

## FOREWORD

**T**he Russian Federation has become aware that Earth has a celestial visitor hiding deep beneath the South Pacific Ocean. The Russians intend to keep this knowledge to themselves. They are unaware that the United States has learned of their secret through one of their intelligence operatives. These nations should be cooperating, but instead they are competing. Each wants to gain significant international prestige when they announce their discovery to the world. Unbeknown to the Americans, they too have been infiltrated, but not by any earthly organization. The United Worlds Authority, UWA, has one of their observers among the US President's confidants. This galactic union of hundreds of planets has an announcement to make to the World: extermination of all life on Earth by another star-traveling faction.

Earth is about to become the focal point of a galactic battle between two massive opposing forces. UWA refers to its adversary as the "Enemy": an organic weapon system composed of thousands of spacecraft. Each Enemy spaceship contains hordes of biologic abominations—horrible in appearance and emotionless.

UWA theorized that this bioweapon had been the inspiration of an extinct species whose origins remain unknown. This unique weapon may have been developed to defeat an opponent, but their creation must have destroyed them as well. Thousands of worlds have been ravaged by this galactic horde; and their next victim is Earth.

The UWA, also called the Authority, has been fighting the onslaught of the Enemy for almost a hundred years. It cannot permit Earth to be taken by their foe and its vast resources to be used against them. Humanity is given an ultimatum: cooperate or the Authority will convert Earth into a small star. Humanity is faced with extermination either by the Enemy or by the UWA. Earth cooperates with the lesser of two evils: the Authority.

Angelica Dimere Bakaru is an ensign and a crack fighter pilot. Her contribution, in what will later be called The Battle for Earth, results in a decisive victory over the Enemy. Everyone has a weakness, and Angelica is no exception. She has an intense fear of being immersed in water.

As fate would have it, Angelica crash lands into the South Pacific. She is fortunate to be near a small island. On the island of Teraina, she meets Sula, a woman who helps Angelica win another battle, one against her fear of being under water.

There is a third battle in the novel—a political one. Within the UWA is an associate member who has been denied full membership far too long. The cause of this denial is the chairman of the Authority's powerful Central Committee. The majority of the Authority members have evolved from the sea, and the chairman is prejudiced against those coming from the land. The target of his ire is the Anrypan Imperial Republic, Angelica's home. The Emperor of the Republic has had enough of the chairman and starts a vicious political campaign to force him out of office.

United Worlds Authority has many characters; some you will admire and love, others you will despise, and a few who are not all that they seem to be. A list of characters and abbreviations is at the

end of the novel. The majority of the story occurs on the Earth, with a few events on the Moon and Angelica's beautiful world of Anrypa.

**SPECIAL NOTE:** During the speech of the British characters some words have been modified to partially capture their English accent.

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## CHAPTER 1

# DISCOVERED

Two hundred and thirty-six feet beneath the former Soviet Union's Glorious Peoples Athletic Stadium outside Moscow, only the nervous clicking of a ballpoint pen interrupts the constant drone of air handlers. In the center of the dark chilly room, several military Staff Officers and one civilian are reviewing a series of photographs. Subdued overhead lighting cloaks the group as they cluster around a large image-magnifying optical table. As each senior military officer examines the high-resolution transparencies, the lower ranks behind them within the chamber's dark shadows view a wall-sized projection of the table's contents. One junior officer twiddles nervously with his ink pen. The heavyset civilian was closely observing each of his commanding officer's

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expressions as they view the evidence. “*You can learn a lot from minor facial changes,*” the lone civilian thinks.

Gradually sounds of nervous coughs and clearing of throats echoed in the chamber. The salt-and-pepper-haired civilian, President Alexei Baikov of the Russian Federation, brakes the mounting tension, “I have convened this meeting because of the photographs before you. For those of you who do not know him, Boris Netchoff is the Admiral of our Fleet, and he presented these photos to me earlier yesterday. I find them very alarming.” Passing his large hand over them, he continued, “Comrades, what do you deduce from these images?” Baikov moved slightly back from the viewing table, his tall robust frame and authority causing others to clear a path.

None of the Staff Officers would say anything about what was obviously being seen on the high-resolution photographs. A few said something concerning a strange wave or a rare anomaly of the South Pacific currents. Most were stone-faced, except for Netchoff, who had a wide Cheshire Cat grin.

“Comrades, these photos may be alarming or even terrifying to you,” began the elderly Admiral, a close associate, old trusted friend, and chess partner of the President. His small hands waved confidently. “A little background, if I may be permitted.” Only the Chief Marshal of the Air Force of the Russian Federation, General Dimitri Mankelo, seemed to mind, noticeably suppressing a smirk. They had a cordial relationship on the surface, but reality was another matter.

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Admiral Netchoff strained a smile toward the General and continued, “These photos you’re inspecting were taken by Arkon-1, a satellite launched from the Air Force’s Baikonur Complex on a Proton booster just before the breakup of our former Soviet Union. Arkon-1 was a secret fifth-generation research satellite capable of providing near real-time images of any location on Earth. In those days the satellite contained our latest digital imaging system and was capable of recording in the full visible color spectrum, black and white, and infrared, all with a half-meter resolution.”

“Arkon-1 was designed to beam its data to relay transmitters piggybacked on our Glonass geo-positioning satellites, thereby giving twenty-four-hour access to the coverage. The Air Force had programmed Arkon to go into a medium earth orbit at an inclination of seventy-two degrees. This would give complete coverage of the inhabited earth. Alas, Comrades, as the Americans so colorfully say—Gabno happens.”

Chief Marshal Mankelo rudely interrupted the Admiral in a defensive and condescending tone, “I suppose the Glorious Peoples Navy has never had such problems?”

With a quick sideward glare of his steel gray eyes, the Admiral fired back, “Exoneration is not the purpose of this meeting, Chief Marshal Mankelo.” The verbal slap turned Mankelo’s wide blocky face to stone, and his brown eyes blazed with indignation from the reprimand.

“Relax, Demetri, relax,” pleaded Baikov, “You’re a good general but you take life far too seriously. You are acting like some

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of your American counterparts, too stiff. Relax, my friend. The Cold War is over and so is your program. Forget about it.”

Most of the younger officers did not understand this exchange, but the others knew all too well. Mankelo was the ranking officer of the spy satellite program during the latter days of the Soviet Union. An acute shortage of funds and trained labor plagued the program. The Chief Marshal never got over the failure. Mankelo took it personally whenever the subject came up. He could not, and would not, “forget about it.”

The Russian President motioned with his large swarthy hand for his balding Admiral friend, Netchoff, to resume. “The Arkon-1 programed burn sequence failed to function properly. During the final injection, the last stage failed to terminate on signal and threw Arkon-1 into a highly elliptical orbit and not the correct perigee. Since the burn occurred in the Southern Hemisphere, apogee occurred in the Northern. In short, the high altitude of the satellite’s passage over North America rendered it useless for its intended purpose.”

“The satellite, Comrades, continues to function flawlessly. To this day, its reaction motors and station-keeping engines are in good order, and the sensors continue to send down a steady stream of data, although useless to us. Useless from the intended point of view, that is. Many years ago, our private market subsidiary, Coscom, sold the up-link encryption code to MIT in the United States—at a profit, I might add. The ingenious MIT students were able to build a functional tracking antenna with its associated equipment and transmitted coded instructions to the

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reconnaissance satellite. Once they acquired the Arkon's attention, they were able to aim its cameras and download high-resolution images of the South Pacific, South Atlantic, and Antarctica."

"This brings us to the present situation, Comrades. These images have been lying in a basement file cabinet at MIT, Boston, Massachusetts, for several years. The exact date they started using Arkon-1 and the date for each photo have not been documented. Logically, they cannot be older than a few decades." Dimitri Mankelo's big frame shifted uncomfortably; he seemed visibly annoyed and openly bored. It was no secret he did not like the new president, a former Navy Chief of Staff, or his potbellied Navy friend, now the current Navy Chief of Staff. He felt these crusty old salts were humiliating him in front of his peers—typical inter-service rivalry.

Ignoring Mankelo, Admiral Netchoff continued, "During that time no one noticed or questioned these odd white crescent patterns. The MIT students attributed these water disturbances to whale activity. When Naval Lieutenant Tanna Paltova, my niece and an MIT exchange student, saw these pictures, she immediately knew that no whales or large pod of whales had made these water patterns. I consider her qualified to make these observations because she has studied these aquatic animals since childhood. The lieutenant has become quite knowledgeable in this field."

He looked behind him into the shadows along the edges of the chamber and beckoned with his aging hand for her to come forward to the glowing table. "Lieutenant Paltova, please come."

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All eyes immediately locked on the ravishing young naval officer emerging from the blanketing shadows. As she approached the viewing table, it was evident that she was a beautiful young woman in every respect, despite her drab naval uniform. She had that same captivating beauty which Anna Kornakova possessed but with more pronounced physical attributes. Even the overly formal Air Force Chief could not hold back a brief admiring look. The Admiral noticed, and a grim look crossed his lined face as if to say, “Over my dead body.”

The Admiral proudly made the introduction, “It is my great pleasure to present my favorite and, obviously, most beautiful niece.”

From the shadows, you could almost feel the reactions of the young officers. As Lieutenant Paltova approached the table, many senior officers eagerly made a space for her, hoping that she would accept their courtesy. She was flattered and paused briefly to decide where to stand. Being fully aware of her uncle’s tense relationship with the Air Force Commander, she deliberately stood next to him, gently squeezing her way in against his athletic body, although he had provided no space for her. As her lithe hip brushed against his, he stiffened and moved enough to break the contact. For a split second, her dark brown eyes caught her uncle’s attention. Their eyes had a certain humor in them.

Captivated by her beauty, no one noticed this exchange except the ever-observant Russian President. Amused, he thought, “*She’s pulling his beard, a potentially dangerous game for one so young. My old friend had better warn his vivacious niece not to play such*

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*games with powerful men like Mankelo. She is but a lowly Pawn engaging the Knight of the Russian Air Force."*

"Tanna my dear, please tell us of these photos," sweetly coaxed her white-haired uncle.

"Comrade President and Most Glorious Defenders of the Russian Federation, I would like to say how truly honored I am to be among so many important officers of our great country," she said in a mellow, purring voice. Her wise old uncle had always told her, "Flatter them gracefully and you will be on the first step to influencing them." She continued, her dark eyes flirting with those about her, "I shall never forget this moment."

"My first day at MIT's Space Science class started with everyone getting acquainted. Each introduced ourselves, where we came from, and about our interests and hobbies. I, of course, mentioned my pastime in whale study, which has been a lifelong interest to me as Uncle Bor..." she caught her impropriety just in time as Mankelo was opening his thin lips to correct her. "Admiral Netchoff had stated. During the lunch break, I was introduced to several others with common interests. While discussing the details of whale habits, a charming senior MIT student who was hosting a nearby table offered to show us some amazing photos of whales playing." She reached forward and with her long, delicate fingers rotated a photo to her view.

"This was the first I was shown. I knew that whales do not school in such a precise arc or simultaneously play in such a large group, what is professionally referred to as a pod. Additionally,

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I'm aware of no whale activity in that area of the South Pacific.” She pushed the photo back. “Later I asked the senior classman if I could look at some of the other photos myself. He offered to help me and invited me to come over to his room in the evening, which I politely declined to do.” Some murmuring could be heard from the surrounding areas of the chamber. When the portly admiral loudly cleared his throat, it stopped instantly.

Her bewitching, dark brown eyes gave the shadows a quick ‘you wish’ look. “Grudgingly, he gave me all of the photos that he thought contained whales. Unfortunately, none had any particular order or dated sequence. I used the MIT image enhancer and noticed something unusual yet similar in all of them. The point where each arc of white water ended, a slight imperfection in the ocean’s wave patterns began. By following this ‘imperfection’ I noticed the arc continued unbroken until joining with the other end of the white arc.” She quickly glanced about and realized she had the undivided attention of these powerful men. It exhilarated her. She was gaining their respect. Tanna looked at her kind uncle, and he gave her a subtle approving nod.

“The combination of this irregularity and white water made a complete and perfect oval. I soon realized what I was looking at was a huge circular object coming out of the sea at a steep angle to the line-of-sight of the satellite. In examining the rest of the photos, I determined there were two different sizes of these objects. I spent most of the night copying....”

The persistent president interrupted her. “Please excuse me, Tanna, but you called these water anomalies “objects.” With his

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questioning blue eyes, he glanced about the room at those who had previously referred to these objects as anomalies. “It is obvious to me that we are all looking at what the Americans call UFOs, unidentified flying objects.”

The Air Force Chief tried to suppress a reflexive snicker and its muffled hiss, but not well enough. Not only did the President notice; so did many others. Wide-eyed, those next to the tall Air Force General moved slightly away from him. They knew what was coming and did not want to be associated with his arrogance. Yet, at the same time, they did not want to make an enemy of the influential Air Force Chief by being too obvious.

“You have something to say, Chief Marshal?” asked Baikov, his piercing eyes narrowing as he turned toward the derogatory sound. “Come now, out with it. What would you like to say, General?”

Mankelo cursed himself for that damn reflex. He knew that former old sea salt was going to make him look like a fool, but made his explanation regardless, “These are either some anomaly in the South Pacific or an elaborate ruse by the Americans to make us look like idiots and discredit us. To imply these prints show...,” he paused searching for the word that would end this silly activity, but again did not act fast enough.

The president chimed in, “Earlier I said you were acting like your American counterparts, and here’s another perfect example. The American Air Force chokes on that word which aptly describes what everyone clearly sees before us, General: UFOs, or just flying saucers. These are obviously spacecraft lifting out of the

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water; look at this one and this...,” Baikov repeatedly shoved photos before Mankelo. “And look at this one. Can you explain these as other than what they plainly are?”

The greatly magnified, digital, high-resolution images clearly showed the definite outline of a massive disk; despite being camouflaged in water patterns, it was clearly visible, all 550 meters of it. Its diameter was over six times the length of the stadium playing field that lay above the hidden chamber. Behind it, two smaller disks followed with white water cascading off their lower edges also. However, even those smaller craft dwarfed the entire stadium.

“Chief Marshal?” The president paused for a reply, his burly hands resting on his narrow waist. Mankelo’s mouth opened as if to venture some reply, but no words came out.

“What are these?” Baikov asked, “Certainly not whales,” in a condescending tone. “Moments ago we had our security people conclusively confirm that these photos are directly from the Arkon spy satellite. We have positively verified that they have not been tampered with.”

Mankelo had refused to refer to the Arkon-1 in that manner. Officially, it was not a spy satellite; its purpose was topographical mapping. This time he made no outward response; he was in trouble enough. Dimitri had learned to control his temper, violent at times, but could not suppress one physical sign. His boss always noticed when Mankelo was angry; his ears turned bright pink. Baikov knew Dimitri was close to buckling.

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Taking advantage of his Air Force Chief's verbal paralysis, the President went on, "There is no American ploy or ruse as you imply." Forcefully pointing at the table's contents with his thick index finger, he accented each key word individually, "These are very real, my General," the president emphatically stated, "Very, very real."

The gray-eyed admiral finally caught his niece's gaze and motioned her to move away. Initially she did not understand, looking at him in a confused manner. His head subtly nodded her to depart. Her quizzical eyes widened, as she suddenly understood. This was not the place for a lowly ensign. The big boys were going at it, and there was no possibility that she would survive if drawn into the middle of this high-level fray. Deftly she back stepped, returned to the shadows, and glided quietly into a corner by the exit. Being out of sight and out of mind would be the best status for her.

"Chief Marshal, your answer is what, Sir!" his deep, resonant voice demanded a reply and his brawny arms crossed over his broad chest in his characteristically imposing manner. Typically, when Baikov got angry, the corners of his mouth turned sharply down, and his lower lip pouted outwardly, creating a very unpleasant frown. His eyes got into the act with a glowing fiery stare. This was not a good sign for Mankelo and he knew it.

The others also became uneasy. What could Mankelo do? He was soundly trapped. Baikov had decided to knock him down a few pegs. He would never want Dimitri to leave his side, and he would never demote this vigorous, efficient man. His Air Force

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leader had done more for his service than his predecessors had and was a most respected officer but, on occasion, just a bit too arrogant. Mankelo had no outward enemies that he knew of, but his friends, at times, despised him for his heavy-handedness. However, he was not always like this. He carried a lot of pain and guilt from his past.

