

THE DJIAHANEL PROPHECY

-III- The Last Breath of Evil

When the star of Kgitah will be completing its 123rd phase, the shadow of Evil will cover Kgitah and would follow a dark era where two successive shadows of Evil would take over, chased away by the light of the People of Kgitah.

At the dawn of the new era, a distant star will appear from a distant star when the Savior, Diahanel, will make the trip back.

The Savior will appear with the light of the new era, bringing the light of the new era.



MONSTERP63

The Djiahanel Prophecy
Part 3 – The Last Breath of Evil
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The Disappearance

The lime-green Honda Civic, which had a spiffy shining look with its sparkly metallic pain under the summer sun, was looking, on this winter day, like any other car in Quebec : dirty gray, splashed with snow, the windows smeared with a mix of mud, grime, snow and windshield washer, its bright lime green paint barely visible. Its low stance, which were making his friends jealous on the highways in the midst of summer, were making them laugh their asses off once the winter had come, calling it the green snow plow.

And it was basically that: a snow plow, the underside of the car dragging on the thick snow of the partially cleared road. The snow was still falling but he had to get his phone back, probably forgotten at Daniel's house. That was the last place he used it before getting out in a hurry because of the incoming heavy snowstorm.

Like most people, that phone had his whole life in it, contacts, information, pictures. He mumbled to himself that he should have setup the auto-backup function eons ago.

He came out of that last bend with the car almost sideways to the road, revving the engine and managing the parking brake to have a nice and steady drift. His eyes widened and he stomped on the break, almost losing control, in view of a police car, all lights on, blocking the road about a hundred meters in front of him.

The car danced on the slippery road surface, but the heavy and thick snow made it stop rather quickly.

A female officer walked out of the car, grabbing her opened jacket to close it while raising a hand, gesturing to him to slow down and to stop. He rolled down the window.

"Hello officer, what can I do for you?" he asked, innocently, knowing very well why she had stopped him.

She smiled, repressing a giggle.

"Going a little fast for the road conditions, sir?" she said, looking at the pimped-up car too low for the snow conditions.

“Oh, well... sorry, officer. It was a little more slippery than I thought.” he said with a smirk. “I’ll be more careful.” he said, hoping it would get him away from a reckless driving ticket.

“Yeah, you should, sir. Apparently, the car in front of you didn’t, and it’s now encased under a semi-trailer.” she said, pointing behind her car, into a curve where nothing much could be seen from his point of view.

“Oh... shit. Any injuries?” he asked.

“Yes, fatal ones.” she said, looking sad.

“I’ll be more careful.” he said, shifting his transmission back in first gear, ready to take off.

“I’m sorry, you’ll have to turn around, sir. The road is blocked. An electrical pole is across it as well as the semi. Might take a couple of hours to clear. I suggest you go back where you came from and try again tonight or better yet, tomorrow. The roads might be more suitable for your... driving style.” she said, flashing a smile.

“Damn. It’s just that I forgot my phone at my friend’s house, about 5km from here and...”

“I understand, sir, but as I said, the road is blocked. A jacked-up 4X4 MIGHT be able to pass while driving on the snow banks but, I doubt that your low rider stands a chance.” she said. “If you leave me... your number, I could call you when the road is cleared.”

“Yes, that would be very nice, but I doubt my girlfriend would... appreciate it, and more, my phone is at my friend’s house, remember?” He said, tapping on his left front pocket where he usually keeps it.

“Yes, of course. Just checking.” she said with a side grin. Well, sir, drive carefully.” she said, making a few steps backward before heading back inside her squad car.

Disappointed, Simon headed back. The next morning he was back on the road. It had been cleared and the sun was melting the snow, helped with the salt and abrasive that had been spread across it.

The scars of the accident were very visible as he drove to the accident scene. He reached Simon’s house a few minutes later and immediately felt something was wrong.

Simon's SUV, which was normally safely parked into his garage, was now at an angle in the driveway, its left wheel half-way into the snow bank, as if he had been coming in so fast that he couldn't stop in time.

That happens. He did it himself a few times and needed help to get out, but the SUV was all wheel drive and it should have come out easily.

As he carefully drove up the driveway, past the SUV, he had a strange feeling. As he got out of his car, he noticed the back door was wide open and slightly flapping into the soft wind coming from the treeless field.

His footsteps creaked in the fresh snow as he approached the house.

"Daniel?" he called, just in case he was outside.

He carefully walked to the opened door, noticing that it hadn't been forgotten open, but had been literally blown out, a large hole where the doorknob should be, with part of the doorframe missing.

"What the fuck?" he said, stunned. "DANIEL? ARE YOU HERE?" he yelled, his voice dampened by the snow all around him, but he knew that if he was in the house, he would have heard.

No answer. Approaching the door carefully, he can only figure out that it had been forced open by a sledgehammer or more probably a powerful rifle as some burning around the edges could be seen, but... looked strange, almost as if the wood of the doorframe and the steel of his door had melted.

As he reached to grab the door, he noticed a large oval shaped hole in the snow behind the house. The soft wind was blowing some of the snow into that hole but it was melting right away. Even the grass appeared to have been burned.

The hell??

"DANIEL! IT'S SIMON. YOU HERE??" he yelled again, even louder.

Still no answer. He entered the house. The door couldn't close behind him as about 15cm of snow had entered the house and packed itself in the doorway. There wasn't any doorknob to keep it close anyway.

"Geesh. How long..." mumbled Simon, stepping over it, being careful not to slip.

"DANIEL! IT'S SIMON. ARE YOU ALRIGHT?" he yelled again, slowly entering the kitchen and discovering the mess.

Someone had been here, alright. The place had been ransacked. Some cabinet doors were opened, furniture in the living room were out of place. The large screen TV was turned on showing a night sky, making the whole scene even weirder. Even the bedroom was a war zone, the bed moved, the closet opened and some clothes on the floor. He noticed a strange garment on the chair, a white and blue piece of fabric, slightly shiny. He took it in his hands, feeling it.

“Strange. Feels like silk and rubber or something. Kinky tendencies, Daniel?” he said with a grin, taking the garment at arm’s length, stretching it, “and a nice lady for sure, judging by the size of this thing.”

Then on the floor, the helmet with strange markings on it, making him realize that the suit also had those strange markings.

“I didn’t know you were into cosplay girls, Daniel... HEY DANIEL! YOU HEAR ME?”

No answer

He walked back to the living room, holding the strange garment in his hands. He took a closer look at what was displayed on the TV screen. It was showing a casting feed of his computer, some sort of star map app. He looked at the starmap, at the suit and through the window, at the melting hole in the backyard.

“Nah, come on. Not abducted by aliens, that would be too weird.” he said. However, the clues, the melted hole in the door, the starmap, the... spacesuit?

He called the cops to report Daniel’s disappearance, fighting the urge to tell the operator that his friend had been abducted by extraterrestrials, then had a closer look at the starmap. One star was highlighted: Gliese 364. He noted it. When he sat on the sofa to think, he felt something hard at the back of the seat cushion. He put his hand down and smiled.

“There you were!” he said, pulling out a car color matching lime-green cell phone he had forgotten about. “Yeah, of course, you’re dead.” he said as he tried to turn it on but it wasn’t responding.

He continued to search throughout the house, looking in the basement, in the garage. There was nobody.

Walking outside while waiting for the cops, he wandered into the snow melting zone, where no snow seemed to stay, melting as soon as it hit the ground. Some soft heat seemed to be emanating from it. He took a handful of snow from nearby and

dropped it in the middle of the zone. The snow slowly melted and was absorbed by the ground. He crouched down. He could feel some heat emanating from it.

“Oh, shit! Is that radioactive or something?” he asked himself while quickly walking out if it.

He thought about the suit. He wanted it for himself, for his own investigation because he doubted that the authorities would do much. He quickly grabbed it and stashed it in the trunk of his car.

Close to an hour later, a squad car stopped. The same woman officer walked out.

“Hello again, sir.” she said with a smile. “I can see you managed to get here safe and sound. Did you find your phone?” she asked.

“Hello officer. Yes, I did.” he said, tapping his left thigh. “It was under the sofa’s cushions. But that’s not why I called you here. I fear my friend has been abducted.” he said, gesturing to the house.

The officer listened to Simon’s recall of the events.

“I’m gonna have to ask for your phone.” she said, putting on black nitrile gloves.

“Why?” he asked, fetching in from his pocket. “It’s dead anyway and it has nothing to do with Daniel’s disappearance.”

“Wel, sir. “Said the officer, “everything that is / was in this house might be related to it. You said it was inside the sofa, right? Then I need it back.” she said.

She continued her investigation, looking everywhere, taking notes, and asked him if anything, of his knowledge, seemed to have been stolen.

“Hard to say, Officer. That place had been ransacked, so yes, there might be something missing, but what? I’m his friend, not his cleaning lady. I don’t know everything he owns.” said Simon.

“Do you know if he has a safe or something? Is some electronic device missing? Kids are eager to get their hands into the latest video consoles and your friend here seemed to be well equipped.” he said, showing the row of gaming consoles laid out in a display case, from C-64 to the latest X-Box.

"Everything seems to be fine. I mean, if I had to steal a gaming console or something, I would have gotten that one and his computer. That thing is bomb. And I doubt teenagers looking for consoles would blow open his door like that."

"So... the break-in wasn't to steal. Was he involved in any illegal activities?" she asked. "Maybe he staged his abduction to get away with the money."

"Look. The guy was a game programmer. If someone stole something it would be his latest game, which could be stored on a USB stick or something. And his only knowledge is computer games. And, officer, without sounding brutal, I honestly don't give much of a damn about what was stolen. I worried about my friend, his disappearance. I think he was probably abducted, and that strange circle in the backyard... well..."

"Are you suggesting that he'd been abducted by aliens?" she asked, raising her eyebrows.

"That's for you to say, officer." safely answered Simon.

The officer grinned and a few hours later, an inspector was there to gather more information, followed by a team of forensic technicians, taking pictures, gathering fingerprints and stuff from the doorframe and other rooms in the house. The inspector made a few phone calls and went to see Simon who was still waiting, in his car.

"So, anything sir?" asked Simon, pretty sure of the answer.

Yes, Mr Gingras. Your friend was seen Saturday evening, on the road leading to the highway, in the presence of a young woman with brown hair. They were informed by a fellow officer that the road was closed following an accident. The officer does remember that they discussed taking an alternate road for the city but apparently decided to go back and wait at the house. Any idea who this woman could be? His girlfriend, maybe?"

Simon twitched at the thought that he could have been on the other side of that accident at the same moment.

"No. Sabrina is blonde. I really can't see who that can be. When we left, he was alone."

"Well, for now, she's a witness we would like to talk to." answered the inspector

"And..." he began, almost reluctantly, "those traces in the snow. What do you make of it?"

"No idea. No radars in the area reported anything strange yesterday or within the last three days. Then again, yesterday's storm was so heavy that some radars couldn't see much." said the inspector "In any case, if some flying craft is involved, they must have flown below the radars."

"Uh... they? Who are they?" asked Simon, puzzled.

"Well, the choppers or drones or something." said the inspector, obviously not prepared. "Whatever landed there was not using wheels. We see traces of apparently two objects, one that left that oval thing and another one who left four impressions, like landing gears or something, both of them quite large. So, without wheels, they could only come from... above." he said, pointing up while holding his arm no higher than his chest, as if to hide the gesture.

Simon nodded. All of this was nothing more than speculation after all.

A few hours later, the investigation was completed. They nonetheless brought the broken door with them, to investigate what kind of weapon made a hole like that. They gave permission to Simon to take care of the house, being already listed into Daniel's emergency contact information.

He called a carpenter, had the door repaired before the end of the day and left.

A few days later, Lieutenant-Colonel Luc Bergeron from the Canadian Air Forces got in touch with him. He wanted to meet him.

They met at the St-Hubert air base, south of Montreal. Bergeron stayed rather vague on what he knew. He revealed nothing of importance but was asking a lot of questions. When he asked Simon if he had seen unusual objects, items that were not belonging to his friend or that looked out of place. Simon hesitated for a moment before answering that no, he didn't see anything out of the ordinary, save for the melting hole in the backyard, hiding the strange suit. Bergeron didn't react. Simon asked about the blast holes but Bergeron simply answered that he couldn't discuss something he hadn't seen himself.

For over a month, Daniel's disappearance made the news, then it was slowly forgotten. A lot of speculation was about him having fled with some strange woman so as not to have to come out with the latest version of his game.

Simon had kept his findings secret.

He was waiting in line at the bank. Daniel had given him some money to help develop a new game controller but he hadn't touched it. For as long as he wouldn't be

working on it, he swore not to touch it. Daniel knew it, it was the reason he gave him that money, and he was even teasing him about it from time to time.

He closed his eyes to think. He had seen the circles, the traces, the spacesuit, the starmap. He now had to take that money and make this damn controller of his. And then, it was to Australia. That was totally stupid, but he felt he had to do it. He felt he owed it to Daniel, to his friend.

Two Years Later

The sports-bar was crowded. A man, not very tall, with red hair, was trying to make a path amidst the crowd, mainly grouped around the bar counter, watching a game of hockey involving the Montreal Canadiens, finally aiming for the Stanley Cup. He was keeping his hands over his head, holding two pitchers of beer.

Suddenly, all the arms raised around him, hitting the beer pitchers, making them dangerously close to splashing everyone around.

"... AND SCORE!!!" he heard coming from the giant main screen. The crowd went crazy and a red light began to flash inside the crowded sports bar. Nothing to help the little red head man reach his table with the pitchers still full.

