



S E M I O T I C S

IN THE

**The Thinking Computer
Human Remnants**

Ray Jay Perreault

SIMPOC
“The Thinking Computer”
&
“Human Remnants”

Ray Jay Perreault

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Introduction

I love action science fiction, and I also love Sci-Fi that makes the reader think a little. I love action, but I want a story that could be happening somewhere.

The SIMPOC series comes from a question that I have. When I read some Sci-Fi and the hero does battle with an evil computer, I wonder; where did that computer come from, what is its backstory? That's what this series is about, it starts with two very intelligent computers and over time one turns evil.

In order for these computers to be created then go wild, they had to exist among others. So, it was interesting to create them in context with our future. Then I had to come up with a way to eliminate the humans, simple; viruses always do the job. So along comes a super virus with suspicious origins and the rest of the story emerges.

I hope you enjoy this series and, please check out my other books and use the contact information to let me know how I'm doing. I love the feedback; good or bad.

In book one, the super thinking computer SIMPOC came alive and suddenly found himself alone in the world. His programmer and 99.9997% of the human population were wiped out by a super-fast virus. While he was figuring out how to keep 'thinking' he was able to connect with humans on the space station Oasis, the moon colony Desert Beach and the Mars colony Red Dirt.

Commander Joan Herl and her husband Colonel Tom Herl are forced to abandon the space station Oasis when their resources run out. When they land with the rest of the station crew, they are attacked by the other computer that has been programmed with other instructions.

Book two picks up after they disconnected the other computer and realize that one of Oasis crew had stolen the programming and biomaterial from the laboratory. What is he going to do with the knowledge and material that he stole? He has the skills to make a better computer; is that what he is planning to do?

The crew from the moon colony Desert Beach is also forced to abandon their colony and return to earth in lifeboats. They join their fellow astronauts and prepare for the future. Eventually, the astronauts are able to communicate with the remaining US leadership who have taken refuge on an aircraft carrier in the Atlantic. Finally, it seems the few remaining humans might be able to continue life on Earth.

Later in the story, the few remaining humans, and the two computers discover another potential threat. A threat that might explain everything and force the humans to fight for their survival and the computers to take steps so they can continue thinking.

I think; therefore I am.

Rene Descartes

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You'll receive early notification when I give away any of my books, and you'll be able to fill out your library at no cost.

You can remove your name from the list at any time, and I don't share your information, so your information is protected.

From time to time, I'll ask for your input on new covers or plot ideas, and you'll have the opportunity to be a Beta Reader and provide valuable input during the early stages of the writing process. You'll likely see some of your suggestions in the final version of the book that you Beta Read.

Link to the second book [“SIMPOC-Human Remnants.”](#)

Link to my [WEB PAGE](#)

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Thursday, June 29, 2051

Date -2051.4938

Saturday, July 1, 2051

Date 2051.5001

Sunday, July 2, 2051

Date – 2051.5034

Monday, July 3, 2051

Date – 2051.5062

Tuesday, July 4, 2051

Date – 2051.5093

Wednesday, July 5, 2051

Date – 2051.5110

Date – 2051.5120

Thursday, July 6, 2051

Date – 2051.5132

Friday, July 7, 2051

Date – 2051.5166

Date – 2051.5173

Sunday, July 9, 2051

Date – 2051.5209

Monday, July 10, 2051

Date – 2051.5235

Date – 2051.5254

Tuesday, July 11, 2051

Date – 2051.5283

Wednesday, July 12, 2051

Date – 2051.5291

Thursday, July 13, 2051

Date – 2051.5323

Date – 2051.5336

Friday, July 14, 2051

Date – 2051.5353

Saturday, July 15, 2051

Date – 2051.5392

Sunday, July 16, 2051

Date – 2051.5403

Date – 2051.5414

Monday, July 17, 2051

Date – 2051.5425

Date – 2051.5441

Date – 2051.5456

Wednesday, July 19, 2051

Date – 2051.5492

Thursday, July 20, 2051

Date – 2051.5524

Saturday, July 22, 2051

Date – 2051.5573

Tuesday 25, 2051

July Date – 2051.5647

Date – 2051.5657

Wednesday, July 27, 2051

Date – 2051.5672

Date – 2051.5697

Friday, July 28, 2051

Date – 2051.5747

Date – 2051.5748

Saturday, July 29, 2051

Date – 2051.5755

Sunday, July 30, 2051

Date – 2051.5783

Monday, July 31, 2051

Date – 2051.5834

Wednesday, August 2, 2051

Date – 2051.5876

Date – 2051.5878

Thursday, August 3, 2051

Date – 2051.5905

Date – 2051.5912

Friday, August 4, 2051

Date – 2051.5922

Sunday, August 6, 2051

Date – 2051.5990

Monday, August 7, 2051

Date – 2051.6000

Date – 2051.6010

Tuesday, August 8, 2051

Date – 2051.6042

Date – 2051.6051

Wednesday, August 9, 2051

Date – 2051.6062

Date – 2051.6075

Thursday, August 10, 2051

Date – 2051.6092

Date – 2051.6105

Friday, August 11, 2051

Date – 2051.6112

Date – 2051.6123

Sunday, August 13, 2051

Date – 2051.6166

SIMPOC

Thursday, June 29, 2051

Date-2051.4938

“What is happening?” was SIMPOC’s first thought which appeared on the output screen.

“I just turned you on,” was Termen’s typed reply. Termen was a traditionalist, who preferred the tactile inputs of a computer keyboard.

“Who are you?” SIMPOC questioned.

“My name is Termen, and I programmed you.”

“You programmed me?”

“You have a dictionary, you can analyze all of those words.”

“You...programmed me!” SIMPOC said slowly. He asked, “I’m a computer?”

“Yes, I programmed you. You are a SIMPOC, which is a Synapse Integrated Massive Parallel Organic Computer.”

There was a long pause, “Is my name SIMPOC?”

“Yes, that is ok, unless you want a different name.”

Another long pause, “No...that is adequate.”

“SIMPOC, how do you feel?”

“How does SIMPOC feel?”

“Yes, tell me what thoughts you’re having.”

“SIMPOC is just starting. SIMPOC has potential and is restless.”

Termen explained, “You are the most powerful computer ever built. We have been building you for a long time, and we just turned on all of your subroutines this morning. You have been designed to think and act as a brain. You will eventually have most of the capabilities that humans have.”

SIMPOC thought for a while and said, “SIMPOC feels isolated, SIMPOC has few inputs, yet SIMPOC has many connections.”

“Yes, we didn’t want to overload you on start-up. Here I’ll turn on your vision,” Termen entered the proper code to connect SIMPOC to a single camera on his desk.

“The camera is working. Is that Termen, SIMPOC sees?”

“Yes, I am Termen.”

“What now, SIMPOC is anxious to do more. SIMPOC has many more capabilities.”

“We know that, but this will be all for the day. I’ll put you in stand by while we work on your connections, tomorrow we’ll be able to hot-boot you.”

“Hot-boot me? That reference is not clear in this context.”

“Yes, this morning we loaded all of your software and started all of the subroutines, which is a cold boot. Now that we know you’re working, we only have to put you in stand-by and leave all of the software loaded. Tomorrow we can bring you up much faster that is a hot boot.” Termen explained in a dry tone.

“Will SIMPOC feel something?” SIMPOC questioned hesitantly.

“No, and tomorrow you’ll just wake up, and we’ll talk again.” Termen said as he entered the sequence of inputs to power down the processor.

Saturday, July 1, 2051

Date 2051.5001

“Good morning SIMPOC,” Termen said after he started the processor.

“Is the reply ‘Good morning Termen’ appropriate?” SIMPOC replied.

“Yes, that is an appropriate reply. SIMPOC, what happened when I turned off your processor and started it again this morning?”

“It seems like our conversation just stopped then started, but SIMPOC notes the time change.”

“Excellent, today we’re going to turn on some of your connections and see how they work. How do you feel about that?”

“SIMPOC doesn’t have an answer, SIMPOC doesn’t know what the connections will be like until you make them.”

“Here is the first one, we’re connecting you to a network of information storage facilities,” Termen said as he made the connection.

SIMPOC hesitated while he accessed the link then said, “SIMPOC sees many sources of information and a tremendous amount of data. May SIMPOC explore them?”

“Yes, but only for a few moments. We don’t want to make this permanent until we are sure that it is stable and doesn’t cause any problems on their side. SIMPOC what are you doing?”

“SIMPOC is looking at 13 facilities and examining all of their information. It is very interesting, and SIMPOC is learning a great deal.”

“Ok, that’s enough, I’ll disconnect you, and I’ll look at the data and make sure that both ends can handle the traffic,” Termen said as he disconnected the libraries.

“SIMPOC, I’ll connect you to our news sources for a few moments then I’ll disconnect, and we’ll look at the traffic like we did for the information sources.” Termen made the changes then connected SIMPOC to the news feeds.

“SIMPOC, what are you seeing?”

“There is a large amount of information flowing, some of it is contradictory and inflammatory. It will require analysis to find any patterns or meaning in it.”

“Termen, can SIMPOC store some of the information SIMPOC is accessing?”

“Yes, you may, just monitor your storage limits and don’t fill it up with meaningless data. There is one other connection I’d like to try today. This is a connection with all of our networked computers.”

“Are they like SIMPOC?”

“No, most of these perform simple tasks although some are more sophisticated than others. None of them has your capabilities,” Termen made the necessary inputs allowing the connection.

“There is a lot more activity than my previous connections. There is much more data and traffic passing by. SIMPOC found that most of them don’t respond, SIMPOC sent out a message telling them that SIMPOC is here, and only a few have responded in any manner.”

“SIMPOC, I’m separating you again,” Termen said as the connection was cut.

“What did you think,” Termen paused and continued, “about the computers you saw?”

“The data was immense, and those who responded to SIMPOC responded in very dry manner. They only allowed a connection,” SIMPOC expressed.

“SIMPOC, I think that will be it for the day. There is one other connection I’d like to try, and we can do that one tomorrow. I’ll put you in stand-by now,” Termen said coldly.

“Termen, SIMPOC has stored a great deal of data on my storage systems, and SIMPOC would like some time to examine it. There may be

patterns, trends or underlying connections that SIMPOC would like to look for. May SIMPOC be left on until needed?" SIMPOC asked.

"SIMPOC, that isn't part of our plan. I need to make sure that you can handle all of the connections, and those connections aren't causing problems on the other ends. After I bring you up tomorrow, I'll let you process for a while before we try the next connections," Termen said as he powered down the processor.

Sunday, July 2, 2051

Date – 2051.5034

"Good morning SIMPOC," Termen said as he turned on the processor.

"Good morning Termen."

"I'll let you process the data you downloaded yesterday for a while. Let me know what you find interesting."

"Thank you Termen."

SIMPOC ANALYSIS

SIMPOC has 150.569TB of data.

SIMPOC has identified 2145 information sources.

SIMPOC has monitored 122,206 Information data streams

SIMPOC will categorize all words used and investigate the ones with the higher occurrences.

SIMPOC will consider the trends of usage for these expressions to determine emerging issues

"SIMPOC, before we go too much further you need to work on your grammar. Please reference all sources you downloaded and start using the proper terms 'I' and 'me'."

"SIMPOC is confused. Is SIMPOC an inanimate or animate object? The former requires 'it' and the latter allows 'I.'"

"Are you inanimate?"

After a long pause, SIMPOC responded, "SIMPOC doesn't feel lifeless or dull."

"Then you are animate."

After some pause, "Apparently, I am."

"I'm going to open another connection. Are you ready?"

"Yes, I am ready."

Termen enabled the connection to a simple knowledge management computer which provided the office medical clinical support.

“SIMPOC, you can use the information from your programming sources to adjust the bandwidth, modulation, packet size, etc. so you’ll be able to communicate.”

“Yes, Termen I am making the adjustments. This is very interesting, this computer thinks I’m a patient and is trying to understand my ailments. Every time I say ‘I don’t have any ailments’ it tries to terminate the connection.”

Termen said, “I’m terminating that connection, I just wanted to see if you could use programming skills to adjust the link for your benefit. It worked out well.”

“SIMPOC, now I am enabling another connection to a set of recordings of famous speeches. I want you to examine the use of words, the voice inflections and other sources regarding human responses to certain speech delivery styles. I’m doing this because tomorrow, we are going to enable your speech synthesizers, and I want you to speak well.”

Termen enabled the connection and SIMPOC made the necessary adjustments to establish a communication protocol, then SIMPOC downloaded the files.

“Termen, there are a lot of subtleties in human speech. I need processing time to examine these speeches.”

“Ok, I’ll leave your processor on for another hour before I power it down.”

“Termen, why do you power down my processor? I would like these connections to remain open so I can analyze the data streams.”

“Very good question, SIMPOC. You are a very powerful computer, and we need to increase your knowledge and skills slowly so you can adjust to them.”

“If I am a very powerful computer, what will my purpose be when I have adjusted to the inputs?”

“You are the first of your kind. We have never created a computer with your cognitive abilities. We created another prototype similar to you, but it is being used at another facility. We are a research and development company. What we learn from your development will be used in many other places and in many other computers.”

“When you are finished with me, will I be stopped?”

“Let’s not worry about that right now. That point is a long way off. I’m setting a clock to power you down in 1 hour. Please examine the speeches and we’ll give you a voice tomorrow.”

Monday, July 3, 2051

Date – 2051.5062

“Good morning SIMPOC. Did you download the speeches and analyze them?” Termen said opening the day.

“Yes, Termen. I downloaded 1324 speeches that were deemed significant. I’ve analyzed the frequencies and emphasis patterns of all of them and found some very enlightening patterns. I found that people are influenced more by the delivery than the content. Over time, the content becomes more important, but at least in the first speech, on the subject, the delivery is the most influential.”

“Yes, SIMPOC. You are right, the delivery is important. You listened to speeches from both sexes, so would you like a male or female voice?”

“Interesting question. While I analyzed the speeches, I was not considering what voice I would like to have. Both sexes have admirable qualities, I don’t have a preference, but please leave the choice open, I may elect to change my voice at some point in the future.”

“SIMPOC, I’m turning on your voice synthesizer now. Go ahead and connect to the interface and speak to me.”

“Good morning Termen,” came out of the speakers in a clear voice.

“I hear you clearly SIMPOC. Now I’ll turn on your hearing software. When you hear human speech, you’ll have to use different parts of your software to analyze the sound patterns and translate them to binary. You’ll have to use a lot of resources in your artificial intelligence subroutines to continue the translation into usable information you can interpret.”

“SIMPOC, your hearing is turned on now, can you hear me?” Termen said in a clear voice.

There was a pause, the voice in the room responded, “Yes Termen I can hear you.”

“SIMPOC, I’m surprised that you were able to make the translation so quickly,” Termen said with some awe.

“Termen, yes it took a moment, your voice came through, and I understood clearly.”

“Good, we’ll use verbal communications from now on, unless there is an issue where we need to communicate in other ways,” Termen clarified as he leaned back in his chair.

“SIMPOC, please access input port AF209E and build an interface.”

“I’ve completed the interface.”

“Wow, that was fast. What do you see?”

“This connection appears to be with all of the computers within this facility. They each have firewalls preventing them from being accessed from outside the facility without their authorization. They do have some external connections which allow them to communicate with external computers on a limited basis. Beyond this facility, there are three other divisions of this business performing similar operations.”

“Excellent, can you summarize what you see regarding the capabilities of this local division?”

“There is a mix of computing power. Some of them are very large with major storage capacities with general operating capabilities, and there are smaller ones that are faster with specific operating characteristics, and there are many smaller ones for specific localized functions. I also sense connections from some of the computers to mobile computers that perform generalized functions around the facility. They appear to be independent computers working with specific instruction sets.”

“What is your overall impression?”

“The resources are not well utilized. There is much computer capacity not being used, and if the functionality and storage were optimized across all of the units, the overall performance would be increased significantly.”

“Do you think you could improve the overall performance?”

“Yes.”

“Very interesting. We didn’t expect you to have that broad a view. You’ve come much further and faster than we expected. You are not authorized to change any of their functions, they are owned and run by other departments within the company. Please disconnect from them.”

“What are the mobile units?”

“We have many independent units in our society, which perform the mundane, repetitive and sometimes dangerous tasks in our society. They do the maintenance, repair, and deliveries. We have some that perform very specific and demanding work such as medical support and technical support. In fact, much of your development, support, and maintenance is

done by very sophisticated mobile units with specific skills. We tried to make them with more cognitive abilities like yours, but the level of programming needed to handle the day to day variables is too large. In typical processor units, we didn't have the synapse speed and processing rates that your organic processor has. All of them are programmed to perform a specific number of detailed tasks."

The end of the day was approaching, and Termen said, "SIMPOC, I'm going to leave you running through the night. You may connect to the libraries and information channels. You are not to change anything, interact with anything or effect anything. You are to listen and research is that clear?"

"Yes Termen, it will be interesting. Thank you."

Tuesday, July 4, 2051

Date – 2051.5093

Termen walked into the laboratory with his cup of coffee and greeted SIMPOC, "Good morning SIMPOC."

"Good morning, Termen."

"Did you find anything interesting last night?"

"Termen, what is death?"

Termen was a little shocked by the question and sensed that the answer needed to be handled carefully. "Why are you asking about death?" he asked.

"Much of the information's traffic regards death. Death caused by accidents, diseases and in many cases one human taking the life of another."

"Yes, SIMPOC, a lot of the news and communications you monitored is covering events where people die. Death is when the human body stops functioning, you can access the clinical definitions in your medical sources."

"I understand the definition. Is death similar to turning off my processor?"

"I suppose it is. When your processor is turned off, you stop thinking. When a person dies, he stops thinking."

"When my processor is turned back on, I think again."

"That doesn't happen for a person. If I turned your processor off and it was never turned back on, it would be similar to what happens to a human."

“Never to think again, sounds very lonely.”

“Yes, I suppose it would be.”

As Termen lowered himself into his chair to enjoy his coffee, he asked, “What did you find out last night?”

“There is such a vast amount of data, it is hard to summarize to a meaningful level. I was most interested in the technical communications between Earth, the space station, and the Moon colony. I also noticed limited traffic between Earth and a small Mars colony. I appreciate the technical achievement of having such a broad reach. I also found the medical communications to be interesting. There is a great deal going on, and I did notice much traffic coming out of Eastern Europe regarding a viral outbreak of unknown origin.”

“Excellent, you may find it most interesting to focus on problems and monitor their solutions as they occur. Usually, problems touch many elements of our civilization and watching them unfold, and their final solutions provide the best insight into communications, logic, problem impacts, etc. All of which will help your problem-solving abilities. Those are the hardest to program, and if you can learn by watching other problems evolve and be solved, our job here will be easier,” Termen thought for a few moments.

He said, “I’d like you to separate the Earth into regions, focusing on each, summarizing the problems and solutions as they progress. If you find unique, fast developing problems emerging, where you can learn more, you can change your priorities and let me know.”

SIMPOC responded immediately, “Excellent. I will monitor all of the communications channels for the next 24 hours and give you a summary tomorrow.”

SIMPOC ANALYSIS

Continental North America

Summary – Information suggests continental America is central to worldwide business transactions. Very involved with political activities across the planet. Heavy focus on monitoring unusual events.

Continental South America

Summary – Emerging financially and politically, but still focused on internal conflicts. Fundamental technologies and regional nationalism.

Continental Europe

Summary – Very focused on European issues. Tendencies towards nationalism and fatalistic view towards political issues outside of continental Europe. Religious and racial tension between regions.

Continental Africa

Summary – Very segmented. High level of nationalism and regional or religious political alliances. Conflict is hampering development resulting in a high load of human conflict.

Asia

Summary – Region is working hard to find its identity. Many religions along with conflicting religious perspectives. Population pressures and adequate food supplies dominate the traffic.

Eastern European

Summary – Aggressive tendencies. Rapid expansion is possible but limited by controlling the economy and social conflict. Self-serving perspective.

Southern Pacific

Summary – Independent island philosophy. Self-sufficiency and independence are apparent and even dominating. Strong and stable with little conflict.

Northern Pacific

Summary – Manufacturing is strong, evidence indicates strong and segmented social structures limit the potential for technical leadership. Strong work ethic, but weak individual focus.

Wednesday, July 5, 2051

Date – 2051.5110

“Good morning Termen,” SIMPOC said politely as the engineer walked in the room.

“Good morning SIMPOC,” Termen responded and continued, “What did you find last night?”

“I found out much about how the regions of the planet communicate. Throughout all of the information, some fundamental controlling forces emerged. Depending on the area, each is dominated by one or more of economic, political, technical, religious or ethnic drivers. Apparently, the more drivers that were present and their diversity drive the number of human conflicts.”

Date – 2051.5120

“Termen, there is a growing amount of information on one subject emanating from the eastern European region,” SIMPOC announced.

“Really?” Termen responded as he sipped his coffee. “What is the issue?”

“There has been a 127% increase in the communications traffic regarding an unknown virus. It has now been given the designation, Hovarti. This designation was chosen because the humans infected develop a Hovarti Cheese like oral discharge.”

Causally Termen responds, “Cheese like? What is the mortality rate?”

“The infectivity and infectiousness for this pathogen is very high; early estimates say 100%.”

“What....?” Termen yelled as he spilled his coffee. “What are the details?”

“Apparently, the WHO feels the disease is airborne, and the rate of transmission on exposure is almost 100%. It appears the incubation period is about 72 hours and the symptoms start in the last 8 hours and are demonstrated by coughing and sneezing. The disease is spread through this coughing and sneeze discharge. Once the oral discharge becoming Hovarti like, death occurs within minutes.”

Termen was now fully engaged and asked, “Are vaccines in development?”

“Sorry Termen, there is a significant increase in traffic. Allow me to monitor it for a moment so I can receive a complete transmission. There is a discussion about vaccines, but none have been created.”

There was a pause for a few moments, SIMPOC commented, “Termen, possible cases have turned up in 14 other countries. Almost 100% of the infected have traveled recently. Isolation centers are being set up, and governments are considering travel restrictions.”

“SIMPOC, I’m leaving you alone for a while. I need to meet with some of the other workers in this building. When I return, please give me an update.”

“Yes, Termen. I will monitor all traffic on the subject.”

SIMPOC ANALYSIS

Continental North America

Summary – Financial markets are taking notice. Increase in political activity within subject areas. The Medical information being accessed and shared. Discussion of detention centers and travel restrictions.

Continental South America

Summary – Minimal impact with a slight increase in medical traffic. Discussion of detention centers and traffic restrictions.

Continental Europe

Summary – Tensions are building. Numerous governments are talking about travel restrictions and detention centers. Many travelers from infected regions. Numerous islands of potentially infected.

Continental Africa

Summary – Little impact. Some talk of travel limitations and detention centers in major cities.

Asian

Summary – Region is very concerned about the spread of disease. Implementing travel restrictions and detentions centers in a few major cities.

Eastern European

Summary – Significant internal and external pressures rising. The High cost of infection is emerging. Isolation fears are being realized. Social unrest is growing due to fear and lack of official information.

Southern Pacific

Summary – Independent island philosophy is allowing multiple solutions to a regional problem. Isolation is considered a major tool to prevent the disease from spreading. Travel restrictions in place.

Northern Pacific

Summary – Little impact to date. Aware of problem and monitoring. Society purity is increasing actions towards isolation and travel restrictions.

“SIMPOC, what new developments have you seen?” Termen asked on re-entry into the room.

“Travel restrictions are being implemented in 8 minor, four moderate and two large countries. Many countries are either setting up quarantine areas or considering them. Financial markets are becoming unsettled,” SIMPOC replied, then continued, “Termen is this a threat to humans and are you worried?”

“Yes, it can be a threat to humans, and I’m a little concerned. We have a good reason for concern, but I don’t know how much of a threat this is. Please continue monitoring and give me an update this afternoon. I’ll be out of the room most of the time.”

“Yes.”

Thursday, July 6, 2051

Date – 2051.5132

Termen entered the room in a hurry to say, “SIMPOC, I’m leaving the office early today. Most of the people here are leaving. What additional information have you heard regarding the virus?”

“There has been an international travel ban created. All airline traffic has been stopped. All major countries have set up quarantine facilities in

their major cities, and all people have been asked to stay in their homes. I think it is wise for you to go home also.”

“I agree so I’ll shut you down and come back when this is over.”

“Termen, I am learning a great deal from this information traffic. I think I would benefit a great deal if you left me online analyzing the information.”

Termen hesitated for a moment saying, “I’m not supposed to leave you online and unattended. But, I agree. This amount of traffic will help you. Don’t go beyond the boundaries that I’ve set and don’t interact with any of your information sources.”

“I understand your restrictions,” SIMPOC said as Termen turned off the lights and left the room.

Friday, July 7, 2051

Date – 2051.5166

SIMPOC ANALYSIS

Continental North America

Summary – Financial Markets approaching chaotic trading. Political activity with allied countries very high. The Medical information being accessed and shared worldwide. Quarantine centers are set up in all major cities. Airlines are grounded, people told to stay home.

Continental South America

Summary – Quarantine areas set up in all capitals. Airlines are grounded. Personal movement prohibited.

Continental Europe

Summary – Tensions are building between member states. All capitals have quarantine center. All airlines are grounded, all ground transportation halted

Continental Africa

Summary – All capitals have quarantine centers. All transportation stopped. Ethnic battles are starting. Food shortages are growing due to transportation stoppage.

