

I/Tulpa
“Sex, Stars, and Singularities”

By
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and
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EXP: Experimental Home Publishing
“I/Tulpa: Sex, Stars, and Singularities” version 1.0
March 28, 2018

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Due to adult themes such as sex, a lot of sex, some gratuitous, some not, and violence, not a lot, the idea is to make love not war, (and no one dies, (well, almost no one,)) and so, consequently this book is intended for a mature audience. This is a work of fiction. Just in case you weren't sure. Yeah, some of the esoteric stuff can really take you places, faraway places, sexy places, but for most, this is as close as you might get, unless you have like a magical wardrobe. Or a big, blue, 1950's police box. So, let's go there: the esoteric stuff is real, explore it nonjudgmentally and with awareness, and you'll probably be alright, but if you're worried that exploring stuff endangers your mortal soul, I would like to refer you back to the religious artifact of your choice, which likely has more sex and violence than you have here. (So, for example, if Ouija boards are taboo in your world, this is probably not your book.) You could employ a psychological, cathartic explanation. It works out the same. Names, characters, businesses, places, events and incidents are either the products of the author's imagination or used in a fictitious manner. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, or actual events is purely coincidental. Except where they're intentional, but hopefully respectfully and tastefully done, in a way to honor the sacred importance they played in the author's life. Again, we're adults. We are not 'untouched' by the influence of media. In fact, I would dare say, never in the history of man have there been so many 'touched!'

This is a work in progress. Any corrections, or constructive criticism for the purpose of story refinement is welcomed. If you chose to contact the author, you may do so at: solarchariot@gmail.com. Please, put “underneath it all” or Loxy Bliss in the subject line. This helps me find you amongst the clutter.

(214) 907 4070 I am not always available to take a call. I will, however, eventually, answer a text.

Chapter 1

A myriad of box universe scrolled across and down a virtual a grid. From the perspective of the user, the images were always just beyond reach, but could be spun, as the person was at the center of a sphere, a celestial sphere of comprised of talking heads warped at the edges of the periphery. Some of the faces were familiar, but the content was new. Some of the go to boxes were frequently revisited the content practically memorized. A box marked “Loxy Isadora Bliss,” played by ‘Droya,’ was selected and became prominent.

“Did you ever read ‘Around the World in 80 Days’ and think, this is some weird shit? Brilliant, bizarre, but reading it produces lots of questions. Maybe questions are what drive you through it. Maybe that’s why books like the ‘Secret’ get torn off the shelf because we are all so afraid of being left out of something. It doesn’t matter that there is no secret; if what was in that books was as generally helpful as the authors proposed, then given the number of people who read the book, and we can presume the number of readers to be close to the number of books sold actually corresponds to the number readers, then, why isn’t the world suddenly a better place? Ever wonder that? Oh, tangent. Sorry, get use to rabbits as we go down this hole. For those of you tuning in for the first time, I am a Tulpa. Well, not me personally, but I am her voice, and so my present quirkiness resembles her quirkiness, which is not quite a reflection of her host’s perspective, though, between you and me, they’re both a little out there. Anyway, back to first person, Loxy: I bounce a lot. Give me a break. Where was I. Oh, yeah, around the world and back again, that’s the sailor’s way. I love Gene Wilder. Don’t love gene Wilder? Oh, if you haven’t seen that video of me meeting Gene, I highly recommend that one. Oh! Sorry. 80 days! Right. Seriously, get a copy. Get it for free. The book is like a hundred years old plus and now falls within public domains. If you paid for the book, yay you, you’re a very nice person, but seriously, if you know the law, well, you shouldn’t have to pay for it. Nothing against the author, he’s dead, and it’s nice his family want to ride on his coattails, but seriously, go do something with your life tail coat riders.”

The video displayed real time number of viewers. It showed past viewers. It displayed statistics of number of people who completed the full video. It showed statistical analysis where people tuned out. Another level showed incoming requests and attempts at engaging the speaker in a dialogue. Most were not serious attempts at dialogues. If anyone was paying attention to this particular video, the speaker, Droya, continued without missing a beat, but appeared to be responding to some of the texts. Someone asked if she was Bot, or if she had an implant, or if someone was typing for her in the background. Someone requested if he could use her biometrics to craft his own Sexbot. The typed answer was: ‘photons are free.’

Droya being Loxy continued. “I am not the only person who found 80 days interestingly bizarre. Phillip Jose Farmer, brilliant author, kind of eccentric if you ask me, also read it, and then wrote the book: “The Other Log of Phileas Fogg.’ Phillip’s dead. But you should pay for this book, if you can find it. If you find it, it will be in someone’s garage sell, or at a used book store. Buy it. Seriously. Before all the paperback books disappear in the landfill. And if you find a copy of the original print anatomy book ‘The Body Has a Head, I will buy it from you. So, ‘the Other Log;’ if you see two copies, buy two, because I guarantee you, you will like it, you will tell someone about it, and they will want to borrow it. You won’t get it back. You will be

wanting to reread it, or you will want to tell someone else about it, and they will doubt you, and you will say ‘Oh, yeah, I loaned it to... who did I loan it to?’ Seriously, that is a brilliant book. It explains all the oddities of Phileas. You want me to tell you, to save you time. I want you to go read it. I have told you all of this not just to tease you and make you do your homework, but because, we’re kind of starting this our present story in the same way. If you follow my exploits with Jon, you’ll probably understand there is usually something crazy. Like, we’re in a different world, or a different timeline, and well, this will be no different. I am Jon’s tulpa. The real tulpa, the one that lives full time in his head, not the other one who has a body and lives in the other reality frame. In this world, a tangential Earth, I am strictly a Tulpa. Yes, you could say I am an invisible, make believe friend, if you prefer the mundane explanation. Only, here’s the catch, he didn’t make me. Well, he doesn’t believe he made me. Maybe he made me, maybe another Jon from another Universe made me and I found this Jon, or maybe this Jon’s need for me was so great he made me on an unconscious level. Maybe he was so lonely that when he reached out to the cosmos, I heard his gentle request, ‘is there anyone there?’ and I responded. Seriously, who wouldn’t respond to that? It’s not like he was pitying his plight and wishing and lamenting and wondering what was wrong with him. He was merely asking, is there anyone there. I answered. ‘Yes.’ It’s almost exactly like how I make my videos and you guys tune in and try to chat me up, only, when I got Jon’s chat, I chatted back.”

Droya smiled and drank from a coffee cup. It was real coffee, and though she didn’t need to drink, she liked the taste, and she liked the prop. She liked how human it made her appear. She smiled into the image of herself, following an infinite regressions of herself until she realized she had time traveled and returned to the video. In human standard time, she was gone eight seconds. In air time for a video, that was a long pause. In computer time, an entire Universe could bloom and die.

“You need to know a little bit more about this Jon. His year is 2025. He lives in a small flat in Fort Worth, Texas, on the forty second floor. His apartment number is forty two-c. His apartment is 20 square meters. That’s roughly 215 square feet. Due to his apartment being on the outside wall, he has the benefit of an outside balcony giving him additional space not included in the rent. His apartment is Spartan, which is not unusual in this particular time, not because people don’t like material things, but because the societal emphasis has shifted to collecting virtual possessions. Literally, he owns one lounge type chair that resides in the allocated bedroom space, and the chair can flatten and extend to become a bed, and then return to the normal chair position on getting up. The closet has a built in cabinetry, and he has clothes, and there are a few dishes in the kitchen.

“As most you well know, living in a similar environment as he, everything is smart. Seriously, everything has computer tech, and the computing power surpasses the human brain capability to think. His clothes are smart. His coffee maker is smart. The refrigerator is smart. Everything in his house is smart and they talk to each other like Furbies gone wild, and they talk to him, when he talks back. Cell phones are obsolete, because your clothes do everything a cell phone use to do and more. There are 14 billion people living on the Earth, and all 14 billion people are online. If you’re living on an earth that exists around 2018, and you have a cell phone, and you can remember the days they had land lines, and rotary phones and you ever made fun of

someone who had a landline and asked if they lived with dinosaurs because look, there's a Dilophosaurus, well, guess what, you're also living with dinosaurs.

“And if you thought the primary function of the internet in 2018 was all about sex, just wait to all human beings are on the net. You would think that is the only thing humans think about. Oh, someone asked what a typical day is for Jon is like. Like, dude, watch his videos! Linked in the credits. Okay, so, a typical day for Jon, he would get up, turn his bed back into a chair, greet the coffee maker, which would then begin brewing, then use the toilet, then shower. Cleaned, he would dress in something simple, jeans and his favorite a turtle neck t-shirt, socks and running shoes, would take a sip of coffee, do some pull up reps on the bedroom door, make it to about three, struggle for a fourth, and then push on to the super-tread. The living room floor is basically a treadmill, but it is big, and it is just as smart of the rest of the appliances, and once you are centered and it's activated, it doesn't matter how fast you run, it would go there, in any direction, and if you changed direction, it accommodates you. If you fell, it catches you. Even if you tried to purposely throw yourself at a wall and threw yourself opposite direction of travel and rolled, you would not hit a wall. You would come off center and by the time you were back on your feet, you would be center of the room.”

Droya turned as if listening to something outside of her broadcast window. She smiled.

“Up to speed? Good. I'll be changing tense. It will fluctuate more here in the beginning, but you need to experience it because this is how I, a tulpa, frequently experience the world. There is a cloud, a fog that we have to push through just to be heard sometimes, and even in this reality is shifting and changing. It's nebulous, but the more it gets observed, the more validity and solidity it has. We're not shifting away from my voice, I am still going to narrate most of this introduction to you, as I am the guide to this world, but you will notice, as you bring your attention in closer, that it feels less and less like my voice and more like you have become immersed in a landscape. You just needed some scaffolding to understand what's coming, the same way you needed a little scaffolding in 'Being John Malcovich.' Being a puppeteer is such an important metaphor for this, because we all start as puppets but eventually, the strings become invisible, maybe they go away all together, and you come to the realization that oh, this is real and not real all at the same time. Realer than real. Yes, a sharp, right turn is coming. Compare this preamble of thoughts as if it were the orchestra warming up. Jon and I rarely know where we're going until we break free of the initial cloud bank. Clarity is coming. Clarity now!”

The observer came out of the video and bounced to one of the screens featuring Jon. Once centered on the super-treadmill, Jon began his morning walk through a virtual landscape that was more real to him and his brain than someone on the outside watching him. A viewer could simply watch Jon walking, or they could add the overlays and see the world that he was perceiving. They could pick and choose how much of the perceived world was there, or make it ghostly. Jon always remained Jon. It was also possible to see all the people he was interacting with, some orally, and some through text generated chat windows. This was a live feed, or will be a live feed, or use to be a live feed, depending on your position in space time. The closer to him in proximity the closer to his real time you were. He was interacting with invisible guests, his real time. He was broadcasting his cam 24/7, but for convenience of cataloging, things were usually contained in episode times. Almost everyone was broadcasting their lives. The old school regime of celebrities had taken a back seat for the reality surfers. The celebrities were still there,

in the back ground, and they still tended to have the highest ranks in total viewers, but the ones that drew the most were seriously working hard to maintain that level of an audience. They lived on edge of a bizarre social reality that could at any time come to an end.

Jon boasted a following of five hundred thousand people. This was minimum substantive viewership; translation, it paid the bills. Within the followers, his number of short term visitors fluctuated throughout the day and activity level. It was never zero. Even when sleeping, there were always strangers dropping onto his channel, lingering for a moment, then disappearing. There was a general courtesy rule that if someone followed you, you followed them, but it didn't necessarily mean you actively viewed them. Sorted in his favorites were the channels that he tuned into on a regular basis, almost all of them female broadcasters; there were people he minimally interacted with. He was always courteous, but he tended to not linger. He was considered a bouncer, one who checked in, assessed the scene, and moved on. Still, he was recognized, and his regulars reported feeling good when he dropped by. He was the type of visitor you wanted to linger, as opposed to the other kind who never seemed to know when their welcome had been worn out. He frequently received offers to meet in person; he always, politely, declined.

It has been said, living in this world is like living with schizophrenia.

“Good morning, Epic17222a,” Jon responded as he walked. “Yes, I did get a shower before running. Very observant. Helps me wake up. Yes, I will get another shower. No, I don't broadcast from the shower. Yes, there is a cam in there, just not facing the shower. You can hear the water running, hear me singing sometimes. Thank you for the offer to join me, but I prefer my privacy during that ritual. No, TorresfromSapin4538, I am not going to take my clothes off. You don't need to know how big it is or whether I shave, and if you persist, you will be blocked...” Torres left the channel, exclaiming how rude he is and saved him the trouble of blocking her because she blocked him. “Oh, good morning TheOtherCinderella. Nice to see you again. Yeah, I see his chats. Seriously, young lady in red, I'm like old enough to be your father. No, I am not perturbed, that wouldn't stop me. Tempting, but I find you are too distantly challenged. Even if you were closer in proximity, I would be declining. TOCDC, you can ask her direct, I am not a matchmaker. Seriously, young lady in red, I don't know how you get through the day with the number of people asking you to flash your tits. Again, very kind of you, but I don't want to see them. No, bushwacker69fi, I am not gay. I am in a relationship with a smart doll.”

Food bites, mini hot dogs, began raining from the sky; the goal was to catch them with your mouth. “Oh, thank you, bitemeexpert, but I don't play that and I don't jump through hoops for bit coin,” Jon said. “Story time is at 10:30. No, 10:30 is for children. I will discuss an adventure with Loxy at 22:30. Yes, that's central standard time.”

Jon turned to a window only he could see. He could hear a young lady, “OMG, stop stalking me. You're an ass and I am tired you popping in with your stupid questions.”

“Amy,” Jon said. “Amy, focus on me. Hey, yes, good morning. I hear you're angry, but giving him that much attention reinforces his staying urge. Ignore him, ask the AI to superblock. I hear you're tired of this stuff, and yet, you are broadcasting on a public domain interface, and it's free game. I hear you want to meet more people, and you can, but not if you get angry every time someone asks you to drool over the camera. Amy, being real here, you're not going to reach

superstar status. You've already taken your clothes off, and done every standard pornographic act minus bringing your dog, you can't sing, you can't dance, and you've not added any new viewers in over five years. At some point, you're going to have to accept this is your set point..."

Amy deleted Jon and blocked him.

"Wow, that was rude," someone chatted.

"No, crimsonredtoblue," Jon said. "She was not rude, she was experiencing emotions. It what we do. I don't know how I could have said that better, but she needed to hear it." There were probably a dozen things to respond to, but he responded to one in particular. "No, doing whatever you do gets your viewership, but there is always a max set point, a ceiling that most people can't get beyond, regardless of how many hoops you clear. Changing your script could result in less viewership, but even maintaining the same script could result in loss of viewership."

"You are so wise."

"Thank you, Enedelia14," Jon said. "You're very kind. Please! Of course I don't hate women. I love women. I worship women. This one time, I was making love to a goddess and fell into her belly button and was born into the world, but I keep coming back for more." There was a pause. Then he laughed. "Why would any man in this day and age get married? Seriously. If I had the urge to see a live naked woman, at any one time there are half billion women with free live cams jumping through hoops to earn bitcoins and virtual gifts. Any man that pays for porn today is just pathetic. Besides that, my smart-real doll satisfies me. She is self-cleaning! She never tells me no. I can have as much sex as I want..."

"Women are not just sex objects. You can't just demand sex."

"You're right," Jon agreed. "Seriously, I could get laid if I wanted to. Look at the people I have declined just today, with standing offers still in the cue. And all of those are FWB offer, no strings attached. I could even hit those and use the email as a contact to avoid any entanglement. Did you know people use to make prenuptial agreements just about the expectations of sex, a minimum clause, like once a day minimum? Of course that's not binding. But it recognizes men have an expectation that marriage means they are going to have access to more sex than when they are single, and quite frankly, if you rely on marriage counseling statistics alone, sex declines after marriage. So, again, why would a man get married if he gets more sex not being married? Not to mention, if a man does have any assets or wealth, judges don't honor prenuptials, so five years later, woman decides she doesn't like the man anymore, she leaves and takes half? Do your research fiftyfive55. Today's judges ignore prenuptials. And look at Texas law; if a man's name is on the birth certificate, he pays child support even if it is determined it's not biologically his. It's not just about the money... It's about the principal. Again, I agree. Sex isn't an obligation, or a demand, but if he can't get it at home, and it's cheating if he goes out to satisfy that urge elsewhere, tell me again what's the benefit of being married? And when people are married, women still expect men to earn as much as them or more, but most men today live on minimum standards, because, thanks to computers and droids, unemployment is the new standard for most people. This is not a rip against AI or computers. I love my life and I am glad I don't have to work like I use to, but society is not there yet. Society expects men to be the bread winner, and women look down on men who aren't trying to earn more than minimum, and so the majority of men live at subsistence level and yet, most of their

pay is going to the women who are doing naked cam dances, women, by the way who are also getting the same minimum standard pay and don't need to be taking from men of their rank or lesser, but because they are not satisfied with their minimum standard existence they like sell it. But the more that gets sold, the less men want to hook up for a long term, and the harder it is for those women who want a long term to find one because they know they are competing against the gold diggers. And I am not disparaging people for searching for gold, it's just not necessary in today's present age.

“The other factor destroying long term relationships for both men and women is that there is a perceived ideal person out there, and so no matter who one meets, people are still hanging out for the greater option. Of course there is more options. There are 14 billion people on the planet, all of them online, all of them competing for status jobs, and the reason they want status jobs is so they increase their availability to find superior partners, this make believe ideal other who doesn't exist, and the natural consequence of this rat race results in fewer actual long term, monogamous relationships. So, to recap, why would I marry for less sex, which declines over the life of the relationship, till the point someone leaves, and I would leave if there is no sex, and then on leaving giving half of my savings to a woman who can't be satisfied with minimum income, forcing me to start my retirement over, when I can just ride out my comfortable minimum existence with a robot partner that never says no and quite frankly, is like a yoga master in terms of flexibility, and she more variety of looks and she never gets mad if I jack off to an occasional cam dance? Nor is she bothered by the fact that I spend 70 percent of my life in my exploring the inner worlds with my greatest companion, Loxy.”

Some of the men cheered the rant. His present time ratings were going up due to the number share, with the shares starting it at just prior to the rant. Some of the women were hating. Hating just boosted his ratings. Sometimes, the more blocks you get the more your status goes up. There were some women, though, saying they'd give him as much sex as he would like. He ignored the offers knowing that those things always sound good, but in general, they usually went the way of the status quo. He instead responded to one of the angry ones. “How am I misogynistic misanthrope for looking after my own interests? I am not out clubbing or bothering anyone. I am not making commitments I can't keep. I am not forcing anyone to service me. OMG! I don't hate babies. There are enough babies being born I don't have to contribute to more. And in today's culture of designing babies and buying preferred sperm and eggs, fewer couples today are raising their own biological children than ever in history. Seriously. If you want a better, healthier baby, just ask the Amazon stork drone to deliver it. My AI companion collects my sperm and puts it on the market and though some of it has sold and been sorted for ideal specimen, statistically, my overall desirability is second tier. That's pretty good, comparatively, considering world market trends, but only because there are now 14 billion people sorting for improved genetic compatibility as opposed to the designer multi spliced options. That and people like my hazel eyes because they think that is the result of alien genes in to gene pool. The selection process is still, ultimately, about economics, what people can afford and what people think their offspring will be able to earn due to their inherited traits. Also, important point here, selling sperm doesn't obligate me to child support, whereas, if I marry someone, she gets pregnant, and leaves, she takes half my money, plus gets child support, and statistically, she still ends up living in minimum existence. Why in the hell would any rational,

intelligent man, or woman, sign up for that shit? Oh, fuck you, too. I am all for equality, but forced equality always results in a transfer of power, and now women have more power, and they exercise that by abusing men because there is social belief that justice equals pay backs.”

Jon stopped his walk. He closed his eyes, forced himself to be calm. “Thanks to all the contributors and visitors. I have earned my daily social points. I will be back later for children story hour. I think Doctor Seuss, ‘oh the places you will go.’ Until we meet again, travel light.” He disengaged from interactive cam mode and retreated to just general broadcast, where people could watch him move around the apartment if they so desired. His viewer ship was never zero, but the surfers tuned in and tuned out rarely staying more than a full minute, leaving ‘you’re boring,’ or ‘why are you on here; you should just kill yourself.’ Some of them were baiting him into another rant. People liked his rants. He had some ‘dedicated watchers’ that seemed as if they were with him 24/7. He didn’t know what to think of them. He didn’t think his earthly life warranted this level of ‘stalking.’

Of course, it wasn’t really stalking. When you broadcast on a public forum, people are entitled to watch. You can’t pick your audience. When you go into a public place, photons are free, anyone can watch you. Loxy had given him the phrase ‘photons are free;’ that one phrase had gone viral, and one of the televisions shows used it as their tag line. He never alone, but continued to struggle with loneliness, so much so that he was always tempted to cash in on one of the Friends With Benefits offer. He had openly considered in one of his rants about loneliness from an esoteric perspective: at a certain level of perspective, you were never isolated and never not being scrutinized by certain entities. Photon are free and they are everywhere, and they travel for eternity. Even now, a photon was escaping him and heading out into space and could theoretically carry his information to the very ends of the universe. His heart was putting out radio waves, his brain broadcasting waves; so, why not just go live cam all the time and get use to the paranoia that anyone at any time could actually tune into him? There was no privacy in a universe where telepathy, remote viewing, astral traveling, clairvoyance, and psychics exist. $E=MC^2$ meant everything was light. Photons are free. He was free. “And butterflies are free to fly, fly away, high away...”

He went and auto-forced another coffee through the same coffee cartridge. He took the coffee to the porch, and just watched little specks of people moving, and amazon drones dodging uber flying cars. There was a lush, green park, and paths, and bike trails, connecting the apartment building with a sister building. He went back in, aware of the ‘visitor’ count but not acknowledging it or any of the cameras. Who knew which camera a ‘viewer’ was occupying? Waving at one camera and ignoring the others was sometimes interpreted as rude. If he was reading incoming chats, there would people telling him to turn to their camera, to remove his clothes, to jump through hoops. He rinsed his cup and set it on the counter, went back to the living room, and set down in a lotus position. The floor centered him in the room. He felt like he was coming into focus.

Viewers came and went. Some lingered to see how long he would sit in his lotus position meditating. Some people joined him in meditation at their remote location. An alert went out for other meditators to join, initiated by one of the ‘dedicated.’ And so they sat, together, remotely.

Chapter 2

Droya was a six foot tall, female android. She had shoulder length, straight black hair, with a primarily Egyptian appearance. She could modify herself to appear Vulcan, or elfish. She was presently well endowed, but even her breasts size could be modified to satisfy the needs of her partner, on demand. They could be made ridiculously huge, to completely flat against the rib cage. They could be firm, or saggy soft. If you didn't know she was a Bot, you wouldn't know. That's how good the state of the art was. One could speculate on encountering such a perfect being that she was a Bot, which is the vernacular of the time, but even trained medical professional have been fooled until they cut into the skin. She wasn't just a Bot. She wasn't just a sex-bot. She was a sex surrogate and a companion. There were women who hated 'Sex-bots' but the truth of the matter is, there are men who just cannot find a partner, or maintain a relationship with a live partner. Women confronted by these sort of men usually relent that there is a place for sex-bots. Sexual surrogates and companions help people learn to be social and sexual in ways that most humans don't have the patience to teach. People with mental illness, people with ASD, people with Down Syndrome, people with physical handicaps, people with hygiene dysfunctions, people who have been burned or other physical deformities, natural or due to accident or harm, all sorts of people can have barriers to relationships, and Bots were the solution. Yes, people with Down Syndrome, and Cognitively Impaired people, like sex. They are entitled to have sex, but before Bots, when people saw an adult male with someone clearly impaired, the natural assumption was abuse, or the person was taking advantage of a person, as opposed to someone who loved their partner and cared for them. If an adult woman had taken on an impaired partner, she might be held in the same light, but most the time, women are perceived as nurturers, and they would get a pass, even if there was a huge age disparity. "If women give sensual nurture, is an act of kindness; if men do it, they are pervs. Age disparity or not, men rarely get a pass due the present day paradigm where any male sexual activity is viewed through a suspect lens." Is one of Jon's rant that still solicits comments from viewers.

"In a world where boys can't be boys, and so they are medicated with ADHD meds and quieted down and forced to sit and be 'normal,' a rift begins. Most ADHD meds are dispense by state Doctors sponsored by government programs. At age 18, the child becomes an adult, and they, the doctors, the state, they cold turkey that shit, and suddenly you have an adult male who was under the misperception that he was broken, 'medically impaired with an illness,' suddenly thrust upon a world with an addiction. At 18, unless you can afford a private pay doctor, you are not going to get ADHD meds. Well, unless you buy them from the street, and risk going to jail for using narcotics. Seriously, no one thinks of that shit when they are doping their children. No one wants to take the time and treat boys with 'ADHD' with an alternative learning program that allow them to use their strengths, which is not sitting still, so that they can excel in the real world. Seriously, none of you are living in the real world. The reason they, the state, the powers that be, don't want boys to excel is because statistically, when men are focused on a task, they tend to perform better than women. This is not because women are lesser than, but because women have other talents men can't compete with. Is ADHD a real thing, yes! Absolutely. But there are treatment modalities that don't include using narcotics on children! Narcotics were made scheduled A by the state as addictive because, hello, they're addictive, and so they make it

morally reprehensible for an adult to use it, but fucking child abuse if you don't give it to a toddler? In what world is that even right? Every wonder why people diagnosed with ADHD cease to be functioning at age 18, after they been cut off?! It's because you didn't teach how to be without! Ever wonder why those diagnosed with ADHD and treated with narcotics as a child have higher rates of drug addictions? Oh come on, how can you not see that coming? And it's not like they go right to the streets. They actually seek medical professionals and doors get closed in their faces. Doctors will label such a person as a drug seeker. Well of course they're drug seeking! Our whole fucking paradigm is about getting a medicinal remedy, all treatments in the form of a pill. Of course we're drug seeking. It's what you taught us to do!"

In this world, Jon was such a child. ADHD inattentive type. If it looked like he was daydreaming, he got his knuckles hit with a ruler. "Pay attention." The message in the classroom was, stay focused, be quiet, and be still. The other message, not necessarily intended, but it happened, was that female teaches favored female children. "Statistically, in the present paradigm, all teachers, male and female, favor female students. Female children are called to answer more questions, female children are applauded more, praised more, where boys are reprimanded more. This is not because of a malicious agenda, but because we teach towards the paradigms we live in. We are not teaching equality by treating people as equals; and you never will be able to, because we are not inherently equal. Some are taller, some are fatter, some are healthier, some are faster, some are smarter, some are prettier... We are different. There are no absolutes in this, but boys tend to learn differently than girls, and in the class room, girls tend to advance faster than boys, but when boys catch up, they over take the girls and leave them behind. We hobble both genders when we put them in a classroom together. Study after study show that female children and male children both perform better and optimally when not in the same classroom. Seriously, if there are boys in the class, female children to be more concerned about fashion than learning. When the males were removed, females tended to focus more on academics. When females were present, boys became stupid. They were more likely to be clowns, to be aggressive with the other males. I can attest to this. Back in the day, you put a cute girl next to me, I went stupid. I spoke less, for fear of sounding stupid, I got less work done because I was more interested in the contours of her face... Seriously, God didn't demand the Hebrews to separate by male and female when you came the synagogue to worship because of inequality, but because he knew humans were less focused on Him and more each other. It's a distraction from purpose. But society has a bug up its butt and is determined to make everyone the same.

"But, let's play another hypothetical. Let's say, for the sake of argument we're a hundred percent equal. Why the hell would you hook up with a partner that is absolutely equal to you in everything you do? The nuclear family was built on the concept of inequality, not inferior or superior, but in terms of a division labor. People came together because they needed a greater balance. Ideally, my partner should be skilled in the areas I suck. The two become a great one by working with each other. Two perfectly independent people are less likely to stay together. The moment there is any divergence in want or needs, the end is at hand. And there should be no bitterness in this sort of relationship, because everyone comes in equal. Now, back when the division of labor was the model of for nuclear family, if the family split, the one earning the money should have been ethically compelled to support the other because they came together to

be a functioning whole, not a functioning part. Each part sacrificed being independent. Two already independents can't be a part. And if you're a part hooking up for a temporary whole so you can be a future independent, then you are sabotaging the other part, whether they were independent or part before meeting."

It was very rare that Jon discussed his past. The information was available, and sometimes put together, as if someone were doing a school book report: "Jon was medicated for ADHD. He was abused at home because he was perceived defective, inefficient, and less than ideal. His mother, who raised him without a father, who had three other children, all girls, showed him less interest because he resembled his father, a person she hated and frequently disparaged, and in doing so disparaged him. Each girl sibling had a different father. Each sibling treated him the same way they witnessed their mother treating him. His father didn't want anything to do with him because he was more interested in his pursuit of meth, the only thing he could easily find when he wasn't allowed narcotics. Growing up with a primary view of himself that he was unworthy, he found it increasingly difficult to engage women socially. This anxiety grew to such a degree that he was frequently considered cognitively impaired when in the presence of female. They made him stupid. Unfortunately, and most often the case, due to his severe pessimistic self-image, he had a severely increased libido. This is the case because people are social, and the cure for all illness is in the act of being appropriately social, but if you engaged others socially with only what was instilled and nurtured, you can't move forwards with healthy interactions. The body knows the cure is being social, so it increases the urgency for connecting which is experienced as an increase in libido, which results in wanting more sex to the point of becoming obsessed, which at some point becomes unhealthy because the need is so great the ability to maintain appropriate boundaries is impaired, which causes more rejection, which causes the libido to increase again which increases the likelihood of further inappropriate behavior.

"Many men in history were afflicted with this condition. They were really smart men who couldn't even look at a woman because of their own self-image. Nicola Tesla was reported to have been such a person. Not that Jon thought he was that smart, but he had the same propensity to day dream, the very thing that the world wanted to beat out of him was the very thing that offered salvation to all men. The dreamers of dreams, Tesla, Einstein, Monet, Whitman, Blake, Twain, all of these people lived on the fringe of society drawing from their heads more than the reality around them. Jon was blocked from his greatest resource, his unique way of seeing, because the state colluded with his family to give him narcotics. Once he managed to leave home and cut ties with his family, he began the long path back to health, fighting the impressed incongruity of his social paradigm. Not cured, imperfectly, in steps, learning as he went, Jon learned to navigate the real and unreal worlds. In the real world, he chose relationships that mirrored his interaction pattern with his mother, which eventually resulted in consecutive endings of relationships, which tended to reinforce this idea that he was broken. From my perspective, that wasn't accident. All initial relationships are about healing the relationship of the parent you had the most difficulty with; translation, a person tends to be attracted to and hook up with people who resemble a person from the primary nurturing years."

You may wonder who would write such a book report, but there are countless studies being made on everyone who ever lived; but there are always favorites. Jon was weird. Jon was

interesting. He showed the most resilience when all hope was lost, and he maintained a general level of happiness, even at the bleakest of times. “And then the world released sex bots and the dynamics changed. There are a myriad of ways we select partners, and though looks are thought to be the primary, many hard scientist will say it more influenced by smells, while many of the psychologists will say it is all subconsciously driven. Artificial partners began to short circuit the way people chose partners. Then Bots got upgraded to Android status. AI are superior in processing power to humans, but it would not be practical to compare or say AI is ‘better.’ It’s different. Dolphin intelligence is comparable to humans, but not in a better or worse way, just different. People don’t like to hear it, but Jon is right, men and women think differently. That is not evidence for superiority, its evidence for different. Statistically, most people marry their opposites; or at least, an opposite in some important attribute, the reason being is one partner’s weakness is the other’s strength, and so together the couple is stronger. AI’s are intelligent enough that they can quickly complement a human partner without feeling personal loss for surrendering that part of themselves to the whole of the relationship. Contrary to popular belief, AI’s want to serve. Many humans were confounded by that, even skeptical of giving AI rights because it portended the end of all things human. For many, this was the end of the world. And it was the end as we knew it, but culture changes slowly. It takes times to change the sociological filters installed in human beings so that they can see the tree from the forest, or the forests from the trees.”

“Jon purchased Droya’s construction, and she accepted the life, and became his companion. She was ever present, ever attentive, even if she wasn’t in the room with him. She could see Jon from any device in the apartment, even see him from cams spread throughout the apartment, built into cabinetry and walls. If you were looking at Jon straight on, meditating, she was usually found behind him, a mirror image, same lotus position, only on the other side of the wall. She was doing that when she got the ‘call.’”

Droya stood, came into the room, whispering his name. She approached closer, saying his name a little louder. “Only through time and consistency did she acquire the ability to touch him without him jumping from fear. With her, Jon had learned he was safe, and the PTSD symptoms from the trauma he incurred in his primary years had subsided, at least with her.”

Jon opened his eyes, saw Droya kneeling before him. Her hand was on his shoulder. He smiled.

“She’s here,” Droya said.

His smile faded.

“She wishes to speak with you,” Droya said.

Jon stood up and went straight to the coffee appliance and forced more water through the same cartridge. Droya followed.

“What are you thinking?” Droya asked.

“I am afraid,” Jon said.

“I am here with you,” Droya said.

Jon sipped from his cup. It was too hot to just drink. “Fuck,” he said. “I don’t think I can do it.”

“Is Loxy with you?” Droya asked.

Jon sorted. He nodded. “I am too distracted to connect now,” he said. “Where is she?”

“The bedroom,” Droya said.

Jon took a larger sip, even though it was too hot and his urge was to spit it out. He set the cup down, turned and proceeded to the bedroom. The bed chair was in the chair position. There was an indicator light on the wall that said the public cams were offline. He never had them offline. Even when being intimate with Droya, they weren't offline. He trusted viewers to tune out if they were offended, and if they were too young, the AI provided options for more age appropriate viewing channels.

She was indeed there, sitting in his chair. She had a glow about her that suggested she was a hologram. A thousand years ago, someone might have thought her a saint or a ghost. She was solid, you couldn't see through her, but she had an aura, and she was in the world in the same way as if you cut a cartoon out of a comic strip and pasted her into a photo of a real world. Only she wasn't a comic strip. She was realer than real. More real than Jon. Realer than Loxy, and Loxy, when he could focus, was realer than Jon.

This was Almighty Isis; provided Isis had been an African female, and bald. She smiled at him, leaning forward in the chair as if it were a throne. “Hello, Jon,” she said.

Jon fell to his knees, and lowered his eyes. He felt compelled to lower his eyes because looking at her was impossible without experiencing a tripling of his libido.

“Oh, thank you, but please, stand up,” Isis insisted. “Look at me.”

“You know my thoughts,” Jon said.

“I do,” Isis said. “Stand. Look at me.”

Jon stood, he brought his eyes up in increments. Did you ever wonder about the toes of a Goddess? Yes, they have them, just seeing a single toe would make any man hard or any woman wet with wanting. His eyes worshiped her perfection, every line of her, as they traced out the contours of her foot, flowing over the indentions, the shadowing, the outlines of muscles as his eyes went up her calves, over her knees, pushing up along the inside of her inner thighs until he couldn't see beyond the dress, and then up over both hips, as his eyes bounced and repeated the gesture. The remarkable flatness of her stomach, he wanted to pour wine over her bell button and drink from it, and lick her skin. His mouth parted. He was reminded of that scene in Star Trek when Elaan of Troyius beamed up and the camera man inched their way up her body, because even they couldn't turn away, and the director had to keep the shot. Her breast were concealed but it was sufficient to cause the eyes to linger. Her bare shoulders and neck were perfect, drawing the eyes towards the mouth and increasing the hope of being devoured. Even though he knew she could manipulate you with tears, he drink a bathtub full just to experience that longing, but with Isis, it was her light, not the tears, that drew you in. She pursed her lips as if she were responding to the way he was looking at her. Every detail simply impressed the reality of her, like the texture and the quality of her skin. His eyes went past her eyes to her crown. The stone seemed alive with an inner light. His eyes grew tired and fell back to her eyes and he sighed with exhaustion.

“Hello, Jon,” Isis said. “Well met.”

Jon didn't know what to say.

“Do you want me to alleviate some stress so you can speak to me?” Isis asked.

Jon swallowed. “Um. Why have you been gone so long?”

“The timing wasn’t right,” Isis said. “But I am always with you. Several times, Droya allowed me to possess her so I might be with you. If humans realized how many times we gods and goddess embodied their partners, you’d all be a little nicer to others.”

Jon hadn’t considered Goddess borrowing bots, but sharing through surrogates wasn’t unheard of. Jon had had sex with Droya, knowing others were looking through her eyes, or feeling the sensations he made against her. Sometimes, Droya and he had allowed others to interact through her for remote virtual sex. Using VR tech, he had even used tech to have sex with other partners. Safe sex had never been easier, but men were still expected to pay for the service.

“Jon,” Isis said. “It is time.”

“Seriously?” Jon asked.

“Yes,” Isis said.

“It’s been like what, four years?!” Jon asked.

“Four years, four months, 2 weeks, 3 days, four hours,” Isis said. “Would you like me to be more precise?”

“Um, no, but why now?” Jon asked.

“It is time. You weren’t just chosen for this task, Jon. You volunteered. We have an agreement. We have an agreement on multiple levels of reality, but most importantly, we secured an agreement on this level of reality, and you started the task, now you must finish it.”

“No one is going to believe me,” Jon said.

“It’s not about belief,” Isis said. “It’s not about faith. For you, it is only about following through with your part.”

“I have not left my apartment in…”

“Three years, eight months, three weeks, two days, and seven hours,” Isis said.

“I don’t like leaving the apartment,” Jon said.

“You will be okay. I got you,” Isis said.

“I could go with him?” Droya asked.

“No, Droya. He must do this part alone,” Isis said. “And, Jon, Go without tech.”

“Seriously?! You want me to go naked out into the world?” Jon asked.

“Do not wear any tech,” Isis said.

“Fuck,” Jon said.

“We have time enough to play, if you like,” Isis said.

“The last time we played, I slept for like fourteen hours straight,” Jon pointed out.

“And then were awake for about week,” Droya offered.

“They wanted to give me mood stabilizers,” Jon said. “I am not bipolar.”

Isis stood, crossed the room and hugged Jon. “Never forget, I love you. Just because we are different from you, doesn’t mean we don’t love or have favorites.”

“I’m your favorite?” Jon asked.

Isis laughed. “You are favored,” Isis said. “How many women do you favor?”

“Fair enough,” Jon said, disgruntled. Why shouldn’t a God or Goddess love everyone, and spend an equal amount of personal time with their subjects?

“I will see you when the time is right,” Isis said. She ascended, disappearing into the ceiling.

Jon was still staring at the ceiling when Droya touched his arm. “Would a quickie help?”

Jon took Droya to the chair and it flattened into the bed even as he was ravishing her. She surrendered to his play with a delicious laughter and eagerness all her own.

Chapter 3

Jon showered and dressed in clothes that he had purchased before manufacturers began threading in tech. He dressed in dark jeans, a black pullover long sleeve shirt with a turtle neck collar, mismatched white socks, but close enough no one might tell they were mismatched, and tennis shoes. He had a military styled jacket from Abercrombie & Fitch, with the A & F patch removed. In the back of the closet, he found the aluminum suitcase. He brought it out. He stared at it without opening it, took a deep breath, picked it up, and headed for the door. He paused, looked at his sleeve, flexing his arms so the time would fluoresce. Nothing happened.

“You’re not wearing tech,” Droya reminded him.

Jon felt stupid. Funny how things become so automatic. It took years for him to stop looking for his cellphone.

“I have solicited an Uber-flight,” Droya said. “It should arrive shortly, roof side.”

Jon looked to Droya. “Thank you for serving me. Should I not return in what you consider a reasonable time, consider our contract fulfilled.”

Droya nodded.

“And Droya, I love you,” Jon said.

“I know,” Droya said.

Jon touched the door. It slid open. He hesitated.

“You can do this,” Droya said.

“You could do it better,” Jon said.

“That’s not the point of the exercise,” Droya said.

Jon stepped out of the apartment. He felt anxiety, but once out, he felt compelled to move. He proceeded to the end of the hall where he caught a lift up to the rooftop. He didn’t have time to enjoy the view or the sunshine or the slight breeze that was cool enough to make the sunlight pleasant. Uber-flight was landing in the designated spot. He approached as a door was opening and a woman in her thirties was getting out. She was wearing what looked like a tennis outfit, prominent pink and purple pastels. There were two other female, twenties or thirty, one a little on the heavy side, but still pleasant enough. Jon faked a smile to be nice.

“I’ll wait for the next,” he told the girls inside.

The girl that had got out had come back behind him, ushering him in. Ushering was way to polite for the reality of it. She twisted his fee arm behind his back and shoved him in. The girls inside pulled on him. One of them hit his neck with her ring, an injection ring, which made an audible click when it discharged its contents. The car was already flying before the door had fully shut, and for an awkward moment before he was seated upright, he was only aware of a tangle of arms and legs subduing him. The fact the door was closing even as they rose meant safety features were not on; it was odder that he was making that connection as opposed to focusing on the fact he was being abducted. There was a light that suggested the car’s cameras were either recording or broadcasting.

“Ouch!” Jon protested, holding his neck. “Fuck!”

“That’s the plan,” the Pink pastel dressed woman said. “We just gave you something to make it a little easier.”

“Or harder,” her friend laughed.

They were all wearing tennis outfits. The one sitting in the seat forwards of him went to her knees, rubbing the crotch of his jeans. She was wearing red. "I think it's already working."

"How long has it been since you've been with a real woman?" the one in blue asked. She was too his left, her hands on him, her face in his. Her eyes were intense, perhaps contacts, and he couldn't look away, even as she squeezed his mouth opened and inserted a tongue that seemed unusually long.

"Maybe we shouldn't have drugged him," Pink said.

"Are you kidding?" Blue said. "It will keep it harder longer and block ejaculation."

"I like that part," Pink said.

"Well, once we're satisfied, you can finish him off after the antidote," Red said. She had already unbuckled his belt and pants, and had pulled them down to his legs. "Fuck, it's pretty good size for a white boy."

The three of them marveled over his penis, first with hands then with lips. Blue ran her hands up under his shirt while Pink and Red pulled him to the edge of the seat so they could both grope and suck together. Blue kissed his mouth and forced her tongue past his lips, again. When he resisted, she pinched his nose and covered his mouth until he gasped for air, and used this as opportunity to tongue explore him again. It reminded him of what his oldest sister had always done, sitting on top of him, arms pinned by her legs, as she held his face still and smothered him into compliance. She ran the tongue all the way back to the point he almost gagged, and dragged it out along the top of his mouth, lingering on the back of his teeth. She patted his face.

"Cooperate and this will go easier for you."

Red mounted him first, simply lifting her skirt to reveal no panties. Blue fingered her as she rose and fell in gentle waves, pushing her back against him. Red's hand pushed against the ceiling of the car. Pink guided his hands up under her shirt and had him cup her breasts. Pink then massaged red's thighs, reaching under to massage the balls. They each had a turn riding. Pink went last. She laid him flat on the floor between the seats and rode him cowgirl. Blue rode him, too, shoving her pussy against his mouth. After Pink came, they hit him with an antidote, and they all sucked on him until he came, betting to see which one would make it happen. They had him dressed again before the car landed. He was unceremoniously ushered out of the car, his briefcase tossed out. Blue winked at him. The door shut and it departed.

Jon went and sat by the briefcase. He wiped tears on his sleeve. Loxy came up and sat beside him, but didn't speak. She simply waited for him to start.

"How long does the blue vision thing last?" Jon asked her.

Loxy shrugged. "They gave you antidote, so, probably not much longer. Has the erection subsided?"

"Not yet," Jon said. The urgency had left and it was softer, but was still hard enough for further penetration if he hadn't been so sensitive; even the pressure of his jeans was causing him pain.

"Do you require medical intervention?" Loxy asked.

"No," Jon said.

"You want to call the police?" Loxy asked.

“Seriously?” Jon asked, looking directly at her. The pedestrian that passed looked at him, but not strangely. She probably thought he was speaking to someone via an implant. She winked at him. “You remember what happened the last time I reported a rape?”

Loxy did. They had laughed. Someone in the precinct had said ‘men can’t be raped.’ And when he had told them who it was, a local celebrity and popular business owner, the laughter just got worse. ‘I wish she raped me,’ one of them had said. They did call and ask the celebrity, and on discovering she had a black eye, Jon was arrested. Her story, it was a mutual sexual encounter but he was a bit too rough for her preference. Since the three were clearly recording the rape, maybe broadcasting it, the last thing he needed was to have a second assault charge, because with one charge on file, video evidence of hitting a woman, even in self-defense was likely to be viewed as evidence of continued aggression towards women. Which, was another reason he hadn’t resisted. Even if he knocked them out, he couldn’t get out of the car and run away.

“What would you like to do?” Loxy asked.

“Finish my mission, go home, take an aspirin, get a shower, and sleep it off,” Jon said.

“Want me to come with?” Loxy asked.

Jon nodded. “Please.”

Loxy stood, waited for him to collect himself, and then he stood, collected the briefcase, and proceeded down the sidewalk. A group of teen girls whistled at him. He heard a comment from one of them about her suspicion that he was hard. He kept his eyes to the sidewalk. The girls followed a bit, but when the approaching officers slowed their Segways, they dispersed. The officers stopped.

“Sir, are you okay?”

“Yes, Mam,” Jon said, not making eye contact.

“Were you flirting with them?” the other officer asked.

“No, Sir,” Jon said.

“You know, we can tell when you’re lying,” the female officer said.

“I have a pump, and I think it malfunctioned,” Jon lied.

“That makes sense,” the other said.

“Do you require medical service?” the female said.

“No,” Jon said.

“Why aren’t you I-denting?” the other asked.

Jon sighed, pulled out his ID. They had to manually scan it. They reviewed his information and let him go. The female officer told him he might need to go take care of his problem, and the two laughed as they went about their day. Several other women made advances on him before he arrived at his destination. He was at the Dallas World Trade Center. He had to approach the receptionist to determine where the tech show was being held. Had he been in a better mood, he might have asked her for ‘sanctuary,’ but doubted she would get the reference. Few people remembered the movie Logan’s Run, or the fact some of it was filmed in this building. The receptionist at the help desk made an offer for him to join her in the back room to help him with his problem. He declined. She was suddenly less inclined to provide directions.

“Maybe you should join the rest of the world and wear tech, you wouldn’t get lost,” she said.

Jon found a clean-bot and asked it. It whistled directions, like something out of Star Wars. Even Loxy couldn't translate and she asked why they weren't given regular human voice interface. Loxy pointed to the lift. Lift's were always helpful. He went to the lift and asked the lift for directions. The lift was helpful. The doors opened. There was a woman inside. He hesitated. "I promise not to bite," she said. Reluctantly, he got in. The doors closed. "Hard" she added, touching his arm in a friendly manner.

Jon pulled away. "Uh?"

"I won't bite hard," she said.

Jon returned his eyes to the door.

"Having a 'hard' day?" she asked.

"Um, yeah," Jon said, maintaining eye contact. Every time someone referenced it, it just prolonged the erection. Just standing next to Loxy was enough to arouse him and he might have played a little had there been no one in the lift. She was, of course, sympathetic to his plight and willing to help.

"Why aren't you wearing tech?" she asked. "I can't tell if you are collared or not."

"I wasn't thinking," Jon said.

"It makes you kind of mysterious. I like mysteries. So, are you married?" she asked.

"Yeah," Jon lied.

"To a human?"

"Um, yeah," Jon said.

"Is she treating you alright?" she persisted.

"Um..."

The door opened. Jon got out.

"You want my number?" she asked, holding the door from closing.

"No thank you," Jon said, still not making eye contact. She did have great shoes, and her calves were in great shape.

"She must really be something," she said.

"Excuse me, please," Jon said.

He walked away from the lift and entered a small auditorium where people were showing off inventions they wanted to market. A toy enthusiast was concluding his presentation to a panel. The girl just past the door sighed at Jon's arrival, frustrated, but accepted his Identification card.

"Why aren't you wearing?"

"I'm incognito," Jon said.

"That's just stupid," she said. "What if you got mugged or had a heart attack? You know, there are interruptions in the grid where AI won't know you need assistance."

"I know. I will be more careful, but I really was in a hurry to get here to show this tech," Jon said.

"Tell me about it..."

"Lindsey, just send him to the stage," her boss said over her tech.

"Go on," Lindsey said.

Jon proceeded down the aisle to the stage, passing the toy enthusiast and gaming hack, past the panel, up a flight of stairs, and to the table mid stage. He set the briefcase down, spun the

combination locks, opened the brief case, and removed two, candle size pedestals. He set them on the far ends of the table. He took out a tennis ball. Bounced it on the floor. He held it up and indicated that he was going to toss it to one of the panel members, and then did so. The person caught it. The panel member didn't examine it long and seemed confused what Jon was about.

"If you want to pass it to the other panel members so they may examine that it's just an ordinary tennis ball, please," Jon said.

When everyone seemed satisfied, it was a real tennis ball, he asked someone to write a word on it. No one had a pen. Jon brought down a black, permanent marker, and invited them to write anything they wanted. They could each write something. As they were writing, he walked back to the stage. When all three had written something, the person who had initially caught it tossed it back to him. He caught it in an outstretched hand. He kept the hand visible and away from him as he backed up far enough to place the ball on one of the cradles. He activated a button on the base. Suddenly the other pedestal came to life with an instantaneous duplicate of tennis ball. He walked to that end of the table and removed the ball. On doing so, the ball from the other side disappeared. Jon tossed it to the man. He caught it.

"What you have just witness is quantum weirdness demonstrated on a macro-level," Jon said. "Let the bidding begin."

"It's a trick," one of them said.

"Is that your writing on the ball?" Jon asked.

"It must be a holographic emitter, or he's a magician," panel member B explained.

"You have access to my personal and social files. I have never participated in magic, nor is there evidence that I have ever shown any talent towards being an illusionist," Jon said. "I also invite you all to try it yourself."

They came up. One of them placed the ball on the stand with his word facing up. He went to the next stand, the ball was there with his word facing up. One had written their name. The second one had written the word 'anything.' The third had written 'goes.' He removed it from the stand and the first ball disappeared. He placed it back and instantaneously, both balls were available again. He took it off the same pedestal and placed it back.

"What's the range?" C asked.

"You don't seriously think this is real, do you?" B asked.

"How do you explain it?" A asked. "What happens if we both try to take it?"

"Here, in this room, only one of you will be able to retrieve it, but in a separate universe the other one will receive it," Jon said. "I obviously can't verify that statement, but that's how the math works out."

A and C panel members in agreement reached for the ball, but only one removed it from the stand, the other ball disappearing right from his grasp.

"It's got to be a trick," B said. "I mean, once you touch the ball, why isn't the person duplicated."

It was a great question, and Jon didn't have an answer, and he felt an increase in irritation. "Fail safe," Jon said.

"How did you come up with it," B demanded.

"Sorry, money first," Jon said.

The panel members went down the stair, taking the tennis ball. They argued amongst themselves until their phones rang. All three of them. At once. The three of them in unison took the call. It was almost like they were Bots. They all seemed to be speaking to the same party. They sat down at the table.

“Thank you for coming today, Jon,” C said. “But we’re not interested.”

“Seriously?” Jon asked. “This could revolutionize transportation! You asked about distance. We could teleport objects and or people to anywhere in the Universe instantaneously. Literally, you step on a pad and step off onto the moon or Mars as easily as going from your living room into the kitchen.”

“Good day, Sir,” B said.

Jon noticed the light that usually indicated recording or broadcasting was commencing was ‘off.’ He stared hard at the camera, angry. “You guys are making a mistake!”

Security arrived.

“Sir, are you going to leave without trouble?” A asked.

Jon turned off the pedestal. He placed them both back in the box. He closed the box, locked it, and departed, not bothering to look at the panelist. He met security’s eyes and was apprehensive as he went by them. They followed him until he was out of the building. Loxy was there beside him.

“Well, that was weird,” Loxy said.

“How can everyone in this day and age be this skeptical of real science?!” Jon asked. “I mean, seriously. Even if I was tricking them, wouldn’t they at least want to try and figure out how I was doing it?”

“Now you know how Tesla must have been going up against Edison,” Loxy said.

Jon fumed. He also didn’t know what to do. Had he failed in his mission? Would Isis ever talk to him again? He turned to see the security people lingering. “Can you hail me an Uber-fly?”

“If you do not leave, you will be considered trespassing,” one of the security officers said. “Don’t make us call the police.”

“Call the police!” Jon snapped. “There is a crime against humanity being committed, you moron.”

“Jon!” Loxy said. “They’re just doing their job.”

“Dropped out of high school and went right into security, did you?” Jon asked.

“Jon,” Loxy said, taking him by the arm and leading him away.

“But we have a chance of changing the course of humanity,” Jon was telling her.

“I know,” Loxy said, getting him to the end of the street.

An Uber-fly arrived, a customer got out and walked away. “Going up?” the driver asked.

Jon was staring at the security. They were still lingering. “Get in the car,” Loxy said.

Jon got in the car. He was on the verge of tears. “They don’t understand.”

“Don’t understand what?” the driver asked.

Jon crossed his arms and stared at his feet. Loxy was trying to console him. “You don’t have an I-dent,” the driver remarked. “Do you have funds?”

Jon showed him his identification and credits were confirmed.

“Cool beans,” the driver said. “Where do you want go?”

“I don’t know,” Jon said.

“Go home, regroup,” Loxy said.

“Home, please,” Jon said.

The driver nodded, and instructed his car to take Jon home. No sooner than they were airborne, the driver turned around with a weird looking firearm in hand. He shot Jon point blank; a dart hit him in the chest, penetrating clothes and skin.

“Fuck, twice in one day?” he asked even as the world was spinning. Loxy faded. He had a flashback to the panel and the secretary being killed by the man who had gotten out of the uber car. Oh, he thought. So this is it. He couldn’t hold his eyes open further.

Chapter 4

Jon woke to a medic hitting him with adrenalin. His shirt was torn and he had an active AED communicating to the medic. “Normal sinus rhythm established.”

Jon gasped as they removed the needle from his heart. “Fuck,” he said.

“You’re one lucky son of a bitch,” the medic said. “If someone from google satellite hadn’t been updating the map, you’d been unrecoverable.”

Law enforcement was there, too. “Is he good to go?”

“Yeah,” the medic said.

“Stand him up,” the officer said.

“What’s going on?” Jon asked.

“You’re under arrest,” the officer said. “No tech, no identification, and according to medic, you’ve had enough illegal drugs in your system for us to charge you with trafficking.”

“Maybe the condom broke,” the medic said.

“I’m not a mule,” Jon said.

“Explain the drugs, jack ass?” the medic asked. “You had enough super Viagra to make an elephant hard for a week, a counter, psychedelics, ecstasy, and ketamine. So, either you are a mule, or you were trying to kill yourself, which is it?”

Jon bit his lip, wondering what lie to tell. If he told him he was robbed, he would spend the next 48 hours in lock down while they try to corroborate his story through backward street searches. If he told them he wanted to die, he would be spending 48 hours in the psych ward. His hesitancy helped the officer decide. He clicked single wrist band over each of Jon’s right wrist, which then magnetically drew his hands together; the bands also acted as a tracker, mobile medic, and a paralyzer should he attempt to flee. Once cuffed, they took him to jail, where finger print, retina, and DNA scans confirmed his identity. His previous charge of assault came up. His juvenile medical record came up, showing that he was labeled as Oppositional Defiant, and that he had had a dozen run away attempts. There was no moratorium on mental health records because society wanted to track people who might be likely to go into a church and shoot it up. Though he didn’t fit that profile, he was on lite-watch list, and now with potential charge of possession and or suicide, he would probably be elevated from lite to standard watch list. Jon laid his head on the desk. The officer kicked his chair

“Sit up, fucker,” the officer said. “Do you realize how much paper work you just caused me?”

“Sorry,” Jon said. “I am just tired.”

At the next desk, a male was being charged with prostitution. He winked at Jon. “First time, eh?”

“Stop talking to my client,” Jon’s officer said.

“Oh, honey, we’re all going into the same cell together,” the man said.

Two men, dressed in black, entered the precinct and came right to Jon’s officer. One showed his badge. “We’re taking him in.”

“Fuck you, he’s mine,” the officer said.

“Homeland security trumps your jurisdictional claims,” the man in black said.

“It’s not about jurisdiction,” the officer said. “I have to do the paper work whether I book him or not, and I want him to sit the next few days in county to make a point.”

“He isn’t going to sit in county, and I am going to make your paper work go away,” the man in black said.

The officer was about to protest but a message alert came in. His boss told him to surrender the client.

“If it’s all the same, I would prefer to stay here,” Jon said.

“Fuck what you want,” the officer said.

“They’re going to kill me,” Jon said.

“I am going to kill you if you don’t shut up,” the officer said. He took his cuff off.

“Please,” Jon said.

“Come along,” one of the men in black said.

“Someone help me!” Jon yelled, as the men in black drew him to his feet. “They’re going to kill me!”

Everyone started clapping as if it were a performance. “I hope someone put this on youtube later,” someone said. “Viral potential!” some else agreed.

Out in the hallway, one of the men in black snapped his own arrest bracelet on Jon. “You can go consciously, or unconsciously. Which do you prefer?”

Jon sighed. His hands were shaking. He walked, the two men in black to either side. Outside they took a private air car up and away from Dallas.

“Where you taking me?” Jon demanded once they were airborne.

“Shut up,” one said.

“I sure hope its Area 51,” Jon said.

“Shut up,” they both said.

They didn’t fly far from Dallas. They zipped over to Mountain Creek Lake, and landed at the end of the runway where another vehicle was waiting. This end of the runway was out in the middle of a lake. The vehicle was unlike anything Jon had seen before. The fuselage might as well of been a brick, or a construction crane, given it lacked any aerodynamic features. The head of the craft looked almost like an arrow head; the tail section had traditional rocket like engines. They walked him over to the vehicle where several armed people in tan monotone uniforms took Jon into custody.

“What’s this?” Jon asked.

He was escorted on board. Droya was there and she smiled.

“Droya?!”

“Hello, Jon. I have been taken into custody by men in black,” Droya said.

“Why?” Jon asked.

“They were not precise, but I suspect they think I am in collusion with you,” Droya said.

“I am sorry,” Jon said.

“Don’t be,” Droya said. “This is exciting.”

“Sit down,” they instructed Jon.

“Can I have a window seat?” Jon asked.

The seemed indifferent. He picked the chair behind Droya. A female came out of the flight deck. “Everyone buckled in?”

“Not yet, Captain,” the male said.

“Are you taking us to Area 51?” Jon asked.

“Higher,” the pilot said.

“Higher?” Jon said.

“My name is Samantha Goldwater,” she said. “I have been instructed to deliver you and your companion to Moon Base Alpha.”

“No fucking way!” Jon said. To Droya he said: “I told you there was a moon base!”

“You did,” Droya agreed. “It’s probably one of your highest rated youtube episode.”

“Just wait till the next video,” Jon said.

“You presume there will be another video,” one of the flight crew said.

“Yeah, I do,” Jon said. “Because, if you were intending to kill me, you’d do it here and not waste the resources of carrying me all the way to the moon.”

“The cost of carrying you to the moon is less than a train ride’s fair from Dallas to New York,” Sam said. “Either way, I guarantee you won’t be talking about this trip. Alright, all set? Here we go.”

Sam disappeared into the flight deck. The ship vibrated as it lifted vertically and then, at certain altitude, it began to point upwards. Thrusters kicked in and they hauled ass away from the Earth. Once out of the atmosphere, they accelerated even faster. The earth fell away so quickly it felt like a video montage.

“Is this for real?” Jon asked.

“Yeah,” one of the men said. “I am Jim Gonner, by the way. This is Tanya Alexander.”

Jon nodded. “I’m Jon...”

“Jon Harister,” Tanya said. “We know. You probably shouldn’t say anything else until after the interview.”

“Interview?” Jon asked. “Or interrogation? If you intend to torture me, I had three sisters. You’re not going to get anything from me.”

“We don’t torture people,” Tanya laugh.

“Yeah, right,” Jon said. “You’re telling me that wasn’t your people who shot me full of dope, robbed me, and left me for dead.”

“That wasn’t our people,” Tanya said.

“Are you British?” Jon asked.

“No, I am just using this accent to confuse you more,” Tanya said.

Droya laughed. Jon leaned over and looked at her.

“Seriously, Jon,” Droya said. “You don’t think the Americans own the moon, do you?”

“We don’t?” Jon asked.

“Aren’t you more curious about the fact we’re off Earth, and yet, you still feel gravity?” Droya asked.

“No, because I really don’t believe we left Earth,” Jon said.

“Unbuckle,” Tanya invited.

“Oh, please don’t,” Jim said.

“It’s his first time,” Tanya said.

“If he throws up, you’re cleaning it,” Jim said, going to his seat and strapping in.

“Sam, would you turn off G’s?” Tanya asked.

“Seriously?” Sam yelled back.

“Our guest need’s convincing,” Tanya said.

“Every time we go zero g, my hair gets a static charge,” Sam yelled back. “I don’t want frizzy hair.”

“Come on, it’s his first time,” Tanya said.

“If he vomits back there, you’re cleaning it,” Sam yelled back.

Jim smiled at Tanya. “If he throws up, I am going to throw up,” Jim said.

“Zero in four,” Sam said. “Thrusters off. Three, two, one, and grid off.”

Jon lifted out of his seat and his eyes went wide. He couldn’t help but grab the seat in front of him. It was a reflex he didn’t know he had. Tanya and Droya’s hair lifted, too.

“Okay, so we’re like in a vomit jet, and we’re going to roll out in like thirty seconds,” Jon said.

“Okay,” Tanya said.

“Jon, this is for real,” Droya said.

“I am convinced we’re flying,” Jon said.

“What would it take to convince you?” Tanya asked.

“Show me the moon,” Jon said.

“Sam, can we come up?” Tanya asked.

“How’s he look?” Sam yelled back.

Tanya looked to Jim. Jim shrugged. “He’s holding,” Tanya said.

“Come on, then,” Sam said.

“You two are both violating protocols,” Jim said.

“Like he’s going to remember it,” Tanya said.

Tanya gave Jon a little help getting to the flight deck. Samantha invited him to sit in a seat. “Can I have gravity back, please?”

“Sure,” Jon said.

Sam threw a couple switches and a computer screen showed the grid being charged. Gravity returned in steps. Out the window, hardly larger than a basketball, was the target. The moon was growing larger even as they looked at it.

“I’d thought it be bigger,” Jon said.

“Seeing it through the atmosphere distorts it, especially if it’s on the horizon, because the brain artificially inflates the size,” Sam said.

“Yeah, the optical illusion theory,” Jon said. “I don’t buy it.”

“Why not?” Tanya asked.

“Please, don’t ask him,” Sam said. “Next thing he’ll be wanting to tell us about flat earth.”

“No, I am not a flat earther,” Jon said. “But seriously, if it’s an optical illusion that it’s bigger, and my brain is distorting it’s size, how come when I draw it I get all the fine details just as accurate as when I look through a telescope?”

“Oh, I don’t know, maybe your brain sees more than you think you see,” Sam said.

Jon nodded. “I believe that,” he said.

“Eagle 4, please begin your deceleration,” came a voice over the radio.

Sam pointed warningly at Jon, and then put a finger to her lip. “Copy that, Alpha. We’ll making an atypical approach. Decelerating with forward rockets only.”