"Finally! It was about time, I'm so thirsty." said a blond man, grabbing a pitcher from the red head's hand before it touched the table, and filling his glass as well as his girlfriend's.

Once all glasses had been filled, the red head guy took out his cellphone and displayed a picture he had taken two years before, day to day, in the kitchen of their dear friend. That was the last time they had seen him. He disappeared without a trace the very next day. He put the phone on the table, leaning it against one of the pitchers. They raised their glasses.

"We miss you, Daniel." said the red head.

"Cheers!" they all said before gulping half their glass in one shot.

Standing around the table were, evidently, Matt, the red head with his girlfriend Melanie, Alex and Caroline, and Valerie, Simon's girlfriend but no trace of him.

"Any news?" asked Caroline while holding Valerie's hand.

"Yes and no. He's in California. I think. He's putting so much time and effort in this fucking controller that we barely speak to each other. I even wonder if we could still consider ourselves a couple." she said. "He tells me as little as possible about it, afraid of some industrial spying or something. I think it's partly true. The other is, I think, he's afraid of being abducted... Like Daniel was..."

Even though they were remembering their friend, the mention of his possible abduction was casting a strange shadow on the group. Simon has shared his findings, minus the suit, and they all believed it was too strange to be false. They never got any news, no

ransom demand, nothing. He simply vanished, which was making the whole story even more mysterious, with the melting circles, where grass barely grew on the next summer, as if the soil was dead.

"Does... he sends you text messages or something?" added Caroline after a moment.

"Rarely. He doesn't even maintain his fakebook account up to date, like, just the other day he... well, when you talk about the devil..." she said, picking up her phone. She raised her eyebrows, puzzled, at about the same time, all the friends around the table were receiving the same message.

"Do not miss the breaking news... now... What the heck...?" said Caroline.

Intrigued, they looked at one of the numerous TV screens suspended all around the sports bar. There was a commercial break for the hockey match. A journalist appeared, the large Breaking News displayed at the bottom of the screen flashing, then, an inset, a picture of Simon shaking the hand of a Asian man.

"Big success for Quebec's know-how," began the newscaster." Simon Gingras, an electronic engineer and inventor from Montreal just closed an exclusivity deal with the game console manufacturer about a new revolutionary gaming controller. The president of the company declared that the new controller will not only revolutionize the games but also the way we play. More details on our late-evening news bulletin."

The friends looked at each other, stunned, then smiled, shouting in one voice: "SIMON!!!", raising their glass before taking a gulp.

* * *

The Subaru Forester stopped in a cloud of dust, a few kilometers off lake Miranda in Western Australia, near the mining village of Leinster, 900km East of Perth. A black man, built like an American Football player wearing simple jeans and a T-shirt got off from the passenger side. The driver, sporting a full tie and jacket suit, stepped down and came to him.

"That's the spot, Mr. Gingrass." he said, struggling to pronounce the French-Canadian name of his customer.

"That will do it. Deal." simply answered the giant man, looking around, kicking dirt with his feet.

"Great." said the attorney, quickly opening the folder he was holding, laying it down on the hot hood of the car, taking his pen and handing it to Simon. "If you would sign

here... and here... and one last one... Done! The land is yours." he said, closing his folder. "I'll send you the final papers in a few days. Now, if I can be so bold, can you tell me what you intend to do with a lot here, in the middle of the desert?" he asked, turning around, to emphasize that there was nothing but dirt. "I mean, there's nothing more to be discovered here." he said, making a reference about the numerous mining facilities in the area.

"Oh, I'm not looking for ore or anything else. I want to build a large antenna dish to send a signal to the extra-terrestrials." he said, simply, without holding back, like it was totally normal.

The attorney looked at him, puzzled, then believed that it was a hoax told to keep him and others curious at bay. An elegant way to say "mind your own business."

"Well, as long as the land is sold," said the attorney, "the rest is none of my business."

Simon got his tablet from his suitcase in the car and turned it around, showing a 3D rendering of a large parabolic dish.

"Your job with me isn't done, it is still your business: find me someone to build this." said Simon to the attorney. "Yes, I am serious."

"Shit. How... How big is that thing?" asked the attorney.

"Just about 100 meters. Why? This poses a problem?"

Three months later, sitting in a brightly lit room, on the top of the Central Park building in Perth, he was involved in a stare match with a few men in suits. Finally, one of the men, what appears to be the leader of the group of suits, lowered his glance.

"Very well, Mr Gingras. As soon as the money is transferred, we'll start on it." he said.

Simon punched a few keys on his laptop and the man in suit laptop emitted a notification sound. He looked at the message then at Simon, puzzled.

"I... I don't understand, Mr Gingras. We just agreed on a price and you're sending about 25% more. What kind of game are you playing, sir?"

"Oh, I'm not playing any games. You said it would be built in six years, right?" asked Simon.

"Yes, that's the timeline we outlined." answered the man, frowning.

"I want it done in four." said Simon, deadpan, starting another staring match.

Four years later. The room was nowhere looking like those elaborate science-fiction movies with lots of computer lights flashing and large screens. It was about 3 meters by 3 meters. One computer screen was displaying the health of the emitter. This was all that was needed. It was an emitter after all. Nothing else. It wasn't meant to listen, to do research or any science related work. It was built only to transmit a message to that Gliese364 planet, 35 light-years away.

"Well," said Simon, looking at the young technician sitting beside him, "if he ever receives that message, I'll be... 59 years old by then." he said, doing the math in his head.

"Ready when you are, sir." said the technician. He was finding all of that totally silly, but he was paid to do it, and to come here every week to check on the equipment and make sure it was still transmitting, everytime Gliese364 was in sight. Everything had to be kept in perfect working order for as long as possible or until Simon told him to stop.

"Geesh. As silly as it may sound, I never thought about what I would say." said Simon.

"We can do as many takes as it requires." said the young man.

"Yeah, right. Although I burned my fingers a few times, I always believed that the first one is the best. Okay, here we go, start the recording... Daniel, My friend..."

The Signal

The mountains were high and pointy and although the elevation was high, their summits were not covered with snow but bare, made out of reddish rock, or more precisely, volcanic rock.

The 7th continent was known by Kajjimy, a Kgithan word meaning Nascent Land, because of its constant volcanic activity, known to be the source of all of Kgitha's continents.

A few millennia before, that continent had the size of Earth's Iceland. Today, its size could easily be compared to Australia. A new continent covered with inhospitable volcanic landscape, high mountains with sharp faces, almost verticals, and some of the highest peaks of the whole planet, and oh... how tempting to climb.

On one of those mountains, one of the highest, known under the name of Brragita, or Large Plateau, two people were getting to the summit, crawling the last few meters.

The woman stopped for a moment to find her breath. She used that short time to look around and admire the breathtaking view: the mountain chain was stretching as far as the eye could see, revealing summits of brownish to reddish rocks. She was recognizing, relatively close, on her right, Mount Sarra which she had climbed two years earlier.

Her chest was steadily rising and falling with each breath, stretching the tight fitting hiking suit she was wearing under the backpack body harness.

She heard the sounds of rolling stones behind her and some scratching as well as huffing and puffing. She tapped her hiking boots on the side of a boulder to detach any soil that could fill the sole's threads as she turned around to look at the source of the noise. She smiled as her boyfriend was approaching.

"Not in shape, The Earthling." she said, giggling, as she was trying to look less out of breath than she really was.

The man simply raised his head and looked at her, mouth opened, gasping for air.

"Very... funny.... Jahana." he managed to say.

Although it's been 28 years since he arrived on Kgitah, Daniel had only visibly aged about ten years, thanks to the anti-aging treatments somewhat involuntarily included into the surgical procedure that saved his life by rebuilding part of his stomach. Some elements of natural DNA structure which stretches the Kgitahn's lifespan, that were present in the rebuilt tissues and organs, mixed and merged with his own DNA. That was not something that had been foreseen, nor predicted. Well, they didn't have any other experience like it prior to that. But it has been an agreeable surprise for everybody.

During that same period, Jahana's body only aged about 2 years. She was a native after all.

"I don't have your physical strength and... especially not your long legs!" he managed to say between two breaths as he was getting closer.

She extended a hand but he pushed it away. He still has his own ego to please. He walked right past her, without stopping, using a slow but constant pace.

"Only about fifteen meters before reaching the summit." he said. "No time to take a break."

She followed in his footsteps while laughing, getting a grip on that rock there, a foothold on the other side, climbing along the narrow passage. The summit of the mountain was a rocky plateau large enough for three cars, practically leveled, as if the top of the peak had been cut with a knife.

Daniel gave one last effort and made the first step on the plateau. He slowly walked to the center and raised his arms in the air, panting.

"YESSS!! I DID IT!!" he yelled, quickly unbuckling his backpack which fell on the rocky ground with a soft thud, his voice echoing in the rocky mountains, quickly joined by Jahana, still laughing.

They embraced, their sparkling hiking suits shining in the setting sunlight. They spun a few turns, Jahana folding her legs up at the knee, flying, while they were kissing and laughing between two breaths.

They slowed their spinning dance until they stopped, then headed for a large boulder where they sat, smiling, looking around, one head leaning against the other one, enjoying the sight, enjoying each other's presence.

That's where they would setup their camp, just to the right of the boulder, for the night. That climb was, after all, the culminating point of four days of hiking, and there

were there for the view but especially for the show scheduled by Mother Nature for the next morning.

The mountain chain was split in half, right in the middle, like it was cut by a celestial ax, by the tectonic plates. It was a high earthquake zone, but Kgitan's technology was able to forecast, days, even weeks in advance, any earthquake that would occur, and at this time of year, this was the calm period, ranging from two to four weeks. That was the ideal time to hike up the mountain, but there was more.

The vertical drop was straight down before slightly curving inward two kilometers down, covered in debris, making one large "V" shape gorge. At sunset, Kgitan's Star would rise in the middle of that gorge, on his left, and would light up millions of quartz crystals which were making the heart of the mountain, into a fairy tale like sparkling show, visible one day a year, like the Stonehenge Solstice, thought Daniel.

He suddenly turned his head away from the peaks, looking high up in the sky which was quickly darkening, looking at a specific place.

"Thinking about The Earth?" softly asked Jahana.

"Well... yes. It's always in my mind, even after close to 30 years. This is my native land, after all. I will have to get back there one day, and when I'll do, I will climb Mount Everest. It's crazy how I've become addicted to mountain hiking and mountaineering."

"That's an... em... important mount?" she asked.

"The highest summit of the planet. And also, I don't know, I have some kind of urge, of a strange feeling that I should go back."

"You're probably just home sick. It happened before. In any case, I will be with you. I want to see that too, but, without being pessimistic, this could take a while. I know it is troubling you. I got in touch with the Council about ten days ago and, according to them, it's not the right time at all. The political conflicts have extended to include the settlements on The Moon and on Mars... again."

"Yeah... but sometimes I wonder if it's really true or if it's just to keep me here. They don't really have day to day updates. They have nobody there... as far as I know. Why couldn't I go there and make up my own mind? I mean, I know how political mayhem happens on Earth. I would be the best to judge if it's okay for me to go back or not." he said, his tone changing.

"Whether it's true or not, you can't simply get back on Earth after thirty years and say "Hi, I'm back." and expecting everybody to say "Hey, Daniel. Long time, no see. How ya

doing? Want a drink?". They would want to know where you were, why you left, the technology behind your spaceship. They will be afraid of an invasion, of any sort of danger." she said with a soft voice, trying to calm him down.

"You're exaggerating." he said, while admitting, deep in his thoughts, that she was right. In part.

"No, Daniel. Think about it. Someone you know disappears without a trace for thirty years, and he comes back, having barely aged. What would YOU think? Would you trust that person? Are you going to believe all he would say, or would you think about some kind of scam, at a clone or something, that this person you knew is not exactly the same person, that perhaps, he's being controlled by some other entity? I know I would."

"Well... when you put it this way, but I mean... what... what is that?" he said, turning around to look behind them, frowning.

It began with a low pitch noise, and then a high pitch noise was added as more power was applied to something. It was getting closer, fast. They both recognized what it was, but they were not expecting to see that here. Not now and not so close to the mountain peaks.

The setting sun got reflected on the hull of the small ship that was approaching fast from the east, then stopped within a few seconds, like totally unaffected by the laws



of physics or gravity, about 5 meters from the plateau. Then slowly, it moved sideways, getting closer, before stopping and standing there, suspended in mid air, totally still. They could see the pilot from the side windows of the ship. The door, flanked with the Presidential Seal opened and a boarding ramp extended out until it met with the top of the rocky plateau. The pilot punched a few things off her control console and got off her seat to meet them.

Daniel and Jahana were waiting, on their rocky platform. The pilot got closer, her body molded in a gray and red tight fitting flight suit with some armor plating pieces,

stamped with the insignia of the Presidential Special Forces. Her long red hair, held into a tight ponytail, was dancing in her back.

Although the armor plating was mandatory in time of war, the presidential special forces decided to wear it at all times, as well as for the decorum as for their personal protection. After all, they were not protecting anybody.

And they were taking good care of their suits and its armor, and if for some reason, a small scratch was to appear, it was repaired and polished like new. The pilot's armor looked brand new. She took a very solemn air of reprimand.

"You were not easy to find! We've been looking for you for over four hours. Why didn't you answer our calls? And why are your locating beacons deactivated?" she said, staring at Daniel as if she had darts ready to shoot out of her eyes, knowing that only him would have been able to hack into them to turn them off. "This is forbidden, and in your case, very dangerous." she added with a military tone and stance.

"We didn't bring our communicators, Captain Nohaha," gently said Jahana, turning the pilot's attention to her, "we wanted to be left alone."

