

APOLLO 918
THE TRIP OF NO RETURN

Joseph Thomas

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Novel**

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novel Collection

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Dedication

To y son, as always each word that come out of my hands. You are the engine that drives me and the strength to move forward on this difficult path.

To my friends Herick de Haro, Michal Guillot, Janet de los Angeles Gonzalez Bherta Garcia, Don Gilberto Rodriguez, Janella Lopez, and many others that I can not mention and should not forget, for all the words of encouragement along the way, my loyal fans.

Titus and Carmen by special gesture trust me, for the help and support.

In memory of my grandmother Alicia Torres. That from heaven guides me, inspires, and sits beside me every night while I was narrating this story.

My parents Olga and Thomas, for they're unconditional love and support from the beginning of my first book.

My muse, Anailys Urra for her strength and confidence in me, and as a blessing in my life.

And God, my beacon, my guide, my strength, my friend.

Joseph Thomas
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I'm John Paul. I'm here, thousands of miles away from planet Earth, sitting in what appears to be a beach. I am a human being waiting for the rest...

CHAPTER 1

Norfolk. Virginia. September 2021

The country has been at war five years, the enemy coalition had finally launched their attack and World War III took millions of lives. The bombings were launched from thousands of miles away, missiles crossing the oceans trying to hit the major cities of the world. The planet was divided into two camps: The Western coalition formed by the United States and most European countries, and the enemy coalition which contained several extremist groups. Which for so many years had tried to control the world. World leaders never measured the consequences of a war of this magnitude.

The enemy groups had joined military arsenals and joining the socialist governments in Latin America, the military bases in the region had prepared for more than two years the deathly blow against the city of Miami. The same day from Asia were launched long-range missiles against major European capitals, to start this war, the president and commander in chief of the U.S. forces ordered to respond the attack, even at the risk of knowing that the enemies were in possession of nuclear weapons that could have serious consequences for humanity.

The fate of civilization was foreseen. The third world war could destroy the planet if unleashed an atomic attack. Since Hiroshima and Nagasaki, such weapons had not been created, these were two hundred times more powerful, if one of the two sides launched a nuclear warhead, the other group would respond in the same way.

The coalition of U.S. and European countries had easily mastered the Americas. The bases in the South American territory had not been a big problem for the U.S. Marines, the bad news came when closely guarded stockpiles were found in the Venezuelan Andes. Six nuclear warheads. If there were such weapons, it was the confirmation that the enemy had managed to manufacture these weapons. The whole world was on alert number 1.

The phone rang on my desk, I had been looking out the window of my office in the commanding headquarters in Virginia. Only days ago I had returned from the battle. The call came directly from the Pentagon. I had to go to the president's as soon as possible.

I picked up some papers on my desk, put on my vest which displayed my medals of colonel, walked into the courtyard of the base. There a helicopter was waiting for me. A something in my gut told me that something serious was about to happen. I remained startled for the two hour journey.

The Pentagon was quiet, the wide hallways were desolate. I was received by an infantry general named Kennedy. Without a word and with a simple gesture of his right hand told me to follow him, leading me to a small elevator that would take us to the bunkers in the basements. I arrived at the office there was the

president himself waiting, I noticed his tired face, in his eyes you could see the several days without sleep, was taking a toll on him. He had a white shirt with rolled sleeves to mid-arm, it seemed he had not changed in days.

There were also several generals, all with the same face of concern. I did not understand why I was cited to this high-level meeting when I all took with me was my vest with my medals on it. With a military salute one of them ordered me to sit. Behind the table a screen reflected a world map, with different colors where I could see the territories that we had won and small spaces that were still dominated by our enemies. The deep voice of General Pot, military and counterintelligence adviser to the president, began the concerned meeting.

- Gentlemen, you have all been summoned to this meeting to give you extremely classified information. Our intelligence agencies have sent us a report informing us that the commander of the enemy force is launching the first nuclear attack on Europe and the U.S second. We are doing everything possible to avoid this catastrophe, but have not yet located the exact point where these weapons are hidden. If this attack happens life on the planet is at risk of disappearing. Now they will be taken to a secret facility of the department of defense, I think it is worth mentioning that what you are about to see is of extreme secrecy.

You could see the faces of concern and curiosity everyone sitting at oval table. No one dared to utter a

word. The president was at the table with his hands covering his face, General Pot had to let him know twice that the meeting was over. We all left from the opposite end to which we had entered, another elevator, this time bigger, with access to a courtyard of the Pentagon unknown. There, a twin-engine Cessna-340 plane was waiting.

We flew several cities over Canada to enter the territory of Alaska. At this time of the year, the snow had covered part of the ground like a big white blanket on the ground. Inside the plane were fur coats to protect us from the cold. The pilot, a master in admiration, managed to land on a firm frozen lake. I was surprised when, poking my head outside, I saw many dogs and several sleds.

The silence was still ruling the environment, in the president's face increased signs fatigue and worry. We spent exactly 53 minutes traveling by sleds. A man who led the group in front, never showed his face, one because of the heavy clothing he was wearing and another because it was an order not to be seen, he stopped between two hills, so high that their tops were visible.

I had my right hand on the gun on my waist. There was nothing there, just snow and rocks and I was afraid it was an attack, but suddenly a big rock started moving revealing a tunnel out of the same stone. Nobody mentioned a word, the huge stone closed behind us as we entered.

I lost count of how many times we went left or right. Obviously we were in a maze of which we had to pass several checkpoints, General Pot showed the identification he carried on his left hand, and the soldiers opened the doors to clear our path.

We reached the end where a thick metal door step stopped us. This time the General raised his hand and placed it in a hole in the stone. Typed a secret code and the double door opened. An elevator swallowed us all. I felt a strange sensation as we descended, 7 minutes and 33 seconds-long journey to the depths, which by my calculations and my military experience told me that we were more than 500 meters below ground level. At the end of the fall, we stopped and the elevator opened. Another corridor between the stone, but this time shorter, until I walked through a door that led us to an office. As my eyes adjusted to the light that attacked us in that room, I could see clearly that there was only a round table with only eleven chairs, against these, eleven refractive monitors all identical in the air, on the wall to my right another monitor, but of a larger dimension, on the left a duplicate of the world map I saw at the Pentagon, with the same colors marking territories, the only difference about this one was ten points of the same size were scattered throughout the map. In front of me, a very dense brown curtain covered the entire wall. This time it was General Smith who broke the silence.

- We're here because it's time to reveal our plan against possible attacks from enemy forces. If that were

to happen in the next 72 hours, if our enemies were to activate all they're nuclear warheads, which at least we think they have about ten, the planet would not survive, the air would be unbreathable, all our species would disappear. The destruction would be complete. Our allies also have similar facilities like this one and also share our plan. Gentlemen, it's time to introduce to you Apollo 918, our newest Noah's Ark.

The brown curtain opened. Behind this, a glass let our eyes look into at a huge hangar the size of the spacecraft for which it was designed, it was a floating city. Our view was lost, we could not figure out where it began or ended, it was a masterpiece of science and technology, we were in it, around the, a gate on the side of the ship swallowed trucks, with what I assumed was necessary supplies. Finally, after so many hours I heard the voice of the President.

- We have gathered together the efforts of all the scientists in our Allied countries, including this one, now we have 3 ships, ready to take off into space. We conducted a selection process, as we cannot save all our citizens. We cannot, do not have time. We have chosen mainly young ones. I want to make it clear that the economic status for this selection was not a factor, our lists are of the best students of each university, divided into specialties. Also as many children as possible, prominent figures of art and literature, scientists, doctors, all have been medically checked in depth. We want you on this ship, out of this catastrophe, we need to save the best of our society and nation, let this group of American men and women rebuild the nation or otherwise, start at

another destination.

We also have a section of the ship where we will save at least a couple of copies of each plant and animal species, genetic laboratories, are cloning the process and will be determining the power of each to regenerate, depending on the time delay. We also have workshops with the latest technology, the highest level hospitals, technical and scientific personnel. In other words, this ship, has everything you need.

I realized the seriousness of the matter. What I did not fully understand was why they had chosen me, what role was I to play in all of this, I am a young man, I'm 43 years old, although I had reached several colonel status, 14 search and rescue missions even in the most difficult terrain, the military were my endorsement, but I knew nothing of outer space, although I am a pilot, I knew nothing about the spacecraft.

An elderly man in a white coat, entered the room where we were. He only greeted the president and he introduced him as Dr. Hans, the most experienced of all the scientists who worked on this project. The man took a remote control from the table and all monitors were lit, images began to appear in front of us, while the scientist spoke.

- The risk of those ten warheads exploding are of incalculable damage to our planet and that would be irreversible, all our species would disappear, and life as we know it, the decomposition of the atom as a weapon of war reduces everything on its path in a

field of thousands of miles around, any point on the planet would not be safe, oceans would reach unimaginable temperatures, it would destroy the ozone layer, the sun's ultraviolet rays would not have anything in their path to stop them, in realistic terms, it would cook the surface. If this happens, and this is the best of forecast, we could not make it back to Earth until at least 15 years have passed, this hoping that the impact would not move the planet out of its orbit. If this were to happen, the option of returning would be out of the question. Right now our elite group of astronomers are looking into the nearest galaxies, a planet where we can start life over and settle our culture. But so far, we have not found anything.

On the monitors, while this man talked, we saw three-dimensional images of what could happen. In front of my eyes I saw the whole planet blow off and the blue areas were disappearing.

The man was about to leave, justifying that he should continue to work, he walked to the door, one of the generals who was at the table, asked a question that stopped the scientist on his course.

- Why did we allow our enemies to build these weapons?

The white-coated man took a 180 degree turn, staring at the general and answered.

- The permit was given to them the day the first bomb was built - He turned around and left.

The monitors remained with the frozen images of the earth completely destroyed, we only listen to the commotion of trucks entering the ship when the rubber of their wheels touched the entrance of the vast spaceship, a sound I will never forget.

General Pot, chief operating officer of Apollo 918's secret plan stood up, walked over to the glass window standing with his back of the window, stared at me, and began to give me orders which explained why I was there.

- Colonel Paul, you have 20 hours to choose among your troops 100 of your best top qualified marines, preferably the ones that are not married, or do not have children, it's hard to say but we cannot afford more people on the ship. I understand this serious and painful situation that I'm putting you it, but you must understand that it is necessary. You were chosen to command the Apollo 918's security. In your experienced hands we have delegated the responsibility of caring for the stability and tranquility of civilians chosen to board the ship. We are all here. We are supplying you with the floor plans of all levels of Apollo 918, we rely on your sole discretion. You need to come back tomorrow at 14:00. The routine is the same. Outside is a plane that will take you back to your headquarters, make sure upon your return you bring with you your men.

I stood up, and with a military salute, walked up to the door opposite where the scientist had left minutes earlier. I felt behind me the voice of the president when he called my name, with just a twist of my

shoulders to face the table. I saw in the eyes of the man in the corner of the table, not the president of the nation, this time, I managed to see the human being. His voice was strong yet painful.

- May GOD bless you.

My answer was simple. It's almost with my back to everyone, with the metal door opened hoping and about to leave with concerns of my own, I replied.

- May GOD bless America.

CHAPTER 2

I was back in my headquarters in Virginia. I asked my assistant not to bother me for a couple of hours. My conscience could not bear the weight of the responsibility that was given to me. At my desk, I had more than 500 records, each of them had I had commanded, all young brave Marines willing to give their lives for this great nation. How was I to choose only one hundred? I was sure that this was the most difficult mission I had ever served in, would have preferred that the order was to fly to the very heart of our enemies and stop the madness that was coming, but choosing one hundred of my men was putting to death all the others. I could not take anything to chance. I also understood the seriousness of the matter, I just wanted to think for a moment that everything was just a nightmare, I wished that at some point the phone would ring with the news that an elite group of soldiers had found the command center of our enemies and destroyed the possibility of a disaster. But I'm a career soldier I must follow orders, I only had thirteen hours for return, exactly five to choose and take the flight to take me back to the maze where salvation was only for a few. I started by separating women from men, I thought, at least, if I chose the same number of each gender it would be partial, or at least even, years of experience have shown me that there are times when women have more value, not counting with the fact that they are much more determined and organized by nature, I managed to separate the first fifty on merit and missions accomplished, then twenty more for their youth and their dedication. Of the remaining records I should take twenty, I looked name by name, I checked every history, personal details, if they were

married or not, they're medical records, so I reduced the list to choose just three, I had already chosen ninety-seven good soldiers.

At that time, the office phone rang, it startled me. I prayed that it was the call I had imagined, but no it was the military hospital that warned that Ronald Cadet's wife had just given birth to a girl. The soldier had failed to be there, because he was on duty. Do not know how or why I did it, I have never failed to fulfill an order, but something inside me drove me to call my assistant asking her to call soldier Ronald and present himself to my office immediately. It took only five minutes when a very young man, short red hair, appeared at my door. Standing firm said.

- Excuse me Sir.

- Come in, cadet, have a seat. - I took off my beret for the first time in hours, and by standing in front of the soldier in a military fatherly tone I said:

- Soldier, I have for you a very important task, you must fulfill and a mission of utmost importance and cannot have the slightest error.

- Just give me your order sir, he said, the boy standing firm and taking his right hand to his forehead.

- Take a military vehicle with the utmost discretion and go to the military hospital, pick up your wife and daughter and come back here, soldier, you have two hours to fulfill this mission.

The gleam in the boy's eyes and smile was evident of the happiness that felt, when he tried to ask me why that mission, before he was even finished, I did not let him talk and in a stronger tone I said:

- Remember that you are a soldier of this nation and you fulfill orders without question, go now, have two hours.

I decided the best thing for me and my conscience would not to walk again through the courtyards of the barracks, I could not bear to leave those facilities with the memory of the looks and greetings from many guys that for years had served this nation under me, I felt nothing but cowardice, and I kicked myself for that, though I tried to find courage to do it, I could not, I closed the windows overlooking the patio and I was alone with my thoughts, people think that military people are strong and never cry, in those last two hours I showed the world they were wrong.

That time had come, I washed my face, put on my beret, I went straight to the plane, my assistant had everyone sitting in their seats, as I entered the plane, my eyes were looking for soldier Ronald, I found him in half way in the right row, I breathed easy, I gave the pilot orders to launch, from the window to my left I could see Lieutenant Colonel Ford, whom had left me in command of the unit with detailed guidance. I closed my eyes and left all my remorse behind the tracks.