Mankelo had never been the same after the tragic crash of Flight 5055 near Warsaw that took his wife, two boys, and his youngest sister from him. Since then he had dedicated himself totally to his work and rose rapidly in rank to the number one position. Sometimes this speedy accession went to his head. He needed a reminder that he was a Knight and that his President was the King on this Russian Chessboard. Alexei had preferred to confront Demetri privately, but he had unfortunately trapped himself. If this insolence continued any further, he would lose the respect and control of his other officers. Regretfully, the timing was bad. He was forced to deal with Demetri's many past indiscretions now and in the open. Baikov hated doing this to him.

"I am waiting, Demetri," the towering President said in a more conciliatory tone. "I said 'spy satellite' in reference to your Arkon-1 and you did not flinch. Yet, in uttering 'flying saucer', you react very defensively. Why is one different from the other? Both are the truth, no? To consider that these circular objects are some form of natural phenomenon is wishful thinking and a blatant denial of the obvious. We are all..." the President put a heavy stress on that last word "...seeing what these actually are." Baikov looked about him and saw confirming expressions from his other officers. "Why can't you?"

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Mankelo also looked about the table. The little Navy beauty had wisely disappeared, probably by her dumpy uncle's cue. He could have easily discredited her along with this completely ridiculous UFO charade. She was too young to know how to defend herself without overreacting. Once she had done that, he would have sprung his trap to discredit her, and the rest would have been easy. Now he was the one that was trapped. No one at the table would meet his searching glance except that smiling old fat bastard, Netchoff. He outwardly sighed and resigned himself to accept defeat, at least temporarily. He would wait for another time to have his revenge for being embarrassed before his colloques.

“Comrade President. Yes, it's as you say, for lack of a better term, a flying saucer, all three of them. It can't be denied.” He, like his American counterparts, nearly choked on those unpalatable words. He believed and suspected his American adversaries also felt the same way. Admitting the existence of such craft traveling freely within the Earth's atmosphere was an admission of personal failure. As Chief Marshal of the Russian Federation Air Force, it was his responsibility and his alone, to keep Russian air and space free from threats. Subconsciously, he couldn't accept that he was powerless to do anything about it; it was rationally more palatable to believe that UFOs didn't exist. Dimitri despised this situation as much as he did the Arkon-1 episode of his life. This charade had to be an elaborate hoax, and he was the only one to see it for what it really was. He had to save his beloved Motherland from humiliating itself before the entire world. Mankelo strongly suspected Boingworth was involved in this hoax, just as he knew the aggravating American was responsible for the Arkon-1 failure.

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His deep-set brown eyes flicked in resignation and looked down at the damp floor, disgusted.

“Do we know the location of these sightings?” asked the Russian President, turning his attention away from Mankelo. He anticipated no more rudeness from his Air Force general.

“Reasonably close, Comrade President,” informed a Third Rank Captain on Netchoff’s staff. Leaning over the map, he pointed at a specific area. “The students at MIT did not record the exact location for these photos other than an approximate: longitude one hundred forty-five degrees west by latitude forty-two degrees south, plus or minus thirty degrees, just north of an area called the Eltanin Fracture Zone. They had no reason to be as precise as we now require. Those loose coordinates involve too large an area to search without attracting a great deal of attention.”

He paused for a moment for that information to sink in before he showed them how well the Russian Navy had done their job. “We strongly believe the location of the...,” the skinny navy analyst paused briefly glancing at Air Force Chief Mankelo, smiled and continued, “...flying saucer is one hundred forty-five degrees, fifteen minutes, eleven seconds west by forty-two degrees, twenty minutes, seven seconds south.” He pointed to the precise spot on the adjacent map with the tip of his pen. He knowingly looked into the watchful eyes of his president, anticipating his subsequent question.

“Previously you used the term, ‘reasonably close’ in determining the location of this, let us say, base,” reminded

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Baikov. “I, as many others here, would like to know how you now arrive at this rather exact location.”

A murmur rippled through the gathering, with the Air Force leader honestly commenting, and without sarcasm, “I should say so.”

Admiral Netchoff interrupted, “Let me introduce Captain Third Rank Fyodor Petrovich Kuznetsov, one of the finest members of my staff. The deductive approach he and his group have applied is the best available considering the uniqueness and the top level of security we must maintain. Now then, Captain Kuznetsov, if you will.”

“First we asked ourselves, ‘where would we locate such a base if we were the aliens? Paramount is isolation. The closest populated island is nearly a thousand miles away to the north, the Austral Islands, with other islands farther away in every direction. The location would also need to be inactive of any air or sea traffic, whether military, civilian or research. As mentioned earlier, there are no whales in this area or anything else for that matter. It is virtually an ocean desert.” The narrow-faced Captain quickly observed those about him and knew that, so far, he had their attention, even Mankelo’s.

“Our research vessel, the Akademik Ioffe, went through this precise spot in March of 1992 and reported no living organisms or seismic activity. This last item is very important. The Eltanin and Challenger Fracture Zones are studied regularly by many nations. This geological study activity is not a problem, since both are

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nearly five hundred miles away to the south and north respectively. The Humboldt Plain to the east is the closest fishing grounds and over double that distance. The Louisville Ridge is about a thousand miles to the west.” Captain Kuznetsov examined his audience with his light blue wolf-like eyes and sensed their approval, but he was not done.

“One benefit of the demise of the Cold War, for our present situation, was the high cost that our former enemies were paying to keep their oceanographic data a secret. The United States Navy undersea mapping and the European Oceanographic Satellite scans of this immediate area have since been declassified. From this information we have located a flat area that would be perfect for such a base if we were to build one ourselves.” The young five-foot-ten captain noticed several raised eyebrows on that tidbit. The best was yet to come.

“President Baikov and my fellow comrades, I saved the most interesting until last.” Typical of an analyst, he was toying with his now captive audience. It gave him a sense of power over powerful men, and he relished every bit of it. Kuznetsov was enjoying himself.

“During the period from late 1990 through most of 1992, this same region exhibited a consistent period of extreme monochromatic seismic activity in the ‘T’ wave spectrum. Before any explorations could be assembled and deployed, it stopped as suddenly as it had started. This strange phenomenon has never been explained and, more important, has never occurred since. As such, the world’s interest in this area is now nonexistent, excluding

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us of course. It is our opinion that this is when the UFO base was constructed.”

Every aspect of Captain Third Rank Kuznetsov’s analysis was correct except one, the assumed date. The “T” wave seismic activity was a natural event and occurred well before the United Worlds Authority, UWA, had established their outpost. The facility was built silently a few months before the supposed defunct Arkon-1 photographed the area. It was intended to be part of the ambush against their adversary, the Enemy. After the Battle for Earth was won, the outpost’s cavity beneath the ocean floor would be refilled meticulously. No evidence of its existence would remain. Developing events would nullify the UWA plan.

Admiring eyes throughout the room were on him as he concluded, “Sum all these scattered bits of data together, with sound assumptions, and we have one hundred forty-five degrees, fifteen minutes, eleven seconds west by forty-two degrees, twenty minutes, seven seconds south. The location is a five thousand one hundred and forty-four foot deep broad and flat depression southwest of the Menard Fracture Terminus.” The room was dead silent. There was some deep thinking going on; even Mankelo was impressed.

“Gentlemen, do we have any idea why they are here and what they intend?” challenged the Russian President examining his advisors. “It appears we possess very little information on this aspect.” Most gave a subtle nod, while the Air Force Chief Marshal would not meet his gaze. He continued with his abject

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disbelief, despite what he had seen. It had to be Boingworth; Dimitri believed that somehow it was he.

Baikov continued, "My fellow comrades, we must know why they are here, what they are doing, why they have not made contact within the several decades that we suspect they have been here and, most important, are they a threat? This will take a great deal of labor and resources we can ill afford. But do we really have a choice?" He looked about him and saw subtle agreement. "Therefore, gentlemen, do we inform our so-called 'friends' in the West of this discovery and enlist their assistance? They have far more resources than we."

The reaction from Mankelo was lightning fast and emphatic. "No, Comrade President, we must not involve them!" Most of the other officers fully agreed, which pleased the egotistical Air Force Chief. "They will only complicate things and, as usual, try to take over. I do not believe it is in the best interest of our people, or those of the world, that they be aware of this...circumstance...until we have some concrete answers. Of particular concern is the American press. They print and tell everything before they consider the consequences. I strongly believe we must do this task ourselves. We must keep this top secret and tell them absolutely nothing." Dimitri's suspicious mind believed that any cooperation with the Americans would result in his nation's humiliation. It would also provide easy access for Boingworth's devious plan to disgrace the Russian Air Force and, in particular, him.

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President Baikov agreed. “None of our Western friends can keep a secret for long, that’s all too true. So then, they will be the last to know.”

The owner of the clicking pen, a nervous naval lieutenant, thought, “*Would you like to wager on that?*”

“Comrade President,” said one of Netchoff’s senior captains, “I believe that we have an opportunity here. We have not had a naval exercise for some time. This isolated area would be a safe place to do so and be far away from prying western eyes. It would be as the Americans say ‘a good cover.’ We can investigate this area effectively on the pretext of an exercise, quietly determine what we are dealing with, and do so with no one else being the wiser. On the surface, it would be seen as a boring exercise in an insignificant part of the Pacific. I suggest we proceed in a casual manner so as not to attract attention.”

“A very good idea, Captain...” Baikov was trying to recall the name that matched that familiar face.

“I am Captain Third Rank Anitol Leonidivich Presyentin on Admiral Netchoff’s Command Staff, Comrade President.” He wanted the national leader to remember his name and present rank for the next time they met; it could be beneficial to his career, possibly a promotion to Second Rank.

“Thank you, Captain. I hope this old brain will recall you when we meet again. A very good idea indeed,” the president complimented. Thinking to himself, “*This will be primarily a naval operation. Presyentin will be a valuable member.*”

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As if he could read Baikov's thoughts, Mankelo sarcastically chimed in, "What shall the Air Force do in such a remote region and so far from land, Comrade President?"

"Do not worry, Dimitri," replied Baikov, "You and your fine Air Force will not be left out. We will need your long-range surveillance Tu-95s, aerial supply capabilities, and patrols to keep the curious at arm's length."

"I will now ask all of you," Baikov waived his meat-hook hand about in a beckoning motion, "my glorious staff, to determine the fine details. I approve of the overall idea. Now gentlemen, come, come, let us go to work!"

As the President and the high-ranking officers started to leave the chamber, Baikov turned to the lower ranks in the shadows saying, "Come, and look at these remarkable photos. At times, my young officers, a small event, such as the chance meeting at MIT by whale hobbyists, can create large events. From this humble start, you will soon be involved in the greatest event in all of man's history. Look these over quite carefully."

The President and his top brass exited; Mankelo held back looking for that pretty lieutenant. He could still embarrass her and put an end to this insanity. He searched the shadows, but they were vacant. She was gone! Moments before, her wise old uncle had whisked her away, tucking her safely behind the President as he departed. Mankelo's jaws tightened, and he briskly turned to follow the others, his opportunity to repair the situation obviously

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lost. He suddenly bumped into someone. “Out of my way, you buffoon!” pushing the naval officer aside as he marched off.

The tense junior naval lieutenant, catching his balance, thought, “*Buffoon? We’ll see about that, you son of a bitch,*” Then he moved closer to the table. The lieutenant’s pen was now in his mouth, aimed precisely downward, and as each photo passed by his tongue clicked it several times. Abruptly a hand rested on his shoulder. Startled out of his concentration, he almost swallowed the camera pen. He quickly took it out of his mouth.

“Comrade Lieutenant,” an officer behind him inquired, “you are quite nervous. Your pen is clicking like an AK-47 set on automatic.”

Glancing sideways, the lieutenant skillfully replied, “Did you see that gorgeous vania: God’s gift to men? Unbelievable! She has curves I didn’t know existed and would love to explore.” With a chuckle, “I bet I’m not the only one nervous in this room.”

“I know what you mean, but don’t get any passionate ideas, my friend, about that little vania. I hear her uncle guards her well from sailors like you...” he paused, “and I suppose, like me as well. If you wish to stay in the Navy, and in one piece, stay away from her. It is far safer that you study those photos,” advised the older officer as he moved off, “rather than her ample...succulent curves.”

“Yes, Sir, I’ll study them well...the photos that is,” the junior lieutenant replied with a sly smile. Then he thought to himself, “*I’ll study them real well, comrade. The Americans will pay*

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*handsomely for these copies,”* and he went back to secretive work, his clicking pen back in his mouth.



A few weeks later, deep under Camp David in a comfortably dry, air-conditioned room, a group of military officers and civilians reviewed a series of photographs digitally projected onto a huge wall screen. This secret facility was completely unknown to any intelligence organization, on Earth that is. In a stadium arrangement, the higher ranks sat in the front chairs while those of lower rank were up and behind them. The subdued lighting was perfectly adjusted so everyone could clearly examine the controversial photos. One officer, a lieutenant commander in the last row, was sweating and occasionally pulled nervously at his size eighteen shirt collar despite the temperature being a pleasant seventy-two degrees.

The photos were shown in a series, starting with the originals obtained from Russia and gradually scaling up to greater degrees of magnification than the photo pen could do. Muttered comments rippled throughout the room and increased to a near crescendo as the magnification continued. A few were in abject disbelief, commenting that this was an elaborate ruse, a sham, or simply, “No frigging way.” Others, in the majority, listened in awed shock as explanations and details were given. The last view was incredible and confirmed what many had gradually begun to realize was the unbelievable truth. Displayed clearly before them was a massive disk lifting effortlessly from the South Pacific with millions of tons of ocean water cascading off its lower edge. The

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scientific expert's estimate of its diameter was over eighteen hundred feet, or six football fields. The lieutenant commander, in the back row, was more disturbed than astonished over the revealing photos. Despite the enormity that his celestial organization's secret undersea base had been discovered, the uncomfortable naval officer would occasionally make a brief glance at the softly illuminated painting hanging by the exit. It created a broad seascape with its waves reflecting the silvery light of a setting moon with an atoll to one side. For a moment longer, the commander's gaze remained upon the painting, his eyes showing a deep longing for his home: Aquadia.

An admiral by the podium was using a laser pen to pinpoint details on the screen while he explained each photo as it was displayed. Occasionally he had to stop and request, "Gentlemen, please keep it down, please! I know this is blowing your minds, but restrain yourselves, OK?"

One gray-haired civilian next to the podium closely observed each of those in front of him, noting their remarks and particularly their telltale expressions. For the first time since the emergency meeting was called, he spoke, "They're real eye openers, aren't they! Thank you, John, I'll take it from here." As he rose from his wheelchair, using a cane to assist him, everyone noticed his discomfort.

"Mr. President, do you need the laser pen?" asked Admiral John Pennington, Chief of Staff of the US Navy, an imposing figure. He had lost most of his South Carolina drawl but not his quick sense of humor. Considering his current position and his poor black

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origins, John had done very well for himself. In his youth, he lived near Charleston, a Navy town, and was fascinated by the old warships anchored at the historical sites. Most young men have little idea what to do with their lives, but not Pennington. He had a childhood dream that he had made into a reality.

“No, you did a great job, John. I couldn’t have done better,” congratulated the President of the United States of America, hobbling over to the podium.



It was a painful and short New York vacation for President Dominic Alfonso Grande. On the first day, his skis crossed, and he hit the deep blue water at a bad angle. He felt his back pop as he went headlong into the cold waters of Lake George. The pain was awful. He was in the hospital for over a month. His opponents and the press had a field day. To make things worse, reelection was only four months away. Maybe Roosevelt got away with being in a wheelchair, but not in this day and age, where everything was ‘image.’ You could be dumb as a rock but be a stereotype of what a good president should ‘look’ like, and you were elected.

If it were not for his conservative opponent’s politically suicidal offhanded remark, “That little Italian boy,” he would not be President. The liberal opposition and their dimwitted Presidential candidate were not, as the President was fond of saying, “the brightest altar candles.” His political advisors thought his anti-crime stance should be softened. If he did, his old man was sure to say, “I told you so,” and Dominic was not going to give him that

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satisfaction. Grande believed that building more prisons was not the solution. Seven times the money was being spent to incarcerate a lowlife than to educate a child in public schools. That idiocy had to stop. He reasoned, “Since most of the lawless bastards liked belonging to gangs, let the scum do their time on Federal Work Gangs and clean things up.”

At law school, he had caused a big stink over his view of Plea Bargaining. If you break the law, you pay the whole price and not less for some boneheaded reason. If the criminal has accomplices and refuses to snitch on them, then he gets their punishment added to his. Some of his classmates liked the idea and coined the phrase “Reverse Plea Bargaining” which the future US President would apply in full measure.

Calling Grande the “American Mussolini” because of his strong anti-crime stance, including his belief that criminals had no rights at all until they had paid their debt to society, blew up in his opponents’ faces. That crude ethnic remark had backfired and discredited the liberal party in the minds of much of the public.