The woman approached them with military precision steps, stopping one meter from them, in a high authority stance.

"Your presence is required at the Tower at this instant." she said with a firm tone. "The President is requesting your presence. I will note in my report the breach of your own safety as well as endangering the safety of Djiahanel" she said, staring at Jahana, then turning toward Daniel, making a small bow, to which he responded by a nonchalant bow."

For him, that protocol in his honor was way too much and he would have very likely got rid of it. However, the High Council was adhering to it, and was even refusing to call him by his Earthly name. For them, he was Djiahanel, the Savior of the Prophecy. Jahana was his girlfriend, his companion, but also his protector and personal guard. The Prophecy was not completed and if something was to happen to Djiahanel, she would be the first one blamed.

Reluctantly, they boarded the Presidential craft, a medium sized, four passenger ship, with up to 2 crewmembers. For them, the hiking was not over. Sure, they had to leave now, but the excursion included climbing down that same mountain, and they would do it.

The craft flew at high speed amidst the rocky mountains. On their way, Daniel and Jahana had already pointed out some other mountains they would like to hike in

future excursions. The pilot gave them a side glance of disapproval. Djiahanel was NOT to take any unnecessary risk.

"Captain," asked Jahana, "What's going on? What's the emergency?"

"I was not brief on the subject, Commander. I was simply ordered to get you back on the double. Direct Presidential order, Commander."

Daniel and Jahana looked at each other. At the same time, they had the same thought, the same feeling, the same knot in their stomach: Crom. No other reason would make the President have them brought back like that. Daniel, rather Djiahanel, was there to deal with the 'darkness'. That was Crom and the Sigamees. Nothing else. Unless...

They flew over half the continent, before flying over the dense but low mountains of the central region, followed by the desert regions of Xamuh County before, finally, they could see in the distance, the unmistakable Barod cityscape, in the middle of a rather flat area filled with lakes and generally low mountains, with the only high one being where the almost symbolic towers were located.

They flew over the peripheral neighborhoods, heading for the foot of the hill, of the highest mountain, at the Coalition Tower. Below them, under a harsher sun than it was before the war, the inhabitants of the city were going on with their daily life, unaware of the sudden urgency of the situation.

The "Lake of Fire" had wreaked havoc with the weather. The moderate weather of the past centuries had been replaced by a jagged weather where periods of cold and rain were followed by very dry and hot periods. They were in one of those dry and hot periods which has been going on for the past two years, while on other parts of the continent, they were dealing with constant flooding. The planet was revolting.

The craft landed on the private pad of the Administrative Tower. The passengers walked off, duly escorted by Captain Nokaha, and were directed, not toward the Presidential offices like they were expecting, but rather toward the lower levels, to the communication and surveillance department. That had nothing to calm their apprehensions about Crom. Daniel's strange feeling to go back to Earth was turning his stomach upside down.

The door of the room disappeared in the wall in front of them and they entered without having to slow down. President Gharkii turned around to welcome them. He had been waiting.

"Jahana, Djiahanel. Glad you could come." he said, making the small bow toward the man.

"As if we had the choice... what's going on, Mr President? Why the emergency. Is Crom..." began to ask Jahana, anxious, her voice slightly shaking.

"No, it's not about Crom." he said with a smile. "I'm sorry to have brought you here in such a rush and misled you about the situation. I simply wanted the information to stay here, so the sooner you're aware of it, the better it will be classified." he said, trying to calm their worries, but it did little. He realized it and quickly tried to ease the situation.

"In fact it's... how do you say it," he said, looking at Daniel, "a... long space call... From the Earth, directed at Djiahanel." he said, trying to put it in earthly expressions.

"Say what?" Asked Daniel, trying to understand.

The president put a memory module in a reader. A monochrome image appeared and, even though it was very low resolution, it was definitely Daniel's face, dating many years.

"This signal was intercepted by the Cibrius station, located twenty-one light-years from Earth, about two days ago. It's not within the usual communication frequency used on Earth. We believe it includes some sound elements but nothing is within the Earth's usual standards. Our systems have been working on it for over a day without results. Maybe you could be of help." he said, politely asked the President, looking at Daniel.

Daniel was more than happy to be able to help. That was without a shadow of a doubt, a message aimed for him, or to whoever would have seen him, since his picture was attached to the message. He took place at the console and studied the series of cryptic alphanumeric sequences which was running down the monitor, a special software he had written, translating the latin alphabet into the Universal Language. After a few minutes, he frowned and began to punch keys on the keyboard, before giving verbal commands to the computer who executed them.

"Yes! Yes, that's it! That's my code. That's my code!" he was repeating, a large smile on his face, while he continued to dictate commands to the computer as well as punching keys. The President and Jahana were looking at each other, puzzled. His "Code"?

A few minutes later, a message was heard, in English.

"... Daniel, my friend. I assume that you would be somewhere near Gliese... something. Anyway, if you get this, please answer me. Tell me that you're still alive. Ah, right, this is

Simon speaking... and... and if somebody, somewhere knows his whereabouts, please, give me some news... Oh, right, this message is from Earth..."

The message was making a short pause and was starting over. The audio quality was equal to the quality of the image, but the message was still clear.

Daniel let himself sink into the leather seat, stunned, his brain working hard to remember the language, the meaning. He hadn't spoken English in quite a long time. It took four loops of the message for him to smile.

"Err... Djiahanel, with all your respect, can you feed that to the translator?" gently asked the President.

Daniel, puzzled at first, woke up and quickly fixed the transmission. The President listened to it and raised his eyebrows.

"You know what it means?" he asked. "You know who sent you the message?"

"Yes, Sir." he proudly said. "That's Simon, a very good friend. He's looking for me... from the Earth. When was this sent? A few days ago? I should answer back..."

"Djiahanel, " said the President. "It was first received at the Cibrius station, the closest we have to Earth, about 2 days ago. It's twenty-one years old."

Daniel looked puzzled.

"How can it be 21 years old? You just got it..."

"Daniel," gently said Jahana, making a gesture to the President that she understood the situation, "It wasn't received through subspace transmission. It was received through normal radio waves transmissions. Radio waves travel at the speed of light, Daniel. This is old Earth technology... Well, not really old, it's their technology, but... You know what I mean. This message was sent something like seven years after you left the Earth, twenty one years ago."

Daniel was stunned. His mind had to take some time to register the meanings of it. It meant that Simon hopefully knew that the message would not reach Kgitah before 35 years and, if he responded with the same technology, Simon would be, if still alive, 90-plus years old!

"Are you sure this is not a ruse, that Crom isn't behind that? How can you be sure it's genuine?" asked the President, snapping Daniel out of his daydream.

"Crom, sir? Do you have information that he's still alive and on Earth?"

“Oh, no. Not as far as I know, Djiahanel.” he said, his eyes widening. “It’s just that you thought it was because of Crom that I had you rushed in and it stuck to my mind. Come to think of it, it’s a totally silly assumption since Crom was still on Janis-5 twenty-one years ago. It can’t be crom. But is it really from your friend, from Simon?”

“Oh, okay. Well, I know it is from Simon because, Sir, the code used for the audio, I’m the one who wrote it for a game I was programming at the time, based on an encryption algorithm I had developed, meaning that I and only myself could decipher it. Nobody other than one of my friends would have taken the time to use it, rather than a generic coding used by NASA or something. A also recognized the voice, the tones, the way the phrases are made. He was unprepared. That’s the Simon I know. That can’t be anyone else.”

Daniel was smiling, his mind already on the Earth. Jahana was looking at him, her eyes worried. She was seeing him leave. She was seeing the Prophecy.

The Blue Planet

"It's been close to thirty Earth years, Daniel. You're sure you will find him back?"

"The Simon I know would have left ways, clues, to find him. He was smart enough to know that his message would take many years to reach me. It was nonetheless intercepted nine years before actually reaching Kgitah. All I have to do is go there. All I have to do is find the emitter. Simon shouldn't be far. If he's listening, he will answer."

"That's quite dangerous, Daniel. You know how Earthlings react to extraterrestrials."

"Yes, that's true, but in thirty years, people change."

"Really? Do you believe so? The Sigamees haven't changed in centuries... If someone inexplicably disappeared for thirty years and suddenly pops back, there would be doubts, no matter if his story makes sense or not."

The door opened with a sharp hissing noise. A man entered and immediately began talking.



"Oh, I was looking for you, Mr. President. It came to my attention that a signal from Earth has been interc...?" was asking the man entering the room, and jumping when he saw Daniel. "That... that's an honor to be in your presence, Djiahanel" he said from his high pitched, undulating voice. It was always as he was signing while talking. He added a little nod of the head while looking somewhat annoyed that Daniel was there.

Daniel could hardly contain his disgusted grin. He hated that man.

Maybe it was his overly flamboyant nature, his feeling of superiority where he even added a cape to his uniform to make a fashion statement. In any case, he didn't like him, feeling shared with Jahana who preferred to look down at the floor. However, the

President had a limitless confidence in him, unbothered by his somewhat annoying attitude.

"Hello, Rimak." said Daniel to the man, with an indifferent tone.

He was the vice-president of the Coalition. A rather tall and thin man, sporting a fine mustache, gesticulating a lot when talking. Daniel thought about him as the perfect caricature of a French-Italian man from Earth. He quickly walked, facing Djiahanel, throwing his cape backward in an almost theatrical gesture.

"With all your respect, Djiahanel, you're not seriously thinking about going back, are you?"



"That is my home planet. I don't think my intentions are any of your concerns, Rimak."

"I wouldn't be so sure, Djiahanel." he said with a low voice and a hint of threat, raising his right index finger pointing up at head level, to mark his objection. "Because of your status, you could put Kgitah at risk by going back, and that, I don't think the Council will be favorable to the idea." he said, looking at the President disapprovingly and

then at Jahana with a softer look, almost begging for her approval.

"He's not totally wrong." she said. "The risks are not only for you, but also for Kgitah." she added. "You could put My planet in danger too."

"Very well..." he dryly answered, feeling his arguments were slim, while searching for ideas. "However, I'm not an extra-terrestrial. I'm an alien to THIS world after all, like you keep reminding me." he said, having a side look at Jahana who was constantly teasing him about it, calling him Earthling. "Somewhat slightly altered," he said, putting his hand to his stomach, "but an Earthling nonetheless. And this is Simon calling me." he said, pointing to the image of his face. "Not some government official or some unknown

person, and Crom is nowhere to be seen. It's not a threat calling, it's my friend, MY friend who wants to have news from ME." he said, leaning forward, pounding at his chest with his index finger. "That's all there is to it."

"In that case, just answer back with another message" said Rimak with the proud smile of the one who won an argument.

The president had a grin and Daniel nodded, lowering his eyes an instant.

"Yeah, right and Simon will get the answer in twenty years, or we would send it a lot closer to the Solar System, and it would be detected by all the planet's radio-telescopes who are pointed in the vicinity and they would, without a doubt, look for its source. At the time when I disappeared, they were already searching for E-T signals and could pinpoint their source, so now, thirty years later, they would be able to do it with even more precision. Is that what you want? Reveal our presence directly to the Earth?" he said, looking at each one of them in turn.

Rimak lost his smile. Daniel had a point.

"No, of course not." said the President.

"I see no other choice than to go." he said, looking at the President, trying to convince him... and himself.

"In that case, as your Protector, I'm going with you." said Jahana, pumping her chest.

"I... I think it would be best that you do not, Jahana." he said, going on as she was trying to argue, mouth opened, "You see, if I'm intercepted before getting to Simon, I'm an Earthling. I would not have anything of special value attached to me. However, you..." he said, taking her hand.

"How come, nothing of special value?" cut-in Rimak from his high pitch voice. "You are Djiahanel, the Sav..." he began to say, interposing himself between Daniel and Jahana, pushing Jahana away with his body to the point where Daniel himself would have to step back, but he stayed put, blocking Rimak, and raising his hand, demanding the right to speak, and when doing so, as the Savior, he had full authority.

"Sure, on Kgitah, I am Djiahanel, the same as you," he said, looking at Jahana, "are the Pure Soul who traveled to a distant world and brought me back, according to the Prophecy." he said. "However, on Earth, I'm just another Earthling and YOU are an alien from outer space."

"Yes, but the Prophecy is saying that..." began to say Jahana, raising her hand, but Daniel cut in.

"Jahana," he said, delicately taking her hand in his, "you know what I think of that so-called Prophecy."

"Blasphemy!" exclaimed Rimak, raising his arms in the air, shaking his hands in an exaggerated theatrical gesture. "Blasphemy!!".

Jahana pulled her hands back as if he had just burned them. She knew what he thought: he didn't believe in it. He had told her about Nostradamus and at what points his own prophecies were so vague and imprecise that they could be attributed to about anything. His thoughts were that things happened this way because that was it. No special reason. Like the fact that his parents died when he was only seventeen. Because believing that all of that was "written in the sky", means that none of our decisions are really decided. All is planned ahead, all our actions, all our good deeds and all our bad actions, whether one dies of cancer or old age, it's all per-scheduled. Believing, accepting the Prophecy meant that we were not masters of our own destiny.

"What YOU think of Kjatrog's Prophecies is of no importance. We believe in them and in that sense, YOU owe us respect." said Rimak, visibly outraged, his face turning purple. His voice was no longer singing. It was cold. Dry.

"If so, the Prophecy warns about the darkness engulfing MY world and I would need the help of Kgitah to win, which means that I HAVE to protect my world from Evil. I won't be able to do so from here, which means that I HAVE TO GO. You want me to interpret the Prophecy? Here it is: the Shadow of Evil is about to engulf my world, and this message is the signal that I have to go back to save it."