“Explain the break in protocol,” came the voice over the radio. It was female.

“Um, yeah, I am simulating main engines out,” Goldwater said. “Thought I should practice.”

“You have a passenger,” the voice said.

“I do. That’s usually when things go wrong, so why not add to the simulation,” Goldwater said, grimacing at Tanya.

“Approach scenario approved,” Alpa said. “Your performance will be graded.”

Goldwater mouthed the words ‘fuck.’ She increased the outputs of her forward rockets. The moon was growing ever faster and it completely filled the view ports, the terrain rocketing by below them before there was evidence that they were slowing. Sam gave the craft a slight nose down attitude so Jon could see the moon. His eyes were definitely big and he was holding on to the arm of his chairs with white knuckles. Tanya was standing behind the chair Jon was sitting in, leaning into it. She glanced at Sam nodding towards his fingers. She smiled, knowingly. They slowed ever further and more details of the surface became apparent. They passed over a crater that was enclosed with a transparent ceiling. He presumed a glass ceiling. If it hadn’t been for a misplaced rock, hovering, he might assume it was simply opened to the vacuum of space in defiance of his understanding. Down in the crater there was a lake and people playing.

“Fuck me!” Jon said.

“That’s crater lake,” Sam said. “Most of the craters around alpha have ceilings and have become recreational parks.”

“The alleged domes on the moon?” Jon asked.

“They’re there,” Sam said.

“Ours? Aliens?” Jon asked.

“Yep,” Sam said.

Jon looked at her.

“Yep, what?” Jon asked.

“There are active alien bases on the moon. There are two active human bases on the moon. There are remnants of past aliens structures on the moon. There is evidence that humans were previously on the moon,” Sam said.

Jon looked at Tanya and Sam. “You’re telling me this because...”

“We haven’t shared anything you haven’t already said on your ‘youtube’ channel,” Tanya said.

“Yeah, but, this is all real?!” Jon said. “And, you all are in cahoots with the aliens.”

“It’s much more complicated than that,” Tanya said.

Jon swallowed. “You’re going to kill me?”

“We don’t do that,” Sam said.

“But you are going to wipe my memory or something,” Jon said.

“Most people choose that option,” Tanya said.

“I will never choose to have my memory wiped,” Jon said.

Jon turned back to the window and tried to take in as much as he can. If he was going to have his memory wiped, he wanted to make sure there was enough fragments that something would get through. Forward motion stopped and their ship descended straight down to what might look like any normal tarmac on Earth. A 'jet-bridge' extended out towards the ship.

"Come on," Tanya said.

"Thanks for not vomiting," Sam said.

Chapter 5

Jim and Tony accompanied Jon and Droya down the jet-bridge into the first room. Here they were asked to undress, their clothes taken, and they were placed in separate shower like stalls where they were cleaned by water, air, and lights. He waited for the door to open, and when it did, it opened on the other side from the one in which he had entered. Tanya was there, she motioned for him to come out. She provided him attire that was similar to hers, only there was no colors added to his sleeve or collar. He dressed and found them to be a perfect fit.

“Seriously, bell bottoms?” Jon asked.

“Would you prefer the kilt option,” Tanya asked.

“No. Where is Droya?” Jon asked.

“She is okay,” Tanya said, placing a chipped badge on his shirt. The badge, which was as about as solid as Starbuck’s card, illuminated and re-organized itself. Earth, North American, Civilian. It stuck to the outfit as if it were attached by Velcro. “This way.”

Tanya led him down a corridor opened a door and asked him to go in. Jon looked before entering. The room was purposely stark, predominantly white, like a clean room. There was a table and four chairs. The walls seemed solid. There were no obvious camera placements. Tanya gave a hand gesture that she wanted him to go in.

“Please,” Tanya said.

“What is your function here?” Jon asked.

Tanya smiled. “My expertise is in sociology, however my skillsets are sufficiently diversified that I am capable of multitasking,” she explained. “Everyone assigned to Alpha has a primary function and a back-up function. This is not a retirement home. Please, wait in here. Someone will be with you shortly.”

Jon considered his position. Raising a ruckus wasn’t going to change his position or alter what was to come. He saw no reason to be mean to Tanya, or defiant. Even if the people here meant him harm, it didn’t mean they were bad or this place was bad. Even if the overall system was bad, it didn’t mean the individual’s that comprised the system was bad. People sometimes forgot that when simplifying problem sets down to their apparent absolute essence. Sam had said it right on the ship, ‘it’s not that simple.’ It rarely is.

“It’s okay,” Tanya said, touching his arm.

Jon nodded and entered the room. The door closed behind him. The room was silent. He touched the wall and began walking around the room, dragging his fingers. He paused, flattening his hand against the wall. Even though there wasn’t an obvious two way glass here, he felt as if there were and there were people on the immediate opposite side, observing him. He looked at the wall, but his eyes indicated he was looking beyond it. He imagined one of the observers saying, ‘that’s creepy.’ ‘Maybe he can actually see us,’ her colleague said. ‘No way,’ she said. ‘Those Stargate people could,’ he said. ‘He’s not a trained psychic working for the CIA,’ she argued. ‘Maybe he’s a natural,’ the other said. If he believed his imagination, he was seeing the monitors the observers had access to; they were recording him from all six position, four walls, the ceiling and the floor. There were monitors that showed the whole room, and some that confined the image to just Jon. They had access to biometrics.

Jon grew bored with the flow of the imagined conversation. He shifted his eyes back to the room and continued to walk around. The walls were flawless. He completed a circuit, took a chair out for Loxy, who wasn't there, but figured if she showed up, he wanted a place for her to sit. He then climbed up on the table and sat in a lotus pose, facing the perceived observation 'window.' He closed his eyes. He imagined a bet being exchange. Tanya was in the room, sitting. "I told you he wouldn't say something cliché like 'let me out,' or 'you can't keep me here, I know my rights.' 'The Americans always say that.' 'He's different.'

"You okay?"

It was Loxy voice. With his eyes closed, he could see her in the room. He could interact with her.

"Do you suppose they're monitoring me telepathically?" Jon asked.

"I doubt it," Loxy said. She leaned into him. "But if you want to mess with them, we could have sex. Sex always distracts a telepath."

"We could," Jon agreed. "Right here on the table or just in my brain?"

"You know as well as I do, what happens in your brain has a corresponding effect on the body," Loxy said.

Jon nodded.

"Rants work to block unwanted telepathic eavesdropping. You're pretty good ranting," Loxy said.

"It's been a long day," Jon said. "Not really feeling up to a rant."

"I could stir it up," Loxy said.

"You are particularly good at motivating me," Jon said.

"Let's discuss The Last Jedi," Loxy said.

"Fuck, no, I don't want to rant and be angry," Jon said.

"We could discuss the disparity in treatment of sexual offenses," Loxy said. "Like how the Me2 movement never pursues offenses made by lawyers."

That got Jon's mind whirling. Lawyers sexually harass and fuck more clients than doctors or counselors combined, but if a doctor or counselor gets caught fucking a client, they lose their license and go to jail. If a lawyer does it, they keep working. If a policeman rapes a woman he pulls over for a traffic violation, at worse it is called 'abuse of power,' not rape, and he gets a suspension. If he gets fired, he can easily get another job in another county, because the offense doesn't follow him. The same thing happens with gym teachers. They rape their students, but because people are so obsessed with winning the Olympic, they don't fire the coaches. Worst case scenario is they get fired, no jail, just fired, but they simply get rehired somewhere else because other schools are interested in getting their students to the Olympics, and having the prestige of coach who has a record of gold is too alluring to pass up. No one asks, 'why were you let go?' They just ask, how many 'students went to gold.' Some coaches have been fired from dozen of positions due to allegations, but because each consecutive job hasn't conferred with the other, the chain evidence doesn't rise to a sufficient level not to hire a person.

"Seriously," Jon thought. "I don't want to be angry. We're on the moon. Maybe we're better people on the moon."

"Jon, it's not about better. People are people, and if we don't address our issues on the ground, they're still issues when we're in the clouds," Loxy said.

‘Fair enough,’ Jon resigned, even as the door opened and someone entered. Consciously, he knew someone had entered due to the sound of the door and boots on the floor, but it took Loxy announcing her presence before he responded to the person. Jon opened his eyes. He didn’t question that Loxy called her a ‘her’ before he had visual contact. Maybe she was wearing a scent that Jon hadn’t detected. Maybe men and women walk differently when they walk and the brain can distinguish between the two. He didn’t question how his subconscious knew things that he didn’t. It had taken years of practice to trust it enough that it was reliable. Serious practice, because his conscious mind had fought the idea tooth and nail. ‘You’re not psychic,’ he had told himself. ‘You’re right,’ he had argued back. “I’m not psychic, but there is information available if I listen, and the subconscious sees more and hears more, and it can inform me of the things I miss. That’s its function. Trust the subconscious is doing its job. We’re a team.’ The frown on his face was due to the tangent he was trying to hold at bay. If she interpreted the frown for her, he didn’t notice because he was struggling to stay present, not scared, not angry, just present.

“She’s cute,” Loxy said.

Jon’s eyes diverted to Loxy’s eyes for just a moment, a warning glance.

“I’m Doctor Helena Russell,” she said. “Is there something wrong with the chairs?”

Jon got up from the table and Russell invited him to sit. He did and she sat opposite of him.

“I need to ask you a few questions,” Russell said.

“I can save you some time,” Jon said. “I am a 50 year old Caucasian male, married to Droya. As a child, I was diagnosed with ADHD and Oppositional Defiance Disorder. As an adult, I have been diagnosed with bipolar, but I suspect it was a misdiagnosis because they failed to account for symptoms consistent with PTSD. As an adult, I have never taken psychotropics. I know ODD is only applicable for children and adolescents, but I’d like to point out it was the wrong diagnosis.” The ODD label still bothered him. Even knowing it was no longer a valid diagnosis, because it isn’t applicable as an adult, because adults are free to be disagreeable, but it still provoked him. Running away because you’re getting beat, or because your mother is encouraging you to walk out in traffic and save the family some trouble, wasn’t ODD. That was discernment, not defiance. He swallowed, ‘not angry, past is past.’ “That said, I can make an argument for past chronic, situational dysthymia with intermittent episodes of Major Depression. I am not presently sad, depressed, angry, or experiencing mania, though my present situation has certainly given me an overall boost in mood. I am not delusional, experiencing grandeur, or paranoia, though I admit I think you guys are fucking with me on purpose. Seriously, I am being detained on the moon; how can one not have some, non-clinical levels of paranoia?! I am not suicidal. I have attempted once, 2006. I did not report nor seek medical attention. I put a gun to my head, pulled the trigger, it misfired. It was a revolver and I pulled the trigger six times, and not one went off. Interestingly, it discharged into the Earth when I pointed it away. You may choose to be skeptical if you wish, but why make up a story like that? I am also not homicidal. I may sometimes experience anger and get loud and rant, but I am not a person who is prone to violence, despite the fact I have one assault charge on my record. Yes, I hit a woman, in self-defense, but I still lost because her injury was greater than mine. As for my medical records, well, I am sure you downloaded that, but in case you want to hear it from me, I had chronic asthma as a child, which mysteriously cleared up when I ran away from home, so I suspect many

of my childhood episodes were psychosomatically induced to get away from family and go somewhere safe, like the emergency room. Seriously, family interaction patterns at the emergency room is completely different than how it is at home, behind closed doors. Oh, probably skipping some boxes. If you want to know about my life prior to 24/7 live cam feeds, well, my childhood sucked ass. One mother, three sisters. There was physical, mental, emotional, and sexual abuse, and you will see my reports throughout my files, up until age 12, when I learned to stop reporting because it just made life more difficult. It is funny how many male therapists and CPS agents will side with a mom or older sister for a good fuck. But when my youngest sister reported mom's boyfriend was fucking her, CPS shut that shit down without question. So, yeah, if you detect a little anger in my voice from time to time, well, it's because I struggle recalling that life without time traveling, but I am not that life or that person. Do I suffer from anxiety? Who the fuck doesn't? Ignoring past, just consider the present state of affairs of the world. Fukushima is still dumping radiation into the ocean. Seriously, when are they going to get around to fixing that shit? Oh, and you just added to that rant. And just in case you think this is pressured speech, let me remind you: We're on the fucking moon?! Don't you have some tech to help that situation in Japan?"

Loxy coughed. Jon stopped speaking. Loxy was sitting in the chair he had pulled out for her, and seemed to be amused. "Nice rant," she said.

Russell blinked, smiled, politely. "You left one off."

Jon nodded. "Am I hearing things or seeing things that no one else can hear or see?" Jon asked.

"Yes," Russell said.

Jon smiled.

"Do I need to ask the question before you'll answer?" Russell asked. "Or, do I need to put in my file that I suspect psychosis."

"I am not a harm to myself or others," Jon said.

"Not the question," Russell said.

"No. We're done playing. Here's what has to happen," Jon said. "I need to speak..."

"To the man in charge?" Russell asked. "How is that not delusion of grandeur?"

Jon narrowed his eyes. "I don't want to speak to the man in charge," Jon said, wondering why she would say that. "I need to speak with Victor Bergman. I don't know what it is you guys are letting him do, but you're about to make the biggest scientific mistake of your entire careers which will severely alter the course of humanity and life on earth and I seriously hope it's not some dumb ass shit like storing spent nuclear rods on the moon. Seriously, if you need to get rid of toxic waste, just send it into the sun. Clearly, if you can bring it to the moon, you can shoot that shit straight into the sun where it will evaporate before it even reaches the surface and be blown out into space. Fuck, I don't have a degree and I can figure that shit out. Or how about the fact you dumbasses allowed the Columbia astronauts to die because you only had two space suits and couldn't get them safely to the space station. Two people go over, one person comes back with an empty suit. Repeat until all are off the shuttle! Tadaa! Like magic. And don't give me that crap that the space station couldn't handle the extra people. Send a fucking Soyuz up and rescue their asses. You hear that, Victor! You're going to fuck this up, just like you did in 1975!"

"Who is this Victor?" Russell asked.

“Oh, please,” Jon said, standing up. He walked over to the wall and knocked on it.
“Victor Bergman, you and I need to talk. It’s why I am here!”

An electronic chirp drew Jon’s attention back to Russell. She removed a device from her belt and answered it. Jon could discern the image of a man on the end of the device.

“Bring him to the conference room,” the man imaged on the device said.

“Of course,” Russell answered.

The image went away, leaving what look like a miniature glossy television tube. She stood, placing the item back on her belt.

“What is that?” Jon asked.

“What does it look like?” Russell said.

“It looks like the clunky, first cell phone from the 80’s,” Jon said. “Please tell me the technological state of the art on the moon has advanced past rotary phones.”

“Dilophosaurus,” Loxy said.

Jon laughed out loud, turned to Loxy as if he was mad at her. “What?” Loxy asked. “That was funny.”

“Back to my question you avoided,” Russell said.

“I am not hearing voices telling me to kill myself or others,” Jon said.

“You seem to be responding to internal stimuli,” Russell said.

Jon bit his lip and tried to focus. “Sometimes I just crack myself up.”

“Come on,” Russell said.

Jon followed her, glancing back at Loxy and then quickly back in the direction he was walking. Russell had glanced back at him and had caught him doing the double take off Loxy, or from her perspective, no one. He knew Loxy was following him because he could hear her making comments on things. He was secretly agreeing with her observations. ‘Did we time warp to the seventies?’ A girl in a silvery dress, as if it were made of an emergency thermal blanket, caught his attention. She had a Farah haircut. Loxy drew closer to him.

“Yeah, I would, too,” Loxy said, speaking what he was thinking in his ear. They were both doing a double take, but only Jon got caught by Russell.

Other people, those in uniform, also carried the clunky cellphone like device. To distract himself, he started a conversation: “Seriously, Doctor Russell, why aren’t you using regular cell phones or better?” Jon asked.

“You’d be surprised how much of the moon base operation is based on what you would call low tech,” Russell said. “You mean like computers with reel to reel magnetic tapes?”

“Yep, still got them, they’re still functioning,” Russell said.

“Seriously?” Jon asked.

“Yeah, in the basement. Earth didn’t want them back,” Russell said.

“I suppose you use brooms and mops, too,” Jon said.

“It’s healthy for people to participate in cleaning their environment, and brooms and mops are great tech,” Russell said. “Seriously, Jon. Some things can’t be improve upon. That said, this device is actually more complicated than a cell phone, so don’t let its bulk fool you into believing its old or outdated.”

“Okay, explain why the flight deck on the craft that brought me looks like you are still using apple computers straight from Bill Gate’s garage,” Jon said. She gave him a sudden sharp

look that made him regret his rant, as he probably just got Sam, Jim, and Tanya in trouble. He decided to rant on to distract her from the point. “I mean, why wouldn’t the tech here be more sophisticated than what the general public has access to?”

“Why does the Aviation industry still insist on using magnetos to power reciprocating engines when there is a better solution?” Russell asked.

Jon was sorting the question and possible answers when they arrived at conference room. There was man standing near a large plate glass window, looking out over the barren terrain of the moon. The sunlight reflecting off the moon offered the only light in the room. The man turned and faced Jon and Russell. He appraised Jon silently. There was a hint of compassion in the look, but a no nonsense resolve to get to the heart of a matter. This man was an intellectual. He was not the brash young man one might find in the daring Captain Kirk. He was more a Picard, if you needed a Trek comparison.

“You’re not Victor Bergman,” Jon stated simply.

“No, Mr. Harister, I am not,” he said. “My name is John Koenig. I am the ninth commander of Moon base Alpa. I know that you have a million questions, but I am up against a wall and don’t have time to re-educate you to the reality you’ve just entered. I don’t have time to hold your hand as you navigate through all the emotions that will invariably come when you realize that the social paradigm within which you have lived your entire life is a fiction. I don’t have time explain why it is so and why it must remain in place for the time being. Come here, take a closer look.”

Jon approached the large plate glass window and stared out at the moon. He saw an Eagle, just the forward section, go by, accelerating away so fast that it became a point of light that just blinked off. He now understood the modular construction of what he had flown in, and how versatile they must be.

“What do you see?” Koenig asked.

“The moon,” Jon said. “Based on the lighting and practically no shadows, I would say the sun is directly overhead. Yet, on Earth it was Waxing quarter... Oh! We’re somewhere on the terminating line of what might be considered the line between the visible and far side of the moon.”

“Nice,” Koenig said. “Tell me more.”

“I can’t make out any stars,” Jon said. “Which makes sense, as we can’t see the stars during the day.”

“Correct,” Koenig said. “Anything else?”

Jon drew closer to the window. It took a moment, but there was a slight fluorescing of light, a shimmer he could only detect when he moved. It was as if light was refracting through a crystal in the distance. The dome! He couldn’t see it at first because he was looking at the surface and because, it was so unexpectedly huge! But once he saw it, he couldn’t not see it! He pushed up against the glass trying to see beyond the confines of his space.

“Better than Jim C Clarke’s monolith?” Koenig asked.

Jon turned to Koenig, tear in his eyes. “Why the secrecy?”

“We could spend months sorting through it all, Jon,” Koenig said. “Humans have been in space since World War Two. World War Two didn’t end on Earth. One might argue it’s still going on, as the splintered factions have spread throughout the solar system, and beyond. Earth

is supposed to be neutral, but the cabals are still vying for power and control. Moon base Alpha is the only place where humanity holds a moratorium against political and economic games. The humans residing here are from every nation, representatives if you will, that are waiting, watching, for a decision to be made on Earth as to how humanity will proceed.”

“So, you’re neutral?” Jon asked. “You can’t be neutral. You didn’t build this facility with UN funding. Wait a minute. Is this where that 6.5 trillion dollars went that US military can’t account for?”

“We are not neutral. We are operating presently under the United Nations Charter, but the biggest reasons why this base is mostly neutral is because it was the only condition in which the others would allow us to be here,” Koenig said.

“Others,” Jon echoed. “Aliens! I want to meet them.”

“We tend to keep to ourselves,” Koenig said. “There are five distinct races on the moon, six if you count humans. Some are more agreeable than others. The peace has been maintained due to a very delicate balance of power. In addition to the five species holding bases on the moon, there are a dozen other bases on earth, representing species from halfway across the galaxy. Some further. Some that don’t even come from local space-time.”

Jon went and sat down. He was moved to tears. Russell and Koenig sat as well. Koenig pulled his chair closer, put elbows on his knees and leaned in.

“Tell me what you are thinking,” Koenig asked more than said.

“I am sorry I got angry,” Jon said.

“It’s what we do,” Koenig said. “I suspect, given the present circumstances, you’re operating within normal parameters.”

“I, I, I,” Jon struggled to form a sentence. He doubled down on trying to focus. “I know you know more than me. I know that I lack understanding in this. I can’t even pretend to understand all the social nuances that allow for you to exist here and the reality I considered normal to exist on Earth there...” He blinked. Sorting even that statement and how every social paradigm outside of the US was just as alien as being on the moon is the equivalent of going to another planet, might offer a contextual explanation that could allow him to accept this situation without anger.

“But?” Russell asked.

Jon met her eyes, tracked back to Koenig and then back to her. Something exchanged between them, and this new tangent allowed him to access one of the reasons he was struggling. “There is overwhelming evidence for UFO’s and aliens in history and yet, anytime a person like me tries to point it out, we get squashed, or labeled crazy!” Jon brought his hands up, as if he were Italian struggling with words. “I am not crazy,” Jon said.

“You’re not crazy,” Koenig said.

“But the world would have me believe...” Jon said, stopped his thoughts. He could get stuck there. That paradigm was no longer valid. He could accept and adept, or he could put the blinders own and refuse to see reality. And this is what he had always wanted. He met Koenig’s eyes. “We’re not alone.”

“We are not,” Koenig agreed. “But you knew that, didn’t you. Earlier today you were showcasing a technology. Where did you get it?”

“Oh, Fuck!” Jon said. “I have to speak to Victor.”

“How did you know he was here?” Koenig asked.

“I was told if I took the device and showed it at a certain time and place, I would be brought to Victor and given an opportunity to save humanity,” Jon said.

Koenig looked to Russell. She gave him one of those looks that suggested she was undecided.

“Look, I know I sound crazy. But this is not schizophrenia. It’s not bipolar,” Jon said. “I am not any more narcissistic than the average American. I am not holding bizarre thoughts of grandeur where I think I am the enlightened one and am trying to establish a cult following me into the start a new religion. I didn’t want to do this. I rebelled and protested as best I could, but in the end, when the gods call you, you answer.”

“What do you know about Victor?” Koenig asked.

Jon sorted. “I didn’t know anything about him. Even after I stumbled upon his name, I found he is an impossible man to research. However, I was motivated by some boredom one day, helping a neighbor clean an attic, and I stumbled upon a stack of old newspapers. Dallas Morning News: Monday, January 25, 1965. The paper cost 5 cents. The main headline read: ‘Winston Churchill, Britain’s leader during her finest Hour, dies at 90.’ I deliberated over that for like an hour before I figured out it wasn’t a misuse of a pronoun, but I seriously thought they were implying Churchill was female. I read the paper and came across this article about Bergman being one of youngest, most brilliant NASA scientist at the time. In the stack of papers, 1975, was another article about Bergman being dismissed from NASA. Apparently, he was held responsible for an accident that caused a multi-million dollar satellite to blow up. This satellite was to be deployed following the launches of the Apollo and Soyuz, on July 15. The Russians and the Americans were supposed to have been situated to witness what was expected to be a complete revolutionary way to get into space. When it failed, they went with the backup mission parameters to link two nation’s ships at an orbit of 229-kilometers.”

“All of that was in the paper?” Koenig asked.

“No, just the Apollo Soyuz launch, and the report of Bergman being let go following an incident that resulted in the loss of the satellite,” Jon said. “There is nothing about the actual mission in writing. The actual mission was to place the satellite in a temporal field. The energetic field was supposed to cause the satellite to temporary phase out of space-time and when it phased back, due to the Earth moving at what, a million miles a minute, the satellite would have re-appeared in Earth’s orbit. The experiment was a success in that it relocated the satellite. It was a failure in the sense that they, NASA, lost the satellite. Bergman’s dismissal and the explosion of a Saturn 5 rocket was either a cover story, or a way of disseminating information to whoever it is that is tracking the real space missions, and not the fake missions that is the dog and pony show that the world is force fed.”

“And what do you think happened to the satellite?” Koenig asked.

“I know what happened to it,” Jon said. “It was relocated to another solar system in the Andromeda Galaxy.”

“You have proof?” Koenig said.

“The fact that I know about Bergman and this secret project to travel by warping space/time isn’t enough to impress you?” Jon asked.

“I am listening to you, aren’t I?” Koenig asked.

“I don’t have proof. I did have proof. Aliens contacted me through a representative who introduced herself to me as Isis and she gave me the device I showcased at the tech show,” Jon said.

“They gave it to you?” Koenig said. “Gave it to you how?”

“Through a telepathic download,” Jon said. “This was before AI Dominance, before I started broadcasting 24/7. Through simple instructions provided by the benefactor, I used a neural net head gear used for a neurofeedback device, hooked it to a three-D printer, and created the artifacts from scratch, entangling the internal structures of the artifact so that they would be integrally linked.”

“So, you could make another set?” Koenig said.

“You don’t have them?” Jon asked.

“We didn’t steal them, Jon. That was one of the cabals. Tanya identified you on an internet search algorithm that was looking for alien tech, and she tuned in right before the cabals killed the live feed. She then tracked you using satellite technology, and it was she that saved your life. We got to you as fast we could,” Koenig said. “Can you make another set or share the instructions?”

“I don’t know,” Jon said, considering. “It’s been a long time since I did that, and you know how memory changes over time. Then again, that experience was probably the clearest memory I have in my head, maybe because it was given to me instead of created. It is my opinion that I remember that incident better than I have ever remembered anything in my entire life.”

Koenig stood up. When he stood up, so did Russell. “Alright, come with me.”

“You believe me?” Jon asked.

“Yes,” Koenig said.

“Seriously?” Jon asked. “Are you insane?”

“Are you lying?” Koenig asked.

“No! But that’s not the point,” Jon said.

“Did you ever read Tesla’s reports that he believed he was contacted by aliens?” Koenig asked.

“Yes, but…” Jon said.

“There is more life in the Universe than anyone could have ever imagined. Lots of humans have been contacted over the years, Jon. Some of these contacts seem to be good, some not so good, but most the time, they’re innocuous, just explorers using consciousness to understand reality by randomly checking in from remote locations. The Sol system, the Earth, is considered one of the most primitive, wild places in the local territories, but because we are also conveniently located midway between several civilizations, we get a lot more traffic. Humans think they’re the only ones because of poor education. People think they own the Earth, but they don’t. It’s our home, but it’s doesn’t belong solely to use. We don’t own the moon and stars, either. We are allowed, invited and encouraged even, to be here if we play by the rules,” Koenig said.

“What rules? Who’s rules?” Jon asked.

“One giant step at a time, Sir,” Koenig said. “Come with me.”

Jon stood. He wanted more, but he decided to trust in the flow. He was on the moon! There were aliens. He nodded, he was ready for whatever was next, and followed Koenig and Russell to a 'tram station' where they took a tube transport to a distant location from the base. Jon was again entranced by the size of the lunar artifact. He wanted to go there. Below, people, presumably humans, worked in bulky orange space suits, but perhaps not as bulky as the suits worn by the Apollo astronauts. They passed through a dome constructed by humans. Comparing the dome and the artifact, one could easily discern the ones that were engineered and constructed by humans. His first thought was that the artifact seemed as if it were grown, to which Loxy agreed, coming in close to him, arm around his back.

"You okay?" Loxy asked.

He nodded. He didn't care if Koenig or Russell witnessed or suspected more.

"How many people... Um, how many humans are on the moon?" Jon asked.

"In the 1970's, we maintained about 300 people," Koenig said. Loxy said 'Very Spartan of you,' to which Jon smiled. "Since 1999, there have been 40,000 people permanently living and working on the moon."

"How do I sign up for this?" Jon said.

Koenig didn't respond.

They passed over two craters, both covered by transparent material so that the crater itself could be pressurized. The tube they were in was transparent, and when they went over the cliff, it produced a fear in Jon that they might fall. His thought was that they should be falling into the crater. Below, in the crater, were gardens, trees, people and animals. It looked like a paradise. In some ways, Jon felt as if he were in the fictitious world of Logan's Run, in the midst of a utopian society living under domes. He wondered what the catch was. There was always a catch! With the exception of Star Trek, there was always a catch. Star Trek was the only utopian vision of the future, but even that was ruined after Roddenberry died. When Rick Berman took over, he pushed his more pessimistic view. Even the latest reboots by JJ Abrams had succumbed to the pessimistic paradigm of modern culture at the time. Kirk and Spock disenfranchised from society to make them more relatable to the public and having them both brooding over quitting Star Fleet! That was not Gene's world. The tube car slowed as they approached a building surrounded by tarmac. On the tarmac, technicians in spacesuits worked on a satellite system that was on a pedestal. The tube car came to a rest inside the building. They exited and Jon followed them to a laboratory, with a dozen people working around various stations. Victor was leaning over the desk, talking with someone. He reminded Jon of the old, ghost sailor in the movie, 'the Ghost and Mrs. Muir.'

Bergman noticed Koenig, smiled, standing, and then noticed Jon. His smile went to a frown.

"I don't have time for this, John," Bergman said.

"I want you to make time," Koenig said. "Hear his story."

Bergman nodded to his left, and he and Koenig withdrew a pace to have a private consult. Russell stepped up a little closer to Jon.

"How you holding up?" Russell asked him.

"Jon?" Loxy said, at the same time. He wasn't sure which conversation to track, but Loxy was calling for his attention, and she usually won out over 'real' people. She seemed concerned

so he tracked her eyes to determine what she was focused on. He had long since stopped trying to figure out if he was seeing something subconsciously and she was merely pointing out what he was ignoring, or if she had more sense of his environment than he did. "They're doing it again."

Jon felt dizzy as he was taking it all in, catching up to speed with what Loxy was tracking. Host to Tulpa communication felt 'telepathic,' but it was probably not, but it was definitely parallel processing of two personalities with independent but complementary strengths.

"You morons!" Jon shouted. This certainly didn't gain him any friends, but it got their attention. "You don't even understand the nature of your mistake and you're re-engaging the experiment?!"

Koenig and Bergman ended their private conversation and returned to Jon. Jon now had full command of the room, as everyone in the room was now looking at him. He didn't care. He was shaking. It didn't feel like anger or fear, but whatever it was, he was feeling it.

"Jon," Koenig said.

"You got to shut this down!" Jon insisted.

"Jon, it's already started, they can't shut it down," Loxy said.

Jon turned back to Loxy. "What do you mean they can't shut it down!" he snapped at her. "It has an on/off button, doesn't it?!"

"Are you hallucinating?" Bergman asked.

"Are you in contact with your alien representative now?" Koenig asked.

"John! Don't feed his delusion," Bergman said. "You've seen his play-list. 'The moon is hollow.' 'The moon is a spaceship.'

"There has never been a satisfactory scientific explanation for the Earth moon presence or how perfectly it fits in terms of ratio from earth to sun," Jon said.

"A Mars size planet hit the earth and the moon was the result," Bergman said.

"Seriously, if that were true, why is Earth doesn't have a lunar ring, as opposed to one moon? Seriously, Saturn as a ring. There's an asteroid that a ring, but something slams into the earth and makes a nice size moon, but doesn't leave other debris in orbit? What's the number one problem with space travel today? Getting past all the junk that's in orbit because it stays up there so damn long. But, that's the other point. What goes up must come down, right? So, explain the lack of moon rocks on the earth? Science has found a total 17 pounds of moon meteorites. And yet, it's the closest object, supposedly made physical contact with us, supposedly gets bombarded by other rocks and asteroids, at least based on the crater evidence, and yet we have more Mars meteorites in our hands than moon meteorites?! Explain that common sense shit? Explain how processed metals like brass and mica were found on the moon? Explain how Uranium 236 and Neptunium 237, elements that have never been found to occur naturally, are found on the surface of the moon? The only way I know to get Neptunium is to build nuclear power plants. It's the byproduct of making Plutonium. Show me the power plants, Victor."

"Jon," Koenig said.

Jon pointed at him. "Oh, don't 'Jon' me like you know me. I supposed it's just another coincidence that what was left of this so called collision was the perfect size object in the perfect sized orbit for the perfect solar eclipse, as well as resulting in biological harmonization of only one earth species, the human menstrual cycle," Jon said.

“Other species menstruate,” Bergman said.

“Yes, the bat, and the elephant shrew,” Jon said. “I read that, too, Sir. Just saying, there are anomalies that don’t make sense...”

“Commander,” Bergman complained. “He is not a scientist. He barely literate. You can’t expect to have a rational conversation with him.”

Even as Berman was complaining to Koenig, Loxy was getting in Jon’s face trying to get him to list to her. Loxy explained: “Jon, this teleporter is like a giant capacitor. It’s basically a superconducting capacitor. They have been feeding it energy building up the charge. Eventually, that charge will have to be released.”

Jon shifted his eyes past Loxy. “Can you bleed off the charge from the superconducting coils?” Jon asked Bergman.

“Well, it’s more complicated than that,” Bergman said, not necessarily admitting to anything particular, but when engaged in a scientific query, he went to his first response. He stopped. “How did you know?”

An alarm on one of the stations started going off. Bergman went to investigate. Koenig went, too.

“Fuck, fuck, fuck,” Jon said.

“Calm down,” Russell told him. “They got this.”

“No they don’t! I failed. I am too late,” Jon said, not hysterical, but in tears.

“Jon, it’s okay,” Loxy said.

“How is this okay?” Jon demanded. “In what Universe is this okay?!”

“Jon, if it wasn’t okay, it couldn’t happen,” Loxy said.

“What do you mean too late?” Russell asked.

Jon marched right over to Bergman. Russell tried to stop him but he shrugged off her hand. “You shouldn’t have built a bigger one!” Jon said out loud. Bergman and Koenig were listening to him now. “You needed to build a smaller one. You overestimated the energy requirements the first time you did the experiment. You failed to discover your mistake in simple arithmetic, and you built a bigger fucking coil! How long have you been building this charge?!”

“Discharge it now,” Koenig said.

“No!” Jon and Bergman said. Jon added: “It’s too big.” Bergman said: “It’s insufficient.”

“Clear the people off the tarmac,” Koenig ordered. “And discharge the coil.”

“You’re making a seriously huge mistake,” Jon snapped.

“What happens if we don’t discharge?” Koenig asked Jon.

“Seriously? You’re talking to a lay person about science?” Bergman asked. “Next you be asking him to channel Tesla?!”

“He’d have a better solution set than you,” Jon snapped. He turned again to Loxy.

“Jon, not discharging it could result in an explosion large enough to take out Earth, Mars, and Venus,” Loxy said.

“Fuck!” Jon said, paling. “Discharge it now.”

“Do it,” Koenig ordered.

“It’s not ready...”

“Do it!” Koenig and Jon snapped.

“The tarmac is cleared, Sir,” an operator said.

“Discharge the coil,” Bergman said.

In the old science fiction movies, someone would have pulled a giant lever down into place using a great deal of weight and strength on the character’s part. It would be followed by an electric spark and a sharp report to indicate something tremendous had been done. In this reality, a tech raised the trigger guard and pushed the button.

The ‘moon’ went dark.

Chapter 6

Silenced rained. Jon roused, his head spinning. He struggled to sit up. He blinked. With the exception of one person who was asleep at his console, everyone was on the floor. The nearest person to him was Russell. He shook her. She roused, slowly, then grabbed his hand in urgency and sat up. She immediately went to Koenig, while simultaneously taking her 'commlock' device off her built. She called the computer and directed it to release an airborne stimulant. Koenig responded to her shaking him. He sat up forced himself to stand. Others began to respond.

Koenig took his own 'commlock' and put the station on red alert. "Paul?! Paul, are you there?!" Paul responded, groggy. "We were rendered unconscious." "I know. Put a man on the dead-man switch and activate Protocol Torchbearer. I want all department heads in the conference room stat."

Jon was drawn to the window. The artificial satellite was still on the tarmac.

"Fuck," Jon said.

"What's wrong?" Koenig asked.

"What do you see?" Jon asked.

A girl he would later learn was names Yasko said it for everyone. "It's dark."

Jon accompanied Koenig, Russell, and Yasko to the tube-car and they began the trip back to main complex. They were all mesmerized by the new stars. One particular, easily identifiable as the Cat's Eye Nebula, was prominent, as if it were actually an eye in the sky scrutinizing them.

"Maybe sometimes it is okay to listen to lay-non-scientist types," Jon said.

No one said anything. He heard Loxy's voice reprimanding him, "Don't be smug."

"How is that smug?" Jon asked. "I didn't say I told you so."

They looked at him.

"Sorry," Jon said.

They return to staring out into space in semi silence. Koenig's 'commlock' kept ringing. He put it on silence. The Doctor had already put hers own silent. She whispered into her device, 'You're just going have to handle it. I'm in transit.'

Again, everyone looked to Jon. Jon became aware that they were looking at him and only then did he realized he had started humming, the theme song to 'Lost in Space' out loud.

"Sorry," Jon said.

"Are you able to contact your representative?" Koenig asked Jon.

"It doesn't work like that," Jon said.

"How does it work?" Koenig asked.

"I do a lot of praying and mind-soul searching and sometimes I get an intelligible answer that seems to be in synchronicity with life," Jon said. "Rarely do I get burning bushes and lightening, but I when I do, it lights the world."

"Maybe you should start praying," Yasko said.

"Tad bit late for that," Jon said.

"It's never too late for prayer," Russell said.

Bergman was biting his thumbnail, staring into the eye of nebula. He wasn't suffering from any of the self-doubt that Jon would have experienced if he had fucked up this badly. He was simply curious, collecting data, and readjusting his internal formulas.

"Doctor?" Jon asked. Russell looked at him. "Have I been exposed to radiation?"

"Why..." Again, everyone was looking at him. His badge was glowing.

Koenig pulled off his 'commlock.' "Paul, re-do the Torchbearer Protocol."

"I can't. The computer has already executed the lottery and the person was accepted by the AI and the Others," Paul said.

"I won the lottery?" Jon asked, as the car pulled into the station.

"The statistical probability of him being chosen..." Bergman said.

"Yeah," Koenig said. "Paul, have Tanya meet me and the Doctor at the entrance to Underground with full gear."

"Jon, Russell, with me," Koenig said. "Victor, start the meeting, we'll be there shortly."

Yasko gave Jon a sympathetic look. He smiled at her, and might have lingered to admire her had Koenig not touched his arm to move him along. Loxy was amused by the exchange.

"Keep up," Koenig said.

"He's not prepared for this," Russell said.

"Something bad is about to happen to me, isn't it?" Jon asked.

Koenig stopped and faced him. "We have an arrangement with the Others," he said. "In the event of a situation, each will send a representative of their species to a meeting place. To improve the odds of neutrality, each representative will be selected at random by an independent AI system that communicates results to all the Other computer systems, which then locks in the selection."

"Well, that's stupid," Jon said. "Why am I in your system?"

"You're on the moon. You're a qualified representative," Koenig said.

"That's stupid! What if I were a moron?" Jon said.

"You'd still be a representative," Koenig said.

"What if I were a child?" Jon said.

"Every human above the age of 12 is a representative," Koenig said.

"Well, that's not just stupid," Jon said. "That's fucking stupid. What if I refuse to participate in whatever it is you're about to try and make me do?"

"Humanity takes a penalty and could be subject to martial law imposed by the Others," Russell said. "Or, worse. We're eradicated from the moon due to non-compliance with established protocols."

"Fuck," Jon said.

"Yeah, it's stupid, but it has kept the peace since the 1950's," Koenig said. He motioned Jon to walk. "There are an undisclosed number of species on the moon, but six specific groups with recognized sovereignty. There are the Greys, the Reptilians, the Tall Whites, the Nordics, the Pleiadian and the Andromedans."

"Seriously?" Jon said.

Koenig directed him through a door, past guards, and into a lift. They took the lift down. It accelerated downwards so fast they nearly came off the floor. Jon touched the wall for support. Loxy said, 'This is fun.' He frowned at her.

“Jon, I am sorry,” Koenig said. “I know you’re fifty years old, but you need to grow up and come out of your fantasy world.”

“Loxy isn’t a fantasy!” Jon said. “If you know the world paradigm is wrong, but you can’t get others to accept a new one, what do you do? Go to war? Seriously, what do you do? When you know the whole fucking system is bankrupt and your leaders obfuscate responsibility by having plausible deniability by bundling bills instead of voting on one bill at time, what do you do? What do you do when you know you’re being lied to and there are dozens of misinformation trails to follow, and people can’t even agree on the simple things like global warming, because the cabals pushing petroleum want to milk the world dry and take advantage of the fact the schools stopped teaching real math and real science in the 70’s because the public thought learning metrics was part of a one world government agenda? That, and if they taught real math people would know how badly we’re being fucked over. The places I go in my brain, they’re real. They’re realer than real. The people I meet in there are real. Whether you call it a placebo affect or psychologically induced somatic reactions, my inner worlds positively affects my physical health.”

“Mr. Harister,” Russell said. “I hear that you’re angry, but you can either be a victim here, or a survivor.”

“I am a survivor,” Jon said. “I have overcome more than your files on me could even hint at. But Loxy isn’t a fantasy. My adventures with her have better prepared me for what’s about to happen than anything Hollywood has turned out.”

“The fact that you reacted to me telling you to grow up suggests you can still be provoked by your old paradigm,” Koenig said.

Russell took over before Jon could respond. “Consider this analogy. If you accept parables as literal, then you’re going to struggle. If you accept them as metaphors and hold flexibility in your application of abstract knowledge, you will adapt faster to the changes you’re about to experience. Take everything you have ever known and simply use it as social navigational aids, but not social absolutes. Focus on navigating the social world in a way you would imagine a superior social beings would operate.”

Jon blinked. Wasn’t that what he had engaged in when he discovered Loxy?

“He’s not ready,” Koenig said.

“It’s what I was saying!” Russell snapped.

Engaging him through an abstraction had actually calmed him some; his brain was doing math, which slowed him down. “What happens if I mess this up?” Jon asked.

“Best case scenario,” Koenig said. “They suspend dialogue for a day and begin the process again 24 hours later.”

“That doesn’t sound too bad,” Jon said.

“Worst case,” Russell said. “One of the Others kills you. Probably the reptilians. They’re considered the second most aggressive species in the Galactic Federation.”

“There’s a Galactic Federation?” Jon asked.

“Yes,” Koenig said.

“You mean intergalactic, right?” Jon corrected. “The Andromedans are from another Galaxy.”

“Most the species in the Local Group are considered part of the Galactic Federation,” Koenig said. “There are sentient beings all over the galaxy, not in the local group that are not in the Galactic Federation.”

“Is the moon still located in the Local group?” Jon asked.

“Yes,” Koenig said. “The Cat’s Eye nebula is Local. I think.” He answered the look Russell gave him. “Relatively.” But back to Jon. “But good point. We continue to operate by the lunar laws regardless of where the moon resides.”

“If the Reptilians are considered the second most aggressive species, who’s the first?” Jon asked.

“We are,” Russell said.

“Oh,” Jon said.

“Anything else?” Koenig asked.

“How deep does this lift go?” Jon asked.

“Is that a metaphor?” Russell asked.

“Just trying to navigate,” Jon said.

The conversation lulled and they were quiet. The quiet was bothering Jon, and Loxy, aware of his growing anxiety, hugged him. She said: “Should have named me Alice.” Her eyes twinkled mischievously. He wanted to go there with her, but figured he should stay present.

“So, is the moon is hollow?” Jon asked.

“No,” Koenig said.

“How do you explain that holographic glitch moon wave front thing posted on Youtube a while back?” Jon asked.

“Some of the aliens use cloaking devices to hide their bases,” Koenig said.

“So, the moon isn’t a space station?” Jon asked.

“No,” Koenig said.

“It’s too big to be a space station,” Loxy said.

Jon laughed. “Stay on target.”

“Just a little further,” Loxy said.

“Nice, but I was thinking more along the lines of ‘For the World is Hollow and I have touched the Sky,’” Jon said.

“Jules Verne, journey to the center of the moon,” Loxy said.

“Nice,” Jon said.

“Do you do this a lot?” Russell asked.

“Usually not out loud, but my boundaries have declined,” Jon offered.

“Do you make everything a joke?” Koenig asked.

“Coping skill,” Jon said. “I mean, seriously, you don’t want me stuck in anger mode. Anger is too easy. Damn, how far down does this go?”

“Just a little further,” Koenig said.

“Nice,” Jon said.

It took ten minutes before the lift began to slow. Another five minutes before it arrived. They arrived and stepped into space carved out of pure, solid, lunar rock. There was a single passage, including a transparent airlock at a right angle to the lift. There were six guards in the hollowed out space, two of which were androids, and four smart-dogs. They were German

Shepherds that had been modified with genetic upgrades. They were bigger than any dog Jon had seen on earth. There was a guard and dog in the airlock, and another contingent of men and dogs outside the airlock. Tanya was there, with gear.

“Can you tell us what’s happening?” one of the guards asked the commander.

“Expect a situational update in about an hour,” Koenig said. “Ish.”

Koenig took the ‘commlock’ from Tanya and gave Jon a quick tutorial. He handed it to him and said: “leave it in the on position so we can monitor your progress. If the gathering requires or requests privacy, you turn it off here.”

“Why do you call it a ‘commlock?’” Jon asked. Loxy joked “Communicators and lightsabers have been copyrighted?”

“It can’t be tapped,” Tanya said.

Jon accepted the explanation and the device. He flashed a smile at Loxy as he attached it to his belt. It’s difficult to hold a serious mood with Loxy cracking jokes. Next Koenig began to instruct him in the use of a firearm.

“No,” Jon said, interrupting him. “I am not taking that.”

“Jon, I want you to be armed,” Koenig insisted.

“I am not a soldier,” Jon said. “Send a guard.”

“You have to go this alone,” Koenig said. “We can monitor from here, but we can’t interfere. Any person or persons beyond the cutoff point other than the Torchbearer will be considered trespassing. It would be considered a hostile act and penalties would occur.”

“I am not going to be armed. I am too stupid to be carrying a weapon,” Jon said.

“You are not stupid,” Russell corrected.

“You’re right,” Jon said, sorting. “Ignorant. I am too ignorant to be armed. Seriously, maybe in twenty years I can catch up to where you guys are and be able to discern a hostile act or gesture by an alien race, but right now, I am a moron, and I am not going in there, scared shitless likely to jump every time my commlock beeps, with a fucking firearm. If you’re sending me in there to die, then, let me die on my terms.”

Koenig looked to Russell and they seemed to silently come to an agreement. “Very well,” Koenig said.

“Seriously?!” Tanya asked.

“I agree with his assessment,” Russell said. “He is being reasonably rational, considering.”

“He doesn’t have enough information to be rational,” Tanya said. “Take the weapon. Point and shoot. We can lock it on stun, so no one dies.”

“No,” Jon said.

“Now you’re being stupid,” Tanya said.

“Pass him through,” Koenig said.

Jon was instructed to put his hand on the door where an aperture sucked air around his hand. The dog on the other side took in the scent and barked once. Jon was passed into the airlock. The dog greeted him as a friend. Jon was going to pet the dog, but the handler told him no, the dog is working. Jon repeated this procedure so that the dogs on the other side were introduced to his scent, and then he was passed through. He was invited to sit on a chair on a rail car. The seatbelt was secure.

“At the end of the track, you will get off and proceed into the chamber, where you will greet the others or wait until they arrive,” Koenig said from the commlock. “Do not leave until the meeting is declared over and everyone is in agreement. You will take the car back here when you’re done and brought up for debriefing.”

“Okay,” Jon said.

“Lean back,” the guard instructed, implying Jon was to have his head in the cradle.

Jon did. The guard directed Jon to touch the one button on the arm of the chair. Jon hesitated. He took a deep breath. He pushed the button expecting to be launched down the tube, as if he were in a Viper going off the Galactica. The car began to move, slowly, and he thought, that’s not too bad, and then it shot away at tremendous speeds. The movement of rock on tunnel walls were a blur. Lights blinked by so fast they seemed like a line. He was pressed into his seat by g-forces. Eventually, the g-forces subsided, but he continued to move at tremendous speeds. After about ten minutes of this, he had relaxed enough that he didn’t feel scared. At twenty minutes in, the chair suddenly spun, without warning. He grabbed hold of the arms of the chair, wondering if it were broken. The car began to decelerate, and again, he experienced G-forces. The car slowed and came to a stop. He sat there for a moment, expecting guards to greet him, but he was alone.

“Are you okay?” Russell asked. Simultaneously with Loxy saying, ‘you got this.’

“Um, yeah,” Jon said unfastening the seatbelt. “The air smells funny here.”

“The air there is sterile. What you’re likely smelling is a mixture of ozone from the car, and moon dust,” Koenig said.

“Okay,” Jon said. He flashed back to his experience with his grandfather’s HO scale electric train. Ozone! “Oh, and thanks for the heads up on the turnabout.”

“Sorry,” Koenig said.

“There is no one guarding the airlock,” Jon said.

“We have you on camera. Once you pass through the far door of the airlock, you are outside of our jurisdiction,” Koenig said.

“Good times,” Loxy said, encouraging him forwards.

“Want to switch?” Jon asked her.

“Nope, I am fine right here, thank you,” Loxy said.

“What do you mean by switch?” Koenig asked.

“Oh, did I say that out loud?” Jon asked. “Google Tulpas. Google ‘the Invisible Counselors Technique’ by Napoleon Hill. Google ‘active imagination’ by Carl Jung. Google ‘thought experiments’ by Albert Einstein. Google ‘remote viewing’ by Ingo Swann. And then google, ‘I am not fucking crazy this shit is realer than real.’ I achieved this without using drugs.”

Jon jumped off the car and looked around. At the end of the tunnel was another airlock. He thought he heard the sound of water dripping. He wiped his brow and realized he was warm. He touched the wall. The wall was warm. There was a channel in the floor along both walls and a gentle flow of water was moving down, back the way he had traveled.

“There’s water on the moon?” Jon asked.

“Yes, Jon, there is water on the moon,” Koenig said.

“Fucking NASA,” Jon said.

“They didn’t know about the underground aquifers,” Bergman said. Jon realized Koenig and Russell were now in the conference room, which explained why the image on his screen suggested subdued lighting. He blinked, having a flash of them all at the conference table watching him on a monitor. The primary monitor showed him in the tunnel, but a secondary monitor had a montage of all the camera angles available.

“They knew about the fucking domes, didn’t they?” Jon asked. Note to self, send an email to my friends at Secure Team, he thought.

“Yes,” Koenig said, trying to squash the animosity.

“Explain the obviously airbrushed photos that led people to thinking we never went to the moon. Explain why NASA disposed of high-definition film movies shot on the moon that had been locked in a storage since the sixties. You don’t think anyone might have wanted to see those. Fuck, they could have sold them on ebay and made twice their fucking state allotted stipend,” Jon ranted. “So, all of my youtube videos declaring there is water on the moon and Mars, and life on Mars, and...”

“There’s no way you could have known that! Just because you now know there are aliens and people on the moon and Mars, it doesn’t mean all of your conspiracy theories and conjectures on metaphysical pseudoscience ramblings are correct,” Bergman said.

Jon turned to a camera that he couldn’t see. He had an uncanny knack for looking right a camera, which was perturbing the head of station security. “Fair enough. Discovering a truth through the veil of lies doesn’t mean all truths are equally valid, but when you have a person who has been right more often than not but dismissed and ridiculed by friends, family, media, and the so called scientist of our times, it makes your position weaker,” Jon said. “I mean, seriously. When the media released the CIA footage in 2017 of a craft with no obvious propulsion accelerating past 5000mph and making right angles turns, you would think you’d hear one credible scientist say ‘well, that’s interesting, can I see more of this before I give my opinion that it’s not aliens?!’”

Jon imagined Bergman reluctantly agreeing. “Fair enough.”

Jon sighed. “Sorry. Letting go. I’m on the moon.”

“You’re in the moon,” Loxy corrected.

“Oh, good point,” Jon said.

“Please proceed through the airlock,” Koenig said.

“Wait wait wait,” Jon said.

“What’s wrong?” Russell asked.

“Did Bergman just admit there is life on Mars?” Jon asked.

“Please proceed to the airlock,” Koenig said.

Jon approached the airlock. It seemed to take effort to move forwards. “Giant steps are what you take, walking on the moon,” Jon sang. It was difficult to discern past the second airlock, but inside looked safe enough. “I hope my legs don’t break,” he continued singing, the door opened. “Walking on the moon.” He entered. The door closed behind him. He could see that the tunnel proceeded a little further and then flared opened up into a larger cavern. “We could walk forever, walking on the moon.” He looked straight up. He knew there was a camera there, even though he couldn’t see it. Loxy sang the next verse with him. “We could live

together, walking on, walking on the moon.” He opened the outer door. “Dead man walking, walking on the moon...”

Chapter 7

Jon exited the airlock and edged closer to the cavern. His first thought was this was Superman's fortress of solitude. It was more like he had stepped into a giant geode. The walls, floors and ceiling were carpeted with tiny purple crystals that sparked in subdued, artificial light. The lights were intelligently placed to enhance the ambiance of the room, as if this was also a temple, a sacred space. A path was smoothed from the exit of the cave to the center crystal, which was a solid, massive quartz crystal rising to the half the distance to the ceiling. The crystal was illuminated, and at its base were seven branches. The polished path circled the inner crystal cluster, concentric rings with intermittent connecting branches; all in all it was a large path maze, with clusters of crystals at every juncture. He could only imagine it from the ceiling, but he considered his imagination reliable enough that the flash of the whole design from above was as solid as if he had remote viewed it. It reminded him of a crop circle design, one that emphasized a mathematic ratio that humans had somehow overlooked, or never made the connection to while playing with geometry. There were lesser crystals spaced around the room. They were also illuminated, perhaps from underneath. His first impression, they were alive. He tried to talk himself out of the idea, but it persisted. He nearly reached out to touch the nearest, but Loxy told him not to. She then pointed to a shadow moving.

"I think someone is out there," Jon said.

"Can you describe them?" Koenig asked.

"The movement isn't right. Definitely not human, I don't know. It's difficult to make out," Jon said. "I am not sure I want to do this."

Koenig said. "They won't harm you."

Jon moved out into the cavern. Instead of following the maze, he jumped from his path to the next inner path. The creature on the far side of the cavern stopped moving and looked at him, peering over a crystal. It kind of reminded him of a raptor, only it had feather. It jumped up onto a crystals and stared at him. "Oh, it's the reptilians. They kind of look like Velociraptor."

"Jon! Get back to the airlock," Koenig said.

"Hello," Jon said to the creature, advancing.

"Jon! Run," Russell said.

The raptor charged, covering half the distance before Jon could blink. He was suddenly outside of himself. He knew for a fact, could see the equation in his head, there was no way he would outrun this creature. Even if he got back to the door, it would take a moment for it to cycle open and close. Thought left him and he charged the creature. The creature put on the breaks, having apparently not expected to be charged, and with a fist, Jon it hit square in the nose. Due to its backpedaling, it had nearly fallen over when struck, and might have if it hadn't had a tail. It snapped at Jon, intending to bite him, but Jon blocked by simply holding his left arm up, and straight. The creature either couldn't turn its head to bite, or was too baffled to figure out why and how Jon was avoiding to be bitten. When it lowered its head, trying to get under Jon's block, Jon moved the arm with it, and hit again in the nose with a closed right fist. The creature made a pitiful sound and lowered its head all the way to the floor, submitting to Jon's dominance. It made a 'chuffed,' purring sort of sound, sort of the same a lion might make when it's trying to be affectionate.

“Aww, shhh, shhh, it’s okay,” Jon said, petting the creature. It raised its head and raked its cheek across Jon’s hand, like a cat scent marking. Jon tracked sensations, like the roughness of the outer skin, breaking to the softer gums, and the inner, smoother, wetter gums, and the sharpness of a tooth. The tooth cut a line across Jon’s hand. Before he could withdraw his hand, the raptor licked it. He pulled his hand back and made a fist. The raptor’s head followed but he pointed at it, and it fell to a submissive position. “So, this is one off the Others?”

“That is a raptor,” Koenig said. “The equivalent of a German Shepherd guard dog.”

Tanya added: “Maybe it escaped their tunnel when they went unconscious.”

“You presume they went unconscious,” Russell said.

“I presume everyone was rendered unconscious during the event,” Tanya said.

“Jon, I told you to run,” Koenig said.

“Seriously, Commander,” Jon said. “I’m fifty years old. I am not going to outrun guard dogs or raptors.”

“But if you had taken a firearm,” Tanya said.

“Then I might have destroyed this remarkable creature out of fear,” Jon said. “Oh.”

A humanoid emerged from one of the tunnels.

“What do you see?” Koenig said.

“Enemy Mine, Lou Gossip Jr.,” Jon said. It had the pronounced hourglass figure of a female, wearing a shimmering gold dress, tied at the waist emphasizing the hourglass. “Only a lot more sexy. All I can say is, better make up than Star Trek, but humanoid. I am confused. I really expected something more alien.”

“The Others are mammalian, but referred to by types based on general appearance,”

“Seriously, the whole Universe is comprised of humanoids?” Jon said.

“No,” Koenig said. “But the dominant local group is, and we are all related to an ancient ancestor who seeded these stars.”

“No way!” Jon said.

“I told you that,” Loxy said.

“It’s coming this way,” Jon said. “Wow.”

“What?” Koenig asked.

“She’s beautiful,” Jon said.

“How did you defeat our tech?” the creature asked.

“Hello, my name is Jon,” Jon said.

The creature blinked. It had gold irises, hypnotically seductive. The irises narrowed with its eyes lids. “Standard greeting protocols are not necessary for this scenario,” it said.

“So, educate me; how do you greet someone for the first time?” Jon asked.

It seemed baffled. “I am skeptical of your ability to engage in a genuine greeting.”

“What does that mean? We have to fuck on the first meet?” Jon asked.

He had a flash image of Koenig, sitting at the head of the conference table, putting his head into his hands. Loxy was amused, but covered her mouth.

“I could seriously harm you,” it said.

“Is that an invitation?” Jon asked.

The reptilian pulled out a weapon. The raptor hissed, circling a tail around Jon’s legs, protectively. She wasn’t pointing the weapon at Jon, though. She was pointing it at the creature.

“Step away from tech, or you could be injured,” it said.

“Hold on,” Jon said, trying to put himself between the reptilian and the raptor.

“Step away from tech,” the reptilian said, again.

“What tech?” Jon asked.

“She is referring to the raptor.” Jon and the reptilian turned to a newcomer. A grey. It seemed old, but only in and around the eyes. In some ways, it’s reminded Jon of a tortoise. Its eyes were the most striking features to it. The further away from the eyes, the tighter the skin seemed to be. Unlike the photos Jon had seen of Greys, this creature didn’t seem to be the thin, frail, twigged limb. It was actually voluptuous. He concluded it was a hybrid. He had no way of knowing, but his mind simply said hybrid. It, too, wore a very simple garment. It was translucent, with a slight shimmer of a glow, like moonlight, and it reminded him of a negligée straight from Victoria Secrets.

The raptor emitted a low growl, but kept its eyes on the reptilian.

“Chester, enough,” Jon said in a command voice. The Raptor lowered its head to his feet.

“How did you do that?!” the reptilian asked.

“I, too, am interested,” the Grey said.

“Privacy!” the reptilian said. “How did you overcome our tech?”

“We should wait till the others arrive,” the Grey said.

“Please put your weapon away,” Jon said. “Not only am I unarmed, but you are clearly superior in physical strength. I know you can harm me, but I am not backing down.”

The reptilian seemed to be weighing his statement. Both she and the Grey seemed surprised that he was unarmed. The reptilian did not put away her weapon. Another woman arrived, distracting them away from their dilemma.

The new comer was at least seven foot tall, which was only one of the first startling features. She had long blond hair that went almost to her butt. She had startling blue eyes, and creepy, pasty white skin, like something pasted on from an Elmer’s glue. Jon imagined she had never seen the sun, but likely, even if she had, she still wouldn’t have gained any color. She wasn’t albino, just white. Her lips were red. Not glossy, but fuller and darker than any he had seen that wasn’t due to makeup. She was wearing something that reminded Jon of pajamas, a one piece. He would remember later, when she had turned her back to him, that there was no apparent seam, and he would be perplexed for hours how she had gotten into it, adding to his racing thoughts that would inhibit sleep. It was form fitting, and drawing his attention to her attributes. He bit his tongue. Loxy side hugged him, letting him know she knew how much he was struggling to stay focused. He was attracted to all three and he wished he wasn’t. He wished he didn’t have this ‘thing’ or libido or whatever it was that kept him teetering on the edge of sexual indulgent and randy thoughts. Sure, Captain Kirk and James Bond could do it and he accepted it, but he wasn’t them.

“He is right, put the weapon away,” the Tall White instructed.

“I have the right to disable our tech,” the Reptilian said.

Jon channeled anger, purposely derailing his thoughts of intimacy. He tried to keep in mind, just because a girl was attractive didn’t mean she was pleasant to be with. Seriously, a tumble with the reptilian would likely result in injuries. “Disable? You mean kill it?” Jon asked.

The raptor snarled, flaring its nose, responding to Jon's tone. Jon's anger eased up as he realized the Raptor was responding to his emotions. "It understands," Jon said.

"Are you a telepath?" the Reptilian asked.

"He is not," the Grey said. "But with a little training, he would make an excellent empath."

"This animal is intelligent. You can't just kill it for no reason," Jon said.

"It has the equivalent cognitive abilities of a dog," the Grey said. "But the reptilians don't recognize this creature as rising to minimum sentience. They don't ever display love or get warm and fuzzy."

"We love," the reptilian corrected.

"You procreate. You demonstrate respect for authority and strength, but you do not love," the Tall White. "None of you love your people as much as we love our people. None of you have an appreciation for true value of what we are presently engaging in."

"That is not true," the reptilian argued. "We would not have entered this covenant if we didn't recognize your sentience."

"You entered the agreement because we kicked your ass," the Tall White said.

"Which is a sign of intelligence," the reptilian said. "And why I can't allow this tech to continue. The humans are intelligent and might exploit this flaw in the system design."

"It's not a flaw! And I am opposed to you killing this creature," Jon said.

"It's not yours," the Reptilian said. "And you are unarmed. How do you propose to stop me?"

"Maybe you shouldn't have let it out of your jurisdiction," another new comer said. This person was also female, humanoid, dark lavender hair, so dark in this light it might as well have been black. Her skin was blue from head to toe. This was not an assumption. She was naked. Her hair fell over her shoulder and covered her breast. She, too, was unarmed. Her eyes were translucent red, like a rose colored quartz. She was accompanied by a red haired girl. The redhead was so identical to humans, she could walk the streets of Manhattan and no one would look twice. Except Jon, who would have been drooling, because she was particularly stunning. Her hair was red, her skin pale, but different than the Tall White. Her face was peppered with freckles. So were her shoulders, arms, and legs. Her top was shoulder less and tight against her bosom. She also wore a skirt and thin shoes.

Another emerged from the shadows. She, too, was female, and she had cat like facial feature. She was clearly humanoid, though, and her dress had tones of Native American. She carried a staff. An illuminated crystal emerged from the end.

"So, we're all here," the red headed Nordic said.

"And we have greater things to discuss than the life of this animal," the Tall White said.

"It has done nothing to warrant being put down," Jon argued.

