



"Is this understood gentlemen?" Colonel Zachary R. Dunn asked his team.

"YESSIR!" they hollered nervously.

"Good. We rendezvous with the station at o' nine hundred. That should give you plenty of rest. We board at nine-fifteen and check the perimeter with Team Red. Dismissed!"

The military shuttle approached the nearest waypoint station, en route to space station *Yakoura II*, orbiting the planet Mars.

Onboard the *Yakoura II* the atmosphere was very tense. Preparations were in progress for the most important and top secret negotiations ever held in the history of mankind. Mikiyaka Oshiro, ambassador of the Far Station Cluster - near Jupiter -, Ousha La Guilla, representative of Terra Force, General Stone, head of the military lunar base *South-side Alpha* and Mike O'Reilly, spokesman for the Independent Extra Terrestrial Mining Company were the four prominent negotiators to attend.

The topic of these negotiations concerned the full independence of the Far Station Cluster and the independent miners. There would also be determined if territorial issues could be resolved. During the last twelve years, the independent miners and miners from earth came to many confrontations in the unofficial neutral zone, resulting in hundreds of unnecessary casualties.

The situation became very complicated when a group of terrorists, whom are presumed to belong to the Far Station Cluster, intercepted and attacked a passenger shuttle, killing all onboard. The vessel was traveling from Callisto, the second largest moon of Jupiter, to Earth. It carried the president of the IET Mining Company, her family and nearly two hundred miners on their way home. This event called for the peace negotiations. They were not made public for obvious security reasons.

The following day the shuttle carrying Dunn and his team docked with the station on schedule. As soon as the air locks were sealed, the team boarded the station. The other security team, Team Red, welcomed them.

"Welcome aboard, Colonel Dunn," greeted Captain Fisher, leader of Team Red. "Long time no see. It's an honor to have you and your team here, sir."

"Thanks, Captain!" Dunn said, saluting before shaking Captain Fisher's hand. "Let me introduce my team." Dunn stepped back and turned to his team. "This is Sergeant Sanderson, Sergeant Simms, Lieutenant Brooks and Second Lieutenant Mill. During operations you will address them as Eagle-Eye, Lights-Out, Safety and Hardball. I will listen to Arrow, as you all know."

"Welcome. You will get to know my team when at the briefing," Captain Fisher said before facing Dunn again. "I took the liberty of organizing the first watch and I contacted the officer at Waypoint Eight in sector thirteen to stay alert."

"Do you have the security script?" Dunn asked.

"Yes, sir," Fisher replied.

He briefly closed his eyes for to have his implanted datacrystal transfer the script to Dunn's through the Terra Force Data-Construct. He had been up all night to put the script together, to impress Colonel Dunn, but he also knew the risks involved in this operation.

"Very well," Dunn said and turned to his team. "Let's find our quarters and start get in gear. Move out!" He turned back to Captain Fisher. "I will contact you at eleven hundred. I will have my men scan the station for any gravity distortion devices or any other explosives that might be hidden on or inside the station. Then you and I will meet with La Guilla and go through the security script with her."

"My men already scanned the entire station when we arrived last night, sir," Fisher said smiling.

"Good job, Captain, but I will have my men check it again when we talk to La Guilla. See you at eleven."

"Yessir."

"Dismissed," Dunn said.

Captain Fisher turned on his heels and ordered his men to lead the way back to the main cargo bay on the far side of the station. As he walked through the dark and cold corridors, he thought about how glad he was to finally serve with the notorious Dunn. This man had more medals of honor than any other Terra Force

Official did. This could give Fisher a chance to impress him and get noticed. He has wanted to join Team Gold ever since he became a Terra Force Official and this was his chance to prove himself worthy.

Halfway across the solar system, the officer at Waypoint Eight poured himself another cup of strong coffee. He had been awake for twenty-three hours and he wasn't going to see his bunk bed soon either. He and his son had been the only crew of this waypoint since the Far Station Cluster migrated to sector twenty-seven a, nine years ago. All traffic to and from the Far Station Cluster, roughly five hundred thousand miles away from this sector, had to check in with Waypoint Eight to get clearance into or out of Terra Force space.