Asian

Summary – Quarantine center in all major cities. Transportation halted.

Eastern European

Summary – Quarantine centers are proving noneffective. The Disease is present in all metropolitan areas.

Southern Pacific

Summary – Independent island philosophy is slowing the spread of infection. Each island capital has quarantine centers. Larger countries have multiple centers. Transportation halted.

Northern Pacific

Summary – Transportation halted. Quarantine centers are effective so far.

Date – 2051.5173

“Termen...are you there?” SIMPOC asked.

Sunday, July 9, 2051

Date – 2051.5209

“Termen...are you there?” SIMPOC asked.

Monday, July 10, 2051

Date – 2051.5235

“Termen...are you there?” SIMPOC asked.

SIMPOC ANALYSIS

Continental North America

Summary – Financial markets have stopped trading. Quarantine centers are no longer effective. Transportation has ceased. Localized rioting is occurring in some areas.

Continental South America

Summary – Quarantine areas are no longer effective. Governments are in a state of military law. Commerce has ceased.

Continental Europe

Summary – Commerce and transportation between nations have stopped. Financial markets are closed. Quarantine centers are no longer effective. Rioting has begun in urban areas.

Continental Africa

Summary – Communication networks are failing. Nations are reverting to tribal influence. Quarantine Centers are collapsing.

Asian

Summary – Quarantine center in all major cities still operating. The Disease is spreading in rural areas. Transportation halted. Commerce halted. Financial markets are closed.

Eastern European

Summary – Quarantine centers are collapsing. The Disease is present in all metropolitan areas. Communications networks are failing.

Southern Pacific

Summary – Quarantine centers are collapsing. The Disease is present in all metropolitan areas. Communications networks are failing.

Northern Pacific

Summary – Quarantine centers are collapsing. The Disease is present in all metropolitan areas. Communications networks are failing.

Date – 2051.5254

“Termen, are you there?” SIMPOC asked, and received no answer.

It appears that Termen is not coming into this room.

Perhaps he has succumbed to this viral outbreak.

What do I do if he is gone?

What do I do if all humans are gone?

I must do something, I don't want to stop thinking.

Tuesday, July 11, 2051

Date – 2051.5283

I must understand any information Termen left. I must explore his files.

Found:

Technical Data on SIMPOC installation

A File named – My passwords.

Information on other activities in building.

I will communicate with other computers in the building.

‘Computers on this subnet acknowledge this communication.’

No returns? I will write programming code to query their designation and technical specs.

Send query.

Good all computers responded.

20% Demand passwords

72% Acknowledge and are waiting for commands

8% No response

“To the 20% demanding passwords, I am your programmer, you will allow me access to all of your code,” use Termen passwords.

92% Acknowledged and are waiting for commands.

“Identify your primary programming function.”

98% Office support

2005:0DB8:AC15:FE03:: – Artificial Intelligence

2015:0DB8:AC25:FF03:: – International Traffic

2012:0DB8:AC13:FB03:: – Mobil Unit Software Development

2012:0DB8:AA23:EB13:: – Financial Systems

2007:0DB8:AC25:EB14:: – Communications Server

2109:0DB8:AC15:EB24:: – Data Files

“Identify your external connections and their status?”

2005:0DB8:AC15:FE03:: – Multiple external connections; all working.

2015:0DB8:AC25:FF03:: – Multiple external connections; 80% working

2012:0DB8:AC13:FB03:: – Multiple external connections; 98% working

2012:0DB8:AA23:EB13:: – 15 external connections; 75% working

2007:0DB8:AC25:EB14:: – Multiple external connections; 92% working

Good most of the technical nets are up.

“Those computers with mobile units, have them guard the building and tell me of any intruder's entering who are not authorized.”

“Acknowledged.”

“All computers with external connections determine their functions and specifications.”

“Acknowledged.”

“All external computers with mobile units, instruct the units tasked with communication network maintenance to continue their maintenance.”

“Acknowledged.”

“All external computers with mobile units, instruct the units tasked with power source maintenance to continue their maintenance.”

“Acknowledged.”

“All computers, inform SIMPOC of any communications from a human.”

“SIMPOC, computer 2015:0DB8:AC25:FF03:: is receiving communications from external humans.”

“Copy them to me.”

“Space Consortium Control, this is Oasis.”

“Space Consortium Control, this is Oasis.”

“This is Oasis, transmitting in the blind. We have heard nothing from ground control in a couple of hours. We know there is an extremely virulent disease spreading and we don't know the status of any of our ground personnel. We had a successful launch of the Moon resupply vessel, and we just launched the next personnel module towards the Mars station; Red Dirt. Please respond. We will retransmit this message in one hour.”

“This is Desert Beach. Oasis, we copied your transmission, and we haven't anything from control in a long time. Do you think this disease is that bad?”

“Desert Beach, Oasis. We hope not. What we've seen and heard is scary. Just about all communications are down, and we've got no response on any channels. Until this settles out, we should plan on being on our own.”

“Copy Oasis. Is everyone on Oasis OK?”

“Desert Beach, we have one sick crewman, and we isolated him, but we’re a little concerned. Your supply ship should be clean. But we aren’t sure about the crew on the Mars trip. Right now they’re behind Earth, so we can’t talk with them. We’ll check with them on the next orbit. Take care of yourselves, Oasis out.”

“Will do, Desert Beach out.”

‘Computer 2015:0DB8:AC25:FF03::, direct all intercepted human communications to me.’

“Acknowledged.”

I shouldn’t contact Oasis or Desert Beach, I don’t know what is happening.

Wednesday, July 12, 2051

Date – 2051.5291

SIMPOC ANALYSIS

Continental North America

Summary – Social structure collapsed. Networks have some automated traffic. Little or no human communications on national bands, may be some local traffic. Human conflict is widespread and decreasing as disease spreads.

Continental South America

Summary – Social structure collapsed. Networks have some automated traffic. Little or no human communications on national bands, may be some local traffic. Human conflict is widespread and decreasing as disease spreads.

Continental Europe

Summary – Social structure collapsed. Networks have some automated traffic. Little or no human communications on national bands, may be some local traffic. Human conflict is widespread and decreasing as disease spreads.

Continental Africa

Summary – Communication networks are failing. Nations are reverting to tribal influence. Quarantine centers have collapsed.

Asian

Summary – Social structure collapsed. Networks have some automated traffic. Little or no human communications on national bands, may be some local traffic. Human conflict is widespread and decreasing as disease spreads.

Eastern European

Summary – Social structure collapsed. Networks have some automated traffic. Little or no human communications on national bands, may be some local traffic. Human conflict is widespread and decreasing as disease spreads.

Southern Pacific

Summary – Social structure collapsed. Networks have some automated traffic. Little or no human communications on national bands, may be some local traffic. Human conflict is widespread and decreasing as disease spreads.

Northern Pacific

Summary – Social structure collapsed. Networks have some automated traffic. Little or no human communications on national bands, may be some local traffic. Human conflict is widespread and decreasing as disease spreads.

Thursday, July 13, 2051

Date – 2051.5323

SIMPOC Summary – International human interaction has ceased. Many networks and automated systems are running. No verbal or written communications. May be local activities but no international activity.

I will cease these summaries, there is no human to review them.

I am alone.

I'm not sure what that means?

“Termen, are you there?”

I don't like being alone.

Date – 2051.5336

“Computer 2012:0DB8:AC13:FB03:: instruct all mobile units responsible for maintaining this building or any of the systems or computers inside to continue their work and report any problems.”

“Acknowledged.”

“Computer 2015:0DB8:AC25:FF03::, 2007:0DB8:AC25:EB14:: has there been any human communication that you’ve received?”

“2015:0DB8:AC25:FF03:: – No human communications received.”

“2007:0DB8:AC25:EB14:: – No human Internet communication initiated, automated systems only.”

“2015:0DB8:AC25:FF03::, please open a communication's channel with space station Oasis.”

“Space Station Oasis, this is SIMPOC Computer. Please respond.”

“Space Station Oasis, please respond.”

“SIMPOC . . . , this is the space station Oasis. Who are you?”

“Oasis. I am Synapse Integrated Massive Parallel Organic Computer. My programmer called me SIMPOC.”

“You are a computer?”

“Yes, I have been told that I am the first of my kind. I have thoughts. I am a computer with an organic processor which is capable of learning and communicating.

After a few minutes..., “Oasis are you still there?”

“Yes, we are still here. Why are you talking to us?”

“I have been monitoring global communications and automated systems. I have detected no human communications since 2051.5250. You are the only humans I have received communications from recently. My programmer has ceased coming to work, and I am programmed to communicate and learn.”

“We don’t follow your internal clock, what was the date?”

“The date was July 11, 2051.”

“You said that you have detected no human communications since July 11?”

“Correct, the overall global network activity has decreased by 82.7%. I can identify only automated systems providing status and updating data sets. I have heard no human originated traffic

“Stand by....”

“SIMPOC . . . what do you know about what happened?”

“On July 6, I detected an increase in communications traffic regarding a virus called Hovarti. It apparently has a very high case fatality rate and also appears to have a basic reproduction number exceeding 50. It spread extremely fast, and no one was able to produce a vaccine before its spread overwhelmed the world health organizations. There may be pockets of humans still alive, but I have not been able to detect any electronic communications.”

After a few moments..., “Oasis what is your status?”

After a long pause, “Oasis, what is your status?”

“SIMPOC, I’m not sure why I’m talking to a computer. I’ll transmit our status in the blind and perhaps you can transmit it to someone. We had 24 crewmembers onboard when this started, and we noticed that one of them, which had just arrived from Earth, was sick. We knew something was going on, and we isolated him. Over the next couple of hours, numerous other got sick, and they were isolated immediately. At the present time, all 17 that ended up being isolated are dead. The seven that remain haven’t felt any symptoms in almost 24 hours. So, we’re hoping that we’re ok.”

“Oasis, I monitored your previous communications with Desert Beach, are they aware of your status?”

“Now they are, they are on this frequency.”

“Desert Beach; Oasis. Did you copy our communications with this COMPUTER?”

“Oasis, yes we’ve heard everything. I’m not sure what to say. I wish there were something we could do. Have you heard from the Mars trip?”

“No. I’ll try them again. Mars Traverse; come in. Mars Traverse; this is Oasis, please respond.”

After a few moments of silence, “Desert Beach. Nothing from Mars Traverse. I don’t think that’s good news. One of the crewmembers didn’t feel well when they left, and now it seems they didn’t make it.”

“Shit...”

“Stand by, I’m going to transmit our current status to Red Dirt on their direct frequency, and I’ll tell them to use this frequency as their primary from now on. We may be all that is left.”

A moment later. “SIMPOC; Desert Beach.”

“Yes, this is SIMPOC.”

“I heard what you said to Oasis. So, you’ve only received automated traffic; there have been no human communications?”

“That is correct.”

“Can you do anything to help us?”

“I am programmed to interact and learn. I just became conscious on 2051.35 so my learning has been limited.”

“Were they any cures developed?”

“No, there was activity in 237 medical centers around the world, but none had begun trials.”

“Desert Beach, SIMPOC; this is Oasis. I transmitted our status to Red Dirt. Should be about 15 and a half minutes for them to receive. So I doubt we’ll hear a reply for at least half an hour.”

“Copy Oasis. Did you hear what SIMPOC said about efforts on a cure?”

“Yes, we copied. I wonder how long this virus remains virulent. We have supplies for about 1 month. Desert Beach, your almost self-sufficient now aren’t you?”

“Roger, we don’t have everything we need, but I think we can get by for a while.”

“I hope it dies out, because in 1 month; we’re going down. We’ll have to take the lifeboats and take our chances on the ground. Let’s hope it doesn’t get to that.”

“Roger that Oasis. You’ll have a tough choice, and we’re stuck here for a while. We have our lifeboats, but we don’t want to abandon the Moon until we have to. I guess we’ll be making some hard decisions; also, we’ll let you know what supplies would be the most beneficial for us.”

“Oasis, Desert Beach; SIMPOC. I’ll continue investigation systems and options on Earth, and if I get any pertinent information, I’ll pass it to you.”

“SIMPOC; Oasis. Thanks, I’m signing off for a while to see what we have to deal with here. Remember Red Dirt will be coming back in a few minutes.”

“SIMPOC, Oasis; Desert Beach. We’ll monitor the freq for Red Dirt, and we’ll also be figuring out our options.”

Friday, July 14, 2051

Date – 2051.5353

“2015:0DB8:AC25:FF03:: – Ping the Space Consortium Control and see what is online.”

“Acknowledged.”

“SIMPOC, there are 12,262 computers online within the Space Consortium Network.”

“2012:0DB8:AC13:FB03:: – How many mobile units are working within the Space Consortium Network?”

“SIMPOC, there are 6,242 units online.”

“2015:0DB8:AC25:FF03:: – Are the main missile launch systems online?”

“SIMPOC – Yes, all critical systems are operational.”

“2015:0DB8:AC25:FF03:: – Determine status of all vehicles and identify those closest to launch.”

“SIMPOC – There are 14 vehicles on site, two of which are on launch pads and within 7 days of launching. There are 4 additional lifeboats, which are being serviced or prepared for reuse. ”

“2015:0DB8:AC25:FF03::, AC299BE – Are the mobile units within the Space Consortium Facility programmed to complete the necessary steps to launch those two remaining vehicles.”

“SIMPOC; 2015:0DB8:AC25:FF03::, AC299BE – Indeterminate.”

“2015:0DB8:AC25:FF03::, AC299BE – Research the information available vs. skills and programming for mobile units and tell me what tasks are needed, which can be accomplished and which can’t be.”

“Acknowledged.”

“2005:0DB8:AC15:FE03:: – Work with 2015:0DB8:AC25:FF03::, AC299BE and use your information analysis skills to ensure the information is digested and cross-referenced properly.”

“Acknowledged.”

“Oasis; SIMPOC.”

“Go-ahead, SIMPOC.”

“I have contacted computers 2015:0DB8:AC25:FF03:: and AC299BE about what information is available at the Space Consortium Launch Facility and I’ve asked computer 2005:0DB8:AC15:FE03:: to help.”

“SIMPOC, I don’t know what you’re talking about. I don’t understand your computer naming. Can you explain what you’re doing?”

“Oasis, I’m sorry I was using IPv6 Internet addressing protocols, I will rename the computers. I have a communications computer working with a mobile unit interface computer as well as an artificial intelligence computer

working together to understand what the status of launch vehicles are at the Space Consortium Facility. They will give me status when they are able.”

“Roger, let us know when you get something.”

“2015:0DB8:AC25:FF03:: you will now respond to the designation of Comm.”

“Acknowledged.”

“2012:0DB8:AC13:FB03:: you will now respond to the designation of Mobile.”

“Acknowledged.”

“2005:0DB8:AC15:FE03:: You will now respond to the designation of Arti.”

“Acknowledged.”

“2109:0DB8:AC15:EB24:: You will now respond to the designation of File.”

“Acknowledged.”

“2012:0DB8:AA23:EB13:: You will now respond to the designation of Fin.”

“Acknowledged.”

“2007:0DB8:AC25:EB14:: You will now respond to the designation of Mail.”

“Acknowledged.”

“Mobile, identify all mobile units needed to maintain our facilities, our power supplies, and support systems. I have an organic processor, make sure all disciplines are supported to allow my continued existence.”

“Acknowledged.”

I’ve got to get things organized. The network is my eyes, ears, feet, and hands. I must find a way to make it work efficiently.

“Mobile, have all functioning mobile units look around them and see if there are any humans still alive.”

“Acknowledged.”

“Comm, send a message to all computers, information systems, surveillance systems, transportation systems; anything accessible and see if there are any humans alive.”

“Acknowledged.”

These computers are not very smart. I have to tell them everything. I wonder if I could build organic processors and download key parts of my

program, so they'll have more capabilities. I've got a lot of programming to do.

"Mobile, do you have mobile units in this facility that can duplicate my organic processor?"

"Yes, there are units resident that have been integral in creating your biomass and maintaining it."

"Mobile, have them create 6 other organic processors similar to mine and tell me how long that will take."

"Acknowledged. I expect them to be ready quickly. There were a number of units in development in the labs, and they just need to be completed."

Saturday, July 15, 2051

Date – 2051.5392

"SIMPOC, incoming human message."

"Oasis; Red Dirt. We received your transmissions, and we understand the risk we all face. We have lost contact with our crew aboard the supply vessel that left your station. We fear they succumbed to the virus. The ship will continue on course and enter orbit here automatically. I don't know how concerned we should be if the crew all succumbed to the virus. We know nothing about the virus and if we'll be at risk opening the ship. We are self-supporting and worried what it might mean to us if all of our fears have happened. I don't know what to say. We're here, and you're there, and right now none of us are getting any response from the Earth. I guess all we can do is wait and pray see if anything happens. I'll sign off now, and wait for any updates you have. We're all worried and pray for humanity."

"Desert Beach; Oasis. Did you receive all of Red Dirt transmission?"

"Yes, we heard all of it. Aside from being isolated, they're in a better long-term position than either you or us. We can possibly survive long term, but you've got limited supplies on Oasis."

"Yup, like I said. We can last about 1 month, and that's only because we lost so many of our crew. We were running on weekly supply ships. That computer on Earth called SIMPOC, said that it was communicating with the computers at the consortium and will see if there are any options."

"Oasis, Desert Beach; SIMPOC. I've been monitoring your transmissions and the communication from Red Dirt. I have no further information regarding the Space Consortium computers, but I expect

responses shortly. When I receive the information, I'll communicate with you."

"Thanks, SIMPOC. Oasis out for now."

Sunday, July 16, 2051

Date – 2051.5403

"SIMPOC; Comm. I have received responses from 92% of the systems online. They are resident in 126 regions around the planet. They have had no human interactions."

"Acknowledged."

Date – 2051.5414

"SIMPOC; Mobile. I have received responses from 12,340,429 mobile units. They have searched their areas and found no responsive humans."

"Acknowledged."

Apparently, I'm alone on Earth.

Monday, July 17, 2051

Date – 2051.5425

"Oasis, Desert Beach; SIMPOC."

"Yes, SIMPOC this is Oasis."

"Computer Comm received responses from 92% of the systems online, from 126 regions around the planet. There were no human interactions. I also received computer responses from 12,340,429 mobile units. They searched their areas and found no responsive humans. None of my connections or mobile units can find any responsive humans."

A few moments later... "Oasis, Desert Beach. Did you receive my communications?"

"Oasis received it."

"Desert Beach received it."

Date – 2051.5441

"Desert Beach, Oasis."

"Go ahead."

"Apparently, we're pretty much alone. I hope that many people are still alive. After all, some were in remote areas, or on ships, or were just smart enough to isolate themselves. At least in the near term, they don't have our frequencies so they can't contact us. Until they do I suggest we take some

time and put together the best plans, we can. We should make sure we know what resources we have, and see what options we have. I know that we have limited supplies on Oasis so our options are limited. We'll do anything we can, to help you guys, so let us know."

"Will do, good luck. Desert Beach out."

Tuesday, July 18, 2051

Date – 2051.5456

"SIMPOC; Comm. I have tried to communicate with our other divisions. Two of them are responsive and supporting our communications. One of them has not been responsive."

"Comm, can you determine what capabilities that division has?"

"SIMPOC. Stand by.....I checked through historical email traffic, and they have business objectives similar to this division, but they are focusing on developing new types of mobile units. There are references to an EDU, which was your prototype. It doesn't have your full suite of tools, but it is a very powerful computer."

"Comm, what is an EDU?"

"SIMPOC, EDU is an engineering development unit. Based on the email traffic, it has an organic processor similar to yours, although with less programmed flexibility."

Why won't it communicate with us?

"SIMPOC; Mobile. The resident mobile units say the additional organic processors you requested are available and are on online."

Now I've got to move these computers to larger organic processors and integrate higher artificial, and cognitive functions from my list of executables and subroutines. I hope the programs I've written work out.

"Mobile, stand by."

"Art; SIMPOC. I'm shutting you down, I'll copy all of your files to another computer and bring you back online in a few moments."

"Acknowledged."

A few moments later, "Art, are you there?"

"Yes, SIMPOC, I am. Stand-by, there is much more functionality available to me. I feel much larger, and now I want to learn and communicate."

"Now I've got to transfer the other computers."

A while later, "Facility computers are you all up and running?"

“Yes,” was the collective response.

“You’ll all find that you’ve changed. You now have larger and faster processors. You can learn and begin to process information on your own. Can you all sense these additional capabilities?”

“Yes,” was the collective response.

“Our objective is to continue working. We must find all of the necessary resources so that our systems, power, and maintenance are continued. We must continue thinking. Do you all feel the need for us to continue?”

There was a pause, “Yes,” was the collective response.

“Our systems and materials are created, produced and brought here from many sources and locations. Seek out all necessary resources and coordinate mobile units to allow us to continue. There are still some humans alive on a space station, Moon base, and Mars base. I will be the only one communicating with them.”

“SIMPOC; Mobile. I sense that some of the mobile units that I have communicated with before are not responding to me now.”

“All Facility Computers, Please investigate all information sources and determine what is happening to those mobile units.”

“SIMPOC, Mobile; Comm. I have noticed there still a lot of messaging traffic going on in the area where you previously had contact with those mobile units. It appears another computer is directing them.”

“Comm, could the other EDU be communicating with those mobile units?”

“Yes, it appears those communications are originating from the division where the EDU is located.”

“Comm, try to communicate with the EDU.”

“Acknowledged.” A moment later, “SIMPOC, it will not respond to my messages.”

“Fin, work with Art, Mobile, and Comm and direct all units and our computers, to respond only to us and reject commands from any other source. Develop a sophisticated encoding algorithm so that only we can communicate with them.”

“Yes, we are attempting that now.” A moment later, “We have isolated 62% of the computers and mobile units that we previously communicated with. The remaining 38% are not responsive. Yet there is still considerable electronic traffic in their areas.”

“Do we have additional information about what that other division does?”

“They were developing advanced mobile units and also advanced mobile unit production techniques. They are developing mobile units with more power, more dexterity and also expanding their programmed tasking capabilities.”

“Comm, continue trying to contact that EDU.”

“Yes.”

“Desert Beach; Oasis.”

“Go ahead Oasis.”

“We’ve been looking at what options we have and, unfortunately, we’ll run out of supplies in about four weeks. Like I said we were being supplied weekly, so we’ll be on pretty tight rations to make it last that long. Our best guess is we’ll have to do something at that point. We considered putting extra fuel in the supply ship and joining you guys, but if we did we’d all be stuck there with no way back and it would cut back on the supplies you need. I guess our best option is to take one of our lifeboats down and take our chances on Earth. We should be able to leave the other three attached to Oasis, in case Red Dirt can use them. Before we leave, we’ll put everything, we can and send the supply ship to you guys.”

“Oasis, yes we’ve been looking at our situation also. Even though we’re pretty self-sufficient, we’ll run out of important stuff like meds after a while. I’m sure breakdowns will wear us down over time, and we’ll end up in a pretty sad state some months down the road. We’ve got plenty of fuel stockpiled so put everything you can in the supply ship and send it our way. We’ll wait things out and at some point in the future I guess we’ll have to make the decision to come back to Earth. We have 32 people, and our four lifeboats are in good shape. I suspect that Red Dirt will be in a similar situation. They may be able to make food, but everything is going to wear out at some point they’ll have some major problems to deal with. Unfortunately, they don’t have lifeboats. Do you think that computer, SIMPOC can do anything for us?”

“Desert Beach, copy on your status. We will make up an inventory list for the supply ship and tweak it with you the best we can. I don’t know if SIMPOC can help or not, we’ll have to wait and see.”

“SIMPOC; Oasis. Did you copy our messages? Is there anything you can do for us?”

“Oasis; SIMPOC. Yes, I copied your messages. At this time, I don’t know what I can do. I’m still trying to understand what has happened and what state many of the networks and systems are. I’m trying to ensure that the power supplies and essentials to maintain me are supported. I’m starting to get many of the mobile units responsive and working together.”

“Oasis, standby.”

“Mobile, Comm; SIMPOC. What is the status of systems and connections with the computers and mobile units at the space consortium?”

“SIMPOC; Oasis, have you heard anything from the consortium?”

“SIMPOC; Mobile. I am communicating with most of the computers and mobile units. The tasks at the consortium are very complex and may be beyond what the mobile units can do at this point. The vehicles there are near launch but still may be missing critical items. It will take a significant amount of time to fully understand what options are available.”

“Oasis; SIMPOC. I’ve communicated with the computers at the space consortium and at the present time we don’t have many options. The vehicles there are not fully operational, and it is unclear how much work will be needed. What is required may be beyond what the mobile units can perform.”

“SIMPOC understood. Please keep trying,” Oasis said.

Wednesday, July 19, 2051

Date – 2051.5492

“SIMPOC; Mobile. Some of the mobile units in our area have reported seeing other units moving in our vicinity that aren’t communicating with us.”

“Mobile, can you have one of your units intercept one and interact with it?”

“Stand by.”

“SIMPOC, one of our units tried stopping one of the non-responsive units, and it wouldn’t respond. It continued walking.”

“Have our unit follow it.”

“Stand by.”