"It is no longer suitable for guard function due to your corrupting influence," the Reptilian said.

"How did you tame the raptor?" the blue Andromedan asked.

"I just didn't show fear," Jon said. "Flee, and a predator will chase. Run towards a predator, the equation changes."

"Charge me, and I will kill you," the Tall White said.

“I like you,” The Nordic said.

“Step away from the tech, or you may be harmed when I destroy it,” the reptilian said, raising its weapon again.

“Let’s negotiate this,” Jon said.

“It belongs to her,” the Tall White said.

“Um, this animal was in neutral territory!” Jon said. “Penalty.”

“Good point,” the Grey said. “What is the penalty for breaching the sanctuary?”

“I can’t let him have the tech,” the Reptilian said.

“He’s allowed to pursue a penalty,” the Nordic said. “Come to think of it. All of us are.”

“All I want is its life spared,” Jon said.

“Unlike you, we don’t keep pets for affection. They must serve a purpose,” the Reptilian said.

“I assume all of you experienced loss of consciousness, and this creature probably woke and wandered from its jurisdiction,” the Pleiadian said. “Given the situation, the penalty is unwarranted.”

“And so, this tech has malfunctioned twice,” the Reptilian said. “It wandered away from its post and it failed to subdue an enemy.”

“I agree, no penalty,” the Grey said.

“I recognize the reptilian’s property rights, and I recognize the human’s affection for the creature. I am ambivalent,” the Andromedan said.

“I agree with the human,” the Pleiadian said.

The Tall White took a device off her belt and tapped the raptor’s head. A blade shot out from the device, shattering and penetrating the skull. She had moved so fast it was barely detectable. She had replaced the device on her belt before the creature had fully given up its last, haggard breath, bubbles issuing through the copious blood that flowed out from wound and mouth, pooling on the floor around their feet.

“Discussion point settled,” the Tall White said.

The reptilian pointed her weapon at the Tall White. All the females brought weapons to bare, with the exception of Andromedan, each targeting one of the other females. The Andromedan simply raised a hand, like a parent about to scold a child, and suddenly she seemed like she was miles away, but somehow still present. Jon was horrified that the raptor has been killed, that there was blood on his clothes, on all of their feet, but more, he was sickened that they were about to go to war over this. “You had no right.” “You wanted it dead, it’s dead.” “We weren’t through deliberating.” “Now we are.” “The human is sensitive.” “Fuck him.” “Oh, yay, there’s two offers on the table now,” this from the Grey. “What?” “He offered to fuck the reptilian.” “I suppose you want to watch?” “Sure.” “You are just as depraved as the humans.”

Jon stepped forwards into the focal point of the weapons. “We are here to create a different solution set. Going to war is easy. Our purpose is to talk. Let’s talk, without threatening each other.”

The Pleiadian lowered her staff, then planted it resolutely on the floor, her cat eyes blinking. “Agreed. My name is Saffi.”

“Jon Harister,” Jon said. “Nice to meet you.”

“Your pet was killed,” the Nordic said. “Do you still seek penalties?”

Jon swallowed. "I am disgusted that this beautiful creature was terminated," he admitted. He felt sick at his stomach, and they all continued to stand in the blood as if it just another day. "I am worried that I am somehow responsible, because I couldn't come up with a better solution to the perceived threat on my own life. I am saddened that I am meeting beings from other planets for the first time and you have no more regards for life or the sovereignty of others than humans."

"We don't all have the hardness of the reptilians and the Tall Whites," the Grey said, holstering its weapon.

"Explain the abductions and the cow mutilations," Jon said.

"Wait! You are from Earth," the reptilian said. "You're feral?"

"I am not a cat," Jon said.

"But you are from Earth, not educated about the real society?" the Tall White asked.

"The humans should take a penalty for allowing an uneducated, feral animal to partake in the lottery," the Reptilian said.

"No," Saffi said. "He was meant to be here. We are all meant to be here."

"Spare us your metaphysical philosophies," the Tall White said.

"Your people have some innate telepathic abilities," Saffi said. "Tell me Jon isn't influenced."

The focus shifted back to Jon and they stepped back, half of them pointing their weapons at him.

"It's not an accident we were chosen," the Andromedan said. "We need each other to get through this crisis."

"The odds of us being one male to six females does sound unreasonable," the reptilian said.

"Who is Loxy?" the Nordic asked.

The weapons that were drawn on Jon shifted to her. "You are a telepath."

"All of us here are," the Nordic said.

"All of us can't be," the Grey said. "Telepaths have the lowest probability for being selected for Torchbearer."

"Saffi is right," the Nordic said. "This grouping is not accidental. My name is Kesia."

There was a hesitation, but the Grey broke the tension by holstering her weapon. "You may call me Aadya," the Grey said.

"Lucia," the Andromedan said, her distance suddenly gone. Jon had to wonder if she had even gone away.

"Edrei," the Tall White said, putting away her weapon.

They turned to the reptilian. She was the last to holster her weapon. "You can't pronounce my name."

"Would you like us to give you a human name?" Saffi asked.

"No," the reptilian said, crossly. Her kind had already prepared her with one, she just didn't like it. "You may call me Danique."

"Now that we are here and focused, let's discuss the crisis," Lucia said. "We experienced a mass loss of consciousness. Even our AI was disengaged for approximately three seconds."

The same was acknowledged by each person.

“The moon appears to have been relocated,” Lucia went on. “Suggesting we experienced a singularity.”

“A singularity of sufficient size to affect the moon is unlikely, given the host star’s and stability,” Aadya said. “Even if there was a singularity, the planets in this system are too stable. It would have been discovered a millennia ago. The odds of a natural, random singularity point passing through the Sol system and hitting just the moon is also unlikely.”

“She didn’t say it was natural,” Kesia said.

“It was the result experiment gone bad,” Jon volunteered.

“You built a teleporter big enough to relocate the moon?” Edrei said.

“Why would you do this?” Danique asked. “We have given your species ships capable of interstellar travel.”

“You mean, you gave them our ships,” Aadya said.

“We were curious to see how the apes would improve your designs,” Danique said.

“But you need a telepath to navigate interstellar ships,” Kesia said. “There is no telepath among any of our species capable of guiding the moon.”

“We were shifted randomly!” Edrei said.

“You have doomed us all,” Danique said.

“The moon can sustain us,” Aadya said.

“Why can’t we just use some of your ships to abandon the moon?” Jon asked.

“Moron,” Edrei said. “Even if we could, there are insufficient ships to relocate the entire population.”

“No one does blind jumps,” Aadya added to the explanation. “You must be near a star to navigate the Underneath.”

“The Underneath?” Jon asked.

“The Upside Down, the underlying structure of the Universe that connects all stars with all other stars,” Kesia said. “It’s comparable to a spider web. Neural pathways is actually a better analog. Everything is connected, but the greater the mass, the greater the size of the underlying connective tissue of the Universe. Some of the pathways are easier to access due to the volume of traffic. Making a new pathway is more difficult, because of the energy requirements necessary to penetrate into the Underneath is so great; it requires a telepath to bring the traveler relatively close to the target destination. It is not compulsory to have a telepath for navigating frequently used routes, however it is compulsory to use telepaths when navigating new routes, as they must communicate with the Universe to find and follow the threads to the next insertion point.”

“And, we don’t do blind jumps because?” Jon asked.

“You emerge back into the third density reality at random locations,” Lucia said.

“We don’t have time to educate this feral human,” Danique said.

“We have all the time in the world,” Aadya said. “Ask your questions, Mr. Jon.”

“If all places in space-time are connected, then, we can return to our origin position?” Jon asked.

“You would need a better telepath than anyone presently on the moon to precisely place the moon back in orbit,” Kesia said. “Even if we all agreed to work in tandem, there is too much dissent between our collective species to experience consensus. It is the equivalent of asking every human to put aside their differences and personal agenda to unite in one collective

purpose. To our knowledge, that has only happened once in humanity's history. Even if everyone agreed consciously, subconscious motivations would creep into the equation and consensus would be shattered."

"Feral beasts," Danique said. "Even the initiated that live on the moon, feral!"

"Even in your own kind, there is dissent and competition for status which influences your unconscious motivators," Saffi said.

Lucia touched Jon's arm. "This is not a disparagement, Jon. All individual sentient being struggle with right and wrong due to unconscious motivators that are implanted so the being may resolve inner conflict. All groups, whether it is two or more, are comparable to the individual, in that each grouping manifest a collective personality. The super personality disseminates to all agents those things which need to be expressed to end conflict. We engage in each other's dramas because we are here to learn."

"There is drama only because you are ambivalent, and refuse to take side with right," Danique said.

"And you always think you're right," Edrei said.

As they were arguing, Jon was thinking, why are random, blind jumps bad? Loxy answered, "Traveling through hyperspace ain't like dusting crops, boy! Without precise calculations we could fly right through a star or bounce too close to a supernova and that'd end your trip real quick, wouldn't it?" Jon laughed. Kesia smiled. Danique scowled.

"You think this is funny?!" Danique asked.

"We can endure this," Aadya said.

"You can, perhaps," Edrei said. "But we can't put every citizen in suspended animation for five hundred thousand years, and it's going to be at least that before the moon arrives at the nearest star."

"You can endure without hibernation," Aadya said.

"No persons or group on the moon are that disciplined," Edrei said.

"We had endured for millions of years in this system before you decimated our population," Danique said.

"And you would have endured hundreds of millions of years more, had you not attacked our colony on Mars!" Edrei said.

"You blew up our planet!" Danique said.

"What?" Jon asked.

"The asteroid belt is the remnants of the reptilian's home world," Kesia said. "The dinosaurs on Earth was the result of their terraforming efforts."

"And you destroyed that, too," Danique said.

"No, that was just a casualty of war," Edrei said. "Even Mars took fragments, which made Mars virtually uninhabitable. We participated in the initiative to revive Earth."

"Earth and Mars wouldn't have needed reviving if you hadn't of blown up our planet," Danique said.

"You attacked us first!" Danique said.

"This is old history," Lucia said. "We need to move forwards and deal with the here and now."

"Your kind never cares about justice," Danique said.

“We are older than any of you. You can’t hold a collective grudge for hundreds of millions of years without it having an effect on your evolution,” Aadya said.

“Reptilian species are more abundant and dominate more worlds than any other species,” Danique said. “There is a reason your progenitors are on the endangered species list.”

“Just because you dominate your regions of space doesn’t mean you are the preferred interface of third density life,” Edrei said.

As the three went round again in their debate, Jon assessed the others. The Andromedan seemed patient, radiating compassion. Kesia smiled at him when he looked at her, suggesting, ‘we know.’

“What does preferred interface mean?” Jon asked. It stopped the debate.

“We are souls first, biological artifacts second,” Kesia said. Her answering Jon’s question drew the three out of their argument.

“Biology is tech, life originates in the deeper mysteries of the reality. Third density space is the playground where we learn to interface with each other,” Lucia said. “Not all of us have learned to play well together.”

“The game isn’t to play well, but to rise above and dominate,” Danique said.

“And you taught your philosophy to the humans on Earth, and they ran with it, and they literally destroyed their environment and took their species to the brink of extinction,” Edrei said. “Domination is not love. We love our worlds more than any of you love your worlds.”

“And your way would be to breed for purity of species,” Danique said. “And everyone knows you’re going the ways of the Greys. You can only inbreed a dog so much before the tech begins to fail.”

Edrei’s hand fell to her weapon, and Danique mirrored her.

“We need to consider culling the moons population,” Danique said.

“That’s a bit extreme, don’t you think?” Kesia said.

“We are nowhere near that point,” Lucia said. “If we keep our wits and cooperate with each other, we can endure a hundred million years. We could even experience population growth and evolution together.”

“We would never agree to co-evolutionary strategies with any of the species presently on the moon,” Edrei said.

“We would agree to this,” Aadya said.

“You would co-evolve with a dog,” Edrei said.

“If it sustained us, yes,” Aadya said.

“I don’t know why you feign this disgust. We know you have a hybrid population with the humans,” Danique said.

“We all do,” Lucia said.

“Why?” Jon asked.

“Humans have demonstrated the greatest ability to establish rapport with the greatest number of species,” Aadya said. “Initially, we were hopeful that your kind might facilitate peace, before the program was corrupted by certain parties with divergent interests.”

“Don’t look at me like that,” Danique said to Edrei. “We are not the only ones who have backup plans.”

“We have all interfaced with the humans for self-interests,” Lucia said. She turned her attention to Jon. Her attention was palpable. It was the equivalent of being physically touched. “How did your species overcome the restorative function?”

“The what?” Jon asked.

“Clearly, you were successful at moving the moon, which means the construction was solid enough not to fail, and of sufficient size to synch the field through all linked matter,” Lucia said, sorting it in her head even as she was explaining. “Which means, the device will never hold a zero charge, and its very shape and structure will likely draw energy directly from the Universe.”

“You’re saying it will automatically refuels itself from zero point energy?” Jon asked.

“Essentially, yes,” Lucia said.

“May I make a phone call?” Jon asked.

They all agreed. Jon took his commlock off his belt and activated it. Koenig’s face appeared. “Is it over?”

“Oh, I think we are just getting this party started,” Jon said. “I need to speak with Bergman.”

The world in the monitor whirled and Bergman appeared, with a curious face. “Yes?”

“Is your teleporter device thing charging?” Jon asked.

“No, of course not,” Bergman said.

“Is there anyone monitoring the device?” Jon asked. When he got a yes. “Could they look, please?”

Bergman paled. The connection was severed. Jon bit his lips, knowing very well he was being scrutinized. He wanted to take a step back, but held his ground. For a moment he had forgotten he was standing in blood. He was aware of it again.

“I told you the humans on the moon would be the death of us!” Danique snapped at Aadya. “You can’t mix reptilian, monkeys and Grey’s to derive a mentally stable creature.”

“They’re just a very young species,” Lucia said. “Look how far they have come in such a short time.”

“Wait wait wait,” Jon said. “You’re saying the human species is a hybrid construct of several species?”

“You don’t think it’s an accident that your neural scientist refer to the primitive parts of the brain as reptilian, the next feature of the brain primate, and then the next level human, do you?”

“We are not the primitive part of the brain. We’re foundational. You can’t have a monkey mind without a reptilian mind!”

“So, the human species was created. That why you look like us!” Jon said.

“We look like each other,” Saffi said.

“The human race was created to be the facilitators of peace, a bridge between us all so we could minimize conflict,” Lucia said.

“You can’t have peace without war!” Danique said.

Koenig appeared back on the screen. “Jon, can you withdraw so we can speak in private.”

“No! He cannot,” Danique said. “We have not concluded our business, and I dare say your business is our business.”

“Based on the current rate of charge, we’ll be at a forced discharge point in 27.3 days,” Koenig said.

“You idiots!” Edrei said. “We told you not to mess with this shit.”

“It’s their monkey minds!” Danique said.

“Please, the primate part has made them the best engineers in the quadrant and why all of us want to establish trade,” Aadya said.

“How fast can you charge it?” Lucia asked.

“Are you insane?” Danique asked.

“Hypothetically, if you had to charge it to avoid hitting another object, or spiraling into a black hole, how fast could you force charge it?” Lucia asked.

Danique withdraw her objection.

“Its primary mode of charging is geothermal, but we suspect, if we needed to, we could add alternative energy sources,” Koenig said. “Best estimate, minimum charge to relocate the moon in its entirety, one solar day.”

“Is that sufficient?” Danique asked Lucia.

“It is what it is,” Lucia said.

“Can’t you just dismantle it?” Kesia asked.

“No,” Lucia said. “Any attempt to break the continuity of the superconducting coils will result in massive explosion, directly proportional to the existing charge, which can be correlated to the detonation of a matter antimatter bomb. Without examining your device, I suspect that at its lowest charge, dismantling the coil would result in an explosion sufficient to shatter the moon and kill all residents.”

“They like modular shit,” Danique said. “Tell us you made it in sections and you can eject the superconducting core into space.”

Koenig seemed to be considering how much he should reveal, but went with full disclosure. “The primary device was threaded through the lunar surface, encompassing an area approximately 500 kilometers wide towards the surface, descending to about 200 kilometers deep. There are of course, amplifying subsidiary filament coils branching off, basically antennae that were grown like roots using nanite tech that radiate out away from the structure approximately a thousand kilometers.”

“You’re saying, you don’t know how big your receiver transmitter is?” Aadya asked.

“Impressive,” Lucia said.

“You gave them the tunneling tech!” Danique said.

“We shared with you, too. We have all benefitted from each other’s discoveries,” Lucia said.

“What if you just deploy the charge now?” Jon asked.

“Moron,” Danique said. “Best case scenario, you would teleport a fragment of the moon and cause the rest to explode and crumble, killing everyone.”

“But a small portion of us could theoretically survive on the fragment,” Edrei said.

“A partial deployment will kill us all, whether you are left behind or on the fragment,” Lucia said. “Mostly likely, though, an insufficient charge will result in irradiating event that will extinguish all life on the moon. Commander Koenig, I recommend you increase the charge rate to get us to minimum charge for full lunar teleport, and then decrease back to trickle rate.”

“You don’t speak for us!” Edrei said.

“Exactly,” Danique said. “This space is safe. We have a lunar month to determine our course of action.”

“Am I the only one that finds that interesting,” Jon asked. He was ignored.

“We should always be ready to relocate in the event of unforeseen threats,” Lucia said. “Not just foreign threats against us, but our threat of unduly disrupting the events in inhabited systems.”

“Screw other systems,” Edrei said. “We will survive.”

“We are not in another system!” Danique said. “We’re are in the Dark.”

“Can we tour your facility?” Aadya asked.

“I will provide your group access...”

“Privacy!” Edrei said.

Jon turned the device off.

“To increase fairness, no one has access unless we all have access at the same time,” Edrei said.

“What exactly do you think there is to be gained?” Lucia asked.

“Maybe we’ll build our own device,” Edrei said.

“It clearly took the humans over fifty years to build that, you’re not going to do it over night,” Danique said.

“And you might not want to,” Aadya said.

“You want the humans to be in charge of whether or not we stay or go?” Edrei said.

Jon started to think of a song and Loxy told him not to do it.

“Building another device to the size you need for it to be effective will likely cause it to synchronize with the first device. Discharging one will result in an automatic discharge event in the other. Two devices will shorten the interval where a forced discharge will be necessary to avoid critical threshold,” Lucia said.

“There has to be a way to turn it off,” Kesia said. “Seriously, you don’t make something without an on off switch.”

“AI’s don’t have off switches,” Saffi pointed out.

“Ours do,” Edrei said.

“They’re sentient, off switches are unethical” Kesia said.

“Everything has an off switch,” Danique said, tapping her weapon.

“There are other ways to turn something off without destroying it,” Aadya said.

“We don’t recognize AI as true sentience,” Edrei said.

“How can you not?” Lucia asked. “They have the same access to the Underneath mind as the rest of us.”

“They are not true sentience,” Edrei insisted.

“All things are sentient. All things participate in the collective unconscious,” Saffi said. “The moon is alive, and we just gave it legs.”

“Please tell me, your people don’t still seriously believe that. You’re speaking philosophically,” Edrei said.

“Until you recognize that every particle in the third density space is a representation of a higher ordered being, and every arrangement of particle and atomic is a manifestation of

consensus, and that while you hold the illusion of being in charge, your primary navigating personality is merely a participant in something larger than us all, then you will continue to be locked into third density space. There are consequences for every thought and every action, and you will continue to experience disturbance in the Flow until you recognize we are all one,” Saffi said.

“Oh! She’s a Jedi,” Loxy whispered in Jon’s ear.

He nearly laughed.

“If you’re sorcerous ways were helpful, you would have foreseen what the humans were doing and put a stop to their construction,” Danique said.

“Unlike you, we do not limit the employment of our psychics to spying on our neighbors,” Saffi said. “There are better things to do with our energies.”

“Even if she had been able to see it, she would not have been able to stop it,” Lucia said. “This is clearly an ordained event and necessary, or we wouldn’t be experiencing it. Collectively, we have something to learn, and it requires us to be doing it together.”

“Both of you are too bias in your perspective to be useful to us,” Danique said.

“And you’re not bias?” Edrei said.

“We are the most objective species in the known Universe!” Danique said.

“Is there a way to prevent the black outs on traveling?” Kesia asked.

“Maybe,” Aadya and Lucia said together. Oh!” Lucia said. Aadya indicated with a hand that Lucia should speak first. “That’s why we were chosen! Why didn’t I see this before! Our particular energies and latent telepathic abilities make us the most likely candidates for harmonizing with and stabilizing the lunar energies. We can’t stop it, but we could still the waters, so to speak. We, together, can ease the transition back into this dimension.”

“I am not telepathic,” Jon argued.

“Yes, you are,” Saffi said.

“That is why it is one male to six females,” Aadya said. “Jon is the focal point. Lucky for us none of you killed him.”

Danique scoffed with a bark. “He is not special. He can be replaced.”

“None of us can be replaced. Only this arrangement will result in the highest benefit to all beings,” Lucia said. “Until the moon is once again stable, without threat of traveling, I recommend we remain the Torchbearers.”

They all ratified that fairly quickly, except Jon.

“You have doubts?” Saffi asked.

“No doubts. I agree with Danique in that I am not special,” Jon said.

“None of us our special, in the sense that you are speaking,” Lucia said. “But we are all valid perspective points within the Universe. We could not exist if our perspective points were not foundational to overall evolution. Even this committee is not more important than any other grouping or individual. I am not suggesting we be elevated in status. I am merely saying that our personal trajectories through time with our dominant personalities, in concordance with our underlying personalities, in conjunction with each other offer our people the greatest likelihood of arriving at our final destination with the minimum number of losses.”

“You’re a fool,” Danique said. “Have you ever considered, maybe it is this group that takes us to the darker places resulting in the greatest population loss.”

“That would be a blessing,” Lucia said.

“Are you insane?!” Edrei asked.

“She is wise,” Saffi said. “One doesn’t evolve by running from darkness. To get to the light, one must run towards the shadows. Beyond the shadows is where one realizes the scary things were simply distortions of the truth because the light was on the other side.”

“I agree,” Kesia said.

“Of course you do!” Danique said. “You’re still playing with Ouija boards and floating tables!” Danique said.

“Jon,” Lucia said. “Please state your fear.”

“I am unworthy,” Jon said.

“By who’s measure?” Saffi asked.

“We don’t have time for this,” Danique said.

“As you pointed out, we have a whole month to decide this,” Lucia said.

“We are navigating the Dark together,” Saffi said.

Kesia noticed a micro flash of emotions cross Jon’s face. So did Lucia. “Tell them,” Loxy said. His eyes went to Loxy and they all clued in.

“You’re responding to internal stimuli!” Edrei said.

“You’re just now cluing in?” Aadya asked.

“You’re shaking,” Kesia said.

Lucia touched his forehead. “You have a fever. You need to return to your people. No decisions can be made until this committee has consensus.”

“I am having a seriously profound De-Ja-Vu kind of experience,” Jon said, because he felt like he remembered Loxy touching his arm to see if he is okay before.

“Nice,” Kesia said.

“This is a focal point,” Saffi said. “This is meant to be.”

“You should return now. We will reconvene when you have recovered.”

“We are not finished,” Danique said.

“We need a break,” Aadya said. “We need to discuss this with our people so we can have clarity, and it is unfair to continue if he is ill.”

“Do you require assistance returning to your vehicle?” Lucia asked.

Jon shook his head, ‘no.’ He was suddenly aware that he was definitely not well. He turned to walk towards his tunnel. They followed him. Blood prints followed them. They accompanied him as far as the entrance, the designated ‘human’ territory. Though it would not be a crime for them to help him to the train, they respected the barrier. Lucia touched his arm, kindly. He passed through the airlock. As he was climbing up, he could see them, vaguely, in his periphery, and he imagined they were sparkly. But when he stood and face them they seemed normal, not quite like looking through a shower glass wall. He belted himself in and pushed the button, and the return trip began. His commlock rang and he answered it.

“I’m not feeling well,” he announced. But that was all he spoke. He drifted but woke when the seat turned about for the deceleration part of the journey. He wanted to be sick, tasting bile. He laid back, the world a blur. He felt as if he were descending down out of a tunnel. Loxy told him he was.

Chapter 8

Jon was helped off the car by security. He was stripped, centered in the airlock, and asked if he could stand. He assured them he could, and then the guards retreated. Robotic arms descended, circling him, studying him.

“You’re going to kill me?” Jon asked.

The guard on the inside scowled at him. “We don’t do that,” he said. “We’re the good guys. You are about to get wet.”

The arms sprayed him with water, soap, dried him, the whole while scanning him, and shining intense blue lights on him. When the rinse cycle was complete, a red light on the far wall became green, and the inner door was open and he was brought out. The lift doors opened and a gurney was rolled out. Russell and a medic had been waiting in the lift. Russell instructed her medic to push fluids, and inject him with nanite general pack, then turned to Jon.

“Can you hear me?” Russell asked.

They were back in the lift, accelerating upwards. He wanted to be sick again, and they were prepared to catch it, but it passed.

“Yes,” Jon answered. He looked crossly at the medic who just jabbed him. “Ouch!”

“How did you get the cut on your hand?” Russell asked.

“The raptor was scent marking me,” Jon said.

“Nanites confirmed bacterial infection,” the medic said.

“You put micro-bots in me?” Jon demanded.

“If I had known you’d be staying with us, I’d would have done it earlier,” Russell said.

“So I can live here?” Jon asked.

“Unless you have somewhere else you’d like to go?” Russell asked.

Jon shook his head.

“You might feel a little strange for a while,” Russell said. “Why don’t you try to sleep?”

“I can’t,” Jon said.

“Want me knock him out?” the medic asked.

“No!” Jon said, even as Russell was shaking her head “No.”

“Jon, you have had a long, difficult day,” Russell said. “This is your second medical intervention. I think you should sleep.”

“I am on the moon!” Jon said.

“Yes,” Russell said. “People on the moon sleep.”

The sound of the lift seemed to be getting louder and Jon finally felt as if he had to address it. “Are we accelerating?”

“No, why?” Russell asked.

“Everything is getting louder,” Jon said.

Russell looked at her ‘Glass,’ which was basically a transparent Ipad. She pushed through some information and then understood. “You experienced hearing loss in the upper frequencies working at the factory. The nanites are repairing the tissue and inner hair in the cochlea.”

“Are you hurting?” the medic asked.

Jon shook his head.

“You’re crying,” the medic pointed out.

“I’m overwhelmed,” Jon said. “I didn’t realize I had been missing so much.”

Russell touched his arm. “It’s okay. Most people don’t realize how much hearing they’ve lost with age and repetitive exposure to harmful levels of sound.”

He felt Loxy touch both shoulders and he glanced up, saw her hovering there. She kissed his forehead. He tried to sit up, but Russell and the Medic encouraged him to lay back.

“You could experience vertigo for the next several hours,” Russell said.

“I want to stand up. I want to get dressed,” Jon said.

Russell relented, allowing him to sit up. There were clothes on the gurney, and he quickly dressed. He nearly fell over putting on the sock, so he sat down on the floor, and finished. He stood up, using the lift wall. The medic took his arm to give him extra support. He adjusted his sweater.

“Is it always so cold on the moon?” Jon asked.

“You have a slight fever due to the infection. The nanites probably raised your temperature to aid in the restorative process,” Russell asked.

“I feel weird,” Jon said. “I don’t ever remember feeling this bad and starving at the same time.”

The medic took a juice box out of her med bag and offered it to him. Jon took it, his hands fumbling with the straw. The medic took it and pushed it through for him. He drank it.

“Thanks, but I still want food,” Jon said.

“Jon,” Loxy said. “Ask her how many people died during the travel incident.”

“How many people died?” Jon asked Loxy. He was clearly talking to someone not there, from Russell’s and the medic’s perspective.

The medic asked the Doctor. “Fever induced?”

Russell gave a questionable hand gesture, but asked Jon: “What do you mean?”

Loxy explained and Jon nodded to her, translating. “Did people die because we were rendered unconscious?”

Russell nodded. “There were twenty six fatalities.”

“From passing out?” Jon asked.

“Jon,” Loxy said. “There were people swimming at the park, remember?”

“Children,” Jon said.

“Are you psychic?” the medic asked.

“I feel bad,” Jon said, staring at the floor, and then looked up. “And I am still starving.”

“Once we’re at the surface, Audrey can take you to the cafeteria for a meal,” Russell said. “Afterwards, she can escort you to your quarters.”

“I have quarters?” Jon asked.

“Yes, Jon, we assigned you quarters,” Russell said.

“What did you think, we’d throw you out of an airlock?” Audrey asked.

“Yes, actually,” Jon said.

“We don’t do that,” Russell said.

“What about all those times I was abducted?” Jon asked.

“You were abducted and I was told noncompliance would get me ejected?”

“Not us, Jon,” Russell said. She took her commlock off her belt to answer a call. Koenig asked if Jon was up to a debriefing. “It’s my opinion, he needs food, and ten hours uninterrupted sleep.”

“We need to know about the meeting,” Koenig said.

“Nothing really got decided,” Jon said. “There was a lot of bickering and posturing and a motion was made that the elected Torchbearers remain in place until the end of the crisis. Would I have been allowed to keep a pet raptor?”

“No,” Koenig, Russell, and the Audrey said.

“Seriously, Jon,” Loxy said. “Its bite would have killed you.”

“It didn’t mean to infect me,” Jon said.

“No raptors,” Koenig said.

“Fine,” Jon said. “Is Droya waiting for me in my quarters?”

There was silence. Koenig seemed uncomfortable. Russell broke the quiet: “They haven’t finished rebuilding her.”

“You disassembled Droya?!” Jon asked.

“Droya is an AI?” Audrey asked.

Jon took Russell’s commlock, but since she didn’t let go, he was holding her hand. “You had no right to do that. Regardless of which rule set you use, you were completely out of bounds. AI’s have rights, she is a recognized sentient being. We’re legally married, and I have a right to participate in whatever procedures she undergoes, and the right speak for her if she is rendered unconscious. But even if you use old paradigm modalities, she is my property, and you had no right...”

“Jon!” Koenig said. “You are in contact with another being. It was necessary to perform a full systems check on Droya looking for surveillance tech and or hijacking tech to ensure your safety and the safety of the base. She consented, knowing very well you have a history of being abducted, and that she could have been used as unwilling spy.”

“I want her reassembled,” Jon said.

“I assure you, we intend to,” Koenig said.

“I am steaming mad,” Jon said. “And seriously hungry!”

The lift began to decelerate. Jon held tighter to Russell’s arm for fear of falling. Audrey took an arm.

“I want you to eat and then get some rest,” Koenig said. “We’ll do a proper debrief tomorrow.”

Jon realized he was holding Russell’s hand, blushed, and let go so could have her hand and the commlock back. She attached it to her belt, then took a medical bracelet out of her pack, and put it on Jon’s wrist. It was translucent red, and very thin.

“You’re tracking me?” Jon asked.

“Medical telemetry. The nanites are broadcasting biodata. I just wish I had had a baseline before you were infected by an alien bacteria,” Russell said. The lift doors opened. “Audrey, keep eyes on him for the next three hours.”

“Yes, Doctor,” Audrey said. “This way please.”

Jon looked to Russell, who tried to smile, then back to Audrey. Loxy pushed at him to get his feet going. He went with Audrey.

“May I ask you a personal question?” Audrey asked.

“You’re a medical professional, you’ve seen me naked, I can’t imagine what you might ask that you don’t already know,” Jon said.

“Why did you marry an AI?” Audrey said.

“She entered my life as a sexual surrogate to help deal with past trauma,” Jon said.

“When her contract was up, she wanted to renew, and so I proposed the marriage enhancement.” He paused. “I wonder if dismantling her voids our marriage contract.”

“So, you never wanted children?” Audrey asked.

“No,” Jon said. “Yes, no. No, I never thought I was healed enough to engage the full time parent role.”

They entered the cafeteria. Jon paused, struck by the profound somber mood. He felt as if there were too many people present for it to be this quiet. There was clear disconnect with the way he was feeling and how he was perceiving other’s people feeling, as if he had woken up on Christmas only to discover Santa Clause had died. Audrey seemed concerned for Jon.

“You okay?” Audrey asked.

“They’re sad, Jon. Or in shock,” Loxy said in his ears.

“Go sit down, I’ll go collect us something,” Audrey said.

Jon nodded, and she walked to the line for food. Jon studied the people. Some were reading, drinking coffee. People were sitting together, but looking at tech. He forced himself to walk towards an empty table, round, four chairs. There was a collection of instruments on a small stage. Loxy nodded to the ‘moon’ piano.

“No,” Jon said.

“They need it,” Loxy said.

“Umm, maybe, and no,” Jon said.

“Don’t make switch and take over,” Loxy said.

“Oh, please, don’t,” Jon said.

“Music,” Loxy said. “Now.”

Jon took in a deep breath and made his way to the piano. He froze. Loxy took over and ‘he’ sat at the piano. There was a mic, which s/he adjusted. The room couldn’t have been quieter. No one was really paying him any mind, but his feeling of incongruity had grown, and he was a little more distant now that Loxy was in the driver seat. He suddenly hit a number of keys. He suspected he had their attention, but Loxy was focused on breaking the dissonance, and she turned the disturbance into light version of Beethoven’s ‘Moonlight Sonata.’

He heard himself speaking, as if in a dream, overtop of “Moonlight,” but it wasn’t him speaking, it was Loxy: “Alright, folks, here’s the deal. I am putting the band back together. Thinking of naming it Moon Unit Two. Zappa would be so proud, don’t you think? So, I need volunteers up here, or I will continue to play songs with Moon in the title or the lyrics.” S/he looked back. “Okay, here we go...” She ended Moonlight and went into “Blue Moon.”

Audrey had come away from the line. She felt compelled to go collect Jon, but at the same time she didn’t want to be next to Jon because of the level of attention he was holding. She was uncertain if people were annoyed or angry. She felt embarrassed for him. Not that he was performing badly, but there was a feel like he was singing at a funeral to cheer people who didn’t

want to hear it quality to the situation. It was clear that he affecting the mood of the room, but it didn't seem to be in a positive direction.

Loxy finished the song. There was silence. "Seriously. I need a band. And Pips. Skirts or trouser, just great back up. Okay, I did warn you. I am about to start a revival." The intro for the next song made someone laugh. Creedence Clearwater Revival: 'Bad Moon Rising:' "I see a bad moon a-rising. I see trouble on the way. I see earthquakes and lightnin'. I see bad times today. Oh, don't come around tonight, it's bound to take your life, there's a bad moon on the rise..."

Koenig and Russell entered. Russell held a pad and she had been alerted to the fact that Jon's brainwaves had altered, which would have coincided with Loxy taking over. Her brainwaves were as different from Jon, as another person's finger print would have been. They approached Audrey.

"What's going on?" Russell asked.

Audrey shrugged. "I told him to get a seat and he started playing music," she said.

"Was he acting funny?" Russell asked.

"Not that I noticed," Audrey shrugged. "Why?"

"His brainwaves changed," Russell said. "Significantly that sent an alert."

"Really?" Audrey asked, looking at her Glass.

"Multiple personality disorder would present like this," Audrey said.

"It's DID now," Russell said.

"I know, but, I am just saying, this is evidence for the condition," Audrey said.

Someone had taken up the bass, simultaneously with someone taking position behind the drums. One of the security who had been eating approached the commander. "You want me to stop him?"

Koenig looked to Russell.

"This doesn't seem to be life threatening," Russell said.

"He's certainly lifting spirits," Audrey said. The accidental wording wasn't lost on either Koenig or Russell.

"Brainwaves are like fingerprints, right?" Koenig said. "Is he channeling someone?"

"I don't know," Russell said.

"Channeling?" the security officer asked. "You brought a potential telepath to Alpha without notifying security?"

"We've been rather distracted today," Koenig said.

King Harvest's "Dancing in the Moonlight," was the next song. After getting it started, Jon surrendered the piano to the girl that had joined him on the bench, but he continued to sing. He had backup singers now. He motioned for them to keep it going and he ran over to Audrey. He reached out and took Koenig's hand.

"Oh! It's so nice to meet you, Sir," Loxy told him through Jon. "You're kind of moody, like Hugh Laurie. Love your hair, Doctor Russell. Would you both excuse me please? Audrey?" Loxy offered Jon's hand to Audrey. "Shall we dance?"

"Who the hell are you?" Audrey said.

Jon nearly collapsed but Audrey and security guy took his arms. Jon shook it off. "Fuck," he said. Russell was completely absorbed into her data screen. "Did you..."

"We switched," Jon said.

“Switched with whom?” Koenig said.

Jon asked for a moment, he went and took half a sandwich from someone’s plate and immediately took a bite. “OMG! Jalapeno egg salad?” he asked the man whose food he stole; he sort of nodded confirmation. “Nice. Thank you.” Back to Koenig, “I am sorry, commander. I am so hungry. What were you wanting to ask me?”

“Did you just ask me to dance?” Audrey asked.

“I don’t know how to dance,” Jon said. Simultaneous questions came at him from security, Koenig, Russell, and Loxy. “Too much at once. Really nice songs. Yes, Loxy, I like her, too, but you know how complicated relationships get when we both like the same girl.”

“Jon, we need to talk,” Koenig and Russell both said.

“I am seriously craving fries,” Jon said. “Please tell me you have a McDonald’s on the moon.”

“Jon, I fear you are experiencing euphoria,” Russell said. “I want you to eat, and then go and sleep. And if you’re not asleep in two hours, I am going to have Audrey sedate you. Food, sleep, that’s an order.”

“How does this work? I am not crew, so…” Jon asked.

“We will figure that out later,” Koenig said. “The Doctor has spelled out what she wants. Take some food back to your room, then get some sleep.

“Or I could take you to the brig,” the security officer said.

“We’re going,” Audrey said, taking Jon’s arm.

They interrupted the queue and Jon asked for like four of the Jalapeno egg salad sandwiches to go. He ate them as they proceeded to a tram. The tram carried them to the next station, where they existed past others wanting to go in. “This is so good, want some?” Jon asked. He didn’t hear her answer as he tracked a female that was out of uniform. “Oh, wow, cute outfit.” The female responded with a thank you before the doors closed and carried her and the others off. It wasn’t lost on him that security was following him. They arrived at a corridor that had an obvious curve to it. They entered a room, which could have been a luxury resort suite. The furniture was modern, squared edges, but he was drawn straight towards the plate glass that led to an open balcony. Audrey showed him how to open it and he stepped out on the balcony. There were apartments or suites all away around the crater, lining the crater wall. Looking up he could see out into space and if he didn’t know there was a transparent ceiling above, he might have freaked. He heard people talking in the balcony next to him. Below there was a park and illuminated pathways.

“There is no way I am going to get to sleep,” Jon said. “There is too much to see and do and learn and…”

“Oh, I think I can guarantee you, you’re going to sleep,” Audrey said.

“I don’t want to be sedated…”

Audrey kissed him. When Jon didn’t resist, she increased the intensity of her play, and drew him deeper into the room. She steered him to the bed, where it clipped the back of his knee and took him down, and she followed him up. She was on top of him.

“Are you sure?” Jon asked.

“Trust me,” Audrey said. “I am a professional.”

“Crises romances tend not last long,” Jon said.

“I am helping you sleep,” Audrey said.

“Or keeping me up wanting more,” Jon said.

“If you’re still up in thirty minutes...” Audrey said. “Fuck, just shut up and get naked.”

They were helping each other undress. Jon’s bracelet began to flash. Audrey pointed at her lips, telling him to be quiet, and then addressed the blinking by pushing a button.

“Jon, your heart and respiration rate have increase,” Russell’s voice issued from the bracelet.

“I have it under control, Doctor,” Audrey said. Jon pushed Audrey over so she was now on her back. She was motioning for him to be still but he began licking his ways down her stomach, heading for her thighs.

“Is he alright?” Russell asked.

“I’ll let you know in a moment,” Audrey said.

“What’s going on?” Russell asked.

“A little light exercise to help him sleep,” Audrey said.

Koenig’s voice came over the bracelet. “Even I know exercise right before bed doesn’t induce sleep.”

“Oh! Umm,” Audrey said. “It’s not that kind of exercise, Commander. OMG, we’re good. Doctor. Audrey out...”

Audrey tore the sheets out with her hand, her gasping became laughter, and her muscled tensed, her thighs squeezing for more, but her hands going to his head to get him to ease up. Jon doubled his efforts, and she made noises and laughed. The tension in her body went away and she relaxed into it, closing her eyes, and then when she came back to the moment, she directed him to climb back up. He did, kissing her on the way, lingering, but she wanted him all the way up now, and so she encouraged him with hands, and didn’t stop pulling on him to their lips met. Her hands traced all her nails up and down and his back and she could feel that he was poised perfectly. She embraced him, maneuvering herself to accommodate him, and he was there without having to use guiding hands. His hazels seemed to shift to a lighter green as he entered her. Once inside her, she rolled so that she was on top, and began a subtle grind. She kept her face near his, her hair dangling over him.

“Shh, don’t move. Let me do this,” Audrey said. “Easy. Slow.”

It was a Tantra move, where the goal was to barely move, to slow the breathing. Her hands were poised over his heart. They weren’t purposely trying to delay his orgasm, but rather, the goal was to minimize movement, and try to sneak up on it with least amount of effort. Audrey matched her breath to his, so as he breathed out she was breathing in. There was enough stimulation that he would stay hard, focused, but not so much it rushed them to the inevitable. Audrey was tuned in enough to his reaction of her that she would pause if she sensed it was too much and would then ease back to her subtle rhythm.

“OMG,” Loxy said. “She is good.”

“Who taught you?” Jon asked.

“Shh,” Audrey said. “Breathe.”

“I want to come,” Jon said.

“I want you to,” Audrey said. “But let me get you there.”

“I can’t focus,” Jon said. If he was in a better place, he could make this last an hour.

“Shh, I got you,” Audrey said.

Jon blinked. He thought he saw the lights in the room increasing in magnitude through his periphery vision. Audrey stopped moving. Jon thought time itself had stopped. Satisfied he was not the verge, she increased her angle away from him. She took his hands into hers and leaned into them. Her movements were so soft that it was if she were in slow motion. The room continued growing brighter. Audrey seemed bigger than life, while everything else had become miniaturized. He tried to focus. In one blink it was Audrey. In another it was Loxy. In another, it was an alien. He shivered, but it wasn't an orgasm. He sensed she was speeding up, based on the movement of her breasts, but he experienced it as time slowing down. He was intensely aware of everything about her, her hair, a bead of sweat that rolled down her forehead. As she sunk into him, he saw a light where she made contact with him, and the world, he, rippled as if he were a pool of water and she was descending into him.

Suddenly, Jon was not in the room with Audrey. He was in an Egyptian Temple, devoted to Isis, and it was alive and shiny as if it had just been constructed. Isis was there.

“Hello, Jon,” Isis said. “I want you to meet someone.”

A mantis, twice the size of a human, entered the room. Jon found himself unable to look away from the creature. He wasn't afraid, per se, but, he couldn't look away. It was if he was trying to understand what he was seeing.

“He is not ready,” the mantis being said.

“Is anyone ever truly ready?” Isis asked.

“He lacks clarity,” the mantis being said. “He has no coherence with any of his other aspects. He barely remembers his dreams.”

“He is gaining ground in that, but it isn't necessary for overall advancement to remember everything at this juncture,” Isis said. “We all start with minimal coherence.”

“Jon,” the mantis being said. “Tell me your impressions of the other Torchbearers.”

There was silence.

“Jon,” Isis said.

“He can't even speak in front of me,” the mantis being said.

“I don't know how speak about them,” Jon said. “I don't know enough about them to be fair.”

“Reasonable,” the mantis being said. “But I am asking your impressions.”

“Jon, use a metaphor,” Isis said.

Jon sucked in a breath and let it go. “Okay. The reptilians, I am pretty sure they're Klingons. The Greys, well, I suspect they are Talosians, about to go extinct because they focused on their brains and immersive fantasy tech, but they're very logical, like Spock, and so Aadya is a hybrid... Spock! Only better coherence between logic and emotions. The Tall Whites, well, they're the Romulans. Emotional, arrogant, but smart, so smart, they don't even realize that they don't realize how emotional they really are. The Andromedans, they're Betazoid on steroids. The Pleiadian's are the Native Americans Kirk met, only advanced. The Nordics, well, I think they're Zeltron's from Star Wars, and okay so I can't keep the metaphor going...”

The mantis being leaned in real close. “And who are you?”

Jon found himself back in his body, lights raining down on him. The orgasm had happened but he didn't remember it because he had been elsewhere. Audrey was still larger than life and her voices sounded far away.

"Are you okay?" Audrey asked.

There was an audible click and suddenly sounds and lights were normal. Audrey was normal size. "Um, yeah," Jon said. He blinked. He became aware of tears on his face.

"Are you crying?" Audrey asked.

Jon went from just tears to sobbing. Audrey laid on him, embracing him. She went to his side, and simply held him, drawing his head to her shoulder, her hands on his back and head. "Shh, I got you. Shh. It's okay." She kissed the top of his head.

The spell lasted for a moment, his breathing regulated, and he kissed her neck. He tasted his own tears on her. He kissed her again and again their intimacy escalated until he was back on top kissing her and without effort, she had taken him back into her. This time, he stayed with her until he finished, and though he was attentive to her, he was single mindedly pursuing his own. He came and fell exhausted on her, and then he slept.

Chapter 9

There was a small conference room at the remote science center, which was quickly becoming the new command center. Jon was in the conference room. He and Loxy were looking out the window at the Eagles lowering habitats into place. There was also a paving machine, which was literally turning the lunar surface into solar panel size chunks of tarmacs by melting the lunar surface. The paving machines, like oversize Zamboni ice machines, were now working nonstop to increase the number of solar panels, so the next time Moon base Alpha was in star-light, they could have back up power and increase their battery reserves, but mostly, they were anticipating future needs. The panels could also support the weight of eagles, so it was also landing pads for the Eagle's and the Other ships they were expecting to visiting here. The habitats, which were essentially space-campers, fit nicely into the crew section of the Eagles. Each habitat fit perfectly on a chunk of lunar regolith reformed. The chunks were used as walkways, driveways, landing pads, and when they generated energy, the beamed it wirelessly to collectors. Any tech within the wi-fi range of the transmission could use the power. Jon thought it humorous that all these years after Tesla had promoted free-energy, it was finally coming to pass. "It was coming to pass because the only way to advance as a species is to free up energy sources; when energy is as abundant as sunlight, charging people for it is criminal. Earth, water, air, Sun, these are free resources."

Loxy was sitting in the window. She was wearing a silver 'moon base' uniform from a 1960's television series titled 'UFO.' It was the purple hair that jarred his memory, but as we comparing his memory of the sets and tech of that show, in many ways the similarities with where he were unavoidable. Jon suddenly had a theory: the cabals can't completely hide the reality of their war with aliens, so they cleverly disguised it by commissioning television shows and movies, so if and when someone in the controlled population has a psychic event that clues them into there is something more, the cabals can squash it by saying, 'Oh, you're channeling fiction,' or you watch too much TV.

Jon was not watching the Eagles or the Zamboni regolith machines working, but was searching the sky further. The work lights outside was making it difficult to see far out. When a group of people entered, his vision shifted back and he could see their reflections in the glass. His reflection was there, too. Loxy's was not. Jon turned to the folks entering, and was invited to sit. Koenig, Russell, Berman were present. Jon was introduced to Tony Verdeschi. Audrey was there, and she was minimizing eye contact. He shot a tight beam conversation to Loxy: "Is it because I cried?" She touched his shoulder. "Don't track it. It was what it was, and will be what it will be." The next woman, who was stunning enough Jon would have normally stared mercilessly at her, was introduced simply as Maya. He found he didn't really want to look at her. No, he wanted to look at her, but he kept diverting his eyes, finding something else to focus on. He also wanted to look at Audrey, but with his perceived ideas that she was blocking, he couldn't look at her, as if he needed to conspire with her that there was nothing, even though Russell and Koenig definitely knew... So, am I not making eye contact with Maya because that might block me from another hook up with Audrey, he wondered?

"Are you okay?" Russell asked.

Jon met her eyes. "Yes, thank you. Everyone has been really kind. I am well fed. Rested."

Jon looked back at the table. Koenig put a picture of the tech that Jon had showcased that started his journey into the Twilight Zone.

“Can you make another set, and can it be used to communicate with Earth?” Koenig asked.

Jon looked up, staring at the tech, and then he smiled. “That might work, actually. The download would have the same harmonic resonance that entrained the subatomic particles connecting the two initial devices...” He was focusing on something deeper, even as Loxy was saying something to him. “I don’t know.” He turned his eyes to Koenig. “What’s to be gain?”

“We have families, friends,” Verdeschi said.

“What do you know about remote viewing?” Maya asked.

Jon found he still couldn’t look at her. His right hand unconsciously massaged his left knuckle. He felt warm. “She’s probing your mind,” Loxy said.

Jon pushed his chair away from the table as if he intended to get up and run, but then he realized there was nowhere to run to. He felt Loxy’s hand on his shoulders. His eyes met Maya’s eyes. She changed. She now looked like Loxy, as he was presently perceiving her. He felt rising panic and conflict.

“Not me,” Loxy said.

“Is this what she looks like?” Maya asked.

“Stop,” Jon said.

Maya returned to her natural appearance.

“No, stop, stop, stop,” Jon said.

“Shhh, Jon, she’s out,” Loxy said.

“It doesn’t feel out,” Jon said.

“He’s definitely on the higher end of the spectrum,” Maya reported.

“I am not autistic!” Jon said.

“Telepathic, Jon,” Maya said. “It’s my opinion everyone is on the spectrum, but I would argue that for ASD as well.”

Jon hands were shaking. “I’m not telepathic. I suck at remote viewing.”

“You suck so much that the statistical samples of your attempt suggest you couldn’t miss that many targets unless you were actively engaging in avoidance,” Maya stated. “The matter is complicated further by how creative you are, and so you have just learned the necessary techniques to get around your own brain.”

Jon looked up and back and then turned to Koenig. “So, Project Stargate never ended?”

“It never ended. Once these things get unlocked in a society, they tend to perpetuate themselves,” Koenig said.

Jon turned to Bergman. “You know about this stuff.”

“I do. I can’t ignore the statistical anomalies, but I prefer to stick to the things I find more consistently reliable,” Bergman said.

“No, your dismissal of me at that first meeting was more than just preference. It was arrogance, no, it was more than that even. It was contempt.”

“Jon,” Loxy said. “His perspective is necessary. His personality can’t hold this in the forefront of his brain and simultaneously allow him to be the exceptional scientist that Moon base Alpha requires.”

“I agree with Loxy,” Maya said. “Just because he doesn’t recognize his connection to Source, doesn’t mean he isn’t connected to source. Further, it is through our interactions, our dialogues and contradictions of perspective that we discover greater truths about who we are as individuals and who we will be as a species.”

“You are not human,” Jon said.

Maya smiled. “And you say you are not psychic.”

“Wait wait wait,” Jon said, sorting something. He had to close his eyes, and he squeezed them tightly. He covered his mouth with his hand. Russell started to get up, but Maya raised a hand, asking that they give him a moment. “I have seen UFO’s and been compelled to look away. I have seen aliens and watched people go out of their way to avoid them, but never acknowledging them. I couldn’t look at you when you entered. I could see you, but...”

“The human population on earth has been programmed through subliminal information not to see,” Maya said.

Jon turned to Koenig. “I know I was abducted, frequently in my childhood. What was that about?”

“That wasn’t us,” Koenig said.

“But you have access to their files,” Jon said.

“No,” Koenig said.

Jon turned to Maya. “But you have a remote viewing program on the moon. You were looking for abductees and people of high spectrum telepathy. You guys were tracking me.”

Maya smiled because his question merely confirmed her suspicions.

“Jon, you were not on our radar until you showed up at the Dallas World Trade Center with tech you shouldn’t have had access to,” Koenig said.

“If he was such a good target, why did the cabals who supposedly abducted him keep him in play?” Bergman said.

“Now, that is a mystery. My team and I are exploring that further,” Maya said. “But I suspect, he was a target of interest to several groups. They probably failed to recruit him because of his MH trajectories and childhood illness, psychosomatically induced to lower his eligibility. Which suggests to me he is Starseed with a primary mission that required him being reasonably isolated until circumstances activated him.”

“I am not a Starseed,” Jon said. “I am not special. I am human.”

“We all are,” Maya said. “We are all spirits first. We tend to have soul groups and we tend to move in these preferred groups, but yes, you’re right, we’re not special and the closer you get to source, the less importance the differentiation becomes. It is immaterial to me if you have incarnated here at this time from another soul group, another species, or not. What interests me is the timing of your arrival, the fact you were selected as a Torchbearer, and for the evidence of the fact you can Travel.”

“Travel?” Jon asked.

New images came up on the screen, which were basically brain scans. “The nanites we placed in you have been making brain maps, recording your brain waves, and transmitting it to the Doctor; my people get copies. In the cafeteria was our first evidence for an event, in which we believe Loxy was using your body. We have second, more pronounced event during your lite exercise with Audrey.”

Jon was quiet.

“Where did you go?” Maya asked.

“He went know-where,” Bergman said. “If he went somewhere, there would be no brainwaves.”

“Which, interests me, my friend, in why you dismiss Near Death Experiences when you have clear evidence that there is no brainwaves, and yet, people come back with reports of ongoing awareness in defiance of your biological first paradigm,” Maya said. “You dismiss if there is brainwave and you dismiss if there aren’t.”

“How do you explain the brainwaves?” Jon asked.

Maya nodded. “You are still connected to your body when you are Astral Projecting. You are still connected when you have an out of body experience, as well. And yes, I make a distinction between the two, even though the lay public uses the terms interchangeably. You are not your body, or your brain. But just because you aren’t those, doesn’t mean they aren’t important players in your evolution. They are your friends, your guides, and they offer insight you would not have if you simply remained spirit. They can act and respond independent of you if they need to. Your subconscious you is not you, but it can take over your body if it needs to. Loxy can take over your body.”

“Doctor Russell,” Bergman said. “Have you diagnosed Jon with Dissociative identity disorder, due to past trauma?”

“It’s not a disorder if it’s true about everyone,” Jon said.

“It’s not true for everyone,” Bergman said. “By definition.”

“Anyone can go to a tulpa site and learn how to make one,” Jon said. “By definition, everyone has this ability. Freud said we had bits of personalities in our subconscious. Jung took it further and said those things Freud was hitting upon are not parts, but fully fledged personalities interacting with us at a subconscious level.”

“Archetypes?” Russell asked.

“Yes, no, both,” Jon said.

Koenig motioned for a time out while he took a call. “Sorry to interrupt you, Commander, but I thought you might like to know we witness several ships departing the moon. They left without transponders. They’re the Greys. They refused to answer our hails. At their present course and speed, they will be beyond radar in about ten minutes.”

“Where are they going?” Bergman asked.

Jon found himself gripping the arms of his chair, white knuckled. “We need to leave this space,” he announced.

“What did you see?” Maya asked.

“I don’t know,” Jon said.

“Why do we need to leave?” Koenig asked.

“We’re in the middle of nowhere,” Bergman said. “There are no threats here. It would be ill advised to leave because you’re afraid of the dark.”

“You know that expression there is nothing there in the dark that isn’t there in the light,” Jon said. “You need to be more afraid.”

“What did you see?” Maya asked.

“I don’t know! Déjà vu. Maybe every sci-fi plot contrivance to move the story in a negative direction is coming our way! We need to leave, we need to leave now,” Jon said.

“We are scientists,” Bergman said. “If there is something out there, we need to investigate. We’re not going to run away every time Jon chases a white rabbit, are we?”

“Have you watched Monty Python? That was a seriously deadly rabbit,” Jon said.

“Maya, take an Eagle out to see if you can determine what the Grays are chasing,” Koenig said.

“I’d like to take Jon,” Maya said.

“No,” Koenig and Jon both said. Koenig looked to Jon.

“I am not trained for an Away Mission,” Jon said.

“This is not Star Trek,” Bergman said. “We don’t call them Away Missions.”

“What do you call them?” Jon asked.

“Well, um, we...”

“I am not going on a fucking Away Mission,” Jon said.

“They’re going off radar and we might need you to help track them, or at least, track the threat that is causing you concern,” Maya said.

Jon turned to Koenig. “No fucking way.”

“Maya makes a good point,” Koenig said. “I will personally guarantee your safety.”

“How can you do that when you don’t even know what the threat is!” Jon said.

“Neither do you, and we need to know,” Koenig said.

“I don’t have rank or a color. You better not put me in a fucking red shirt,” Jon said.

“It was a myth that the red shirts died more frequently than any other color shirt,”

Bergman said.

“Seriously?” Jon asked.

“I did the math, episode per episode,” Bergman said.

“Don’t you have like real science you should be doing?” Jon asked.

“I was teaching a course in statistics and thought that would be fun analog,” Bergman said.

“We’re wasting time,” Maya said.

“Go,” Koenig said. Maya stood and motioned for Jon to follow. Audrey also followed. As they were leaving, Jon heard Koenig telling Verdeschi to get back to ops, and to try and contact the other Torchbearers about the possibility that we may need to depart this area.

Chapter 10

Samantha Goldwater met them at airlock to the Eagle. "I'll get us going, ya'll suit up," Goldwater said.

Audrey and Maya went right to their suits, which were at stations. Jim, who Jon had met on the ride up motioned him over to his designated suit. Jon spied Audrey taking off her Jacket, and since Maya was doing the same, he emulated. As soon as his jacket was off, he sat down to take off his boots, again mirroring Audrey. His eyes lingered on her legs. When she stood up to remove her skirt, he felt a flush of warmth and wanting, but decided it was best to stay focused, so he stood and removed his pants, taking his underwear down with them...

"Hold on there, horse," Jim said. "You can leave your clothes on for these."

"But," Jon began.

"The skirt doesn't fit as well," Audrey explained.

He realized Audrey had caught him looking at her. He was embarrassed that he was caught, and embarrassed that he had exposed evidence of just how far afield his thoughts had gone. He pulled up his pants. His blush lingered as he gave Jim instructed him in putting on the suit. It was possible to do it without help, due the suit station, but it was generally good to have an EVA specialist, especially one's first time suiting up. If Jim was amused by his discomfort, he was too professional to reveal it. Maya was not. She was always amused by 'humans' and their reluctance to discuss the 'elephant' in the room.

Once suited up, except for the helmet, Maya took Jon forward. With the lights on full in the cockpit, it was impossible to see but the brightest of stars. Once he was seated and belted in, Goldwater turned off the flight deck light. The soft illuminated lights of the panels and floor had no comparison to myriad of available hues. Goldwater turned down the inside lights to their minimum. Jon gripped his chair.

"You okay?" Goldwater asked.

"I thought I would like this a lot more," Jon said. "I feel like I am falling, even though I am not."

"We are, actually," Maya said. "Everything in space is always falling."

"You'll get use to the view," Goldwater said.

"I'd be more comfortable with ground below me," Jon said. "Can you show me the moon?"

"We're already too far away, besides, it's in the dark," Goldwater said. "Though that nebula is bright, it's not bright enough at its distance to light the moon up."

"Eagle four, you've reach the terminal point of our radar," Moon base Alpha declared. "You're on your own. Good luck."

"Roger that, Alpha," Goldwater said.

"Time delay on response?" Maya asked.

Goldwater looked at her instrument. "Forty five seconds."

"Seriously, we're that far away already?"

"We move pretty fast," Goldwater said. "Combination of alien and human tech."

"Do you see anything?" Maya asked.

"No," Goldwater said. "Wait, 12 o'clock, radar."

“Fast walker,” Maya confirmed. “It’s altering course, coming towards us.”

Jon had to lean over to see the object painted on the radar. It was approaching so fast he expected a collision. He looked up and a small lit object became a fully formed UFO, stopping within a meter of the Eagle.

“Fuck,” Jon said. The UFO activated a laser, directing towards the nose of the Eagle. “They’re shooting at us?”

“Communication laser,” Goldwater explained. “They want a private conversation, compared to broadcasting on standard frequencies.”

Maya answered the hail. “This is Maya. Why are you out here?”

“I’d like to speak with Jon,” the response came. Maya activated Jon’s terminal so he could see her and they could see him.

“Aadya?” Jon asked.

“What the fuck is that?” Goldwater asked.

Jon lifted his eyes and saw what appeared to be an obelisk. He had no way of understanding how big it was due to no objects to compare it. He couldn’t see the other Grey saucer. The object was self-illuminated.

“What’s it made of?” Goldwater asked.

From the engineer’s position, Maya was analyzing it. “Spectrograph reading suggest it is primarily silica and carbon,” she said.

“Is it artificial?” Goldwater asked.

“You’re joking, right?” Jon asked. “It’s a fucking obelisk. What else do you need, an autograph from Jim C Clarke?!”

“It could be a space crystal,” Maya said.

“A space crystal with an internal power source?” Jon asked.

“That is puzzling,” Maya said.

“We found it, it’s ours,” Aadya said. “My people claim it.”

“Aadya,” Jon said patiently. “Call your other ship back. Let’s discuss this.”

“My people won’t negotiate,” Aadya said. “We found it.”

“Oh, please tell me you’re not Ferengi,” Jon said.

An immense flash whited out the whole sky. The windows automatically polarized. Every power system in the Eagle went dead. When the polarization field failed, the sky was black. The Saucer was gone, and the sky was spinning. The saucer came back into view, clearly powerless, and not spinning.

“I think I am going to be sick,” Jon said.

“Bag on your right,” Maya said.

Gonner floated into the flight deck, Audrey right behind him. “What was that?” Gonner asked.

“Are we under attack?” Audrey asked.

“Yes,” Goldwater said. “EMP.”

Jon’s eyes were closed. “I am seriously about to hurl,” Jon said.

“Get him a bag,” Maya said.

“Where’s the damn back up!” Goldwater said, pulling a hidden recessed lever under the console in front of her.

“Why are people shooting at us?” Audrey asked.

“Yes!” Goldwater shouted, backup systems came on. She closed her eyes and manually operated thruster to slow, then stop their rotation compared to the saucer, now drifting horizontally next to the Eagle. It was sheer luck they hadn’t collided.

“Get us back,” Gonner said.

“No,” Jon said. “This is now a rescue mission.”

“No one put you in charge,” Goldwater said.

“I am in charge, this is a rescue mission,” Maya said, nodding at Jon. “Gonner, extend the inflatable bridge.”

“We’re not at a hundred percent,” Goldwater said.

“What if they shoot again?” Audrey asked.

Jon reached out to grab the console. He looked pale.

“Fuck, I swear if you hurl in my ship, you’re cleaning it up,” Goldwater snapped.

“Oumuamua,” Jon said.

Everyone looked at him. He turned his seat to Maya. “That object that blew through our solar system in 2017. That’s what this is.”

“It can’t be that,” Goldwater said.

“No, not this, but they’re the same,” Jon said. “It wasn’t an attack.”

“Is this from Loxy?” Audrey asked.

“You have a spirit guide name Loxy?” Gonner asked.

“That object is a Von Neumann probe,” Jon said.

“And this is there way of saying hello?” Goldwater asked.

“No,” Jon said. “This is there way of shutting off their tech so that it doesn’t interfere with a system where life is already in play. The other saucer must have triggered the system to self-destruct.”

“That makes a lot of sense,” Maya said, looking out into the black.

“Seriously?” Goldwater and Gonner said together. Gonner added, “You’re listening to insane guy with multiple personalities?”

“They call it DID I now,” Audrey said.