He closed his eyes to enjoy the warmth and bitterness of his coffee, when he heard a loud bang, like a large barrel had fallen on the floor.

"Dad, dad, come here...I need your help for a sec. Quick!" he heard his son scream.

He put his cup down, spilling the hot brown liquid on his hand and uniform, jumped out of his chair and ran to his son's aid. When he ran into the mescal, his son stood in the middle of the scarcely illuminated room.

"What is it?" he asked his son, with true concern in his voice.

His son didn't respond, but took a step forward. Then light reflected off a shiny object in his son's hand, and he recognized it.

"Hey, I told you many times before, you can NOT play with my..."

His words were muffled by the echoing blast. He fell to his knees, grasping for his son. He was able to manage one more word before falling to the ground. "W..w..why?"

His son heard his father's last breath and knelt down beside him.

He whispered, "Sorry father, but they promised to get me off this station, promised me a future. I'll be seeing you, dad."

He got on his feet and slowly walked over to the control room and pressed a couple of buttons on the communications console.

"Yes?" came over the speakers.

"It is done, you're cleared," he said. "Now come and get me out of here!"

"Pack your stuff, we're on our way," the speaker replied.

On the *Yakoura II*, Dunn entered a small conference room where Fisher awaited him. He looked up and jumped to his feet to salute to Dunn.

"At ease," Dunn said. "Did you bring a console for madam La Guilla?"

"Yes, sir, right here," Fisher said.

Only Terra Force Security Agency and Elite Guard Officials were implanted with a datacrystal to access the Data-Construct.

Five minutes had passed when two Terra Force Elite Guard Officials entered the room, saluted Fisher and Dunn, and took position on each side of the door. They were dressed in a black and dark blue armored uniform with black shiny helmets on. They both had large disruptor rifles hanging from their shoulders. These men had been selected from the best officials in the world. They both jumped in position when Ousha La Guilla stepped in. She was wearing a brown and beige dress with a black cape that reached all the way to her shiny black boots. Her long dark brown hair caught the light in the room while it lay draped in the brown hood of her cape.

"Welcome gentlemen," greeted La Guilla to the men who had stood up. "Oh, please. Sit down. All this protocol makes me nervous. I can't seem to get these two here to relax."

Fisher was suppressing the urge to giggle. That would not be appropriate, but he was surprised by the sudden laughter coming from Dunn.

"It is nice to meet you again, ma'am," Dunn said.

"You too, Zach. It has been a while hasn't it? Was it on the Paris IV where we last met?"

"Exactly," Dunn replied.

When Dunn and La Guilla had finished talking about past times, Captain Fisher was asked to present the security briefing. He spoke excitedly about all the high-tech details of the security measures he and his team had prepared. Dunn and La Guilla listened carefully, but their attention was disturbed when a soft beeping sound came from the door. The Supreme Guards grabbed their rifles and opened the door. A station's staff member popped his head inside and informed them that Mr. O'Reilly and General Stone had arrived. Also, that Mr. Oshiro would arrive shortly.

La Guilla turned to Fisher and said, "Thank you, Captain Fisher, but I have to go and meet my guests. I assume that everything is in order and that you and Colonel Dunn can handle it without me."

"Yes, ma'am. We can," Captain Fisher said, while he and Dunn stood up to see La Guilla to the door.

On the Moon, Terra Force Space Control Center tried desperately to contact Waypoint Eight.

"Officer Bradley, come in! Officer Bradley, anybody. Come in!" the operator yelled into the microphone, but there came no response from the waypoint.

"We have to contact the nearest waypoints in sectors thirteen and fifteen b," the operator recommended to

his superior.

