting and history-making in scope. Yet the gentle soul had vitiated most ego, arrogance and pride that consumed so many others in the space sciences field. He treated everyone around him as family, becoming something of an Uncle-like figurehead to most Alphas. The "Professor" usually had a lesson, an unabashed opinion and an fascinating anecdote to share with anyone interested.

Adair reminded himself that he needed to make more time for one of Bergman's lyceum events if—*when*—he recovered.

Koenig leaned over to Adair. "Ty, did you hear me? You need to understand: We found the missing page."

"From the journal?"

"Yes, we found it. Or, should I say, someone stepped forward to deliver it to us."

Marisa Solas.

The name echoed through Adair's ears.

"The page had formulas, codewords..." Koenig volunteered. "Information that might help you both to remember."

"Then let's get started!" Adair bellowed.

"Not yet..." Koenig said pointedly. "In due time. Doctor Russell wants to wait on the actual medical procedures—at least until Professor Bergman pulls through. I... would prefer to wait, too."

"To see if he works for him?"

“Exactly.”

Adair began to move away from Koenig. “So, I’m still stuck in the Looking Glass... in Wonderland. And without any magic potions.”

Koenig shifted positions, moving to his comm post. “Computer, clearance Alpha One Zeta Nine. Gerald Simmonds’s journal.” A digitally scanned image of the former Commissioner’s notebook appeared. Koenig punched one of the console’s buttons to change the images. Adair walked over to see the display for himself.

“I took the liberty of scanning the journal into Computer myself. But you need to know: It doesn’t mean a damn unless we get physical proof—actual evidence—that it occurred.”

“Why is it so important?” Adair asked bluntly. “We’re focused on our very survival! Everyone seems to have forgotten about Breakaway! We’re chattering about where the next meal is coming from, or what cosmic menace has attacked the base. Can’t we just forget and forgive the past?”

“Forgive our trespasses?” Koenig mused. “Whether ten days—or ten years—from now, there are a handful of Alphans who know the ultimate answers—about what led to our exodus, about why we were exiled amongst the stars...”

Koenig grew upset. “I can’t imagine any of our consciences can bottle that up for very long.”

And he added: “—and I think those answers are tearing apart Professor Bergman’s mind.”

Adair delayed giving an axiomatic response, opting instead for silence.

“Alpha is a fragile community, Ty,” Koenig conceded. “We may be in survival mode, but it will take leaders—leaders such as yourself—to assure our ongoing survival, our growth by dealing with truths, not denials, omissions or lies.”

Like the destructive, deceitful nature of Gerald Simmonds.

“I have faith in Alpha to handle the truth,” Koenig waxed. “We need more than a dead man’s notes, which may have been written in a last act of sick revenge to unhinge Alpha.” He looked at Adair. “Something to dismiss the possibilities of carefully planned claims of amnesia.”

Adair understood. For all he knew, he was a pawn, a random player brought unwillingly into a sad, twisted game.

Koenig turned off the display and paused for a moment before looking Adair squarely in the eyes.

“Are you sure you don’t recall anything, Ty?”

“Commander, I wish I could remember, but I don’t,” Adair lamented, feeling disappointed, even embarrassed for the lack of knowing. “Something lies deep within my brain. I just can’t recall anything...”

“Something might lie beneath the far side’s surface, too.” Koenig put his

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hand on Adair's shoulder. "I hope you can find the answers. For all we know, there are no hidden memories, no secret base, no truth to any of this. And one of our finest lies in Medical—"

Adair stood firm in his resolve. "Sir, I have to believe this trip will uncover those memories. For me and the Professor both."

"Alpha's future may depend on it."

CHAPTER TWENTY

On this Thursday afternoon, Tom Graham stood alongside the forward starboard landing strut of Eagle Six, eyeing the squarish landing foot. *How many alien worlds has this metal touched upon?* he thought to himself. *How many more until it need not?*

He, like most Alphans, longed for a habitable world to settle on. As they discovered, most worlds with Earth-like environments also hosted lifeforms—typically intelligent, mostly hostile lifeforms. No unpopulated “Garden of Eden” was to be found—not yet anyways. It had become known unofficially as the “Bergman Factor” following Professor Victor Bergman’s repeated, whimsical comments on the subject. At some point, the Alphans might need to evacuate to a populated planet, provided the bio-sphere—and inhabitants—could accommodate them. But a habitable planet usually meant there were lifeforms present—typically intelligent, often incompatible, life. Given Alpha’s past encounters, finding an abandoned or minimally populated wasn’t likely to happen. It had led to serious debate amongst the populace, most of whom tabled their arguments when asked how Earth would have handled a wayward moon with a group of beings requesting sanctuary. The answer? Intense distrust, paranoia, racism, and violence; ugly realities that couldn’t be ignored. Maybe it was cosmic karma reaped upon the Alphans for their world’s intolerances.

“Tom, are you ready to go?”

Ty Adair’s comment preceded his appearance from the underside of the spacecraft. He had taken a few moments of pre-flight checking, too, as they waited for their crew mates to arrive.

“Bring it on,” Graham replied with a wink. “I’ll see you in the cockpit. Don’t be late.”

A yellow-hued moon buggy wheeled in the distance, bringing Ian Johnson and Marisa Solas across the tarmac to the Eagle. Solas appeared ill from the sharp turns that Johnson was making. The small rovers were agile on the near-weightless lunar surface. However, on the gravity-laden, synthcrete flooring of the hangar bay, they didn’t take corners very well. For Solas, the saving grace was wearing her spacesuit, as instructed in advance by Adair. She had secured her helmet. Had the buggy taken a spill, her head would be protected. Then again, she was more apt to lose her lunch with his driving skills. And within a spacesuit, that was something to be avoided at all costs.

The supreme irony had been Johnson’s refusal to wear his helmet during their crazed sprint across the hangar floor. *I’m battling a terminal illness and I’m the one wearing the protective head gear?* Solas thought to herself. She quietly wished Johnson would flip the buggy to prove her point.

She watched Eagle Six grow closer. Adair stood next to the ship's stairway, ready to receive them.

"Where's the red carpet, mate?" Johnson yelled, squealing the rover to an abrupt halt within walking distance of the ship. Both passengers climbed out, carrying additional instruments with them.

"It would be a lot easier to carry everything if you wore your helmet," Adair said. He took a couple of items from Johnson, who had nearly dropped the yellow-colored bucket more than once.

"Geologists make poor travelers," Solas mused. "We should have put everything into a tool cart for you."

"Yeah, yeah," Johnson mocked sarcastically, boarding the ship.

"Marisa, wait up a moment," Adair asked. He walked away from the Eagle with her, shoulder to shoulder. "I need to ask you—mainly because there have been so many surprises in the past few days—have you and Graham been keeping any more secrets about Simmonds?"

Solas looked intently at her section chief. "Ty, I can't answer that. Not directly, anyways."

"Why?" he asked sharply.

She turned to face him, looking up into his curious eyes. "When I came up to the moon with Simmonds, I was Simmonds's assistant. I was supposed to do liaison work for the Meta probe project. Obviously that never happened."

Solas continued, "After Breakaway happened, I practically ran to Commander Koenig's office to ask for a reassignment. Do you remember? Koenig put me into your section as a junior technician after the base recovered. He made up some nonsense about how I arrived with the last cargo Eagle to Alpha on September 11th or 12th..."

"We noticed you were unusually wet behind the ears..."

"Behind the scenes, I've had to educate myself on every aspect of flight operations. It has been a daily struggle."

"That's why I assigned Bette to work closer with you," Adair commented. "And had I known you worked for Simmonds..."

Solas looked downwards, feeling shamed. "When Simmonds turned mutinous—something most Alphans weren't aware of—it confirmed my worst fears about the man. Right after Breakaway, he tried to get Graham, then me, to rally some Alphans into fleeing in Eagles. It would have been suicidal; even I knew that. When we refused our 'duty' to the Commissioner, it made him even more paranoid and solitary. I kept far, far away from him."

She shifted her gaze across the hangar deck. "Simmonds was certifiable at the end. Koenig would probably have had to imprison him, maybe even kill him eventually, if he hadn't left Alpha with the Kaldorians."

A voice boomed from the distant Eagle's passenger module entrance. "Let's get going, shall we?"

Adair waved his hand to the waiting spacecraft, but continued his focus on Solas. "Are you and Graham in cahoots?"

Solas's pupils widened. "No—no, definitely not."

"You've kept other things secret. Why should I trust that now?" he asked.

"Thomas Graham couldn't pick me out of a line-up!" she replied. "He was a shuttle pilot, pure and simple. He ferried us to the moon and that's all."

She directed her gaze elsewhere. "He never once came out of the cockpit to say anything, not even to the Commissioner. That's why it's all the more surprising that Simmonds ever went to him, when he tried to rally his own evacuation after Breakaway. Simmonds had no friends on this base, no allies. *He was totally alone.*"

Adair paused before replying, then decided enough had been said. He nodded quietly and placed his hand on Solas's shoulder. Both Alphans walked briskly to the waiting Eagle.

The two crewmembers entered the passenger pod. Adair closed the thick outer door behind them with his commlock while Solas moved to the passenger area's computer console. Johnson had already buckled up in his own seat, tinkering silently with a tool he'd brought along. "All set?"

"All aboard the Adair Express! Next stop: Landau crater."

"Our final destination?" Solas said, both light-heartedly and sadly.

"We're on an odyssey without end, Marisa," Adair smiled. "The journey is just beginning."

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"What I'm about to ask you must remain in complete secrecy for now. None of you have been excused because I believe you can follow the orders I'm about to give."

John Koenig stood on the stairs leading from his office to Main Mission's console area. His authority as Moonbase Alpha's leader remained strong and influential. Most Alphans regarded the man as a natural born leader, one who wasn't swayed or shaped by the political machine that installed him as the base's ninth commander. Fate had cast him as the new mythological hero amongst this band of outcast space travelers—the fearless father figure determined to safeguard his people—the Alphans—to a new home amongst the stars.

As he frequently did, John Koenig questioned if he was suited for such a megalithic task, save that his sounding boards were both in the Medical Center. Today, he stood alone. Or so he thought as he addressed the large room of Alphans. In truth, each Alphan before him was an extension of his command structure, ready to follow any order that would keep them alive—orders they had come to respect, admire and obey from their fearless leader.

“Eagle Six is about lift-off from launch pad three. I’m asking that all telemetry, all communications are routed directly to Main Mission and kept encrypted for the time being.”

Koenig walked amongst the staff members, talking loudly for all to hear. “Eagle Six is returning to the place that started our journey: the former location of Nuclear Disposal Area Two.”

Various Alphans reacted to the mention with puzzled faces and curious looks. Nary a single person said anything as Koenig continued. “Since we broke out of Earth’s orbit, I’ve tried to keep us looking forward. But recently we uncovered information which bears investigation—information that might shed further light on why the waste areas exploded.” Koenig paused, then gestured back towards his office. “It’s information that I need each and every one of you to help gather and contain until we can present the results to the entire base.”

“Will Professor Bergman joining us?” Sandra asked. “I heard rumors he was in Medical.”

Koenig smiled with assurance as he faced the slender operations technician. “No—he isn’t. Not yet. It’s a long story, but one I hope he’ll share when we explain everything.” Koenig looked around the room. “Can I count on all of you?”

The room filled with a mixture of low-key yeas and enthusiastic approvals.

“Then let’s get to work. We have an Eagle to launch.”

And a new chapter in Moonbase Alpha’s mythos to chronicle, Koenig pondered.

•••

Eagle Six rocketed across the dark-gray moonscape, adjusting its altitude and approach angle towards the horizon with short bursts from the retro rocket nozzles. Ty Adair realized it was one of his favorite manual control maneuvers while piloting. Each burp of gas from the retro-rockets was immediately noticeable in the weightlessness of space; the Eagle would react instantly whenever he touched the thruster controls. He enjoyed keeping the agile spacecraft on course. At least while Tom Graham wasn’t busy with other matters. The New Zealander had only permitted Adair to pilot the ship until he could resolve a recurring issue—an issue which wasn’t improving since they reached the lunar far side.

“Eagle Six, this is Alpha. Can you adjust your optical sensors again? We’re still getting distorted visuals. Lots of static, virtually no picture.”

Paul Morrow’s voice was calm and soothing; professional and to the point. Graham reciprocated in kind, while adjusting various controls.

“Copy that, Alpha,” Graham said. “It may be a transmission issue. Re-modulate to nine four point five.”

“Eagle Six, we may be depending on your flight recorders for analyses. We didn’t get much improvement. We’re having problems receiving you, too.”

