

TERRA NOVA:

Rebirth

A novel by
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Terra Nova was a wonderful television series on Fox.
It aired one season, 13-episodes, from September 26 to December 19, 2011.
There was no closure. It is missed daily by many people.

This is a story about the next events in the life of the Terra Nova Colony.

Forward

Most of you are familiar with my writing, and know I just simply enjoy describing the movie I am watching in my head. Periodically, I go back to the beginning and reread the entire story. It reinforces situations and brings in new ideas, circumstances, and attitudes that may not have been apparent to me before.

At this time, writing this sentence, there are less than 10,000 words in this story. That is roughly the Prologue and the first two chapters. I feel in order to make a good story it needs to be a story worthy of becoming a movie, and the best and most affordable way to watch this as a movie is to watch it play out in my mind. So far, I have not disappointed myself. I think...hope...I have captured the character's nature, and not just their persona.

But, the one thing I strive for when I write, is to write a story that others will read and enjoy. To that end, I am posting this on my website and asking for ideas, editorials, and critiques. AuthorCancilla.com is the place to read this story.

So, if you are reading this, please let me know what you think about it and if there is anything you would do differently. If you have an idea as to where a character or a story line needs to travel, let me know that to; I like multiple arcs interwoven into a story or short side trips that can be taken as a diversion when the story takes a turn.

So, read this and let me know what you think. If you have never watched Terra Nova, and you have Netflix, you can binge watch it, which is something I like doing on rainy days when there is nothing else to do. I have also watched it on my kindle or cell, in my tent, when camping.

Thanks,

Let me know what think.

Chris Cancilla

Prologue

Commander Nathaniel Taylor, leader of the Terra Nova expedition to the year 85 million BC or so, walks casually across the main compound as he has done thousands of time before. As he looked at each face he passed, they all had the same look. Hope; had he given them hope when they could not see it themselves?

A simple act of disconnecting them, the thousand or so travelers in his charge – colonists – stranded in the distant past, from their future or former present in the year 2149. Hope Plaza, a fitting name for the beginning of hope for the survival of the human race, was gone; the temporal rift was gone. The terminus was gone. Not gone was the catalyst of destruction, his son Lucas. Lucas' employers in 2149 wanted to exploit Taylor's present, for profit. Meteor minerals and other resources, both natural and not, they could sell or use to gain wealth and power.

Taylor came up with the plan but the Sheriff, Jim Shannon, had executed the plan flawlessly as far as he was concerned. Less than a year ago, closer to 6 months actually, half the Shannon family had stowed away; Jim, after breaking out of prison for having a third child, along with his youngest daughter Zoe, covertly arrived on the 10th pilgrimage where the rest of the family, his wife Elisabeth, his son Josh and daughter Maddy, were transitioned from 2149 to 85 million BC to create a new life for themselves in the only colony of humanity, well before humanity even existed.

Commander Taylor saw something in this stow away that eventually led Taylor to offer Shannon a position on his Security Force; where Shannon was in command of the colony at times; at least when the commander and his second in command, Lt. Alicia Washington, were away from the colony on business, or simply off fishing.

To disconnect themselves from the future, and survive in the past, it was necessary to tranquilize a Carnotaurus; which meant possible death for Taylor who helmed this duty for himself, using himself as bait and hoping his men shoot the tranquilizer darts where they would act fast, before he was eaten or squashed or worse. It worked. The carno was placed into the cargo pod that was swapped with a cargo pod containing something Mira, a sixer, found in the badlands; Shannon

volunteered to babysit the sleeping monster until the pod was opened and he could inject the beast with a massive stimulant, as his wife instructed him, as close to the creature's heart as possible.

Why did he volunteer for this duty? Well, after all, Shannon had broken into the Hope Plaza complex to stow away and get to Terra Nova to start a new life with his family so he sorta knew his way around already. At least, that's what he told his wife. Either way, after spending a couple years in prison for having a third child, anything was better.

Just before Weaver opened the pod to show off all the meteorite minerals, and what they found in the Badlands, Shannon injected the monster. For Weaver, all the money he and his employers were going to make were gone in that instant, his plan to ravage the past had backfired thanks to Jim Shannon and the rest of those colonists fighting for their lives 85 million years in the past.

He injected the sleeping creature with the massive stimulant, directly into the heart of the beast, literally, and it went to work terrorizing Hope Plaza and making a quick snack of Weaver's employers, and finally Weaver himself. Leaving just enough chaos in its wake so Shannon could maneuver around the facility and place the massive explosive, the pyrosonic device Lucas brought back to clear the land of all flora and fauna so they could lay claim to, and mine, the meteoric metals buried in the dirt. Shannon dropped Lucas' pyrosonic bomb into a tube, a vent, that lead directly to the main power core, the reactor, of the dome where Hope Plaza is ...was... located. The detonation destroyed the entire dome and destroyed the time fracture. Effectively cutting the colony, and the mercenaries un Lucas, off from the future.

It worked. At the last instant both he and the carno escaped back to the past where they had started, 85 million BC. He landed several kilometers away from where the terminus would be, thanks to Malcom, who managed to destroy the time tether in the past; allowing the colony to start a new life as a group of the only humans on an Earth where the future is not yet written, in a different time stream than they left. A future where they will care for the planet and not destroy it. A future where each generation will instill in the next version of themselves a desire to preserve and not to destroy. Hopefully, teaching greed and apathy out of the human psyche.

But there are still some who want to profit by the exploitation and destruction of THIS new Earth. Since it is in a different timeline than the Earth they left, these

marauders.... pirates... see nothing wrong with destroying this planet and gaining wealth in the process. Led by Commander Taylor's estranged son, Lucas Taylor already made a name for himself as a ruthless killer bent on revenge. By personally putting a bullet into the head of Commander Taylor's second in command and a woman Taylor considered a sister. Lt. Alicia Washington died while Commander Taylor watched helplessly. She was killed by the hand of Lucas for crimes against him, his policy and rules set forth by him and the Phoenix Group; Lucas had also managed to stick a knife into his father's side hoping to wound him just enough where he could finish him off and watch joyfully as he died slowly. Thankfully, Skye Tate arrived and put a couple bullets into Lucas and both she and Taylor thought she killed him. Unfortunately, Lucas managed to survive the shooting and disappeared into the woods while Skye was performing first aid on Lucas' knife work on Taylor; he did not gain his revenge on his father, but rather learned his father had managed to thwart his plans to have 2-way travel through the terminus; thereby negating his efforts to rape this pristine world and leave nothing behind but the empty remains of a once plush land. These plans were put on hold.

Lucas commands the army of mercenaries from the Phoenix Group. Bringing enough firepower and manpower to not only decimate the colony and everyone in it, but also to strip this plush world and ravage it into a prehistoric version of the crippled world they left behind in 2149. Once the terminus was destroyed, and the connection in Hope Plaza in 2149 was lost; the Phoenix Group, the sixers, and anyone else who opposed the colony began to make their way to the Badlands; a place where not many are willing to venture. Could it be a temporal nexus, bringing together time periods from all of history? Multiple universes? No one is certain, but they found several interesting artifacts to just add more fire to their theories.

Commander Nathaniel Taylor had walked in through the front gate of his compound; he was doing a personal visit, his daily check, on the remote guard outposts. A secure location he put in place roughly 100 meters outside the wall and 100 meters from a large chasm they made to stop vehicles from making it all the way to the gates easily. It was something he thought about doing a year or so ago but never got around to it. The Phoenix group was kind enough to leave some mining equipment behind, the diggers made short work of the 20-meter-deep by 10-meter-wide moat filled with nothing but air. This also stopped a lot of the local creatures from making runs on the colony walls; a good thing since the walls were

shot to hell, quite literally, by Lucas and his goon squad. Some repairs take priority over others, the security fence is on the top of that list.

Returning to the compound he walked past people he knew, some better than others, exchanging pleasantries with the people he protects daily with his life and hopefully his wisdom. A few of those are the initial transfers from the 11th Pilgrimage, those fortunate enough to survive the explosion at the terminus.

He was still sore, but not in too much pain, not fully healed from where his son pushed the knife into his side, but Elisabeth, Dr. Shannon, had done a fine job of his repair in her makeshift clinic in the woods while hiding from the mercenaries hired to protect Lucas and the exploiters of this beautiful world.

He entered a small building near the EYE, an information repository of all human knowledge. It was formerly his conference room and lying on each table, was a friend, a colonist, a subordinate, a comrade in arms lying peacefully, covered with a sheet; 29 dead, unacceptable losses all of them. But there was one that made him both sad and mad. Commander Taylor walked over to a table and stopped. Folding the sheet back neatly to uncover the face of Lt. Alicia Washington; Wash as he and most people called her. He took a medal out of his pocket and pinned it to the bloody shirt just above her still heart.

He surveyed the room and a tear formed in his eye. He took a couple steps back and saluted to the room. A perfect example of a proper military salute. Holding it for a moment he turned slightly and faced Wash full on. Ending the reverent gesture with a snap, his hand fell to his side and his eyes were transfixed on the unnaturally white face of his second in command. No, strike that, his former second in command and the woman he felt was more like a sister than a subordinate. She stitched him up more times than he wanted to remember.

He walked back over and covered her face with the sheet, not realizing the Sheriff had entered the room a few moments earlier. He turned and saw Jim Shannon standing near the door. They locked eyes for a moment, not needing to say a single word. Shannon nodded slightly to Taylor; Taylor returned the gesture and left the room in silence.

Taylor was in the room to pay his respects; Shannon was there for a different purpose. As the local law enforcement, it was his job, as nasty as it was, to review all of the bodies and learn what happened to them. He did not need to do that with Lt. Washington, since he watched Lucas, Commander Taylor's son and leader of

the mercenaries, shoot her in the head because she, singlehandedly, created a massive diversion which allowed the entire Shannon family to escape from the compound and into the woods to meet up with Taylor and the rest of the guards from the colony who managed to escape from the terminus before the Phoenix Group could surround and kill them all. Taking prisoners was a last resort, and only done to the seriously wounded who could be of use later.

Because Lucas had his own agenda, he did not follow the plans laid out by his employers who were still in 2149; this allowed for the Terra Nova residence to plan and execute the complete destruction of Hope Plaza, stranding everyone in the past.

Mira, leader of the sixers, blames her inability to return home to the future to be with her daughter on Lucas. He was so hell bent on the revenge of his father that he was blinded to what was truly happening around him. She will never get to see her daughter again, a daughter who has not been born yet and who will not be born for at least another 85 million years in a different place, a different time, a different life, a different universe. If she had her way, she would put a bullet in Lucas' head and move on. But she works for him and the mercenaries are loyal to him, she needed it to look like an accident, or frame someone else to take the fall, hopefully one of the mercenaries.

Chapter One

Commander Taylor woke up early this morning realizing he was in his own bed and not lying next to a tree like the dream he was having; although roughing it was fun at times, sleeping in an actual bed did have distinct advantages. He had nothing planned today, except to help clear, clean, rebuild or anything else that was needed to get his community back into livable condition. The Phoenix Group left a lot of scars on his colony, he was hoping to erase as many of them as possible.

He showered and decided he did not want to shave this morning. He rubbed his face, couple days growth, and grinned at himself in the mirror. Opening his closet, he decided to wear the black attire today. Not that there was any other color in front of him. Breakfast was a simple meal. Fresh fruit, bread with something similar to peanut butter, fresh juice and a cup of coffee. Thankfully, someone on the first pilgrimage had thought to bring a few hundred seeds with them. They are now the supplier of coffee to the entire colony, and a thousand people can drink quite a bit of coffee.

He left and walked to the office, one of his favorite walks. He walked past a few people and made pleasantries with them. He saw the guards in the towers, on patrol, and standing right where they should be. He had a few ideas about promotions but needed to think about them a bit first.

He also had another idea in mind. This one involves the sheriff. He knew for a fact that Shannon was a good cop. Shannon was trained to see things, things that other people missed or passed over. He saw and learned a lot in his short time at Terra Nova; more than the security force, military force really, could see because he could read between the lines.

With Wash gone he needed a second in command and Shannon had proven himself capable in the role on several occasions. Reynolds and Reilly, well, these two had a skillset that was more than a soldier. There were a couple others he had in mind, but he thought he would first talk to Shannon about the position, and about creating a real police force, maybe 5 or 10 people in size. He figured a few with military training and the rest no training at all. There were a lot of people eager to get out

of the trenches, so to speak, and they would be willing to learn a new profession to do it.

“Reynolds” Taylor shouted as he walked up the stairs to his office.

“Yes sir” Reynolds stopped in his tracks and looked halfway up the stairs; Taylor continued walking as he talked not looking at Reynolds at all.

“Find the Sheriff and Reilly and the three of you report to my office in an hour, but make sure you get breakfast first.”

“Yes sir. See you in an hour.”

Taylor climbed the rest of the stairs and as he hit the top, his landing and favorite place to stand, he stopped at the noise he heard. In the compound, someone had started singing and a lot of the others joined in. It was not pretty; it was off key a little, the tempo was wrong for that song. But it was absolutely beautiful none the less. Taylor did not sing, mainly because he felt there was no way for him to carry a tune even with a large oil drum. But he did find a way to join in.

He moved his hands and arms as if he was conducting a choir and a few people noticed. They started laughing but kept singing. More and more people saw him and laughed as well. The song ended, and he hooted and yelled and clapped his hands as loud as he could, as did everyone else within earshot of the choir.

He waved to everyone, “Thank you!” he shouted and walked into his office. He needed that this morning and he also needed to finish cleaning up the room destroyed by his son and get ready for the meeting with his new police force in an hour, the meeting when he informs Shannon of his new position; and Reilly and Reynolds that they are being moved from military soldier to police officer.

An hour later there was now a desk, chairs, and a pitcher of water ready. Taylor glanced at the time when he heard steps outside the office. They were 2 minutes early.

The trio stopped at the door and looked; Taylor was standing on the opposite side of the visual display and waved them all in.

“You wanted to see the three of us, Commander?” Shannon asked knowing the answer.

“Yes, I did Sheriff. It has come to my attention that as an officer of the truth, and the law, you played a crucial role in the past issues that we have had recently.

Therefore, I have a proposition for you.” He walked around the monitor and stood in front of all three of them.

“With Wash gone, I need a second, I can trust you to have my back, you proved it more than once. And that’s you.”

“Really?” Not a shocked reply, but more of a revelation.

“That is a fact. As for you two, you are two of my best soldiers and I hate to lose you. But I have a new assignment for you. You are reassigned to learn from the Sheriff. Law enforcement is a bit different than soldiering and I think you have the best instructor on the planet to learn from.”

Shannon laughed. Taylor looked at him and grinned.

“Well, you said best on the planet, I am the only cop on the planet right now so by default, I guess I am the best.”

“Yes you are Sheriff, yes you are. Now, since law enforcement is about protection and the Sheriff here already carries a sonic as his primary, the two of you will return your rifle to the armory and withdraw a sonic. I still expect all three of you to maintain qualification on all weapons. All three of you can keep your projectile weapon as a means to an end when necessary, a backup. But first and foremost, use the sonic if possible.”

Reilly and Reynolds stood there silent.

Shannon spoke up. “Does that mean we get to come up with our own uniforms and maybe a tin...uh titanium star?”

“Not only that!” Taylor continued, “But you can select 7 more people from the population to train as well; that is once you feel it’s time to bring in more hands.”

“Police force of 10. That makes it 1% of the population. Good round number.”

“Actually Jim,” Taylor walked back behind his display. It was transparent more or less. “I prefer to call you Sheriff, and those in your force Deputy Sheriff. It has a nicer connotation than Police Officer.”

All three nodded in agreement.

They turned to leave, “Oh, one last thing.” They all stopped dead in their tracks and turned. “In the event of a security interest, like we get overrun again, your

entire force will fall under whoever I put in command of the troops, and Sheriff...you will fall under me as the second in command. Do we have a deal?"

"So, pretty much status quo, as it is now. Sure thing, I'm fine with it. You two OK with that arrangement?"

A pair of yes sirs were heard in unison.

"OK then, you need to start teaching these two all about law enforcement and I need to figure out a way to find out what Phoenix is up to and why they are headed to the Badlands."

Jim nodded and lightly waved as he left the office, with his trainees in tow. It was going to be interesting explaining to his daughter that her father just became her boyfriend's boss, mentor, and instructor. As they left the deck all three of them stopped for a moment and looked around. They all remembered how the place looked before Phoenix and Lucas tried to destroy the colony. Standing there looking at the people working below, without looking at either of them or taking his eyes off the working population below, Jim spoke quietly. What he did not know was that Taylor was standing next to the door and could hear his every word.

"Reynolds...Reilly... It's our job to keep things safe inside the gate. Investigate whatever needs to be investigated for the safety and security of the population. Sometimes, protecting is not enough. Squabbles, upset emotions, family issues. We need to stop it before it happens if possible, minimize it if it's not possible to prevent it. The best medicine is education. Congratulations you two. You just joined the ranks of a therapist, sparring partner, law enforcer, shoulder to cry on and soldier. You need to be all these things and more. Hopefully not at the same time, but you never know."

He paused for a moment. "Now, go get changed. Something comfortable and meet me at my house in half an hour. I have an errand to run."

They left, and Shannon stood there a few minutes looking out over the area, the land beyond the fence, the mountains. Taylor walked out a moment later and stood next to him. They were both leaning on the railing looking at nothing specific.

"So, what'd you think of my speech?" Shannon said.

"Personally, I liked it. Let's the kids know this is a unique job like nothing they ever saw before."

“Well, that’s true at least.”

“You need an office, a station house. Any ideas where a good place would be?” Taylor said after a few moments.

“I was actually thinking about that. There’s a storage building not far from Boylan’s bar. I thought keeping close to him would give him a warm fuzzy feeling. Now, don’t get me wrong, I like Boylan, but the idea of giving him the impression I was keeping an eye on him gives me a warm fuzzy feeling.”

“Looks like I got the right man for the job. Far enough away from me to be your own department, but close enough if I need you for anything. Have you thought about uniforms, maybe a badge or something?”

“Actually yes, but I want to run it by the others to see what they think about it first. As for a badge, I was thinking about getting Casey Durwin to help with that.”

“Interesting idea. I think he will come up with something nice just because he realizes it is something that will be seen and used for years to come.”

“That...” Shannon said, pausing ever so briefly, “and I intend to pay him twice what he asks so I know I will get his best work.”

“Twice?”

Shannon started walking down the stairs and without stopping he looked over his shoulder at Taylor, “Yep. Oh, by the way, does the Sheriff’s Department have a budget?”

A couple more steps and he added, “I may even draft Casey to run the office. I need someone sharp, and since they don’t need to ... well run, just maintain the office. If he is willing, I may give it a shot.”

“Desk sergeant, well, think hard about that, I can think of a few others who would fit that role better.” Taylor was laughing a bit. He knew Shannon was pulling his leg.....he hoped.

Shannon kept mumbling to himself as he entered the bazaar area, where Casey seemed to always be. Walking around he found him playing his guitar under some shade.

"Casey, I would like to hire you....commission you really for a confidential project. In a few days, it will be made public, and so will your design." Casey grinned; he was interested.

"Design what?" He asked.

"Be at my house in 45 minutes and we can discuss it."

He walked away from Casey and bought an apple and took a huge bite of it. It was slightly cool, crisp, sweet and the best apple he had in his life. At least since the last time he had an apple. Beats anything produced in 2149 though.

As he got back to his house, he tossed the apple core over the fence behind the house, knowing it would be gone shortly. Opening his front door and walking into the house, he saw Mark Reynolds was there, sitting quite close to his daughter.