If that did not do enough damage, their cheap and insulting attempt at representing themselves as the friend of the growing Islamic population, only a few days after performing the same song-and-dance with the Jewish community, finished off their hope for election. This blatant brown-nosing with every segment of society was the final straw for the electorate.

A deciding factor in Dominic’s Presidential victory was that he had joined the third and newest political party, the American

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Foundationalist Party, AFP. It used the word “foundation” to declare the party’s belief that the Constitution should be followed and not circumvented. Although the AFP was a blend of the other two constantly squabbling organizations, it was more traditional in its approach. Grande’s party provided rational and concrete solutions to issues that the other two had been unable to resolve for too many decades. The public had had enough of the name-calling, enough of the blame-shifting and enough of the long established political institutions; the time was right for a change, a real one.

A logical and commonsense platform was appreciated by a sufficient number of American citizens for Grande to win and push the AFP into the forefront. He garnered many votes for his economic example. What would happen to the regular citizen if they spent money as frivolously as their government did? Many pet projects could only be explained as silly and irresponsible. If elected, he promised that that sort of financial insanity would stop immediately. Additionally, the public related more to the AFP symbol than to the other two, which didn’t have a national appearance. The AFP rampant white eagle on a star-studded blue field contributed to Grande’s victory. He had won by a miracle. Dominic was short, thin, gray-haired, and wore spectacles. He was no ‘image’ of a traditional national leader, and that was for sure. Both of his opponents looked like Hollywood movie stars, and the public had seen enough of that phony veneer.

Then there was the impact of his father, Alfonso, with his ‘crime family’ connections. He and his old man had never got along. What irked President Grande the most was that his middle

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name was his father's first. It was a constant reminder of their significant moral differences.

With his crippled condition and family history, it would take votes from God and all his angels to win reelection. His advisors said that his injury could be turned into an advantage. He didn't see it that way and had packed a few personal items already.

If that wasn't bad enough, there were the riots. Although their frequency had decreased, the statistics could be misleading. The intensity and violence of demonstrations had increased, as had the loss of life and financial costs. In a 'Me First' society everybody thought their problems and beliefs were paramount. When the protestors didn't get what they assumed they wanted, they went ballistic. If the demonstrators got what they had asked for, they went nuts again, when they realized that wasn't what they really wanted. You couldn't win. Now the subject of these supposed intruders upon Earth comes up. There is an old saying, "When it rains it pours," but this was a major downpour.



President Grande smiled at his Navy leader and trusted advisor saying, "When I first saw these photos, I thought it was a joke being played on me. We all know Admiral Pennington's off-beat sense of humor."

The Admiral rolled his brown eyes and smiled, "I am not appreciated or understood. I feel deeply hurt." He had scored on many of the staff with his pranks and dry wit. He was not your typical straight-laced, top-ranking military officer. He loved a good

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laugh, even if it was on himself. His deep, barrel-chested laugh had a near magic effect of relieving tension in many situations. It was his way of maintaining morale and sustaining a personal bond within his organization. Pennington had the rare combination of being respected and simultaneously genuinely liked.

“OK then, everyone, what do you think of these?” asked President Grande as he motioned his stubby, hairy arm toward the massive screen.

The stocky Air Force Chief of Staff, Franklin Grant Boingworth, quickly responded. He and his followers had to nip this in the bud. “It looks like a very good setup and elaborate ploy cooked up by Mankelo. He would be ecstatic if he could embarrass us, particularly our Air Force and me to boot.”

“How come, Frank?” President Grande had heard the story from others. He was curious to hear it from the horse’s mouth.

“Sir...” the General paused briefly while a cunning grin spread over his face “...old Demetri was in charge of a very promising state-of-the-art Soviet spy satellite program, the Arkon-1. It was my job to see to it that it never worked. The only satellite that Demetri got into orbit was the one that these, ah...” he paused for a few moments searching for the right word, “...ah, improbable photos came from. Sir, my people on the inside messed up every one of his launches, and we took care of this last one in fine style. We saw to it that good old Arkon Number 1 was the first and the last for Ivan’s optical real-time imaging satellites.”

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“Appears like you enjoyed yourself,” commented Grande with a similar grin, “but does he actually know you were responsible?”

“After all these years, it’s a good bet. That’s why I feel this is a ‘get-even’ trap to make us look like idiots. A big lie has a far better chance of being swallowed than a little one. It’s far-fetched enough to consider these things are real.”

“Well, that’s one thing you and Mankelo actually agree on,” said his boss. “He thinks its crap too, as some others here think as well.” The President looked over the top of his bifocal glasses, a clear warning sign that he did not agree with the dissenters. It had been said that those light gray eyes could cut you in half and have you babbling like a baby in seconds. Although he had a short, trim stature, his glowing charisma projected a pervading strength and an all-knowing confidence that neither of his bumbling political opponents came close to. These were very good traits for a President; his charismatic qualities won people over far more than a big flashy smile and imposing appearance.

The President continued before his Air Force Chief of Staff, or anyone else, could respond. “The CIA, NAIC, DIA, and particularly our British intelligence friends are all convinced these are exactly what they look like—UFOs. I hope everyone has read the Intel reports on this. Besides, our man inside the Russian High Command has never failed us, even in the last days of the Soviet Union,” without a pause so Frank would not cut in, “and if the Brits buy into this, well that settles it.”

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Finally, the Air Force General thought he had his chance. “But, Sir—”

“Frank!” Grande’s sharp tone silenced his good general instantly. “You’re pretty much alone on this,” as he gazed about the room with his renowned menacing look. The President noticeably shifted his weight to reduce the pain growing in his back, which was making his notorious Italian temper get even shorter.

“Are you with me on this or not, Frank?” If he could shut down the Air Force general’s resistance, all the rest who had the same belief would crack and fall in line.

Undeterred, Frank explained, “Sir, we realigned two of our best surveillance satellites to check that area in detail and we got zip. If there was something actually there, you’d think we’d get at least one damn picture.”

The tall sweating lieutenant commander in the last elevated row sighed in relief thinking, *“Thank the Supreme Creator they received my warning in time. I did not realize that these photos existed. The humans have seen far too much. This could be awkward, very, very awkward. The Captain must know of this and evacuate immediately.”*

The entire situation could have been avoided if his celestial organization had listened to the warnings from a lower status member about the potential use of Arkon-1. His people continued to believe that the old satellite was of no use to anyone and ignored it as it passed over their undersea outpost. There is an old saying,

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“Assumption is the foundation of all travesties,” and that applied perfectly here.

“Frank,” interjected Admiral Pennington, “really, what could you expect to get in two weeks when these pictures were taken over several years and months apart from each other? For crying out loud, less than twenty percent of the MIT photos showed anything. What did you expect in two weeks?”

Unlike his Russian counterpart, General Franklin Boingworth was a good friend of his opposite service chief, unless they were playing handball; then it was cutthroat all the way. Pennington’s longer limbs gave him a slight edge, but Boingworth was lighter in build and quick. His origins were a stark contrast to Pennington’s. Frank had grown up in Colorado Springs, Colorado, and because his environment was an Air Force community, his future career was straightforward. Both were physically fit and surprisingly strong for their age. Many young bucks got their cocky self-confidence shattered when the ‘old man’ kicked their ass on the court. It was entertaining to watch the top military leaders trying to surpass each other on the court. Nevertheless, here in the professional court it was mutual respect and cooperation.

“John, that’s exactly my point. If there was activity over that period, there should be something now, for Pete’s sake. The randomness of these photos does not eliminate the possibility that the activity could actually be constant,” retorted General Boingworth. “The MIT kids didn’t do what we did; our effort was 24/7 and we got nothing. I say it’s a prank or some natural....” A

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man enduring increasing pain, who had a short temper, ready to explode, cut him off again.

“Frank!” barked the President with that familiar icy glare magnifying to the point of actually cutting through Boingworth, “Are you with me or not?” His voice was tinged with pain and with a touch of mounting anger.

“Sir,” realizing this was not the time, or the place, the general condescended, “I’m always with you; you know that, Sir. You’re the best President this nation has ever had. What can I do?”

“You’re only saying that because I am an old gray-haired Italian in pain and I have friends in low places that own concrete companies.” President Dominic Grande had a way of defusing a situation just as quickly as Pennington. The room reacted as he wished it, full of laughter.

After the hilarity subsided, “Frank, you asked the very question we all need answered; what can we do? Indeed, what can we do with this mind-boggling situation? There was no Cornell Law College class on this one. I doubt that any military academies covered this situation either.” The President looked around at his advisors on what to do, flinching to another stab of pain. Although slight in frame, his back was not going to support this torture a second more.

“Mr. President, you should sit down, Sir, please,” his aide, pleaded. “You’ve been standing long enough. Sir, your forehead looks clammy too.” Dominic hadn’t realized that. He had been standing longer than his doctors had advised. He did not want, and

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could not afford, to be bed-ridden again, not with the election and this awesome development combined.

“Thanks, George, you’re right. I’ve been up much too long.” Breathing a sigh of relief, the President settled back into his wheelchair. The pain subsided but still made its throbbing presence known.

Pennington highlighted a point that he knew was bothering his cohorts as it was troubling him, “What concerns me the most is why these aliens have not contacted anyone since they arrived, whenever that actually was.” Those about him, who were in agreement with the UFO viewpoint, nodded their heads. Those not yet fully convinced remained silent and motionless.

The admiral added one last observation as his large hands waved in frustration, “We can’t be positive this site is actually the location of an undersea facility. It could be only a convenient departure point, and their base could be anywhere. God, it could be in the North Pole with Rudolf for all we know.”

“Ideas, Gentlemen? We need all kinds of ideas,” requested Grande. “Go the whole gambit. I want a plan on how we find out what’s going on without anyone else asking that same question. I hope that we’ll learn why they are here, how long they’ve actually been around, are they a threat, how do we keep a lid on this and how long we can expect to do that? Let’s brain-storm this thing big-time, people.” Clapping his hands together, “OK, who’s going first?”

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They were a good group. Although some of the plans concocted were strange, no one made any derogatory remarks. Every plan, no matter how weird, had some part of it that had value. It was the early morning before they had the plan finalized. Many were tired, but the President was the leader and he was exhausted. Dominic retired to his convalescence session before going to bed. He believed he would sleep better knowing they had come up with a gem of a plan. The sweating lieutenant commander agreed but there would be no sleeping for him.

*“It was quite simple and very neat. My people did a good job,”* Grande thought as the therapist worked on his lower vertebrae and adjacent muscles.

Every administration had used sources to ‘leak’ information when it couldn’t be released ‘officially’ for any of a wide variety of reasons. Using trusted ‘sources’ to feed the news services would subsequently be followed by the usual theatrics of outcry and indignation over the irresponsible release of the sensitive information. There would be the expected statements of “heads will roll” and other similar incriminations. Some willing person that was in need of retirement, for whatever reason, would be found and used as the ‘sacrificial goat.’ The fall guy, or gal, would endure the routine until the Press and public lost interest. John or Jane Doe would then quietly vanish from view and live comfortably at some faraway tropical paradise or such. They were told it was worth it all and that they had done something good for the country, although not being exactly sure what. The completely orchestrated process was a tried-and-true process used by every administration since George Washington.

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Their plan deliberately leaked information from various documents. E-mails and contents of trashcans implied that a live-fire exercise for approximately two weeks had been planned over six months earlier. It was to be conducted in a remote area of the South Central Pacific Ocean. The main reason for the government's apparent irritation over the breach of security was public safety. A live-fire naval exercise could be a dangerous place for the Press and in particular for the idle curious. The location was difficult to get to since air and sea traffic was rare. The Press would of course blow off this for-your-own-good logic. It did not apply to them since war correspondents had been an imbedded activity for many decades and were accepted by all governments. An 'exercise' would be far less dangerous than an actual war. Naturally, the US Navy would grudgingly capitulate and permit the press to observe from the relative safety of one of their frigates. Regretfully, the ship would develop engine problems at just the wrong time for the Press—and the right time for the Navy.

The President's activist wife would fit in just right with the other justification for this faraway place. That part of the Pacific was devoid of any sea life of any kind. It was literally an ocean desert. That would placate the environmentalists and the "Save the endangered" activists, despite that the area was devoid of life.

The timing was also fortunate. A recent situation that threatened to get out of hand in Papua, New Guinea, had one of the main units of the Seventh Fleet on hand. Only recently had the local government forces, with assistance of the Australian and American military, jointly taken care of a potentially volatile state of affairs. When the Fifth Carrier Air Wing from the USS Kitty Hawk flew

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over Port Moresby and the USS San Francisco attack submarine surfaced in its harbor, the pro-Indonesian forces, bent on overthrowing Papua's parliamentary democracy, surrendered en-masse. The Seventh Fleet commander, Vice Admiral Jacob (Jake) F. Moran—a former Annapolis classmate and very close friend of Admiral Pennington—could be trusted completely and would not let the truth be known until the time was right, if ever. Additionally, the Seventh Fleet's Task Force 70 had its attack submarine group nearby. These naval units were conveniently located for redeployment to the suspected alien site. Other conveniences were available.

Admiral Pennington had previously mentioned that the British Royal Navy had two ships in the Falklands that could be released to assist. The National Security Agency would have its closest satellite realigned so they could have surveillance over the area 24/7 in conjunction with the other two 'weather' satellites. The President's past election pledge was to keep the Armed Forces in top fighting trim. Four months ago, the Air Force and the Army were jointly engaged in a similar exercise, although not a live-fire. This naval exercise could only help the reelection in November, despite the two opposition parties complaining about wasting money.

The initial disclosure of the operation would whet the Press's appetite. Bits and pieces of interesting facts would be hidden, but not so well that the Press couldn't get to them. Yet, care had to be taken to avoid making it appear too easy. That might draw suspicion that they were supposed to find the information. The latter could cause the Press to suspect a cover-up, and the whole

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thing could unravel. Every President knew you had to keep the Press gainfully employed doing what they believed was meaningful and rewarding work for their career. After all, they had to look good too.

By using the Press in this way, Grande protected America's man inside Baikov's staff. The Russian leader might be suspicious but not enough to do an investigation. His election was almost as close as Grande's. Two Electoral Votes and slightly over half of the Russian Popular Vote was as close as it gets. Alexei Baikov could not afford an investigation inside his own organization. His opponents would eat him alive with charges of poor judgment and sloppy leadership, destroying his reelection. Both national leaders were in a precarious political situation.

Eventually, Baikov would contact Grande, and Dominic would do what the liberal Press always accused him of: he would play dumb, his favorite game. The American President would tell his Russian counterpart that it was all a simple coincidence. Baikov would suggest a joint exercise, probably with the same few ships he had patrolling around the Philippines watching the US Navy.

Admiral Pennington would not allow that and would correctly argue that there had not been enough time to coordinate Russian ships into such a volatile exercise. If not orchestrated perfectly, an accident might result, and that would be a real political mess for all parties concerned. This added effort would also delay the live-fire so that it occurred close to the reelection. Additionally, the delay could not be economically justified, and the exercise would officially last only two weeks or even less. There was no advantage

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for either navy to incorporate a few Russian ships into a joint training operation. The President and his staff were confident their plan would blindside their ‘friends’ in Moscow.

The Russians had never understood how handy the Press could be. They made everything a big secret. By keeping their Press inactive and unoccupied, the Russian military would be forced to go about vital and urgent preparations in a casual and dull manner. They couldn’t attract any attention and kindle suspicion that something worth reporting was actually going on. This slowpoke preparation by the Russians would allow the US Navy time to prepare and deploy without any fanfare. Initially the US Navy would head south at a leisurely pace. Once out of sight of the curious, the fleet could proceed southward at maximum speed. The Russians, on the other hand, would need to scramble to catch up, something they could not afford to do. The Russians would be stuck in a trap of their own making.

The US President’s chiropractic therapist, Diana, gently with firm palms, moved something back into its proper place and the pain was almost gone, but not completely. After World War II, her grandparents had come to America from the Philippines. All the women in her family were in the medical field. Chiropractic Medicine was generally not open to women, but she persisted and became one of the best. His lower back was feeling so much better.

“Diana, do you ever think of divorcing Dave?” The President’s humor was always his strength.

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“How about you, Sir, did you ever think of divorcing Carmella?” she questioned with a knowing smile.

“You should be in politics. You’ve got it all figured out; always answer a question with a question,” he praised.

The pain was only a slight pressure and sleep was a priority for his tired old body. Diana made it clear to him that his back needed to be nice and quiet. That was a tall order for the most powerful man on Earth to do.