Graham thought to himself: *We’re linked to Alpha’s orbital monitors. We should be getting a perfect transmission while on the far side. This doesn’t make sense.*

“Roger, Alpha. We’ll keep investigating. Six out.”

Graham twisted in his seat to shout down the passageway. “Solas! I need an E.T.A. on those instrumentation packages! They need to be operational!”

The video monitor blinked to life, revealing Marisa Solas through a haze of static. “You don’t need to yell, Tom,” she said calmly. “I’m working on them.”

Adair took notice of the increasing onscreen interference which was now affecting internal communications. “Maybe we should abort the mission, Tom.”

“And when you’re the pilot, Ty, you can make that call.”

Graham bore an obvious chip upon his shoulders that Adair was becoming more concerned about. Within his astromechanics section, he had the unswerving loyalty and dedication of his crew. Short of opening reactor cores with their bare hands, they would do most anything he asked. He was having doubts about Graham. If Koenig encountered strong doubts to any command decision, he countered them with a thunderous rejection, mandating what needed to be done. And often enough, he was right.

Save that Adair wasn’t Koenig... and he wasn’t sure Koenig’s style would work on Graham.

“Nope, I’m just the co-pilot, Tom. I’m *also* the mission leader. Just make sure we can navigate a return course if I say so.”

Adair unbuckled from his chair, standing extremely tall in the cramped cockpit platform. He noted Solas had signed off; she had quietly cut her communication as things flared between the two men. Adair added before leaving the cockpit, “I’ll check on the instrumentation with Marisa. It’s her forté. If it can be fixed, she’s the one.”

Sheer bravado, Adair thought. *Stupid posturing, too*. Solas was a barely qualified junior technical section worker who lacked years of experience. Graham sensed she was the wrong choice for the mission, although he had no clue why the attractive brunette was assigned by Commander Koenig himself. Adair hoped Graham would back down, enough to complete the mission successfully. He worried how much time Solas actually had. Doctor Russell had provided a medical kit with specific instructions if her pain increased. There was little chance she would be affected during this mission. But her time was limited. And she bore the occasional signs of hurt upon her face.

...

From the dark side of the moon where Moonbase Alpha currently resided, data from the orbital monitors began to flood Computer's memory banks.

For the moment, the moon's "far side" was illuminated, thanks to the nearby group of supergiant stars that washed a pale blue-green light upon the lunar surface. The moon's orbital rotation had put the Alphan party's destination into the "daytime" side of the starshine. While the light brought a surreal brightness to the lunar soil, it also carried unrelenting showers of radiation, much of which had finally begun to register with Moonbase Alpha's orbital monitors.

Had the moon carried both an atmosphere and strong magnetic field, the waves of energy might have registered a phenomenal *aurora borealis*-like effect overhead. Instead, the cascades of radiation arrived unabated, hammering into the lunar surface. Despite traveling through cold, interstellar space—despite being thousands of light years from the stellar firestorms—the moon was still subject to these ancient energies.

Energies that were finally getting the attention of those within Main Mission.

"We're looking at a spike of activity in the southeastern quadrant, down by Petavius," noted David Kano, who addressed the room while holding multiple printouts from the command nexus's wall of computers. "The levels are rising steadily. They're still in the green zone—for now." Controller Paul Morrow took the initiative to page Commander Koenig.

Sandra Benes added, "That section of the moon is on the day side. It is receiving a direct bombardment."

The large rectangular wall unit slid open, revealing Koenig's office. The man sat in his chair, monitoring the various reports from his own console. "Kano, Sandra—I want a report every ten minutes. Alert us immediately if levels rise to yellow or red. Paul, raise Eagle Six."

"Yes, sir. They're coming in now."

The transmission on Main Mission's large overhead viewscreen was garbled and fuzzy. The face of Tom Graham was a rasterized haze mingled with crackling static that roared through the command area. Morrow worked frantically—and without success—to adjust the reception.

"—Alphaaaa, E-gle Six——ver Landau crat_——receiving—"

The transmission ended.

"Commander, there may be cause for alarm," noted Kano. "Alpha entered into the night side a few hours ago. Based on our current rotation, trajectory and speed, we will be exposed to the day side in... two hours, eleven minutes."

"And if the radiation levels continue to rise..." Koenig stopped mid-sentence, already surmising the situation ahead. "Sandra! Evacuate all non-essential personnel to the deep emergency shelters!"

Paul Morrow was quick to add his own thoughts: "Sir, what about Eagle Six?"

•••

"That looks like a nice place for a picnic."

Tom Graham's sarcasm brought a smile to Ty Adair's face as he re-emerged into the cockpit area. "I think we're getting heavy interference from area two down there. We've lost contact with Alpha."

"Marisa couldn't find the source of the problem. She's running diagnostics right now."

"Maybe we should dispatch Johnson with his geiger-counters and sensors," Graham quipped, pounding the side cockpit wall with his fist. "Maybe they'll have more luck drawing information than these bloody gadgets."

Eagle Six soared over the barren, dimly-lit moonscape, reaching the edge of what had formerly been known as Landau crater. The stark contrast of the white-colored spacecraft against the darkened surface region was pronounced; the ship shimmered brightly against the light of the distant stars while the terrain below looked like a blackened abyss.

"I'm not getting any readings from area two," Graham noted. "Don't get me wrong—I'm not interested in a landing for old time's sake."

Adair sat down in his pilot chair, buckling up while observing the lunarscape through his forward window. "Even with this sunlight, we still can't see anything. It's... surreal. Almost like a giant black sun embedded into the side of the moon's surface."

The Eagle rose slightly at Graham's behest, adding a subtle shift in G-force as he jerked the controls to the side. The action changed the ship's approach vector west-ward. "Just a course correction. We're closing on Douglass crater. E.T.A.: about three minutes."

"Sounds good."

"I actually wish we had more time to investigate."

Adair nodded quietly, but felt anxious to grapple with whatever secrets lay waiting within the Douglass sub-surface station. "*Something might lie beneath the far side's surface, too,*" Koenig had said to him earlier. "*I'm hoping this trip will unearth those memories.*"

As did he.

"We'll look closer at Landau on our way back. I want to start with Douglass instead."

“A change of plans. You’re the boss,” Graham said, giving him a quick nod of approval. Adair found strange comfort that the man was actually listening to, not challenging, his wishes.

•••

Alan Carter rushed into Main Mission’s interior, nearly colliding with Tanya Alexander as she returned from the computer wall with new information for Paul Morrow. Since the emergency evacuation order had been given, Carter felt his presence would be needed in Alpha’s command hub. If some calamity were to befall the moonbase, he wanted to be part of the action, not cowered below meters of lunar rock and soil, waiting for the crisis to end.

“Commander!” Carter cried out. “How can I help?”

Koenig turned away from Sandra Benes. “Are the pads secured?”

“Each and every one. It’s Pete Garforth’s shift. He just headed into the shelters with his crews.”

Koenig nodded and turned, shifting focus to the next series of status reports that awaited him. But the blonde-haired Australian pilot wasn’t done. “Has there been any word from Eagle Six?”

“No,” Benes replied, injecting herself into the conversation. “The orbital monitors are out of commission. We can’t reach them.”

“Then we need another way to reach them.”

Carter circled around Morrow’s desk, reaching across Alexander’s console. His fingers tapped a series of buttons, each ending with several soft beeps. He spun about, facing Koenig’s direction. “Let me recall some of the men to the hangars.”

The dark-haired Alphan stopped his conversation with one of the operatives to approach Carter. “You would might be endangering their lives if you do.”

“Commander,” Carter protested, “we need to get an Eagle into sub-orbit, just high enough to relay a message from Alpha. We can’t get one launched without some of the crew.”

“And risk losing you, too? No, Alan—their sensors will alert them. They’ll abort the mission.”

“If their sensors had alerted them, they’d be back already! Commander—John, we’re talking about two of our own in the pilot section. Any of the crews would volunteer in a heartbeat. Please, I’m asking you. *Those men and women don’t need more losses to deal with.*”

Koenig's pupils widened as the words made an impact with him. Mere months before, he had delayed the detonation of asteroid diverting nuclear mines so Carter could have a chance to complete his mission and escape to safety. Morrow, Bergman and others felt the move would be disastrous, despite the potential loss of their comrade. But Koenig made the call—and Alan Carter miraculously survived.

“Go.”

Carter smiled, racing around Koenig towards Main Mission's exits in an eager sprint while simultaneously drawing his commlock from his belt. “Garforth, get back to pad one. Bring two techs with you. Eagle One. On the double.”

“Roger that, Alan.”

In within the remaining ranks of Main Mission, Sandra Benes shouted out a new development: “Contact lost with orbital monitors one through six!”

“That leaves two more... the ones over Alpha,” added Alexander.

“And a new radiation alert!” Benes continued frantically. “We've entered the yellow zone!”

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

Ancient lunar dust and ash dispersed chaotically into the airless void as Eagle Six maneuvered down onto the surface. Moments before, Ian Johnson's keen eyes had surveyed unusual outcroppings of rock, possibly jetsam deposited from the thermonuclear explosions of the former disposal area two—or something artificially created.

The Eagle's weight dropped onto the lunar surface as Tom Graham exacted another of his "delicate" landings. The deafening impact rumbled through the ship's interior, reminding Ty Adair why his astromech crews were constantly checking—and rechecking—structural integrity on ships like Graham's.

"Another four-point landing," Graham celebrated loudly.

"I think I'd be grounded for landings like that," Ty Adair grumbled, painfully aware of the work endured by his crews from Graham's previous encounter with launch pad three.

Graham stayed in his chair. "Well, if you're up to it, you can land us back on Alpha."

Adair unbuckled and moved to unsecure his stowed space helmet. "I just might take you up on that. Then I can only blame myself for any repairs needing to be done. Try not to do any damage in the meantime, will you?"

"Ty..." Graham turned to ask, "Where exactly are we? Why are we here?"

The tone was uncharacteristic for the Kiwi-born pilot. He was expressing genuine concern.

Adair bowed his head, wondering at what point it was appropriate to start divulging information. Graham had landed Eagle Six on the coordinates found within Simmonds's journal. The pilot, however, had willingly accepted the mission without receiving any details. "*Point A to Point B, then back to the barn*" was what Koenig had told him.

"If you promise not to crack my skull during the next landing, I'll debrief you myself. But only then."

Graham understood. Orders were orders—and Adair was staying true to his. Nothing more was said.

The tall Alphan maneuvered into the narrow connecting hallway, passing by the lockers of spare spacesuits and supplies. Everyone had suited up beforehand; Adair had made sure of that. He wasn't comfortable bringing the suit-up competition with him on this mission.

The two connecting doors to the cockpit section slid closed as Adair emerged into the passenger compartment.

Marisa Solas stood perky and alert, fueled by both adrenalin and anxiety. "Ready? Let's go!"

"Marisa, you say that *after* everyone's visor shields are shut," Johnson reminded her, half-jokingly. There were safety protocols for any extra-vehicular activities. It would take more than a simple "*let's go*" to decompress the passenger cabin.

"And definitely not until you both put away your drinks," Adair added, pointing at two cups sitting out. "Unless you want frozen cups of coffee and tea." He then pointed at Johnson's feet. "At least you put your boots on first this time."

"Sorry, mate," Johnson said, moving to properly dispose the beverages.

"Alright, by the book, people. Air hoses, check. Suit diagnostics, online. Tom, are you reading us?"

"*Loud and clear.*"

"Visors down."

All three Alphans pushed their helmet visor units downwards, locking them closed. With seasoned astronauts, little was said. Each knew their checklist inside and out, waiting for the thumbs-up from each person before decompressing the airlock.

And like seasoned veterans, the thumbs-up signal came simultaneously.

"Cycling."

Adair outstretched his commlock and activated a series of atmospheric controls. The precious recycled Alphan air was sucked back into the life support systems; temperature controls disengaged. An unseen burst of electronic signaling from Adair's commlock opened the Eagle's left side door.

A blackened, seemingly charred expanse of moon rocks lay exposed before them.

It was almost miraculous that Graham's landing hadn't sent one of the many large boulders into the spaceship's interior. The Eagle's stairwell remained unextended, blocked by countless deposits of crumbled debris and craggy basalt. The lunar surface was unrecognizable. That fact captivated Johnson's geology-trained mind; he took notice of every formation, every deposit, every placement of moon material that caught his eyes.

"Tan, is it safe to traverse?" Solas asked nervously.

"I think so," Johnson said. "Aim for larger surface areas, like the boulders to the middle and the right."

"I guess I picked the wrong day for my first moonwalk," she replied.

Adair was astonished. "First? You've *never*—"

"And I swore I was going to do it at least once before I died. Now's my chance."

