

Space: 2299



01: Breakaway

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With political dissent in the solar system becoming more widespread mankind stands on the brink of war with the expectation that colonies will start to declare their independence from Earth. The preparations for this by both sides are centred on the moon, where the Earth is reinforcing its bases. As well as the open preparations being made the Earth also has a covert plan to create an arsenal of weapons that will guarantee victory over the rebellious colonies, however the existence of this plan has been uncovered by Martian insurgents and their plan to expose it will have dramatic consequences...

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I.

Monday 11th September 2299. Two days before leaving Earth orbit.

Colonel John Koenig entered the main mission command centre of Moonbase Alpha through one of the doorways on the upper floor, enabling him to pause and easily look around the room from the landing that ran most of the way around it. As befitted the largest human settlement on the moon main mission was a hive of activity with both officers and enlisted personnel in Global Defence Force uniforms either sat at their posts or stood discussing their duties. All of the control consoles in main mission were aligned so that they faced towards one particular wall that was dominated by a massive central display screen surrounded by several smaller ones that were still large enough to be seen from anywhere in the room. At the far end of room from these screens was Koenig's own desk, located at the top of a flight of steps in a more open area of main mission that could be separated from the rest so that not only could he directly observe his staff but meetings could be held in private if necessary.

"Anything to report?" Koenig asked out loud as he made his way towards the nearby flight of stairs that would take him down into the primary section of main mission.

"The general's Eagle is expected in half an hour colonel." Captain Sandra Benes, Alpha's chief communications officer responded.

"Intelligence is reporting a Martian registered transport holding at five million kilometres colonel. It's not on a registered flight path and it's not made any attempt at communication. Do you want it intercepting?" Lieutenant Tanya Alexander, Alpha's chief traffic controller and defence co-ordinator added.

"We're not at war yet lieutenant." Koenig replied as he walked over where the two women sat close to one another, "Best get onto Epsilon though," he continued, referring to the main military facility on the moon where most of its defences were concentrated. Commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Tony Verdeschi, this included all of the Hawk interceptors stationed on the moon's surface, "have Colonel Verdeschi send up a couple of Hawks to escort General Simmons' Eagle here." then he turned to another of the duty stations where a shaven headed man sat, "And what about us Kano?" he asked.

"Apart from a fault in the lift for launch pad four everything's functioning properly colonel. Major Carter's down in the hangar giving the maintenance staff grief for it." Captain David Kano responded and Koenig smiled.

"And that's why I've got the best job on the moon." he said, "I've got the best staff. Even if I hear some of you were up to no good last night." and he looked back at Benes and Alexander, "Helena gave me a key to look after."

"Ah, yes." Alexander said nervously, "If you could-"

"Lieutenant, Helena already filled me in on your little practical joke and the less I know about it from now on the better. All I ask is that it doesn't interfere with Baker's work." Koenig interrupted and then one of the communication staff in main mission spoke up.

"Colonel I've got General Simmons calling from his Eagle." he said and Koenig nodded.

"I'll take it in my office." he replied.

Walking up the stairs to his office, Koenig slid his comlock from his pocket and swiped his hand across the touch sensitive face. Then as he stepped across the threshold of his office he tapped a finger on the device and the wall closed up behind him before he sat down at his desk and activated the computer terminal.

"I've got it." he said over the intercom and an image of a white haired man in the uniform of a GDF general appeared on the monitor in front of him.

"John." General Simmons said and Koenig smiled at him.

"Gerry." he said, "Calling to see if everything's ready for your big speech?"

Simmons smiled back at Koenig and nodded.

"A lot of questions are being asked about what we're doing at Mu on Earth. The Department of Planetary Defence wants me to put the worst of the stories to bed. I'm not free to talk about that now though. My little visit has another purpose and I wanted to give you some advance warning." he said and Koenig frowned.

"I've got a feeling I'm not going to like this but do go on." he said.

"Certain theories are starting to float around the academic world about the aliens who attacked Earth." Simmons said.

"Don't tell me someone thinks they're back?" Koenig said, knowing that in the more than one hundred years since the assault on Earth by an unknown extra-terrestrial species nothing more had been heard of them and now the aliens were little more than the subject of historical drama, speculative fiction or wild goose chases spent looking for none existent UFOs.

"No, we're as alone in the solar system as ever but it looks like there could be some new technology that we missed first time around when we reverse engineered their ships. I'm bringing along a scientist whose been

pushing this theory and I'm sorry to say that I'm palming him off on you while I'm busy at Mu."
"So I get the science nerd and you get Gorski?" Koenig said, "Sounds like I'm getting the better end of the deal. What do I have to do?"

"Just give him some space to work and let him have what resources he needs." Simmons said.

"A blank cheque?" Koenig commented.

"Not quite. You'll have discretion over what you supply him with of course but I should tell you that a lot of powerful people back on Earth are paying attention to this man. You know the sort, politicians, industrialists, the general staff."

"The unholy trinity." Koenig said.

"Precisely. Look John, you don't need to hang on this guy's every word. Don't you have that captain on your staff who's got experience with this sort of thing?" Simmons asked and Koenig nodded.

"Alyson Keynes. She interned with one of the companies handling the reverse engineering. She also knows our supply inventory like the back of her hand."

"Good. Then she should be able to sort out his demands before bringing the reasonable ones to you and explaining the unreasonable ones to him." Simmons said, "Now unless there's anything you want to add I'll be seeing you in about twenty minutes."

Koenig was about to end the conversation when a thought occurred to him and he took a small silver key on a chain from his pocket and held it up.

"There is one thing you could help me with." he said.

Emerging from his office Koenig paused when he saw his second in command, Major Paul Morrow entering main mission.

"Major do you know where Keynes is?" he asked.

"Yes colonel, I just saw her heading for Eagle Park to make sure that everything is set up for the general's press conference." Morrow replied.

"Good, I'm on my way to meet the general now and I need her to be there as well. Benes, contact Colonels Verdeschi and Gorski and tell them to get over here. Alexander clear the general for pad one and have a suitable honour guard ready. Major Morrow you've got command until I get back."

Eagle Park was the most historic location on the moon. Centuries earlier at the dawn of human space flight a crude vessel carrying two astronauts had set down here to become the first humans to walk on a planetary body other than Earth and Eagle Park got its name from their space craft. Now the artefacts they had left behind, including part of their landing module could be viewed from a pressurised environment through armoured glass. In addition to this, to honour the brave men who had risked their lives to expand human knowledge a row of statues representing all of the astronauts of what had been called the Apollo Program was stood beside the remains of the module.

The section of Alpha that comprised Eagle Park was a large open space that allowed as many people as possible to view the landing site and the memorial statues at once. The section could also be used to host public gatherings and now a podium had been set up in front of rows of chairs for General Simmons to be able to address members of the press gathered from around the solar system.

Captain Alyson Keynes, adjutant to Colonel Koenig was double checking these chairs, ensuring that the name labels on each were correct before the journalists arrived when she heard the sound of someone rushing into the room and she looked over her shoulder to see who it was.

"Good morning Spacewoman Baker." she said with a smile, "How are you feeling after last night's celebration?"

"I woke up in my quarters with a pounding headache." Baker answered.

"Well you were somewhat the worse for drink so we thought we'd better carry you back to your quarters. Can't have the bride to be getting hurt so close to her wedding now can we?"

"You also stripped me and locked this thing to me." Baker said, pointing to her own waist although there was nothing out of the ordinary visible under her service uniform.

"Oh that." Keynes said, still smiling.

"Come on captain, where's the key? It's really uncomfortable."

"Francis I honestly don't know. That thing as you call it belongs to Tanya and no, I don't know why she owns it. It's just another thing about her private life I don't ask about. Have you tried asking her?" Keynes suggested before turning around and walking over to the podium to make sure that everything there was as it should be.

"Lieutenant Alexander's already started her shift in main mission. Same with Captain Benes and Doctor Russell is in the medical section. I can't go anywhere as crowded as that and ask for the key. I don't want people knowing what you did to me."

"Then you'll just have to be patient spacewoman." Keynes replied as she moved from the podium to the row of chairs behind it that would be occupied by the senior GDF officers on the moon while General Simmons

gave his press conference and Baker darted around her to stand with her back against the window overlooking the memorial statues.

"Okay I hate to do this but if you don't get me the key then I'm going to Colonel Koenig." she said, staring at Keynes.

"You're going to tell on us? You do remember that the colonel doesn't care about practical jokes that don't get in the way of base operations don't you?"

"Oh I'm not going to tell him what you all did to me I'm just going to tell him about you. I'm tell him that you've got a massive crush on him and you think he's dreamy and you have a photograph of him in his swimming trunks that you-" Baker said rapidly and Keynes' eyes widened before she pushed Baker up against the armoured glass and clamped a hand over her mouth to prevent her from continuing.

"You can't do that." she exclaimed, "Doctor Russell has already threatened to stitch parts of me shut if try anything and besides, that's blackmail and blackmailing an officer-" then she released her grip on Baker and looked out through the glass, "Oh no. Oh no, no, no."

"What?" Baker asked and she turned around to look outside as well, "What's wrong?"

"What's wrong?" Keynes said, stepping to the side so that Baker was not in her line of sight, "The Apollo Eleven statues are supposed to go Neil Armstrong, Buzz Aldrin, Michael Collins. It should not go Neil Armstrong, Buzz Aldrin, garden gnome, Michael Collins."

"General Simmons will be looking the other way." Baker pointed out, "Maybe he won't notice."

"He won't notice? There'll be dozens of journalists with cameras sat in front of him. Sooner or later someone in the solar system is going to notice a garden gnome with its trousers around its ankles in the background and then everyone will know about it. I mean where do you even get a garden gnome on the moon?" Keynes said.

"Something wrong?" Koenig's voice called out from behind the two women and both spun around to face him, standing so that they blocked his view of the gnome.

"We were just making sure that the seating was in order colonel." Keynes replied.

"And enjoying the view it seems." Koenig said, "I have to say that I'm somewhat envious of what those men out there achieved." and he leant sideways slightly to look around Keynes and Baker. In response to which they both leant in the same direction to prevent him from seeing the gnome, "Anyway," Koenig said as he straightened up, "General Simmons' Eagle will be here soon and there's an extra passenger I want you to look after."

"Of course colonel. Do you know who it is?" Keynes said.

"Some scientist with an idea about some aspect of alien technology and since you interned for a year studying yourself I thought you'd be the perfect candidate. Now come on, I don't want to keep the general waiting. Baker can finish up here." Koenig told her and he waved her towards him before turning around.

"You can rely on me captain." Baker said to Keynes, "Remember what we spoke about." and then she blew a kiss in the direction of Koenig and smiled, prompting a snarl from Keynes.

"How's your sister by the way?" Koenig asked as they walked towards the landing pad.

"Better thank you. She's out of the hospital now." Keynes replied.

"Still no word on whether the police have any leads on the bombers though?" Koenig said.

"Frankly colonel I don't think they're trying. Red Mars has friends high up in the Martian government, we both know that. Short of GDF troops being sent in I don't think that they'll ever be caught." Keynes responded.

"And that," Koenig commented, "would start the war Red Mars wants."

Lieutenant Colonels Verdeschi and Gorski were already waiting in the reception area for landing pad one when Koenig and Keynes arrived.

"Tony. Anton." Koenig said to the two men.

"John." Verdeschi replied.

"Everything ready for the press conference?" Gorski asked and Keynes winced.

"Don't worry Gorski, we'll keep the general happy." Koenig said before there was the sound of marching feet and a unit of soldiers entered the reception area. These troops all carried the magnetic accelerator rifles that were standard issue to GDF ground troops but were not wearing the usual combat fatigues and body armour their role normally called for, instead each of them wore the same dark blue service uniforms marked with their ranks and awards and the officers awaited the arrival of General Simmons' Eagle.

"Honour guard reporting as ordered colonel." the commander of the unit said, saluting as his troops lined up inside the door and stood at attention.

"Very good Master Sergeant Washington." Koenig replied, returning the salute and then his comlock beeped.

"Colonel the general's Eagle is just about to touch down." Benes told him and Koenig nodded.

"Thanks, we're all set to receive him." Koenig responded.

Beside the door leading to the landing pad itself there was a display screen that showed the pad and the

gathered officers all turned to watch as the familiar bullet-nosed form of an Eagle transporter set down on the large red cross that formed the landing pad lift platform. Given the importance of the Eagle's passenger, this particular craft was a militarised version armed with a pair of magnetic accelerator cannons beneath its forward structural module while a smaller turret mounted weapon could be seen in the deployed position above it, ready to shoot down any incoming missile. Though no match for dedicated attack craft such as the two Hawks that had escorted the Eagle to Alpha, these weapons did at least give the craft the chance to defend itself against the less advanced weapons that the solar system's various insurgent groups had access to. Visible from the side of the screen, a boarding tube extended out from Alpha and pressed itself up around the air lock just forward of the Eagle's detachable passenger module and at this point a sign above the door to the landing pad changed from showing the word 'DEPRESSURISED' to show the word 'PRESSURISING' in flashing letters until they changed to 'PRESSURISED' and the door slid open. At the far end of the boarding tube the Eagle's own airlock door unfolded and General Simmons emerged with a briefcase in his hand, followed first by a grey haired man in civilian clothing and behind him came the two space suited Eagle pilots, one of them carrying a bag of golf clubs over his shoulder. "Honour guard present arms!" Washington ordered and the line of soldiers moved their rifles from their shoulders to hold them out in front of them. "General Simmons, I trust your trip from Earth was enjoyable." Gorski said, stepping forwards to greet the general ahead of Koenig or Verdeschi. "Kiss ass." Verdeschi muttered. "Fine, yes. Colonel Koenig's pilot knows his stuff." and he looked over his shoulders at the man carrying the golf clubs. "Major Carter swears that Captain Fraser is one of our best." Koenig said. Then he added, "Thinking of working on your handicap?" "If I get time to head over to Kappa, yes. Why let the tourists have all the fun?" Simmons said. "Well it is the oldest sport on the moon." Verdeschi said and Koenig and Simmons both smiled. Simmons then looked at the civilian man who had accompanied him. "Colonel Koenig may I introduce Professor Victor Bergman, he's the physicist I told you about." he said. "The science nerd as you put it." Bergman added. "You heard that?" Koenig replied. "I did tell you he was there." Simmons pointed out. "Pleased to meet you colonel." Bergman said, stepping forwards and offering his hand to Koenig who reached out to shake it. "The general says you're here to carry out research into some aspect of alien technology that we've overlooked." Koenig said. "Yes, that's right." Bergman replied, "You see two things that have always puzzled us about the alien ships used to attack Earth were the design of their weapon systems and how they actually got to the solar system. We know that they were based on the dreadnought they kept in orbit near Saturn for most of the war and that they sent raiding craft at-" "Excuse me professor but can we discuss this another time?" Koenig interrupted, "This is my adjutant Captain Alyson Keynes. She will arrange a workspace and quarters for you and you should make any requests for resources to her." "I'm looking forward to working with you professor." Keynes added, "I actually interned with one of the companies that reverse engineers alien technology." "Really? That is excellent news." Bergman said. "If you'd like to come with me I'll show you where you'll be working." Keynes said. "I'd be delighted captain." Bergman said. "Alyson is fine." Keynes told him as she began to lead him away. "Okay now we can get down to business." General Simmons said, "I want to speak with all of the moon's military command staff before this press conference. How soon can you arrange that?" "Helena's only in medical but Capston's over at Lambda and Weston's at Eta." Koenig said and Simmons nodded. "Well get them over here as fast as you can. Now before we head for your office what was this other matter you wanted to discuss?" Simmons said and Koenig held up the key he had been given.

2.

Lieutenant Colonel Doctor Helena Russell was already waiting in Koenig's office when he returned to main mission with General Simmons and the two lieutenant colonels. Unlike the other military personnel present she was not wearing a uniform. Instead she had on the scrubs and lab coat she usually wore while working in Alpha's medical section.

"Doctor." Simmons said as he walked towards the steps leading up to Koenig's office, "I'm sorry to tear you away from your duties."

"That's alright general, my staff can manage without me for a while." she replied.

Meanwhile Koenig paused as he walked past where Major Alan Carter, chief pilot and head of Alpha's reconnaissance section was stood.

"Alan, send someone out to Eagle Park." he whispered, "Our little friend has done his job." and Carter smiled and nodded.

It was then that General Simmons noticed Baker standing beside where Alexander sat at her console.

"Baker isn't it?" he said.

"Yes general. Spacewoman First Class Francis Baker."

"I hear you're leaving us in a couple of days." Simmons said.

"Yes sir, I'm going back to Earth to get married." Baker said and all of a sudden she noticed that Simmons had taken a small key on the end of a chain from his pocket and was casually swinging it back and forth.

"Well I hope all goes well for you spacewoman. Now if you don't mind could you show Major Capston and Weston into the office when they get here?"

"Yes general." Baker said and she watched as the senior officers all headed into Koenig's office and the wall slid shut behind them to separate it from the rest of main mission, "You gave it to the general?" Baker then hissed, looking at Alexander who shrugged in return.

"Don't look at me." she said and she looked at Benes.

"I never had it." Benes said.

"Is there a problem?" Morrow asked from his station, looking at them.

"No major, nothing to report." Benes replied.

"Good. Let's keep it that way." Morrow said.

While the officers in Koenig's office were awaiting the arrival of the commanders of the bases labelled Eta and Lambda, Keynes showed Bergman into a disused room on a subsurface level. This room had the same white panelled walls as other rooms at Alpha and there were a few tables and chairs scattered around it, left over from the last time it had been used. However, apart from the communication panels that were built into the walls all electronic equipment had been removed to be reused elsewhere at the base.

"I hope this will do." she said, "It should meet all your requirements. We can clear out all of this and bring all the equipment you need down here."

"Yes," Bergman said, nodding as he looked around the room, "I'm sure it will do just fine."

"So what is it exactly you'll be doing here Professor Bergman?"

"Victor. If I'm going to be calling you Alyson then you can at least call me by my first name as well. To answer your question though I'll be working on a theory that I've been developing for a number of years now. As I'm sure you know a lot of the technology we make use of in space flight, our fusion drives and artificial gravity has been reverse engineered from technology taken from the alien spacecraft we shot down during the war. Even the medication I take for my heart is derived from one of the aliens' bio-engineered plants. Anyway we never observed any means by which the alien ships could travel at faster than light speed and when their dreadnought was discovered near Saturn it was assumed that this mothership had made its way to our solar system at subluminal speed. The problem with that was that when our forces boarded the dreadnought at the end of the war what they found did not match with the idea of a ship that could support an invasion force over such a long journey. In fact there just wasn't enough room aboard for them to have supplied their forces throughout the war."

"You think you've found out how they did it?" Keynes said, "The aliens could travel faster than light."

"In a sense, yes. Though if my theory is correct their ships never actually broke the light barrier, they simply had a way to move themselves from one place to another instantaneously and I think that we can replicate that."

"How?"