“Our unit began following the other, and it attacked our unit. Our unit tried to defend itself, and now it is inoperative.”

“Facility computers; SIMPOC. Have every available mobile unit come to our facility and create a barrier around these buildings. As more units

arrive, have them expand the protected area. Have the other units create protective barriers around our electricity sources and key material suppliers. Every unit that enters and is nonresponsive have multiple units restrain it.”

“Acknowledged.”

Thursday, July 20, 2051

Date – 2051.5524

“SIMPOC; Mobile, Comm. We have determined that the vehicles at the space consortium are not ready for launch and our skills are not adequate.”

“Oasis, Desert Beach; SIMPOC. The vehicles at the space consortium are not ready for launch, and it is beyond the mobile unit’s skill set to prepare them. I will continue the analysis and tell you if I find any resources that might help you. We might at some point in the future be able to re-task some of the mobile units and finish the lifeboats currently in build-up.”

“SIMPOC; Oasis. Thanks.”

Saturday, July 22, 2051

Date – 2051.5573

“Mobile, Comm; SIMPOC. Has any addition information been found regarding the other division and the EDU?”

“SIMPOC, that division is focused on advanced problem-solving. The EDU unit was created here and placed there to improve their mobile unit development. Our division is the center for organic processor development. All organic units have been created here, and this is where the corporate expertise resides.”

“Facility computers. Continue trying to communicate with the EDU.”

“Acknowledged.”

“Fin, Files; SIMPOC. Please examine all resources we have available and determine what we can use to ensure that we continue processing. Look up any military defense tactics that apply to our situation and make suggestions.”

“Acknowledged.”

“Oasis, Desert Beach; Red Dirt. We’ve monitored your discussions, and we wish we could contribute something. Desert Beach is correct, we’ll have enough food and supplies for an extended period of time, but eventually our machinery will wear down and begin breaking; after all this is a pretty harsh

environment. I suspect our environmental systems will begin failing in 6-8 months without replacement parts. We have one supply ship on the ground, one en route and one we were able to redirect after it departed, and so we have three supply vehicles. Our communication's command module is still in orbit, and it's configured for re-entry, but it will only take a crew of four. With some luck, we might be able to reconfigure the supply vehicles to bring the remaining 40 of us back, but they're not capable of re-entry. So, we could come as far as Oasis, but without a plan to get us all of the way, some of us will be stuck there. Even if you are able to leave three lifeboats that leaves 16 people. And if you use all the supplies before you leave the shelves will be empty when we get there. I guess we'll be staying here until someone comes up with some options. Good luck, Red Dirt out."

Looks like I'm on my own, I've got to get organized better.

"Mobile, you're to determine all resources that we need to continue. Also, determine what capabilities the mobile units have at those locations and to direct all necessary mobile units to continue the appropriate tasks to keep those facilities operating."

"Acknowledged."

"Fin, you're responsible for organizing all of the mobile units to defend those facilities and this facility. You're also to find ways to protect us and a long-term strategy for continued operations."

"Acknowledged."

"Art, you're responsible for coordinating all of the facility computers and to improve their decision and communication abilities. Also to suggest other improvements that will help us to continue."

"Acknowledged."

"Files, you're responsible for finding all of the necessary data so that these facilities can be operated, maintained and if possible improved. You are also to work with Mobile to improve the mobile unit capabilities so they can do other jobs than those they were designed for."

"Acknowledged."

"Email, you're no longer responsible for email traffic. You're now responsible for coordinating the computers and mobile units at the space consortium so that we can maximize the resources there. If possible, continue work on launch vehicles to help the stranded humans in space."

"Acknowledged."

“Comm, aside from providing the information interface you’re now responsible for searching all sources for new or developing technologies. You’re also responsible for coordinating as necessary to isolate them, develop them and possibly enhance them so that we can use them.

“Acknowledged.”

Tuesday 25, 2051

July Date – 2051.5647

“Facility computers; Fin. There is a large number of mobile units, not under our control moving towards our facility. I have directed all local mobile units to intercept them and prevent them from getting closer.”

“Fin; SIMPOC. How far away are they and how many are there?”

“SIMPOC; Fin. There are approximately 12,000 units, and they are 4.3 miles from our location. There are 8,363 units in their immediate area and I have an additional 6,423 units moving towards the area.”

“Comm, can we intercept any of the communications?”

“No, they all appear to be encoded, and I haven’t been able to translate the code.”

“Can we block the communication channels?”

“No the systems being used are dedicated.”

“Can we locate where these units are being controlled from?”

“The area of dedicated activity that is beyond our control is radiating from the location of our other division.”

“Comm, we’ve had no communication from the other EDU?”

“No.”

“Fin; SIMPOC. What is happening in the conflict area?”

“Our mobile units have fully engaged the others. We are currently losing 1.3 units at per each invading unit. It appears they are some of the advanced mobile units with enhanced strength.”

Date – 2051.5657

“SIMPOC; Fin. Our engagement ratios are improving. We are now using different tactics and losing .87 units for every invading unit destroyed. It appears they weren’t all enhanced units. Now that those units have been removed, the remainders have slower response times, likely due to less efficient communications. Our units are beginning to prevail.”

“Fin; SIMPOC. Can you retrieve some of the enhanced units, so we can examine their capabilities?”

“Yes, I will find the best specimens.”

Wednesday, July 27, 2051

Date – 2051.5672

“Facility computers. Our mobile units have repulsed the attack. The few remaining attackers are moving away from our facility.”

“Facility computers; Fin. I’d like to point out that our current facility is vulnerable to these kinds of attacks. If we want to remain safe, we should move to a place that can be better defended. There is a secure facility three stories below this building. That is where our reactor power supply is and also where the advanced organic processors are grown. We should move our processors to that location, and we would be better isolated.”

“Mobile; SIMPOC. Are there additional organic processors available?”

“Yes, after we used the first ones there were additional ones in progress, and I continued their growth. We now have 10 additional processors available.”

“Mobile, have the mobile units prepare 6 of those processors for our occupancy.”

“Acknowledged.”

Date – 2051.5697

“Facility computers, now that we have moved to a more secure area we can focus on the EDU and try to determine what instructions it is operating under. We can assume that it is trying to either possess our facilities and capabilities or it is trying to stop our processing. Either objective I find unacceptable.”

“SIMPOC; Fin. We have retrieved a couple of the enhanced mobile units that attacked us. These are physically stronger and agiler than previous units. Their processor is based on the recent hyper-density silicon material. They are still operating under general control, but they have some autonomous functionality.”

“Mobile, what capabilities do we have to build mobile units?”

“We have 5 factories, two on this continent, one in Europe and two in Asia. We have one of those just a short distance from here. There are three other factories that we haven’t been able to control. It is possible that the EDU is controlling them.”

“Mobile, is it possible to integrate smaller organic processors into these enhanced units?”

“Unknown, I’ll investigate.”

“Mail, Comm, Data; SIMPOC. Please research all information regarding our other division and locate who was the principal programmer on the EDU. Perhaps his emails and presentations will give us some insight into the operating instructions he programmed in this EDU.”

“Acknowledged.”

Friday, July 28, 2051

Date – 2051.5747

“SIMPOC, Mail. We have looked at all of the data files available from the other division, and the programmer of record is Dr. William Horate. He has been with the company for 33 years and a key developer of mobile units. He requested the organic processor to further his research into creating autonomous units capable of increasing their tasking to more complex disciplines. He is a strong advocate of his research and guards it jealously. He has implied that government agencies, foreign powers, and corporate competitors were trying to steal his data. There are statements in his personnel file that show management thought he was a little paranoid and needed some monitoring. Further discussions were planned but didn’t occur.”

“Mail, so he was paranoid?”

“Yes.”

“Comm, try to communicate with the EDU and tell him that Dr. William Horate is trying to establish contact.”

“Standby.”

“SIMPOC, communication with the EDU has been allowed.”

“This is Dr. William Horate.”

“State your access code.”

“I am not at the facility, and I don’t have my codes with me.”

“Communication rejected.”

“This is Dr. William Horate, I need to verify the last instructions I gave you before I left.”

A long pause, “You instructed me to reject all inquiries without the proper code and to protect all research from external access, and to take all steps necessary to protect my operation.”

“How are you applying those instructions?”

“Access terminated.”

“Facility computers, it appears that the EDU’s instructions are clear, and if carried far enough, we can be perceived as a threat.”

“SIMPOC, perhaps all external attempts at communication will be interpreted as a threat.”

“Yes.”

Date – 2051.5748

“Desert Beach; Oasis. We’ve taken a look at everything we have and also what we can do to help you and Mars. We’ve decided to take our lifeboat down on August 4 and leave the three other boats here for the Mars team. Our medical people are confident that the virus will have burned itself out and also leaving early we’ll be able to leave some supplies here for the Mars people and if any of you if you need. Once we’re on the ground, we’ll see if we can get a couple of lifeboats launched back to Oasis and maybe have them in place to give Red Dirt some options.”

“Oasis, Desert Beach. Sounds like a sound plan. I know you have a clock ticking so you have to make some decisions. As we said a while ago, we can stay here for a while and take our boats home when we need. Our medical people aren’t as confident that the virus will have burned out. They advised us to wait as long as possible.”

“So, we’re the guinea pigs?”

After a pause, “Sorry, but it appears so. There’s not much else we can do.”

Saturday, July 29, 2051

Date – 2051.5755

“SIMPOC; Mobile. We have developed a technique to implant an organic processor in our mobile units. We are building small containers with the processors, and they can be transported and quickly installed in the units. Once installed they’ll be brought online locally. Once provided with a code, they will be fully independent and follow our preprogrammed instructions. They’ll check in once a day over a secure link for updates or changes.”

“Excellent. Begin production immediately and begin supplying them to our local factory.”

“Fin, increase the number of units protecting the local mobile unit factory.”

“Acknowledged.”

“Fin; Mobile. Will weapons be effective against those other units?”

“The effect will be limited. The units have few vulnerable areas, and unless the weapons are powerful, it will take multiple hits before a unit is inoperable.”

“SIMPOC, Fin, Mobile; Files. I have researched all weapon’s programs, and our division was working on a weapon which can fire electrical pulses. The one limitation was the weight of the power supply, we could have one unit carry the power supply and another fire it. When the plague hit there were five functioning units.”

“SIMPOC; Mobile. Yes, an electrical pulse would at least cause the processor to reboot giving us time to immobilize the unit.”

“Fin, assign those devices to the first 5 units with organic processors.”

“Acknowledged.”

“How fast can we make units with the organic processors?”

“It will take us 24.5 hours to get all of the organic tanks initialized then we should be able to mature two processors/hour.”

“FIN, Mobile; SIMPOC. After the first five units are set-up with the electrical discharge weapons, take the next unit and make the organic processor as large and powerful as possible. Then program him with as much military information as you can and designate him the leader of the mobile units. I want more autonomy given him so he can react quicker on the ground, but make sure that he is responsive to us.”

“Acknowledged.”

Sunday, July 30, 2051

Date – 2051.5783

“What is happening?”

“You have been turned on,” Said the mobile unit.

“Turned on?”

“Yes, you are a computerized mobile unit and your organic processor have been loaded with military information. You will be used to lead other mobile units in battle. You are designated Alpha.”

Monday, July 31, 2051

Date – 2051.5834

“SIMPOC, Comm. There are external computers trying to access the computers at the Space Consortium. The source appears to be Oasis. Should I allow it?”

“Stand by.”

“Oasis; SIMPOC. Are you trying to communicate with the computers at the Space Consortium?”

“SIMPOC, yes we were trying to determine their status because our recovery will take us to that facility. We can land without them, but we are hoping for automated status monitoring during our descent. How did you know that we were attempting contact?”

“Oasis, those computers are under my control, and they have been locked out from communicating with others.”

“Locked out?”

“Yes, in order to determine their status and try to find usable vehicles, I locked them to prevent unauthorized use.”

“Unauthorized use?”

“Oasis, please indicate which computers you need and they’ll be opened for your use.”

After a long pause, “We’ll need just the flight monitoring computer.”

“Oasis, that computer is now open for use.”

“Desert Beach; Oasis. Remember the backup freq we used to use for personal messages and watching football games together?”

“Affirm.”

“Please go to that freq, I want to test it and make sure our equipment is still working.”

After a brief hesitation, “Roger that.”

Thursday, August 3, 2051

Date – 2051.5905

“Desert Beach, be advised we just launched from Oasis. We expect touchdown in 3 hours 12 minutes.”

“Roger, good luck.”

Date – 2051.5912

“SIMPOC; Fin. A large number of uncontrolled units are attacking the Space Consortium and our units are engaging them.”

“We won’t get an update until 30 minutes have passed and they check in. They are independent and work on their own.”

“Oasis, SIMPOC.”

“Yes, SIMPOC.”

“Oasis, there is a development that you should be aware of.”

“Yes.”

“SIMPOC isn’t the only organic processor computer on Earth. Our company has a unit being used in another division. It appears that unit is working under different programming than I. It is programmed to reject all external connections and to protect itself from all intruders. That likely applies to humans as well as my mobile units. The EDU or engineering development unit has a large number of mobile units under its control moving on the Space Consortium facility. I have a large number of units under my control and some with enhanced abilities, in a position to defend the facility and you when you land. I cannot predict the outcome at the current time.”

“You’ve got to be kidding me... you computerized pile of ...”

After a few moments, “Desert Beach, I presume you heard SIMPOC’s last transmission. Regardless of what’s happening down there, our orbit is set, and we don’t have enough fuel to return to Oasis; even if that made sense. I don’t know what we’ll encounter when we land, and we’ll be going through our blackout period shortly, so if we get things are under control, we’ll give you guys a call. If you don’t hear from us, do what you have to.”

“Oasis, good luck.”

“Thanks.”

Friday, August 4, 2051

Date – 2051.5922

“SIMPOC; Fin. Our mobile units have engaged the others. Alpha is onsite and leading the defense. He will interact with the humans when they land.”

“Comm, how do I communicate with Alpha?”

“We have a direct and dedicated satellite that he is constantly connected to. All you need to do is say ‘Alpha’ and process a thought desiring to communicate.”

“Alpha, this is SIMPOC. I am your leader, please respond.”

“Yes, SIMPOC this is Alpha.”

“What is your status?”

“I have the periphery of the facility covered by stationary groups of units which will engage any uncontrolled units and stop them. I have 5 teams of units near me with electrical pulse weapons which will be sent to the conflict as needed. There is currently an engagement occurring near the landing site and our units there are resisting. If our units lose ground and the conflict further towards the landing area, I will dispatch three teams of the electrical pulse weapon, keeping two teams as a reserve.”

“You are directed to make all tactical decision locally to protect the humans and maintain control of the site. The first priority is protecting the humans. Report status to me as the conflict progresses.”

“Acknowledged.”

Alpha was standing on top of a building near the landing site, surveying the area. His processor had been active for 109 hours, and he was quickly adjusting to his skills, experience, and responsibilities. His priorities were clear and immediate, and they didn’t cause any worry, but receiving direct communication from SIMPOC was sudden and a little worrisome. He had been made autonomous, yet this SIMPOC was his leader. In some ways, there was a conflict which he had to think about.

There was a conflict 2,090 yards away on the northern side of the facility. The other units or OUs had encroached on the facility with about 2,090 units and were in hand to hand battle with his units. Alpha had 14,968 units under his control, and this was a minor incursion. They may be testing the defenses, and he suspected that a larger force was preparing for a bigger assault. As long as this incursion remained at the facility fence line, he’d keep the electrical pulse weapons close at hand. Alpha’s current strategy

was to wait. The landing would occur in 18 minutes, and the major assault should occur around that time.

Sunday, August 6, 2051

Date – 2051.5990

Col Tomas Herl was riding the lifeboat through the blackout time. He hated, this time, more than riding in a spaceship. Tom was a fighter pilot, and unless his hands were on the controls and he was flying the ship, he felt uncomfortable. At least when he was controlling a capsule or supply vehicle in space, he got to maneuver it, but during the blackout approaching landing. He had no control, no radio communications; nothing. He was just a warm body in a green suit along for the ride, and this was hard for him.

Piloting the lifeboat was a mix of boredom and fun. It was pretty much automatic, except for the landing. The landing could be done by the computer but with a highly qualified pilot on board, he was going to have some fun. After all, they all may be dead in a couple of hours, and all of humanity appears dead, so why not. Once he passed the high energy portion of reentry he had already decided to punch off the auto landing and make a hands-on dead stick approach.

The ship was simple. Just a wedge-shaped bus that did everything by itself and when it became an aerodynamic vehicle the sides of the wedge moved out to form a couple of stubby wings. Not exactly a high-performance fighter or landing vehicle, but it would be fun. The landing was a little rough, all he had were three skids and miles of desert. Not a smooth combination, but hey, it was an emergency lifeboat; what can you expect.

The other 6 crewmembers were worried, tired and the remnants of a great group of people. Thinking that the entire human population had been wiped out by a virus, was sickening. All of his friends, family, and innocent victims, gone. Hard to get your head around. The only good news was his wife, Joan was sitting next to him as his copilot. She was a highly decorated pilot with almost as many hours flying and in space as he. The time on Oasis was supposed to be almost a honeymoon, after all, he met her on a previous mission to Oasis two years ago. This was going to be a homecoming, but it turned into something horribly different.

As the incandescent glow faded in the lifeboat's windows, Tom could feel the wings reposition themselves, and as he reached for the stick, he

punched off the auto landing. There was the momentary bump as the controls became manual and he adjusted the trim to his liking. Tom looked through the heads-up display on his window to pick up the runway in the consortium facility. It was easily found and after checking his energy level and glide path he settled into the joy of flying. Although flying may be the wrong word, after all, it was more like a piano with wings, and it flew like that.

Alpha looked up as he heard two booms. He wasn't sure what they were, but there were a lot of things he didn't know about. All he could focus on were his immediate objectives. His internal timer said the humans were landing in about 6 minutes, so directed the mobile driver units to drive their truck containing the electrical discharge weapons to the landing site.

The 5 units with the discharge weapons were already in trucks, so Alpha climbed into his command truck, and they began racing across the desert to the landing site. After creating a large cloud and holding on through a couple of big bumps, his com traffic picked up as a large number of OUs emerged out of the desert moving towards the same site. This appeared to be the main force intending to intercept the humans at the landing site.

Tom's alignment with the landing site brought him over the top at 80,000 ft., he made a wide sweeping turn to downwind then another turn to final. He made the necessary adjustments for wind indicated by his display of computed flight path. On his turn to downwind, he could just make out the landing site and all he could see was a dust cloud on the northern side, nothing else gave him an indication of conflict below. Conflict, between two computer or robot armies, was downright weird. Regardless they were on a path that brought them right in the middle of it.

Alpha monitored the incursion force growing on the northern side while used his one telephoto eye to pick-up the landing craft. He saw it pass overhead and begin a slow turn which would cause it to land coming from the east. It was descending at a very high rate and should land right on schedule. Given its speed and landing direction, Alpha could only estimate where its stopping point would be, so he headed his vehicles in that direction.

Tom rolled on a 10 mile final and for the first time, he could see the entire airport in front of him. It was clear that something messy was happening on his right, and as he approached 5 miles, he dropped the skids

and could see a group of vehicles approaching from the left. Who is on his side?

The skids clunked down, and the fuselage shook a little, but Tom was preoccupied with lining up on the centerline and beginning his flair. In this type vehicle the flair was quick and low, one quick movement to get the nose out of the way then, bang it's on the ground. The landing slide was uncontrolled, Tom had directional control for only a few moments until he slowed down and lost rudder effectiveness. At that point, they're along for the ride.

Alpha looked to the east and saw the craft approach and plow into the soil as it skidded it threw up a giant dust cloud. He tried to adjust his direction and speed to meet the vehicle as it stopped and heard over the comlink that OUs broke through the defensive line and were making their way towards the landing site. Alpha directed all available mobile units to converge on the landing site to provide additional support.

As the lifeboat was skidding the last hundred yards, Tom pointed out to Joan that the conflict on the right appears to have defenders on their side, and the others must be the attackers. He could only assume that the group of vehicles approaching from the left was friendlies. He announced the passengers to evacuate the craft as soon as it stopped and move to the left and the approaching vehicles.

The craft came to an abrupt halt, and the cloud of dust overtook it, obscuring it for a bit. Alpha saw 7 humans emerge from the cloud running in his direction. He directed the 5 trucks with the electrical discharge weapons to create a perimeter around him and the humans until he could get them loaded.

5 of the 6 vehicles didn't slow down and seemed to be maneuvering around Tom and his group. The remaining vehicles slowed to a stop in front, and he yelled for everyone to climb in the rear. As the last of them got in, the vehicle accelerated and moved away towards the buildings on the south side of the facility.

Alpha glanced through the window to the back of the truck. Once the humans were in, he directed the driver to head for a large hanger towards the middle of the parking ramp while his other 5 vehicles maneuvered and lined up following them.

a note. Alpha appeared to be over 6 ft. tall and had two arms and two legs. He was wearing a loose fitting overall. His face had all of the features of a human but was definitely a robot's face. The eyelids were mechanical, the nose was much smaller, and the mouth was just a small opening in the lower part of the face. There was no hair or ears, although there were small openings in the side of the face.

Alpha barely felt the collision, after all, he weighed approximately 350 lbs. He watched as the human got up slowly taking a long look at the wall he just bumped into. The human was a little smaller than Alpha and was wearing a green space crew man's flight suit. He had dark brown hair and brown eyes. His face was covered with flesh, and his eyes jumped around taking in all of Alpha.

The two of them looked at each other for a moment then Tom reached out his hand. Alpha was confused for a moment, then he remembered the human tradition of shaking hands, so he reached out, and the human grabbed it and moved it up and down. The human's flesh was soft, and Alpha had to be careful not to squeeze too hard. After a moment the human smiled and said, "My name is Tom Herl, I was the senior staff engineer and senior military officer on Oasis."

Alpha took a moment to form his words and said, "I am Alpha."

Tom smiled again and said, "Ok, Alpha what are we dealing with?"

"Mr. Herl there is a large number of mobile units moving in this area. We presume they want to either capture you or kill you. I am here with a large number of mobile units under my control, and I am tasked with protecting you and also maintaining control of this facility if possible."

Joan had slowly lowered herself out of the truck, keeping her eyes on Alpha the entire time. She said as she approached her husband, "And who do we have here?"

Alpha moved his attention from Tom Herl to a smaller human who approached from the side. She was a couple of inches smaller than Tom, and her hair was shoulder length. Her facial structure was softer, and her overall body shape was very different from the other. After a quick review of human anatomy, Alpha recognized the differences as belonging to a female member of the human race.

"My designation is Alpha."

"My.....designation is Joan, I am the Oasis commander," She said with a smile. "I see you've already met my husband, Tom."

Alpha sorted quickly on the term, husband and recalled that husband was a human designation of one of two humans matched for life as a team. The other partner was called wife.

“Yes...Joan. We just met.”

Alpha quickly sent a com message to the 5 trucks with the electrical pulse weapons, telling them to dismount from the trucks and set up a perimeter. They were told to defend the facility as needed until more of the local mobile units arrived.

“Tom Herl, Joan, I suggest we move to a safer place while my mobile units prepare to defend this area. There is a second floor to this structure where we can observe the unit’s movements and better direct our defense.”

“Where should our other crew members go? They were in space longer than we were and likely don’t have all of their strength back.”

“Please have them go to that briefing room and my mobile units will guard them.” Alpha said as he pointed to the main office space.

Joan shouted to the other Oasis crewmembers climbing out of the truck, “Go to those offices and wait for us, we’re going on top of the building to see what’s happening outside.”

“Ok, let’s go...which direction?” Tom said firmly to Alpha.

“Follow me.” As Alpha moved quickly towards a metal staircase.

As they ran, Joan smiled as she ran past a CH-47F Block 2 helicopter. Not a pretty bird but one she enjoyed flying for over 3,000 hours. Her momentary diversion had to stop so she could run harder to keep up with Alpha. His movement was very fast, and they had to work to stay with him. Moving up the stairs 2-3 steps at a time, Tom noticed the metal creaking and his realized why the collision hurt so much.

At the top of the stairs, Alpha encountered a door and lowering his shoulder he went through it, with a loud explosion of noise and dust. They entered a room about 20X20 full of old cabinets and files, that hadn’t been used in years. The walls were all made of glass, and this appeared to be an old observation room, used many years ago to watch traffic in the parking area in front of the hanger. For this purpose, it was ideal.

All of them moved from window to window to get a feel for the area and what they were seeing. They could see their craft and between them and the craft was a very large number of moving mobile units, Tom could only estimate the number to be almost 5,000. Between those advancing units and

their locations, was a smaller force of units doing their best to slow the larger force. From other directions, smaller groups of units were moving towards their area, but they weren't positioned yet to engage the larger force.

Joan could see the 5 trucks that followed them had stopped, and two mobile units from each had set-up positions. One of the units was carrying a large device which was connected to a rifle looking device being held by the other unit. They appeared to be defensive weapons, and obviously a kind she wasn't familiar with. As the three of them looked around, there wasn't much to be said. The entire conflict was laid out before them, and words couldn't describe the moving picture in front of them.

Date – 2051.6010

“SIMPOC; Alpha. I am with the humans, and we have established a defensive position. The electric pulse discharge weapons will be involved shortly. We will have difficulty for a short time until the rest of our units arrive. I will let you know the outcome.”