Once in the air I decided that it was best to talk to my soldiers on the mission entrusted to us, I worried about Ronald soldier girl, but it was the only chance I had to survive, to stay in the hospital was to be sentenced to death for Anyway, if enduring the trip to the cave-hangar would be more likely that millions of human beings. I stood up and came, holding, central plane.

- Marines, - I said out loud to draw attention of all - is it possible that a nuclear attack can occur within a few hours, you were selected among thousands of soldiers to protect the safety of what's most precious to our nation, never in the years that you have served may lead you to such delicate mission, we are going to a secret facility where we probably may never return, there will be thousands of civilians for which our mission is to care for. We will flying into outer space on a ship designed and prepared by the best scientists of our land, the plan is to remove the best of our youth from a nuclear risk, we must watch that on that ship no unpleasant altercations occur that may endanger the life of any of its crew. Here are 100 chosen within our unit, I expect from you the utmost discretion and the highest sense of duty. With that, a murmur was heard on the plane, but for only a few seconds, after that silence had reigned the four hour trip. We got to the point of landing.

The journey we had previously on sleds, was not feasible this time, because we needed to take equipment with us, we had to walk. Besides, someone could be watching from a satellite, the journey would be three hours away, as calculated by the guide that

we expected. We were forbidden to use any communication equipment, long weapons should stay on the plane and returned to base, the guide handed out special coats for the 12 degrees below zero that were hitting our faces, we were given some instructions and started walking. Though he was the head of my platoon through the snow, from time to time he would do a visual inspection of all the men behind, especially soldier Ronald's wife and daughter, the youngest American marine.

When we finally arrived at our meeting point at the secret passage, it was the guide this time who put his hand in the stone and gave it the "open sesame" the first part of the mission was accomplished and there I was on time with my 100 soldiers and ready to begin the second stage.

After going down the elevators in groups of twenty, I was taken by the guide, who never said his name, with all my trained guys to a room where I would be given instructions and drawings of the ship. entered Through a side door, entered General Pot, followed by the president, was saluted in unison, the two men walked the line of marines, checking that everything was in order and looking into the eyes of each and every one, I was two steps away from them when they came to where soldier Ronald's wife and newborn daughter were, the General turned around to ask me, but before he could even ask me, I responded, and said:

- It's my 100th soldier, sir - The President, who was to At the right of General Pot and in front of me, could not nothing more than laugh. We all laughed and the General gave the ok and reaching out in a hand shake congratulated me on the timely efficiency and quality of the chosen men. He asked me to follow him to his office where we would discuss here the strategy of the plan.

My men were taken to a room where they would be using computers, given new larger caliber rifles for accuracy. A portable intercom mounted over their ears, which linked with each other and receive direct signal from the command post. New uniforms equipped with antiballistic. The mission would be explained in specific details and the responsibilities they had. The chain of command, learn the ships floor plans and learn to move within the ship.

All civilians chosen to board the ship were all in military barracks prepared for this purpose, in a restricted area of the underground facilities. The second step of my mission was to lead them into groups and housing them in the ship's south-west side, where six floors were divided in shelters, we decided to separate the men from the women, and put them up on the upper floors, minors and a few elders who were each selected for their knowledge and experience, all great doctors, in different fields of science. Each floor would have military command post, with ten of my soldiers. In the south-east side of the ship were the workshops, machine rooms, areas for the protection of animal and forest, a huge fish

like pond with different species of marine life, one with fresh water species.

And cloning laboratories that ensured food for all crew. In the northwestern part of the ship were grocery stores, hangars with about sixty exploration aircrafts, a military department with reserves for all the weapons available, drinking water supplies and oxygen tanks, tanks for fuel, in this case it was hydrogen in the six wings of Apollo 918, at the northeast side the main control rooms, main operating rooms, it was the only part of the ship that had large windows or skylights installed which allowed us to look into space.

I organized my soldiers and began to move all civilians, with only five thousand remaining to board the ship. According to General Pot, we had enough time for the operation, but an alarm put everyone on alert, the General on radio told me we had to leave, according to the latest reports ten warheads could suddenly be in the air, the ground troops in the area of greatest conflict had captured an enemy commander's son who had gone mad. There were only fifteen minutes left to be in the air and through the atmosphere.

I gave my soldiers the order to take all civilians left towards the ship, there was panic and despair, all in parallel formation marked the way for my soldiers to bring them to the barracks and thru the main gate, someone with the force of their body struck me making me fall a few meters back, I pulled myself

together and finished the operation, when I made sure that all of my soldiers were inside the ship, I pressed the button to close the huge gate, I immediately felt the gnashing of the powerful motors begin to run and again my body was on the floor when the vast mass of steel took off, my soldiers and I spent about 10 minutes trying to fight the inertia of our bodies, the belt of our uniforms had a button where we could press it and it would tie us securely to any side of the walls of the ship just by pressing the button, so we did and we merged with the walls of the immense Noah's Ark.

When calm was apparent and we could standing and walk around, it was soldier Ronald saw blood on my right arm.

CHAPTER 3

It was just a scratch, it would not pose any concern or danger to me, I could not afford an injury at this time we were just passing through the atmosphere, just a few minutes before we reached outer space, I tried to finish organizing the last civilian who entered the ship, the young soldiers who had chosen lived up to my expectations of them. After takeoff and the impact we were able to stand, I resumed the task of organizing the remainder of the civilians, I was in control of the shelters and tried to maintain my crew calm.

Everything in order, I decided to go up to the command post, I needed to know the level of emergency the escape plans were still in, I found General Pot, sitting in the back of the room. From his position I could see all the different flight captains of operations, the front control panels took up almost the entire width of the ship, more than fifteen men were needed to work in the control system of this modern Noah's Ark, behind them were five captains of navigation, they worked in front of huge glass skylights able to see everything, it was the only place on the ship where you could see outer space, from where I was the General gave orders to detain the ship's hovering at a safe distance from where they could observe planet earth.

I had the opportunity to see from a different angle parts of the world, two ships exactly like ours, were in the atmosphere communicating with our command post and asked for instructions, we all stopped to look at the planet, from where we were it showed how beautiful our planet is and at risk of disappearing, it

now looks like a billiard ball light blue, with uneven patches of dark colors, but it makes it a perfect combination of blue dominating the picture.

These moments that we were living were of incalculable value and power, you could see in the face of each and every one of the crew members, despair and uncertainty in they're faces, but nobody said anything, it was also the concern for friends and family members left behind, it's times like these that humanity emerges in humans.

Most of the women were crying, I remember one of the captain of navigation, with tears running down her cheeks, but still doing her job with the ability and integrity required by the situation, many of the soldiers were also concerned, but followed orders without question. We were just waiting for the alarm of mass destruction on the planet, but it remained as just that, an alarm. I left the control room, I decided to tour the ship, I took one of the eight elevators available along each corridor, and began my inspection.

The section of the ship dedicated to saving marine species it managed to relax more than I expected, it was a good idea to start there, the tranquility of the tanks and fish moving managed to take my worries away for a while, the sound of the whales made me think, I stopped in front of them for about half an hour, the majesty of the species managed to capture me, their size and innocence, but above all the ingenuity in their eyes that made me feel guilty of others. How was it possible that humans were able to

cause so much damage to animals on the planet? It's all our fault that today they are also at risk of disappearing. I also visited the cages prepared for the terrestrial animals, I was there for nearly half an hour, I don't know if it was just me, but saw in each of the animal's eyes concern. It was one of the men that was caring for them that mentioned to me that animals perceive danger much better than humans. The area of the warehouses, was all quiet and going well, the upper information floors were going well, the hangar where the air crafts were, was also fine, with surveillance patrols that were organized round the clock. Everything was going as planned.

The barracks where my soldiers rested, were all in order, as soon as I went in, all the soldiers stood up to greet me. I ordered the reports from the men chosen responsible to command each floor, they gave me all the information has requested. Everything was going as planned.

I revisited the upper control room. Nothing new. Then I went to my room, I needed to get some rest. What was expected to happen was unknown territory to me and I should be prepared for any eventuality, nothing better than a rested mind to make decisions.

CHAPTER 4

The shot was accurate, perfectly between the eyes. The man dropped upon impact from the bullet in his head and the knife he held in his right hand. The rifle barrel that soldier Neal was holding was still smoking, the girl trapped in the hands of that mad man, was trembling with fear, the blade of the knife to her throat managed to break every nerve.

We had only been in outer space for two hours and problems already began. I stood frozen in front of the scene I had just witnessed. We were all out of danger. I immediately gave orders to have the personal file sent to my computer of the man that was now dead. In the hallway of the second floor, a pool of blood filled the bunkhouse door number 234. The girl was trembling while on her way to the infirmary, she was held by one of my best soldiers, the Cadet Laura o' Hara.

Only two minutes had passed since the soldier Neal had fired his rifle, on my right side appeared general Pot. He appeared nervous. He asked what had happened and I tried to answer his questions in just a few sentences. :

- Soldier Neal radioed me reporting problems on the second floor. He was making his usual rounds, when he saw a man holding a girl hostage, threatening to kill her with a knife to her neck. Soldier Neal pointed his rifle at him. When the man saw that, he tried to cut the girl and the soldier fired. We do not know the reasons, I just ordered the man's record and hopefully we can talk to the girl after she calms down, she's now in the infirmary.

-The General frowned, he approached the dead man's body and checked into his pockets, he found nothing, not a single document, no identification. He stood up, and ordered:

- Colonel, order the evacuation of this man's body, I need someone to clean this place up, I do not want to panic among civilians. You have five minutes to come to my office. We need to talk. - And he went thru the same where he had appeared.

I walked in five minutes the General had asked me, after I had walked thru hallways of floors 3 and 4. Everything was quiet. Then I came to his door. Door was open. I stood there, firm, hoping he gave me orders come in.

- Come in Colonel, have a seat.

The office was small; little furniture, a metal desk coming out of the floor and was made to turn into a bed all the way to the left side of the room. Papers on his desk and a computer. Two metal seats of the same color in front of the desk and a larger one behind the desk. On the back wall a screen that reminded me of the one that I had seen in the secret government bunkers. I sat and waited for the general's questions. - What about the attacker, Colonel? – He asked the question without facing me. His back facing me, looking on the screen the image of planet earth. At some point I noticed the image had him concerned.

- One of my soldiers is transferring the files from the main control room to my PC. We could not talk with

the girl at this moment as she is resting and asleep, she has been sedated. The incident shook her up. His back still facing me, his voice just told me he was not paying very much attention to me.

- Ok Colonel, I need the report of what happened in my hands today by 22:00 hours. We already have enough problems. – He sounded serious and concerned. I wanted to inquire about Planet Earth, but it was not necessary. The General changed the subject, and immediately said:

- This is not why I called you Colonel. I need to reveal information about the situation on the planet. I want you to know that the two ships that accompany us in this mission, two ships exactly like ours, are already here, one to our right and one to our left. To the right are the European's ship named MARGARET, you need to make contact with Colonel Fabien. He's French, but speaks perfect English. On the left are the Russians. It's distinguished by the red letters that adorn the ship on the top with the name XX MOSCOW. You may contact the colonel in charge of security is, he is Ukac Yaroslav.

I gave orders for a communication chip be installed in your intercom, this way you can maintain communication with their personnel. You need to pass by where the engineers are to be installed. You need to be in constant communication with the officers of the other ships. If necessary these ships have a permit to transfer between them. Becoming between the three ships a humongous floating city.

But that's only if it becomes necessary. So far the situation on the planet remains the same. The threat is growing every second and our intelligence agencies cannot find where enemies have that nuclear arsenal. Just thirty minutes ago Kazakhstan was defeated, its fiercest general, right now they are questioning him. Hopefully we can obtain important information and all this will be nothing more than a terrible nightmare. You may leave, Colonel. And remember to have that report ready by, at 22 hours.

I said nothing, I stood up, and saluted him firmly with my right in a typical military goodbye, thus letting the general know that his orders would be fulfilled. I went to my room and my body collapsed on the bed. I needed to go over what happened in the last two days. To recount the events in my mind. I had to reorganize my ideas.

Trees on the street painted the landscape of a dark orange, the sidewalk was barely visible through the dry leaves that covered it. I could feel the crunch of dry leaves under my military boots. I came to the front entrance of a gate, as I walked. I saw my father thru the gate, sitting in the front porch. As soon as he saw me, he jumped for joy. He did not let me come to him, he came to me and gave me a big hug. It was exactly three years since I went back home to visit the home I was born in. Since being transferred to Virginia, I had not been able to return home, in times of war calls are scarce, my father excited for my visit,

did not know what to do to show me his happiness. We entered the house, I stopped to watch him sitting in the kitchen. He had gotten old.

You could see in his hands that the strength of his youth was gone. Ever since my mother had passed, he was never the same again. From the refrigerator he reached for two beers. The stove was on, he was cooking a stew that now surely he would share with me. He checked the food on the stove, before giving me the beer, he sat next to me.

- Colonel? Colonel!

Soldier O'Hara's voice woke me up. I wished it had not happened. So I could continue searching for fresh memories of my father. I was surprised to have those memories so fresh in my mind.

- Come in, soldier. Tell me. - I ran my hands over my face, trying to finally wake up, because I was still half asleep.

- Colonel, the records you requested of the girl and his attacker are already on your computer.

Sitting on my bed, I thanked O 'Hara, and asked him to leave. Again alone and quiet in my room, I opened the files.

Lindsay Hemle, California, January 23, 1998. Just graduated from Harvard Law School. She lived in her

hometown until the age of 14, her parents separated and she moved to New York with her mother, her father passed away three years later of an overdose, the separation was the reason for his depression. Lindsay never returned to California, her mother remarried and she decides to leave the house. She then moves to an aunt's house who lives in New York, spent her years studying and earns a scholarship to Harvard with very high grades. Her college years passed uneventfully again outstanding grades. Never has been arrested, never a problem in college, one known boyfriend, a guy from Denver, the son of a U.S. Congressman, who died in a car accident. Finished her studies in 2019 being the second best grade in her class. She was hired by the firm Berner's & Associates. An attorney there, she worked 18 months, defending four cases, she won all of them, the Jersey case is the most important one. She defended Jayden Nobals, son of one of the richest man in the country. Suspected murderer of 4 people in Detroit, shot to death, is acquitted by Lindsay's great defense. In other words, young, famous professional, no connection with crime. Clean, done, end of story.