"Go ahead," was the superior's response. "You might want to warn Waypoint Fifty-six, too. I saw a high concentration of vessels in that sector heading towards Mars, coming from Jupiter."

"Aye, sir."

The crew of Waypoint Fifty-six was notified, but replied that a large group of cargo containers with mechanical supplies was being tugged to the Galaxy Trade Center.

"But then they are way off course. Who cleared them for this route?" demanded the Space Control Center operator.

"Uhh. We did, sir."

"Send a patrol team and have them check it out at once!" barked the operator.

"Ehmm, yes, sir. We will immediately," floundered the waypoint officer.

Two shuttles with patrol troopers were dispatched and flew towards the tug and container combinations.

When they came close to the first containers, the loading hatches on the side of the containers opened.

Five small fighters appeared from every container.

"Oh my god!" screamed the patrol shuttle pilot, "Sir, they are dispatching fighters, please advise!"

The waypoint officer panicked and called for retreat. But before his words reached the pilot, he saw two explosions close to the containers.

"Space patrol, we are under attack! I repeat, we are under attack!" the officer yelled in sheer terror.

Oblivious to the events at Waypoint Fifty-six, the representatives on the *Yakoura II* placed themselves around a large oval table. La Guilla at the head of the table with O'Reilly and Stone at her sides. Next to Stone sat Oshiro. Other representatives, such as the chief of Terra Force Space Control and two guides from the Interplanetary-Community Society, occupied the remaining seats.

La Guilla rose to her feet and gave her guards a signal to leave. She folded her hands on front of her and spoke calmly to her audience.

"Welcome. I would first like to thank everybody present here today for making the long trip to this facility. It means allot to me to see you all present at these very important negotiations. It is not an understatement to say that the future of human society in our solar system depends on the outcome of our achievements," she said, talking slowly and carefully choosing her words.

Although La Guilla appeared calm, the rest showed signs of tension. Oshiro joined his fingertips in front of his mouth, but his eyes revealed his true emotions. O'Reilly shifted in his chair from left to right, and while Stone was playing with a large cigar - which he wasn't allowed to light - the two guides kept looking back and forth at the others. La Guilla noticed the tension, but ignored it.

"To find a solution for coexistence in our solar system is more important than anything," La Guilla said. "We have survived living on Earth for many centuries, in war, but mostly in peace. We now stand at the beginning of a new era where humankind expands into the galaxies. But until we can really travel into the depths of space, coexistence in this solar system will be our first test. A test to see if we can adapt to life in space."

Ousha La Guilla took a moment to look everyone in the eyes - emphasizing her words - and then seated herself in her large chair. She tapped a small button on a little control panel on her right hand side. It activated the monitors placed inside the armrest of each chair. The monitors displayed the agenda of the negotiations and all issues that had to be discussed. After she had introduced everyone present, she looked at Mikiyaka Oshiro. "Mr. Oshiro, if you would like to start with our first subject concerning the independence of the Far Station Cluster," La Guilla said, leaning back in her chair.

During the negotiations, Colonel Dunn lead his team back to their shuttle while Captain Fisher and his team searched all the chambers, quarters, rooms and bays.

"Eagle-eye and Hardball, you two check the outer hull from the shuttle. Safety and I will follow you along the inner hull and Lights-out will get out onto the outer hull and follow your directions," Dunn said.

The air locks cycled and the door to the shuttle was opened, Eagle-eye and Hardball stepped inside. Once they were strapped in their seat, Eagle-eye backed the shuttle away from the station, activated the external lights and turned the shuttle to direct the beam of light on the outer hull. On the forward monitor they could see the three men inside the station on the infrared display. Lights-out then stepped slowly out through the air lock and secured his safety line. He slowly drifted towards the spot where the lights of the shuttle were shining on the hull plating.

"Ok. Let's check this baby. On the double," Dunn said over the intercom.

"Lead the way, sir," Lights-out answered.

"They're heading this way!" screamed the officer at Waypoint Fifty-six.