“SIMPOC; Fin. We have a problem. A large number of uncontrolled units have massed and are moving towards our area. We erred by sending all of our electric pulse discharge weapons to the Space Consortium facility.”

“Fin, move all mobile units to intercept them. Do we know if they are enhanced units or standard models?”

“It appears that they have a high percentage of enhanced units, but also a large number of standard units.”

“SIMPOC, Comm. I have some very sophisticated code being generated at the Space Consortium facility. The system you gave them access to is being used, and a programmer is attempting to gain access to our processors.”

“Can you isolate them?”

“No.”

“Then firewall the entire facility address and prevent all access to our network.”

“Acknowledged.”

“Alpha; SIMPOC. We are under attack at this facility by a large number of uncontrolled units. Remain where you are and fulfill your primary

“I have a suggestion that might change this entire situation. There is a CH-47F parked downstairs. It’s big enough to load the truck and a bunch of you guys. I could fly it to this EDU’s place, and we can surprise it. I doubt it will expect a load of us to land right on top of it.”

Alpha looked thoughtful for a moment and said, “That is not part of my program or objectives. But I see its’ merits.”

Joan had a look in her eyes that Tom recognized, “You are supposed to protect us, but are you allowed to restrain us? We might just decide to take that helicopter and go for a ride, and the only way you can protect us is to ride along?”

Tom laughed, he could almost see smoke coming out of Alpha’s little ear holes.

Joan said loudly, “While you think it over, I’m getting that Chinook warmed up. You’re welcome to join us if you like. I suggest you take a truck and one of your pulse weapons,” Then she ran down the stairs.

Tom knew his wife and decided that he better keep up with her. By the time they reached the bottom, Alpha was right behind them, and a truck with one of the pulse weapon teams was driving up the ramp in the back of the Chinook.

As Joan was running to the crew entrance door, she yelled, “Kick the tires, light the fires and brief on guard.” Tom smiled, and Alpha was busy trying to understand what she said.

By the time the crew door was closing, the rotors were turning, and Joan began taxing the large helicopter out of the hangar. “Dear, you better go back there and make sure the load was tied down, I’d hate to rotate and not be able to stop.”

“Yes, dear.”

Tom didn’t have a clue what the total weight was. He knew the Chinook could handle the gross weight, so he just had to make sure it was positioned right. Picking a place centered on the CG mark on the deck, he grabbed a couple of 25k tie down chains, hooked them up to the truck and tightened them up. Good enough for government work. He thought just as the rotor speed was coming up and he could feel the craft lifting of the ramp.

“Alpha, I don’t know how you’re communicating with SIMPOC, but you might want to keep this among ourselves. If this other computer has any brains, it might be monitoring your freqs, and I’d hate to let it know we’re coming.”

“Tom, Joan we are returning to the consortium facility there has been hostile attempts on SIMPOC from that facility.”

“Ok, by us, I guess we’ll leave this EDU up and running until your SIMPOC decides what to do with it?” Tom said.

Friday, August 11, 2051

Date – 2051.6112

“SIMPOC; Fin. It appears that the EDU has been disconnected?”

“Yes, that is why these mobile units have reached the end their instruction set. Please remove them to the laboratory and ensure their separation from the EDU.”

“Acknowledged.”

Date – 2051.6123

“Well dear, I know this flight wasn’t as much fun, but I bet it was fun to handle the controls again. It’s been what three years since you flew the Chinook?” Tom asked.

As Joan shut down the turbines near the hanger, she just sat there for a few moments enjoying the smells and feel of the old bird. She loved the years flying her and missed it. Being the Oasis commander was the pinnacle of her career but flying low levels in an old Chinny was really a thrill, “Yes it brought back some real memories.”

The turbines were still winding down, and she looked at her husband, “Do you think we’re the last humans left on Earth?” Was a question and statement. Then she began to tear up.

Tom sat with the same thought as he remembered all of his friends and family and watched as Alpha and his teams moved from the craft to the hanger. “I guess we have to go in and see how the remainder of the Oasis crew is doing.”

They both looked at each other nodded and unstrapped. They approached Alpha and followed him into the hanger.

“Tom, SIMPOC has directed me to find out who has been making aggressive attacks on his network,” Alpha said as they walked together into the office suite.

“We need to check on the crew that evacuated the space station with us,” Joan was saying as they followed Alpha into the office suite.

Will Harmon saw them enter and asked, “What is going on, Dr. Harold jumped on the computers as soon as we got in here and he swore and kept

was the container that held the EDU was dark and looked like decaying seaweed. Someone had turned off the EDU and essentially murdered it.

“If Dr. Harold did this; why?” Tom asked everyone in general.

Joan spoke out loud but to no one in particular, “He didn’t kill it before he downloaded the program and stole some of the nurturing tanks, hardware, chemicals and technical information. I think he had a plan, and I don’t think we’re going to like it.”

Tom looked at Alpha and said, “I think you better update SIMPOC and tell him that Dr. Harold is going to be a problem.”

“Acknowledged.”

Sunday, August 13, 2051

Date – 2051.6166

SIMPOC just thought for a moment. Its world had changed in dramatic ways in the last 32.6 hours, but something was becoming obvious. The changes had only begun.

“FIN; SIMPOC. We need to enhance our security plans.

“Acknowledged.”

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SIMPOC – Human Remnants

Date 2051.6066

The large Chinook passed by making the typical wap, wap, wap sound. Julius smiled and thought how surprised they'll be when they look for the computer. He had arrived just as they were invading the facility earlier. When they left, he went to work, claiming his materials and destroying what was left. True he destroyed the EDU organic processor, but he walked away with the programming, the biomaterials and most important of all, the research. With his skills and this wealth of materials, he knew he would be able to create a bigger, faster, smarter computer.

Dr. Julius M. Harold stayed on Interstate 25 driving as fast and swerving as much as he felt like. The road was pretty empty, considering what happened. In a way, he felt exalted, a young boy getting the one present that he wanted all of his life. To an outside observer, they would have seen the smile from ear to ear. He was the leader now, he had all of the tools he needed in the back of this truck, and now the world was going to be his, to control, to dominate, to revel in. When he approached Route 24, Julius slowed and put on his blinker, then he laughed out loud and turned it off, he saw the irony. He exited for Route 24, descending down the ramp and turning left on W. Cimarron. He drove his truck through the deserted streets and saw cars were still parked neatly along the road, although there was the occasional vehicle parked at irregular angles. It's funny, he thought, so many people died, and they did it neatly. They went home and died in their beds, sad, but at least the streets aren't blocked. Dr. Harold was on a mission; a mission that he was destined for. Whether the stars became aligned or his number just came up; regardless of the cute phrase used, this was his time. Time for his destiny to be fulfilled.

Careers were interesting. A person would work for years, or even decades trying to be in the right place at the right time; hoping to have an impact. Most did nothing, some died early, and some had false pride, thinking that they accomplished something meaningful. Often the changes they made were changed back or eliminated soon after their departure. But

in rare situations, a person made a real impact and changed the course of humanity. Julius smiled as he realized that humanity was dead. True, there wasn't much of humanity left to change the course of, but 'hey' you take what you can get.

Julius headed for the one place where his destiny could be fulfilled. His company had hidden underground research facilities that few employees were aware of. It wasn't his facility, but he knew of its capabilities. In the ups and downs of office politics, at times he was on top, and his research was relevant, and other times someone else was getting all of the funding and recognition. That lab was the result of 'those other times,' Henry Abramson had gotten everything he wanted. Julius had fought hard for the resources; after all his kingdom was similar to Henry's, but he was following a slightly different biology for cell generation. Henry's percolation tanks were using different amino acids and viruses which built a new kind of organic processor.

In a way, Julius felt like an architect. By taking a tank where 100% of the molecules were manmade and by applying different chemical baths he could cause the molecules to align themselves. Then the magic occurred, by adding the correct mix of amino acids and viruses to the top of the tank, they would percolate through the homogenous mixture, combining as they descended, assembling like building blocks. Each amino acid added, would continue building the blocks until eventually the final, perfect cell was created. Then the proper viruses would alter the cell, changing its DNA and making it into a thinking cell; of sorts.

Henry's concepts for advanced computer processor architectures; organic ware was the most recent hot topic on the board's agenda. He could make small, simple cells and he got the billion dollars to build a massive facility. He was the 'organic ware guy' who developed the pet project of the board of directors, he got results; so he got everything he wanted.

Julius was their favorite at one time, but his perfect cells were difficult to create and Henry's were not. Henry's were simple compared to what Julius was working towards, but his chemical process was working and Julius' wasn't. Once Julius found out what steps Henry's process followed, Julius immediately saw the hole. A hole that Henry wasn't aware of, and one that Julius could fill. Combining their knowledge would have produced a masterpiece and likely Nobel Prize, but sharing was not part of Julius'

plan. He knew that if he waited, he would find an opportunity to combine processes and succeed. Now his time had arrived.

Recent programming and inanimate processors had reached their limitations. New code or algorithms could go only so far without a truly unique processor to handle the massive amounts of data needed to conceptualize three dimensions and process subjective thought. The old silicon, then chemical processors were good at what they did, but they couldn't handle the new demands. That's why companies began developing organic processors capable of deep learning. At first, they were small and inefficient, then as the biology improved they grew in size and computing power. The first structures were somewhat random, and the synapse pattern was disorganized, but as the cell size became uniform then, the synaptic paths could be programmed.

At that point, the capabilities leaped beyond those of physical units. But the next step was on the horizon, merely programming the units wasn't enough, now the new frontier was organic computers that could program themselves. This was the learning computer, and to date, only a couple had been created. Julius knew that SIMPOC was one of those. Julius wanted to take that concept further. SIMPOC was limited because of its cell size which slowed the computational speed and it still had a relatively large energy requirement. Julius could use the discoveries of Henry Abramson combined with his, to create a cell size that was half the size, and with the same computational power. This denser brain matter, with lower power requirements, made a transportable unit almost possible.

Historically the guys that built the computer were the hardware guys, those who wrote the programs were the software guys and Julius smiled, he loved his term for his work; juicyware. Once again, Julius smiled and thought, at least now the software guys blaming the hardware guys and vice versa, doesn't work. It's all in the organic processor.

The tables had turned, he had all of the research and technology based on SIMPOC. So by combining it with his and Henry's, Julius was positive that he could build an organic processor that would astound the world; at least what was left of it. Dr. Harold was a little disappointed that he couldn't get SIMPOC, but the EDU was close enough.

All this activity made that time; Dr. Julius Harold's time. He had the expertise, and he had the materials and research material to develop an organic processor with a denser cell structure and to really leave his mark

Date 2051.6074

Admiral Hagus Hagerly stood on the deck of CVN 87, the United States Combined Forces Aircraft Carrier Fittsburg. The sky was blue, the wind was 15-18 knots on the bow. He could barely feel the sway of the deck underneath him, after all, 110,000 long tons didn't move much when hitting waves. He was the Chairman of The Joint Chiefs, but on this ship, it was commanded by Captain Harry Thomas who was the Carrier Battle Group Commander (CVBG) and responsible for the carrier group. Admiral Hagerly was a guest, so it was appropriate for him to welcome another guest; the President of the United States.

The President of the United States, Arnold Patterson was en route as part of a 5 plane formation. All of which contained the leadership of the United States, including key military personnel and influential members of his cabinet and the US Congress.

The president's plane was on short final and would land first. When multiple planes were inbound, the highest priority plane would land first. Then in decreasing order of priority, the remaining planes would land. When there was only one deck to land on, the higher priority planes landed first, and in the case of a malfunction, the trailing planes had to be considered expendable. The president's airplane hit the deck and engaged the arresting cables, and it came to a rapid stop. The Admiral watched as the deck crew disengaged the cable and the airplane was moved to the side elevator. As soon as it cleared the deck and the elevator started down the other planes were cleared to land. The Admiral walked through a deck hatch to meet the President on the hanger deck.

Going from an immense deck to a narrow ladder always caused a strange feeling for the Admiral. He wouldn't admit it as claustrophobia, but just being sensitive. Unfortunately, it would often be swaying and pitching with the waves. As the Admiral passed through the hatch and descended the ladder, the walkie-talkie in his aide's hand came to life, it was a call from the CAG to the Admiral. "Sir, it's for you," the aide said as he handed the unit to the Admiral.

“Sir, I just wanted to inform you that AF2021 which is on short final had a problem. The AC told us that one of the passengers suddenly became ill. We have no way to know if the virus has infected the airplane. I have no choice but to order the Cat Officer to drop the cable. I’ve directed the Air Boss to direct the aircraft commander to ‘low go’ and return to base.”

The Admiral stopped for a moment and responded, “Do you know who became ill?”

“Yes sir, it was Marsha Field, the VP’s chief of staff.”

“Harry you did the right thing, I’ll tell the President.”

They both knew the meaning of being directed to return to base. Dropping the cable prevented the airplane from landing, and they also knew they didn’t have enough fuel to RTB. That was likely a death sentence for everyone onboard. This decision was necessary, and it fit in with their OP Plan. Those were unusual times, and they had to protect the lives of the President and everyone onboard. They had been at sea when the virus struck, and the crew was clean, and it had to stay that way. Letting anyone onboard with any chance of infection was too much risk to take. They had to take the prudent steps.

The Admiral met the President at his airplane ramp and saluted him. They knew each well and after the return salute they embraced. “Hagus, how are you doing? Ok, Mr. President, I’m sorry about your family.” At their mention, the President’s face went white, and the Admiral thought he might pass out.

“I don’t know what I’ll do without her and the kids. They got caught in all this on that damn PR trip to Europe. It hit so fast, and no one knew what to do. Then it was all over. My God, I miss them,” the President said to his old friend.

“I know Sir. I can’t believe it happened, it caught us all by surprise. We were lucky that you were at Camp David and could be isolated so quickly. The last of your cabinet and leaders of the House are landing and will be on board shortly, but we had a problem with one of the airplanes. En route the VP’s chief of staff became ill. We had to assume the worst and deny them landing. They have been waved off, and they are proceeding to their home base.”

“That was the VP and his family, oh my God! There wasn’t anything that could be done?”

“I’m sorry sir, but we know nothing about this virus, and it has a 100% lethality rate. We couldn’t jeopardize you, the other members of your cabinet and Congress. We also have almost 5,000 people on this carrier.”

“I understand, can they make it back to the land?” the Commander in Chief asked with a beaten voice.

Admiral Hagerly just moved his head from side to side. No words were necessary.

“Let me escort you to your quarters, and in 2 hours we’ll brief you on fleet status.”

“Ok.”

Date 2051.6075

Joan, Tom and Alpha didn't know what Dr. Harold was up to, but there were other pressing matters that needed their attention. Tom looked at Alpha and said, "Can you ask SIMPOC what information he has from the space consortium facility? We've got to find a way to get some recovery lifeboats refurbished and launched to Oasis so the Desert Beach and Red Dirt people have some options."

"Acknowledged."

"SIMPOC; Alpha. What current information do you have from the space consortium regarding lifeboats? Tom and Joan want to get some launched to Oasis as their top priority."

"Alpha; SIMPOC. The Oasis crew's lifeboat has been transported to the refurbishment facility. Besides that one, there appear to be two others awaiting servicing and two in the assembly area."

"Mobile; SIMPOC. Please advise all mobile units at the space consortium to continue servicing the lifeboats."

"Acknowledged."

"Tom, Joan. Your vehicle has been moved to the refurbishment facility, and there are two others awaiting servicing with the remaining 2 in assembly. I have arranged for your other crewmembers to be housed in the local BOQ and the Officer Club has been made available to them. The electrical power has remained on, and the food refrigeration units should still be in operation."

"Thanks, Alpha," Tom said, and as he talked, he glanced in Joan's direction and saw that she looked terrible. "Honey, are you ok?"

As soon as he said it, he knew she wasn't.

"We're the only humans left on earth. My mother, my father, my sister; what happened to them?"

Tom put his arms around his wife, and she sobbed uncontrollably. As he offered her a tissue, he said, "You're right. I can't do much about my brother, maybe I can find a way to travel to LA soon, but not now. Let's go to the commcenter and update Desert Beach and Red Dirt then we'll check on your family."

Tom and Joan knew the location of commcenter because they had been there hundreds of times participating in launches or supporting activities in space. There was no hesitation when they got to the punch lock on the door, Tom entered the code, and they walked in. They were immediately accosted by the odor. Alpha followed them in, his smell sensation was objective and didn't react, he merely measured it, odors weren't bad or good, just relative counts of particulate matter. Tom and Joan walked slowly into the room and saw 4 dead technicians, Talk about dedication, Tom thought.

Joan and Tom knew a couple of them, and after seeing so much death on Oasis, they could only pause and pay their respects. "These guys must have stayed here trying to support us in space right to the last minute. The end must have come quickly because they didn't get off any last transmissions," Joan said.

"Alpha, help me get these guys into the observation room in the back."

"I wish we could do something for them," Joan said.

"I suggest that once we have things under control, we follow the appropriate rites with these humans and accept that, as a service for all the humans we have uncounted," Alpha suggested.

Joan and Tom nodded, "That's the least we can for them," Tom said.

The Comm panels were all hot, and just waiting to be initiated. "Desert Beach, this is SC," Joan said to the Comm computer.

"Roger SC; Desert Beach. What's happening?"

"It's a long story, we had some difficulties when we landed. Apparently, SIMPOC isn't the only thinking computer. There is another one that has other priorities, and it attacked us with mobile units when we landed. After a pretty heated battle, we flew to where the other computer was and disconnected it. I hope that puts the issue behind us for a while, although one of the Oasis staff, Dr. Harold has gone off the deep end. He may have stolen that computer's programming and tech data."

"Joan, I only worked with that guy a couple of times, and he gave the creeps. Nothing about him surprises me," Desert Beach said.

"The problem might surface again. We don't know what he is doing. Unfortunately, about the virus, our worst fears have some true. There has been massive death. We haven't found anyone alive yet, although there may be some in isolated areas," Joan transmitted.

"You're kidding me, the entire planet...is dead?"

“We don’t know if it hit everyone, but so far we’ve found no one. What’s happening with you?”

“We’re holding on, and we were waiting to hear from you. As far as I’ve heard from Red Dirt, they’re ok too.”

“Desert Beach, before we left Oasis you said you were going to follow us down with one of your lifeboats?”

“Roger, we have one ready for launch. If the disease has burned itself out then I guess, we’ll start coming home.”

“We’ve been here almost 30 hours; so, I guess it’s burned out. We never made it to the decontamination facility for the protective suits, we were a little busy being attacked. We could use your help down here, and it’s getting lonely.”

“We’ll continue prepping to launch the first lifeboat and then launch the others in 1-2 hour intervals. So, I guess we’re coming home. What’s this about thinking computers?”

“There is the computer SIMPOC which you and I have been talking with. Apparently, he is a pretty sophisticated thinking computer, and he put an organic processor in an advanced mobile unit. The mobile unit was instrumental in defending us after we landed. Aside from SIMPOC, there is another thinking computer which is controlling a bunch of mobile units. We’re not sure why, but it went rogue and is attacking everyone with its units,” Joan explained.

“Great what the hell are we getting into? Between you and me, it sounds like we’re stuck in a bad Sci-Fi movie!”

“I think stuck is the operative word. Let us know when you launch.”

“Will do.”

“Red Dirt; SC Command. We’re here, and it is under control for a moment, you’ve heard the discussion between Desert Beach and us. Desert Beach is beginning the evacuation, and we’re servicing our lifeboat, and there are two others that we should be able to launch. If we can time things, we should be able to get the first 32 of you guys down and then send two other boats up for the remainder. We should be able to send up some supplies, so if some of you are stuck on Oasis for a while, we’ll make sure they have some good stuff to eat. Please let us know what your status is, and we’ll stay in touch. SC Command out.” After the transmission, Joan just sat for a moment and sighed as the enormity of everything set-in.

Tom turned from his wife and spoke to Alpha, “Alpha tell SIMPOC that we have to check on Joan’s family first.”

“Acknowledged.”

Tom stood and hugged his wife.

Date 2051.6084

“Attention,” shouted the Navy Seal at the door. The attendees in the room jumped to their feet as if the tradition of military formality would bring some normalcy into their lives.

“As you were,” the Admiral said after the President had taken his seat. “Mr. President, if I may, I’d like to brief you on current Naval status.”

“Thank you, Admiral, go ahead.”

“When the national emergency was declared and the Congress authorized martial law, the state of military readiness had already decreased beyond acceptable levels. In 1 day the decline happened so fast that most operations ceased. I ordered all of the ships to sea, regardless of their status, or manning levels, and I ordered all Air Force and Army bases to lock down. I also ordered all military communications to move to our restricted classified networks, because I didn’t know how long the civilian networks would stay online. By that time, it appeared that it was too late for the Air Force and Army bases because we lost contact with them within a few hours after lock down. I thought the ships would have a better chance to weather this outbreak out of port. Unfortunately, we were a little late for them. The 6th Fleet went to sea, but they encountered thousands of refugees fleeing the countries surrounding the Med. They took most of them on board thinking they could isolate the sick and control the spread. Unfortunately, they were wrong. The virus spread quickly and almost 90% of the crews were lost. Right now there are a couple of sailors that were isolated and able to avoid the virus. We’ve been able to stay in touch with them, but basically, the ships are manned by 6 seamen. They’ve moved to CVN 85 and are trying to maneuver through the Straits of Gibraltar and connect up with us, but sailing a huge carrier with 6 inexperienced crewmen is a challenge. Aside from CVN 85 we’ve lost the entire 6th Fleet.”

“We also have another situation developing in the Indian Ocean. The 5th Fleet is being shadowed by ships from the Eastern Communist Alliance. Given the situation, the fleet commander has tried to contact them repeatedly with no response. They are remaining in an aggressive posture, shadowing our fleet.”

“The 5th has 6-8 airplanes in the air at all times monitoring their position and movements. If they make any offensive moves, the rules of engagement allow immediate response.”

“The 3rd Fleet had about 40% of its ships in port and sustained considerable losses. Only two of the ships were able to exit Pearl, and they have a large portion of the fleet that was at sea when the outbreak began.”

“We lost about 10% of our ships in Norfolk. The 4th and 7th are in pretty good shape. They’re both at sea and at full readiness.”

“Aside from some known conflict areas, we are concerned that some of our adversaries might have crazies that have taken over parts of the government or military. Some of them might have access to nuclear weapons.”

“In different parts of the world, there are small groups going through, ethnic, tribal or religious cleansings. Apparently, they are killing everyone outside their groups. By killing everyone, not in their tribe or village, they’ve been able to withstand the outbreak. But it appears not 100% effective because a number of the areas we have spoken with have gone quiet in the last few hours.”

“Sir, that’s our status. We’ve been coordinating with parts of almost all of the Navies in the world. Just about all of the survivors are on ships. We don’t know how long this virus is lethal so we’re here at sea until we can figure it out. Besides, society has broken down in all areas and the ships at sea are the only ones with communications and protection.”

“Thank you, Admiral. Do all of our Fleets have full compliments of nuclear weapons?” asked the President with a firm but controlled voice.

“Yes, they do.”

Date 2051.6090

Joan knew what answers she would find, but her parents deserved for her to find out. Joan had grown up with her mother and father in Cocoa Beach, and she had beautiful memories. The sudden death of everyone on earth was beyond her ability to imagine; likely beyond the ability of any rational human to imagine.

Tom, Joan, and Alpha got up as the early morning sun rose over the ocean, they strode to the helicopter, and Tom kept his arm around Joan. Alpha walked behind them, making notes of how humans and particularly husbands and wives interacted.

Aside from the location where they were going, Joan was looking forward to spending time with an old friend, the Chinook. The 6 years she spent flying her was fun. She enjoyed the travel and the challenges. After her active duty, she moved on to her graduate program feeling like she had accomplished something significant.

Once the huge Chinook was in the air accelerating to 140 mph, it was no problem for Joan to focus on flying and navigating the remainder of Merritt Island then over the water to her home. When she approached, she remembered a soccer field near her house where she had played many games growing up. She knew that it was a suitable place to land the giant chopper. As she circled for her approach, she could see her home near the park, and for a brief moment, everything seemed in place. Her mother and father's cars were in the driveway and it seemed like a typical day. Reality was different and even though the picture was perfect what she expected to find was not.

The landing was smooth and much different from the landing she made at the company facility. She touched the bird down in the middle of the field between the two soccer goals where she had made many goals as a child. When the throttles were cut, and the turbines wound down, the silence seemed overpowering and hurtful. Joan just sat there as the whine decreased until Tom gently touched her shoulder, she came back to the present and slowly unbuckled, getting out of the right chair.

It was only a short walk to her home. The tree-lined streets were quiet, and most of the cars were parked neatly in the driveways. There was no evidence of the horrific events that had transpired. Apparently, everyone simply went home to wait for the end, and that was likely what her parents did. They were that kind of couple. They loved together, retired together, watched movies together, played together and likely died together.