President Grande had departed his revitalizing therapy session and headed for the White House. He believed that all would go exactly as planned and chuckled to himself, “Alexei, my old friend, you shot yourself in the foot on this one; I gotcha, gotcha good.” That last thought was a good one to sleep on, in a nice warm bed, and next to his dear sweet Sicilian wife.

However, the American President had forgotten that the Russians are excellent chess players, particularly Baikov, who had been the USSR Naval Champion in 1979. It was now the Russian’s move in this international game.



Along with everyone else, the sweating lieutenant commander had departed the Camp David marathon meeting. Unlike the others, he was not comforted and reassured. Passing by the familiar wall painting, a thought of deep desire entered his mind once more, “*Aquadia, to be home again!*”

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The UWA had their work cut out for them. Earth's many nations only cooperated with each other when threatened by a common foe. Presently the two major powers were not militarily at each other's throats, but they competed at every other level. That situation was to the Authority's advantage, for now. Later, it would be difficult to get those big countries to collaborate, and even more so to get the multitude of other nations to follow suit. Captain Daeser, and his associate on the moon, had a tentative plan that used the 'common threat' motivation to unite Earth's nations into a coordinated effort, which would be initially beneficial to everyone.

The disguised US Navy officer left the underground room calmly, suppressing a strong urge to run or at least move faster. The Americans and Russians were not the only ones who didn't want to attract any attention. While in the elevator, he made small talk with his Navy comrades. Noticing that he wore no wedding ring and admiring his six-foot-plus muscular stature, a young female officer asked if he did a lot of weight lifting. He politely replied in the negative. In his undercover role, he could not have any human female companionship; besides, he was very happily married. To do so would betray his beautiful wife and young children.

Obtaining a human uniform that would fit him had been a problem. He wore a size eighteen shirt but had only a thirty-four inch waist. That was one reason he had been chosen for this assignment. He was small enough in stature that he could successfully pass as being human. The majority of his race were too tall to accomplish this.

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Another officer commented on him sweating so much, and the alien calmly said, “Who would not be after what we just saw.” The other officers concurred and jokingly displayed their wet palms and damp armpits.

Walking toward his car, a nearly three-decade-old tan Volvo-740 station wagon, the would-be lieutenant commander tried to recall a saying that the humans often used about a bag and something getting out of it. Suddenly, out of the darkness, a stray cat shot past him chasing a brightly colored autumn leaf, causing him to jump back and bump into an enlisted man.

“Sorry, Sir, my fault,” excused the seaman.

“No, it is not. That little animal scared the life out of me,” the officer apologized.

Saluting smartly, “Have a good evening, Sir,” and offhandedly commenting, “You’d think someone would have given that cat a home or something by now. He’s always hanging around.”

Without thinking the lieutenant blurted out, “The cat is out of the bag. That is it.”

“Sir?” The seaman was confused. “What bag?”

“It’s been a long meeting. Have a good evening, I mean morning, sailor.” Returning the military courtesy, he saluted and turned toward his car thinking, “*The cat is well out of this bag. Captain Daeser is not going to like this change of events.*”

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The US Navy officer was actually Technical Sergeant Norv Thrim of the United Worlds Authority. He drove past the Camp David guardhouse, gathering his thoughts about what he had to do before leaving Earth. It was obvious that his departure had to be very soon, tonight if he was permitted.

Unless the evacuation of the undersea outpost was done perfectly and not rushed, the humans would probably discover evidence of the Authority's past occupation. Yet, if they found nothing, they might suspect that a warning had been given, and their security procedures would be greatly increased. In that heightened status, he might be discovered and captured. That must not happen for any reason.

Exiting the Catoctin Mountain Park and eventually driving onto Route 15 toward Gettysburg, Thrim thought about his next move, *"I must inform the Captain, then get back to Camp David and eliminate any evidence that I ever existed."* He yawned and sighed, his eyes blinking, *"It's been a long day and night...it is going to be another long and sleepless day."*

Arriving at his outdated condominium, Sergeant Thrim casually walked from his old, very reliable car, crossing the worn and potholed parking lot. Arriving this early in the morning meant that all of the good parking spaces were still in use, making it a long, tiring walk. He had been wearing the human skin overlay for almost nineteen hours, and it felt like his own skin was developing a rash. The phony skin was not what the scientists had promised.

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“It is just like your own. You will never notice it,” they said. He would love to stick those know-it-all scientists into their own creation for a day and see what they thought about it.

Once his condo door was locked behind him, he cast off his coat onto the cluttered couch and walked to the backroom closet. He opened its door and swung it back and forth in a precise sequence. After repeating the sequence again, a faint click was heard from the flooring inside the closet. Kneeling down and crawling under his hanging wardrobe, he pushed a small section of a baseboard backward and then slightly to the left. A small section of flooring next to it swung quietly upward. He removed the diminutive communicator and brought it over to the satellite TV receiver box.

He passed by the bathroom and briefly glanced inside. The chipped bathtub was half filled and its Jacuzzi was ready for use. Norv could almost feel the mineralized salt water sensuously flowing over his tortured, itching body and soothing his parched gills. However, there was no time for that. He would need to endure this tortuous discomfort a little longer until he got back to the orbiting cruiser.

Thrim crouched by the satellite TV receiver box and disconnected the cable leading from the dish. He joined the cable to the top end of the communicator and plugged the bottom end into the wall outlet socket. A holographic keyboard appeared before him a foot above the floor. The lettering was in his language, and he quickly entered his name, rank, and pass-code. Norv removed the left USN lapel symbol from his shirt and snapped it into the communicator's side. The keyboard briefly

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vanished, but soon the word “transmitted” appeared. All that he had seen and heard that day was delivered to his waiting spacecraft in seconds. Then the keyboard returned. Rapidly he typed in a short message, “Risk of detection drastically increasing. Suggest overall mission termination.” He waited a few minutes as the keyboard once again vanished. It reappeared, providing his orders; “Depart immediately, other agents departing as well, outpost not fully evacuated, proceed with utmost caution.”

That last part was good and bad. His comrades were taking care not to leave any trace of their former presence. If an early arriving ship or aircraft detected them, it could get very awkward, or worse.

The Earth’s news agencies would broadcast worldwide that humanity had celestial visitors. That information would alert the approaching Enemy to the UWA being near Earth, which would be a catastrophe for everyone. Even the ignorant Birgosians might get curious and inadvertently cause the same disastrous result, but earlier. The sergeant made one more entry. “Last message: terminating mission now, destroying all evidence at both locations, will await pickup at...” he thought for a moment, *“I have had enough of filth. I will be cursed by the Supreme Creator if I will swim in the Chesapeake Bay to get to the primary rendezvous.”* Continuing his entry, “...the secondary pick-up location off Ocean City, end.”

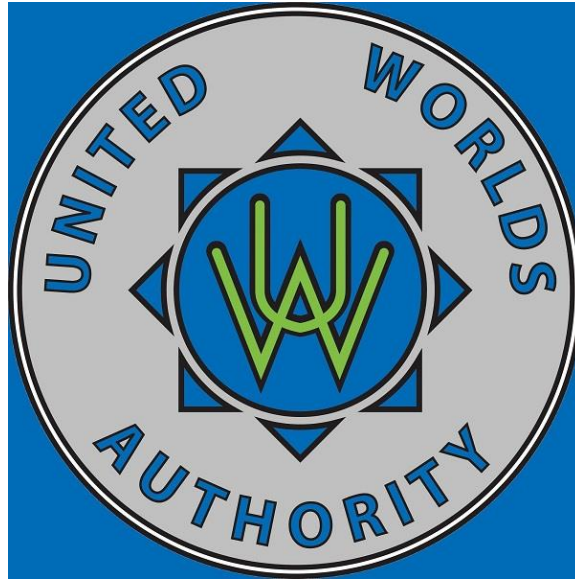
He took his time and removed any trace of his presence, first from the condo then later from his Camp David office. By using as much Earth technology practical to complete his mission, Thrim could easily destroy what little belonged to the UWA.

### *Discovered*

There was more than enough amperage in a common outlet to fry his communicator along with the phony US Navy lapel symbol. He returned the satellite TV connections to their normal setup but left the communicator plugged into the outlet. Grasping the communicator's casing, he squeezed and crushed it slightly. Soon it glowed bright white and disintegrated into a fine gray dust. Thrim brushed the residual debris under the carpet along with the rest of its grime. The remaining cheap Wal-Mart cord was pitched into the trash can and would never be noticed as anything important.

Driving to the Atlantic Ocean was an additional two hours after crossing the Chesapeake Bay Toll Bridge near Annapolis, but worth it. The thought of being in that river again made him cringe. On a Monday morning the beach would be nearly empty. Swimming in the Atlantic with his playful water-born friends would be a pleasure compared to being alone in the rancid river and bay.

These charming creatures befriended his fellow Aquadians so willingly upon their arrival on Earth that many of the Authority believed it was due to an ancestral similarity. Millions of years ago, Thrim's decedents had the same physical appearance as these gray jesters of the sea and had their origins from the land also. The cleaner Atlantic water and the antics of Earth's aquatic clowns would make his journey away from the beach a better one. Even so, he longed to be in the crystal clear waters of his home, Aquadia.



## CHAPTER 2

# UNINVITED GUESTS

Thrim reflected, *“What a relief, I am finally done. I hope it has been worth it?”* That was an open question. The Enemy, an adversary like no other, was now fully aware of the Earth, and UWA was solely responsible for that potentially disastrous discovery. The Anrypan Imperial Republic, AIR, had done their best to block Earth’s transmissions from going beyond its solar system; but not well enough without UWA advanced technology. AIR could not be held to blame since UWA had refused to provide the technical equipment that would have guaranteed success of the required task. Without the Censoring Field, AIR was hard pressed

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to prevent all of Earth's audio and video transmissions from leaving the solar system. It was a major blunder by the UWA Central Committee—prompted by its Chairman, Draysh Placarr Mashau'tay—that forbade transfer of the field to AIR. Anrypa was an Associate Member and, admittedly, under restricted access to such technologies. An exception should have been made considering the dire consequences of failure. Nevertheless, as usual, Chairman Mashau'tay was going strictly by the book. If Anrypa had had that field in place, the Enemy would never have known about Earth, and the desperate situation they were now in would have been completely avoided. The Central Committee's paranoia and restrictive efforts to prevent Anrypa from gaining access to UWA top-secret technologies would, almost two decades later, be an exercise in futility. Luck and circumstance would provide it to the Anrypan Imperial Republic on a silver platter and a lot more.

The Enemy's consumption of a biologic and mineral rich world like Earth would be a disaster. They would be free to develop a huge region directly behind the defensive sphere of UWA. The Authority and its members would be effectively surrounded and forced to fight a two-front war: historically always resulting in defeat of the encircled. Despite this dire result, the Central Committee continued with their bureaucratic travesty and refused to release UWA's censoring field to their Associate Member. The root cause of this foolish reluctance was mired in politics and ingrained prejudices by the majority of Central Committee members toward land-born sentient species.

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Hours later, as Thrim traveled eastward through Maryland on Route 50 passing Salisbury, his mind drifted from politics and military matters to more pleasant thoughts. Thrim envisioned Aquadia's captivating blue seas, thousands of small lush islands, many more atolls, his beautiful sweet mate, and their rambunctious offspring. He missed them so very much. Norv had left his family almost two years ago. He recalled their favorite inlet with its warm, shallow waters cradled along the atoll with its typical central freshwater lake. His two children loved to gather the green-blue crystal spheres from the lake's bottom, letting the sun's rays reflect through them, creating a dazzling array of colors over the white sand. The spheres would eventually degrade into sharp, dual arrow-headed shards, becoming hazardous. These splintered crystals were cast away into the deep abyss beyond the continental shelf and out of harm's way.

Soon Thrim would be able to swim again after the corrective surgeries fully healed. With the webbing of his hands and feet restored, he could race through the inlet and breach the surface, spinning his body wildly in the air, mimicking the many tan and white ospreys circling above. He dreamed of arching and diving back down into the luxurious waters, skimming over the golden sandy bottom and teaching his children how it was gracefully done. Norv was abruptly jolted from his slumber when the forty-six-hundred-pound station wagon bounced off the road. He was not fully awake when the old Volvo sideswiped a big immovable oak tree at over fifty miles per hour. The violent impact sent him painfully back into dreamland.

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Stooping over the mangled car, “Looks like we got a comatose here, Jimmy,” the lead EMS technician informed the approaching rescue unit’s driver, and then called over to the truck, “Dave, are we getting any help?”

Dave, the Incident Commander, who had made repeated requests to the EMS dispatcher, leaned out the passenger’s window. “Butch, we are completely on our own, no backup, or any Medevac. The situation at the docks is really getting bad.”

By the road, Officer Clark, a Wicomico County Highway Patrolman, waved the rubberneckers past the accident area, his squad car lights flashing brightly along with those of the county’s only available professional medic unit. If the fire was as big as the patrol dispatcher had said, there’d be no assistance coming his way either. They were all on their own and badly understaffed. Dave had lost his partner, Skip, to fighting the blaze.

Several cargo barges on the Wicomico River had caught fire, and most of the police were called there. If the petroleum docks and nearby storage tanks caught fire too, there would be hell to pay. Because of that threat the entire local area was being evacuated. The bulk of the fire and police departments were heavily involved.

Butch O’Conner, a stocky man with a salt-and-pepper crew cut, commented to Jimmy, a recent replacement, “He’s got a tachy heart rate and seems to have a breathing problem too. He needs oxygen and fast.”

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The younger man was in his late twenties and, although a little green to EMS work, threw himself into it with a lot of energy. In Butch's first career—a US Army Medic with the Seventy Fifth Rangers—he developed a good sense of whom you could rely on, and James Blain was one of them. He knew Blain would learn quickly what he needed to know. Even if his last name was of Anglo decent, O'Conner suspected he had some Asian or South Pacific blood in him. There was a slight trace of it in his eyes, black hair and skin tone, but that is where his physical ancestry ended. You needed to be in good physical shape for this job. Jimmy was about six-one, heavy boned, and well-muscled with not an ounce of fat on him. Incessant snorkeling and scuba diving does that to a person. His hands were big, and on several occasions Butch had been amazed at how the young man could grab a jammed car door and, barehanded, pry it open. Jimmy was a walking 'jaws of life.' However, this time, the old Volvo door refused to budge, not even an inch.

Jimmy prepped the oxygen tank as he observed, "The man's lucky that's all he's got wrong. Look what this old Swede tank did to that tree, almost cut the sucker in half. If he wasn't in this old crate he'd be history. Any other car would've crushed like an empty beer can."

Butch commenced to cut away the confining Navy uniform and shirt from the naval officer's chest to aide in his breathing, "Damn, he hit hard enough to pop his left USN lapel pin right off his shirt. This guy had to be doing near fifty or more to do that. He definitely dozed off; no signs on the road that he ever hit the brakes."

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Jimmy complained, "You'd think we would be lucky enough to get somebody that was small, just once, like a little body. This guy's built like a frigging gorilla. At least he's not like that big obese guy last week. He had to be pushing four hundred pounds."

"Tell me about it. I hurt my back pulling another big tub out last month. At least there's no fat on this guy and it should be...." Butch's mouth dropped open as his eyes almost popped out of his head.

Vickie Davidson, the shorthaired blond female EMS member, started carrying over the sixty-pound 'jaws of life' and announced, "Hey, guys, we're getting no help from anybody. That fire by the fuel docks and the tank area is a real bad situation." Looking over her shoulder to the west, "It's got to be a real beauty; you can even see the smoke columns from here." Struggling with her heavy task, "Hey, will one of you help me?" Getting more annoyed by not getting a reply, "One of you needs to get the compressor!"

None of her crewmembers seemed to hear her. Numbed by what he saw, Jimmy had dropped the oxygen tank onto the Volvo's hood. Neither man paid attention to it as it rolled off and clanked loudly onto the ground.

"Jimmy, watch what you're doing. Guys...hellooo!" Vickie had enough; she let go of the heavy 'jaws' and it thumped onto the grass. Had the voters passed the Emergency Medical Bond issue she would've had a new lighter-weight and more reliable Jaws-of-Life. She wiped off her sweaty brow as she walked toward the other two, muttering to herself about how they were as lazy as her

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former husband was. “What the hell are you two goons ogling at?” Working her solid, trim frame between them she continued, “Like you never saw a guy smash himself...,” her deriding remark stopped abruptly and she froze along with her friends, only saying, “what the hell?”

Her large hazel eyes widened in astonishment. The impact of the airbag had dislodged and torn Thrim’s synthetic human skin, uncovering part of his upper body. His gill slits on his silver gray colored chest were exposed. Having lost consciousness, Thrim started breathing normally rather than through his nose and mouth. He began to convulse violently. Jimmy had retrieved the oxygen cylinder and was readying the mask.