"We have dispatched two Heavy-Assault Fighters from sector one-o-two, and three more from the frigate *TF. Antarctica* in sector one-o-nine," said the operator at Space Control. "They should reach your sector within the hour. The *Antarctica* will follow behind them."

"That will be too late, they..." The officer stopped talking when a loud explosion was audible through

speakers.

"What was that?" demanded the operator.

"They just took out our power generators and" Two more loud explosions followed. "Oh shit! They blew out the shuttlebay too. Half of the station is decompressing. I'm gonna head for..." Then connection went dead.

"Officer. Officer!" repeated the Space Control operator.

Within five minutes twelve small fighters had destroyed a four hundred ton space station.

"Space Control, this is Lieutenant Richard Mill from Terra Force Security Agency," Mill said, contacting the Terra Force Space Control Center at the lunar base *South-side Alpha*.

"Come in, Lieutenant," replied the operator.

"I'm reading some activity in the neighboring sector and I lost Waypoint Fifty-Six on my astro-sensor scope. What is going on?" Mill asked, patching his connection through to Dunn's intercom so he could receive the conversation.

"Waypoint Fifty-six was attacked by a rogue container convoy. They were heading in your direction."

"What?" Mill erupted. "Why the hell weren't we notified?"

"Well, sir," the operator said, "this only happened a couple of minutes ago and we assume no danger for yourselves or the station."

"This is Colonel Dunn, Terra Force Security Agency," interrupted Dunn. "We have La Guilla and other VIP's onboard this station, so you better keep the heat off our back here," Dunn yelled.

"Oh Christ," said the operator shocked. "I wasn't aware of the presence of these people in that sector."

"Well now you do. Dunn out," Dunn said and disconnected his intercom.

"Space Control," Mill said. "Keep us informed about the situation and scan this area thoroughly. I want no more surprises. Mill out!"

Mill continued looking on the astro-sensor scope.

"Sir?" Mill said to Dunn. "I see five H-A fighters and a frigate entering that sector. Also, the group of fighters is leaving, heading out of the sector and away from us."

"Good," said Dunn. "Keep an eye on their whereabouts. If they change course, we have to evacuate everybody off the station."

"Aye, sir."

Not far from the *Yakoura II*, fifty armed men climbed out of their hiding bunkers and onto the surface of Phobos. Phobos is the larger of two asteroids in orbit around Mars. On the icy surface of Phobos they had stashed their shuttles and armaments.

They intercepted the communications between Mill and Space Control and learned that the diversion at Waypoint Fifty-six had worked. Now that all Terra Force's attention was drawn to events elsewhere, they could proceed with their mission.

Every trooper was wearing a zero-g suit and carried an astonishing collection of weaponry. Attached to their backpacks was a small laser guided missile launcher with a battery of two missiles equipped with thermal detonators. On the other side of the backpack hung a turbocharge disruptor rifle while the straps of the backpack supported six cluster grenades on the trooper's chest. Two automatic projectile guns and a large knife completed the trooper's collection. If multiplied with fifty-one has created a little, but very powerful army. And this particular army had its mind set on attacking the *Yakoura II* to undermine the negotiations.

Five small shuttles, carrying the troopers, took off and headed for the station. Meanwhile four guided missiles were launched from the second asteroid Deimos to destroy radar-relay satellites in high orbit around Mars. This would give the shuttles a window of at least thirty minutes from being detected on the intermediate astro-sensor scopes, before the nearest waypoints could re-establish radar contact.

On the *Yakoura II*, Ambassador Mikiyaka Oshiro was explaining to his audience the necessity of the independence of the Far Station Cluster to improve the trade economy between them and the IET Mining Company. He believed that this would only work if both the IET Mining Company and the Far Station Cluster would be granted full autonomy in the solar system with Terra Force only participating as a trade partner instead of a regulating authority. IET's spokesman, Mike O'Reilly, and the guides from the Interplanetary-Community Society applauded his statements.