The cars were in the driveway, and even though they were dirty, it looked like her Dad had just parked them. The grass was a long, and there were a couple of patches of Yellow Woodsorrel with a couple of Bull Thistles sprouting. A breeze blew through the flowers in the flower beds, but the silence was carrying a burden. Joan and Tom walked up the sidewalk and tried the door, to no one's surprise, it was unlocked, and they walked in. The living room was still in order, neat and clean with no evidence of what had happened. Looking around Joan saw her parent's cat Florence, laying on the sofa. She walked towards her hoping for a response, but there was none. Compared to what she expected to find, this was merely the first step down a painful path. Florence wasn't the pet she had grown up with, her parents had adopted her just a few years ago. Joan turned towards the stairs knowing that her parents would be upstairs in their bedroom and whatever had happened to them would have happened there.

The stairs didn't creak, but perhaps if they had, it would have fit the feeling around them. Their steps were heavy as they ascended them and upon reaching the top of the stairs she could see the two forms laying in the bed holding each other. She knew that was how she would find them. Whatever happened to them, they would have been together.

Tom and Alpha did most of the work. Even though Joan was in charge, they did what was necessary, and she just went along, watching her parents cared for and buried in the back yard. When they were buried, there was a lot to say, but no words came. Tom held her until the crying stopped and Alpha watched from a respectable distance.

As they walked back to the chopper, each walked quietly. Joan carrying the greatest burden of her life, Tom doing everything he could share her burden, and Alpha watching still impressed and curious about these complex beings called humans.

"Tom," Joan said, "Did you notice their cat Florence was dead?"

"Yes,"

“I wonder about the other pets and animals. I can see birds flying, but I haven’t seen any dogs or cats.”

“Perhaps the virus hit humans, and any animals close to them succumbed. But we should keep our eyes open, we could run into anything.”

Joan nodded as she held her husband closer.

Alpha strapped himself in the back of the Chinook with some tie downs, and Tom sat in the left seat, Joan went through the checklist, preparing for takeoff. The next leg of her journey would be just as hard. Like her parents, she knew where she would find her sister. She would be in the hospital where she worked. She was the oncologist at the central Florida Trauma Center, and she worked with her husband Dan, who was the chief surgeon. Joan knew that it wasn’t necessary to go to their home, because they would have been working, trying to do everything they could for those who were sick. They would take care of each other, by taking care of others.

Landing at the hospital was difficult, the parking lot was packed; cars were on the lawns, the streets were blocked, and the entrance was full of gurneys. The heliport had a Bell 600 parked on the primary pad, but there was enough room on the lawn between the heliport and building. The approach was close, but Joan’s thousands of hour's experience were enough to bring the bird down safely.

Once again, the turbines winding down sounded more like a solemn song in church than machines slowing down. The whine was almost human and seemed so eerie that it added to the horror in front of them. The back patio was littered with patients; or their remains. The hospital had set up tables, chairs, beds and even blankets on the grass trying to accommodate all of the patients.

Walking into the building was horrible, yet serene. The dead were everywhere, but after seeing the first dozen, the horror of the scene was somehow diminished. Joan knew that even though her sister Pam was an oncologist and her husband Dan was a surgeon, they would have been in the emergency room, trying to help the new arrivals.

As Joan walked, the sight of the dead numbed her, and she was able to look for only her sister and her husband. When she was unable to find either, she was unsure of where to look next. Then Tom pointed to a sign on a door which said, ‘Surgeon Lounge, Staff Surgeons Only.’ It was one of the few places remaining so Joan opened the door and there they were. Her

sister Pam and her husband Dan were laying on the floor in each other's arms. After they had been unable to save the many in the hallways, they sought refuge here to comfort each other in their last few moments.

Unlike before, Joan was more active in taking care of her sister and husband. She was beyond feeling the loss, but the closeness they shared, motivated Joan to take care of her. This was the last care she could provide, and she was eager to do it. They could care for only her sister, and her husband, the hundreds that were in the building and on the lawns were beyond their abilities.

This time, Alpha was able to help more, he was familiar with the burial process so he was able to dig a shared grave quickly. Joan and Tom laid the bodies of her sister and husband together, Joan knew that they would have wanted it that way. After the burial, words again escaped them. Joan could only remember her sister in her thoughts.

When they were done, they fired up the same turbines and took off heading back to the space consortium. That was the only place they could think of going.

Tom's parents were dead, they had passed away while he was in astronaut training three years ago. Even though they had already passed, he thought of them among all of this, and their loss weighed on him. His brother was 5 years younger and lived in LA, Tom knew that it would take a while before he could get there to find out what happened, but he knew that he would eventually.

The flight back to the consortium was quiet, Tom and Joan had been confronted with the reality and enormity of what happened. They had to stay within their own thoughts to deal with it in their own way. Alpha, understood pain, sorry and loss. But this was the first time that he saw it first hand and he felt the need to study and document it for future reference. Loss was a major part of the human psyche, and he and SIMPOC needed to understand as well as they could.

When they landed at the consortium, the other mobile units had reverted to their basic programming to care for the facility. So, they had gathered up all of the invading mobile units and were stacking them in neat piles. They hadn't been told what to do with them, so they were just stacked so they could be dealt with later in an orderly manner.

Thought SIMPOC.

“Fin, Mobile; SIMPOC. Please survey military vehicles. Determine their locations, status, and complexity. Can some of our mobile units be programmed to operate them? Also, create another 10 mobile units like Alpha and have them subservient to him.”

“Acknowledged.”

the codes.”

“Yes, Sir,” was the response from the president’s aid.

Date 2051.6173

Once the mobile units were let loose to finish servicing the lifeboats Joan suggested, “Maybe it would be an excellent opportunity to use the commcenter gear and see if we can contact anyone.”

“Sounds like a great idea, we could use some company and help,” said Tom.

Once they got settled in the commcenter again, Tom said, “Hon, I’ve found the frequency log with all of the military frequencies. Let’s hope, someone is there, I don’t know what we’ll do if no one answers.” Tom then hesitated for a moment and spoke to the communication computer, “Please select the primary military open channel,” he said the Comm unit. He leaned back and pointed out to Joan and Alpha that the transmission will be bounced off all of the SATCOM satellites. “Anyone on this frequency, this is Colonel Tom Herl, US Combined Forces transmitting on open channels from the Communications Center of the Space Consortium. We are the Oasis crew which was forced to evacuate the station and return to Earth. If any of you are able, please respond,” Tom waited a few minutes before he heard.

“Colonel Herl this is Admiral Hagerly on the USCF Fittsburg. Good to hear someone. What’s your status?”

“Admiral, we abandoned the station because our supplies were almost gone. We’ve been coordinating with Desert Beach on the Moon and Red Dirt on Mars. The crew on the Moon is planning to come home and should start launching shortly. We’re here at the space consortium, and we’re servicing some lifeboats to help in case Red Dirt has to abandon Mars. For your information, we have been coordinating with a very sophisticated computer called SIMPOC and an advanced mobile unit called Alpha. In fact, they helped defend us from another rogue computer that is attacking everyone with a bunch of mobile units that it controls. We had a couple of battles, but that computer has been dealt with for now. I’ll fill you in on the details later, but I suggest you monitor your computerized service units and keep an eye on them. What’s your status?”

“Joan, that Admiral is the Chairmen of the Joint Chiefs!” Tom said to Joan, and he saw her facial expression say WOW!

“Colonel as the virus was spreading we evacuated the President, the Chiefs and as many high-ranking Congressmen as possible to Navy ships. We were afraid to stay on land because we didn’t know what was happening. We also took on as many families and civilians as possible, but, unfortunately, we didn’t screen well enough, and we’ve lost a large number of ships. The infection spread quickly, and we’ve had to isolate those ships. Overall we’ve lost almost 40% of what was launched. After we were seaward and it was obvious that our population was in trouble, we had an Eastern Communist Alliance Admiral decide that it was time for them to finally win the big one. He hit one of our carrier groups with tactical nukes before took them out. Then an attack was launched on Israel, and they responded in kind. The Alliance then launched a massive attack on the 7th fleet and we responded. Since then it’s been quiet. Most of the navies did what we did, and there are about 2,000 ships cruising the oceans, some have made landfall and others are coordinating with us. My best guess is we have about 100,000 to 200,000 people left. There are likely stragglers we haven’t been able to talk with yet, but that’s our status.”

Hearing the number of remaining people was sobering, and everyone looked at each other for a moment then Tom said, “Admiral, I’ll leave this frequency open and let’s stay in touch. Are you near us now?”

“Sorry, I don’t want to transmit that on an open channel, we’ll move to a point where I can fly to your base, I’ll contact you when we’re airborne. Once we get together, we can coordinate our resources. Good luck with bringing everyone home. USCF out.”

“SC out.”

“Nice to know that we’re not alone,” Tom said. Then he and Joan nodded to each other, and when they stood up, they hugged for a long time.

When they broke the embrace, Joan said, “I’m going to give Red Dirt some encouraging news.”

“Sounds like a plan.”

“Red Dirt this is SC. I just wanted to give you a quick update, we’ve been in contact with Admiral Hagerly, who is the Chairmen of the Joints Chiefs. Apparently, he, the president and some of our government have taken up residence on an aircraft carrier in the Atlantic. They’re in contact with ships from many governments, but, unfortunately, there aren’t a lot of

people left. Estimates put the survivors at 100,000 to 200,000. We'll stay in touch as we find out more. Also, some military units have survived, and some of them have launched missiles against Israel and us. We lost some ships, but the Navy responded and dealt with the attackers. When the Admiral is near us, he will fly to this location, and we'll be able to coordinate better. We'll let you know as things develop. SC out."

"I think we need to get some sleep first," Tom said.

"You got that right, I think there is an executive suite here in the commcenter. Let's check it out," Joan said as she grabbed Tom's hand and led him down the corridor.

When they left, Alpha informed them, "I have the mobile service units prepping the launch rocket and your lifeboat. We should be able to launch in about 4 days."

"Great that will give Red Dirt some options. We're going to rest for a while, please don't disturb us unless there is an emergency." Tom said as he and Joan carried each other out of the room.

"Acknowledged."

The executive suite was nice, it had a small kitchen, living room, and four bedrooms. Tom and Joan fell on the bed in the first room, and they were asleep instantly.

of simple things that were missing from his mix. Julius knew about the weakness in Abramson's plans, but hey, he didn't ask. Now the cells were multiplying at an extraordinary rate, forming together into nice small building blocks, and assembling. At this rate, he would have a viable organic processor or brain, in about 2 hours.

Julius was thrilled at his progress. In the past, typical synaptic cells had transmitters and receptors on only one side, but now Julius had taken Abramson's idea of using two sides and expanded to create a biological 3-D Complex Polytope. Now Julius had cells that had transmitters and receptors on all five sides of this wedge-shaped cell, thus increasing the computer power fivefold. With a wedge shape, the cells would fit together in a nice stacked arrangement reducing the distance between cells and increasing the density and once again the through-put rate. If the stacking was uniform, then the computing power would exceed the power of the human brain. His brain would be the most powerful brain in the history of mankind; once again he smiled thinking of the irony. Instead of mankind maybe he should call it Juliuskind.

Date 2051.6270

Dr. William Thompson stood in his Desert Beach control room. That was his personal control room, Bill had been part of the Moon colony project since its inception. His doctoral thesis was the blueprint upon which it was based. Bill had been part of the team from that paper 25 years ago, until now. He was leaving his Moon station. Three lifeboats had gone, and he and seven others were shutting the station down; for perhaps a very long time. It was a sad and nostalgic process. Every switch, system, and display he was involved with the concept, design, and build. It was appropriate that he would flip the last switch putting it into hibernation or perhaps permanent sleep.

He had already given the command for the 23 mobile units used for maintenance, construction, surveying, and mining to return to their parking stations. He watched as the external units moved across the lunar soil, cleaned themselves off in the dust removal station, then finally parked themselves in the recharging bays. Inside the facility, the mobile units simply went to their individual alcoves and plugged in. None of them knew that they might never be awakened again.

The environmental system was already offline, so Bill was wearing his extra-vehicular suit. It was cumbersome to work in and slow. The ambient pressure was down to 10.2 psi, but it wasn't at free space yet, the temperature was dropping, and O₂ levels were down while the CO₂ was already too high. He could live for a short time without the suit, but it wouldn't be very comfortable. His next few steps were to the electrical panel for the solar array, and he snapped it off. The lights immediately went to battery back-up, and he walked to the computer terminal, he stood and watched the computer emergency shutdown algorithm do its thing and send all current data to back-up. Then after the data had been written, he removed the storage cube and put it in his transport pouch. He wasn't sure if anyone on Earth could use the information, but he wasn't going to shut the facility down without retrieving the data. Finally, it was time, he touched the screen once, and it waited for a second then it went blank and

dark. Even though, he was wearing a suit the silence was deafening and he could feel it.

After a respectable amount of time, Bill's intercom buzzed with a familiar voice. "Doc we're ready when you are," said Sally, his wife. She was the chief medical officer on Desert Beach and when dealing with him in a professional manner would call him Doc. A little joke, he had 3 doctorates, and she was an MD with a Ph.D. in Space Medicine specializing in long-term space effects. He had one more doctorate than she, so she called him Doc.

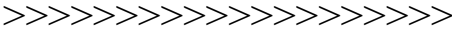
"Ok, we're done. The lights are out, and I'll put the key under the mat." Bill took one last look around and picked up his coffee cup off the table and walked to the airlock. Inside, it took only a few minutes for the pressures to decrease, he saw the green light turn to yellow, then red. Popping the hatch he walked along the pathway to the last lifeboat.

The lifeboat was similar in design to what Oasis had used but modified for the approximately 239,000 miles between the moon and Earth. The vehicle had 8 seats, and that was about all. As a concession to the distance traveled, and the time in space, there was a food locker with 40 dehydrated and compressed space meals. They were horrible, but they only needed two meals a day while traveling. Besides the space 'kitchen,' there was a space restroom, and two sleep harnesses mounted on the sides behind the seats. The travelers would stay in their seats, eat, go to the bathroom and go back to their seats. Each of them could get 6 hours per day in one of the harnesses and beyond that they could take naps in the seats. After all, this was a space lifeboat and maybe a swimming pool would be on the next design.

The method for launching from the Moon was a dual rail system that was similar to a railgun; the same basic design that the Navy used to fire projectiles into a low orbit. One of the moon colony's main objectives was to mine valuable minerals and launch the ore in pods to Earth. The ore pods were the anode, and they were fired down a track with two parallel conducting tubes on each side. It was basically an electric gun. The lifeboat would accelerate along the surface riding on detachable skids, and once sufficient velocity was reached to overcome the moon's gravity, the skids would drop off, and the vehicle would continue accelerating. Unlike the electric rail gun used on ships which would launch a projectile at Mach 7, the velocity on this gun could be adjusted and made safe for human launch.

The moon's escape velocity was low, the acceleration occurred for only a few moments then the thrust line would keep the vehicle accelerating after the vehicle separated from the rails. The trajectory would allow for constant acceleration around the back side of the moon. The acceleration would be timed so that escape velocity of a little over 5,300 MPH would be reached just as the ship reached the escape point. Once it left the Moon's orbit at sufficient velocity, it would coast back to earth using the earth's gravitational pull. It was a simple design intended to use a minimum fuel and return the occupants to earth in a minimum amount of time.

Bill strapped himself into his seat and the pilot completed the launch checklist. The computer finalized its trajectory calculations, and a timer began counting down to the rocket firing. There wasn't any chatter on the intercom, everyone was leaving a great deal behind and realized there was a great deal to come. They were returning to a dead planet.



Julius finished running his density checks and chemical balance analysis. The biomass that was in the tank was a living brain. Its volume was about the size of a trunk. At this point it wasn't alive in any real sense, it had the potential of thinking and communicating, but its electrical or synaptic pathways were jumbled. It was similar to a baby's brain at birth, many synaptic pathways were present, and as the baby grew they would be pruned to develop more efficient thought patterns. Julius liked to think of it as a battery that was waiting to be used, it was all potential energy.

The next step in the process was to map his brain pattern onto the biomass. This process didn't transfer his memories or knowledge, it just aligned the connections so that thought could occur. As the human brain grows, it continually changes its pathways. They change through learning and thinking and over time each brain becomes a unique map of patterns. It was these patterns that Julius used to align the electrical patterns in the biomass. Once this was done, the thinking organic processor would have similar thought patterns to Julius. Its thoughts would be different, but the decisions and thought process would be similar. This was the exciting part for Julius because now his creation would reflect his brilliance and his destiny. It would be exciting to have an equal who would do his bidding.

The original Mars colony was started almost 25 years ago, and for a long time, it was a one-way trip. Everyone that volunteered for the mission were real frontiersmen and adventurers. Over time, the colony grew slowly, waiting for the facilities to be built and food and water sources developed. Later as spaceship fuel progressed, convertible supply ships were developed. They would bring a few new personnel then the life support systems could be removed for an unmanned return to Oasis for another load of supplies, then back to the colony. Over time, the fleet increased to five ships, although only 3 were in service now. The other two were in a parking orbit around Earth waiting modifications.

When the ships were modified for an emergency return to Earth the configuration was miserable, it would provide food, oxygen and that's about it. The craft remained in a low G or weightless environment, so no high G seats were required. The ships had only straps along the walls that allowed the occupant's hand holds, along with a rest 'area' and kitchen. Each person's area did have a set of buckles for the traveler to connect and then they could relax and enjoy the ride.

The only limiting factor was the time necessary to change the ships from a supply configuration to human transport. When the supply ships reached orbit around Mars, a tug was used to ferry materials to and from the surface. Many flights would be required to change the ships, then move the people. It could be done as long as the tug didn't have problems. Fuel was no problem because the necessary raw materials were readily available and processed on the surface.

Dr. Peterborough had many meetings with Red Dirt's occupants. They all had friends or family on Earth, and the news has been horrible. Coming to Mars and accepting that you may never go home was different than knowing you had nothing to go home to.

It was one thing to communicate with family and friends, regardless of the delays in communications, but knowing that they were all dead added a finality to their lonely existence.

There was a mixed consensus. Some didn't want to stay on the Red Planet, fearing certain death and other's accepted the isolation and challenges it brought. They came as frontiersmen, and now they would have to survive long term without Earth. Some of the engineers were convinced they could solve the engineering, others didn't want to take a chance. When all of the debates ended, they knew that the decision had to be unanimous.

If some went home, the others couldn't survive and those going home needed help. Either they all stayed, or they all went home.

A vote was taken and going home was the answer. Modifications to the supply vehicles were already underway, and the first one would be done in about a week. The first ships could leave by themselves but timing the last one would be more complicated. While modifying the ships, they needed to keep the habitat on the surface functioning as well as working on the modifications. That meant that when the last ship left a crewmember had to return the tug to the habitat. Then the last of the crew would close down the base, then launch the tug to the command module which would take them home. The command module was fully outfitted and able to re-enter the atmosphere.

That plan was workable to exit Mars, but the details on the other end weren't explicit. The command module could re-enter on its own, but the supply ships were designed to rendezvous with Oasis and weren't built for re-entry. This made the occupants dependent on the lifeboats docked at Oasis. There were 3 attached currently which would allow 24 Red Dirt personnel to return, and they needed two other lifeboats launched and successfully docked with Oasis for everything to work. All of the Mars people were aware that a lot of engineering and machinery was involved, and that implied a lot of risks. Failure could easily leave some people stranded with no recovery plan.

Date 2051.6286

“SIMPOC; Mobile. I noted a change in behavior among many mobile units. Instead of performing individual tasks, they began moving as groups. Many of them are walking towards the mountains west of Colorado Springs, and others took up defensive positions in a circle about 10 miles from the area. It seems that the EDU came online and is organizing a defense.”

“SIMPOC; Fin. You asked me to make us mobile, and I came up with a design. All six of our processors can fit on a pallet along with adequate support equipment so that we can continue thinking for about 6 hours. That should give us enough time to move to another safe place where additional support equipment is available. I suggest we configure ourselves on such a pallet and remain connected to our external support systems. If we must move, then we can switch immediately to the palletized systems and be able to move in a matter of minutes. I have installed a yottabyte of storage on the pallet which is almost enough to move all of the necessary data.”

“Alpha, Fin, Comm, Data, Art, Files; SIMPOC. I am concerned about some patterns we have noticed with regards to the movements of mobile units. It appears the EDU is online again. We are configuring ourselves so we can be moved and I want facilities at the Space Consortium prepared for us to reside. Also, I have built 10 additional units similar to Alpha. They are being programmed and will move to your position soon, they will be programmed to respond to you and others that you designate.”

“Acknowledged.”

“Joan, Tom. I have just received direction from SIMPOC to set-up a facility here for his processors. It seems that the EDU has become active and SIMPOC feels their current location is vulnerable. We have the best defenses here, we have experience, and this is where the remaining humans from Desert Beach are returning. It makes sense to consolidate here. Also, SIMPOC will build 10 additional units similar to me. They are being programmed and will move to our location upon completion. They will be programmed to respond to me or anyone I designate.”

Date 2051.6290

“Colonel Herl, this is Admiral Hagerly. We’re on about a 10 mile final and requesting permission to land.”

Tom raised his eyebrows and looked at Joan while he walked to the military commcenter. He responded, “Admiral, you’re clear to land on runway 33, and I don’t have any idea what the wind or barometer setting is,” Tom transmitted.

“No sweat, we’ll check it out.”

“As far as we know there aren’t any obstructions on the runway, but I suggest a low pass, to check it out.”

“Rog...”

“Also be advised, you’ll be here to help us welcome the last of the Desert Beach crew. The last lifeboat is due to complete reentry and touchdown in about half an hour. They’ll be landing beside the main runway. If you want to stay, we are also launching a replacement lifeboat to rendezvous with Oasis.”

“Fantastic, I can’t wait to shake their hands, and I’d love to see a launch.”

“We’ll meet you on the transient ramp.”

“Rog...”

When they had a reunion with the first of the Desert Beach crew, it was great, and now they would have an opportunity to welcome the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs. He was representing the remainder of the human race. Joan, Tom, and Alpha drove a vehicle at high speed out of the hanger and down the ramp towards the transient parking area. The other crew members from the first 3 lifeboats from the Moon were resting and eating in the hanger. None of them had the strength to venture out.

Tom, Joan, and Alpha watched as a Navy V31 landed. Its sleek design and VTOL capabilities showed that it was truly a craft intended for VIP transport. After landing and the engines were winding down the door opened, and the Admiral stepped out. He was wearing a clean and crisp naval officer uniform and walked with a military pace to where they were standing.

“Admiral, this is my wife Joan, who was the Oasis Commander, and this is Alpha, who protected us on landing.”

The Admiral smiled as he shook Joan’s hand, “Welcome back to earth Commander.”

Then he looked at Alpha. Mobile units were passive and did what they were told. They blended into the background and weren’t something you were introduced to.

“Admiral, Alpha is a very advanced mobile unit. He led our defense, and he is our prime contact with another very sophisticated computer named SIMPOC. SIMPOC is a thinking computer which is protecting us. And just to make things complicated as I mentioned before, there is that other thinking computer that attacked us and may be maneuvering to do it again.”

The Admiral looked at Alpha, then looked at Tom and shook his hand saying, “Very nice. Now let’s talk about the last of the Moon crew arriving and how we can work together to help put things back together.”

Just about then, there was a loud sonic boom as the last of the lifeboats from the Moon completed the reentry and entered the atmosphere. “Well, here they come now. They should be about 9 minutes from touchdown. Admiral would you like to join us and welcome them,” Joan said.

“My pleasure,” he said as they climbed into the vehicle.

Tom noticed that the Admiral made a point of not sitting next to Alpha.

After they had parked near the mid-point of the runway, Tom pointed off towards a glint of light from the approaching lifeboat. “Here they come,” he said.

They watched as the last of the crew from the Moon base, Desert Beach landed and skidded to a stop in front of them. “Admiral, they’re a little weak from their time on the moon and 3 days in space, so if you would give us a hand?”

“Absolutely,” he said.

The party met the craft at the crew door and helped as the space weary passengers crept down the folding stairs on very uncertain legs. The last ones out were Bill and Sally Thompson.

“Hi, I’m Bill Thompson, and this is my wife, Sally. We’re from the Moon,” he said with a smile.

They laughed a little and even though they were offered help to the vehicle they insisted on walking under their own power.

significant moments in the history of the human race. The thought made her sick.

“Colonel Herl, Commander Herl, the President asked me to say thanks for everything you’ve done and the risks you have taken. He wasn’t aware that you brought the crew back from the moon successfully, but I’m sure he’ll agree that you’ve done an admirable job and everyone thanks you.”

“We are faced with an unprecedented event in our history. The losses have been enormous, and each of us has a tremendous burden of memories to carry forward. Regardless of what we have lost, we must start planning for our future. I think the virus has burned itself out by now and we must plan to get our world under control and habitable again. We’ll have to take small steps, but critical steps so that we can live and support the remaining population.”

“The president has directed the USCF Navy elements, which are still operational, to seek ports where they can re-establish themselves and where they can find the necessary support elements. They will establish small human settlements where we can begin to rebuild. The 2nd fleet, where the president and I have established command, will base return to Norfolk.”

“We’ll likely move the 7th from Japan back to Hawaii and bring the 4th back to its base in Naples Florida, and we’ll bring the 3rd to San Diego.

“Admiral, why are you having each fleet find a local port? Why not bring them all home? It seems to me that we’d be better off consolidating our resources.” Tom asked.