Rimak was at a loss for words. Daniel had just thrown the Prophecy in his face, and he was totally right, even to his own surprise! Having no more argument, Rimak turned around and left, without adding a word. Almost.

"I'm not done!" he yelled from the corridor as the door closed behind him. "You will NOT go to Earth!"

In the following days, Daniel asked the Council for the permissions and explained his intentions. Jahana was also met by the Council. In a private meeting from which she got out with a smile and a deep sense of responsibilities.

Four days later, he was leaving Kgitah for Earth amidst Rimak's heavy and loud protests, who had done everything that he could to prevent it. Unsuccessfully.

The council had approved of his trip. He was not making official contact on Kgitah's name. In fact, a contact with the Solar System Authorities was not wished, and the mention of Kgitah was to be kept to its absolute strict necessity. He was visiting a friend, and that was it.



The medium sized spaceship, one of the oldest generation, showing signs of wear and tear but still fully functional, which was capable of space as well as full atmospheric flight, had been chosen. It was thought that it would look the most Earth-like technology and would attract less attention. It was nonetheless fast and very agile.

Sporting his flight suit, ready to depart, he walked along the ship, doing a little personal inspection, rubbing his hand along the hull. His head was full of contradictory emotions, his heart was beating hard, he had butterflies in his stomach. He was feeling as if he was going to a new world, as if the Earth was unknown to him, even tho, this was his native world, his native planet.

He was approaching the entrance hatch, when he saw Jahana slowly walking toward him, wearing high heels, tight shiny leggings and a crop top. They met and she tightly hugged him, resting her head on his shoulder.

"Did you have to dress that sexy to say goodbye?" he whispered in her ear, admiring her revealing outfit.

"I just want you to not forget me." she answered with a smile. "I don't want to lose you."

"I can't forget you. And don't worry. I'll be careful" he said.

"Have you thought about Crom? He was heading for the Solar System when he disappeared." she whispered.

"Yes. That's what they computed but we never heard about him. The situation on Earth never changed, I mean, there was never a sudden and brutal change in their behavior,

in their ideology, in their religious beliefs, or their technology. They still haven't discovered faster than light travel. The arrival of an alien would have changed all that. I know, I'm from that place, remember? There's no trace of an alien or of Crom. Do not worry. All will be fine." he said, kissing her.

Jahana kissed him back, but she was stressed and it showed. He climbed on board the small spacecraft, powered it up and smiled. Jahana had programmed it that it would display the Prophecy on first power on. He couldn't help himself to re-read it with some apprehension.

When the star of Kgitah will be completing its 123rd phase, the shadow of Evil will cover Kgitah and would follow a dark era where two successive shadows of Evil would take over, chased away on both occasions by the Great People of Kgitah. At the dawn of the third occurrence, the light of freedom will come from a distant star when the Savior, Djiahanel, found by two pure Souls, from which only one will make the trip back will wrap Kgitah's Star of his goodness. The Shadow of Evil will take revenge by spreading to the Savior's Star and it's only with the power of Kgitah's Star that they will be able to destroy the Shadow of Evil and bring the Good Light back to all the worlds.

He entered the trajectory for Earth into the navigating computer and the ship slowly lifted off the landing pad. The small craft floated around for a moment then quickly accelerated, and it was out of the atmosphere a few minutes later. He tried to relax. After all, that was a fifteen hours trek.

Jahana looked at the ship going away with a pinching feeling in her heart. She didn't like it. There was something. She didn't know what it was, but she had a feeling. A very strong feeling. Like when she brought him back, when she had that strange feeling that she had to keep him with her, to bring him along. Now she had the feeling that she should be with him, to follow him, to protect him.

The astroport was very busy in the early hours of the morning. Djiahanel's ship went almost unnoticed, as well as two more, lifting off almost in sequence shortly after, with a similar trajectory. Very similar trajectory.

He hardly found sleep. He was confident that Crom wasn't on Earth, probably scattered in a zillion molecules within the Transpace. That was not what was worrying him, it was more the reaction of the people of the Earth, of Simon, from his sudden reappearance.

Kgitah's Intelligence Services gave him the information they had on the Solar System, from what they gathered in the frequency decoded from that same station which intercepted the message. Yes, Earth has evolved. They were now space

travelers, however, limited to the solar system. There were colonies on the Moon, on Mars and on some moons of Jupiter as well as cloud cities on Venus.

Within the last few years, there has been a sharp increase in their development, but nothing out of the ordinary, like any technological evolutions, things go fast. They seemed to have discovered faster ways of traveling, and made bigger ships.

After many hours cramped in the small seat, the fatigue had the best of him and he fell asleep.

About a few hours after his departure from Kgitah, a sound signal woke him up. A quick look at the instruments and he knew the reason: Simon's signal had stopped. The emitter had ceased to function. A little calculation informed him that the signal had stopped twelve years after its original broadcast. That was posing a problem: he had envisioned going to the emitter's location, figuring that the best place to get in contact with Simon was there. Now that it has ceased emitting, where should he go?

The emitter stopped after twelve years, which makes it ten years ago, two years after Crom's vanishing. Could it be? Nah. Come on. It couldn't be crom. Ten plus twelve makes twenty-two. He was twenty-two when he sold his first game. Why was he trying to find a meaning to those numbers? The emitter could have stopped for any number of reasons: fire, earthquake, equipment malfunction, Simon's passing. No, that couldn't be it.

Nonetheless, his mind kept playing with the numbers, making all sorts of comparisons, multiplications, divisions, additions, complex formulas, all to only bring more anxiety as nothing seemed to add up to something consistent. Or was it something consistent but he just didn't see it.

He was arriving at the solar system due south, perpendicular to the planes of the planets, directly in line with the south pole of the Earth. He knew that a lot of telescopes were pointing in his direction from the night part of the southern hemisphere, for which, right now, it was summer, meaning the shortest nights of the year. Coincidentally, that would help him get closer before being detected.

He dropped out of the Transpace at about an hour travel time at conventional speed, coming in slightly aimed at the dayside, to hide his ship within the glare of the Sun. All his transmitting equipment was off but he was listening, grabbing as many news channels as possible, his ship now not moving. His first target when leaving Kgitah was to go to the transmitting station, but it had stopped, so he had to know where to go. Where was Simon? Earth? Moon? Mars?... Dead?

He learned that Simon was very much alive and now very big, even having his own moonbase!

"I should go there, then," he said, thrusting the ship forward. His ship was an old Kgithah model but in no way Earth built, and he had no identification or anything. As he approached the Simon moonbase, he was hailed.

"Unidentified vessel, this is Moonbase Shoemaker-Alpha. You're entering controlled space. Please state your name and purpose." said the soft but firm voice of the agent. He could see her beautiful soft face surrounded by long blond hair, on the monitor. He smiled. Simon was the one to gather himself around pretty women.

"Yes... hi." he said with rusty English. Making it sound like it wasn't his native tongue. "I would like to meet Simon Gingras. I heard that he's on the Moon right now? Is it possible to meet him?"

The woman looked puzzled. Obviously, not a usual request.



"May I have your name and the purpose of your visit? I will have to check if Mr. Simon is at the base and available."

"Oh, yes, of course." said Daniel, "my purpose is to... ahem..." responding to his radio call after many years and my name is Daniel."

"Very well, mister Daniel... who?"

"Just... just Daniel. He will understand. Well, he should... If

not, well, forget it." he said with a grin, not so sure of himself.

"Humm... Okay. Hold your position, please." she said, the screen displaying the Shoemaker-Alpha Moonbase symbol with the S.A.I, for Simon Aerospace Industries, logo.

Daniel did. His instruments alerted him of a lot of probing. They might even detect that his ship was not exactly Earth-built.

It was taking a heck of a long time. Then again, when waiting, one minute may feel like an hour.

The face of the blonde came back on the screen.

“Okay, Mr Daniel, I have three... questions for you.” she said with a puzzled look as she looked at some other screen. “Question one: Hum...” she said putting a finger to her ear. She was obviously wearing some earplugs. “Yes Sir... Question one: what was the game level on that last night?” she said, frowning, not understanding the purpose of that strange question.

Daniel smiled.

“Level Eight, looking for the chest in the big room”

“Hum... okay. Question number two: what was displayed on the TV screen when you left in a hurry?”



“A starmap toward Gliese 364” quickly answered Daniel. Yes, those were the sort of questions only he could answer.

“Okay... third question... Sorry sir, say again?” she said, putting her finger on her earphone again.

“Really?... okay. Mr Daniel, last question. What... What was the name of the babe in blue spandex?”

Daniel couldn't repress laughing out loud. He remembered Jahana's spacesuit.

“Ah, shit, Simon! Come on, man, I can give you any answer. But really, her name is Jahana.”

“Yes... Yes, sir. Will do, sir...” she said, putting her finger on her ear. “Okay, Mr Daniel, please proceed to Platform Number 4” she said, cutting the communication to the Moonbase log..

Daniel powered his engines and headed for the Moon. He spotted the lunar base, near the Shoemaker crater, near the south pole, in a zone practically always lit by the sun. A

network of solar panels stretching East and West of the base was visible as well as eight clear circular domes, each one the size of a football field, inside which more standard buildings could be seen, the domes being linked by surface corridors. At least four landing platforms were visible amidst the domes. Daniel carefully directed his ship toward pad number 4.

Another young and sexy woman, a black woman this time, appeared on the screen. "Daniel's ship, this is Shoemaker-Alpha, you are authorized to land on platform number four," she said with a sexy voice, which made Daniel smile.

"Fucking Simon. You probably have some of the most beautiful women in the world up there." he said, smiling to himself, then to the com link "Authorization to land on platform four. Roger that." he answered, just before the comlink returned to the moonbase logo.

He softly landed on the platform and waited. The com screen opened up again, this time showing a black man, head shaved, looking quite fit. Daniel smiled.

"You say you're Daniel?" he asked..

Daniel felt a shiver run down his spine. What a pleasure to hear that voice.

"Wow... Hey, hi, Simon... Shit... Long time." said Daniel, his voice full of emotion, trying to figure out what to say. He had imagined it, he had planned it but now, it was all a mess in his mind.

"Well, you do look like him. Sorry, but over the years, I've got a lot of pretenders, so I'm careful." he said, looking down at some screen. "That ship...That's a nice ship. It doesn't resemble any of our designs. Interesting. Who built it?"

"That would be the people of... err... Gliese 364, Simon." said Daniel, his voice trembling with emotions and remembering to keep Kgitah out of the conversation as much as possible. "It's an old model and they figured it might be best to look less conspicuous."

"Oh really? Uh, okay. Well, this landing pad is for standard Earth docking rings, and since you don't have one, you will have to move to pad 2H, which is located close to a hangard where it can be towed in. But the pad isn't ready yet, there's already a ship there. It would take about half an hour. You'll be notified when the pad is cleared. That pad is located on the other side of Dome 2, right in front of you. I'll meet you there once you're inside. Is that okay with you?"

"Yes, yes, sure, Simon. It's been 30 years. I can wait 30 minutes." he said with a giggle.

The logo of the Moonbase appeared again and Daniel waited for the signal.

Half an hour later, he saw a huge ship, which he assumed was a cargo, fly over his head and he was given the okay to head for platform 8H, a large zone near a small building next to a rocky face. He landed as close as he could from the door. A few moments later, the door opened downwards into the ground, revealing a large empty hangar closed by another large door on the opposite wall. A group of astronauts walked out and using a small vehicle, dragged Daniel's ship inside the room before the outer door closed. They didn't seem puzzled by Daniel's ship. There was nothing else in that room and Daniel figured that it was some kind of airlock. He could see, through small windows on the back door, people moving around in a larger room, without any spacesuit.

He looked at the exterior pressure instrument of his spacecraft and saw it rise rapidly, until it reached 0.8 atmosphere. The large interior door opened and the ship was again pulled in the new room, evidently carved inside the rocky hills, while the airlock door closed after him.

He opened the outer door of his ship which was in two parts, one part, the glass, going up, the other part, the stairs, going down. He placed himself inside the door frame and waited.

Someone entered the room, tall, squared shaped shoulders. Daniel recognized



the walk, the stance, the clean shaved head of the smiling man approaching, although it looked more bald than shaved now. Only his grayish eyebrows were telling about his real age.

Daniel stepped down the small staircase and walked toward the man. Both stopped a meter apart, examining each other. Simon laughed when he noticed the shiny, metallic white and red suit Daniel was wearing, pointing at it.

"Damn. I do prefer the look of the blue one... You look... practically the same. You haven't aged a bit." he said. "How is that?" he asked, suddenly less sure of himself.

"Oh, I did age, just not a lot. They have technologies we don't have here. I was partly... repaired."

"Uh... you mean you're an android or something like that now?" he asked, almost with a defiant tone.

"What? No. Regenerated organ transplants. I... I'll explain later." said Daniel, suddenly eager to skip away from the subject. "I'm really happy to see you again, pal." he said, extending his hand.

"Me too." said Simon, grabbing his hand and pulling Daniel toward him for a tight embrace. "I'm glad you're here."

But Daniel had sudden doubts, he was feeling something odd, the hug just too tight, as if he was sensing, searching, probing with his hands, almost to make sure he was real. But, thinking of it, he thought that it was probably normal. He would have felt reluctant too if the roles were reversed.

Moonlight

"Me too, Simon." said Daniel, fighting to breathe.

"Hey!" said Simon, suddenly letting go of the tight hug, "you deserve a tour of the facility." he said, making a broad gesture around him. "I sort of owe all of that to you."