I closed the file and opened the girl's attacker's, file hoping to find some answers.

Jarod Huken, South Carolina, August 8, 1996, graduated from Florida International University. Doctor specializing in orthopedics. He lived until he was six years in South Carolina. His parents moved to Florida in September 2002. Lived in Tampa till he was 10, his father is also a Doctor, specializing in

pediatrics. His mother, a renowned surgeon at Jackson, he graduated with honors in 2020 receiving his diploma from the hands of the state governor. Never been involved in any crime, medical examinations reveal that never drugged, did not smoke, never seen drinking alcohol. When he began medical school his parents choose to live in Miami. Three girlfriends known, all medical students with him. All with clean records. Before being chosen to come aboard, he was directly working in implanting limbs amputees. In other words, friendly, young, prominent professional, no link to crime, nonviolent, clean, done, end of story.

I closed the file puzzled, nothing in the file told me what could have happened. I decided to visit Lindsay in nursing and see if I could speak with her. Maybe what she told me, could give me details and I could determine what happened. I needed to find out details, my report was due on the General's desk before 22 hours. I had exactly six hours to do so.

The hospital was in one of the upper floor of the ship, the busy medical staff meeting with the wounded and beaten caused by the civil stampede to board the ship from land. Lindsay was still sleeping. A doctor with last name of Estevez, name on her medical gown's badge, was determined to check the wound on my right hand, while I waited for the girl wake up. She took me to one of the private nursing cubicles, where

she withdrew the band that hours earlier I put on to stop the bleeding.

She was a woman of about 35 years, tall, Latino features, black hair up to the middle of her back.

Light eyes, very beautiful. She treated me as if the wounded arm was a small child's. The tenderness of her movements immediately caught my attention. She crossed eyes with mine every time I she tried to suture the wound, as if looking for signs of pain. She kept looking into my eyes for signs of pain. I saw uncertainty in her eyes. The doctor completed the work on my arm about the same time that a nurse let me know that Lindsay had awakened. I found the girl on her bed, she was quiet, but her eyelids still had signs of having cried. I sat by her side after formally introducing myself and started to ask her questions.

- Hello, Lindsay how do you feel?

- Thank you. I feel much better. She replied getting up from bed, waiting for my next question.

- I need you to tell me what happened, why this man wanted to kill you?

- I was in my room. – The girl told me, and decided to walk to one of the dining rooms looking for something to drink. By mistake, I went towards the right bunker and found this man trying to open with a knife panels on the right. If you look there you will find marks. I realized he was not a technician, because he did not have tools with him. I asked him what was he doing, he got scared. He took me by the

neck, threatening me and pointing the knife at my throat. He started to say a few phrases in a language unknown to me, it was like a prayer. I cried for help before he covered my mouth. Apparently, my cry for help was heard by the soldier. You know the rest of the story.

- Can you remember any phrase that this man was saying, I need you to make an effort.

- He repeated various times, something like: Rows jan you viladi kueli join.

Upon hearing this phrase, my whole body was by swept with shiver. I thanked her and told Lindsay I might need to see her again.

Back in my room I kept thinking the sentence that the girl had repeated. My experience as a soldier and three missions in Arab territory had taught me a little of their language. The translation of the phrase was simple but very dangerous. For Allah is my revenge. That was what the man repeated. Before going to my room I decided to check again and check the panels that what Lindsay said was true. I took a picture with my phone and loaded them to my laptop, which the pictures were seen clearly, I saw the marks produced by a sharp object. Apparently the girl was right. The scratches she mentioned were there, the question that was spinning in my head was why the panels? What was there that could be of interest to him? Because of the seriousness of this matter I decided to write the report and submitted to the General Pot before 22:00 hours. I sent for one of the main

engineers of the ship, I needed to know every detail.

It took only minutes for the engineer to arrive, in the meantime, I went ahead and wrote a short report to send the other two ships that accompanied us notifying them of the incident. It was necessary for them to be on alert, it was alarming to even think that our enemies had penetrated was alarming in my head. I spoke lengthy and in detail with the engineer. I asked him to explain to me what kind of connections were passing thru the panels, and ordered him to review each one of them. If Harold Hunke wanted to open that panel, it was because something in them had caught his attention.

CHAPTER 5

In the middle of writing my report in my computer after my conversation with the engineer, an alarm in my intercom sounded off, I should report myself to the central control room of the ship. I saved my report in an encrypted file which I had written on my travel log. Not much information yet, only my interview with Lindsay, and the engineer's report. I stood before the General. All military and civilian leaders of the ship were there, we would also be in video conference through a screen with the command posts of the other two ships that accompanied us in the mission. After the formal presentations from senior leaders, the General lit a small monitor screen and read the latest reports coming from earth.

- The Western coalition troops had advanced towards our enemy's stronghold. Casualties on both sides were counted in the thousands per hour. Europe had been fully released but there were still points where Arab enemies were posing resistance. Cities such as Madrid and Brussels were reduced to rubble. According to estimates, only 6% of the civilian population had survived in these cities. Though still no warheads had exploded on the planet, medium range missiles plied the skies. The attacks were devastating, it was known that few thousand survivors in the Swiss Alps had escaped before the bombing. The West Coast of the United States was at this time under fire. Three coalition aircraft carriers had been sunk. Of enemy forces, seven were knocked out thanks to the courage of the soldiers of the U.S. Air Force. The African continent was dominated by the English forces and no activity had been reported some four hours now.

One of the main leaders of the Arab enemy forces, had been killed, with all his men in Zimbabwe. Many cities in South America, had been virtually wiped out along with their inhabitants. Although there was no longer enemy presence, hunger and thirst began to take its toll on the population. Countries such as Brazil and Argentina had offered their support and military force to the liberating troops. The general paused for a moment, took a sip of water before continuing with the investigation report. Now came the part that we all expected. -Still unaccounted for is the president and commander in chief of the enemy forces. We have taken three more cities in Iraq, Iran and Saudi Arabia. But have not found the nuclear arsenal. Our orders were still to remain at 12,650 miles from the planet. Ensuring the safety of our crew and civilians. And ensuring their safe return home if this war ends. If this is not possible, our astronomers are looking for a place to settle our culture. But have nothing yet. We are receiving reports from the planet every two hours. We will continue to inform you of additional news.

The commander of the Russian ship also read the report from Moscow that had been sent. Not much more encouraging than the one that came from Washington. From the third ship their commander was silent, almost at the end of the meeting he raised some questions about the work of astronomers who were dedicated to finding a point in space where our civilization could continue in case of a disaster. General Pot dismissed all giving the order to meet there again within four hours. I was about to leave when the man's voice asked me to stay. All officers

had left, only I had stayed alone with him. The man sat down on the right side of the oval table. He gestured with his face denoting high concern while staring me in the eyes, until he finally spoke:

- You have news about the attacker, Colonel?

I was about to reply when over the intercom in my right ear, the voice of one of my soldiers telling me to I was needed at level two of the ship, urgent.

- It's something on level two of the ship, General. - That was my quick response before leaving as quickly as possible to the place where I had been called. The man did not wait for my response, said nothing, picked up his gun from a drawer and went behind me.

CHAPTER 6

The entire left wall in the central corridor of level two, of the ship destined for storage of food and supplies, was stained with blood. A thread that began almost at the door of the elevator was lost across the hall and almost to the end. One of my soldiers had found this while doing his patrol routine of the facilities. The alarm sounded off automatically. The general who came behind me was faster and pulled the gun he had in his waistband. Soldiers who heard, my call were there already. We decided to follow the traces of blood to the end and see that we found there.

I took the lead between my body the empty hallway. My mission was also caring for the General and his life. With signs I gave my soldiers orders to make silence, caution in this cases is a fundamental ingredient, I asked my staff for a secure channel thru my intercom, I needed drawings of the floor plan sent to me, the possible exits on that side of the ship. Hopefully we could find the cause of this.

I took from my pocket a refractor and in seconds I could study the floor plans. Then I gave three of my men the order to block the only exit available, if the responsible was still here, he could only exit where I had sent my soldiers or where we were. Now we just needed to follow the traces of the red spots and see where they took us.

We followed the trail of blood to the end of the hallway it bent to the right. And finally right again when we finally got to the end we stumbled upon an image that could not be more heartbreaking. Dr. Hans lay slain on the floor. His neck was completely

severed. His white coat was completely soaked in his own blood, his eyes wide open, clear signals of the struggle in his last minutes of life. On the stacked boxes in the warehouse we noticed the evidence of a pitched battle. They were all scratched it was obvious it had been a big struggle. Then I thought maybe the murderer of Dr. Hans could be hurt, beaten, with some scratches. I sent one of my soldiers to the ship hospital to alert doctors, mainly to Dr. Estevez. I gave orders that if someone were to seek medical attention, should communicate to me immediately.

General Pot also gave orders to shut down the entire second level of the ship. Before removing the body, we called in forensic specialists to check for evidence throughout the area and find some clue. After the general gave his orders, he stood up and gave me his direct orders.

- Colonel, make sure no one enters this place until the blood and body have been removed, I do not want the civilian population on the ship to know about this, I expect you in my office in 10 minutes. - He turned around, put his gun in his waist holster, and left horrible scene.

I left two soldiers in charge of watching the scene of the crime. Things were getting difficult for me in this mission, just in 24 hours we had two deaths. I could not even imagine how, but obviously the enemy had penetrated somehow.

I ordered one of my corporals to organize greater vigilance in the most desolate part of the ship. We

would no longer make rounds. From now on I wanted two soldiers in each area. After I finished giving my orders, I left for the general's office. Once there the man was sitting on his bed, shirtless, noticeably tired. I sat opposite him and waited for him to start talking.

- What do you think of this, Colonel?

I did not want to cause unnecessary alarm- I stated, but I'm pretty sure we've been penetrated. Somehow the selection process with the civilians population, the enemy managed to infiltrate some of their men in the ship. How many of them, or who they are, I do not know, but they are among us.

- What is your plan then, Colonel? What do you think we should do?

- First thing is to ask back home, information and procedure used to select civilians and compare it with our records, this way we might find some clue. If identities were stolen, then those civilians are still back home. We must get in touch with the FBI and try to find them. I already gave orders to strengthen surveillance in all parts of the ship. The forensics experts are now trying to find traces that lead to the murderer. Hopefully that gives us results. I also think that their goals are senior leaders and scientists. The first incident with the girl could be a fluke. According to her the man repeated a phrase in Arabic.

- So from now on Drs. and everyone who has high rank within this ship should be moved to another

level, organize them in different rooms and increase their surveillance, also station soldiers in laboratories, in the hospital and in the control room where flight captains are.

- It will be done Coronel, I think it is also time to inform the other two ships on what happened, they must have a report on this incident, but no one can doubt that they are probably also infiltrated. That could create chaos. I think it's best to be prepared.

- Ok. Contact the colonels of the two ships through a secure channel and report on what happened. Now ask earth to send files with all the information used, mainly civil DNA. We can compare them to what we have here and that can help us uncover these terrorist.

A knock at the door interrupted the general. It was agent Robert, head of the CSI with the initial report on what they found at the scene of the murder. Without asking he began to speak.

- The person who murdered Dr. Hans is a trained professional. We did not find a single trace of anything, all the blood belongs to the Dr. His neck was cut with a sharp object, small knife or razor. The murder weapon was not found at the scene. We are confident that the Dr. was wounded first in the elevator. He had a cut behind his right cheekbone, this occurred first but it was not the cause of death. The initial study indicates that the body had been struggling and tortured before death.

It is possible that the murderer wanted to know

something and used torture, he could have killed him in the elevator and did not. Dr. Hans tried to defend himself. All the scratches on the boxes match the remains found in his nails. The death was caused by a severe cut into his aorta and this was lethal blow, this killer knew where he needed to cut. We have also concluded that it looks like it had to be a strong man, because he dragged his victim, the Dr. physically a tall man and nearly six feet tall and weighing around 200 pounds. Then the murderer had power to control that weight, or more than one. As I said earlier it is a professional, he wore gloves and mask. We could not find a trace of hair, nor a drop of sweat, or anything by the murderer.

The general stood up unexpectedly, nobody expected him to do that, sat in front of his computer. His back to us, contacting urgently with the FBI. The image appeared on the screen, it was the image of an agent, he greeted the general and began to speak.

- What can I do for you General? How are things up there?

-Hello, agent Starry, I requested personal communication with you because I need to report an extremely serious situation here, I can only trust the Colonel Paul and his men, we had two major situations here, I can tell you that we have been infiltrated by the enemy. A man named Jarod Huken tried to kill a girl. He was caught trying to open a few panels in the wall, about an hour ago we found the body of Dr. Hans beheaded. We think that enemies could be impersonating other identities and are within

us. I need you to send me a list of all missing or found bodies on American soil in the last thirty days that are not victims of war. If possible send these records with medical reports, DNA. Social security and criminal history records. I have to stop this dangerous situation as soon as possible.

The man on the screen noted in astonishment as the general spoke. When the General finished explaining what happened, he responded:

- Do not worry, General, you can count on my discretion. I will send those files as soon as possible. Give me a few hours to get them ready.

- Remember Starry, that you need total discretion. I do not know how or where was this operation infiltrated, you will not comment on what I just asked you OK?

Starry nodded with military gesture to the general. The screen went off the in the air, the General closed it then returned to us, and give us instructions. He started by Agent Robert.

- Agent Robert, re-check again the scene of Dr. Hans death. Find something, anything, give me at least a clue. Again check the body again. Do the retinal test. Perhaps we find something there. Use all necessary resources. I want to see back here with results in four hours. I do not want one more death on this ship. – He said, the officer got up and left right away. The general and I were alone again. The General slumped in his chair and slammed his fist on his desk, I never

would have expected this reaction from this man that I admired so, I dared not mention a single word. He looked up to me and started talking.

- Paul. It was the first time he had called me by my first name –I need you to take charge of checking the records that agent Starry agent sends. Make sure you reinforce security on all fronts, and all specialists in this ship, do not leave it in the hands of anyone else. Do it yourself personally. We do not know what will happen with this. I prefer a thousand times a thousand battles on land than this uncertainty. You take charge of the research and catch the enemies among us. - The general's words got to me, they seemed so very human, I could feel this strong military man that had commanded armies had collapsed under the pressure of all that had happened. I walked to where he was and put my right hand on his shoulder. I found in me encouraging words and a smile, I said.