Marisa Solas leapt forward, carried higher and further than she ever anticipated. The lunar gravity had remained fairly constant since Breakaway occurred. Her weight, combined with the suit, came close to 72kg. On the moon, she weighed all of 12kg.

Her jump propelled her towards a large promontory. Her silver-colored, anti-radiation spacesuit smashed into the outcropping, just as she had extended her arms to grab on. It was obvious that her mind hadn't wrapped around the entire experience yet. Like moonwalkers before her, she was caught in the illusion of suspended time as she "floated" through the void. She hadn't gauged her descent, or the solidity of the granite-like basalt before her.

"Marisa!"

The female Alphan clung to the rock as her two companions leapt across the lower level of rocks, hastening towards her position. Graham kept watch on the team from the Eagle's main camera platform.

"Remind me not to do that again..." Solas groaned.

"You can be glad Alpha isn't receiving any of this. We might even have time to strike that from the flight recorders."

"Thanks, Tom. You're a real sweetheart."

"I try, love. I try."

Both Adair and Johnson jumped up to Solas's position. Johnson endeavored to hold onto the rock face while gripping a large survey equipment pack in one hand. Adair had dropped his equipment pack, like a seasoned pro, to focus on the issue at hand. Both reached out to the beleaguered Alphan.

"Any leaks?" Adair asked.

"Um, none, I think."

"Then why aren't you climbing down? Just let go," Adair said.

"Because of *that*."

In the distance, the glint of polished metal captured the attention of all three Alphans simultaneously.

"What? What are you seeing? The onboard cameras aren't picking up anything."

"Our destination."

•••

"Put your backs into it, lads!"

Pete Garforth whisked past his two astromechanic technicians as they unclashed a fuel line from Eagle One's rear starboard landing pod. He clenched his commlock tightly while helping to retract the hoses. "Alan! We're almost set!"

"Not a moment too soon. Thanks, Pete."

"Get Adair back home safe and sound! I'm not about to run double-shifts if he doesn't make it!"

"Roger that, Pete. We'll bring them all home."

From inside the Eagle's cockpit, Alan Carter finished suiting up in an anti-radiation spacesuit. Compared to the standard-issue orange-colored suits, the extra layers and composite coatings added some protection.

And given the increase in radiation levels, Carter wanted as much insurance as possible that he would return alive as his colleagues aboard Eagle Six.

One of the hangar's cranes hoisted the Eagle, moving it towards the awaiting pad elevator.

"Alan?"

"Yes, Sandra"

"You will only have fourteen minutes to reach the horizon and maneuver within communications range of Eagle Six without direct exposure to the radiation storm. Alan, you won't have enough time to reach them."

Carter looked concerned, "The radiation levels?"

"Still rising. Middle of the yellow zone."

"Thanks, Sandra. Keep me posted."

Strewth, Carter thought to himself. *Could anything else go wrong?*

•••

"What a stroke of luck!" exclaimed Ian Johnson excitedly.

Tom Graham had unknowingly landed his ship within walking distance of the former secret base. Despite the fact he had transported Commissioner Simmonds during their final trip from Earth to Moonbase Alpha, he had no involvement in the man's work. But he found him becoming quickly indoctrinated with it, albeit unknowingly. As Adair had thought earlier, *What supreme irony that Simmonds's pilot should be the one to return us to the beginning of this nightmarish cover-up of his.*

He wondered briefly if Graham might have been lying about his involvement. He then recalled the man's actions when Simmonds sought to mutiny. Graham swore then that his allegiance was now and forever to Koenig. Adair wondered how the man would react when he eventually learned the mission specifics. Fortunately, he wouldn't have to wait long. As events unfolded, Graham would be a front-row observer and witness. He wondered if Koenig had planned the mission this way.

"Tell me what you see," Graham asked, endeavoring to watch via Eagle Six's camera arrays. To his chagrin, the fields of rock and debris had obstructed most of his view.

"It's a small structure, rectangular and rising out of the surface, about, say, forty meters across," Johnson replied. "Part of the wall appears to have been sheared off. You wouldn't believe the damage here. These synthcrete walls are about fifteen to twenty centimeters thick and they're peppered full of holes like swiss cheese. There's even some rock embedded through the material. I'm gobsmacked..."

"And look here—there's chemical burns and scorch marks," Solas added. "This place didn't just burn from the outside. Something inside caught on fire."

“Tom, we’ll check back in five. Marisa, Ian, switch to Z-28. Repeat: Z-28.”

“*Alright, boys and girls, I’ll send a wake-up call in five minutes. Be good.*”

Graham’s voice tapered off as Adair adjusted the communications band to a private channel. “Are you both reading me?”

“Loud and clear, skipper.”

“Yes, Ty.”

Adair looked at his comrades. “I think Tom was getting too much information. He’s supposed to be our courier, nothing more.”

“I wish Koenig had debriefed him before we left—”

“Well, he *didn’t*. And so far, I’m getting the impression he was never involved with this outpost. Were you, Marisa?”

The female Alphan turned towards Adair, “Would you believe me if I told you?”

“I’d like to think so, yes.”

“Then the answer is no,” Solas replied.

“Remind me not to play poker with you,” Adair noted. “I do believe you, though.”

“What does Marisa have to do with this?” Johnson asked.

“Ty, I had only been with Simmonds’s office for a year, playing diplomatic attaché more often than not,” Solas answered Adair, glossing over Johnson’s query. “I may have been part of the inner circle at times, but I wasn’t involved in this. Trust me.”

“You worked for Simmonds?” Johnson obsecrated with growing disbelief.

“Yes, Ian.”

Johnson stood shaking his head side-to-side, showcasing a large grin beneath his visor.

“I swear, Ty—all of this because of a lousy spacesuit-up contest.”

“You know how to pick ‘em, don’t you?” Adair teased.

•••

Bette Salzgitter found herself wiping perspiration from her damp brow as she raced around a fellow Alpha technician to reach the doorway of Main Mission. “*He has to be alright. He must be.*”

She had watched from the safe confines of the underground shelters as Pete Garforth asked two of his most able-bodied crew to return to pad one. He refused her pleas for explanations, sprinting away with his enlisted help towards the hangar bay. She knew Eagle Six was the only spacecraft away from Alpha. And any effort to get another Eagle aloft during an evacuation lock down of the base must have meant there was trouble—*serious trouble*.

Salzgitter slowed slightly, entering into the busy complex and moving towards the computer wall to watch and learn. She didn't dare ask anyone directly, for fear of being ordered or escorted out. She watched patiently as Sandra Benes and Tanya Alexander drew readings from their consoles, conferring with Paul Morrow—who, in turn, would occasionally report findings to Commander Koenig. Other operatives worked fast and furiously alongside David Kano on the computer wall controls, seeking answers as quickly as they could input their queries.

She took a few steps downwards, wanting to ask a simple question. “*Where is Eagle Six?*”

“Where is Eagle Six, Commander!?”

The female voice shouted near the large screen within Main Mission. “You must tell me, please. What is going on with Eagle Six?”

It was Molly Cranston.

In a flash of time, Salzgitter's gaze caught hers across the room as Cranston turned to meet every eye in the room.

“Cranston, everyone has been ordered to the shelters. You need to—”

“I need to know. Please, Commander...”

Koenig looked exasperated. He walked up to the distraught Alphan, wanting to escort her out of Main Mission personally. At times of crisis, he needed every person to follow orders unswervingly. It had been ingrained into each Alphan. Or so he thought.

“Molly—please. I promise I'll explain later. We need every minute to deal with this emergency.”

Morrow approached them both, standing virtually between them with an outstretched hand with paper printouts. Benes and Alexander stood sullen in the background.

“It might not matter, Commander. See for yourself.”

Spectral analyses printouts displayed a multitude of complex datasets, projecting billions of miles ahead of the moon's current position. Koenig's eyes scanned the readings, then re-scanned them again.

“You've double-checked this?” he asked.

“Quadruple-checked this, sir,” Morrow replied solemnly. “This isn't a temporary increase in stellar radiation. We're headed into a quadrant with rad levels off the charts. We might as well be parked against the nearest star.”

“Can we wait this out in the shelters?” Koenig asked grimly.

Kano voiced his opinion from afar. “The moon's trajectory and speed will keep us in the danger zone for... 19 months or more.”

Koenig looked panicked. “Survival projection?”

Without skipping a beat, Kano replied with Computer's answer.

“None.”

...

“This is surreal...”

The spacesuited Alphans knelt down in tandem, setting their scratched, soil-scuffed equipment carriers onto the lunar surface. Locking clasps were carefully removed on each, followed by the unheard hissing of atmospheric remnants escaping into the void. Johnson handed out rectangular-shaped flashlights to each person. The units had unique technological properties: When activated, the Alphan spacesuit visor were attuned to the spectral properties of the light beam. The unassisted naked eye would see only a soft illumination. However, thanks to the visor technology, the light was amplified considerably, providing enough candlepower to brighten a large area.

From the rocky outcropping, Solas peered into the maw of the sundered complex wall, aiming her light downwards. Adair joined up with her, looking long and hard. He had brought along an astrocam—one of Alpha’s special environment hardened cameras—for taking photos. Despite the ambient starlight and the flashlights, he prayed the unit’s powerful flashes would yield good images. They would be needed to show the rest of Alpha. As Koenig had noted, many within Alpha’s community would want conclusive proof of this secret operation, not the scribblings of a departed madman, nor presumptive snapshots from the orbital satellites or allegations of hidden memories, conveniently forgotten by himself or Professor Bergman.

And when the Moonbase Alpha populace would learn of the reasons behind their exile into the universe, Koenig was been right to have as much information available as possible. *Cover-ups often incited more paranoia*, Adair thought. Koenig was working harder to reconnect himself to the whole of Alpha; he didn’t bargain on this episode to create a further schism. He had nothing to gain by smearing Simmonds’s already tarnished image. There would be questions—many questions—arising about Koenig’s role. It was doubtful that anyone would immediately consider usurping Alpha’s command—but it might eventually provide any excuse to try and do so.

“Any memories returning?” Johnson candidly asked Adair.

He didn’t hesitate to answer: “Not a one.”

Adair felt a strengthening twinge of anxiety throughout his being, fueled by a sense of near-surrender to a seemingly hopeless situation. He felt there the answers would never be known, that part of his life had been erased and forgotten—and maybe it was time to accept and move on. Solas put her gloved hand firmly on his shoulder.

“Just breathe, Ty. Deep breaths.”

Adair exhaled hard within his spacesuit, holding back the growing waves of anxiety.

“Alright, we need to take pictures, gather evidence,” Johnson interceded. The English geologist had a natural social detachment; it minimized his conversations to the mere specifics. It also bottled up his innermost thoughts, save for those things which struck a nerve. “And if you don’t want to use the camera, then pass it over. I’ll do it.”

Adair positioned the camera behind him for Johnson to take hold of. And as soon as he felt the unit grabbed from his hand, he raced forward, leaping downwards into the sundered opening.

“Ty! What are you doing?”

“Man, are you bonkers?”

The free fall was risky: The interior had no lighting; it was heavily coated in lunar dust and dirt. Adair’s flashlight beam did little to objectify any of the shapes within the inner structure. As he would soon find out, there was far more debris below than any of them had noticed. He landed off-balance against a twisted section of bulkhead which had been buried under a thick coat of dark gray soot. His strained grunts were audible across each suit’s audio channel.

“Worthy of Graham’s landings...” Solas commented. She kept a watchful eye, training her flashlight on her colleague as he rose from a small cloud of moon dust. The particles hung effortlessly in the vacuum, floating freely in the near zero-G environment. Adair’s silver-colored spacesuit managed to stand out visibly amidst the muck.

“Coming at you!” Johnson announced, hurling a long length of rope towards the Alphan below. A small clamp at the end provided the necessary mass to send it downwards. Adair fastened the clamp to his suit, tugging to assure him that the line was attached and secure. He watched as Solas rappelled down the side of the embankment, reaching another section of displaced bulkhead across from him. Johnson remained above.

“Next time, do you mind giving us a warning?” she asked.

Adair stayed in place, looking over at his colleague. His flashlight trained on her form.

“Sorry, Marisa. I’m growing impatient.”

“You’re going to get killed,” she stated emphatically. “Just stop.”

Both Alphans began to shine their lights in the same direction, observing their surroundings.

“Very modern, very Alpha-like,” Adair observed. “The ridges in the walls look identical to Alpha’s interiors.”

“Needs housekeeping, though,” Solas jested.

“Hold still. I’m going to take some snapshots,” Johnson said from high above.

"I have something better," Solas added. She moved closer to the nearby wall panel and reached upwards. Her fingers dug and clawed at a dust-covered section, wiping away the electro-statically charged moon dust to reveal a newfound treasure.

"A wall sign!" Adair exclaimed.