"Well another mystery about the alien ships has always been their choice of armament. Every one of their combat ships from their single seat attack fighters right up to the dreadnought itself was armed with a directed energy weapon in its nose. Now we have deployed a variety of laser based weapons in specific

roles but projectiles have always been more efficient and so we still use them overwhelmingly to arm our troops and ships. In fact the aliens also used projectile weapons for their ground forces. My theory is that the energy weapons they fitted to their ships also doubled as their means of travelling between star systems. Are you familiar with Lagrange points?"

"Where the gravitational pull of two large bodies in space cancel one another out? Of course. I'm a qualified pilot." Keynes said.

"Good. Well I believe that Lagrange points represent weaknesses in the curvature of space-time and that if we subject one to an immense burst of energy then it will bend space to connect with another Lagrange point, effectively creating a wormhole through which we can travel from one point to the other in an instant." Bergman explained, "My plan is to first construct lasers that we can mount to a craft such as one of our Swift scout ships and then see if we can open up a wormhole between a pair of Lagrange points. We'll send a probe through first of course but then we should be able to try and send the Swift itself through. With a bit more work mankind may finally be free of the limitations of our solar system."

"Yes spacewoman?" Koenig said when Baker contacted him on his comlock.

"Major Capston and Major Weston are here." Baker said.

"Show them in." Koenig told her and he opened the dividing wall to allow James Capston and Sarah Weston to enter along with Baker. Meanwhile General Simmons took the key from his pocket and began to swing it back and forth casually while leaning his elbow on the arm of his chair.

"I think drinks would be in order now." he said as Baker stared at the key, "Spacewoman Baker perhaps you could oblige us."

"Of course general." Baker said and she took out her comlock, ready to list the drinks people wanted on it.

"Just bring us a tray with milk and sweeteners and we'll do the rest Baker." Koenig told her.

"Yes colonel." Baker replied before leaving the office again and Koenig sealed the wall behind her.

"I thought you were going to hypnotise her there swinging that back and forth." Verdeschi said as Simmons stopped swinging the key.

"Am I missing something?" Capston asked as he took a seat.

"Perhaps you should explain John." Simmons suggested.

"I think Helena should have that honour. She helped put young Baker in her current situation after all." Koenig replied.

"Francis is getting married a couple of days and the women of main mission and I took her out for a fancy goodbye dinner last night." Russell began, "After which-"

"During which you got her good and drunk so she passed out." Koenig pointed out.

"She may have consumed as much alcohol as the rest of us put together, yes." Helena admitted, "But we made certain she got back to her quarters safely at which point we may have put a chastity belt on her. Only I gave the key to John."

"And I gave it to the general." Koenig added.

"That's viscious." Weston said.

"On the other hand all the guys just clubbed together to buy her a nice silver high resolution photo frame with enough memory for all her wedding photos." Koenig said.

"Plus all the ones you preloaded of you all pulling stupid faces." Russell added, "Not to mention the one you had me take of you all bent over with 'Congratulations Francis and Mike' painted on your-"

"I think I've heard enough." Simmons said.

"Spacesuits. She was going to say spacesuits weren't you?" Koenig said, looking at Russell and smiling.

"Sure, whatever." she responded and she looked away from him.

"Personally I prefer to keep my base more professional." Gorski commented at which point Koenig's comlock sounded again.

"Our drinks are here." he said, opening up the office so that Baker could bring in the tray on which several mugs of coffee along with milk and sweeteners were laid out, "Just put it on my desk spacewoman." Koenig told her and Baker set the tray down on the desk as ordered.

"Oh spacewoman," Simmons said as she turned to leave and he picked up his briefcase and opened it, "I have something here for you. I've found this very useful over the years I've been married and when I heard about your departure from us I thought I should pass it along to you."

"I don't know what to say general." Baker said, walking over to Simmons as he took an old-fashioned printed book from inside his case and held it out to her. Taking it from him she looked at the cover and frowned, "The Art of War."

"By Sun Tzu. A classic text." Simmons said.

"I really don't know what to say." Baker said.

"Look inside spacewoman." Simmons suggested and she opened the front cover of the book to find herself looking at the key on the chain he had been taunting her with.

"Thank you general." she said, smiling.

"Congratulations again spacewoman." Simmons said before Baker dashed from the room and Koenig closed the wall again.

"Okay now coffee and business." Simmons said and as the gathered officers sweetened and put milk in their drinks as they wished he began to explain why he had called the meeting, "GDF command has intelligence that Mars could be about to make a move soon and the moon could be their target." he began, "There's been a lot of chatter across the system about a push for the full independence of the colonies from Earth in the past few weeks but four days ago all of the chatter here on the moon went silent. Intelligence thinks that is because any insurgents here have gone to ground before they make their move."

"So Mars will declare independence and start nationalising assets?" Weston asked.

"That is what a lot of their congress has been calling for." Verdeschi answered.

"And then we go to war to get all our stuff back. You'd think they'd realise that it's not in their best interests to start a fight." Weston commented.

"Red Mars and its supporters only care about keeping Earth companies and nations out of Martian affairs. They don't care about the interests of anyone but themselves. Lee was working on a project to improve their aqueduct system when Red Mars killed him." Russell said, reminding the other officers of how her late husband had been murdered by the Martian terrorist group.

"What's the current military assessment?" Verdeschi asked.

"Well once the *Anholt* and the *Schell* are complete Earth will have a fleet of seventeen Anderson-class frigates, sixty Osprey bombers and just under two hundred Hawk attack ships. Plus we've got enough Condors and Eagles to move more than a hundred thousand troops to anywhere in the system we want to. Between them the colonies can muster about four to five hundred old Vulture gunships, about twice as many as we have of those old things held in reserve by the way and about a quarter of the dedicated transport capacity that we can lay our hands on. There is always the issue of the bulk freighters that the colonies might try and equip with weapons but they're so slow that they'd be sitting ducks for a frigate and its Hawks let alone any orbital or surface based defences they were used against. With only forty or so operating in total in the system they aren't considered a realistic threat." Simmons said.

"So we can out gun them wherever we want." Capston said with a smile.

"It's still not enough." Koenig replied.

"No it's not." Simmons agreed, "Of course we'd win any protracted war. We have four times the population and infrastructure of all the colonies combined."

"Not to mention the only functional and self sustaining biosphere." Russell pointed out.

"Exactly." Simmons agreed, "Starving the colonies into submission would work but that would involve massive civilian casualties and take time, neither of which the public on Earth is likely to tolerate. If it comes to war then Earth needs a quick and decisive victory but the colonies could scatter their ships and we couldn't hold every piece of rock in the system at the same time while we spent the time it would take to hunt them all down. That of course is where my project with Lieutenant Colonel Gorski comes in." and Gorski smiled.

"The first prototypes are ready general." he said, "Twenty-six of them each with a theoretical yield of five mega-tonnes. We'd have to test detonate one to be certain of course but I'm confident in our computer models."

"So after more than a century without them you've let the nuclear genie back out of the lamp." Russell said, "Are we going to threaten to start nuking colonies until they fall into line?"

"Of course not." Simmons said, "But if we can obliterate an asteroid base with one shot rather than having to invade it and take the associated loss in time and manpower then we can give the colonies nowhere to flee to."

"Meanwhile the public still thinks Mu is just some project to store waste here on the moon to protect the environment on Earth." Weston said.

"Yes and the longer they continue to think that the better." Simmons said, "If our program became public knowledge then the colonies could spin it as the threat Doctor Russell suggested it could be."

"So we're not planning on using it as a deterrent to war then?" Verdeschi asked.

"No. Our conventional build up will continue in that role." Simmons said.

"On that note it will take at least another eight months to get Lambda up and running." Capston said, "Then you'll have a base that can house another eighty Hawks and twenty Ospreys. That's more firepower than the whole of Mars can manage in a single base."

"Sounds like Lambda would be a good target for a pre-emptive strike." Weston pointed out.

"There is a Martian freighter holding further out. It would have a line of fire to the dark side." Koenig said.

"Forget the freighter." Simmons said, "It's too far out to be a threat."

"That's right." Verdeschi added, "I could have a flight of Hawks swarming it before it got close enough to launch a missile with any chance of success."

"GDF Command has still decided to deploy a frigate." Simmons said, "The *GDS Landau* will take up a position on the dark side of the moon to act as a sentry. No matter what secret modifications they may have made to that freighter, the Martians will think twice about taking on a frigate."

3.

While the moon's senior staff continued to discuss the potential for war between the Earth and its colonies beyond the moon alpha's regular operations continued as normal and in main mission Alexander took note of a ship approaching the moon from Earth.

"I've got Condor six five on approach." she announced, "Distance seventy thousand kilometres."

"Is she on our roster for today?" Morrow asked.

"Yes major. Transport carrying more nuclear waste for Mu." Alexander answered.

"Okay give her express clearance. I don't want that stuff hanging around out there any longer than necessary." Morrow ordered and Benes signalled the approaching vessel.

A Condor transport was a larger version of the more common Eagle, possessing a similar though more bulky bullet shaped command module and modular space frame as its smaller cousin but capable of carrying bigger and heavier cargoes. Like an Eagle, the craft could be operated by a single pilot but it was more common for it to carry two crew as a precaution with the second functioning as the communication officer and navigator.

"Alpha calling Condor six five." Benes' voice said over the radio and the Condor's co-pilot smiled.

"Sandra is that you?" he asked, "The guiding light for us poor waste jockeys."

"Who else?" Benes responded, "What's your status?"

"Tell her we're bored as hell." the pilot said and his co-pilot smiled.

"Did you catch that Sandra?" he asked.

"I'll put in the log as 'situation normal'." Benes said.

"Well we're coming up on the L-one point and we're going to cut power then and let the moon's gravity pull us in." the co-pilot told her, "How's our clearance?"

"You've been given priority all the way to Mu." Benes told him.

"That's what I like to hear. No queuing." the co-pilot said.

"Nearing L-one point." the pilot said, "Stand by for main engine shut down in five, four, three, two, one-"

The explosion was visible from inside Alpha and the senior officers in Koenig's office looked out through the windows that faced towards Earth in shock.

"What the hell was that?" Simmons exclaimed when he saw the brilliant white flash in the sky.

"Main mission what's going on?" Koenig said into his comlock.

"Condor six five just exploded colonel." Morrow replied and Koenig opened up the wall separating his office from main mission.

"I should get to medical." Russell said, "If there are survivors-"

"Go." Koenig said and she ran from main mission while the other senior officers rushed to see what Alpha's instruments were showing.

"Explosion confirmed." Alexander said, "I'm not picking up Condor six five or its transponder."

"Launch search and rescue Eagles." Koenig ordered, "The crew might have been able to eject." then he looked at Carter, "Alan I want you out there as well. Kano go with him. Find out what the hell happened." and the two men hurried out of the room.

"Err what about the cargo?" Gorski said.

"Condor six five was en-route to Mu." Morrow pointed out.

"Oh that's just great." Weston said, "Can we tell if the containers survived the blast or are we about to be showered with radioactive debris?"

"Colonel sensors picked up a massive energy spike." Alexander said, "It could have been the fusion plant overloading or-"

"Or it could have been a gamma ray burst when a container cracked." Koenig said.

"Whatever it was the EMP was enough to blind our sensors in that area." Alexander told him.

"Which means our rescue ships are going in blind." Morrow pointed out.

"Pull them out and we could be leaving survivors to cook inside the command module." Verdeschi said.

"Or order them in and cook three crews of our own." Koenig replied, "Benes tell our Eagles to watch their rad counters. If there's any indication of elevated levels then they are to break off while we try to figure out if there's anyone left to rescue."

"And if there is?" Weston asked

"Then we'll fly an Eagle in by remote and use it to pull the command module out." Koenig said before turning towards Morrow, "Major, have the hangar prep a recovery Eagle for remote flight just in case."

"John, Gorski and I bet get to Mu." Simmons said.

"I think the rest of us should be getting back to our own bases as well." Verdeschi added and Koenig nodded. "Lieutenant Alexander, make sure their travel tubes have priority." he ordered, "And where's Keynes? This could be a security matter."

"I'm wanted in main mission. I have to go." Keynes told Bergman when she saw the message appear on her comlock summoning her.

"Is something wrong? What should I do in the meantime?" Bergman replied.

"Actually you better come with me. I'm not sure what's going on and I can better arrange for someone else to show you to your quarters." Keynes told him.

"Of course. Do lead the way Alyson."

The pair made their way as quickly as possible to main mission. So far no general alert had been sounded across Alpha or any of the other bases on the moon and so the corridors of the base were still filled with people, mainly civilians in this section who were going about their daily business. When they reached main mission they found it a hive of activity as space flights between the moon and Earth were being diverted to enable the flight of rescue Eagles from Alpha to carry out their work unimpeded.

"Major Morrow what's wrong?" Keynes asked when she could not find Koenig in main mission.

"A Condor coming from Earth carrying nuclear waste for Mu exploded." Morrow told her, "Everything was fine until it reached the Lagrange point and it suddenly blew up."

"The Lagrange point?" Keynes commented and then she looked at Bergman, "Professor could this be related to your theory?"

"Oh I don't think so. My theory concerns injecting energy into a Lagrange point, not passing through them causing ships to explode. We'd have known about any effect like that for a long time now. Although I would be interested to see any sensor data that shows how the point reacted to the explosion." Bergman said.

"I'm sorry and you are?" Morrow asked.

"Professor Victor Bergman. Pleased to meet you, major isn't it?" Bergman said, holding out his hand.

"Yes. Major Paul Morrow. XO of Alpha and my people have a lot to do." Morrow replied.

"The professor is here under the authority of GDF Command." Keynes said, "Perhaps Colonel Koenig can-"

"Colonel Koenig says the professor can stay as long as he doesn't get in the way." Koenig suddenly announced as the wall separating his office opened up and he came down the steps into main mission,

"Alexander, perhaps you can provide the professor with a console?"

"Of course colonel." Alexander said and she smiled as she waved Professor Bergman towards her.

"Be nice with him Alexander." Morrow said and Alexander glared at him briefly.

"Command is diverting the *Landau* to help cordon off space around the Lagrange point." Koenig told Morrow, "She was supposed to be taking up a sentry position on the dark side but now the *Bain* will be brought back to do that."

"How long's that going to take?" Morrow asked.

"No less than forty-eight hours. She's currently in orbit around Phobos and it's going to take a while just to get the order to her to make way for us." Koenig explained.

"What can I do colonel?" Keynes asked.

"This could be an accident with the fusion drive. The crew were just shutting it down when the explosion happened but it could also be an attack. I want you to take Master Sergeant Washington and a squad of troops in an Eagle and conduct a patrol around Alpha to make certain that we're secure." Koenig said before he turned towards the other main mission staff at their consoles, "Now can anyone tell me anything about what happened?" he called out.

Sat beside one another in the cockpit of their Eagle, Carter and Kano saw the two search and rescue craft up ahead.

"Search and Rescue Eagles one and two, what have you got to report?" Kano transmitted while Carter focused on piloting their ship.

"This is rescue Eagle two, did you guys hear a rumour about a spaceship blowing up somewhere around here?" one of the crew from a search and rescue Eagle responded.

"What do you mean?" Kano asked.

"We came up looking for what's left of Condor six-five. But there's nothing out here."

"That can't be." Carter said as he looked at the sensor readout in front of him, "Even if the blast tore apart every part of the eagle then there ought to be debris scattered from here to the moon." then he frowned, "These sensors can't be working right."

"Try turning them off and back on again." Kano suggested and then added, "Sorry, force of habit. I'm not picking up any significantly elevated radiation levels either."

"So at least the waste containers didn't fracture." Carter said, "But any blast big enough to generate an EMP that could interfere with sensors ought to have split them wide open."

"I better call this in." Kano said, "Alpha this is Eagle three we've arrived in the vicinity of the explosion but there's nothing here."

"Can you define 'nothing' Captain Kano?" Benes responded from Alpha.

"Nothing. No Condor, no wreckage and no radiation. It's like the ship just vanished." Kano said.

"Oh this is just great." Koenig said, "First the ship explodes and now there was an explosion that didn't destroy the ship but there's still no ship."

"Could the explosion have been a diversion to cover the hijacking of Condor six-five?" Morrow said, "The hijackers could have fired the main engines while our sensors were blinded and then gone to running silent."

"I was in contact with the Condor's crew right up to the point that it exploded." Benes pointed out.

"You were in contact with someone on the other end of a radio link but by audio only." Morrow pointed out and he looked back at Koenig, "Colonel those transmissions could have been faked."

"Excuse me colonel." Bergman said suddenly from the console he was sat at, raising his hand in the air, "I think I may have something to add to this discussion."

"Really professor?" Koenig asked as he and Morrow both walked across main mission towards where the professor was sat.

"Well your radar has the Condor on track right up to the point where it reaches the Lagrange point and then there is the explosion which creates an EMP that blinds your EM sensors for about three and a half minutes. But what wasn't blinded was your gravitational sensors and a fraction of a second after the explosion they picked up this." and Bergman pressed a button on the console's touch interface but nothing happened, "Oh, I seem to have done that wrong. Excuse me lieutenant but could I trouble you to-"

"Let me see." Alexander said as she came back over, "Here." she said, pressing another button and a graph appeared on the display that showed a fairly constant trace until the exact time that Condor six five exploded where there was a significant spike.

"What the hell is that?" Morrow asked.

"Something to do with your science project professor?" Koenig asked.

"I think so. I think we're looking at the first ever recorded proof of a wormhole." Bergman said.

"A wormhole? But a wormhole exists at the Lagrange point between Earth and the moon then why hasn't it been seen before?" Alexander said.

"Because nobody ever injected enough energy into it to open it up before." Bergman said, "When Condor exploded and its cargo of radioactive waste was released it tore open the wormhole and sucked the ship and its cargo through."

"So where is Condor six five now?" Koenig said but Bergman shrugged.

"It could be on the other side of the universe colonel. Every Lagrange point between two bodies large enough to disrupt space-time enough to create a wormhole could be a potential exit point. My experiments haven't even reached the point of opening up a wormhole, let alone properly navigating one. If not for the fact that the crew of that Condor have probably been killed then I would consider this graph a very exciting development in astrophysics." he explained.

"Probably? You mean that there's a chance that those two men are still alive but stranded somewhere?" Koenig said.

"That is a possibility colonel, yes. If they were able to eject when their ship exploded then their command module would have been pulled into the wormhole along with the rest of the wreckage. Now I can't tell you about what they'd encounter inside a wormhole in terms of radiation or other forces but if we assume that the alien raiders we encountered during the war were intended to allow their crews to survive a trip through a wormhole then there is no reason why someone inside the command module from any of our ships shouldn't survive it as well."

"Stranded in a different galaxy in the confines of a Condor cockpit. It doesn't bear thinking about." Alexander said before Benes suddenly called out across main mission.

"Colonel I think that you should see this." she said and she pointed to the big screen at the front of the room as she transferred the video signal she was receiving to it.