- Everything will be fine, have faith in God, everything will be fine.

- I know -was his answer, this is why you were chosen among many, we have walked a bit of life together and I know who you are and what you are capable of giving. I am an old man now. I also know that if tomorrow I'm not here, this mission will be in good hands.

I removed my hand from his shoulder and with my right hand took his and expressed:

- Do not say that. You and I will return and liberate

many battles together.

- No, son. My body is tired now.

The general's eyes were beginning to moisten, a bad feeling about this came to my mind. I decided to change the subject and asked.

- General, forgive my indiscretion. There is something I want to ask you, out of curiosity. May I?

- Colonel, said. Of course, what do you want to know?

- Why is the President not on this ship?

- No captain abandons his ship, nor his sailors because, Colonel, would you leave your men if an operation goes wrong or becomes dangerous?

- No – I quickly replied.

- Yesterday, when we boarded this ship, the President was in the secret hangars, I asked him a thousand times to come with us, but he showed his courage by strongly refusing. His wife and two children are somewhere in a safe place this massive of iron machine. Just myself and their secret service know where they are. But the president stayed behind to command his troops. From here I can only send blessings and wish that everything on earth goes well. That is a brave man.

With nothing to say after his answer, I asked for asked permission to leave, I'm convinced I'm a Colonel of a country and armed forces always ready for anything in order to defend freedom.

CHAPTER 7

Arriving at my room-office-command post, I communicated with the other security chiefs in the other two ships. From a secure communication channel told them what happened and asked them to increase surveillance on civilians of greater importance. The Russian colonel informed me that in his ship so far, they had only small altercations that had occurred among civilians. Fabien, the French Colonel, also reported a corpse, but for medical reasons, we agreed communicate every 4 hours thru this secure channel and report to us of ant the events in each ship.

I felt strong and calm so far facing the enemies of Apollo 918. I gave other colonels instructions and also asked for their discretion. I let my body rest for a moment and lied in bed, just wanted to relax my muscles a bit for five minutes before continuing my work.

My father took out of the fridge two cold beers, they were covered with a thin white frosting, after he opened it, uncovered a white smoke that escaped through the mouth of the bottle. We were in the backyard and a coal burner showed red flames over coal rocks, he was cooking burgers. It was spring and the trees in the backyard were fully bloomed, the grass bright green. The lake gleamed, with midday sun and invited to jump into the water.

The old man, with the wave of his hand, called me to sit beside him on the bench, as a boy I helped build to put in front of the lake and under the shade of the

trees. Arriving at my side, he put his hand over my shoulder, which I was surprised, my father was not an affectionate person. Remember the day we built this together? He asked, looking at me tenderly sitting by his side.

- Yes. I remember. It was now, spring. I felt you hammering outside my room, I saw you cutting the wood. I remember I wanted to help. You put my hands for the first time a smaller hammer with some nails. I think I was about nine years. I spent my days running from here to there. That afternoon was the first time I felt like a man, but ended up mistreating my fingers with the hammers. After that I sat every evening on this bench made with freshly cut wood of pine forest. I was proud of it.

- Yes. Until the day you left. - My father starring at the shiny reflections on the lake. I did not look at him because I knew he would have a tear running down his cheek. I let him vent completely.

- The day you left with your military uniform, you were just a kid. That war in Iraq that lasted so many years. Your mother God rest her soul prayed every night without you knowing it. We were also at war with you, every word, every report we kept informed. Until you returned as a corporal. Then another war and another. Your mother could not take it. I always knew that one day your mother could bear the uncertainty of whether you came back or not. With every war, we filled this country with deaths, young brave men like you. We got up every morning expecting officer's visit with the yellow envelope.

Every night giving thanks to God for another day without the bad news.

- You never accepted that I wanted to be in the military. I said loudly and almost standing up.

- No! We never accepted that you were fighting causes that were not yours.

- In the military you abide orders, that's what you never understood. I said emphatically.

- And men break them when they are not fair, dammit!

The noise of the bottle crashing against the rocks of Lake woke me up. I was dreaming again with my father, very far away from this ship and all these problems. How I wished, I could be there even if it was in a controversial conversation with him. There, in my backyard, under my tree, sitting on my bench..

Cadet Neal suddenly appeared at my door telling me there was some kind of commotion in the top command post, General Pot had called me several times thru my intercom and seeing that I did not respond he sent the cadet for me. I must report urgently to the central control room of Apollo 918.

Upon arriving there I found joy among all flight captains. Some hugging, others laughed, others cried. I searched for answers, when I found general Pot, and saw him sitting with documents in his hands. When he saw me, he stood up and almost ran to where I was standing, I was watching the excitement in the control room. The General handed me the documents to read, and was waiting for my reaction. I could not believe what my eyes were reading. It was the latest report from Earth, where the nuclear warheads were reported as been found. At present the Iranian president was trying to surrender to coalition forces. The nuclear warheads were hidden in the African desert. There were exactly twelve nuclear warheads. Without much thought I embraced the general and almost kissing on his cheeks I said:

- I told you General that soon we would fighting and winning other battles.

The man did not feel sorry I hugged him in front of everyone, in short, the joy was present in the air, no one noticed our warm embrace. When do we receive the order to return? Was the question I asked.

- We must wait orders from the Pentagon. According to the report, we'll be firing engines in about five hours. The other ships were also informed of this and the joy is general in all command posts. Civilians have not been informed as of yet to avoid causing disturbance, due to the joy, as soon as we decide to return. As for the murder case, we will resume investigating in land and the guilty will be brought to justice. Take advantage of this time and go to the hospital. Get the wound on your arm treated. I'm sure

we will be greeted by the president.

- Thank you, General. I will go to the hospital now. You have given me great joy.

I saw her at the hospital. I was able to stop for a few minutes and stare. For the first time I stood silent before her beauty. The white coat contrasted with her black hair and straight up the middle of her back. I was still, watching zealously as she examined the throat of a boy sitting on a dark metal table. I felt like hugging her around her waist and tell her the great news. She wore tight military pants that hugged her thighs, which caused my thoughts to wander in other territories. In her hands a pen, which she played with and the boy. I envied that smile. She looked up and saw me watching her.

- Colonel? What can I do for you?

- Yes -was my answer- The General has ordered me to come and check my wound. The band is stained with blood.

- Come on in, please sit. I'll be with you shortly. She finished with the boy in only seconds, I wanted to think that it was because she wanted to come to me as soon as possible. She came to me prepared with scissors in hand. Without my permission she took my arm and cut the band at once. I kept staring at her but I dared not say a word. Finally, I thought that upon my return, I would not see her again, my military life

did not allow me such luxuries of love and family life. I do not know if she felt the lack of concern on face. Sometimes women have that sixth sense that allows them to read a man's mind easily. I know men would give anything to find out what a woman thinks even if he has been by her side for more than twenty years.

- Something wrong, Colonel? Anything new you want to share with me? I see in his eyes a tranquility and happiness do you want to share with me?

- Indeed, there is good news, but you know I cannot share confidential information with other non-military personnel.

- Do not worry. I understand perfectly.

I reacted when she spilled rubbing alcohol on my wound. As if in revenge for my refusal to tell the doctor the news, she while smiling. It really hurt me, but I must admit I also liked her reaction. A little game began between us. She bandaged my arm and ended the necessary treatment. I stood and walked to the door. I turned around and looked at her. I found myself face to face with her eyes full of light. She was looking at me. I gave her a wink and in a single sentence said- We will soon return, The Dr. as her prize to my confession gave me a smile.

I decided to gather my soldiers and prepare them for the return. I had to organize everything and still not relent in our mission. We had to take care of all civilians and make sure they went back to earth safe.

Almost as I began talking to everyone an alarm sounded throughout the ship. I ordered my sergeants to remain calm and return to their posts. I ran to the command post. My legs did not respond fast enough. Upon my arrival everyone was glued to the glass that left us to look outside. A dead silence pervaded the room, no one was in place. Only lights on the controls reassured me that the ship was in operation. I did not ask or say anything. I approached the glass. I could not believe what was in front of my eyes. The planet until a few minutes ago, covered in blue and white was now a deep orange. From our place we could see the seething atmosphere in flames, smoke in several parts of the parts of earth. It was a heartbreaking spectacle. I swear in my ears I could hear the screams of horror of thousands of innocent men and women. It was all a ball fire and death. The blue was lost while tears welled down the faces of all around me. I do not know if that moment lasted hours or minutes. For me it was eternal. The color of death covered the entire planet. Not a free space. Many hands on their heads in disbelief. Others were still staring into the end of life of our species. Everyone was crying. I searched general Pot. I found him in a chair unarmed. With his shirt open. Hands detached from his chair. I looked for answers in his your eyes, I asked a question:

-What do we do now?

CHAPTER 8

It's been hours and the sadness and misery does not abandon us in the Apollo 918, sadness flooded every corner. In the other two ships the reaction was the same. All wept, crying. The news was leaked to civilians and it was difficult to control. Many reacted violently. It was understandable that in this situation, almost by accident the ship did not spiral out of control, it is amazing how human beings can respond in certain circumstances. I have not been up to the central control room. I decided to stay down and ensure the peace and stability of the ship. As it was all under control I went to my room, I needed to rest for at least fifteen minutes. I removed my belt and shirt. Sitting by my bed, when I heard the voice of Dr. Estevez, it got me out of the lethargy in which I was.

- You have deceived you, Colonel. You lied to me as if I were a little girl.

- No! I never lied to you. I told you what we knew so far. Everything has been was a surprise. Nobody expected it.

- I see you are determined to keep playing with me.

- Listen to me, and please listen carefully. I do not have permission to give out classified information to a civilian, two hours before going to the hospital we knew we were back soon. The allied forces told us they had discovered the nuclear weapons arsenal with more than ten warheads. Ground guess was they thought those were the weapons they were looking for. But it was not. Somewhere in the world there was another arsenal, and was shot in retaliation for finding

the others. I feel bad or worse than you. - She collapsed in my arms I said a few words. I felt my right shoulder moistened with tears. I hugged her body closely. I pressed her against me. I stammered some words of encouragement trying to give the support she needed. The smell of your skin flooded my senses. Without letting go of my hug, she asked

- Will you do something to make sure we will all survive here? Tell me you will do something.

The interruption of the soldier Neal did not give me time to answer. General Pot urgently demanded my presence in the central control office. I noticed he had not called me on the intercom in my ear. Just this thought made me smile a bit. The old general still preferred the old way of giving direct orders.

Get there and were several people sitting in the oval table. I sat in a place available and prepared to hear what was being said. A gray-haired man and a white coat opened the meeting.

- Good afternoon, gentlemen. I'm Dr. McCarty, after the assassination of Dr. Hans, I will be in charge of the scientific part of this mission. As you all know, unfortunately, the planet earth has collapsed. 15 warheads exploded at different points, and I'm quite sure that there is nothing left alive on earth at this time. Our enemies were faster. The arsenal was hidden at the North Pole. From there it was easy to shoot them to five continents. The oxygen in the

atmosphere is unbreathable. The oceans as we knew are now boiling at over a hundred degrees Celsius. As I said we are sure that nothing is left alive on earth. In our ships we have oxygen and fuel reserves for at least ninety months. But returning to the planet would not be possible for at least fifteen years. And that is our biggest problem at the moment.

A voice from the left wall screens a young man interrupted the doctor. He was the chief engineer of the Russian ship.

- These ships were designed to integrate each other if needed. I think if we do, we can increase you ninety months by three or four months additional. At least for fuel.

-Excuse me- Another man in a white coat from the European ship-added to the dialogue? Dr. McCarty, under the conditions that the planet is under now, how long will it take for the north and south poles to disappear?

- Now I cannot give an exact answer without first doing the calculations. But I'm pretty sure that in 30 days maximum all poles have disappeared. The water temperature in the seas are very high.

The man who asked the question again to spoke:

- Each of these ships have in their hangars sixty ships and rescue small ones. If we hurry, we can prepare and enter the planet, collect the ice still left, break it down and convert it into much more fuel. This is

precisely why these ships are designed to work with hydrogen. We can also acquire oxygen decomposition and fill our tanks to capacity.

- This is a very good idea.-Dr. McCarty regain the conversation. All others were silent-the world's water source is contaminated, but not the ice.

General Pot, which until then had been just listening in, stood up and began to give orders.

- Let us prepare to integrate the three ships within the next two hours. Let's make sure that engineers prepare to enter the Planet in search of ice with a group of small ships. Dr. McCarty, prepare the laboratories for the necessary decomposition of the ice. - Then turned to one of the captain of-flight, I need you to organize the best pilots and prepare them in two teams, one for the south pole and the other one to the north pole. We need to bring back as much ice as possible and store it. Then we can go on to the process of disintegrating it takes and into our reserve tanks. I want everything ready in 72 hours. The group of specialists from the three ships need to work together after the integration of the ships. Civilians remain in their places. The tunnels between ships are only for authorized personnel to pass thru.

All nodded. We were about to finish that meeting, but I interrupted with a question:

- Any results in finding another planet where we can settle?

- So far we have nothing concrete, Colonel. - Said Dr. McCarty - We are studying two points that we find interesting. One is in the Magellanic Clouds. A dwarf galaxy planet pretty close. The Large Magellanic Cloud is classified, according to the database of extragalactic objects from NASA, as a barred spiral galaxy SB ring unstructured non-regulate without bulb. The irregular appearance of the galaxy is probably the result of interactions with both the Milky Way and the Small Magellanic Cloud. For a long time it was considered that the Magellanic Cloud galaxy was flat, like spiral galaxies and could be assumed that it was a single galaxy away from us. However, in 1986, Caldwell and Coulson found that Cepheids in the northeast of the Cloud was closer to the Milky Way Cepheids in the southwest. More recently, the tilted geometry has been confirmed by observations of Cepheids. These studies suggest that the LMC has a slope of $\sim 35^\circ$, considering that 0° it corresponds to a galaxy whose plane is perpendicular to us. In this galaxy there is a young star of only 40 million years. The TAURUS III. Depending on its composition may have developed a kind of atmosphere similar to Earth. Due to its proximity we mainly focus on this star. According to our calculations through a single black hole or worm and atomic teleportation we could get to it fast enough. We are also studying a second. This a little bit further. Is the Andromeda galaxy. A giant spiral galaxy. At 2.5 million years. The Andromeda Galaxy is a spiral Sb-type supergiant with a luminosity that is, apparently, somewhat larger than our galaxy. He turned towards us so that its principal plane is a 15-degree angle with the line of sight, that is, almost edge. The angular dimensions of the

Andromeda galaxy Hubble measures are at a distance of 460 kiloparsecs of 20 for 5 kiloparsecs. However, I must say that the concept of dimensions of the galaxy, are not fully determined, since galaxies do not have sharp boundaries. Within this galaxy we have found the CENTAURUS VIII a planet similar in size and composition to ours. We do not have the results of the gases that make up its atmosphere. But the density of it is quite similar to that of the planet earth. So we believe that it can contain high percentages of oxygen. To reach it we would have cross three black holes or worms, which makes it harder to travel and even higher risk. We would take nearly two months with our transportation to get to the system. But if nothing else is found, we would have no alternative. To embark on an adventure or journey of this kind with three ships is crazy. Then the best thing to do would be send a small ships to confirm the studies and our results. Only after should the large ships travel. We are working day and night. Until we have something firm and solid, we will not inform the military leadership of this mission.