Chapter Two

"Hey, what are you doing to my new trainee?" He jokingly asked his daughter.

"Filling him in on how to make you nicer."

"And how is that?"

"Chocolate cookies."

Shannon stopped dead in his tracks, stood straight up, looked up at the ceiling for a moment, looked back at her, "That may just work...."

A few moments later Laura Reilly arrived. "Heard the laughing, did I miss anything?" She asked.

"Not much." Reynolds said before Shannon could answer. "Just that our new boss can be bribed with chocolate cookies."

"Good to know..." Reilly replied.

Changing the subject quickly, he invited his daughter to stay since he needed someone with computer and math skills, like setting up their private network or other things. They all talked and decided the uniform would need to be casual. Black pants and a dark blue shirt. They all had them already, so it was easy. Besides, less formal made them appear less intimidating to the population.

There was a knock at the door.

"Come in." Shannon yelled.

Casey rolled in and looked at the four of them. "OK, with you four here at the same time I'm invited for a secret project, this looks like it may be interesting."

Shannon outlined the new Sheriff's Office idea, uniform, and the idea of a badge to identify them apart from the military force.

Casey had an idea, "A shield has negative connotations brought from 2149, so it can't be a shield. I was thinking of a rounded triangle, highly polished but really dark to almost disappear into that shirt color you are talking about. In the middle, a figure eight to represent the colony, and infinity. Inside of each circle the letter, T

and N. With printing on the outer edge of each side. One side has Terra Nova; second side has the word Sheriff; bottom side has a number starting at 1. Badge number one is yours Jim and as for 2 and 3, well that is up to you three to figure out. As people are added to the 'force' the next number can be used." Casey snapped his fingers, "I can implant a locator beacon in the badge that can be remotely activated in the event of an emergency."

"I like it. Can you make five badges in the next few days?" Jim asked.

"I would need to bring a few people in on it but yes." Casey replied.

"Do it. But make sure they understand they cannot talk about it till it is announced."

Reynolds spoke, "This is really happening." He looked at Reilly, "I guess we're cops now."

"Yes we are. But we are Deputy Sheriff's!! Not cops." Reilly added.

"Mr. Shannon, you said 5 badges. Are you implying that the 5 of us are to be the beginning of the Sheriff's Department?" Reynolds asked.

"Nice job Reynolds. You picked up on a small detail and made an assumption." He grinned. "Yes you are correct. Casey, I would like for you to join the Sheriff's Office as an office manager. You are familiar with protocol being on the security force before you became chair bound, and I think you would be good for the department."

"I would be honored." Casey replied.

Jim mentioned about the location for the Sheriff's office he was planning to use, and they headed over there. It was about a ten-minute walk from his house and all of them could make it back to their residences in less the 15 minutes.

As they entered, they saw a lot of containers with Phoenix Group logos.

"I had no idea Phoenix was using this as a storage area."

Casey went over to one and grabbed a plex, it contained a manifest of everything in the room. "These guys may have been assholes, but they were organized assholes." Casey paused while he read over the plex manifest. "Uh Jim, look for case Delta 934."

"Why?"

“It contains 5 autonomous surveillance drones. Able to maintain flight indefinitely if it gets a couple hours of direct sunlight every 24 hours and transmit range is nearly a thousand kilometers.”

Reilly spoke, “If we send one of these things to the Badlands, about 600 clicks away, we can keep tabs on the pirates.”

Reynolds added, “...and they would never know.”

“Dad, you need to modify the transmit and control frequencies of the drones so – The Pirates – as you call them will not know we are monitoring them. That’s easy. We can even put together a repeater to increase their operating range, or better yet use a drone as a comm repeater to increase the range of our comm units by several times.”

“You can do that?” Reynolds asked his girlfriend.

“I can, but I would need Reilly’s help. She can hack it and together we can find a unique frequency band.”

Reilly said, “If we are lucky, we may be able to set the receiver to transmit the Phoenix comm signals back to us and we can monitor their communications.”

“If we can get this done it would justify our existence instantly. Nothing is to be said to anyone about these drones.” Shannon looked each of them in the eye.

Maddy was looking though the plex and she exclaimed, “WOW!”

They all looked at her at the same time and said, “What?”

“Well, if this case is still in the room, it contains 375 promethium core modules in an EMP protective casing.”

“Really?” Jim replied.

After a few moments, “Found it!” Maddy exclaimed.

Mark moved cases until he could get to the case they were looking for; opening the case, they all looked inside and saw a case filled with small metal boxes. Each one had the core symbol.

“Well, I guess we’re set for a while.” Casey said to no one in particular.

“What else is on that manifest?” Jim asked Casey, who still had the plex on his lap.

Reynolds opened a box to see what treasure he would find, “Oh yea!! Field rations.”

Everyone said YUM!

“Maddy, grab a handful of cores and bring them to Boylan. Tell him you found a few and this is your way of thanking him for helping you or something.”

She grinned at her Dad. “Gocha!” she said.

Everyone took a turn looking at the plex, finding something interesting and handing it to the next person.

It was like opening birthday presents!

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Commander Taylor was about to yell for Lt. Washington when he remembered she was murdered by his son. His face changed as he yelled, “Dunham!”

Walking into the office Dunham stood just inside the door. “Yes sir”

Taylor stood and slowly walked over to where Dunham was standing. He looked at him for a moment.

“Sir, is everything OK?” Dunham asked.

“No, no it’s not. I lost a lot of good people recently, and I just lost my corporal to a new job posting.”

“You mean Reynolds sir?”

“Yes I do. But I need a new corporal Private, and YOU ARE IT! Congratulations Corporal.”

“Thank you, sir. I won’t let you down.”

“Of that I am certain corporal. Now, go find Guzman and let him know I need him.”

“Yes sir.”

Dunham left, and Taylor walked slowly around his desk. He looked at his chair but did not sit. He walked out of the office and onto his porch. Standing there looking nowhere in particular he stared off into the hills. A few minutes later

Guzman showed up. He stopped near his Commander but did not say a word. A moment later Taylor began speaking without taking his eyes off the hills.

“Sergeant Guzman, you do a pretty good job. You know the people; people generally like you. Tactically, you have good ideas, but they need to be refined. Do you agree with that assessment?”

Guzman stood there dumbfounded, “Yes sir, I think you have it right. May I ask what this is regarding sir?”

“You can ask.” Taylor paused for a long few seconds. “I need a new Lieutenant, someone I trust.” Turning slowly to face Guzman. “That would be you.” He looked him in the eye. “You up for the responsibility?”

Eyes opened wide, and a look of what the hell am I doing on his face, “Yes sir I am.”

“Good. You are my new LT, time for you to learn about command.”

“Sir, what about Reilly? She is your Lieutenant. Won’t she....”

“Reilly has a new job, new department, you’ll hear about it later this week. For now, you are the new LT for security. There, my first field commission.” Guzman was about to say something “Dismissed Lieutenant.” He handed him a set of second lieutenant bars for his collar, known to everyone as butterbars.

“Yes sir.” He turned and left the deck.

Taylor picked up his comm and tapped a button. “Reynolds.” He waited for a reply.

A moment later, “Yes Commander?” It was not Reynolds voice, it was Reilly.

“Reynolds, you sound a bit different?” He said smiling and you could hear the smile in his voice.

“Yes sir, this is Reilly. I was closest to the comm and grabbed it. All 4 of us can hear you, what can we do for you.”

“Well, if the Sheriff can spare the two of you for...wait, 4?”

“Yes sir.” Reynolds had the comm again. “Me, Reilly, Mr. Shannon and Casey Durwin. Maddy left for a moment.....” ...to get her plex at the house to use to organize the treasure they were uncovering in the place.

“Casey, Maddy....Where are you?”

Shannon grabbed the comm. “Commander, if you have a few minutes can you stop by that building you and I were talking about earlier.” Trying to be covert as to their location.

“See you in 10. Taylor out.”

Shannon thought about what just happened. The comm was across the room and it would be a lot better if it was closer or attached to his person. “Casey, can you think of a way to make a pocket on a shirt or jacket that would fit the comm unit? It would need to fit the unit and make it operable without removing it, like a comm holster or something.”

“Let me think on it.” Is all Casey answered.

Shannon hated putting the comm in his pants pocket. On the police force, he had a comm pocket sewn into his shirt, and his jacket, so the comm would be accessible easily. This is what he wanted, and since everyone had seen police officers, everyone knew where they carried their comm units.

## *Chapter Three*

Commander Taylor walked into the new Sheriff's Headquarters and looked around. "It looks like you all have been good boys and girls and Santa was good to you."

Maddy walked in as Taylor was speaking. Taylor looked at Shannon as if silently asking a question.

"Every law enforcement agency needs a technical department." He answered.

"Yes they do. Good choice." Taylor replied. "Now, what was it you wanted with me."

In the hour or so they had been in the room, Maddy had catalogued the manifest into categories; five groups actually. Weapons, food, technology, miscellaneous, and classified. She handed Taylor her plex and he reviewed the list.

"OK, classified has my interest." Taylor looked directly at Maddy Shannon when he said it.

Jim Shannon walked over to a wall, then through it. Hologram technology used to hide a secure area, keyed to the biometrics of the person attempting to walk through the holo-projection. He emerged with a small container.

"Commander, my team here has modified this device to hide it from the Pirates. We can also keep track of their movements and monitor their comm traffic."

Shannon opened the container and removed a drone. Half a meter in diameter and propelled by five lift blades. A large one in the center that provides lift and four slightly smaller one's near the outer edge to provide directional changes. Quiet and covert.

"Very nice Sheriff. How can we get it to work?"

Casey pushed a button on a hand-held controller, and it hovered in front of Taylor. Its camera pointing directly at the Commander and the image displaying on the wall screen they set up in the room.

"I take it you changed the operating frequencies already." Taylor asked.

Maddy replied, “Yes Commander. We did, and also found the comm frequency the Pirates are using, so this drone will transmit their signal to us, and we can listen in on their conversations.” She paused a moment. “Oh...” She handed him a small plex. “With this you can monitor the video feed from the drone whenever you think about it. When the Sun sets, we will send it to the Badlands to wait for the Pirates and see what they want or find or whatever.”

“Can I ask why you started calling them the Pirates?”

“Shorter, easier to say and a pretty good description if I do say so myself.” Shannon replied.

“You musta came up with it Jim. I like it.” He looked at Reynolds and Reilly, “Laura, Mark; I just promoted Guzman to LT and Dunham to Corporal. When you two have a moment, find them and offer some words of wisdom.”

“Yes Commander.” They both answered.

Taylor turned and left the room, still carrying the small plex. “This is a good thing,” he said to himself, he can watch them and find out what they were up to and not endanger anyone in the process. “This is a real good thing.” He put the plex into his vest and walked down the path.

Taylor walked back towards his office and as he passed Boylan’s bar he stopped in mid-stride. As if debating in his head if he should go in or not, the look on his face was interesting. Turning to the left, he walked on down the side path and into the bar. As he entered, everyone stopped and looked at him, the silence was deafening. He did not frequent the bar but has been in a time or two when the situation deemed worthy, as did today.

There is not a lot of love between Taylor and Boylan, but there is a level of mutual respect.

Boylan saw Taylor walk down the stairs to his bar. “Commander, to what do I owe this honor?” Being a bit sarcastic, Taylor knew it and he knew that Taylor knew.

“I need a double shot of your best stuff.” Pausing for just a heartbeat, “Make that two.” Taylor told him, holding up his thumb and index finger.

Boylan walked over to where Taylor was standing at the bar and reached under the counter and produced a bottle. Dropping two small glasses in front of Taylor, he

filled them about three fourths of the way full and put the bottle down next to them. Taylor picked up a glass and handed it to Boylan, who accepted it and then grabbed the other.

Holding the glass about eye level he saluted Boylan, "To the future." He clicked glasses with Boylan and they both downed the contents in one gulp. Boylan refilled them and saluted Taylor.

"Commander, To Terra Nova!" They clicked again, barely, and downed the contents. Taylor dropped a few Terras on the bar top and nodded to Boylan. Turning slowly, he looked around the bar and smiled. Taylor walked out and made his way to his office.

Josh walked over to Boylan, "What was that all about?"

"That son was the Commander telling me he appreciates me, but only to an extent. I'm touched actually." Pausing a moment. "It was his way of apologizing for the past and telling me the future is not yet written."

Josh went back to his duties. "Huh?" Is the only sound he made.

Zak walked up to Boylan, "What was that all about?"

"Taylor being Taylor. Letting me know in his own way that he appreciates me." Grinning wide, "But don't get the impression he likes me, Taylor only likes Taylor."

As Taylor approached his office, the plex in his vest made a sound. He stopped on his landing and looked at it. At first glance he did not see what he was looking at, then he saw it. The Pirates were making their way to the badlands for god knows what, but this little drone Shannon found located the Pirates and was watching them.

"I thought they were going to launch it tonight?" he said to himself.

He tapped a button on the plex named monitor, and low and behold he heard voices. Taylor yelled... "Wa...GUZMAN! Get up here, you need to see this." Guzman climbed the stairs, fast. As he entered the office Taylor was transferring the image and sound from the little pocket plex to the big screen in the office.

"It seems that our new Sheriff's department came up with a way to monitor the pirates." Taylor said.

Guzman looked at him, not fully understanding the pirate moniker.

Taylor qualified it, “They are referring to the bad guys, Phoenix Group, my son, the Sixers and such as the pirates. I guess I just got used to it.”

“OK, understood.” He said to the Commander, “So we can monitor them. How?”

“Well, visually, over their comms, IR, a variety of ways. Suffice it to say yes, we will know when they are coming, and will be ready for them.”

“I like that Commander. I like that a lot!”

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A few days ago, Shannon was just the Sheriff of Terra Nova, now he was the Commanding Officer of the Sheriff’s Detachment for Public Safety. They managed to get their uniforms squared away with the assistance of Casey and a few of his chosen artists. The triangle pin was an absolute masterpiece. Made of three dissimilar metals, it actually produced an electrical charge, the charge used to monitor a specific frequency, classified frequency, that would activate the beacon built into the badge. The only people that are aware of this are badges numbered less than 10, so anyone starting at 11 would not be made aware of it unless circumstances dictate differently.

The uniform they settled on consisted of dark blue pants, medium blue shirt, and a black baseball cap. Shoes, or rather boots, were standard military issue. The shirt had a pocket that would house the comm unit, right or left side around the clavicle; opposite side of the weapon. Each had a holster similar to Taylors now, with the pistol front left or right, near the stomach, depending on the wearers dominant hand. The backup weapon was a smaller 9mm and where you wore it concealed was your choice.

Maddy and Casey had a similar uniform, Casey wore a sonic – Maddy did not. At least not yet that is. She needed to be trained first in the use of weapons. So far, this team had proven valuable. Discovered the drones, sent the drone to watch the Pirates, listened in on their comm traffic and learned a great deal about their ‘mission’.

The meeting where the badges were passed out was a solemn one. Casey made 10 of them, Jim Shannon started at badge 5 and handed it to Maddy. He walked to Casey and before he handed it to him, he smiled that Shannon ‘I know something good’ smile.

Casey Durwin looked him in the eye, “What?”

“Well,” Jim Shannon said to him, “We were all talking and badge number two is a special one. It is reserved for someone who needs to be there to hold the place together and make certain we don’t look stupid.” He grinned, “The four of us all talked last night and decided you should be #2. Congratulations Casey, now, if you accept this badge, it means you will be responsible for all the administrative minutia of this detachment.”

Casey sat up straight in his chair, “I accept.”

He handed him the badge and Casey looked at it. You could see in his face he was honored. He was destined to do a remarkable job.

He walked over to the last two initial members of this team. “Reynolds, I thought long and hard on this one. But it was not until Maddy saw me thinking, or as she put it, over thinking about it. You have badge number 4. Maddy wants you close, so, you two are consecutive. That leaves badge number 3 for Reilly. In the field, you two are equals. There will be different times I will be putting you each in command, for the experience and the other is to take a second seat. Let the other lead, it is a learning experience.”

He paused a moment, “Pin it on.”

All 5 of them pinned the badge in place. It was time to attend a special meeting called by Taylor of all residents. They all walked out together, and the streets were empty. They made their way to the stage of the amphitheater in the big field, large enough for all one thousand people to attend.

They entered from the back, the sun was setting to the right of the stage as you were looking at it and Taylor walked out.

“Residents of Terra Nova. Welcome to the first monthly briefing on our situation. I plan to do this once a month or so to keep you informed. First, I have some good news for you. Guzman, Dunham, please join me on the stage.”

They handed their rifles to the soldier standing next to them and joined Taylor, standing to his left and his right. They were both still wearing their side arms, as was Taylor.

“Guzman here has been promoted to second lieutenant and has agreed to be responsible for the well-being of each and every one of you. He is also my second in command as far as the military presence is concerned.”

He turned to Dunham, “Dunham here was promoted to be the leader of the soldiers. As my corporal, his role will be to coordinate and lead a variety of missions as needed.” His voice trailed off briefly. “I look forward to working with these two men and teaching them command.” The applause was constant, and heart felt.

You could see that a lot of people agreed with these promotions, and there were murmurs as to where Reynolds and Reilly were during all this. The applause quieted, and Guzman and Dunham left the stage and returned to where they started.

Taylor raised his hands slightly and the place quieted down, “In the past few months I discovered just how valuable a good cop can be here in the colony. And to that end, I have commissioned Jim Shannon with the responsibility of leading the Sheriff’s Detachment, his name for it not mine. He said Sheriff sounded better than police, I agree. Friendlier.”

He paused a moment and turned, “Shannon, will you please join me?”

Jim walked up next to Taylor. Taylor got a first look at the uniform. Functional, simple, nonmilitary, and most of all it looked friendly.

“Nice uniform, where did you find that holster?” Taylor laughed, as did everyone else. It was very similar to the holster Taylor wore.

“Had it made. Yours seemed to be functional and it felt really good when I was traipsing around at Hope Plaza, so....what the hell!” Everyone laughed, Taylor extended his hand and they shook.

Shannon walked out in front of Taylor and started speaking. “A Sheriff’s Department, with one person, means two things; either an overworked Sheriff or someone who can never catch up on his work.” He paused a brief moment. “So, let me introduce to you the first Deputy Sheriff’s in the history of Terra Nova. Deputy Reilly and Deputy Reynolds.” They entered and stood to his right, the side they came in from. The applause quieted, and he continued. “Well, there needs to be someone responsible for the administration and anything else I really do not want to do,” Chuckles in the audience. “So, let me introduce you to the Desk Sergeant, Casey Durwin.”

Casey rolled out next to Shannon, on his left. Everyone knew Casey, liked him mostly and the applause was a hair louder than for the Deputy's.

“One last thing. Intelligence is more than just a word; it needs to be actions. The Sheriff's Department has its own technical department,” He paused a moment and found his wife. He was about to introduce his daughter as a member of the Sheriff's Department, and he never told her about it till right this moment. “The director of Technical Services for the Sheriff's Department has a role that is very unique and well suited for this individual. They will need to work rotations with all science departments to learn the concepts of each specialty. This person will need to be a general scientist. Not an expert but rather someone who comprehends when a particular specialist needs to be brought in to assist. The person I am talking about is Maddy Shannon, my daughter.”

Huge applause as she entered the stage and stood next to Casey. Shannon in the center, and Administration on one side, and operations on the other.

Jim Shannon locked eyes with his wife, Elisabeth, who had no idea about the fact Maddy was to become an active member of the Sheriff's Department. He was not sure as to how she would react but whatever it was, she would stand by the decision.