"Yeah, you did... expand outside of gaming controllers, I've heard." he said with a smile.

Simon was looking at him puzzled.

"What do you think? That I came back here after thirty years without checking anything? I've been parked nearby, listening to all radio waves transmissions, news channels, and they talk about you pretty much everywhere. You made it big: your own moon base, an energy company. I bet you're a heck of a lot richer than I was at the time."

"Oh... Yes. I run quite a few things around here." he said with a wink. "So you saw my latest pub?"

"Err... Simon. To me, everything is your latest publicity." said Daniel with a grin.

That seemed to satisfy Simon's apprehensions, like he had the proof that the man in front of him was really Daniel.

"Nice spaceship you got there, my friend" said Simon, pointing with his chin at Daniel's spacecraft. "I can't wait to learn more about it, and ready for fighting, I see." he said pointing to two long cannon-like tubes located in front of the ship.

"That? That's asteroid blasters. It sends a strong beam of energy over a wide area to loosen the bonds holding an asteroid together, then the shields of the ship break it apart. That's all."

"Oh, really? Just that? No disintegrator or lightsabers or ion cannons and the like?"

"Err... no. This ship is unarmed. Those are for asteroid deflection. I'm not here to fight but to meet someone who sent me a message." he said, looking at him.

"The message already reached the planet you were on? The star chart on your computer said 37 light-years or something. Unless the signal traveled way faster than the speed of light... or you are not on Gliese 364. Where is it?" he asked.

"Oh, no. The system is 37 light-years away. We, or rather they have remote stellar stations. It was picked up by one of those a few light years ahead of Kgitah. Oh, right,

yes, Kgitah is the name of the planet, but I'm not supposed to talk about it". He said to Simon's puzzled look.

"They're spying on us?"

"Spy on you? Considering that said station is about 20 light-years from the Solar System, I wouldn't say spy..." said Daniel "we got news that is 21 years old."

"We?" said Simon. "You talk like you're one of them."

"Well, I've been there for 30 years. It is my home now."

"Yes. Of course." he said, trailing off.

Simon smiled and invited him to follow and as soon as he was some distance from the ship, the door closed.

"Well... remote door locks." said Daniel, smiling. "Yeah, it got that!" he said, giggling, but Simon didn't react as much as he thought he would, as if it was something he expected. It was perhaps a feature already standard on his ships.

They exited the hangar into what looked like a changing booth with three lockers. Simon approached one of the lockers and pressed a button. The door disappeared into the ceiling and he took one of the two-pieces outfit that were hanging inside, like the one he was wearing except for a different color, and handed it to Daniel;

"Here. Put this on, it will attract less attention than your shiny suit. It's made out of cellulose. We don't have a particular dress code, but this is what most visitors and workers wear.." said Simon. "Unless you're from Mars. They want to keep their... identity."

Daniel smiled and undressed, right there, in front of Simon. No shame. After all, they knew each other since school, and they had already seen each other naked in gyms. Simon was surprised to see the large scar on Daniel's chest, and the different skin tone, slightly darker. Daniel noticed.

"That's the result of the... reconstruction they did. I was hit in the stomach by a weapon's discharge. I had a new stomach, a new liver, one new kidney, and part of my intestine replaced with cloned organs sourced from my own DNA... and all the needed, ahem, supporting stuff around it." he said, putting the loose fitting jumpsuit on. For him, this scar was part of him. "That's one of the reasons I didn't come back. I would have become a freak for science." he added with a grin.

"Your own DNA cloned right? You think we could... borrow the technology?" he said, his eyes sparkling.

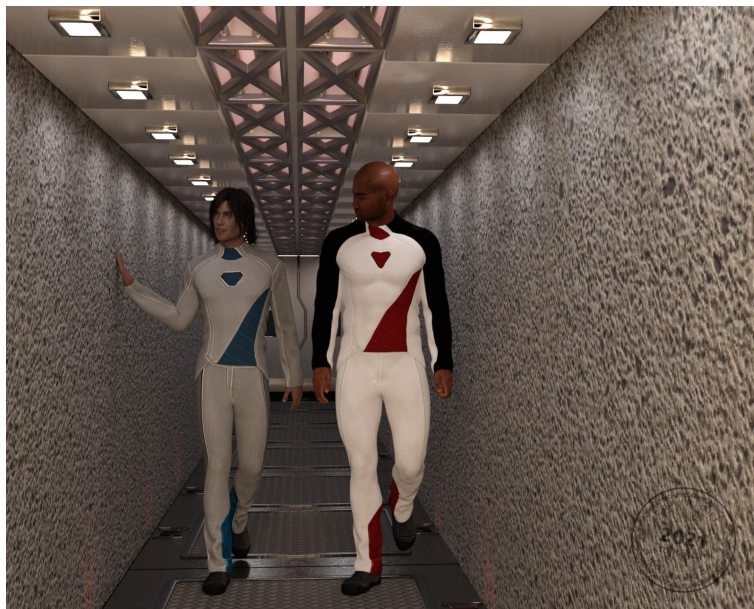
"Uh... Everything is possible, Simon. We would have to discuss it." said Daniel, a little taken aback, not having thought about any technology exchange which would go mainly one way... toward the Earth.

"Come," said Simon, "we'll be able to talk more about all of it in private, in my office." he said. "I've already given directives so that you and your ship would be kept secret."

"Thanks Simon," said Daniel, puzzled. He would have preferred that he used the words "unseen" more than "secret", as if hiding something.

For some reason, this was not the idea he had of how his return would play out. Simon was appearing surprised, but it was as if he was expecting it. He was more interested in Daniel's technology, even at his body repairs than at the man itself. He was appearing distant, detached, as if his arrival had been planned, even rehearsed. It was a very strange feeling, not asking where he had been, how he was living, wife, kids, planets, etc. And it was weird how, at one point, he seemed genuinely happy to see him, and at other times, he was, like, questioning his sanity. He might be too stunned for those mundane questions, he figured. However...

They walked along a rather long 2 meters wide tunnel which seemed to have been carved directly into the rock, below the surface of the Moon. The walls were somewhat shiny and smooth although they were all bumpy. They reminded him of the



war tunnels and caves Jahana had shown him on Kgitah. The floor and the ceiling with the lights and ventilation were definitely modern looking.

"Wow." he said, trailing his hand on the walls, "What kind of tunnel boring technology was used for that?" he asked.

"Pulverisator beams, what else." said Simon like if it was perfectly known, as if Daniel should have known, then quickly snapped back, adding "well, you know, technology did evolve on Earth

in thirty years, Daniel. We've not used a mechanical boring machine for quite some time." he said. "I imagine you have something like that on... err... Gliese... Sorry, Kgitah, right?" he said, at a loss of words.

"Yeah, we do." simply answered Daniel. "We... THEY have similar technology. Who invented it on Earth?"

Simon stopped dead and looked at him with a large smile, the smile of the conqueror, slightly opening her arms.

"Who do you think?" he said, proudly.

Daniel raised his eyebrows.

"You?"

"You look surprised. I have expanded my activities a lot, you know. In fact, it's one of my research laboratories who did the discovery. They were working on a particle beam when they lost control of the device. The research center was partly destroyed, but with the data we were able to gather, I built a circuit that was capable of controlling the flux and... voilà!"

"I see." said Daniel. "Well, it was a team effort. Your company developed it."

Simon laughed, loudly, and they continued to walk. His laugh seemed artificial. More and more things were weird. Simon's wristlet beeped.

"Yeah, wrist communicator." he said, getting his wrist up to read the message.

"Apparently, I need the hangar where your ship is stored for some machinery. You don't see any problem if my men move it, don't you?" he said, then hesitating, "... it won't start to shoot at people or deploy some kind of shield preventing anyone from touching it, isn't it?"

"No, Simon." said Daniel, giggling. "Nothing like that. I told you, it's not armed. Anyway, you are the master of this domain, I couldn't really object to your requests." he said, smiling.

"Ah, for that, you're right." said Simon, putting his wrist communicator to his mouth and giving instructions to his employee, apparently relieved.

They exited the tunnel into a corridor with the walls looking like smooth plastic, with some ventilation grills. Two rows of lights on the ceiling were providing a slightly dim atmosphere. Everything seemed rugged and also showed signs of wear.

They were crossing a few people here and there, every one saluting Simon with a smile or a gesture of the hand. Apparently, he was appreciated and liked.

A few more corridors, to the right, to the left, to the right again and finally an elevator which brought them five floors higher, exiting into a large circular room of about fifteen meters of diameter made with pretty much nothing but windows, from the base of the walls to the top of the bubble ceiling, divided into quarters by large support beams following the curve of the glass. That room seemed to be located in the dead center of the Lunar complex and, except for some communication towers, was giving a stunning view of the Moon landscape. Daniel was speechless.

There was only the elevator in its center, a few rooms or rather areas divided by mobile dividers with a work desk, a conference table and a few sofas and chairs in them.

"Wow!" said Daniel. "A room with a view! Impressive but forget any privacy. You see everything and everybody sees you."

Simon laughed.

"Nah, Daniel. I'm not an exhibitionnist. Melanie was, however... Anyways, the windows are completely opaque from the outside, unless I change the polarization. And since there's nothing higher than this room around, people on the ground can't see much."

"Oh, speaking of Malanie, what happened to the rest of the gang? Any contact?" asked Daniel, a little shy.

"Melanie left me when she realized that I was serious about building the dish antenna, you know, the antenna that sent the message. She was saying that I had to let go and look the other way, not burning my money in something so useless. Everything that followed the sale of my video game controller sent me farther from them. We kept in contact for a while through social media, but, you know... we went our separate ways."

Daniel was somewhat disappointed. He would have wished that the whole gang stayed as is but, he knew. Things change. Each one goes on with his or her own life. He himself had made his life elsewhere. He walked closer to the transparent wall bubble, looking at the Earth. It was night time in Europe and the terminator was approaching the Americas.

"I wonder how much it changed down there." he said.

"You would be surprised. Oh, there's still those conflicts here and there, but the planet is global now, especially since we colonized the inner planets. There's a colony of 10000

people here, and the one on Mars will reach 6000 by the end of the year and a cloud city of 600 people on Venus. On the outer planets, there's another colony preparing to go to Jupiter, precisely on Ganymede, next year. Sixty people for a starter. People realized that the Universe is large and can be explored."

"Shit! Colonies on the Moon, Mars and Jupiter? What do they do there? Still looking for traces of life?"

"No, of course not. They go there for the adventure and, mostly, for the money. They make in five years what one makes in 50 years on Earth."

"Really? What is worth so much?"

"This!" he said, picking a 3cm wide rock from his desk looking really heavy for its size, a rock Daniel quickly recognized with its purple color, emerald like sparkles, and the small octagonal protuberances in eight different directions.

"That's Antarcticite" said Simon, smiling.

Daniel was about to speak but Simon went on without waiting.

"The first deposit was found in Antarctica, hence the name, ten years ago. Not very original, but the rock is. When it's heated at a precise high temperature, it starts to vibrate and to dissipate a fantastic energy, more powerful than the energy needed to maintain said temperature. We can harvest that energy and use it. No more hydro-electric plant, nuclear plant, or fossil fuelled power plant. Each house has its own little generator with a crystal like that in it. You realize the implications? No more electric grid, and when it has consumed its energy, it's nothing more than a rock someone can throw in his backyard, although that shit is heavy, about 50tons by cubic meter, but only weighs 10 tons by cubic meter when drained out."

"And a lot cheaper to use." added Daniel, knowing perfectly that it was what he knew as Mirox. He also knew that 1Kg, half of what Simon had in his hand, could provide the energy output needed in a northern country for over a year.

Simon smiled.

"We are still a capitalist civilization, Daniel. The cost to the consumer hasn't changed much. We are just making more profits."

"We? You mean..."

"Of course! I own the one on Earth as well as five more mining operations here on the Moon. With help from SpaceX, we found a few deposits on Mars. The ships that travel to Jupiter are a joint venture between them and me."

"But why? Are the deposits on Earth that small?"

"Oh, it was a respectable size, but with one kilo per house per year, it wears out fast."

Daniel was about to mention that 1 kilo per year per house was way too much but then again, they were in their infancy with that technology, probably at the same level as when the Kgithans first discovered the mineral."

"I imagine that you're using the Mir... euh... the antarcticite for the spaceships too? Titanium? Platinum?"

"Exactly. And large deposits of all those materials have been found on outer planets and moons, hence the modern gold rush. I'm guessing that, for you, that's pretty lame but we can reach 0.9 light speed! We believe we will be able to jump over that theoretical speed limit in five years or so!"

Daniel was stunned. So many discoveries, so many innovations in such a little time. Then again, in less than a hundred years, the Earth went from horse carriages to steam engines to rockets and landing on the moon.

Simon looked at his watch and quickly cut short the conversation.

"I'm sorry but I have an unforeseen event to attend," he said. "I'll show you your quarters. It's just one floor below. You'll be able to relax. You must suffer some jet-lag or something," he said, nervously. "I should be back in about two hours, if you don't mind."

"No, not at all," quickly said Daniel. "After all, I came in unannounced. Sorry to push on your schedule. I wouldn't mind wandering around, you know?"

"Yeah, but... I would prefer to be with you. There's a lot of... err... dead-end corridors around here" he said, leading him to the elevator.

At the same time, in space, a small ship was approaching, from below the orbit of the moon, apparently undetected by radars or surveillance equipment. It flew close to the Moon's surface, heading to the south pole. The way his hull was reflecting the surroundings, he was practically invisible to whoever would have been looking in its direction. There, close to the Shoemaker crater, it landed, barely lifting dust, as if it had been designed to be as stealthy as possible.