I thanked the Dr. for his response and wished him luck in his work and his findings. From his research depended the fate of all human beings who were in all three ships. Everyone left, but with a signal, general Pot let me know to stay at my post.

The General opened his computer files and made a comment:

- Minutes before the earth's misfortune, agent Starry managed to send me this file. Yesterday in Miami

they found a decomposed body in the bottom of the bay of Biscayne in Miami. The characteristics match that of Jarold Hunke. However the DNA tests performed on the body of the person who tried to kill Miss Lindsay Hemle, does not match. This confirms your suspicion of supplanted identities inside the ship. This file also contains the names of all the bodies found in the entire nation. I ordered for a specialist you can trust to do the comparison of these files and the ones of the civilians on the ship, you may well find other stolen identities. It will be a good way to catch the murderers of Dr. Hans. I'll call Robert, CSI agent. I will put this file in your hands and see what we can find out from here.

- Ok. Do what's necessary.

- I can see you are tired general, why don't you get some sleep?

The tone of his voice betrayed this man, it showed pain inside. This time the answer was by a friend, a man. Not the career military man of many years.

- My wife died three years ago. I always wanted to rest beside her. I never thought this would happen one day, I left behind two daughters and three grandchildren, now they are dead. All for what I once fought, is destroyed. I wonder if it was worth it. I'm a man with more combat wounds medals, and finishing a tired old man, I'm alive inside the ship. And all my family and friends, were all killed by a madman who could not stop. If you would have asked me or someone had told me this would happen, I never

would have come on board this ship. I would rather die a thousand times with them, then feel this pain. This uncertainty of not knowing what will happen with the rest of us. If there is a God why did this happened, Colonel. Whenever I went to church with my family, I always trusted what God taught me. Why did God punish me this way today. Letting me live and taking everyone and everything I ever wanted.

- Have you read the Bible, general? I asked.

- Yes. I've read it. The man answered while pulling his old red worn up by time bible.

- I? I said as I stretched my hand trying to reach for it. I began flipping through its pages without saying a word. The man in front of me sat on his chair, eyes staring at the floor. His hair seemed greyer, it seemed older. His broad shoulders seemed reduced by the weight of his thoughts and pain. His hands looked thinner while he passed them through his hair. Finally I found what I wanted and began to read:

There was a man in the land of Uz, whose name was Job, and that man was perfect and upright, and fearing God, and eschewed evil. And there were born seven sons and three daughters. His substance also was seven thousand sheeps, three thousand camels, and five hundred yoke of oxen, and five hundred asses, and a very great household that this man was the greatest of all the Orientals. And his sons went and feasted in their houses, everyone his day, and sent

and called for their three sisters to eat and to drink with them.

And it was so, having gone on duty the day of the banquet, that Job sent and sanctified them, and rose up in the morning and offer burnt offerings according to the number of them all. Job said: Perhaps my children have sinned and cursed God in their hearts.

Thus did Job continually. And one day the sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD, between Satan also came with them. And the LORD said unto Satan, Whence cometh thou? And Satan answered the LORD, and said, from roaming through the earth and walking around on it. And the LORD said unto Satan, Hast thou considered my servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a blameless and upright, fearing God and turning aside from evil?

Then Satan answered the LORD, and said, Doth Job fear God for naught? Hast not thou made an hedge about him, and about his house, and all that he has on every side? The work of his hands you have blessed and his substance is increased in the land. But the forth hand now, and touch all that he hath, and he will curse thee to thy face.

And the LORD said unto Satan, Behold, all that he hath is in thy hand: only do not lay your hand on him. So Satan went forth from before the Lord. And one day when his sons and daughters were eating and drinking wine in the house of their eldest brother, And there came a messenger unto Job, and said:

The oxen were plowing, and the asses feeding beside them, They rushed and took, and slew the servants with the edge of the sword: I alone have escaped to tell thee.

While he was still speaking, another came and said: The fire of God fell from heaven and burned up the sheep and the servants, and consumed them only for escaped alone to tell thee.

While he was yet speaking, there came another and said, The Chaldeans made out three bands, and fell upon the camels, and took, and slew the servants with the edge of the sword, and I alone have escaped to tell thee.

While he was yet speaking, there came another, and said, Thy sons and thy daughters were eating and drinking wine in the house of their eldest brother, And here came a great wind from the wilderness, and smote the four corners of the house, and fell upon the young men, and they died, and I alone have escaped to tell thee.

Then Job arose, and rent his mantle, and shaved his head, and fell to the earth and worshiped, and said, Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return there.

Lord gave and the Lord hath taken away: as the name of the Lord be praised.

In all this Job sinned not, nor charged God foolishly.

I closed my Bible in my hands. I was silent for a while. The man was still there. Sitting with his hands on his head. As I stood next to the table and left the Old Testament there, I noticed on the floor, right under the eyes of the general a few drops, tears of pain fell of a man whose faith had been broken.

CHAPTER 9

Agent Robert came to my office minutes after being called. I explained the situation that we presented and what was expected of him. I sent to your computer the files received from earth. We needed quick results of his research. He must compare the profiles with those of the civilians in the ship.

The logical thing was to start with the records of those who had turned up dead before the disaster. Compare if these people were on the ship, was the most rapid way of doing it. After DNA taken from all crew and civilians, the enemy among us will be uncovered. I gave him 24 hours to put on my desk the first results of their work.

I asked to be alone in my office, talked by video to the security chiefs of the other two ships. Colonel Fabien European ship and Colonel of the Russian ship Yaroslav. Before we finished we agreed to ensure everything go as planned. The heads of the tunnels should be kept by the soldiers of each group. And only authorized personnel could pass thru them.

The organization and design of the ships was not capricious. Everything had been well thought out, the Apollo 918 would be in the middle of the three ships. On the right would be the Russian ship and at the other end the European ship. Our ship would command center and operations of the entire star mission.

Eventually Apollo 918 opened 6 large compartments, at the ends, three on the right and three left. The ships

tunnels alongside our ship, those would slowly unify into the mouth of the gates of the Apollo 918. Already done the switch, the secure compartments were closed and pressurize. The three ships had merged into a single energy saving machine. This way Apollo engines would remain working at fifty percent of the maximum capacity. Stable enough to keep all the weight of the three ships. The European and Russian spacecraft could switch off their engines and leave only power generators, needed to light the elevators and oxygen compressors working and distributing thru all parts of the ship. At each end of these tunnels surveillance was strict with soldiers of each ship.

It was early morning as our clocks had been programmed not to lose track of time when we finished all the coupling operation. Within a few hours I was to meet personally with colonels Fabien and Yaroslav. We had decided it was best to rest a few hours. My body was exhausted and sleep deprivation attacked me. I decided to take a tour of the lower floors of Apollo 918. Walk a little, to clear, and gather my thoughts.

The tranquility reigned in ponds dedicated to saving marine species on the ship. As before, I finished my walk with the whales. I stopped in front of them. I leaned my back against the opposite glass wall and I started to look at them. Quiet and constantly swimming from one end to another of that huge pool. One of them, the youngest, came to me. It remained motionless. From my position I could see it's fullness. A white line through his body from his head

to the opposite end of it's body. I saw a question in his eyes, as if asking me and expecting an answer as to why they were in a manmade pool and not in their humongous oceans. Why so far from their seas? It was still standing in front of me. My hands crossed on his chest, I felt the coldness of the opposite wall in my back. But I could not move a millimeter, not a single muscle moved, my body was tired.

The animal's sudden movement jerked me out of the concentration I was in, my body reacted together to the fright caused by the sudden movement, and thanks to that, the bullet that was headed to my head, escaped me. He went down the hall, I fell to the floor. In my fall, I was trying to grab my weapon, I could only see a shadow slip away to my left. I stood up as quickly as possible, called the guards at the entrance of the ponds. This time I would trap one enemy, he could not get out so easily. He had just fallen into his own trap, one that I had not organized nor prepared. Mistakes are always made and this time it was his.

The two guards at the main entrance did not answer my call. From my intercom I gave the word close the central control room of the ship. After a few minutes about fifteen soldiers appeared before me. I ordered two possible exits of the place. The man who had tried to kill was still there and I would get him no matter what.

- The two soldiers are dead entry, Colonel. - Said one of the men who had come to my rescue.

- Then, this man should still be here, he would have encountered you in the main hallway. By my calculations he did not have enough time to leave the premises and slip away. The enemies are not stupid and when they act they have everything well organized. He knew that if he failed he did not have enough time to get out. Let's find him, he is still here.
- I answered decisively.

From the computer attached to my intercom I searched for the floor plans, across the floor where we were, I wanted to have knowledge of every possible hiding place. I divided the men into three groups, and I assigned each group a section of the site. They had to check everything. Each panel, each door. Even the smallest place had to be checked.

- If you find him, do not shoot to kill. -Was my order.

In the silence of the moment just my soldiers footsteps were heard and the bubbles from the oxygen tanks. We were quiet for over twenty minutes, we were just looking for the murderer who tried to kill me and had failed.

- Colonel, Colonel, please come. - I heard softly on my intercom.

- Where? – I Answered.

Third hallway to your right, by the pool with the dolphins. –Was the answer.

I got there and saw three of my soldiers kneeling

before a panel door. One of them motioned with his hand and pointing it to the floor. We saw a trickle of blood on the floor. We were all not heard anything, not a whimper or a movement. But it was evident that the person we were looking for was there. Behind that grating. Two of my men were stationed on either side of the edge of the panel where my attacker had entered. Three more from the front and pointing their weapons ready in case the murderer responded to us. I took my gun firmly in my hands. And with a flick of my fingers gave the order to open the duct. Two assault bayonets were used to force the lid. The lights on the guns of the soldiers lit inside the hideout. Total silence, when in front of us a body with dark clothes and covered head, his throat was completely severed. The same murderer had cut himself the jugular vein. There, in front of us was the only human being we could have clarified all the question with, but we arrived too late.

We hauled the body to the corridor outside the air duct where he was hiding. All the dead man's chest was covered in blood from the gushing of his neck. I myself took off his head the balaclava. I wanted to see his face.

I never would imagined that who I discovered under the black cloth. By lifting the body I saw, blond hair spilled viscous fluid out of her body. It was Lindsay was Hemle, the girl who two days ago was the alleged victim of the first attacker.

- Call the coroners. -I ordered while thousands of things circled in my head and tell the agent Robert

that I need him in my office in twenty minutes. - Pulled my arm from the body of the girl and headed my way and out of there.

As I walked to my room-office, I kept thinking what happened. I wondered what kind of ideology was able to get a human to attempt against their own life. What kind of religion could obstruct the minds of men and not let them think with reason. How could a young, American, brilliant student, was capable of betraying her country and her people like this. Was she one of the fake personalities spoofed on the ship. All these questions haunted me when almost to the door of my office I was addressed by General Pot.

- You all right, Colonel?

- Yes, Commander, thank you. I'm fine. - I Answered.

- What do you think about what happened, Colonel?

- I really did not expect to find the surprise like what I found, something like this never crossed my mind. I can only draw the conclusion that our enemies within this ship are well prepared and trained. If that girl was able to make fun of us and make us believe that she was a victim. The others will remain on alert.

- Yes, you are right, Colonel. But we are urged to stop this threat.

- I sent agent Robert a message, to present himself as soon as possible here. I want to know if you could get

something out of the records that we received before the planets misfortune.

- Keep me informed, Colonel, and when you have something go personally to the control room. I want to know how things are going. – With a handshake I nodded to the general and urged him to rest. He had complete confidence in me.

I sat for a while waiting for agent Robert. But it was not him who came. Suddenly at my door a man dressed all in black appeared. He did not say his name. Nor did he show credential. He entered without permission. He closed the door and it struck me, he knew the code for this operation.

- Who are you? I asked, putting my hand on the gun in his waistband.

- Colonel Paul. You do not need to know who I am. The first lady of our nation wants to see you. Please come with me. Leave your gun here, you will not need it.

Apparently today was the day of surprises. I thought.

My military instinct made me trust those words. I took off my belt where my gun was. I put it in one of secure drawers with a safe and signaled with my hand to this mystery man to lead me. As I followed the man in black, I realized that we were going thru a section of the ship that was not in the plans that I had studied. All I could notice was that we were on the top right side of the ship. Upon arrival, after passing guarded gates, we entered a small room, a bit

furnished with only two couches and a coffee table. Large skylights lit to see into outer space and two large lamps that lit the whole place. The man who took me there ordered me to sit and wait, disappearing through a side door of the room.

It took about five minutes for the same door the man had disappeared thru open again, thru it appeared the woman who was our first lady, now widow of our president and commander in chief of U.S. forces. She was quiet, I nodded with emotion and sat opposite me. I noticed in his eyes fatigue and sadness. Her eyes had traces of shedding many tears, her face was strong and soft-spoken.

- I want to start by offering my apologies for sending for you this way. -She said looking into my eyes.

- Do not worry, I understand the circumstances. I Answered.

- I will get to the point, Colonel. - Continued the woman I know your time is limited and you have many responsibilities. I've sent for because I am aware of all that has happened on the ship and I want to offer information that although have no evidence to, it can help resolve the problem we have. As I said this information is not confirmed, but in the white house the best information is not the one in documents of state, the truth many times is in the halls and corridors. As whispers and secrets are spoken. When you live as first lady you learns that there are two types of secrets, some very small which are not worth to be saved and others very large that

do not fit in any place where they can hide. So today you will hear one of those secrets.