Dr. Shannon looked at Sheriff Shannon and smiled, nodded.

Maddy saw the transaction and heard volumes in the silence. Mom not only understood but approved. Maddy had a troubled time in this present, seeing as her IQ is higher than anyone else her age, or most anyone in Terra Nova for that matter. She revels in the sciences and this posting, this lifetime internship, will be one she could do with as she saw fit. All sciences, all technologies, any scientist she knows of will eventually be a mentor, a trainer. At least she knew medicine was not her forte. She did manage to get that out of the way. She will need a medical rotation, as will everyone. A good base in First Responder First Aid is important.

Taylor walked over to the group; he had slipped to one side to give them the spotlight. “My friends, it is a great day here in Terra Nova. We have my new second-in-command, Sheriff Shannon has his department that is dedicated to more than law enforcement, since all of us understand that rules are there for a reason. But, occasionally, their services will be needed I am sad to say. We are, after all, all humans.” He looked at Casey, “Sergeant Durwin, you know...I like calling you

that, you were a valued member of my force at one time and I am very happy and very proud that you found a place to serve once again.” Looking at Maddy, “Miss Shannon, you do realize you are probably the most intelligent person in the Sheriff’s Department. So, please make the rest of them look smart.” Everyone laughed. Maddy blushed.

Commander Taylor walked over to Reilly and Reynolds. “You two, your presence will be missed in security, but you are opening a new facet in your lives, your careers. You need to learn from the Sheriff here, so you can teach others eventually, when you are ready.” He side-stepped a bit and stood in front of Jim. Jim was grinning from ear to ear. “I really hate that grin you know.”

“Yes Commander, I know....” Shannon said while Taylor was busy taking in a bit of air to continue.

“Well, in that case this should be an interesting venture.” He turned to the audience, “Ladies and gentlemen, and lizards of all sizes, I present to you the new and improved Sheriff’s Department. Give them your support.”

The applause and hooting were overwhelming to Maddy. She was almost in tears and Casey saw her. He reached up a bit and touched her arm for a moment. She came back from wherever she was and smiled at Casey.

The rest of the meeting was a normal briefing. Maddy and Casey went over to where Taylor and Shannon were talking.

“Excuse me Commander.... Sheriff. We have a bit of news you may find interesting.” Casey looked at Maddy who continued.

“Well, I was going through the manifest we found on the plex and discovered there were three other storage facilities in the colony. Casey and I have visited them all and took inventory and we have some really cool things that will come in handy.”

Shannon spoke, “Cool things, very descriptive.” He smiled at her. “Like what?”

“Well, there are three comm repeaters and over a thousand comm units in a building on the other side of the colony. These guys were the textbook description of overkill. Casey and I set up a repeater with rotating encryption over there,” She pointed to the waterfall in the distance, “... on the mountain near the waterfall. Once activated, we can communicate farther and better than the previous idea we thought about. We also found a drone capable of destruction.”

Casey took over, “Commander, this is a somewhat larger drone flown by a pilot and capable of expending ordinance remotely. The camera on the drone has infrared capability so we can use this to watch the areas around the colony. Standard flight is about 100 meters higher than any weapon in this time, unless the Pirates have a shoulder launched missile they want to expend.” Maddy took over the conversation.

“There are other toys we can discuss later. But, suffice it to say, we have new toys. I do have one question; do you know if there are any pilots in the colony?”

“Well, I think that...” Taylor stopped in midsentence. “Pilots? As in flying a plane or something?”

“Yes sir. Let’s discuss this later.” Casey added. He saw that Jim and the Commander were very curious about that last comment.

Casey knew Taylor was, early in his career, a recon pilot until his skills as a strategist came out. He was moved from recon flying to special ops in the middle of the night, he vanished for nearly half a year as he was trained in the art of war and practiced in battle simulations until he was promoted to lieutenant commander where he learned from the best. Before he left the generals command, Taylor was promoted to commander and given a command of his own. A 14-man guerilla unit whose primary mission was to remain alive and harass the enemy every chance they could. His second in command was a new lieutenant, Alicia Washington. They split up a lot and she learned a lot from him, as did he from her. Thankfully, she knew how to sew and practiced her sewing on Taylor’s skin when his luck ran out. He lived that life for 4 and a half years only losing one man during that time. And that was to illness, being stung by that many scorpions had a way of changing the direction of your day.

Taylor excused himself when the mini-plex in his vest beeped. They all knew what that meant and Maddy knew when it beeped it meant she was recording the event back at HQ. Something her and Casey started calling it. They set up the other three storage areas and satellite locations, set up a holo storage area and made it look like an office, getting others to assist in cleaning it up and making signs and desks and chairs or whatever. Maddy had a few who were in security, rent a cop as they called themselves. They wanted to be a part of the Sheriff’s detachment and everyone knew it was to change profession from manual labor to something not quite as muscle intensive. She took the names and will pass them on to Casey.

But for now, the festival was in full swing. Mark was standing next to her. She had a real job. Life was working out well.....finally.

Chapter Four

Commander Taylor walked into the new Sheriff's Headquarters and looked around. He looked directly at Reilly and Reynolds since they were the only ones in the room at the moment.

"OK, aircraft?" Taylor asked the question in his polite voice.

Jim Shannon came walking into the room through the wall, the holo wall Reilly and Maddy discovered. "Commander, glad you're here. I need to encode your biometrics, got a couple minutes?"

"Sheriff, it seems Commander Taylor is interested in the aircraft we found." Reynolds said, and it sounded like there was some humor in his voice as he said it.

"Good, he should be. Now all we need to do is hire a couple flight attendants, have Boylan make those little bottles of hooch, and were all set."

Taylor did not look amused. Jim looked at him and said, "Reilly, put it up on the big screen." A moment later the holo wall became a screen, actually a full computer interface.

"Here is what we found commander." Reilly walked over to the display and Maddy joined her. "The ship can carry a crew of three and six passengers with plenty of space for cargo. 2 pilots and it looks like an engineer are the crew. As for the passengers, there are 6 retractable seats just off the cargo area behind the command center. The cargo area, off the passenger compartment and through an airlock is quite large. Entrance is made through the cargo area, and also through a hatch on the port side of the craft. It uses antigrav for lift and a forced air, more like ducted fan, propulsion system. Impressive at the limited number of moving parts actually. Minimal electronics package, mostly comms and nav. No weapons. For orbital and high-altitude maneuvers, it has a large compressed gas cylinder for orbital maneuvers and jets on the appropriate sides, top and bottom of the craft."

Maddy took over, "One big difference is the comm systems though, they are keyed, scrambled, and locked. If we fire this thing up before we figure out how to fix the systems for our use, someone will know we did it and may possibly be able to take control of it, or self-destruct it, at will. Can't be sure. Should have it

figured out in a week or so. Made some progress this morning with the encryption. The first two levels were easy, 2048-bit keys but the next level is a bit trickier. It uses a specific frequency and.....” Maddy paused a moment and looked at the ceiling.

“Oh oh.....someone had an idea.....” Jim looked at Taylor who stayed silent.
“Maddy.....”

“I was just thinking.” She said, looking at the ceiling. “If we run a spectrum analysis of the transmissions maybe there is a signal it is sending to a receiver, like a remote or something, and it is actually waiting for a return signal.”

Taylor looked at Jim. “Does this happen often?”

Jim chuckled slightly, “Welcome to my life...” He smiled at Commander Taylor, who smiled back, and sat in his chair.

Maddy and Reilly walked away and disappeared into the wall. Jim stood and walked over to Commander Taylor, “Shall we join them?”

Jim opened a small panel on the wall by touching it and entered a passcode. “OK Commander, now, just walk through.”

Taylor nodded slightly and walked slowly forward and came to a dead stop when he hit what appeared to be a solid wall.

“Oh, I guess I need to hit this button to.....OK, try it again.”

“I owe you one now Jim. Remember, I always repay my debts....” Taylor grinned and walked through the wall; Jim Shannon had a sinister look on his face. Taylor knew that he knew that he did that on purpose. All Taylor really needed to do was touch the wall, so his DNA could be encoded.

Taylor looked around and said, “Where the hell are we?”

“On a small landing in front of the stairs to the basement. Shall we walk down the stairs?”

“Basement? We have a basement? How is a shuttle getting out of a basement?”

“I had that question to, wait till you find out. Blew my mind.”

The flight of stairs was pretty standard, and the cases and crates stored here are mostly munitions and technology. Taylor stopped on the stairs and looked at an alcove, “Grenades?”

“Yep. Frag and sonic.”

“How many?”

“10 cases, 12 of each in each case, so 120 of each here.”

Taylor stopped and looked at Jim, “Here?”

“Oh, the briefing ain’t over yet.” He walked down the rest of the steps and into the basement.

As they entered the big room they looked around and saw the girls and the shuttle over to the left. To the right was a series of shelves and a whole lot of containers.

Taylor looked at the shuttle. Average size box type ship with grav panel lift capability. Taylor looked up and saw a roof and a seam. The roof retracted or opened or something. Then he glanced toward Jim and realized this room did not end at the stairs, it went under the city and was a steel box. A small fortress, then he saw the cases and the boxes and the rows....and rows....and rows of shelves.

“As you know, we are at the edge of the city with the wall of the fence and the wall of the building about a meter apart, the fence would actually be over there somewhere, so this would be the top of the rise on the other side of the fence and directly in front of the shuttle would be the face of the cliff.”

“What exactly is above us?” Taylor asked.

“Nothing. This entire area was off limits when they arrived, so they had all this, the box and the shuttle, in the cargo pods. Lots of cargo pods actually. They installed it and reassembled the shuttle in less than a week. You gotta remember, I was trying to keep tabs on the number of cargo pods they ran through Terra Nova, and lost count at 75. Who knows how many they pushed through initially?”

“Dad, we got it.” Maddy exclaimed.

“Got what? Is it contagious?” Jim jibed back.

“We activated the shuttle and changed its operating system to be in sync with our systems. Reilly hacked into the code and removed all trace of the Pirates logs

and passcodes. We added a new set of protocols, biometric and verbal, that will launch and fly the ship. It can be flown on computer or manually.”

Taylor spoke up, “I need one more thing. A kill switch. I need it to be able to disconnect the computer from the shuttle, manual everything. It has to be a manual disconnect and not a computer software toggle. I do not want to be surprised if we missed something.”

“I think we can do that,” Reilly replied. Maddy nodded.

Taylor and Shannon walked from the shuttle to the cases. “You said here?” Taylor asked.

Shannon got a look like what are you talking about for a moment, then “OH yea. We discovered there were 5 other locations where items are being stored. Some in the open and some behind a holo screen. We managed to get into all but one of the holo’s, must be something really good in there. The other locations, well, one has nothing but weapons and ammunitions. Good stuff to, not sonics. A few more sonic cannons, rifles, pistols,” He handed Taylor a small pistol. “No idea what it’s really called, Reynolds started calling it the triple threat. There’s a small switch on the right, a white, blue, and red dot. Move it to the white, a mini sonic, move it to the red and it is a somewhat impressive laser,” He looked up, as did Taylor, and saw a burn mark on the ceiling. “Set it on the blue dot and it shoots what I think is plasma. There is no clip, no reloading. My tech team believes it is some type of regenerative power source since we can see no way to set it to recharge.”

“I remember hearing about this weapon a few years before I left. It was on the drawing board. Something for covert ops because it was so small and in theory so powerful. How many of these do we have?”

“At the moment, we know about 50 of them in 5 cases back there.” He pointed to the racks they were talking about earlier. “I suggest my team and I go on a field trip soon. There are a couple other gadgets I want to test before I give you more info on them mainly because I have no idea about how they really work. But let’s just say comfort and leisure are in our future.”

“I think you need to take Guzman with you. He likes to camp.” He smiled.

“The more the merrier.” Shannon replied.

Taylor thought out loud, “Maybe a good backup weapon, or a primary for scientists and doctors. Small enough to not get in the way but powerful enough to get you out of a bad place.”

“Agreed.” Shannon replied. “I already pulled 10 for the sheriff’s department. Reilly, our munitions genius, is going to learn everything she can about them and create a training course.” Jim smiled at Taylor, “Commander, here’s yours.”

He handed him a freshly made holster and mini. “This is your mini.”

“Mini?” Taylor looked directly at Casey who not only heard everything as the sound reverberated but wanted to make certain the commander knew where it came from. He was on the landing at the top of the stairs.

Casey spoke, “Well, it is a descriptive name...”

They stayed in the basement for another hour or so looking in crates and boxes. Taylor came across an entire set of kitchen items and called Dunham to grab a few of his friends and head this way.

Shannon, Reynolds and Taylor carried the cases and the boxes upstairs and waited for Dunham. When he arrived, he had half a dozen soldiers with him.

“Corporal, congratulations on your promotion.” Reynolds said to him and slugged him on the arm. They were pretty good friends and respected each other tremendously.

“Thanks Deputy.... man, that sounds weird!” They both laughed a bit.

Taylor took over the conversation. “Dunham, the containers with the black X on them go to the kitchen staff, I know they could use them. The red X goes to my office, and the green X goes to the armory.”

Thankfully, Maddy and Reilly found a box of marking pens.

“Yes sir. We’ll take care of it.”

Taylor grabbed for his comm and pressed the talk button, nothing happened. He tried a couple times, nothing. “The self-test is telling me it is functioning OK.”

Shannon tried his, nothing. As did Reynolds.

As Dunham exited the building, Reilly walked out through the wall. “Commander, that is my fault. I found, in the shuttle, a comm jammer.” She held out her hand

and showed it to him. About the size of a small plex and the display allowed you to select jamming coverage frequencies.

“Shut that thing off.” He said.

Taylor grabbed his comm again, “Guzman!”

A second later, “Yes sir?”

“Get on your horse and get to the Sheriff’s office.”

“Yes sir, be there in 2 mikes.”

“Is he running here. Or already on his way here.” Shannon asked.

“A good second in command anticipates the next command of his superior.” Jim rolled his eyes. They grinned at each other, no one else saw them. But they all heard them.

A minute or so later, Guzman entered the building. He walked up to Taylor and waited.

“Good, glad you’re here. Reynolds, lead the way.” He said knowing full well that the wall would not let him pass.

Reynolds said, “After you Guzman.” He put his arm out as if to usher him through.

Guzman made the same motion and Mark nodded slightly and walked through the holo.

Guzman watched Reynolds walk through what appeared to be a solid wall and followed him. He hit the wall hard, no injury, just his pride.

Taylor spoke, “Shannon, you’re right. That is funny.” He chuckled a bit, “Don’t sweat it Guzman, the Sheriff did the same thing to me. Welcome to the club.”

Guzman eyed Reynolds who was playing with a panel and pointed at him. He walked up to Taylor and waited.

Reynolds spoke, “Now you can pass through. You need to fail once so the screen can grab your DNA, then you can be programmed to have access.”

Guzman looked at Reynolds, “So all I needed to do was touch the screen with my hand...” which he did “...and it would have a fail.”

“That is correct LT.” Reynolds smiled. As did all the others.

“I owe you...” Guzman said to Reynolds.

“Commander, you said the same thing to me a few minutes ago.” Shannon jibed.

“Yes I did Shannon, yes I did.” He turned to Guzman, “Let’s plan to spend some time tomorrow talking about how we can repay these two for their kindness.”

Guzman grinned from ear to ear, “Yes sir!”

Reynolds and Jim Shannon looked at each other at that moment and in unison said, “Oh Oh...”

Reynolds walked Guzman to the cases and handed him a plex. They copied the manifest and found a few things not in the inventory, so they added them. They also learned that Maddy and Laura were having so much fun they have not slept in more than a day.

Guzman saw Laura and Maddy, “You two look like something the carno dragged in. How long has it been since you slept?”

“They looked at each other a moment as if reality just returned, “A day....or so.”

Taylor broke in, “Finish what you are doing and at least take a nap. No less than an hour. Understood!” He winked.

“Yes sir.” They finished up a few minutes later and left the room. Not leave the basement, just to the back of the room.

Taylor, Guzman, Reynolds and the Sheriff sorted through several boxes. They came up on one with Lucas’ name on it. Reynolds scanned it, not booby trapped so they carried it to a table and opened it.....SLOWLY!

Looking in the box, since it did not explode, they found several bottles of very expensive booze. “My son has good tastes in his alcohol!” Taylor said.

Guzman added, “Yes he does. Good and expensive.”

Shannon grinned, “Got an idea.” He said. The rest looked at him in wonder.

“Suppose we get a bottle from the bar and pour the contents out and refill it with just a couple shots in the bottle with this; then we go to the bar and congratulate Boylan on some first-class hooch, even offer him a taste. That would keep him guessing for weeks!”

“Reynolds, your trainer is devious, I like it. But we can’t just do it ourselves, we need someone else to take it to him and show it off.” They thought about it a minute.

“Any of us is too obvious, Josh too.” Guzman said.

“Got the perfect person.”

They all looked at him. He smiled, “Curran.”

Everyone nodded.

“Back to the cases.” Shannon said. “What’s this?”

“A memory cube. Looks as though it would plug directly into the eye. Which means that is the LAST place we want it to go. Give it to your daughter and let her scan it first. May keep those two busy for a few hours.”

They looked into several more cases and found a few cases filled with nothing but candy; chocolate actually. Someone had a sweet tooth.

“Got an idea for this. Next town meeting we can pass it out to the kids, after your wife tells us it won’t kill anyone that is.” He said looking at the Sheriff.

It had been nearly 3 hours and they needed to get about their day. Lunch was on everyone mind actually. Reynolds walked over to a case and grabbed 4 meal packs. “These are new so I thought we should try them out.” He said.

They each grabbed one and went over to the table near where the girls were sleeping. Keeping their voices low, sitting at the table, they hit the auto heat and waiting a few minutes.

Reynolds spoke, reading the package. “Salisbury steak and mashed potatoes with glazed carrots.”

Guzman said, “Chili mac with asparagus spears.”

The Commander said, “Hawaiian pork tenderloin, peas and carrots in a cheese sauce and apple sauce.”

“That sounds great,” Jim Shannon said, “But, how about ribeye steak, smashed potatoes with Mexican corn salsa.”

“STEAK?” They all said at the same time. Loud enough to get the girls to wake up. Well, they got nearly 4 hours sleep.

“Yup, I propose we share and taste it all!” Reynolds said to the group.

The meals were in a self-contained package that doubled as a plate and came with utensils and seasonings. They each tasted their food and were amazed. “This is good. They shifted the meals to the right one and tasted again. This time the girls joined in and pulled a spoon from a pocket.

“Where did you get the spoons?” Jim Shannon asked.

“We had to eat in the last 39 hours. We found these yesterday.” Maddy said as she grabbed for the chili mac. “I like this one the best. Compact and easy to eat, and pretty tasty. Besides, the dessert is fruitcake...AND I love that fruitcake!”

Guzman stood and walked to the case and rifled through it. “Spicy Mexican shredded beef with tortillas, rice, beans and salsa. OK, I gotta try this one.”

He brought it to the table and popped the tab. A few minutes later it smelled like a Mexican restaurant.

“This is good.” He said as he took a large taste on a tortilla with a little of everything.

Laura said, “That is my favorite!”

They spent another half hour at the table then went about their day.

Chapter Five

It's been about a week since they found the stores and rearranged things with the assistance of the military. Maddy and Laura managed to get into the other holo screen, and they found four pyrosonic devices. The downside was they found empty cases for another three, and if they were planted anywhere near the colony and detonated, no one would survive. Maddy recoded the wall to open only for them and Taylor and put this information on NO inventory plex anywhere. Essentially, they did not exist.