A device implanted within Norv’s C2 vertebrae, which transmitted his condition to his companions far above, regularly updated Thrim’s physical condition. A worst-case scenario had now happened, and Captain Daeser was instantly informed. Things were bad enough before; now it was heading downhill even faster. Daeser and his crew had to act quickly before the situation went too far and became ugly.

“Who the...what the hell?” stammered Vickie as she backed away, almost tripping over herself and falling down.

“Son of a bitch, what the hell is the Navy doing now?” exclaimed Butch, “I thought experiments like this were bullshit. Damn, I guess not; leave it to the Navy.”

As Jimmy tried to place the mask over the officer’s face, Butch forcefully pushed it away, “No, Jimmy!”

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“What are you doing?” Jimmy protested. “He’ll die without it!”

“Forget it, Jimmy, look at him, he’s gasping like a fish out of water. Oxygen’s the last thing this guy needs,” Butch explained. “His pulse is dropping too!”

Turning to Vickie, Butch ordered, “Get some water, a lot of it, by the bucket.”

Vickie was bewildered and could only utter, “Huh?”

“Son of a...I told you to get the goddamned water, now move your butt!” ordered Butch in a tone loaded with extreme urgency.

With a commanding bellow, “Officer Clark, go to the corner store at Forest Grove Road and buy as much water as you can!”

Butch removed his wallet, tossing it to the policeman, “Take this and buy all they got. Jimmy, give him your money too.”

Obedying his muscular boss, Jimmy ran over, gave the Highway Patrolman his last forty bucks, and ran back, “What’s going on, Butch?” Jimmy looked directly into his eyes, “Who’s this character and what’s this experiment stuff?”

“I’ll bet it’s some top-secret aquatic research the Navy’s doing. Look at the symbols on the briefcase and the car sticker pass: Camp David and we’re not that far from Annapolis. For crying out loud, he’s a lieutenant commander on top of it all. Piece it together, Jimmy, and what do you get?” asked Butch sarcastically.

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Running over to Butch in a full run and panting heavily, Vickie said, "This is all we've got. I even took Dave's water jug; now what?"

Leaning back into the car and over the naval officer, Butch gently held the convulsing gills open and instructed Vickie, "Pour the water into his gills."

"What?" Vickie exclaimed in disbelief, "Are you nuts?"

"Jimmy, you do it," and to Vickie in a condescending tone, "Now you make sure no one, and I mean no one, gets near this car. That includes Clark. You got that, dear?"

"Damn, I wish I knew what the hell was going on!" and angrily, "Is that too much to frigging ask?"

In perfect harmony Butch and Jimmy responded, "Yes!"

Jimmy felt guilty and in a more apologetic voice, "Vickie, you really don't want to know...seriously. If anyone tries to get by, you tell'em no damn way, particularly the Press. I'll tell you what I know, but you say nothing to anyone else; it's probably a matter of national security."

"You're shit'n me?" Vickie said sarcastically, "Like, that's really lame, guys."

"Vickie, I'm sorry for being so short with you, but this is no joke. It's for real and big time," Butch added with a kinder tone, "now don't let anyone by, and I mean absolutely no one."

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As the five-foot-four woman walked toward the road's edge, she thought, "Man, has this week started out with a bang!" She looked up toward the sky and noticed dark clouds beginning to gather. "And those WICO weathermen said no rain today. If that radio station had a weatherwoman like Carol, they wouldn't goof up their reports all the time—morons."

Jimmy and Butch continued to pour the last of their water into the commander's gills. They knew they were doing some good because the convulsions decreased in severity and were occurring progressively further apart. Water was being expelled smoothly from the gills when the patrol car returned. It seemed the weather was not going to be 'clear and sunny' as forecasted. In fact, it looked threatening.

*"Rain, it always does when you're outside,"* thought Butch, *"like this poor slob needs any more problems."*

"Vickie, don't let Clark over here," Butch politely instructed, "just carry the water he brought over here yourself. Moreover, don't tell Dave anything either; we need to keep a lid on this. OK, honey?"

"Got it boss," Vickie replied respectfully and thought approvingly, *"Honey; now that was nice."*

As the patrolman approached, Vickie called out, "Officer Clark, thanks, I'll take those."

"Nah, I'll do it. These are heavy and I have twenty two-gallon jugs and five cases of drinking water...they're heavy Vickie." He

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liked this medic better than the prior one. Vickie was a little rough around the edges sometimes, but she was truly kind and thoughtful. Besides, she liked to fish and knew some good spots. This would be a good opportunity to get on her good side.

“Where do you want...?” He never finished; Vickie cut in.

“Drop them right there please,” Vickie said firmly but politely. For a cop Phil was OK. He was cute, kind, and thoughtful. He liked to fish too, all year she was told. Her former husband was a cop too, and she worried many nights that she would get one of those dreadful telephone calls. When he was actually home, he wouldn’t lift a finger to do anything. They had been tested to learn why they remained childless. The results determined that Vickie was barren. She had a very high fever and a severe pelvic infection when she was eight years old from a wound to her lower abdomen. She had fallen on some scrap metal in a wooded area behind her home.

What was left of their marriage went downhill even further. Then she dumped her cold-hearted husband and returned to her maiden name. She never liked being called Mrs. Benanavich anyway; it made her feel like a Polish banana.

She shifted gears, becoming as polite as she could, when you considered their weird situation, and said, “I can’t let you go any further, Phil, really, I can’t. I have been told by Butch not to let anybody near that car, and that includes you. Just take the stuff out of your car and I’ll do the rest, OK?”

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Phil was pleased that she had called him by his first name; it was the first time in several months since his arrival. He was perplexed at what was going on by the old tan Volvo. "A military guy falls asleep at the wheel, takes out a tree and that's a problem that the police can't handle? What's going on over there, Vickie?" He was a little ticked off at being pushed away by what seemed to be a cover-up. There was something else going on over there.

"I can't tell you because I really don't know, honestly. Butch and Jimmy are tight-lipped. They asked me if you could help keep the rubberneckers away. I had to chase off several well-meaning souls while you were getting water. Dave still can't get anybody on the horn. I really could use your assistance with those nosey civilians. Phil, that's what I really need, OK?" She ended on a conciliatory note with a big, broad smile, hoping to smooth his ruffled feathers.

"You're sure about this?" he sounded better; "I know Butch was a Ranger so maybe he knows what he's doing. What about the backup I just called for. If they arrive, do I keep them at arm's length too?"

She considered what he could tell them but then asked, "Is Burns coming?"

"With that dock fire raging, probably not; besides you know how he can be."

"Yah, tell me about it; mister macho man himself. He'll want to take over as usual. What a jerk, just like my ex," Vickie said

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derisively. "If and when backup arrives, keep them by the road. Thanks a bunch, Phil."

As if to highlight her comment, a low rolling rumble came from the darkening sky.

They both looked up and Phil said in a disgusted tone, "This day gets better and better. I get cold-shouldered by a pretty blond, and all my house windows are open, just great!"

He smiled at Vickie and shrugged, turned and headed toward two cars that had just stopped by the roadside. Turning his head back to Vickie, he smiled again and said comically, "Well, back to the old grind."

Phil was a nice guy and Vickie blew him a kiss. The patrolman liked those full tender-looking lips and her well-tapered hips. If fate were good to him, he would know how fine they really were. However, the future was not going to be kind, at least not for Phil.

Another rumble from above followed a light blue flash a mile to the south. Two big trees were hit simultaneously by something that appeared to be lightning. They fell precisely across Route 50, blocking both north-and southbound lanes. About a mile north of the crash, an eighteen-wheel semi tractor-trailer was suddenly buffeted by what must have been a strong crosswind. The truck jackknifed across a modest bridge, blocking both lanes. Several automobiles miraculously avoided colliding with the tractor-trailer when that same wind seemed to move them aside to safety. Approximately a two-mile stretch of Route 50 was now isolated and traffic along it ceased.

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Vickie kept the water coming, her trim arms and feminine shoulders aching increasingly. The EMS team was doing their job correctly. The Navy officer was starting to come to as the tepid water aided his body in getting the oxygen it desperately needed. Lacking any salt and familiar minerals, it stung his sensitive gill membranes, actually helping him regain his awareness sooner.

Technical Sergeant Norv Thrim was well trained and conditioned for this critical UWA mission. Even while unconscious his inner mind had done exactly what repeated exercises had taught it, gathering information as all minds do. Every sound and sensation was retained, ready for delivery when the outer mind was revived, but nothing ever happens as it should.

“Hey, Jimmy, I think he’s coming around. His eye lids just fluttered,” said Butch. “Give me a flashlight. It’s getting dark as night, for God’s sake. This could be a bad storm. Those clouds are really churning.” The clouds had developed into a low-lying threatening mass, rotating and tumbling with long heavy rolls of thunder that almost seemed musical. However, for some reason they lacked the familiar bluish white lightning; there was only thunder. That was very odd.

Thrim’s mind awakened and instantly knew what had transpired. Reactively his gill plates closed, he inhaled deeply and coughed up the remaining water. That’s when the pain hit him.

“Ah!” Norv cried out. Instinctively he did not use his native tongue. “Supreme Creator, that hurts!”

“Sir, what exactly hurts?” Butch asked professionally.

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“My left side feels like it’s on fire,” pointing with his right hand.

As Butch’s big hands gently probed and pressed, “Here?”

“Oh, Creation, yes!” Norv stiffened in pain.

“Sorry, Sir, I had to do that. I believe you’ve broken several ribs,” apologized Butch.

With great difficulty Vickie dragged the jaws and the compressor next to the mangled Volvo. Panting deeply, “Well, do I hear our lullaby boy is awake?” Thinking, “*Man he looks like shi....*” She never completed her thought. An unusually long-lasting, low heavy rumble startled her. Deeply concerned, the three humans looked skyward.

Butch reprimanded, “I thought I told you to stay away, Vickie? I’m going to have enough trouble with this goofy weather.”

“Well excuse me, mister big boss man. I only thought I could help you hotshots get this poor guy out of the wreck. It looks to me like he needs all the help he can get. So, do you want the jaws or not?” Vickie’s annoyance was not only noticeable by her tone but her habit of biting the inside of her right cheek.

Thrim heard the message hidden within the thunder, “That will not be necessary. Thank you for what you have done, and you have done very well, thank you again. Help will arrive very soon.”

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“Yeah, I’ll bet you have big friends upstairs, Sir,” replied Butch “I have met a few of them in the past, so I know how to keep a lid on this...ah...operation.”

“You have?” This shocked Norv, “That is strictly against regulations contacting an immature species. No one in the Authority would dare do such a thing.”

“Immature what?” asked Jimmy looking at Butch and Vickie with a dumbfounded expression that matched theirs.

“Hey, buddy, no one here is immature...well at least not me,” Vickie said, “and what’s this ‘Authority’ crap, or is that hush-hush too?”

Thrim’s conscious mind was still dazed and now confused about an apparent unauthorized contact with this human. “*Who would do such a thing?*” he thought. He moved and the resulting pain did not help his mental perception. His inner mind sensed something was very wrong, but the rest could not piece it together.

Wicomico County Patrolman Philip Clark was beginning to wonder if he would get any backup. He had called for at least one, but now he noticed something odd: what had happened to the normal road traffic? There wasn’t any. Suddenly an intensely bright blue flash blinded him, and his muscles began to weaken as they became numb. As he gradually and gently collapsed onto the curbside, he noticed there was no thunder. He seemed awake but in a deep foggy dream. He was aware of a large upward movement at the accident site but could not comprehend any sights or sounds. Sleep came to him in a soothing caress.

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Cool rain pelted his face as he awoke. Clark's sight began to come back, but his hearing had a strange hissing-whistle sound. His muscles were the last to get going and they tingled.

Staggering to his feet, he prayed, looking toward the clearing sky, "Thank you, God, for letting me live."

Leaning against his patrol car, he called out loud, "I survived a lightning hit, hallelujah!"

His vision was still a little blurry, but it seemed there was no one else around. He wobbled over to where the Volvo should've been. It was gone. He noticed the TraumaHawk E-350 truck's lights were off. So was his patrol car's.

"Hey...where'd you guys go? Hey, anybody? Vickie, Butch, Jimmy, Dave?"

He heard Dave groan but no one else replied. As he staggered over toward the EMS commander, he heard that same hissing-whistle sound again. It was diminishing, becoming fainter and seemed to be coming from directly above him, somewhere beyond the thinning clouds. The 'jaws of life' lay in the same spot that it had been dropped, and the other equipment was there too, but the Volvo and three of the EMS team were missing. He could not understand how that old two-ton car had disappeared. It had been totaled and wasn't moving on its own for any reason. The Wicomico County police chief could not understand it either, but that was not the only thing. How could Clark fall asleep on the job? The chief did not believe Officer Clark's near-miss lightning explanation. Clark's boss believed he had concocted the story, and

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while he slept, someone had kidnapped the EMS personnel and the old Volvo. The chief put a letter of reprimand into Clark's job performance file, which assured promotion to sergeant was doomed. He would be lucky to keep his job. Clark's future looked bleak.

Hundreds of miles to the east a forty-six-hundred-pound tan colored mass fell from the low-lying clouds and splashed into the sea, causing a column of white foaming water to hurl skyward. The sea cascaded down and soon it was still, leaving no evidence of the crumpled vehicle's entry. The Volvo eventually arrived at its final resting place many hundreds of feet below on the Atlantic floor. In several hundred years it would corrode into oblivion.



Vickie's eyes opened slowly and saw Jimmy's young face. "Hi, peach fuzz," she tried to sit up but it was no-go. Everything was spinning and she had a mild headache.

"Whoa," she laid back on the cot's soothing surface. "What happened?"

"I think we took a near-hit from lightning," Jimmy replied, "but I don't understand where we are."

"Looks like we're in a closet or storage room, for God's sake," as Jimmy sat up from his cot and surveyed their strangely shaped quarters, "This is no hospital room."

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The narrow space was hardly wide enough to hold the three cots, two protruding seamlessly from either opposing wall while Vickie's flowed upward like a pedestal from the center of the room. The ceiling at one end curved in a gentle arch from the floor until half way up, and then it went horizontal, rising over eleven feet above them. On the opposite end there seemed to be a slight oval recess that could be an exit. It was over nine feet high and some four feet wide, using almost two-thirds of the wall.

As Vickie looked about she asked, "What happened to our Navy dude? He wasn't doing very well."

That's why Butch had chosen this little gal for his team. Despite their weird situation, her first concern was for their injured.

Vickie gazed at her partners, "Why are we in this crappy room?" As she rubbed her eyes clear, "How long have I been out?"

Butch, still resting flat upon his cot, lifted his left arm before his face, "We've been asleep over three hours by my watch."

Perplexed, Vickie looked at Jimmy and asked, "So where did you sleep, on the floor?"

Both men looked at her as if she had two heads.

Jimmy piped in quickly, "You need more sleep. Can't you see my...." When he put his hand down beside him to pat the cot, it met empty space. He jumped up out of what was now a low chair.

Wide-eyed, Jimmy yelled, "What the hell is this shit!"

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Butch followed suit and rose quickly from his cot. Everyone watched with gaping mouths as Jimmy's chair shrunk and molded into the wall without leaving a trace, while Butch's cot did the same.

Vickie got off her cot as fast as she could. Jimmy held her arm as she wobbled to her feet. Her cot was soon gone, blending down into the center of the floor.

"Did you ever see anything like that?" asked Vickie.

Gazing about him, seeing only blank, smooth walls, he looked at Vickie and shook his head. Jimmy replied, "Goofy furniture, no medical personnel or anyone else in sight; this is the looniest hospital I have ever been in, baby,"

"Jimmy, don't call me baby," suddenly twisting her arm free from him, "I hate that word. That's what my former called me when he wanted something."

"Well then, don't call me peach fuzz," Jimmy fired back, "OK?"

Looking about intently, "Have you two lovebirds noticed this door thing doesn't have a knob or latch?" inquired Butch, "and I don't see any windows or ventilation vents either, yet I can feel cool air. Strange, I don't hear any background sounds either: no talking, no electrical humming, and no road noise, absolutely nothing. It's dead quiet in here." Butch noticed an outline next to the door, "Hey, check this out. This inset on the wall looks like an oversized hand."

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The recess was over shoulder high to Jimmy, “Well if it is, it has two thumbs,” he remarked.

“That’s probably so it can be used with either hand. It’s one of those security handprint things.” Butch pressed his hand over the recess but nothing happened.