I settled into my seat because what this woman was saying needed my attention and seemed to be something important. As she spoke I just kept quiet so as not to interrupt while staring at her eyes. She did not pause in her speech, I got the impression that her words had been studied or memorized, if I interrupted her, I could break the course of her remarks, so I let her continue.

- The process of selecting people that would be allowed on this ship was something my husband took with great importance and care. A Senate committee reviewed each record. Among the senators who participated was Senator Will Thomson. In the corridors of the Pentagon was said that this man, while U.S. troops were at war, was dedicated to getting juicy oil contracts with Middle Eastern sheiks. He was a man without scruples, only cared about money. My husband did not trust this man. The night before boarding the Apollo 918 the President of the nation was alone with me and his daughters for at least three hours. He confessed to me his distrust in Senator Thomson and handed me this file flash memory, where all the records of civilians that this man proposed and pushed for are included among the chosen. – Saying this she stretched out her right hand and gave me the small memory lash. I kept letting her talk. Perhaps this information will be inconsequential. But it is possible that within that file you can find a clue that will lead to trap the enemies among us.

The first lady was silent. I kept the memory in one of my pockets, we were alone in the room and no one knew of our conversation, no one heard. I stood up and thanked the woman for what she gave me. I told her- The enemies will be caught sooner than later.

I was about to get out when the side door unexpectedly opened a third time and eldest daughter of the president appeared, with a newborn baby in her arms. This was the fourth surprise of the day, to find that the baby was none other than the daughter of soldier Neal.

I walked up to this lady and made sure my eyes were not deceiving me. When facing the white blanket covering the baby. She looked so healthy, I passed my hand her face, and without knowing how, soldier Neal's daughter grabbed one of my fingers and squeezed it. It was a special moment when that baby just days old gave me a smile. The woman I spoke to so seriously minutes ago stood beside me and said:

- Do not be surprised, Colonel. I have this baby here by direct orders of the President. He asked the soldier and the father of this child not to even say a thing to you. If today I sent for you and providing this information is because my husband among the last things he said to me was, referring to you with this phrase: When a soldier saves a child's life even against orders, this is a man you can trust.

I said nothing, I said goodbye with a military salute and returned to my tasks. Upon returning to my room-office agent Robert was waiting for me at the door.

CHAPTER 10

- Good afternoon, Colonel.

Agent Robert greeted me warmly as he walked behind me to my office. He sat down without asking, waiting for me to speak first. Slowly I explained the details of all the information given to me by the first lady, without going into details of who had given me this information.

- It's great information – The agent said. I ordered him to thoroughly investigate every person chosen by the senator. Something told me that if we followed the track and we checked carefully this information, we would find one or more members of the group that infiltrated the ship. I told him discreetly that information of the progress of the investigation should only be given to General Pot and myself. I gave the agent the password to enter the files where all records of all civilians in the Apollo 918 were, I would contact him within 24 hours. I apologized for the urgency and for the need to work fast and efficiently. I let him go, explaining that he had to attend to other matters.

On the way to see General Pot almost reaching the central command post I crossed paths with Dr. Estevez. As always, her hair fell on her shoulders over her white coat, making her eyes shine bright like two suns. This woman had a charm that fascinated me. When she was in front of me, I could forget all the problems, I was scared when my mind reacted saying: I was falling in love. I never had time to experience that feeling. And I wondered why now. How could I afford to love someone who, like me,

had no destination. Every human being at this time who lived within these three ships, had a destination.

Nobody knew what would happen. I know love can overcome all obstacles. When she approached me. She took my arm in her hand. She lifted a corner of the dressing and looked me straight in the eye, gave me the most beautiful smile ever before saying:

- You must make an upcoming to visit to the infirmary. Since the wound is healed, we can now remove the bandages and clean the scar.

I promised the doctor to visit her in a few hours, I really had no desire to take my arm and those bands off. I was quite pleased with her diagnosis. What I did not mention to her was my desire to see her again. And the thought that crossed my mind that now I did not have an excuse to visit her, where she spent most of her time.

General Pot was giving instructions when I got to where he was. The flight captains were coming and going between the control panels. I approached him and asked him for private time. The man asked me a few minutes. I stood behind his seat. I heard him give orders. Until finally he rose from his chair and looking at me asked me to follow him, to a small rooms adjacent to the main control room.

- I hope you come to give me an interesting report on the investigations- The General told me as he sat on the chair of this room.

- Yes, I have, General. - I replied. And immediately I explained everything that had happened since meeting with the first lady in their private quarters. I gave the commander of Apollo 72 all the information and told him about the orders given to agent Robert.

- Very good job, Colonel. I expected no less from you. Keep me informed of every step in this research. And tell agent Robert that only you and I must know this.

- I already did, Commander. - I said.

- Ok. OK, now go and rest about two hours. At 21:00 hours I need you ready to receive instructions and be ready to go with seven pilots to the mission we talked about earlier. Since the ships are ready to remove the ice needed. At 23:00 hours you will leave for earth.

With a military salute, I turned my back to the man who commanded those three ships.

Two hours was very little time to rest, so I decided to go to the infirmary and have my arm bands removed. As I arrived, my eyes were searching the doctor. She was taking the pulse of one of the patients admitted, who remained in quarantine. The weight of my eye looking at her caused her to turn around and saw me staring at her.

- Colonel apparently you are desperate to remove that band. – She said. It's only been forty five minutes since I told you and you are already here.

- I'm leaving in two hours for a mission and wanted to have them removed. But if you're busy I can come back another time. -I replied.

- It's OK, come with me.

I followed her to small end at the end of nursing quarters. She ordered me to sit on a metal table and extend my arm. From a shelf she had pulled a tray with all the healing tools in her hands, she put on nylon gloves, and taking scissors started cutting the bandage. I kept looking at her. I had her there so close to me and yet I dared not say anything. She looked up at times. And sought my eyes. Bands finally disappeared from my arm. And then I felt her fingers touch the scar that extended a few inches into my skin while cleaning what was left of the wound. I do not know how made. But my other hand sought hers. Her fingers lost between mine. This time she did not look up. But let the warmth of my palm caress her hand. – Your arm is like new, she said. And I, not knowing how I jumped over the metal table and taking her by the waist pressed against my uniform. She was so close to me that for the first time I could smell her hair and skin, your perfume. A that point I was almost ready to kiss her. Almost touching her lips with mine when a girl suddenly opened the door of that room.

- Doctor, the patient in bed 34 has worsened, Dr. RIMT needs your help. Said the girl and closed the

door.

I picked up my military cap from the table, before the Dr. noticed my cheeks were red, I left.

I checked the time, I appeared before General Pot, which he had been expecting me. With him, we went to the main hangars of the Apollo 918. Already there were the other seven pilots that would accompany me on the mission, several of the experts were explaining how to extract and store ice in the eight ships ready for this. It was the general who gave the first indications.

- You will depart exactly at 23:00 hours, Colonel Paul will command the mission, enter the planet thru the northern hemisphere, which currently is the hemisphere that is facing the sun.

Exactly the coordinates $10^{\circ} 57' 42''$ north latitude and $74^{\circ} 46' 54''$ of longitude west of the city of Barranquilla. When passing through the atmosphere you will be divided into two groups of four and these in turn into four pairs and make a reconnaissance flight. Since the eight ships are equipped with special cameras and equipment to measure pollution, none of this will be a problem for you because these cameras will be directed from here. Overfly each capital city of every country of the Americas. You will not leave your ships, see what you see. After the reconnaissance flight, the four ships that will be in the southern hemisphere and will go to Antarctica. Overflying the northern hemisphere at 4:00 pm in the Arctic pole. While there a hydraulic arm attached to

each ship in the bottom will be extracting the ice to fill the compartments with which there are eight ships. You only need to ensure that the depth reached for these arms is five hundred feet, at that point it should not have contamination.

You have five hours for this. At the end you should have turned around and then the four ships that are in the Antarctica fly over the continents of Africa, Australia, and Asia, the ships that fly over the Arctic are Europe and Russia, meeting everyone at the coordinates $25^{\circ} 03' N$ and $121^{\circ} 30' W$ in Taiwan City to begin the climb and through the atmosphere at 17:00. You should be back in Apollo 918 at 23:00 am tomorrow. The team of experts will explain how to drive the hydraulic extraction. You have enough oxygen in you ships for 48 hours. You cannot take off your spacesuits or leave your ships for no reason at all your equipment are designed against radiation. Pilots, God bless. - The general became silent and each of the pilots including myself headed to the ships prepared for the mission, though I was familiar with all controls and the flight deck of a ship, for the first time I was going to fly a ship that would cross into the atmosphere. The Z-shaped wings out from the center of an oval frame where the cockpit was in the bottom. Small windows let us see into outer space.

One expert went with me and showed me how to handle the arm that would draw the ice. Everything else was of my knowledge. All ready, General Pot, gave the order to go, the Apollo 918 gate opened to release the eight ships departing.

We leave the Apollo 918 in triangle formation, we started our journey to our land. I was sure this would be the last time I would see the world in which I lived in for so many years, a feeling of heaviness invaded my spirit. We crossed the atmosphere at the agreed point, and there I gave orders to divide. Three pilots followed me to the northern hemisphere. The other four were out of my sight flying to the southern part of the planet. After flying over Mexico with a difference of a few miles between ships, we separated, one of the pilots was to fly over the east coast of the United States, fly over the states of Arizona, California, Nevada, Oregon, Idaho, Utah and Washington. A second pilot would travel the cities of Texas, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Kansas, Colorado, Nebraska, Wyoming, South Dakota, Montana and North Dakota, the pilot closer to me was to fly over the states of Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, Arkansas, Tennessee, Missouri, Kentucky, Indiana, Illinois, Iowa, Michigan, Wisconsin, and Minnesota. And finally I would fly over the east coast of the United States, the states of Florida, Georgia, the Carolinas, Virginia, Ohio, Pennsylvania and New York. After passing over the United States each ship would head north, and fly over the states of Canada, to meet at a point in the Arctic pole. I realized I had been selfish in distributing routes, but I had wanted to pass by the military barracks which had seen me grow into a Colonel. I wanted to see with my own eyes the city where I grew up in. See the lake where every evening I would sit with my father in that old wooden

bench that I helped build.

As we flew, the silence became king of the eight cabins on the ships, although we were all were interconnected, not a word had been heard. The horns of our ships were not used a single time.

The destruction on the planet was complete. Everything was reduced to rubble. Not one of the cities that I flew over was still standing. The colors of the streets of my country, had now the color of funeral gray including the landscape. The waves were invading some of the buildings that had height. Not a single sign of life. A few trees were still standing but not a single green leaf. Major interstate highways were full of cars and trucks turned into ashes. Nearly half of Florida had disappeared under the sea, the Carolinas, now only a desert full of silence and death. From the old castles in the state of Virginia had less than ten feet, all with more than half of the buildings destroyed. I intentionally flew over my old neighborhood, my home, nor the house or the bench were there. I understood why the pilots refusal to say a word. When I approached New York, no city had been destroyed like this one. One of the warheads had crashed in the center of Manhattan. I only found dust and sand, and the waves of a sweeping black sea took what little was left.

And so the mission passed in silence, we just let the images from our ships do the talking. The images we were also seeing were also seen by Apollo 918, not a single word from them either.

At the appointed time the four ships headed to the Arctic, the other four, twenty minutes before had been reported as on site in the extraction site of the Antarctic pole. We placed our teams on the marked extraction site. The digging arms moved towards the white ice. Within half an hour the tips of the augers in the arms were at the required depth. I gave orders to start the motors. And the compartments began to fill, the measuring needle began to move, everything went as planned. So far the mission was a success. Except the sadness of seeing our home, the earth, totally destroyed and dead.

Exactly three hours forty-eight minutes the extraction operation lasted. The northern hemisphere ships were ready for the second part of the mission, to fly over the other side of the planet. The ships in the southern hemisphere needed about twenty minutes more. I hoped that the launch was timed as had been calculated. But when going to the second part of the mission one of the ships left hydraulic arm was stuck in the ice. For the first time in our cabins speakers we heard the voice of a pilot.

- Colonel, I have problems!

- Tell me pilot, what wrong? -I said to the man that seemed scared.

- My ship, the auger is stuck. It does not respond to my commands, the coupling mechanisms to the ship have frozen.

- Calm down, cadet. Do not leave, stay put, let me ask for instructions. - I connected my radio equipment to the frequency of Apollo 918, we were all waiting to see what would happen, but I was not willing to leave that pilot on earth, many human lives had already been lost.

- Apollo, Apollo, Colonel Paul here. Do you read me?

- Affirmative, Colonel, I read you, what happened? From the other side a voice of one of the flight captains answered my call.

- The ship number 3 is stuck in the ice, the auger and hydraulic arm do not let go, des not respond to the system.

- Colonel. Here speaks engineer Douglas. -I recognized the man who spoke to me, he was one of the experts who had shown us how the whole system worked to extract and fill the compartments – the hydraulic lines may have frozen, the ice also imprisoned the length the arm. I connected the pilot to the frequently of the ship.

- Ok, Affirmative. I copy. - From the cockpit of my ship I could connect the other ships to the frequency of Apollo, I looked at the controls on my head and I added the cadet in trouble to the conversation.

- Pilot. Are you there? - Asked from Apollo.

- Affirmative, cadet Lester here. Pilot Ship No. 3.

- Pilot, engineer Douglas is speaking to you. What is your situation?

- All the compartments are filled to 100%. I was about to take off, but when operating the ice trying to get systems hydraulic arm, the system does not respond. I'm stuck in ice.

- Ok, cadet, I understand your situation, listen closely. To your right are two panels of the ship stability. Among these you have a small panel installed, it will release, it is a different color to the others in your controls.

- Affirmative, here what I have.

- Release the panel that I mentioned, you will find a black control.

- Yes, here it is.

- That's the manual command to expel all hydraulic arm extractions, operate it slowly upwards. The arm will come off the ship and you can take off.

It took about two minutes until the pilot's voice came again.

- Here, pilot of the ship three. I powered the control arm twice and does it does not release. What do I do?

- Calm down, cadet. Await instructions.

From the Apollo 918 spacecraft took the three in the frequency just heard the whole conversation, for the second time the engineer Douglas spoke to me.

- Colonel Paul, are you there?