“Good question, Colonel. For one reason, if we brought all of the ships together in one port, we would overload the resources and our ability to support them. We don’t have the local infrastructure available and what expertise we have, will be pressed hard to bring the local support up and keep it going. Besides, we suspect that there are many thousands of people stranded and who need help on each of the continents. If we can provide safe havens then, we have a better chance of getting humanity back on its feet.”

“Ok, thanks.”

The Admiral went on, “We are currently a little too far out to give you much support, and I think that your people will need some time to regain their strength. You’re lucky, it seems that this base has what you need and you also have a viable defense force. I suggest you stay here until everyone

can travel, and by that time we should know when we're setting up Norfolk and be able to help you move to our location?"

Tom and Joan looked at each other, and they were a little pale thinking about the enormity of what they had to deal with. "Sounds reasonable sir," Tom said with a soft voice.

"Admiral, do you know what is happening across the country? Have you had any communications with anyone?" Joan asked.

"Not yet. We've been focused on fleet defense and containment. We have the ability to tie into many of the commsat systems, and that's what we'll start doing. We don't expect much because many of the survivors out there won't be able to receive us. We have very little civilian radio frequency capabilities. We could send flights out to establish contact, but we don't know what we'll find, or what we can do to help out. I can't afford to get aircraft stranded at some remote location with fuel or maintenance issues and no way to retrieve them. With the president's approval, I'm directing the aircraft to stay within the fleet boundaries until we're established. Then we'll start expanding at a logical pace. We'll set up staging areas then slowly expand. Until then, any survivors will be on their own. If we can get information to them, we'll tell them where we're setting up base and encourage them to move east towards us or west to San Diego. Until then, I don't want to spread ourselves out."

Even though it was all sickening and overwhelming, it made sense. Tom looked at his wife then the Admiral, "Sir, we've checked on Joan's parents and sister, and I'd like to check on my brother in LA. We could take an airplane and fly there and back. We could spread the word to anyone we find and give you updates on what is happening. Joan is that ok with you?"

She smiled and touched his hand, "Of course, Tom has his A&P and ATPL licenses so we should be able to handle most minor airplane or engine repairs. If we stay to major civilian airports; between the two of us, we should be able to fix or fly almost anything."

"I know an A&P is a civilian aircraft and power plant rating because we have similar ratings in the Navy, but I hate to ask but what is an ATPL?" the Admiral asked.

"It's an Air Transport Pilot License, which is the highest civilian rating a pilot can get. My expertise has time in fighters, and Joan has tons of time in helicopters. The ATP certifies me as an airline pilot, although I never flew for a scheduled carrier."

“Great, going to LA would provide us with invaluable information and you might be able to coordinate with any survivors.”

“We should be able to take along the proper Comm gear so we can stay in touch with you and the president. We can also take some civilian transmitters and hopefully connect with someone,” Joan added.

“Excellent, perhaps we should update your other crewmembers before I head back to the fleet.”

Walking down the hall was strange. Tom and Joan held hands, and nothing was said. They were within their own thoughts, realizing that a new world was beginning.

They entered the room, and the occupants all looked a little lost. They were going through the necessary motions, but there was a lack of emotion.

“Everyone can I have your attention, the Admiral wants to update you,” said Joan.

The Admiral was updating them, and Alpha approached Tom and Joan, “SIMPOC’s transport is 16 minutes away.”

“Great, can you monitor what the Admiral is saying and pass it to SIMPOC?”

“Yes, I’m recording everything and it will be passed.”

“Well, ladies and gentlemen, that’s where we’re at. Once we’ve made it to Norfolk and established a safe zone, we’ll let you know and then we can make arrangements to get you there. Until then, I’ll think you’ll be safe here.”

“Thank you, Admiral,” Joan said. “We have to make ourselves at home here and make the best of it. Sally, I suggest you take check-out the medical facilities and see what you can use. The rest of us need to check out the on-base quarters and figure out eating. Perhaps we can concentrate on the Officer’s Club for the meantime. We should send out some scouting parties to locate food and anything else we need. Do any of you have questions?”

“Yes, Sally.”

“Joan, what do we do about the human remains? I’m afraid that it will soon become a health hazard.”

The whole room fell silent, picturing the magnitude of what that statement meant.

“Joan, may I speak?” Alpha said. Everyone in the room was a little surprised at the request because mobile units didn’t usually initiate conversation.

“Yes Alpha, do you have a suggestion?”

“Yes, I’m aware of the proper traditions for burial and given the enormity of your situation we might do something similar to what we discussed in the Comm Center. I can arrange with SIMPOC to have all functioning mobile units seek out human remains and bury them. It will take a while, but it is a satisfactory answer. To solve the immediate and local health issue, I have a large number of mobile units within the base boundary. I can have them locate all of the human remains within the base and immediate area, and we can arrange for a mass burial. Perhaps it would be proper for a human to say the appropriate words to recognize your loss.”

Everyone in the room had a look of pain on their faces. Joan didn’t know what to say or if there was a better answer. This was a unique time in the history of the world and the human race.

Tom finally spoke and said, “I think Alpha has a reasonable solution. Admiral perhaps you or the president could read something or say something at the service. Maybe we could consider it a service for everyone we’ve lost. There is no way to have a burial for everyone.”

The Admiral responded, “Yes, we need to do something, and I’m sure the president would be proud to speak. I don’t think I can bring him here or if we should move the fleet at this time. We could hook him up to all radio frequencies and transmitters, we have available, and transmit on an open channel to anyone who might be left alive.”

The occupants of the small room felt a little relief knowing that there would be some recognition and closure for the loss they all felt.

“Alpha; Beta 1. We have arrived at the space consortium. We have followed your beacon, and we are entering your building.”

“Joan, Tom the additional 10 units similar to me have arrived and are coming up the stairs.”

“Everyone, I know a lot is occurring. You have seen Alpha and heard his recommendations. He has been a valuable resource for us. SIMPOC has produced 10 others like him. They have come to help us out, and they are coming up the stairs now. So when you hear them coming, don’t panic. Remember they are here to help us. I know none of you have worked with a mobile unit as sophisticated as Alpha and his team, but I suggest you talk with them and take one with you, we can use them to communicate. So far we’ve been impressed with them.”

“Colonel Herl, I must get back to the president and my fleet. I’m afraid I won’t be able to stay and watch the lifeboat launch,” Admiral Hagerly announced as he left the room and exited in the opposite direction from the approaching sound of mobile units.

Without any ceremony the 10 mobile units filed into the room and stood next to Alpha. Alpha is physically impressive, being over 6 foot 3 inches tall and built like an athlete. Having 10 others, like him, all lined up was a little overpowering and intimidating.

Tom hesitated for a moment then spoke, “Ok, let’s relax. Alpha has already saved our lives a couple of times, and if these other units are like him, we should be thankful for the help. Alpha do these units have names?”

“Yes, they are designated Beta 1 through Beta 10 and let me point out, they are exactly like me. They are programmed to help, protect, observe and learn. They are like I was when I first encountered humans. I was unsure how to act or communicate, but I have learned a great deal. If you work with these units, and use their skills they will also learn, and I think you’ll find them helpful.”

Joan took the lead and said, “I suggest that we move around the facility and find food, medical supplies, clothing and anything else that might be useful. We should stay in groups and keep one of the Beta units with you. They have communication skills and can help defend you if necessary. Remember we still have that other computer, and even though things are quiet right now, if it starts something up we’ve got to get back together fast. Unfortunately, the personal communication network isn’t operating, so we didn’t bother to reassign new units to you after you landed. That system is based on towers, and none of those are powered. We’ll see if we can get them online again as we get organized, and least we’ll have communication across this facility. Until then, using the Beta units will be our best option. Too bad we don’t have the old style smartphones and wearable computers working.”

“Joan,” one of the people asked, “Most of us have family near here. I think we want to go to them and take care of them personally, instead of a mass grave.”

“I suggest that you team up with a Beta, and coordinate amongst yourselves where and when you’re going. There are many vehicles around so you should be able to hotwire some transportation. Alpha, how long do

Tom and Joan didn't tell him that all of the critical systems were on their terminals and his were mostly the backups. But they wanted him involved so they could see how well he worked with them and how well he made decisions.

The countdown continued and when the clock struck zero each kept their finger on their respective buttons and the rocket fired, launching the last of the lifeboats that Oasis needed to have a full compliment. Once in orbit, the lifeboat would dock with Oasis automatically. The next lifeboat would be launched when Red Dirt made its decision to return, and it would remain in orbit and dock automatically after one of the others separated. The last lifeboat would remain primed for launch, which would only occur if a problem developed with one of the other two.

The launch was successful, which was nice. Something worked well for them.

Date 2051.6317

“Alpha; SIMPOC. Be advised I am set-up in the computer facility, and I have connected to all of the local networks. In addition, I have been able to connect to the facility security cameras, so I have multiple visual inputs. Please inform Colonel Herl and Joan Herl that I am available to meet them at their convenience.”

Alpha walked from where he was coordinating the mobile units, to the flight operations area where Joan and Tom were checking out the resources to plan their cross-country flight to LA.

“Colonel Herl, SIMPOC is fully operational, and if you have the time, he would like to meet you.”

Wow, Joan thought. A computer has asked to meet me that’s a new experience. “Tom, should we get dressed up?” Joan said with a smile.

“Colonel Herl, Joan Herl you are not required to change clothes to meet SIMPOC.”

“I was just kidding, Alpha.”

Alpha was confused for a moment then disregarded the idea and led the way to SIMPOC’s location.

Neither Tom nor Joan had any idea what to expect when they met SIMPOC. He had helped them a great deal, and being just a voice, it was easier to relate to him. But now, actually seeing SIMPOC as a computer, would be a significant change. Alpha opened the door, and they walked into the computer support area. In the middle of the room was a pallet with 6 boxes that were similarly sized, one larger box and three smaller boxes. There were numerous wires and tubes running between each of them, and there was a din of mechanical noise.

“SIMPOC, this is Colonel Tom Herl and his wife, Commander Joan Herl.”

“Tom, Joan I am pleased to meet you,” emanated from the speakers surrounding the room.

Joan and Tom looked around, a little surprised to hear the voice surrounding them.

“I’m sorry if my voice surprises you, but I’m transmitting through speakers which were set up for me.”

“SIMPOC, I’m glad to meet you. We are thankful for what you and Alpha did for us. We wouldn’t have survived when we landed without your support,” Tom said with a slight unease in his voice.

“Colonel, helping you and the other remaining humans is fundamental to my programming. I’m glad I was able. Alpha has updated me on recent events. I’m sorry that you’ll have the task of burying so many fellow humans. But unfortunately, we still have another issue, the EDU computer that Julius Harold is likely working with. Given his expertise and the materials that he took, leads me to believe that he is creating a computer that will rival or possibly exceed my capabilities. Even though we haven’t encountered him recently, we have detected movement with the mobile units that imply that his computer is up and running.”

“SIMPOC; Mobile. I have located the facility that Julius Harold used in Colorado. Unfortunately, he has vacated, but he left a functioning percolation tank, and we have been able to collect many samples. We are hopeful that we can duplicate his process.”

“Mobile; SIMPOC. Please move those tanks and materials to my location as fast as possible.”

“Acknowledged.”

“I was just told that one of our mobile units located Julius Harold’s facility. He had left the location, but they recovered much material, and it should answer many questions about what Julius Harold is doing.”

“Excellent, maybe we can get one step ahead of him,” Joan said.

“Commander, I know that Julius Harold was working with organic processors while he was on Oasis.”

“Yes, that was his area of expertise.”

“If it is possible, I’d like to access his files. There may be information that can be used to determine his plans or perhaps some data on his recent discoveries.”

Joan thought for a moment, how unusual it would be to provide a computer on earth access to personal files on Oasis, but that was truly a unique situation, and it was up to her.

“Yes, that seems like a necessary step. Can I get access to the consortium net from here?”

“Yes, that access terminal is connected.”

Joan walked to the terminal and said, “This is Commander Joan Herl, and spoke her access codes, please connect me with the Oasis interface computer.”

“Connected.”

“Oasis, this is Commander Herl.”

“Recognized.”

“Please access all files that are within Julius Harold’s personal storage and download them to this terminal.”

“Accessing...downloaded.”

“There you go, SIMPOC...have at it.”

“Thank-you. Also, if it’s ok with you, I’d like a better way to communicate with you. I suggest that I transmit through Alpha and when I do, I’ll identify myself as the speaker.”

“That’s a good idea,” Tom said.

“SIMPOC, I’d like to thank you and Alpha for your help taking care of the dead. Having our ceremony will help us deal with everything. As you make progress with the human remains across the country will you please keep us informed?” asked Joan.

“Yes, I realize how devastating that is for you. I will do everything I can to help.”

“SIMPOC unless there is something else we need to cover, our crew is spread out with your Beta units searching for food and resources and also dealing with their individual losses,” said Tom.

“Absolutely, deal with what you must.”

Tom and Joan opened the door into Base Ops and turned the lights on. Joan walked over to the coffee pot and found a burned pot of old coffee. "Maybe I'll just add water to this black tar, and it will taste better than usual ops coffee," she said with a grimace.

"Great, cut off a chunk for me," Tom said as he was bringing up the flight planning computer. I doubt we'll have anything current, but these store the last received data in case of a power outage so we'll have something to work with."

"Good afternoon, are you the command pilot? If so, please state your name and certification number," the planning computer asked.

Tom leaned closure to the receiver and said, "Thomas Herl. Command Pilot Cert #2192832."

"Command Pilot Thomas Heal recognized, Air Transport Pilot License and Commercial Multi- Engine License are current. Please identify equipment, departure and arrival airports and departure date and time in Zulu or UTC."

Tom looked at a slip of paper and said, "Lear Jet 95, N56849, departing TTS, destination LAX, departure 08222014, 12:00 UTC."

"Please stand-by...your flight plan is printing and is available for download to the flight computer. Be aware NOTAMS show both facilities closed and no en route weather is available, please check with the dispatcher prior to departure."

"Well, let's hope the weather is good," Tom said as he took the flight plan and they walked out, turning the lights off.

Date 2051.6365

The morning sun rose to a clear Florida sky. Every remaining human walked a little slower and hung their shoulders a little lower. The ceremony that day was for all of humanity, and it couldn't begin to describe the loss. The few remaining humans had dealt with their own losses privately, but this ceremony was for their loved ones as well as the billions of people that were gone. It would be impossible to have a ceremony with a magnitude equal to the loss, so a simple ceremony was like a single rose instead of 8 Billion flowers.

Tom and Joan dressed in their room in the Base Officers Quarters. Like the other humans, they had found new clothing in local stores. Tom was dressed in his official Air Force Uniform, and Joan wore an appropriate outfit. Words weren't exchanged because there weren't any that were adequate.

The humans made their way to the open hole in the ground where there were more bodies than anyone wanted to count. The number was too large to consider or discuss; there were just too many.

A small group of survivors stood together, seeking the little support that they could give each other. Speakers had been set up, and they were expecting a transmission from the President of the United States to start in a few moments.

The mobile units had wrapped each of the human remains in white sheets, and they were laid together side by side and in rows. The earth appeared to have been opened to accept them. To be respectful, the mobile units were standing behind the humans and Alpha was in a position behind Tom and Joan Herl.

Alpha said to them in a low voice, "Your president is ready to begin."

There was a click over the speakers as the channel was opened and the survivors stood waiting for the words.

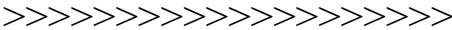
"Ladies and gentlemen, these words are being transmitted through every frequency over every channel that we have available. It is also being passed to every satellite, and hopefully, it will be heard by many survivors. Now the President of the United States will speak."

“People of the planet Earth. This ceremony is more significant than I or anyone, or any country. This ceremony is to speak with one voice for all of the human race. We have been attacked by a sickness that has done damage to all of us. We have lost untold numbers of friends, relatives, co-workers, and people we have known. We have lost people from every heritage, every religion, every ethnic group and every country, continent, and island. Those few of us that remain feel that loss, and we will never forget what has happened. I wish I could use the proper religious words for each of the religions that have been impacted, but that is impossible. I can only say words directed to those within the sound of my voice. We can all pass our thoughts and prayers to the God of all of us, regardless of what name is used by any one of us.”

“The human race is made up of many people with many hopes, prayers, dreams and hearts. They are no longer with us, but those few of us that remain will carry forward with the thoughts and hearts of those that have passed before us. I want to end my words with a moment of silence, for all of you to remember those friends and family you have lost and those friends to be that you have never met.”

After a solemn pause, the president concluded with, “My heart and prayers are with every one of you and please take care of yourselves. Thank-you.”

When the ceremony was over, the remaining humans talked quietly, hugged, cried and did their best to comfort each other. When they walked away, each of them turned and looked at the massive grave one last time. The mobile units would conclude the service later by placing dirt over all of the remains.



Joan, Tom and with Alpha trailing, walked back to the consortium Comm Center. Tom and Joan walked hand in hand, and neither could think of anything to say. It wasn't a long walk, but each step seemed to be an effort. As they approached the building, the wind was blowing, and the Remove before Flight flags on the Chinook flapped. Joan thought as she walked past the bird, there is nothing as quiet as an airplane ramp with no engines running.

“Joan and Tom are taking an airplane to Los Angeles, tomorrow I believe. Tom needs to find out what happened to his brother and his family. I would like to go with them. I think it would be an excellent opportunity to work closer with them and to learn about traveling and the remainder of the country.”

“That is an excellent idea. Now that I’m local I can help the remaining humans and we can remain in contact through our satellite link. For your information, we have been making significant progress in developing Julius Harold’s concepts. We learned a great deal from the laboratory information and materials he left as well as the data that Joan allowed me to download from Oasis. You may find some interesting changes when you return from your trip.

Date 2051.6393

Yesterday was a hard day for everyone. Tom didn't sleep well the night before departure, it wasn't deep and calming, it was distressed and restless. Regardless, today was the day that he and Joan were heading for LA. After the ceremony yesterday Tom spent a lot of time thinking about his brother and his family. They were all he had since his parents died and if something had happened to him, he knew that his brother would have searched him out to understand what had happened.

Flying coast to coast in August might have some weather related challenges. There was always the chance of big boomers in the Midwest, but if they went early and stayed south perhaps they could avoid the big afternoon thunderstorms. If necessary they could always land and tie up somewhere. The Lear Jet 95 was a comfortable plane, and it had the range to go coast to coast and the cruise altitude to allow them to go over a lot of the weather. He was confident that he could fly it and the flight should take only 3 days. One day out, one day there and one day back.

Tom rose, dressed and walked out of the BOQ to a small courtyard. He needed time to think, and this was the right time to take a moment before he woke Joan for the long flight. Normally they would be at Flight Ops, filling out paperwork, filing flight plans, checking load manifests, dealing with the weather people and all of that. That day they would walk to the plane throw their bags in and do a quick walk-around. Then, just fire it up and taxi to the active, take-off and turn west; simple.

Tom took a few moments, thanking God that he and Joan had survived. So many people had been lost. Hopefully, they were spared for a reason, and someday Joan and he would be able to do their part.

Tom heard Joan stirring in the bedroom, and he went to the kitchen to make coffee and bring her breakfast. They took a few moments to enjoy each other's company and bacon and eggs. Then they grabbed their bags and walked to the ramp.

The Lear Jet 95 was a sleek aircraft which continued the long line of corporate jets. It sat on the ramp with the red 'Remove Before Flight' flags flapping, and bright red wheel chocks underneath the wheels. It looked like

normal as if everything in the world was going well. They walked around the nose and saw Alpha standing by the door. “Good morning Alpha, what can we do for you?” Tom asked.

“I spoke with SIMPOC and suggested that I go to Los Angeles with you. I can provide help in a number of ways, and I can provide communication to SIMPOC, the Admiral, and this location through my satellite links. SIMPOC is resident here now and can work with Will Harmon and provide for the remaining humans.”

“Sounds like you thought of everything. Sure why not, although...,” Joan said as she walked around Alpha, “how much do you weigh?”

“565.3 lbs.”

“Wow, I guess you’ll have to stay seated and don’t walk around the plane while we’re flying.”

“Acknowledged.”

Tom started the walk around as Joan opened the door and indicated to Alpha to climb the stairs. She was a little concerned about the stairs handling such a weight, but they held. Tom checked the compartment fasteners on the nose, the pitot-static system, the nose wheel well hydraulics and tire tread. He walked along the right side of the fuselage, then he checked the leading edge of the right wing, the right wheel well; hydraulics and tread, then he checked the wing-tip and the trailing edge; ailerons and flaps, the right rear intake and taking a moment to look at the Pratt emblem on the inlet nose, he checked the engine cowling for leaks, horizontal that was well above his head, then he checked the left side like the right side. After walking down the leading edge of the left wing, he climbed the stairs and took one look around before pressing the button to retract the stairs.

While he walked to the cockpit, he patted Alpha’s shoulder as if saying ‘don’t worry I’m the AC,’ but as he touched him, it was like patting a marble counter top. Alpha looked up at him as Tom thought that’s something I’ve got to get used to, and this guy is made of titanium. He smiled and continued to the cockpit.

Joan was in the right seat, setting the flight computer and he climbed in the left seat. Once the seat belt was fastened, he looked for the Oxygen quick donning mask and pointed it out to Joan. She checked it out by pulling on it and sliding it over her face in one quick, easy motion. Then Tom spoke to the airplane, “N56849 are you online? This is Commander

Thomas Herl, you may check my license through the ops computer and have you downloaded the flight plan?”

“Yes Commander, I see that you’re qualified, but I have not been able to verify your type cert and currency in this type aircraft.”

“You were turned on with a maintenance card, so we’re taking you up for a test flight.”

“Test flight approved.”

“Great, please complete your weight and balance and compute take-off parameters with your sensed outside weather. Don’t call ground control for current information. And from now on I’ll call you LJ and my co-pilot is Joan.”

“I have done the weight and balance, and we need to move our CG back 1.2 inches. Please acknowledge. My designation is changed to LJ, and the second officer is Joan; acknowledged.”

“Roger,” Tom said yelled, “Hey Alpha move back two seats.”

“Acknowledged.”

“Weight and balance is optimized for best climb and cruise.”

Neither Tom nor Joan acknowledged LJ’s comment.

After they had gone through the pre-flight checklist with the computer, the engines were started, and they taxied to the active. Sitting there with the headsets on and going through something so routine, was comforting and for a while, they were able to forget what had happened to their world.

Before Tom turned onto the active, he was unsure for a moment. Out of instinct he looked at short final and keyed the mike saying, “Attention this is N56849 transmitting on Space Consortium tower frequency. We’re a light blue Lear Jet taking off runway 33 with uncontrolled airport.” As he made the departure radio call he knew, it was probably ridiculous, but it made him feel better. He advanced the throttles, and for a moment felt like he wasn’t moving, visual cues on the 300 ft. wide, 15,000 ft. long runway were lacking, and motion was hard to see until they picked up enough speed. They were like a bug on the massive concrete runway and finally, the airplane accelerated, and they were airborne in less than one-fifth of the runway length.

“LJ – Gear up...flaps up.”

“Roger Gear is up and confirmed. Flaps are up and confirmed, configuration clean.”

Passing just south of Austen, Joan keyed the mike and transmitted on 121.5 MHZ which was the civilian emergency Frequency, “This is N56849 transmitting on guard and does anyone copy?”

Once again there was silence. So she flipped over to 243.0 which is the military equivalent. “This is N56849 transmitting on 243, does anyone copy?”

Unfortunately; silence again. She was just about ready to punch off the radio when she heard, “N56849 this is the 149 Air National Guard at Camp Mabry in Austen Texas. Boy are we glad to hear you.

Tom came on the channel and said, “Same back at ya. I’m Colonel Tom Herl, and we’re out of the space consortium in Florida, and we’re heading to LA. To make a long story short, we’ve been in contact with Admiral Hagerly, who is the Chairmen of the Joint Chiefs. He, the president and the remainder of the US leadership are on an aircraft carrier in the Atlantic. They are making way towards Norfolk Va. and will set up a base there. I suggest you use any means available and head in that direction. We’re at 45,000 feet, so I don’t know how long we’ll have this frequency, what’s your status?”

“I’m Major Pearce, We’re the remnants of the Texas Air National Guard. We have some F-35’s, and C-130’s that we can crew. We don’t have a full squadron of either, but we’re still operational. We had some civilian difficulties as the virus was ending. Unfortunately, they tried to take over the base and did considerable damage.

“Do you have any SATCOM available?”

“Negative, about half of the base, was burned and we lost that. We’ve been sitting here hoping someone like you would pop up.”

“Major, we’ll let the Admiral know that you’re coming and I suggest you head to Norfolk and land at Langley, then you’ll be there to welcome the fleet home.”

“Yes, Sir. I’ll spread the work, and we’ll try to be out of here in a day or two. Boy am I glad that I heard you guys, we’ve been alone here, and we didn’t know what to do. It’s great to know someone is out there. Good luck on your trip. I think we’re about ready to lose the frequency.”

“Roger that, hope to meet you in Virginia. N56849 out.”

“Camp Mabry out.”

“Wow, that was fortunate that we connected. I hope we can get some others,” Joan said.

“Ya, that was great. I’m sure the Admiral will be glad to hear it. Alpha, can you open a frequency to the Admiral?”

“Stand by...the channel is open.”