Inside, a woman with brown hair. Jahana turned on her surveillance equipment. After all, she had her duty to fulfill. She was the protector.

Simon left Daniel in the rather spacious room, with sofas, desks, computers, and of course a bed. He sat at the computer and browsed, trying to learn as much as possible about the current Earth and especially Simon Industries.

He was finding Simon attached to many recent discoveries. Too

many in fact. That was just too strange, too weird.

What he found on the company website itself, was astounding! First, there was his game controller, for which Daniel remembered giving him money. That's when he had built the dish antenna which sent the message four years later for eleven years. During that period, nothing special happened. A few more electronic and feedback gadgets for the gaming industry here, little bits and pieces of technology there.

He created Simon Energy Corp (S.E.C.) the year following the beginning of the construction of the dish, and apparently invested a lot on alternative energy sources, including nuclear fusion, but it led nowhere. He had a few new energy storage technologies patented, tho. The rest of the world seemed to develop with the same progression as before: return to the Moon with eventually the construction of a base, which was operational about six years later, the first trip to Mars, the construction of an orbital station around the Moon, then Simon Aerospace Industries was created, eleven years ago, and from there, everything changed.

He, or rather his S.E.C. discovered the first antarctcite deposit, searching for thermal energy... in Antarctica? Anyways, then one year later, his laboratory accidentally discovered the particle cannon and the pulverisator boring machines were patented, then the construction of his moonbase and, surprisingly, the discovery of a massive antarctcite deposit. The next year, he already had enhanced spacecrafts that could travel from the Moon to Mars, in about 3 weeks, then S.E.C. with S.A.I. and SpaceX discovered a large deposit of antarctcite on Mars and by now, S.A.I. is the most space-faring company, operating on Earth, the Moon and Mars, with SpaceX leading exploration from Mars to the outer planets.

Daniel finds it strange to have so many important discoveries and progress after years of regular discoveries. And it all started eleven years ago, one year after Crom's disappearance. Doubts were beginning to form in his mind. Perhaps he should better go back to Kgitah, keep his distance and just closely monitor Earth for a while.

And his attitude? Sometimes he acted as if he was surprised to see Daniel, and other times, it was as it was expected. Sometimes he acted as if he doubted, even feared Daniel, and other times like it was the friend he always knew.

He had been browsing the new internet for about an hour, pretty much dozing off at the screen when a chime indicated that there was someone at the door, woke him up. Daniel opened and in front of him, was standing a very young and sexy woman, like only Simon knew how to select, tall, long black hair, some asian traits, mid twenties, wearing a sexy tight fitting bodysuit with very tight fitting pants, that showed most of her hips, revealing her perfectly sculpted body, and strange high heel boots... On the Moon!

"Hello Daniel. My name is Kim. Mister Simon asked me to make sure your stay was as agreeable as possible." she said with a hot, sultry voice and a wink. He's sorry not to tell you himself, but he will be busy some time longer and asked me to give you a tour of the facility. If you want, of course." she said with a smile that would melt frozen steel, offering her arm so that Daniel could grab it with his.

He smiled.

"How could I resist such a wonderful proposition." he said, grabbing her arm. He was not to resist her charms.



She led him to the main center, where the different mining operations were monitored, then passed by the rest area, where pools, gyms and other facilities were available, thanks to the artificial gravity, otherwise the water would be hardly containable. Many people were wearing a uniform like he was, but there was a good proportion that were wearing anything but that, ranging from worn-out clothes to armor-like spacesuits or being almost naked. It made him

question why Simon was so eager for him to take off his flight suit. Sure, the suit would not have attracted more attention, apart perhaps, from the Coalition's logo.

Finally they reached the garden, a green oasis in this otherwise white and cold



environment. That's where they were growing their fruits and vegetables, but it was also just a green park, with trees and flowers. People of a lot of different cultures were there, again, sporting many different outfits, from the classic to the outrageous.

She knowingly led him behind a large bush, furtively looking around to make sure they weren't followed.

She then unzipped her suit which seemed to be a relief for the zipper ready to split open under the tension of her ample breasts.

"Simon asked me to make your stay as...fun as possible." she said, giggling, leading Daniel behind the bush, where they embrace, their lips locking and their suits leaving their bodies.

Hidden by the tall grass, they made love. Nobody seemed to notice or care, and Kim didn't seem to be doing anything improper or illegal. Things have changed, apparently.

After the act, they stayed there, just chatting about everything and nothing. Kim didn't seem to know much about the technical aspects of the moonbase. She was a party girl, and she liked to party. It showed.

They were cuddling when there was a buzzing sound. She startled and looked at her wrist communicator.

"Oh, rats, I forgot to bring you back! Simon has been waiting for you for half an hour now, in the main restaurant. Quick. Let's dress back up and follow me." she said, giggling, finding the whole situation quite funny, so did Daniel.

Fifteen minutes later, Kim was escorting Daniel in what could have been a high end restaurant in Montreal or New York. The setting was expensive with heavy velvet curtains over false yet real looking windows. Large columns made out of exotic wood were holding the high, richly sculpted ceiling. A soft warm dim light was casting nice shadows in calculating places. At the back of the dining room, slightly hidden behind a column in what looked like a private alcove, Simon was waiting, taking a sip from a cocktail glass. He had a joint giggle with Kim when she asked forgiveness for being late, did a little bow and excused herself.

"Don't tell me. She showed you the garden?" he said with a smile.

Daniel smiled back.

"Yes, why? That's a beautiful garden that needs to be... experienced." he said, looking in the direction Kim had walked away. "Impressive, like this restaurant. For the Moon, that is. I was expecting something looking more like a cafeteria or similar. It must have cost a fortune to import all this exotic wood and stuff."

Simon giggled.

"Nice imitation, right? Fake. All fake. Made with regolith, Moon dust. The velvet drapes are made out of cellulose. But even though it's fake, and everybody knows it, it gives out a better experience than the cold, artificial, yet functional, rest of the station.

Daniel was impressed. The image he had of a Lunar base was totally different. He had in memories the numerous science-fiction movies of the 21st century with their base cold and dry, and the difficult life of mine workers on the Moon. Even with their technology, the Kgitahns didn't put such warmth into their orbiting stations. That would be something for them to learn from.

The meal arrived. It was again, expensive restaurant food, with a seafood entree followed by a damn excellent steak.

"Don't tell me..." said Daniel between two flavorful mouthfuls of steak and carrots, tastes he hadn't experienced in decades, "...that it's also done with regolith?" he said, quickly taking another bite, so he would not start laughing too hard.

"No, not regolith, but it's cloned meat nonetheless."

Daniel stopped chewing. Not by disgust but by surprise.

"I'm serious." said Simon. "All the steaks are identical, cloned from one single cell. Same thing with chicken, shrimps, any meat. We can't clone something, like... alive. We clone meat. Only the vegetables are fleshly grown."

"Still, quite impressive" he said, happily chewing his mouthful. "There must be a lot of eco and granola groups who organized demonstrations against that." he said, thinking that, although the Kgitahns were not cloning their meat, they were making it at the atomic level. He wondered which method was more artificial.

"You must know everything about that, I mean cloning." asked Simon.

The question, as well as the tone, was as if he was testing Daniel, and using "you", putting Daniel as part of the Kgitahns. That was cold and it surprised him. He put his utensils down and swallowed what was left in his mouth, marking a pause.

"The Kgitahns, yes." he said, emphasizing the word Kgitahns. "In a way, cloning is old technology. They make their food at the atomic level. It's more replicated, fabricated than cloned. It's a little complicated to explain and not really my field of expertise. And honestly, this steak is a thousand times better tasting!"

"And your organs, they were... replicated?" asked Simon, putting his elbows on the table and leaning forward, almost as if he was challenging him. "They're cloned or not?"

"Err... yes. In a way. They took some of my cells and made them grow in a speedy process to make new organs. Since they have the same molecular signature as my own DNA, there's no rejection."

"And between cloning a liver and cloning a whole human being, there's only a small step, right? And it's not this big of a step." he said, then realizing from Daniel's reaction that he might have gone a little too far, so he quickly added a footnote. "I mean, that's what the pressure groups against it are saying here."

Daniel suddenly felt totally out of place. He tried to play it cool.

"As far as I know, when they discovered the cloning technique, over two-hundred years ago, they tried to clone full human beings. They cloned only one, actually, a young kid who had died in a car accident. It happened to be the son of one of the researchers of the program. It succeeded yet failed at the same time. They made a full "him" but it was an empty shell. The brain was there but there was no one home. The brain seemed to be always running idle. All the organs were functional, but it was nothing more than a biological doll, not reacting to any stimuli. Nothing more than an organ farm. They never tried the experiment again.

"Oh... officially." he said, smiling and making quote marks with his fingers.

"I... Fuck, Simon. What the hell do you want? What are you trying to say? What are you insinuating? That I am not me? That I'm a fucking clone because of that?" he said, ripping his cellulose suit open to show his scar.

People were looking at them.

"Let's just say that your story, and especially your apparent age, is difficult to believe." he said, taking a large gulp of wine, like to close the discussion, and at the same time, celebrating his win.

Daniel took some time to sink the news. He let himself fall into the soft chair.

"Don't tell me you're jealous of my... age appearance, Simon." said Daniel.

Simon stared at him, without moving. Daniel felt threatened. Things had changed between him and Simon. Between him and the Solar system. Maybe he was the changed thing. He lowered his eyes.

"Where's the Simon I know, the joker, the guy with a joy of living like no one else."

"I... I think he's overwhelmed by the current events." he said, letting himself drop in his chair, looking at something he alone was seeing behind Daniel.

They completed their meal, but it was by courtesy. The desire to eat was not there anymore. After a dessert and some coffee, a taste he hadn't experienced for a long while, Simon led him back to his quarters, and as soon as the door opened, Simon pushed Daniel inside, who tripped and hit a table which flipped on its side, before he fell on the floor himself. He quickly rolled back to his feet and turned around.

"What the fuck, Simon..." he said, but he had the answer.

Simon was there, a weapon in his hand and four security guards who were apparently already inside the room, all holding guns aiming at him, familiar looking guns, strangely looking like Sigamee technology. Simon walked closer, his eyes sharp.

"You are not Daniel. You are his clone. Daniel is dead, killed by the Kgitahns, like they destroyed the people of Sigamee."

Daniel was stunned. What was he talking about? Who told him all this? How come he knew the Sigamee and the Kgitahns?

He heard a slight rumbling he recognized in a second. He swiftly turned around."

"Crom!!!"

The Shadow.

"Nice to see you again, my *friend*." said Crom with his usual cold and morbid voice.



Daniel made a grin of disgust. Crom was standing on two legs, but his right one was seriously damaged and he was missing his right arm. The right side of his head sported many large scars, one closing the gap where one of his eyes would have been. He had obviously taken a severe hit as he escaped.

Crom smiled and had a small laugh.

"Yes," said Crom, answering Daniel's disgusted grin, "that's what you did to me in prison, in your

never-ending torture sessions."

"Tortures? You're lying like you're breathing, Crom." said Daniel, then turned to Simon. "Don't tell me you believe in this piece of trash?"

"Yes, TORTURES!" said Crom, speaking louder. "After my escape, I erred one year within Transpace. one fucking year. Enough time to fix my wounds, and for the last twelve years, Simon has given me shelter, helping me, so I could help them prepare against the Kgtitahn's invasion. I was sure you would come to conquer the Earth like you conquered and destroyed Sigamee. I wasn't to let you do it one more time. That was enough." he said, almost screaming in rage.

"This... piece of trash, like you say, survived your tortures." added Simon, enraged, brainwashed into believing all Crom was saying." But you don't give a damn. After all, a clone doesn't have a conscience. Crom showed me and you said it yourself: the clone was nothing but a doll."

"He showed you? How? What did he show you?"

"Through hypno-learning."

"Hypno-learn... but how the hell did he build the machine? It requires crystals we only find on Dolaron." said Daniel, completely overwhelmed by the sudden change of situation.

"Not if the whole machine is brought in, Djiahanel." said a man behind him with a singing voice Daniel immediately recognized. His eyes widened as he turned around.

"Rimak! I should have known. That's why you were trying very hard for me NOT to come here, because it would risk interfering with your plan, because you have a plan, don't you?" said Daniel, turning to Crom. "A plan with only one goal."

"Daniel," cut-in Simon, "Crom helped us. He's the one who made us discover the power within the antarctice. He's the one who brought most of the space technology you see around us. I was heading for the dish antenna, which also held a space-related research station, when I saw an asteroid lit up the sky and fell into the ocean near me. I went and found out that it wasn't an asteroid but a spaceship. My team got it out of the water and we found him, badly injured, barely alive. We saved him from certain death. He explained what happened, what you did, how you were abducted and cloned before the original was killed... Yeah... cloned. Why the fuck am I explaining all this to you? You're not Daniel." he said, raising his hand, pointing his weapon at Daniel's head while gesturing to the chin to look out the window.

On the other side, an armada of a hundred spaceships, each one the size of a football stadium, obviously Sigamee made, were floating above the Moonbase.

"We are ready to protect the Earth."

"What? No! Wait. Let me tell MY version of that story." said Daniel, raising his hands, not wanting to initiate a conflict, ready to surrender. "Let me try to prove to you that I'm not a clone, that I am really the one I say I am. Give me a chance, Simon. You never made a decision before knowing all the facts. You never acted on the spear of the moment. You always calculated the risks. Let me prove to you that I AM DANIEL, your friend." he said, trying to gain some time to think, to find a solution, trying to figure out how to call Jahana for help.