The image that then appeared showed a figure covered in black clothing including gloves, a face mask and sunglasses so that no part of their skin, hair or eyes were visible while hanging behind them was a flag that consisted of a red circle to represent the planet Mars on a black background and a single five pointed star in the top left corner.

"We are Red Mars," the figure announced, its voice electronically processed to prevent identification and as it spoke subtitles in several major human languages other than the English being spoken automatically appeared along the bottom of the screen. Obviously this message was meant to be understood by as many people as possible, "and we claim responsibility for the destruction of the GDF Condor spacecraft between Earth and the moon at fourteen sixteen Mars standard time today. Until our home is free from the corruption of Earth fascist capitalist imperialism we will continue to interdict more flights between Earth and the moon."

The responsibility for all the deaths lies with the Earth governments and corporations that oppress us and our colonial brothers and sisters." the figure then extended its right arm forwards with its fist clenched before added, "Free Mars!" and the screen went black.
"So much for the chance that it was just an accident." Koenig said.

9.

Tuesday 12th September 2299. One day before leaving Earth orbit.

Moonbase Beta had originally been constructed as a rival to Alpha at a time when there had been greater competition between the nations of Earth than there was now. When the nations of Europe and North America had banded together to construct what would later become known as Moonbase Alpha several other nations had agreed between themselves to construct Beta so that they too would have a stake in the future of the moon. As the nations of Earth grew closer together Alpha, as the larger and more capable of the bases became the de-facto capital of the moon and Beta became more of a backwater that focused more on private civilian activities than Alpha did.

In a room above a vehicle maintenance garage at Beta a man sat behind a desk tapping his fingers against its edge while in front of him sat a loaded magnetic accelerator pistol.

"Come in." he called out when the door chimed and it slid open to reveal two more men, one of whom carried a primitive ballistic shotgun and this man shoved the other through the door.

"Arlen Kane to see you Mister Garcia." the armed man said, taking up a position just inside the door as Kane regained his posture and looked at the man behind the desk.

"Carlos." Kane said with a smile, "Did you see it? We blew that ship to hell and the Earthers are-"

"Shut up!" Garcia yelled at Kane and he flinched, "Do you have any idea what you've done?"

"We proved we can hit them anywhere Carlos."

"You idiot." Garcia said as he got up and walked around the desk, picking up the gun from on top of it, "What you've done is demonstrate that we have a way into that little nuclear program of theirs at Mu. Supposing they start reviewing all their security now? Do you know how difficult it was to cultivate the contacts we needed for this operation? We are less than a week away from exposing how Earth plans to keep their empire using the threat of nuclear annihilation of any colony that steps out of line and you've risked it all. Once we prove what they're doing the entire system will rise up and there'll be war, but now you've tipped them off. We had their frigates scattered across the system looking for us. We were all set to bring down the *Merton* and the *Naguzami* while they were isolated but now they're pulling back their entire fleet from the outer system to consolidate their positions around Venus, Earth and Mars. Do you know what those fifteen frigates they've got can do? Even without nukes they can rain down death on any colony they want and shoot down any missile we send against them. They can sweep aside any fleet we put together to try and stop them and thanks to you that's just what they're going to be able to do unless we can bring things forward."

"Are we ready for that?" Kane asked.

"We're going to have to be. We need to start this within the next two days or we'll lose any chance of bringing Earth to its knees." Garcia answered.

"What about your contact on the inside at Alpha? Will they be able to get away in time?"

"Oh don't worry about them. Their escape has been planned since we started this." Garcia said, "In the mean time you need to create a distraction to throw the GDF off the scent."

"What sort of distraction?" Kane said nervously.

"They still don't know how we destroyed their Condor. There's something odd about their investigation and they still haven't recovered any wreckage so they haven't found the remains of the bomb you smuggled aboard from Earth. You're going to have to take your people out onto the surface with a laser cannon and bring down one of their Eagles. We need them to think that you shot that ship down from here on the moon."

"But we've only got one laser cannon and if the GDF-"

"Are you a total fool?" Garcia snapped, "The laser cannon is nothing compared to our mission here. Sure it's valuable but thanks to your impatient need to act without thinking about the consequences we're going to have to risk losing it. Now get out of here."

Kane hesitated.

"Carlos-" he started to say but Garcia suddenly brought up his pistol and pressed it to the side of Kane's head."

"I said get out!" he snapped and Kane turned around and hurried from the room, leaving the door open behind him, "Have him followed." Garcia told the man with the shotgun, "If his cell looks like they're chickening out then arrange a accident. We'll make it look like they tried to use the laser cannon and it blew up on them."

"Yes Mister Garcia." the guard said, nodding before he exited the room as well.

A day later than originally planned General Simmons stood at the podium in Eagle Park facing the solar

system's media, only it was not to promote the nuclear storage project at Mu. Instead, with Koenig and Verdeschi behind him it was intended to reassure the inhabitants of Earth and the moon that the terrorist attack that destroyed Condor six five the previous day would not be repeated.

"Ladies and gentlemen of the press I would like to start by paying tribute to the two servicemen who lost their lives in this cowardly attack. Captain Jacob Watson was a married father of two and our thoughts go out to his wife and children at this difficult time. Lieutenant James Young was unmarried but this does not mean that he did not have relatives that will feel his loss deeply." Simmons said and the reporters began to wave their hands in the air to try and ask questions.

"General do you know how Red Mars was able to bring down a Condor?" one called out.

"Why is the frigate Landau interdixing shipping near the site of the attack? Have Red Mars laid mines near the Lagrange point?" another added and Verdeschi leant towards Koenig.

"Mines. That would have been a pretty good cover story. A mine would float around the Lagrange point for quite a while." he said and Koenig nodded.

"Please, I'll take questions later." Simmons responded before continuing with his prepared statement, "The men and women of the GDF's lunar garrison are currently working hard to determine the exact details of the attack and the sickening video issued by Red Mars claimed responsibility for this criminal act is being studied closely to identify the individual featured in it. Meanwhile the Anderson-class frigate *GDS Landau* has taken up a position between Earth and the moon to safeguard all traffic there. As you know the Earth-lunar run contains the busiest shipping routes in the solar system and all travellers can be reassured that the GDF is able to protect them. I can reassure you that the rumours of a minefield are false. The *Landau* is not conducting mine sweeping duties. Now I have time for a couple of questions. You there." Simmons said and he pointed to one of the gathered journalists.

"Amanda Powell, Pacific Coast News. Is it true that so far no flight recorder has been recovered?" the woman asked.

"All the wreckage has been cleared from the shipping route but the flight recorder was not recovered intact." Simmons answered and Koenig and Verdeschi exchanged glances, knowing that there had been no wreckage at all, "And next. You."

"Greg Foster. North American Broadcasting. Was the transport ship part of the project to relocate nuclear waste from Earth to the storage facility at Moonbase Mu? If so what effect does this attack have on the program?"

"Condor six five was transporting radioactive material to Mu, yes. However, I would like to point out that there was no release of that material to either Earth or the surface of the moon." Simmons said.

"Do you really think that deepening your occupation of the inner planets will stop Red Mars?" a voice called out before Simmons could select the next person to ask a question and when Koenig looked towards the source of the question and saw a man standing there with a cameraman whose camera bore the markings of a Martian news outlet that was known to be sympathetic to the anti-Earth terrorist groups operating in the colonies.

"Err general we have that meeting." Koenig said before Simmons could respond to the obviously provocative question.

"Of course." Simmons said and then he addressed the gathered journalists again, "I'm afraid that's where I have to end this press conference but as additional information becomes available it will be released to you." Simmons then walked away from the podium while the journalists shouted questions at him in the hope he might pause to answer one.

"So how do you think that went?" Simmons said as soon as the door to the Eagle Park viewing lounge closed behind them.

"So you didn't decide to just tell them that our new resident scientist thinks that the explosion tore open a hole in space?" Verdeschi said as they headed towards main mission.

"Frankly I'm not sure I even believe it." Simmons replied.

"Professor Bergman does seem quite convinced." Koenig said.

"Maybe but that still doesn't help us figure out how Condor six five was destroyed to begin with." Simmons said.

"It was either shot down or a bomb was placed aboard it." Koenig said.

"A bomb is out of the question." Simmons replied, "The entire project at Mu is under the strictest security."

"A missile would have shown up on our sensors." Koenig pointed out.

"Which just leaves a stealth projectile or beam weapon." Simmons said.

"Or a mine like that reporter said." Verdeschi pointed out.

"Without any debris we never know how the Condor was brought down." Koenig said, "Which puts us in the unenviable position of actually having to wait for the terrorists to bring down another of our ships away from the Lagrange point."

"In other words exactly the opposite of what I've just told the press." Simmons said, "Frankly gentlemen I find

myself just waiting for the terrorists to make a mistake and that's not a situation I like being in."

With four members in his cell, Kane needed all of them to move the laser cannon across the lunar surface. The convoy was made up of three vehicles in total, a moon buggy on which Kane and one other member of the cell rode while the other two were larger exo-tractors. Like the smaller moon buggy these were wheeled vehicles and were designed to be able to mount or tow a variety of equipment. Unlike the moon buggy though, these two vehicles featured enclosed and pressurised cockpits that meant a driver did not need to wear a spacesuit while operating it as long as the cockpit remained sealed. Despite this the two terrorist drivers still wore spacesuits in readiness for when they would have to disembark from their vehicles. Each of the exo-tractors pulled a large trailer carrying equipment that was covered to prevent its identification. Under one of them was a heavy fusion generator while under the other was the laser cannon itself.

Directed energy weapons were not common among human military forces. Equal or even greater destruction could be caused for less energy consumption by projectiles and conventional explosives but weapons such as this laser cannon still had their place for pinpoint strikes. Driving from the Red Mars safe house, a pressurised warehouse constructed near the refinery base Gamma so that vehicles travelling to and from it would appear to belong to the miners whose settlements were concentrated in that region of the lunar surface, the terrorists made their way to a point between Gamma and Moonbase Delta, a facility given over to manufacture largely using the resources processed at Gamma. Much of the travel between these two bases was done using the sub surface travel tubes that connected all of the bases on the moon but there were also occasions when something or someone needed to travel between them much faster and that meant that there were regular Eagle flights between the two bases.

"Okay stop here." Kane told the other terrorists when his moon buggy's navigation system showed that they had reached what had been calculated to be the optimum firing point and the exo-tractors came to a halt. It took only a few seconds for the drivers to disembark from the exo-tractor's, the air in their cockpits rushing out into space as the doors were opened. The two trailers were left hitched up to the exo-tractors that had towed them here to make it easier to get them clear of the area afterwards but the covers still needed to be removed from the laser cannon and the generator that was going to be used to power it, after which the generator was hooked up to the laser cannon and while the weapon was powering up Kane stood back and took out the computer tablet he would use to control it. The laser cannon was equipped with an active targeting radar but Kane did not want to use this just in case the emissions were detected before the weapon could be used. Although he was confident of being able to bring down a relatively low flying transport ship such as an Eagle, dealing with a flight of Hawks was another matter altogether.

"Spread out." he told the others in his cell, "Even spacing on all sides. I want to know as soon as possible when an Eagle approaches."

Bounding across the surface of the moon in its low gravity, the other terrorists positioned themselves in a triangle so that Kane and the laser cannon itself was roughly in the centre of this while they kept watch through magnifiers that they raised up to the visors of their spacesuits. Kane then armed the laser canon and it rose in its mount, angling upwards slightly at the same time.

"I've got a contact to the north. Range fifteen thousand metres and closing. Altitude two thousand metres." one of the terrorists announced suddenly and Kane used his tablet to turn the laser cannon to the north and on the visual targeting display he saw the familiar shape of an Eagle in its transport configuration.

"I've got it." Kane replied and he fired the laser cannon.

There was a brief flash of green as the laser fired and at the same time there was an explosion from the rear module of the Eagle where its fusion plant was located and as the craft began to spin out of control Kane heard the crew send a distress signal.

"This is Eagle four to Gamma, mayday, mayday. We've had an explosion on board and we're going down." one of them exclaimed as their Eagle continued to drop towards the surface of the moon. Then before the base could respond and with the crew failing to eject in time, the Eagle ploughed into the surface and exploded.

"Let's go!" Kane snapped as he disarmed the laser cannon and it returned to its resting position in its mount, "Pack up this gear and let's get out of here before rescue ships arrive."

The terrorists hurried to disconnect the laser cannon from the generator and cover them both once again before setting off back towards their safe house.

S.

"Colonel I've got a report coming in from Gamma." Benes announced and Koenig looked up from his desk. "What is it captain?" he asked.

"They're reporting one of their Eagles down. They received a distress signal but it was cut off suddenly and the ship is not on their sensors any more." Benes told him, "They're launching a rescue Eagle now to investigate."

"Tell them to hold off. It could be another terrorist attack intended to lure out a rescue ship." Koenig said and while Benes was relaying his message to Gamma he used the communication system built into his own desk to make a connection with Epsilon, "Tony," he said when Verdeschi's face appeared on the screen, his office and the window overlooking the underground Hawk hangar where the attack ships were aligned vertically on their launching cradles visible in the background, "I need you to launch a Hawk patrol immediately."

"Sure, what's wrong?" Verdeschi responded.

"An Eagle's gone down near Gamma and I think it may not be an accident. Gamma's sending up another Eagle but-" Koenig told him.

"But you'd like to make sure it doesn't get shot down as well. Okay, we're on our way." Verdeschi said and he shut off the communication link.

It was standard practice to maintain a pair of Hawk attack ships manned and ready for immediate launch at all times at Epsilon and so just seconds after Verdeschi finished speaking with Koenig the two craft shot from the launch shafts leading from the hangar up to the surface, using their main engines to build up as much speed as possible as they arced around the moon towards the area between Gamma and Delta. Their course took them over Alpha and Alexander began to track the two craft.

"Hawks one and two I have you on track." she transmitted to the crews as they flew overhead.

"Confirmed Alpha. This is Hawk one. ETA to target zone seven minutes. Any idea of what we should be looking for?"

"Negative Hawk one. Just keep your eyes on the ground as well as the sky. The Eagle from Gamma could have been brought down by ground fire." Alexander told them.

"Understood Alpha. Be advised we're loaded for a fighter role rather than ground support but we can still carry out a strafing run if needed. Hawk one out."

"Benes let Gamma know that the Hawks are on their way. They can launch their rescue Eagle as soon as they reach the target area." Koenig said, watching the sensor display on the big screen that showed the two Hawks flying towards the crash site.

"Colonel, should we think about preparing any ships to support them if Red Mars is active in the area?" Morrow suggested.

"Those Hawks should be able to handle anything the terrorists can throw at them." Carter commented, "On the other hand They're going to need help if in chasing down any of them that they come across."

"Captain Keynes." Koenig called out and Keynes hurried to his side.

"Yes colonel?" she asked.

"Captain I want you to gather a squad of men and equip them for an operation on the surface. Then you and Carter take a combat Eagle to back those Hawks up. Alexander, let them know that they're coming."

"You get the troops, I'll handle the Eagle and meet you at launch pad one." Carter told Keynes and she nodded before they both hurried from main mission. As she went Keynes took out her comlock and raised it to her head.

"Master Sergeant Washington." she said.

"Yes captain?" Washington responded.

"Sergeant I want you to assemble an infantry squad in space suits and equip them with stun guns." Keynes told him.

"Yes captain, are we looking for some trophies?" Washington asked.

"Yes we are sergeant. We may have a lead on the terrorists who shot down Condor six five." Keynes said. Meanwhile Koenig turned to where Baker sat at a nearby console.

"I guess you didn't expect your last shift here to be as exciting as this did you?" he said and she sighed.

"To be honest colonel I was hoping for balloons and a sign that said 'Good luck'." she said.

"If you want a party-" Alexander said but Baker interrupted her before she could finish.

"No thank you lieutenant. I don't want to miss my flight because you've left me hog tied with an apple wedged in my mouth somewhere." she said.

"Oh like I'd use an apple." Alexander muttered.

"Hawk one to Alpha I have the crash site in visual range now." the pilot of Hawk one reported when the two attack craft came close enough to see the wreckage of the Eagle. With no atmosphere on the moon to

maintain flames and create smoke the remains of the Eagle were clearly visible from the air, the dust thrown up by the impact having been spread sideways over a wide area.

"Understood Hawk one. Any signs of life?" Benes responded.

"Negative Alpha, I'm not seeing any movement or picking up any beacons."

"This is Hawk two to Alpha. I think I've got something. Could be a hotspot to the south about twelve thousand metres away from the crash site. I'm feeding it back to you." the co-pilot of the second Hawk said when he noticed a thermal hotspot on the surface that he could not account for.

"Put it on the big screen." Koenig ordered and Benes transferred the image as ordered. This was a false colour image where temperature differences of less than a degree could be picked out by the colour used to represent them. The high resolution scan showed the temperature of the moon's surface in this manner over an area of about a square kilometre, the Hawk co-pilot having focused on this region to provide as much detail as possible while still providing a contrast with the surrounding terrain. At the centre of this area there was a spot of about ten metres across that showed up as being abnormally warm compared the ground around it, the temperature difference being more pronounced at the centre of this spot and dropping off further away until it blended into the surrounding terrain.

"Opinions?" Koenig asked, looking around at his command staff.

"Looks like someone used some high powered equipment there not so long ago colonel." Kano said.

"If it was warm enough to leave the surface wouldn't the equipment itself still be pretty hot?" Koenig asked and Kano nodded.

"Inevitably colonel." he said and Koenig turned the communication panel in front of him.

"Hawks one and two I want you to conduct a search for any equipment in the area that is showing a high temperature reading. Start close in and spiral out. Report back the moment you pick anything up. Be advised that we have a combat Eagle on its way with infantry support aboard." he said.

"Confirmed Alpha, we'll keep an eye out for them. Starting thermal scan now." the co-pilot of Hawk one replied.

"Combat Eagle one do you read me?" Koenig then transmitted.

"Loud and clear colonel." Keynes responded.

"Captain the Hawks have come up with something. Stand by to receive strike instructions from them." Koenig told them.

Washington stood in the doorway of the combat Eagle's cockpit while Carter and Keynes sat at the controls. Like the two officers he wore a space suit but unlike theirs his was a pale grey colour intended to blend in with the lunar surface rather than a bright orange that was meant to stand out. In addition to the difference in colour his spacesuit was covered in armour plates to protect him from attack. Washington was armed with his standard issue magnetic accelerator rifle but this was clipped to the side of the life support pack he wore on the back of his spacesuit while on his leg his usual pistol had been replaced by a stun gun that had a shape similar to a squared off horseshoe, the laser emitters at the front of the weapon being arranged vertically in front of the grip while the safety catch was mounted on the top edge of the weapon.

"Did you catch all that?" Keynes asked, looking over her shoulder at Washington and he smiled at her.

"Loud and clear captain." he said.

"We better deploy the turret." Carter said, "If we have to come in hot then the troops might need some covering fire." and Keynes nodded.

"Deploying turret." she said, reaching out to the control panel in front of her and as the turret mounted twin close in defence guns unfolded from within the combat Eagle's dorsal framework the targeting system for it became active, "Turret deployed. It's on automatic operation for now."