They found roughly a quarter million rounds of ammo, and 172 rifles and pistols. A total of 100 mini's and several cases of sonic grenades, flash-bang type, and one case containing 50 old school fragmentation hand grenades.

The additional perimeter mines went to work instantly reinforcing the perimeter. There were a lot of plex's and data storage devices. Maddy linked them all to a single plex and ran them through an algorithm to search for a virus or back door program. Nothing turned up, so she opened the plex to see if there was any interesting data. It would take her a year to sift through it all. But at least it was all in one place now.

Every morning Reilly and Reynolds walked the entire circumference of the colony and saw or watched everything. It seems the Sheriff was teaching them early. He put a few things in places they had no business being. A pink streamer in a tree here, a fruit from one tree in a different tree, and a man covered in red clay dirt in the middle of the corn field that contained only black dirt.

They saw none of them. The sheriff sent them back on that same walk until they saw all of the things he planted. He was opening their minds in a way. It took him years on the streets to gain this skill, he did not have years to teach them.

After the third walk around the colony they returned to the HQ building and found a note. Make your way to Taylor's office. Fifteen minutes later they walked up the stairs. Everyone was there but Casey.

"Did you find it?" Jim asked.

"Pink streamer in the tree at 8 o'clock." Reilly replied.

"Excellent."

Taylor looked at Shannon, “8 o’clock?”

“Well, main gate is noon, medical is three, you know... numbers on an analog clock.”

“Interesting, compass points too difficult for you to master?” Taylor poked at him.

“Yep, that’s it exactly Commander. That and this way if a civilian asks us where things are, we can tell them a number and they can get in the general area. Most cannot see north with a compass.”

“Ok...ok...Now, down to business.”

They came closer to the large display panel and Taylor pulled his little plex out and put the display on the big screen. Immediately Maddy’s eyes got very large and she became excited.

“Oh my.... we found them.” She said.

Her Dad said, “What? Who?”

“Dad, this signal is from the pirates. Commander, if I may?” He waved his hand.

“Ok, a little refinement...” After a minute the voices started to get clear enough to understand. “The drone is working!” She said to all of them.

Reynolds asked, “They never changed their comm frequency? Not very bright for mercenaries.”

“My thought too, son.” Taylor said in reply.

There was a lot of static, and some of the words were clear enough to understand.

“found...Lucas...shot.....need....ical...atten.... “

An new voice, female, possibly Mira, *“found Lucas ... alive.... rendesv....grid....6...repeat...Golf six”*

Reilly asked, “Are they using the same grid map we are?”

“If they were, G6 would put them in the middle of the Lake. So, I am guessing they made up their own in case we could hear their comm traffic.”

Maddy started playing with the drone remote, Taylor asked, “What exactly are you doing?”

“Hold on for one minute and I will answer that for you.” She said under her breath and to no one in particular.

After a minute or so the voices cleared up and most of the static died off.

“None of our comm traffic can be transmitted through the drone, right?”

“We are on a rotating frequency; they are using a static frequency. Since we have the only comm broadcast system in this time, we can do that. They, however, are not able to rotate or change their frequency easily, if at all.”

“Maddy?” Jim asked his daughter. “If we wanted to, can we transmit through the drone on a close but different non-rotating frequency.”

“Sure. But they could hear us if they locked on, and if I were them, I would be monitoring our former frequencies for signals.” Maddy looked at her Dad who had ‘that’ grin on his face. The same one Taylor, Guzman, Reilly, and Reynolds were wearing. After a few seconds, “OH...I get it. We can send false comm traffic to them and when we’re sure they’re listening give them something to really listen to..”

“Great idea Miss Shannon.” Taylor said to her. “Great idea. Now all we need is a plan and a script.”

“Well, according to the book I read...” Maddy continued.

Taylor cut her off, not mean or anything, playfully curious, “BOOK you read?”

“Well, yes. Mark gave me a couple books on war and strategy.”

“...and you read them?” Taylor was getting amused.

“Of course Commander, I really love to read.”

“So what can you tell me about the books?”

“Everything. Pretty much. I may not fully understand but I remember everything I read.”

Taylor picked up a plex and tapped a bunch of keys, then handed it to Maddy.

“Read this.” He said to her.

She did. It was 64-characters of random letters and numbers. “OK. Now what?”

He took the plex back and cleared the screen, “Repeat it back to me.” She did, perfectly.

Taylor grinned. “Sheriff, in her head is the master code to the colony. If anything happens to me, she can unlock...well...everything. Reset passcodes, the whole enchilada. Maddy, you understand you are not to use this unless it is vital for the existence of the colony.”

“Yes Commander, I understand.”

“No one but me has this code, it is not written anywhere. The only other person in the history of this planet to know this code was killed by my son. So now, it is only in my head, and now hers!” He pointed at Maddy Shannon head. “We are the only people who know this, it is never to be mentioned again. CLEAR!”

“YES SIR!” Guzman, Reynolds, Reilly and Jim said in unison.

Taylor turned and went to his desk. He sat in his chair and took a long drink of water, closed his canteen and set it on the table. He stared at the group in front of him.

“Lt. Guzman, can you come up with something we can put over the comm to see if they can hear us?”

“I think I can sir.”

“Good. Then do so. Grab anyone in this room you need to help you and have the idea at the morning briefing. This is confidential.”

“Yes sir. Laura, Mark, Maddy. Can we meet somewhere later and hash this out?”

“You can use my place, or for that matter the Sheriff’s office if you want. It will be empty most of the afternoon and early evening.” Shannon volunteered.

“Good. That sounds great. We can meet in the Sheriff’s office. Say around 1630.”

Maddy spoke up. “I will make a batch of something for dinner we can all share. Not sure what yet, but it will be edible.”

Mark added to the conversation, “How about if I stop by the mess hall and grab four take-outs. Usually pretty good, enough food.”

Taylor spoke up next, “Shannon, let’s take a walk, I think they got this handled. Where is Casey now? Got a favor of him.”

“He went to storage room six to see what treasures he could find.” He grinned at the commander. “Interested in a bike ride commander?” Taylor smiled at him.

Taylor stood and left with Shannon, a minute later they heard a couple motorcycles starting and their sound trailed off as they made their way to the exact opposite side of the colony. Storage room six was located at six o’clock on the dial. A nice ride on a beautiful day.

They stopped and chatted with a few people on the way and arrived 30 minutes later. Walking into the storage room they saw Casey rummaging through a small box on a table.

“Whacha find?” Shannon asked.

“Nothing life changing. A box of old school handcuffs. I think they had plans for these.”

Taylor and the Sheriff nodded agreement.

Shannon looked around, “Casey, this would make a great secondary HQ.”

Casey stopped and looked around. “I agree. But that means we need another desk sergeant. Any idea on who that could be?”

“Not yet but keep it in the back of your mind since when we find that person, you will be training them.”

“Yes boss!”

“He seems to be trained pretty well Sheriff.” Taylor said.

“Brainwashing is almost complete.”

“Yes master...” Casey said in his best monster voice.

They looked around and 20 minutes later a call over the comm.

“Commander, we had an incident.”

“Can you be a little more specific please?”

“We came upon and surprised an ancestral dragon. It bit someone. We need medical here and I cannot seem to get in contact with anyone. It seems only you can hear us. I think my comm is on the fritz”

“OK, we’ll have medical there shortly. Where are you?”

“We are providing security for a work detail OTG, far east about 5 clicks. They are creating an irrigation system for the new field, diverting water from the stream to the new fields.”

“Understood. Sit tight.” He said.

Chapter Six

Doctor Elisabeth Shannon walked toward a table where a woman was lying, motionless. Part of her left arm was gone but for the most part she looked in good shape. Elisabeth brought the table online and checked her vitals, tapped a few keys on her plex and turned the table back to stand-by. Looking at the plex in her hand she had some concerns. Could she design and construct an artificial forearm and hand?

She kept looking from the plex to the bandage on the arm. About half of the forearm was there. Something as massive as a pair of legs, no way. But this was basic. Grip, open, close. Should be easy. She scrolled through images of artificial limbs on her plex when a nurse shocked her back to reality.

“Doctor Shannon. There is a call for you.” The nurse told her.

Some of the extra comm units were placed at various locations around the colony to make it easier to contact key locations. Medical was one of them. “OK, thank you. I’ll be right there.”

She cleared the screen and walked to the desk. Not her desk, her desk was a room in the back of the medical center with a door on it. This was what they started calling the nurses station. A desk located in the middle area of the room.

She sat at the vacant chair and pressed the button, “Dr. Shannon here.”

“Dr. Shannon,” It was Commander Taylor. “I’m sending a vehicle to pick you up. We need you at the far end of the colony.”

“Can I ask what this is about?” She questioned him.

“You can ask, be ready in 3 minutes. Like you’re going OTG.” He paused a heartbeat. “OH, got any antivenom for an Ancestral Dragon? Bring it with you. Taylor out.”

The unit reset, and she sat there dumbfounded. She briefly considered calling her husband and asking what was going on but thought better of it. “Nurse Ogawa, put together an OTG kit, apparently I have about 2 minutes before I get collected for a mystery assignment where someone was bitten by an ancestral dragon.”

“I’ll add that to your kit.” The nurse said with a shocked look on her face.

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Jim Shannon put together a pack for a few nights in the woods. Pack filled with the ration packs they found, they are good enough and don't require a fire or heat source to cook them, if at all. Water is easy since all the water here is drinkable after a purTAB and a few minutes.

The last couple bags he decided would be a sampling of the munitions they all found. And there were about 15 different things he wanted to test before they actually used. This is the trip he talked about to test the new weapons, but they needed to hold off a few days and now, 11-days later, they have the chance to go do the tests.

He is taking Mark Reynolds, Laura Reilly, Lt. Guzman, and considered taking Maddy along to record their finding and give Taylor a report on what they did.

“Shannon?” Taylors voice broke over the comm.

“Go head.” He touched the comm unit in it pocket.

“There are two additional people you need to take with you on this campout.”

“Who's that?” Shannon stopped what he was doing and listened intently.

“Your daughter Maddy and me.” Shannon grinned.

“Why Maddy?” He asked.

“In case someone needs to science the shit out of something.” He grinned, “and to put together your report when you return.” You could hear the grin through the comm.

Shannon grinned back, he and Taylor are starting to think alike and he's not sure if he is thinking like Taylor or if Taylor is thinking like him. “Agreed!”

“Meet us at the front gate in two hours, about 1800 hours. Eat a good dinner first, sunset is about 2130 so we should get there in plenty of time to setup camp, and a perimeter.”

“Sounds like a plan. See you then.”

Shannon decided to stop by Boylan's bar and grab a bottle and take it with him, in case they needed to toast to something.

He headed home to finish packing. Everyone was required to carry a sidearm and a rifle on this trip. Maddy needs to learn how to shoot and Reilly and Reynolds are her instructors. Shannon needs to see how Maddy shoots for one thing, and how his deputy's train for another. Uniform of the day for all was military armor, Reynolds is bringing Maddy her set, and Reilly is instructing her in how to put it all on.

Shannon walked into the house and before he could say hello, he heard Maddy yelling, "OW, there smashing my boobs!"

Reilly replied, "Yes they get smashed, but look at it this way, you don't need to wear a bra. Besides, this stuff is cooler than a bra."

"Really?"

Shannon looked at Josh who was about to run out of the house, Reynolds looked like he wanted to join him. Shannon looked at Reynolds and smiled that smile like he was up to something. Reynolds looked back at him and his head tilted to one side, like a puppy wondering what he was looking at.

"I'm home, you need any help?" Shannon yelled.

"NO!" Maddy cried back. Reilly was laughing, and Reynolds was trying really hard to laugh but not make a sound. Josh laughed, loud.

"Mark, see if you can scare up 6 small glasses that won't break in a backpack." He produced the bottle of hooch he picked up on the way home. "A little something to take away the chill or start a campfire."

Reynolds looked around the small kitchen and found 6 small plastic cups, a bit larger than a shot glass. "Found these."

"Perfect, put them in your pack so we know where they are." He paused and thought of what he needed to ask Reynolds, "Have you had the chance to let Maddy squeeze off a few shots on your sonic?"

"No sir, I haven't got the chance. She took a couple shots with my rifle once or twice though, a few weeks ago. Before the Pirates showed up."

"How'd she do?"

"Not bad actually. After three shots, she figured out aiming and managed to hit 7 out of ten after that."

“What range?”

“Between 3 meters and 100 meters. She missed three in the middle, early. She is a pretty good shot actually.”

Maddy and Reilly emerged from the bedroom. At that moment Elisabeth walked in. “What is going on?” She was almost laughing at the site, Maddy dressed up like a soldier.

“Honey, we got a little camping trip tonight. I told you about it. We should be back tomorrow about dinner time. If you need us, the comm should be able to reach us. So,” He pulled a comm from his pocket and handed it to her. “Taylor and I talked, since we have a few extra comm units now we decided you needed to carry one. If you need to learn how to use it, ask Malcom. You know he’s in command for the next 24 hours.”

Shocked look on her face. “Malcom! How did he take that news?”

“Taylor is telling him now.”

Over the comm, “Shannon, on my way to the gate.”

“How did it go?”

“He is not keen on being in charge, but I think he’ll be ok for a day. Be there in 20, pick up my pack and we are out of here.”

“Got two rovers prepped at the gate, our toys are packed up inside. There is a buzz in the air so we should be good.”

Taylor thought about that buzz comment then remembered about the drones.

“Understood.”

“OK Ladies, let’s pack up what we need. Reynolds, you ready?”

“Yes sir. Pack is by the door, rifle, sonic, extra rifle and sonic for Maddy after she is fully trained, enough food for a few days, and 6 cups.” He paused then remembered. “Oh, and a water purification kit we can all use.”

“Good. Reilly, is she good to go?”

“Yes sir, she knows all about the suit now, and the technical aspect of a sonic and a rifle.” Maddy strapped the sonic to her leg like a pro. Reynolds handed her a rifle.



“Heavier than I remembered.” She made sure the power cell was disengaged and the safety was on, put it over her shoulder. Her Dad was impressed.

“My baby is all grown up!” Shannon said, then looked at his wife who had tears in her eyes. Happy tears. Happy for the fact Maddy found what she was looking for, a role she could embrace.

“Let’s move out, Reynolds you take point, Reilly watch our six.” They knew he was joking with them all, it was rather comical to see them all head for the main gate.

As they walked to the gate people looked. Maddy dressed as a soldier and armed with a sidearm AND a rifle was a sight to see. No one laughed, but there was a lot of applause. Maddy didn’t know how to take it and almost said something, Reilly quietly told her to ignore them and act as though you are on a mission, focused. It helps things to be overlooked and passed by without noticing.

When they arrived, Guzman was standing next to Taylor, and Casey rolled up near the group. They were all standing in a huddle at the moment waiting for someone to talk or something.

Taylor looked at Maddy, “Deputy Shannon, may I saw you look wonderful when properly dressed. Wash used to tell me the uniform was more comfortable in certain areas than regular clothing.” He winked. “I see you’re armed; you know what you’re doing with those?”

“Yes sir. I read the manuals and have fired each once or twice.”

Reynolds nodded and Taylor asked him, “She any good?”

“Yes sir! Trained her myself. Took 8 minutes.”

They all looked at him and Casey took the opportunity to add his two cents.

“OK, here’s the drill.” Casey said. “There is one hovering about 200 meters up and will remain over this rover. Keyed on it actually. The other is at a thousand meters and the only thing it sees right now is the local flora and fauna. Couple big boy’s east, but you are headed west so you should be good. I coded the output to the commander’s little plex in case you’re curious. Maddy has access to it also as does Reilly. Key 4 switches from visual to low light to heat.”

“You know how to do this Casey?” The Commander asked.

“Not really. I helped set it all up and feel a bit useless in a case like this...”

“Well,” Shannon said to him. “You are the law till tomorrow. Just don’t let it go to your head!” He smiled.

He scratched his head, looked at the ground. “You’re asking a lot, but I’ll try.”

“Reynolds, Maddy, Guzman in rover 2, the rest of us in rover 1.” Commander Taylor said. He looked at Jim, “What?”

“Technically, I am in command of this mission so...” Shannon said sheepishly. Taylor saw what he was doing, playing around.

“OK, take charge Sheriff!” Taylor said to him.

“Great Commander, then you, me, Reilly in rover 1; Maddy, Reynolds and Guzman in rover 2. Maddy, you drive, you need the practice.” He gave Taylor a huge grin. “Besides, better if you drive when I’m not in the car!” Taylor patted him on the cheek and nodded. “You drive too Commander. I know how much you like it!

All this time Malcom was standing on the deck watching. He was technically in command for the next day but knew if he tried anything Taylor would have his head. Status quo is the way to go. They all waved to Malcom and Dunham, who was standing next to him, they waved back.

Everyone climbed into their rover and the gates opened and they took off. It was about 2 hours away and a nice area to camp more or less, as far as camping goes. Plenty of fresh water from an artesian well nearby and if they wanted there were a few tasty plants in the area. But there was a very large open area a few hundred meters away. A great place to set up a shooting range.

The gate slid up and the rovers left. Taylor was driving one and took off like a bat out of hell; Maddy did her best to follow him and the idea of driving this fast scared her, but she did it.

An hour later it felt normal to her and she was comfortable driving.

She was getting signed off on a lot of things this weekend.

## *Chapter Seven*

Dunham was on watch while Malcom went to his quarters and took a shower and got some food. He hoped to get a few hours' sleep and relieve Dunham before dawn. The shower was wonderful and as he was getting dressed his comm sounded.

"Mr. Wallace...I mean Commander. You are needed in the command center." Malcom looked dejected, he was exhausted, but duty calls!

As he was walking out of his quarters, he grabbed a meal bar of some kind and walked rapidly to the command center. Taking a bite of the bar, he looked at it, "Chocolate, at least there's that!" he said to himself.

As he climbed the steps to the command center, he finished the last of the bar and stuffed the paper in his pocket. The one thing he thought was odd about Taylor was that he always had water on his desk. Although he was very grateful for that fact at the moment, pouring himself a glass of room temperature water and holding a finger up to Dunham in a hold on a moment sign, he drained the glass. He washed the dry bar down and gave Dunham his full attention.

Before Dunham could speak, "You do realize that the remainder of the command staff departed the colony less than 10 hours ago?"

"Yes Commander, I know. But you need to see this."

Dunham activated the display which was a visual representation of what the drone hovering over the colony was seeing. It was quite dark, so Malcom was not too impressed. Dunham pressed a toggle and it went into low light mode and they could see movement, but what it was no one could really tell. One more touch and it went into heat tracking. Definitely a human, male, and injured.

"How far OTG is this mystery man?"

"Three clicks. Thick stuff too, take hours to get to him." He paused a brief moment, "He knows exactly what he is doing. Looks like he is well experienced in life OTG."

"Pull back a bit, want to see where he is near."

The image regressed toward outer space, sorta, and the heat source was near the nine O'clock spot of the colony. "Reinforce that area and pass on to everyone to watch IR for an intruder." He thought for a moment, "Can you zoom in and snap an image of that person?"

"I think so." Dunham replied. He kept zooming in on the heat source and thankfully the entire process was computer controlled. No way he could maintain a visual lock on a moving object at this extreme zoom. The image froze.

"Is that Lucas Taylor?"

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"So, you're sure it's Lucas?" Taylor said to Malcom. He had to call Taylor to let him know.

"Commander, we are about 95% certain it is Lucas. He is favoring his left side like there were injuries to his ribs and shoulder."