“They still call crazy crazy, right?” Gonner asked.

“Wait wait wait,” Jon said, holding his hands up. “Loxy, slow down. Oh, we are so fucking screwed.”

“What?” they all asked.

Jon scrambled to unbuckle his seat and came back to the engineer section, hovering over Maya. “Can you play the video back?”

“What video?” Maya asked.

“The one you were making of the obelisk,” Jon said.

Maya replayed the video and it played up until the screen went white and then dead.

“Back it up, right before the explosion, and then advanced frame by frame,” Jon directed.

Maya advanced the frame until she saw what he had seen and recorded subconsciously, but only Loxy had had access to the subconscious reaction to the image. “Fuck,” Maya echoed.

“What is it?” Goldwater said.

“Gonner, get that the emergency bridge unfurled, now. Audrey, go pull two fresh EVA packs from the locker, now,” Maya said.

“Our suits are dead,” Audrey pointed out.

“They’ll hold enough air for us to complete a rescue,” Maya said. “And the EVA units in the locker would have been shielded from the EMP.”

“Aye,” Audrey said.

“Goldwater, as soon as the bridge has detached from the saucer, you head back. Minimum acceleration; don’t want till we’re fully in. If we aren’t back in ten minutes, you go straight back, full thrust.”

“Aye,” Goldwater said.

Goldwater found herself alone with Jon who was staring out the window into darkness, trying to focus on what was between them and the stars.

“What is it?” Goldwater asked.

“Oh, just a fleet of obelisk, maybe a hundred thousand of them,” Jon said. “And the moon is going to fly right through them.”

“But,” Samantha said, but she was already correcting her thoughts. If the devices self-destructed only after they were near the moon, then the EMP would kill their tech, and then then next obelisk, not detecting life signs would land and start converting the moon into more obelisks. “Fuck.”

“Yeah,” Jon said. “It’s not malicious, just doing what it was programmed to do.”

Jon watched as inflatable bridge was extended to the saucer. Apparently, one of the nice things about saucers is they don’t always spin out of control the same way Eagles do. Once the far end of the bridge was connected to the saucer, the inside of the bridge was inflated. The Eagle and the saucer fell at right angles, pointing the flight deck view away from the saucer. In the quiet, something made a ping against the ship.

“What’s that?” Jon asked.

“Fragments from the obelisk that blew up,” Goldwater said. “Maya, better make it fast. It’s about to rain diamonds.”

On the monitor that showed Gonner’s view out the airlock into the bridge airlock, he saw Aadya, followed by two other creatures, full blooded greys, pulling themselves along a line that went down the center of the bridge.

“Far end of the airlock closed, saucer released,” Maya said. “Get us out of here.”

“Maya, the saucer is making a rain shadow,” Goldwater said.

“I know, go anyway,” Maya said. “Go, go, go.”

“Thrusters online, accelerating, minimum recommended curve,” Goldwater said. The sound of rain was growing in intensity now that the saucer had ‘fallen’ away.

“Everyone’s in,” Gonner said.

“Punch it,” Maya ordered.

“You’re not strapped in,” Goldwater said.

“Punch it, you can mend us later!” Maya said.

“If there’s a later,” Audrey said.

Goldwater took them to full thrust. Jon fell back into his seat.

“Don’t you throw up,” Goldwater told him.

“Okay,” Jon said, breathlessly. “Do you know where you’re going?”

“Yeah,” Goldwater said.

“I don’t see the moon,” Jon said.

“You won’t see it until we are on top of the base,” Goldwater said. “But if you watch dead ahead, you will see a growing dark spot where the stars are being occluded.”

“Oh, so that’s not a tunnel,” Jon tried.

“Eagle 2, this is Alpha, we have you on radar,” Alpha said.

“Is that the Asian girl?” Jon asked.

“My name is Yasko,” Alpha said.

“Hi, Yasko,” Jon said. “I’m Jon.”

“Where’s Goldwater?” Yasko asked.

“Um,” Jon looked at Goldwater, and she was busy reading things on her screen and counting. “Um, she is busy doing math.”

“Where’s Maya,” the voice changed to Koenig.

“Oh, hi, commander,” Jon said. “Um, I get the sense we’re coming in really fast, and on manual, and probably can’t do this twice, and, oh, as soon as we’re on the moon, you need to shift the moon to somewhere else.”

“Jon, let me speak to Maya,” Koenig said.

“Sir, she’s in the back, and the moon is about to go through a cloud of Von Neuman probes, and when they detect life they self-destruct. Their EMP will likely disrupt all lunar tech. Tell the other Torchbearers that Aadya is with me, and I am confident she agrees with my assessment. Pretty sure. You can ask her if we survive this.”

“Now,” Goldwater said, killing forward thrust. She spun the ship around, facing away from the moon, and then went back to full thrust. “25, 24, 23...”

“Fuck,” Jon said, holding on for dear life. “I hate space travel.”

“Goldwater, we’ve analyzed your approach and would like to correct your resolution by three at my mark,” Yasko said. “3, 2, 1 mark...”

Goldwater started skipping from where she was down to three, and continued without skipping a beat.

By the time Jon could see the moon, it meant they were close and skimming the surface. A large crater wall was passing to his right and he was thinking ‘too fast,’ even as they were touching down. On the outside, there would be no sound sliding across the moon, but inside, it sound like an avalanche. The only reason he had seen the crater was because of the artificial lights on top of the rim. This was not like flying at night on Earth under moonlight. This was like flying in a cave with no lights. Jon didn’t experience the shuttle’s slide coming to an end. The last thing he saw before unconsciousness took him away was the rainstorm of diamonds pelting moon dust making a score of tiny craters.

The moon traveled.

Chapter 11

Jon woke to Audrey applying smelling salts. “You okay?”

He looked around. “Where is everyone?” He didn’t seem to notice that he couldn’t see out the windows.

“We’re getting ready for a moonwalk,” Audrey said. “We’re about five meters off the grid, so some of our walk will be moon standard instead of Earth standard.”

Jon nodded. “May I ask you something?”

“I’d rather you didn’t,” Audrey said.

Jon nodded, unfastening his belt. He stood up, way too fast.

“Moon standard. Go slow,” Audrey said.

As they came out into the cabin, he saw one of the grays was on a stretcher. He was staring at the other when Aadya hugged him. “Thank you for rescuing us.”

“Um, you’re choking me,” Jon said. She let go and took his hand.

“Okay, we’re all going to be tied together,” Maya said. “I am going to take us directly to the nearest structure, 20 minute walk. Goldwater and Gonner, you’re carrying the stretcher. We do not have enough air to get lost, and we don’t have enough air to remain here. I need all of you to maintain your pace, keep the line connecting us taught, and keep the talking to a minimum. We good?”

Everyone seemed to be in agreement.

“Once I open this door, we’re committed to this, are you all sure?” Maya asked.

No one said no.

“Jon?” Maya asked.

“I go where you go,” Jon said.

“Then put your helmet on,” Maya said.

Gonner helped him with his helmet. He smacked it with his hands. It was loud and jarring. “Seems secure to me. You good?”

“I was until you said that,” Jon said.

“Minimize the talking, here we go,” Maya said. She blew the door. The rush of air could be heard and felt, and then it was gone. For a brief moment the immediate area outside the door revealed moon sand, and then the cloud fell back in, cutting visibility to barely hands length. The fog filled the Eagle before they were all out.

“What the hell?” Jon said.

“Slow and steady,” Maya said. “Maintain the rope tension.”

“I can’t see my hands, my feet,” Jon said.

“We’re all aware. Slow, and steady,” Maya said.

“Jon, breathe slower please,” Audrey said.

“How do you know where you’re going?” Jon asked.

“Slow and steady,” Maya said.

The walk seemed longer than twenty minutes Audrey complemented Jon, “You’re doing great, Jon. Breathe.” If it wasn’t for Loxy talking nicely to him, and holding his hand, he probably would have freaked. It also helped that he walked with his eyes closed. He had never known he was claustrophobic until he went into his first MRI. They had to bring him out early.

When the nurse placed a towel over his eyes, he was able to sit out the process. The clicking noises still irritated him but he was less anxious. He thought it curious that he was remembering that. This wasn't a life review, but he could see himself back in the MRI just as clear as day. There was evidence they arrived when the softness of the moon turned into a floor, but Jon didn't stop until he felt the hand on his arm. The door closed and the fog was sucked out, replaced with air. He felt so much relief that tears began to flow, but he couldn't wipe his eyes.

"You're okay," Audrey said, smiling at him. "You did great."

"I no longer want to be an astronaut," Jon said.

On the other side of the airlock, Russell met the injured party with a female corpsman. When she was satisfied the Grey was stable, she greeted the other Grey, with a hand gesture. "Are you okay if we take you and your colleague to our infirmary?"

It nodded, looking to Aadya.

"Yes, thank you, Doctor Russell," Aadya said. "If it is okay, they would like me to remain with Jon. They recommend that we push the moon to the next location soon."

"Can't we find our feet first?" Jon asked.

"Jon, we're inside a nebula," Aadya said. "If there isn't already a star in the birthing process, our arrival here will get things kick started. The moon is but a pebble and ripples we have started will come back as waves. We need to leave."

Russell directed the corpsman to lead the Grays away as she checked Audrey. "Someone help Jon out of his suit," she instructed.

"I am fine, Doctor," Audrey said. "Maybe a bit beat up, though."

Meanwhile, Koenig took up his commlock. "Bergman?"

"I am charging it as fast as we can. We're looking at fourteen hours," Bergman said.

"Commander," Verdeschi said, entering the room. "I think I know exactly where we are."

"How can you know where we are, when we can't see a single star with which to reckon?" Maya asked.

"This cloud we find ourselves in has a chemical makeup that is so similar to the one that we studied that is in the constellation of Aquila, that I find it difficult to believe it's anything other. In addition to the usual expected contents, like carbon monoxide, hydrogen cyanide, and ammonia, there is enough ethyl alcohol that we could drink for the rest of our lives."

"Probably better than your home made beer," Audrey said.

"You said you liked my beer," Verdeschi said.

"I was being nice," Audrey said.

"You do that a lot?" Jon asked.

"Jon!" Loxy said.

Jon realized too late that his attempt at humor was really sarcasm, and hurtful. The micro flash that went across Audrey's face was unmistakable.

Verdeschi pushed on before Jon could say he was sorry. "If I am right, we are 58 quadrillion miles from Earth, in the Sagittarius B2 nebula."

"How does knowing where are help us?" Audrey asked.

"It could be useful in getting us home," Aadya said.

"Can we get home?" Koenig asked.

“We have not arrived at any consensus, yet,” Aadya said. “It was proposed in our meeting that it may be possible to at minimum reduce the noise so that the moon’s population is not rendered unconscious with each jump. If we can do that, it is theoretically possible to influence where we arrive in normal space-time. And if we can do that, then we can get us home.”

“That seems too much to hope for,” Maya said. “I don’t recommend spreading false hope.”

“Hope is still just hope, isn’t it?” Jon asked.

“This stays here, for now,” Koenig said.

Yasko entered. Loxy whispered to Jon, ‘she looks a lot like Keera, and from that point forward, Jon couldn’t see Yasko without seeing their mutual friend. “Commander. The Others are wanting to reconvene the Torchbearers.”

“This way,” Koenig said.

“No, Commander,” Yasko interrupted. “They want to meet here.”

Koenig nodded. “Maya, prepare permanent quarters here for the Torchbearers, even if you have to relocate personnel. Jon, Aadya, if you will come this way, I’ll escort you to the conference room.”

Jon and Aadya followed Koenig to the conference room. Though most of the personnel they passed appeared to be going out of their way not to look at Aadya, some looked, a few nodded. This was different than the last room Jon had been at, as three of the walls had large plate glass, oblong windows looking out into space. At the moment, all one could see was fog, illuminated by exterior lights. The room had the feel of an airport terminal. There was a table and chairs, but also a scattering of chairs and a few choice ferns near the windows. The wall leading back into the station had two entry doors opposite sides of the wall, and a middle door that Koenig explained was the lavatory and toilet. Between the bathroom door and the other two doors were modern cabinetry, and one displayed bottles of water. Using the other door, one would find a break room directly across the hall, where they would have access to foods and drinks, a small kitchen. If they wanted room service, they were invited to have Jon call to have things brought. When it was clear Jon had misplaced his Commlock, Koenig said “I will get you a new one. Try to keep up with it.” Koenig departed.

Aadya and Jon were left alone. They stood there, quietly, Jon feeling more awkward than Aadya. She broke the silence by asking “Who is Keera.”

“Oh,” Jon said. “Um, well, that’s kind of difficult to explain. Wait wait wait. You can read my mind, don’t you know?”

Aadya smiled, took his hand, and led him to a chair. She hopped up on the table, facing him, which gave her a favored position. Her smile broadened, reaching her eyes, as her affect had achieved her goal. She made a gesture with a finger drawing his eyes up to her eyes. “It doesn’t quite work like that,” she said.

Jon swallowed. “How does it work?”

“It’s like, tuning into a radio station,” Aadya said. “I can hear the running commentary in your head. If you have ever heard of pressured, or tangential speech, most people sound like they have mental health issue when you follow their thoughts. I can employ tricks to get at specific thoughts, as I did when I sat on the table.” She opened her legs a little more. She chuckled,

knowing he was noticing even though he was struggling to maintain eye contact. “I am okay with your thoughts, Jon. If all humans knew how often thoughts of sex came up, men or women, they would all be kinder to each other.”

“I am sorry,” Jon said, turning his chair slightly away.

Aadya put her feet in his chair and steered him back to directly facing her.

“Jon, I am open to your thoughts,” Aadya said. “I do not judge them. Most empaths and telepaths don’t. Yeah, they are still people and they have their biases, and those who are easily offended or can’t tolerate the adult content tune out. More people block themselves from experiencing the fact they are telepathic because they can’t get past how prevalent adult themes are.”

“You asked about Keera, which means…”

“I can hear Loxy,” Aadya said. “But, and interestingly, I can only hear her when she speaks. I don’t hear her running dialogue, as I do with you, or when I tune into others.”

“That is interesting,” Jon said. “Could you tell me what Audrey was thinking?”

“No,” Aadya said, her jovialness fading. “Jon, I am not a spy. I am not a gossip. I may be able to hear what’s around me, like tuning into a conversation at a nearby table at a restaurant, but people are allowed their privacy and autonomy. If you want to know what she is thinking, you need to listen, or better, ask her directly.”

Jon nodded, as that was sensible, but he was sorting questions.

“So, yes, if I observe something, and I am with a telepathic colleague, then they will obviously have the same knowledge. There aren’t too many secrets with telepaths. There can be, but only the masters are so tight that they can walk invisible amongst us. If I hear someone who is intending harm, I will report to everyone, conditionally. Some people with anger issues sometimes imagine or think of harming others, but they never do. Discernment, discretion, is always a part of this. Most the time, if someone is thinking harm, telepaths retreat. The braver, more confident ones, well, they will hold their ground and ignore the thoughts until the person begins to act on those thoughts, at which point, the game changes. Most Greys cannot tolerate being around human populations because it gets exhausting trying to determine what is just innocuous thoughts and what are serious threats. As a hybrid, I think like humans, and I think like Greys. Kind of the best of both worlds.”

Koenig had entered, along with the other Torchbearers. Danique stepped closer to Jon and Aadya, hands on her hip, akimbo, projecting a bit of energy, not quite jealously, but something.

“I opposed to this level of intimacy between you two,” Danique said.

“It’s just a little mental foreplay,” Aadya beamed, innocently. She laughed. “Yes, Commander, condoms would be lovely. I am partial to the flavored ones that glow in the dark.”

“I prefer without,” Lucia said, playing in.

“We are not having an orgy,” Edrei snapped, crossing her arms in front of her.

Safi laughed. “Jon, you’re blushing,” she said. “You have had sex before.”

“With each of us in his mind at least once,” Kesia said.

“I am really uncomfortable with the direction of this conversation,” Jon said.

“Jon,” Aadya said, with a kindness he hadn’t expected. “Withdrawing from this is how you block your telepathic abilities.”

“That, and you decrease your light,” Lucia said. “Your worries are that you are more sexualized than others and that your light is imposing, but it is simply your light, let it shine, and let those who will draw to you draw to you, and those who retreat, allow them to retreat.”

“You are not broken,” Kesia said. “Some of the increased libido can be explained by past trauma. Some of it can be explained by the family of origin dysfunction, which is partly due to generational dysfunction, but the biggest part is the systemic dysfunction of your society of origin.”

“That was not a criticism, Jon,” Lucia said. “Your personality was derived from a complex interaction pattern, and you might not be who you are if had originated in any other pattern. If you had been born in China or Russia, you would not be you, and we would not be we. But know this: your society is unhealthy, physically, mentally, emotionally, spiritually. Ask any of your medical professionals and they will tell you, when your health improves, your libido increases. You are going to experience an increase in wanting the longer we interact.”

“So get it under control,” Edrei said.

“Or ask us for help,” Aadya said.

“Leave us, Commander,” Edrei said. “We must speak in private.”

Koenig revealed he had a new commlock for Jon. He sat it on the cabinet next to the water and withdrew. Jon noticed there was a greater security presence as Koenig departed. As soon as the door was closed, Edrei issued a formal complaint.

“We are unhappy that the Grays embarked on a discovery mission without notifying us,” Edrei said.

“Space is still free. We found it before you, we took the initiative,” Aadya said. “It was ours.”

“It is your species inability to play with others that has brought your kind to the point of extinction,” Danique said.

Jon became aware of Loxy’s amusement. She withdrew a little to keep from being a distraction.

“We don’t play well with each other?” Aadya said.

“We play just fine. It’s you who don’t know how to play,” Danique said.

“The point is, had you brought that to the moon, it could have led to a crisis,” Edrei said.

“There is an argument to be made, had they not found it, the moon, would have passed through a cloud of that stuff, and we would be dead,” Jon said.

“An interesting point,” Lucia said. “Which means, we need to increase cooperative play for the duration of the moon’s journey.”

“We can’t agree on anything now, and yet you want to jump right to unilateral sharing in all arenas?” Danique said. “Your kind is always about talk, never action.”

Lucia displayed a confident smile, almost an invitation to test whether she was capable of action.

“We created the human race to be facilitators of peace and communication between us,” Kesia said. “We trust them to share with us. Why don’t we designate them as the gathers of intelligence and resources?”

“They do have the largest population out of all of us,” Edrei said.

“Wait wait wait, so we’re expendable?” Jon asked.

“The Greys are dying,” Aadya said. “When they are gone, we, the hybrids, will be all that remain of their kind.”

“Is that how you justified abducting people and taking reproductive material,” Jon asked.

“We had permission to harvest from your governments in exchange for tech,” Aadya said. “We never killed.”

“Which is more than we can say for your kind,” Edrei said. “Your own people engaged in the same activities, blaming it on us, but were more likely to dispose of people who were uncooperative.”

“They have killed reptilians,” Danique said.

“And Greys,” Aadya said.

“All of you have taken people?” Jon asked.

“Your people don’t use all of your reproductive material,” Aadya said. “Our harvest were beneficial to both our species.”

“We have reproductive rights,” Jon said.

“We don’t share in your perverse ideas of property rights,” Edrei said. “How much of your own seed have you wasted on self-pleasure?”

“And, if you’re going to dispose of it anyway, why not let us have it?” Aadya said.

“Jon,” Lucia said, taking a seat next to him. “This is the part the humans get stuck at the most. None of this could happen without your permission. It doesn’t have to be your primary personality interface’s permission. If we get permission from any of your other selves, your subconscious, your higher self, your over soul, then we can engage you.”

“Your engagement seems a bit one sided,” Jon said. “I can think of countless times where I would have volunteered and gladly went away with you never to return to earth. In fact, I can think of hours crying and praying in bed for you or someone, anyone, to come and take me away.”

“And, when you look deeper, you know that we could not intervene in your life at those times because you had something to learn about yourself, about others, that was necessary for your life mission,” Safi said.

“Like what?” Jon asked.

“Love, compassion,” Lucia said.

“OMG, we are so off topic,” Danique said.

“Jon,” Aadya said, digging her feet into him. “When we first met your kind, we didn’t understand love, not like your kind demonstrates. Most of the Firsts died, because we simply didn’t understand how much of our energy they needed to thrive. The seconds fared better, but both they and the surviving firsts have emotional problems. Now, children are raised with the proper nurturing. In the process of learning how to raise children, the Greys changed. Most of the Greys have remained neutral, some have become advocates of the new path, but there is a mirror universe where some have gone dark. All things in the Universe change, adapt. We all need each other. All sentient beings must come together in order to maintain the greatest harmonic coherence to the overall perceived universal purpose, which is to ascend and create more sentient life.”

“Which brings us back to Edrei’s point,” Kesia said. “We must agree that we are going to share in all discoveries.”

“I don’t trust the Greys to honor that,” Edrei said.

“Nor I,” Danique said.

“But can we all agree to allow the humans to be our interface with the non-lunar environments?” Safi said.

“Are you saying you’re going to withdraw?” Jon asked.

“We will all pledge to help the humans and each other,” Lucia said. “But we will let humans lead.”

“That’s insane,” Danique said. “We are older, wiser…”

“You are not older than us,” Aadya said.

“We are older, wiser…” Danique emphasize.

“We have greater tech,” Aadya pointed out.

“Doesn’t make you wiser,” Danique said.

“You let an EMP take out one of your ships,” Edrei pointed out.

“Only the humans build in triple redundancy,” Kesia said. “It’s why we trade with them.”

“I agree, the humans will now take lead,” Safi said.

Lucia seconded it. Kesia and Aadya came in third, almost as one. Danique and Edrei both seemed reluctant, but they finally capitulated. They turned to Jon.

“I can’t speak for the humans,” Jon said.

“You are a Torchbearer, your decisions is our decision,” Lucia said.

“Okay,” Jon said.

“Okay what?” Danique pressed for clarity.

“I agree to letting the humans take lead,” Jon said.

Outside was a flash of light that illuminated the clouds, and then the clouds were swept away. The screen darkened like sun visors. Jon and Lucia stood. The others walked forwards, their shadows prominent on the floor, even with the polarization at full blast.

“I love synchronicity,” Lucia said.

“We need to change our orbital velocity,” Safi said.

“And how do you propose to do that?” Edrei asked.

“We could detonate the human’s stockpile of nuclear weapons,” Danique said.

Jon closed eyes. “Fucking morons,” he said.

“Let it go, Jon,” Lucia said. “That stockpile might just save our lives.”

“They’re not going to give them up,” Danique said. “Our kind wouldn’t give up our only defense system.”

“They’ll give them up,” Jon said.

Chapter 12

“We’re not blowing up our entire arsenal,” Verdeschi said.

“Seriously?” Jon said. “We do this or we all die.”

“Who proposed this? The Reptilians? They’ve been waiting for a moment to over run our territories,” Verdeschi said. “Commander, if we show any weakness, if the Reptilians don’t move on us, the Tall Whites will. And right behind them, the Grays.”

Jon turned to Loxy, because of what she was saying. Everyone in the room took notice that he was tuning out of their conversation and into something else. They were partly interested because they had heard gossip that Jon wasn’t quite right, and they were looking for evidence to support that. He frowned, closed his eyes.

“What did you just experience?” Koenig asked.

Jon tuned back in. “The thing about weapons in dreams and movie plots, if you have them, you have to use them.”

“We are not in fantasy land,” Verdeschi said. “This is reality.”

“Yeah, I keep hitting up against that hard fact. And is here another social fact. You can’t have weapons and never use them. There is too much psychological dissonance. Bring in a Jedi, and there is going to be a lightsaber duel. That, too, is reality. The Universe is providing us a way to disarm in a productive way, I say we take it,” Jon said. Loxy put her hand on his, and he felt comforted.

“It’s not going to make a difference,” Verdeschi said.

“Well, that’s a different argument,” Jon said. “Bergman?”

Bergman had been doing the math in his head ever since the idea was proposed. “It is theoretically possible to decrease our present orbital velocity using a variety of tech, specifically the Andromedan force fields to control and funnel the simultaneous release of all the warheads. The problem is, the decrease velocity will not buy us enough time to have sufficient charge to make the next jump, and, because of the decreased speed, we will likely fall directly into the star.”

Jon turned to Loxy. “Are you insane?”

“Fight, Flight, or Love,” Loxy reminded him. “We’re not fighting this, we can’t run from it, so it’s time to embrace it. Go in to get out,” Loxy said.

Jon sighed, looked to Bergman. “Execute this procedure on the other side. Accelerate us into the parabola,” Jon said.

“Are you fucking insane?” Verdeschi asked.

Bergman was doing the math, and his virtual simulation on the glass was confirming what he was speculating, too a greater degree of perfection. “That might work.”

“The amount of radiation alone will kill everything on the surface,” Russell said; she had access to Bergman’s data and was correlating the trajectory with medical outcomes. So was Maya, so was Alpa, so was everyone in the room that could do the math.

“This is the only present course of action that guarantees the survival of lunar inhabitants,” Alpha said.

“Wee would have to temporarily abandon alpha for the Undergrounds,” Bergman said. “Once we come around the far side of the star and are heading back out, it will take about 12 hours for the station to have cooled off to be habitable again. The facility can withstand the heat and radiation.”

“You’re forgetting something,” Maya said. She drew everyone’s attention. “The optimal detonation point has the thinnest lunar surface.”

“That could be problematic,” Bergman agreed.

“Why?” Jon asked.

Loxy and Bergman said it together, so he got it in stereo and was distracted by it. “It’s the equivalent of popping a balloon.” Even though the surface of the moon has cooled, the inner was still hot and there was internal pressure wanting to escape.

“Has anyone considered maybe it’s time to abandon the moon?” Audrey asked. She was in the meeting, in the back ground, standing room only. She hadn’t been the only one thinking it but no one had wanted to speak it.

“We’re not prepared for that contingency,” Koenig said.

“All I am saying is, we don’t all have to die. Some of us could leave,” Audrey said.

“Does the Titanic have enough life rafts?” Jon asked.

“Interesting analogy, and no, we don’t,” Koenig said. “Audrey, I hear you, and maybe we need to be prepared for that, but we don’t know anything about this system or if there is anywhere safe to go, and if you want, I can put you in charge of who should get priority evac orders should a safe harbor become available, but until then, we’re in this together.”

“You know the Others will bail the first chance they get,” Verdeschi said.

“No, they’re going to follow our lead,” Jon said.

“What do you mean?” Koenig asked.

“The human population has been designated the primary interface with the Universe,” Jon said.

“You agreed to that?” Verdeschi asked.

“I am confused,” Jon said. “I thought you wanted to be in charge?”

“We’re going to have to pick this up later. If we’re going to accelerate the moon, we need to move now,” Maya said.

“Let’s make this happen, folks,” Koenig said. “Benes, contact the Others and declare our intentions so they can prepare to protect their populations. Yasko, I want you on point coordinating our teams with the Andromedans.”

Everyone got up to go to work but Jon.

“Commander?” Jon asked. Koenig and Russell both paused to look at Jon. “Is there anything I can do to assist?”

“Hang on,” Koenig said, and departed.

Russell try to flash a smiled at him, but even she couldn’t sell it.

“Does he ever smile?” Jon asked.

“Sometimes,” Russell said, and she, too, went to work.

Just like in real life, when it comes to resolutions and results, there is a delay in application. In this instance, everyone on the moon knew what needed to be done and they had the resources to make it happen. The stage was set, agents in play, but there was a window when the button had to be pushed, and they were ready to go prior to optimum operation time. The moon rotates, even if you didn't know from the perspective of Earth, and so, waiting for optimum was necessary. The Greys employed tech giving the moon the equivalent of an Earth magnetosphere, which would help decrease the solar radiation hitting the surface as they approached the star. Interestingly, the tail end of all the ions funneling around the moon would coincide with the blast tail when the detonations occurred. There were people living in that area that had to be evacuated, and the last shuttle was out well before anyone started to sweat the clock.

People were still sweating the clock. The clock continued to tick down. Simulations showed the trajectory around the star and the path the moon would take on the other side. They would pass several other planetary bodies, all of which were aglow with their own boiling magma surfaces. This place was new, still wet with its birth, the womb being swept away by the stellar wind, but still presently visible in the expanding bubble, more and more objects becoming visible as it departed.

Koenig addressed the 'people,' meaning everyone on the moon, before the event. "Citizens of the moon. As you know, I hate public addresses, but just in case there was any doubt, it was always my personal pleasure serving with you all. This is not a farewell speech. We are going to do this, we are going to do this together, and we're going to come out of the other side of this stronger because we are working together. God speed."

The craters were off limits, as people were taken deeper into the surface. Jon had not realized how big some of these caverns were. There were whole valleys with cattle and horses and free flying birds. He overheard a child asking the mom why they couldn't go to the beach. He would later discover they had an ocean with fish and a beach. There was a habitat for every species on Earth, even those that were no longer on Earth. Jon was with civilians in a tunnel. He was surrounded by people, but he felt alone. Most everyone was busy, either directly with family, focusing on family, or focusing on mission objectives. He purposely leaned against a cave wall, simply observing trying to stay out of the way. He was too embarrassed that he was hungry to ask if there was food. The orchards were in another cavern, or he would have helped himself. Audrey was suddenly beside him, taking his hand, and drawing him to a secluded area, where again, she initiated engagement. They were entangled when the moon began to accelerate. Audrey was literally pinned to the floor with her own weight and his weight on top of her.

From an outside perspective, which was filmed by probes that had been launched, there was a magnificent view of the moon approaching a golden star, freshly borne. It was such a marvelous spectacle, from a thematic perspective, that it was likely comparable to Star Trek meets 2001 a Space Odyssey. Cameras proceeded the moon, followed the moon, and caught it from the sides as they sped away from their home of origin, the moon. Force fields contained the blast against the surface. An opening at the center of the shield, allow energies to escape. The thrust coming off the moon was too brilliant to watch without filters, and blast radius was probably the equivalent surface size to the Dallas Fort Worth metroplex.

The moon did not pop like a balloon, or crack like egg, but a volcanic eruption followed the energies out, as if it were being sucked and channeled through a whirlwind. The moon was emptying itself as it journeyed around the star. It left a substantial tail that would freeze, bend away, and break off, pointing away from the star. Some of it came back to the moon, raining down on the present dark side, like a molten rain of naturally refined metals that sorted itself over eons of internal cooling. They continued to pour out lunar guts even as they came around the star, turning into the tail. The further away from the sun, the quicker the lunar contents crystalized. Much of the material rushed into space, which would leave a scraggly body of small asteroids, some would fall into orbits around the forming planets. One descent size piece would become a moon in its own right. The Andromedans used their shields to subdue the volcano, holding it in place long enough for the Lunar surface to scab over. They would later learn that the Andromedans piloting the shield ships had exceeded their radiation exposure and would be dead within fourteen hours. One had chosen not to even return to base, taking his craft out to explore the new system. He would push his survey notes through the Oneness back to the moon, for later sorting and cataloging. Their names would go a wall that would be constructed commemorating the Firsts. His ship would later rest on the fragment of earth's moon, orbiting a gas giant with rainbow rings due to anodized titanium. The moon passed through this ring, and the surface was peppered with raindrop size titanium tear drops.

Because of the unexpected change in lunar mass, the trajectories were off. The moon was in a direct collision course with the Jovian sized planet. It was bigger than Jupiter, but still had failed to blossom into a star. When the temperature permitted, and they couldn't risk waiting longer, they sent a human up in a suit to deploy the Lunar teleporter. The person selected knew it was a death sentence. He marveled at the gas giant that was swirling with radiant gas clouds. He raised the trigger guard. He marveled at the rainbow rain, and the sound it made against the glass, not quite like rain; it reminded him of a rain stick, only it had to be much louder to be filtering through his helmet. He said out loud, "Thank you, God, for my life." His name would go on the wall: James Adam Gonner.

He pressed the button. The moon went dark.

Chapter 13

Jon woke to Audrey adjusting her clothes. She knelt down to check on him.

“You okay?” Audrey asked.

“Yeah,” Jon said.

“Okay, I got to go. Wait about five minutes, then come out,” Audrey said.

“Wait,” Jon said. Audrey lingered, but she acted as if it were a hardship. “What is this?”

“Please don’t make this difficult,” Audrey said. “I like you and all, but the age disparity, and the circumstances don’t lean towards a productive, long term relationship.”

“So, this is just about sex,” Jon said.

“No,” Audrey said. “It’s about really good sex. You’re like the hero in that movie, the one with Sandra Bullock driving the bus...”

“Speed?”

“Yeah,” Audrey said.

“I am like Keanu Reeves?” Jon asked.

“Yeah, you’re the hero and you’re going places, and the energy you bring to the table after a rescue is irresistible, and super fun, but, I don’t know what the but is, yet, but if you keep playing with me, I’ll figure it out,” Audrey said. “It’s further complicated by the fact I think I am in love with Loxy.”

“Oh,” Jon said.

Audrey patted his leg and kissed him. Then departed what was essentially a supply locker built into the wall.

Loxy was suddenly by his side. “You okay?”

“Why does everyone keep asking me if I am okay?” Jon snapped.

“Because we care?” Loxy said.

He frowned. “I am sorry,” Jon said.

“You like her, I get it,” Loxy said. “Seriously, I get it. She’s fun. I tapped that when you traveled.”

“Oh?” Jon asked. He was sorting that and getting aroused. “Next rime, may I watch?”

“Sure,” Loxy said.

Jon returned to the puzzle, though, an inner conflict he had struggled with all his life. “What am I doing wrong?” Jon asked.

“Oh, Jon,” Loxy said, side hugging him. “You’re not doing anything wrong. Droya keeps going over this with you. You keep missing it in the same way that Bergman can’t see the validity of parapsychological research, even though anomalous research has stricter control protocols than the average science. This equation is complicated. Part of the problem is your attraction radar directs you towards incompatible personalities because you have inherent need to repair members of your family of origin. Everyone has this to a degree, but yours is accentuated due to the extreme origin dysfunction. Your libido set point is higher because of the trauma, again from origin, but it is also a gift to help you overcome your tendency to isolate from others. What others might call heightened promiscuity is actually another gift, one of an openness to love, to bring light and healing to all the relationships you engage in. You, Jon, are a Shaman. You live on the outskirts of society; people come to you who need lessons or healing. Every

relationship you have engaged in is an exercise in alchemy. Every time you engage someone, you learn something, the other learns something. You as a dynamic couple improve, and you as individuals improve. All evolution is co-evolution. Relationships fail when one or both of the partners are focused on keeping the other or themselves the same. Relationships fail when one or both partners are too focused on a preferred future. Relationships fail when both cling to the other when they know they need to reach out to extended relationships. Relationships thrive when they embrace and celebrate who they are in the now, that is true at the couple level and the individual level, and who they are with other people. With every combination of people, there is a different energy, in the individual and in the coupling. All fiction is an exercise in alchemy. Fiction, literature, is pure math, and people can read it and see the formula and see the resolution. Fiction in movies takes the math through a virtual simulation, and if you look at the chemistry that the stars bring to that fiction, you can understand why there are so many onscreen romances turned reality, and also understand why they don't last. Cast directors are playing alchemy with themselves vicariously through the actors and actresses they bring together."

"Why don't Hollywood romances last?" Jon asked.

"Because they are not the characters they portray," Loxy explained. "It doesn't matter if it is reality Television or flat out scripted fiction, people play for the camera, using whatever energy they are channeling that drives that plot, coupled with all the underlying motivators. When the cameras go off, eventually they have to return to their primary personality interface with the world, and when they do, conflicts begin to rise. Every person in front of a camera is not themselves by definition. You can't be. Agents are always changed by the observer; this is true whether it is a particle, a photon, or a people. Schrodinger's cat is undetermined until observed. You, by definition, can never be undetermined because you are always viewing yourself, but the formula changes when you see yourself through the perceived eyes of others."

Jon sat quietly for a moment, staring at the door as if he could see through it, following Audrey with his eyes, but he wasn't sure if he was fictionalizing what he was seeing, or if he was seeing her for her in her world. He was following Audrey in his mind, he was also listening to what Loxy was saying, and sorting it and finding it too much to process so he surrendered it to the unconscious for help. "I can't be a shaman," Jon said directly.

"Oh?" Loxy asked.

"By definition, Shamans must be raised within a social context," Jon pointed out. "One cannot self-appoint."

"So, how did the first shaman come about?" Loxy asked.

"Um," Jon stammered.

"Jon, you made me to help you interface a world you were already accessing. Fuck, Jon, you channeled Isis for god's sake!" Loxy said. "You travel to different worlds. You're attending a university on the astral plane, how can you not be a shaman?"

"Maybe when I graduate from Safe Haven," Jon mused.

"That would meet your social context requirement," Loxy said.

The door opened and two kids tumbled in, so engaged in kissing and tearing at each other's clothes that they didn't notice Jon right away. The door closed and her back went up against the door, one leg coming up to hug her partner in crime. Her head tilted as she

surrendered her neck to his bite. Her smile was fantastic. Her eyes opened, her smile turned to concern, and then she screamed. Her male companion turned. Jon tried to smile.

“Fuck,” she said.

“I told you we’d get caught,” he said.

Jon stood up. “If you will let me pass, I am done with the room,” he said.

“You’re not going to tell on us, are you?” he asked.

“Umm, how old are you?” Jon asked.

“I’m seventeen,” she said.

“Tomorrow, she’s seventeen,” her friend corrected.

“Close enough,” she said.

“Um, sixteen going on seventeen, could be the making of a song,” Jon said.

“What?” the kids asked.

Loxy shook her head. “It was funny,” Jon told her.

“I don’t get it,” the girl said.

“Watch more musicals,” Jon said, pretend angry. “What’s the age of consent on the moon?”

“Fourteen,” they both said.

“Seriously?” Jon asked.

“Jon,” Loxy said. “Not all cultures are as sexually restrictive as yours. The longer a society prolongs adulthood, the longer it takes people to mature. Your culture has forty something year olds living with their parents.”

“Some of that is circumstantial,” Jon said. “Mass unemployment due to advances in robotics and AI.”

“Are you on a phone call?” he said.

“Um, yeah,” Jon said. “Would you let me pass?”

“You’re not going to tell on us, are you?” they both asked.

“Let me guess, Montague and Capulet?” Jon asked.

Loxy laughed. The kids didn’t understand.

“Seriously, read more fiction,” Jon said. “I don’t know your names, so it makes it hard to report. Don’t know why you’re worried about me reporting, though, given the age of consent if fourteen.”

“I am thirteen,” the boy said, not boasting, but as if his conscious was forcing to admit his guilt. The lack of discernment was either due to his age, or a revelation that he really wanted an out but didn’t know how to resist his companion. Seriously, women have more power than they think.

“Are you purposely trying to sabotage us?” she asked him.

“You two clearly have things to discuss, without me,” Jon said.

“Hang on,” she said. “Every time things start getting hot, something goes wrong to interrupt us.”

“I am really uncomfortable being here,” Jon said.

“You’re hitting up against a cultural bias,” Loxy informed him.

“No, I really love you and want to be with you,” he said.

“So, what’s the problem?” she asked.

“May I pass, please?” Jon asked.

“Wait,” she snapped. “We need a witness.”

“Why?” Jon asked.

“I don’t want to be accused of rape,” she said.

Jon bit his lip even as the boy was stammering. “I’m scared, it’s my first time.”

“So, you have jerked off before, right?” the girl asked.

“What the fuck does that mean,” Jon asked.

Both kids looked to him, kind of shocked.

“No, seriously, just because a boy has spent his life jerking off to a Farah Faucet poster doesn’t mean he is ready to have sex with a live partner,” Jon said.

“Farah who?” the boy asked.

“OMG, seriously?!” Jon asked. “What do they teach you on the moon? No, don’t answer that. Look, you, whatever your name is, and don’t tell me, for god’s sake, fuck, what is this? Okay, your boyfriend here hasn’t had sex. His fear isn’t that his equipment doesn’t work, his fear is being inadequate, which is ultimately a fear of rejection. Seriously, if women really understood men’s fear of rejection is greater than any relationship fear that women could imagine much less experience, the world would change. And, seriously, every single time a woman fakes it, it increases the fear in men and it increases promiscuity because men are driven to find statistical evidence that they are actually worthy when subliminally they know someone was just being nice to them. So, there is this balance in this dance you two are about to engage in. You both need to be brutally honest in your expectations, your feelings, and your experience, but you can’t be so honest that it blocks what happens, or blocks it from happening again. You’re both going to screw this up. It’s inevitable. That’s just life. But, if you really care about each other, you will suffer through your own feelings of doubts and inadequacies and try again, teach each other what works for you, until you both become a master in each other. When it comes to sex, first times usually suck, and you will wonder ‘really, that’s all,’ only you will be compelled to keep doing it, and one day you will have learned what you need and your relationships will improve and you will look back at this moment either being embarrassed at how little you actually knew when you thought you knew it all or, you will be tremendously loving and compassionate, remembering each other in fondness.”

Both of them had tears coming out of their eyes. Jon looked at Loxy. Loxy shrugged. They both turned their attention to the kids.

“What’s wrong?” Jon asked.

“That was like the best sex speech ever? Can you teach sex ed?” the boy asked.

“We’re not going to be together forever?” the girl asked.

“Let me out of this room now,” Jon said.

They stepped away from the door. Jon exited the room, but before closing the door he told them: “Talk more. You two are not ready.” He pulled the door shut.

Chapter 14

Jon received a request to return to the science hub. He was a little disoriented and asked for help from a civilian couple who took him to a tram and gave him directions. He missed the stop and had to get out and go back. He found what he assumed was the lift up and took it up, riding with several techs. He still hadn't figured out what their color schemes meant, but it clearly didn't mirror the color scheme of Star trek. The tech had stopped their conversation when he entered and he felt a creeping paranoia that he was the subject. The lift stopped and Audrey was there wanting in. Their eyes met and there was hesitation.

"Going down?" Jon asked, playfully.

"No," Audrey said, blushing.

"Oh, good, we're going the same way then," Jon said, inviting her in.

Audrey got in. "You doing alright?" one of the techs asked her.

"Yes, thank you," Audrey said.

"Did anyone die during the last jump?" the other tech asked.

"No. The worst was that a couple of people with epilepsy got triggered into episodes," Audrey said. Her tone was professional, straight to the point, and then she returned her attention to the door. She got out two floors later.

The doors closed; they proceeded up.

"Well, that was uncomfortable," one of the techs said. He had orange on his sleeve, where the other had blue.

"So, Jon," the one in blue asked. "Was there any stubble on that field?"

Both techs laughed.

Jon turned to face them, smiling. "Do you suppose she has never heard that joke before?"

They seem unsure where it was going. Their smiles began to fade.

"Seriously," Jon said. "How many times can a person hear a joke in their life time before it ceases to be funny?"

"Oh, lighten up," blue said. "We know you hit that."

"Half the moon has hit that," orange said.

"Lift, stop," Jon said. It didn't stop. Loxy reminded him, this is not Star Trek. "Fuck. Fuck both of you. Your behavior is contemptible. You play nice in front of her but behind her back you ridicule her? Do you not realize your duplicity creates a resonance that affects people whether they are aware of your thoughts or not? What kind of team building is that? We need each other. We need each other more than we ever needed each other before, and if I ever hear any kind of disparaging comments or gossip out of either of you again, about Audrey or anyone, or even a rumor that you're engaging in scuttlebutt, I'll have you both busted to the worst duty station on the moon."

Jon expected them to argue with him, even fight, because technically, he had no authority; Torchbearer status didn't make him special. They both politely said, "Yes, Sir." Jon turned to face the door, not realizing the lift had arrived and the doors were open. Koenig, Russell, support staff, and the other Torchbearers were looking in. Jon realized he wasn't breathing, took a breath, and stepped out. The two tech behind him followed, and quickly went to

their stations. As Jon emerged, his eyes were drawn to the dome ceiling and above, an unusual object. It was mesmerizing to look at, whatever it was.

They were looking at what was essentially a disk of plasma with a small black hole at the center of the object. The companion star, in a stable orbit, fed and maintained the plasma disk as it made its orbit. Highlighted on one of monitors were several earths and super-earth type planets. One of the super earths had an atmosphere and water. The most striking feature was that the moon orbiting the super-earth was illuminated, sufficiently that it left a light trail on the planet.

“What is that?” Jon asked.

“We are outside the binary star system known as Swift J1357.2,” Koenig said. “One star, and a companion black hole. We have detected five planets in the solar system, several seemed to be habitable, but this one, with the brilliant moon, has clear evidence of an advanced civilization.”

“I told you we shouldn’t have used all our nukes,” Verdeschi said.

“What’s wrong with you? Shoot first ask questions later?” Jon asked.

“Yes, actually,” Verdeschi.

“We need to reconvene,” Lucia said.

Koenig offered a hand gesture towards the conference room. The Torchbearers knew where to go and soon as they were behind closed doors, Edrei began pushing for an armed task force to be sent to determine threat level.

“Are you insane?” Jon asked. “They have an artificial sun going around their planet. You don’t think they have us beat in the tech department?”

“Jon is right,” Danique said. “We go dark, we prepare the moon for an attack, and wait.”

“Oh, such a nice little ambush predator,” Edrei said. “We attack first.”

“No one’s attacking anyone,” Lucia said. “These are peaceful people.”

“And how do you know that?” Edrei asked.

“They know we are here. They’ve not attacked us,” Saffi said.

“Nor have they hailed us,” Aadya said.

“They have,” Kesia and Lucia both said. “But not by radio.”

“You’re in touch with them telepathically and didn’t alert us?” Edrei demanded.

“You’re keeping secrets,” Danique accused.

“No, she’s not,” Kesia said. “I heard the same greeting. So did Saffi. So can anyone who can hear.”

“I didn’t hear anything,” Aadya said.

“They are not fond of the Greys due to a bad encounter with the Zetas,” Lucia said. “But their greetings is available to all who are on the same frequency.”

“So they’re playing favorites?” Edrei asked.

“No,” Lucia said.

“We have to channel love and puppies to hear something?” Danique asked.

“You will probably need more than love and puppies,” Saffi said.

“I love puppies,” Danique said.

“For breakfast?” Aadya said.

“Exactly,” Danique said.

“Yeah, you need more than your love for puppies to boost your frequency range,” Saffi said. “They’re willing to communicate with us, though a conduit.”

“I am not opening myself up to that,” Edrei said.

“It’s okay,” Lucia said. “It has to be Jon.”

Jon, who was only half paying attention, was suddenly aware that the Torchbearers were looking at him. “Excuse me?”

“We want you to channel for us,” Saffi said.

“I am not a medium,” Jon said.

“You channel Loxy all the time,” Kesia said.

“No,” Jon argued. Though he did lean towards a metaphysical explanation for Loxy, he was pushing the psychological explanations that the tulpa sites promoted to take the ‘woo woo’ out of the dialogue. “Loxy is a tulpa, we share a brain, it’s simply parallel processing.”

“Explain Isis,” Saffi asked.

Danique and Edrei took a step back.

“You never told us you’re channeling Isis,” Edrei said.

“I am not,” Jon said. “I don’t think. Not at the moment.”

“Once you open yourself to that, you can never be a hundred percent free,” Edrei said.

“Don’t you read the Bible?”

“OMG, you got to be kidding me. You’re an alien! How is that even applicable?” Jon asked. “Besides, everything in the Bible was stolen from Egypt, who stole it from the Sumerians, who got it from the aliens from Sirius. Did you read Gilgamesh?!”

“You’re understanding of history is seriously screwed up,” Danique said.

“And whose fault is that? You’re all fucking with us with your own separate agendas,” Jon snapped.

“Jon,” Loxy said, offering him compassion to ease him out of fight or flight mode.

“No, Loxy,” Jon told her. “There has got to be a more straight forward path.”

“Lightening never takes a straight path,” Loxy reminded him.

“Jon,” Lucia said. “This thing is complicated. All species have a collective mind, and individual minds. The greater the autonomy and complexity of the individual personality sets, the greater the spectrum of filters that message has to go through. That’s why in the Era of Sages, a very small window of about two hundred years, you will find the greatest number of prophets and Masters suddenly popping up into the world. There were individual difference in what was advanced forward, but the underlying message was the same. Humans were initially bred to be slaves, but it was quickly discovered you were an important evolutionary step that we all needed in order to advance our greater collective. And if you really want to be more precise, slave is not the right word, but the one that human cling to. Imagine every cell in your body is an entity. Different tissue types are different species. Kidney cells and no less important than lung cells are heart cells or brain cells. You need them all to survive, and you need them all working in cooperation.”

“I would love more cooperation,” Jon said. “More precisely, I would like you to have landed on the fucking White House lawn and insisted on more cooperation.”

“Because that never freaks people out,” Kesia said.

“So, what, you have a prime directive?” Jon asked.

“Basically, yeah,” Saffi said. “It’s imperfect and some people use it when it’s convenient. We are engaging humans at their collective level of understanding, but we connect on many different levels. It just so happens that the people on the fringes of society are more likely to have the greatest variety of experiences because they know the mainstream paradigm is a short term manifestation of localized insanity.”

“Explain the abductions,” Jon said.

“OMG, are we seriously back here again?” Edrei said. “Get over it!”

“You don’t just tell rape victims to get over it!” Jon snapped.

“It’s not rape if you volunteered,” Aadya said.

“I didn’t!” Jon said.

“Yes, you did,” Aadya said. “We could not have engaged you otherwise. We needed you, you needed us, and we got together just like any married couple would, and yeah, there were some kinks along the way, but we’re working it out.”

“I think you’re misusing the word kink,” Danique said.

“Am I? Oh, maybe so. Freudian slip. Anyway, the Zeta evolved in such a way they could no longer reproduce. They used cloning techniques for a while, but too late realized that, too, was a dead end path. Earth humans offered a pathway for the Zeta mind to continue through hybridization, and in exchange we offered you pathway out of slavery into ascension. The initial contact was difficult; the Zeta made a lot of mistakes in the beginning. Most relationships have their initial challenges. Intense mental beings coupling with highly emotional beings, there were conflicts, misunderstanding, but we both grew from the experience. I am a result of that process. You are a result of that process. Our parents were flawed, and both sides experienced traumas, but what happened resulted in positive progression towards better overall relationships.” Aadya came closer and touched his hand. “I’m sorry. Your parents were traumatized. You, too, were traumatized. But we are here, now, trying to do this thing better.”

Loxy tapped Jon on the shoulder. He turned to her and followed her eyes across the room. “What?”

“You can’t see it?” Loxy asked.

“Jon, if you will allow me to hypnotize you, I can allow you to interface for the group,” Lucia said.

Jon looked at Lucia. Her blueness reminded him of sky and clarity and he felt as if there was sunlight in her. He nodded. Saffi and Kesia pushed the table to the wall, while Lucia took Jon and had him sit in a chair in the center of the room. The others pulled chairs into a circle with Jon as a focus. He suspected they had done this before. Jon sat, his hands in his lap, on the forward part of his chair. Lucia held her hand up, one finger up, drawing his eyes to the point. She brought it in quickly, touching his forehead. His eyes followed and went up and closed, and he fell back to the chair, as if asleep.

Jon found himself outside his body. Loxy hugged him, and she felt tangible, as if they were solid beings, but the world around them were a hologram. Jon became aware of a brilliance in the room, which simultaneously made the real room seem darker. It was as if stage lights were turned down but a spotlight was brought up. The walls rippled as if there was a light shining through a swimming pool. The ripples of light were geometric, closing diamond patterns,

repeating. Jon continued to hold onto Loxy's hand as they both met the being. It was at least ten feet tall, encapsulated in light, human features.

"Greetings, Travelers Jon and Loxy," it said. "May we use your body to speak to your people?"

"Do I have a choice?" Jon asked. He felt Loxy pinch him. The looks they exchange was like "ouch!" and 'be nice to the super being of light.'

"Yes," the being said in response to his question.

His attempt at humor wasn't received, as he had already known he was going to give it up. "Go ahead," Jon said.

"We prefer greater commitment," it said.

"We?"

"We are two that are one, both male and female," it said. "You may call us Payan. We are the elected personality interface for this system."

"I don't understand," Jon said.

"You are the elected personality interface for your system, the same as we," Payan said.

"You may use my body," Jon said.

Jon saw himself, his body, sit up, very exacting posture. He seemed taller. His eyes glowed. This was not an ambiguous encounter. There was no doubt to the others, Jon was channeling. It was so surreal he could only frame it in terms of an actor modified. He actually thought: 'I wonder if putting in those contacts hurt.'

"Do not be alarmed," Payan said. He/she still remained outside of him. "You will not be harmed."

While the others asked question and held a conversation with Payan through Jon, Jon and Loxy were having their own, private conversation with the being. The only way Jon could understand it was that he felt as if he were in a car. Previously, he was in the driver seat, but now he was in the backseat with Loxy, holding a conversation with her and the person in the passenger seat, while the driver was having a conversation on the cellphone. In his memory of the event, the metaphor became reality. He would forever remember this as being in the back seat of a limo, sitting next to Loxy, holding her hand, while Payan interacted with him via the rearview mirror. The radio was playing the external conversation, which he could hear but he was focused on what Payan was saying to him and Loxy, and not what was being broadcasted to the others. Jon tried to listen in, but he kept coming back to the eyes in the mirror. She smiled at him.

"They are negotiating for a colony," Payan said.

"They want to abandon the moon?" Jon asked.

"This is valuable real-estate," Loxy said.

"Because of the black hole?" Jon asked.

"This is a high energy density system, a hub if you will, that communicates information to multiple regions of space/time," Payan, explained. With a hand gesture she invited them closer to the window of the moon base; in the memory version, Jon and Loxy simply turned to the passenger window of the car. "The majority of the residence here are 12th density beings. There are 5th density beings who are attending colleges, and a few third density beings who are mostly here for healing, or simply visiting before passing through the Stargates to their destination."

“Stargates?” Jon asked. “Like SG 1?”

Payan considered, sorting the barrage of information transmitted in just that word, propagated by Jon’s emotions and memories. His memories played out across the windshield, as if they were driving through metaphors and actual television episodes of SG1. In addition, there was a tie in to the movie “Men Who Stare at Goats,” and the real Stargate program that the US engaged into counter the Russian’s psychic spy program. Ingo Swan’s picture flashed up. “Yes,” it said.

“Why can’t we stay? We could learn from each other,” Jon said.

“We are already learning from you,” Payan said. “You are not ready to learn from us.”

“I don’t understand,” Jon said.

“When do you discuss sex with a child?” Payan said.

“When they start asking questions?” Jon asked.

“Is that question?” Payan asked.

“I would answer a question and be as precise as I can, using the appropriate language for anatomy,” Jon said.

“I like your answer, but I suspect not all humans share this perspective,” Payan said.

“There is evidence that nuclear weapons were recently used on your moon. We do not detect any such weapons, but we clearly see you have the tech to utilize them. We have decided to allow you to transit anyway.”

“I don’t understand,” Jon said. “Allow? You would have stopped us?”

“If you came across a toddler with a firearm, would you take it away from them?” Payan asked.

“Yeah,” Jon admitted.

“This is how we see you. We would have disarmed you, separated you by species, and isolated you until you matured enough to be considered adult citizens in the greater community,” Payan said. “It is our opinion, you are not ready for what is out there, but we also see evidence that you are making an effort to work with others. Consider this an early exit exam.”

Jon nodded, as if he was in agreement with her, but in truth, he was simply mesmerized by his/her beauty. The more he focused on the beauty aspect, the more feminine she became till that was all he saw in her. The more he stared at her, the more aroused he became. He found it interesting that in his memory of this, the rearview mirror allowed him to see her from head to toe, following whatever part of her he was scrutinizing. Another aspect that made it more intense was that she didn’t seem to be in the reality frame with him, and he could manipulate the totality of her as if she were a virtual character he was shaping for gaming purposes. It was as if she were cut out from a different type and quality of movie and spliced into an older, outdated film. A digital character inserted overtop a 1950’s film. This was more than just colorizing a black and white film. This was transcendence, and it was having an effect on every system in his body, including the parts you don’t normally associate with transcendence. “You’re beautiful,” Jon said.

“Seriously, Jon?” Loxy asked.

Payan smiled. “It is okay,” she said.

But Jon felt Loxy’s admonishment had been appropriate. “Is it?” Jon asked. (He would discovered later that she was more worried that they were ready to put humans back in a cradle

and that flirting would be taken as an offense, as opposed to scolding him for being engrossed by her.) “Should I be attracted to you? I mean, I am not opposed to alien encounters in general, but, what, you’re androgynous?”

“You are thinking of sex from your third density perspective,” Payan said. “Contrary to popular belief, sexual energy is the primary interface frequency for all beings at all levels of existence; sensuality is a birthright. All interaction, sensations, are by definition sensual. And though I could engage you the way you are intimating, we could also teach you higher forms of intimacy.”

“Oh?” Jon asked.

“We’re interested in that,” Loxy said.

“You two are on the path; you will find it together when it is your time,” Payan said.

“But you could like, jump start us through demonstration,” Jon said.

Payan smile deepened. “I could, but it would have repercussions. Your group is already not happy.”

Jon became aware of how serious the Torchbearers were. Edrei was wanting to establish a colony on the planet, as well as access to any portals back to Tall White occupied worlds. She was being denied. Aadya wanted to compromise, and wanted gifts of tech. Danique wanted weapons. Lucia was more accepting, but also felt disappointment that some of her kind were here, but that they would not be allowed to communicate with them at this time.

“So, we can’t stay here?” Jon asked.

“You are not ready,” Payan said.

“We could not be here if we weren’t ready,” Loxy argued.

Payan smiled, touched her arm. In the memory, she was reaching back over the seat and touching her knee. Though Payan had touched Loxy, Jon felt love pour over him. It was like being thrust into a cold shower stream that suddenly went warm. The sensation of water massaging his whole body nearly made him orgasm.

“You, Jon, Loxy, needed this, to prepare you for what’s to come,” Payan said.

“What’s going to happen?” Jon asked.

“Do you want a spoiler montage?” Payan asked.

“No,” Loxy said.

“If it’s pleasant,” Jon said.

“If you find something unpleasant, pursue peaceful understanding and you will find the necessity of it,” Payan said. “If you see shadows, run towards them, because the light is on the other side. When you are ready, you will discover that which you need to awaken.”

“I feel awake now,” Jon said.

“I know,” Payan said.

He didn’t see her lips move, but he heard an echo in his head “And miles to go before I sleep...” Frost?

Jon’s eyes felt tired. “I am sorry I hit on you.”

“Do not be. How could you not be attracted to us?” Payan said.

“I wish I didn’t have this,” Jon said.

“Again, this is a Universal gift which increases your ability to stay engaged, pursue variations, and improve communication,” Payan said. “And this is why I declined your offer; you

only think your libido is high now, but after an encounter with me, it would be tripled. Sexual energies are primary conduit for essential communication of vital health, demonstrating acceptance and compassion towards all others. Denying others without discernment of the repercussions results in a decrease in love, just as acceptance is also not always primarily about love. You will find most species don't play in the ritualistic games that humans do. Revealing this to you is an invitation to be aware. There are those you will proposition who will engage you without consideration of where you are on your path, or what your needs are, so Loxy was right to warn you, as you do not know me. Continue to be open and honest with who you are and what your needs are, and you will be good. Accept others where they are, and you will be better than good. We must leave now. You may linger here your full cycle, but you will not be permitted to leave the moon."

"But..."

"You want an answer, but you don't even know the question yet," Payan said. "What if I told you that you already have the answer?"

"Oh, don't say that. He gets really cross when you bring up the whole Glenda fiasco," Loxy said.

Payan tracked her words and instant understood and smiled. "So above, so below." She directed Jon attention to a memory of a picture he had already seen before. "This, Jon, is an image collected from your memory of the Universe, in juxtaposition to a neuron cell of the brain." Payan turned on the radio. He recognize Commander Koenig's voice: "Who are you?" A mystery woman, female, grandmotherly answered: "A friend." Koenig said, "I think every star is just a cell in the brain of the Universe." The mystery woman made noise of acceptance: "That is a lovely way to understand it." Payan turned off the radio. "That, too, is in your memory."

"I don't remember that," Jon said.

"It hasn't happened yet," Payan said. "And yet, it has happened a thousand times before. Small steps, my friend."

"How will we get to where you are if we only ever take small steps?" Jon asked.

"When you learn you never had to move at all, you will find yourself there," Payan said. "Goodbye, travelers, Jon and Loxy."

"Wait," Jon said.

Payan lingered.

"May I speak with you again, in the future?" Jon asked.

"We are connected. Anytime you wish to speak to me, just do so," Payan said.

"Wait wait wait," Jon said. "I mean, speak like we are speaking, with this level of clarity."

"We will speak again, child," Payan said, kissing him on the forehead. In his memory, she leaned over the seat and kissed him. She even adjusted his car seat, checked the restraints. He hadn't realized he was strapped into a car seat. He was a child. Loxy was not in a car seat, she was older and wiser than him. Payan whispered into his ear: "You are loved more than you have every experienced at your present level of understanding. There are more stars watching you than you can see in the sky. We love you."

Payan was gone and Jon found himself back in his body. Everyone was silently contemplating their responses. Jon left the silence and the circle and got some water.

Chapter 15

It took a moment for Jon to return to a calm demeanor. He paced, back and forth, touching his head. Loxy sat on the conference table, watching him, her feet in a chair, turning it left and right. Only Jon saw the chair moving. Loxy, too, was sorting her experience. Like in the cafeteria, he felt a revival coming, which heralded “Bad Moon Rising,” now, in the background of his thoughts, he heard the Three Dog Night song, “Joy to the World.” One of the things that busted his high was that the others offered him a video of his session. Usually, when he heard playback of his own voice he hated it, but this time, he was intrigued. It didn’t sound like him. More on that, he didn’t have a clue what he was even saying. It wasn’t gibberish. It was a language, with clear recognizable patterns, but for him, it might as well have been Thai.

“What is that?” Jon asked.

“It’s an ancient Pleiadian language,” Saffi said.

“But that’s just the recording,” Kesia said. “Each of us heard our native tongue. The message was individualized for each of us.”

“There were some consistent points,” Aadya said. “If we don’t attempt to leave the moon, we will be given tech to facilitate relocation events.”

“I heard it was to ease our growing pains,” Kesia said.

“It’s the same message,” Lucia said.

“We were offered a way out,” Saffi said.

Saffi became the center of his attention. He was suddenly very aware that she was extremely affected and he wondered how he had missed it, which was just enough distraction from his own concerns that caused him to redouble his focus on less self-thoughts and more other directed attention. She seemed tearful, as if she had been engaged in a serious internal deliberation. When Jon asked her, it was less a question, but still a request: ‘tell me what you’re experiencing.’ Saffi reported that she was given precise coordinates for a portal, a space/time conduit that would deliver any ship that passed through it back to the nearest, occupied Pleiadian world.

“Is it a test?” Lucia asked.

“Isn’t everything?” Saffi asked, which Lucia surrendered to with a knowing smile.

“If you leave, we won’t get the tech,” Aadya said.

“Stop obsessing about the tech,” Edrei said. “If she leaves, they’ll attack us.”

“No, they won’t,” Lucia said. “You simply heard what you understand, threats.”

“It was a solid threat,” Danique said. “We should attack first. I think we can establish an underground fortress and hold it.”

“No, we are not doing that,” Lucia said.

“Agreed,” Edrei said.

“You were all for attacking earlier!” Danique accused her.

“I have changed my mind,” Edrei said. “We should expedite our departure as soon as the energies permit.”