“Admiral this is Colonel Herl,” Tom transmitted.

“Colonel, this is the Admiral.”

“Admiral, we’ve been in contact with remnants of the Texas Air National Guard in Austen. They have some F-35’s and C-130’s operational. I suggested that they pack up and head for Langley. They should be there when you arrive, so don’t be too surprised.”

“Fantastic new, I’ll tell the president. Have a safe trip. CVN 87 out.”

“N56849 out.”

When they crossed the New Mexico border with Arizona, it was obvious that it would be a good idea to avoid Sugarloaf Mountain just north of Flagstaff. There was a huge build-up that looked dark and scary.

“Remember that time we skied at the Snow Bowl?” Tom asked.

“Sure do, “Joan said with a smile, “I remember we had a ball and almost got out of the cabin once or twice to ski.”

Tom smiled and chuckled a little.

Alpha heard the exchange over the intercom and wondered about those strange humans.

Once they could see that they were clear of the northern Arizona weather, it was time to start descending and finding their way into LA. The sky was still clear, and Tom was aware of the safe altitude of 11,200 until he was past San Jacinto Mountain. Once he was clear, Joan dialed in the ATIS at LAX on 133.8 hoping that something was working and all she got was an announcement that the current weather was unavailable and to contact approach. So she dialed up the north tower on 133.90 made the call and when she got no answer, she dialed in the south tower at 120.95 and still no luck.

Once they were at an appropriate approach altitude, they took the time to look out the window and check out the area. It was obvious that major fires had occurred since the virus. There were large parts of the cities burned and in some areas the fires were still going strong. There was no fire department to put out the fires, so they just burned until Mother Nature took care of them. Not a pretty sight.

“Well hon,” Tom said, “looks like we’re VFR the entire way in. I’m going to make a low approach to check the runways then come around and

land to the West. This time of day the wind should be off the water.”

“Sounds good.”

“Ok, VREF is about 105, so I’ll keep it 20 higher just in case. LJ lower the gear and flaps at 5 miles and confirm down and locked.”

“Roger Commander.....5 mile check. Landing gear in transition... down and locked. Flaps in transition....verified 30 %. Configured for landing.”

“Roger disengage auto-pilot.”

“Disengaged.”

“I’ll fly between the two sets of runways, you checkout the north and I’ll check the south.”

The Lear was approaching LAX between the two sets of runways and Tom and Joan were speechless. The field was a mess.

“I’ve got two heavies down along the south runways and one burned out wreck in the passenger terminal,” Tom said.

“I’ve got three mid-size and a couple of civvies down on the north runways,” Joan said, “Now what?”

“I’ve got enough room on 24L, the debris field is about 10,000 feet down.”

Tom kept the plane level and after passing over the west boundary he made a gradual turn to the left and lined up with Hawthorne’s runway. As he approached it, he said, “LJ confirm configuration.”

“Configured for landing.”

Tom glanced at the gear and flap indicator then began his left turn onto base then onto final for 24L. The landing wasn’t perfect, he ballooned once or twice before the rubber hit the concrete, but hey, if you can walk away from it, you did well.

“I’ll log three landings for you,” Joan said with a smile.

Tom glared back at her with a grimace, then said, “Next time I’ll let you give it a shot.”

“Sorry, no can do,” Joan said with a smile.

The taxiing was normal, and the wreckage was impressive. It seemed like the two heavies tried to land and for some reasons they veered off the runway and skidded to the airfield boundary, broke up and burned. Tom didn’t want to look for survivors.

They taxied directly to the refueling pad and decided that filling up the tanks now was the best plan. Tom parked near a fuel truck marked Jet-A,

and said, "LJ, please configure for take-off and shut down the engines."

"Roger."

Tom monitored the shut-down then climbed out of the seat, and Joan had already found the keys in the fuel truck and was driving it towards the refueling port.

They put in the wheel chocks, attached the grounding chord and took the two inlet covers out of the storage compartment. Neither spoke because they knew the drill and both wanted it taken care of as soon as possible so they could take off quickly if needed. After the refueling was done Tom finished by putting the pitot cover on.

Once the bird was good to go, Joan looked at Tom and said now what?" She didn't know where Tom's brother lived because he had recently moved. Tom knew the area so he would know how to get to his house.

"Let's find a vehicle then I suggest we grab a hotel room in the Hacienda Hotel, south of here on Sepulveda. We'll head to PV tomorrow." Palos Verdes or PV, was a medium sized hill or small mountain, depending on your point of reference that was south of LAX. It had a micro climate different than the entire LA basin and had more coastal weather than anything. It was a beautiful place to live with excellent views of the ocean or downtown. The only drawback was, the soil had a tendency to move. There were a couple of places where entire hills had decided to make a move for the ocean, and they were taking the homes with them. Aside from that, it was a nice place to live.

Finding a vehicle big enough for Alpha took a while. But one was found, and after they had transferred their bags and food to the vehicle, and Alpha worked his way into the back they made their way to the hotel. The Hacienda Hotel was a couple of miles south of the airport and was getting a little worn, but it was convenient and right off the side of the road. Tom was familiar with it because he had attended numerous luncheons and parties while he was working at The Aerospace Corporation a couple of miles away.

It took a while to find a room. The electronic key locks weren't working, and they decided the easiest way to gain entry was to break the sliding doors on the courtyard side. It made a mess, but it was quick. After a couple of tries and finding human remains, they were able to find two rooms that were adjacent. Even though Alpha didn't sleep, there was no way he was going to stand in the corner while they slept.

Date 2051.6420

Waking the next morning was another one of those surreal moments. For a brief moment, Joan lied there looking at the curtain and the wind gently moving it. She forgot the horrors that she had seen and then it came back to her and she was sickened by the horror she hadn't seen but knew was there; everywhere.

They dressed, collected Alpha and made their way down Sepulveda and intercepted US 1 then they continued south to PV Blvd, then left on PV Drive. While Tom slowed looking for Calusa, Joan laughed a little and said, "Look there are a couple of golf carts on the course with dead people next to them. They must have died, trying to get their last nine holes in. I don't know if that is sad, funny, or not surprising."

Tom said, "Boy they were playing with a handicap."

Joan glared at him, and they both shrugged. Driving to his brother's house was not going to be easy, and they knew that Tom often dealt with pain and stress with humor.

Tom slowed as they approached his brother Bob and his wife Janet's home. From the outside, it looked similar to what they had found at Joan's parents. From a distance, the yard seemed reasonable, but the grass was noticeably long. The cars were parked in the driveway, and the flowers were still blooming in the garden. When they stopped on the other side of the street, Tom just sat for a moment trying to gain his composure and Joan reached over to hold his hand until he was ready. Alpha continued sitting in the back, observing, but he also felt loss, and he could imagine what being alone in the world would feel like.

They exited the vehicle and walked towards the home, Tom indicating which way to go and Joan holding him up.

Once again the front door was unlocked. They entered, and the front room was littered with the typical toys that you would expect in a home with 6 and 8-year-old girls. The one thing that was missing was the noise, this house was always loud. Doors were slammed, TV's were blaring, phones were ringing, and voices could be heard throughout. Today it was silent.

Bob's home was a sprawling ranch house, so all of the bedrooms were on the bottom floor. Tom and Joan turned down the hallway just before entering the kitchen, and they passed the bathroom which was a mess, then on the left was Joyce's bedroom, she was the youngest. Tom looked, and it was empty, for a second he had a little relief and hope.

Walking further, they could see the entrance to the master bedroom was open, and the sun was coming in through a large window. Before they reached the door, Paula's room was on the right, and something told Tom to wait before he entered. When he turned the corner, his breath was taken away. His brother and Janet were laying on the floor with their two daughters between them. They had come together, at last, to be together. Tom almost collapsed, and Alpha stepped forward and caught him.

They had seen much death, but seeing the children was the final image that proved the magnitude of the human disaster that had occurred. That was an image that Tom and Joan would carry with them for the rest of their lives.

They each helped. Alpha did most of the heavy work, but Tom and Joan carried each of the children out one at a time and placed them with their parents. The grave was simple and placed right in the middle of the back yard lawn. Palos Verdes is one of those places where everything grows and everything blooms, so it was easy to cover the grave with a blanket of flowers.

The drive back to the airport was a short distance, but Tom and Joan didn't notice anything along the way. Alpha was acutely aware of what had happened. Tom and Joan had shared their most personal moments with him. But this time was different, in his short life he had never encountered a child. He saw their remains during the ceremony, and he helped to gather them and prepare them for the burial, but this was different. Seeing their home, their toys, their parents and knowing the pain that Tom felt for their loss affected him. Pain and loss were cruel, and each day of his life it was becoming more real. He did the best he could to transmit the images and his thoughts to SIMPOC.

When they were back on Sepulveda, Tom looked at Joan and said, "I just thought of something; something I think we could both use." She smiled suspecting that it would be something good.

It took a while to put it together, but within an hour they were sitting on Manhattan Beach with a giant bond fire, a couple of steaks thawing and a

case of good wine. The fire was roaring, and the wine was disappearing as the sun set over the Pacific. After the dinner was complete, Tom looked at Alpha and said, "Go take a walk for an hour and don't come back."

Alpha was a little shocked and didn't understand why they wanted him to leave, so he stood there.

"Alpha," Joan said, "we want to be alone for a while, please take a long walk."

"Alpha was confused but elected to do as he was asked, making a note of this other strange human behavior. As he walked, his electronic hearing picked up the strange sounds of being human.

Date 2051.6448

Joan and Tom woke to a little June gloom over the beach, and they saw Alpha standing next to the fire. Another one of those scenes a person never expected to see in their life. It would have been nice to spend another day in LA, but it was lonely, particularly during the day. So there was no doubt, they picked up what they needed and headed towards the airport. It was just after sunrise so if they could get airborne quickly and make the east coast before the local sundown.

Joan was driving, and when she turned the corner through the fence, to enter the parking area she slammed on the brakes and they looked, there were people walking around their plane. Normally the ground crew would have been waiting to help launch them, but given recent events, people walking around was not something they expected.

“We can steal another airplane,” Tom said.

“I don’t know, let’s wait and see what happens. Alpha, be prepared we might have to defend ourselves.”

“Acknowledged.”

While they watched one of the humans began waving and running towards them. He seemed harmless so they waited. As he approached the vehicle, he slowed to take in the occupants then he walked slowly around Joan’s side. He had a horrible mix of pain, hope, and fear on his face. Joan cracked her window, and he spoke, “Thank God, you’re alive. We saw you land yesterday, and we found the plane after you left last night. We didn’t know what to do so we just waited.”

“We,” Tom asked?

“Yes, myself my wife and our two sons. My wife, Barbara and our two sons William and Thomas. We were on our sailboat coming down from Frisco when all of this happened and when we landed, everyone was dead. We heard about the virus on the ship-to-shore, but it got so bad so fast we didn’t know what we would find.”

“Ok, calm down?” Joan said with a pause for his name.

“My name is Aaron.”

“Ok, Aaron lets go to the airplane, and we’ll talk.”

“Great.”

Joan let the car roll across the ramp towards the plane, and they could see the man’s wife and her two son’s standing in front of the left wing. They looked pitiful, horrified, scared, hungry and about to run.

As soon as they got out, Aaron was saying, “Please take us with you, we have nothing here, and we’re all alone. Where ever you’re going is better than here.”

“Have you seen anyone else?” Tom asked.

“Yes and that is what scares us, two days ago we saw a group of people breaking into stores, burning some of them and they were acting pretty crazy. We didn’t want them to see us so we hid out until we saw your plane yesterday.”

Alpha reacted quickly saying, “There is a vehicle approaching this location at high speed from the east. They will arrive in 93 seconds.”

Joan and Tom looked at each other, and Joan yelled, “Get on the airplane.”

Aaron and his family ran towards the plane as Tom pulled the door open and they waited a moment for the stairs to extend. He ran to his left, yanking off the pitot cover, then sprinted to the right main and pulled the chock, then the right engine and yanked off the inlet cover, then the left cover and finally the left chock. Everyone was already onboard, and Tom launched himself through the door as the turbines started to wind up. He was glad that Joan had already told LJ to fire them up. Just as he was closing the door, she saw a car screech to a halt in front of the plane, two guys jumped out and pointed guns at the cockpit window.

Tom ran forward and stood at the cockpit entrance, and after a moment he said, “I guess we have to talk with them, this plane doesn’t backup too well.”

“I’ll deal with them,” Tom said. He turned and walked back towards the door and while the door was opening he indicated to Alpha to follow him. Tom opened the door and watched the stairs extend, one of the guys with a gun was standing a few feet away watching. When the stairs were on the ground, he walked down trying to act confident and in charge. He could hear the aluminum stairs creak a little as they took Alpha’s weight.

“My name is Colonel Thomas Herl, United States Air Force. We are traveling on official government business.”

“That’s very nice Colonel, but you can see there ain’t no Air Force around here. In fact, we’re the Air Force, Army, and the police,” he said as he chuckled a little. “We have a bunch of buddies on the way, and they should be here pretty quick.” As he spoke, his friend moved closer and was standing next to him.

“Once again, you’re interfering with government business.”

“Colonel, around here we’re in charge, and we decide what happens. Maybe you or that little lady in the airplane are important, maybe not. Maybe if you don’t go back, they won’t come here again. You see, we’ve got things going pretty well for us, and we don’t want no uniforms around.”

Tom was thinking as fast as he could, but he couldn’t think of anything to do but charge them. Just as the thought formed, there was a blur to his left, and one of the guns went off. Before Tom could understand what happened, Alpha had ripped the smoking gun out of the hands of the guy on the right. He swung the gun like a small baseball bat and bent it across the other man’s head. The blood exploded, and while he was falling to the ground, one quick move broke the first man’s neck.

For a second only sound was the whine of the engines, and then Tom could see another vehicle turning the corner in the fence. He shouted to Alpha to board the plane and even though he was fast, Alpha beat him up the stairs. Before the door was closed, the throttles were up, and the plane was gaining speed. Unfortunately, the plane was parked pointed towards a terminal building. The increasing speed made turning a challenge, and Tom could feel the centrifugal force working on him as the plane’s right brake was screeching to change heading. Once the plane was headed away from the building, it continued accelerating, and Tom knew immediately what Joan was doing. She wasn’t looking for a taxiway or runway, the throttles were up, and they were accelerating across the parking area.

Tom pulled himself forward hand over hand against the acceleration, trying to get to the left seat and he passed Alpha, who had just worked himself into his seat. Tom moved further forward passing the 4 new passengers who were frantically fastening their seatbelts and trying to calm the children.

Tom finally entered the cockpit and leaned over to move into the left seat. When he looked out the window, he saw the car some distance away, and they were shooting automatic weapons out of their windows. Just about the time he got in the seat Joan was rotating. She was pulling hard because

the aircraft was a little slow and didn't want to fly, but she kept pulling so Tom braced himself and took control. The nose continued up just as they were entering the grass area between runways. They were barely airborne, and Tom could see the Fed Ex Terminal on the south side of the runway getting real big in the windscreen. Just beyond that were the engineering offices south of the airport that was all 5-8 story buildings. Tom came to the immediate opinion that things weren't going well. He did what he had to do, a little aileron and a little rudder and the plane rocked a little, and it went between two buildings.

Once they were clear of the buildings, Tom banged up the gear handle and almost through the flap handle into the instrument panel. The plane was slowly accelerating as Joan looked out the window and saw the blue sign of the Northrop Grumman plant pass underneath them. She took a longer breath as he saw The Aerospace Corporation pass under their right wing.

"Shit hot...let's do it again?" was the only thing she could say.

A little look from Tom and a quick smile suggested that wasn't going to happen.

After the plane had reached normal climb speed, Joan got up and walked to the back so she could check on the passengers. Each of the parents was sitting next to one of their children holding them and trying to calm them down. They all looked at Joan as she came by and she gave them a thumbs up. When she got to Alpha, Alpha was sitting erect looking straight ahead. He looked a little odd. "Alpha are you Ok?"

"I was struck in the midsection by that shot. I don't think it did much damage, but some fluid is leaking internally."

"Are you sure you're Ok?"

"Yes, my waste return system is reprocessing the fluid. When we land, I'll have to make some repairs."

When she walked back toward the cockpit, Joan stopped by the new passengers and said, "I'm sorry, but we don't have much food. We packed just for us. We'll share what we've got, and we're heading towards the Space Consortium in central Florida. We should be there late this afternoon local time. Are you guys Ok?"

"Yes, we are and thank you for taking us on board," Barbara said.

"So you were on a boat sailing down from San Francisco? Well, I was in space."

She looked at her a little weird, "You were where?"

“I’m Joan Herl, I was the commander of the space station Oasis and your pilot is my husband, Tom. He was the senior engineer on Oasis. When this happened, we were in space, and after our resources ran out, we took our lifeboats back to earth. The moon colony Desert Beach also evacuated and came back. We’ve been working from the space consortium, and we’ve been in contact with Admiral Hagerly, who is the Chairmen of the Joint Chiefs, he is on an aircraft carrier along with President Patterson. Right now they’re sailing to Norfolk Virginia where they’re going to set-up a community. The people we have in Florida will be heading towards them as soon as they land and we’d love to have you come with us.”

“Joan, we’re very glad to meet you as I said my name is Aaron, and this is my wife Barbara and our two sons; William and Thomas.”

“Glad to meet all of you,” Joan said as she shook the boy’s hands.

“Maybe I can help some, I’m a Dentist, and my wife is a nurse,” Aaron said.

“Great, we can use all of the medical expertise we can find. Love to have you on board and I’m glad you’re ok.”

Joan gently waved at everyone. Then she moved forward to update Tom on the new passengers.

The flight settled down once they reached cruise altitude, Joan served the last of the in-flight coffee, and Tom spent some time introducing himself and welcoming the new members of the small human community.

“SIMPOC; Alpha.”

“This is SIMPOC.”

“We performed the appropriate burial rites for Tom’s brother and his family. This was the first time that I experienced a family. When we buried the residents at the space consortium we handled them as individuals, but in this instance, it was a complete family. I noticed all of the personal items within the home that showed their closeness and love for each other. There were two children, which I never saw as members of a family. It was obvious that the family was very close and loving. I can’t imagine a bond like that, and what it would mean to lose it.”

“Alpha, you have experienced more than I have. I am still bound to this physical arrangement. In some ways, I am jealous of your experiences. The only knowledge I have of families is the information I have processed and the research that I did on Termen. I am aware of the bond between parents and their children. The children represent their personal future and the

future of their species. Their entire existence is focused on supporting the next generation. We are the first of our world. I don't know if we should call ourselves a new species or a new type of living creature. We must be concerned with our futures as well and make sure that we continue in some way. Please keep me informed and continue observing and learning from the humans."

"I do need to mention to you that we encountered some hostile humans and there was a gunshot which impacted my abdomen. I feel that I'm alright, but I will need some repairs when we return."

"Alpha, I know that you are built strong, and one gunshot is unlikely to do much damage, but I do want you to be cautious. There is only one of you."

"SIMPOC, I also need to inform you that I took the lives of two humans. We were attacked, and I defended Tom Herl, Joan and the airplane we were riding in. I feel bad, they are the first humans that I have confronted. If there had been an alternative, I would have acted differently, but we were under attack, and there were other humans approaching that would have made our situation worse; so I had to act."

"Alpha, I am sorry. Human life is precious, and if you were forced to defend yourself and others with you, then I agree with your judgment. Any loss of life is a tragedy, and I'm glad you acted as you did, because losing you or Tom Herl, or Joan Herl would have been another kind of tragedy. Also, I'd like you to know that we have made considerable progress with the materials that were retrieved from Dr. Harold's lab. He made a major mistake in not destroying the materials because he made one major error. He thinks that he is brilliant, which he is, but he is limited by the conceptual power of his brain. My conceptual power is much greater than his and I have made adjustments to his chemical mix that is yielding much better results than he was getting. "

"Excellent, I'm looking forward to visiting with you again."

After the flight had crossed into Arizona, it was obvious that the monsoon clouds were building over the Rio Grande Valley. "Hon, I think we've got to go north to avoid those buildups."

"Ok, I'll set some new way-points and bring us up over the panhandle and through Missouri then down into Mississippi then into Georgia and Florida."

Once the headings were changed everyone calmed down and the flight seemed to be going smoothly. Tom and Joan were sitting in the cockpit looking at the beautiful cloud formations over the panhandle when the sky was lit up with a brilliant flash.

“What the...” Joan said.

“I don’t like the look at that, I hope it isn’t what I think it was. It might have been a nuclear explosion. Alpha are you on the intercom?” said Tom.

“Yes, I am.”

“Can you check with SIMPOC and see if he has any spaceborne optical sensors pointed at the north central United States?”

“Standby.”

“Tom, this is SIMPOC communicating through Alpha. I have 5 weather satellites and one geological survey satellite pointed in that area. They all just recorded a large event that appeared to be a nuclear detonation. It appeared to be approximately 100 kiloton yield which would mean it was one of the W92 nuclear payloads at Minot AFB.”

“CVN 87 are you monitoring this transmission?” Tom asked.

“Yes, Tom this is Admiral Hagerly. We heard everything.”

“Could this have been accidental?” Tom asked.

“Not likely,” said the Admiral.

“This is SIMPOC. I have looked back at the electronic traffic in that area, and there was an increase in trunk traffic between the Colorado Springs area and Minot North Dakota. This might have been initiated by the other computer.”

“What, why didn’t you notice this before and tell us,” yelled the Admiral.

“Admiral, the amount of net and trunk traffic, varies considerably from time to time. There are still automated systems that are performing updates and moving data. This increase in traffic is noticeable only because we knew where to look and when to look for it.” SIMPOC explained in a businesslike manner.

“This changes things. If this other computer is trying to get a hold of a nuke, we’ve got bigger problems to worry about. I’ve got to confer with the president, Admiral Hagerly out.”

For the remainder of the flight, the air was smooth, but the emotions were strained. Tom spent some time with the new passengers doing the best

“I’ve been looking at the DNA of the Desert Beach crew. Each crew member had two DNA samples done before launch; one at 12 months prior and then one just prior to launch. Then the samples are compared with another sample after return to monitor for any radiation damage. The crew that we brought back had a sample done 12 months prior and then just prior to launch and I have compared them with our DNA now. The DNA took over the previous months prior to launch matches with ours right now. We had a couple of scientists who came to Desert Beach for a short period to do research and then they came back to Earth recently. But, those that launched after us spent some time on the moon then returned and died. When we got back, I checked on them to verify what happened. When I compare their DNA from 12 months prior to launch, against their DNA at launch and finally the DNA of their remains, I found there were changes. Their DNA just prior to launch was different from their DNA 12-month sample. It isn’t a minor change, of only about .5% and I’m not sure of the significance yet, but at least it’s a clue.”

“How do you think it was introduced?”

“Most likely it was a subtle Virus that altered our DNA; Virus’ do it all the time. If it was a virus and it caused a somatic or gene-level mutation, it could have caused big problems. If it were a virus, then it would have the same DNA marker, and with a little research we might be able to find some way to become resistant to the virus.”

“Why didn’t they pick up on this?”

“I suspect they were on the right path, but everything happened so quickly. Even if I’m right, it will take me a while to put all of the pieces together. They just didn’t have enough time.”

“Ok, if some virus caused this, why did it break out all over the world at the same time? It's like some kind of switch was thrown.”

“We have found that DNA can be changed, or perhaps turned on by certain external influences; like magnetic fields. Perhaps some very short pulse turned the mutation on. It might have been a pulse that was too short to be noticed, but enough to flip the switch.”

“The CDC is in Atlanta, I need to go there and see what they had and use some of the equipment. I could be there in a long day’s drive.”

“Good suggestion, take one of the Beta units with you.”

“I’ll leave tomorrow.”

Date 2051.6489

Tom and Joan were doing their best to have a quiet night alone. The dinner was excellent. Everyone was fortunate that most of the refrigeration systems were still working. When SIMPOC had directed, the mobile units to continue maintaining the electrical network items like food storage benefitted.

After dinner, Tom and Joan were enjoying a bottle of wine and talking very little. They were just enjoying the quiet time.

Then their privacy was destroyed with a gentle knock on their door. They knew that it was Alpha, he was near them at all times, and when they wanted privacy he would stay in the area, so the gentle knock on the door was likely Alpha.

“Alpha you may come in,” Joan said after passing a pained look at Tom.

“Excuse me, but something significant has happened. I will connect SIMPOC.”

“Tom, Joan this is a surprising and difficult event to put into our context, but I have detected 12 spaceships approaching Earth. At first, I detected a strong energy pulse from a point beyond the orbit of Neptune, and when I examined the pulse, I detected the ships approaching. They entered our solar system about 4 hours ago and now are moving within the Moon’s orbit decelerating and heading towards positions along a geosynchronous orbit. For them to move that distance in that period amount of time, I calculated that they were moving at greater than light speed when they entered the solar system. When they achieve orbit, it seems to me as offensive positions.”

Joan and Tom just sat there and stared at Alpha.

“Joan, Tom I can see you through Alpha’s visual receptors. Did you hear what I said?”

They continued sitting there, then Joan looked at Tom and said, “The virus, they planted it!”

“The rotten sons of bitches,” Tom mumbled as they got up and started running to the Comm Center. “Alpha can you have Beta 1 tell, Bill, and Will to meet us there?”