“Well that came as no surprise,” Jimmy said.

Gazing upward, Butch made another observation. “Hey, guys. Does anyone see any lighting fixtures?”

Vickie was still feeling a little dizzy but mustered up enough bravery to sit slowly back down where her metamorphosing furniture was last seen. As she went into a crouching position the floor rose up and gently supported her.

“Really, really weird,” She wiggled in the chair a little, “but very comfortable. I wonder what company makes these things. It could be a good outfit to invest in, guys.”

Butch continued to nose around, “It seems the ceiling and walls are glowing, or am I losing it?” Only the medium-gray colored, metallic floor seemed to be unlit.

“Oh, like you ever had it.” Despite their odd situation, Jimmy could not pass up a wisecrack, given such an easy opening by his boss.

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“Shut up, you pain-in-the-ass!” Butch snapped back in a typical northeastern USA reply. With an off-centered smile he continued, “You’re not in any better shape than I am, you young pup.”

Jimmy and Butch moved about the high, skinny room examining their surroundings. Butch confirmed Vickie’s observation, “Yeah, you’re right. Weirdest thing I’ve ever seen.” He ran his palm over the woven texture of a nearby wall and saw a slight shadow over the back of his hand. The wall was the source of illumination.

“Like Dorothy said in The Wizard of Oz, we’re no longer in Kansas, Toto,” Butch said.

“I don’t know about you two, but I really got to pee,” Vickie said urgently, “anyone see a ladies room?”

“Maybe you should squat in the corner and see what the wall does,” laughed Jimmy.

“Up yours...peach fuzz.” Vickie really had to go; they all did.

“Seriously, that would be a good idea for me too, and more,” Jimmy agreed. “Maybe we should bang on the door since we can’t open it.”

Butch was closest to the room’s tall door. As he turned to face it, the door’s surface changed its shape. A small oval hole appeared in its light gray center, and then rapidly expanded silently outward, disappearing into the edges of the slightly darker gray frame-like recess. Looking upward, he stepped back as his mouth dropped

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open. Someone, or better yet something massive walked through the opening, holding what was obviously a weapon, and it was pointed directly at O'Conner. The huge figure's hands had two thumbs with webbing between all five indexes. The person's jacket was a dark yellow with black pin-stripping. The color of the non-pleated pants almost matched the gray floor. The black polished shoes were unusually wide at the toes, almost like a duck's foot.

From behind the strange-looking, burly guardian came a low, mellow male voice, "I must apologize for your accommodations, but it is all that we have. Understand, Sergeant, we have no need for a holding cell or prison, as you call it in your Army."

The three did not seem to hear a word. They were all transfixed upon the guard's face. As the figure behind him moved into the room, the sentry went to attention, a ramrod-straight nearly nine-foot posture. Despite the guard facing straight ahead, his eyes were still locked with Butch's. The stare was returned in full measure.

Vickie was the first to stop gaping and ask, "Who the hell are you? What the hell's going on and what's with the Halloween getup? Is this some kind of sick joke?"

A blue-gray hand with two thumbs and similar webbing rested upon the guard's shoulder and moved him aside. Unintelligible words came from behind the guard as he stepped slightly off by the door's edge and relaxed his pose, yet remained fully alert and glared down at Butch. As Captain Daeser stepped into the room, he said in a soothing, regretful tone, "I truly wish it was a joke. All would be so much easier."

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Butch had traveled over most of the world but could not place that strange accent and thought, *“A mix of British and Italian, and how in hell does he know I was an Army sergeant?”*

If it wasn't for the deep relaxed texture of his voice, the three apprehensive guests would have bolted for the door, linebacker guard or not. Butch's combat experience and senses told him this was no joke. Their confined room and strange furniture certainly weren't. Although he felt that he might get past these two, the others outlined behind them beyond the opening would make such a valiant effort foolhardy. All the figures that he could see had hands with two thumbs and stood near or over eight feet tall. Deep in his gut he had a sinking feeling that Vickie was wrong about this being some perverse Halloween prank, and big time.

“Again, I must apologize for the inadequacy of the room. Before your unexpected arrival it was used for general storage.” The Captain's large dark eyes looked at them with a gentle but penetrating gaze. “Please believe me when I say you are in no danger. Absolutely no harm will come to you. Your being here was an unfortunate mistake. I know your minds are confused and full of questions. I will answer what I am permitted to and do my best to relieve your concerns, if I am given the opportunity.”

Daeser had an appearance similar to that of the guard except that his short coarse dark hair receded a little more on either side of his temple and he was just over eight feet tall. Their skin was the same as the disguised naval officer from the Volvo: gray with a hint of silvery blue. The nose was hardly noticeable, being no more than a wide shallow hump that blended smoothly below the high

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cheekbones. The eyebrows were sparsely haired, hardly a shadow. The mouth was wide with thin, darker gray lips terminating in dimples. His entire uniform was a medium gray with burgundy trim. Going from his left hip upward across his broad chest to the top of his right shoulder was a pattern of silver bands adorned with decorations or medals.

Butch thought, *"If you've seen one officer, you've seen them all."*

The guard's jacket had no diagonal bands but did have several horizontal stripes about his lower sleeves. Butch suspected he was a sergeant, just as he had been before retirement.

"This is a bullshit joke, and we don't have time for this crap," Vickie was getting testy and could be a real scrapper. "We're a medical emergency team and people's lives depend on us. So just take off the monkey suits and the stilts. You've had your fun," she wobbled a little as she moved forward, "now get the hell out of my way." Looking upward and glaring at the Captain, she demanded, "And what happened to the naval officer we were taking care of?"

Jimmy moved to assist her and Butch followed, despite his better judgment, and started to say, "Vickie I wouldn't do anything stupi...."

The guard moved fluidly like a cat, stepped in front of his superior and in a firm demanding voice uttered, "Domnet!"

The word was not understood, but the meaning of his menacing tone, the narrowing of his dark eyes and their icy glare made it all

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too clear. She stopped cold. The mountainous guard towered over her slight frame. It was then she suspected this was no joke but instead, a very serious situation. A deep chill went down her spine and she visibly shivered.

As Jimmy moved to block the guard, the alien Captain ordered in a loud authoritative voice, “All of you sit down...now!” His broad hand, fingers spread apart, motioned forcefully downward. The sudden change from a gentle soothing voice to that of one accustomed to having his orders immediately obeyed caught Jimmy and Vickie off balance. Butch, with many memorable and rewarding years with similar leaders in the US Army Rangers, reacted instinctively and stopped promptly.

Looking sideways at each of them, “Vickie...Jimmy...do what he says.” Butch calmly backed up and sat down by the wall, which responded quickly with a chair. “This is not the time and certainly not the place for futile heroics.”

Jimmy did as he was told, cautiously watching the transformation of his chair. Vickie went to sit at the back wall rather than the center of the room. Butch was about to warn her that her chair was in the middle when one formed gently beneath her. The Captain gave an instructive glance to his guard who returned to his former position, continuing to watch the three humans like a junkyard dog. The humans sat, feeling very vulnerable before the towering figures.

“Everyone, please, relax. Sincerely, I assure you that no harm will come to you and you will return home as soon as it becomes

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practical.” The Captain’s tone began to shift into a calming one. He sat down before them hoping to reduce their apprehension, resting his large hands on his knees.

Butch was going to ask exactly what “becomes practical” meant but thought better of it and remained quiet, at least for now.

“We have been waiting for all of you to fully awaken, and we are aware of your biological needs.” Daeser commented with a wry grin and returned to a relaxed tone as he continued. “We will need to accomplish this biologic relief one of you at a time due to the cramped space of my craft. Our custom is the same as yours, ladies first.”

The Captain stood straight up and stepped off to the side, pointed at Vickie, motioning her to go through the opening, “Miss Davidson, if you please.”

Butch noticed Vickie was called by her last name but dismissed it as anything significant since it was on her nametag and tunic. Nevertheless, he was still bothered about this alien knowing that he was a sergeant in the Army.

“I don’t really need to go that bad.” The fear in her voice was all too apparent, and she began to tremble. She looked at Butch for reassurance and comfort. Vickie had known him for about two years and trusted him to do the right thing. She thought, “*The big goon will know what to do.*”

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“Vickie,” Butch leaned over and put his meat-hook hand tenderly over her slender shoulder, “it’ll be OK; they mean us no harm. If they did, it would have happened long ago.”

Without leaving his form-fitting chair, he gently lifted her arm to help her shaking body rise, saying, “Go ahead, it’s OK.” He used humor to relax her and joked, “Don’t worry, besides our hosts will not appreciate the mess you’re apt to make on this beautiful gray floor.”

“But, Butch, I...” she started to protest, looking into her boss’s reassuring eyes for help.

“Vickie, just go do your thing. God, if you pass wind in this dinky room, we’ll all die,” Butch said comically. He was a good man and had a knack for calming a tight situation.

It was then they realized they were truly in no danger. Captain Daeser spontaneously broke out into deep roaring laughter. His wide-open mouth showed a solid band of white rather than separate teeth. Getting control of himself, he said to Vickie, “Please do so, my dear; we all wish to live a long and odor-free life.”

Butch and Jimmy completely lost it. The three males were laughing loudly. When they noticed the perplexed expression on the guard’s face, they laughed even harder. Obviously he didn’t speak English and had no idea what was going on.

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Vickie was not amused one bit and muttered as she got up, headed for the opening, “Men, they’re all the same.” Behind her followed a guide gently directing her to the right.

“Thank you, sergeant, for your reassurance. I must say it was helpful and very well timed,” praised Daeser as he sat back down.

Jimmy said, “You know, you can’t live with them and can’t live without them.”

A massive grin exposing his continuous white smooth tooth came across Daeser’s face once again, “That is a common saying no matter what part of the Galaxy you hail from.”

Jimmy was young and sometimes a little slow, but he noticed that word quickly. “You say what?” Jimmy asked with his eyes wide open, “Did you say Galaxy?” He looked at Butch’s face expecting to see his amazement also. Instead he saw a calm expression that seemed to say, “*I knew it, I damn well knew it.*”

“While your fellow emergency worker is tending to Mother Nature, let me be a gentleman and introduce myself.” The Captain had previously put together in his mind what to say, but this pleasant turn of events made much of it pointless.

“I am Squadron Captain Larn Steven Daeser, commanding officer of this light cruiser and her two frigate companions. She is one of the ‘Golden Wasp’ cruiser class. That is a rough translation, but it describes the proud name of my combat spacecraft well enough.”

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There was a definite ring of pride in the Captain's voice. Butch was familiar with that and respected him for it. This man, if that was the term, was a good leader. Butch sensed his first loyalty was to those under his command. Despite the absurd situation he was in, O'Conner began to like the Captain and instinctively knew he could trust him. His former career with the Army's best, the 75<sup>th</sup> Regiment or the Rangers, had provided him with many such leaders. This invaluable trait was easy for him to recognize.

"First, I want to thank you sincerely for saving the life of Sergeant Thrim. He is one of my best," explained Daeser.

With his military bearing resurrected, Butch politely interrupted, "Excuse me, Sir, but you said sergeant? The man we saved wasn't an officer?"

"Quite an irony is it not?" responded the Captain. "Many of our special assignment personnel are not officers. They are chosen strictly for their inherent talents and flexibility for a specific task. For the Earth assignment the selection also required someone of slight stature. His nickname is very descriptive, 'Shorty.' Normally after such unique assignments the enlisted become officers after successfully finishing the Officer's Academy. I have found such men to be excellent leaders, but you know that, Sergeant."

Butch wondered, "*Just how much does he know about us?*" Being a former master sergeant, Butch openly smiled, "They see both sides of the fence, Sir. It's a big advantage."

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Captain Daeser's large, dark eyes locked with Butch's, and he thought, *"You have been there. If I get the chance, I will enjoy a little chat with you; your Special Forces training shows."*

Breaking eye contact, Daeser resumed, "I deeply appreciate what you have done for Sergeant Thrim. If given the time, I would like to know how you knew precisely what was needed to save his life. Such a situation is far from normal for your EMS team." Then in a fatherly tone, "Again, I want you to understand that absolutely no harm will come to you. Your presence here is a complete accident. It is our responsibility to return you safely home and with everything that belongs to you."

The captain motioned toward Butch, "Mister O'Conner, several hours ago, you commented to Sergeant Thrim that you believed he had 'big friends upstairs and that you had met a few of them in the past.' He wrongly assumed you meant someone from the United Worlds Authority or even the Anrypan (*pronounced Ann-rye-pin*) Imperial Republic. This was a reasonable assumption considering his poor physical and mental condition at the time. May I ask what you actually implied?"

"Since your sergeant appeared to be part of some US Navy Special Forces experiment, I was referring to his secretive superiors. It's funny how we're using the same words but the meanings are worlds apart." Butch smiled casually at the comedy of his choice of words. The alien officer caught the irony also and smiled back. It was reassuring that the other had a good sense of humor.

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The huge captain before him was indeed from a world apart—many thousands of light years. He missed Aquadia and its soothing oceans and grinned reflectively. Larn also missed his wife and two older children who had blessed him with two darling grandchildren each. He and his beautiful wife adored the four little ones and spoiled them continuously with gifts, trips to the Crimson Sea and on long weekends to other water worlds. When the defense of Earth was over, he would take everyone to the planet of Marcela and its fantastic amusement complex once more. They loved it just as much as he did.

“What’s the United Worlds Authority, Sir?” asked Butch in a respectful tone, “and the Anrypan Imperial Republic?”

“I will explain that later in greater detail if I have the opportunity. I regret that my activities are soon to become rather hectic,” excused the Captain. “Briefly, the United Worlds Authority is a galactic-wide organization of hundreds of worlds and is called either the UWA or the Authority. The Anrypan Imperial Republic, an Associate Member of the UWA, is referred to as AIR by most of the other members and as the Republic by the Anrypans.”

“I haven’t a clue about what’s going on; can someone let me in on this,” pleaded Jimmy.

“You’ve gotta be kidding me, Jimmy boy; you can’t be that slow.” Butch thought, “*The kid is strong as a bull but not too quick on some occasions like this. Time and experience will iron that out. Hell, I wasn’t any better at his age, young and dumb.*”

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Butch rubbed the base of his neck as he shook his head and explained, "Jimmy, my boy, we're in a spaceship and it ain't one of ours. This officer," Butch paused to reflect, "*I'm sure you are the head-shed,*" looking at the Captain, "is in charge, so don't give him any shit...in particular not to that really big guy next to him."

Daeser did not say anything but nodded and smiled at Butch. There was a touch of humor and agreement in his dark eyes.

"OK, *I got that one right,*" Butch confirmed to himself. "Jimmy, you can't seriously tell me you haven't pieced this together yet? Look around you. What's the last thing you remember? Don't give me that bullshit of being hit by lightning either. If that were true, then these guys are angels. Like I said, Jimmy boy, we're in a spaceship, a light cruiser like the Captain said." He glanced at Larn Daeser and received another nod, "and this is the strangest closet I've ever been in, glowing walls, curving ceiling and cots and chairs popping out of the walls and floor." Leaning forward and right into Jimmy's face, Butch asked, "Well?"

"Butch, this is hard to swallow. I feel like I'm dreaming," Jimmy replied in the same manner that he had last weekend when he got absolutely plastered at Mike's Bar and Grill. "It's too much, Butch. Like, this can't be real. This is like a Hollywood set and...." He never finished as someone entered the room.

It was Vickie returning with her female escort. The Captain politely stood up. The guard and Daeser stepped aside as they made a chivalrous, slight bow. Vickie took immediate notice of

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these courtesies and smiled at each of them only as a woman can. “*A rarity, gentlemen.*” she reflected as Daeser sat down.

“Hey, Butch, like you said, we’re not in Kansas anymore,” she commented with a mixture of concern and amusement in her voice.

“No shit,” retorted Butch.

All Jimmy could muster was, “Whatever. This is freaking me out.”

Vickie looked a little annoyed, “Why do I get the impression I’ve been left out again?” She paused and smiled, “But this time I’ve got one over on you two dopes. You’ve got to see what I just saw—really awesome,” nodding her head in confirmation.

She turned and looked at the Captain, “Nice place you got here. I love the clear view of the Earth and the...” she stopped briefly to think if she should use the word “...flying saucers must be flown by some real sharp pilots, zipping in and out from your fighter bay through that floor opening...damn, it’s no bigger than they are.”

She looked at Jimmy’s bewildered face and then at Butch’s concurring expression, “Now I know why this room has a curved back wall. Guys, I was wrong, this is no early Halloween party joke.”

“My dear, I was about to get to that,” Daeser calmly said, “but first I believe your friends need to tend to their certain biologic needs as well.”