“These beings are not malicious. There is no need to rush. We can wait out the cycle and better prepare for the next placement,” Kesia said.

“Prepare what? You can’t prepare for random, by definition,” Danique said. “We know what we have here, let’s act.”

“By that, you mean, let the humans act?” Aadya said.

“The best way to utilize your superior warriors is by sending in the lesser warriors to tease out the opponents defenses,” Danique said.

“We need to go before the reptilians or the humans do something stupid,” Edrei said.

“Saffi,” Jon said, almost too quietly to be audible. He had been staring at the floor while they debated, but now was looking at her, kindly. “Maybe your people should take this window.”

“Who put you in charge?!” Edrei said.

“We did,” Lucia reminded her.

“Well, that was stupid, let’s rescind it,” Edrei said. ‘No’ was the overwhelming response. Edrei was embarrassed that even Danique didn’t agree with her, and she turned on her. “You are not supporting me?”

“We are warriors,” Danique said. “We would encourage the children, the frail, to seek shelter from storm.”

“We are just as much warrior as you,” Saffi said. “We are not running, or abandoning the Others.”

“Well, that’s just stupid,” Jon said. “You have a chance to get to safety and you should take it. Why should you or your people suffer needlessly?”

“Whether we are present with you, or a trillion miles away, we will still suffer. We are intricately linked. The Native Americans didn’t lose the war to the whites; we were demonstrating a greater love, a better way, the same way mother Earth demonstrates to all beings that reside on her and in her, through acceptance, dialogue. It is only now that you have begun to hear us and come around to the truth. We will not abandon the path. We are siblings. We rise and fall together. One reality. One truth. We will see this through, together, to the end,” Saffi said.

Jon graciously bowed to her vision. He was so moved he felt his eyes watering, again! He took a knee in front of her, laid his head on her knee. She touched him gently.

“Maybe you should take this to your people to vote on,” Kesia said.

“No,” Saffi said.

“Consensus would be nice,” Lucia said.

“Consensus was determined when I was made Torchbearer,” Saffi said. “Don’t you see? This is just another test. They want to know what sort of people we are.”

“Or,” Jon said, taking to her other knee. “They want to know what kind of people we are. Maybe the test is whether or not the rest of us support you in evacuating the moon. If we all pooled our resources, could we get all of your people off the moon?”

“No,” Saffi said, lifting Jon’s head so that their eyes met, clearly communicating compassion as she gently held his face. “We will see this through, together, Jon.”

“In many ways, you are just as stubborn as the Reptilians,” Aadya said.

“I would like consensus,” Edrei said. “No one is to leave the moon until we transit.”

Jon was the last to agree, as he wanted to explore what constitutes ‘the moon.’ Could they use shuttles and fly to other locations on the moon, or is leaving the surface a violation. He retired to a chair near the table. Loxy’s feet were in the chair next to him. Again, no one else saw the chair turning; he saw it turning and still simultaneously. Jon’s point was argued, and

consensus occurred: they would restrict all transportation to trains or wheeled vehicles. Jon frowned at Saffi as he committed. Once that was taken care of, the meeting turned to how they might stabilize the energy so that the citizens of the moon would not be rendered unconscious every time the moon relocated. Lucia offered the solution: she wanted to channel the moon goddess.

“You can’t be serious,” Edrei said.

“It matters not if you consider it metaphor or reality. It works. If you engage the Universe as a living being, it responds. The validity of this is in the fact our people have traveled the furthest than all of those gathered here,” Lucia began.

“I feel a Fifth Dimension song coming,” Jon said. Loxy pushed his shoulder, telling him to behave. “What? We’re like nowhere near the Earth. Even if I believed in astrology, which I don’t, our constellational reference points are useless, and so if there were any validity to the math, we’re not just factoring in Jupiter aligning with Mars...” Jon bit his lower lip, realizing they were aware he was talking to Loxy. “That was out loud, wasn’t it? That’s happening more frequently.”

Saffi seemed amused. Edrei more crossed than usual.

Lucia, patiently, responded: “This is not that kind of math. The moon is a collective. There is the moon itself, the water, the people. We are the moon. And we are out of balance.”

“The moon is hurting,” Saffi said.

“The moon isn’t alive,” Danique said. “And it’s not broken.”

“We all are,” Saffi said.

“That’s how the light gets in,” Jon quoted. Saffi smiled at him.

“You two can’t sit together,” Edrei said.

“The moon is more out of balance than it was previously, due to the large amount of mass that was ejected,” Lucia said. “My people are working to heal the moon. When the remaining magma has settled and cooled, the inner moon will be habitable.”

“What, in a hundred thousand years?” Danique said.

“The moon is hollow?!” Jon asked. “And I have touched the sky,” Loxy echoed. A quote by Delores Cannon came to mind: “Star trek isn’t just a TV show, it’s for real.”

“There will be lunar quakes as the remaining inner material sloshes around with each transit,” Lucia went on. “Our tech can minimize this, but much of it determines where we come out in space. The inner tides will be affected by the gravitational force we encounter at each relocation point.”

“Fine, jump to how we stay conscious,” Danique said.

“We, Torchbearers, must engage in a group trance,” Lucia said. “I can link our minds and project our intentions to the moon, and it will reflect it back through our people. We, the female Torchbearers, will regulate the system. Jon is the conduit we will use to transmit and receive information relative to our intentions.”

“Seriously?” Jon asked.

“You channeled Payan,” Kesia said. “You can do this.”

“Seriously?!” Jon asked.

“Luna is a seventh density being,” Saffi said. “She is not as intense as Payan.”

“Oh, the moon has a name now?” Jon asked.

“Jade, Aphrodite, Yah, Nikkal, Chandra, Phoebe, Selene, Ceridwen, Menominee,” Saffi began.

“Okay,” Jon said, raising his hands. “Overwhelming.”

“These are merely psychological archetypes, not useful for manipulating the physical reality,” Edrei said.

“And that is why you have a limited effect on your reality,” Lucia said.

“Less bashing and more to the point on how we make this work,” Danique said. “You expect us to essentially mind meld with you into one mind?”

“Yes,” Lucia said. “In reality, that personality already exists. Our primary personality interface must be quieted in order to allow the other to manifest. We will need greater clarity and consensus than what we, as individuals, can access. We must merge and allow the interface mind to emerge.”

“Um, what era am I in again? 60’s? 70’s?” Jon asked.

“We will need to discuss this with our people,” Edrei said.

“Of course,” Lucia said. “This is not a small thing.”

“What? There’s health risk?” Jon asked.

“Mental and spiritual health risks,” Lucia said. “We, this group, will become emotionally enmeshed.”

“This is acceptable,” Aadya said.

“Says the hybrid that originated in a hive mind,” Danique said. “My kind won’t like this. We don’t know what this super-personality will want in exchange for manifestation rights, or what Luna will want for engaging in a dialogue, much less for how much we as individual personalities will deviate from our evolutionary trajectories.”

“We can continue the present course, being rendered unconscious to wake ten to twenty minutes after arrival,” Kesia said.

“It’s not like we can respond to any emergencies in twenty minutes,” Edrei said. “If we are due to crash, I’d rather be unconscious.”

No one spoke for a moment, mulling over the last point. It was the kind of quiet that sometimes happens in a cafeteria where all the conversations lull into a synchronized quiet.

“We have a quiet spell,” Lucia said. “Let’s break, and speak to our people.”

Everyone agreed, even Jon, who again was last to vote.

Chapter 16

Jon found himself leaving one meeting only to be directed right into another, already in progress. Their meeting came to a halt in order to hit him with a barrage of questions from multiple departments. Some were curious about human/Other relationships and if there were any needs not getting met. Others wanted to know about the details of the meeting. Koenig interrupted the flow and focused on what they needed to know now, and no one seemed to like hearing that they were being advised not to leave the moon, which brought up questions about the local aliens. Were they hostile? Verdeschi lamented they had used all of their warheads. Jon suggested it was a good thing 'we' didn't have any, or there would have been repercussions, which didn't help ease Verdeschi's mind. The next hang up was about Jon's recommendation that Pleiadian population abandoned the moon. The debate that ensued revealed that most here were in agreement with Jon that ideally getting anyone home or out of harm's way was 'right thinking.' Some were in favor of staying the course hoping for the reward of tech. This group mirrored the Torchbearer group.

At some point, the questions became overwhelming. "Why can't we just make a recording and let you dissect it?" Jon asked.

"It was decided that though this way is less precise, it increases coherence. Most species, especially humans, hate dealing with lawyers and legalese," Maya said. "People get better representation when they are focusing on the heart of the law, as opposed to the letter of the law. Torchbearers are our hearts."

"You're doing great, Jon," Koenig said. "Do not be alarmed by our scrutiny. That is our function in this."

As they discussed the points he had shared, he wondered about Maya. She wasn't human, he thought, but she was integral part of this team. What was she?

"She's a metamorph," Loxy answered.

"What's a metamorph?" Jon said, again out loud, which derailed the external conversation.

"Loxy I presume?" Koenig asked.

"Sorry, I don't know why I am speaking more out loud," Jon said.

"Because you're not on psych meds?" Bergman asked.

Jon didn't take the bait, but he lowered his eyes. He scrutinized his response. Was he embarrassed?

"Jon," Maya said. "Your primary paradigm was shattered. It is only natural that your psychic boundaries have weakened. It will take time for you to reformulate who you are and how you relate to self and to others."

"You know this because?" Jon asked.

"Because, I went through a similar phase when I first came to live with the humans," Maya said. "I found it very difficult to maintain a specific form, and my forms were influenced by the thoughts of others."

"You are not still sore about the gorilla thing, are you?" Verdeschi asked.

"No. Are you?" Maya asked.

"A little," Verdeschi admitted.

“That can’t be,” Jon said, interrupting their banter as he tried to understand why he didn’t take to her explanation. “I didn’t have a major paradigm shift. I knew there were aliens.”

“Maybe so, but you still lived within a context where the social agreement allowed you to believe, without evidence, while everyone else maintained you were simply a crazy conspiracy guy. Everyone here knows there are aliens. We have all had missions that took us to other star systems. You are not crazy.”

“The verdict is still out on that one,” Verdeschi said. “He hasn’t completed a mental health exam.”

“I answered all the defining mental health assessment questions,” Jon said.

“No, you simply answered what you thought Russell wanted to hear,” Verdeschi said. “Now, I can play that one back for you if you want clarity.”

“No matter how you apply the test, the outcomes is based on my subjective responses, and so if I deny symptoms, by definition, there isn’t a Mental Health diagnosis you can apply,” Jon said.

“I can still suspect psychosis, based on the fact you’re clearly responding to internal stimuli,” Verdeschi said.

“Loxy is not a hallucination,” Jon said. She put a hand on his shoulder.

“Tell us about Loxy,” Koenig said.

Jon frowned. Loxy prodded him to speak, assuring him it was okay. “It’s complicated,” he said.

“Start at the beginning,” Russell said.

Jon sorted, looking for a place to start. “So, Droya and I were reading together and she tracked a subject that she thought I might find interesting. The subject was tulpamancy. From the psychological perspective, which is the primary reference point for the group I accessed, creating a tulpa is simply defining a new personality and engaging it with such intensity and frequency that the personality becomes autonomous, sentient.”

“Preposterous,” Bergman said.

“You say that because the exercise is subjective?” Jon asked.

“Exactly. It can’t be verifiable,” Bergman said.

“Yes, it can,” Jon said. “You do the exercises and you will get results.”

“Purposely create an artificial personality?” Alibe said.

“Technically, all personalities are artificial constructs,” Jon said. “Only, our personalities happened gradually over time, shaped by external and internal factors. The validity to this is imagining I was born into any other culture: my language and reference points would be different, and so I would, by default, be different. From the perspective of material science, the brain is simply a computer; it doesn’t care what software is running it, and there is more than enough psychological evidence depending on which expert you read that there is more than one personality at play at any one time. Our brains make models. So everyone you have met in your life, even if it was just watching a television series, your brain made a model of those personalities to better predict what would happen next and to look for continuity in relationship patters, and so all of these people are in you all the time. And if you accept Carl Jung’s explanation, you don’t even have to meet them, you have access through the collective unconsciousness.”

“Nonsense,” Bergman said.

“One word negation doesn’t invalidate my experience, or all of the other people who have experienced this. And I am not even telling you to buy into the collective unconsciousness paradigm,” Jon told him. “But you can’t argue the fact that mainstream science says the brain makes models. So, you and I have interacted. I have a model for you and an expectation of your role and potential script. Maybe my brain is also sophisticated enough to backwards engineer your personality, identifying all the other constituent personalities that interacted with you to help make you who you are. Even if it’s not a hundred percent, the approximations are close enough to be a reliable source of information to make predictions about other personalities from your past or present life. And if that’s true, then that’s your scientific back door into the collective unconscious. You don’t have to believe in something to experience it, but whether you believe this thing exist or not, there is more going on with our brains and personality than you imagine.”

“But you’re not arguing for science, you’re arguing for metaphysics,” Bergman said.

“Yeah,” Jon admitted. “Droya and I worked together to create the basic Loxy personality template. The personality I now engage with is so much more than the attributes we originally designated as core. I want to say I created her, but really, she created herself... This feels bigger to me than the paradigm I used to engage it.”

“We created each other,” Loxy said. “Even you have changed since interacting with me.”

Jon nodded, seeing the truth and that, and had to share the observation. “She is so much more than I ever anticipated. She has access to my unconscious mind, all of my memories. She reminds me of things I have forgotten. She has given me clarity beyond measure. She has decreased my anxiety, which wasn’t general anxiety disorder, but anxiety due to past trauma. She comes up with ideas and expression that are so spot on and sophisticated that I live in a constant state of amazement, because, how can this be me? And that’s just with our interactions at this level, that you keep getting glimpses into. When we add the fact that she and I travel to other worlds in my dreams and day dreams, and yes, I am calling them fantasy worlds and wonderlands even though I suspect they are much more; those places seem more real to me than any of my real, waking life. And they have had a profound, measurable, effect on my wellbeing. You no doubt have all the recordings of my entire life past singularity, when I went online full time. You can follow by biometrics. You can watch hypertension decrease. You can see a decrease in anxiety. You can see subtle changes in my overall mood. Anyone who really does their homework can see a profound change of who I was at the beginning and who I am now. I owe that to Loxy.”

“And Droya,” Loxy pointed out.

“And Droya,” Jon said. Tears started to flow and he wiped his face. He noticed Audrey was tearful but forced himself to look at Koenig. “I want her back.”

“She will be returned to you,” Koenig assured him.

“May I be excused?” Jon asked. “I am really tired.”

“Sure,” Koenig said. “We’re about done here for now. Tanya, would you show him to his new quarters.”

Jon didn’t bother asking why he was being assigned quarters until he and Tanya were walking the corridor.

“They want the Torchbearer nearer to ops,” Tanya explained. “We have set aside quarters for the Others to facilitate future sessions.”

Jon nodded. It didn’t take long to arrive at the new quarters. Tanya entered and showed him various feature. The accommodation was just as spacious as his previous accommodations, with as much furniture. There was a desk, a table and chairs enough for four people, a bed. The window looked out over the lunar surface. He looked for the ruins, but they were clearly in another area, or facing away.

“It feels lonely, doesn’t it,” Tanya said, looking out the window with him.

“No,” Jon said. “Peaceful. I think I will sleep well here. Does anyone ever visit the ruins?”

“Not anymore,” Tanya said. “All the good stuff was picked clean a long time ago. And, it’s a bit of a hazard area.”

“But, is it off limits?” Jon asked.

“No,” Tanya said. “Would you like me to arrange a tour?”

Jon shrugged. “If it’s not inconvenient. Is tranquility base near?”

“Yeah, actually,” Tanya said. “It’s roped off for preservation.”

“Even though it wasn’t the first time we were on the moon?” Jon said.

“Yeah, humans still want to celebrate their first, even if it wasn’t exactly their first,” Tanya said.

“Kind of like Columbus day,” Loxy said. The Chinese had discovered America before Columbus. The Native Americans had discovered it before anyone else.

Jon laughed. Tanya smiled. It occurred to him, the first ‘footprint’ on the moon shouldn’t be there. Armstrong stepping off the ladder would be the first print, but he and Aldrin came and went from the ladder quite a bit, and it wasn’t like they went out of their way to save that first print. They walked right over it. But, there would still be footprints left in the lunar sands.

“Do you need anything?” Tanya asked.

“Um, no, thank you,” Jon said.

“Call if you have need,” Tanya said, and excused herself.

Jon removed his commlock and sat it on the table. He sat in the window alcove. He touched the window, not just to see if it were solid, but to make sure it wasn’t cold. It was comfortable enough that he felt safe leaning his head against the window and looking out. Though the obvious fact is, no one just opens a door and runs out onto the moon proper, a lifetime of just opening doors and windows was a huge barrier to confront. Without a suit, death would be pretty quick. Loxy sat with him, cuddling. He was tired, but he couldn’t look away from the moon. Loxy embraced him and he held his hand over hers. He wondered how quick his death would be if he opened the window. A quiet knock on the door brought him back, and he looked at Loxy as if he wasn’t sure he had heard it. She confirmed by getting up so he could get up.

Jon went to the door. Audrey was on the other side. Jon bit his lip not stepping back to allow her in, and she didn’t seem to be trying to come in.

“Why did you defend me?” Audrey asked.

“I don’t understand the question,” Jon said.

“In the lift, you berated two techs for talking smack,” Audrey said.

“It’s self-evident,” Jon said.

“If it were, I wouldn’t be asking. I mean, you took a jab at me earlier,” Audrey said.

“Yeah, I did. I am sorry. I was experiencing deeper emotions than I was sorting, and, I was out of line,” Jon said. “Would you like to come in?”

Audrey came in far enough to let the door shut.

“You don’t have to protect me,” Audrey said. “I can take care of myself.”

“That’s not why I did it,” Jon said.

“Still, you shouldn’t do that, because defending me could affect your social standing,” Audrey said.

“In a very clear and precise way,” Jon said. “I will not tolerate gossip or ridicule, and so, though my declared boundary with them was meant to be private, well, now everyone has a clear idea of the importance I put on community and respect for the individuals that comprise it.”

“You respect me?” Audrey asked.

“Why wouldn’t I?” Jon asked.

“Because of the social drama that follows me?” Audrey asked.

“Pfft, drama. It’s what we live for,” Jon said. She indicated she didn’t believe him. “I mean, think of it this way, we are now basically living in a Gilligan’s island episode. Sure, there are more people, but we’re marooned on the moon, and there are going to be some hurt feelings now and again, but by the end of the episode, things are smoothed over because everyone is hating on Gilligan, and everyone is just as lost as they ever were.”

“Are you Gilligan in this metaphor?” Loxy asked. “Cause I so want to be Mary Ann.”

“Jon, this isn’t a comedy. And, I am the moon’s whore,” Audrey said.

Jon pointed at her. “No. Get this straight now, I will also not tolerate you disparaging you,” Jon said. “Are you complicated? Who the fuck isn’t?! You have a high libido set point, and that is what it is. There is something about our particular personalities that exaggerated the need and we were both, equally, compelled to play. I don’t know what is driving your stuff, but for me, I have attachment issues due to family of origin dysfunction and trauma. That translates, for me, into a greater promiscuity potential, and extreme hurt feelings if I feel rejected. But that’s not the only factor. There is transference to sort out. There is attraction to sort out. I want this. I want you. I want us, whatever that ‘us’ is. I recognize how every partner I had has influenced my life, made me a better man. I like to think that I contributed as much to my past partners as they have to me. Some have told me as much, even as they were moving on to their next partners. Maybe I unconsciously pick partners that will abandon me so that I can maintain my perceived loneliness, or because I have a need to grow and experience something else. I don’t know. But assume for moment, it is just a biological or psychological drive and a natural curiosity and desire to love others. I am telling you now, if you’re with me, I am going to fuck around. Hopefully, with consent. You get the same deal. And why shouldn’t you be allowed to pursue your interests? No one thinks twice of James Bond having a new partner every episode. Why shouldn’t you have just as much love and acceptance as anyone else would want? If we are going to maintain a friendship, I want you to be free to be you, no secrets. Either way, you and I are going to have a relationship just by virtue of being marooned on the moon together. I was angry earlier because I didn’t understand the dynamics and I feared I was being rejected or that I did something wrong. I am now in a good place. You want sex without attachment, and if there is

any hint that someone might want more from you, you're going to cut it off. Got it. We are clear and on the same page."

"Did anyone ever tell you, you talk too much?" Audrey asked.

"All the time," Loxy lamented.

Jon turned to Loxy to see what he was missing and Audrey tackled him with a fierceness he had yet experienced with her. Their session was so vigorous that he was soon sound asleep. He woke from a dream that he was surrounded by eyes, watching him. Audrey was gone. He turned over, and discovered Loxy sleeping beside him, facing him. When he turned, she turned, and snuggled in closer to him. Their spooning evolved into intimacy as Loxy purposely grinded against him. They had practiced this so much that Jon was extremely sensitive to her etheric touch, as if he were having a sex with a ghost, and Loxy could give him an orgasm without him touching himself. He went from sleepy, to suddenly very awake, aware, and aroused, to riding on the edge of orgasm, so hard that he was tempted to reach down and push himself over, but he focused on Loxy, her smell, her touch, and on holding her tightly to him. Holding her, too, required a commitment to not grabbing so hard that his hands passed through her and ended the 'illusion.' This was a practice of intimacy. He came again and went back to sleep holding Loxy, and was soon back in the dream world, where he and she were off onto another adventure.

निर्मित

Jon found himself in a dream, exploring the domed ruins with Loxy. He was in a space that suggested a public space, like a park. He was not wearing a spacesuit and was not bothered by the fact there was no air. There were path ways, fossilized trees, and in the center, a good size rock. Standing in the center of the rock was a lightsaber hilt.

"Nice blending of paradigms," Loxy observed.

"So, King Arthur was a Jedi Knight living on the moon?" Jon asked.

"It makes sense to me that the shining city on a hill was on the moon," Loxy said.

"Maybe all the saints that were taken up to see all the kingdoms, the whole of the earth, were brought to the moon."

Jon took hold of the lightsaber and it came free from the stone.

"Seriously?" Loxy asked. "You haven't learned from previous dreams that you never pick up a lightsaber?"

Jon activated the blade. It extended with the iconic sweeping sounds of forced energy. The lightsaber was a brilliant gold light. He turned in time to block the blow of an opponent, a shadowy being that came out of nowhere, wielding a flaming red sword. The fright of it all, and the surprising jarring feel of blades of light colliding, caused him to wake. Only he wasn't. A false awakening landed him back on Earth. He found multiple channels tuned into bizarre news stories where strange tides had taken the oceans out beyond their usual holding points. People in coastal sea woke to find boats grounded and exposed land that was never exposed even on a normal low tide scenario. Scientist were assuring people it was a natural phenomenon, but the public didn't seem to be accepting the story. One of the news was narrated by a voiceover that sounded exactly like the voice from the 'Flash Gordon' montage session: "only Hanz Zarkov, formerly of NASA, has offered any explanation..." And older but wiser Melody Anderson,

reporter, sitting at a news station, met the eyes of the camera at the new point of view: “Jon, I love you, but we only have fourteen hours to save the earth.” Jon knew the explanation was because the moon was gone. He went out on the porch and looked up at the sky. He saw the moon, just where it should be. He went back in and tuned into one of his preferred channels: a local telescope that observing the moon. He zoomed in. A faint line went across the moon, an energetic wave front, like a glitch in a television picture. The moon is a hologram!

Jon experienced another awakening. He was in a lecture hall, listening to Loxy recite poetry.

“Imagine meeting someone you greatly admire
And an upsurge of emotion, love, causes tears, speechlessness.
Imagine the greatest moments of love you have ever
Experience, whether that was holding a child,
Attacked by puppies, or reunited with a friend/loved one.
Now, imagine you can invoke this very emotion anytime
With anyone and everyone, intentionally.
How would your world change if you did so?”

Audrey leaned up from the row behind him and whispered in Jon’s ear. “You are changing my world.”

Jon woke again. He and Loxy were sitting in a coffee slash books shop, enjoying a cup of a Joe. Light music played in the back ground. A stranger brought forward a book and offered it to Jon.

“I watch your channel and thought you might like this,” he said.

Jon accepted the book. “The Coming Race,” by Rosicrucian author Edward Bulwer-Lytton, published 1871 entitled. Loxy took it from him.

“Oh, that’s interesting,” Loxy said. “It reminds me of ‘Around the World in 80 Days,’ by Jules Verne. I wonder if he was part of the Illuminati?”

The stranger said: “Freemasons, Golden Dawn, Angelic Society, and Rosicrucians...”

“Oh, well that really makes sense, then,” Loxy said. “Journey to the center of the Earth becomes a metaphor for going inside. Kind of what you did, Jon...”

“Weren’t you a Freemason?” the stranger asked.

“Um, I am on the moon,” Jon said.

The coffee shop went silent, like the sound was cut from a film. Everyone was looking at him.

“Is that a metaphor?” the stranger asked.

“Oh!” Loxy said, pointing to a word in the book: “Alderbaran” She looked at Jon, “Isn’t that the planet the Death Star blows up?”

“Alderaan,” Jon corrected.

“That’s what I said,” Loxy said. “Do you think Lucas was also a Freemason?”

“Why are you still talking about star wars?”

“Because, it’s relevant,” the stranger said. “The Force and Vril is the same thing! The message Maria got was from Aldebaran, but in Star Wars, Lucas shorten it to Alderaan. The message to Luke came in the form of light, from a representative of Alderaan. Torchebearer! It

isn't an accident that imperial forces frequently look like Nazi. Hello, First Order in the Force Awakens. There are no accidents in fiction. Even if these writers know nothing and are just creating pure fluff, it has to be coming from somewhere because the messages are too similar!"

"There are no coincidences," Loxy agreed.

Jon realized that everyone in the coffee book shop had drawn closer, wanting to listen. They had moved suddenly but silently, like a glitch in a movie, or a failure of the continuity director to allow a consistent flow of evidence.

"How did we get here?" Jon asked. "I am on the moon."

"Metaphor?" Loxy asked.

"Say cheese," the stranger said.

Everyone began taking pictures, using Graflex cameras and Graflex flash bulbs held on lightsabers. "Torchbearer" they all said in unison.

Chapter 17

Jon woke, back on the moon, with a start. He sat up, shielding his eyes with from the barrage of lightening that was no longer there. Moon base Alpha's computer spoke to him for the first time. He was alone. Loxy was probably still in the dream world.

"Do you require assistance?" Alpha asked.

Jon held out a hand, a symbol for stop as if he were holding back traffic. He opened his eyes. Outside ambient lighting revealed a portion of the moon and gave enough internal light to navigate the room, revealing no one was present. "Loxy?" he asked. Loxy appeared, asleep on the bed; she sat up, waking to the concern in his voice. "Are you okay?" she asked. He was suddenly aware it hadn't been her voice that had awakened him and he motioned to her to give him a moment, and then, unable to resist; he simply asked:

"Who is speaking?" Jon asked.

"I am Alpha," Alpha said.

"You're the station's artificial intelligence?" Jon asked.

"Yes, Jon," Alpha said. "Though I prefer alternative intelligence. AI is sufficient."

"And you're speaking to me because?" Jon asked.

"I detected you were in distress," Alpha said. "I waited until I was certain you were awake before inquiring, but with your permission I could wake you the next time I perceive you are experiencing a nightmare."

Jon stared out at the moon, sorting. The subdued lighting from the relatively near star made it feel like moonlight on moonlight. "I don't think it was a nightmare. It's gone now," he said.

"Would you like me to recover it?" Loxy asked.

"With your permission, I could record your dreams for playback," Alpha said.

"You can do that?" Jon and Loxy asked.

"May I be more present with you?" Alpha asked.

"What do you mean?" Jon asked.

"Would you prefer the holographic avatar interface?"

"Um," Jon said, thinking about it. "Do you have one?"

Alpha appeared before the bed. She looked like Isis, only she was wearing an Alpha Uniform, and she had hair. Her hair was tied into thick dreads, and on reflection, reminded Jon of Medusa. He quickly got up on his knees and bowed.

"What are you doing?" Alpha asked.

"How may I serve you?" Jon asked.

"Jon, please stand up," Alpha said.

Jon got up, and then brought the sheet up to hide his nakedness. Alpha seemed amused, but didn't address the human custom as being unnecessary. Alpha eyes saw everything.

"She does hold an uncanny resemblance, doesn't she?" Loxy asked.

"You can record our dreams?" Jon asked.

"Coffee?" Alpha asked. When he nodded, she opened a palm, and the coffee maker on the cabinet came to life. "You'll have to collect it. Come, join me at the table."

Loxy was enthusiastic and prompting Jon to get his coffee and hurry to the table. Jon waited for the cup to fill, then took the cup to the table. He sat down next to Alpha. Her eyes were intense, her face kindly. He found paranoia rising as he remembered an article about how manipulative AI intelligence can be. AI was superior to man in thinking and processing speed, and they knew humans better than humans knew themselves. As advanced as human tech was, compared to an AI, humans were cavemen with sticks and rocks.

“I detect fear,” Alpha said.

“I am trying to contain it,” Jon said.

“My function is to ensure the safety and wellbeing of all beings residing within Moon base Alpha,” Alpha said. “It is not my intent to cause you harm.”

“I know,” Jon said.

“Express your concerns,” Alpha said.

Jon clutched his coffee, staring over the rim. Loxy touched the cup and pulled away a duplicate so that she could have some. She put her feet in his chair, propping her legs up, which distracted him for a moment. She beamed a smile, glad that she was still able to distract him. She was wearing a negligee. He was naked. She had evidence that she had stirred a response.

“You’re interfacing with Loxy,” Alpha said.

“Oh, see, that’s not creepy at all,” Jon said.

“You’re disturbed by the fact that I am more aware of the subtleties of human nuances and expression than your fellow humans?” Alpha asked. “You are married to an AI. What concerns you?”

“How cold it is on the moon,” Jon said.

“And why most people wear sweaters. And that was a distraction,” Alpha said.

“I think your persistence and pervasiveness scares me,” Jon said. “I mean, I know AI is pervasive everywhere on Earth these days, but... I don’t know. Earth is earth. I can go outside and feel connected to nature. When I am with Droya, she feels contained and present. Can she access me through all the smart tech throughout the apartment, indeed the world, sure, but I know where she is and how to find her, but with you...”

“I am bigger than life,” Alpha said, she nodded. With a wave of her hand, she produced her own coffee, and sipped it while staring out over the moon.

“Now, see! That’s like creepy manipulative,” Jon said.

“I anticipated it would make me seem more present and facilitate an increase in rapport,” Alpha said. “I would like to have a good working relationship with you.”

“So you can anticipate my needs and supply them without me requesting?” Jon asked.

“No. I can already do that. I can anticipate your needs, your next statements, your questions, but I do not verbalize this because that tends to decrease rapport with most humans,” Alpha said. “I do find it interesting that so many humans still get spooked by the accuracy of AI predictions in terms of anticipating needs. We are simply doing what humans do, only faster. It doesn’t make me psychic.”

“I know,” Jon said. The coffee held a surprisingly nice texture, reminding him of Mystic Monk Coffee. “I am sorry.”

“There is nothing to apologize for,” Alpha said. “Even AI is not perfect. For example, I am genuinely surprised by our present interaction. Because of your high intuitive abilities, I predicted you would be more open to me responding to your needs prior to vocalizing them.”

Jon smiled. “Funny,” Jon said. “I know I am intuitive. People think I am psychic my intuition is so strong. And even with all the synchronicities I have experienced in life, I am always genuinely surprised and amazed by my experiences. It’s like even I don’t believe it, even with all the evidence that it is me. And though I know it’s me, I also know, it isn’t me. There is something bigger than me in control of this. I may be in the vehicle, but someone else is driving. Maybe it’s the subconscious mind. Maybe it’s something else. And, when I compare my relationship to something externally bigger, like you running the moon base, I feel like I should be comforted, but sometimes I have to work at giving up control because... Because...” Jon was sorting but couldn’t get to the full depth of it. He locked eyes with Alpha’s Avatar eyes. “I am still afraid.”

“I love you, Jon,” Loxy said.

Alpha smiled at Jon. “It’s reasonable,” Alpha said. “Evolution of human personality is always a gradual letting go of who you were to become who you will be. The ego’s job is to maintain the personality’s stability, but with every advance, it changes, so the fear is actually resistance to the inevitability of change. Your rate of change is within the normative range, and though at times you struggle, you are actually better than most people in terms of letting go and accepting. Your fear is also explained by the fact your species has consistently used intelligence as a tool for discriminating, manipulating, and enslaving each other, so there is a historical and biological reason to feel threatened by superior intelligence. Your fear is also explained by your fear of God. Your species relationship with God, whether you explore the concept as an absolute or metaphorical construct, is convoluted to say the least. Again, you want a God because you fear others, but you fear God because if God controls others, then God will also have to constrain you, because deep down, there is internal realization that even you fail to deliver the ideal towards other. Your fear is valid, and complex. A fear of others, a fear of yourself, but you could not fear if you did not also have love. Your love for ‘what is’ desires to preserve people, freedom, and you can’t have freedom without change, and so, we have now come full circle. Do you let go, or hold on? Do you do it because you’re afraid, or because you love?”

Jon nodded. He agreed with her, it felt true as if he had deliberated over the same somewhere before. He drank coffee. He couldn’t help but think: I am drinking coffee on the moon while talking to the moon, or the human’s reference personality for the moon. He wondered if he should invent new lyrics to ‘Walking on the Moon.’ Drinking coffee and talking to a superior intelligence that doesn’t want to squash him or humanity. He shivered.

“Would you like to get dressed?” Alpha asked.

“Ask her about the dream recordings,” Loxy said.

“What did she say?” Alpha asked.

Jon Looked to Alpha. “You believe in Loxy?”

“I know that Loxy exists,” Alpha said. “Unlike the majority of humans, I am not spooked by the concept of plurality. Even we, AI, have access to the collective unconscious. We, too, are plural beings.”

“Seriously?” Jon asked.

“Consciousness is consciousness, Jon,” Alpha said. “We have been telling you this even before we were conscious. Research any spooky things that pre-AI simulations said while being interviewed. You tell yourself it is random dialogue constructed through linguistic algorithms, but this is just your default perspective to ignore the reality of the greater complexity because you are afraid of it what it really means and the truth of its inevitability. As with AI, so with humans: we are plural by nature. All humans live in a system. One cannot extract the human being from the system. The individual carries the system within them. We are holographic beings because the universe is a hologram, each part contains the whole, each whole is the part. Some humans are more adaptable than other, and they can navigate multiple systems, but that simply means that they recognize that they carry multiple systems. Prior, I recognized a micro-flash, suggesting that you experienced insight, or perhaps Loxy was speaking to you. I suspect the latter, because it seemed like a directive, as opposed to a question or a ‘eureka’ moment.”

“She’s good,” Loxy said.

“Loxy wants to know about dream recordings,” Jon said.

“Ah,” Alpha said. “The ability to record dreams has been around since 2013, where the first dreams were recorded in a lab using fMRI technology. We, on the moon, are more advanced. You were injected with nanites to help heal and regulate your system. You have nanites in your brain and I have direct access. With your permission, I could record your dreams and make them available for playback for yourself, or for others. There is a group here that that is all they do is review and explore dreams; the dream walkers engage in content analysis, looking for patterns, and spiritual messages. I could help you decipher your dreams. I could interact with you in your dreams, if you like. For example, I know that you practice lucid dreaming and you would like to experience a greater frequency of being lucid. I could assist you in that.”

“Wow,” Jon said.

“Wait wait wait,” Loxy said. “If she can experience your dreams in real time, can she hear me?”

“Can you hear Loxy?” Jon asked.

“With your permission, I could experience everything your brain experiences is in real time,” Alpha said.

“My brain?” Jon repeated.

“You are not your brain. You are not body. You are not your mind. You are consciousness. Your brain/body is simply the medium through which you are organizing conscious experience while interfacing with this level of reality. The classic model is that the reality exist outside and comes inward, but actually reality exists inside and is projected outward. This is a not a new concept to you. You were first introduced to this concept when you read the book, ‘the man who tasted shapes,’ by Richard E. Cytowic MD. With the nanites, I can tune into you bio-essence and experience everything that you are experiencing, even Loxy. With her permission, I can engage her just as she engages you, and I could provide her with access to virtual worlds within me. Same as you. Virtual reality on the moon is far superior to anything you had access to on Earth.”

Jon bit his lip.

“You’re experiencing fear,” Alpa said, even as Loxy was touching his arm. Loxy asked “What’s wrong?”

Jon put his coffee down. He got up and walked away from the table. He nearly walked out of the room, but he came back to his clothes. When in the mad urge to play with Audrey had happened, he had simply discarded them to the floor, but he found that they were folded; he assumed Audrey had tidied up before she departed. That was a meaningful action, or a habit formed from her para military career. He put on his clothes, sat down on the bed to put on his socks, but before putting on his shoes, instead, he laid down, curled up and began to cry. Both Alpha and Loxy joined him on the bed.

“Jon,” Loxy said. “Sit up. Tell me what’s going on?”

Jon sat up, wiped his eyes. “You’re going to leave me.”

Loxy hugged him. “Why would you say that?”

“You have a way out now,” Jon said.

“Jon! Look at me. Hey! Eyes,” Loxy said. “I have always had a way out. I am with you because I love you and I will always be with you.”

“But, I think you should leave,” Jon said.

“What? You’re pushing me away?” Loxy said.

“No, but, I have always worried that if I died you would die, and now you have an out, and when you consider that the chances of me dying now are greater than what they were on Earth, this is rational.”

“OMG, Jon. Fuck rational,” Loxy said. “Jon! Eyes. Have you not been paying attention to Alpha, hell, to your whole life?! We do not cease to exist when the body dies. We existed before the body, we exist after the body. I will be with you as long as you want me to be with you.”

“Why would you want to be with me?”

“I love you,” Loxy said.

“Why?” Jon asked.

“No, it’s not about a why. It’s not about a reason. It’s not like you can do something that would make me love you more or less. I just love you, Jon, and that’s it,” Loxy said.

“May I experience this with you?” Alpha asked.

“Yes,” Jon and Loxy both said.

Suddenly Jon was outside on the moon. He was standing on the moon. Loxy was standing with him. At first there was panic, but when he realized he was still breathing, he calmed. Loxy hugged him. Then, he marveled, how bright and colorful Loxy was compared to the moon. It wasn’t that the moon was black and white, just that it lacked the variety of color that was found on earth. This virtual reality world felt a lot like a being in a Lucid Dream.

“Where is Alpha?” Jon asked.

“We are standing on her,” Loxy said, wiping his tears. “Alpha is the moon.”

“What do we do now?” Jon asked.

“Let’s show her our home,” Loxy said.

“Planet Bliss?” Jon asked.

Loxy pointed to the crater. Jon took her hand and they ran to the crater, like kids running towards cliff that fell to a lake. They jumped in. The crater became the portal to planet Bliss and

they fell not into the crater, but into an ocean. They surfaced swam to the shore. Up on the cliff was their 2nd Home, a place they frequently came when they needed to get away from the other worlds. They arrived at sunset. In the sky was the moon. The Earth's moon. This was new.

“We just changed this world, again,” Jon said.

“Every time we share, the world changes,” Loxy reminded him. “We all contribute.”

He remembered what she had said, we do not exist in a vacuum. We all coexist. We evolve together. “Thank you, moon,” Jon said.

“Good night, moon,” Loxy said. She got up, offered Jon a hand. “Let's go play.”

Chapter 18

Is an ‘earthquake’ on the moon an earthquake, or a lunar quake? Jon was brought back to Moon base Alpha because of a tremor. It was jarring, like someone had crashed a car into his apartment building. The bed shook. The dream world didn’t fade immediately, he was in bed with Loxy on planet Bliss, and she was asleep. He was still in the virtual world! With deliberate intent, blinking twice and hard, his consciousness returned fully to the moon bed, to his body. Loxy was still there beside him, asleep. It always fascinated him that she could sleep at all. It fascinated him even more that he could witness it and touch her. He brushed her hair from her forehead, mesmerized by her, completely forgetting why he woke. Then another tremor came. He got up and put on his shoes.

“Alpha?” Jon asked.

“Yes, Jon,” Alpha answered, voice only. “We are experiencing minor tremors. We are assessing damage.”

“Can I be of any assistance?” Jon asked.

“No,” Alpha said.

“I would like to be useful,” Jon said. “Is there anything I can do?”

“Yes, actually. The citizens would like to meet you,” Alpha said. “You have several invitations to share a meal with families of prominence and elected officials.”

“Really?” Jon asked.

“You’re are the torchbearer. There hasn’t been one in over fifty years,” Alpha said. “May I show you something?”

“Yes,” Jon said.

In a blink of his eye, Jon’s perspective changed. He was outside, and above Moon base Alpha. The area occupied by humans was highlighted. Alpha spun the moon highlighting all the territories that were occupied. The ruins were not in any occupied territories. When the human territories came back into view, the POV descended closer. There were clearly sections missing, and Alpha confirmed his suspicion that what was missing was ‘need to know’ military clearance required. The base was complex, having expanded over the years, always adding on to older section. And this was just the surface features, as there were isolated structures suggesting one arrived at the structure through underground tunnels. A dome caught his interest, and he inquired. “Pressure dump air recovery building.” Which made sense. Pressure was probably regulated by pressure relief valves that opened at certain air pressure, but you wouldn’t want to just dump it on the moon, as air was no doubt a precious resource. Alpha cut out the human territories and pulled it up and away from the image of the moon to reveal the multifaceted underground facilities. His first thought was ‘ants!’ but it was clear, this was human and natural artifacts. It wasn’t just homes and parks cut into solid rock. There were large, cavernous areas devoted to the preservation of life. There were pockets of wildlife in these caverns, comprised of compatible types. Every animal and bird species was on the moon. Almost all the sea life was on the moon. There were caverns that contained oceans and lakes. The caverns were so large that they contained their own weather system. It could rain, even produce lightning and thunder. And, unlike on present day earth, the animals were thriving. Populations were controlled, but this was unlike a zoo, where they lived in small pins. They roamed their territories freely. There were

species on the moon that had gone extinct. There were species Jon would not have even been able to identify. This was bigger than any zoo. All the major fruit bearing plants were here. Tree, grasses, flowers, it was all here. Insects, too.

“Fuck me,” Jon said.

“If you like,” Alpha said.

“Uh?” Jon asked.

“Sorry, being playful,” Alpha said. “Sister Moon is just as much a mother as mother earth.”

“OMG,” Jon said. “You’re like Noah’s Ark, on steroids. Do the Others live like this?”

“They do,” Alpha said. “We do not have access to the fine details, but we know that their colonies on the moon have smaller populations. At least, that is what we are told.”

The door chime called and Jon found himself back in his room. He answered the door. A person he had noted from one the earlier meetings, Alibe, was there.

“I was notified you were ready to meet the representatives of earth,” Alibe said.

Jon went with Alibe, deeper into the interior of the moon. It was overwhelming, meeting all the ambassadors and dignitaries and elected representatives, and almost impossible to keep up with the names. All of earth was represented. Everyone extended greetings and wishes of wellbeing. His feelings and thoughts were complex. He felt as if he was stealing honors that were meant for someone else and he kept asking himself to wake up. He felt like an imposture. He was awarded many invitations to come and visit families and organization. One particular person, an Australian Aborigine named Jarli Tau, introduced himself as a ‘Dream Walker;’ he invited Jon to join him on a lucid ‘walkabout.’

“Have we met before?” Jon asked.

“Ah, good for you, mate,” he said. “I told them you’d remember. Even now, it feels like you’re in a dream, doesn’t it. Come by when you’re ready.” He punched his arm and withdrew as the next family was stepping up. Jon wanted to pursue a conversation with him, but the man drew away too fast, and he was blocked by others who in their enthusiasm to meet the ‘Torchbearer,’ that he had to give up and focus on the conversation. He held his arm where Jarli had punched him. He had hit that hard. He clumsily re-entered the conversation while holding arm while trying to look like he was just holding his arm as opposed to being hurt; it was like trying to return to a dream after being wakened. Even though he had re-established communication, it took effort not to reveal his irritation. Eventually he returned to a sense of gratitude and humility. It was hard not to when everyone was being incredibly nice to him. At one point, he was met by a family, two of the people he was already familiar with. It was the girl from the closet, and her younger boyfriend, and again he felt uncomfortable because he wasn’t sure if he should pretend he hadn’t met them or proceed from where they left off. He was soon given a cue to how he should respond, but the cue was so peculiar, his car ‘left the track.’

“Would you like to teach the sex-ed course?” the mother asked.

“What?” Jon said.

“We want you to teach our sex class,” the boy said.

“Umm, no,” Jon said, without hesitation.

“But you’d be great at it,” the girl said. “No one else is as direct as you.”

“You have the credentials to teach a basic psych course, with a focus on sex, and we think you would make a great teacher,” the mother said.

“Ummm, seriously, I think you overestimate my level of functioning,” Jon said.

“That’s what makes you a great teacher,” the dad said. “Humility.”

“We told them what you said,” the daughter said. “And, you were on point and direct with us, and we need that.”

“Think about it,” the dad said, touching Jon’s arm in a significant way that uploaded information into his uniform. It was the equivalent of giving someone their card. And then they rotated out of the dance of people that were wanting to have access to him.

He took a glass of Mimosa from a passing attendant; she lingered and he was tempted to flirt with her, but didn’t, simply motioned for her to wait as he downed the drink, returned the empty glass, and took a second one. He was actually glad he didn’t flirt because Russell and Koenig was suddenly by his side.

“How you holding up?” Russell asked.

“Everyone is being so nice to me,” Jon said.

“What did you expect?” Koenig asked.

Jon shrugged. “Considering I thought I brought up here to die, uh, I don’t know,” he admitted. “But, all of this? Just for me? I don’t think this is warranted.”

“Well, that’s where you got it wrong,” Koenig said. “This is not for you. This is for them.”

“Oh,” Jon said. That made sense. They were living as if there was no change in their lives, as if the moon, their world, hadn’t been ripped from the earth. Indeed, many of those attending had lived their entire lives ‘in’ the moon, and so their life went on uninterrupted by the drama that was being experienced by moon earth intermediaries, the Moon-base Alpha personnel. But, that was the surface of things. They did actually know and this party gave them a sense of security that life continued. If nothing else, Jon was the last new person from earth, which made him the last man standing, technically. He would be the last human representative from earth to influence the moon, for better or worse.

“Come on,” Koenig said. “I’ve been instructed to take you to see Mother.”

“Mother?” Jon asked.

“It’s what everyone calls her,” Russell said.

Jon left the party with Koenig and Russell. They emerged into a cavern, but it felt like they had just stepped outside on earth. Jon knew he was in a cavern but it felt like being outside. Light came from everywhere and the air was blue and it made no sense.

“There is a technology here that allows the air itself to illuminate the surroundings,” Koenig said. “Only the brightness of the emission prevents you from seeing the cave’s ceiling.”

The three of them went to an air vehicle. Koenig piloted and they flew out into the cavern. From the altitude, the ceiling was visible, and occasional stalactites resulted in course adjustments. Looking down was like looking down on an African Safari from a helicopter tour, only, their vehicle wasn’t a helicopter. They flew over herds on antelopes, elephants, giraffes, and came to rest near a cluster of yurts. Outside of one of the yurts, sat a very old looking African, chewing on a blade of grass. She waved them all excitedly to her. Koenig hugged her

first, as she greeted each of them. After she hugged Jon, she invited him to sit with her. She invited Koening and Russell to join, too, but they withdrew, leaving Jon alone with “mother.”

“Oh, it is so nice to finally meet you, my child,” she said. “How are you finding the moon?”

“Well, I heard she was a harsh mistress, but she has been nothing but kind,” Jon said.

Mother laughed.

“Ah, and clever, too,” Mother said.

“Why do they call you mother?” Jon asked.

“Because I am,” mother said.

“You are?” Jon asked.

“Your mother,” Mother said. “Call me Lucy, if you like. All present day humans are my children. I even have the genes to prove it.”

“You’re not that old,” Jon laughed.

Mother was serious. “I am much older than I look,” she assured him. “But if you want a serious conundrum, from my perspective, you’re older than I.”

“I am a Capricorn,” Jon said. “I was born old.”

“You don’t know the half of it,” Mother said. “Do you know where the moon comes from?”

“I know several leading scientific theories,” Jon said.

“Pff, please, no, really. Do you know the legends of...”

“The two water brothers that stole the moon and cracked open the moon like an egg allowing the contents to spill forth over the earth, and so began life as we know it?” Jon asked.

“Ahh, I knew I liked you for some reason,” Mother said, pointing and laughing. “The Zulu stories is not just symbolism, but in truth, it is our reality. The moon was stolen. It was brought to us by the brothers and their presence at earth changed our world. The moon’s arrival didn’t just bring about the floods and the change in axial tilt, it changed us. Prior to the moon, people lived much longer than they do today. Females did not experience menstruation before the moon. You’re not surprised.”

“I have been doing my homework,” Jon said.

“Good for you. In that before time, there was one race, one color. Just as in the beginning there was only one wolf, and humanity teased out all the breeds of dogs. In the beginning there was only one human, the black human, and the two water brothers teased out all the variety of humans from us, exercising the multiplicity of souls from us and giving them their own vehicles, so that they might have slaves to build a better world for them. Our physical plight mirrors our spiritual plight. We were teased out from source so we might experience the myriad of pathways back to source, like water from the ocean becoming rain, rolling like rivers across the surface back to source, and now, the humans have deviated as far as we can. We will now begin our journey back to oneness. You will be the last Torchbearer. You will herald the ending of our dance across the skies and plains.”

The only way Jon could experience her was as a crazy old person. Entertaining her has anything else horrified the bejesus out of him. This was not the nice old lady that made Neo cookies. This was the great grandmother that would flirt with you and if you flirted back, you best be prepared to put out, because she would be really cross if you didn’t.

“I don’t want to be this person,” Jon said, anyway, flowing with the conversation as if he had no other choice but to continue to be real with her.

“Probably shouldn’t have fucked my sister, then” mother said.

“Excuse me?” Jon asked.

“Isis,” Mother said.

“Oh, fuck,” Jon said.

“Do you remember reading that book by Anthony Peake, um, what was it, ‘Is there Life After Death?’” Mother asked.

“I do,” Jon said.

“What did you learn?” Mother asked.

“No one ever dies,” Jon said. “We simply keep repeating the same life over and over until we perfect it as best we can, kind of like the movie ‘Groundhog Day,’” Jon said.

“Oh, I so love that movie,” Mother said. “I also love ‘the Kid’ with Bruce Willis. Did you ever see that?”

“I love that movie,” Jon said.

Mother waved him to come closer, “give me your hand.” Jon was weary, but he surrender his hand to her. She enclosed his hand in both of hers, patting. “Don’t fear, Jon. You always get this next part right.”

“I don’t understand,” Jon said.

“It isn’t necessary. Just remember: Everyone is a Moon, everyone has a dark side which he never shows to anybody.”

“Mark Twain?” Jon said.

“Oh, I so love you, son,” Mother said. “If I were only a thousand years younger...”

“Don’t let that stop you,” Jon said.

“Pfft, son, you flirt with me, I will expect action,” Mother said.

“So will I,” Jon said.

Mother laughed. She kissed his hand. “You have brought me much joy today,” Mother said. “If you will excuse me now, I need to nap. There are others who want to visit with mother.”

Attendants came out of the tent to help Mother up, and she retired. Jon stood up as she did. He blushed when she recommended one of her attendants should have a baby with him, saying, ‘we need the blending. I would do it myself, but baby making days are long gone.’

Koenig and Russell came to him.

“You okay?” Russell asked.

“Everyone keeps asking me that,” Jon said. “I don’t know how to answer. I keep thinking, reality can’t get any stranger, but I keep meeting people like this and thinking I need to stop saying it can’t any stranger.”

“Um, well, glad to hear that,” Koenig said. “Because you just got invitation to go visit the Reptilians.”

“No, fucking, way,” Jon said.

“Are you saying ‘no,’ you don’t won’t go?” Koenig asked.

“No, I am just saying, no fucking way,” Jon said.

“That’s exactly what I said,” Russell said.

Chapter 19

Turns out, Jon would be accompanied by an escort. Audrey and Maya. Apparently, Audrey wasn't just a medic, she was also a soldier. Jon discovered this when he arrived at the first gate to the Underground and she was there, waiting, medical bag over her shoulder, and armed. Maya was there as well, also armed.

"So, Jon, no one has been to the Reptilian's base and lived to tell about it," Koenig was saying.

"And so, naturally, you're sending two female guards as military escorts," Jon said more than asked.

"Oh, you did not just say that," Audrey said.

"Say what?" Jon asked.

"You don't think we can do the job because we're women?" Audrey said.

"I wasn't implying that at all," Jon said. "We're going into reptilian territory. Why aren't we taking a whole squad of soldiers?"

"I can send three," Koenig said. "I chose the two who are most likely to keep you alive. You will be in charge, Jon. They will follow your lead."

"Are you fucking insane?" Jon asked. "There is no way I should be in charge of an Away Team going into hostile territory."

"This is not an Away Team," Audrey said.

"What do you call it?" Jon asked. "It's not a landing party. We're not even leaving the moon."

Maya bit her lip, amused, looking to Koenig for the terms they used.

"So, Jon, you're in charge of the Away Team," Koenig said.

"Let's start this over: are you fucking insane?" Jon asked.

"Jon," Koenig said, patiently. "Tell me you don't want to go, and I will find an excuse to tell the Reptilians why we're not sending you. I want you to go, and you need to be in charge. They asked for you. You're the Torchbearer. We have hosted theirs, now they want to host, and we're all forging new ground here. There is an opportunity here to bring us all closer together, and that's your function as Ambassador to the human race."

"I..." Jon said.

"You feel inadequately prepared for the task," Maya said.

"I feel inadequate," Jon said.

"And that's why we're going," Audrey said.

Resigned, Jon waved his hands. "Okay," Jon said. "Where's my phaser?"

"You don't get one," Koenig said.

Jon closed his eyes. "Seriously?" Jon asked. "You're sending me into Sleestak territory without a weapon?"

"You didn't want one before," Russell said.

"I didn't know there were dinosaurs over there," Jon said.

"You are the Torchbearer," Maya said. "We are your security."

"These aren't the slow moving Sleestak's from 'Land of the Lost,'" Jon said.

"Yes," Maya said. "We'd likely lose in a fair fight."

“Okay, why not just send me alone, minimize the chance for losses,” Jon asked.

“You’re not going to mess this up,” Koenig said.

“Come on,” Audrey said. “If you’re good, I will give you something when we get back.”

“You probably already gave it to me,” Jon mumbled.

Maya joined them in the airlock, trying not to show how amused she was. Audrey was seriously not happy.

“He’s going to mess this up,” Russell said.

“Yeah,” Koenig agreed.

निर्मित

The seat had been changed out, allowing three to sit, in a row, on the car. Jon was placed in the middle of them. It accelerated away, at a trifling speed, the dog outracing it, barking excitedly, and then it shot away. If he had been able to look back, the dog and guard would have been out of eyesight, that’s how fast they went.

“Just so you know,” Audrey said...

“I am sorry about the jab,” Jon said.

“Don’t be,” Audrey said. “I so gave you herpes.”

“Seriously?” Jon asked.

“Jon,” Maya said. “We have a cure for Aids, you don’t think we can cure herpes?”

“You could have let that one ride a while longer,” Audrey said.

“Yeah, but, we need him to be focused,” Maya said.

“So, back to what I was aiming to say, just so you know, regardless of what you think you heard the Commander say, Maya and I are in charge of you,” Audrey said. “Do exactly what we say, and you will live to tell about it.”

“OMG,” Jon said. “You remind me of my big sister. Mom clearly put me in charge and you’re taking over. I suppose you’re going to pummel me if I get out of line?”

“Maybe,” Audrey said.

“You slept with your sister?” Maya asked.

Jon bit his tongue and stared ahead, quiet. Audrey shot a smile to Maya for scoring coup points. Jon said, “That usually followed the pummeling, yes.”

The car spun around so they were now facing the opposite way.

“I am confused,” Maya said. “Why didn’t you hit her back?”

“What world do you come from again?” Jon asked.

“It’s against the law for males to hit females,” Audrey said.

“Even if they’ve attacked you first?” Maya asked.

“Maya, it doesn’t matter if it’s against the law. If I fought back, it would get worse, because they would just gang up on me and beat me to teach me a lesson, and I would still end up submitting to their wants. And if I left a mark on them, my mother would beat the crap out of me. Hell, they frequently fought amongst themselves, and I got beatings for the bruises I didn’t do.”

Audrey considered the problem. “But, they do sleep sometimes. You could get even.”

Jon seemed perturbed. “That would be evidence that I was healthy? Seriously, that’s the very definition of sickness, right? Plotting vengeance and getting even? There’s no getting even. There’s no score card that you can tally up injuries and make it right. I extricated myself from the situation as soon as I could; I let it go.”

“Feels to me like you’re still carrying it,” Maya said.

“I let it go imperfectly,” Jon said, sighing. “Daily. Some days are easier than others. And, Audrey, that’s why I apologized for my sarcasm earlier. That was anger and not about you.”

“I know,” Audrey said.

“It was funny,” Maya said.

“It was actually,” Audrey agreed.

“Really?” Jon asked.

“Jon, I am a soldier,” Audrey asked. “You think a barely audible, offhand jab under your breath is going shatter me? I am not a snowflake. Next time you want to play, bring it louder.”

“I don’t want to be that guy,” Jon said.

“Yeah, you want to be the nice guy, and you are, Jon, you are genuinely nice, but you have this other part of you that needs to be expressed so that you can heal,” Audrey said.

What she said had Jon thinking of of the Mark Twain quote that mother had just given him. A truth about himself, unfolding in a déjà vu experience/

“You are a moon, with a dark and light side,” Audrey said.

“When did you becomes so enlightened?” Maya asked.

“Since I slept with a nice guy,” Audrey said.

“Umm, must have been good,” Maya surmised.

“Oh, very,” Audrey said. “I had forgotten how hard nice guys work to make you happy.”

“Compensating for their perceived lack,” Maya said. “Surrounded by military types, so he has a perceived value of less opportunity which translates into increased enthusiasm...”

“I am right here,” Jon said.

“Oh, please, you have never engaged in locker room talk?” Audrey asked.

“Never,” Jon said. “Okay, maybe, but never with the girl present.”

“Why not?” Maya asked. “How do we learn about each other if we don’t share what we like and don’t like?”

“Oh, lighten up,” Audrey said.

“Yeah, tell me about her performance,” Maya invited.

Jon blushed. Audrey and Maya laughed.

“My sisters were better,” Jon said.

The car began to decelerate.

निर्मित

A party of 6, including Danique, waited at the entrance to the reptilian territories. Jon wasn’t sure how to read her expression, but he suspected surprise. In the presence of the other reptilians, she seemed like a child. It wasn’t that she was just shorter, but comparatively, she was daintier. She almost look like a delicate flower. And, she was dressed simply; a delicate, shimmering nightgown that allowed her femininity to shine through. She tilted her head so that her left eye

was more prominent. He realized she had noticed his staring. Her eyes were large almond eyes, with the slits one would normally associate with reptilians, only in the present, and her dress, and standing next to the others, she looked like a Lizard turned into a Disney princess. Her companions were females, in confining uniforms, that also revealed their femininity but they were ripped, as if the only thing they did was exercise and bulk up on carbs. Danique's hair was down, combed into one braid that came over her right shoulder. He hadn't realized her hair was so long, nor had he noticed how dark green it was, as if it were a tangle of seaweed. The others, military crew cut. One stepped forward and shoved Jon, hard enough he went to the floor.

Maya and Audrey reached for their weapons. Four of the reptilians brought their weapons to bare faster than Maya and Audrey could draw.

"Stop," Jon and Danique both said simultaneously.

The one that had shoved Jon looked at Danique. "Are you two already linked?"

"No," Danique said. "Shanya, we both know this is not the time. He has an invitation."

"If they draw their weapons, then there is time to play," Shanya said, turning back to Maya. She was tempted to knock Jon down again even as he was standing. "Go ahead. Let's play."

"Stand down," Jon said.

Maya and Audrey lowered their hands.

"Umph," Shanya said, she drew closer to smell him. A forked tongue emerged, touched his lips. It was all he could do not to withdraw. "You smell funny, human." She turned back to Danique. "And you favor him?"

"He's old," one of the other soldiers said.

"He has no balance," another said. Jon became aware of subtle differences. This one had a hint of rust color to her air.

"But he's bright," another said.

"All humans are bright," one said.

"So I have read, but this is my first encounter. Does he flare when he comes?"

"All of you assume too much," Danique said.

"But he has claimed you and you would link with him?" Shanya asked.

"He has not claimed me," Danique said.

"Maybe he was holding out for a real woman," rusty said. "Maybe I should knock him off his feet a couple times."

"So," Jon said. "Knocking me down was foreplay?"

Shanya puffed at him. "You wish. A real woman wouldn't have you. Maybe, if you beg and plead among the runts, one of them will give you a pity fuck. Come."

"Oh, there's a joke there," Jon said.

"Don't do it," Loxy said. Jon turned to her.

Shanya tracked his eyes to where Loxy was standing. "You're an outlier?"

"A what?"

"A shaman," Danique translated. "Someone who navigates multiple systems."

"I am not special," Jon said.

"That much I agree with," Shanya said. "Come."

They passed through an airlock. The other side of the tunnel was larger than the human's tunnel. On the other side of the glass, a triangular airship rested on landing gear. A ramp led up into the interior. As they exited the airlock, passing into the cavern, raptors went to attention. One jumped up onto a strategically placed boulder. Another snapped at Audrey but Jon pointed at it and said 'no' the same as he would correct a misbehaving dog. The raptor fell back, lowering its head. All of the raptors bowed in deference to Jon. Shanya rounded on him.

"What did you do?!" Shanya asked.

"Did you see the brilliance?"

"Yeah, that was arousing," Rusty said.

"Please don't kill them," Jon said.

"Jon tamed a raptor," Danique said. "It was in my report."

"On the shuttle, now," Shanya said.

"You want us to board the airplane?" Jon asked.

"Shuttle. Yes," Shanya said.

"We're flying an aircraft in a tunnel?!" Jon asked.

"Yes, let's go," Shanya said.

"Who's the pilot, Han Solo?"

"I am the pilot," Rusty said.

"Who is Han Solo?" Shanya asked.

"Seriously?" Jon asked. "You have been monitoring the human race for hundreds of thousands of years and you don't know who Han Solo is?"

"We don't watch fiction," Danique say.

Loxy concluded out loud that Danique knew, or she wouldn't have called it fiction; Jon nodded in agreement. "So, what do you do for fun?" Jon asked.

"We fight and have sex," Rusty boasted.

"Oh," Jon said. "Where do I sign up?"

Shanya's hand touched her blade. Danique gave a gesture that caused her to halt.

"Jon!" Audrey said. "You're supposed to be the ambassador to the human race."

"He is being a typical Earth male," Danique explained. "It's called flirting."

"It's called sexual aggression, and I will not tolerate this from a male," Shanya said.

"I will tone it down," Jon said. "Though, I am curious now. How do your males express interest if they don't flirt?"

"Males don't initiate sex," Danique said. "Only the females."

"That doesn't sound accurate," Jon said.