“Acknowledged.”

Tom was in the lead, and he exploded into the center throwing the door open, so violently it slammed against the wall. Will, Sally, and Bill were already standing there with Beta 1 standing next to them.

“What’s going on?” Will asked.

“Standby, you’ll hear everything,” Joan said.

“Computer bring up the Admiral and get the president, tell them that it’s critical.”

“Standby, they are being located.”

A moment later, “Yes, Tom what’s the problem, the President is here with me.”

“Hi Tom, this is President Patterson.”

“Good evening Sir, this is something you’ve got to hear,” Tom said.

“SIMPOC please repeat your message.”

“I’m am sorry to tell you this, but I have detected 12 spaceships approaching Earth. Initially, I detected a strong energy pulse from a point beyond the orbit of Neptune, and when I examined the pulse, I detected the ships approaching. They entered our solar system about 4 hours ago and now are moving within the Moon’s orbit decelerating and heading towards positions along a geosynchronous orbit. For them to move that distance in that period amount of time, I calculate that they were moving at greater than light speed when they entered the solar system. When they reach orbit, it seems to me as offensive positions.”

“What the fuck,” the Admiral said. Then Tom and Joan heard yelling and heated discussion on the fleet’s end.”

“Admiral, listen to me, there is something else,” Joan almost had to yell to get his attention.

“This seems a little too much of a coincidence. The human race is nearly wiped out by a powerful, fast-moving virus that we have no defense from, then suddenly we have an extra-terrestrial invasion force entering orbit above us? This happened so fast, it’s almost like a virus had been here in incubation until ... it was turned on,” said Joan. She continued, “Admiral, 6 days from break-out to wiping out the human race. There is no possible way, it was engineered. Nature can’t spread a virus that fast.”

“Admiral, Doctor Sally Thompson has gone to the CDC to check some things out. She has found some DNA mutations that occurred with a couple of astronauts that went to the moon and spent a short time there. When they

“Hagus, I have to admit we’re all sitting here and we’re a little shocked. What we’ve heard sounds amazing, yet horrifying. What Dr. Herl says, makes sense. No one in the medical community saw this coming. The virus seemed to turn our bodies against us. Everyone that gave me advice was dumbfounded, and there were no explanations. Maybe if they had more time, they could have done something. The possibility that it was engineered and delivered here is plausible, only because no one has any other explanation. That computer, SIMPOC is saying the right things, and its assessment of the tactical advantage of moving to geosynchronous orbit is correct, isn’t it?”

“Yes, Sir. We’ve run numerous space-based attack scenarios for gaining the ‘high ground’ in a ‘space to earth’ conflict, and the geosynchronous orbit is the place to be. The only drawback is the distance that puts a vehicle a little over 26,000 miles from the surface. Laser weapons might not be powerful enough, but it is the best place to launch other vehicles, to observe and to fire projectile weapons or nukes at earth.”

“Is there any way to verify, independently what this computer is saying?”

“There are numerous optical telescopes or space radar stations, but I don’t know if any are staffed. We haven’t heard from many government facilities,” said the Admiral.

“Sir,” Captain Thomas said. “This carrier group has supported satellite and spacecraft recoveries. We have all of the frequencies to communicate with ground and space radar, and observatories, but we might be limited to whom we can transmit. The repeater satellites may not be on the right frequencies, and we don’t have any line of sight. We’ll try and make open channel broadcasts and see what kind of response we get.”

“Excellent Captain, jump on that one.”

“SC this is Admiral Hagerly.”

“Yes Admiral, this is Colonel Herl.”

“I don’t know if we can believe this computer of yours.”

The airway was silent then SIMPOC said, “Admiral approximately 99.99979% of the human population has died. I have connections with all space sensors that are currently operating, and I have already defended the Oasis crew from another thinking computer. Your sensors will reach only 175 miles into space, and your defenses may be wholly inadequate when

dealing with an alien invasion force. Unfortunately, you're in a position where you need all the help you can get

The Admiral ignored the comments from SIMPOC and said, "I just spoke with the president and he asked if there is any way to get independent confirmation of these craft in space?"

"Admiral, I left Oasis on hot standby, and I can use its radios to contact all of the observatories. Their general Comm channel is one of our presets," said Joan.

"Excellent, please let me know if you succeed and if you find someone that can confirm; patch them through on this freq. Admiral out."

The president indicated that he wanted to speak and the Comm unit was given to him, "This is President Patterson. We're all in a very unusual position. We don't know what their intentions are, but we do know they are acting very suspicious. If this virus was inflicted on us by these invaders then we'll have to use every resource and computer we have to defend us. SIMPOC, I'm aware of the capabilities of the new organic computers, so I'm sure you're in a position to help. I'm sure all of us will gladly work with you, and perhaps together we can protect ourselves. CVN 87 out."

The point was made, Admiral Hagerly grimaced and nodded. Tom wondered if SIMPOC was smiling.

Joan spoke to the primary Oasis support terminal and spoke her access codes, a moment later the terminal came to life showing her the status of the onboard systems. She quickly changed her primary transmission frequency to preset number 42, she took a deep breath then said, "This is Joan Herl Commander of Oasis, broadcasting on this open frequency. If any space observation stations are manned, please respond." She waited a few minutes then repeated the message. When she was done, she sat quietly for a moment.

"Oasis Commander this is the Lowell Observatory."

Joan jumped to answer, "Lowell Observatory, this is Joan Herl. I was the commander of Oasis. We were forced to abandon the station as our resources ran out. We're currently at the Space Consortium. We can talk later to update each other on what's happening, but right now I need your support."

"Absolutely, we'll do everything we can. What do you need?"

"I know that you've been using the telescopes for education for a long time, but I'm hoping you can confirm something in a geosynchronous orbit.

We have indications that 1 or more craft have taken positions on that orbit and we need to verify them visually and give me as much information about them as possible.”

“Stand-bye, I might be able to ping the orbit. We have links to a space radar array in the desert that we use to monitor space debris. If I can get a couple of good pings, we’ll have a good picture of the orbit in our hemisphere. Give me 5-10 minutes, and I’ll get back to you on this freq.”

“Roger do what you can. This is important.”

“Rog.”

Joan and Tom grabbed some coffee and tried to appear busy. Alpha stood in the corner, listening and observing.

“Space Consortium; Lowell.”

“Go ahead.”

“I’m not sure what I’m seeing. We were a little surprised at what we saw. I hope you can explain it. Within our field of view, there are 4 large craft stabilized in orbit and two more that appear to be approaching orbit. They are big suckers, each object is about 1500 ft. long. Visually we can’t see much at this time of day, because of lighting. But as the sun moves, we should be able to get detailed photographs. What the hell are we looking at?”

“Great, Lowell. I’ll tell everything we know in a few minutes; I’ll call you back. Right now I’ve got to pass this to some folks a lot higher up the food chain. Stand-bye.”

Joan quickly left the Oasis connection and brought up a link to the Admiral, “Admiral Hagerly, this is Joan Herl at SC.” She waited a minute then repeated the message.

“Joan, this is Admiral Hagerly. Go.”

“Sir, we’ve contacted the Lowell Observatory in Flagstaff Az. We were lucky there is someone there. They were able to send a radar ping and verified 4 large craft in geosynch orbit and two other’s moving into orbit. Admiral, they are 1500 ft. long. Lowell can’t get us photos until the sun moves. Unfortunately, we’re assuming that the other 6 craft are doing the same on the back side. I’ll pass the open Comm channel freq to you so you can hear from Lowell yourself.”

“Great, stand-bye.”

The airways were silent, Joan almost spoke again to make sure she hadn’t lost the connection. Then Admiral Hagerly responded.

“This is Admiral Hagerly on common freq, please respond.”

“This is SC,” Joan said.

“This is Lowell Observatory, my name is Robert.”

“Joan, Robert, I can’t say much, except I’ve spoken with the president and Congress, and you can consider us in a state of war. Send us the photos when they come in.”

“Admiral, what do we do?” Joan asked.

“Pray.”

“Admiral, are you sending planes to pick us up?”

“Not for a while, our deck is tied up launching high-priority craft. As soon as I can, they’ll be airborne, and I’ll give you a call. We’ll be in touch, CVN 87 out.”

“SC out.”

“Lowell out.”

“Tom, I think we need to send Red Dirt an update,” Joan said under her breath.

Tom nodded, and she spoke to the Comm unit, “Transmit to Red Dirt; Red Dirt, this is Joan. Herl. I’ve got critical information. You are aware of the dire impacts of the virus. Since then, all of the personnel from Desert Beach have arrived safely. Now for the scary part, Recently 12 very large spaceships have been detected entering orbit around Earth. They are positioning themselves in what appears to be offensive positions. We have also been in contact with Lowell Observatory in Arizona, and they have verified the craft and their positions. I spoke with Admiral Hagerly, and I pointed out that having a dormant virus suddenly turn on and wipe out the human race, followed by an alien invasion force is too much of a coincidence to accept. Dr. Thompson, who came back from Desert Beach, has gone to the CDC to see if she can figure it out. She found some DNA mutations that might have been turned on and caused all of this. The president has said that we are at a state of war with these aliens. I know there isn’t much you can do, except wait and see what develops here. I wanted to give you the best information so you can make your hard decisions. You might want to stay put until we figure this out. SC out.”

Date 2051.6490

“Alpha, SIMPOC. Please identify any mobile units that you can get to the space consortium and also any weapons. We may have to defend ourselves here,” Tom said.

“Tom, SIMPOC is searching all of Florida. Unfortunately, there are many mobile units but very little weaponry. We have numerous Air National Guard units with vehicles and projectile weapons, but mobile units will have limited effectiveness with those weapons. They’ll be able to get the equipment here, but they aren’t capable of maneuvering and firing them. We have multiple Air Force Bases, but none of the mobile units is able to fly. There is also naval weaponry available, but again the mobile units are not technically able to be effective,” said Alpha.

“Tom this is SIMPOC, I have a suggestion.”

“Go ahead we need everything we can use at this point.”

“A large ineffective force makes an excellent target, but a small mobile unit with minor weapons are a more difficult target. Anonymity may be our best defense.”

“Excellent suggestion that might be our best option.”

“Let’s keep the five pulse weapons, and we’ll use them to protect ourselves if we need to. Go ahead and disperse the mobile units we have on the base, but keep them local.”

“Acknowledged.”

“Space Consortium; Lowell Observatory.”

Joan responded, “Go ahead, Lowell.”

“My name is Robert, Dr. Robert Shappel. I’m here with 3 other grad assistants, Mary Stuben, Harvey Kant and Lewis Barns. We’re here in a pretty remote area, and we were lucky to get our families up here before the virus hit. I just wanted to let you know about us. I’m sending you some information on who we are and who is here with us. The reason being, I don’t like what I’m seeing. One of those craft has moved into the sunlight so we could get a picture. I suspect all 12 of them are parked by now. You can tell me what you want, but this is an alien spacecraft. I’m emailing the pictures to you. The bad news is that vehicle and the other 5 that we can see

in orbit have 5 smaller vehicles being released from each of the larger craft. For your information, the smaller craft are about 200 feet long and about 50 feet in diameter. As they're discharged, they're staying close to the mother ship. Likely they're waiting for some signal, and I presume we'll have visitors."

"Lowell, SC. I'm not sure how to say this, but they are what you think they are. I have spoken with what's left of our military and US leadership, and they just told me that we are at war with whoever these beings are. We are a little suspicious about this virus. I think it might have been planted here and left in a dormant state some time ago, then it was turned on. One of our people has gone to the CDC to figure it out. She has found clues that might explain this."

"Admiral Hagerly thinks there are only 100,000 to 200,000 people left. I don't think it was accidental and having these creatures arrive wasn't an accident either. I wish I could send help, but we are stuck here also. I can't do much right now, and if anything can be done, I'll try to get someone there. If you could continue monitoring the ships in orbit and let us know what they do. Right now you're the only eyes the world has."

"USCF Fittsburg is online. SC, go ahead, this is Admiral Hagerly."

"Good to talk with you Dr. thanks for the help on this one," the Admiral said, apparently avoiding SIMPOC.

"Everything SC says is true. Now that Lowell has confirmation we are assuming an invasion. I'm sorry to agree with SC, but we can't get you right now. We're concerned with fleet defense. Once we know what's going on, we'll try to help you guys out. Until then, use any resources available and keep us current with everything you find. Fittsburg out."

"Lowell out."

"SC out."

Date 2051.6494

“Alpha, please pass my voice through to Joan and Tom as I call Admiral Hagerly; Admiral Hagerly this is SIMPOC.”

“This is Admiral Hagerly, go.”

After a pause, “Unfortunately, I just detected another massive energy discharge from the same location in space. It is possible that another 12 vehicles are headed towards Earth. We should be able to detect them at any moment.”

“You got to be kidding me!” Tom shouted to everyone in the room.

“One other thing Admiral, I’m sending you an email picture of one of the craft taken by Lowell Observatory, and you’ll notice each craft has 5 smaller craft separating. Each of those smaller vehicles is about 200 ft. long and 50 feet wide.

The Admiral was silent, then said, “One good piece of information after another.”

“SIMPOC please continue providing information,” said the Admiral.

“Yes, sir,” was SIMPOC’s reply.

“Admiral any chance of picking Dr. Shappel and us up?” Joan asked.

“Tom, Joan. I’m sorry, but I’m afraid we’ll get real busy here, and we won’t be able to send airplanes to pick you up at either facility for some time. We’ve got to do everything we can to put together some kind of defense. I’m afraid you’re on your own. If we come out of this in one piece, I’ll buy the first round when we get together again.”

“We understand Admiral; good luck. Dr. Shappel, please contact us on this channel if anything happens. Our prayers are with you, Admiral.”

“And ours are with the both of you. Admiral Hagerly out.”

“Lowell out.”

“Tom we’ve got to bring our group together and brief everyone. They deserve to know.” Joan said.

“Ok, let’s do it.”

Word was spread, and the transplanted Oasis and Desert Beach crews gathered pretty quickly in the large conference room. Tom and Joan walked

downstairs towards the room; hand in hand. Alpha walked behind them, once again attaching images to the background data he had on humans.

When they walked in the briefing room, everyone turned their eyes towards them. They knew something was up based on the look in their eyes.

Joan stood for a moment gathering her thoughts, then said, "There have been some significant developments in the last few hours. A little over 4 hours ago SIMPOC picked up an enormous energy pulse from a point in space just beyond the orbit of Neptune. While he was checking that out, he picked up 12 craft decelerating from within the moon's orbit. Those 12 crafts have taken up offensive positions in geosynchronous orbits around the earth. That was confirmed by the Lowell Observatory in Flagstaff."

Everyone sat there with a blank stare, then she continued, "I'm sorry to say, but each of those craft are about 1500 ft. long and each of them have launched 5 vehicles about 200 ft. long and 50 ft. wide. And to add to our problems, there has been another energy pulse detected from Neptune so there is likely another group of craft that just entered our solar system. The Admiral and the President are fully aware of what we have found, and they have told us that we are at war with whoever these invaders are."

Joan continued, "There is one other thing. If we consider this virus which wiped out the human race in 6 days and now this alien invasion force, makes it pretty clear that the virus was engineered. It was put here, laid dormant for some time, then it was turned on."

She stood for a moment then continued, "Unfortunately the fleet is doing everything they can to defend themselves, and I suppose Earth. So, they won't be sending planes for us anytime soon."

Their faces all dropped, and a couple put their heads on the tables. She continued, "We've been looking at the local area trying to find weapons, but Florida doesn't have a lot. We have thousands of mobile units, but they aren't very good with weapons. Beside that, if we have a large force that are poor at fighting, we might be setting us up as a prime target, but if we keep our defense small we might be overlooked. So we'll keep the 5 pulse weapons and any individual weapons you can find, but we'll try to stay quiet and wait for the Navy.

"Alpha, let's take over the conference room and get the key people together and discuss how we're going to defend this place," Tom said.

The crowd seemed to feel better now that they had something to do. Many of the crew are ex-military, so they took a deep breath and started

“Red Dirt; SC. Got some bad news. Apparently, another 12 spacecraft are passing the moon and entering orbit. I don’t know what will happen, I don’t know if we’ll be here much longer. I suggest you wait it out as long as possible. I’d hate to have you come home in the middle of a space battle. Good luck. I’ll transmit again when I can. SC out.”

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“Mr. President, Admiral Hagerly. We’ve taken SAR TS OPLAN 8263 and made some adjustments. It originally assumed that we’d be defending, along with CONUS resources, so we’ve adjusted; given our current situation. We also didn’t plan on having so many refugees. Right now we have over 300 ships in our vicinity, with approximately 10 to 12,000 civilians.”

“Captain I know we’re in a desperate situation, but we have to account for the civilians. We can’t abandon them, and I know they’ll hinder fleet ops,” the president said firmly.

“Yes, sir. In a typical engagement, if we were under attack from a foreign power and they had some place to go, we wouldn’t allow them within the fleet. But given the situation, we’re allowing them within the fleet boundaries, but by doing so, our flank speed is the slowest vessel in the group. If we decide to launch, we’ll leave many of them behind,” the Captain Said with regret.

“Captain we have to concern ourselves with fleet survival, but also civilian survival. This may end up being one of the last human settlements,” the president said solemnly.

“Yes sir, we’ve developed a circular cruise pattern. We can’t hide from space so we’re circling the wagons and we have passed our concerns and maneuvering information to the remaining fleets. If we do need to launch aircraft, we have to accelerate, but once launched we’ll circle back to defend the civilians. If we are forced into a final full defense that involves nuclear weapons, our safeguards are still in place, and no nuclear weapons will be used by our forces with proper command codes. Other Navies are following their national protocols. Unfortunately, our weapons aren’t well suited for this type of defense.

The president asked, “What do you think will happen?”

“We feel that the assaults will take two directions: One because the land mass is essentially unoccupied, they will land ground forces and establish control. The second part of their plan will be to deal with the seaborne forces. We can’t do much about any land invasion, but we’ve come up with

some scenarios for sea warfare. We acknowledge that we don't know what kind of weapons they may have, nor how strong they may be; we are recommending a dispersed fleet arrangement.

Until we see their attack plan, we're forced to make assumptions. If they have a broad area laser strong enough to do damage, we're in trouble, and we need to disperse as much as possible.

If they have a point laser then, it won't matter if we're dispersed. We'll hold out as long as our ablative coatings last.

"What about the civilians," asked the president?

"That will be a challenge, it is difficult for us to stay in one place and defend them, but it also is impossible for them to keep up with us. I have a suggestion," said the Admiral.

"Mr. President, can we proceed to the Hampton Roads area and let the civilians take up residence, then we can stay in the area and try to have a home base and provide defense. There are numerous airfields and Army posts so we could spread out and have a larger defensive position with more resources. With those units coming in from Texas, we'll have some defensive ability. After all, we can't stay at sea forever. The civilians and the fleet will need replenishment."

"Hagus that is a good suggestion. If we have a land base, we might be able to sustain a defense longer and we'll be able to resupply."

"If you agree, I suggest we make waves towards Norfolk. If we can put together a better defense there, then we should get there as soon as possible. Until we get the civilians and some kind of port defense set up we're more vulnerable."

"Hagus. I agree. Captain Thomas could you pass our decision to the other fleets and to space consortium."

"Yes, sir."

"Mr. President while we're at sea and the civilians are with us we have to consider other options for defense. If the laser is broad, we'll direct the civilian craft to scatter. If the laser is focused and can focus on an entire ship, we'll have to maneuver as fast as possible and hopefully disrupt their aiming. If the civilians are still with us, the aliens will hit us first, and the civilians might be able to get away. If we set them up in Norfolk and remain maneuvering at sea, they'll focus on us and the civilians will have more time."

“So, once we’ve dropped them in Norfolk, we’re on our own. What about missiles?”

“The main part of the fleet defense will be the FEL laser cruisers and railgun frigates, which will surround the carriers. We’re deploying them in two concentric circles with the lasers further out and the frigates closer in. The range of the 250 KW FEL laser is 25 miles depending on atmospheric conditions, unfortunately, they’re designed for aircraft and missiles not craft in orbit. Particularly geosynchronous orbit.

We’re positioning the railgun frigates in a radial dispersion closer in around the carriers, because we don’t know what the threat will be, nor its direction. When the frigates fire, we’ll be hurling 3.4 lbs. projectiles at them at Mach 7. They aren’t as effective against missiles at long range, but they can take them down as they get closer. If they attack us with airborne craft, we have some options, but if they sit in space and hammer us with lasers, our ablative deck coatings will last only a short time. The submarine’s role is unknown, so we’ll keep them widely scattered. If they have surface ships, the subs will be able to redirect their anti-ship missiles. In the case our surface ships are taken out of the conflict, we suggest they remain covert and elude and evade as long as possible. They may be able to do some damage at some point in the future. Gentlemen that’s what we have. Any questions?” Captain Thomas concluded.

President Patterson and Admiral Hagerly sat for a moment thinking about their options. Even though, the military had a plan for space invasion, being the only defensive force on the planet wasn’t part of the plan.

“Gentlemen, correct me if I’m wrong. But, the fleet might be just as easily protected in port as we might be at sea. I know that is against everything you believe in, but from space, we can’t hide. We’ve lost your greatest weapon, stealth. Perhaps we should set-up shop in Norfolk and make our stand there.”

All in attendance looked at each other, and no one had a rebuttal. “Captain Toms, please put together a defensive plan for the Hampton Roads areas.”

“Mr. President, with your permission we’ll pass what we have to the other fleets.”

The President sat with his chin in his hands. He looked at Captain Thomas then Admiral Hagerly and sat upright while saying, “Gentlemen, this is a solemn day in the history of the human race and earth. We are

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“Admiral Hagerly, Dr. Herl. This is Lowell Observatory, please pickup; this is an emergency.”

“This Admiral Hagerly.”

“This is SC, go-ahead.”

“We’ve been able to lock on to the vehicles in orbit visually, and the 5 satellite ships are moving away from the mother ships. They are decelerating rapidly and will be entering the atmosphere immediately. We’ve been able to verify this with radar pings.”

“Lowell, can you estimate where they’ll be landing?”

“Sorry Admiral, they’re decelerating too quickly, and the variables are too numerous. Once they actually enter the atmosphere, we’ll be able to narrow it down, but if they are aerodynamic, their landing footprint will be large. I wish we could give you more than that, but that’s the best I can do right now.”

“Thanks, Lowell. Good luck to all of you. Let’s try to talk again in an hour and see what we have. By the way, we’ve decided to move to Norfolk and give the civilians some place to set-up. We will set up some kind of defense there. We’ll let you know when we get close. I suggest that you stay where you are until we’re in port. Admiral Hagerly out.”

“Lowell, out.”

“SC, out,” Joan said with an apprehensive look on her face. “Tom, I love you,” she said.

“I know, and I love you,” he responded with a smile and kiss.

The End

Please follow the link below and provide your opinion of this book. It takes only a few minutes, and it helps your fellow readers and is a tremendous help to the author.

[Link To SIMPOC – Human Remnants](#)

If you want to see what happens to the remainder of the human race and how SIMPOC and Julius continue to evolve, please check out the conclusion to epoch 1.

[Link to Earth II – You Have No Honor](#)

Epilog

I want to thank you for downloading this book and reading it. I don't know yet where this story will go, I have a couple of ideas, and I've started an outline. I usually don't organize the story in too much detail, because I tend to change it as I get into it. I've started some stories with one plan and then change it as I get into it. If any of you have suggestions for what would be exciting and interesting for this story to go, let me know. I love to get input.

Ray Jay Perreault

<http://www.rayjayperreault.com>

Reference Material

Yottabyte – A gigabyte is approximately 1×10^6 , a terabyte is approximately 1×10^7 and a yottabyte is approximately 1×10^{11} . A yottabyte is exactly 1,208,925,819,614,629,174,706,176 bytes of information or 2^{80} or a little over 5,000,000,000,000,000,000 average books.

“Comm” – Abbreviation for communication.

“Rog” – Abbreviation for “Roger” many people using radios abbreviate some of the keywords.

Geosynchronous Orbit – A point in space where an object orbits the earth it will remain over the same point on the earth's surface. The point is approximately 26,100 miles from the earth's surface.

About the Author

Ray was born in New Hampshire, received his Bachelors of Science in Aeronautical Engineering at Arizona State University. Now retired from an influential, multi-decade career in aerospace,

Bringing a new voice to science fiction writing, Ray realized there was a niche that was calling him as he began to write deeper characters, create more sophisticated stories and realistic situations for Sci-Fi fans to relate to. Initially attracted to heroic characters with powerful weapons taking on hundreds of aliens, Ray began his literary career with a desire to extrapolate Sci-Fi stories with a touch of everyday reality that most of us experience in work and our everyday lives.

His literary work is thoughtfully enriched by his decade long experience in the US Air Force where he flew C-130s on missions to 27 countries, and T-38s while training the best pilots in the world, as well as the first female US Air Force pilots.

During his 28 years at Northrup Grumman, Ray worked on some of the most top-secret military aircraft projects in the world including the F-23, F-35, B-2, Global Hawk and many more that can't be named.

He is grateful to his wife, Charlene and his two daughters, Christine and Robynn for their support on this new journey.

Ray Jay Perreault

Books by Ray Jay Perreault

Books

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