"Keep it that way. If the terrorists send a missile our way its better to let the computer intercept it." Carter said.

"This is Hawk two. I think we've got something. Looks like a convoy of ground vehicles heading south east. One moon buggy and two exo-tractors that appear to be towing some heavy equipment." one of the Hawk crews reported.

"I think I see them. Range sixty thousand metres." Carter said as he checked his own instruments.

"They could just be miners." Keynes pointed out, "This part of the moon is covered with independent mining outposts."

"We'll find out when we get a good look at whatever it is they're towing captain." Washington added, "Don't worry, it's not like we'll be firing off live rounds unless we really have to." and he patting the stun gun holstered on his leg.

"Looks like they're approaching some kind of structure. Most of it is underground but those doors look big enough to take those tractors plus whatever they're towing." Carter said and they watched as the doors to the structure opened and the three vehicles went inside before they closed again, "Call it in captain. Sergeant prepare your men." Carter ordered.

"Alpha this is combat Eagle one we have a target. Structure at co-ordinates papa november six four, oscar echo two nine. We've just observed a convoy of vehicles heading inside. It could be a Red Mars safe house. We're going in."

"Understood combat Eagle one." Koenig replied, "Remind Sergeant Washington and his men that we want prisoners to interrogate not bodies of martyrs. Moonbase Alpha out."

In Alpha's main mission Morrow looked up from his console.

"Colonel our records do show a mining camp at those co-ordinates but the claim for the area expired seventeen years ago. Apart from regulation emergency equipment there shouldn't be anything there." he said.

"I suppose the crash of the Eagle could have damaged one of the vehicles." Baker suggested, "The crews could be going there to make repairs in a pressurised environment."

"In which case someone is about to get a rude surprise from our troops." Koenig replied.

"I think you should set down about two thousand metres from the target." Keynes suggested.

"That's a hell of a walk." Washington commented.

"Better than us being taken down by a missile." Keynes pointed out.

"Okay, taking us down two thousand metres west of the target. The ground looks pretty flat there but there's cover between it and the target just in case." Carter said, "Sergeant you better get your men prepared to deploy."

"And I'll go count them out." Keynes added and she released her harness to get out of her seat.

The combat Eagle was fitted with a standard passenger carrying module and this was occupied by a squad of troops equipped in an identical manner to Washington. The only differences were the rank patches that had been attached to their suits so that each soldier knew who he should be taking orders from.

"Okay we're up." Washington announced to his men, "Seal your suits and get into the air lock. As far as we know this structure is the usual sort of shelter prospectors set up so it'll be pressurised with Earth normal gravity. Going in through the air locks means overriding two doors and giving whoever's inside notice that we're coming so we'll be making our own door. Foster, you carry the breaching lock. Dalton, you've got the charges. As you know we want prisoners but I'd rather see dead terrorists than dead soldiers so Cooper and Robson will act a snipers. That's all unless Captain Keynes has anything else to add."

"No thank you master sergeant. You can carry on." Keynes responded.

"Okay then you heard the lady. Get to the ready line." Washington ordered.

As the Eagle descended all of these men lowered and sealed the visors of their helmets before switching to their spacesuits' own life support systems. Keynes also sealed her spacesuit and when the soldier marched into the airlock just forward of the passenger module she went with them and positioned herself by the door they would be leaving through. Getting ten people into this part of the Eagle was a squeeze but there was enough room that only this part of the ship would have to be de-pressurised to allow Washington and his men to deploy to the surface.

The Eagle lurched slightly as it touched down and without waiting for Carter to give the word Keynes opened the airlock's exterior door. This unfolded to form a ramp down to the lunar surface and Washington drew his stun gun.

"Go!" he ordered and with their stun guns in their hands the soldiers rushed down the steps.

Holding her comlock in her hand Keynes made a note of each man who came past her, creating a record of who had gone onto the surface of the moon along with a time stamp that could be used to calculate how much capacity they had remaining in their life support system.

"Troops out." she said, limiting her communication to inside the Eagle only and then she took one last look at the line of soldiers bounding across the lunar surface in the low gravity before she closed the Eagle's air lock again.

Having spent several hours in spacesuits Kane's cell were taking the opportunity to eat and drink now that they could remove their helmets before returning their weapons to their lockers when the computer terminal beside Kane began to bleep and he looked at the display to see a simple message shown on it.

GET OUT.

"The Earthers have found us." Kane exclaimed as he leapt to his feet and scooped up his weapon, "Grab what you can and we'll get out in the tunnel."

The other members of the cell threw their food aside and hurried to pick up their own weapons as well as any other portable equipment they could find easily while Kane darted to the computer terminal and aimed his weapon at it. There was a rapid succession of sharp 'crack' sounds as Kane fired the automatic carbine into the computer, the sound coming from the magnetically accelerated projectiles breaking the sound barrier. It was common when using a modern projectile weapon inside a pressurised environment to lower the velocity

of the rounds to limit the risk that they could cause ruptures that would lead to uncontrolled depressurisation. However, Kane was keen to destroy the computer before the GDF could capture it and cared nothing for the structure of the safe house they were abandoning.

Satisfied that the computer would yield no information to the GDF, Kane looked around and saw two of the members of his cell carrying bags towards a hatch set into the floor while the third was rigging an explosive charge just inside the interior air lock door.

"What are you doing?" Kane asked as he rushed up to the other terrorist.

"Leaving a little surprise for the Earthers." the man said.

"Forget it. They won't come in through the air lock, they'll breach the wall." Kane told him and he began to drag the other terrorist away, "Now come on, we need to get down the tunnel. Grab your helmet and let's go."

When Kane opened the hatch in the floor it exposed a shaft that descended into darkness and he tossed a chemical light stick into it before the four terrorists began to climb down the ladder built into one of the sides, their equipment slung over their shoulders as they descended. At the bottom of the shaft was a chamber that contained a moon buggy and on one side there was a tunnel leading away into yet more darkness. The terrorists clambered aboard the moon buggy with their equipment and Kane started up the motor, turning on the headlights so that he could see where he was driving as he sped down the tunnel as fast as possible. In turn this tunnel led to a second underground chamber that was larger than the first that served as a hangar. The single craft stored here was an obsolete Vulture gunship, its bullet shaped command module demonstrating its common design heritage with the more modern Eagles and Hawks that had replaced it. Unlike the two more modern types of vehicles that specialised as transports or attack craft, the Vulture gunship had been designed to be more of a multi-purpose craft that combined what for the time had been a good dogfighting capability with a limited troop or cargo transport capacity. The colonies beyond the moon still retained these craft for defence but in Earth service the Vulture had been relegated to reserve status and large numbers had been disarmed and sold off. This particular example had been obtained via a private owner but its weapons had been replaced by Red Mars and it remained fully functional.

There was more than enough room inside the Vulture for all four of the terrorists and when Kane sat down in the pilot's seat he hurried to prepare it for lift off before the GDF could discover what he was doing.

"Target in sight." Washington broadcast, his words being carried not only to his entire squad but also back to the Eagle that had brought them here from where the signal was then relayed back to Moonbase Alpha as well, "Get that lock set up."

The portable air lock that the soldiers had brought with them was a simple air tight bag supported by lightweight rods that could be quickly unfolded to create a box that was open at one end. This was pressed against part of the exposed structure and fixed in place while Dalton began to unreel a length of explosive charge. This had a rectangular cross section and one side was labelled 'DANGER! BLAST THIS WAY!' and it was this side that he placed against the wall and taping it in place. Dalton unrolled enough of this to form a large square that was almost as wide as the portable air lock and the troops moved towards the back of it, standing well back and pointing their weapons towards the wall.

"Set?" Washington asked and Dalton nodded.

"Ready when you are sergeant." he replied, taking out his comlock and bringing up the command function for the shaped charge he had just set.

"Blow it." Washington ordered and moments later the shaped charge detonated, blowing a large square hole in the wall.

As soon as the wall was breached air from inside the structure flooded into the portable airlock, balancing the pressure as the GDF troops leapt through the hole and began to spread out before anyone inside could respond.

"Global Defence Force!" Washington shouted, speakers built into his spacesuit amplifying the sound of his words, "Everyone drop your weapons and surrender."

The two soldiers assigned to be snipers quickly found cover behind storage containers and kept watch over the other troops as they continued to spread out and search the inside of the structure. This appeared to be a single large chamber with the exception of the air lock that two of the troops headed towards. Most of the internal space of the main chamber was empty except for the vehicles that the terrorists had driven here and scattered cargo containers of various sizes. None of this looked out of the ordinary for a mining outpost but the far wall had been decorated using paint in the form of the emblem of the Red Mars terrorist group.

"We've got a hot charge here sergeant." one of the troops called out and Washington nodded.

"Don't touch it. We'll let the technical section deal with it later." he said.

"Computer terminal over here. Looks smashed." another soldier added as he found the bullet ridden computer.

Meanwhile Washington himself made his way towards the two exo-tractors and the covered trailers they were both still hooked up to and peering under the cover on the first he instantly recognised the machinery

he was looking at as a laser cannon and he smiled.

"Gotcha." he said to himself.

"Sergeant! Over here!" another soldier called out and Washington looked around to see the soldier waving him over.

"What have you found?" Washington asked as he hurried over to the other man.

"Looks like we're too late. They've already gone." the soldier said as Washington reached him and he pointed down the open hatch into the darkness below.

"Captain Keynes this is Master Sergeant Washington." Washington transmitted.

"Go ahead sergeant. What have you found?" Keynes responded from the cockpit of the Eagle.

"Captain we've found and secured the laser cannon that brought down the Eagle from Gamma but there's no-one here. Looks like they had a bolt hole to go down and took it."

"Sergeant does it look like its a tunnel or a bunker to try and hold out in?" Keynes asked.

"I'm not sure captain. But I'd guess that its a tunnel. If it was a bunker we could just drop in a couple of grenades and bury them alive down there."

"They must have a ship close by." Carter said to Keynes, "It wouldn't make sense to have a secret escape tunnel that either left them having to travel across the surface on foot or by slow moving vehicle or led us right to whatever base they're operating from." and Keynes nodded in agreement.

"Hawk flight this is combat Eagle one are you still up there?" she broadcast.

"Keeping watch from above captain." the co-pilot of Hawk one responded.

"Good. Keep an eye out for any launches nearby. If you pick anyone up then escort them to Gamma."

Keynes said.

"Understood captain we'll-" the Hawk co-pilot said.

"Hawk two are you still there?" Keynes asked.

"Affirmative captain but we've got a launch. Eight thousand metres from your position, single contact. Looks like an old Vulture. We're in pursuit now." the co-pilot told her.

6.

Less than a minute after clearing the hidden hangar, the sensors aboard the Vulture began to warn Kane and his terrorist cell of the two approaching Hawks when their sensors locked onto the older craft.

"They just lit us up for a weapons lock." Kane's co-pilot warned him, "I'm reading two Hawks closing fast from astern."

"I see that." Kane responded.

"Unidentified Vulture craft this is Hawk one. You are ordered to divert to Moonbase Gamma for security checks. Signal your compliance." the voice of one of the Hawk crew said over the Vulture's communication system. The older ship's visual communications had been disabled to prevent intercepted signals from helping the GDF identify members of the Red Mars organisation and so the Hawk crewman's image did not appear on any of the screens inside the cockpit of the Vulture.

"So what do we do?" Kane's co-pilot asked.

"First we'll try and shake them but if that fails we'll see if we can at least take them with us." Kane told him.

In Moonbase Alpha's main mission Koenig and his command staff watched the chase unfold as the two Hawks rapidly closed the distance between them and the older Vulture gunship. The Hawk crews repeated their demand to the pilot of the Vulture to change course for the nearby Moonbase Gamma but he responded only by continuing to try and evade the two pursuing attack ships.

With no way to safely disable a spacecraft within a gravity field, even one as limited as the moon's without having it crash Koenig felt that the warnings issued by the Hawk crews needed to be backed up with something more.

"Hawks one and two this is Colonel John Koenig, fire a warning volley across their path." he ordered.

"Understood colonel. Starting my run now." Hawk one's pilot responded.

Already well within weapons range, the pilot of Hawk one angled the magnetic accelerator cannons mounted on the tips of the craft's stubby wings roughly towards the fleeing and evading Vulture before he squeezed the triggers built into his controls. Immediately two lines of projectiles burst from the muzzles of the cannons, the glowing plasma used to accelerate them clearly visible against the blackness of space. As intended the twin streams of projectiles missed the Vulture but came close enough that their occupants knew that they had been fired upon.

Inside the Vulture Kane's co-pilot flinched.

"They're firing on us!" he exclaimed.

"Then we fire back. Take control of the cannons and return fire." Kane replied and his co-pilot took hold of the controls in front of him.

Like the main magnetic accelerator cannons on the more modern Hawk, those carried by the older Vulture gunship could be rotated around to fire behind the vessel and the gunship's co-pilot did this, watching as the Hawk appeared in the targeting display.

"Free Mars." he hissed as he fired the weapons when the GDF attack ship appeared to be in the centre of the display and a stream of projectiles shot out of the cannons.

"Whoa! That thing's armed!" the pilot of Hawk one exclaimed as the burst of projectiles passed close by his craft and he stopped simply flying straight at the Vulture to adopt a more evasive posture.

"Alpha this is Hawk one we are under fire from the target. Requesting instructions." the co-pilot signalled.

In main mission Koenig frowned. He had hoped it would be possible to take the terrorists in the gunship alive but if their vessel was capable of fighting then that was no longer an option.

"We can't let them escape with a ship like that colonel." Morrow commented, pre-empting what Koenig was already considering, "It may be obsolete but it could still kill hundreds of innocent people."

"I know." Koenig said before he turned back to the communication system, "Hawk one and Hawk two this is Colonel Koenig, Weapons free, fire at will." he ordered.

"Arming missiles." the pilot of Hawk one announced. In its standard space superiority role his Hawk carried a total of six space to space missiles, two mounted under the wings and a further four in its internal weapons bay and as the pilot turned the Hawk back towards the Vulture he linked these missiles to his sensor feed. It took less than two seconds for the sensors to achieve a lock, alerting the pilot to this with a flashing icon on the targeting display projected onto the cockpit viewport in front of him, "I've got a lock. Fox one." he said, squeezing the missile release trigger.

The missile mounted under the Hawk's right wing dropped momentarily before its rocket motor ignited, propelling it forwards with greater acceleration than even the Hawk itself could manage. Inside the Vulture Kane was alerted to being targeted as soon as the Hawk achieved the lock and he tried to turn his craft aside to get it out of the targeting ark of the missile. However, having put so much effort into building up speed to try and keep ahead of the two pursuing Hawk's his craft had too much forward momentum to lose before being able to get out of the path of the missile and he and his passengers could only watch in horror as the missile sped towards them before detonating just behind the Vulture, sending a cloud of shrapnel forwards in a cone that shredded it.

"Hawk one to Alpha." the co-pilot signalled, "We have a confirmed kill."

"Roger that Hawk one." Benes responded, "Hawk one and Hawk two return to base."

"Captain Keynes, put me through to Sergeant Washington." Koenig said and in the Eagle Keynes linked the signals coming in from Alpha to Washington's spacesuit radio.

"You're through now colonel." she said.

"Washington this is Koenig, the terrorists were attempting to escape in a Vulture but our Hawks shot them down. That means we've not got any prisoners to interrogate so we're relying on what you can tell us you've found instead."

"The big find seems to be the laser cannon colonel." Washington said, "It's trailer mounted and there's a portable fusion generator here to power it as well but we've also got stocks of small arms that look like a mix of military and civilian weapons. There's also other equipment that you'd need to run a military operation, survival gear and rations."

"What about command and control?" Koenig asked.

"Not much sir. There's a computer terminal but its smashed. Technical section might be able to make something of it but it looks like someone emptied a weapon into it before we got here. I'm not sure if this will be useful or not but I think they were alerted to our approach while they were eating. There are some half eaten ration bars here that could have DNA traces on them."

"Great. Don't touch anything. I'll have a forensics team sent over as soon as possible." Koenig said.

"Better send a bomb disposal unit as well colonel." Washington replied, "Someone got part way through rigging the air lock with an explosive charge."

"Okay I'll make sure the team knows what to expect. Alpha out." Koenig said. Then he activated the intercom, "Doctor Russell." he said.

"Hi John." Russell responded, "I guess this isn't a social call."

"Sorry no. Washington's just raided what looks like a Red Mars safe house and I need a forensic examination of the place." Koenig told her.

"Okay, where is it?"

"A structure near Gamma."

"Gamma? I thought you meant it was here at Alpha." Russell said.

"No. This looks like Red Mars did bring down that Eagle and this was their base of operations. We've got their laser cannon and a Hawk brought down their escape ship though so at least this particular group won't be troubling us again and they've lost their cannon. The problem is that there were no survivors so I need you try and tell me who they were and maybe we can get some more leads from them. I'm sending Kano out as well to take a look at their equipment and a bomb disposal unit to deal with a booby trap they left behind. How soon can you be ready?" Koenig said.

"Give me ten minutes to wrap things up here." Russell told him.

"Thanks. There'll be an Eagle waiting for you on pad one when you're ready." Koenig said before shutting off the intercom. Then he looked at Kano, "Captain gather a team to make any of the weapons in that structure safe for transport back here. Send another team to where that Vulture came down. I want the wreckage securing before anyone else can get out there. I also want you to take a look at that laser cannon and computer. I want to know where they got a weapon and ship like that and also whether anything can be determined from what's left of that computer."

"Yes colonel." Kano replied as he got up to leave and at the same time Koenig headed for his office.

"I'm going to update General Simmons on what's going on. I don't want to be disturbed while I'm speaking with him." he said as he made his way up the steps. Closing the wall behind him, Koenig sat down at his desk and activated the communication system, linking to General Simmons and Lieutenant Colonel Verdeschi simultaneously.

"John, have you made progress?" Simmons asked.

"Possibly general." Koenig replied.

"So we didn't lose everything when you had my Hawks shoot down that Vulture?" Verdeschi commented.

"No, fortunately the terrorists left a building full of evidence for us to examine, including the laser cannon they used to shoot down the Eagle from Gamma."

"A laser cannon and a combat capable Vulture? Red Mars seems to have a lot of firepower here on the moon." Verdeschi said.

"Yes, hopefully each of those was unique." Simmons added, "How soon before we know whether that laser cannon was also used to bring down Condor six five? I've just had the Space Commission on the line again asking about security for further flights bringing nuclear material from Earth. Most of them still think it's an environmental operation and they want to use it to promote themselves to the public."

"Won't they get a shock when we finally go public?" Verdeschi said.

"Master Sergeant Washington has secured the safe house and I've got forensics and technical people on their way over to take a look at what's there." Koenig said, "With any luck the evidence left behind will be able to lead us to any other people that Red Mars have here on the moon."