"And not any wall sign, either!" Solas responded. "Just look at the colors and the markings—they have nothing to do with Moonbase Alpha!"

*Nuclear Waste Disposal Area 2 Recovery Room Omega
Security Area
No Unauthorised Personnel*

"The wording is ominous..." Adair replied.

"Anything?" Solas asked.

"No."

"Ty, I'm going to try something."

Adair nodded.

"Violet giraffe swimming in the summertime desert."

Both Johnson and Adair looked directly at Solas from their respective vantage points with befuddled, yet amused faces.

"Have you gone off your trolley? What insane phrase is that?" Johnson asked.

Solas gestured for Johnson to be silent, then started again.

"Azure Tyrannosaurus Rex mollycoddled the resultant acceleration."

Johnson chided sarcastically, "Alright, now I *know* her oxygen levels are low."

"Any change, Ty?" Solas asked.

Adair stood puzzled and confused. "Nothing—I think." He replayed the odd collection of words in his mind to no avail.

"They're keywords, or codewords," Solas said. "They're from Simmonds's missing journal page. They're the only two that I could remember, assuming I got that right. There's only a few listed."

"Nothing. Nothing..." Adair commented, drifting with his words as he kept trying to find meaning in what was said.

"Folks, we're running out of time," Johnson quipped.

"Maybe we should call for an Eagle with a magnetic grapple winch," Solas suggested. "What if we took it back to the base?"

Johnson quickly injected, "It's an empty shell. It'll probably collapse if we unearth it, I mean *unmoon* it."

The term evoked an uneasy chuckle from the three explorers.

“Look at the position of the exo-structure: The surface shifted; this unit was forced up from the ground,” Johnson observed. “The blast from disposal area two *thrashed* this place.”

“Let’s have a look then,” Adair announced.

The astromech took the lead, climbing easily onto the angled flooring. The downward slope, however, made it difficult to maintain his balance despite the low lunar gravity. He reached a doorway, similar to Alpha’s designs, with Solas close behind. His gloved fingers dug into the grooves of the sealed doors. Without power to the magnetic seals, they began to pull apart. What lay beyond was an expansive hangar area—completely devoid of any equipment or spacecraft. The far end of the room was completely exposed to space. Thousands of small to medium sized rocks littered the soiled deck plating.

Solas drew a long breath as she surveyed the room with her eyes. “This reminds me of a large mobile home which had one wall ripped away during some hurricane or tornado.”

“It reminds me of a garage: a workspace where large...” Adair’s thoughts drifted. “Where large... objects could be brought in—hey, this sort of looks like the main hangar deck’s machine shops! Part of them, anyways.”

“Empty, though.”

The duo moved down the slope to the only door within the room. It had been jolted partially open, likely by the same forces that damaged the structure. Adair borrowed Solas’s flashlight and aimed it into the opening.

“I’m losing visual on you both,” Johnson said.

“Nothing! Nothing here! It’s gutted,” Adair replied.

Solas added, “Abandoned and gutted. Someone was very thorough.”

Adair pointed excitedly to the nearby rear wall. “Wait! There’s a hatch... a door over there! Do you think...”

“I doubt we’ll find anything else,” Solas said. “This structure looks like it was taken off-line years ago. Whatever used to be in here was probably buried with Nuclear Waste Disposal Area Two. But you should take pictures. *Lots* of pictures.”

Adair raised his camera, taking the suggestion seriously.

“At least this adds credibility to Simmonds’s journal. Present company excepted,” Adair said, gesturing to Solas.

“We need bigger tools to gain full access,” Johnson said. “Do we have anything back on the Eagle—”

“Hey!” Solas declared. “Shouldn’t we check back with Tom?”

“You’re right!” Adair said. All three Alphans paused to adjust their suit controls.

“—*now!* Get back to the ship! Ty, we need to lift off now!”

Adair answered immediately. “What’s the situation?”

"Get your collective arses back here now! No time to explain!"

•••

Eagle Six's passenger pod door sealed silently as the cabin flooded with life sustaining air and heat. Adair was the first to remove his helmet. Over the cabin's speakers, a desperate voice sounded out.

"Eagle One to Eagle Six! Tom, I say again. You have no time. No time. You have to find cover or make shelter."

Johnson was the first to say what was on everyone's minds. "That's Alan Carter! What is he talking about?"

The Eagles engines surged to life in a flurry of noises and vibrations.

"I'm out of time, too. Good luck. Carter out."

Adair headed to the cockpit, struggling not to fall down as the ship rocked from the rapid ascent. Johnson held onto the weapons rack, dropping his helmet and gripping Solas as best he could. They were perilously close to being tossed around like rag dolls as the Eagle jerked yet again.

Adair reached the forward cabin, falling to his knees while determined to make it back into his co-pilot chair. He threw his helmet into the seat and pulled himself into proper position.

"Tom! What is going on?!"

Graham held the flight yoke firmly in his hands, frantically checking and re-checking the numerous gauges before him.

"Does Solas know you don't take instruments off-line when doing a diagnostic?"

Adair looked at his console.

The radiation alarms flashed wildly.

Red.

Both Solas and Johnson reached the cockpit doorway, straining in their suits to stay upright.

"Thanks to you, sweetheart, we're all going to die."

"What are our options?" Adair asked hurriedly.

"What options? You heard Alan! We're out of time! We're being subjected to lethal rad levels this very moment!"

Adair paused and searched his thoughts. "He said we have to find cover, or something to that effect."

"Cover? Where?" Graham demanded, his mind clouded by anxieties and hopelessness. "What about the abandoned structure?"

Adair shook his head. "No way. It's an empty shell. The opening is exposed. There's no shielding there."

Johnson leaned forward, pointing at the forward viewport. "Down there!" he shouted. "Put us down! Anywhere! We need to get *underneath* this ship!"

Within nanoseconds, Adair somehow understood Johnson's logic. They were dealing with space-borne radiation. The Eagle's multi-layered skin and mesh work would shield them briefly as the levels rose, but only temporarily. There was no time to fly the Eagle to safety; they would need to land and take cover.

The multiple layers might provide the necessary buffer to stop a lethal exposure.

Assuming he was guessing correctly.

"Tom! Put us down!" Adair exclaimed. "Ian's right! We have one chance to do this."

Graham looked across the cockpit section. Time stood still. The look in his eyes reflected the fears he carried in the bottom of his very soul. He looked lost, helpless—and needing a guiding hand.

Adair's hands reached for his own set of controls. He lowered the ship downwards, shifting his weight to reach the alarm klaxons that relentlessly hammered at their senses, turning off the loud shrills. Would moving underneath the Eagle be enough? Which section should they crouch under?

Maybe they needed to go under the lunar surface itself.

Adair readjusted again in his seat, reminding himself which panels displayed the onboard laser controls.

"Everyone, suit up! Helmets! *Now!*"

Both Solas and Johnson scrambled without hesitation back into the passenger pod. Adair ignored the warning lights as he cycled megawatts of energy into the laser amplifier. He needed one powerful burst. The system could overheat or overload afterwards, but he wanted a single, clean shot at the surface. With a swift pressing of the scarlet-colored "Fire" button on the laser weapon control panel, he got exactly that. A blue streak of concentrated photonic energies thundered downwards, carving a single hole deep into the lunar surface below.

Adair switched on the internal communications. "Ian! Marisa! You're going to need to deploy the winch! It's a manual unit, above the same doorway we used earlier. It's marked by a red label marked 'W1.'"

"*W1—got it.*"

Adair drew his helmet from his lap and seated it into the collar unit. He drew his right hand back, and with a time-tested maneuver, managed to pull the air hose into the magnetic coupler, then swept his hand back across his helmet to seal the visor shield.

He looked across at Graham. "Is everyone ready?"

Each Alphan yelled their approvals.

Adair kept his gaze on Graham. "I really have no clue how to land this ship. Will you do the honors?"

Graham turned to tap a series of thruster controls. "Hang on."

Adair shifted his focus again. "I'm going to do a ship-wide emergency decompress in ten seconds. Standby."

Eagle Six neared the surface, kicking up clouds of lunar soil as it had done earlier. The descent angle was steady; the speed wasn't.

"Tom, aim us alongside the hole I made."

Graham leveled the ship almost at a perfect horizontal degree angle. "Stand ready to evacuate."

"Decompression in five... four... three... two... one... Decompress!"

The Eagle vented atmosphere like a wailing banshee, flushing the gases directly into space, rather than back into the life support systems. The spacecraft rolled sharply as the gases vented. The side door followed in tandem, sliding wide open. Both Johnson and Solas were almost ready, although straining to maintain their balance—and Solas began to feel an unrelenting, gnawing pain nipping at her innards.

Not now, she thought.

Graham cut the engines, permitting the momentum to land the ship. He began to unfasten his safety harness before the Eagle had reached the surface.

"Touchdown!"

As was the hallmark of Graham's landings, this one went poorly—*possibly the worst ever*. The man had again inaccurately gauged their distance from the craggy surface strata. Eagle Six's retro-rockets ceased their output sooner than they should have. And regardless of the weak lunar gravity, the free fall brought unpredictable, disastrous results into the bulky rock debris below.

The space frame wrenched micro-meters out of alignment as the landing pads were pushed back into the pod housings. Had the moon possessed an atmosphere, the shrieking sounds of compressed metals, strained metal alloys and crushed moon rock would have been deafening to anyone nearby. For the crew of Eagle Six, their now-vacuum environment protected their ears from the cacophony. But the ship showed its displeasure at the landing by tossing four Alphans about.

Ty Adair gripped onto the control yoke, straining as the artificial gravity and seat beats kept him grounded in his co-pilot chair. The sudden impact had rippled across the entire ship, pushing him simultaneously upwards and outwards. The restraints stretched and strained, but kept the Alphan from further injury.

Tom Graham felt the fury of his own landing. His body flew from the pilot chair, caught in part of the unfastened safety harness, causing him to twist and smash against the side panels, then over his seat into the back wall. Despite the cockpit's wall padding and the protective nature of his suit, there was nothing to stop the multiple bone-jarring impacts.

And had there been an atmosphere, the now-unconscious Graham would have hit the floor with an audible, sickening thud.

"Everyone out!" Adair yelled out as the spacecraft ceased its violent jerking—settling at a perilous angle, tilted about 25 degrees into the lunar surface. He tried to steady himself, flipping a series of switches to make sure the main motors were powered down before turning to realize what had happened to his pilot.

Graham was splayed out like an abandoned rag doll against the rear of the cabin. Adair found himself fumbling with his own restraints while trying to assess his colleague's condition. He shouted the man's name over and over. There was no response.

"Ian! I need you up here!" Adair cried out.

Silence filled the audio channel as he finally unbuckled himself and moved alongside the fallen man. Adrenaline surged through his entire being as never before as he grappled Graham's limp form, dragging him back into the passenger area. His mind fixated on evacuating the Eagle as quickly as possible. For all he knew, they had already been exposed to lethal amounts of stellar-borne radiation. His survival instincts kept him moving towards the exit without pause.

Adair emerged from the tilted passageway, pulling the Kiwi to the edge of the passenger pod's open door. The red glow of the alarm lights blinked repeatedly from various panels as he braced himself against the wall unit, looking for the extended winch cable to lower them both to the surface.

The unit was not deployed.

The airlock door was wide open.

Johnson and Solas were nowhere to be found.

The large, vacuous maw of the laser-drilled hole lay below the Eagle.

And Adair immediately surmised why neither Alphan had responded to his calls for help.

The Alphan gritted his teeth, choking back every negative thought that cascading through his psyche. "*No time... no time...*" he murmured to himself repeatedly. He pulled Graham to the open doorway, struggling against the perilous angle of the floor and straining for the winch arm. His gloved hand gripped the metal extension as his boots dug into the sides of his colleague, preventing him from sliding out. He dropped to his knees, pulling the winch cable and connector to latch onto Graham's spacesuit. In doing so, both men began to slide out the airlock doorway. Adair grasped Graham's backpack, quickly kicking his own feet outwards to land them against the side of the large hole. The Eagle hadn't landed squarely over the opening; it only covered a small portion. Adair would need to keep the Eagle's mass positioned directly above him for protection while climbing further down into the lunar depths.

He had forgotten that the hole itself had its own challenges, its own secrets.

The laser impact had punched deeply into the lunar surface, but it had not exacted a clean cut. Jagged, rocky outcroppings lined the pitch-black walls. Adair found himself swinging into one of them, slammed first with his own weight, then by the inertia of Graham's body into his side.

Adair's surprise turned to shock as he recoiled from the pain of the impact, only to realize he was continuing to fall into the dark depths—*by himself*.

•••

“Could we add layers of shielding? Rig another force field like Professor Bergman created?”