Taylor knew it was him. Skye had saved Taylor's life when Lucas put a knife in his side. Just before Lucas delivered the death stab; Skye shot him, twice. Once in the shoulder and once in his side.

"That's him." He turned to Maddy, "We need to keep an eye on him. Miss Shannon, set the drone to covertly track him."

"Yes Commander." A moment later, "Done!"

Maddy continued and Malcom and Dunham could hear her. "I also set the colony perimeter as off-limits for the drone tracking systems, so if the mysterious person gets within a kilometer of the fence the drone will alert the command center and us."

"Good thinking." He turned to Shannon and minutely rolled his eyes. "Good choice Shannon." They both knew he was referring to Maddy as the Sheriff's Office Technical Crew.

"Thanks." Shannon responded. "Between her and Reilly, I think we have things pretty well covered." He smiled. "If I need someone to shoot something, I always have Reynolds and me." Taylor chuckled.

"It'll be light soon; we need to run our tests and make our way home. Malcom, we should be back by suppertime. Call us if you need us. Taylor out." He put the

comm back in his pocket. “You know, I may have a comm pocket added to my uniform.”

“Casey can take care of that for you Commander.” Reilly answered.

The testing went well. They started with the larger items and finished with the smaller ones. The plasma rifles they had were the most devastating. One shot took out a number of trees but amazingly did not start a fire. The grenades were the most fun.

About the time they needed to test the grenades they had a visitor. A pack of nykoraptor’s was being chased by a Carnotaurus. Taylor tossed a concussion grenade in front of the nyko’s, which were on a bee line to their camp. Stopped them dead in their tracks. The carno stopped and Shannon tossed one at his feet. Knocked the carno over and dispersed the nyko’s. One more between them and the humans and they all went their own direction.

Reynolds made a comment that made everyone smile, “I wonder what would happen if the carno ate the grenade?”

“How many of these do we have?”

Maddy opened her plex. “500 concussion and 400 frag and about 100 pyro.”

“Frag.....pyro? Let’s see one of the frag.” Taylor asked.

Shannon pulled one from his pocket and handed it to him. It was about the size and shape of a baseball and once the spoon ejected, it was a near perfect sphere. Taylor got a happy place look in his eyes, “FIRE IN THE HOLE!” He yelled. Pulled the pin and threw it as far as he could. 5 seconds later, according to Maddy, it exploded and took out the tree it landed next to with great efficiency.

“OK, now, what can you tell me about the pyro before we set one off and start a forest fire?”

Reilly spoke, “A lot actually. A bit larger than a frag and packed with compressed fuel and white phosphorus. Upon contact with the air it burns everything. Smaller blast radius because they wanted to incur max damage on the target location.”

“Let’s not test one of those and let’s put them on the ‘other’ manifest out of public conscience.”

“My thought too commander.” Shannon said in reply. “One last thing.” He looked at Reynolds and nodded. “Deputy, you’re on.”

Reynolds walked in front of the group and removed a mini from his vest. “Mini test, 6 steps, sonic low and high, laser low and high, plasma low and high.”

Sonic low was interesting, he shot into the trees and a few flying creatures took off. The path of the blast was about a meter wide and 30 or so meters long designating it as a knockdown but not disabling shot. He slid the finger pad to max and aimed 45 degrees to the left, a clear area and pulled the trigger. Those to his sides felt the effect slightly and the blast wave was roughly 10 meters across and seemed to travel several hundred meters into the trees.

“Now that’s impressive.” Shannon said. Taylor nodded.

“Wow. OK, laser low.” He fired into the tree about 10 meters away, five second blast. It heated the wood but did not decimate anything, so he increased it a bit and shot at a log on the ground a meter in front of him. Maintained firing for 15 seconds and the log burst into flames. “That was quarter power for 15 seconds.” He reset to full power and aimed at the log he dragged into a sandy open area when they started this test.

He pulled the trigger and in 3 seconds the log exploded.

“I had a theory this would happen.” Maddy interjected.

“Do tell.” Her father asked.

“With such a concentrated beam, the water in the wood was instantly super-heated, once pressure built up high enough, it exploded. So, a steam explosion.”

Shannon, Reynolds and Taylor looked at Reilly who responded, “Makes perfect sense to me.”

Reynolds reset his footing, “Last set of tests – PLASMA.”

He set the switch to plasma and low setting, pulled the trigger and a ball of energy hit a tree and shook all the fruit out it, so it had mass and force and energy. The bark was singed slightly. “Setting plasma to max setting.”

He aimed at the same tree. Pulling the trigger, the tree fell. Not because it was pushed over but because the section hit by the plasma bolt was gone.

A moment later a carno came charging at the group. Without thinking Reynolds aimed and shot the carno in mid body. The beast came to an immediate and complete stop, then fell over dead. A hole half a meter in diameter completely through the creature.

“Nice shooting Reynolds, I was just wondering what the effect of this weapon would be on living flesh. You answered that question all right.” Taylor walked over the now dead dinosaur. “Cauterized. But a clean shot. Took out most of its vital organs including its heart. Completely incinerated. As I said, nice shot; and a better meal than ration packs.”

Reilly and Taylor stripped some meat off the beast and carried it back to the camp. Maddy and Mark Reynolds stayed back with the Sheriff.

All this time, Guzman was standing quietly waiting for his turn to play. “So, can I see what this does now?” Guzman asked.

He held up what was referred to in the manifest as a zap gun. It was supposed to deliver an electrical charge at a max range of 25 meters.

Shannon nodded and waved to him, he aimed at a tree and shot. It made a lot of noise but not much else.

Maddy said, “Aim at the dead carno.”

He did and pulled the trigger again. This time a bolt of lightning hit the beast and fried what it hit.

“Anti-personnel. Deadly anti-personnel.” Maddy said under her breath.

Guzman saw a slide on the side and slid it to the opposite end of the spectrum.

“Not sure if this new setting is minimum or maximum. But if that last shot was minimum, this is gonna be interesting.”

He aimed at the carno again and this shot was a stun setting possibly. A very light charge hit the beast.

They went over and inspected the site of the electrical burns. Serious burns and it incinerated the spots it hit.

“Let’s pack it up and by the time we get back to camp lunch should be ready.”

Shannon said. Reynolds and Guzman collected all the weapons and stowed them where they came from in the cases they had near their standing area.

They picked up the cases, Guzman in the middle and Reynolds on one end and Shannon on the other, the two large cases between them with Guzman having a hold of both. Maddy carried a few of the rifles over her shoulder.

They got back to camp and put the cases near the rovers and walked to the fire.

“Anyone for lunch? Carno steak and baked potato. Well, prehistoric potato anyway. Needs butter and salt, but not bad. Lived on these things for a few months, when I got here.”

The food was not bad, good is another story. Dino steaks leave a lot to be desired, but it was edible at least.

“So, Shannon, never asked you about the carno that followed you home from Hope Plaza. Any idea what happened to him?”

“I think I solved that Commander.” Maddy said. “Dad tells me he was running at his top speed and the carno was running but trying to avoid all the ‘ribs’ on the walkway so he could not run fast enough to catch up to him, thankfully. Dad came through at a high rate of speed and just as he hit the vortex, he dove to one side thinking that he would avoid the carno and not get trampled. The carno, who can run a lot faster, hit the vortex with a higher rate of speed /force and straight on. Since the terminus was gone, there was nothing to tether it on this end and Dad landed a few hours later. If the theory holds true, the carno is a few months prior or after Dad returned. However, he will appear in the same place.”

“Like what happened to me when I got here. They followed a few minutes later and ended up with me being alone in the jungle for 118 days. Fun times.”

“Do you think the carno that destroyed the terminus when the pirates got here was the same carno?”

“No way to know for sure, but it is a very distinct possibility.” Laura added.

They talked a bit more and decided the mini’s needed to be issued to science teams when they go OTG. “Reilly, Reynolds, Guzman; create a training class to teach them to use it, so they don’t shoot each other please.”

“Yes commander.” They all said in unison.

“Sheriff, I’m giving you a case of mini’s for your department. Use them as you will.” He looked at Maddy, “Miss Shannon, please join me here.” Taylor stood

and walked a few meters away and Maddy joined him. “Tell me what you know about this weapon.” He handed her his pistol.

“Well, a sonic pistol. Basic aiming, power dial, trigger. Not much to tell.”

“OK, set it to minimum and hit the fruit on that branch over there.”

She set the power level to minimum, took it off safety, and aimed and fired. The fruit exploded, and she had a grin on her face. She liked shooting. Taylor noticed it was the same grin Jim Shannon wore a lot of the time when he was up to something.

“OK, power level to max, hit that tree with the blue flowers fourth branch up, see it.”

“I do.” She aimed and fired, and the branch fell out of the tree.

“Guzman, bring me your rifle.”

He did, he handed it to Maddy. “Do you know how to operate this weapon?”

“Yes Commander, I do. Mark and Laura gave me training in its use, operation, cleaning, and maintenance.”

“How much of it do you remember.” He asked her.

“All of it.” She responded. “I have a near photographic memory remember, so if I read or see and do something, I can’t forget it no matter how hard I try. Remember...your code.”

“You still remember that too. It’s been several days.”

“Yes sir, I do.” Taylor smiled.

“OK, there’s a dark green line on that tree about 200 meters away. Can you see it?”

She woke the weapon up and looked through the site, zoomed in and found the mark. “Found it.”

“Can you hit it from here?” Reilly grinned, as did Reynolds. Jim Shannon looked at them and Laura mouthed ‘no sweat’ and Shannon got that grin.

“Sure can.”

“Do it.” Taylor said.

Maddy took the safety off, powered to max, and pulled the trigger. The branch exploded like a small bomb went off.

Everyone was in shock; at best it should have blown the branch off the tree not exploded.

“Nice shot. I put some incentive under that green paint line and only a direct hit would have set it off. Saved me the trouble of either hitting it myself or walking over to retrieve it.”

Taylor walked back to the fire. “Shannon, consider her fully weapons trained and authorized to carry a weapon. Laura, Mark; you did a great job teaching her.”

“Commander,” Laura Reilly said, “You need to know her training took 20 minutes. She read the manuals on every weapon we have, including the new ones, and after a few minutes, handled each like she was a marksman.”

“Well, Reilly. It seems you have an ordinance intern.”

He sat back down on his rock, “Shannon.” He grinned at him. “Life in 2149 is a cluster. Power plays and limitations keep the young people from achieving their full potential. Here in Terra Nova we consider an adult to be 17 years of age. Miss Shannon, how old are you?”

“17” she responded.

“Good for you. Since we do not foresee any future pilgrims from 2149 joining us, the new quarters we set up for the 11th are up for grabs. Reilly, Reynolds; that includes you also. You are no longer in the military aspect of Terra Nova so Maddy and Laura can grab a two-bedroom unit and Reynolds, well, you can grab one also.”

Shannon joined the conversation, “Josh has been looking to go on his own, he may be interested in living with you Mark. That, and it gives me a built-in spy for date-night.” He smiled at Maddy. She rolled her eyes at her father.

They talked for a bit longer and then cleaned everything up and put out the fire. Packed it all up and climbed into the rovers.

“Commander; me, you and Guzman in the rover on the way home.”

“Roger that. Guzman, with the Sheriff and me. We ready to go.”

The ride home was not interesting, and they made it faster than they thought. About 90-minutes and Guzman got a whole lot more work. He was tasked, by the commander, with training the military staff in the use of the new weapons and to give the corporal, and each scientist, training on the mini to have as a backup weapon for Dunham and a primary when OTG for the science types.

“Commander, I have a request.” Guzman asked.

“What’s that LT?” Taylor replied.

“Military wise, there is one lieutenant and one corporal. Making a Lieutenant is one thing, but there are a few I feel would make great corporals, squad leaders, since Dunham is essentially your protégé right?” He glanced over at Taylor, since he was driving. Taylor had the look of contemplation on his face.

“You know, you’re right. How many corporals do you think you need?” Was Taylor playing with him?

“Since we’re on 12’s, two per shift so right now 4. If we go to 6 hour shifts I think 6 would be a good number. And before you ask Commander, yes, I have thought about the shift rotations and duty roster, and the one’s I would like promoted to corporal.”

“Write it up and bring it to the office in the morning.”

“Yes sir, another thing I wanted to bring up to you is troop replenishment. I had a few requests from several colonists to join the military ranks. Something we want to consider since fresh meat is not coming any time soon.”

“Let me worry about that one Guzman.” Taylor responded.

Shannon had a question, “Guzman, I have a question for you; kinda personal.”

“Go for it. Not like the answer is going on the net or in the news.”

“Since I got here, everyone just calls you Guzman. I have not heard a single person call by your first name. Why’s that?”

“Well Sheriff, just before I transferred to Terra Nova I went to the courts and had my name legally changed to just Guzman. My first and middle name were my fathers, he forced my mother to put them on my birth certificate, but she always called me Mi Jito. Let’s just say I did not see eye to eye with my father, ever, and wanted nothing of him in my life. He left us when I was four, two days before my

fifth birthday and have never seen him since. Guzman is actually my Mother's family name." He paused for a moment. "Tasha will never have to learn those lessons."

Chapter Eight

Dunham was on watch when the group returned, seems like he was always on watch these days. Him and Malcom spent the night watching who they thought was Lucas.

Malcom walked out to the gate as they got closer and were announced by the guards. They extended the bridge across the moat and the rovers zipped into the compound. As Taylor got out of the rover Malcom stopped him and handed him a plex. Taylor took one look, “Yep, that’s him.”

“We goin after him.” Guzman asked.

“Nope. At this point we would expend more energy than he was worth. Unless he came up with a miracle cure, he should be in some mighty fine pain right now and any injured animal that’s cornered is more dangerous so, leave him be, watch his progress. Maybe the cretaceous will take care of the problem for us.”

The image was a clear sunlight image of his son looking almost directly into the camera. The drone stayed in the Sun, so Lucas was not able to see he was being watched. Taylor headed to his office leaving Shannon and the rest to clean things up. He felt bad right now and did not want to be around people. Last time he felt like this seemed like a lifetime ago, little Zoe Shannon gave him a hug. Maybe that’s what he needed right now.

He headed for the dining hall after drinking a large glass of water. He wanted something a bit stronger but that can wait. He left the office and started down the stairs. As he hit the dirt he almost ran into Jim Shannon, literally.

“Commander, I was hoping to run into you.” Taylor grinned as did Jim Shannon, “We’re having an impromptu gathering of the camping trip gang at my house in about an hour. Dinner, some drinks, maybe prehistoric wine if I can find some more, and we can discuss things. Invited Casey and Dunham also.”

“Sheriff’s Party huh?” he clapped his hands together, “Sounds good, see you in an hour.” Shannon started walking away very fast. “Hey, can I bring anything?” Taylor yelled.

“Sure. Whatever you want.” Shannon had something he really needed to do and fast. He was out of sight before Taylor turned to head home for a shower and change of clothes before he went to the Shannon residence.

He walked a little lighter, felt a little better. He stopped to talk to Boylan who, for some reason, was standing in front of his bar on the street.

“Drumming up business?” Taylor asked in jest.

“Naaa Commander. Waiting for a delivery.”

“Delivery?”

“Sure. Someone on the other side of the colony makes a few cases of wine, and it is supposed to be really good.” About that time a man and woman walked up pulling a homemade wagon.

“Mr. Boylan, I have it here. Commander, did not expect to see you here.” They looked shocked or nervous, but Taylor took the discomfort out of the situation.

“Just passing by actually, but I do like a good glass of wine now and again. What’s it made from, if it is not a secret recipe that is?”

The woman took over, “Apple, strawberry, orange mostly. A few other things that add to it. Smoky and fruity.”

“Well Mira,” He finally remembered their names. Mira and Jason Wilkins. If he remembered right, they were botanists or gardeners or something. “Those gardening skills have been put to good use then.” He thought for a moment. “I was asked to dinner at a family this evening, and maybe bringing a few bottles would be a good thing. Can I buy three from you?” Taylor saw three cases in the wagon.

“Mr. Boylan is buying two of the cases and we have most of the rest marked for friends. But I think we can spare three.”

“How much do I owe you?” He looked at Jason.

“Commander, I can’t charge you for this.” He smiled.

“But me you can charge 2 Terras a bottle?” Tom Boylan said, not upset just making a statement.

“Well, yes sir.” Mira answered. Taylor smiled

Taylor reached in his pocket and pulled out 10 terras. “Nonsense, if it is as good as it must be, I lay odds it is worth a lot more.”

He put the terras in Jason’s hand and grabbed the bottles from Mira. As he passed Jason, “Thanks, this will be nice at the dinner party. Is it better cold or ambient?”

“Have not tried it cold yet, so no idea.” Jason said.

Taylor tapped him on the arm and nodded to them both, “Jason, Mira, have a good evening. Tom, you have a fine evening also.”

He walked to his quarters and into the small kitchen. He opened the cooling unit and put the three bottles in and hoped they would get cool while he cleaned himself up.

“Commander, this is Dunham.” His comm erupted.

“What is it son?”

“Do you want us to continue to monitor the heat source?”

“Where is he?”

“8 kilometers out and still walking away. Wonder when he plans to stop for the night?”

“Set the system to auto, Maddy set up a protocol to use.”

“Yes sir. Understood.”

“See you at the Shannon’s later for the dinner party.”

“Yes sir. Wait....”

“Taylor out.” He shook his head. Shave, shower, clean duds.

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“Come In!” Taylor heard after he knocked on the door.

He walked into what appeared to be chaos, but there were a lot of smiles in the room. Zoe walked up to Taylor, “Commander, glad you’re here.” She said as a matter of fact.

“Why thank you youngest Miss Shannon.”

She led him to the couches, and he sat on the end of a small bench. “Anything I can do?” He snapped his fingers, “Almost forgot, found some wine we can have with dinner.”

“Reynolds, did you bring those glasses back tonight.”

“Yes, I did Sheriff. On the end of the counter to your left.”

“Thanks.” Jim grabbed them and started walking to the table, Reynolds had his hands out and Shannon knew he wanted them tossed to him. Reynolds caught them easily and put them on the table in front of each plate.

“Finally, dinner’s ready. Zip kabobs, mixed vegetables, and mashed potatoes. Dessert, well, I have no idea. Laura and Mark brought that.”

Laura spoke, “I grabbed a cake from the market, nothing big.”

Mark spoke, “I picked up some ice cream. Didn’t know about flavors so I got half vanilla and half chocolate.”

“Cake and ice cream, my favorite food group.” Taylor said and they all chuckled at the idea of the Commander eating cake and ice cream.

Taylor was standing, and Josh came out of his room. “Josh, did you hear about the new quarters?”

“Yes, I did Commander, and Mark and I are moving in in a few days. Paint and stuff need to be done first.

There was a knock at the door. Taylor was closest, so he opened it and saw Guzman and Dunham.

“Welcome to the nuthouse gentlemen. Hey Shannon, biggest nuts just arrived.”

“Good, since the food is ready. Commander, would you like to lead us in giving thanks?”

“I would be honored.” He calmed himself a moment, “My friends, and yes, you are all my friends.” Looking at Zoe he winked, “Some better than others. But giving thanks for anything is a personal and private thing. Please lower your head, raise your arms, close your eyes or whatever it is you do to thank the deity who watches over you.”



About 15 seconds past and Shannon said, “Thank you Commander. That was quite nice actually.”

“Take a seat. Josh, are you joining us?”

“No Dad, gotta work. I’ll grab something there.” He walked to the door.

“Josh, you have a fast second first?”

Taken by surprise by the Commander, “I think I can spare it sir.”