"Kane's dead." the woman told Garcia as he drank in the hotel room he currently used as his sleeping quarters and he smiled as he poured himself another drink. His position as the leader of the Red Mars groups on the moon made it necessary for him to move around a lot to make sure he was not in one place long enough for any of the Earth's law enforcement or military agencies hunting him to locate him. Right now a run down hotel run by an Martian ex-patriot was the best he could manage. The rooms were filthy and amenities limited but the local neighbourhood had a high portion of Martian citizens there and outsiders would be noticed quickly making it difficult for government agents to operate there without being detected. "I take it he died before the GDF got a chance to talk to him? My source at Alpha was supposed to be watching for any operations they launched against us." he said.

"Of course he did but this little diversion of yours has cost us our only laser cannon and a Vulture. Things we needed to bring the war to the Earthers." the woman said.

"If not for Kane rushing off to prove that he could penetrate the Earthers' nuclear security he'd still be alive and we'd still have our laser cannon and Vulture. Blame him for this mess, not me." Garcia told her.

"But the other cell leaders know what happened and they're nervous. They don't know about the Earthers' nuclear program, all they know is that we've lost a cell and some of our most valuable equipment in the mix. They know that you ordered Kane to shoot down that Eagle and they think that you're putting us all at risk by rushing into things." the woman said, "If you'd at least let me tell them what we're planning to do then maybe they'd calm down."

"No." Garcia said sternly, "All it takes is for one of them to get cold feet or say one wrong word and the GDF will find out what we're doing as well and that will be it for all of us. They'll lock down Mu so tightly that we'll never make it through the perimeter. Now what about the bomb?"

"Menendez wants to talk to you about it. I think he's finished." the woman replied.

"Then why didn't you tell me instead of spouting all that crap about Kane?" Garcia said as he put down his drink and got to his feet. The woman then led Garcia from his quarters through the narrow hallways of the hotel he was staying at and down to one of the lower levels where a workshop had been set up. Inside this a man sat surrounded by electronics and as Garcia entered he looked up.

"Ah Mister Garcia I was wondering when you would next come and visit me." Menendez said.

"I'm told you've finished the bomb." Garcia said and Menendez sighed.

"How many time must I keep telling people that this is not a bomb? I don't make bombs, I have no knowledge of explosives whatsoever. What I do know about though is electronics and this little device is what you have been asking me for for the last three months. Now it is fully functional." he said, holding up an electronic circuit board.

"I don't get it." the woman commented, "I thought we were going to set off a bomb."

"Of course we are. Or rather you are." Menendez replied, "But all this device is is the trigger. Or rather a device to override the existing detonation circuitry."

"So once we attach this to one of the Earthers' weapons we can tell it to explode whenever we want?" Garcia said but Menendez shook his head again.

"No. To send a remote command to detonate would require a transmitter and receiver strong enough to penetrate the shielding of the bunker where the Earthers keep their munitions and that would be too big. This device functions off a timer. See the display here?" he said and he pointed the LCD module attached to the circuit board he was holding, "This will show you how long you have until detonation. It can be configured using a comlock but once the timer is running it can't be stopped." he explained.

"So we set the timer and get clear before-" Garcia began.

"Before you become the first people in more than a hundred years to detonate a thermonuclear bomb." Menendez interrupted.

With the air lock of the Red Mars safe house rigged with explosives a new air lock had to be fitted in the form of a prefabricated unit that could be quickly constructed around the soft skinned bag that Washington and his team had used when making their entry into the safe house. As soon as the technical team that had

accompanied Kano and Russell in the Eagle that had brought them both from Alpha completed assembling this they were all finally able to make their way into the structure.

"Doctor. Captain." Washington said in greeting as they stepped through the interior door of the pre-fabricated air lock.

"What's your status sergeant?" Kano asked.

"The building is secure." Washington answered, "It had already been abandoned when we made our entry. There's an escape shaft near the back that leads down to a tunnel. I'm guessing that it leads to the hangar that Vulture was kept in. Meanwhile we've got a heavy laser cannon, fusion generator, computer terminal and assorted small arms for you inspect before it all gets carted back to Alpha."

"I believe there's also evidence for me to collect and analyse?" Russell responded and Washington nodded.

"Yeah over here." he said, beckoning for her to follow him and he led her to where the terrorists had sat eating and drinking before they had been warned about the impending raid, "Looks like they didn't have time to finish lunch."

Russell crouched down beside the table and looked at the half eaten ration bars and drink packets that were scattered across its surface.

"This looks good." she said, setting down the equipment case she had brought with her and opening it up. Inside were numerous clear plastic sample containers and she began to lift the abandoned food and drink from the table using tweezers before sealing each item in its own container.

"I guess this is the laser cannon, right?" Kano called out as he advanced on the covered weapon.

"That's the one. I'm glad it wasn't armed when we came in. If they'd had it up and running then they could have fried my entire squad in one blast." Washington said. Then he looked towards the main airlock and pointed at the interior door where one of his men stood guard by the explosive charge, "That charge is all they left for us though. Fortunately we made our own door."

"So I see. Taylor check out that charge but don't touch it yet. The rest of you give me a hand with this." Kano said as he began to release the fastenings of the cover over the laser cannon and he looked at the weapon underneath.

"Yep, this thing could bring down an Eagle or a Condor easy enough." one of Kano's men said when the cover was pulled back to expose the laser cannon, "Easy to operate as well, probably controlled using a tablet or a comlock."

"I don't know." Kano said, "Something's not right about this."

"Like what captain?" the other technical specialist asked.

"This is a mobile artillery piece, right?" Kano said.

"Yes captain. Looks like one of the old mark fourteen pulsed laser cannons. Control it directly or just leave it in place with a list of viable targets and a power source and it'll shoot on sight all by itself. There must be hundreds of these old things tucked away across the system. I'll bet this one came from a Martian reserve depot."

"But it's a battlefield weapon, not a planetary defence battery. So how did it bring down a ship that was about sixty thousand kilometres away? At that distance the laser should have dissipated enough energy that it wouldn't even have been able to dazzle the crew of that Condor through the polarised cockpit viewports."

"Looks like some one replaced some of the power conduits back here captain." another of Kano's team called out, "Maybe they boosted the power output."

"Maybe." Kano said, "But I'm not convinced. We'll have to get a recovery Eagle in to transport this back to Alpha so we can run some test firings. Then we'll know how powerful it is."

"Doctor I think you should see this." Taylor suddenly called out and Russell looked around from the table where she was still carefully packing evidence in her case.

"What is it?" she asked.

"I think there's a fingerprint in the explosive." Taylor said.

"Let me see." Russell replied, rushing to Taylor's side.

"Careful there doc." Kano said as he abandoned the laser cannon and ran to join her.

"Actually I think this charge is safe captain." Taylor said, "I don't think they had time to finish setting it before they had to get out."

"He's right." Russell said as she examined the plastic explosive compound and saw the impression left when the terrorist who had been in the process of setting it had pressed one of his fingers into the explosive itself and left the tell-tale mark, "That's a fingerprint." and taking out her comlock she used the camera mounted into it to take a high resolution image of the print, "Okay I've got what I need. If you could slice out that bit of the charge and keep it that would be good but don't take any risks with it."

Taylor nodded.

"I should be able to do that for you doctor. This looks like a commercial explosive so it should be pretty stable." he said.

"Chemically tagged as well." Russell commented when the soldier told her that the explosive was probably a

commercial type, "With a sample we might be able to track it back to its source."

While Russell watched as Taylor took out the combat knife he carried and began to slice into the explosive, Kano turned away from the laser cannon and instead went to take a look at the computer terminal. It was obvious that the damage to the terminal had been inflicted using a projectile weapon, with small holes in the front of the terminal's casing where the projectiles entered and larger, more irregular holes in the rear where the projectiles and debris had exited, leaving pieces of the computer's internal components scattered on the floor behind the computer.

"Looks like we've got some bullet holes over here." he called out when he saw the holes punched into the floor by Kane's bullets after they had passed through the computer.

"Sergeant Washington, could you try and dig those rounds out for me." Russell asked.

"I'll get right on it doctor." Washington answered and he took one of the sample containers from Russell's case before heading to join Kano.

Kano himself crouched down beside the computer and opened up the compact technical kit he had brought with him. Removing a suitable screwdriver he then began to open up the bullet ridden casing of the computer. As he had expected a large number of the internal components had been damaged by the gunfire, the rounds Kane had fired into it having had more than enough energy to punch through multiple layers of material. All of the computer's internal components appeared to be standard off the shelf items and this meant that the only part that interested him was the hard drive. This was a basic solid state non-volatile memory device that was capable of rapidly accessing a vast amount of stored information and was the only part of the computer that would not have lost all its data when the machines lost power due to the power supply being shot. However, as one of the larger devices inside the computer it was also one of the most likely to be hit by the random gunfire Kane had put into it and two of the rounds had struck it. One of these had just clipped the edge of the drive and dug a groove across it. On the other hand the second had passed right through and the material surrounding the path of the bullet had shattered, leaving a large jagged hole all the way through the drive.

"How does it look captain?" Washington asked as he crouched down close by and looked at the holes left where the bullets had entered the floor.

"A mess." Kano replied, "I know pretty much all there is about electronics and computers but even I can't put a hard drive back together after it's been shot. No, this will have to be examined layer by layer to build up a composite image of whatever was stored on it. Mind you we might be able to get some information on where whoever they were in communication with from other sources. If they used any public networks then the information will still be held remotely."

"Well it looks like these bullets are in good and deep." Washington said as he inspected the bullet holes in the floor more carefully, "I bet whoever fired them off didn't bother limited the muzzle velocity of their weapon. It's a good job these went into the floor and not the front wall or this place would have lost pressure and we'd be trying to work in a vacuum."

"Need a hand there sergeant?" Russell asked as she walked over to him, a sample case containing the lump of explosive with the fingerprint in it in her hands.

"We'll need to draw these rounds back out of the holes." Washington said and Russell nodded.

"There's an electro-magnet in the evidence kit. If they came from an magnetic accelerator then we should just be able to suck them back out the same way they were propelled in. Then after that it's over to Captain Keynes to see if she can tell us anything." she said.

"Colonel it's time." Morrow told Koenig over the intercom, Morrow had kept his voice low as he spoke and Koenig glanced at the time display on the wall.

"I'm on my way." he said, "Any ETA on the Eagles from the safe house yet?"

"They should be back with us in about ten minutes but that'll be too late." Morrow said still speaking quietly.

"Okay let's do this." Koenig said and he shut off the intercom. Then he opened a drawer in his desk and took out a large gold coloured envelope that he carried with him as he opened the wall to main mission and walked down the steps outside his office.

"Command staff to attention!" he shouted and all of the command staff present got to their feet and stood at attention. Then Koenig held up the envelope as he walked towards where Baker stood by her console, "Spacewoman First Class Francis Baker, in acknowledgement of your loyal service and friendship here on Moonbase Alpha and despite you choosing a location in Canada for the ceremony that none of us were invited to, the command staff have asked me to present you with this card to celebrate your upcoming wedding to some guy who I believe is called Mike. Congratulations Francis." and he handed her the envelope.

"Oh that's so sweet of you all." she said as she took the envelope and opened it to see the card inside that had been signed by all of the senior personnel of Moonbase Alpha as well as General Simmons as well and then she hugged Koenig.

"The others wanted to be here as well but it's the end of your shift and they're still not back." Koenig said.

"That's okay, tell them I said I love them all." Baker said.

"So are we ready for the next part then?" Koenig asked and Baker looked around.

"What next part?" she said.

"Grab her!" Koenig snapped and Morrow and another male member of the staff in main mission dashed forwards, the three of them grabbing hold of Baker and she screamed as they lifted her up.

"Setting up the camera now." Benes said, propping her comlock up on her console as the rest of the command staff gathered around where Baker was being held aloft. Benes then hurried to join them.

"Camera will bleep before taking three images and then again before shooting five seconds of video." she said.

"Good. Everyone know what they're doing?" Koenig asked.

"Getting ready to throw up." Baker said before the comlock beeped and then there were three soft 'clicks' as it photographed the scene. Then it beeped again and in unison the command staff all called out the same phrase.

"Congratulations Francis and Mike!" they shouted.

"And you better treat her well Mike." Koenig added before he looked around, "Okay let's set her down and everyone get back to work. Spacewoman Baker it's been a pleasure working with you."

"Thank you." Baker replied as she was set back down on the floor, "And not just for putting me down again."

"I'll just get these pictures to you." Benes added as she picked up her comlock and sorted out the footage it had just taken.

"Just be sure to send us pictures from your wedding." Alexander added and Baker smiled and nodded.

"I promise." she said.

"And every time you look up at the moon remember you have friends up here." Benes said.

"Now off you go. You've got packing to do." Koenig said and Baker saluted him one last time before heading for the exit.

"Bye everyone." she called out from the doorway, waving before she left.

7.

Garcia and several other members of his own terrorist cell stepped from the travel tube into the terminal at Moonbase Alpha. His personal cell was much larger than the standard cells and even though most of them were liaison agents used to pass on orders to those other cells Garcia was still able to call on eight well trained men for this operation. All of these were professional soldiers, former members of the colonial defence force on Mars who had been recruited to Red Mars towards the ends of their terms of service. For Garcia these men formed an elite corps to the forces he had available to him on the moon. Although coming to Moonbase Alpha was more of a risk than operating out of Beta it was far more convenient to launch the final stage of the operation from here than from there owing to the distance between the two different bases and the nuclear storage and processing facility at Moonbase Mu as well as their relative positioning. Alpha lay between Beta and Mu so as well as cutting down on the distance that needed to be travelled it also meant that Garcia and his unit would have to cross only half of Alpha's total control zone as they left and then later returned to it rather than either crossing the entire zone twice or making their route even longer still by trying to circumvent it on a journey all the way from Beta.

"This way." Garcia told his men as they made their way through the tube terminal station and he pointed to a sign that read 'LIFTS AND STAIRS TO SURFACE LEVELS', "The rover should be waiting for us."

With travel to Mu restricted to a small pool of authorised personnel, Garcia's team needed to make it to a surface level so that they could take an exo-rover across the surface between there and Alpha. Exo-rovers were wheeled surface vehicles much larger and heavier than ordinary moon buggies. Much of their extra size was made up of their enclosed and fully pressurised hulls that eliminated the need for the driver or passengers to have to wear spacesuits for their entire journey. Given the distance that Garcia and his men needed to cover this was a definite advantage over having to spend several hours in suits.

Once on the surface they made their way to a private garage unit where Garcia used a comlock coded specifically for this task to open the door and they went inside to find the exo-rover waiting for them.

"Okay everyone get aboard and check the gear." Garcia said once the door slid shut behind them and he dropped the comlock to the floor before stamping on it several times, smashing the device into pieces. Then he picked these up and placed them in a small bag, "We'll ditch these en-route." he added.

Aboard the exo-rover one of Garcia's men headed for the driver's controls at the front while the others began to inspect the equipment that had been left for them by another Red Mars cell that operated here at Moonbase Alpha. There were enough spacesuits for the entire unit, all of them with fully charge life support packs. In addition to these there were several weapons. Most of these were magnetic accelerator pistols and rifles but there were also two stun guns included in the mix as well. It was not intended that the unit would engage GDF troops, secrecy being the most essential part of the mission, but if they were discovered at Mu then they would inevitably have to try and fight their way out so they were going prepared.

"What are these? They look like radio beacons." one of Garcia's men said as he picked up a case containing several small devices fitted with obvious radio antennas.

"Careful with those, they're the transponders our informant in Alpha's command staff gave us the codes for." Garcia said, "Mu's surrounded by a permanently active defence grid like the one surrounded the prison at Theta. The grid will fire at any person or vehicle that approaches without one of these things transmitting a recognition code. If we lose them then this whole mission is off. But if we activate them too soon then Alpha will pick them up and they'll be alerted to our being here. There should be a comlock in there as well to get us into the vault where the warheads are stored."

"So if we can get these then why not get transponders so we can get through the defence grid at Theta and break out our people being held there?" another of the terrorists asked.

"Because then the Earthers would know we could get their codes you idiot." another commented.

"Precisely." Garcia said and he looked towards the man now sat in the driver's seat, "So what about the rover itself?" he asked.

"It looks in perfect working order and the air and fuel tanks are both full. It'll get us as far as Mu and back easily." the driver told him.

"Good. Don't forget, we don't want to take a direct path." Garcia said and the driver nodded.

"Instead of straight south I head south west away from any other bases as if we're going prospecting or sight seeing. Then after sixty kilometres I'll veer south east and take us towards Mu."

"That's it. Now everyone find a seat and take it. We've got a long drive ahead of us." Garcia ordered and as the rest of his unit sat down the driver started up the vehicle, using the remote control system for the garage to de-pressurise it and then open the outer door from within the vehicle before he drove out onto the moon's surface and turned to the south west.

Koenig and Russell landed on the bed they shared at the same time, their arms around one another as they kissed. However, just as they started to undress the door to their quarters chimed.

"Ignore it." Koenig said.

"I was going to." Russell replied but then the door chimed twice again.

"Damn they aren't giving up." Koenig said as he got up off the bed, "I'll get rid of them."

"And do it quickly." Russell said, watching as Koenig made his way to the door and opened it to find Professor Bergman standing in the hallway outside.

"Professor." Koenig said, "This is a surprise."

"I'm sorry about coming round at this hour colonel but I need your help rather urgently." Bergman said.

"Yes professor, what can I do for you?" Koenig asked.

"Well I understand that there's a frigate standing watch by the Lagrange point where your Condor was lost." Bergman said.

"That's right, the *Landau* has been keeping commercial shipping away." Koenig replied.

"Well I need access to its sensor data from the time when the Red Mars terrorists fired their laser cannon at the Eagle from Gamma." Bergman said.

"What for?" Koenig asked, frowning.

"Well I contacted the observatory at Moonbase Zeta and I got them to supply me with the orbiting satellite data from around the time of both attacks but I need to narrow this down to the precise point at which the laser would have been fired, if indeed it was a laser that destroyed the Condor and opened the wormhole. To do that I need to be able to identify the exact energy pattern of the laser so that I can filter it out from the background noise and the only way to manage that is to-

"Is to get the data that the *Landau* would have recorded when the Eagle was shot down." Koenig interrupted.

"Precisely. The frigate was perfectly placed to capture the moment of firing on its sensors and I can match that with the data I received from Zeta." Bergman said.

"Okay I'm coming. We can contact the *Landau* from main mission." Koenig said as he hurried to pick up his comlock and then he turned to Russell who was sat watching him from the bed, "Sorry about this Helena. I need to fight evil now but we can have sweet loving time later." and then he dashed from their quarters, closing the door behind him.

"Don't count on it John Koenig." Russell called out after him.

Carter was the only member of the senior command staff in main mission, overseeing the start of the night shift when Koenig and Bergman came rushing in.

"I didn't expect you to be here so late colonel." Carter said, "Everything's pretty quiet."

"I need to speak with Lieutenant Colonel Martin aboard the *Landau*." Koenig said, "Put him through to my office."

"Yes colonel." Carter replied.