Commander John Koenig had faced the imminent destruction of Moonbase Alpha a dozen times over. In each case, some miracle, some act of Fate had intervened, or granted renewed hope and opportunity for survival—something Koenig became reliant upon.

“For the short term, maybe,” Sandra Benes chimed in. “There may not be anything remaining of Alpha, not after passing through this region of space.”

Koenig nodded. Since the encounter with the Space Brain, he had since realized that the lunar outpost was amazingly resilient—but not indestructible. As long as they lived, there remained hope. It was an oft-quoted cliché to some. To most Alphans, it became a daily mantra.

“Eagle One has returned!” Tanya Alexander exclaimed.

“Tell Carter to get to the shelters,” Koenig ordered. “Paul, we’ll work in shifts, working topside when Alpha is facing away from the radiation—”

“Commander,” Benes injected, “that might not matter. Whether we’re facing the stellar radiation directly, or rotated away from it, the levels will continue to rise. After a while, it won’t matter which way we’re facing.”

“Then we need to get below and plan for the next window of opportunity. Here’s how I want to proceed...”

Bette Salzgitter found herself walking across the width of Main Mission, aiming towards Molly Cranston. The Austrian watched as the Canadian-born technician removed herself from the frenzied conversation between the Main Mission operatives. Both women were sorely out of place in the command area; they were both left to wonder their original question: *Where was Eagle Six?*

It was Salzgitter who reached out first.

“I had wondered the same thing,” she said shyly.

“Wondered what?” Cranston replied. The blond technician had recognized the dark-haired fellow technician. There had been no animosity between either of them in the past. However, Cranston was aware of the relationship shared by her current lover and this woman—and even in the clutches of radiation-borne doom that awaited them, she had no intention of lowering her guard to talk with her.

It was a catty attitude. An unfortunate attitude. One that Ty Adair would have frowned upon.

"I wondered about Eagle Six," Salzgitter said matter-of-factly. "Don't worry—there's nothing between me and Ty. I have other friends on that ship, too. I want to know how all of them are."

Cranston gave a frank stare, sizing up the statement and wondering how honest Salzgitter was being.

"It's ironic."

Salzgitter shook her head. "What do you mean?"

"I mean it's ironic. This is it. Maybe the last time for all of us on Alpha—and we can't say what we really mean. I know you love him."

Salzgitter took a step back. Cranston turned slightly, but moved forward.

"There's nothing there. He's made that clear, even when I—"

Cranston looked directly into her eyes. "If he makes it back to Alpha, we can all sit down and talk. I mean, we *should* sit down and talk."

Salzgitter was confused.

"Talk?"

"Maybe this isn't the right time, y'know?" Cranston said plainly. "This really isn't about you and Ty having a past. Not for me, anyways."

Salzgitter took a step back.

Cranston continued, "I hear about you, Ty and others having a grand ol' time together. You have history together. But that's you guys. Me? Am I ever there? No. Maybe it's the fact I have a different work shift, different hours. Maybe—maybe I'm just afraid of getting to know any of you."

Salzgitter nodded in agreement. Unspoken words passed between them both.

"Assuming we get out of this alive. When—"

"*Commander!*"

The two women turned to see Tanya Alexander pointing to Main Mission's large monitor above them. The live video fizzled in a wave of static energies, then shifted to other images, one overlapping onto another.

Morrow raced for his console. "Attention all sections Alpha! Brace for—"

Darkness and silence washed over Main Mission, followed by horrified screams of sheer terror.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

Ty Adair floated through the silent, aphotic abyss, unaware of what direction he faced. Small lights on his frontal life support pack blinked dutifully, too faint to illuminate any of the surroundings. His audio channel remained silent. However, his breathing, surprisingly shallow and weak, echoed audibly through his helmet's interior.

Falling...

He flailed about again, hoping one of his limbs would make contact—any contact—with the walls. Each outstretched motion threw his body in untold directions, none of which brought any sense of touch, any sense of connection to the physical world.

Falling...

The sepulchral environs denied every attempt at salvation.

Falling...

Moonbase Alpha was my dream, my destination, my arrival, Adair told himself.

Is this it? Have I finally achieved? Am I finally being recalled in the grand galactic scheme of things?

Is this adventure over?

Are we able to hold onto our humanity?

We're being tested. The human mind, the human heart... the human experience. We have it in ourselves to meet the challenge, survive and evolve.

Survive...

Evolve...

Human heart...

Love.

Molly.

Molly.

A voice from beyond.

A voice of familiarity and comfort.

A voice distinctively... not his own.

Adair drew gasps, his pupils widened further than ever before, unable to

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focus anywhere within the chasmal darkness. He found himself twitching erratically and infrequently, unable to control the convulsions, but completely disowned and unconcerned with each muscular jolt.

*Not my time...
Too much to do...
Refocus...Re—*

Molly.
Chaos.
Salvation.
Legacies.
Geneses.
Rebirths.

His world suddenly spun in several thousand vertigo-inducing directions at the same time, echoed by the ethereal vociferations slamming simultaneously into his senses. Swirls of colors sparked around the Alphan. Shimmering, starlight-fueled bursts briefly appearing from across multi-dimensional planes of elsewhere...

Before, after and always.
Alpha is destiny.
You are Alpha.

What are you?

Ever watching.
Ever protective.
Without end.

Man in the moon? No, the voice is female...

Alphan memories.
Past and present.
Sum of one's spirit,
yearning to be unleashed.
Heal.
Remember.
To remember you must also forget...
Such is balance.

Are you there?

Rising...

*The light—it's intense!
Bright blue, rushing winds...
How I miss the ocean...*

“Ty...”

So bright...

“Ty... stay with us...”

I'm not going anywhere... I think.

“...vitals are up. Keep going—“

Where?

“Where?”

“Welcome back, mate.”

“Keep that oxygen mask on him—“

“Alpha has two white knights inbound: One rescue, one heavy-lifter.”

Adair's voice crackled as he spoke. “*Where?*”

“Don't sit up, Ty.”

“You're on Eagle Six.”

“Everyone is—“

Ian Johnson maneuvered closer to Adair's reclined body, pressing into his spacesuited form. “We're on Eagle Six. The radiation storms are over. The ship is crippled, but help is on the way. We're safe now.”

“*How?*”

“We passed through some sort of space warp.”

Adair lifted his head slightly, trying to look around, squinting from the brightness of the overhead passenger pod lighting array. He noted Johnson hovering over him; Tom Graham stood hunched over him. A white-colored bandage was affixed to his temple; a light amount of blood soaked through, causing Adair to refocus and mull over recent events. *How much time had passed?* he wondered to himself.

Adair suddenly leaned up.

“Where is Marisa?”

He doubled over, lying back and twisting onto his side, fighting to stay upright as best as possible.

“Take it slow. Your pack was damaged when you fell. The gas mixtures—“

“*Marisa*. Where is she?”

“Resting in the rear section—in the lavatory.”

“Resting?”

“She’s been violently ill. Maybe radiation sickness, maybe stress.”

Adair forced himself upright, finally sitting straight up and taking hold of the aspirator unit which cupped over his mouth.

“Alpha is monitoring,” Graham said. “There’s a medical team en route. Alan, do you read me?”

“*Still here. Welcome back to the land of the living, Adair.*”

Since making contact, Eagle One had maintained an open audio channel with Eagle Six. Given the radiation exposures endured by the downed Alphans, Eagle One’s onboard medical team wanted to keep a close watch on the crew. Miraculously, Graham, Johnson, Solas and Adair had avoided fatal exposures. But their health—and possible lingering effects from the unknown doses of spectrum-spanning radiations—kept the medical team busy. They had walked Graham and Johnson through Adair’s resuscitation; they listened to Solas’s worsening condition; and they provided comfort as best as possible to the stranded crew.

“What’s your present E.T.A.?” Graham asked.

Alan Carter’s voice resonated over the interior speakers, crisp and clear. “*About seven minutes. Danielle is fifteen minutes behind me with the winch pod. Just sit tight. We’ll recover you first. He’ll bring your ship home.*”

“V.I.P. treatment all the way,” Johnson commented.

“V.I.P.?” Adair recalled in his thoughts.

His mind flashed to a group of unknown men and women traversing Alpha’s hangar below launch pad two, each carrying or moving containers as they walked towards a waiting Eagle. “*They’re V.I.P.s as far as we’re concerned,*” a voice whispered. “*No cargo manifests, no records. Remember our briefings: Don’t ask any questions. Maybe we’ll finally be done with this ‘virus’ outbreak.*”

In the present, he stared across the length of Eagle Six’s interior.

In the past, his focus remained on the gathering of nameless souls whom readied themselves outside of Eagle Three.

This was familiar...

“Put down on the starboard side, Alan,” Graham added, “We drilled into the surface on the port side.”

“*Roger that.*”

“It’s happening... *It’s happening!*” shouted a gleeful Adair. “Wait... no, yes...”

“What, Ty?”

I’m remembering! he thought to himself.

Johnson looked at his comrade with growing concern.

“I’m remembering,” Adair said. “I’m... remembering... everything...”

Graham ignored the statement, believing him to be recalling the rescue from within the laser-bored hole. Johnson shifted onto his other knee, trying to make eye contact with the flight technician.

“You’re recalling the past?” Johnson said in a low voice.

“Yes. *Everything*,” Adair replied with a growing smile.

Johnson beamed, placing a firm grip upon Adair’s spacesuited shoulder. He didn’t inquire further, knowing the man was already dealing with an overload of memories and emotions. He reassured his friend with a firmer hold.

Adair pushed himself harder, trying to stand up. “Someone needs to go check on Marisa.”

“Nah, she’s fine,” Graham announced.

“No, I’m *not*...”

Marisa Solas stood propped against the rear corridor of the passenger area. Most of her spacesuit had been removed, but she had not changed back into her uniform yet.

And she would never again don her familiar red-sleeved Alphan outfit.

Her body slumped over, crushing into the deck plating like a dropped rag doll.

“Medical emergency, Alan!” Graham yelled.

Johnson raced to Solas’s side. He cradled her unconscious head, trying to find a pulse. “Full throttle if you can—we need help *now!*”

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

Within the Medical Center complex, the mood remained somber, even cold.

Alpha's medical teams had often kept the lighting lowered for patients to rest comfortably. The practice had created mixed feelings amongst everyone. For some, the darkened environments seemed dreary and depressing, as if an eternal twilight clung to Alpha's interior. To others, the reduced lighting lessened stress levels and unnecessary stimulation.

Within one of the patient recovery areas, Ty Adair sat on the edge of his bedding, helped up earlier by an ever-watchful Doctor Matthias and his assistant as others watched from the sidelines. It had been a full day since returning from the lunar far side—over twenty four hours of ebbing drama as he and Marisa Solas were brought to Medical. Only an hour since he had awoken from a deep, day-long sleep.

Drama, which as it unfolded, had seen the full recovery of Ty Adair, along with Professor Victor Bergman—and the slippage of Marisa Solas towards death's dominion.

Adair had insisted on being brought to Solas's side—something denied repeatedly by the caregivers. As he was told, *there was nothing he could do*. To the Alphan, it was a challenge. As every Alphan knew, with survival, there remained hope. He wouldn't hear otherwise. Eagles had been lifted back to the hangar areas time and again, "damaged beyond repair." The astromechanic, like his colleagues, would never accept such condemnations, instead working to salvage, repair and rebuild the Eagle fleet. He knew, though, that the human body was vastly more complex than any Alphan spacecraft.

"Make sure you take these six times a day. Two with each meal, two between meals. And at the smallest sign of dizziness, headache or sudden fatigue, report to Medical, understood?" Doctor Matthias said. "You can rest in your quarters, but no physical exertions. Not until after your next appointment."

"We'll make sure of it," Molly Cranston answered, moving to help her lover with his uniform. The blonde-haired technician had remained at Adair's bedside virtually non-stop since he arrived. Matthias and others had ignored any rules about visiting hours—as requested by Commander Koenig himself. While the medical staff had the authority to override the request, they knew Adair's full recovery was critical, something helped along by Cranston's presence. It also permitted the staff to focus on other Alphans whom had been admitted for far more serious injuries since the moon entered the jarring space warp event.

"So, tell me again, Ian," Adair asked, looking towards the far side of the room, "what happened to you and Marisa?"

"There's not much to tell. We were thrown from the Eagle before our lines were secured, except we missed the hole. Both of us scrambled under the Eagle. We found you unconscious at the bottom: Damaged life support pack, malfunctioning communications gear... We would have loved to have heard what you were mumbling."

"That's a long ways down... *Mumbling?*"

"Deliriously so. Quite a conversation, too, but I couldn't hear any of it. We just saw you jabbering away inside of your helmet. No audio. You stopped before we pulled you back into the ship."