Taylor poured everyone a half glass of the wine he brought. “I was walking past, well, your workplace Josh and Tom was getting a shipment of this wine. I thought it was appropriate to bring some to dinner and we can raise a glass together.” He finished pouring everyone a drink and picked up the last glass and put a small amount in it and handed it to Zoe. She got excited.

He raised his glass, as did everyone else. “Not sure what it tastes like, but that’s how we all met. Not knowing each other but now I would put my life in any of your hands.” He looked at Elisabeth, “And some of you have put me back together on occasion. Others kept me from dying,” He nodded to Jim, “some did as they were told without question while another gives great hugs that make you feel better.”

“That’s me!” Zoe said!

“Yes it is. So, to our new family. Let’s make sure we are always there for each other.” He raised his glass higher.

“Here here...” Shannon said, everyone repeated it and drank.

They put their glasses down, “Wow! That really is good wine.” Josh said. “Better than the stuff he normally sells.” He set his glass on the counter, “Gotta run. Thanks Commander.”

“Not eating anything?” Reynolds asked.

“No, grabbing a turkey sandwich at work.”

Reilly chimed in, “Gallusaur Sandwich. Really tasty.”

He waved and left the room, letting everyone know it is a smoked turkey sandwich. Everyone went to sharing and eating.

Elisabeth stood and started clearing the dishes. Reynolds and Guzman told her to sit, they would take care of cleaning up. She smiled and sat back in her seat, holding her empty glass and waiting for someone to see it.

“Commander,” Taylor looked at Reilly. “I believe there is a subtle hint to your left.” Taylor glanced and saw the situation and corrected it immediately.

They sat around and chatted another 15 minutes while the guys cleaned up the kitchen. Everything was done, cleaned, washed, put away; nothing left to do so they returned to the sitting area.

Reynolds was sitting very close to Maddy. Jim made a strange look at Mark, who realized now, finally, that it was ok, and he was giving that look because he was supposed to, it’s a Dad thing.

“Sheriff, can I make an observation?”

“Sure thing Commander.” Shannon had an idea what Taylor was going to say.

“If I did not know any better, I believe that young man there is disturbing the personal space of that young lady.”

“You know, Commander, I think you are correct. Maddy, is there something going on between the two of you.?”

Mark refused to reply, and Maddy said. “Yes. What it is you will find out in the future.”

Taylor and Shannon talked about this in the rover on the way back, and Guzman had been waiting quietly for it to happen.

Taylor and Shannon spoke at the same time, “Reynolds, my office, first thing.” The best part about it was they were on opposite sides of the seat, so he looked as though he was watching a tennis match.

Guzman fell off the chair, laying on the ground laughing hysterically. “I been waiting for that.” He said through tears.

It was not that they said it, but Maddy and Marks reaction that cracked him up. Dunham was oblivious to the whole thing and that made it even funnier.

They sat in the living room and then on the front porch till late in the evening. It was nice just being with people. Guzman has Tasha and Reynolds has Maddy; but Dunham, Reilly and Taylor had themselves. Tonight, however, they felt like they

belonged. They felt like they belonged to a family. The conversation, joking and just being there for each other. Tasha walked past and realized her dad was on the porch and walked up; she joined the group as if she belonged.

Josh came home from work and finished off the rest of the wine. As he walked out to the porch and sat, Skye came up and sat close to him. He offered her some of the wine, she took it. Everyone saw there was a relationship growing, no one said anything. They needed to find it themselves.

## *Chapter Nine*

Guzman and Taylor walked into the command center. Today was the day the last of those killed by the mercenaries was to be put to rest. The military were all buried on the same day, in the same procession. The civilians were buried either individually, or as a family in one instance. Today was Kara's funeral, and since she had no other family in the colony, Josh was her family. In the last few weeks, since her death, Josh reflected on the incident a lot. Finally, he was starting to not blame himself for her death, but put that responsibility, her death, fully on the mercenaries, and on Lucas Taylor. He thought of a good way to come to grips with the situation, and a way to honor her memory, to give back to the community.

The casket, as it were, processed down the main street and to memorial field. Josh Shannon walking directly behind it, the Shannon family and Skye following, the rest of the colony standing on the roadside offering support or following the procession.

At the grave site, Josh asked to speak. As Taylor walked to the front, Josh stood to join him.

"My family." Taylor said opening his arms wide. "Today we lay to rest the final casualty of the war, and yes we are at war." He paused. "Kara was here to become a part of this family, let's honor her today." He walked back a few steps and left Josh standing alone.

"Kara was a wonderful soul. She was not only at peace with her place in the universe but made those around her feel the same way. It's my doing she is here, and if she were standing next to me now, she would tell me she wanted to come. To be here, to be a part of this place. To be needed, and to help." He got quiet for a minute, a long minute and Jim was about to walk up next to him when Taylor and Reynolds went up and stood on either side of him. Taylor gave him a half hug and a handshake, Reynolds put his arm around him and walked him back to the family.

They put her in the ground and Josh walked over and put the first shovel of dirt on her casket. That's when he lost it. He went to his knees and Maddy and Skye joined him as he sobbed uncontrollably.

Thirty minutes later the place was empty, except for the Shannon family, Reynolds, Skye, and Taylor.

“Josh, I have done this too many times, it’s never easy. If you need to talk, you know where my office is. There are things you would say to a friend, not a parent.”

Taylor left; as did Zoe and Elisabeth after they hugged Josh. Maddy and Reynolds left next, then his father after a bear hug. Leaving Josh and Skye alone in the twilight.”

Josh spoke to Sky, “Last night I had a dream. Kara came through the portal and I was standing there waiting for her. She walked up to me and told me she wanted to be here, but not with me. Like she was releasing me from our promise, so I could find someone else. I don’t know if that means she is telling me from beyond death to find someone else, or my mind telling me I have someone wonderful right in front of me.”

Skye opened her mouth, but nothing came out. Yes, she did like Josh, a lot and she knew he liked her, a lot. She knew Josh secretly felt like he was cheating on Kara with her, but never said anything. But in the last few days, she realized it was more than like.

Josh spoke again, “Kara always told me I needed to be more nearsighted.” He smiled at the thought. Skye looked befuddled. “She told me I needed to look at things in my life that are closer, not far away, not in the future, not in another dome. So, this morning, knowing what we were doing today, I took a walk around the colony.” He took a deep breath and let it out. “I walked and got hugs, words of encouragement, and realized the people I met were telling me the same things Kara told me when we were together in 2149.” He looked at Sky. “I needed to look right in front of me to see my future, and the future I see is you Skye.”

Skye stood rather abruptly. Standing over him as he sat on the grass. She did not walk away. Josh stood, and they hugged. More than friends, yes. Where it goes, they will be able to go together, they were and always will be the best of friends. If this leads to something more, they understand and will let it see what happens.

After a minute or two Skye spoke, “We need to get back. Getting dark.” She pointed to the almost black sky. A few shooting stars were visible. Just a few. They turned and headed back to the Shannon residence, for something to eat and a drink.

For each family that lost someone, Boylan gave them a couple bottles of something for the party, as he called it. The memorial time, the wake, whatever it was called. It was what he had, so he gave it.

As they entered the Shannon home, Skye and Josh holding hands, many noticed and smiled in agreement, including Hunter. He wanted it to be him that Skye selected, but the smile on his face spoke volumes. He wanted her to be happy, and she was...

Josh and Mark moved in together, and Maddy and Laura moved in together, next door to Josh and Reynolds. They were a few minutes' walk from the Shannon house, and they all ended up there an awful lot in the last week. Skye was never far away. Her and Josh were on the same work details. It was a wonderful arrangement.

"Friends, family, thank you for being here." Josh spoke loudly and everyone quieted. He repeated himself in the silence, a bit softer. "My friends and family. I want to thank you all for being here. To celebrate a life cut short by greed. Something Kara could not understand as it was not a part of her DNA. Most of you really never met Kara but let me give you a little insight into her mind."

He paused a moment and took a sip of whatever he was handed in the glass. It was Boylan's hooch and pure alcohol. At least he had gotten used to it by now, so he did not cough. "In 2149, she came to dinner at our apartment. During dinner, a simple meal but as always very good; Mom is a good cook by the way." Light applauds and chuckles. Mom took a slight bow. "My Dad was talking about apprehending some bad guy or other who stole food from a family or a rebreather or something," Everyone laughed a little at how he was making light of his fathers work, "but Kara could not comprehend anyone willingly and with full understanding....doing something bad to someone else. My Dad tried to explain it to her, but it was like Maddy trying to explain some simple math problem to me, simple for her that is. I understand where she is coming from but in reality, she was so kind and thought about others before herself that doing something negative to someone hurt her. She always wanted to be a teacher and was accepted into the university but when this chance, a chance to start over in this place, popped up, she knew she had to be here. Personally, I believe she was an empath and realized if she was nice to someone, the feelings they experienced were transferred back to her."

He took the rest of the glass in one sip and Taylor walked over and refilled it to the halfway point.

Raising his glass, Josh toasted his lost love, everyone else raised their glass. “To Kara. The kindest soul that ever existed. The best friend anyone could ever have in 2149, and now, a permanent resident of Terra Nova. You taught me a lot!”

Josh drank the glass dry.

“Here here.” Taylor responded and emptied his glass, and everyone followed his lead.

The gathering continued for a few more hours and Josh and Skye, Laura, Maddy and Mark were the last to leave, after helping Mr. and Mrs. Shannon or Mom and Dad to clean the place up.

The 5 friends sat on the attached porch between their residences and did not say a word. Just being together was enough. Maddy leaning on Mark with is arm around her, Skye leaning on Josh, his arm around her. Laura sitting, or rather reclining in the lounge chair looking at the stars and trying to count the shooting stars.

Feeling like a fifth wheel, but not in a bad way, she stood. “Going to bed, may read a little first. Good night.”

They all said good night but did not move.

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Just over two weeks ago, they buried Kara. A few nights a week Josh worked for Boylan out of a sense of honor more than repaying the debt of bringing Kara to Terra Nova. He liked Boylan, didn’t really trust him completely but he did give good advice at times. The day job Josh chose was to be a part of the security force, auxiliary part actually. For the last week or so Josh was in training during the day, and some nights. Learning to be a soldier.

The training is tough. He has never worked that hard for anything and realized the harder you work to get something, the sweeter it is.

Over the last month Reynolds and Reilly did a great job learning how to be a law officer and lose the military mindset, even though it was ever present in the back of their minds, a good thing.

Skye, on the other hand, approached Jim Shannon and asked for a job in the Sheriff's department. Skye wanted to be a part of something positive, and this is the most positive thing she can think of at the moment.

Skye is a little technical, but not on the Laura and Maddy level; she is physical but not on the Reynolds level, so Shannon decided to pair her with Casey and let him teach her how to be a desk sergeant. Eventually, they wanted to expand a bit and open an office on the other end of the colony, so maybe she would be the desk sergeant there. One day the number of people will require it, so why not get things ready now.

He also brought in a few civilians 2 men and 3 women, to begin training to be Deputies. In less than a month, the sheriff's department doubled in size.

After a few weeks Skye finished her training, and in a public ceremony she was issued her badge and mini.

"Skye" Jim Shannon said as he stood in front of her on the stage in the market area during the monthly or so briefings Taylor held, "This is a proud moment for me. You are the FIRST person to complete your training, and your TO – that's Training Officer – told me confidentially he would put his life into your hands. That's a lot coming from Casey so now I wanted to be the one to tell you, you are now responsible for the well-being of each member of this colony." Shannon paused and looked at Taylor.

Taylor walked to the front and stood there a moment and just looked at Skye. "When I found out your mother was still alive, my heart did a backflip. I always knew she would be proud of her girl, and I felt like the parent of that little girl who grew into a very intelligent and beautiful woman, who only wants to help." He paused a moment and stared at her. The issues of the past are just that, the past. They made up and reconciled to each other and vowed never to hold back anything; to always proceed with the truth.

"It is my GREAT honor to pin your badge onto your uniform." He pulled the badge out of his pocket and pulled the shirt away from her skin a bit. Pinned it on and locked the pin in place. "Shannon, do I salute her now or something?" He said smiling.

"Sure, why not!" Jim Shannon replied laughing. So, he did. Then she grabbed him in the biggest hug he ever received.

The audience rushed the stage and congratulated Skye. Not many people knew the extent of her tie in with the sixers, and those who did know kept quiet about it. She was being blackmailed but she was very selective about the intel she passed on to Mira. Her primary goal was to free her mother, keep her alive until she could get her away.

She saw Taylor walk over to her mother and he gave her a hug, and a kiss. Not a friendly kiss, but a kiss of two people who are in a relationship. She smiled at the thought Taylor may be her stepdad one day. Could be worse! At least he was no longer upset at her for being THEE sixer mole he searched for so long and hard. She was in the Sheriff's department now, law enforcement, administration. But she was armed!!

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Skye walked into the Sheriff's office early, expecting to be the first one in the office. It turns out she was the last to show up. The surprised look on her face told the whole story.

"FINALLY!" Maddy said to her.

"What?" She replied.

"OK, note the time." Shannon asked the group.

Casey said, "0721. Who won?"

Reilly spoke up, "Well, depends. The sheriff had 0722 and Maddy had 0720 so they tied."

"Wait, you bet on the time I was going to show up?"

No one said a word to her, they all looked at her and nodded.

"Well, I picked that time after Maddy picked hers, so she had the edge, give her the win."

Reilly reached into a small bag and handed Maddy a handful of Terra's. "Spend it wisely.

"OK, that's out of the way. Skye, time to get to business."

The rest of the gang went about their business. Shannon went into his office and Reynolds sat in front of the giant monitor screen checking vids from the night

before, including the sky cam. Reilly and Maddy walked into a side room with a glass window and started working on some piece of equipment she could not identify.

“Our job revolves around their jobs,” Casey said to her, “but not necessarily because of their jobs or maybe in direct response to their job. If they need something, it’s our job to make certain it happens when they need it to happen.”

Skye looked at him, for some reason, it made sense to her.

“Sarge, I’m going for a walk.” Shannon said as he walked out of his office. “Any suggestions?”

“Be on the bench at the 4 O’clock position, in an hour.” He tossed Jim Shannon a canteen since he saw he did not have one in his hand. “You may need this.”

“Thanks Casey.” Shannon never slowed down, caught the canteen and left the office.

“What was that about?” Skye asked.

“Well, I noticed that at about 10am every day the Commander takes a walk. Full circle and always stops on that particular bench to sit for a minute. I asked him once what the attraction of that bench was, and he told me it’s in the middle of the first group of houses they built. Nostalgia.”

He paused a moment, “So, if he is there at 10am, the Commander will arrive and sit next to him about 15 minutes later. Who knows, it may even become a normal thing for them.”

“You see a lot, don’t you?” She asked.

“Yes, I do, but I repeat just about none of it. I am not a gossip, but I will not let something slide if it is not a good thing. Know what I mean?”

She nodded, she understood, and got down to continue her training.

## *Chapter Ten*

Taylor was walking, making his circumnavigation around the colony as he did nearly every morning, even in the rain. He approached his favorite sitting bench and saw half of it was already occupied.

“You’re in my spot Shannon.” Taylor said plainly, not upset or anything, just wondering why he was sitting in his spot.

Shannon slid to the other side of the bench and Taylor sat down. Taylor looked around and then at Shannon, “Why are you disturbing my serenity?”

“Seemed like a nice place to sit and watch the community.”

“That it is Jim, that it is.”

They sat in silence for a long while, saying hello to people as they passed by to start their day. Jim handed Taylor the canteen and he gladly accepted it and took a drink, as he put the cap back into place, Guzman walked past and froze.

“Lieutenant, did your joints just seize up?” Taylor was grinning again. Jim had a smile on his face also but stayed quiet. By his calculations, Guzman was about 20 minutes late to relieve night watch.

“Yes sir. Uh, no sir. I took Tasha to medical, she has something, and they had me on a bed in case I had it too. I called in to let them know.”

“Well...” Shannon asked.

Guzman was clueless, “Well what, Sheriff?”

“Do you have anything contagious?” Taylor finished the thought.

“Oh, sorry sir, no. Clean bill of health. But they have no idea what she has or what to do about it.”

Shannon asked, “What are the symptoms?”

“A little nausea but not sick or anything, her joints are on fire and she can barely walk, I had to carry her to the infirmary, and she was crying because of the pain.

Once they got her on a bed, they gave her something and the pain relaxed a bunch.”

“OK, Guzman. Get to the office. I’ll be back in a bit, just got one more appointment. Then you can head back to your baby.”

“Thank you sir.” Guzman walked away and toward the command center. “One more appointment huh. Let me guess, infirmary?” He said to himself as he headed to the office to relieve the night watch.

The duo walked into medical and up to Elisabeth. “Hello Jim, Commander. What brings you to....well, never mind. I’m guessing you saw Guzman a few minutes ago.”

“Good guess.” Her husband said.

“So, what do we have here doc?” Taylor asked, genuinely concerned.

“Well, we have a 15-year-old girl...” Elisabeth was interrupted by Tasha yelling 16, she was within earshot. “Sorry, 16-year-old girl with painful joints, nausea, headache, and fever. Tasha, do you have a rash on your body anywhere?”

“On the inside of my left leg. How did you know?”

Taylor looked at Jim, “She knows what it is! Already.”

“Definitely.” Jim replied. “She is good!!”

Dr. Shannon ignored the comments, “Nurse, please check the rash for erythema marginatum.” The nurse closed the curtain and a moment later. “That is a positive doctor.”

“OK then. Major criterion, Jones criterion actually, is the joint pain, minor fever and erythema marginatum. That does it, Jones criterion fulfilled.” She looked at the nurse.

Nurse Ogawa replied, “Treatment?”

“Antibiotic, higher dose by ten percent. Once a day for a week.”

“OK, fill us in?” Jim Shannon said to his wife.

“Tasha has Rheumatic fever. Pretty nasty strain from what I can see. She had a sore throat a few weeks ago but we knocked it out with homeopathic medicine to save the meds. If we used a little antibiotic a couple weeks ago, this would never

have happened. She must have had strep and we missed it, but the treatment did clear that up.”

“She has what?” Shannon and Taylor said nearly in unison.

“Rheumatic fever, a side effect of a Streptococcus bacterium infection. Nurse, let the bed do a full scan on her and see if there are any other surprises waiting to be discovered.”

“Yes doctor.” She turned and activated the bed.

“OK doc. What do we need to do?” Taylor asked a little miffed.

“DO? Nothing. It just happens, that’s all. Only about 5% of the people get it, so she hit the lottery today.”

“No evidence of Myocarditis. Everything else looks good. We gave her the meds already, so things are starting to return to normal. Fever is dropping also, at least a little.”

“Good. Thank you. Jim, Commander! Go away. It’s like the flu. No one has any idea where it comes from or why certain people get it.”

“Commander, I believe we just got the boot to our britches.”

“Sheriff, I think you may be right.” They both turned and left the infirmary. Jim headed over to the Sheriff’s Department and Taylor to his office. Taylor grabbed for his comm and remembered it was attached to his shirt. He tapped it.

“Guzman, Taylor.”

“Go ahead Commander.”

“I’ll be there in a few minutes, you can head back to medical and take care of Tasha when I get there, just get me someone in the office to watch the vid. Puts me to sleep sometimes.”

“Is Tasha OK?”

“Yes, bacterial infection. She’s already doing better. Doc Shannon is really good.”

“Yes sir, I know. She put Tasha back together after the slashers diced her up after the tenth.”

“Yes she did. Taylor out.”

Taylor walked through the market on his way to the office. A man called his name.”