Koenig and Bergman made their way up the steps to Koenig's office and he closed the wall behind them just as the face of Lieutenant Colonel Martin, commanding officer of the *GDS Landau* appeared on the computer screen on his desk.

"Colonel you wanted to speak to me?" Martin asked.

"Yes have you been monitoring the lunar surface while you've been on station?" Koenig asked, already knowing that the frigate would have been scanning in all directions, but not know how much focus its crew would have put on surface scanning when their task was to control shipping.

"The sensors have been running but we've not been monitoring for surface activity." Martin replied.

"Okay. Well I need your logs anyway. One of the people I have working on the investigation needs to compare your sensor logs at the time the Eagle from Gamma was shot down to when Condor Six Five exploded. How soon can you get me the relevant logs?" Koenig said.

"Give me ten minutes to locate that portion of the log and another five for the data transfer." Martin said and Koenig nodded.

"Thanks, that's great. Alpha out." he said before shutting off the communication link with the frigate. Then he looked at Bergman, "Will that do?" he asked.

"Yes, if you can get the information transferred to me as soon as it arrives then I'll compare it with the data from Zeta's satellites." Bergman answered, "Hopefully I'll be able to find match at the time when the Condor was destroyed as well. If not then that only leaves a bomb placed aboard the ship as an explanation for how it was destroyed and that means that someone has been able to penetrate the security of your little nuclear weapons program. I hate to think of the consequences of that."

"I don't know what you're talking about." Koenig said.

"Oh come now colonel we are both intelligent men." Bergman said, "I may be an astrophysicist but I happen to know quite a number of nuclear physicists as well and I know the names of all the men hired for the project at Mu. I know that when the project was first unveiled to the public a number of friends in the academic world were consulted about the practicality and safety of moving nuclear material up here to the

moon but when it came to actually starting work on the program the Global Defence Force only hired men from private industry, not the academic world. Now all these men are fully qualified to run a program relating to nuclear fission but since no-one has operated a fission reactor for anything other than research purposes for almost a century that means that their real area of expertise is fusion. Combine the fusionable material that is available widely here on the moon with the fissionable material being brought up here from Earth and it all adds up to the GDF building thermonuclear weapons."

"That's an interesting story professor." Koenig said, "Though I doubt the Space Commission would approve of someone they've awarded a lot of resources to spreading conspiracy theories."

"Oh you don't need to worry about me telling anyone what I've figured out colonel. I have enough faith in men like yourself and General Simmons not to use a weapon of mass destruction on a civilian target but there are others who will be able to figure out what I have and they may not be as sympathetic to the military as I am. Now if you don't mind I'd like to return to my lab. Could I ask you to send the data from the *Landau* to me there when it arrives?"

"My pleasure professor." Koenig said, opening the wall to main mission so that Bergman could leave. Then he closed the wall again and turned back to the computer terminal, using it to communicate with Moonbase Mu, "Anton. You up late as well?" he said when Gorski's face appeared on the monitor.

"Things are pretty hectic here." Gorski replied.

"Well I'm sorry but I may be about to make things even worse for you. When did you last run a full security review of the project. Both here and on Earth?" Koenig asked.

"A security net was set up along with the project. It hasn't failed and no-one's any the wiser so why waste time with a full review?" Gorski responded.

"Because people have figured out what you're up to over there Anton." Koenig told him and Gorski frowned.

"That's not possible. Every precaution was taken to-"

"Victor Bergman just explained to me how he figured it out and you can bet that there are other people smart enough to do it as well. Since half the project's security is based on no-one even knowing what you're making over there I'd say that security has already failed.

"Bergman knows? Are you sure this isn't just a test? Perhaps General Simmons let him in on the secret and he wanted to see if you could avoid blabbing about it." Gorski suggested.

"Oh stopping being such an ass Gorski." Koenig exclaimed and in the background behind Gorski on the monitor he noticed the startled reaction of some of Mu's command staff to this, "Go ask the general if you want. Ask him if he broke security personally just to test me. Alternatively you could start checking your security procedures because if it turns out someone did manage to smuggle a bomb aboard Condor six five then God knows what else they've been able to breach."

"Colonel Koenig you're over reacting." Gorski said, sighing, "Mu is surrounded by an impenetrable defence grid and there are physical security patrols at random intervals so they can't be predicted. I can assure you that this base is secure." and then he shut off the link from his end.

8.

Wednesday 13th September 2299. The day the moon leaves Earth orbit.

The automated turret was located at the top of a hill and built into a reinforced base that also housed all of the sensors used for target acquisition and tracking.

"Looks like a standard fifteen millimetre rapid fire accelerator." one of Garcia's men said as he peered over the edge of a crater just under two hundred metres away from the weapon emplacement. The Red Mars terrorists had left their vehicle several hundred metres further back, out of sight of Mu's perimeter defences and made their way from then on on foot, "That thing can cut us in half from ten times this range."

"Don't worry. It won't fire. Watch me." Garcia said and he got up and jumped over the crater rim, landing several metres ahead. Immediately the sensors built into the turret's base detected his presence and the weapon turned to face him. At the same time the identify friend or foe system activated and scanned for any signals from Garcia. Picking up the low energy transponder he wore on his shoulder the turret's control system determined that he had the proper authorisation to be where he was and the turret did not fire, "See?" Garcia said to his men, "Easy." and one by one the rest of the terrorists emerged from in cover, each one pausing as the turret took aim at them briefly before their own transponders were accepted by the IFF system as well and they were free to continue on their way right past the automated weapon.

Despite being the newest of the human settlements on the moon, newer even than the still incomplete military base of Lambda, Moonbase Mu was still one of the largest. The nuclear storage silos, reinforced bunkers constructed on the surface were spread over a very wide area while at the centre of this sat the inhabited part of the base that featured landing platforms and the nuclear processing facilities on the surface while the command and control as well as the living quarters for the base personnel were built beneath it for added protection. None of these interested Garcia and his men though, all they wanted access to was the bunker used to store the completed nuclear weapons.

Like the storage bunkers for the waste nuclear material this was constructed on the surface and it could be distinguished from the storage silos by the loading systems that connected it to a pair of landing pads that would allow the weapons to be rapidly loaded aboard Eagle or Condor transports for transportation to other military bases or vessels belonging to the Earth's armed forces. The nuclear weapon storage silo was also surrounded by an inner defence grid that consisted of more automated turrets set about a hundred metres from the bunker they protected. These were smaller but spaced closer together than those on the outer perimeter and three of them turned to track the Red Mars terrorists as they approached.

"They aren't turning away." one of Garcia's men said, noticing that the turrets did not return to their resting positions as they moved across the ground between them, each step a small leap in the low lunar gravity.

"They're not firing on us either." Garcia pointed out, "According to our source these are here to protect against unauthorised attempts at accessing the bunker as well as just approaching it. They'll track us right up until we go inside."

"Be nice if we could change the transponder codes they respond to." another of the terrorists added, "Then anyone who came to investigate would be chewed up by their own guns."

"Yes and the Earthers could just cut the power to them and be left knowing we'd been here. We get in, we get out. That's all." Garcia replied as he came to a halt out the entrance to the bunker, a large sign over the door reading 'DANGER - RADIATION', "Okay everyone take cover just in case my source thinks we can be double crossed." he said as he took out the comlock that had been left for him in the exo-rover by the Red Mars cell from Moonbase Alpha and he held his breath as he activated it.

There was the usual bleeping sound, audible over his spacesuit's communication system and the door to the bunker began to slowly slide open. Garcia then looked around to see that the automated turrets were now turning away from his team and returning to their default positions facing outwards from the bunker and he finally allowed himself to exhale.

"Everyone inside." he said, "A patrol could come along at any moment."

The terrorists then hurried into the bunker's airlock and the last man in closed the outer door behind him before Garcia activated the airlock to pressurise it. The airlock was large enough to permit a vehicle such as an exo-rover to be driven inside and so there was plenty of room for the group of terrorists to fit in without it being cramped while they waited and some of them looked around while other focused on the inner door.

"We walked all the way from the rover and we could have just driven it in here." one of them commented.

"We'd never have got it past the Earthers' sensors even with a good transponder." another replied.

As the pressure increased Garcia not only put his comlock away, knowing that the inner door would open automatically once the process of equalising the pressure was complete, but also took out a Geiger counter. In theory there should not have been any significant radiation leaking from the finished warheads but Garcia

could not be sure of this without checking. As soon as the pressure in the airlock reached normal the inner door began to open and Garcia looked down at the Geiger counter's display. The count increased slightly above what it had been inside the airlock before the door opened but the level remained below what was normal for being out on the surface, unprotected by the structure of a base or outpost. Looking into the bunker Garcia saw that it consisted of numerous alcoves, each one identified with a serial number over it and space between the rows wide enough to drive a moon buggy or forklift along. All of the alcoves visible from inside the airlock were empty but it did not take much to guess that they were intended to provide each nuclear weapon made at Mu with a dedicated storage location, meaning that somewhere there would be alcoves that were occupied.

"Spread out." Garcia told his men, "If anyone else comes in we'll have no choice but to engage them now. Verenich, you're with me."

"Yes sir." the terrorist known as Verenich responded while the other terrorists spread out to take cover in the empty alcoves arrayed in front of them. Garcia led the other man in the rough direction of the nearest landing pad, reasoning that the GDF would start storing its nuclear weapons as close to the distribution point as possible and work their way away from there. Sure enough as the door leading to the landing pad's loading dock came into view Garcia and Verenich also saw that the alcoves around it contained large sealed containers marked 'GDF ORDNANCE' and a serial number that matched the one above the alcoves they were stored in. There was, however, no specific identification of what the containers had inside.

Garcia looked up and down the row, counting just over a dozen containers in it. Then he walked past this row of alcoves and looked down the next, seeing that it too had a container in each alcove.

"This one." he said, pointing to one of the containers at random.

"Why that one?" Verenich asked and Garcia shrugged.

"Why not. At least with one in this row if the Earthers do come along and check the bomb I modify isn't going to be the first one they come to." he replied.

The two men made their way to the container that Garcia had chosen and then Verenich watched as Garcia opened up a toolkit and took out a pair of cutters so he could cut through the wire seals on the containers. These were a standard type and Garcia's kit held a number of spares so it would not be possible to identify which warhead had been tampered with purely by looking at the container.

"Help me with this." Garcia said after the seals were broken and he and Verenich lifted the cover off the container to reveal the metre long cylinder inside.

"So that's a nuclear bomb then?" Verenich said, frowning.

"You don't seem impressed." Garcia replied.

"I don't know, I just thought a weapon that can level a city would look more imposing than a trash can." Verenich said.

"Never mind that now. I need to open the cover." Garcia said, turning back to his tool kit and selecting a compact battery operated drill that when fitted with the correct bit could also double as a screwdriver. Then he set about opening up the case of the warhead to expose its working parts. Once again Garcia and Verenich worked together to lift this off, "Now I just need to add this to the detonation circuit." Garcia added as he took the custom made trigger from a pouch on his belt.

"Are you sure you know what you're doing here?" Verenich asked.

"Trust me, this warhead has a conventional explosive for its trigger that has been adapted from an ordinary archer air to surface missile. I've practised this plenty of times on one of them. Besides so what if it does go wrong?"

"The bomb goes off and we all get vaporised in an instant?" Verenich suggested.

"Then we die martyrs and we still expose the Earthers' nuclear secret to the entire system." Garcia said,

"Now stand back, you're in my light."

The trigger designed for Garcia needed connecting to the nuclear warhead's own circuitry at three different points. First it needed to be able to draw power while also matching its own voltage levels to those of the warhead and so using a portable soldering iron Garcia soldered the trigger's two power wires to the warhead's battery and as soon as the second connection was made the display lit up, flashing a row of zeros to indicate that it was ready for the timer to be set. Before Garcia did this though he needed to connect the trigger's output to the warhead's detonation circuit and he soldered the third and final wire coming from the custom trigger circuit to the warhead's own detonator. Although the new trigger circuit was now connected electrically to the warhead, it was still hanging loose on three wires that anyone could simply rip free if they pulled on it hard enough and the loss of any single wire would be enough to render the circuit inoperative. To remedy this Garcia took a simple tube of fast setting glue from his tool kit and first glued the circuit board to the warhead's own control circuit and then applied glue to each of the three wires, pressing them against any convenient parts of the bomb he could find until their entire lengths were secured.

"That's it." Garcia said, "Now I just need to set the timer. I think six hours ought to be enough time for us to be well on our way back to Beta before this goes off."

"As long as we're outside the blast radius I don't care." Verenich said as Garcia entered six hours into the timer and then set it going, watching as it immediately began to count down towards zero.

"Hurry, let's get this back the way it was and get out of here." Garcia told him.

The two men then reversed the process used to open up the bomb. The cover would not fit back on the warhead now that the additional trigger had been added and so to disguise what they had done Garcia stuffed the loose cover and its screws into the container beside the weapon before he and Verenich closed it. As a final touch Garcia replaced the seals he had cut through, picking up the pieces of the old ones so that there would be no visual clues that the warhead had been accessed in any way, let alone set to go off in six hours.

"I just remembered I forgot to take a photo." Garcia said.

"What for?" Verenich asked, "Do you really need a souvenir?"

"No, not for. Our contact at Alpha just thinks that we're breaking in to gather evidence of the nuclear program to be spread online. Do you really think we'd be able to get someone to help us detonate one of their own secret nuclear bombs?" Garcia told Verenich and the other man smiled.

"I wish I could be there to see their face when this goes off." he said.

"So do I but I don't think they're ever coming back to the moon after this so we won't get the chance to ask for their reaction." Garcia said as he packed up his tool kit, "Okay let's go. Every second we wait now brings us a second closer to going up with this thing." he added.

"Professor Bergman is waiting in your office colonel." Morrow told Koenig as soon as he entered main mission and Koenig looked up the steps to his office to see the scientist sat waiting for his arrival.

"Professor I hope I haven't kept you waiting long." Koenig said as he hurried up the steps and sat down behind his desk, leaving the wall between his office and main mission open this time.

"Oh not long. Just a few minutes. I'm afraid I have bad news for you colonel." Bergman answered and Koenig sighed, resting his head on one of his hands as he leant to one side.

"It was a bomb that destroyed Condor six five wasn't it?" he asked.

"It does look that way. Obviously without any physical evidence for your technical staff to examine I can't be one hundred percent certain but I've compared the data recorded by the Landau's sensors when that Red Mars cell brought down Gamma's Eagle to the corresponding data from Zeta's satellite observatory network and I managed to isolate the energy spike from the laser pulse. However, there was no such pulse at the time Condor six five exploded. So unless the Martian insurgents have managed to come up with some sort of stealth technology that our best sensors can't defeat the only option remaining is that they used an explosive charge placed aboard the Condor while it was being loaded on Earth. I've written a full report for you here." Bergman said and he handed a tablet to Koenig.

"Which means they might be able to infiltrate Mu itself." he said as he took the tablet and glanced at the first page of the document on the display.

"Colonel." Kano's voice called out suddenly as he came rushing into main mission, also carrying a tablet as he hurried up the steps to Koenig's office.

"Yes captain?" Koenig said.

"Colonel I've checked out that laser cannon and even without firing it I can tell you that it couldn't possibly have inflicted serious damage on a spacecraft as far out as the Lagrange point. In fact it wouldn't even get through the forward viewports." Kano told him.

"Yes, Professor Bergman has just informed me that the terrorists used another method." Koenig replied.

"There's more though." Kano continued, "I left the drive we recovered from the terrorist safe house being scanned over night and when I checked it this morning I was able to pull some usable data off it."

"Can you identify the terrorists yet? Doctor Russell hasn't come back with any results from the forensic examination." Koenig said.

"I'm sorry no, I can't tell you who they were but I can tell you how they knew we were coming. Someone here tipped them off and by here I mean Moonbase Alpha." Kano said.

"How do you know that?" Koenig asked.

"The section of the drive dealing with communications was still intact. The terrorists were using software that deleted their logs each time they disconnected from the network they were attached to but when they shot up their computer they shut it down before disconnecting so their security program never had chance to run and we've got the last message. It simply told them to get out and it had a Moonbase Alpha point of origin." Kano explained.

"If someone was going to try and get into Mu then Alpha is the logical starting point. But they'd still need a vehicle of some kind to make it that far." Koenig said before he got up and walked into main mission,

"Lieutenant Alexander."

"Yes colonel?" she replied.

"What vehicles have left Alpha recently that could have got to Mu?" Koenig asked and Alexander began to

check the records of all vehicle departures from Alpha. Although the general population were free to come and go between bases as they wished Alpha's computer system kept a record of the registry of every vehicle that arrived or departed, as did the computers of every other major base on the moon. This was intended as a safety mechanism whereby in theory any vehicle that remained away from a base for too long could be flagged as missing and a search carried out before its occupants could run out of air. However, it also doubled as a security feature that allowed the location of suspect vehicles to be tracked while they remained close to a base.

"I've got six vehicles that have left our control zone and not returned or entered another control zone yet." Alexander said, "Four moon buggies and one exo-rover and an exo-tractor that left together, any of them could be heading for Mu."

"I doubt that anyone would want to sit in a spacesuit for the amount of time it would take to reach Mu by moon buggy but the exo-rover is a possibility." Koenig said and he turned towards Carter, "Carter get the stand by Eagle in the air and tell its crew to locate that rover and tractor. They don't need to do anything more than find out where they went. Alexander will give you the details." he added.

"Yes colonel." Carter said before he began to issue orders to the stand by Eagle crew.

"Okay Alexander, what about vehicles that have either come back here or reached another base? Could any of them have travelled as far as Mu?" Koenig said.

"Checking." Alexander said, continuing to scroll through her records, "We've got an exo-rover that left Alpha yesterday evening and returned just under two hours ago. It could have made it there and back with time to spare. The course it took through our control zone was in a different direction but there's nothing to stop it from looping around after it got out of range."

"But colonel wouldn't any vehicle approaching Mu have been engaged by the automated defences?" Morrow asked.

"Not if someone had a way to disable them remotely." Koenig said and he glanced over his shoulder at Bergman before looking at Benes, "Captain I need to speak with Mu immediately."

"Yes colonel, putting you through now." Benes said and an image of Mu's main mission centre appeared on the big screen, both General Simmons and Lieutenant Colonel Gorski

"Colonel Koenig, do you have any news for me?" General Simmons asked.

"Yes general though I'm afraid it's not very good. Professor Bergman has provided me with evidence that the security of the operation at Mu may have been penetrated." Koenig told him.

"This again Koenig?" Gorski interrupted, "General I can assure you that we are safe here. No-one can get through the perimeter without being challenged by the automated defences."

"And what if they've got a way past them?" Koenig said, "General someone here at Alpha warned the Red Mars cell operating the laser cannon that we were about to raid their safe house."

"Sounds like it's your security that needs improving." Gorski commented.

"Oh give it a rest Gorski." Koenig snapped, "Both Professor Bergman and Captain Kano have confirmed that Condor six five was not brought down by a laser. Our sensors show that there was no projectile or missile and as far as I know the Landau hasn't reported finding any mines out there. The only realistic option left is a bomb placed aboard the ship."