Danielle interrupted, "Johnson here went in by himself and got you and Graham out."

"How deep... how deep had I—?"

"Over 200 meters."

"Your laser shot impacted into sub-surface fissures. The strata easily split apart—and then some. I think some of the Alphan mining community might start asking for your services," Johnson teased. He approached Adair's bedside with Bette Salzgitter, Pierre Danielle and Bill Fraser silently in tow.

"We got back a couple of hours ago," Danielle added. "There was not anything to salvage at that outpost. Whatever had been there was removed long, long ago."

"Probably stored under disposal area two," Fraser said, "We'll never know just what."

Adair leaned towards Cranston as he buckled his waist belt, then attached his commlock unit, whispering, "Does Alpha know about the journal?"

"Yes."

Adair felt the Atlas-like weight of the world lifted abruptly from his shoulders.

"We're due at the Commander's office for a debriefing," Cranston addressed the gathering. She exaggerated her point, knowing they had plenty of time before Koenig would be receiving them.

Adair walked forward, feeling weak, but determined. "Not yet," he said. He moved towards the corridor with the other Alphans close behind. "Which ward has—"

"Marisa?" Salzgitter finished. "Ty, you should know—"

Adair looked back at the Austrian, both concerned and determined. "Everyone has said plenty. It doesn't mean—"

"Yes, Ty, it does," Cranston interrupted. "You need to wait. We're due to see Koenig first. There's a service planned in a couple of hours. Bette has everything taken care of."

"We were waiting on you, Ty," Salzgitter said. "It was by Marisa's own request."

Cranston led Adair down the hallway headed towards Alpha's centralized Main Mission complex. He remained speechless.

"I'll page you when we're done!" Cranston said, addressing Salzgitter from afar. "We'll meet you back here!"

"Assuming Koenig doesn't keep you long!" Salzgitter shouted back.

•••

"That's... fantastic!"

Marisa Solas looked up from her bedside to the ternary of John Koenig, Helena Russell and Victor Bergman. They had gathered privately to talk with the stricken Alphan about her condition—and to share something that few Alphas had ever heard before: The story of Koenig and Bergman's seemingly otherworldly, metaphysical encounter with a mysterious entity during their passing through the black sun many months before.

"And this being... was God?"

"Of that, we do not know, but one would assume in the cosmic order of things," Bergman replied. "How else might we explain our safe passage, our carefully guided rendezvous amongst new solar systems? Some things are best left unexplained without the calculations or machinations of the human mind for something... much, much larger in scope and purpose."

"I don't think there is another time in my life where I could have heard this and believed it to be true. But I do. I... needed to hear this."

"How are you feeling?" Russell asked, with a certain lilt of compassion and care from her soft-toned voice.

"Thirsty, tired..." Solas responded. "Very tired." She returned her gaze to the aged professor. "There have been many times where I thought the end had arrived, including our encounter with that black sun. Might we have died then, only to have been reborn... by God's will?"

"Theological dogma aside, your guess is as good as mine," Bergman answered.

"Professor, I'm... sorry for what you endured."

"No need to apologize, I'm quite well now. In fact, I'm remembering dozens of projects that I never had the chance to begin. Now I have all the time in the world to work again on them!"

Solas bowed her head, demurring from her shame for being involved with Simmonds's work, plus simultaneously feeling the vexatious strains of illness coursing through her body. "I hope there can be forgiveness."

"Of that, I would not worry," Bergman said, smiling brightly. "You were the catalyst to returning my memories. Without you, I might not be standing here now."

"Has Ty—"

“Yes,” Koenig interrupted. “He’s fully aware.”

Russell added, “We discharged him a short time ago. Once he’s done debriefing with the command staff, he’ll be able to come visit.”

“As much as I expected the news of Simmonds’s cover-up to affect the base, the opposite happened. Most people have forgiven and begun to move on,” Koenig said. “I do want to get his recollections of past events, though.”

“Yes...” Bergman said, “Comparing stories should help to piece together the larger picture of events. Alpha’s history is due for some updating.”

“I’d like to share what I can as well,” Solas added.

Russell nodded. “We’ll assign a technician to get an audio recorder for you, after your next round of treatments.”

“I’d like that, doctor,” Solas finished.

Maybe it’s time to start logging Alpha’s living history... Russell thought to herself. By archiving stories and events, the Alphans could preserve their legacy for generations yet to come, lest the past be forgotten for all time.

...

“What scares you most about your new memories?”

Both Molly Cranston and Ty Adair walked slowly together, hand in hand, down the quiet hallways of the Medical complex towards Main Mission. The open display of affection was rarely seen this close to Alpha’s command nexus. The operations hub of Moonbase Alpha housed some of its most focused, busy workers. Any traces of romance were often suppressed until after duty shifts had ended—and usually in the more reclusive confines of recreation and dining complex. *Protocols be damned*, Adair thought.

“Probably that most of my cheerful, optimistic disposition came from the brainwashing,” Adair replied. “I’m actually a real hard-ass, sadistic son of a bitch. Oh—and I think Tanya Alexander had my love child, too.”

Cranston stopped, jaw dropped, looking completely thunderstruck.

“*I’m kidding, Moll*,” Adair teased. “Especially the part about Tanya.”

“Oh, I don’t know,” Cranston teased back, half-jokingly, as she regained her composure. “I’ve heard the occasional story about her. Quite a few Alphans have stories they could share, too.”

“I’m sorry I went there.”

“Me, too—and you’re avoiding an actual answer.”

Adair searched his thoughts. “I think I could write a book on the subject. There are too many things, mainly the intimidation used to keep us quiet... before it was decided to hypnotize, brainwash or whatever it was they did to make us forget. Those were... very scary times.”

Cranston cupped her hand on her lover’s face. Adair met his hand upon hers.

“There was one time when Bobby Kensington and I snuck back onto the hangar decks to see what was inside of various containers. I vividly remember the ones designated as ‘spare parts’ and wondered why they were in cold storage.”

“I’m not sure I want to know...”

“Let’s just say there really were aliens aboard that crashed ship. Obviously, there’s no traces of them on Alpha anymore. They were long since transported back to Earth. Along with tons—literally tons—of sliced-up spaceship parts.” Adair paused, thinking of Kensington. “Y’know, the Professor and I are really lucky. None of the others would have ever found out.”

Adair looked at Cranston, “I keep wondering why I was allowed to have another extended tour of duty of Alpha.”

“Maybe to make sure your programming stuck. Maybe the same for Professor Bergman—”

“I’m not so sure about that. The Professor made a career decision to move long-term to Alpha, one of the rare exceptions ever granted by the World Space Commission. Maybe he had a bigger role than he—”

“Relax, Ty. The Professor is one of the good guys. You might live longer without the paranoia or the mistrust.”

Adair agreed, silently nodding.

“It certainly didn’t work that way for Simmonds.”

The duo continued their walk to Main Mission, reaching the inner sanctum in silence. They would have plenty to talk about in the time ahead.

•••

Main Mission control center was unusually calm, sporting a reduced staff and a lack of urgent matters. David Kano sat alongside the wall of computer banks. Others had sat or stood nearby, watching as the man was less than two moves from winning another of his fabled chess matches against another of the operations staff. Only Sandra Benes and Paul Morrow had taken notice of their entrance.

They approached Paul Morrow directly.

“The Commander isn’t in, but he’s still expecting you,” Morrow said dryly. “He should be here in ten minutes. You can always watch the game over there while you’re waiting.”

“The one that’s already over? Thanks, no,” Adair replied.

“Ty... I am curious,” Benes asked, “how did you live with a portion of your memories gone? Did you not question any missing events in your life?”

“Good question, Sandra,” Adair responded, drawing some of the Alphans from the sidelines. “Nothing was ever fuzzy or missing from my thoughts... just the specifics. Like remembering something you’d done as a child, but without the minutiae. Mostly faint remembrances of working my shifts, doing repair work, moving cargo... not the most memorable stuff anyways. Like remembering you’d pushed lots of buttons during your shift last week, but not recalling for what purposes you’d done it, nor questioning yourself about it.”

“Deep re-programming,” David Kano chimed in. “Sorry...” he paused, “I didn’t mean to use a computer metaphor.”

“That’s alright,” Adair said, grinning. “In many ways, it’s true.”

“The Professor has had much to share,” Benes said.

Tanya Alexander joined in. “It would be fascinating to listen to you both talking about the past.”

“That’s why we’re here,” Cranston said.

“Alpha’s historical archives are due for some edits,” Morrow added.

“Maybe it’s time to let go of the past and focus on our future,” Adair said, turning to everyone, “There’s too much pain and anguish over what happened all those years ago. The future, however, is *fantastic*.”

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

Bette Salzgitter bore a steely, sullen gaze shaped by hours of crying.

The Austrian-born Alphan had often eschewed sarcastic wit and humor as a key part of her personality. She found those fires had been diminished, even extinguished, as she dealt with the reality of what lay ahead: Saying goodbye to Marisa Solas.

In past attacks upon Moonbase Alpha, most deaths had been abrupt. Solas, however, had been forced to endure a lingering finale to her shortened lifespan. Salzgitter had privately questioned more than once whether there was some cosmic, karmic twist of irony as her former boss, Commissioner Gerald Simmonds, had also been forced to endure an excruciatingly painful death.

But unlike Simmonds, she was far from alone.

Salzgitter looked around the Medical Center hallway, noting the gathering of over sixty Alphans. Nearly one-fifth of the base. They stood attentive, some praying while others talked softly.

Unlike Simmonds, Solas had touched many of the Alphans she met.

Maybe the universe truly does create balance in all things, Salzgitter thought.

“Ready?” Ian Johnson asked.

“Never,” Salzgitter replied, half-serious. She began the procession, leading everyone down two passageways, then stopping outside of a door marked *Medical Care Unit Five - Authorised Personnel Only*. Her hand clasped her commlock, activated by a quick series of clicks to the unit’s numeric pad. Doctor Russell appeared on the small, mono-colored video screen.

“May we enter?”

“Yes, please,” the doctor replied. Salzgitter redirected her commlock to open the doorway.

The ward was the largest within the medical section. Next to using one of the hangar decks, it had been intended for disaster recovery triage. Doctors Russell, Matthias and Vincent didn’t hesitate when asked to make arrangements for Marisa Solas.

Within the large room, equipment, furniture and supplies had been moved. Only a single patient lay waiting: Solas herself, connected to the bank of life support monitors. The room’s lighting was different, almost entirely a soft crimson-amber hue coming through the rows of windows—a light emanated from the dying helium embers of a nearby red giant. A fading star which bore a system of few worlds which the moon might encounter. And among them, a large-sized world which might be habitable for the next million years or so.

It would be enough time for the Alphans to start anew; enough time to grow and evolve before future generations returned on the path of the next cosmic journey.

"I don't have to remind you: She's very weak," Doctor Russell whispered to Salzgitter. "There isn't much time."

Salzgitter turned to address the crowd, but instead found her fellow Alphans moving close to Solas's side. Most shared a brief instant of eye contact with the Spaniard; others uttered faint, often unintelligible words which she somehow heard and acknowledged with a weak nod or facial gesture. Instead of pity or sorrow, Solas found herself bathed in the warmth of kindred spirits, all of whom had arrived to celebrate her life. Nary a single person clung to the bedridden Alphan. Almost every Alphan rekindled her failing condition, if only briefly, with their well-wishes, support and love.

•••

"Everyone, it's time."

Bette Salzgitter stood alongside Marisa Solas, speaking to the congregation. Both women smiled with a sweet sadness, a fervor of tears and anguish that was understood, even shared, by everyone in the room. It was known this would be one last final hurrah.

"Marisa has asked some of us to step forward... to share and celebrate her life with her now, not after she leaves us." The Austrian-born technician cupped her hands across her face, increasingly overwhelmed by the moment. "I—I cannot say strongly... enough... of how much we all love this woman. She—" Tears streamed from her eyes, joined by some within the room. "She—"

"She came to us, as Fate would prescribe, to a tour of duty, on a mission amongst the stars," Ian Johnson said, pushing to the forefront of the assemblage. The British geologist conveyed his thoughts with a stony resolve—the best he could muster without slipping into a quagmire of emotional outbursts and paralyzing sorrow.

"She began with missives to get our men to Meta. Had she the chance, it might have proved to be a torturous existence of bossing, micro-managing, slapping a few bums..."

The crowd laughed briefly before Johnson continued.

"But some mysterious, unknown force had other plans. Maybe God, maybe something beyond comprehension. It has brought us to this point, huddled together amidst the void, outcast into the depths of nothingness... or so we think."