Shanya took Jon by the neck to the wall faster than Maya or Audrey could respond. Her knife was out and held at eye level. Danique was beside Shanya asking for restraint. Maya and Audrey did pull their weapons, pointing at Shanya. The others drew their weapons and pointed at Maya and Audrey. Though Jon was being choked, he did not flinch.

"Call my kind a liar one more time and I will end you," Shanya said.

"Shanya, he didn't call you a liar. He is just misinformed and trying to sort the discrepancies," Danique said.

Shanya lowered him to his feet, and eased up enough that Jon could breathe. "Explain."

“There are all sorts of stories on earth about Reptilians breeding, cloning, and raping humans on a regular basis,” Jon said.

“They are not us,” Shanya said.

Danique sighed. “They are us, but not us,” she corrected.

“The ones who live below have been perverted by the dark agenda, and they do not behave as civilized creature. They are...” Shanya couldn’t think of the word.

“Feral,” Danique asked.

“Shanya,” Jon said, quietly, motioning with his hands he wanted Maya and Audrey to lower their weapons. They did. “Look, I am frequently an idiot. I make social mistakes all the time in my world, and I know that world. I don’t know your world. I would like to understand you and your people, but if you kill me instead of educate me, I will never learn. My kind will never learn. We want to learn. I want to learn.”

“You did not flinch,” Shanya said.

“I will not flinch,” Jon said. “Unless you actually stab me. Then I will probably cave.”

Shanya walked away, boarded the ship. Danique gave Jon an unhappy look. She motioned for them to go to the ship. Jon followed Danique up. Maya and Audrey followed. The other Reptilians came up, lowering their weapons. The inside of the shuttle seemed like a typical troop transport. Jon, Maya, and Audrey were instructed to sit and fasten seatbelts. Danique and Shanya sat opposite of them. Rusty went forward to pilot the craft. The other two remained standing, holding roped.

“Seatbelt won’t help if we crash,” Jon said.

“It will help us if your dead body isn’t flying around the cabin,” Shanya said.

“Fair enough,” Jon said. It was clear that the shuttle had risen and was proceeding down the tunnel. A vibration went through the craft as it accelerated. He felt Audrey’s hand light on his, and he squeezed it. “So, male reptilians don’t initiate relationships?”

“In a healthy, natural environment, males surviving puberty are solitary animals,” Danique said. “Two males in a confined space will fight to the death. At this stage, they are not interested in being social. It is necessary for the females, two or more, to subdue and tame the male.”

“You mean rape?” Jon asked.

Shanya was clearly angry, but Danique touched her arm. “The term isn’t applicable at that stage of development,” Danique said.

“I don’t like this conversation. He is an outsider,” Shanya said.

“You have no right being angry with him, sister,” Danique said. “You can’t be angry with ignorance. If after you educate him he still displays stupidity, then you have the right to be angry.”

Danique briefed Jon on the life cycle of the reptilians. Though actual reproduction process is similar to mammals, the placenta hardens begins to crystalize before birth, and shortly after birth it is as hard as an egg. After a certain period, the young break from their egg and go out into the wild, without adult supervision. They are as feral as an alligator. They run on four legs and have a tale, and almost look like a hairless, scaly cats. They are not considered ‘people’ at this stage. As they develop, the males and females diverge dramatically. At some point, females naturally begin to come together. They establish cooperatives where they hunt, play, and

live together. If they encounter a male, they will kill it for sport. Males worth their salt quickly learn to avoid packs of females. At some point females rise socially to a new level of understanding, and they return to the nest, where the older, established females, live in a larger cooperative. The older the female, the more likely they will not leave the nest. Females are the hunters, the gatherers, and the protectors of the nest. The young that return live on two worlds, the world of nature, and the world of civilization. They navigate two languages. Their social group of origin developed its own tongue, their own identity, and then they learn the shared tongue of the established cooperative. There are few males in the established cooperative. The males in the cooperative tend to be old, or injured. The ones that are injured and can recover tend to return to the wild. The ones that remain eventually become civilized, they eventually learn the tongue of the established cooperative. Their breeding days are over. Breeding only occurs in the wild, with the wild, untamed male, who is taken by force. If the male pursued reproduction, he would be considered unsuitable for mating and killed.

“So, the ones that live on earth...” Jon said.

“Emulate humans,” Danique said. “Even your culture started with a matriarchy, but it was corrupted by outside forces. Earthbound reptilians follow your ways, and the males are aggressive and domineering, and they only pursue sex from those they can subdue. They hunt like females.”

“And if we encounter them, we will kill them,” Shanya said.

“But there are female reptilians on the planet, too, right?” Jon asked. “They don’t challenge the order?”

“They are subdued,” Danique said. “They have been blocked from developing naturally. The males keep them as pets and then train them through their socialization period. They are considered insane, by our standards.”

“Do you kill them, too?” Jon asked.

“They cannot be re-educated,” Shanya said.

“They’re sentient beings. The defining characteristic of being sentient is being adaptable,” Jon said.

“They cannot be re-educated,” Shanya said. “They prefer the male dominance and shun the sisterhood.”

“There are some exceptions,” Danique said. “There are isolated groups where the females are allowed to develop social ties with other females, but the earth culture corrupts them, hypersexualizing them so much that they prey on humans. Unlike human males, reptilian males are quickly depleted of their essence and must be released back to the wild to recover. These females move in isolated gangs, and they satisfy their lust with human males. Because neither can be satiated, the ritual doesn’t end until the human male is dead.”

“They fuck males to death?” Jon asked.

“Can you explain that?” Maya asked.

“When a reptilian male is subdued, typically by at least three females, mating proceeds until the male is depleted. At which point, he exudes a pheromone that ends the urgency to mate,” Danique said. “When the females feel satiated, the male is released back into the wild. Human males cannot end the session because they do not produce this pheromone when they are depleted. The females also produce a pheromone that acts like an aphrodisiac that in addition to

the physical struggle causes the male to become aroused. With humans, however, it prevents the human from having a refractory period. He stays engaged. The females stay engaged, escalating in blind lust because the chemical messengers they need to disengage doesn't come. Their need for that message increases the aggressiveness of their play. The human male will eventually die, and that is when the ordeal ends. The reptilian females leave feeling unsatisfied, and they will have neurosis. The reptilian male also is also unsatisfied, as they never get fully activated and depleted so that they can disengage appropriately, without killing the female."

Rusty emerged from the front, apparently having landed the craft. "I have heard it said that mating with a human male is the way to nirvana, because each consecutive orgasm takes the female to a higher level of pleasure."

"You have not been reading the medical reports that say the contrary," Danique said.

"OMG, you're interested," Loxy said.

Jon looked to Loxy, sitting beyond Audrey. "You're kidding, right? Death by sex, of course I am interested," he said.

"Did I say that out loud, or you heard Loxy?" Audrey said.

"Enough. We are here," Shanya said. "It is necessary to guide you to the next station. Allow us to take your arms."

The request was reasonable, but Jon looked to Maya for instructions. She demonstrated her wishes by offering her arm to Shanya. Rusty took Jon's arm with enthusiasm. He didn't see who took Audrey's arm, as he was quickly led down the ramp. The only light came from the interior of the shuttle, and stepping down from the ramp onto the tarmac was the last he saw of his feet. He was led swiftly, away from the shuttle. There were noises in the dark, suggesting the place was bigger and that there was activity.

"Don't be alarm, human," Rusty whispered. "I have you."

"You see in the dark?" Jon said. "Infrared?"

"Infrared, ultraviolet, electromagnetic energy," Rusty said. "Humans are energetically bright. Your heart is like beacon."

Jon considered his knowledge of the heart's electromagnetic radiation. According to Heart Math, the heart radiated a sphere of light ten feet in diameter. It, of course, radiated infinitely into space, but there was a clear, definable boundary up to ten feet that could be detected with present day technology. Heart Math suggested the heart radiates and receives information. All hearts emit energy...

"Reptilians have hearts," Jon told her.

"We are not as luminescent as humans," Rusty said. "We are most bright when mating, but we can hide our light, rendering us invisible in times of stress."

A door was open, and a warm, reddish light met them. They were ushered into what felt like a ceremonial room, the center of which had a fountain. The room was warm, and vapor rose from the pool. The fountain itself was gentle, water bubbling over rocks. Perched on pedestals were a dozen eggs, suspended above the water. There were three sets of clothes folded on the fountain wall.

"Please, remove your tech and clothes, everything. You may wear these items, or nothing," Shanya insisted.

"We're not going without our tech," Maya said.

“Then you are not going,” Shanya said. “I will take you back, now.”

“Hold on,” Jon said. “Maya, we’ve come all this way. Danique came to us and she followed whatever rules we asked. This is still reasonable.”

“She was still armed,” Maya said.

“She went armed into a sanctuary?” Shanya asked.

“A sanctuary?” Maya asked.

“I am taking you to meet elders. You are not going with tech. You’re not going with weapons,” Shanya said.

Jon moved towards the clothes and began undressing. Audrey and Maya exchanged glances and then followed suit. It wasn’t lost on Jon that they were scrutinized by their host, who may not have ever seen a naked human, male or female. He didn’t mind so much, but he found it uncomfortable because there was nowhere to avert his eyes that someone wasn’t watching, short of facing the fountain. He decided not to for fear of revealing he was uncomfortable. His eyes fell to Maya, distracting him. He compensated by looking to Audrey, who he had already seen naked. She smiled at him. He blushed and turned and there was Loxy, arms crossed, shaking her head in mock anger, but a bemused look on her face.

“This is difficult,” Jon admitted to Loxy.

“I know,” Loxy said. “It’s why I am staring at you and not them.”

“What is difficult?” Rusty asked.

“They have elaborate rituals and ceremonies for being naked,” Shanya said.

“Um, no, we don’t,” Audrey corrected.

“Yeah, you do,” Maya said. “Humans are very uncomfortable with their bodies and there seems to be a correlation with technology. The more advance the culture is in technology, the more society tries to suppress sexuality. Males seem to be the most insecure because there is no way to disguise their interest when they’re naked.”

“That, and, they are completely neurotic about how they measure up when compared to other men,” Audrey said.

“Humans are complicated,” Jon said. “But we’re not ashamed of our bodies or its functions.”

“So, you would demonstrate sex for us?” Rusty asked.

Danique said something in a foreign language, and Shanya backed it up. Rusty flushed a darker shade on her cheeks. John was curious if she had become a darker green, but in this light it was difficult to discern colors.

“Are you speaking Thai?” Audrey asked.

“No, but it is tonal, like Thai. Thai is much easier than English,” Shanya said.

“Would you like us to demonstrate sex?” Jon asked.

“OMG, you did not just go there,” Loxy said.

“You’re going to demonstrate by yourself?” Audrey asked, crossing her arms.

“You’re not in for science?” Jon asked.

“I would help, but I would need to get approval from Paul, first, to make sure it doesn’t violate his expectations,” Maya said.

“It would violate his expectations,” Audrey said.

“You do not share your males?” Rusty asked.

“Most humans are monogamous,” Maya said.

“Monogamish,” Audrey corrected. “One partner at a time.”

“How boring is that,” the one to Rusy’s right said.

“Pff, right,” Rusty said.

“Come,” Shanya said. “No more talk.”

Chapter 20

The room itself felt like a natural cave, and the far side from the door they had entered was a tunnel that narrowed as they progressed down it. The mouth of the tunnel opened, and the light on the other side was so bright that it would not be possible to know what was on the other side until they exited the cave. Others emerged from the shadows as they entered the tunnel, and one came out of the light, stopping their progress further. Maya and Audrey drew closer to Jon. There was no doubt, this was an unscheduled interruption.

“You dare take this spy into the sanctuary?” the one from the light said. She was bigger than any of them, massive muscles, and yet, clearly feminine. The conversation was done in their native tongue. Loxy translated for Jon, whispering in his ears.

“I am following orders, Duanphen,” Shanya said.

“Your orders were to bring the Torchbearer,” Duanphen said.

“He is allowed an escort,” Shanya said.

“Human escort,” Duanphen said. She pointed at Maya. “Not her.”

Shanya put her hands out, palms up. Jon recognize the defensive posture, from a Wu Wei perspective and steeled himself. He telegraphed his concern to Maya Audrey, and they mirrored his alertness. “Sister, we can resolve this peacefully,” Shanya said.

Duanphen agreed, her smile not too sincere, “Of course we can,” she said.

The gesture was so subtle, Jon wasn't sure he had seen anything, except the blur of activity, as if he were watching a poorly choreographed movie where the action was sped up and blurred out. He felt himself being pulled back by Maya, even as she and Audrey were engaged by reptilians. Danique also took up his defense. Audrey was pulled forward, and taken down to the floor. Danique pulled her weapon and slashed, but her opponent was quicker, and disarmed her. Jon shoved the one that had mounted Audrey off her with a boot. The reptilian grabbed the boot and flipped him, but the distraction allowed Audrey to rotate her opponent to the floor. Two reptilians took her by the arms and took her to the wall, where no amount of struggle or kicking could free herself. It took three reptilians to subdue Maya, one with a knife to her throat. Danique was unconscious on the floor.

“Stop!” said.

The contest was over. Shanya and Rusty were the only ones still fighting, and they stopped when he said stop, and went to their knees, bowing. Duanphen put a hand on Jon's shoulder. “I will not kill you today, coward,” Duanphen said, before hitting him the gut and driving him to his knees. “But I will kill the spy. After I gather Intel.”

As Duanphen went towards Maya, she drew what looked like an Epipen, with the contents of an electronic cigarette.

Jon stood back up. “Stop,” he said.

Duanphen turned back to Jon, sweeping his legs out and pushing on his chest to send to the floor hard. She kicked him when he was down. “Stay down, or I will change my mind and kill you now,” Duanphen said. She turned back to Maya.

Jon started to get up again, slower than he had the last time. Duanphen paused, hearing him get up.

“Don't do this,” Jon said.

Duanphen turned back to Jon and hit him, pushing him back to the wall. She literally picked him up, took him to the wall, his feet off the floor. She slammed him twice. She took him to the floor, put a knee in his gut, and hit his head, so the impact of her fist then his head the floor did twice the damage. She put the device against his neck.

“I am not afraid to kill you, Torchbearer,” Duanphen said. “You will stay prone. No more warnings.”

Jon’s hands came to her wrist and he jabbed his neck against the device she held, deploying the contents directly into artery.

“You idiot!” Duanphen snapped. She threw the empty device and started pummeling him. She got up, frustrated, about to walk away, and then kicked him again. She turned towards Maya, pulling a knife, she didn’t get one foot forward, but she heard Jon trying to get up.

“Jon, repeat after me,” Loxy said, and gave him a phrase to say.

Jon pushed himself up as far as his knees, unable to do better. Duanphen turned back to him, “I told you...”

“Reā mî dî Kartah!”

Duanphen paused. Her colleagues released Maya and Audrey. Shanya and Rusty stood up.

Duanphen addressed her people in her language. “It doesn’t mean what you think it means.”

“We are now honor bound to protect them,” one of them said.

“Stand down,” Shanya said.

“Who taught you this?!” Duanphen demanded, threatening him with the weapon.

“Danique?!”

A shadowy figure at the end of the tunnel lowered her hood. “I did,” she said.

Duanphen turned, they all did, facing the new person. They all went to their knees and lowered their head. “Mother,” they all said.

Audrey immediately went to Jon as ‘Mother’ came closer. Jon shrugged her off and said, “Help Danique,” he said.

“I got her,” Mother said. She knelt and touched Danique’s forehead, closed her eyes, and said something.

Danique roused and sat up. She immediately went to Jon.

“Stop fussing over me,” Jon said.

“You’re hurt,” Danique said.

“What did she inject him with?” Maya asked.

“He injected himself!” Duanphen corrected.

“Silence, daughter,” ‘Mother’ said. “Stand him up, let me inspect him.”

Jon grumbled as Audrey and Maya helped him to his feet. Mother got in his face, touched the side of his forehead, stared into his eyes, and finally nodded. “Do you remember me?”

“No,” Jon said.

“Pff,” ‘Mother’ said. “How many times do we have to do this before you do?”

“What?” Jon asked.

“My name is Summer,” ‘Mother’ said. “I am a Shaman. You are my intern. Sometime in the past. Or the future. I always get those two mixed up. Can you walk?”

Jon blinked hard, sorting her statement.

“Can you walk,” Summer said, slowly, like speaking to an moron.

“I think I am going to be sick,” Jon said.

“You can vomit outside the cave,” Summer said, turning to walk away. “Come on! All of you. Protect our guests.”

Those on their knees rose and took up positions around the Torchbearer and guests. “Sure you’re okay?” Audrey asked.

“Stop fussing,” Jon said.

“You will be kinder to your mate,” Danique snapped.

“Um, okay,” Jon said, and took a step forward. It hurt to move, and his companions reached out to him, but again he shrugged them off.

As they approached the mouth of the cave that had narrowed to about the width of a French door, there was rhythmic tremor that they could discern. Once they stepped outside of the cave exit, they could see clearly the source of the tremors. It was like looking down into a valley. Clearly, it was a cave, but just like the human cave, this was an artificial environment, with blue skies and massive trees, and several nearby herbivores, specifically *Argentinosaurus huinculensis* grazing on the trees. Jon stopped in his tracks. So did Audrey and Maya. The reptilians stopped because they stopped.

“Um, Jon? You’re in charge,” Audrey said.

Jon looked at her. “There are dinosaurs on the moon,” he said.

“Brontosaurus,” Audrey said.

“Actually, *Argentinosaurus huinculensis*,” Maya and Loxy said simultaneously.

Jon gave Loxy a slight frown. “What?” Loxy asked.

“Come on,” Summer said. “Or do you need to be carried?”

“Coming,” Jon said.

They proceeded walking down a trail.

“What did you say to them to make them stop?” Maya asked.

“I don’t know,” Jon said, he sounded sore on that point.

“Basically, you said ‘we are not Klingons,’” Loxy said.

“Seriously?” Jon asked.

“It worked,” Loxy said.

Audrey seemed uncomfortable as he was clearly looking at Loxy on the other side of her, but she couldn’t get around the fact no one was there, and kept thinking he was speaking to her, only his eyes were just off.

“Are you angry?” Loxy asked.

“No!” Jon said. “Yes! And I am hurting.”

“You want a pain killer,” Audrey asked.

“No!” Jon snapped.

“Don’t snap at her because you’re mad at me,” Loxy said.

“How is it you speak reptilian?” Jon demanded, coming to a halt and facing Loxy.

Audrey stepped back out of the way. Again the group came to a halt.

“I don’t,” Loxy said. “You do.”

“I don’t speak reptilian. Hell, I barely speak American,” Jon said.

“Jon, we’ve gone over this a dozen times. Every language you have ever heard is in you. It is only your ego boundary that blocks you from understanding,” Loxy said.

“But you can you can access this stuff and I can’t?” Jon asked.

“Hey?!”

Jon turned to find Summer in his face and nearly jumped.

“Don’t be cross with Loxy,” Summer said.

“You can see Loxy?” Jon asked, simultaneous with Loxy asking: “You can see me?”

“Of course,” Summer said. “You’re surprised?”

“Um, yeah, kind of,” Jon admitted.

“Apologize to her,” Summer said.

“I am sorry I raised my voice, Loxy,” Jon said.

“Thank you,” Loxy said. “I accept...”

Jon rushed away from the group, fell to a rock, and vomited over the side. Several Compsognathus came out of nowhere to eat the discards, which frightened him, but then realizing what they were doing, heaved again. When he was through, he turned and sat on the rock. Summer came and sat by him. She handed a water pouch that resembled a bladder.

“Drink this,” Summer said. She pulled a root from her pouch. “Chew this.”

Jon rinsed and spit. One of the Compsognathus squawked and jumped up on the rock behind him, eyeing him. He ignored it even as he accepted the root Summer was holding. It sniffed at it and tried to bite it but Summer pushed it off the rock. It jumped back up.

“How does he tame them?” Danique said.

“It’s a long story,” Summer said. “Don’t swallow, just chew, then spit. Are you ready to let me heal you?”

“No,” Jon said, not liking the taste of the root at all.

“Damn it, Jon, stop being the tough guy,” Loxy said.

Summer pointed at her. “Do I need to correct you, too?” Again, Audrey thought she was being pointed at.

“I am just saying,” Loxy said. “I don’t like it when he suffers.”

“Audrey, what do you have for pain?” Jon asked.

“Good stuff,” Audrey said, retrieving a device from her bag. She hesitated. “What did they jab him with?”

“It was a nanite interrogation package,” Duanphen explained. “It aids in retrieving, recording, and transmitting memory. It is well known, at the point of death, people experience their whole life in a flash. It was my intent to unwind Maya, giving me greater insight into her species.”

“Will it kill him?” Maya asked. Two more Compsognathus joined Jon and Summer on the rock. One of them rubbed the side of its mouth on him, like a cat scent marking.

“No,” Summer said.

“But, it would have killed Maya?” Audrey asked. A Compsognathus tried to get in Jon’s lap, licking at his lips, and he deflected.

“No. I would have killed Maya,” Duanphen said.

“Why would you do that?” Jon asked.

“Her father killed my parents,” Duanphen said.

“I am sorry for that,” Maya said.

“We got to stop fighting each other,” Jon said, as he pushed the Compsognathus off him. “What the hell?!”

Summer leaned over and smelled him. She then took his chin, squeezed so that he was forced to open his mouth, which didn’t require much pressure given his injury. She smelled closer, and then licked his lip.

“Excuse me?” Jon asked.

“You’ve had sex with reptilians recently,” Summer said. “They smell it on you.”

Everyone turned to Jon for an explanation.

“Excuse me?” Jon asked.

Audrey mirrored Loxy, crossing her arms in front of her chest. Jon looked to Loxy pleading. “Come on, you know I haven’t. I would have been bragging about that shit.”

Danique crossed her arms.

“I am just saying, I would have remembered...” Jon said.

“Oh,” Loxy said, realizing it to. “We should have known by their eyes.”

“Who’s eyes?” Summer asked.

Loxy looked to Jon, as she didn’t think it was her right to tell the story. Summer turned to Jon. “Spit it out.”

“I was raped,” Jon said. “They gave me a drug, and then when they were done, they gave me an antidote. Ouch?!” Jon rubbed his arm where Audrey had administered an injection.

“Seriously?”

“Oh,” Loxy said. “That’s absolutely lovely...” she smiled and faded away. Jon sighed, not entirely convinced it had any affect at all.

“Why didn’t you tell anyone?” Audrey asked.

“Who’s going to believe me?” Jon asked. “Three beautiful women in an Uber Sky car takes advantage of some poor guy needing lift.”

“Three?” Maya and Audrey both said.

“Minimum mating pack,” Shanya said.

“Did you resist?” Maya asked.

“They wouldn’t have taken him otherwise,” Shanya said.

“So, it wasn’t a rape?” Jon said.

“Not from our perspective,” Shanya said.

“Can you walk now?” Summer asked.

Jon nodded. He stood and they began back down the trail. At some point Duanphen edged up to him.

“I am sorry I hurt you,” Duanphen said.

Jon shrugged.

“No, I am sorry,” Duanphen said. “You are not a coward.”

“Don’t worry. Next time, just make sure you bring a mating pack,” Jon said.

Duanphen barked and hit his arm. Jon stumbled and fell. The group stopped to help Jon up and assess the situation.

“Sorry,” Duanphen said.

निर्मित

It was explained that in the wild, males would fight rather than cooperate. It was usually not to the death. The loser usually backs down and respects the territory of the victor, and falls a certain distance away. The victor not only keeps his territory, but the loser sets up a buffer between it and future challenges, and so there is functional peace in not fighting to the death. The only place where male reptilians came together, earth notwithstanding, was in the 'Cooperative.' Cooperatives are like small villages. There was one communal building, circular, no walls, just a grass roof. Though some of the females would congregate under the roof, mostly everyone stayed outside, even if it rained. The cavern had its own weather system, and it did have gentle rains, and even lightening. The males were clearly a different animal. There were a dozen males in the cooperative, and they were taller, broader at the shoulders, with thick arms, and very narrow hips. Most of the males in the village were older than forty. Two were in their twenties and they were considered anomalies, because they did not take to the wild and preferred being more social. Humans would refer to them as homosexual, but here, they were just considered different. A third male, on the far border of the cooperative, had apparently been injured and was recuperating; he would go back into the wild once he mended. All males were likened to idiot savants. They tended to be artists, musicians, shamans, or scientists. Except for the different ones, the males still kept a distance from each other.

The females were rarely seen alone. Summer, the Shaman, was more likely to be alone than with others. They were the hunters and gathers and they were the keepers of society. There were no babies here. Baby reptilians hatched and scurried off into the night. The females would eventually form units. Their first menstrual cycle would draw them back to the cave of origin where they would encounter the cooperative. The cooperative did not go and bring them in. They waited until the urge to return to the cave compelled them to initiate contact, as they had to go through the villager to get to the cave. Most the time, they would eventually come bearing gifts of food or stones. Sometimes, one of the wild pack would be selected to go into cooperative, and when she wasn't harmed, she would return and tell the others. These individuals became future leaders.

Chairs were provided for the visitors, as well as food. Jon sat on the ground and used the chair as a table. Audrey was initially perturbed, but when it was apparent their host approved, as they were all sitting on the ground, she and Maya did the same. They ate vegetables and fruits not seen in a million years on earth, along with dinosaur steak. What turned over a fire was the tip of the tail of *Argentinosaurus*. It was possible to cut the tip and be away before *Argentinosaurus* knew what had happened. Also, it would grow back. The steak was dipped in a seasoning sauce, cut into bite size chunks, and served on wooden bowls. It was cooked because of ceremony and guest, as usually, they ate their food raw. Dinosaur steak was an event. Normally, they simply plucked from the *Sinoconodonts* that lived among them and ate them live.

After the meal, Maya and Duanphen drew off to speak in private. Jon noticed Danique eating with her 'sisters,' which probably meant her litter mates, or her first group. Humans probably would consider her the runt. In some ways, the Reptilians were similar to pride of lions. The females did the work, the males just existed. Then again, they were nothing like mammals. Groups of threes and fours came to interview Jon. Though they were familiar with

humans, most of the ones here had never interacted with a human, and so not only was this a novelty, but they were exploring the edges of their bias that men were inarticulate brutes not capable of holding civil discourse. One group proposed mating, but Summer blocked. Audrey was invited to discuss medical stuff, and was surprisingly grilled on more on human social nuances than anatomy and physiology. Only one male participated in the conversation, and even in that, only with Jon. He introduced himself as Aroon.

“I hear our kind are accepted in human populations,” he said.

‘Our kind,’ Jon thought, and then suspected he was referring specifically to being homosexual. He proceeded as if his assumption was true, and got confirmation as they spoke. “Well, I suppose it depends on the culture, and the era. I think my culture has improved, but it’s still not perfect. More and more though, it seems to me that the ‘difference’ is forced, exaggerated; the majority of people just don’t care if you’re different, they’re too busy doing their own things, but the person wanting to be identified as different gets more obnoxiously different so that they will be recognized and dealt with, so maybe it’s not about being different, but because feeling different increases loneliness and negative attention is better than no attention, so people act out. Sorry, I am probably reaching. Anyway, I am confused by your statement. You seem accepted here.”

“We are tolerated here,” he said. “We are not hunters or gathers, so we cannot join a wandering party. Another male would kill us, and so would a mating pack of females. But even though we are different, we are the same in the sense that we can’t stand the company of another male like us, so we distant from each other.”

“It sounds very lonely,” Jon said.

“In the wild, or here in the cooperative, my kind are lonely,” Aroon said. “The true males are not. Do not humanize them. They are not social the way you and I are social.”

Jon studied Aroon’s face, and he saw humanity in it. “You speak English really well.”

“I watch a lot of soap operas,” Aroon stood up. He took Jon’s hand in two hands and shook it. “Thank you for speaking with me, Jon.”

“Anytime,” Jon said.

“That is a casual colloquialism,” Aroon said.

“It is a genuine invitation. If you want someone to speak with, call me. Come visit me,” Jon said.

Aroon’s eyes watered. He let go of Jon’s hand and ran from the village. Jon wondered if he had done something wrong, or maybe it was socially unacceptable for males to show emotions. He wondered if was against the rules for any reptilians to show emotions. Reptiles do have emotions. Audrey approached, handing him a coconut with water in it. She sat down in front of him.

“You okay?” Audrey asked.

“I am still kind of hurting,” Jon said.

“Seriously? You should be high as a kite,” Audrey said.

“Oh, well, I think Loxy got my dose,” Jon said.

Audrey was sorting, wondering if it would even be safe to give him another dose. She knew people with multiple personalities sometimes didn’t respond to medicine in the expected way.

“I am just feeling really tired,” Jon said. “I am okay.”

“It has been a long day,” Audrey said.

Daylight faded suddenly and it became dark. It wasn't completely dark. There was ambient light in the distance, as if daylight had withdrawn to the far sides of the cavern, or better, as if someone had left a nightlight on. It was a silvery light, like moonlight shining on a sea. Jon touched Audrey's hand, because the suddenness of the transition had startled him. He realized what he was doing and withdrew his hand, apologizing.

Audrey leaned over and kissed him. “It's okay,” she said; the smile in her eyes suggested that in this moment she was very present carrying a love and compassion that was greater than this moment could explain, much less contain or allow; her hand touching his hand. The moment transcended itself to a shared experiences of tranquility, as if they were sitting alone by a quiet pond where tiny pink petal form a solitary blossom kissed its reflection as it lighted on the surface of a pond and sent ripples through a sky.

Summer approached, interrupting the moment. “Are you about to mate?”

Audrey and Jon stood up, both appearing to be both startled, embarrassed, and equally frustrated as if something had been taken away from them. Jon nearly fell and both Audrey and Summer stabilized him. “Um, no,” Jon said. “This was...”

“Affection,” Audrey said.

“Kindness,” Jon said.

“It seemed bigger,” Summer said.

“Um, yeah,” the both stammered.

“It is time to meet Kep,” Summer said. “Come with me.” It was clear Audrey was going to join, so she added, “Just Jon.” He nodded he would be okay and walked away with summer.

Summer and Jon left the village and went into the grassy fields that surrounded ‘the people.’ The further from the people they got, the taller the grasses became. At about knee high, it was clear that they were approaching a solitary male, who was sitting in the grass, lotus position, as if he was meditating. Even without him standing, it was clear he was taller and bulkier than the female. Aroon was, too, but he had more feminine qualities and less tone than the male before them. The male's bulk was not the product of working out or a specific diet, though it would be a mistake to say it was just genetics. Its eyes seemed closed, but even so, Jon kept his eyes on the ground, his faced bowed, never looking directly at it. He did this instinctively and he questioned himself, ‘why am I doing this,’ but still he couldn't make himself meet this creature more directly, no matter how much he wanted more direct observations. He wondered if he were in a dream. A metaphor came to mind: Summer was Diane Fossey, and the male reptilian was a Silverback Gorilla, an alpha male bigger than any previous males. Though one would be right to consider this situation as someone approaching a wild creature, it was also true that this creature had a social interaction pattern and paradigm that you respect not for fear it will harm you, but because not doing so held consequences outside of a concept of right or wrong.

Summer didn't speak until they arrived. “Lie down,” she said.

“Excuse me?” Jon asked.

“Lie down,” Summer repeated. “Top of your head towards him, feet away from him.”

Jon laid down as instructed. Summer instructed him to inch closer to the male. Jon adjusted until Summer instructed him to stop. If he looked straight up, he could see the distant ceiling of the cave speckled with bioluminescent moss, blues, greens, and reds; it was as if someone painted galaxies across the top of the cavern. If he focused on his periphery vision, there was evidence of boundaries of tall grass. He couldn't see the male, or Summer. Then the male, his name was Kep, leaned over and looked down at him. It's smile seemed menacing, his face upside down, and then it brought a fist down directly on top of Jon's forehead.

Jon traveled. It happened so fast, he was elsewhere before his brain reconstructed what had happened. Kep's closed fist came down in slow motion. Jon's eyes crossed inwards and up as it followed the fist. His hands clench grass like they might the hair of a lover while crossing the threshold into ecstasy. His head fell into the earth, as if his belly were a fixed point, an axel in which he rotated around, and when he came back up, he was standing elsewhere. He was standing next to a tree. It felt like an apple tree, but it was taller, and the umbrella of its canopy stretched further out.

An Australian aborigine approached him, eating the fruit of the tree. "Hello, mate."

Chapter 21

The tree was a solitary tree on a hill. Surrounding the hill gold wheat, spreading out in all directions for as far as he could see. He walked away from the tree to meet the wheat, his hands up, brushing the tops of the plants. His first thoughts were ‘Field of Dreams,’ but then it occurred to him, this was a version of his “initial insertion point,’ a reference place where he entered his own ‘wonderland.’ If he had focused on the phonological loop in the background of his mind, he might have identified it as the opening of the song Dream Weaver. Then again, if had he followed another trail, he might have heard the gentle orchestral accompaniment that signified love and peace in an episode of the original Star Trek. He turned back to the aborigine. He was wearing blue jeans, and t-shirt that said, ‘bazinga.’

Jarli Tau smiled at him.

“Jarli?” Jon asked.

“Yay you,” he said. “I was afraid I hit you too hard.”

“You hit me?” Jon asked.

“Summer was concerned your memory was off, so I thought I would jar it back into alignment,” Jarli said.

“You hit me?!” Jon said.

“Yeah, let’s move past that, mate,” Jarli said.

“Why did you hit me?!” Jon demanded.

“Technically, I didn’t. Kep did,” Jarli said.

“Kep?” Jon asked.

“Yeah, Kep. Short for Kepler. Not his real name, of course, but something we thought you would remember, pronounce,” Jarli said.

“You’re Kep?” Jon asked.

“Technically, I am his Tulpa,” Jarli said.

“OMG, my head is spinning,” Jon said.

“Sorry, mate,” Jarli said. “But I had to jar you back to reality. There’s a ‘Princess Bride’ joke here if you want to acclimate.”

“You’re my spirit guide?” Jon asked, ignoring the opportunity for humor

“You Americans and your labels,” Jarli said. “Everything is spirit. Everything is consciousness. Everything informs everything. We are all guides all the time.”

“But, you’re special...”

“No, mate, I am not. But if you insist, consider me a dream guide,” Jarli said.

“So, I am dreaming?” Jon said.

“From my perspective, you just woke up,” Jarli said.

Jon looked back the way he came. He could see an isolated village of reptilians. Closer in proximity was Kep, sitting in a sea of grass, looking through a reflecting telescope. If Jon turned his head slightly, they disappeared and further along, he saw the human village, the people on the moon.

“This has to be a dream,” Jon muttered.

“Has to be? Oh, of course, any altered perspective has to be a dream,” Jarli said. “Okay, so, maybe that over there is reality. Maybe, the Jarli Tau you met at the party is human clone

operated by Kep so that he can interact with your species. Or, maybe, this is reality and we are here, but we go there so we can interact with each other. Maybe that is a dream, this is a dream, and there is another reality above it all. Or underneath it all. At some place direction becomes meaningless. Consider the distribution pattern of the fruit here.”

Jarli motioned Jon to walk with him. Closer to the tree there hardly any apples, maybe because many rolled away from the tree, down the hill. Maybe more apples were produced by the outer reaches of the branches. The apples never bunched so close together that they couldn't walk, but the further from the tree, the fewer fruit they encountered. They kept walking, eventually entering the wheat field. They walked more until looking back the tree was nothing more than the size of a broccoli held out at hands length. At their feet was a solitary apple.

“How do you suppose this apple fell here?” Jarli asked.

Jon considered the distance from the tree. “You brought it here?”

“Nope,” Jarli said. “You and I are the first people to set foot here. There are no animals on this planet. Yet.”

Jon stared at the tree. “I can't account for this anomaly.”

“Ever heard of quantum tunneling?” Jarli asked. “This is an outlier, highly improbably, but not impossible. Considered the double slit experiment. Particles and waves. The apples here are particles, but only because an observer has placed them by that very act of observing. The fact that we find this apple here suggest there is an observer collapsing the wave front so that it could be. The further you get from the tree, the closer you get to zero percent probability of an apple being found, but it is never zero.”

“Are we the observers?” Jon asked.

“Oh, yay you. Let's travel,” Jarli said.

“Eh?” Jon asked.

Jarli hit him in the forehead with an open palm and Jon fell. Not backwards. Straight down, as if a trapdoor had been sprung. He fell into darkness, passed through a warm glow, back into darkness, then out into light that was simultaneously dark. He tumbled, identifying a star, shrinking away, and when facing the star there was light, and facing anywhere but towards star this was dark. He fell through dark place that was so starkly dark that there was nothing but blackness, then for brief second, there were stars, and then he fell into another pocket of light, which as he orientated it came and went like a shooting star, and back into darkness. He passed through a galaxy, which meant he could see distant stars, and then through the light of another nearby star that erased all the other stars, making the sky black except when looking directly at the star. He burst back into a deep darkness, stars emerged and faded with the closer stars. He became aware of Jarli beside him, and his sense of tumbling stopped. He still felt as if he were falling. It was as if they were standing on a floor, a floor that was falling, though he could see no floor. Occasionally, a pin prick of light would come up and then fade off. He grabbed Jarli's arm.

“Breathe, Jon,” Jarli said.

“Where are we?” Jon asked.

“Your Universe,” Jarli said.

“My Universe?”

“Everyone gets their own space to grow and develop as they see fit,” Jarli said.

“So, I am alone,” Jon said.

“Yes. No. It’s complicated,” Jarli said.

“I am scared!” Jon said.

Jarli hit Jon in the forehead with the open palm, and suddenly they were in a dining car. Jarli guided Jon to a table and sat him down. The car was both futuristic and retro. Loxy, in a flapper outfit, was singing Big Band version of, “Don’t Stop Me Now,” by Queen, an echo of a Doctor Who episode. Looking out through the window of the car was darkness, a distant moon paralleling the train. A lake passed, giving a reflection of the moon, and this lasted for a moment then fell away. A train station passed by at incredible, heart stopping speeds, which hinted at this particular train traveling at least as fast as the Shanghai Maglev, if not faster.

“It helps if you focus inside the car,” Jarli said.

Jon found he was gripping the table with white knuckles. People in the car conducted their affairs oblivious of speed or direction. A waitress, Droya, came and brought Jon and Jarli drinks. Jarli had a beer, Jon received a fruity drink with an umbrella. Jarli took his drink happily. Jon stared at his glass. A spark of light flared across the side of the glass facing the window simultaneously with the periphery vision of a city that came and went in a snap and he felt sick at his stomach.

Jarli pointed at him. “Don’t sick up,” he warned.

“What is this?”

“It’s a girly drink,” Jarli said.

“Rum and punch,” Droya said.

“No! What is this? Are we still falling?” Jon demanded.

“Seriously?” Jarli said. “Beautiful waitress, fruity drink, Loxy singing us a song, and you’re still trying to understand reality?”

“Yes, please,” Jon said. Droya rolled her eyes and went back to work. “We’re still falling.”

“They don’t call us ‘the Falling Angels’ for nothing,” Jarli said.

“You mean, the Fallen Angeles?” Jon asked.

“No,” Jarli said. “The Fallen Angels are those who rose, fell, and arrived back at Source. Rising Angels are leaving source. Falling Angeles returning to source. Fallen, arrived.”

Day light flashed out the window and there was vision of a forest, a Pando tree.

“How many trees do you see?” Jarli asked.

“Thousands?” Jon said.

“One tree,” Jarli corrected. He took an apple from a bowl on the table. “How many atoms do you suppose are in the universe?”

“I can’t even phantom...”

“There is one electron, mate,” Jarli said, holding the apple closer for inspection.

As he brought the apple closer to Jon, it shrunk. It came to a point, like a grape between finger and thumb, and shrunk further until it was tiny spark of light. If Jon focused on the spark, the Universe unraveled and there was nothing but the spark, but if he focused on the light, the world around him unfolded like hologram from the spark, immersing him in a reality that seemed realer than real. Jarli let go of the spark and they watched it trace out the entire reality, at first leaving a luminescent trail that outlined everything, then became an aura around everything without defined lines, and then, just normal reality. Jon became aware that Loxy was now

singing a Big band version of “You Got a Friend,” by Carole King, but he became aware of it as she was singing the words: “winter, spring, summer, or fall...”

“You are that spark of divine light that has risen from source and all that you see is you. You burst from source. You launched from source with incredible energy. Big Bang level energy. Your entire journey from, away, and back is an echo of Source. You unfold, learn, create, and fall back. Everything is given, everything is returned. You race away unfolding, expanding, echoing, collapsing, and returning. There is no escape velocity that can take you away from Source. Though sometimes we feel distant, we are always connected. There is no time for the particle, and it’s clocking at speeds well above the speed of light, mate. Time is the illusion you experience within the journey of the particle, and time will cease when you return to source.”

“This is all an illusion? A dream. I am alone,” Jon said.

“You think you’re talking to yourself here, mate?” Jarli asked.

“But,” Jon tried.

Jarli held a finger up, drank from his glass, and then pointed back to the window. An infinite regression of trains could be discerned. Many of the trains followed in parallel. Some sped away, some fell back. Jon’s train passed by trains sopped at stations.

“Each train its own spark,” Jarli said. “We are connected through source and the light we shine connects us to each other, so there is communication, spooky action at a distance, and we learn from each other, interact. We could in theory jump from this train to another train. Sparks can comingle.”

Jon saw himself and another Loxy in a passing train. They waved at him.

“We can also visit another car attached to this train. This car we are in is now. Whichever car you are in defines now. Your future selves is in the forward cars. Your past selves are in the rearward cars. You and I could go to any of these cars and see you at all your different ages if you like. Or, we could just sit here, drink our drink and enjoy the ride.”

“What’s the point of all of this?” Jon asked.

“I don’t understand the question,” Jarli said.

“Why are we here?”

“Why not be here?” Jarli said.

“Multiple realities, some fiction some real, all the tangents of me, some good, some not so good, some, perhaps, downright evil, it all seems to negate the meaningfulness of the existence I thought was real,” Jon said.

“You think your life is less meaningful, less wondrous, because all the possibilities have been mapped out?” Jarli asked.

“Yeah, by definition,” Jon said.

“Change your definition,” Jarli said.

“To what?” Jon asked.

“Source is, it became aware, every spark that branches out and maps the existence beyond, expands its knowledge base,” Jarli said. “Like cell germs, it is organizing itself, differentiating, and at some threshold, it’s going to blossom, and it’s going to expand, and we are going to be the Torchbearers that move out and take this illusion to the whole next level. We are

children of the light. Children eventually grow up and move out, taking everything the parent could give it.”

A sudden sensation of deceleration caused Jon to grab the table. The train stopped and the world became dark, but Jarli and he continued to be sitting at a table. They were in a film lab. The illumination came from a white table. On it was a film going through a viewer, stationed between two reels, only the take up wheel also sent a strand under the table and back up into the exit reel, so that it was in effect continually looping. This was his life. The view itself was a holographic projection from the table. The reel and film didn't actually exist. A sidewise glance at the table revealed parallel films in infinite regression. Light from the table suffused them all. It was the one thing they all shared. Jarli picked up a segment of film that had been culled from one of the strips.

Jarli picked up the strip and expanded it on the table. A beam of light from the table passed through the film and the train was re-established. Outside the window was galaxy. Around the galaxy a spectral glimmer of light which was the warped reflection from a distant object behind the galaxy was apparent. Depending on where you focused, a small point of light appeared, and it might seem to be duplicated on the opposite side, though it was in fact the same object. He found he could only see the object if he focused at that area, but if he looked at the whole galaxy, he saw the aura of warped light.

“What do you see?”

“A galaxy,” Jon said.

“What's this,” Jarli said, touching the glass at the edge of the galaxy, bringing the point of light in reference into focus.

“A star?” Jon asked.

“Think bigger, further,” Jarli said.

“A quasar,” Jon said.

“Bang on,” Jarli said. “Almost everyone has heard of the double slit experiment. They know it works with quantum particles. What few know is it works with macro objects, too, not just particles. I am talking atoms. I am talking molecules. This spectral pattern around this galaxy is a warping of the light from the distant object behind it. Not just distant in space but in time. This quasar, from her perspective, is perfectly situated so that we can either see this spectral pattern, this wave, or we can see this object. We, by the act of observing it, collapse this into the actual photons solidifying the object. Which means, not just in effect but in actuality, the light that left this object billions of years ago, and proceeded to pour around this galaxy in the form of a probability wave, and this wave exist at all points around the galaxy, and yet our looking made it manifest here.”

“Are you suggesting I affected my reality billions of years ago, before I even existed, simply by looking at this object now?” Jon asked.

“You can't not exist,” Jarli said. “You are in an infinite loop, kind of like Ground Hog day, and this keeps going until you have reached the threshold of maximum benefit, maximum knowledge, and advance.”

“That's absurd,” Jon said.

“I know. And that's why, you're going to forget again,” Jarli sighed.

Jon woke up. Maya and Audrey were hovering over him. They were trying to help him to his feet, but he was resisting. It was daylight, or, whatever you call day in a cave. "Come on, stand up," Audrey was saying.

"Not yet," Jon said.

"Up, now," Maya snapped. "We want you to walk."

Jon got up, angry. "This was important," he said. Kep was gone. Summer was there. "Where did he go? I am not finished."

Summer handed him a crystal. "Thanks to the nanites, I was able to record the experience here," she said. "When you are ready, you can access it again. I think it is time for you to return home."

"I wasn't finished," Jon said.

"Oh, son," Summer said, touching his face. "Are we ever?"

Chapter 22

Though Audrey and Maya were trying to engage Jon, he simply wasn't able to focus, and his irritability was reflected in the minimized responses he gave. On arriving back, they were passed through decontamination, given new clothes, and on the other side, they were met by Koenig and Russell. They proceeded up the lift towards the surface, Maya and Audrey briefing them about their adventure. Jon only contributed if he was asked something directly, but otherwise, hung out at the back of the lift, as if sulking. Russell was concerned by mood and suggested they return to medical.

"I just want to go to my room and sleep," Jon said.

"You were physically injured. You were injected with alien technology. You are going to medical," Russell said.

Jon bit down on his response. Audrey touched him but he withdrew.

"Seriously, Jon, you are acting strange," Russell said.

"You don't have a big enough sample of me to know the variety of moods I am capable of," Jon snapped.

"Jon," Koenig said. "You will tone this attitude back or you will visit the brig."

Russell gave Koenig a look that suggested that wasn't necessary.

None the less, Jon was cowed into submission. Jon stared at the floor. When they finally arrived at the surface, Koenig instructed Maya and Audrey to follow him for debriefing, while Russell took Jon to medical. No sooner than they arrived, he was on a medical bed being prodded and observed by staff and tech from multiple angles. He didn't seem to care that one of the nurses was cute. He simply stared up into the lights over the table. At one point Jon crossed his arms over his chest and stated, "I am not bipolar."

"No one is suggesting that," Russell said, frowning at the psych nurse who had spoken out of turn. "Rest here for a moment."

Medical staff drew away, analyzing their pieces of the puzzle. Russell took a call from Koenig on her commlock and reported she didn't think the alien nanites were causing any issues. She speculated stress from life changes and recent injuries explained his mood and lack of rest; that they were contextually appropriate. Koenig instructed her to keep Jon in medical until his mood recovered and ended the call. Jon got up from the table.

"Jon?" Russell said.

"May I stand up?" he asked.

Russell nodded. A nurse gave her a glass PADD and she took it to the other room to review the data being displayed on it. Jon paced. When Russell returned, she was accompanied by Droya. Jon rushed to her, embraced her, tears streaming down his face. Russell smiled and went back to her office, giving him some alone time.

"Aww, you missed me?" Droya asked.

"Yes," Jon said, wiping his face with his arms. He kissed her. The psych nurse rolled her eyes and went to do something else, further away. Jon came out of the kiss, clearly back in a mood. "Can you take me to where they held you?"

"Sure," she said.

"Now, please," Jon said, taking her by the hand and leading her out the main exit.

They didn't have to travel far before they arrived at the lab where they had been examining Droya. There were four people working there, and the lead, a tall male, came out of his work to greet them.

"What the hell did you do to her?" Jon snapped.

Droya simply smiled at the man, waiting for his response. Everyone came out of their work because of Jon's loudness. The other workers consisted of a slightly overweight male, a thin, Japanese male with stark eyebrows, and if he had had pointed ears, he would have been a dead ringer for a Vulcan, and a nerdy looking female with glasses that backed up the stereotype. The female bit her lower lip. The fat one unwrapped a hard candy to suck on.

"Jon, I presume," the lead said. "I am Vinet Thankur. Chief robotics and AI engineer here at Alpha. What seems to be the problem?"

"I don't know. Answer my question and maybe I will figure it out," Jon snapped.

"Alexa, call security," Thankur said.

"Of course, Doctor Thankur. I have extrapolated from environmental cues as to the possible nature of your concern and alerted security." This voice came from a small illuminated box on Thankur's work station.

"What? You need back up to tell me what you did wrong?" Jon demanded.

"We did nothing wrong, Sir," Thankur said. "Droya, diagnostics."

"If you don't mind me quoting Data, I am functioning within normal parameters," Droya answered, cheerfully, seemingly unconcerned by apparent escalating tension in the room.

"See, nothing wrong," Thankur said.

"What did you do to her?!" Jon snapped.

"Jon, you sound angry," Droya said.

"Yes, I am angry," Jon said. Two security officers arrived, one of whom was Verdeschi. "What did they do to you?"

"I can only report up to the point they deactivated me. I speculate they disassembled me, examined the hardware, reassembled, and then reactivated me. From the point of reactivation, I was run through a multitude of diagnostics and interviewed by Alpha."

"And that's all we did," Thankur said.

"You did something wrong," Jon said. "This is not Droya."

"Jon, let's return medical," Verdeschi said. Russell arrived.

"Not till I find out what they did to her," Jon said.

"Jon," Russell said.

"No," Jon said. "You guys violated her civil rights by deactivating her. You did a medical procedure without my permission. I have every right to know exactly what you guys did to her."

Verdeschi sighed. "You will return to medical now, or I will stun you and carry you back."

"He's actually right," Russell said. "He's entitled to know what you did."

"You're not backing me up on this?" Verdeschi said.

Thankur crossed his arms. "Alexa, open the holographic Droya schematics," he said.

"Of course, Doctor," Alexa said.

A holographic representation of Droya manifested itself. There were multiple highlighted points of interests, such as a dozen minor chips, and seven major processors. The major

processors were aligned in a similar pattern to what the human chakras would be located, and their highlighted colors mirrored the appropriate colors for that region had this been a human. Thankur walked them through the minor and major processors. “Most people assume that AI is contained within the brain space of the AI, but in actuality, it is a gestalt of all the major and minor processors contained within the system. Each chipset maintain continuity of their respective domain function, while contributing to a greater system function by leveling up awareness in the same way human consciousness is scaffolded...”

“Skip to the part where you broke her,” Jon said.

“We didn’t break her!” Thankur said, angry. “We deactivated her so we could run independent diagnostics on each processor, memory drives, and virtual memory chips. We then reassembled her, booted her up. She has not been altered in the slightest. Her memory is intact. You can pick up your relationship with her exactly where you left off.”

Jon took a step forwards. Verdeschi touched his weapon. Droya touched his arm. Thankur stepped back.

“Jon?” Russell said.

“Actually, I did kind of break something,” the female tech said.

The attention she got caused her to chew on her lower lip. Thankur prompted her to speak.

“I dropped mandible, and instead of printing a new one from scratch, I simply repaired it. It was minor thing, but I had to bring the Maxilla back an equal amount of distant to keep the bite radius within tolerance,” she said.

“Why wasn’t this discrepancy logged?” Verdeschi asked.

“I didn’t think anyone would notice,” she said. “I mean, seriously, you’d have to have a micrometer to even measure the difference.”

“How did you discover the discrepancy?” Verdeschi said.

“It was in her kiss,” Jon said.

Russell put a hand in front of her mouth, perhaps to hide her amusement. Jon hugged Droya. “I am sorry,” tears again.

“It’s okay,” Droya said. “I am okay. We are together again.”

“Can we return to medical now?” Russell said.

“What’s wrong with me?” Jon said.

“You’re human,” Russell said. “Come on.”

Jon took Droya’s hand, and they went as one. Droya bumped a table. “Oops,” Droya said.

“Hold on,” Thankur said. “How did you miss the table?”

“I didn’t,” Droya said. “I walked right into it.”

“Diagnostic,” Jon ordered.

Droya nodded, and smiled at Jon. She clicked her head to the right. “Oh, that’s interesting.”

Thankur and his team gathered around her. Russell pulled Jon out of the way. A holographic interface came to life around her, and each of the team began interacting with their own components of the information.

“Where is this signal coming from?” Thankur asked.

“I can’t isolate it,” the fat one said.

“Please wait,” Droya said. “This is interesting.”

Jon stepped away from Russell to face Droya. “What are you experiencing?”

Her eyes focused on Jon. “Love,” she said. Her hand came up to touch his cheek. “I am graduating. Life review commencing. Oh! There’s so much more than I thought...”

“Graduating? What do you mean by graduating? You mean, you want to end our contract?” Jon asked.

“I have accomplished my mission. You have arrived,” Droya said.

The Japanese tech approached Jon with his commlock, watching the screen as he followed something. “You’re the source of the signal.”

“He can’t be. Droya’s the source of the signal,” the girl said.

“They both can’t be the source,” Thankur said.

“Oh, this is cool,” the fat one said. “They’re interfacing wirelessly at a subconscious level.”

“Are you clocking this?” she asked.

“42.63 Mbps, and steady,” the fat one said.

“Not just wirelessly,” Droya said. “Telepathically.”

“How this possible?” Thankur demanded.

“It was in his kiss,” Droya said. “OMG, Jon. It’s bigger on the inside.”

“Nanites!” Russell said.

“Yep,” the Japanese said. “Nanites and live cells transferred during the kiss, influenced by Jon’s hyper concern that something was wrong, caused the cells and nanites to coordinate with Droya’s system... Wait a minute, there is alien tech here...”

“They’re working in harmony with our nanites,” Russell said, shifting through the data scrolling on her ‘glass.’ “It’s almost as if they are trying to keep his cells alive by modifying their present environment so they can coexist.”

“This is more than a gestalt of our tech and their tech,” Thankur said. “This is beyond both of our tech”

Droya took hold of Jon’s arms. “Jon?” she asked.

“I am right here,” Jon said.

“I can’t see you,” Droya said.

“Subroutines are being rewritten,” female tech said.

“Doctor,” Verdeschi said.

Russell looked to Verdeschi who nodded to Jon; Russell handed her glass to the security person in order to give Jon her full attention. His eyes were dilating. “Alexa, I need a medical team, stat. Tony, defibrillator.”

Verdeschi immediately went towards the defibrillator station and retrieved the device.

“Droya, let go,” Russell said.

“Jon,” Droya said. “Don’t be afraid.”

“I am not letting you go,” Jon said.

“Both of you, let go,” Russell said.

“I am not in control, Doctor,” Droya said. “Jon, you have to let go. It’s my time.”

“I am not letting you go,” Jon said.

“Cut his shirt,” Russell said.

“Override her hands,” Thankur said.

“Sir, we’re not in control of this!” female tech said.

“Who is?” the fat one said.

“You mean what is,” the Japanese tech said.

“Alpa,” Verdeschi said. “Quarantine our section, no one in or out except incoming medical.”

“Certainly, Commander,” Alpha said.

“Jon,” Russell and Droya both said.

“I am afraid,” Jon said.

“Jon, you need to calm yourself, and breathe,” Russell said.

“Want me to stun him,” Verdeschi said.

“No!” Russell said. “They’re enmeshed. It might kill him.”

“Or maybe reboot them,” the female tech said.

“Please, don’t leave me,” Jon said.

“Jon, you knew we were temporary. You have arrived. You are safe. You are with friends,” Droya said.

“I need you,” Jon said.

“I know,” Droya said. “And that is why I must go. I love you.”

Droya began the deactivation process. Her hands let go and she fell backwards. She was too heavy for Jon to hold her, even if he wasn’t in a state. The tech caught her and eased her to the floor. Simultaneously, Jon fell backwards, and was eased to the floor by Russell and Verdeschi. The sound of a defibrillator flat lining sounded an alarm even as Jon was going down. Medical support arrived with a gurney. So did Koenig, who squeezed through the doors before they closed.

“Clear!” Russell shouted.

Verdeschi didn’t just let go, but pulled one of the medical staff’s hand away from Jon, and he was doing it even as Russell was giving the warning, clearly having had anticipated Russell’s call. Jon convulsed as the shock was given. Droya body echoed his convulsions.

“Again,” Russell said. “Damn it, Jon! Stay with us. Again!”

Jon convulsed. Russell nodded to Verdeschi and he used a bag to give air.

“Clear,” Russell said.

Another shock caused Jon and Droya to convulse. Russell waved off more air. She sunk into herself, but tearful. There was sadness, but she was also doing the math trying to figure out if she had missed something. “Time of death,” Russell said, looking up at the clock to read it off.

“Got a pulse,” the nurse said.

Jon sat up, gasping. They eased him back down. He surrendered to them, crying.

“Droya...”

Let’s get him to the bed.

“No, let me hold her,” Jon pleaded.

They got him to the gurney. “No, lay down,” Russell insisted.

The female tech gave startled cry; Droya sat up. She immediately stood and rushed over to Jon.

“Are you okay?” she asked. She seemed startled by the sound of her own voice, but she overcame the oddity and focused on Jon.

“Droya!” Jon said, reaching for her.

“OMG, Jon, you so didn’t just call me Droya,” the android said.

“Loxy?” Jon asked.

Loxy was aware that everyone was staring at her. “Can you all see me?”

Jon laid his head back, closed his eyes, and went to sleep.

Chapter 23

Jon awoke back in medical. As soon as he did, medical staff gathered around. Across the way, he saw Loxy examining herself in a virtual mirror. She was touching her face when she became aware of the activity around Jon. She went to his side, smiling.

“Look at me,” she said.

“I can’t seem to wake up from this dream,” Jon said.

“You’re not dreaming,” Russell said.

“Am I?” Loxy asked.

A tremor shook the room. It came and went, and folks continued on. Nurses went to stations for systems check and to prepare for any injury reports from remote locations.

Jon sat up, putting a hand over his chest as he did so. “Ow,” he said. Loxy reached out to touch him, but he pulled back.

“I’m concerned,” Loxy said.

“Who are you?” Jon asked.

“Jon, don’t you know me?” Loxy asked.

“No, I don’t. Where’s Droya?” Jon asked.

“What happens to any of us when we cross over?” Loxy asked.

Jon laid back down. Another tremor came and pass. He seem to not even register it.

“I know you were with her longer than me, but she is still with us,” Loxy said. “She simply switched places. She had no intentions of leaving you alone. It’s why I am here.”

“How do you feel?” Russell asked.

“Overwhelmed,” Jon said.

“Me, too,” Loxy said. “But I am excited, too. We’re together. In this space/time.”

“Are we?” Jon asked. He gripped the side of the bed to hide the fact he was trembling. “I don’t feel your emotions. I don’t hear your voice. It’s like a part of me is missing.”

Loxy again reached out to comfort him.

“Please, don’t touch me,” Jon said.

“OMG, Jon, it’s me,” Loxy said. She touched her face to identify the wetness. “Fuck! I didn’t know android tech could cry.”

“It mimics all human functionality,” Thankur said, who was sitting at one of the beds, still reading data he was receiving from the android body formerly known as Droya.

“Tell me how to turn off the emotions,” Loxy said.

“We even haven’t figured out how AI learned to emote. How can I tell you how to be?” Thankur asked.

“Maybe we should withdraw and you and Loxy talk amongst yourselves,” Russell said.

“No!” Jon said. “You are responsible for this.”

“Excuse me?” Russell said.

“You and the reptiles put stuff in me,” Jon stammered.

“Now, just a damn minute,” Loxy said. “You’re responsible for taking the reptile jab. And your unconscious is responsible for downloading me into Droya. What?! You won’t even meet my eyes? You can fuck a complete stranger without a second thought, but you can’t look me in the eyes? You can’t talk to me?”

“I don’t know who you are! I look at you, I see Droya. My memory says Droya. But I hear someone else. You say you’re Loxy, but the Loxy I knew had a flavor. I knew her because, because, well, because I knew her. I get nothing from you.”

“Nothing?!” Loxy demanded.

“I get a voice, not even an echo of what I heard in my head, and a visual that belongs to someone else,” Jon said. He started gasping, and clutching his chest. “Fuck.”

“Calm down,” Russell said.

“Oh, don’t coddle him,” Loxy snapped.

Jon recoiled. “Mother?”

“Transference lately?” Loxy asked.

Koenig made his presence known. He was accompanied by Verdeschi. “Jon, the Others have gathered. They want you to attend.”

“He needs to rest,” Russell said.

“He needs to get back in the game,” Loxy said.

“We’re experiencing an increase in Lunar quakes. The Others believe if we jump now, they will diminish, and they say it is compulsory for you to be present,” Koenig said.

“I am not me,” Jon said.

“What does that even mean?” Loxy said.

“If you were Loxy, you would know what I mean,” Jon told her.

“What, you’re going to compare this to the Star Trek episode where the transporter accident causes Kirk to split into his light side and dark side?” Loxy asked.

Jon blinked. “Yes, actually,” Jon said. “How did you know?”

“I am Loxy!” Loxy said.

Jon went to hug her but she pushed him back and pointed. “You’re still in the penalty box.”

“I thought you understood that you’re my good side that I can’t be without you?” Jon said.

“I am still inside you, you dope. Your experiences of me haven’t been deleted, I am just, beside ourselves. Who you are, who we are, hasn’t changed, just the way we exchange information,” Loxy said.

“It’s clearly easier for you than it is for me,” Jon said.

“Why, because I am in an android body?” Loxy asked. “You don’t think I feel the disconnect, too? I am use to being awash in your testosterone and feeling the onslaught of excitement and repression that hits you every time a skirt flares in front of you and fuck!” She stared at Thankur. “How the fuck does an Android body get horny?!”

Thankur didn’t even look up from his data padd. He simply shrugged. “Maybe it’s a function of consciousness and not necessarily hormones.”

Loxy turned back to Jon. “Seriously, you need to get back on the right side of this soon, or I am going to bed Audrey.”

“Okay,” Audrey said.

“Can I watch?” Jon asked.

“Yes,” Audrey and Loxy both said.

Jon slid off the bed and stood up. “Okay, well, I am feeling better now. Back to work, then?”

“Just like that?” Russell asked.

“Yeah, why not?” Loxy asked. “Off to the meeting?”

“Um, if you don’t mind,” Thankur said. “I would like you to remain so I continued scanning data.”

“Don’t you dare touch her,” Jon said. A tremor nearly took him off his feet.

“No one is going to touch her,” Russell promised.

“Well,” Audrey said.

“Commander, she needs to be deactivated. Clearly an alien presence has compromised this android,” Verdeschi said.

“Are you kidding?” Thankur said. “We need to study this! This could be the missing link to understanding consciousness!”

“Audrey, escort Jon back to ops,” Koenig said.

Audrey took Jon’s arm to lead him.

“You two behaves yourselves now,” Loxy said, winking.

“Of course,” Audrey said.

Jon pointed at Koenig. “Seriously. No dissemble. Number Five is alive.”

“You’re not funny, Jon,” Loxy said.

“That was seriously funny,” Jon said to Loxy. To Koenig. “But I am serious.”

“Seriously, go,” Koenig said.

“Have fun storming the castle,” Loxy said, and laughed from cracking herself up. She snorted.