"Don't waste your time with him." said Crom, visibly irritated.

Simon hesitated but dropped his weapon.

"I'm willing to listen, it will make my decision easier. I always loved fiction stories." he said ironically. "Go on..."

"Okay. We, or rather you and the gang were playing video games, my latest one, but a snowstorm abruptly ended all that. You left early in the day. I was shoveling the snow when that spaceship crash landed behind my house. One person jumped out. Her name was Jahana. She explained that she was being chased by Crom's men. The Sigamees had a plan to destroy their planet and she had to warn them before it was too late. Their system was visible from the Earth's south pole, toward the star Gliese 364. We had no phone or anything. We tried to go downtown but the road was blocked. Then the Sigamees came back. We fought, disabled them and Jahana asked me if I was willing to help her. I said yes and we took their ship to go back to Kgitah. We reached the planet but were taken prisoner. We nonetheless succeeded in warning them against Crom's plans. Well, I did and that's the reason he shot me. The Kgitahns saved me and I have lived a peaceful life with Jahana since that time. I am not the bad guy here, HE IS!" he said, pointing at Crom.

He had said all this at such a speed that he himself couldn't figure out if anything made any sense. Simon took a few moments to understand it all.

"Wow. Nice story, Djiahanel." said Rimak to fill the void left by Simon's sudden silence, "except that it's false. You forgot to mention that you destroyed Sigamee after that... win."

"The Sigamees destroyed their planet themselves." said Daniel nodding. "We help them get it back up."

Simon raised his arm to ask a question.

"Woah, woah, here. Rimak, twice so far, you called him Djiahanel. Why's that?"

"That's... that's his clone name in Kgitahn." quickly answered Crom, staring at Rimak. "That's not important. What's important is to get rid of that clone." he said, pointing a shaking hand at Daniel.

"That's from the Prophecy." said Daniel.

"A piece of shit!" yelled Crom, suddenly nervous, even taking a few steps back, putting his left hand on his side arm, ready to draw.

"Prophecy?" asked Simon, lowering his weapon even more.

"Yeah, the Djiahanel Prophecy. A Prophecy according to which a shadow of Evil, associated with Sigamee would wrap Kgitah of its darkness, but someone coming from a far away system, Djiahanel, will strike down the Evil, only to see his own world being

engulfed by said shadow of Evil. I helped them win against Crom's plans. Sigamee's plans. Djiahanel, Daniel. A link was made. Well, they made a link.

"You? A Savior? A hero?" said Simon, eyes wide, on the verge of laughing. "You???"

Daniel opened his arms.

"Hep... Seriously, I never really believed in it. You know how I despise those silly things, that was until I saw Crom here, today." said Daniel, suddenly a lot more serious, his tone almost creepy. "Now I'm seriously afraid for my home planet, and especially with that." he said, pointing at the armada with his chin.

"We have to do everything ourselves, here, a bunch of worthless Earthlings," said Rimak, grabbing one of the guard's weapons to fire on Daniel, but this one was faster and plunged forward toward Crom.

He felt the wave of heat brush his back as he was throwing Crom on the floor, taking his gun, quickly turning around, aiming and shooting at Rimak, hitting him on the left leg. That one screamed as he collapsed on the ground, growling.

Simon stood there, looking everywhere, not knowing what to do, where to shoot at. His security personnel were doing the same thing, awaiting directions, orders. Who's the bad guys, who's the good guys?

"I think we're going to take care of this way earlier than planned." said Crom, then, switching to Sigameese, he barfed what seemed to be orders.

Daniel made wide eyes and turned toward the armada.

"NOOOOOOOOO!!!!"

The armada was slowly turning around and getting away from the Lunar base.

"What? What are they doing? Where are they going? Crom?" asked Simon, stunned.

"They are getting in position." said Crom, staring at Daniel straight in the eyes, his eyes on fire.

"To destroy the Earth..." completed Daniel, teeth clenched, returning Crom's glare. But he saw something from the corner of his eye.

"What? Why? What are you doing?" asked Simon, totally lost.

Crom answered by laughing, totally stunning Simon.

"Simon! Behind you!" yelled Daniel.

Rimak was there, crawling on the floor. He had managed to take the weapon back and was aiming at Simon. The shot was fired, but Simon was quick, and literally jumped over the blast, landing on his feet, turning and firing at Rimak, hitting him on the head, which exploded sending brain fragments all over the wall behind where he was standing.

"Wow! Way funnier than videogames." said Simon, smiling.

"Yeah, but a lot more painful." said Daniel, putting his hand to his scar. "Fuck... where is Crom?"

Simon was doing a quick look around and a guard pointed in one direction.

"Where did he go? You have another access to this place?" asked Daniel.

"I might be crazy but I'm not stupid. Of course there are other accesses, four in fact." he said, walking where the guard was pointing, where Crom had apparently fallen, and walked in a straight line to the wall where he pushed a hidden door.

"And... for them? What can we do?" asked Simon pointing at the armada of spaceships heading for the Earth.

"You probably don't have any fighter spacecraft, don't you?"

"Yes, I do... Well, as a matter of fact, I don't really know. Crom was in charge of the Earth Defense Fleet construction, and, seeing what I know now, he probably didn't leave me one as a token of gratitude."

"So, no way to stop them. And only Crom has a way to talk to them." said Daniel.

"He went over here! Come." said Simon, trying to cast himself away from the responsibility of allowing a deranged mind to build a fleet to destroy the Earth. He was mad at himself for believing in Crom's story. "We may have a chance to get to him and get his communicator."

"Nah, forget it. Knowing him, he's already far away. The only chance we have is from my spaceship. I'll be able to talk to them and call for help. Only the Kgitahns will be able to help us."

"Ah... is that written in the... Prophecy".

Daniel closed his eyes and sighed.

"Yes..." he answered, not believing it himself. He went alone, Kgitah was hours from here. Damn!

"You came alone?" asked Simon, like reading his mind.

"Yes. I'm sorry."

"Sure?" asked Simon.

"Yes... why? You know something I don't know?"

"Well, I got a message earlier that a small spacecraft landed not far from here, barely detectable. They thought it was a meteorite but when they took a picture from the mapping satellite, they saw this." he said, showing a picture. "Recognize this? Not Sigamee, I hope."

"Oh... Can you zoom in... again... AGAIN!" said Daniel, getting more excited. "Jahana!!! Oh gawd!!!"

"What, who? The girl from your story? Your... girlfriend"

"Yes, that one. She followed me here. Oh, I'm so glad she did! She was believing in that fucking Prophecy, and she probably follow to... I have to contact her. The only way is through my ship." said Daniel.

"Come!" said Simon, suddenly having a clear idea of where to go, what to do.

"Maximum Alert" he yelled to his security guards. "Prepare for an asteroid imp...err... an invasion. Gather all the ships you can find, we'll use them as throwing rocks if we have to." he said, disappearing behind the secret door.

Daniel could hardly follow him in the narrow and low corridor with ladders to go down.

"What the hell was that? You have an invasion protocole?" asked Daniel, puzzled.

"Hell no we don't, but... I had to come up with something to put people on alert." said Simon, struggling in the narrow passage.

"This looks more like a ventilation duct than an escape route" said Daniel.

"We do what we can with what we have, here." said Simon, climbing down rather fast, almost like flying. "We're not on Earth either."

They were getting way lower than what Daniel was expecting and he felt... lighter.

"How deep do we go?"

"Sorry, quite deep. Second gallery. In fact we're leaving the effects of the station's artificial gravity. You must have felt it." he said, easily jumping off the last 5 meters and landing quite lightly.

"Yeah, I felt it." said Daniel, doing the same thing at 10 meter high. He had more experience in weightlessness than Simon.

"Just be careful when running. The ceiling is low." said Simon, smiling, himself a good head taller than Daniel.

Simon ran, stunning Daniel, doing very long yet very low steps, as if he was walking while sitting. Daniel did the same with more or less success, trying to keep the pace. Then there was a flash of light and he felt a hot wave in his back.

"I don't think they want us to go this way." said Simon. "Too late anyway, we're there." he said, pointing to a ten meter high ladder. With one jump, he was already half way up. Daniel did the same, evading at the same time what would have been a direct hit which melted the last bars of the ladder.

Simon turned around and fired a shot just behind Daniel, making the small tunnel collapse.

"That will keep them occupied for a while" he said as he was climbing slower in the last section of the ladder, getting back into the effect field of the artificial gravity.

That's when Daniel's mind lit up.

"Shit. That artificial gravity. How..."

"Crom." simply answered Simon. "I don't have a clue how it works."

"Of course." said Daniel, pissed off after himself. He should have known that something was odd. They were way too early to have discovered how to control gravity on a small scale.

At the top of the ladder, Simon carefully pushed out a lid and had a prudent look around.

As it had gotten dark after the collapse of the tunnel, a bright light entered the small slit created by the opened lid, which almost blinded them. Daniel could see part of his spaceship. Simon opened the lid more, getting his head completely out.

"Okay, we're good." he said, quickly jumping off of it, followed by Daniel.

He immediately spotted his ship. Apparently, it had been moved and was at the far end of the room. Polymer transport crates, 2 meters per side, were piled up in five or six rows of three crates high on his right. It was totally cleared and exposed on his left.



He glanced around, found a few protective spots and ran. He took the first row when the shot of a pulverisator exploded near his head on one of the crates. He threw himself forward, making a roll in the small space between rows one and two. The hit had weakened the crate enough so that the whole pile collapsed just behind him, actually creating a wall protecting him from the following shot.

"Geesh, thanks." he said, looking in the direction of whoever fired, smiling.

He tried to have a better look, looking through a peeping hole in the piled up crates. He saw four Sigamees.

"Damn! He got his own men here!" said Daniel.

He heard noise behind him. He turned around and startled, barely quick enough not to shoot. It was Simon.

"I chose another path." he said, deadpan. "Why don't they shoot at your ship? They would prevent you from doing anything, call for help, fight them... flee like a coward." he said with a grin.

"I can't believe you can still joke in those situations, Simon." said Daniel, then looking puzzled. "But you're absolutely right? Why wouldn't they simply destroy my only way out of here... unless... oh fuck... They wanted me here. It's a trap and I fell right into it." he said, looking where the Sigamee were, and there were none.

"Shit. They can blow the hangar up and... oh, double shit.!" said Simon as there was a change in the sound of the ventilation. "They are depressurizing the room! We have to get out. We have four minutes."

"Depressurizing? The whole hangar? But how? Shouldn't only the airlock be depressurized?"

"The airlock internal door is opened." he said pointing in the direction. "They probably override the protection and are using the depressurization system of the airlock to get everything. That means that they control the base. We're by ourselves." said Simon.

"Where can we get out?"

"Technically any do... shit. A depressurization will lock all the doors and since they are opening from the outside of the hangar, or inside of the base if you will, out of the question to force them open. Basic depressurization protection." he said, raising his shoulders.

"So, it means we have only one way out of here." he said pointing at his ship. "They are gone. Lets go." he said, but as soon as his head appeared on the side of the alley, a shot was fired and he could see that the Sigamee were sporting a spacesuit now.

"Fuck! They thought of everything." he said, stepping back.

Simon ran to the other side of their protective alley. Daniel could already feel the loss of pressure from the pain in his ear, like an airplane climbing fast. Simon took his weapon and aimed at a box on the opposite wall, near the ceiling and fired. There was a small explosion and a lot of sparks, followed by total darkness. All the lights were off.

"We don't have a lot of time." said Simon. "They will bypass that power unit in no time." he said, running toward the spaceship, followed by Daniel. The door opened as he got close by, pretty much lighting up a target point for the Sigamees.

Shots were fired, hitting the wall and the inside of the ship through the opened door. Daniel and Simon literally threw themselves through the door opening, Daniel quickly reaching the pilot station and commanding the door to close.

Another shot and he heard Simon scream.

"Ahhhh!! Shit, my FOOT!!!"

Daniel turned around and could see Simon, holding his leg where his foot was replaced by a fuming mess.

"The good thing about those weapons is that they cauterize the wound at the same time." said Daniel.

"Moron." said Simon, looking him straight in the eyes. "You ARE Daniel." he said, before grinning in pain.

Daniel was about to answer back but a more powerful blast hit the ship, making it rock side to side.

"Damn! They got the heavy guns. If they get the legs out and they collapse, I won't be able to lift off, he said, heading for the radio while powering on the spacecraft.

"Shit! They mangled with it. I can't use it." said Daniel. "I can't even power the ship up."

"Uh... My fault. They were afraid you would mess up their plans. I gave them permission to come here and play with your toy. That's why I asked you if there was some auto-protection or something."

"Bah, that's okay. You did the best from your knowledge, only it was twisted." he said, moving the pilot seat and bent under the console, quickly finding the connector. "There, all set". He said.

"How did you..."

"I've had... prior experience." he said, powering up the spacecraft which started levitating, retracting the landing gears.

"Do you really want to keep this door intact?" asked Daniel, pointing at the airlock exterior door.

"Fuck it, Daniel. Blow that damn thing up and let's get out of here!" yelled Simon.

A few moments later, a discharge of an intensity Simon had rarely seen blew the door open and the small craft flew off at high speed.

Simone was stunned.

"You said that there were no offensive weapons on this thing, just something to weaken asteroids." he said.

"That's exact."

"But that was..."

"Do you have any idea of the blast power required to vaporize an asteroid, Simon? A simple airlock door is like comparing a stone to a rock the size of a bus."

"Ah, yes... of course. Didn't think of that. Now what?"