He looked longingly at Solas. "Without you here amongst us, there is a void, there is nothingness. But without you ever having arrived on that fateful day in September 1999, we wouldn't have realized how much you'd filled our lives."

Johnson turned, brushing off the trickle of tears that followed.

Solas spoke up meekly. "Why, Ian, I think that's the most you've ever said."

He nodded, striving to regain his composure. "You asked us to bring a quote, an inspiration, whether in death or life. I'd like to share mine. It's by Walter de la Mare, a former countryman of mine."

Johnson began, reading from a hand-scribed note that he carried. "If we do call life a journey, and death the inn we shall reach at last in the evening when it's over; that, too, I feel will be only as brief a stopping-place as any other inn would be. Our experience here is so scanty and shallow—nothing more than the moment of the continual present. Surely that must go on... And so we shall all have to begin again... What worlds we've seen together, you and I. And then—another parting... It has all, my one dear, happened scores of times before—mother and child and friend—and lovers."

Silence continued across the room.

"Thank you, Ian," Solas uttered.

"May we see you again in the lives yet to come, Marisa," Johnson added. He clenched her outstretched hand, kissing it, then her cheek, and stepped back.

"I would like to share mine as well," Bill Fraser spoke up. "I apologize that it's so brief, but it speaks to many things. Norman Cousins once wrote, 'Death is not the greatest loss in life. The greatest loss is what dies inside us while we live.' We... will miss you terribly, Marisa."

"Thank you, Bill." Solas's voice drew weaker, but ever-determined. Her eyes widened as another approached.

Ty Adair.

"You know you're late for your shift, right?" he announced teasingly as he walked through the crowd. Much-needed laughter again filled the room.

"I have a passage I wanted to read. Bette, Ian, Bill, if you would join me..."

He began, speaking aloud from an unfolded sheet of paper as he walked towards her bedside, "Love is stronger than death even though it can't stop death from happening, but no matter how hard death tries it can't separate people from love. It can't take away our memories either. In the end, life is stronger than death." He stopped alongside Solas, joined by Salzgitter, then Johnson and Fraser—all of whom formed their hands upon Solas's own. "I—*we*—all love you. Everyone here loves you beyond measure for the time you shared with us. Your legacy *will* live on. I promise that."

Yin and yang, he thought. *Universal balance indeed.* Simmonds had been despised, loathed—every negative pundit that could be brought to bear upon the late Commissioner. And Marisa Solas had gained redemption and respect, love and loyalty from those whom she touched in her time on Moonbase Alpha. Both had started their adventure together during Breakaway; neither was fated to continue with the Alphans in their transcendental, generational journey across the cosmos.

"You promise?" Solas asked, straining with her words.

"I do," Adair reassured.

"We all do," Salzgitter added, now surrounded closely by everyone in the room.

...

John Koenig stood alongside Helena Russell and Victor Bergman in the rear of the medical care unit. Each wanted to participate, yet realizing—mostly at Russell's behest—that Alpha would heal best from within its ranks, not by the oversight or intervention of the command staff.

"I hate to say it, Victor," Koenig whispered, "but now that you have your memories returned, I'm glad you don't remember Marisa Solas before her arrival in 1999."

Bergman nodded.

"I'm glad young Mister Adair doesn't either," he replied softly, pausing briefly. "We've endured enough betrayal. Whatever her work would have entailed on Alpha when she arrived with Simmonds, we shan't worry that it was going to be devious or deceptive in nature. I believe she truly was a pawn in the scheme of things. She had her redemption."

"I'll miss her," Russell added.

"I think all of Alpha will, too," Koenig finished.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

Ten.

“Got it!!” he yelled triumphantly through the muffling confines of his space helmet. Air rushed forth from the life support tanks, expanding his orange-colored spacesuit from within. The fresh oxygen quenched his heavy gasps of air as he stood to face his colleague a few meters away.

Nine.

The other Alphan seated his own helmet into the collar seal, desperately working to finish his own suit-up. Alarm klaxons blared, adding another layer of unwanted distraction.

Eight.

He reached his gloved hand behind his shoulder, straining to reach the air hose connector in his life support backpack. The action went from one swift, controlled motion, to desperate flailings, as the attachment remained out of reach.

Seven.

He continued without abatement or surrender, trying to grasp onto the small connector to no avail. For a few microseconds, he entertained the idea of removing his glove momentarily, given its bulk and padding made it near-impossible to sense where it lay. Too much time would be lost—yet his time was almost out.

Six.

He drew his left elbow into his ribs, grunting in mock frustration, then pushed his arm backwards, making contact with his rear pack.

Five.

The unit moved slightly to the right, giving the Alphan a second chance to feel around the pack's backside.

Four.

There is it! he thought to himself. Without pause, he tugged the air line towards the back of his helmet, coupling the end piece snugly into the waiting port.

Three.

His hand pulled back, gliding across the surface of the yellow-colored visor plate, pressing it downwards and into its closed position with one graceful stroke.

Two.

His hand continued down to the front pack, his two outstretched fingers striking the suit's activation controls. Just as quickly, the suit silently pulsed to life, electronic and environmental packages surging to full operational status.

One.

The Alphan looked up proudly. "Done!" he exclaimed. "I'm done."

"Time!"

Instead of cheers, there had been stunned silence throughout from the hallway. "Adair! Good time as usual!" Xu Sun Shui announced. "Fraser, you... *you won.*"

The two spacesuited Alphans turned to one another, hands outstretched and soon clasped together.

"Well, I'll be damned..." Bette Salzgitter muttered.

"18 and 1" Ian Johnson said, astonished, but smiling broadly. "My God, someone actually did it!"

"Bill!" cried out a voice from the crowd. "Bill! That was amazing!"

The woman stopped alongside the two men, looking wide-eyed and jubilant. She knocked on Fraser's helmet, practically bouncing on her tipped-toes, trying to draw his attention. The British Alphan unsealed his helmet, sliding his visor upwards and shifted his gaze downwards.

"Can I talk you into having dinner with me now?" Fraser asked.

Annette Geissler beamed an enormous smile of adoration and approval. "Yes!"

"You better not let this one get away," Salzgitter said loudly, approaching her fellow Alphans.

"Oh, I don't think he's going anywhere," she replied, tucking her arm under Fraser's.

Salzgitter replied teasingly, “We’ll promise to leave your table alone tonight.” She pulled Adair aside as the two Alphans shared their moment together.

For everyone on Moonbase Alpha, it has been exactly two weeks since Marisa Solas had passed away—two weeks which had seen an encounter with another alien world, another failed opportunity to initiate Operation Exodus. Their original analyses revealed the Earth-like nature of the planet, but not the protean, volcanically unstable surface that would have eventually doomed any settlement. The moon had since returned to the uncultivable expanse of interstellar space, accelerating at untold speeds towards their next encounter.

It had given Alpha’s populace plenty of time to refocus on other endeavors: Maintenance cycles which brought the moonbase’s life support systems to their most efficient operations ever, housekeeping exercises which saw a rotation in various crew quarter assignments, and the beginning stages of new construction of additional life sciences facilities to the northern-most rim of Plato crater.

Plus the resumption of Ty Adair’s fabled spacesuit-up contest.

“Ty, did you throw that contest?” Salzgitter asked Adair bluntly.

Adair handed her his helmet, proceeding to detach his gloves from their wrist housings. “Why would I do that?”

“Look at Bill and Annette over there. You tell me.”

“I’ll never tell,” Adair winked.

Salzgitter threw her arms into the air. “More Alphan secrets... haven’t you had enough?”

“More than you’ll ever know,” Adair replied.

Johnson came between the two, placing his arms around his fellow Alphans. “Some of the folks over there are already lining up for the next round of contest. They’re feeling like they might actually have a chance to win now.”

“Fat chance at that. This is Ty Adair, astromechanic, flight technician, section chief *and* Eagle pilot we’re talking about,” Salzgitter boasted. “Fraser got lucky.”

Adair looked over at the couple, still talking happily with one another in the distance.

“Some things are worth more than winning,” he uttered softly.

“Hey, Ty!” Johnson asked, “did Molly want us to come over at 1900 or 1930? I can’t remember what the invitation said.”

“1930,” Salzgitter chimed in. “Not that you’re ever on-time anyways.”

Johnson brushed aside the comment, now used to her badgerings. “As long as we’re done by 2030, we can make tonight’s hydroponics session. The third shift crew is starting another planting cycle. I don’t want to miss it.”

“I think Molly will like that,” Adair said. “She’s really enjoying her time with everyone.”

Salzgitter nodded. "I'm glad she's joining us, Ty."

"Y'know, there was a quote I meant to share... back when... well, when we were gathered with Marisa," Adair said. "It went something like 'Friendship is a single soul dwelling in two bodies.' I can't help but to think it's something more than that."

Johnson looked over at Adair, still under his wing.

"Don't walk in front of me, I may not follow," Johnson said. "Don't walk behind me, I may not lead. Just walk beside me and be my friend." He then looked back to Salzgitter, adding, "I can't imagine better friends than you both."

The Alphans reached the beginning of another corridor, another pathway leading towards their next destination.

One as mysterious as the destinies that awaited each of them—and the souls aboard Moonbase Alpha.

AUTHOR'S NOTES

“Space: 1999—What Lies Beneath” was started December 19, 2005. Interestingly, that was 2289 days since the Moon left Earth orbit in the TV series (on September 13, 1999), and 2283 days since I launched my www.Space1999.org fan-based web site. (For those unwilling to do the math, that’s December 13, 1999.) The date also marked my 39th birthday which, ironically, is also the exact day/year that *Space: 1999* character Alan Carter was born.

This fan fiction novel provided me a unique palette to explore ideas and situations ignored (or time constrained) within the actual *Space: 1999* TV episodes. As entertaining as the show was during it’s original run, it was often moreso science *absurdity* than science *fiction*. Implausible events—such as a nuclear explosion hurling Earth’s moon into interstellar space, surviving a black hole (eg. black sun), or having the moon rendezvous with Earth-like planets, then quickly move on to other solar systems—sorely tested and traumatized the logic within my third grader’s brain.

But, as witnessed by this novel, the show left a strong impression with me. The horror and dark fantasy elements contradicted the uplifting, semi-utopian realization within another beloved science fiction TV series of mine. But for someone who idolized 2001: *A Space Odyssey*, plus science fiction literature from Clarke, Heinlein, Piper, Burroughs, Bradbury and others (and waited anxiously for the NASA lunar missions to continue) there was a hunger for more sci-fi fantasy. The weekly adventures of Moonbase Alpha were a welcome sight.

I hope this novel, set in the *Space: 1999* universe, is a welcome sight for you, too. It does require a solid knowledge of the television series. And for those die-hard fans, stand ready with your Barry Gray Year One soundtracks. (Perhaps with the occasional track from Derek Wadsworth’s Year Two scoring, despite this being a Year One novel.) You’ll know what musical pieces should be played at the appropriate times.

Koenig, Russell, Bergman, Carter, Morrow, Benes, Kano, Alexander, Mathias, Verdeschi, Vincent, Fraser, Adair... Their Odyssey shall know no end...

Ever Earthbound,
Michael Faries
March 2006

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The author would like to acknowledge the following individuals who had an impact, directly or indirectly, on this literary work:

William Latham

A very gifted writer who, with one book, rose towards the top of my favorite author's list without a second thought. He brought exquisite suspense, superlative wordsmithing and gripping intensity to his own *Space: 1999* novels "Resurrection" and "Eternity Unbound" that I cannot praise or recommend strongly enough. May we see many more novels in the years ahead.

John Kenneth Muir

A remarkable professional writer, keen intellect, and kindred spirit whose analytical books helped to reignite and further my interest in two childhood science fiction series. To you and Kathryn, my best always.

Mateo Latosa

The definition of "fan" is ardent devotee and enthusiast. This blessed individual upholds and promotes the living spirit of this TV series with his line of original, licensed novels from the publishing house known as Powys Media. Few others could ever dare to match his work, dedication or passion for *Space: 1999*. Thank you, Mateo, for daring to succeed.

Christopher Paulsen

Someone who actually gives Mateo a run for their money with his passion and enjoyment of this series. "Space: Eternal," his eloquent, extraordinary, self-produced video summary of *Space: 1999*, is sheer brilliance. I wish your vision for a continuation series could come to fruition. Here's to celebrating September 13th each year with a special viewing of the grand old show.

Martin Willey

Quite possibly the most knowledgeable person of all-things *Space: 1999*—a person who isn't envied, but truly respected and admired for the breadth of research and documentation amassed on this series. Cheers, Martin.

Roberto Baldassari

A talented illustrator who sets an all-too-rare example of modesty and mastery of his trade. Your cutaway Eagle poster remains a personal favorite. It was a pleasure to have met you back in 2000.