Oshiro was about to proceed with his final argument, when a small device in his left ear started making subsonic vibrations.

"Eh, excuse me, ladies and gentlemen. I must leave you for a minute, for I have to make a little trip to the men's room," Oshiro said.

"Of course, Ambassador Oshiro," said La Guilla. "We will continue when you return. Meanwhile why don't we enjoy some beverages," La Guilla said, signaling the staff.

Outside the conference room, Oshiro took off his long beige robe and headed for his quarters. He knew that if he wouldn't be off the station within the next twenty minutes he would become space debris. He ran

past the main passenger deck and continued onto the stairways. He passed the recreational decks where dozens of crewmembers were enjoying the station's sports and leisure facilities. He looked at these people like a veterinarian putting an animal to eternal sleep, unaware of its certain death. He reached his quarters and gathered his belongings. Looking at his watch, he grabbed his bags and headed back out of the room into the hallway. He consulted the station's map on one of the information consoles, found the location of the shuttlebay and ran to the nearest elevator.

"Sir!" Mill said, looking at the astro-scope. "This does NOT look good!"

"What's up?" asked Dunn.

"Four objects appeared on the radar near the asteroid Deimos, heading towards...extrapolating course. They are on a collision course with our radar-relay satellites in orbit, ETA in three minutes. I'm trying to identify the objects."

Dunn contacted Captain Fisher and his team.

"Heads up, Captain. We have four bogeys on our radar. They originated from Deimos."

"Oh no! We must interrupt the negotiations and warn La Guilla," Captain Fisher said.

"You warn La Guilla and local security. We will try to deal with the situation from here."

"Aye, sir."

When Captain Fisher and his team ran through the small bright lit corridors of the station, speakers in the walls sounded an alarm. One of Captain Fisher's men consulted a nearby console and said that something was wrong in the shuttlebays.

Outside, Sergeant Brooks looked out the window of the shuttle when he saw a bright flash on the left side of the station. A small passenger barge blasted its way out of the shuttlebay, leaving parts of the station's hatches and other debris drifting into space.

"Look!" he yelled to Mill.

Mill stood up from his seat to have a look at the departing shuttle. "Wow, he's in a hurry," he said.

Dunn and Simms started talking at the same time when the station shuddered. "What the hell was that?"

Simms said aloud, "I could barely hold on to the hull out here."

"Someone just hauled his ass off the station. He didn't even wait for the shuttle doors to open," Brooks said.

"I think something is going down, and I don't have a good feeling about this," Dunn said. "Lights-out. Get back inside, on the double."

"On my way, sir," Simms said, climbing back to the airlock.

"Everybody, please remain calm. I will check and see what is going on," General Stone said, while he walked to the door of the conference room.

The sudden shudder and loud rumble had frightened the guests. La Guilla walked over to O'Reilly. His eyes revealed he was very scared.

"I was afraid of this," he whispered to La Guilla, now standing close to him. "We shouldn't have gathered here on this vulnerable station."

"Now, now, Mr. O'Reilly," said La Guilla, trying to calm him. "I'm sure everything is going to be alright."

But as soon as La Guilla had spoken, Captain Fisher and two of his men walked into the room, General Stone trailing behind them. The crowd went silent and everybody held their breath. Fisher's eyes met La Guilla's and she knew that he wasn't gonna bring good news.

"We better evacuate the station. Four missiles just destroyed the radar satellites around Mars," Fisher explained to La Guilla and the other guests. "We have no communication out of this sector. I think we...hold on," Captain Fisher said, pressing the intercom unit on his ear.

La Guilla could clearly hear the excited screaming from the little speaker, covered by Fisher's hand. His eyes grew big and he turned to La Guilla.

"We have to leave. Now!" Captain Fisher ordered.

"What is it?" demanded General Stone.

"Five shuttles took off from Phobos and are heading this way. They will be here in fifteen minutes. We don't know who they are, but Colonel Dunn thinks they mean serious bad news."