“Commander!” Taylor turned just in time to see a piece of fruit headed to his face. He caught it and waved. The man yelled back to Taylor, “Have a good day sir.”

“Thank you, I will. You do the same Walter.” He took a bite of the fruit and it was good. Still a bit cool from the previous night. An odd tasting plum, about the size of an orange. Still really tasty though. It just happens to be Taylor’s favorite fruit. Ate a bunch of them during the 118 when he arrived, that’s when he determined they were high in fiber, maybe too high. He grinned at the thought. Still remembering like it was yesterday.

Commander Taylor made his way slowly up the stairs to the command post. He looked around as he took each step, the scars were going away. The pirates, he realized he started referring to the mercenaries from the Phoenix Group as the pirates and smiled to himself. Well, the pirates did some damage to his colony. Not his personally, but a collective his. Each member of the colony has an equal stake in the colony. For it to succeed, each person was needed to pitch in. Sometimes to fix a power relay, build a new house, or dig a sewer. He did it before, he’ll most likely do it again.

As he reached the top of the stairs and stepped onto the deck outside the entrance to the office, he saw something off in the distance. Pulling his binoculars out he trained them on the faint movement.

What he saw astounded him. There were ten men and women running in formation about 3 clicks OTG. He scanned the area around them and saw nothing. He walked into his office and Guzman nodded to him, “Commander...”

“There’s a group OTG running. You aware of that fact LT?”

Guzman smiled, “Yes sir. My first batch of recruits. A dozen left after this week and I suspect there will be a couple more who opt out in the next few days. There are about ten I would be happy to bring into the security fold, sir. You would be proud to have them serve under you.”

“When is their next run?” The Commander asked.

“1800 hours.”

“Perfect, count me in but do not tell them I will be joining them. What’s the course?”

“In the morning, 0700, we do ten clicks. Five out, with packs and weapons; weapons training and a bit of personal training too. Five back no gear at a sprint if possible. Winner get into the chow line first.” He paused a heartbeat. “At 1800 we do three circuits of the colony inside the gate, whoever is in the lead picks the direction. Then we all eat at the mess.”

“So, within a couple minutes you run past my house?”

“Yes sir. Stand in the shadows and join up with me at the rear.”

“See you at 1800. Go take care of Tasha.”

“Yes sir. Thank you.”

Guzman left, and Taylor realized the person watching the displays was Skye. How had he not noticed that when he walked in? He needs to keep his head out of the clouds or a carno may wake him up.

“Skye? What are you doing here?”

Skye tapped the plex, “Watching home movies sir.” She smiled.

He walked over to her, she paused a brief moment, “I want you to know EVERYTHING is behind us. We’re good?”

“Yes sir. We are.” She got that grin on her face and Taylor narrowed his eyes.

“What?” He asked her.

“I was just thinking; you would make a pretty good stepfather.”

“Oh, you saw that huh?”

“Yes sir. I like it. Mom is doing well and improving every day, it’s about time she did something for herself. Now, I’ll tell you this, you hurt my Mom and I’ll hurt you!” She smiled a huge smile.

Taylor took a half step back, saluted, “Yes Ma’am, I understand. It will never happen.” He turned and went back to his desk.

Taylor tapped his comm, “Shannon, you have a minute?”

A moment later, “Sure thing Commander. Your place or mine?”

“Mine.” Taylor said.

“Be there in 4.”

“Roger that.”

Taylor opened his canteen and took a drink. The weather was cooling off, but it was still damn hot. He hates humidity.

A few minutes later Shannon walked in, “You needed me Commander?”

“No, not really, just your mind.” Taylor replied back to him and offered a chair.

Shannon sat and smiled at him.

“It seems that somehow Guzman is renting a deputy for the day. Just wondering if you can explain it to me.”

“Sure thing, and in small words too.” Skye chuckled a single chuckle. They both looked at her, but she was already quite composed and looking at the vid.

“Well, he called me this morning and since you are in the process of training new staff, you are spread a bit thin. He asked if there was someone that I can spare for part of a day to watch the vids. Since this is a part of her training also, seemed exactly what was needed at the moment.”

“OK then, thank you Shannon.” He looked at Skye, “Deputy, anything interesting to look at?”

Skye tapped a few keys and, “Actually yes.” They both perked up and made their way to the display.

Skye began, “When I got here this morning, I noticed it was still somewhat dark and I sent the camera over the Badlands. I scanned in IR and visual and saw nothing too remarkable, then I switched to EM.”

The screen changed from heat signatures, identifiable as local wildlife; then to a pretty dark screen since the sun was not up yet; then to EM.

“What the hell is that?” Taylor asked.

“My guess, it’s what the pirates are heading for and they are a bit more than a day away. Looks like an electromagnet fissure, another tear in the fabric of space-time. I wonder where it goes.”

Shannon and Taylor jumped up and joined her at the screen.



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Reynolds was making his morning walk, a little later than usual actually. As he passed the Shannon residence he almost stopped, then remembered that Maddy lived next door. He needed to wake up this morning. For some reason, he did not get good rest last night.

“Boo!” Reynolds jumped.

Maddy had snuck up on him, first time she was ever able to do that. “So, what are you working on today?” He asked his girlfriend.

“Well, Reilly and I are going to build a very small but powerful EMP device and have the drone drop it off in the Badlands. Blast radius of maybe half a kilometer so we and the drone will be safe from the effects. But all of their gear, including their weapons, will not be, if you get the idea.”

“You’re in bomb building school?” He asked, incredulously.

“Sorta. I am learning about a lot of things. This week is the EMP and the best part, the detonation is no greater than a tree limb hitting the ground and the flash will appear like a bolt of lightning if anyone is looking at it.”

“How big is this thing?”

“It would fit into a large taroca fruit, once it’s hallowed out. I figure we can make it look inedible, so no one would touch it. Then leave it in a clump of bushes. Once they’re in range set it off and watch the fun from a few clicks away.” Maddy smiled.

“You’re devious.” Mark said.

“Thanks. Laura is teaching me a lot.”

They walked through the market holding hands, not appropriate but everyone understood.

Over the comm, “Reynolds, get to the main gate. There is transport waiting. You will be briefed on the way.” It was Casey in his desk sergeant role.

“This is Reynolds, roger. ETA 2 minutes.”

A second later Maddy’s comm opened up, “Shannon, make your way to the main gate. Your technical knowledge is needed.”

“Affirmative, ETA 2 minutes.” She replied, curious as they both broke into a dead run to the main gate. Her and her father had a discussion about what to call each other on the comm. They decided for simplicity she would be referred to as Shannon and he would simply be called Sheriff. They let everyone know and so far, there has been no issues with the designations. Except for Mom. She thinks it’s cute to call her Maddy over the comm and she calls her husband Sheriff, deliberately lowering her voice as low as possible when she says it. Taylor once said he needed to speak to the older Shannon. That was fun!

They arrived at the gate as a rover sped into the colony. Locking all four wheels as it came to a dusty stop. A little rain can lower the dust, and it would come soon enough, winter was not all that far away.

The driver exited and ran to the rear compartment, opened it fast and pulled out a small box, twice as long as it was wide and thick. It had a control pad built into it, and the lights were flashing in what appears to be a random order.

“Reynolds, with me. Sheriff is sending you to figure out what happened out there.” The driver said to them both. “As for you, we need to shut this down. The random lights don’t seem to mean anything, and each light is a toggle to enter the correct passcode. Every once in a while, it sets itself off, huge electrical output. Be careful.”

Maddy said nothing, just stared at the lights. For a long moment. The driver tried to speak to her, but she ignored him. A few seconds later she tapped a few of the lights, the toggles, and the unit deactivated.

“What did you do?” The driver, flabbergasted, asked her.

“My job. I studied the technology until I understood what it was asking and what it wanted. Then simply entered the next code and shut it off.”

“We had three people looking at this thing for 6 hours and all they succeeded in doing was needing medical attention. Can you tell me more please, explain to me what they did not see? This is going to boggle their mind.”

“Quite easy actually. The lights were not random, they were displaying the binary equivalent of 5 prime numbers, 5-13-23-37-47; the next logical prime number that it was waiting for had to be 61.”

“So it was displaying the first 5 prime numbers and you punched in the next one?”

“Not exactly. The primes are 2, 3, 5, 7, 11, 13, 17, 19, 23, 29, 31, 37, 41, 43, 47, 53, 59, 61. Therefore, 5, skip two numbers and 13, skip 2 and 23. And so on. There are two primes between 47 and 61, they would be 53 and 59. Basic math.”

Reynolds and the driver just looked at her like she had a hand growing out of her forehead. Reynolds said, “No, not basic.”

The driver said, “Are you a new species, a Mathasaurus?”

Several people in earshot heard it and chuckled. She realized she had a new nickname.

“I can take this back to the office; you need to go out and do the visual.”

Reynolds nodded and jumped in the rover, the driver hopped in and they sped off OTG.

Touching her comm, “Shannon to Reilly. Meet me at the office in ten minutes.”

“This is Reilly, roger that.”

Maddy turned to a security type nearby as Mark sped off in the rover OTG, “Can you get me a transport to deliver this to the Sheriff’s office please?”

She said, “Sure thing, Mathasaurus.”

Maddy closed her eyes a moment and shook her head but she was smiling at the idea. She thought to herself, ‘Well, better than other nicknames I guess’.

The soldier returned with a rover and they loaded the box in the back and Maddy jumped in. They made it to HQ in a few minutes. As they arrived Laura was getting there and her and Maddy carried the box into the office and into their room.

Carefully, they began removing panels and once they removed the bio-cover they found, the alarms went off. Bio Hazzard alarms.

Chapter Eleven

Sheriff Shannon walked into the department about an hour and a half after Maddy returned, she and Reilly had the time to review the device and mostly take it apart.

He walked in and looked at Casey, “Holding down the fort Sarge?”

“Yes sir Sheriff. If anyone gives me any lip, I’ll use my pen on em!”

“Good for you.” He turned and glanced through the tech windows, as it is being called these days. “Anything from the peanut gallery?”

“Well, one or both of them has received an electrical shock and I suspect they are getting to like it by now, but not too bad since they never left the vertical state. As for those two, they are very dangerous together. I would guess they could not be any happier if they found a secret stash of ice cream.”

“So, you have no idea then.” The sheriff smiled at him.

“No sir, not a flipping clue!” Casey smiled back.

A very loud scream from the girls and Maddy was not visible. Shannon ran into the room and saw Maddy sitting on the floor. “Everyone OK?”

“Yes Dad. Got bit by that little bastu...bad thing.” Maddy said realizing she nearly cursed to her father and felt odd about it.

Shannon smiled. Reilly shook her head. “Well, Maddy, I think it is safe to say that your vocabulary can be proportional to your level of responsibility. And personally, in this instance, you were very justified in using that specific word.” Awkward moment, “What did you find?”

Reilly took over, “It’s definitely the pirates and designed to be buried in the ground and detonated remotely.”

“Whoa...detonated?”

“Yes Dad, but it malfunctioned when they set it off, thanks to the local wildlife who found it first. The surface is made of a self-sealing material like they use for spacecraft, but the insides are just plain electronics. It had about 104 kilograms of plastic explosive,” she pointed to a small cart behind the Sheriff that had several

stacks of maroon bricks and a couple yellow ones. "... and was covered with these." She handed him a couple small metal darts. It looked more like a finishing nail with fins. She handed him a plastic tub about half filled with the little things.

"Flechette's! These things were outlawed more than a hundred years ago."

"A what?" Maddy and Laura said at the same time.

"They are called flechette's, and in the late 1900 they were used in small rockets as anti-personnel devices, in shotgun rounds during war, and a variety of other things. Suffice it to say they are a nasty part of human history. Normally, 10 to 20 of these things rammed their way through the unfortunate soul who happened to be in their way. Very rarely did they survive."

"Damn..." Maddy said. She popped her eyes open wide at the realization what she said.

Her Dad looked at her, "Now that was well placed and appropriate." He smiled at her.

Cussing was not a common thing in the Terra Nova colony. Not because it was banned or outlawed, but because people here generally wanted to be better than what they were in 2149. But occasionally, the person's history came back when the situation warranted.

"OK, tell me about the plastique?" Shannon said.

Reilly took over. "Standard C-47 plastic explosive, nothing too amazing. 100 of the one-kilogram blocks at least. The last four, the yellow ones, are new. They are actually quite nasty. Built into them is a talcum powder stuff, set-off the biohazard alarms as soon as we opened the box. Not sure what the powder is, but we have been cleaned and the room was scrubbed. Those things are just plain mean." She pointed to the sealed bag on the cart with the 4 yellow bricks.

"Has Taylor been briefed?"

"He is on his way here now. Wanted a practice run on you first." Reilly smiled at her boss.

"Good thinking." He smiled back. MAN! He loves his job!

Malcom and Elisabeth walked into the Sheriff's Department. Casey, being Casey, said, "Good morning citizens, how may I serve you?"

Malcom gave him a double take and a twisted look on his face, but Elisabeth smiled at him and said, “Good morning Casey.”

“Good morning Dr. Shannon, you too Mr. Wallace.”

Malcom just nodded and waved and made his way to the tech room. “We need to collect those bricks and find out what they are.”

Maddy replied, “Sure thing, just remember these are very high explosives so I do not recommend lighting them on fire and stepping on them. Be bad....real bad.” She grinned, and Malcom gave her the same look he gave Casey a moment ago.

Maddy and Reilly gave their practice briefing on what they knew of the new explosive. Maybe 4 minutes or so, good length.

“Nicely delivered, good information.” The Sheriff said, “But finish with the bottom line, not the chemical composition. No one cares what it’s made of, just how big of a boom it will make.”

“I care what they learned about their composition, thank you.” Malcom said to Jim.

“Right.” Jim replied.

The Sheriff left the room and as he was about to go into his office, Commander Taylor walked in.

Shannon stopped and looked at Taylor. Casey, on the other hand, “Good morning citizen, how may I assist you?”

Taylor stopped dead in his tracks and stared at Casey and chuckled a bit. Shannon looked at Taylor, “He’s not house broken yet.”

Casey gave a wide grin. “The techs are waiting for you in the fishbowl, Commander.”

Taylor looked a bit like he was about to ask a question, then realized the large window and four people in the room. “I get it.” He said to Casey. “Oh, Casey, please get back on your meds.” It was a joke and taken as such.

Taylor and Shannon walked into the tech room, “OK ladies, whacha got?” Taylor said to them.

Reilly started, “Well, this is one nasty little device. Last ditch effort to take out a very large area with minimal effort. Thankfully, it looks like an ankylosaurus was rooting around looking for food most likely I would guess and trashed the remote circuitry, so they were not able to set this thing off completely.”

“What exactly does it do?” Taylor asked.

Maddy spoke, gesturing to the rather large container on the worktable, “It contained 100 kilograms of standard C-47 but it also contained 4 kilograms of a very toxic version with less explosive power, laced with a neurotoxin of some type.” She motioned to her Mom and Malcom. “They just received the samples and will report when they have the chance to analyze them I’m sure.”

“How do you know it was a neurotoxin?” Taylor asked.

“It set off the biohazard alarm when we opened the container.” She paused a moment, “The weapon was designed to be set off remotely and the first to detonate were the four toxic blocks. 500 milliseconds later the remainder of the bomb would detonate. This would ensure maximum dispersal of the toxin over the widest area. There was a thick layer of flechette’s to take out anyone in the vicinity, or anyone in the blast area when they return to the surface.”

“I need to know what that stuff is.” Taylor looked at Malcom.

“We should know by morning.” Malcom replied. Elisabeth realized she would be working all night on this analysis.

Malcom and Elisabeth nodded to everyone in the room and left. They had a lot of work to do.

“OK, tell me about the guts of this thing.” Taylor said.

Maddy and Reilly looked at each other and smiled, Shannon shook his head at Taylor who wondered what he meant. Then he was inundated by an entire dictionary of technical terms and he understood some of it at least. 15 Minutes later they were silent.

“OK, let me get this straight. The transmitter sends the signal from pretty much anywhere between here and the Moon and depending on the distance a few minutes later the 4 yellow explosives went off. Half a second later the rest went off. As for the electronics you spoke about for the last 15 minutes, pretty much a standard det-pack. Hears its number, boom.” They nodded realizing he was right,

not much really there at least. “So, is there anything we can do with this? Any kind of advantage we can gain?”

Reilly opened her mouth, “Maybe...”

Maddy said, “You think?” Then, as a rhetorical question, “Off the shelf component?”

“What are you two talking about?” Shannon asked.

Reilly looked at the Sheriff, “In explosive school, we learned on the old devices, and this is an old device. That’s how I was able to disarm it so easily, I did it several times in school. If that’s the case, in school we used the receive circuit to send a signal back to the transmitter to burn it out. No way they would even know unless they opened it and looked. And that’s not likely. These guys are the gorillas, not the chimpanzees.”

Taylor and Shannon got the reference to the old movie. “Well Reilly, when you have a moment, please burn out their transmitter.”

She nodded to Taylor and walked over to a console and picked up a small plex. Hit a few buttons and, “Done sir.”

“That easy?”

“Yes sir. It is an all or nothing. Once I hit the send button, that was it. Went out through the colony antenna and the transmitter is now a door stop.”

“Good. Carry on.” Taylor slapped Shannon on the shoulder and left.

Shannon motioned to the remains of the bomb on the table, “Scrap it and keep everything usable. Make certain it can never receive ANY signal again please.”

The girls nodded. Shannon left.

As Shannon left the tech room, he saw Taylor and Casey looking at the monitor built into his desk.

“What’s up? Shannon asked.

Casey Durham looked at his boss, “The drone just arrived at the designated location.”

“...and!” Shannon asked.

Taylor continued, “...and we see something that may require a little investigating.”

Taylor walked around the desk and looked at the screen. “What the hell is that?”

“That, Commander, is a temporal rift. Also known as a portal.”

“Thanks Casey. I wonder where it goes?”

Chapter Twelve

Shannon walked into Taylor's office a few hours later.

"Commander, this would be a good time to test our little shuttle. We can make a very wide arc to not let on we are on our way anywhere, land and do a little recon, maybe plant a few surprises to make their lives interesting when they actually get there and be home for dinner."

"I had the same thought. But we need to find all of them, we need to know their exact location and how far away from us they will be."

"I'm ahead of you on this one." Shannon smiled and walked over to his console, pressing a few buttons an aerial map of this area of the continent appeared. Since just about all of the landmass on Earth at the moment is a single landmass. There were three dots flashing. A red, a yellow, and a blue.

Shannon spoke, "Yellow is the shuttle which as you can see is located right here, therefore it is at the colony. Blue is the starting point and the destination. Once the shuttle moves away a blue dot will appear designating home. And the red dots are the band of Pirates." Shannon paused so Taylor could take it all in. "The high drone is using IR to see heat sources, and there are no heat sources within a hundred clicks of the destination."

"How dense is that part of the jungle?" Taylor asked.

"Very. We estimate that the best speed will be at most 35 clicks. Which puts the closest of them about three hours away. The next team is about 6 hours behind them. So, to be really stealthy, we can get there and do what we need to do and leave in three hours. Or take them out and we have a few more hours to snoop around."

"Before we leave, I want your tech team to interrogate ANY signal in the colony. I want to know who or what is transmitting anything to anyone."

"Uh...Reilly anticipated that from you and here is her report." It appeared on the screen.

"What's this?" Taylor pointed to a green glow near the main gate.

“That, Commander, was a camera bug pointed at your office. We think they were watching you and the briefing area in the event you built up troops for some sort of an attack. That was the only stray signal we could find.”