"What? We find that vermin and, knowing him, he would make sure he's at the best spot to look at his achievement, meaning the biggest ship of the fleet... Yeah, he has a rather big ego." said Daniel.

He put full power on the engines and the armada quickly grew bigger in front of them. Simon had taken the co-pilot seat and was looking at the console, stunned.

"What's wrong? Lost? Don't worry. Once you know one, you know all of them."

"Yeah, that's what I was thinking... They look very similar to ours, except... they're in English."

"That's understandable. The technology is very similar. In fact, your antarticite is known under the name Mirox by the Kgitahns. All of that is Kgitahn technology, and to be honest, the exploitation you have there could last a thousand years."

"Really?" said Simon.

"Yeah, really, and for us... I mean the Kgitahns, that's old technology."

"Holly crap. We're already behind... oh I get a blip on the radar." he said.



"Crom!" said Daniel, pushing the engines to their maximum and in less than thirty seconds, he had reached the armada and was heading straight for the spotted ship, barely bigger but a different construction than the others, definitely Sigamee. Without slowing down, Daniel fired four full blasts.

Two of those four hit the ship, which veered off course.

"That was... NOT an anti-asteroid cannon." said Simon, almost

relieved that the ship was well armed.

"Nope, that's an anti-Crom canon." said Daniel, between his teeth.

Simon never saw Daniel in this state of mind. His eyes were cold and precise. His face seemed rigid. He was controlling the ship as he saw nobody pilot one before, not even his best pilot. Daniel was looking disconnected from the outside world, like a... machine. Has he been programmed? Was he really, in the end, a human, a cyborg or a clone?

Crom was heading for the Earth. He hit the atmosphere, leaving a long trail of incandescent gas behind him. Simon was sure that their ship was doing the same. He could hear the shell crack under the heat and pressure, like an oven that warms up, which was not totally reassuring. Overheat, and overspeed alarms were blaring in the cockpit.

He was grabbing the armrests of his chair with so much force, to the point where his knuckles were getting white. He was simply hoping that its fixation and the harness would hold on.

Simon was constantly looking at Daniel, trying to detect the clone, the android in him. His eyes were cold and dark, focusing on the tasks of piloting the ship, then his facial expression changed, his eyes changed, yet he was still relatively calm.

Simon looked ahead and saw: they were heading for North America, on the North-East, toward the province of Quebec, North of Montreal, in the mountains.

"He's heading for..."

"Mount Tremblant" said Daniel. "He's heading for my home. As I know him, He will try to destroy my home, in an attempt to weaken my will to fight, but he knows that destroying my house won't make me mad, so he will probably try to destroy everything around it." he said.

Daniel was juggling with the thought of firing or not. With the current angle of attack, if he misses, the plasma ball would hit the ground, destroying a whole block of housing at a time. He had to level with Crom's ship. He accelerated, pushing the ship to the breaking point, alarms sounding.

Opposite to Crom's ship, it was now the forest, then Daniel felt safe and risked it, firing five times. Two hits, sending Crom's ship into a downward spiral. The ground was only 5km away, and Daniel was stunned to see how things had changed. What was then forest and farmlands was now filled with housings and buildings. The city had stretched out but in the middle of all this, in a large lot, he spotted the house, his house, circled with farmlands, a clear spot surrounded by civilization.

"I kept everything." yelled Simon to cover the noise of the engines and of the ship's outer shell which was vibrating close to falling apart."

Crom, out of control, swerved in front of him. Daniel fired. If he missed, the bowl of plasma would burn a hole in his backyard, If he hit...

The plasma ball hit the back corner of Crom's ship, making it tumble uncontrollably. He tried to compensate but nonetheless ended his dive into Daniel's backyard, digging a long hole, stopping pretty much at the same place Jahana's ship on that dreadful day.

Daniel put his ship in full reverse to break. He could feel the hull twisting under the effort, and he managed to land, or rather did a controlled crash-landing besides Crom's ship. He got off his seat and walked to Simon, still tightly fastened in his seat, his fingers digging into the armrest, completely stunned.

"I had 30 years to take pilot lessons," he said, explaining his skills. "You stay here".

"I can't run away anyway." answer Simon, pointing at his missing feet.

Daniel gave him a sharp slap on the shoulder and smiled. That was the Simon he remembered. He ran to the door which opened with a grinding noise. The shell had obviously bent. He opened a compartment by the door which was totally hidden before he opened it, revealing an assortment of weapons. He reached in and took a hand held gun jumping out of the spaceship.

The heat was melting the snow all around the ships, making an eerie hissing sound. The steam generated was helping him hide.

He carefully ran to Crom's ship. The door was opened and a roasted odor emanated from it, and bloody traces were visible in the snow, heading toward the house.

Daniel headed for the entrance door, moving carefully, his back against the house. He knew that house, he knew the views the windows were giving and was staying away. He also knew where the dead angles inside the house were when he reached the door, which was opened, half torn off its hinges, balancing and clacking in the cold wind.

His cellulose suit proved not to be very warm and he was shivering, glad he felt some heat entering the small entrance hall, protected from the wind.

If Crom was hiding to get him, he could only be in the direction of the bedrooms, the rest being open space.

He heard the faint sound of a weapon charging up. He jumped forward in the dining room, doing a roll. The discharge pulverized the entrance wall of the house at floor level. Crom was obviously in control and was fully capable of aiming right. He seemed to have aimed low, but, if Daniel had been standing up, he would have pulverized his head. If he had been crouching down... he would have been vaporized. Crom was thinking.

As soon as Daniel ended his first roll, he threw himself forward toward the kitchen as another discharge pulverized the sofa before hitting the legs of the dining table. Daniel quickly got back up and fired in the direction of the bedroom through the kitchen cabinets.

Crom barely avoided the blast and stumbled backward. However, Daniel hadn't foreseen that part of the discharge would hit the mirror on the opposite wall and come back right at him. Although weak, it could be deadly if it hit the right place. He threw himself again in the dining room. His weapon caught some debris and flew off his hand.

Crawling on all four, he tried to find it through the dust when he saw Crom, right there, in front of him, pointing his gun, a winner's smile across his face.

"Why do I have a feeling I've seen this before?" he asked with a very calm and morbid voice. But Daniel perceived a little twitch of pain on his lower lip, as he made a small hop. His right leg, which was already greatly damaged, was leaving blood gushing out. His suit was torn, showing a large hole on his left chest. He was struggling to keep the rather heavy shoulder gun with his only arm left, a weapon generally having to be held firmly on the shoulder.

"Ready to admit defeat, Crom." asked Daniel, trying to stay calm.

Crom laughed with a hoarse voice, some blood flowing from the corner of his mouth.

"Admit defeat? While it's my greatest victory? I will be remembered in all history books as the one who tamed and crushed Djiahanel, The Savior, I will be remembered as the one who defeated the Prophecy. Admitting defeat as the triumph is on me? Never!"

Daniel had kneeled and had his hands raised at shoulder level in a surrender gesture. He looked at Crom pulling his weapon up and aimed at him, his eyes full of rage and vengeance. Daniel was frantically looking around, searching for a way out. He saw his weapon, right there, unreachable at Crom's feet, actually, he had his foot over it.

The Savior, the Elected, couldn't die like that. Then, he remembered this little line from the Prophecy.

"...and it's only with the power of Kgitah's Star that they will be able to destroy the Shadow of Evil and bring the Good Light back to all the worlds."

A fast shadow, a lightning bolt, a scream. In one instant, Crom was disarmed and totally stunned. Daniel looked toward the entrance of the house. She was there! Jahana, wearing a combat spacesuit! Obviously, she came prepared.



"I know this place and this house too." she said, a little sarcastic, getting closer to Daniel, still pointing her weapon at Crom. "You're okay?"

"A few bruises but I'm fine. Thank you very much, Jahana. How..." he said, smiling, obviously happy to see her, getting back up, walking to her

"Details are for later. And your friend... Simon?"

"He stayed on the ship." he said.

"Nope, empty." answered Jahana.

"Ohhhh... they worry about their little friends," said Crom with a mocking tone. "This is so... Earthling" he added with a disgusted tone

"Shut up, Crom. It's time you surrender. The armada has been stopped. Your plan didn't work."

"That's Impossible!" yelled Crom, eyes wide. "Impossible! The... Earthlings don't have the means to stop my army. They have no comparable weapons. All those ships are crewed by Sigamees. They will never surrender!"

"You're right for one thing: the Earthlings don't have what it takes to take down your armada but... the Dolarons do. They came as back-ups with eight astrocruisers." said Jahana with a proud voice.

"NO!!!" Yelled Crom. "It won't end this way!" he said, grabbing a concealed arm and pointing it at Daniel at lightning speed but before Daniel or Jahana could react, there was a loud thunder-like noise and Crom's head exploded, splashing the walls with Sigamee brain parts as his body collapsed on the ground.

Stunned, they turned around and saw Simon, leaning in the entrance, holding a .12 Gage rifle in his hands.

"We always need a weaker friend," he said, laughing.

"But... where..." began to ask Daniel.

"I knew you had one in the garage. Just very lucky that the rounds are still good."

Daniel reached Simon and pulled him upward so he could stand up on his good leg. In the distance, they could hear the sirens of the emergency vehicles approaching, and, over their head, the sun was eclipsed, from a large ship floating 1000m up, a huge ship as large as Montreal Island. Daniel was totally shocked as well as Simon. They never saw anything this big before.

"An astrocruiser. The Dolarons' best kept secret. Until now, that is." said Jahana with a smile. "May I present you the... Prophecy."

Through the living room window, Daniel saw a bunch of curious people carefully approaching, looking in the sky. The police officer already on the site didn't quite know what to do, as a small ship landed in the middle of the road and someone dressed in a very non-Earthy way, was approaching with a firm pace: the Coalition's President. Daniel looked at Simon.

"Say, Simon... Earth Ambassador. What do you think of that title at the Coalition table? Unless you're too busy mining the moon, of course."

"What? Me? Ambassador?" he said, thinking. "Nah, better not dream awake. Who would propose my name anyway."

"Me."

Simon laughed.

"You? Really? You think a simple guy from Earth would propose his friend and they would say: sure, why not? Come on, Daniel." said Simon, giggling.

"Daniel, probably not." said Jahana, smiling, "but Djiahanel, they will."

Mount Everest

The cold wind was freezing their cheeks as it hit them. Their fingers were getting numb by the cold, and their aching feet were making every step more difficult. They were far from the moderate climate of Brragita, but they were proud. They had conquered the higher summit of the Himalayan mountains. They looked at each other, joining their hands together as they made, together, the last steps toward the culminating summit. They tried to kiss but their large parka's hood made it difficult. They laughed, embracing, admiring the view.

They look all around them, over China in one direction and over Nepal in the opposite one, seeing endless mountain peaks in this region containing the highest mountains on Earth. The view was breathtaking!

They heard a strange noise. At first, they thought it was coming from the wind, but Daniel quickly realized what it was and rolled his eyes.

"I can't believe it! Not again!" he said in disbelief, letting his arms fall to his sides.

Like a replay of a movie, the sun reflected on the hull of the fast approaching craft which stopped at their level, the thrust of his engines creating a little snowstorm which covered the climbing couple. They could see the pilot through the large window. The door, on which was stamped the Presidential Seal opened and a walkway extended to their feet.

The pilot put the ship on hold and stayed put.

A tall, strongly built man, walked forward on the walkway, wearing a dark blue parka with the Coalition's symbol embroidered on the chest, as well as another crest, representing without a doubt, the Earth.

"Leave me the fuck alone, Simon." said Daniel. "Can't we have a little time for ourselves? You can't climb, like everybody else? You have to use a craft?"

"You've been nominated only four months ago, can't you leave Djiahanel alone?" added Jahana, but she wasn't able to sound as sincerely pissed off as Daniel.

"Been there, done that." said Simon. "Six years ago to be exact. Anyway, sorry for Djiahanel's ego," he said with a snobbish move of the head, "I come for Jahana."

Jahana pointed to herself with her gloved finger.

"Me? Why? What have I done?" she asked.

"You have just been named unanimously the Coalition's Vice President to replace Rimak and the President is requesting your presence now. He had important issues about the Dolarons who want to play a more active role in the Coalition, which have to be looked at at the highest priorities."

"Hey! What about me in this? I'm nonetheless Djiahanel."

"Yeah, about that... The President said that, since the Prophecy is, well, over, you're nothing more than... symbolic."

Daniel's knees almost let go then he straightened up, pointing an accusing finger at his friend."

"Oh shit! You and your fucking pranks!"

Simon was holding his stomach from laughing.

"You should have seen your face!!!" he said, laughing again. "Hilarious!! More seriously, the United Nations moved the meeting forward. I will need you by my side tomorrow morning. We have to take into consideration the requests from Mars and the development of Jupiter."

"Well... I think I still deserve a few days of rest. After all, we just climbed Everest." said Daniel.

"Stop that, silly. I know you were dropped off 100 meters off the summit about an hour ago. Alright, come on in. The mosquitos are rushing through the opened door." said Simon, still giggling. "Oh... that face!!!"

The door closed and the ramp retracted as soon as Daniel, the last of the three, went past it. With a light hum, the ship turned to the West and quickly flew over Asia, climbing to the edge of space, then crossed part of Europe, the Atlantic Ocean, then arrived in North America, over the Province of Quebec, starting its descent toward Montreal. No, north of that, in Mont-Tremblant, where was now standing tall the newest addition to the Coalition, the Earth's Division Administrative Office, a fifty storeys tower, built on the Sacred Lands of Djiahanel.

The house was still there, embedded inside the ground level of the tower, intact, encased in glass walls, kept as it was on that dreadful day.

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