"Oh god. We're going to die!" yelled O'Reilly, who had heard what Fisher said.

"Get a grip!" roared Stone. He hated yelpers.

"Let's go," Fisher said aloud. "You must hurry to the shuttlebay and evacuate."

Fisher waited until everybody had left the room and then headed towards the airlock where his men had prepared their own shuttle. Towards the main deck, dozens of people were running towards the shuttlebay area, carrying only small bags and suitcases.

"Groups two and six, prepare for boarding," shouted the senior officer onboard the first of the approaching shuttles. His voice was transmitted to the other shuttles and his face was displayed on small monitors.

"Groups one and seven, set up a five-hundred yard perimeter around the shuttles and fire at anything that moves. The rest follow me into the station on my signal."

"Aye-aye, sir!" hollered the excited troopers.

They were not aware of the presence of Team Gold and Team Red, but still expected a reasonable amount of security forces to protect the station.

"I think it's time to announce our arrival. All shuttles, launch two short range ion torpedoes and assume attack formation," ordered the senior officer.

As the shuttles advanced rapidly, now within visual range, the torpedoes crossed the distance in seconds. When the first torpedo struck, all the power circuits were disabled. Consoles and workstations exploded in fountains of bright sparks, hissing and crackling, as if the station was violently bleeding to its death. Large sections of the station had depressurized and bulkheads started to buckle. Many unfortunates were sucked out of hallways and shafts while they were on their way to the evacuation shuttlebay. Their screams were not audible as the air was pulled out of their collapsing lungs.

Dunn opened his eyes. He remembered hearing loud and excited screaming on the intercom, but all he heard now was silence. He tried to look around in the dark hallway and reached for the flashlight on his helmet. When he raised his left arm he felt a burning sting in his side and screamed in pain. He looked down and started feeling around with his right hand and found a warm, wet spot on his suit. Tasting the wet on his fingers, told him it was blood. He also realized he wasn't sitting on the floor. Instead, he was soaring in the hallway towards a bulkhead. The station had stopped rotating and lost its internal gravity momentum, but this section still carried oxygen.

"Brooks...<pause>...Brooks come in! Mill...Simms," Dunn whispered into the intercom, but she didn't respond. "Damn it!"

He reached up to his helmet again, grunted away the stinging in his side, and turned on the flashlight. The narrow, but strong beam created a blur of circular reflections on the wall he faced, which illuminated his surroundings. When he realized he was soaring upside down something clicked in his head; a feeling similar to déjà vu. It was as if a program had been loaded into his neural subconscious remembering his years of zero-g training and experience in the Saturn Operation. He 'switched' into some sort of zero-g mode like a machine. He pulled himself towards the nearest junction and turned into a corridor that had a soft red light at the end of it. When he came close he saw it was only an emergency exit sign. He was about to open the door, when he heard voices on the other side of it. He took off his helmet and listened closely.

"Woohoo...yeah! Looks like we hit them hard, sir!" Dunn heard a man yell.

"Let's look for more survivors," said another.

Dunn backed away swiftly from the door when he heard the men approaching. He gently kicked the wall with both feet, launching him across the corridor junction. When he tried to reach out for a metal pipe running along the bulkhead, he nearly passed out from the pain in his side. Suddenly, he heard the door behind him hissing as it was opening. Two beams of light found his back.

"Hey you! Turn around and raise your arms or die," echoed through the corridor.

"Don't shoot, I'm wounded," Dunn said, placing a hand on his side as if putting pressure on a wound.

Still with his back to the troopers, he slowly reached for his disruptor pistols holstered onto his belt. Gritting his teeth, Zachary R. Dunn whispered to himself, "Nobody threatens to kill me," and he turned around blasting his pistols.

--- End of episode 1 ---

Created by: Barry G. Rijkse © 2001 (webmaster@rijkse.com)

Outer Space Wetworks © and Terra Force © are Copyright © 2001 Barry G. Rijkse. All rights reserved.