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“Man, do I,” urged Jimmy. He looked at Butch like a whimpering dog at the back door.

Butch motioned his head toward the opening, “Your turn, go ahead.”

Vickie added, “Hang a right.”

“Oh man, this could take a while,” Jimmy whined as he quickly departed the small room, his escort in tow.

In reconsideration the Captain commented, “Maybe I should have revived you earlier rather than wait for you to come about on your own, but I doubted that you would have cared for the intense headache.” He looked at Butch. “Are you able to wait, sergeant?”

“Yes, Sir, no problem,” he replied. Butch turned to Vickie as she sat down on her reappearing chair, “What were you chattering about when you came back?”

Vickie turned sideways to lie down. The chair returned to its former shape, a comfortable mobile bunk. She rested her arms behind her head and with a smug look said, “You just wait and see, Mr. Know-it-all. Wait and see. It’s a ‘wow’ of a view.”

With a questioning look the Captain asked, “Do the three of you actually work together in a cooperative manner. Do you have any liking for one another?”

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“Yes, Sir, believe it or not, and very well too,” responded Butch. “I’m proud to work with both of them. They make a good team.”

Vickie thought to herself, *“I’ll be damned; I got some credit and recognition for once. The old goat likes me, like that’s a real surprise.”*

Daeser was looking doubtfully at them when a series of three rapid, resonating, deep hums was heard overhead. The Captain said something to the guard as he stood up. Butch recognized only one word, “Thrim.”

“I must tend to my duties so please, if you will, excuse me,” Daeser said as he started to depart the room, “I will have someone you may recall be your escort to better quarters when we arrive at the moon base.”

Turning back with a wide grin, “When your friend Jimmy returns you will see what few of your race has ever seen—Earth setting below the horizon of the dark side of your moon. If he’s delayed, all you will see is the inside of a dank lunar cavern. We will be landing soon, in less than five minutes. The door will remain open so you do not feel so confined. In that respect your new accommodations will be far better than this storage room. Again, I apologize, but it was the only space available on a craft of this size.” He then turned, said something to the guard and they both departed the diminutive room. The portal remained open as promised, but two others were still outside out of sight—almost.

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While they waited for Jimmy, Butch and Vickie talked about the thoughtfulness and courtesy of the Captain, the huge stature of their hosts, and tried to imagine what could happen next. What was meant by better quarters and who was the person they would remember? The humans no longer feared for their future; the Captain had convinced them of that. By leaving the door open, the Captain was also extending a small degree of trust toward his unexpected guests. Although they felt less threatened, they still had concerns about when they would go home. Butch felt they were very safe and it was only a matter of time before they would be released. He was sure this whole thing was just as the Captain had said—an unfortunate mistake.

Jimmy took his time; too much, almost ten minutes. He came into the room rubbing the right side of his forehead, which had a round, reddish-pink blemish. “This place is cramped everywhere. There are pipes and all kinds of crap sticking out here and there. Watch out for that orange handle down the hall on the right. I thought everything was high up. Man, that hurt,” grumbled Jimmy.

Finally it was Butch’s turn. All he saw through the circular fighter bay portal were dull, gray cavern walls and flat stone floors. When he reentered the room, he slapped Jimmy across the back of his head saying, “Thanks a lot, asshole.”

“Hey, what was that for!” Jimmy complained as he massaged the sore spot on the back of his skull. “What did I do? Damn, that hurt!”

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“I am just spreading out the bumps over your thick, inconsiderate head,” snapped Butch glaring at him, “jerk off.”



### CHAPTER 3

## GREAT INCONVENIENCE

**T**he EMS team would soon appreciate that the Captain was good to his word, every bit of it. A voice announced they could leave the Cruiser's storage room for a better place to stay. Butch and Jimmy looked at each other. That voice was very familiar. Their new host stood in the doorway.

"I am Technical Sergeant Norv Thrim. You knew me as a United States naval officer. If you want, you can call me what most of my shipmates do, Shorty. I would be honored." He had the same broad, single-toothed smile and a face like the Captain. However, his black hair was longer than Daeser's and combed straight back, and his hands had no webbing and only one thumb. His uniform was a medium tan with several silver bands on his uniform sleeves, more than the guard had.

For a few moments the EMS team just stared at him. Butch broke the silence. "I'll be damned, you look just like the rest of them," he

blurted out. “Oh shit, I don’t mean that as an insult, Sir. It’s just you’re not...human, like before.”

“None taken and, Butch, I am not an officer. Please do not call me Sir,” Thrin requested.

Vickie cut in, “You’re a real diplomat, Butch.” She made a sweeping, professional examination of Thrin with her eyes, saying, “How are you feeling...Shorty?”

“Thank you very much for saving my life, and I feel reasonably well considering the severity of my accident. My ribs are no longer broken as Butch correctly diagnosed, yet they are a little tender. Again, thank you all so very much. I am truly in your debt.”

“You made quite a cosmetic change...” Jimmy could not fully gather what or who to call the man they had saved, “...aah, it’s Shorty, right?”

“Yes, as long as we are by ourselves and not within earshot of my seniors, Shorty will do very well. In fact, I prefer that nickname. For members of my species, it’s unique,” he proudly boasted.

Getting back his humor, Butch said, “We noticed that. I’m getting a sore neck from constantly looking up at your Captain and his big buddy.” He had a wide grin, “Sorry for the ‘Sir’; I didn’t mean to insult you. As a sergeant you work for a living.”

Norv smiled in a whimsical way. His tone and manner were warm and friendly. He was in their debt, and he was about to pay it back in spades. The humans were in for a pleasant and very comfortable surprise.

Staring and pointing at Norv’s hands, Jimmy asked, “Why are you different from the others?”

“My friends, if I may call you that?” Thrin beckoned as he stepped back into the passageway, “Please follow me to your new quarters and I will answer that question, unless you have become attached to this tiny space.”

“Hey, lead the way, Shorty,” Vickie said cheerfully, “I have had enough of this dump.”

*“Friends?”* thought Butch, *“Time will tell.”*

Raising his left hand before them so they could see it clearly, they departed the storage room with Thrim explaining, “I was altered to appear as you do, and when I return home, and these changes will be surgically reversed.”

Ever thoughtful and concerned, Vickie asked, “Isn’t that change process painful?” You could see by the expression in her face that she would never have her thumb removed and reattached for any reason.

They turned left and walked down the narrow, curving gray passageway as Norv replied, “Initially it was. The worst part is trying not to grip things with that worthless little finger as if it was still a strong thumb. Now that truly hurts.”

They all chuckled a bit until Jimmy hit his head on another orange handle. “Son-of-a-bitch!” bellowed Jimmy. “It’s that goddamned bastard handle again.”

Butch was going to tease him but Vickie got there first, “Always thought you were a bit slow.”

“Vickie, shut the hell up! Man, that really hurts,” complained Jimmy, rubbing his forehead again.

“Jimmy, that was not the same handle. The first one you hit is behind you on the opposite wall,” Shorty said.

“Oh, well that’s OK then. I feel so much better now,” Jimmy said sarcastically, rubbing the additional bump.

Looking down at the otherwise drab gray floor, Vickie asked, “What’s this bright red, wide line in the center of the hall? Oh...I called it a hall, but on a ship it’s a passageway.”

Butch looked at Vickie approvingly and thought, *“She knows a lot more than most. Pretty smart girl; I like that.”*

“You are correct, Miss Davidson, and the red swath is the Emergency Line,” responded Norv. “Anyone with an urgent need relating to the safety of the craft or its crew has absolute authority while running along this line. By regulation everyone is to get out of the way.”

Butch added, “Except the Captain.”

“He is not excluded. I said ‘everyone’ and that is a vital regulation. On larger craft a magnetic runner is used. It is like your moving walkways at the airports except you float over the floor. On those ships this red paint is replaced by an illuminated area, which follows the person as they proceed.”

“Have you ever used this red line?” Jimmy asked.

“I never have and probably never will. I am not a specialist for propulsion, navigation or weapons,” explained Shorty, “and it is rare the Captain ever uses it. It would be irresponsible of him unless the reason was critical.”

Thrim continued to inform the three of the compactness of his ship, which was typical of all war-craft regardless of exterior size. The engines and their thrust distribution ducts, along with the weapons chambers, used up most of the ship’s interior. Much of what remained went to other systems: life support, navigation, fighters and last, the cramped living quarters. The only room with marginal open areas was the Tactical Observation and Execution Sphere, which he was not allowed to see. The engine room and weapons chambers were also off-limits, not only to him but to the Captain. Only specific crews had access to those ultra-top-secret compartments.

Butch realized that the UWA staff ran a tight ship, very tight. He liked that. Looking about him, he asked, “Where are we going, Shorty?”

“I hope your new quarters will gain me the honored title of friend.” Thrim looked at the three with an expression of a cat that had just eaten the canary. “I have many contacts here on your moon and

learned long ago always to be nice to those in payroll, maintenance, and supply. My friends, you will have the great honor of staying in the one-and-only Senior Officer's Guest Quarters. The base commander is an Anrypan and was not pleased about this in the least. Captain Larn Daeser approved of my suggestion regardless of the Group Commander's vehement objections. The Captain said it was the least we could do, considering the great inconvenience we must put you through."

"So this base of yours is the responsibility of a non-UWA senior officer?" Butch asked in a confused tone.

Thrim smiled at Butch, "Frankly, this is not our base. The Anrypanns have been observing your world for some time. This is solely their base, since they built it."

Butch was more bewildered now than when he had started, and he pushed for more understanding, "These Anrypanns serve the UWA?"

"No one 'serves' the Authority. Each member is just that. No one owns or serves anyone else," clarified Norv. "Every member is an active and equal sovereign partner, depending upon membership status. All support each other."

Butch was impressed by what seemed to be an organization that did not dominate its members. They were independent yet supportive of each other. Not a bad deal.

The four departed the cruiser's interior along a gray textured ramp extending downward from the fighter bay rim. The mouths of the three guests dropped open as they walked beneath the huge saucer's perfectly flat underside only forty feet above. Their attention was transfixed upon the huge craft's light gray underside. Beneath their feet was the same gray surface of their former confinement and the spacecraft's passageway decking. Not only were they oblivious to this, but also to the activity buzzing about them and the gigantic cavern they had entered, with its cathedral ceiling arching hundreds of feet above them.

Butch stopped briefly, thinking, *“Holy shit, this sucker’s big, and it’s only a light cruiser?”*

Well away from beneath the UWA Golden Wasp’s outer edge, Norv stopped his alien companions. They continued to gawk, shaking their heads in wonder. The upper body was also the same tone of dull gray. Starting at its top edge, the surface slowly inclined upward. A third of the way from the center, the body rose into a gracefully curved low dome. The top was the same as its underside; no imperfections, lettering, or openings could be seen. The spacecraft was apparently seamless.

“God, look at that thing,” Vickie was amazed at its massive size.

“I bet it’s over two thousand feet across,” Jimmy added.

“My craft is slightly over eighteen hundred feet in diameter. It must sound like a lot to you, but it is modest compared to our fleet’s heavy battle-cruisers,” Shorty said in a proud, off-handed manner.

Vickie innocently inquired, “How big are those heavies”? When no reply came she sighed and thought, *“I shoulda seen that one coming...or actually, not coming.”*

“It’s like a flying aircraft carrier, for God’s sake,” Butch was awed. “How many fighters does she hold?”

In a typically military monotone Shorty replied, “That information is not for you, Sergeant,” giving Butch a glance out of the corner of his eye that said, *“You, if anyone, should know better than to ask that question.”*

“Same answer I got, Butch,” Vickie teased.

Breaking eye contact with Thrim, Butch suddenly noticed the huge cavernous panorama about him for the first time, “Hey, guys, will you look at this?”

He motioned them forward as he walked farther away from the spacecraft's underside, gaping at his surroundings, "Holy shit...it must have taken a bunch of digging to make this hole."

Norv informed them, "This cavern and thousands like it are natural formations. The one you are in is over thirty miles long and over three miles wide in some locations. Your number twelve, thirteen and sixteen Apollo missions sent their discarded Landers impacting into the moon's surface. Previously installed seismographs recorded prolonged reverberations from one to over three hours. This unexpected resonance indicated the potential of these chambers to some of your scientists, yet, most disregarded the results as an unexplained phenomenon. Many have tubes exit but their thousand or so foot wide interiors are inadequate for spaceships."

Gazing about him, Thrim smiled, saying, "Obviously, they are quite wrong. Except for leveling the floor in some places, adding interior walls and the airlock system, the Anrypanans did very little. Most moons, like yours, have an abundance of these caverns. It is very convenient, and several more have recently been adapted for our mutual use."

Vickie was the first to stop surveying the awesome cavern and noticed the commotion about them, "This place is like a frigging beehive. What the hell's going on, Shorty?"

"You will learn about that soon enough, but for now let me say we are preparing for a great event."

"Hey, that cleared that up really good, thanks." Jimmy could have a sharp wit occasionally. "That insight helped a lot."

"Wait a minute...most of those people are human!" Butch was shocked over what he thought he saw. "How in hell did the press miss this one? I can't believe this was kept a secret from our people."

"Butch, they are not from Earth but from Anrypa. Remember, this is their facility." Norv was amused at Butch's faulty assumption since it was so predictable. "You are the only humans here."

As some passed by, they smiled, with a few giving a quick wave. Vickie immediately noticed their teeth; not a single canine tooth could be seen. She also noticed that not one had a discolored tooth; all were bright white. Vickie thought, *“Damn nice dental work; must have cost them a bundle.”*

Jimmy noticed a smaller UWA craft docked off to their left. He saw many others, but different shapes, along the opposite cavern wall and more toward the back. These were not like the disk-configured UWA ships. What he saw were dark green, slope-sided, rectangular, elongated and much smaller. The front was conically blunted. He knew it was the front because the other end had clusters of distinctive engine exhaust cones enclosed in a beveled shroud. The cones looked somewhat like NASA’s Space Shuttle but were significantly bigger and had offset vanes inside. Overall they were bulky, ugly and looked like oversized, multi-green carpenter’s pencils. On the side of each ship was a thinly black-bordered red square with what appeared to be a symbolic or stylized white eagle in the center. Above and below were markings or lettering that he could not understand. Jimmy compared them with the UWA ships, which had no markings of any kind.

Pointing to these elongated ships he politely asked, “Are those yours too?”

“No, they are not. All of those,” Thrim motioned with his arm around the cavern, “belong to AIR...I mean the Anrypan Imperial Republic. Jimmy, if you think our ships are cramped, those craft put a completely new meaning to the word. Warships are not designed for the comfort of their crews, and the Anrypan’s meet that requirement with a vengeance.

“Tell me about it; it’s the same for Hueys,” Butch confirmed, remembering his helicopter experiences. He had noticed far more AIR ships than UWA; in fact, he only saw three of the latter. He wondered how many caverns there were and how many more ships they contained. The moon base was Anrypan, and they seemed to have the majority of the spacecraft, yet UWA acted like the top dog. This was very odd to him.

Jimmy wasn't catching on to Norv's tight-lipped tendencies and continued to ask the unanswerable, "Your ships don't seem to have any engines. Where are they? And what about...."

Vickie cut in, "You're a very slow kid. Don't ask questions that will never be answered. Butch and I..." glancing at O'Conner comically, "...figured that out early in this...aah...selective conversation."

Thrim grinned pleasantly and motioned with his arm, "Please follow me to that near wall. I thought of providing transportation, but after your confined quarters, a relaxing walk seemed to be a good idea. Would anyone prefer to ride instead?"

No one had a chance to decline when Butch stopped in his tracks and looked at his companions, "Wait a minute! We're on the moon—right? So why don't I feel a lot lighter in weight like our astronauts did? Those guys jumped and bounced all over the place. Shorty, what gives?"

Swinging his hand downward, "Look at the decking we are walking on. All the races use the same technology to increase the lower gravitational fields of smaller worlds, or in this case, your moon." A fiendish expression came over their host's face, "Butch, step off the deck onto that flat rocky area and you will see exactly what I mean."

Butch made his first step off the dull gray surface well enough, but his next was an exaggerated leap. He stumbled and nearly rolled over onto his back after arching several feet upward. He was kneeling with his hands on the gravel surface, "Holy shit!" O'Conner didn't dare move, "Now what? I'll bust my ass if I do that again."

Thrim smiled, "It is not very graceful, but I suggest you shuffle over to the decking and do so very slowly. You might not be aware of this fact, but your astronauts had weighted boots for better control of their movements."

With a twinkle in his eye Shorty said, “Butch, I do not think your medical working shoes are that heavy.”