Eric Bernard

“To what was... and might have been.” You validated that quote with your six remastered episodes of *Space: 1999* back during the Main Mission: 2000 event. And to have reworked one of the worst Year One episodes “Ring Around The Moon” into one of the best, renamed “The Eyes of Triton” with your new edits, post-production touches and CGI additions (with extra thanks to those that contributed)... it was pure genius. Whatever you put your mind to, you will certainly excel at. Like Roberto, you are an incredibly modest individual.
À votre santé!

Richard Bennett

A man of integrity, sincerity and helpfulness who opened doors for myself and others. Thank you.

Robert Ashley Ruiz

An amazingly talented and creative soul who set the bar exceptionally high for Internet fan web sites with his former Cybrary1999.com domain. He inspired far more than he may ever know. A class act through and through. It was a pleasure to finally meet you back in 2000.

Phil Merkel

The fan's fan: an incredible family man, devoted science fiction (and *Space: 1999*) aficionado and now-legendary sender of Christmas cards to my household. I'm still looking forward to the day when we'll meet again. The first (and second and third) round is on me.

Doreen Hess and Charlie Voboril

Two extraordinary people for whom my world is a much better place with friends such as these.

Barry Morse

A treasured individual who transcends the art of acting with his remarkable wit and humor, generous nature, devotion to the arts and zeal for intellectual lore. With your portrayal of Professor Victor Bergman in *Space: 1999*, you were truly pulling faces, making noises (in reference to his outstanding autobiography with authors Robert Wood and Anthony Wynn). I will never ever forget the conversations we shared back at Main Mission: 2000 event, alongside Johnny Byrne, Christopher Penfold and Keith Wilson. Treasures for a lifetime. Thank you.

Space: 1999 - What Lies Beneath

From one of Barry's own inspirations:

Imagination is the beginning of creation. You imagine what you desire, you will what you imagine and at last you create what you will.

- George Bernard Shaw

Barry once said, "The series has maintained a very loyal cult following ever since those days more than 25 years ago when it all began. The support the series has maintained has been in many ways to me, quite amazing... Over the years since *Space: 1999*, I have been to a number of conventions celebrating the series. Sydney and I often said to each other how very touching it is that this group of young people are so kind and devoted to each other and regard themselves as virtually members of the same family. I regard those young people as my honorary grandchildren."

So noted and accepted. You're a saint and a gentleman, Barry.

Johnny Byrne

To one of *Space: 1999*'s original script writers and story editors, I feel the utmost respect and kinship for someone I regard as a true gentleman, a wise sage and a masterful prose. From the instant we met outside the green room at the Main Mission: 2000 event in New York City in September 2000 (when you recognized me right away, of all things!) to the conversations shared during that weekend, you remain one of my favorite people in this world.

Brian Johnson

To someone that should be masterminding the ultimate Battle of Britain aerial recreation—and someone that couldn't fathom why anyone would want to continue a dialogue over a little science fiction series from decades ago that showcased his special effects mastery, you have my appreciation and admiration. Your body of work is—and will ever be—remarkable and inspirational to many. (And your Eagle spacecraft designs... bloody *brilliant*.)

David Kerin

A creative whiz, selfless individual, and phenomenal family man. I value your friendship very much.

Dr. Kevin Grazier

To my best man... literally. (Check my wedding photos if you need proof.) A gifted writer, an imaginative soul, resident genius and an actual rocket scientist. And a friend I'm very lucky to have.

Richard Hatch

To a good friend, a remarkably driven and determined individual who saw the extraordinary possibilities within another 1970s science fiction genre TV show... something which became a five-year journey to bring the *Second Coming* of the original cast, characters and continuation of adventures with the original battlestar, *Galactica*. It was an amazing project that traveled far, but didn't reach it's intended destination. I wouldn't trade a moment of the hard work we did for all the tea in China. (Unless I could sell the tea, then bankroll... never mind.)

Here's to your continued success and ever-growing role within the current, reimagined incarnation of *Battlestar Galactica*. I only wish it had been your continuation version that had been brought to fruition. *We know how glorious it would have been.*

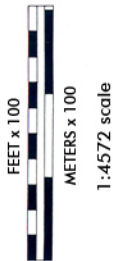
And most importantly,

Stephanie Faries

To my wife, the love of a lifetime and beyond. For all the wonderful words showered upon others, no one could possibly grok the depth of anything I might describe about you. From the core of my being, I am blessed to have you, my lover, my friend and mother of our children.



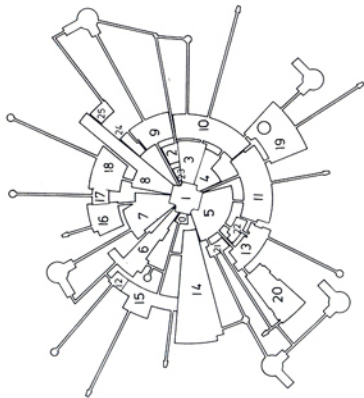
- PLAN VIEW KEY**
- (A) Launch Pad 3
 - (B) Launch Pad 1
 - (C) Launch Pad 2
 - (D) Launch Pad 4
 - (E) Launch Pad 5
 - (F) Laser Batteries (5)
 - (G) Gravity Towers (8)
 - (H) Travel Tube (Typical)
 - (I) Flammable Materials Storage (7)
 - (J) Nuclear Waste Domes (8)
 - (K) Radio Telescope



Location: Crater Plato (51.6° N 9.3° W)
Compliment: 320 persons (maximum capacity)
Number of Eagle spacecraft: 40
Number of Moon Buggies: 25

MOONBASE ALPHA

EXTERNAL VIEW*
Circa September 1999



BUILDING I.D. KEY

- (0) Main Mission Computer Annex
- (1) Main Mission Command Tower
- (2) Weapons Stores
- (3) Chemical Labs
- (4) Weapons Section
- (5) Computer Section
- (6) Medical Center
- (7) Astrophysics Labs
- (8) Technical Section
- (9) Technical Experimentation Labs
- (10) Geological Labs
- (11) Accommodation Unit
- (12) Fuel Storage (Non-Flammable)
- (13) Nuclear Generating Facility 3
- (14) Recreation and Dining Complex
- (15) Hydroponics Farms
- (16) Nuclear Generating Facility 1
- (17) Life Support Equipment Stores
- (18) Life Support Systems Building
- (19) Observatory
- (20) Maintenance Building
- (21) Nuclear Generating Facility 2
- (22) Deep Space Tracking Station
- (23) Chemical Stores (Non-Flammable)
- (24) Technical Stores
- (25) Alien Life Experimentation Unit

* As depicted in Starlog's "Moonbase Alpha Technical Notebook" by David Hirsch, Geoffrey Mandel and David McConnell © 1977

The Moon

Diameter: 3476 km

Mass: 7.35e22 kg

Location: Unknown (formerly in Earth orbit)

In Earth history, the Moon was called "Luna" by the Romans, "Selene" and "Artemis" by the Greeks, among other names in various other mythologies.

The Moon has virtually no atmosphere. And it does not possess a global magnetic field, although some surface rocks exhibit residual magnetism, implying one may have existed in the Moon's history.

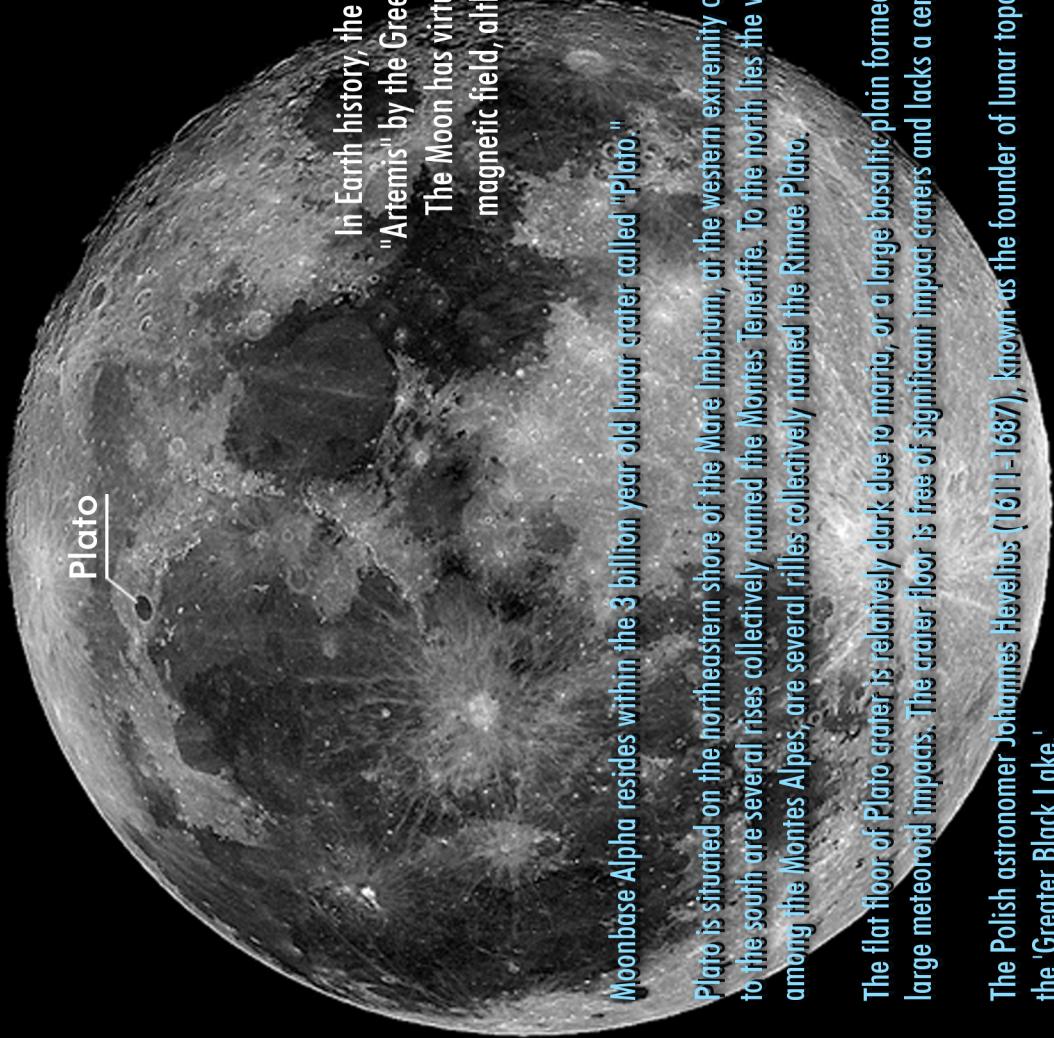
Moonbase Alpha resides within the 3 billion year old lunar crater called "Plato."

Plato is situated on the northeastern shore of the Mare Imbrium, at the western extremity of the Montes Alpes mountainous range. In the maria to the south are several rises collectively named the Montes Teneriffe. To the north lies the wide stretch of the Mare Frigoris. East of the crater, among the Montes Alpes, are several rilles collectively named the Rimae Plato.

The flat floor of Plato crater is relatively dark due to maria, or a large basaltic plain formed by ancient basaltic flood eruptions from extremely large meteoroid impacts. The crater floor is free of significant impact craters and lacks a central peak.

The Polish astronomer Johannes Hevelius (1611-1687), known as the founder of lunar topography, originally called this crater the 'Greater Black Lake.'

Plato



COMING IN MID-2006

Soon after the events of the Year Two episode, "The Seance Spectre"...

The Moon is trapped in a causal loop, entering into a space warp, then reappearing back into the same flight path from four days, 16 minutes, twelve seconds ago. For the men and women of Moonbase Alpha, time is not repeating, just the re-emergence of the moon on the same trajectory over and over and over...

And the Alphans are helpless to stop this endless cycle.

No alien intervention, no nearby worlds, no escape.

No hope.

Or is there?

SPACE: 1999
What Lies Beyond

A continuation of the Ty Adair saga.

An original eBook from the Space1999.org imprint.

Space: 1999 - What Lies Beneath

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Space: 1999 - What Lies Beneath

FOR MORE INFORMATION ON *SPACE: 1999*

For more information on *Space: 1999*, visit one of the many sites on the World Wide Web, including:

Fanderson: The Official Gerry Anderson Appreciation Society
<http://www.fanderson.org.uk>

Powys Media (*Space: 1999* books)
<http://www.powysmedia.com>

Space: 1999 Fiction Archives
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Space1999.net
<http://www.space1999.net>

Space1999.org
<http://www.space1999.org>

EagleTransporter.com
<http://www.eagletransporter.com>

Dragon's Domain
<http://www.dragonsdomain.co.uk>

Wikipedia
<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Space:1999>

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