"Colonel Gorski I want your men to carry out a sweep of the outer perimeter. Look for any signs that our defences have been penetrated. Also run a check on the security system for any successful attempts at access that can't be accounted for from your patrols or work schedules." General Simmons ordered.

"But general that would-" Gorski began.

"Just do it Gorski!" General Simmons snapped at him and Gorski flinched. The general then turned his attention back to Koenig, "John if you've got a spy over there then find them. Do whatever it takes to make sure they don't escape."

"Yes general. Alpha out." Koenig said before the image of Mu's main mission vanished and big screen returned to its previous state, showing tracking data for the area around Alpha.

"Stand by Eagle is in the air colonel." Carter told him and Koenig nodded.

"Good. Alexander where is that exo-rover now?" he asked.

"It returned to a private garage where it's been ever since." Alexander told him.

"Good. Sergeant Washington." Koenig said and he looked around at where Washington was sat at the security console in Keynes' absence.

"Yes colonel?" he said.

"Take a squad to the garage and secure that rover." Koenig ordered.

"Yes colonel. Stun weapons again?" Washington said and Koenig was about to agree when he considered why Red Mars would want to gain access to the base at Mu and the possibility that if they knew about Earth's nuclear weapons project they could attempt to seize control of some of those weapons for themselves.

"No. Use live ammunition." Koenig ordered, "If there is any resistance then shoot to kill."

The other officers in main mission exchanged nervous glances.

"Colonel perhaps-" Morrow began.

"You heard my orders major. If there are terrorists in that garage then I want them neutralised as quickly and efficiently as possible." Koenig said sternly.

"Yes colonel." Washington said and Koenig turned back to Alexander.

"Lieutenant lock down the base. No-one gets in or out until I give the word. No exceptions." he said.

"That will cause chaos at the travel tube terminal colonel." Morrow pointed out and Koenig nodded.

"I know. Someone get me Captain Keynes." he responded.

9.

"Message recorded. Delivery schedule set." the computer voice said in Keynes' quarters before the communication panel display suddenly changed to show Koenig's face.

"Colonel." Keynes said, smiling at him, "I just finished writing home."

"Captain I'm sorry but I need you to start your shift early. It's an emergency." Koenig said.

"Of course colonel. I'll be with you in five minutes." Keynes replied.

"No." Koenig said, shaking his head. I've ordered the base put on full lock down. We may have Red Mars terrorists on the base. Sergeant Washington is about to raid a suspected safe house but I need you to make sure that the travel tube terminal is secure. If the terrorists try to leave that way they could cause a lot of casualties when they find they're trapped."

"Yes colonel, I'm on my way now." Keynes said, turning off the communication panel. Before she left her quarters she hurried to a locked drawer and used her comlock to open it, revealing the stun gun and holster she kept inside. Then after fastening this around her waist she made her way out of her quarters and headed towards the travel tube terminal.

Back in main mission Koenig looked around.

"Okay everyone we have a job to do. I want everyone prepared to deal with an emergency situation should things go wrong. Make sure your sections are ready and all personnel are on alert. Captain Kano I want you and Captain Benes to start going through our communication logs. If someone here on Alpha warned the terrorists then we should be able to trace how they did it. Find me our spy." he said and the command staff began to act, all of them checking the status of their sections and their preparedness for an emergency of any kind.

"Excuse me colonel," Bergman said, "but what about me?"

"Professor you seem to be able to figure out things that no-one is supposed to know. I want that intelligence close at hand now so if you don't mind I'd like you to stay right here." Koenig told him and Bergman smiled back at him.

"Of course colonel." he said.

Startled civilians leapt back as Washington and his assault team hurried along the hallway to the garage where the exo-rover known to have spent a number of hours beyond Moonbase Alpha's control zone was stored. Wearing full body armour and carrying magnetic accelerator rifles the squad looked imposing as they took up positions around the entrance to the garage and Washington took out his comlock.

"Washington to main mission," he said through the microphone built into his helmet, "my squad is in position. Overriding lock in five, four, three, two, one." and he pressed a button on his comlock's touch screen that activated the security override program, opening the entrance to the garage, "Global Defence Force!" he then yelled as his men stormed into the garage, their weapons held at the ready.

There were just two men inside the garage when the soldiers burst in, both of them busy replenishing the exo-rover's fuel and life support reserves. Rather than surrendering to the armoured troops, both men took cover and reached for weapons. There was a sharp 'crack' as one fired a carbine and one of the GDF troops fell to the floor, clutching at a wound where the high velocity round had punched through his body armour. In response to this Washington and most of his men returned fire while another man in the squad pulled their injured comrade back out of the line of fire. Firing short bursts, the GDF troops' gunfire had a muffled sound to it. Unlike the two Red Mars terrorists who were willing to risk a decompression, this was something the soldiers were looking to avoid and so they had set their rifles to fire their rounds at subsonic speed which made the only sound produced that of the displacing air. The barrage of fire made both terrorists duck behind the structure of the exo-rover. This was sufficiently reinforced to protect its occupants from the hostile environment that the bullets fired from the GDF soldiers' weapons bounced off rather than punching holes in it.

"Keep up the pressure on this side." Washington told his men as they continued to fire at the terrorists, "Thomas, with me." and then Washington led the other soldier behind the parked exo-rover, circling around the front of the vehicle to try and catch the terrorists in a crossfire. This did not go unnoticed, however and one of the terrorists also moved to the other side of the exo-rover, firing his own rifle around it. Washington ducked as the terrorists fired and instinctively he fired back and put a short burst of rounds into the terrorist's chest, "Move!" he then snapped and both he and Thomas ran along the length of the exo-rover to get around it before the second terrorist could react to the death of his comrade.

Knowing that he was now on his own, the surviving terrorist looked for a way out. The GDF troops advancing on either side of the exo-rover blocked his access to the exit from the garage into the hallway outside and the

only other door was the one that opened onto the surface of the moon. Without a spacesuit, opening this door would be suicide but there was another way for him to protect himself from the vacuum outside and he quickly climbed up the ladder at the rear of the exo-rover that led to its outer airlock hatch, entering the vehicle before slamming the door shut and locking it just before Washington could get to him.

"Damn!" Washington hissed, knowing exactly what the terrorist was planning now, "Someone get to that inner door and jam it open." he called out as he started to run back towards the front of the exo-rover. Inside the vehicle the terrorist hurried to the driver's seat and sat down, turning on the vehicle's power plant. Then he reached for the controls that operated the garage's outer door, instructing it to open. With the inner door already open this could not be achieved without decompressing this entire section of Alpha and so first the computer controlling the doors acted to close this one. Fortunately one of Washington's men had already reached the doorway and before it could slide closed he wedged his rifle in it, blocking the door as it began to move. The terrorist was not deterred by this though and he demonstrated that he did not care about the dangers of large scale decompression by starting the exo-rover's engine and putting the vehicle in reverse. The exo-rover backed up suddenly and slammed into the outer door, producing a loud 'crash' as it hit it. Then the terrorist moved the exo-rover forwards again, trying to steer towards some of the GDF troops who fortunately were fast enough to get clear before being run over. The terrorist made a second attempt to batter down the reinforced outer door but it remained intact still and he was forced to drive forwards again in anticipation of making a third attempt.

However, Washington had used this time to adjust the setting of his magnetic accelerator rifle, increasing the velocity of the rounds it fired to the maximum and he took aim at the front of the exo-rover. Lining up his sights on the terrorist sat in the driver's seat, Washington squeezed his trigger and fired a single round that shot from his weapon at more than five times the speed of sound. This produced a loud booming sound as it broke the sound barrier and at almost the same time it struck the exo-rover's windscreen. Although it was toughened, the exo-rover was still a civilian vehicle that was designed to protect its occupants from environmental hazards and not a military armoured transport that needed to be able to protect against attack. and the bullet punched right through the windscreen before hitting the terrorist right between the eyes. The man's head jerk back as the shock wave being dragged along behind the bullet blew off the back of his skull and spread blood and brain matter around the interior of the exo-rover behind him before slumping forwards over the controls. The bullet still possessed enough energy to keep going and it punched through the rear of the exo-rover just as easily as through the windscreen while it was coming to a halt. Then it hit the outer door of the garage and there was a 'hiss' of escaping air as it also made a hole in this and the atmosphere of Alpha began to leak out.

"Okay someone get a patch on that hole." Washington said, pointing to the damaged outer door, "and let's get this thing opened up. I want to see what's inside."

Dressed in civilian clothing and with a large holdall over her shoulder that held the things she needed for her trip back to Earth, Baker stood in the travel tube terminal and looked at the crowd of people ahead of her. Although still a member of the GDF who could have hitched a ride aboard almost any military flight heading back to Earth she had opted to book a seat aboard a civilian transport from Moonbase Eta, but this meant that she first had to reach that base and she had decided that the travel tube network was the best means to do this. She had served on the moon long enough to know that the queue she was stuck in was not normal and she did her best to try and see what was causing it. Unfortunately her short stature made it impossible for her to see very far through the crowd and she could not see any of the travel information boards from her location. Instead she took out her comlock and used it to connect to the terminal information feed, calling up the state of the tube cars scheduled to be departing she was horrified to discover that every single tube car was listed as 'CANCELLED'.

"Oh no." she said, knowing that she had barely two hours to make it to Eta if she was going to get off the moon as planned. She knew there was an information desk close by and she began to push her way towards it, hoping to find out what was going on and how soon she would be able to get to her destination, "Excuse me. Excuse me." she called out as she approached the desk, "I need to get to Eta."

"Everyone needs to get somewhere." someone else in the crowd commented and Baker briefly glared in their direction.

"What's going on?" she asked the woman behind the information desk.

"I'm sorry we don't know. All of the travel tubes around Alpha have been taken off line. All cars approaching have been recalled to their previous stops and nothing is going out. The base is on a full lock down."

"A lock down? But I need to get to Eta, I'm getting married in three days and I have to-"

"I'm sorry, there's nothing I can do." the woman said before she turned towards a man who was jabbing at the screen of a tablet to show her how his plans were being disrupted by the lock down.

"Francis?" a familiar voice said from behind Baker and she turned to see Keynes standing there as a squad of soldiers in armour and armed with stun guns and rifles moved through the crowd, ordering people back in

the most crowded areas.

"Captain Keynes, what's going on?" Baker asked and Keynes looked around quickly.

"I can't tell you, not here." she said, "Why are you here?"

"I'm trying to get to Eta. I have a flight booked back to Earth but I've been told that Alpha's on lock down. Captain I can't miss my flight. I have to get home for my wedding." Baker said and Keynes paused for a moment.

"Come with me." she said, taking hold of Baker's arm and pulling her towards the exit.

"But the travel tubes-" Baker began,

"Aren't the only way to get you back to Earth. Trust me." Keynes interrupted.

"Where are we going?" Baker asked as they left the travel tube terminal.

"Launch pad seven. Or rather the hangar beneath it." Keynes answered, "The advantage to being a captain in charge of logistics and security means that I know where the stand by Eagles are and there's one there all fuelled up and ready to go. I'll fly you back to Earth myself."

"But won't Colonel Koenig mind?" Baker said.

"Once we explain what we're doing I'm sure he'll let us go. He doesn't want you to miss your wedding after all. He's just trying to make sure that terrorists can't get away from Alpha." Keynes said.

"There are terrorists here at Alpha?" Baker said.

"Colonel Koenig thinks so. Now hurry up. The hangar access is just up ahead." Keynes told her.

"Colonel I think we've found something here." Washington said into his comlock.

"What is it sergeant?" Koenig asked from main mission.

"A Geiger counter. It was inside the exo-rover and I can't think of anywhere on the moon that anyone would need one of those other than Mu if they were trying to crack open a storage vault." Washington said and Koenig nodded.

"I agree. Bag that thing up and get it under lock and key. I'm going to let General Simmons know about this." Koenig said before he shut off the intercom, "Captain Benes-"

"Putting you through to Mu now colonel." Benes said before he could finish his order and then General Simmons and Lieutenant Colonel Gorski appeared on the big screen again.

"Koenig, have you found anything?" Simmons asked.

"Yes general, I'm afraid we have. My troops raided a garage that held an exo-rover that left our control zone yesterday long enough to be able to get to Mu and back."

"Are we back on this?" Gorski commented.

"They found a Geiger counter in the rover sir." Koenig said, ignoring Gorski.

"And the only reason they'd have one of those is if they were planning to break into one of the storage silos." Simmons replied, "We're on it." and then the link was cut off.

"Colonel I think I've got something here." Kano said suddenly.

"What is it captain?" Koenig responded.

"I've managed to isolate the immediate source of the warning given to the terrorists to get out of the safe house." Kano told him.

"That's great. Where did it come from?" Koenig asked.

"Right here colonel. Main mission." Kano said.

"One of the command staff warned them? I'll check the duty log now." Morrow said.

"No need major. As I said that was the immediate source but the message had been bounced off another node to here before it was relayed to the terrorists." Kano replied.

"Can you tell where it originated from?" Koenig said.

"Yes colonel. It came from outside Alpha. It came from combat Eagle one." Kano said.

"Well don't look at me," Carter said as several of the command staff glanced in his direction, knowing that he had been the pilot of the Eagle, "and it can't have been one of Washington's men either. None of them were ever alone before they went in."

"There was only one other person aboard that Eagle." Morrow pointed out and Koenig looked towards the empty console that was usually occupied by Keynes.

"It can't have been Alyson. It just can't." Alexander said.

"She was alone in the back of the Eagle after Washington and his men disembarked." Carter said.

"That means you were alone in the cockpit." Alexander said.

"Where is Captain Keynes?" Koenig said, "We need to sort this out."

"She should be at the travel tube terminal." Morrow said

"Get me in touch with the leader of the squad she took with her." Koenig ordered.

"Putting you through now colonel." Benes responded.

"Sergeant Foster reporting." a voice said over the intercom.

"Foster do you have eyes on Captain Keynes?" Koenig asked.

"No colonel. She left just after we arrived. I think she had that young spacewoman who's getting married with her."

"Francis?" Benes commented.

"Kano cancel Keynes' comlock and get me a location." Koenig told Kano.

"Yes colonel, cancelling the comlock now. Wait, this isn't right." Kano said.

"What isn't?" Morrow said.

"Captain Keynes' comlock. I can't shut it down. There's a localised firewall in the system that's preventing me from accessing it." Kano said.

"Well I think that proves who sent the signal." Morrow said, looking at Koenig.

"Do you need to do something about that?" Baker asked when she saw Keynes look at her comlock after it beeped at her.

"No, it's not urgent. But we should hurry to the Eagle." Keynes replied as she opened the door in front of them marked 'HANGAR - RESTRICTED ACCESS' and the pair of them went through the doorway.

Inside the cavernous underground hangar were row upon row of spacecraft. Most of these were the ubiquitous Eagle transport craft in both armed and unarmed versions but there were also several Swift scout ships as well as older model Vulture and even ancient Kestrel craft held here in reserve. As they walked through the hanger Keynes pointed across it to a large open doorway that led to one of the launch pads themselves. Here an Eagle sat on the cross shaped pad in its lowered position so that it was possible to walk right up to the craft.

"That's one of the combat Eagles." Baker commented when she spotted the pair of accelerator cannons mounted beneath the Eagle's forward section and Keynes nodded.

"I don't think we'll have much call for the weapons for our little hop." she said, "Now let's get aboard and we can lift off."

Walking up the ramp into the Eagle, Keynes immediately turned towards the cockpit while Baker hesitated.

"What's wrong?" Keynes asked.

"I'm just not used to riding up front, that's all." Baker said as she then followed Keynes to the cockpit and sat down before Keynes started to bring the Eagle's systems on line.

"Colonel I've got an unauthorised access to the standby Eagle." Carter announced.

"Shut it down." Koenig ordered but Carter shook his head as he tried.

"I can't. I've been overridden locally." he said.

"Get Washington to the hangar now. Tell him to detain Alyson Keynes." Koenig ordered as he reached for the communication system on the console in front of him, "Captain Keynes shut down that Eagle and give yourself up. We know you warned Red Mars about the raid on the safe house."

"Captain, what's he talking about?" Baker exclaimed when she saw Koenig's face on the communication monitor and heard what he said.

"Forget it. We're ready to take off." Keynes replied, starting the Eagle's engines. Then she reached for the flight controls and used them to close the door between the launch pad lift and the hangar. As soon as this happened the lift shaft leading to the surface began to de-pressurise and the landing pad itself began to rise up towards the outer door.

"Launch pad seven lift rising colonel. I can't shut it down." Carter reported.

"Lieutenant Alexander, arm surface weapons." Koenig said.

"Colonel are you really suggesting that we-" Alexander began.

"Do it!" Koenig snapped.

"Yes colonel. Arming surface weapons." Alexander replied and a klaxon sounded as she armed the various magnetic accelerator and laser batteries mounted in fortified positions around Alpha, each turret rising up from their bunkers as they activated.

"Keynes if you try to take off you'll be shot down." Koenig said over the intercom.

"I don't think so colonel. Baker's here with me. She's got nothing to do with this." Keynes replied.

"Colonel what's going on?" Baker's voice suddenly said as she grabbed a communication headset in the Eagle's cockpit.

"Benes contact Lieutenant Colonel Verdeschi now. Tell him to get Hawks in the air." Koenig said, "Keynes you can't escape." he added.

"I'm sorry colonel but by tomorrow I'll be on Mars and everyone will know about the nuclear weapons program at Mu." Keynes said.

"Benes contact Mu. Tell them Red Mars may have accessed the nuclear weapons vault. They need to make sure that they're all still there." Koenig said, "And someone tell Washington to get a move on."

"Don't worry colonel. Red Mars are just going to photograph the weapons to show everyone what we've been doing. I really am sorry about this but I had no choice." Keynes said and she shut off the Eagle's communications system.

"Captain please, what's going on?" Baker pleaded.

"Don't worry Francis. We're just going to be taking a little detour, that's all. That Martian freighter that's been hanging around is there to pick me up. They'll leave you in the Eagle and you'll be picked up and taken back to Earth in good time for your wedding I promise." Keynes told her.

"No!" Bakers said, releasing her safety harness but before she could get up Keynes drew her stun gun and pointed it at her.

"Sit down." she said sternly, "I don't want to use this but if I have to leave you stunned and tied up in the back I will."

Baker sat down.

Washington and his men burst into the hangar and rushed towards the access lift for launch pad seven. The large door was now closed and Washington ran up to the control panel beside it. However, his attempt to override the lift function failed, the message 'ACCESS DENIED' appearing on the control screen.

"This is Washington," he said into his helmet microphone, "I can't get access to the lift."

"They aren't at the surface yet and the outer doors are still sealed." Carter told him, "Just cut the hydraulic line behind the main access panel and the lift will crash. Just stand well clear. Seventy tonnes of Eagle comes down hard."