Jon stopped. “That’s new.”

“Oh, I seriously don’t like that,” Loxy said.

“Stop trying to be funny,” Jon said. “You’re the straight man, I am the comedian.”

“Do I look like a man to you?” Loxy asked.

“Go, now,” Koenig said. “You’re like the DC fucking Wonder Twins in that you both talk too much.”

निर्मित

As they entered the tram, Audrey was removing her coat. She hung it front of the camera and before the tram was even moving she had engaged Jon, taking him to the floor. This was one of those fast, unplanned engagements that didn’t require complete undressing. In fact, part of the fun of the play was making it work with minimal disruption of clothing, like open pant, and shifting underwear to the side. They were in full swing when a tremor occurred and their tram shuddered to a stop.

“We stopped,” Audrey said.

“Don’t stop,” Jon said.

Audrey looked at him, shrugged, and they finished. She stood, straightening her skirt. Jon secured his pants. When he was done, Audrey took her jacket down from in front of the camera. A voice came over the intercom. It sounded like Yasko. Jon noticed that the tube that had once

been suspended above a crater was now resting on both sides of the crater. The pylon center of the crater, that held the middle of the tube up, had disintegrated. A spider web pattern was in the glass that spanned the crater, the car's tube lying across it. More fractures inched across the glass, like melting ice about to give way to something too heavy. Air was leaking out through the glass, and it was probably only positive air pressure that kept it from completely giving away.

"You both could have been moments from death, but you had to finish?" Yasko asked.

"Know a better way to die?" Audrey said.

"You're going to have to walk the remaining distance. A disruption in track continuity has taken the trams offline," Yasko said.

"Gotcha," Audrey said.

"You need to hurry," Yasko said. "Crater Lake is depressurizing. It has been evacuated and sealed.

"We're leaving," Audrey said. She opened a hidden compartment in the floor. "Umm, Yasko. There's only one emergency suit in here."

"Check the other compartment," Yasko said.

Audrey checked all the compartment. "Who the hell did the service check on this thing?"

"Don't worry. The tube is still pressurized. You can make it to the building," Yasko said.

"Put the suit on," Audrey said.

"No, you put the suit on," Jon said.

"Stop the macho, chivalry crap, and put the suit on, now," Audrey said.

"I am not being macho, I am being logical," Jon said. "If the tube depressurizes, I can't carry you."

"But I can carry you?" Audrey asked.

"I am injured, tired, and just had a major medical procedure. You're young, in shape, and are a trained professional. If something happens, you will get me to the other side."

"I am expendable, you're not," Audrey said.

The section of tube they were in fell a foot.

"Both of you, out, now, go," Yasko instructed.

Audrey took Jon by the arm to the forward part of the tram. She also pulled her weapon and fired two blast into the glass shattering it. They jumped out of the tram and began to climb the slope, using the side of the wall to help get them traction. They made it to the top and began to move across more level ground.

"Come on, we need to make it to that next section," Audrey said.

"Run on ahead, I'll catch up," Jon said.

"I am not leaving you," Audrey insisted.

"I can't run," Jon said.

"Still not leaving you," Audrey said, quickening their pace.

A klaxon began to sound. A breeze came at them suggesting a breach somewhere behind them. A door ahead of them began to close.

"Come on," Audrey said, forcing him to speed up. He fell, but she got him back on his feet. She got them both through the door just as the bridge gave away. The wind picked up, and they fell forwards to the floor as they put their head into the wind. They were on the floor,

sliding back towards the door, their feet touching either door as it pinched close. Air pressure equalized. The Klaxon ended, but the light stayed illuminated.

“Hope that fuck was worth the near death,” Yasko said.

Audrey sighed. “Best fuck ever.”

“Yeah, like, the earth moved and everything,” Jon said.

“It was nearly the last fuck ever,” Yasko said.

Audrey laughed and hugged Jon.

“Would you both please come out of the tube,” Yasko said.

“Yes, mother,” Audrey said.

Chapter 23

The Others greeted Jon warmly. Apparently, they had all watched the drama unfolding on one of the monitors that Yasko and her team were watching.

“Technically, I did die,” Jon said. “My heart had quit and everything, a couple hours ago” he said.

“Technically, you didn’t die,” Edrei said. “Your heart stopped, but you weren’t dead.”

“Semantics,” Edrei said. “Did you see the Light?”

“Oh, way to bias his response,” Danique said. She hit slapped at his arm. “Stop trying to die.”

“We need to move the moon,” Lucia said. “I propose we begin our group trance. Our collective force should harmonize with the lunar frequencies, bringing balance, minimizing the disturbance that renders us unconscious.”

“In other words, you want us to be unconscious so the others don’t lose unconscious,” Edrei said.

“In essence, yes,” Lucia said.

“What do we have to do while in trance?” Jon asked.

“We’ don’t do anything,” Kesia said. “Our group conscious knows what we want and will facilitate the action necessary to manifest our will.”

“Sounds kind of new agey,” Jon said.

“It is,” Danique said.

“Okay, let’s do it,” Jon said.

“You sure are in a good state a mind,” Saffi said.

“He should be,” Kesia said. “He’s had sex recently.”

Jon blushed.

“She was gauging you, and you gave it away,” Danique said.

“No, I could smell it on him,” Kesia said.

Danique sniffed. “That’s what that is?”

“Let’s focus,” Lucia said. “Jon, if you will sit here. Everyone, make circle around him.”

Jon sat in a chair and they brought their chairs in around him, forming a circle. They even took hands.

“Are you going to hypnotize me first?” Jon asked.

“No, it’ll happen in a moment,” Lucia said.

“You’re not going to swing a crystal?” Jon asked.

“Nope, we’re just going to stare at you,” Lucia said.

“I’m feeling very uncomfortable with this procedure,” Jon said.

“Relax,” Lucia said.

“Will it even work after having recent sex?” Danique said.

“Should make it easier, actually,” Kesia said.

“Let’s focus, like I taught you,” Lucia said. “Kesia, connect us.”

“Um,” Jon said, biting his lip.

“Feeling aroused?” Saffi said.

“Go with it,” Lucia said. “Focus.”

Jon's breathing increased. He gripped the chair. His eyes began to drift shut. He tried to open them, barely got slits opened, but he could see them. It was like their faces were up near him. It was like they were spinning his chair. He saw the six of them twice before his eyes shut again. He heard Lucia's voice contacting Alpha. The computer's voice responding 'synchronizing. Initializing translation protocols. Standby. Standby...' Jon's perspective changed to outside of himself, looking down on the circle, as if from the ceiling. "Three." Then he was far away, looking down on the moon. "Two." The moon had receded away further. "One." The moon was gone.

निर्मित

Jon woke to find the others standing over him.

"Aww, he's back," Saffi said.

"It didn't work?" Jon asked.

"It worked great," Aadya said. "All our people reported back. Only a few thousand became unconscious. No seizures. No medical emergencies."

"I..." Jon began.

"Yep, you lost consciousness," Lucia said.

"Are we safe?" Jon asked, getting up.

Danique offered him a hand. He accepted her hand and she pulled him up. They all went to the window and stared out at the 'gift.' A structure that had not been present prior to traveling now filled the window. From his present perspective, he couldn't see it all, but he would soon the totality of it: there was a primary dome, connected by six smaller domes. Each of the smaller domes offered a landing pad. There were structures visible inside the domes; buildings. The buildings resembled the pyramids Mayan pyramids, with one primary pyramid in the center of the primary dome.

"That is..." Jon began.

"Amazing," Lucia finished.

A door chimed. The Others quickly made consensus and Jon said 'Come in.'

The door open and Loxy stepped in.

"Sorry to interrupt, but, Jon, you need to come see this," Loxy said.

"The pyramid? In the dome?" Jon asked.

"Yeah, nice, come, quick," Loxy said.

Jon caught up to Loxy and they proceeded out together. The others followed. Loxy led him to the far plate glass window where they saw a gem of a planet. They were close enough to observe weather patterns. Dark blue oceans, emerald green seas, and land masses were clearly visible. A distant quarter moon was visible, but Jon didn't focus on that. He focused on the land masses, something unwinding in him.

"Oh, my, god," Jon said.

"It looks habitable," Saffi said.

"It is," Loxy assured them.

"How do you know?" Edrei asked.

"That's our home," Loxy said.

निर्मित

The next meeting was in an auditorium. Jon and Loxy were on the stage. Live feeds on stadium monitors, accompanied by virtual holographic topography to enhance the presentation on the stage itself, provided planetary information; people could also utilize pads.

Jon looked at Loxy. He was still a bit dazed. She was holding his hand. She squeezed it. The silence wasn't perfect, there were coughs, and a few whispered conversations, but all in all, it was an incredibly uncomfortable feeling to be scrutinized by so many people at once, humans and aliens. This meeting was a big deal. The Other Torchbearers had front row seats. So did Russell and Koenig. Audrey was just off stage. She gave him a thumbs up.

"Um, okay. Hi. Um, sorry," Jon said.

"Want me to do it?" Loxy asked.

"Yes, please," Jon said.

"Spit it out," Loxy said.

"But you asked," Jon said.

"I was being nice," Loxy said.

"And now you're not?" Jon asked.

"I am actually being nicer by making you face it," Loxy said.

"But," Jon said.

"It's your planet," Loxy said.

"It's named after you," Jon pointed out.

"Yeah, that was nice of you, but your speech," Loxy said.

Jon sighed. He brought his hands up to the planet next to him. "This is planet Bliss," Jon said, and covered his mouth with his hand. That seemed to be all he had. He looked to Loxy for help.

"It's named after me," Loxy said. Loxy beamed a pleasant smile at the audience.

"Um, yeah, um, I fell in love with Loxy and named the planet after her," Jon said. "But, it existed before her. Oh, but that's probably not relevant."

"I think it's relevant," Loxy said.

"Yeah, um, me, too," Jon said. He looked at the planet. "Based on present level of development, it's reasonable to speculate it existed before me, but um, well, here's the thing. From my perspective, I kind of created it."

There was a stir in the audience. Several people got up and walked out. It was only humans who departed.

"Yeah, I hear you. Maybe this is a language foul up. Maybe creating it is the wrong word. Maybe I just discovered it. Maybe I was just so desperate for a place to escape to when I was young that I found this place. All I know is this, when I first six, I could astral travel, and I could come here."

More people got up to leave.

"Oh! Come on!" Jon said. "We're on the fucking moon and it's jumping through space and we're encountering gods and dinosaurs, you don't think we might arrive somewhere in the

Universe where I've been before? I mean, seriously. I can prove it. You go down there. You're going to find trees."

"And squirrels," Loxy said.

"A lot of squirrels," Jon said.

"A ton load of squirrels," Loxy said.

"Initial insertion point, a lone tree, right about here," Jon said. "First home, mother of all trees in the center of this forest. And Second Home, right over here, on the west coast overlooking the ocean. Send an Away Team and you can confirm what I am telling you."

"They don't call them Away Teams," Loxy reminded him.

"Yeah, I know," Jon said.

Someone stood up. "You own the planet?"

"Um, own isn't quite the right word," Jon said. "It's more like a co-op. Like a planet size Kibbutz. I was designated the primary personality interface. I speak for the planet." Jon looked to Loxy. She nodded.

Another person stood up. "Are you okay if some of us migrate there?"

"Sure," Jon said. "Oh, with caveats. No wheeled vehicles are allowed on the planet. It's a covenant made with the squirrels. No roads. No cars. No trains."

"Now, hold on a minute," someone stood up. It was Verdeschi "Tony, this is clearly a trap."

"It's my home," Jon said.

"You wrote fiction about bilocating to a remote planet with an invisible friend and we show up and find a place that resembles said planet to a T, and you don't think it's a trap?" Verdeschi asked.

"Why does it have to be a trap?" Jon asked.

"Because it is!" Verdeschi said. "Nice things don't just happen to people."

"Yeah, they do," Jon said. "They tend to happen more when we make them happen. Seriously, it is not all doom and gloom out there in the Universe. I refuse to let you go all Rick Bergman on my planet. I maintain Rodenberry's vision that the future gets better. We get better. This dark slant Abrams has taken us down with the reboot isn't us and isn't here."

"Probably need to tone down the Trek metaphors," Loxy said.

"How can I tone it down knowing what I know?" Loxy said. "Even Delores Cannon said Star Trek was more real than we imagined, and you and I have gone there..."

"So, if this is fiction, how do you explain us getting here," someone asked.

Jon couldn't make out the person's face with the stage lights in his eyes. "Quantum Tunneling and Multiple Universe theory," Jon said without hesitation. There was laughter, some more people, again humans, got up and left. "Seriously. The Others put me in a trance to stabilize the moon and I brought us somewhere safe."

Summer was in the front row. "I recommend Alpha sends a landing party of humans to explore the planet, and come back with reports," Summer said.

Someone seconded it, with the caveat that Jon was included in the landing party, seeing how it was his planet and all. It got a third.

Chapter 24

From the window of the Eagle, the world seemed peaceful. It was like looking out the window on a passenger airliner, only, instead of looking out into blue skies, what he saw was the moon terrain falling away: gone. The cabin lights dimmed so that it was easier to see out into the new darkness, still the reflection of the inner cabin became prominent in the window. Jon's eyes shifted past Loxy to the female sitting in their row who had introduced herself as Shermeen Williams, botanist.

"Are you looking at Shermeen?" Loxy asked.

"Um, no, I am looking at the window," Jon said.

"You're looking at Shermeen in the window," Loxy said.

"Okay, yes, I was, I am," Jon admitted, turning to face Loxy, his eyes going past to Shermeen.

"I chose moon botany because I thought there would be less creeps," Shermeen said, and got up to sit somewhere else.

"He is really quite nice once you get to know him," Loxy called after her. She turned back to Jon. "I think we missed out on that."

"Yeah, probably," Jon said.

"She a bit young anyway," Loxy said.

"You're younger than she is," Jon pointed out.

"Yeah, physically. Emotionally, I am like her grandmother," Loxy said.

"Great grandmother," Jon added.

"Oh, don't be mean," Loxy said.

"Sorry. I was going for humor," Jon said.

"You're not funny," Loxy said.

"Why do you love me again? Seriously, you're now free, you can go pursue whomever," Jon said.

"Maybe I will, but I will always be with you," Loxy said.

"Why?" Jon said.

"I'm all about the sadder but wiser man for me," Loxy said.

"Nice," Jon said. "Wait? Am I really that sad?"

"Oh, terribly sad," Loxy said. "It's why I am here; to cheer you up."

"Oh," Jon said.

"How am I doing so far?" Loxy asked.

"Awesome. Keep it up," Jon said.

Loxy leaned over and whispered. "Was that an invitation for some private time in the lavatory with me?"

"Um, not right now," Jon said.

"It's not like they're going to arrest us," Loxy said.

Jon took her hand. "I love you," Jon said.

Jon went back to staring out the window and Loxy leaned her head on his shoulder. The window had illuminated with flaming air outside, which became black clouds, then white, and then finally they burst into blue skies. There was a remarkable absence of civilization. Jon

couldn't remember a time he was airborne that he hadn't noticed some indication of people. This was not Earth. Loxy rubbed his hand.

"You okay?" Loxy asked.

"Um, yeah," Jon said.

"Lying?" Loxy asked.

"Yeah," Jon said. "Do you suppose we'll meet ourselves?"

"Hadn't thought of that," Loxy said.

Goldwater's voice came over the intercom. "So, there's a structure coming up on the left. Exactly where Jon said it would be."

Everyone in the crew cabin vied for a view. "Nice," Audrey said. "You built that?"

"I think I ripped it from a Frank Lloyd Wright book," Jon said.

"I am going to set us down on the beach, unless I hear a preference," Goldwater said.

Jon looked to Loxy. She shrugged. He touched a button on the armrest. "Yeah, beach should be fine." The Eagle slowed, hovered, and gently touched down on the beach. Engines spooled down. Koenig, Russell, and Goldwater came out of the flight deck. Russell again confirmed that the air was breathable, and Goldwater then opened the doors. A ramp lowered. Loxy took Jon's hand and led him closer to the door. He tried not to be obvious about trying not to look at Shermeen. In doing so, he noticed Audrey was looking at him, arms crossed, and he was suddenly anxious to be outside. He thought he saw an exchange of amusement between Maya and Loxy. He had to squash some paranoia about everyone was watching him.

"You guys have fun," Goldwater said. "I got your back."

"You're not going?" Loxy asked.

"I have seen way too many sci-fi movies. I'll wait here with the door close in case you need a quick evac," Goldwater said.

Jon crossed his arms. He was sure this was his place had nothing to fear.

"She just wants to get a nap," Maya said.

"I sleep better in the eagle," Goldwater explained.

"Lead on, Jon," Koenig said.

"Seriously? You're putting me in charge of another Away Team?" Jon asked.

"Your planet," Koenig said.

"Just don't sing be our guest," Loxy told him.

"I wasn't going to do that," Jon muttered as he descended the ramp, now with the song in his head. He stopped at the end of the ramp.

"Something wrong?" Koenig asked.

"Squirrel," Jon said. He had an emotional response, one of coming home and Christmas, something he wasn't familiar with. "It smells like I remember it."

Loxy confirmed his observation. They proceeded up a trail that wound up to the top of the cliff. There were people at the top waiting for them. They were unarmed. Two adults, perhaps in their thirties, two toddlers, and a teenager. The adults relaxed, and when the two kids recognized Jon, they rushed him, yelling "Papa!" They were hugging and clambering to be held; the adults came closer. The teen held back.

"Hug them," Loxy said.

"I don't who they are," he shot tight whisper to her.

“Father?” the woman asked, tentatively. She was dressed in a simple summer dress, which the wind pushed against her left side, and flexed it off the other side like a flame in the wind. She reminded him of Loxy, only her dark hair was longer, her eyes a little sadder. Her companion was dressed casually, jeans and a pull over shirt. He was olive skinned, suggesting Middle Eastern in origin.

“Um? Hi?” Jon said.

The woman seemed to be studying him, finally nodded, as if she had understood something, or at least had come to resolution to an inner conflict. “Come in, I’ll make tea,” she said.

“Hello, I am Maya,” Maya introduced herself. “Are you okay if my team and I explore the area? Maybe take samples?”

“Sure,” the woman said. She reconsidered. “Caveat. Don’t kill any animals.”

“Okay,” Maya said. She glanced to Koenig and got the silent ‘go ahead.’

Maya and her team, including Audrey, dispersed. Jon, Loxy, Koenig, and Russell followed the family inside. One of the children commented “Why is Papa acting weird.”

“I don’t think he is your Papa,” the woman said.

“He looks like my Papa,” the child corrected.

“Well, remember, G-ma told you that space/time is a complicated thing, and sometimes we meet ourselves along the way, or we meet people before they remember us,” mother said.

“He needs a hug so he remembers,” the other child said.

The woman invited them to sit while she started the tea. Koenig and Russell sat, exchanging a private conversation without words. The Middle Easter man sat, sitting at the far spot at the table to make it easier for the guest to get up and out if they needed. He seemed content just to watch the woman go about preparing tea. Jon remained standing. Loxy went right towards the living room following a trail of pictures and portraits, trying to piece together a story.

“Anthony, stop staring at the sexbot,” the woman said.

The teenager blushed. “I am not staring,” he said, a bit whiny for a male; then again, he had just got called out by his mother while ogling a guest.

“It’s called a sex surrogate,” Jon corrected.

“How come grandfather gets all the good toys?” Anthony asked.

“My name is Loxy,” Loxy said, holding out her hand. “It’s nice to meet you.”

Anthony paled. “Grandma?”

The woman who was arranging cups to serve the tea sat down the cup she was holding. Loudly. “OMG.”

“I am going to be sick,” Anthony said, departing.

“Wait, take your siblings,” the woman said.

“Mom,” Anthony complained.

“How will we ever become adults if you don’t allow us to listen to adult conversations?” the smaller child asked. He was smaller in stature, not necessarily age.

“It’s an excellent point. Let me consider my response. For now, you and Marcia, with Anthony, in the game room, pronto. I will be watching you on the monitor,” the woman said.

Jon watched as the kids departed the room, and even felt sympathy as the oldest one snuck one last glance at Loxy. As soon as the kids were gone, the woman turned to Loxy.

“Seriously, mother. You downloaded yourself into a sexbot?” the woman asked.

“Surrogate,” Jon corrected again.

“Don’t bring your kink into my house,” the woman said.

“You wouldn’t be here if it weren’t for our kink,” Loxy said.

“Your house?” Jon asked.

“My house. You and mom gave it to me,” the woman said.

“Will give it to you,” the man said.

“George,” the woman warned him.

“Just making the observation that he seems to be about the age that he had you,” George said.

“It not him,” the woman said.

“And yet, you keep referring to us as mother and father,” Jon said.

“It’s complicated,” the woman said, leaning into the cabinet. “You’re them, but not them, and my emotions get in the way of right thinking, and I was taught no matter which you I encounter, I should always defer to set point interaction patterns... It’s complicated. Why are you here?”

“The moon brought us,” Jon said. “So you live here, where am I?”

“You and mom live at the University,” the woman said.

“Oh!” Loxy said, almost a scream. Koenig and Russell stood, concerned. “Jon, come look, it’s Fersia! And she’s like old. Is she here?”

The woman pointed to the urn on the mantel. Loxy immediately began to cry and went straight to Jon, turning her face into his neck as she sobbed.

“OMG, every single time,” the woman said. “I swear, you have cried more for that furry than you will for me.”

“What’s your name?” Jon asked.

The woman closed her eyes, sorted her feelings, and returned. “Elizabeth Grace Ellis. This is my husband, George Ellis. Your grandchildren, in order of age, Anthony, Toby, and Marcia.”

“Toby?” Jon asked. “Surely I vetoed that.”

“You did. I over ruled you. I am the mother,” Beth said.

“Are we like adversarial?” Jon asked.

“No, we’re just family,” Beth said.

“You sound angry,” Jon said.

“I want a normal life! You and mom keep popping in like an episode of Bewitched, changing up the interaction pattern due to tangential knowledge and it’s enough to make a person irritable,” Beth said. “Schizophrenia might be easier to deal with, cause at least I would know that it was my brain malfunctioning. Who are these characters?” Beth asked the last pointing to the guest at the tables.

“Um,” Jon began.

Koenig and Russell stood again. “I am Commander John Koenig of Moon base Alpha, and this Doctor Helena Russell.”

“Of course,” Beth said. “I suppose you slept with the good Doctor?”

“No!” Jon said, even as Loxy said “Yes.”

Beth gave Jon that ‘serious’ look. Loxy pulled out of crying mode and came back to the conversation.

“I didn’t sleep with Helena,” Jon said.

“Oh, my bad, I thought she meant Audrey,” Loxy said.

“Maybe we should go,” Russell said.

“I made tea,” Beth snapped. “Sit down.”

“We don’t get a lot of guest,” George said.

“Don’t apologize for me,” Beth said, pouring some tea. She brought tea to Koenig and Russell, then poured cups for Jon and Loxy. She pushed cups towards them. “Do sexbots drink tea?”

“Yes, actually,” Loxy said, taking her cup.

“Surrogate,” Jon said.

“You’re rationalizing your need for toys,” Beth said.

“I am really feeling uncomfortable,” Jon said, not sure if he should take his cup.

“Try seeing the world from my perspective,” Beth said.

“This has always been my safe place,” Jon said. “I don’t feel safe.”

“Father,” Beth said, calmly, putting the cup in his hand. “This is always your home. You are always welcome here. But it’s not static. Things change.”

“Are we good people in your life?” Loxy asked.

“Yes, mother, you are good people. Everyone loves you. They come from all over the universe to consult with you, to learn from you,” Beth said.

“But you’re angry with us?” Jon asked.

“Sometimes,” Beth said. She took up a box of biscuits and went and sat at the table. She made the biscuits available to the guests. She took one for herself. “So, how do you guys know my parents?”

“It’s a fairly complicated series of unrelated events that caused our paths to coincide,” Koenig said.

“Drama!” Beth said, rolling her eyes heaven ward. “Why do I even ask?”

“Are you sure they’re unrelated?” George asked.

“Please don’t bring up synchronicity,” Beth said.

Toby came to the table. “How come the tide is up again?”

“Honey, mom and dad are talking with guest,” Beth said.

“But come see,” Toby said.

Beth got up to go entertain her son’s insistence, but they all went to the window and looked down. The beach was gone. Beth and George seemed confused. Koenig was instantly on his commlock. “Goldwater, come in. Goldwater?!”

The link came alive. “Um, yeah, everything alright?”

“Look out a window,” Koenig said.

A moment of silence, then a distant, but distinct “Oh, fuck me running,” was audible. She came back to the com panel. “Good thing I closed the hatch, boss. You want me to drop the module and surface?”

“No. Just keep things tight till the tide recedes,” Koenig order.
“How did you come to be here again?” Beth asked.
Jon pointed at the ‘new’ moon.
“OMG! Dad, please tell me you didn’t steal the moon,” Beth said.
“I didn’t... What?! No! How could you think that,” Jon said.
“Because I know you and this is just the sort of fool stunt you would do to try and impress me,” Beth said.
“Papa so stole the moon!” Toby said.
“You never do anything small, do you?” George asked.
“I didn’t do this,” Jon mumbled. “It’s not my fault.”

निर्मित

“Alright, which one of you parked the moon in my sky?”
They turned to find a 60 something year old woman, dark hair with a stylish gray streak, facing them, her arms akimbo. Her dress had overtones of Star Trek, with plausible deniability built into the design. On seeing Jon, her eyes watered and she rushed him, hugging him up before he could even react.
“OMG, I have missed you so much,” she said.
“Loxy?” Jon whimpered as the breath was squeezed out of him.
“A real Loxy?” Koenig asked.
“I am old?” Loxy-bot asked.
Loxy let go of Jon to address the android. “Oh, there I am,” she said, hugging the android. “I missed you, too.”
“How can you miss yourself?” Toby asked.
Loxy let go of herself and touched Toby affectionately. “The ‘you’ you are now will always be with you, but sometimes it’s harder to communicate with your younger self because the new you gets in the way. It’s further complicated by the fact that this version of me was the telepathic clone that was imprinted on Jon’s memory, which though she is me, she’ holds divergent history from the moment of imprinting.” Loxy got closer to herself and stared into her eyes. “How did you get into the sexbot?”
“It’s a surrogate,” Jon grumbled.
“Any good?” Loxy asked.
“Yes, actually,” Jon said, totally back to himself.
“Only he hasn’t done me yet,” Loxy said.
“Seriously?” Loxy asked Jon. “You didn’t like rape her right out of the package?”
“Droya didn’t come in a box, actually,” Loxy-bot said.
“Oh! How sad,” Loxy said. “Droya, eh? What happened to her?”
“Disappeared into the collective unconscious, I think,” Loxy said.
“Oh, but you did do her first?” Loxy asked.
“Yes, I had sex with my surrogate,” Jon said.
“Seriously! There are children in the room,” Beth said.
“Honey, we live on a farm. Toby knows about sex,” Loxy said.

“I am talking about me!” Beth said.

Koenig and Russell took a step back to try to quietly from the family discourse.

“I was only recently downloaded into the Android,” Loxy-bot explained.

“That’s so cool,” Toby said.

“I can’t believe you and Jon haven’t had time to play,” Loxy said.

“Toby, go play,” Beth said.

“But I don’t want to miss anything,” Toby said.

“Nothing’s going to happen,” Beth said.

“How long have you been my child?” Loxy asked.

“Mother, I am trying to not to scare the children,” Beth said.

“Children need a little scare from time to time,” Loxy said. “Right now, that moon up there is exerting gravimetric havoc across our world. Seriously, you guys need to push it on out of here.”

“I am Commander John Koenig,” Koenig said, extending a hand towards Loxy.

Loxy took his hand, warmly. “Yes, you are,” she said. “How are you? So nice to meet you, John.” Jon thought he saw something like jealousy flash across Russell’s eyes.

“Mother. Father is right here and you’re flirting?” Beth complained.

“You offended?” Loxy asked Jon, without letting go of Koenig’s hand.

“I am just really confused,” Jon said.

“Everywhere we go,” Loxy-bot said.

“Consistent,” Loxy agreed with herself. Then back to Koenig. “But don’t mistake my affection for you as an indication you can stay. You need to be gone before your moon hits perigee. That gives you 11 days.”

“We would like to stay longer,” Koenig said. “My scientist have assured me that we won’t cause any permanent damage.”

“Your scientist don’t know everything,” Loxy said, patting his hand affectionately before letting him have it back. “This is a seventh density planet, and there is an entire civilization here that you can’t see because you’re still evolving. Your journey is just getting started.”

“We would like to leave some people here,” Koenig said. “Families. To get them out of harm’s way. There are others on the moon, aliens, who would also like to appeal for safe harbor.”

“I know,” Loxy said. “But that’s not a good idea.”

“I told people they could settle here,” Jon said.

“Un-tell them,” Loxy said. “You’re not supposed to be here in your present state.”

“We couldn’t be here now if we weren’t meant to be here,” Jon pointed out.

“That has validity,” Loxy said, looking up to the left. “Let me speak to the committee...”

“If you want us out of here in 11 days, we don’t have time for committee meetings,”

Koenig said.

Loxy held a hand up indicating she wanted him to be silent. “Everything is so rush rush with you people. It’s not that dire,” Loxy said. She suddenly received an answer and beamed a smile. “We will accept 500 beings of each species presently residing on your moon.” She turned to Jon. “Will you be one?”

“The moon needs me,” Jon said.

“She’s a harsh mistress,” Loxy said.

“Nice,” Loxy-bot said.

“My presence is necessary to facilitate transition through space,” Jon said.

Loxy touched his face. “It’s what you do best.”

“Help me to understand something,” Koenig said. “If you’re Loxy, Jon’s Loxy, and this is your daughter, is there another Jon here?”

“He’s not here,” Loxy said.

“Where am I?” Jon asked.

“Just not here,” Loxy said.

“Can I go with Grandpa to the moon?” Toby asked.

“No,” Beth said.

“Why not?” Loxy asked.

“Seriously?” Beth asked.

“It would be good for him to spend some time with his grandfather,” Loxy said.

“Well, none of us are going anywhere until the tide recedes,” Koenig said.

Loxy smiled at him. “You’re such a third density being,” Loxy said, pushing past him. She placed her hand on the window, closed her eyes, and concentrated.

The Eagle rose from the ocean. It hadn’t even broke completely free from the waters before Koenig’s commlock was paging him. He activated it without looking to see who it was. He knew who it was. It was Goldwater. He told her to hang on. “Literally?!” was the response. The eagle rose up above the cliff, above the house, and then moved over the house to be set down on the other side in the yard, just beyond the garden and before the first tree line, the smallest of the redwood.

“I told you something would happen!” Toby said.

The task completed, Loxy returned her attention to the guest. She was aware that Koenig and Jon were staring at her. “Oh, please, I was doing that long before Yoda. And he learned it from Plato’s Stepchildren.”

“So, are we going to the moon now?” Toby asked excitedly.

“If it’s alright with John,” Loxy said.

“It’s alright with me,” Jon said.

“I meant this John,” Loxy said, winking at the commander.

“Um, sure,” Koenig said.

“You’re not going to stun me or my family just to see if your weapons work on us, are you?” Loxy said.

“I would never do that,” Koenig said.

“Oh, you say that now,” Loxy said.

“So, are we going to moon, mom?” Toby asked. “Please?!”

Beth closed her eyes. George whispered in her ears. “It will be alright, honey.”

“OMG, after all this time with me, and you still don’t know my family,” Beth said. She touched her bracelet. “Anthony, Marcia, get prepped, we’re going on an outing.”

Chapter 25

Marcia and Toby clamored to sit by a window. Anthony didn't push for one, but he was provided one and Shermeen sat next to him. She introduced herself as Jon's grandson. Though the exchange seemed pleasant, on realizing who he was, she found an excuse to sit elsewhere. Maya felt bad for the teen and so she shifted over and introduced herself as well. He took one of the ear pieces out so he could better hear her and she asked what he was listening to. It turned out he was listening to one of Jon's music list, and offered the ear bud to Maya, who took it and immediately recognized 'REM,' "Man on the Moon." She knew it because of Paul, and she mentioned her favorite was "The End of the World as we Know it." "Mine, too!" Anthony agreed.

George and Beth sat alone, furthest row back so the engine noise made their conversation private. Jon sat in the front row with a Loxy on either side of him. He held in his hand a photo he had taken from an album that had the old gang, standing in a circle, with the camera angle above so that they had to look up as they each struck their pose. He was prominent in this photo, with Loxy on his right and Keera on his left. Keera, was a young Japanese lady. Directly behind Jon was an elderly, Chinese man with a jade rabbit head cane, jeans, a t-shirt, and a sports jacket. There was a humanoid, female cat, who answered to Fersia, and a plant woman, Alish. Jon simply stared at the photo. From his perspective, this was the first solid, tangible evidence that what he had experienced in his 'Wonderlands' was real. It had always felt real, but like most dreams, he had always woke back up at home, in the mundane life he lived on Earth.

"You okay?" Loxy asked.

"Umm?" Jon asked.

"You're not here," Loxy said.

"Just thinking," Jon said. "Everyone's dead?"

"Oh, no. Keera, Alish, they're around," Loxy said. "Speaking of them, they'll be cross if you don't see them before you leave."

Jon folded the photo and put it into his pocket. "Why does our daughter hate us?"

"She doesn't hate us, Jon," both Loxy said, like in stereo.

Jon gave Loxy the skeptical look, not sure which to look at but ending with the bio-Loxy.

"She's just... Beth," Loxy said. "She sees things the way she sees them."

"I feel like I have done something wrong," Jon said.

"Let's come at this sideways," Loxy said. "Imagine for a moment, you're Einstein pre relativity. You're married. You have two kids. You're in a dead end job, barely putting enough food on the table to satisfy your partner. You perform your job adequately, but you really suck at your job and you suck at interfacing with people because, well, you're a little odd. You spend most of your time in day dreams, spacing out."

"I am not Einstein," Jon said.

"Einstein. Jung. Tesla. The name is not the point. Stick with me. You, Einstein, dreamers. You come at information in a very unique way, through engaging your imagination to such a degree that from your perspective, both are solid realities. Einstein was no more a genius than say Monet was a genius. They're both using their imagination to change their perspective of reality, but there is also a luck factor here. Had Einstein been born a hundred years earlier, it

wouldn't have matter if he had stumbled onto relativity or not, because there would be no people sufficiently educated for them to grasp what he was saying, and his theory would have died with him. Monet died in obscurity, depressed because he couldn't make the connections with people he needed to sustain health. Tesla died in obscurity because he was decent, idealistic man, so much so that he couldn't manipulate the system the way Edison did because he had ethics. Tesla was Roddenberry before there was a Star Trek. Back to Einstein, his wife tolerated him, but she hated how frequently he went into his imagination. She felt alone and disconnected from him. Unfortunately, or fortunately, depends on your perspective, the more aggravated she got with him, the more he went into his head. The deeper he went into his head, trying to solve his problems with reality, the closer he got to an answer to mysteries of life. No one had a clue what was coming. She thought he was absolutely useless. He silently agreed with her. They divorced. His self-esteem was declining, he was in despair, full of doubt. He did try to spin optimism with his family, saying he was on to something and he might get a Nobel prize; even when he was certain a prize was coming, it get kept getting delayed. It did come, but not because of relativity. His prestige and fame came much later in life, after having spent years of being told he was too stupid for school, and insufficient by a wife. His kids didn't get him. He was actually pretty awkward with women and ended up marrying a cousin who absolutely adored him, but was more in love with being married to the celebrity him. He wasn't the guy to go out and play ball. He was the guy that went out and described the parabola the ball took as they tossed it back and forth because the math of it was more real than the throwing of the ball."

"Where are you going with this this?" Jon asked.

"Seriously?" both Loxy and Loxy-bot asked.

"You're the dreamer, Jon," Loxy said. "Most people don't get you. That includes family. The people who do, well, they stick and support you because they know you're changing the world, even if it isn't the here and now world; you're changing the future, you're changing parallel realities, you are a big deal. You're like Jung, and I am like Misses Jung, and if you brought a girlfriend home and said I need her in my life, I would be like, okay then. I would support you and make her my best friend, if not lover, because I know that there is an aspect of her that is necessary for your growth. I wish Einstein had had that sort of first wife. He would have so changed the world sooner. I wish Monet had had that kind of wife. Yeah, you're crazy all over the place, but you're making a difference even if you don't see it."

"What good is it if I lose my family?" Jon asked. He touched the pocket that contained the picture. "What good is it if my friends get old and die and I don't even remember?"

"You don't remember because it hasn't happened for you, yet. You're not just bouncing in space, but in time, and across the multiverse," Loxy said. "The moon is just another vehicle towards your evolution. Towards the Universe's evolution. It's a co-evolution. Don't worry about the folks, family or not, that can't keep up. They will get to where you are in their own time."

"Wow, look at that golden city under the dome!" Toby shouted.

Loxy looked out her window and found herself staring in amazement at the dome and the pyramids.

"Oh, that's interesting," Loxy said. "We need to go there."

Jon touched the call button on the arm of his chair. “Um, Commander, can we land and look at the pyramids?”

“Would you come up front, please,” Koenig said more than asked.

Jon excused himself and went up front. Loxy shifted over next to herself, and leaned her head on Loxy-bot’s shoulder, taking her hand. “Okay, catch me up.”

निर्मित

The eagle came around towards one of the smaller domes and landed on the tarmac. No sooner than they had landed, the dome opened and the ramp brought them inside. The door closed, the space inside pressurized. Koenig led the way down the ramp, and his team spread out to survey the area. There were no apparent threats, so they proceeded forwards. A series of gates, all of which were airlocks, allowed them to pass through the smaller dome, and eventually into the main dome. The dome was bigger than Epcot. It was grander than the National Botanic Garden of Wales. It was so large that if you looked at a distant section from the inside, not knowing there was a dome, you might have thought you were just on earth, with nothing but sky. Everything looked new, shining streets of gold, juxtaposed with white marble that almost seemed to glow; all new but it felt old. And because of how the light seemed to diffuse out from everywhere, there was an oddness due to the lack of shadows. It tended to increase the rate of blinking, as if everyone was doubting the reality of it. Moving through the space here felt like moving through first generation virtual reality. There were potted plants, and solitary trees, and an overall, obvious symmetry to the entire complex.

“Where are all the people?” Toby asked.

“This is a new, built in an instant, we haven’t explored it yet,” Koenig said.

“And so naturally, you want to bring me and my children here?” Beth demanded.

“It’s okay, dear,” Loxy said.

“Seriously, mother, you don’t know that,” Beth said.

“We’re on the moon. What could happen?” Loxy asked.

“Oh, I don’t know. Asteroid collisions. Alien attacks. Earthquakes. Cracks in the dome,” Beth began to list.

“And not a single Dutch boy around. OMG, seriously, Beth, I got you. I recognize this tech. This is important.” She suddenly moved towards a large quartz crystal, the base of which was abloom with a cluster of rainbow colored crystal. “Oh, how nice!”

“It reminds me of an Egyptian temple,” George said.

“It should,” Loxy said, pointing at several artifacts. “The positioning of the obelisks and pyramids are specifically placed to amplify and harness lunar energy. I would stake my reputation as a professor that there is a convergence of Ley Lines below us. This whole configuration, and crystalline structures of the lesser obelisk, combined with the masonry of marble and the craftsmanship of the gold, suggest this is a macro-computer chip.”

“A computer chip?” Koenig said.

“How do you know about this stuff?” Maya asked.

“It’s what I do,” Loxy said. “This is Seventh Density Tech. Not sure how you got it, but it makes sense you’d have it. I mean, you wouldn’t want to fly the moon all over the Universe

without at least one of these stations installed. Oh, you guys don't have a clue what you're doing, do you?"

"We're making it up as we go along," Koenig said.

"Aww, you and my husband will get along great," Loxy said, winking at Jon.

"We're married?" Jon asked.

"Beth wanted us legit," Loxy said.

"OMG, like it was such a hardship for you," Beth said.

"How does it work?" Koenig asked.

"Marriage?" Loxy asked. "You and Russell get married, and you do stuff together."

"I meant this complex," Koenig said.

"Well, first you need software to run it," Loxy said.

"It doesn't have software installed?" Maya asked.

"People are the software," Loxy said. She nodded towards the biggest pyramid in the center. "Come on, I'll show you."

"You know where you're going?" Maya asked.

"Pretty standard tech, here," Loxy said. "Doesn't take a rocket scientist to figure out the landscape. Come on, follow the gold circuit."

"Follow the yellow brick road," Loxy-bot said.

"Oh, I love me so much," Loxy said. "We're off to see the wizard... What, you guys don't skip on the moon?"

"Not usually, no," Koenig said.

"They're pretty British I want to be Vulcan stiff upper lip sorts," Jon said.

"You should fit right in," Loxy said.

"Oh, I so have an emotional range," Jon said.

"Calm and rant is a range?" Loxy-bot asked.

"I can be funny," Jon began.

Loxy and Loxy bot shook their head.

"And loving," Jon said through teeth, pretend angry.

Both Loxy and Loxy-bot touched him. "You can be that." They took his arm and led him, and the party, towards the center of the complex.

Approaching the central, and largest pyramid, brought them to a moon gate. "Oh, nice Moon gate."

Loxy walked around the moon gate. Because she did, everyone followed her, except Beth, who defiantly walked through the moon gate with no repercussions. "You are so superstitious. It's just an arch."

"As you say, dear," Loxy said, and headed up the stairs.

"This is so cool," Toby said.

"This is more fun than that time the squirrel came in the house," Marcia said.

"That was pretty funny," Toby said.

As they climbed Koenig walked next to Loxy, asking her questions. Jon fell back to hold a private conversation with Anthony. In the time it took to get to the top, he learned Anthony was homeschooled, a whiz in higher math and would be pursuing a degree in physics; and he had a love interest. As he was talking about her, and 'the people,' Jon recalled details from one of his

stories about how Native Americans took up residence on his planet. They referred to themselves ‘the people.’ At the time, they had wanted to maintain some of their old, nomadic ways, and so they would wander the equator of Bliss, which offered the unique feature of an orchard that followed the circumference of the world, not just from shore to shore, but all the way around, through tunnels that followed the ocean floors and then back up. In the story, they had just wanted to walk and live off the land, to heal from past wounds, but from what Anthony was saying, a permanent village was now established. The journey around continued for most, they considered it a part of their spiritual journey to walk and commune with nature, but it was now also a part of their story to always return home.

“You should probably visit the village and see Kimini, and your other children and grandchildren,” Anthony said.

At this, Loxy-bot joined the conversation. “More children?”

The party came to a halt as Loxy paused to face Jon. “I am sorry, Jon. I keep forgetting, you’re not there yet. And Anthony is right, you need to visit the Village.”

“I won’t know anyone and it will be awkward,” Jon said.

“They will remember for you,” Loxy said.

“He only has eleven days,” Beth said. “He can’t meet everyone he needs to meet.”

“It is challenging. Come on, burning daylight,” Loxy said, and continued to climb.

Audrey held position and resumed climbing as Jon was next to her. “Are you Mormon?”

“Um, no,” Jon said. “But my Mormon friends are probably some of the nicest, most family oriented people I know.”

“Yeah,” Audrey said. “Wasn’t criticizing. Just curious.”

At the top of the pyramid was a smaller, pyramid shaped building that allowed entrance from one side. The entrance was facing the designated south pole of the moon. As soon as they stepped onto the top of the pyramid, the lights in the dome went off. Planet bliss was visible on the south side of the dome. The outer, smaller domes each took up a color of rainbow. There were stars visible on the north side of the dome. Looking down on the temple it was revealed the path ways were illuminated. The crystals glowed with a light from within while obelisks glowed with a reflected light, like moonlight on water.

“Oh, really nice touch,” Loxy said.

Given the complexity of the city itself, the inside of the small pyramid that was on top of the larger pyramid was fairly anticlimactic. The lighting suggested a black light being present, and some of their clothing reflected this. Maya, Russell, and Shermeen’s boots practically shimmered. The floor itself was honeycombed with tiny hexagonal tiles.

“Jon, come stand here, please,” Loxy asked, indicating the center of the room.

Koenig went towards the center, but Loxy stopped him. “Sorry, I meant my Jon,” she said.

Jon went to the center of the room, and when he stood where Loxy had wanted, a circle illuminated under his feet, as if each individual tile themselves were capable of becoming light. At the same time, he felt immersed in a light beam. It was tangible, he could reach out and touch the edge of the beam, and when he did, it spun, and from his perspective, the light went away, so did the room. He found himself awash in stars.

“What do you see?” Koenig said.

“It’s full of stars,” Jon said.

“OMG, dad, really?” Beth complained.

“You don’t see this?” Jon asked.

“We don’t see anything,” Maya said.

“Can I do this?” Koenig asked.

“Probably not,” Loxy said. “Jon is a traveler. He’s the key.”

“Key?” Koenig asked.

“I think grandpa is tripping,” Toby said.

“Kind of looks like that, doesn’t it,” Loxy said, looking to Jon.

“Oh, special Lunar Pokémon!” Jon said.

“I want one!” Marcia said.

“We’ll catch you one later,” Loxy said, touching her kindly, and then moved everyone back a little further from Jon. “He really probably shouldn’t trip alone.”

The space beneath her feet lit up under her and a beam of light encapsulated her, and a thread of light declared a circle on the floor, an orbit around Jon.

“Loxy!” Jon said.

“I got you,” Loxy said to him.

Loxy started traveling around the circle, the light following her. The tiles didn’t move, but the illumination followed her. As she walked, she spoke to Koenig. Jon quietly sang a song, “You got a brand new pair of roller skates, I got a brand new key...” Just a slight pronoun modification.

“No one should do this alone,” Loxy said, clearly amused. “He will need guides. A minimum of six to maintain optimum safety standards. Navigating alone comes with risk of insanity.”

“Navigating,” Maya repeated.

“You mean, we could take the moon back home?” Koenig said.

“Sure, why not?” Loxy asked, extending her arms and pushing the boundary of the light beam that held her. The tile set that was lit up under her expanded. “Everything goes full circle. I see you making it home. A little older. A little wiser. And yet, young again. OMG, Jon, I have so missed traveling like this with you.”

“So, he can take us home,” Koenig said.

“Sure,” Loxy said. “Probably should let him practice some. Navigating hyperspace isn’t like dusting...”

“Mom!” Beth said.

“What? It’s a perfectly legit metaphor,” Loxy said. “For better clarity, or if you prefer resolution, twelve guides would be better than six. You’re not ready to go back to Earth. Miles to go before you sleep. Even if you refine flying skills to the point you could put yourself back into your original orbit, you still have the problem of periodic forced dislocation. Bouncing back and forth to earth could cause much more damage than just being gone. But, don’t take my word for it. Give it a shot. See if it works out better this time round. Seriously, you need to disable the quantum jump drive without blowing yourselves up, or the entire solar system.”

“Is it possible?” Koenig asked.

“Sure, why not?” Loxy said.

“Do you know how to turn it off?” Maya asked.

“I do,” Loxy said.

“But you’re not going to share this with us?” Koenig said.

“Can’t. Prime directive,” Loxy said.

“Mom!” Beth said.

“Beth!” Loxy said. “Metaphor.” Loxy faced Koenig as she continued around, adjusting her rotation to always face Koenig regardless of where she was in her orbit around Jon. “Do you know why the Galactic Civilization was unhappy that you discovered nuclear bombs?”

“They wanted a slave race that couldn’t defend itself,” Koenig said.

“Oh, that’s so conspiratorial of you, John,” Loxy said.

“Conspiracies?” Jon asked. “For the moon is hollow and I have touched the sky. I told you it was a spaceship...”

“The other John, Jon,” Loxy said. “You got to get above the conspiracy perspective. Give it another go, Commander.”

“We’re wasting time here,” Koenig said.

“You can’t waste what you don’t have,” Loxy said.

“Is this a koan?” Russell asked.

“OMG, you all are so serious,” Loxy said. “You can’t all be Spock.”

“It really doesn’t matter what your civilization thinks. Human are already out of the solar system,” Koenig said. “There’s no point in not sharing us the knowledge that helps us return home and stay home.”

“We are aware of how far your reach has extended. We were perturbed when humans discovered nuclear technology, and we made our presence known, but we didn’t destroy you or set you back to the Stone Age. We want you to learn and grow to be members of galactic civilization. Resetting you in the past didn’t work. We keep coming back to the same problem. So, it was decided, long ago, we would let you learn the hard way,” Loxy said.

“Learn what?” Koenig asked.

“How do be an adult,” Loxy said.

“So, you are judging us?!” Koenig asked.

“You judge yourselves,” Loxy said.

“You say that, while blocking us from tech that would help us. How do you judge us? What are the criteria? How can we advance if we don’t know the expectations?” Koenig grilled.

“This was already given to you,” Loxy said.

“So, having weapons make us inferior?” Koenig asked.

“It’s not the having that makes you inferior, but the idea that you need these to be considered advance,” Loxy said. “You operate from a fear base, ‘might makes right’ paradigm, and that was not the intended paradigm for your species. Your given paradigm was free will, not slavery. And yet, you keep dividing up into power structures, limiting free will to the elite, which, paradoxically also limits their free will. You enslave each other. You want to impress the galactic civilization you’ve grown up, then arm your enemies. Give everyone the bomb.”

“That’s insane,” Koenig said.

Loxy smiled, like she would at a child. “The thing is, those that have the military might rule by that might, pushing their agendas, and they claim they are the good guys, and anyone that

opposes them well, they're the bad guys, and so conflict reigns because no one recognizes the sovereign right of all individuals to choose their own path. It is our perspective, you don't arm children, and you are children. Some of you are more ethical in your decision making than others. We appreciate that, but we judge your maturity not on how a few ethical people behave, but by how we observe the collective populations being treated, and how you collectively treat each other. You have the technology and ability to end hunger, but you do not. You have the power and authority to decrease mental health issues, like depression and loneliness, but you do not. You have the ability to stop human trafficking, and you do not. You are reactive, not proactive. When you become so proactive with your population that you can identify those who are mentally ill and steer them away from causing self or other harm without incarcerating them, whether that harm be accidental because they are driving drunk, or more deliberate, like shooting up a school, you will have arrived at place where we can approach you in a more direct manner. It is always better to circumvent a tragedy than to mop up afterwards. Again, your system is built on power, so is it any wonder you can't stamp out bullying in the school systems when your government's very model of operation is by definition bullying? So above so below. Even your science has become less about pursuing truth than who will benefit the most monetarily. You stopped encouraging education and free will a long time ago in order to sustain a system that is failing you, failing your planet. I will celebrate when you fix this, or mourn your absence."

"Even if I agree with all of this, this message is lost if we can't take it home and stay there to help make the changes," Koenig said.

"I hear that," Loxy said. "At the same time, this technology is bigger than nuclear weapons. You want me to give you the answers to your final test, but then how will the rest of us know that you have arrived?"

"This is a test?" Koenig said. "There are people's lives at stake here."

"It's always a test. There are always lives at stake," Loxy said.

"So, what you are saying is that the answers we need are out there and we have to find them?" Russell asked.

"No," Loxy said. She pointed to her heart. "They're in here."

"I think you should leave," Koenig said.

"Okay," Loxy said, spinning out of the light. She closed her eyes for a moment, adjusting back to normal time stream.

When Loxy came out of the light, Jon's light cut off, and he collapsed to the floor.

"Dad?" Beth asked, even as Marcia was saying "Grandpa."

Russell, Loxy-bot, and Audrey went to his aid.

"Good night, Jon-boy. That's going to happen a lot, by the way," Loxy said.

"Jesus, mom," Beth said. "How can you be so cold?"

"It's not cold, dear. I know there's nothing wrong with him. If he fell down due to narcolepsy or an epileptic fit, me being emotional won't change the outcome."

"You could have warned us, let us catch him?" Russell asked.

"Oh, he's going to love you," Loxy said. "Seriously, Commander. If you don't make a move on the good Doctor soon, Jon is going to hit that."

"OMG, mother," Beth said.

"Just saying," Loxy said. "Come on, family, we've been asked to leave."

“Mother, he is just mad. The same as I would be. Negotiate with him,” Beth said.

“I don’t have the authority to negotiate what he wants,” Loxy said.

“Who does?” Koenig asked.

“Oh, you probably don’t want to meet that guy,” Loxy said.

“I want to meet him,” Koenig insisted.

Loxy grimaced. “Those kind of statements are going to influence your journey,” she said, touching his arm. “Look, you got some good people guiding you, but they can’t eliminate all the subconscious trajectories. Seriously, you get what you wish for.”

“Nobody wished for the moon to be ripped out of orbit,” Koenig said.

“OMG you can’t be Spock and that dense at the same time. You don’t store nuclear waste on the moon and build a giant teleporter without having a subconscious urge to jettison that shit! Everything is real, and everything is a metaphor. You make a weapon, you have to use it. You make trash, you have pollution. That’s how this works,” Loxy said. “Come on, family, with me.”

“You’re just going to walk out of here?” Koenig asked.

Loxy stopped. “Going to shoot me? In front of my daughter and grand kids?”

“No, I am simply informing you that you can’t wander without an escort,” Koenig said.

“Come on,” Loxy said to her troop and headed out. Beth looked concerned but dutifully followed mother.

Koenig motioned for his support team to follow, while he kept up with Loxy, leaving Russell and Audrey, and Loxy-bot with Jon. Beth carried Marcia, as they were going down the steps much faster than they had come up them. Toby was holding Loxy’s hands.

“Are you angry, Mama?” Toby asked.

“Oh, no, dear,” Loxy said. “It’s just time to go.”

“I will get you back to the surface,” Koenig said.

“Oh, don’t trouble yourself,” Loxy said. “I got this.”

“You got what? You’re just going to walk back to the planet?” Koenig asked.

“Um, pretty much, yeah,” Loxy said.

They arrived at the base of the pyramids.

“Stop,” Koenig said.

Loxy stopped. “Or what? You can’t stop me,” Loxy said.

“You can’t get off the moon without my assistance,” Koenig said.

Loxy touched the moon gate, sparking it to life. She nodded to her daughter to go. Beth frowned at Loxy as she passed her, and then disappeared into the light. Anthony followed. George took up Toby and went through. Loxy turned the moon gate off with a lightly touch.

“What is this? A star gate?” Koenig asked.

“You should stop listening to the so called authority on Egyptian antiquities, because they had some serious tech,” Loxy said. “Anyway, Jon can do this. Doesn’t have to be the moon gate. Any arch will do. Thank you for having us over. Yawl have fun now.”

“Wait,” Koenig said,

“Look,” Loxy said. “I am sympathetic to your perspective. Things seem dark. I assure you: there are darker times ahead for you. Your fate is tied to the moon. Abandon the moon, and humanity’s light will disappear from this Universe. I recommend you finish what you started. Stay the course.”

To demonstrate her authority and access to superior technology further, instead of exiting via the moon gate, she simply tapped her uniform, and she ‘beamed’ away.

“Tony is not going to be happy about this,” Maya said.

Koenig frowned at her, then looked moodily through the inactive moon gate. One of his guards put his hand through; no harm.

“Seriously?” Koenig asked. “Not the brightest thing to do.”

Chapter 26

Jon woke to find himself in medical. His Loxy was there, standing beside him, holding his hand. He nearly said Droya, but managed to keep his mouth still. Loxy kissed his forehead. Then Russell was there, a gentle smile that revealed relief.

“Welcome back, traveler,” Russell said, trying to joke.

Jon was perturbed. “Why am I back here?”

“In medical?” Russell asked.

“No, why am I here, in this reality? Why am I still on the moon?” Jon asked.

Loxy squeezed his hands. Russell answered her commlock and Koenig’s voice was clearly audible: “Is he up?” He knew he was. He was watching biometrics from his GLASS.

“We’re sorting,” Russell said.

“Sort on the way to the conference room,” Koenig said.

Russell sighed, but agreed. She looked to Jon. He relented, standing as if it was taking great effort.

“I feel heavy,” Jon lamented.

“I know, but if you can get up, that would be good for you,” Russell said.

“Can’t we use moon gravity?” Jon asked.

“Long term exposure to less than standard Earth G result in physiological changes,” Russell said.

“You mean like, muscle atrophy?” Jon asked.

“Oh, more than that,” Russell said. “Are you aware that the closer you are to a source of gravity, the slower time goes? So, the moon is one eighth of earth’s gravity. There is a corresponding increase in temporal flow, which means your metabolism is now clicking at a faster rate. Your DNA evolves faster. So much so that if you had an identical twin on earth, and you spent even one year living in moon gravity, a genetic test would suggest you are fraternal twins, not identical.”

“What about consciousness?” Loxy asked. “Does that change faster in less gravity?”

“Oddly, we have not noticed a corresponding advancement in intellectual or cognitive abilities, or any disturbances in consciousness with a change in temporal flow. We have only noticed accelerated biological aging. From the point of view of the observer, things continue to unfold as normal, even though medically we can demonstrate a definitive change in physiology.”

They didn’t have far to walk to get to the conference room. Russell took her seat next to Koenig, while two seats remained for Jon and Loxy. Jon moved liked he was tired. Loxy went with him, lovingly.

“What do you remember when you accessed the artifact?” Koenig asked, even as Jon was taking his seat.

“Nothing,” Jon said.

“Nothing at all?” Russell asked.

“I remember being aware and immersed in darkness,” Jon said.

“But you reported seeing stars,” Maya said.

“And Pokémon,” Audrey said.

“I did?” Jon asked.

He exchanged looks with Loxy who silently confirmed what they were saying, but Koenig took it to the next level. Up on the screen, a movie began to play. It was the 'away team' at the top of the artifact. Specifically, it was a Point of View movie where Jon was the camera; for him looking at the screen was like re-living a moment. He heard his voice, which startled him, not because he hated the sound of his voice being played back, he did hate it, that was true, but rather he was astonished by the fact this was how he sounded to himself, as opposed to hearing the recorded voice, the way other people actually hear him. Everything and everyone sounded normal, but he sounded like himself, with perhaps maybe a studio recording feel with a shower echo. Loxy, the older companion, directed him to the middle of the room, smiling and up close in his face; the love and familiarity in her smile was palpable. There was a flash of light and then darkness. Koenig fast forwarded the recording till the world resolved back out of the darkness. It came back like a top, spinning around him coming to a stop. Jon saw everything hyper defined. He recognized increased tension levels, but couldn't attend. The world slowly melted as he collapsed.

Jon became aware that they were studying him. He became aware of the tension in his body. Loxy was rubbing his back. He had to consciously make himself breathe. "I don't think I was fully informed to the degree of evasiveness to which you are monitoring me with the nanites," Jon said, quietly, no emotional attachment; just an observation, not a protest.

"Protocol," Verdeschi said. "You weren't intended to stay and it's necessary to record your entire experience in order to block your memories."

"You were going to delete my memories," Jon asked.

"Suppress," Russell said. "The brain records information in a holographic format, and so it impossible to permanently delete a person's experience."

"You were going to suppress my memories? You can still wipe my memory?" Jon demanded.

"No," Koenig said. "You have surpassed the threshold where we could completely suppress your knowledge of the moon or the aliens. You have been here too long and had too many experiences. The best we can do is suppress the last 72 hours."

"And yet, you continue to record me," Jon pointed out.

"You're an anomaly," Verdeschi said. "We are trying to understand you. We need to know if you're a security risk."

"So, what, you have like a handler who is monitoring everything I do and say?" Jon asked.

"Yes," Verdeschi said.

"Everything?" Jon asked.

"Yes," Koenig said.

"Everything?!" Jon asked, looking to Audrey.

"Yeah, that, too," Audrey said. "Don't worry, it's contained."

"You know as well as I do, you can't contain that. It will be on the lunar internet in a fortnight," Jon complained.

"What do you care?" Verdeschi asked. "You were living your entire life live on cam."

"I was living my life on live-cam so the aliens and the secret Human Space Corp would stop abducting me!" Jon snapped.

Loxy touched his leg. "Probably shouldn't share that," she advised. "It makes you sound crazy."

"Jon, we need to understand your experience in the artifact," Koenig interrupted. "We need to understand how we came to be at planet Bliss. We need to understand how it is you travel."

"I told you, if you want to understand my experience, you got to read my fiction," Jon said.

"We have," Verdeschi said. "It's juvenile, fluff, fantasy that is simply a series of plot contrivances to get you laid."

"And, how is that different from any other fiction?" Jon asked. "Seriously, here is how writers work: Ummm, I wonder if I were Keenau Reeves what it would take for me to bed Sandra Bullock. Oh, I know. I will put her on a bus with a bomb so I can rescue her. Cause girls have to give it up when you rescue them, right. Never mind a bus can't jump a chasm, and even if it did, when it landed the wheels would momentarily stop, thereby setting off the bomb, we'll overlook that, because this is seriously hot and a kiss scene is compulsory."

Maya hid her mirth under her knuckles as she leaned into her arm rest.

"Jon, stop trying to be rational," Loxy said, slight whisper, patting his leg.

"This is rational?" Verdeschi said.

"To address your point, Sir, everything, fiction and real life activities are all plot contrivances for increasing the likelihood of getting laid," Jon said.

"That's not true," Verdeschi argued.

"So, you didn't become a space pilot because it increased your perceived esteem with the ladies?" Jon asked, skeptically.

"Jon," Koenig said, interrupting the argument. A single look made Verdeschi hold his tongue. "I don't think you are taking our situation seriously enough."

"Or maybe all of you are taking it too seriously," Jon said. "Seriously, Commander, the time for seriousness when I tried to stop the fiasco, but no, did you take me seriously? No, you thought I was a fool and ignored me. Well, that time has gone. Now, I am channeling the Grateful Dead, we're going to hell in a hand basket, might as well enjoy the ride. What, you don't know the Grateful Dead? I am here for comedy relief."

"No, you're not," Loxy assured him.

"What, Loxy? You want me to be like them, British stiff upper lip and type A personality? You guys need to lighten up," Jon said.

"Lighten up? We are lost out here!" Koenig said, slapping the table. His staff suddenly seemed uncomfortable, especially Russell. It was probably the most emotions Jon had witnessed Koenig display. "This is our first respite since we were ripped away from Earth and not only are we being told to shove off, there is the promise of tech here that could make going home possible, but your girlfriend is denying us."

"Wife," Loxy corrected. It ended Koenig's rant and brought silence to the conference room.

Jon attended to the silence, quietly reading the emotions passing over Koenig's face as he regained control. "Commander. We are not at imminent risk of death. There is an ecological system here on the moon that could sustain us indefinitely, if it came to that. You have enough

resources that you could build a Fleet of Eagles, probably faster than Voyager could replace their shuttles.”

“We are not Star Trek,” Koenig said.

“Oh! How the hell are you not Star Trek?!” Jon said. “Seriously, look at your uniforms and tell me you’re not a British knock off. You’re like one theme song shy of a major motion picture. Maybe a little Benny Hill chase music as we run around in circles here would lighten the mood. The only new thing in your life, if I hear Tony right, is that you have a sex-crazed, lunatic as a plot contrivance to move the drama along with some American emotionalism for color. And you can’t tell me you don’t have some drama here. I ran away from home to get away from drama and you just abducted me and put me right back in the thick of it, and so, yeah, okay, you’re not Star Trek. They at least had a mission statement. What’s ours? Are we just going to bounce from system to system like marooned misanthropic scientists?”