- Affirmative, here I am.

- Colonel, this is engineer Douglas again. I will explain the situation, apparently the eject commands are also frozen. You will have two options. Disconnecting the drill from the outside of the ship, which is extremely dangerous for any human being. Due to radiation levels that our system is reading, or the other is leave the pilot and the ship behind, I know it's a tough decision, but we will have to sacrifice a pilot to achieve the mission's success. The clock is ticking.

- I will not leave a man behind, - I said - tell me what to do.

- Colonel, are you sure of your decision? – I recognized the voice that spoke to me this time. It was the Apollo 918's commander, General Pot.

- Yes, Commander. I'm sure, too many lives have been lost on this planet to afford to lose one more. I wait for instructions, but I'm not leaving here without that driver.

- Colonel Ok, I trust your decision. Engineer Douglas will instruct you.

- Colonel? The engineer began to give me instructions- in the bottom of the ship is the hydraulic arm that has a command equal to the one just operated by pilot Lester. This time you must drive it down hard. Please use the auxiliary protection suit behind your seat. Two suits will protect more than one. Leave your hatch open. If the bit is clear, you should run to your ship. A block of ice can break and leave you trapped, and that will not be very good for you. We will be in touch from the intercom attached to your suit. Good Luck.

- Copying, engineer. Thank you very much.

In two minutes I was ready to go outside of my ship. I opened the hatch, which was behind me and an icy wind hit the inside of the ship 1.

My boots sank when they collided with the ice below me. A strange feeling overcame my body, after all that had happened, for the first and the last time I was putting my feet back on the planet who just days ago gave us life. Now, that same planet could take my life away. I walked the hundred yards that separated me from the trapped ship. Through the window I could see pilot Lester's frightened face, with my right hand I signaled him that everything would be fine. At last I came to the hand control of expulsion. For the fifth time I resumed the conversation with the Apollo 918.

- Apollo, Apollo, here Colonel Paul, I'm in position.

-Perfect, Colonel. Give me a minute to give pilot Lester instructions, stay in frequency. Engineer

Douglas started instructing the pilot after adding him to our frequency-Cadet, you have Colonel Paul under your ship. Start your engines and put them at the lowest power. When the Colonel pulls the eject command you should attempt to take off. You also need to pull the hydraulic arm, do it carefully but quickly. The colonel's life is at stake.

- Affirmative. I'm ready, engines on.

- Colonel, press with full force the command arm down when you feel it move, you should leave there as soon as possible, wait for my cue to power. I will count backward from number 5. Upon completion of the count, you operate the panel and the pilot will attempt to take off. Got that?

- Ready. I replied with both hands on the expulsion panel, while the pilot was a set in his cabin.

- Five, four, three, two, one, zero!

I pulled with all my might. Until I felt the exhaust system work. My ears told me I had done my work, I ran as fast as I could, I felt like the ship was leaving behind me the ice block. I looked back a second and saw the detached arm, at a distance of nearly two feet ship three. While white pieces of rock scattered through the air. As quickly as possible I reached the hatch that had been left open. I almost threw myself in my ship. I sat in my seat, gave everyone orders. Thru the intercoms you could hear the happiness in the central operating room Apollo 918.

The third part of the mission was on its way, which was flying and recognize the second part of the planet, silence reigned, the sadness of the images were repeated again. As before, there was dust and death. Nothing was left of our civilization.

At the appointed time we started the climb, the eight ships were already gathering and crossing the atmosphere, it was 22:30 pm when we spotted the Apollo 918 gate waiting for us.

CHAPTER 11

It was three days ago since the operation, upon my arrival, I had been covered in a giant anti radioactive bag, then isolated from the entire staff of Apollo 918, the worst part was that I could not see Dr. Estevez, as only the specialists in this field were able to treat me. They ran certain test to make sure everything was fine with me. Until finally I was able to get out of there and return to my duties as head of security for Apollo 918. Thank God the two suits managed to save my life and my body had no traces of contamination.

The first thing I did after leaving the hospital was send for agent Robert urgently. There were the murders still to solve, which until now had only been committed in our ship, the other two being free of any altercation. Agent Robert was present immediately in my office, I could tell in his face, he had interesting news about the information only a few days ago I had provided to him. I, was eager to get into action.

- Any new news? Were you able to use the information I gave you?

- Yes, and I have something that will surprise enough. The agent, as always, sat down by the table without asking.

- I hope you brought the report I asked, you had plenty of time, actually several days.

- Don't worry Colonel, it was worth the wait - the agent started talking, I decided not to interrupt again, before leaving you sent the report to my computer.

Major Pot is already aware of the issue, he will come to see it as soon as possible, thanks to the files you gave me, it was discovered that indeed the senator Thomson was doing business with our enemies. We have records that prove the Senator selected ten possible suspects. All are being watched now, but the most interesting thing of all, is that among these ten subjects are Jarod Hemle Hunke and Lindsay. This caught my attention, the girl I knew belonged to the enemy group, but the guy I was curious about, and decided to seek more information comparing the files that made it to Apollo 918 before the holocaust the planet. It turns out the real Jarod Hunke was found dead about twenty miles from his home just one day before leaving for the secret facility. So the man that died in the ship is not Jarod. We do not know who he is and how he got here. But we also know that one of the civilians in the ship MARGARET is not who he says, as his record belongs to the paternal brother of Jarod. And he was also killed in France a day before leaving for Europe's secret facilities. However, according to the results of DNA the testing effectively proved it is the blood brother of Harold Hunke; Now, I found no link between the senator and the people he chose for civilians on the ship Margaret. Only the guy already in custody knows. We waited for you to make the first interrogation.

- Good work agent, good job, I said almost excitedly I'm going to see Colonel Fabiens to coordinate the interrogation.

- Wait Colonel, the most interesting thing I have not told you yet, he said. The agent stopped me with this

phrase. - In your absence we inspected the panels that Harold or Lindsay wanted to open. And found this. - The agent pulled out of his pocket a nylon bag and inside was a small trigger fusion. Sufficient to set off a small bomb H, or hydrogen. The puzzle of these murders began to come together. The hydrogen was the fuel the ships used and this type of detonator told me that the risk was higher than expected. If these terrorist infiltrators were trying to make or detonate a bomb on our ship we would not let them, because we were on their trail. I ordered the agent to double up on the monitoring of the eight suspects we already knew of, as well as throughout the ship, I wanted to talk to Harold Hunke.

I passed the checkpoints in the tunnels that connected the two ships. I found Colonel Fabiens doing his routine tasks and was glad to see me again. They had the guy in custody, two French soldiers guarded the door of the room where he was being held. We went and the boy looked peaceful. While lying in bed his eyes were still closed, but he was awake, we heard a kind of prayer that came from her lips almost imperceptible. Noticing our visit he stood. I ordered him to sit. We want to talk to you. -I said cordially. The boy nodded, not a single gesture showed me that he was scared. He waited in silence for the first question.

- Do you speak English?

- Yes, He replied.

- Who are you? I asked looking into his eyes.

- Aston Hunke. – He replied.

- That's not true. I know you're not Aston Hunke. You changed identities with that person. That person is dead. He was killed the day before you showed up with false identity in Europe's secret facilities. Your brother did the same in the United States. Jarod's identity supplanted Hunke, we know from DNA tests that you are brothers. But they are not the Hunke brothers.

- The boy looked up at me surprised. He did not expect me to tell him what I had just mentioned, his response was a question.

- How is my brother, also being held like me?

- Your brother is dead. I said with the low tone, he was found dead in a confrontation in Apollo 72ship with a girl named Lindsay Hemle, do you know her?

The boy's eyes were teary eyed, he did not mention a single word. I waited a few minutes trying for him to react, but he still did not lift his eyes again ... Behind me Colonel Fabiens remained silent with arms folded across his chest. From my experience I decided to leave the boy alone for a while, I stood up and said a few words before leaving.

-Listen, I want to think that your brother was not on the side of evil. Hopefully his death will not be in

vain. I do not know who you are, I do not know who your brother was either, but if you can help stop these murderers you will be of great help. I will wait until you are ready to talk to me, just let them know and one of the guards will come get me. I regret very much the death of your brother, remember, we are on the good side, just a few of us here of our species. You are just in time to help save them. - I gestured to my companion to come behind me. Once outside the room, Colonel Fabiens asked:

- Why did you stop the interrogation?

- Something tells me this guy knows something, but does not belong to them. Hopefully in a few hours, he will the talk. I responded to the colonel before heading back to the tunnel that would take me back to the Apollo 918.

Pretty rest after the last three days, it was best to catch up on how things were. I toured the ship, I did a short interview on each floor with security guards and crew chiefs. Everything was quiet. Civilians began act a bit uneasy but normal and expected. The levels dedicated to the animal species there was no new, except a lionesses gave birth to a little baby that was the entertainment of many. The workshops functioned according to the daily work and the stores were all good. Everything under control, I thought it best to also check how the Apollo 918 hospital was running. First time I was deeply interested in this topic without me knowing why.

She was standing with her back to me when I reached

for the door. As always her neat white coat showed her perfect silhouette, still remember the feeling my hands take her by the waist, tight military trousers marked her strong and firm legs. Further north of her thighs something that made me crazy. She had not noticed my presence and for a few minutes, I was just staring at her. Until one of the doctors noticed me and greeted me loudly, then she turned to look at me, her face broke into a blushing smile. She did not come to me. As I walked toward her, I was watching as she gave nurses and patients instructions, until finally I had her beautiful bright eyes in front of me.

- Good afternoon, Colonel. Is something wrong that you are in the hospital?

Now I do not know what to say, the art that women have to put men between the sword and the wall.

- No, I'm fine, just a routine visit. It was the answer that came from my mouth without thinking.

- How's your arm? The Dr. insisted.

- My arm is fine, although still a little sore. I answered with a lie, just wanted to take the opportunity to feel her hands on my skin again, I would not let that pass.

- Come with me, let's look at the wound. She told me. My mind jumped for joy, because my little white lie had worked.

We went to the same room as last time. The same

table, the same tray into the rack. But this time I closed the door. I took her by the waist. With my hands I turned her body around holding her close to me a few seconds. She said nothing, I touched her soft cheeks, I did not kiss her, but we just stared into each other's eyes and she stayed still and let me hug her, while stroking her back firmly. I whispered into her ear that everything would be fine. She pressed her arms against my body, looked down and lost her eyes up to my shoulder. Then my intercom broke the magic.

- Colonel Paul? Commander Pot requests your presence in the control room.

It was the phrase that rang in my ear and both of us heard. Our bodies were separated, never had I hated an intercom as much as this time. I went walking toward the hallway that would take me to where the General was. I ran my hand through my shoulder and discovered moisture from a tears the doctor had shed on my uniform.

Commander Pot was waiting in the main hall of the control room. As I entered, he stood almost lunged at me, exclaiming:

- Good news Colonel. Finally some good news!

On the table were the leading astronomers and scientists of the three ships, on a screen in the left wall showed images of galaxies and planets. I sat at the table and I joined the conversation that already had begun at that meeting. The man who had supplanted Dr. Hans, Dr. MCCARTY and now chief astronomer and research director of Apollo 918 was the one that began the dialogue.

-According to our studies and calculations we have concluded that indeed in the Magellanic Cloud galaxy there is a planet, the Taurus III, which has developed a kind of atmosphere with chemicals almost identical to that of the earth. We also confirmed the presence of a liquid that may be water. We can see two small oceans Taurus III, all the other surface is solid. We have a plan to corroborate this information. The science and astronomer Dr. Thomas Reynolds will explain in detail what it is.

A man in his fifties, about six feet tall, with total baldness, and firm body of a man that had seemed to have exercised. He stood up and took the remote control in his hands. With this he spoke and passing different images on the screen at his back.

- As Dr. McCarty mentioned, indeed we may well have found a planet where settle our civilization. The Taurus III in the LMC. The plan is to send a ship to take samples of liquid, solids and gas. Also if approved we would send some animal species within this ship, in order to prove that the atomic teleportation does not affect in any way the life and survival of our species, so far this method is just a

theory proven, we need to confirm solid objects, such as metals, wood, etc., but that has not been tested or with animal life. To reach Taurus III would have to go through a black hole, so it is necessary because of the distance that separates us from it. Using this method, if all goes well, in 72 hours the survey ship should bring back the results. Only after that would we confirm our theory.

Commander Pot nodded and made some scientists questions that were answered by them. After nearly an hour of debate General Pot approved the dispatch of the ship. Dr. McCarty is responsible for all studies and would be the head of this investigation, reporting progress every twelve hours to the commanders of the three main ships.

The meeting ended and I was alone with the general, I wanted to talk to him personally. Now alone, it was the general who started the conversation.

- Glad to see you and back to your duties. Since I was given the report of what happened on earth, I want to tell you that although it was a very risky decision I congratulate you for your courage.

- I just did my job, Commander. I replied.

- Let's move to another topic. - The man crossed his arms over his chest and leaned back into his seat. - How are the interviews with the boy at the MARGARET ship?

- This morning we first spoke with him. Actually he was a bit upset when he learned of the death of his brother, so we decided to let him rest and not continue with the questioning, my personal opinion is that this guy has valuable information. But I don't think he belongs to the bad side, let's hope he wants to talk. We will give him a few hours and at night I will be visiting him.

- Remember, Colonel, that this situation is delicate, I do not want another person dead in this ship. The Commander's tone was strong-Try for this guy to give you the information you have, for the moment I have given orders for all each suspects to be watched closely and monitored. I do not want to leave any loose ends and give the enemy the opportunity to threaten the safety of this ship and this mission.

- I'm sure the guy will talk.

- After you talk to him at night not delay a second to come to me with your report, whatever happens on that interview I'll be waiting.

After a military greet, I stood up and left the Commander, we had finished our conversation. I decided to rest a couple of hours while it was time to go to the Margaret ship, but my calculations within two hours of rest went wrong, leaving the central control room agent Robert met me, he came looking for me because the man wanted to talk to me. I turned around my steps and went straight to the tunnel that led me to the room where I expected this guy incognito. I found him sitting on the bed. As I entered

the room, he motioned for me to sit.

I did and waited for him to start talking. After a few seconds he became interested in the body of his brother, for the details of his death, and asked permission to see him one last time. I answered all their questions with absolute truth. I explained what the real situation was and that it presented a problem, I asked for his help. I knew the boy was confused, but my intuition did not deceive me from the first moment when I thought this guy before him was not among our enemies. After I spoke to him honestly and he decided to tell his story.