Jimmy was about to make a digging remark when Butch shut him up, “One word out of you, wise guy, and I’ll throw you out here; then we’ll see how funny it is!”

Butch sighed as he regained his balance, including his dignity, when he slid his feet back onto the gray walkway. “I know a bunch of people who would give their right arm to know how those panels work,” as the EMS leader looked at the dull gray sheets below him.

The small party walked leisurely behind Thrim when the female EMS technician noticed two dark green uniformed women lifting large cylindrical objects onto a platform. None of the nearby male soldiers made any effort to assist. “Well, isn’t that typical,” Vickie’s tone was clearly sarcastic and highly annoyed, “Lazy bums.”

“I beg your pardon? To whom are you referring, Vickie?” Her demeaning remark and the target of it confused Thrim.

“Those two gals are busting their asses, and not one of those guys will lift a finger; that’s all...typical males.”

Norv suppressed a chuckle, “Vickie, unless they were having difficulty, any assistance would be considered an insult. I am not saying the Anrypan do not help one another, but they do only when it is obviously needed or specifically requested. The female master sergeant and the assisting private would consider unwarranted aid as an implication that they were not capable of doing their work. The Anrypan, above all else, are a proud race and ask for help only if they truly need it.”

“Wait a minute,” Butch was amazed, “you’re telling me that good-looking, black-haired gal is a master sergeant? She’s too young, Shorty; she can’t be a master.”

“The multiple arched chevrons slightly above her right elbow denote her rank, and she’s typical of Anrypan women: very pretty and vibrant.”

Jimmy was admiring their figures, “For real, Shorty, for real.”

Vickie thought, *“I’d like to know what that sergeant uses for makeup. God, she doesn’t look any older than the private.”*

Meanwhile, Butch was observing the human-like staff scurrying about them. Despite that some had more chevrons than the sergeant they had just passed they all looked just as young. There was not a gray hair on anyone; even the senior ranks had no crows’ feet or lines on their tan faces. That was puzzling, but he dropped his intent to ask why when their host seemed ready to say something important. O’Conner could see it in his facial expression.

As they continued to walk away from the Wasp, the friendly texture of Norv’s voice changed to one of a stern warning. He was getting concerned over his guests’ constant prying curiosity. It could develop into something more aggressive. This was as good a time as any to put an end to it.

“Captain Daeser wants me to inform you, in no uncertain terms, not to do anything foolish, or you will seriously regret it. He is trusting you and hopes you fully realize this. Frankly, there is no place you can go. Again, he wants me to reassure you that you are safe and will not be harmed in any way. But if it is confinement you want...,” Thrin paused for the thought to sink in, “...well you had a recent taste of that. Moreover, let me say this, the Anryfans are not as tolerant as we are with unexpected guests. Simply put, the Captain wishes you to be as comfortable as possible for as long as you must stay, so please...behave yourselves.”

This time Jimmy decided to get brave, “Just how long is long, Shorty?”

“Although Captain Daeser cannot say exactly when you will return home, I believe it will probably not be beyond a month if Group Commander Mordan has his way.”

“A month!” cried Vickie. “We have people that will miss us. Our families will be worried sick. They wouldn’t know if we are alive or

dead. What about my cat? This is bullshit!” Butch and Jimmy stopped walking, and their expressions displayed that they, too, were upset. Thrim’s manner, and what he was about to say, calmed them, somewhat.

“I am truly sorry, but the situation of your world is very desperate. If we release you now, as Commander Mordan wishes, any chance of saving Earth from being literally consumed by the Enemy could be lost. The Captain believes it is irresponsible for us to do that. Group Commander Mordan feels that it is a moral obligation to send you home now. You could have been retained two months if Captain Daeser had his way. Certain technical arrangements need to be completed first, and that fact was used to convince Commander Mordan to wait until the conclusion of that primary operation. Those two are good friends but had quite a heated discussion over your situation. Eventually, they compromised on one month. If there is any consolation, your great inconvenience will help save your world.”

“Inconvenience, hell, and what is going on? What situation, what operation,” demanded Jimmy?

Shorty made a noticeable sigh, “I am very sorry, but you are not permitted to know that, at least for the moment. I probably should not have said anything. But I would want to know something if I were in your place.”

The look in Thrim’s dark eyes had an expression of real concern and compassion. “I assure you that it is an extremely dangerous situation. That is all I dare say except, my dear Vickie, your charming cat, Haun, is waiting for you in your new quarters.”

“What?” she exclaimed, “How?”

Now it was Jimmy’s turn for a barb, “Don’t ask questions that will never be answered.”

## United Worlds Authority Spacecraft and Descriptions

The following pictures were created from handmade models and are not computer generated. The Corner Copy Shop in Beavercreek, Ohio, and Mr. Todd Norton produced the graphics explicitly for the author. The author is the designer of these spacecraft. He retired from the U.S. Department of Defense, U.S. Air Force, with over thirty years of involvement in missile and combat aircraft development. These designs are practical and not fanciful Hollywood concoctions. If actually manufactured, the UWA/AIR spacecraft would perform as described within the novel, unlike those from Hollywood or television. A DVD is available from the author, which provides more than only spaceships. It contains many pictures, which are excellent screen savers and clipart, and depict various city and scenic settings from the story.



**ANRYPAN IMPERIAL REPUBLIC MANTASS HEAVY  
FIGHTER MARK 8F**

The Anrypan (Ann-Rye-Pin) twin seat heavy fighter is colored medium to dark green, has six weapon wings, has no armor, and uses a reverse tricycle landing gear system. Twenty-one year old Ensign Angelica Dimere Bakaru is not only the Republic's best fighter pilot, but also a real knockout of a woman. Her squadron symbol is a pair of overlaid double-edged battleaxes painted silver. A squadron consists of five fighters. At the tips of each wing/tail/canard are single shot energy tubes. Technically the name is Nuclear Bond Dispersion Charge, NBDC. The crews call them Charges or if an earlier version, Shell Crackers, in reference to what they do to the hull of a spaceship. Any material struck by a Charge has its atomic bonding disrupted with cataclysmic results. The Charge is like an energy torpedo and is hell incarnate. One hit will annihilate an enemy escort, frigate, destroyer, and will cripple a light cruiser. Larger warships require more than one hit. Under the nose is what many other worlds consider an antique, a 60 caliber cannon. Each projectile/shell, which is more of an energy mass, is precision guided and contains a very high explosive. When the Charges are spent, the cannon goes to work. This weapon is used primarily against fighters, escorts, ground targets, and damaged energy shields of warships. Repeated pinpoint hits by 60 to 70 shells will result in at least one getting through an intact energy shield. It then travels directly to the target's energy converter, located within the engine room. One hit by the projectile's warhead, destroys the converter, leaving the enemy defenseless. It then it becomes a turkey shoot. The hapless warship will look like Swiss Cheese when the squadron is finished with their cannon. Although the Mark 8F is not the fastest, nor has the greatest acceleration, it is the most maneuverable of any fighter. It is a VTOL (**V**ertical **T**ake **O**ff & **L**anding) and has multi-positioning exhausts and thrust ports located on its underside. It also has small steering ports on the upper surface of the main wings, upper body, and forward body sides. The underside canards have ailerons and, are effectively forward nose rudders. The 8F can literally rotate in place, briefly traveling backward, and fire its cannon at a pursuing enemy fighter. The prime target for these guided shells is the cockpit. The Mark 8F is an all non-dense atmosphere spacecraft. It has no intakes since the engines are fully self-contained. If crew ejection is needed, the crew compartment is used, a capsule. If within a breathable atmosphere, the ejection seats are used. The flight suit and helmet are biologic and fit the pilot and WDO (Weapons Delivery Officer in the back seat) perfectly for ultra-top-secret missions. The helmet provides all visual and targeting needs. On the ground, its audio capability is better than a bat's. The suit has a reactive camouflage skin and automatically blends in with its surroundings. The crew is virtually invisible, if they

move slowly. The opposition refers to the Mark 8F as the “Undertaker” and most opposition fighter pilots will have nothing to do with the it. Specifications: feet and pounds: Length = 52.8; Width = 43.2; Height = 18.6; loaded weight = 71,000.



### **ANRYPAN IMPERIAL REPUBLIC EAGLE'S TALON HEAVY CRUISER**

The Eagle's Talon class heavy cruiser does not have the appearance of something very dangerous. Its unique inclined hull and complete lack of any exterior appendages, give it a simplistic appearance. Looks can be deceiving. The Anrypan Galactic Service, AGS, does not use energy as protective shielding. Instead, raw armor is used. Less than a dozen people know what the composition of this brute armor is. What is known is its high resistance in deflecting energy beams from opposing warships. The hull uses the same medium to dark green coloration, but unlike the fighters, it can change to display any color or pattern. Since its evasion of electronic detection systems is superior that leaves only visual detection. The five engine exhausts are unique. The two large port and starboard engines are for primary forward thrust and these nozzles are fixed. Centered between them are two smaller cones, which swivel to port and starboard providing

bank and roll maneuvering. A slightly larger exhaust than these two is centered between them and the main engines. It swings up and down for pitch and yaw movement. This complex configuration provides surprising maneuverability for a spacecraft of its size, to the detriment of its enemies. Knowledge of the cruiser's weaponry, including the ability to fire through its armor without damaging it, is a well-kept secret. Anrypa does not sell any of its weapon technology, or any item that may reveal any of its secrets. The favorite battle tactic of the AGS takes advantage of the cruiser's sloped armor and gets in close and will ram a crippled enemy ship. Why waste valuable energy. The Eagle's Talon has four bays holding twenty fighters each. It is an AGS design requirement that all warships carry as many fighters as practical. As such, an AGS fleet does not normally need many carriers. The advantage in a pitched battle is that the enemy rarely knows from what direction the fighters are coming from. Specifications in feet and tons: Length = 750; Width = 240; Height = 132; loaded weight = 87,600.



## **UNITED WORLDS AUTHORITY (UWA) LIGHT CRUISER**

Very little is known about UWA spacecraft. The heavy cruiser is 1,800 feet in diameter (5 times the length of a NFL football field). The center body diameter is 924 feet (2.5 football fields) and 344 feet high, the distance of a NFL field. What its top speed is remains unknown. It has traveled from Earth to the vicinity of the Orion Constellation (average of 1,000 light years away) in 3 days using Celestial Canals: debris cleared routes of space. Roughly, that is over 8,000 times the speed of light. An AGS light cruiser takes 30 days. UWA weapons are also unknown. Yet, on a scale of 1 to 10 (10 being the most powerful) UWA is an undisputed 10. The AGS has a 5.4 to 6.0 and Earth is a .5 (each whole number is an exponential of the one before it). Communications/Navigation is also a top secret. A message's delay time to the Orion Constellation from Earth is 2 minutes. It is the same for communication verification/plotting. The AGS takes 20 minutes. UWA hull integrity (resistance to weapon penetration) is one more top secret. If the "Enemy" hits the exact same spot seven times, it will penetrate the hull. One hit on an AGS warship by the Enemy will completely destroy it. Maneuverability is also unknown, but has been witnessed to make 90 degree turns in less than its diameter. Yet, AGS warships can almost turn on its own axis and therefore have one advantage, maneuverability.



### **ENEMY LIGHT CRUISER WARSHIP**

The UWA refers to their opponent as the “Enemy.” These warships can be massive, as the comparison above of the UWA light cruiser to an Enemy light cruiser displays. Other Enemy ships, like dreadnaughts, are larger still. No Enemy ships have been captured, so, little is known about them. Yet, they are slow in comparison to UWA and Anrypan AGS warships, have poor maneuverability, and are predictable in combat. The unusual shape is that of an oversized pinecone. This is the result of repeated layering of hulls as the spacecraft enlarges over time. Although this method is economical, it has a

downside. The seams of the gargantuan spaceship are its Achilles Heal, or weak points. A precise attack at these junctures can literally tear the craft apart, like peeling an onion. The Enemy outnumbers the UWA by seven to one. Quality and superior combat tactics offset these odds. The war with the Enemy has been at a near standstill for almost a hundred years, although the UWA has made marginal progress. The trump card in this lethal game will be the AGS. Its

future combat spaceships will surpass the UWA craft and result in driving the Enemy from the Known Galaxy.



### **ANRYPAN TIMBER HAWK INTERCEPTOR 6D**

Another creation from the Anrypan Mantass Design Bureau is the Timber Hawk 6D Interceptor. Compared to the Mark 8F Heavy Fighters, the ultra-light weight interceptors seemed to be at a serious disadvantage. They have no energy tubes, no armor, stubby delta wing, slanted twin tails, no ejection capsule or seat, one engine, and one pilot. Offsetting these negatives are two important advantages. First, each of the six 30 millimeter cannons has eight hundred, ultra-high explosive, precision guided shells/projectiles. This provides the Timber Hawks with a very lethal punch. Second, its oversized engine and its unique thrust director slats jointly give the 6D a phenomenal thrust-to-weight ratio of 1.93 and unbelievable maneuverability. Squadron Lieutenant Naundraya (Nauny) Volarye Razyro's Red Squadron 6Ds during the Battle for Earth made short work of unprepared Enemy corvettes, escorts, and crippled a destroyer with

their total of twenty-four thousand rounds of pure hell. The stocky fuselage contains electronic weapons that jam an opponent's navigation, communications, and targeting systems. There is no single 6D that performs this jamming, but all 5 in the squadron. Since there are 5 squadrons in a Flight Formation, the adversary has no hope of countering their electronic attacks.



**NAUNDRAYA (NAUNY) VOLARYE RAZYRO**

Naundraya (Non-Dray-Ah) Volarye (Voe-Lar-Ree) Razyro (Rah-Zie-Roe) has the nickname of Nauny. During the Battle for Earth she was an AGS Squadron Leader for five Timber Hawk Interceptor 6Ds.

Nauny is Angelica's very best friend since early childhood and has the same charismatic personality, except Angie's short fused temper. Yet, Razyro can be much worse. If provoked she patiently plans her revenge and strikes without warning. Nauny, like anyone, has a flaw, which at first might not seem so. She is a perfectionist to the extreme and tolerates nothing less from her command's subordinates. This trait could be very annoying to many; however, her charming personality overpowers that reaction. She has been the Class President for her entire education since tenth grade, even for the four years at the AGS Academy. Any task she is given or initiates is completed with absolute excellence. Her confidence level in her ability to succeed is of the chart; she never considers failure. The day will come when a traumatic event shreds that belief. Her AGS career, despite this one catastrophe, skyrockets her to the top position of Supreme Commander. In the future, despite an occasional disagreement with her Commander in Chief, Empress Angelica Dimere Bakaru the Third, their lifelong friendship remains true.



**UWA ANRYPAN GREAT WHITE EAGLE AND ANGELICA  
IN HER BIO-SUIT**

The world symbol of Anrypa is a huge white feathered eagle, with some light gray. It is the largest raptor in the Known Galaxy. This praised aerial monarch appeared on Anrypa 200,000 before the establishment of the world's Imperial Republic. Prior to that time no fossil remains have been found, despite extensive explorations, which are ongoing to this day. The Great Eagle's size is not the prime reason that it was chosen as Anrypa's symbol and is so revered. In early times when Anrypan were ignorant of these great creatures all kinds of foolish beliefs were created, as the talons made you sexually active, the beak would cure this or that ailment, and so forth. It is told the first time the Eagles were hunted, the attacker's villages and cities

were bombarded that night by hundreds of heavy stones. The destruction and loss of life was terrible. During the day the raptors would return, but drop more upon empty fields or shallow streams. The Anrypans may have been ignorant, but they were not stupid. They got the hint. Some of the wiser people began to watch these huge birds. They noticed whenever one eagle would catch a fish, lay it upon the shore, and fly off to get their family for the meal; none of the others would touch it. In fact, they would prevent animals, or even Anrypans, from touching it. The character of these huge raptors became obvious: always honorable and helpful. The ancient people began to worship and emulate them. A religious sect, “The Way of the Eagle”, was created and spread across the continent. The influence upon Anrypan society and its supportive culture was astronomical; it created the respectful, honorable, promise keeping, and deeply religious race they are today. Angelica’s gloss-black ultra-top secret biological skintight flight suit nourishes and protects her in many ways. It keeps her comfortable, fed, nearly invisible from detection, and forms itself into lethal shapes that make her an efficient killer. Angie Bakarú can hear, see, and smell better than any predatory animal. She can move through underbrush without making a sound and blend into the surroundings so perfectly as to almost be invisible. The bio-suit sustains itself from greenery, water, insects, small fish, and other nutrients its surfaces contact. Except the Emperor or Empress, and those within an ultra-top-secret unit of the “Ministry of Cultures and Societies” is aware of its existence.