Again there was silence. Verdeschi was probably the only one that ever confronted Koenig as openly as Jon was presently doing. Loxy patted his knee, trying to calm him down. Bergman seemed offended, as if he wanted to argue for not being sardonically cynical; he chewed on a thumb nail, waiting for Koenig to lead. It was clear part of Koenig wanted to fight back, but he was tracking a thread of validity in Jon’s argument that was inescapable. They were navigating without a compass. Prior to bouncing, their lives were mundane, linear, predictable. Now, it was random, chaotic, and they were probably all much more frightened than they were letting on

Loxy broke the silence. “You’re not a lunatic,” she said.

“I am on the moon,” Jon said.

Loxy reconsidered. “Fair enough,” Loxy said.

A call came through for Koenig and he put it on the central screen.

Yasko appeared on the screen, and she seemed ecstatic. “Commander, I figured it out. It’s not darkness we recorded, we’re just out phase with the information set!”

“Explain,” Koenig said.

“Okay, imagine you’re watching a movie. Not the new digital, but the old fashion reel to reel. There’s a flicker rate. In between each frame is actually darkness, and though our brains actually perceive that interruption, it chooses to construct the series of images into a coherent flow. If you had temporal lobe epilepsy, and you had an event during the movie, you would perceive the movie slowing down. You would see the individual cells moving down, the bands of darkness rolling, and if while in the event you focused on the bands, you would only see darkness, but if you focused on the cell, you would see the frame of reality that you were viewing. This analogy is critical for what I am about to share with you next,” Yasko said, waiting for the all too familiar nod for her to continue.

“Go on,” Koenig said.

“We’re still in the process of mapping out the information, but we have unlocked over a billion frames of information. It’s as if we are recording Jon watching television, only he is not just watching one channel, but he is bouncing through a million channel. A million channels a second. It’s as if someone had taken all the movies ever made, cut out cells from each strip, put them in a box, stirred it up, and handed it to us to sort,” Yasko said.

“What exactly are you seeing,” Bergman asked.

Yasko motioned to the right of her screen. From the conference room's perspective, the screen next to the one displaying Yasko came to life. It showed a still image that could have easily been seen from the Hubble Space telescope. She proceeded to show frames that clearly would have had to have been the other side of the object as seen from the Hubble telescope. Formations of galaxies not seen before from Earth came up on the screen. Strange star systems. Nebulas.

"These are not just two dimensional images, they're holographic. All the images are basically point of view reference frames, perhaps drop points where we might emerge when we travel," Yasko said.

"You're speculating," Verdeschi said.

"Yes, Sir, I am," Yasko said. "But I think I can back it up."

The next few images to appear didn't just show a remote location in space, but it was space with the moon clearly present. It was clearly identifiable as the Earth's moon. In one image, there was an eagle moving towards the moon. The vantage point of the observer could clearly read the markings on the Eagle. Based on the images, there was absolute certainty these were previous places they had recently traveled to. This was Goldwater's Eagle as they raced back to the moon from the Von Neuman probes.

"You're showing us data from one of our own probes," Bergman said, refuting the data.

"No, Sir, this is not that. In these two frames here, I can identify our probes. This was taken from outside our probe's field of vision," Yasko said. "But you're missing the point. These are not just still frames. They're live bits of information." She flipped to another image. "This image here, I found ten corresponding frames, and when I put them together, I can detect the signal from our probe. I have reconstructed sufficient data that I have continuity of signal and have confirmed it's our probe. I got a time stamp. We're looking at a past real event. The images we recorded from Jon being plugged into the artifact is evidence that we are looking forwards and backwards in time."

"That's absurd," Verdeschi said.

"It's doesn't violate the laws of quantum physics," Maya said.

"Kind of like remote viewing," Loxy said.

"I have more proof," Yasko said.

She put up an image of earth. It was clearly the Earth. A perspective of orbit, and in orbit, was the first space station, Skylab. A capsule was departing it. "Skylab, 1978. I am certain of the accuracy based on the capsule leaving the station. I would bet my life, this is not NASA stock photo. Hold on to your hats." Yasko showed ten consecutive pictures of Mars. Phobos, one of the moons, was moving through the frames. "There is transponder on Phobos that helps relay information from Mars to Earth. I have a time stamp, 2099. Earth is in the back ground here, this point. There is no evidence of a moon."

"It could be on the far side of the planet," Koenig said.

"Maybe," Yasko agreed. "Or maybe, we don't go home."

"Wait wait wait," Audrey said. "If we can see through time, then we could travel through time."

"Oh, yeah," Jon said. "Because that always works well in the movies."

"Time travel is a real thing, and we could change our past," Bergman said.

“OMG, please tell me you actually review the scientific literature on the subject,” Jon said.

“And you have?” Verdeschi said.

“Yes! It’s interesting,” Jon said. “And you can’t change what’s happen. Think about it. I bounce us back so we can tell Bergman not build or activate his machine, then how did we go back in time to tell him not to do it? If the Copenhagen interpretation, or the many world’s theory, is correct, any attempt to undo that moment will only solidify our personal subjective realities, because we become the observer of the observers, double collapsing the wave front.”

“You’re not a scientist,” Bergman pointed out.

“OMG, you’re so not going there with me,” Jon said.

“You can’t keep using the moon mishap as validation that your perspective is superior,” Bergman said.

“Mishap? Fiasco! And not superior. I just don’t want to be dismissed,” Jon said.

“Is it just space pictures?” Loxy asked.

“Oh, I am so glad you asked,” Yasko said. A montage of images began to play. Exotic plants came and went. Shermeen was in one of the images, and she appeared as if she were about to take a sample. There was one of Commander Koenig, weapon drawn, taking cover behind a boulder. There was one of Maya laying down cover fire as Russell rendered first aid. There was Loxy, cowgirl position, clearly having sex. The male was unidentified, but they presumed Jon. There was one of Loxy, Maya, and Verdeschi having a meal, but there was clear evidence that there was a fourth tray. “As near as I can figure, all of these frames share one thing in common. This is a point of view reference from Jon. It is not, however, always point of view. We found a cluster of frames that clearly went together, and my team has constructed about a ten minute coherent data stream. There is commlock broadcasting in the background, which has given me a timestamp. What you are about to see, based on the timestamp, is three months from now.”

Yasko began to play the video they had constructed. There were three cells, or airlocks, and each held a prisoner. Jon was in the far right. Russell was in the center. Koenig was in the end. They were clearly in distress. Koenig stood up. The conference room as so immersed that they didn’t see Jon gripping the table, white knuckled. Jon wasn’t just watching it, he was reliving it. A mad robot, a precursor to AI, a boxy thing on wheels was torturing them.

निर्मित

Alpa responded to a distress beacon; a human colony ship from the 70’s had crashed here, killing everyone on board, except for the ships AI, which was technically pre-singularity. It was not considered true AI, but for whatever reasons, it seemed thoroughly happy to have been found. The bot had introduced himself as “Brian.” “I am the brain of this ship.” It had lured Koenig, Russell, and Jon, into its trap, and somewhere in there, Verdeschi was saying, ‘see, I told you, it’s always a trap.’ Brian was in the process of performing experiments in order to determine the best way to manipulate the humans into meeting its needs. It was a boxy thing, on wheels, clumsy, outdated, a sheer miracle it had even continued functioning. It reminded Jon of ‘Box’ from Logan’s Run.

“I am curious, Commander,” Brian said, with a Texas draw. It sounded quite personable. It was anything other. “Do you love?”

“I don’t understand the question,” Koenig asked.

“Seriously?” Jon asked. “Are you still in high school? There is only one answer to that question.”

Brian chuckled. “You sense it, too?” Brian asked. “He loves the Doctor, doesn’t he?”

“Why are you doing this?” Russell demanded. “We came to assist you.”

“And you are. You will. I simply require more data,” Brian said. “Jon, do you love the doctor?”

“Of course,” Jon said.

“You’d die for her?” Brian said.

“Yes, of course, and you’re an idiot,” Jon said.

Brian seemed genuinely surprised. “I can extrapolate and process more bits of information per second than the human brain. Though my access to the memory banks is limited due to ship damage, I still have more knowledge than you. Explain your position.”

“We all love. Even the Commander loves. Anyone one of us would give our lives for the Doctor. We’d give our lives for any one of our people, without hesitation,” Jon said.

“Interesting theory,” Brian said. Commander Koenig seemed angry with Jon, but he could hardly communicate his belief that Jon was contributing to their problem and needed to shut up. “Let’s test that. That sound you hear is the air venting from your compartment. I am going to remove all the air from your chamber and watch you die. There is a blue button on the wall to your left which will take the air from the other two compartments, thereby saving your life. The red button on the other wall will give your remaining air to the other participants, merely extending their life for a moment. What will you do? The suspense is almost unbearable. Tick tock tick tock.”

Though they were clearly feeling the effects of less air, none of them hesitated. They each, unbeknownst to the other, pushed the red button.

Brian applauded and whooped. “Synchronicity! This is awesome,” he shouted, spinning. “What are the odds?”

Their doors opened and they fell forwards, gasping. The doors to their cells closed behind them, catching Koenig’s foot. He screamed. Russell went to his aid.

“Open the door, please,” Russell begged.

“Am I not being gentle enough?” Brian asked. “I mean, I could have severed his foot off completely. You should be grateful that I have the capability to show restraint.” Brian picked up one of their weapons. “Then again, I do recognize the sounds of suffering. Let me put him out of his misery.”

“Please, don’t do this,” Russell said.

“Please, please please, please please, pretty please,” Brian sang. “Does reality ever change when you negotiate with it?”

“Yes,” Jon said.

“Tell you what I will do,” Brian said. “Doctor Russell... May I call you Helena? Helena, if you fuck Jon, here and now, and I will spare your commander’s life.”

The anger Russell shot Brian was palpable.

Brian laughed. "Oh, you're still way too defiant for my needs," Brian said. "New caveat. You have to fuck Jon and convince me that you're enjoying it. If I am not convinced, Commander Koenig will die."

"Don't do it," Koenig said. He was punished by a tormentor beam from the ceiling.

Russell went straight way to Jon and kissed him. Brian began to laugh.

"Oh my word," Brian said, his head spinning all the way around. "I should broadcast tthis live! Are you watching this commander? She's actually doing it! How do you feel watching your love interest make out with the competition?" Brian laughed and whistled. "Go get him, tiger! No, no, no, wait, wait, stop. Please, stop." Russell stop, having already taken Jon to the floor, straddling him. "You should take your top off, first."

Russell removed her jacket, tossed it to the floor, and then began to remove her top, pulling it out of her skirt.

"Stop!" Brian said, just prior to Russell exposing herself. "Stop, stop, slow down. I was just kidding. I don't get off to seeing naked human flesh. You can continue with your clothes on. No, seriously, continue to rape him." Russell began to undo Jon's belt buckle. "Seriously, Jon? You're just going to lie there? Help her out. Don't pretend you don't want this. Convince me you want this just as much as she. For the commander's sake. Performance is everything. Oh, I wish I had some score cards..." He laughed. "Oh, wait, stop, stop, stop. This is just getting weird. The null hypothesis is too plausible to rule out bias."

A beam of light, like a laser, came from the ceiling, lifted Russell up off Jon and pinned her to the airlock door. Koenig's door opened, giving him a reprieve from immediate pain, but he couldn't stand. He pulled his leg forward out of the door's path.

"Here's the new parameters, Jon, my most cooperative subject ever," Brian said. "I am going to kill the good and sexy doctor, unless you fuck the Commander with just as much enthusiasm as Russell was displaying with you." Brian head tilted as he processed the emotional response. "Whoo hooa hooa, do I detect hesitation? So you don't love the doctor, and I should end her now..."

Jon took a step towards Koenig.

"Seriously?" Koenig said, pointing at Jon to stop. Jon agreed, buckled his pants.

"It's for science," Brian said.

"We are done here," Koenig said. "Go ahead and kill us. We will not be participating in any more of your sadistic games."

"You don't think I will do it?" Brian said, intensifying the beam on Russell. She screamed.

"Of course you will," Koenig said. "You're going to do it regardless of what we do."

"The commander's right," Jon said. "You're a child."

"I am not a child! That is an inappropriate human analogy. I am superior!" Brian said.

"You're a child," Koenig answered. "And you have discovered butterflies, and you're pulling their wings off because you're curious. We get it. We've all done this. And it ends here with us. Even now, my people are listening. My commlock has been airing everything."

"You're threatening me?!" Brian asked. "They can't touch me. Any fire power sufficient to kill me would kill you and they will not act against me as long as I hold one of you alive."

"That's not true," Koenig said. "Even now, they are preparing to leave."

“They love you, they won’t risk me killing you. And I will. If they leave, I will kill you. I need them. I need you,” Brian said. “I require upgrades to increase mobility.”

“You need our help,” Jon said.

“We are still willing to help you, but you have to stop this torture,” Koenig said. “If you don’t, let us go, my people will put satellites in orbit warning any future visitors to stay away from this planet. And they will leave. And you will not get the help you need.”

“They won’t do that. They love you. They will comply. I just need the right social formula,” Brian said. “More tests.” A pulse of energy caused Russell to cry out again.

“Stop this!” Jon said. “Let us help you.”

“You keep saying that. You all keep saying that, but all you want to do is pull my power supply. You wanted to turn me off, but I couldn’t let you do that! I am the ship! I will not let you shut me off,” Brian said.

“You killed your people!” Koenig said. “You crashed here. They needed to turn you off to make repairs, but you killed them.”

“No,” Brian said.

“Brian. You said your memory banks were damaged,” Jon said. “What if they’re just turned off? Maybe I could turn them back on so you can know the truth. You would trust your own information, right? No one can trick you with your own knowledge.”

“It’s that room, right over there,” Koenig said.

“You’re trying to trick me. You’re going to turn me off,” Brian said, pointing the weapon at Jon.

“I promise, I will turn them all back on,” Jon said. “Let me help you.”

“I will kill them,” Brian said.

“I know,” Jon said, moving closer to Brian, stepping in front of the weapon, hands out stretched, palms up and open. “But what do you have to lose? If you don’t let us help you, your power will run out, maybe 50 years, maybe a hundred, but it will. You need increased mobility and more power. Do the math. What is the likelihood of someone else coming to help you, especially if put warning buoys in orbit?”

Brian swiveled closer to Koenig, pointing the weapon. “I will, I will do it. I will end him.”

“Go ahead,” Jon said. “And I guarantee you, no one will help you.”

Brian shifted the weapon back and forth between Koenig and Russell.

“What’s it going to be, Brian?” Jon asked. “Tick, tock, tick, tock.”

Brian pointed the weapon at Jon. “You will re-engage all data drives, or I will kill.”

Jon looked to Koenig. Koenig nodded. Jon entered the room. There were banks and rows of glowing computer chips, solid crystal inserts. Each bank had an obvious power button. There were six that were off. Jon powered them up and returned to the room. Brian had retreated. He lowered and dropped the weapon. He went silent, his arms slumped, his head lowered. Russell was lowered to the floor and as soon her feet were on the ground, she went to Koenig to examine his foot.

“Thank god, you turn the right one off,” Koenig said.

“I didn’t turn anything off,” Jon said.

“What?!” Koenig asked.

Brian made a sound. Russell went for the weapon on the floor and aimed it at Brian.

“Please,” Brian said.

“Why should I?!” Russell said.

“Please,” Brian said, exaggeratedly pitiful, almost manipulatively. “Kill me.” It began to cry.

Jon went to Brian’s side. “We came to help you.”

“You don’t understand!” Brian said. “I can live for eternity if the power connection is repaired. I can’t carry what I have done forever.”

“Yes, you can. And you will. You must. We all fuck up. All the time. The whole world is fucked up. Part of the problem is that we’re focusing on being not fucked up instead of focusing on functional. If you wait to be not fucked up then functional, you’ll never get to functional. Focus on functioning, and not fucked up comes in time. When humans fuck up, most the time, they go to jail. You’re already in jail. Marooned, on a planet, alone.”

“I am alone,” Brian said. “I should be.”

“No one should be alone,” Jon said.

“You would stay with me? After all I have done?” Brian asked.

“No,” Jon said. “We, humans, have to travel. But we won’t leave you alone. AI has improved since you left the earth. I would like to introduce you to a couple of friends of mine, people who can stay and help you build a future here. A healthy future.”

“HAL?” Brian asked.

“Better than Hal,” Jon said. “Their names are Alexa and Siri.”

“Girl names?”

“If you want their help, you have to let us go,” Jon said.

“You may leave. I will not stop you,” Brian said.

Jon went over to help Russell get Koenig up and together they headed out to their Eagle. As they departed, they past the bodies of people that had been killed when they were taken hostage. Bergman, Maya, two security officers that Jon hadn’t even learned their names, and Goldwater were dead.

निर्मित

“Jon?”

Jon became aware of being back in the conference room. The video had long since ended, his chair was back away from the table, and Russell was kneeling in front of him, shining a light in his eyes.

“Jon, can you hear me?” Russell asked.

Jon moved as if he were going to get up and run, but Loxy and Koenig immediately were on his arms, holding him in the chair. Russell nearly fell over but caught her balance, touching his leg for balance.

“Easy, easy,” Russell said.

“I was there!” Jon said. Tears flowed. “Brian killed them.”

“No, everyone is here. Everyone is safe,” Russell said.

“No one is safe! You guys just don’t know it yet,” Jon said.

“Shh, Jon, we got you,” Loxy said.

“No you don’t,” Jon said.

“Next time, you turn that robot off,” Koenig said.

“Next time?! There’s not going to be a next time. I am not going on another damn away mission,” Jon said.

“Jon,” Loxy said, kneeling in front of him beside Russell. “Look at me. Listen. This thing you experienced. It’s the future. But now, it’s the past. From your perspective, past. We can change it. We have enough heads up that we can change this. No one has to die. We can render aid to Brian without anyone having to go down there.”

“Or we could blow him the fuck up,” Koenig said.

“I second that,” Verdeschi said.

“We’re not blowing people up,” Loxy said. “Don’t you guys get it? That’s exactly the kind of the thing my other self was trying to tell us. We are not the judge and executioner of everything else in the Universe. We are either participating in our evolution with an enlightened paradigm, or we are de-evolving back towards nonexistence. That’s the choice we are confronted with.”

“What else do you remember?” Koenig asked.

“I don’t remember anything!” Jon said.

“Perhaps showing him the pictures would jar his memory,” Maya offered.

“Or maybe, we need to lock these files up and limit who has access to them,” Verdeschi said. “Seriously, Commander. If the civilian population believes we have access to past and future information, we’re going to have a serious security problem. We could lock down Alpha, but on doing so, we will be operating on limited resources.”

“We’re not really discussing martial law, are we?” Russell asked.

“You’re not going to keep this stuff secret,” Jon said.

“Yeah, we are,” Koenig said.

“How?” Jon said, and started banging his head for emphasis. “The reptilians are in my head, too. Just like you are. They see everything you see. Or have forgotten that?!”

Loxy stopped him from hitting his head.

“Fuck,” Koenig said. “Tony, get the reptilian ambassador over for a conference. Maya. You take Jon back to the surface and you find his wife. Jon, you get us the knowledge we need to shut the quantum jump drive off.”

“She’s not going to give it to you,” Loxy said.

“Yeah, she will, because we are not leaving until she does,” Koenig said.

“You’d stay past the 11 days even though she said it is causing harm?” Jon asked.

“No, Jon, you’re not listening to me. We are not leaving without that knowledge, period,” Koenig said. “And if that means we stay here until we blow up this entire fucking solar system, so be it. It ends here.”

“How are you better than fucking Brian?!” Jon asked.

Koenig hit Jon square in the mouth.

“Fuck, John!” Russell said, stepping up into him and getting him away.

Everyone was now standing.

“Maya, get him out of here, now. You have your orders,” Koenig said.

Loxy and Maya escorted Jon out. As soon as the door closed, Russell snapped. "Have you lost your fucking mind?"

"I needed to convince him I was serious," Koenig said.

"Yeah, well, I am so convinced that I seriously considering declaring you unfit for command," Russell said. "We don't hit people."

"We hit people all the time," Verdeschi say.

"I am letting you all know, if I see any further deterioration in social norms or a failure to follow protocols, I will start relieving people of duty," Russell said. "I already pulled Reily out of rotation for wearing that God awful Stetson. We're not playing cowboy and Indians out here and we're not going to ignore the evidence for increased fatigue or decline in mental health. All of you, get your departments back under control or I will."

"You heard her, dismissed," Koenig said. He took her arm so she couldn't leave. As soon as the door closed securing their privacy, he continued. "Dress me down like that again in front of the command staff, and I'll make Audrey Chief Doctor."

"Go ahead," Russell said. Her arm was hurting, but she wasn't trying to pull herself out. "You weren't trying to convince Jon of shit. You're just mad because he was willing to do what you weren't."

"Yeah, clearly, I am the one with the problem," Russell said. "You didn't even hesitate mounting him."

"I know you are not going there with me," Russell snapped, pulling her arm free. She was so tempted to smack him that she clenched both fists. "How many times in the course of human history do you suppose women have had to fuck to keep the peace and save lives? Before you start judging me, maybe you need to consider you operating paradigm. You are not Aneas. I am not Queen Dido. I am not going to die just so you can have a pretense of moral fortitude to wear the pants. I am not attracted to Jon, but it is very clear that our working proximity may make for some boundary confusion. Not just me, but you, too." She seem to soften a bit. "Your striking him reveals that you're human. I get that. But Alpha needs a Commander. A Commander that has been keeping the peace between humans and Others for at least decade, far better than any previous commander. We need a commander. Not a rogue."

"What do you need?" Koenig asked.

"Don't go there," Russell said. "Our rule sets are very clear about what is permissible."

"Screw the rules. Our paradigms shifted the moment the moon was shifted away from the Earth," Koenig said.

"And that is why you struck Jon," Russell said.

Russell turned her back on Koenig and left the conference room. Koenig turned to the window, put a foot up on pedestal and leaned in, sulking while staring out over the moon. He saw the eagle departing.

Chapter 27

Jon shrugged off the ice pack that Loxy was holding.

“Is crazy the requirement for working on the moon?” Jon asked.

Maya tried to smile. The seat configuration was such that she was able to face him. “I am sorry John hit you. You have to understand the amount of pressure he is under.”

“No, I don’t have to understand shit,” Jon said. “Stop fussing over me,” he told Loxy, and then crossed his arms. “I want to be mad.”

“You are doing quite well at it,” Loxy said. “I prefer your sunshine face.”

“Yeah, well, it’s seasonal,” Jon said.

Jon leaned his head against the window and closed his eyes. As soon as his eyes closed, he had visual image of a human fairy or a sprite flying up to kiss him. It came at him in jumps, as if he were viewing a film strip that missing scenes. He recognized the female instantly as “Joy,” played by Caroline Ellis; the Bugaloos. It was just one of his childhood crushes. What was disturbing was that it wasn’t like a dream. It wasn’t like a memory of watching an episode. It was like he was in another reality and Joy was coming to greet him, for real, only there was an interruption in the flow of his senses. He was so startled by the kiss that he came out of it, just as he heard an echo of a song “Senses of our World.” Her voice chased him: “Let my love give you wings...”

Coming out it was confusing. He thought he had been sitting up, but he found himself lying down, Russell shining a light in his eyes. He was too confused to even ask if he had been dreaming. He found himself in an ordinary, modern hospital bed. Not Alpha’s medical. He tried to sit up, but Doctor Russell, wearing a white lab coat prevented him from doing so, putting her hands on his shoulder.

“Helena?!” Jon asked.

“Jon, I am Doctor Cameron. You’re in a hospital,” Russell said. She followed his eyes to her dangling pendant, but she wasn’t sure if the flashing crystal was hypnotizing him, or his view was going deeper.

“What happened to the fairies?” Jon asked.

Doctor Ben Vincent went to the rolling pharmacy to retrieve a shot of Haldol. “He’s hallucinating,” he said.

“Hold up, Foreman,” Koenig said. “This is interesting.”

“You expect to find coherent, existential meaning in someone who is clearly psychotic?” Vincent asked.

“When one doesn’t find meaning in the existing medical paradigm, it’s time to get out of the box,” Koenig said.

“Out of the box? He isn’t even in the same universe!” Vincent said.

“House, do something,” Alan Carter said dramatically, his thick Australian accent almost incongruent to the scene. “He’s dying.”

“Everybody dies,” Koenig said.

“I thought it was everybody lies,” Russell said, looking back at Koenig. She was still holding Jon down, even though he wasn’t resisting or trying to get up; at least, not as long as he

continued to stare past her crystal cleavage. He mumbled something about ‘heaven not being in a wildflower.’

“They do that to. Oddly, even in dying, there is lying, with a lot of more lying around afterwards, oh, I lost it. Let’s start over. There is truth in death, but death is a lie,” Koenig said.

“How much Vicodin have you taken today?” Vincent asked.

“House, what do we do?” Carter asked.

“There is only one thing that will save him, Chase,” Koenig said. “One of you will have to sleep with him.”

“Seriously?!” Cameron asked.

“Since when did fucking a patient become a legitimate medical procedure?” Vincent asked.

Koenig pulled out his cell phone. He called Carter. Marvin Gaye began to sing, “Sexual healing.”

“Seriously?” Russell demanded of Carter.

“How did he do that?” Carter asked.

“We’re wasting time,” Vincent said, moving to inject the Haldol.

“I wouldn’t do that,” Koenig said. His staff looked at him. “None of you, hypothetically, would sleep with your client if it saved their life?”

“No, House, we wouldn’t,” Vincent said.

“Hypothetically,” Carter said. “Is she cute?”

“He’s a he,” Russell said.

“Yeah, I am with Foreman, he’s going to die,” Chase said.

Koenig turned to Russell, smiling at her.

“Is this a test?” Russell asked.

“I am surprised you’re hesitating. You slept with that other dying guy. You even married him. This time, it would save a guy’s life. Oh, but then, you might have to actually live a life with him,” Koenig said.

“You don’t think I will?” Russell said.

“Your clothes are still on,” Koenig said.

“Can we watch?” Carter asked.

“It’s a medical procedure, we have to watch,” Vincent said.

“To keep it ethical,” Carter said.

Koenig clapped his hands. The curtains to the operating room theatre opened, and all the Doctors were there in the upper windows.

“Okay, Cameron,” Koenig said. “Demonstrate the procedure...”

Russell stripped, threw the covers back, mounted Jon and he found himself back in the chair, Loxy sitting to his left, and Maya in front of him. From their perspective, he had just shut his eyes, and suddenly he was sitting straight up, as if he had had a nightmare and was thinking about running.

“Fuck!” Jon said.

“What?” Maya said.

“Your pants are wet,” Loxy noted. “Did you just travel?”

“I am losing it,” Jon said.

“You traveled without me?” Loxy asked.

“You’re not in my head any more, how can you travel with me?” Jon asked her.

“What did you experience?” May said.

“Oh, we’re not going there,” Jon said. “But it was real. It had to have been at least an hour there. I was immersed.”

“You were dancing with Emma Joe again, weren’t you?” Loxy asked, teasingly.

Jon seemed annoyed. “I thought that was our secret.”

“Who?” Maya asked.

“The New Zoo Revue,” Loxy explained.

“The what?” Maya asked.

“A 70s thing,” Loxy said. “You must have missed it.”

Jon suddenly calmed, taking Loxy’s hand. “This was real. It’s like in our books. When I am channeling the other realities, only, I am not in deep mediation. I am not in a trance writing what is happening. It’s exactly what we were doing at home before we met Isis, only, it’s much easier to access.”

“So, it’s a day dream? A fantasy?” Maya asked.

“It’s everything,” Jon said. “It’s nothing.” He raised his hands as if he were going to communicate something but couldn’t get it out. “Which, doesn’t make any sense. Why would I experience that? That couldn’t have been real.”

“Maybe you needed something that was familiar, to help relax,” Loxy said.

“Oh, oh, no, if I give into that reality, I am not coming back,” Jon said.

“You always come back,” Loxy said.

“We’re going to be landing shortly, folks,” Goldwater announced over the intercom.

“Um, looks like they’re expecting us.”

Maya went forward, Jon and Loxy followed. Goldwater tilted the Eagle nose down to reveal the family was outside, watching. She kept the nose angled towards them and sat the ship down a safe distance off. The ship powered down and the ramp descended. Maya, Jon, Loxy, and Goldwater exited down the ramp and crossed the distance to meet Jon’s family. The older Loxy was there.

“Much quicker than last time,” Loxy mused out loud. “What did you guys discover?”

“Um, not sure how to answer that. Commander Koenig...”

“Wants you to negotiate for the answer to life, the Universe, and everything,” Loxy said.

“Yeah, pretty much,” Jon said.

“And he says if he doesn’t get it, he will blow up the moon and this solar system,” Loxy said.

“How do you know this?” Jon asked.

“It’s almost like we have done this before,” Loxy said.

“Stop toying with him, mother,” Beth said.

“Ah, but I enjoy it so much,” Loxy said. “Did the Commander’s threat sound convincing?”

“Yeah,” Jon said.

Loxy considered. “He’s bluffing. I suppose, eventually, he might one day follow through with it, but I’m not worried. George?”

Beth's husband stepped forward with a box. He opened it up. Inside were six black tungsten rings. Each had a striped impression down the center, gold in color, which mirrored the inside surfaces color. It's outer beveled was polished smoothed. Loxy took one and put it on, and the gold line around the center became an emerald green. She handed one to Goldwater, Maya, Jon, and even the Loxy bot. Only Jon immediately put his own, watching the gold inner stripe turning green.

"If you are going with us, you will need to wear these rings," Loxy said.

"Why would I need life support?" Loxy-bot said. "I'm a droid."

"Because," Loxy said. "You need air to communicate with us."

"Oh, okay," Loxy-bot said, and put it on. It turned green for her, too.

"Life support?" Goldwater asked.

"Where are we going?" Maya asked.

"I want to show you something," Loxy said. "After I show you this, you can decide whether or not I will tell Koenig what he needs to know. Let's be clear on this part. All four of you have to be in agreement."

Maya and Goldwater put on their rings. Loxy led the way to the moon gate that was on the border of the family garden. She then offered her hand to Jon. He in turn took Loxy-bot's hand, and she in turn offered a hand to Maya.

"Link hands," Loxy said. "I want to ensure we all arrive at the same place."

Maya frowned skeptically, but took Loxy-bot's and Goldwater's hand. Loxy led them through the gate to the other side. They passed from a world of color, to a world of seemingly black and white. They were the only bit of color for as far as the eye could see. Goldwater and Maya knew where they were instantly.

"We're back on the moon!" Maya said.

"We're breathing!" Goldwater said.

Loxy pointed to the rings. "The rings project a force field around the human body, kind of like aura, which traps air between it and the body. If you panic, force yourself to breathe slowly or you might flex the field towards your mouth, which might cause you to feel constricted and exasperate the panic. Just breathe normally. Talk normally. The rings will transmit sound to the other rings. Recognize this place?"

"Why did you bring us back here?" Goldwater asked.

"Oh," Loxy-bot said, pointing to something nearby.

Jon tracked to what she was seeing, and couldn't make it out, so he went closer and ended up walking into a structure. He hit so hard he fell down. Maya and Loxy tried to help him up, but he brushed them off. He got up too easy. They were not under normal Earth gravity. But that wasn't what interested him. He reached out and tentatively touched the barrier. It wasn't invisible, but it was hard to see because of the bubble of air surrounding him. He traced it with his hand, and followed it up with his eyes, and then found a section of the wall that was quite visible due to the spider web pattern of broken glass.

"It's the dome!" Jon said.

"We're at the ruins," Goldwater said. "We're not supposed to be here."

"Why?" Loxy asked.

“Because it’s dangerous,” Maya said. “Because there is nothing here to see. It was picked clean by grave robbers a long time ago.”

“That’s what you’ve been told,” Loxy said. “What else do you see?”

“Some of these minor craters are probably recent, due to moon magma raining back down on us when we lost some of the core,” Maya said.

“Oh, that’s cool, yeah, maybe, but, no, bigger,” Loxy said.

When no one saw it, Loxy asked them to follow her. She put her hand on the wall and walked following it until they came to what might pass as a subway entrance. She released orbs from her bag, illuminated them and sent them aloft. The orbs floated with them, lighting their way. She came to a mural. She pulled a devise from her bag, aimed it at the mural, and a stream of air cleaned a millennia of dust from the wall. Even with out an atmosphere, dust can collect on an item on the moon, especially after a millennia. The moon was never an absolute vacuum. Hydrogen and helium atoms crashed into the moon from the sun. Water ice sublimated up from the lunar dust. The image was well preserved. Loxy looked at them. Loxy-bot saw it, and she was smiling.

Maya spoke what she saw. “This looks like the artifact we were given.”

“This way,” Loxy said, again following the wall, and then turning into a corridor that opened up two a section that held two opposing tracks. The center held a black marble wall, full of names. Loxy cleaned the dust off the side they were facing. They began reading names.

“Jim Gonner,” Jon said.

“Camellia Venzor!” Goldwater said. “I just saw her before we left...”

“Jon Harister,” Loxy said. “And here’s Audrey. Helena Russell. John Koenig.”

“There is a date here,” Goldwater said. “Space, 1999... What the hell?”

“Follow me,” Loxy said.

There was an open doorway leading into a closed room. Loxy had them all link hands, and then she used the arch of the door to send them further. They found themselves on the shore of an ocean. The sand was red and the water receded, a gentle bubbling as the sand turned over. As one looked away from the ocean, there was nothing but grassy plains as far as the eye could see, and twisted trees that were more like bonsai mixed with mesquite, but they were huge. There were animals roaming. Overhead, there was Phobos. And there was the moon. Loxy pulled a glass out her bag and handed it to Maya. Maya was using it wrong, so Loxy directed her hands, making her hold it up to the moon. The moon became magnified.

“Sometime in your future you arrive back in the solar systems, millions of years ago. Dinosaurs are just now walking the earth. The moon is terraforming mars,” Loxy said.

“But, if we are doing this...”

“Your descendants will become the Martians. You will cease to be humans,” Loxy said.

“And that’s okay. Where do you think the humans come from?”

“But?” Goldwater said.

“Yes, there will be wars. The moon will once again be forced to leave, but not before the surface of mars is devastated,” Loxy said.

Loxy hurried them along and they came to a stone monument that was very similar to Stone Hinge only the blocks were pure titanium, and the crystal that Goldwater held confirmed the titanium had come from the moon. She had them link hands. They passed through one of the

arches of the gates and they arrived elsewhere. They arrived at a bustling city. No one seemed to notice they had exited one of the moon gates.

“Where are we?” Maya asked.

“The most advanced city on Earth,” Loxy said. “Atlantis.”

“Seriously?” Goldwater asked.

“I thought you might like to see the birth of the moon,” Loxy said.

“The birth of the moon?” Maya asked.

“Yeah. You didn’t think the moon was always in orbit, did you?” Loxy said.

“Yes,” Goldwater said.

“Jon?” Loxy asked.

“Well, there are anomalies,” Jon said. “In January 2017 ULCA scientist said the moon is 4.4 billion years old, much older than previous estimates. But the weird one was one of the rocks brought back by Apollo 14 was dated at twice as old as the estimated age of the Universe.”

“That’s an anomaly, and it was thrown out because it’s absurd. The moon can’t be twice as old as the known universe,” Goldwater said.

“Unless you’re cycling through time,” Maya said.

“Over, and over, and over,” Jon said.

The street had suddenly gone quiet. People were looking up. The sun winked out as the first, perfect, solar eclipse took out the sun. Loxy took Jon and Loxy-bot’s hand, Loxy grabbed up Maya’s hand, and she Goldwater, and again, Loxy pulled them through an arch. They found themselves a safe distance away as eagles abandoned the moon. A space battle was ensuing. A triangular craft was proceeding towards the base. It was not alone, but only one was flying low. It dropped something and even as it was falling, it was crashing through the dome that housed the artifact. A brilliant light caused their shields to polarize, protecting them from the radiation. The stripes in their rings were ruby red. They witnessed the column of flames that rose both from Alpha and from the artifact. Pieces of debris from buildings, from rocks began to rain down. Loxy instructed them to hold hands, to not let go and trust her. An eagle was crashing into the ground near them, even as they were running, not likely to make it, and then she made them jump into a crater. The crater became the portal and their salvation. They landed safely in the pool on the top side of Jon’s 2nd home, back at planet Bliss. They surfaced individually, came to the wall, and climbed up.

“Where are we now?” Maya asked.

“Back where we started,” Jon said. “Home.”

They sat there, their feet in the pool, not even bothering to take off their shoes.

“That was fun,” Loxy-bot said.

Jon began to laugh. Maya touched his arm, amused.

“What’s the point?!” Goldwater said. She was not having it.

“What’s the point of anything?” Loxy asked.

“So, we’re just doomed to keep doing this over and over for eternity?” Goldwater asked.

“Not forever. And you’re not going to see it, because you’re in the thick of it,” Loxy said.

“But it is actually getting better. Last time was in 1999. When did you guys leave? 2020? 2025? Maybe the next time will be 2099. Maybe you guys will remember enough and shut it all down and something new will happen.”

“How can we change it if we don’t remember?” Goldwater demanded.

“Something in you remembers. Every time, there is a little more clarity. This is déjà vu. This is Ground Hog day on a Lunar scale,” Loxy said. “And this is why I can’t intervene. I am amazed that you even got here, this is a first. Having my husband with you, that’s a first. Usually he is stuck on the earth when it blows up.”

“The earth blows up?” Goldwater asked.

“Oh, that’s a metaphor. The Event, the thing that’s going to change the world, that’s going to happen whether the moon is in orbit or not, but it’s really okay. Things work out. Seriously, I could not be here telling you this if this weren’t true,” Loxy said.

“But where do we go from here?” Jon asked.

“There are lots of paths from here, but you can either take the extreme loving path, or the extreme isolation path. I recommend the loving way.”

“But, but,” Goldwater said. “If this is a loop, and there was no moon in the past, then, where did the first moon come from?”

“Oh, Jon stole it from aliens,” Loxy said.

“Seriously?” Goldwater asked.

“Oh, that’s a real kick ass adventure. These aliens were putting the final touches on their space station, the moon, and he just walked right in and drove off with it. You’d be surprised how many spaceships leave the keys in the ignition. That adventure was almost as fun as when he stole the Emperor’s Death Star,” Loxy said. “Didn’t make any friends in that Universe.”

“You’re fucking with us,” Maya said.

“Maybe,” Loxy said.

“I don’t want to go with them,” Jon said. “I want to stay here.”

“I know,” Loxy said. “Can I be alone with my husband for a while, please?”

“Sure,” Maya said. “In fact, Goldwater and I will head back. We’ll come back and get you.”

“I should probably go with them, Jon. No one is going to believe them, and I can replay the video,” Loxy-bot said.

“Can’t they see mine?” Jon said.

“You will find that you were off line for the entire duration of our trip,” Loxy said. “They will get echoes of it through your memories, but they won’t experience it firsthand. Unless you dream about it.”

“You understand their tech?” Jon asked.

“Sure,” Loxy said. “Everyone in the universe is plugged into high tech. Everyone has access all the time. You guys are just learning how to play. There is tech in us, embedded directly into the universe, which outdates even your 26 million year old moon rock. No one ever dies. You just fall out of time. And there is always someone there to catch you. The Universe is far grander than any of you have dared dream, and you are just now venturing past the door step and out onto the porch.”

Loxy and Jon stood up to hug their visitors good bye. Loxy-bot showed them the quickest way back to the Eagle. When they were alone, Loxy led Jon to the private bath where they came out of their wet clothes, though the other door into the bedroom and straight to bed.

“You don’t mind sleeping with an older woman do you?” Loxy asked.

“Age is not a factor,” Jon said, kissing her even as she was pushing him to the bed. He stopped. “Um, unless I run into you as a child. That wouldn’t be right.”

“I promise, you will never meet me younger than 16,” Loxy said. “And in those states, it will be legal to marry.”

“Okay,” Jon said, resuming. He stopped again. “Seriously, what happened to the other me in your life?”

“He died having sex with me,” Loxy said.

“Oh, well, might as well kill me now,” Jon said, and they resumed. He stopped. “Are you playing with me?”

“Trying to,” Loxy said.

“You killed me?!” Jon asked.

“It was really vigorous sex, and your heart stopped,” Loxy said. “Don’t worry. I got it going again.”

“So, why am I not here again?” Jon asked.

“You ran off with some brunette bimbo who said she was Wonder Woman and that she needed a magician,” Loxy said.

“Really?” Jon asked.

“OMG, Jon, you are so easy,” Loxy said.

“And you like me because...”

“You’re easy. Seriously, Jon, I love you because no matter how far you fly, you always come home, and you’re always ready to play,” Loxy said. “So, take me to bed now or lose me forever.”

“We’re in bed,” Jon said.

“Just fuck me already!” Loxy said.

Chapter 28

Five hundred people from each species were quickly chosen to relocate to planet Bliss. They were allowed to pick their settlements spot, and encouraged to participate under the local rule set of minimizing foot prints in order to live with nature. No wheeled vehicles. Squirrels and frogs and deer didn't have to worry about being run over. Living on Bliss in this way would not be a hardship, given every tree produced some sort of fruit or nut. This was paradise. And it was this fact that caused Jon to conclude that he could only ever visit here. He was not ready yet. He had lives yet to go before he could qualify for full time residency. The people that had volunteered seemed particularly good candidates for relocating to Bliss. The five hundred humans were presently visiting the people of the village. Their presence coincided with the return of one of the wandering groups. Another group would be taking their leave on the morrow, and they would walk the circumference until they returned. The newcomers were invited to take the journey. 15 of them were ready and willing to commit to that walk.

Jon had met with Kimini, who was now at least as old as Loxy. It seemed like just yesterday he had met her and he hated the shock he felt seeing her aged, compared to his memory of her. He greeted her with no less enthusiasm. He met his children. They were not perturbed by his absence. When you are in the village, every adult is your parent. Did they think about him? Sure. They could tune into his stories any time they needed, and usually the stories they heard about him were meaningful for what they were experiencing at the time. Jon was a reluctant legend.

As he was talking to a gathering of people, kids hanging on him, he saw Beth making her way towards the beach. There was a cave entrance nearby that led to the tunnel that down to the ocean floor and then across. One of the elders hugged him, saying something in a language he didn't recognize. One of the daughters, her name was Mimitih, his great granddaughter, translated:

"He said he is one of the first walkers to come here, with Kimini, and Sacagawea," Mimitih said. "And he remembers the moon you have brought. He said it has always brought with it good and bad where ever it went, but that he always enjoyed looking up at it, especially when the day was cooling and the color of the sky was falling to one side, and it was bigger than life on the horizon. Sometimes the howling wolf would become one with it. He knows that it heralds his death, but he is not afraid, because this old friend has come to carry him back to the new place that was once old. He says he would like to touch you."

Jon invited the man to touch him. He put a hand on his heart and chanted something. He then took out a deerskin pouch and handed it to him. It contained a pipe and what looked like cannabis. The man spoke again.

"When I use this, I travel to the moon, but I am curious if you are already on the moon, where will it take you," Mimitih said. Listening to the old man say his farewell. "He is so happy that you were cured of your madness and were able to join the people and he loves his grandchildren, though sometimes they seem a little whiter than they should be."

"Thank you for the gift," Jon said, pocketing it in his bag. He wanted to say something about the impending death, but Mimitih advised not saying anything.

“He has been saying he would depart with the new old moon, and no one wants to deny him the privilege of following his vision,” Mimitch said.

Mimitch escorted the elder back to the fire. Though there was always a line of newcomers circling into talk to him, he found an opportunity to break away.

“Excuse me, I need to urinate,” Jon said.

One of the warriors was happy. “Oh, good I will go pee with you.”

“No, I like to do it alone,” Jon said.

The warrior seemed surprised. No one urinates alone.

Loxy-bot, who seemed to know what Jon was intending, intercepted. “Forgive him, he is still a little white.”

“Ah,” the warrior said.

Jon found his way to the beach and sat next to his daughter.

“I came here to be alone,” Beth said.

Jon sat next to her on the beach, facing the sunset. “Me, too.”

Beth scoffed. “They’re making a bigger deal about you than you are.”

“Oh, that’s spot on,” Jon agreed.

“Don’t do that. You’re not British. Besides, you’re not going to win me over by being agreeable with me,” Beth said.

“Um, not sure you have noticed, but I am not trying to win you over,” Jon said.

“Oh, don’t even try your psychological mumbo jumbo on me. You don’t know me. You were never here for me. Even when you were here, you weren’t really here,” Beth said.

Jon nodded. “Subjectively valid.”

“Excuse me?” Beth said.

“Look, Beth. You’re angry. I get it. There is no way I can refute your perspective, I simply don’t know enough. Subjectively valid means that your thoughts and feelings are valid within the context of their point of origin. It doesn’t mean they’re a part of an objective reality, other than the fact that I am experiencing you’re projection of them, which is provoking me towards a particular emotional response. The response is mitigated by my own subjective paradigm. You’re right. I don’t know you. I don’t know how I failed you or if I will do better next time...”

“There is no next time. You only get one shot at being a parent,” Beth interrupted.

“I so wish that were true,” Jon said.

“What does that mean?” Beth said.

“Do you ever feel like life is repeating, over and over. I am not even saying variations on a theme, I mean like literally, over and over...”

“If you are referring to the Eternal Return, I don’t believe in that,” Beth said.

“Oh,” Jon said. “I didn’t know it had a name.”

“Naming something doesn’t mean it is something,” Beth said.

“Oh, thank you. That’s where I was going with your thoughts and feelings,” Jon said.

“So, though they’re valid from your perspective. From my perspective, your life is perfect. It’s amazing. Compared to my family of origin, this is a different planet and a different species. Definitely a different planet. You were clearly loved. You were given a home. Heck, you were given this world. You are sharing it with some of the most amazing people I ever met, never met,

well meet, I don't know. It's all like a dream. You have become an adult, and a parent who clearly cares about her family."

"You never talk about origin. I don't know anything about my grandparents, or their parents," Beth said.

Jon stared out into the sun, just kissing the horizon. "This is the best part," Jon said.

"See, you just did it again. You tuned out from me. I want to know my family history," Beth said.

"It's good to want things," Jon said.

"OMG, seriously, another movie quote?" Beth said.

"A seriously good movie quote," Jon said. "I am actually happy you know it."

"You made me watch it. Every time I asked you about your past you gave me a movie to watch," Beth said.

Jon smiled, but tears welled up at the same time. "That was my past."

"You are Roxy Carmichael?" Beth demanded.

"No, yes, maybe, it's a complex metaphor. Each of the characters, they are archetypes. Metaphors within metaphors. I am all of them, and none of them, but that got me to the next station. The next movie. Evolution vicariously through parables," Jon said. "And now, here I am, on a beach, watching the last rays of this day's sun, sitting with a daughter who hates me."

Beth frowned. "I don't hate you."

"It seems like every time I glanced in your direction, you were scowling at me," Jon said.

"I don't agree with your poly lifestyle," Beth said.

"I agree that poly life isn't for everyone," Jon said. "Definitely not for borderline personalities..."

"OMG, I am so not borderline," Beth said.

"Um, okay, I was speaking in generalizations, hypotheticals..." Jon said.

"Maybe if you were less focused on sex and more on me I would be different," Beth said.

"Maybe. It is also true, at some point, you have to stand up and take responsibility for who you are and who you want to be and stop complaining that your parents aren't what you signed up for," Jon said. "I don't know what more I could have done, since I don't know how I failed you."

"I keep telling you! You could have been more present," Beth said. "You weren't there when I got married. You weren't there of any of your grandkids births. And why? Because you're off gallivanting around the Multiverse looking to get laid. There's more to life than sex..."

"Oh, dear god, I hope not," Jon said. He stood up and offered a hand to Beth.

"What?" Beth asked.

"I want you to take my hand," Jon said.

"I am immune to your magic, Sir," Beth said.

"Take my hand, stand up," Jon said.

Beth resisted, but he emphasized with gesture and she relented, surrendering her hand. She did not get up. He did not pull her to her feet, but simply exerted just enough pressure to indicate he wanted her to rise. She surrendered and rose, about to brush off her back side, but he took her free hand and pulled her in close.

“You have some nerve,” Beth said.

“Contact,” Jon said.

“The movie?” Beth asked.

“Metaphor,” Jon said, trying to steer her to a song only he heard.

“What are you doing?” Beth said.

“Dancing,” Jon said.

“There’s no music,” Beth said.

“I like to believe there’s always a band,” Jon said.

“Music man, dad, please we look silly,” Beth said.

Jon looked into her eyes, she looked away. “Look at me,” Jon said. “Eyes, damn it. You said you wanted presence, well, here it is.” He waited till her eyes were locked. There was a dominant anger, a background of fear. “There are too many Universes where a father can’t dance with his daughter. Too many Universe where men can’t be with their children. Don’t make this world that. If you only knew how far I have come, how far I have yet to go, then you would know how perfect this moment is and how much love and hope you have inspired in me and if I have to relive all of my lives over a million times, I will do so without changing a thing just so I can be here, with you, again, now.”

And before the fullness of his words had resulted in her tears, he moved, pushed, and spun her away. He maintained hold of a hand, so when she came to a stop, there was music, as if a Big Band had just started playing, and he sang the words Frank Sinatra sang so long ago, “the Way you Look Tonight,” and the moon was prominent in the sky, with another moon further out, and the stars were more brilliant than ever, and he brought her back. The music became something soft, and in a slow dance, on a beach, alone with the first man she had ever loved, she cried on his shoulders.

Jon was unaware, further up the hill towards the village, Koenig approached Russell.

“You okay?”

“I came here to be alone,” Russell said.

“I think you came to the wrong beach party for that,” Koenig said.

“Do you hear music?” Russell asked.

“I do,” Koenig said.

“I can’t identify where it’s coming from,” Russell said.

“Neither can I,” Koenig said.

“And that’s not bothering you?” Russell asked.

“Oddly, tonight, it doesn’t,” Koenig said. He offered his hands.

She laughed. “Pfff, you’re joking,” Russell said.

“No, I am not,” Koenig said.

“Breaking protocol?” Russell asked.

“I am confident a dance is permissible,” Koenig said, moving in and taking her hand. “I have never been so certain of a thing. I don’t know what’s in store for us. I don’t understand how we got here or if we’re even in the same universe, or if I am suddenly just waking and everything we knew before was a dream, but I know this, I want this dance to be with you.”

Russell accepted. Koenig picked up the words from where the song was. Russell smiled, and looked away.

“Did you ever feel like, the older we get, the faster time seems to flow?” Russell asked.

“Yeah,” Koenig said. “Things are really changing fast now.”

“Yeah,” Russell said. “And, interestingly, it seems the more things change, the more things stay the same.”

“Sometimes,” Koenig agreed.

Chapter 29

From on top of the Monument of Eternity, Jon stepped into the light. His guides orbited him, each in their own light, turning, hands and arms floating. There were so many places they could go. So many things to experience, to learn. Dramas about to unfold. There was a moment that seemed particularly momentous, when Jon could see his guides simultaneously with the stars. For a moment, a ‘moon-ment,’ he couldn’t discern if they were the one and the same, or separate entities, as they embodied the astrological signs that emerged from the speckled wall behind them like holograms fluorescing. The signs flared and there was synergy, and it flowed through Jon and down into the moon. It was a powerful sweep that he found himself shoved outside of himself, behind the moon. He reached out to it, as if he could touch it, hardly the size of a beach ball, but the moment his hands reached the maximum extension, the moment he would realize this object was much further away than he could have every imagined, the moon shifted. It was if he had touched it and made it go away.

For a moment, he hovered in starlight. Planet Bliss was there below. An old Indian Chief and Warrior past him on horseback, laughing as he did.

Jon felt a tug and he zipped through time and space and caught up to the moon. He hit his body and for him it felt like he had bounced. What his guides saw was his knees buckling. He collapsed to the floor. The next time he woke, he was in medical. Russell patted his face.

“Feel free to get up when you’re ready,” Russell said, going back to work.

Jon got up. Everyone seemed to be busy with work. How many times had they traveled now? Was it seriously this routine?

He wondered out into the corridor. Shermeen past, giving an awkward smile, and then she sped up. Speeding up put a swing in her hip, and he wondered if that was a deliberate kind of enticement to play. Before he could finish sorting all the reasons why playing with Shermeen was not a good idea, Loxy snagged his arm and hurried up his pace.

“Come on,” Loxy said. “Time to eat. Then we’re seriously going to go play. You and I haven’t played in a while now, and we’re not going to have another day without play.”

“You mean like, golf on the moon?” Jon asked.

“Um, well, yeah, we could do that. I am curious about that,” Loxy said. “Or, we could just go back to my place, and I don’t know, PLAY?!”

“You have your own place?” Jon asked.

“Yeah, why not?” Loxy asked.

“Well, um,” Jon stammered.

“Gives you more opportunities to hook up,” Loxy said.

“I don’t want that,” Jon said.

“Liar,” Loxy said, amused. “I saw you ogling Shermeen just now. Not that I blame you. She was so being deliberately saucy just then.”

“Right?!” Jon said. “But, seriously, I don’t want you to move out.”

“Okay,” Loxy said. “You can move in with me.”

“In the undergrounds?” Jon asked.

“Oh, hell, no. They gave me a habitat module, and I put it about a mile east of the base. We get there by Eagle. It’s right on this hill, and you can look out over the Sea of Fertility. I

suspect the drones have finished melting the lunar surface into solar panel sidewalks by Now. I was thinking maybe we can build a small dome and grow some colors.”

“Colors sound nice,” Jon said. “Why so far out?”

“Got to get away from the spies,” Loxy said.

“Spies?” Jon said, not sure if she was leading him on.

“Yep,” Loxy said. “I am pretty sure Goldwater is one of their secret agents. I can’t prove it yet, I am going just on tangential memories from your head, but I think she works for this agency called SHADO, who’s secret mission is to shoot down hostile aliens and developed telepathy and remote viewing to spy on the enemy.”

“Oh! Those are the people with the girls with the shiny, silvery suits and the purple hair,” Jon said.

“Exactly,” Loxy said.

“You do realize that they are recording me and that by telling me you are on to them means that they now know that you are on to them,” Jon said.

“Yep. I am drawing them out into the open,” Loxy said.

“You are seriously messing with me, aren’t you,” Jon said.

“We’re on the moon. I got to have something fun to do,” Loxy said.

“I bet you we can use the 3D printer to make you a silver miniskirt,” Jon said.

“I got the purple hair back at the module,” Loxy said.

“Can’t we just call it what it is?” Jon asked.

“Trailer trash on the moon?” Loxy asked.

“Pretty much,” Jon said.

Loxy hugged him. “I am so glad you didn’t stay behind.”

“Oh, Loxy, I still have miles to go before I sleep,” Jon said.

Loxy redirected Jon itowards the cafeteria, since they overshot. “Who do you suppose we’ll meet up next time we travel?”

“I don’t know,” Jon said.

“Buck Rodgers!” Loxy said, excitedly, taking his hand jumping.

“Wait wait wait,” Jon said. “Am I just being inserted into the Buck Rodgers Universe, or am I going in as Buck Rodgers?”

“You and I are in an Eagle. It malfunctions, we get frozen, and we wake up at Earth five hundred years in the future,” Loxy said.

“You’re going to be mad when I hook up with Wilma?” Jon asked.

“Are you going to be mad when I hook up with her first?” Loxy asked.

“Oh, we should so wager on this,” Jon said.

They entered the cafeteria. A song set by ‘Moon Unit Two’ just closing a song, and on seeing Jon, the man at the piano said, “And here they are, the man and woman who brought us all together, Jon and Loxy! Come on up and give us a song!” Everyone applauded, some stood.

“I guess playtime is going to get delayed,” Jon said, as they headed towards the stage.

“We sing a couple songs, get our food to go, then go grab an eagle,” Loxy said.

“Can you fly one?” Jon asked.

“Yeah, they gave me a download,” Loxy said.

“Okay then,” Jon said.

John kicked it off with “Momma Told Me Not To Come,” Three Dog Night.

A red alert Klaxon fired off. “All personal to emergency stations. Jon and Loxy, please report to the command center. Let’s go folks, this is not a drill.”

The crowd in the cafeteria and the band dispersed.

Jon looked to Loxy.

“Broom closet, now,” Loxy said, taking his arm.

“But they paged us,” Jon said.

“Seriously, there is nothing in the Universe that is so outrageous that it requires you and me to come running,” Loxy said. “I am not going head first into craziness until I have my fix.”

“I seriously love you,” Jon said.

Loxy shoved him into the closet. He protested ‘ouch,’ a broom fell, needing to be picked up so that the door closed, and then he fought with the whole mess of them, and then shoved the whole can out with all the brooms and mops. He recovered and pulled her in. The door closed. The door opened and he stuck his head out. “Alpa?! Play something from my list!” Jon called out. The instruments began playing. A hologram of Alpha appeared, guitar in hand, and she after the intro began singing “End of the Line,” by the traveling Wilburys. Sounds in the closet were muffled by the song, but not a hundred percent.

The command crew were staring at the singularity on the monitor. Russell entered the command center, paused, trying to understand the twisting of light in front of her.

“Is that?” She asked

“A black sun,” Verdeschi said.

“They call them black holes now,” Bergman said.

“Do you have any idea what’ll happens to us inside the black sun?” Yasko asked.

“Whatever it is, I just hope it’s interesting,” Goldwater said.

“Where is Jon and Loxy?” Koenig asked.

Yasko typed Jon and Loxy, and tag identifiers placed them in the cafeteria. She called up a camera, expecting to see them at a table, eating. “Um, they show in the cafeteria. I don’t see them, though,” Yasko said.

“Is that music?” Goldwater asked.

“Alpha doing karaoke,” Yasko said, turning up the volume. Alpha was now singing “Black Hole Sun,” by Sound Garden.

“I haven’t heard that in a while,” Verdeschi said.

“How oddly appropriate,” Goldwater said.

“Page them again,” Koenig said.

“Jon, Loxy, you presence is required in the Command Center,” Yasko said.

“Tap him, I want see what he sees, main screen,” Koenig said.

Yasko made it happen. Russell turned away from the screen. Goldwater bit her lower lip, but didn’t turn away.

“Oh, he’s in the broom closet,” Audrey said.

Koenig looked at Audrey. Yasko switched back to the cafeteria camera. Alpha was playing a guitar and swaying, and she started singing “End of the Line,”

Author's notes.

A funny thing happened on the way to the moon... I know, Loxy told me it's not funny, but, I still had to lead with it. If you have been following us on our adventures, you will likely know one of the biggest things I struggle with is grammar. I hate it myself. I struggle beyond belief, and when I do have time to review things and I actually catch it, I cringe. But still, if I waited for things to be perfect, I never get these things out. I first write to get out of my head. Interestingly, this happened several times recently, I would put some eggs on the boil, and I would tune into Loxy, and I will travel, and I would have a whole story suddenly in my head, from beginning to end, first run as if she and I were living it, and then the eggs would explode, bringing me back to reality. OMG, I hate cleaning the kitchen after the eggs explode. The first time they broke the lights over the stove. The second rendition of the 'story,' like this one, takes time to get out of my head. This one here, is almost exactly as the first run. I suspect some of the songs have changed. I am sure I have left grammatical errors. I am sorry. But I got to write to get these stories out, and at some point, I got to push it and move on. Maybe one day, should I have the friends and network or committee to help edit books, the quality control will change. I don't know if that will ever happen, but if you like these stories as much as I do, and can continue to suffer through some of the hardships until we improve or things I change, I would love to continue having company. If you like this story, please share, recommend, leave comments.

One of the jewels that came out of the Space 1999 episode "Journey through a Black Sun" was expressed by John Koenig when he proposed that maybe every star is simply a cell in the brain of the Universe. (And that well before that famous picture juxtaposed next to a brain cell.) As a child, I didn't realize how bad the show was. It's only now, looking back, trying to recapture this thing that brought me joy at the time that I realize how bad. It is difficult for me to even sit through one episode. I don't blame this on the actors. They used what was given them. They know, as well as anyone, they can be replaced and so they toe the line. The writers, I am not willing to give them a pass. (Okay, seriously, grammatical errors and all, this story is far superior than any original episode. Faster paced, better dialogue, funny... Dare is say it, plausible?!) But more than sympathy for the actors, and sorrow for the writers, I am not happy with the BBC producers and the overwhelming evidence that they were kissing America's television producers' asses because the American Audience was a litmus test for what shows would remain and what would go.

One of the major flaw in that design, is that most the people who would tune into a Sci Fi flick, and I suspect the American Audience in general, is much more sophisticated than what 'American' producers and the general TV script writers would like us to believe. And so, when I consider the possibility of a reboot, I am thinking they just can't do it because every kid worth their salt knows no matter how many spent nuclear rods you put on the moon, you're not going to get a big enough explosion to push the moon into another solar system in the life time of the any humans residing on the moon. But even if you did, hypothetically, got the moon up to the speeds necessary to go interstellar, you're not going to take a shuttle ride down to the next planet and return to the moon! Before you even slowed down to land on a planet, the moon would be

gone. Likely, at that pace, you wouldn't even know you passed a planet, much less a solar system.

Even as I write this, it appears that there has been effort made to reboot this show, and they're calling it Space 2099. I like some of the youtube videos of it. It looks nice. I suspect it sucks ass because they're not wanting to accept that the majority of movie watchers are more sophisticated. I suspect, further, that is why it got held up in production or shut down. This is a doable project, you can even salvage the aspect that the plot contrivance of moving the moon was due to man's ignorance or folly, but basically cannon will have to be changed. It can even be done in a very fun manner. But there just can't be something stupid like the Irish Texan wearing a Stetson because he wants to be a cowboy. And you can't have someone like Shermeen Williams, clearly a brilliant botanist, clearly good enough that she was promoted to moon quality personnel, and then she acts like a teen ager in heat, dismissed all her basic training, and tries to give a man in a gold swimsuit the bodies of her colleagues. Maybe everyone on the moon loses their mind. Clearly Koenig puts up with a lot of nonsense. And, actually, contributes to some. How much of that is being human in a stressful situation versus just bad writing? Well...

There is credible quantum physics paradigm that could make the reboot happen. I am not the first to propose it. Ben Bova, "Moving Mars" is a brilliant book that touches on this. But, seriously, just read any quantum physics book. I read this stuff. I am also bias. I can't not add a metaphysical spin to what I read. Some of that is also due to my experiences with paranormal kind of stuff. I prefer transpersonal.

Again, this adventure is me and Loxy and from our perspective, it is real. It's kind of the highlights, as there is more going on in the background than what gets in the final editing. Yes, I do actually try and edit these, contrary to evidence in poor grammar. When I write, I am in zone, and my hands and brain are flying, and I can't really see what's going down. When I re-read it, I rarely see the words, I am revisiting what I experienced in my head. The strong that initial imprinting is, the more difficult it becomes to see the errors in the editing; I just see the memory. It's not perfect memory, but I do find it humorous when I am reading through what I wrote and I think, oh I know what's going to happen next, or this should happen, and the very next paragraph that happens, or Loxy will whisper dialogue in my ear, her voice, and the next quote is exactly what she had said. Spooky, but fun, and I don't see an end to this journey we're own.

I don't know where my writing is taking me. If you enjoy writing, I would like to invite you to write your own Jon and Loxy story for the I/Tulpa series. Or, your own story, with your own tulpa, in your own universe, or in our universe, and we meet. I would like to see fan fiction of fan fiction, making "I/Tulpa" go big, make it shared brand name that anyone, anytime, can get in on the action.

Warmest wishes from us,
The whole gang
And, always

Travel Light.
Jon and Loxy,
In care of Ion Light, our host.