"Understood." Washington replied and he pulled open the nearby inspection panel to reveal the three thick hydraulic pressure lines, "Okay stand back." he told his squad as he backed away and raised his rifle, checking that it was set to a muzzle velocity high enough that they bullets would be able to pierce the armoured pressure lines. Then he fired a rapid burst from his rifle and there was a loud 'bang' followed by a whistling and jets of escaping gas from the holes he had just shot in the pressure lines.

This sudden loss of pressure in the lift system brought the lift for launch pad seven, Eagle and all crashing back down inside the shaft and inside the Eagle both Keynes and Baker felt the craft shake as it hit the bottom of the shaft even with its own independent artificial gravity and inertial dampening systems now working.

Detecting the crash the computer controlling the hangar automatically opened the inner door, supposedly to permit a rescue unit to reach the occupants of the Eagle but it instead allowed Washington and his men to charge up to the closest of the Eagle's air locks and opened it.

"Go!" he yelled as he then rushed up the ramp into the ship with his rifle against his shoulder.

One of the other soldiers was the first to turn towards the cockpit, making his way through the short connecting corridor between it and the air lock before opening the cockpit door. Keynes had recovered from the shock of the sudden drop though and as soon as the cockpit door slid open she turned in her seat with her stun gun in her hand and fired, a flash of bright yellow enveloping the soldier as the laser created a plasma reaction on the surface of his armour that stunned him instantly, causing him to collapse.

"Fire in the hole!" Washington shouted as another soldier dragged their stunned comrade back towards the air lock and he plucked a stun grenade from his webbing, pulled out the pin and tossed it into the cockpit.

The soldiers ducked back into the air lock as the grenade went off, producing a bright flash and a loud bang that was enough to leave both Keynes and Baker disorientated. Blinded by the flash, the stun gun fell from Keynes hand as she instinctively reached for her eyes and at this moment Washington's men charged forwards, grabbing hold of Keynes and binding her wrists as they dragged her from her seat.

"I can't see! I can't see!" Baker shouted out from the co-pilot's seat.

"Don't worry, we'll get you to the medical section." Washington replied, "Doctor Russell will soon patch you up."

Gorski and as many soldiers as he had been able to cram into an armoured exo-rover spilled out of the vehicle as soon as the air lock in the nuclear weapons bunker as fully pressurised.

"Move." he ordered, "I want every warhead accounting for visually."

The soldiers then ran through the bunker, heading for the storage alcoves that contained the initial production batch of nuclear warheads and as soon as they reached these they began to cut through the seals on the their containers and opened up each one in turn to check that the powerful weapons were still in place. As each weapon was confirmed to be present the covers to their containers were left where they had fallen as the soldiers then moved onto the next one, eager to check them all as quickly as possible.

"Colonel!" one of the soldiers suddenly called out, "You need to see this now. We've got a problem here."

"What? Don't tell me those terrorists actually managed to steal one of our warheads." Gorski responded as he hurried to join the soldier and as he ran he took out his comlock, "General Simmons I'm in the bunker now

and we've got a problem. I think-" and then his face fell as he ground to a halt when he saw the warhead that Garcia had rigged with the new trigger circuit, its display showing the state of the timer as it counted down.

00:00:04

00:00:03

"Gorski what's going on out there?" Simmons demanded when Gorski went silent.

00:00:02

00:00:01

"Oh f-" Gorski began before the nuclear warhead right in front of him exploded and every molecule in his body was vaporised in an instant.

10.

The force of the explosion was not limited to just that of a single five mega-tonne nuclear warhead, the blast consumed every other warhead in the bunker and the fusionable material inside them was added to that of the initial bomb to create an explosion with the combined force of just over two dozen weapons. The bunker that the weapons were contained in could not contain even a small fraction of this force and it burst open to release the heat and light of a small sun on the surface of the moon. Furthermore, even without an appreciable atmosphere to carry a blast wave the force of the explosion was still carried through the ground and every single one of the storage silos filled with nuclear waste was torn open and shattered, sending radioactive debris up into space and scattering it over an area of several miles. Built largely underground and heavily armoured against attack, even Moonbase Mu itself did not survive and its structure was shaken apart, its occupants roasted alive in a microsecond by the intense heat from the explosion. The shock wave continued to travel through the moon and just seconds later it reached Moonbase Alpha. Alpha was far enough away that it was not obliterated as Mu had been but all across the base people were thrown against walls as the ground beneath them shook violently and alarms sounded all over the base as pressure seals failed creating dozens of small leaks in the outer hull. After Moonbase Alpha the other bases on the moon were violently shaken as the shock wave reached them as well. Next were the food producing caverns at Iota where fruit was shaken from trees and illumination units that provided the artificial lighting for crops to grow broke free of their mountings, crashing to the ground where they started fires. At Epsilon the Hawk interceptors stored vertically in their launch cradles shook from side to side as Verdeschi and his command crew did their best to maintain their balance in their underground main mission centre, watching helplessly as one of the Hawks broke free of its cradle and fell to the floor of the hangar, bursting into flames as it snapped in two. Worst affected of all the bases was Moonbase Kappa, the moon's one and only dedicated tourists destination and thousands of holiday makers found themselves being thrown about by the sudden and unexpected tremors that ripped amusement rides from their mountings and created sudden waves in supposedly calm swimming pools.

At the space port facility at Moonbase Eta Major Weston and her command staff held onto their consoles as the control tower shook and there was an explosion as an Eagle coming into land at the moment the tremor hit the base crashed into its landing pad instead of setting down normally.

The remaining bases, further away from the epicentre of the tremors at the former site of Moonbase Mu suffered little damage but all were shaken and at the maximum security prison at Theta the guards had to force prisoners back into their cells as they began rioting.

However, the after effects of the nuclear explosion were not limited to the surface of the moon. The explosion produced a massive blast of radiation across the electromagnetic spectrum that radiated out into space at the speed of light and at its position close to the Lagrange point between Earth and the moon the frigate *Landau* was right in its path, unable to move aside fast enough.

"What the hell was that?" Captain Martin exclaimed as the blast struck his ship and all around him display screens flickered and warning lights appeared on control consoles.

"Massive burst of radiation from the lunar surface captain." one of the bridge crew responded, "Thermal, ultra-violet, X-rays, gamma rays. Sensors are overwhelmed."

"Communications are down." another added.

"Helm control has failed captain, we're drifting." the helmsman said.

"Captain I'm picking up something new, massive gravitational disturbance close by."

"Where from?" Captain Martin asked.

"Looks like the Lagrange point."

"That's not possible. There's nothing there." Captain Martins said.

"I can't explain it captain but we are definitely being pulled towards the Lagrange point. Something's definitely there now."

"Damage report." Koenig said as he pulled himself back to his feet.

"We've got pressure leaks all over. Nothing serious yet but we'll need to fix them." Kano responded.

"What was that?" Morrow said as he looked around main mission.

"A nuclear bomb going off?" Carter suggested.

"No." Bergman said, picking up his glasses from where they had fallen and putting them back on before getting back to his feet, "I think it was more than that."

"An entire nuclear arsenal going up in one go." Koenig said, "Benes get me Mu. I need to speak to General Simmons."

"I can't colonel." Benes replied.

"Communications are out?" Koenig asked.

"No colonel. Communications are fine. Mu just isn't there any more. It's been destroyed. General Simmons, Colonel Gorski, all of the others, they're all dead."

"Colonel I'm picking up something strange." Alexander said, "From the Lagrange point between here and Earth."

"Can you put it on the big screen?" Koenig said.

"Yes colonel, that's working fine." Alexander said and she called up the feed from a surface based camera that pointed towards Earth, focusing it on the region of space around the Lagrange point."

"Good God. What is that?" Carter asked.

"A wormhole." Bergman answered.

At the exact spot of the Lagrange point space had twisted and formed a point of bright light that was surrounded by a swirling pattern as it expanded and nearby the frigate *Landau* was tumbling towards this.

"The *Landau*." Koenig said, "Benes can you get in touch with them?"

"Negative colonel. They aren't responding." Benes said.

"Colonel it looks like they're being pulled into the, err, the wormhole." Alexander said.

"The wormhole must exert a strong gravitational pull. It's dragging in everything close by." Bergman said,

"That's why there was no wreckage from the Condor. The pull of the wormhole sucked it all up."

"Colonel the *Landau*'s going in now." Alexander said and then she looked away at the exact moment that the helpless frigate and all of its crew vanished in a flash of light.

However, the wormhole did not close even after it swallowed the warship.

"Colonel we're moving." Alexander said, her eyes widening as she looked at her console.

"What do you mean we're moving lieutenant?" Koenig demanded.

"I mean we're moving. Towards Earth. Measurements confirm that we are getting closer." Alexander said.

"No." Bergman said, "We aren't heading for Earth. It's the wormhole. It's pulling us in as well."

"Surely a wormhole can't pull the entire moon in professor." Morrow said.

"Just how much energy does it have?" Koenig added.

"This particular wormhole?" Bergman responded, "As much energy as was released by all those bombs plus all of the other nuclear material from over a hundred and fifty years of the fission industry on Earth could create."

"So what happens now?" Benes said.

"Well either the wormhole stays open and we are pulled in or it closes and we crash into the Earth." Bergman replied.

"We're picking up speed." Alexander said as the wormhole that was now clearly visible through the windows of main mission continued to expand, "Acceleration increasing as well."

"Colonel the satellite system is failing." Benes said, "Communications, navigation, observation. They're all dropping out of orbit."

"What do we do colonel?" Kano asked.

"Hold on." Koenig said.

The wormhole remained open and continued to grow, expanding as the moon got closer to the point where it was even larger. The moment the moon reached the event horizon it shook again as it was suddenly pulled into the gigantic wormhole, illuminating the entire moon with bright white light for a few moments before it was hurled out of the other end of the wormhole.

The *Landau* had already emerged from the wormhole and was still adrift, its systems still affected by the radiation from the explosion and so its crew could do nothing but watch as the moon emerged from the wormhole after it, speeding straight towards the frigate. Caught up in the gravitational pull of the moon, the *Landau* fell towards it, heading right for the space port at Eta and from her control tower Major Weston looked out of the windows in horror.

"Oh my God." she said, "It's coming right for us."

"Confirmed major." said one of her control staff, "Estimated point of impact is two thousand metres away."

"Sound evacuation. Everyone into shelters." Weston ordered but another of her officers pointed out of the windows at the frigate that was speeding toward them.

"Too late!" he yelled moments before the frigate hit the surface of the moon almost exactly where it had been predicted.

The warship's rear section exploded on impact and the burning wreckage tumbled across the lunar surface, smashing through surface hangars and exposed spacecraft. Then it crashed into the control tower itself and this was engulfed in flames as it collapsed, Major Weston and her entire command staff were killed in an instant as the wreck of the *Landau* continued to skid across the ground leaving a trail of destruction behind it until it finally came to a rest.

"Are we all still here?" Koenig asked when he regained his senses and looked around main mission. Then he

looked out of the windows and saw that the moon now appeared to be in orbit around a gas giant planet with a massive red spot in its atmosphere, "Is that what I think it is?" he said.

"It's Jupiter colonel." Benes said, "I'm picking up navigation beacons. I'm also picking up longer ranged transmissions that appear to be coming from us somehow."

"Check the time stamps." Bergman said, "They'll be a couple of hours out of date. Those signals were sent before we passed through the wormhole and we overtook them."

"What about casualties?" Koenig said.

"We're getting reports from all over the moon." Benes said.

"Damage as well." Kano added, "Colonel, Eta's gone. I think the *Landau* came down on it."

"How many people died?" Alexander said.

"Probably thousands." Carter said.

"Colonel I've got Doctor Russell for you." Benes announced and Koenig nodded, turning to the closest communications panel.

"John what's happening?" Russell asked when her face appeared on the screen.

"It's complicated Helena." Koenig replied.

"Sergeant Washington and his men just brought Spacewoman Baker and Captain Keynes in. They say Keynes is under arrest and that she's working with the terrorists." Russell said and Koenig frowned, "John what's wrong?" she added.

"I'm on my way." he told her before shutting off the communication panel.

Even the corridor outside the medical section was lined with wounded being assessed for treatment and Koenig had to pick his way between them before he entered medical where he found Russell examining Baker while she sat on the edge of a bed, trails of blood running from her ears.

"John." Russell said as he walked up to her, "Please tell me what's happening."

"What?" Baker shouted, "I can't hear."

"What happened to her?" Koenig asked.

"A stun grenade. Apparently Sergeant Washington used one when arresting Alyson Keynes. Baker will be fine in a few hours but I need to know what's going on. What were all those tremors and that light?" Russell said.

"Red Mars found out about the nuclear weapons program at Mu. They got someone inside and managed to trigger one off somehow. All of Mu is gone Helena, General Simmons is dead." Koenig said.

"Dead?" she replied.

"I'm afraid so but it doesn't end there." Koenig continued, "The explosion that destroyed Mu also opened up one of the wormholes Professor Bergman is here to study. It was big enough to drag the entire moon through and now we're in orbit around Jupiter."

"Jupiter? How is that possible? And what does any of this have to do with Alyson Keynes?"

"Alyson has been working with Red Mars Helena." Koenig answered.

"Surely not. Her sister was injured in one of their attacks on Mars." Russell said.

"I can't explain that. All I know is that she's the cause of all this." Koenig replied, waving his hand at the crowded medical section, "Now where is she?"

Russell stepped back and then pulled back the curtain that separated the bed Baker was sat on from the one next to it. On this Keynes sat with her wrists tied in front of her using a set of plastic ties, her ears also bleeding like Baker's from the effect of the stun grenade.

"Colonel I-" she said when she saw Koenig but before she could continue he reached out and suddenly grabbed her by the throat.

"Do you have any idea what you've done?" he yelled at her and all around the medical section people suddenly looked at him.

"Colonel, I'm sorry." Keynes croaked.

"John let her go." Russell said, putting a hand on his arm and Koenig relaxed his grip then looked at where Washington stood.

"Get that out of here." he said, nodding towards Keynes, "Secure her at Theta. I don't want to see her again until her court martial."

"Yes colonel." Washington said and then he and one of his men each took hold of one of Keynes' arms and started to drag her away.

"Colonel no. I can explain." she shouted but Koenig just turned away, his comlock sounding and he raised it to his head.

"Koenig." he said.

"Colonel you should get to main mission." Morrow said to him, "We have a problem."

"What, another one?" Koenig replied, "Okay I'm on my way." then as he put his comlock away again he looked at Russell and added, "I have to go. I'll let you know as soon as I can organise relief flights from

anywhere."

When Koenig returned to main mission he found his senior officers clustered around Alexander's console.

"What's going on?" he asked.

"Ah colonel, perhaps you should take a look out of the window." Bergman said.

"It's Jupiter." Koenig replied.

"No, look that way." Bergman said and he pointed at an angle away from the gas giant visible through the windows from the angle Koenig was looking through them. Moving closer Koenig looked out again and this time he saw the glowing white light with the swirling space surrounding it he had seen earlier.

"The wormhole. It opened again." he said.

"It never closed colonel." Bergman said, "You see when we passed through we also brought with us a great deal of radioactive debris and this, combined with the continuing emissions from Mu have held the wormhole open. Think of the radiation we're emitting as a doorstop. As long as it continues the wormhole will stay open and as more radiation reaches it the bigger it will become until-

"Until it pulls us in again." Koenig interrupted.

"I'm afraid so colonel." Bergman replied.

"But that will just take us back into orbit around Earth, right?" Benes said.

"Unfortunately I don't think that is the case Captain Benes." Bergman replied, "You see when we left Earth's orbit the Lagrange point at which the wormhole formed will have ceased to exist and without the Lagrange point there can be no wormhole exit. Wherever we end up it won't be in orbit around Earth."

"So it'll be somewhere else in the solar system, right?" Carter said.

"I wish I knew. Maybe we'll appear somewhere else in the solar system but I can't rule out us travelling to a different star system entirely. Maybe even a different galaxy. I'm afraid that I really don't know enough about wormholes yet to tell you. I came to the moon to research the phenomena in the hope that I could discover how they work."

"How long before we're pulled in again?" Koenig asked.

"At the current rate of the wormhole's expansion and our acceleration towards it I would say about ten to fifteen minutes colonel." Bergman said.

"Not long enough for an evacuation." Morrow commented.

"Not even long enough to fuel ships to evacuate people." Carter added.

"Benes I need to address the entire moon." Koenig said, "I'll do it from my office. Oh and I want it broadcast across the system as well. If anything goes wrong then Earth has to know what happened here." and he hurried up the steps to his office and sat at his desk.

"Ready when you are colonel, you're patched into every communication circuit." Benes called out and Koenig nodded before he activated his desk communicator, at which point his face appeared on every communication and video broadcast screen on the moon.

"This is Colonel John Koenig, commanding officer of Moonbase Alpha." he announced, "I must inform you that the moon is no longer in orbit around Earth. Terrorists believed to be from the Red Mars organisation committed an act of sabotage at Moonbase Mu, detonating a nuclear warhead there. This started a chain reaction of events that in addition to destroying Moonbase Mu entirely also opened up a wormhole that pulled the moon in, resulting in us being transported to an orbit around Jupiter. I have since been informed that the wormhole has remained open and once again we are being pulled towards it. Hopefully we will be transported somewhere else in our own solar system and will be able to start to organise an evacuation. However, it is also possible that we could be transported beyond known space entirely. All I can ask of you now is to prepare yourselves for this next passage through the wormhole. We know that we can survive this and it is my hope that there will be no further injuries but it is essential that you do not panic. All transport systems will be shut down. Do not attempt to travel to different bases and if you have your own spacecraft do not attempt to leave the moon. We do not know what will happen if you try. Please stay in your current locations and remain calm. Listen to the instructions of base administration staff and emergency services. Thank you and may God protect us all."

Koenig then shut off the communication system.

"Think that'll work?" Carter asked as he came back down the steps.

"I don't know. People are bound to panic anyway but hopefully my message will keep people from getting too out of control." Koenig replied before he looked at Alexander, "How long do we have left?" he asked.

"We've picked up speed. Less than one minute now colonel." she replied and Koenig looked out of main missions windows where he could now see the wormhole from his current position.

"Well here goes." he said after a brief hesitation and then the moon shook and everything went white.

When the light faded and the moon stopped shaking Koenig looked around him.

"Damage report." he called out.

"Looks like we came through that one pretty much unharmed colonel." Kano replied, "Computer isn't

reporting anything more that's serious."

"Good. Benes what are the other bases saying?" Koenig asked.

"They're all still there colonel. No exact reports on casualties yet though." Benes replied.

"Colonel I think you should see this." Bergman called out from beside one of the windows and Koenig rushed to his side.

Through the window a planet was visible. This was dark, suggesting that the moon had appeared on its night side and there were patterns of lights below that indicated settlements on its surface. Meanwhile just above the planet's horizon a dull brown moon could be seen orbiting it and Koenig could not identify any of these features.

"Where the hell are we?" he asked.

"I'm sorry colonel, I don't have a clue." Bergman replied.