- The story is long, I needed time to listen. My real name is Abdel Hadi. I am twenty-six years and although I was born in Iran, I lived for fifteen years in France. My brother's real name was Arfan Hadi, also born in Iran, four years older than me. Our father brought us up in the Baha'i religion. Our brothers have been abused, tortured and massacred for hundreds of years by groups of the Islamic Republic. When my brother was fifteen he witnessed our father's death. Then tied him to a horse, dragged his butchered body through the streets. My brother saw that. He vowed for vengeance. Some friends of my father took us out of Iran, me to France, and my brother to the United States. Arfan never forgot, and although our beliefs do not support revenge or war, he swore vengeance on our enemies. Then infiltrated in an anti-Western Islamic groups within American territory. A week before presenting to the secret facility my brother traveled on false documents and

visited me. He told me about the ships and the escape plan. That an influential senator had managed to introduce civilian personnel to a group of ten. The order was for the group to assassinate leading scientists before the discovery of another destination and perpetrate a terrorist act inside the ship detonating a bomb that, as I said, had infiltrated while building the ship. I do not know the exact location, but he mentioned several times ponds and marine species. There was a problem, Jarold Hunke's brother had been chosen in the UK for their qualifications at a university in London. The day before leaving back to America my brother killed Aston Hunke. He confessed this to me, that night he gave me all of Aston's documents, asked me to be present at the European secret facilities after 36 hours. He murdered Aston Hunke to save the lives of all civilians who are on this ship. He had to be here and stop the terrorist plot. But he could not trust anyone, not knowing who was with the senator and who was not. He was ordered to kill that guy and get me on the ship. We should not have any contact while we were here. The last time he was at my side was in France, he told me everything and told me that if anything went wrong, find someone you trust and tell my story. I did not have names, just telling you what I know. All these days I have prayed for him. But today when I heard he was dead, I know his plan failed. So I decided to tell you everything. I swear I'm telling you everything I know.

I thanked Arfan for his decision to tell his story, and shook my hand as a sign that I believed everything he was saying.

I promised that I personally would take him to see the body of his brother and when we got to our next destination, I would help him find proper burial for him according to their beliefs. I asked for his discretion. For security, until the bomb was not found and have the eight enemies inside the ship arrested. I will make sure you remain in custody in this room for protection. At the door, ready to leave, the boy said something that stopped my steps.

-Do not trust anyone, Colonel.

I go through the tunnel that led me back to the Apollo 918 I went to the commander and General Pot. Over two hours we talked about the derived information at the MARGARET and the data the man provided and by the first lady. Thanks to them we had everything under control in our ship. We decided that the strategy would not be to apprehend the eight civilian infiltrators who were inside the Apollo, always but keep them in check. They would lead us in one way or another to the hidden bomb in the level dedicated to marine species. How long it would take? We did not know, but we were sure that they were against the wall. After the assassination of Dr. Hans our vigilance and care of other doctors had put the kibosh on the plan to kill the specialists. All that remained was to try to activate the bomb. So they would not delay much. The tranquility of the past few days made us think they were preparing the attack carefully.

We put an additional monitoring system at the level where the ponds are and made them believe that we neglected the care of the area by leaving a single soldier guarding the gates, when in fact in the premises were twenty of my best cadets hidden. We encoded a new frequency for the staff assigned to this new operation. From that moment would speak only on that channel. It was only a matter of time when they trusted and try to get to the bomb

CHAPTER 12

Everything went as calculated. We only had to wait two days for our enemies to try to reach the bomb. The bulletproof vest covered the soldier well. The soldier guarding the tanks had orders to drop to the floor and hit the alarm installed on his belt. That would give us the required time so they thought they were alone and show us where the bomb was hidden.

Since the silent alarm sounded, we were following every step they took, at this time there were only three. They went quietly. Two of them went to the pond where a few days earlier I had been shot, where the whale was. The other guy walked further back to where dolphins circled around and jumped without stopping in a few cubic meters of salt water. In the the bottom of the tanks were some kind of running basement where connections and piping needed to keep the animals alive. They uncovered panels giving access to those spaces beneath tons of water. We let them act. One of them stood out in the hallway watching, but one of our well prepared cadet O'neals acted quickly, a martial arts expert in defense, neutralized them with only two movements of his hands, others followed and responded to the alert.

A few seconds later, the two men who had entered the basement tried to leave. It was relatively easy to catch them with the panels uncovered. The five other men were also arrested. The operation was a success. Now in custody, the small enemy group in a small makeshift jail inside the ship, I went to the central control room to report what happened to the commander Pot. I waited impatiently.

- Excuse me, Commander. I told him to get his attention.

- Go on, Colonel. Report what happened.

- Everything went as planned. They themselves took us to the bomb, two ponds were under two explosives that were hidden inside the pipes that run the wires that fed power to the venting of the tanks. They tried to remove the pump. The pump was able to enter the ship and it was decommissioned in three parts. But where the dolphins were was a conventional explosive charge and a wedge smaller to act a striker. One of those arrested worked in the repair shops of Apollo 918 and I thought that this way build a bomb of plutonium needed to put it together, we are currently reviewing every millimeter of the whole place.

- Did you try to interrogate detainees? The General asked, crossing his hands behind his back.

- Yes, I tried, but they did not say anything and I doubt they will, given the degree of fanaticism that these men possess.

That night, we slept so calm, the threat had passed, we had in our power the pump and its detonator, our enemies were arrested and would be tried when we got to our next destination.

CHAPTER 13

Dr. McCarty summoned the chief commanders at an emergency meeting. Only four days had passed since it was approved the mission to send a scout ship to Taurus III. As always commander Pot asked me to accompany him to the meeting. All being there already, the scientist began to explain the reasons for the meeting.

- As of 32 hours ago, the exploration ship for Taurus III returned. The mission was a success, indeed as our suspicions told us, the planet visited has developed a kind of atmosphere compatible with the planet earth. The solids deposits collected also show chemical components similar to ours and fluid samples tell us that there are exactly the same, having a hydrogen atom, but it is possible under chemical treatment to purify and make clean water. The atomic teleportation was also a success, the animal species on the ship came back healthy, but with a genetic alteration, not harmful to life. We have created a vaccine to counter this mutation. We have been working steady for hours in our laboratories, but we are ready in the second phase of this mission, now we need to send a man into Taurus III. If all goes as calculated, this man alone would make the round trip, sending a signal of approval and then these three ships would mark a course safe and direct. Otherwise, he could return.

Everyone in that room were silent for a few minutes, until commander Pot asked one of the main flight engineers.

-Would we have enough fuel reserves, oxygen and water for the trip?

- We think so. - Replied the engineer - after breaking the ice brought back by the eight ships, we have supplied our reserve tanks. If we stay here expecting another destination before they have exhausted these reserves would last about 124 months, if the mission is approved and all goes well, we will make the trip with 75 percent of that fuel.

- How much time is needed to make vaccines for everyone? This time the commander was directing his question to back to Dr. McCarty.

- We have been producing this vaccine since yesterday- replied the doctor – we should have all we need in three days.

- So we just need to choose the man who will go on this mission? - Pot General asked the question and looked at me - Colonel, choose one of your best pilots and Proposed the mission to him.

- I will not risk the lives of any of my men commander. – I did not think very much before responding - I will go.

- That's crazy, Colonel, you are needed in this ship. The Commander said.

- I can leave someone in charge. They will do a good job, I'll go to the planet.

- Are you sure, Colonel? The tone of the voice of General Pot was to try to convince to desist on the idea.

- I will or else you order another man to do it, but I will not ask any of my soldiers to risk their lives. - I said quite categorical in my overall response and he nodded. Everyone at the table gave me a grateful look. Dr. McCarty said the final words.

- You must be present today at 22:00 hours in the hospital. You will have a thorough health check-up. If all tests are positive, you will start at 6:00 pm tomorrow. The ship that will make this trip with you shall be everything you need. Do not worry, Colonel, all is well.

At the appointed time I went to the hospital of Apollo 918. A group of doctors were waiting for me. I felt like a guinea pig for a few hours, they stripped me of my uniform, they did everything possible and impossible, had spent nearly four hours when they finally let me rest.

I was alone in a quiet room, thinking about the decision I had made. In bringing myself so much risk, was madness. Then she came in, closed the door behind her. That night she was more beautiful than ever. Or at least I that she was. I noticed in her eyes that she knew of my mission. She did not mention a single word, there in front of the bed where I was, slowly unbuttoned her doctor coat, dropped it to the floor. My muscles all tensed, then came her boots and

pants. A black silk lace panty adorned her beautiful skin. Her hair loose, slid down her back like a spring of fresh clean water. She still did not say a word. She stopped in front of my bed, stripped what was left covering her purest parts. Then crawled under my sheets. She herself took off my patients robe. I got lost in her flesh, caressed every inch of her skin. I heard thousands of moans in those hours that was beside me. I do not know how many kisses I left on her lips. I cannot say she was mine. Because I was hers. Because I was hers from the day she sutured my wound, the one I blessed for giving me the chance to meet her. She said goodbye when we finished, she said whispering in my ear, I will wait for you and you wait for me.

An hour later I was ready at the starting hangar. The ship that I would make this crazy trip with expected me with the hatch opened. Waiting for me commander Pot, Dr. McCarty and several engineers. They welcomed me with affection and nostalgia. It was the scientist who gave me this mission instructions.

- Colonel, you will start at 6:00 am as we agreed. This journey will take 32 hours exact. When you have browsed for 13 hours, you will have to inject the drug in the blue syringe on the right of your seat, do not panic, it's just a sedative to pass through the black hole asleep, atomic teleportation is something uncomfortable and you are not going to like what you

feel. The second part of the trip you will be asleep. From here we will be monitoring you and checking your vital signs and wake you up if necessary.

Your ship is scheduled to get at coordinates 15 ° 37 '54" north latitude and 71 ° 23' 58" south latitude. You will like the landscape there. You will arrive come just dawn on the west side of planet Taurus III. When you have gone outside of the ship, apply to your throat the orange syringe, a vaccine left in your seat. Only after that should take deep breaths and enjoy the atmosphere of this new planet. Did you understand?

- Understood. - It was all I said so they would not notice the fear that came over me. I did not take more time. Goodbyes have never been to my liking, shook some hands and went to the hatch of my ship. Almost activating and closing the hatch when Commander Pot stopped me and entered, and spoke a few words to me.

-Son, God bless you. – He brought his hand to his forehead to say goodbye with a military salute.

The ship went out the gate two minutes behind. Time was moving on the stopwatch in front and Apollo 918 was lost from sight. All around me was silence and eternity, I saw how tiny we are in relation to infinity. I was there alone, between stars and planets uninhabited. Navigating to an uncertain fate. If every human being would have the chance to be like me

now, maybe they would have avoided many unnecessary wars. Now I realize how stupid we were. We had been so uncivilized, so stupid how we behaved. Much time lost in measuring the development of nations compared with the capacity to destroy our planet. We are millions, and yet today I realize that we were nothing. A species that self-destructed motivated by selfishness. Wanting to have more than others, to say that we were stronger and powerful. When we were just really weak. But it's too late, only a few of us now, and we are afraid. We seek a new destination to start over. Just wondering have we learned the lesson? Would we destroy this new planet? Are the few who remain behind will be moved by greed, hatred, pain? Will God be moving with us to this new planet with us? How to find the answers, I think so, we'll start again and try to be better, and that this new planet not plunder, or perforate, not destroy its oceans, I think that we will take care of this new beginning.

Finally I spotted the black hole that I was had to cross. I looked to my right for the blue syringe. I broke the plastic seal uncovered a long, thin needle. I applied the relaxant on my arm. My head spun a few minutes to make me sleep.

CHAPTER 14

I found him sitting on the wooden bench in the courtyard of the house facing the lake. He did not notice my arrival or the sole of my military boots on the grass, he was concentrated looking for small shining bubbles on the water. Beside him, a beer warmed by spring sun. I stood right behind him to face him. Since my father was old. His shoulders looked tired. I turned around and sat on my piece of the bench.

- Your here? I asked.

-I came to see you, - I said looking also to the water-I leave tomorrow on a mission and do not know if I will return. You know how war is.

-You did well to come. When you come back, I will not be here. Do not be sad, I'll be fine, your mother is waiting for me and I desire to leave. I have something for you.

He rose with a bit of a problem and asked me to follow him. We entered the house. He went to an old cupboard in the dining room and from there took a wooden box with gold metal clasp. He reached into his pocket for a key. He opened the box and asked me to come to his side. Inside the box were hundreds of photos. He put his right hand and pulled out a few that were tied with a green ribbon. He put them in my hands. I started to look at them, it was all of my father in uniform, I never knew that he had belonged to the U.S. Army. I looked, he left me to see them in silence. When I finished, I looked up to ask. His answer was simple.

It was not my war. I gave up everything for her. It was your mother who made me understand that it was not my war.

I woke up with a ray of sun coming through one of the windows of the ship. A new sun was shining on me. I had reached my destination. I did not think twice and putting the diving suit on went outside. Sunrise began on the Taurus III. The show was amazing. A sea a deeper blue than the one on planet earth. Behind me Yellow Mountains began to light up a reddish sky without clouds covered everything for miles as far as my eyes allow me to see.

I took the orange syringe I injected the vaccine. I felt my lungs were broken into pieces, my heartbeat quickened. My body twisted in pain. Until a black sand cushioned my fall. I do not know how long I was there, writhing, convulsing.

My body reacting to the effects of the vaccine. I got back on my feet. The moment was now or never. I opened the locks of my diving with my two hands and lifted the glass hull.

My lungs filled with a breeze that caressed my face. I started laughing. A crazy laugh, on this new planet. The Taurus III gave me a fresh start. I was giving it my first laugh.

I plopped down on a rock. I tore my uniform, from this moment I will only be John Paul. I sent a message thru my intercom to Apollo 918.

The central control room of Apollo 918 was expecting news. They were all there, waiting for this mission to be complete, in the main communication screens suddenly appeared my message:

"GOD GIVES US A SECOND CHANCE, SEIZE THE MOMENT" I'M JOHN PAUL. A HUMAN, I'M SITTING IN WHAT APPEARS TO BE A BEACH, I HOPE TO SEE YOU ALL SOON"....

918 Apollo Cheered with joy and infinite hope...

The End

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