“Well, has it been neutralized?”

“Not exactly. We, and by we I mean Maddy and Laura, connected to it and created a loop; you sitting at your desk. It runs continuously. Right now, they think you are sitting there,” He pointed at his desk, “working on reports or something.”

“What happens when the sun goes down?”

“It’s a computer thing. You get up, leave, no activity in the compound, boring day. Looks like we could give a care about them or anything else. Like we are self-absorbed in the day to day operation of getting the colony back to 100%.”

“How soon can we leave?”

“We need 20 or so security, me, Reilly, Mark Reynolds, and I am assuming you will be coming also.” He smiled at him. “Meet in the compound in 10 and we leave in 15.”

“Sounds good.” Taylor said. Shannon left and started talking into his comm. Reilly and the rest of his team were in the shuttle bay waiting for the word, they had loaded a few of the new toys they found and prepped the shuttle.

Before Shannon descended the stairs completely, Malcom ran up the stairs past him like it was a matter of life and death. Shannon turned around and followed.

Malcom was a bit out of breath, so Shannon did not miss anything.

“Commander, we need to get this plastic and toxin out of the colony now.”

“Why, isn’t it safe?”

“Well, yes and no.” Taylor gave him a look, “Let me explain. The compound is C-47 and a non-persistent neurotoxin that will kill everyone it touches. When detonated, the fine powder descends on the area and gives it a coating, making it toxic to all mammals for 24 hours.”

Taylor cut him off, “So, we just don’t blow it up.”

“...No, not my point. It has a secondary chemical compound built into it that created the proper conditions for self-detonation, if it is removed from the containment vessel.”

“As in the original bomb.” Shannon added.

“Exactly. We have less than 12 hours until it self-detonates.”

Shannon grinned. “What?” Taylor asked.

“Well, I was just thinking if we packed 4 gourds with the 4 blocks of plastic and hung them in the trees around the landing area. We get in, get out and about 3 or 4 hours after they all get there, they get the opportunity to find out just how well this little product works.”

Now Taylor smiled.

“Make it 30. See you soon.” He looked at Malcom, “Wanna take a little field trip?” He briefly paused while Malcom looked curious, “Come with me.”

They left. Taylor called his teams and passed on what he knew. Guzman selected the team of 20 and armed them to the teeth, including a few of the new weapons they came across.

25 minutes later, the security team and the Sheriffs team assembled near the main gate. “OPEN THE GATE!” Shannon yelled, and it folded up, so they could all walk out. 10-minute walk to the cliffs and they stood there looking out over the valley. A moment later the shuttle rose and backed up and hovered close to the edge of the cliff. Shannon yelled, “FOLLOW ME.” And he jumped the foot into the rear hatch of the shuttle. Everyone followed.

Once everyone was in, Shannon closed the rear hatch and yelled, “Take a seat.”

Everyone looked around and smiled at the humor. This was the cargo area, no seats.

Shannon was on his comm, “Careful flying please. No seats back here and nothing to hold on to...”

“Roger that Sheriff.” Taylor’s voice sounded playful. At that moment, the floor dropped away for a second. “Oops...sorry.”

“Funny man.” It was all in fun. The flight to the Badlands took less than 40 minutes with the arc flight path so-as not to alert the Pirates they found the shuttle.

“Commander, I see you are about to land in the area. All clear.” Skye was in ops.

“Thank you, Skye. Keep a close watch on them, I want to know when they are 30-minutes out.”

“Understood. You have less than 2-hours.”

“Hang on, landing.” The commander said from the pilot’s seat.

The rear hatch opened, and the teams exited. Taylor yelled, “Perimeter search.”

“OK, I need the cameras there and there and pointed up and back down that path.” Taylor directed. “Sheriff, you have our toys?”

“Maddy, you’re on!” The sheriff said.

Maddy and Reilly placed the EMP down the road, path actually, about half a kilometer. The four gourds with the toxin laced explosive were placed around the area to offer the largest area. 24 hours after detonation, they can verify if anyone survived.

Jim Shannon walked over to Maddy, Reilly, Guzman and the Commander. “I really have a little problem with just killing this group, wholesale murder but our survival is at stake.”

“I agree. What choice do we have?” Guzman said.

Maddy responded, “We don’t have a choice. If they get here, they may have something that can allow them to return home, even if it is not the same home they left. Our survival is at stake. Dad, we are at war, and war is not a nice business.”

Taylor and Shannon looked at each other, “She reads a lot.” Reynolds finally said.

“OK, what do you suggest?” Reynolds asked Maddy.

She thought for a minute, “If it were me, I would place a relatively large charge about a kilometer down the road. Set it off after talking to the Pirates, as a way to convince them we are serious. If they all want to travel to wherever this portal takes them and leaves us alone, we will not set off the rest of the charges.” She paused. “After they all go through, we hit the portal with an EMP blast and hopefully collapse it so they can never return.”

Everyone just stared at her. Taylor looked at the Sheriff, “Sounds like a good plan.” He walked away.

They set up a two kilo charge down the road and a handful of meters off the road, linked it to a remote trigger. Covered it is rocks and then in underbrush.

When Reynolds and Guzman returned, “Commander, it will make a big noise, lots of dust and dirt, and throw rocks and pebbles within a kilometer. We also covered sections of the road in smaller explosives, here’s the map.” Guzman handed Taylor a plex.

“Good thought.” Taylor said.

Jim Shannon joined the group. “What’s up?”

Taylor handed him the plex. He reviewed it, “Nice....” He said.

Reynolds grinned, “What’s the word on the thing?” He pointed to the rift, or vortex, or anomaly. He had no idea what to call it.

“Maddy, Laura; got a minute?” The sheriff yelled.

The ladies joined the group. Without being asked, “Well, it is a temporal rift, but it is not like the rift that was disconnected in 2149. This is a multiverse. Using a scanner, a portable camera, and a transmitter we determined it goes to the mid-19th century or so and over water. I am making a guess it goes to the area known as the Bermuda Triangle.”

“Why?” Jim Shannon asked.

Laura understood him, “We tossed a camera into the vortex and before it hit the water, we received a very clear image of the sky. The stars fell into line with that time frame. But the atmosphere and water sample did not correlate to what we expected.”

Taylor shifted slightly, looked at Laura and as he opened his mouth to ask more questions, Maddy spoke.

“The water had a lot of toxic compounds and the air was mostly carbon dioxide. I am only guessing, but it looks as though this Earth is more of a volcanic nightmare than we can conceive.”

“Good. So, it is not a connection back home for them.”

“Don’t get me wrong, Dad. Humans can survive there, but not in comfort or luxury. The air is better than 2149, but not much. At least it’s breathable.”

Laura added, “Oh, and it’s one way. Here to there only.”

Taylor grinned. “Is there a boat handy nearby?”

He gave his plan, set the boat near the entrance and have it appear as though it poked from there to here.

A voice over the comm, “Commander, 20 minutes.” Skye said.

“Understood. Pack it all back up and into the ship.”

A short time later the shuttle launched and made a wide arc and hovered at midpoint between the landing zone and the Sun. Essentially invisible to anyone on the ground.

A few minutes later the first of the pirates arrived. They saw the boat sticking out of the rift.

“Mira, we found it.” He said into his comm.

“...and...” was her reply.

“There’s a boat protruding from it. Looks like it just got here.”

“What kind of boat?” Mira said, angry.

“I don’t know, like a big rowboat maybe.”

“Sit tight, we’ll be there in 15 minutes.”

“OK.”

The shuttle hovered as everyone arrived. All of the pirates were in the vicinity of the vortex now.

Lucas arrived 20 minutes later. “What are we waiting for?”

“We have no idea where this rift goes. You want to step through and tell us, be my guest.” Mira said to him.

He walked up to the opening and put his hand into it and it disappeared, a few moments later he removed it and it looked perfectly fine. “We need a volunteer to go through and tell us what’s there.”

Lucas walked up to one of the pirates and grabbed him by the collar and pushed him into the rift. A moment later, “What the hell was that?” Came over the comm.

“We needed a volunteer, describe your surroundings.” Lucas said into his comm.

“I’m in a lake, I see a small fire on the shore like someone is camping. Maybe a half click away. The air smells like someone is cooking meat.”

“Load up the boat.” Into her comm, Mira said. “Make your way to the shore and we’ll meet you there.”

The pirates loaded the boat and 20 of them jumped in, the rest of the pirates pushed it through. Leaving about a hundred of them on this side of the rift.

They paddled to the shore a bit away from the fire glow and took up positions on three sides of the group camping. They activated a remote camera and sent it silently into the area above the fire.

The images sent back were crystal clear and scared the hell out of them all.

The people around the fire were not human, and they had no idea when or where that rift lead. These 21 men were lost, never to return.

The camera pointed to the stars; a clear night and the stars were easy to see and identify. It was the same sky they left in 2149. A moment later one of the campers yelled, it almost sounded like English. The last thing they saw was a fire fight starting and the rift disconnected.

A moment later they saw old sailing ships passing by on the other side of the rift.

They would never see those men again.

“What the hell!” Mira said.

“Same kind of connection as we had to 2149, but instead of being linked to a single point in time, it changes.”

“Will we get back to where the team went through?”

“No idea. This rift is useless to us.” Lucas said.

They watched as a couple more scenes passed in front of them, Mira looked disgusted. She lost several men in this process, good men, friends. But the mercenaries lost more. Her new goals were (1) not lose any more sixers and (2) watch Lucas die, hopefully in pain.

She turned to walk away; she was standing there alone at the moment. As she turned, she noticed out of the corner of her eye something inside the portal, a flash of light.

She looked back at the rift and saw something floating up towards her. She backed away slowly and called Lucas.

Chapter Thirteen

Taylor walked into his office. It had been a few days since they drove the pirates into the rift, and they managed to hack into the feed and saw the creatures huddled around the campfire thanks to the hover drone on their frequency.

Maddy was in the room and Taylor asked her, “Were you able to identify where they are by the stars?”

Slowly, Maddy nodded. “Yes, Commander Taylor. I had no trouble determining the location and year, and the month, of the sky that we saw.” She paused, not believing it herself. “It was August of 2149; the rift is nearly at the exact spot where we left from, where Hope Plaza is...or was, to make a new life here in Terra Nova.”

“What were those things? People?”

“Actually, I have a theory on that also; suppose a thousand years ago someone found a way to create the first ever DNA modification. Now, fast forward a thousand years, where would they be?”

“So you’re telling me those were humans?”

“Not humans, humanoids. I would love to get my hands on the data, but I would guess they are smarter, stronger, and their body can take more damage just by their appearance. Internally, I have no idea but if you are planning to upgrade the outside, why not do a little interior redecorating at the same time.”

“Humans. Those things were 4 meters tall and built like body builders. Did you see how fast they moved? And their weapons, like they were a part of them. The bolts seemed to be firing from their hands for some of them and shoulders for others.”

Shannon walked into the office. “Did Maddy fill you in?”

“Yea, and I still don’t know what to do about it. Do we send the rest of them through and let the humanoids take care of them, or do we let them alone and let the carno’s take care of it for us?”

Shannon raised his hand, “I vote for both actually. What the carno’s don’t eat we can toss into other Earth.”

“Other Earth?” Taylor looked at Jim. “Really?”

“Reynolds and Maddy came up with it as a team, I kinda like it. Explains it well without explaining it.”

“Shannon, I’m leaving now. I plan to go to 6 o’clock and help build the wall up. You can do whatever you want and take your team with you. They give me the creeps.”

At that moment Reynolds and Maddy removed their arm from around the other and separated a handful of centimeters. Jim Shannon nearly laughed out loud at the site. Taylor noticed and had to leave before he busted up also.

Maddy spoke, “We sent a drone to survey the area. They left before the 12-hour time on the toxic bombs hit zero. No one was killed when they did.”

Taylor added, “Send someone to pick up that little EMP toy of yours. Call it a day.”

Laura said to the Commander, “Actually Commander, I would like to set it off and see if it disrupts the rift. If it does, we can search for them on the path they are taking and destroy them as we find them, before they get there.”

Shannon smiled, “That’ll confuse em. If they expected them to be in a certain spot, and there’s nothing there, they may think their math is wrong.”

“Or they may blame the mathematician solving another of our problems in the process.” Skye added. Everyone smiled. The meeting was over, they all knew it.

“OK, back to work.”

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Mira and Lucas waited around for the rift to reopen and when it did, the humanoids sent through a small device about the size of a grape. It hovered at the opening to the rift for a moment, then a voice came out very loudly.

“This is Ragar Mac. Be advised if any more aliens come through the portal they will be swiftly dealt with lethal force. Your invasion squad has been decimated by our surveillance team. We monitor the portal from this side

for the last century and expected an invasion. We intend to close the portal from your end using a powerful device. It is hovering at your portal as we speak. If you use time as a reference, you have roughly 100 times the duration it has taken for me to speak this message to get away from this area. We know you are humans as we used to be, but the improvements have made us better. The inferiors that you are can easily be dealt with, and you pose no threat to us. Your weapons barely cause us discomfort. This message is ending now.”

“We have an hour and a half.” Lucas said. “Let’s pack up everything we can find and get the hell out of here.”

“Where do you expect to go? Terra Nova?” Mira said to him. She no longer feared him and that scared Lucas a bit.

“No, south east. If I am guessing correctly these rifts are staggered from west to east along a line that intersects this one, and the rift we used to get here from 2149, our 2149. If we head south east, we should find another one and hopefully it will lead someplace we can live with and get out of here.”

Mira nodded. She stared him dead in the eye. He knew the look, the same look that was on his face when he pushed the knife through his father’s skin in the hopes to kill him. She wanted him dead and he needed to make sure she went first.

For the next 45 minutes they repacked their vehicles as best they could, loaded up all their trailers and compartments with any and all tech they found no matter how it looked or where or when it was from, and headed south east.

Less than an hour after they left the portal they heard and felt a massive explosion. The rift was gone. The entire area was gone. That little thing made the pyro look like a pop gun.

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Six months ago, the pirates headed south east from the rift where they were threatened by the new humans of the alternate Earth. Terra Nova knew all about it, the hover drones kept an eye on them. They watched as the humanoids destroyed several square kilometers of forest and a lot of the flora and fauna. Yes, the rift was gone, but so were the Badlands. They extended out maybe a kilometer, but

that little grape destroyed and incinerated nearly two full kilometers in diameter. They also saw Lucas and company high tale it out of there before the explosion. Their number was down to 81 now, Skye did a head count thanks to the infrared camera. At night they were able to keep a count on all of them. Carno's and other creatures tracked them and if the opportunity presented itself, several of the pirates fed the carno clan. The mercenaries used the sixers as fodder, and most of Mira's people were dead. The mercenaries themselves lost a few but not like the sixers.

They found a third rift about a week later and sent a camera through. It flew around and looked at the sky. Same sky they were looking at just a few thousand kilometers away.

"I need a volunteer to walk through this rift. It appears to be on this planet and in this time also and once through you should be able to comm with us. We believe this rift takes us to the far east of this land mass, the east coast more or less. Judging by the sunrise we can see through this rift and the images from the camera."

"I'll go." Carter said. "I want a rifle, pistol, extra ammo and food for a month in case I get stranded. I'll tell you what's there when I get there."

The previous rift was just above the ground on this end, but about a meter or two above a lake on the other end. This one appeared to be a walk through on both ends.

As with the other gate, they tossed a rock through to see if it was an 'outgoing' portal. It was. The rock landed in the dirt on the other side and did not bounce off the ripple.

Carter gathered his gear and put his pack on his back. He had a pistol on both hips and a rifle in his arms. Heading for the rift he stepped through.

"I can hear the ocean crashing on the shore off to my left, I am facing the portal. I hear creatures in the distance behind me and in front of me. To the right I see mountains." He picked up a rock and tossed it at the rift. It bounced off, meaning the portal was a one way. "I am heading for the ocean." Everyone saw the rock bounce off and knew if they went through there was no return, at least no fast return.

After a few minutes he pulled out the more powerful transmitter they possessed. "Mira, can you hear me?"

It was odd. It came through the portal and then a second later it came through weaker and with static. It was a direct signal the second time. Radio operators referred to it as the long and the short path.

“We hear you.” She replied.

“Now that sounds strange. An echo.” He said.

“Yes, how far is the ocean?”

“10-minute walk maybe by the sound. I’ll call you when I get there.”

“Affirmative.” She said and walked away from the radio. Someone, another sixer, would monitor the radio and the well-being of one of their own.

Terra Nova was listening to all of this. They still had no idea they were being monitored.

Chapter Fourteen

In the past year, the pirates all went to the east coast leaving a very large amount of land between them and Terra Nova. Their goal was to get home, where-as those in Terra Nova were already home.

A year ago, they were attacked and nearly destroyed by Lucas and his mercenaries. Now, they have become a colony on their own, as far away as possible on this land mass where they both live.

A month ago, Maddy said yes when Mark Reynolds proposed. The wedding is a week away, why wait they said.

Commander Taylor is officiating, their request. There is a minister in the colony, but religion is not as important as survival. They all believe, mind you; but the idea of a church has been toyed with, and dismissed. Reverend Reyes and the Commander had a long talk. She has been in Terra Nova since the third and as the gates were being built, she did whatever she could to assist. She worked with Taylor a lot and they became very good friends. She spends her time in the garden mostly, a place she feels most at peace and useful. Recently, however, she made Minister Helps official. A few years ago, after the 8th. This is a place you can go and talk about anyone and anything, get it off your chest. A place to help. She is a certified councilor and therapist, and an ordained minister. She has two interns who want to learn from her. A third is toying with the idea also, Tasha Guzman; she thinks this would be a wonderful profession but is afraid to commit.

Skye will be the maid of Honor with Laura Reilly as an attendant, Jim and Elizabeth will both walk their daughter down the aisle. Mark asked Guzman to be his best man and Casey and Josh to be ushers. Zoe, of course, has a part in the wedding also; taking on the role of both ring bearer and flower girl. The entire colony is invited.

They both borrowed cloths from others in the colony, not many brought formal attire, so this is by far the fanciest wedding yet. There are a lot of skilled tailors and seamstresses in the colony, and as needed they make and remake clothing to suit the needs of the moment.

The entire community came out to witness the union of Maddy and Mark, a potluck served as the highlight of the reception. Music was provided by the local band playing everything from way back music, as some call it, to newer music and some original songs. It was wonderful.

They picked out a house in the newer section a week ago, when they announced, it's been completed for a while and sat empty. Now, since there will be no more pilgrimages from the future, there is an abundance of housing units in the one to three-bedroom size.

As children aged to adulthood, they are invited to take a home of their own, and a roommate if they want, and make a life for themselves.

Mark did just that. He spent almost a year with Josh and now he is leaving Josh as a roommate and moving in with his wife, still weird for him to say that. All of the units looked the same inside and out, but the colors were inventive.

Their house was a quarter of the way around from her parent's house. All of the houses in that area were two or three bedrooms, since the restriction on the number of children the parents were permitted to have in 2149; no family was to have more than two children. This is the reason the Shannon's came to Terra Nova. Zoe was their third. There are no restrictions here.

Between the Shannon residence and Mark and Maddy's home were the singles area. 26-single units which is where Josh has chosen to live. If he did find the right person, and marry, they could live in a one-bedroom for a while before they had to move.

For most of the colonists there was no need for additional rooms, but one family has succeeded in doing just that, and the solution was to take the house next to them, knock out a wall and make a double size home. One living room became the new master bedroom and that left six additional bedrooms for the children. They recycled one of the kitchen's, equipment and all, since only one kitchen was needed, and this made for a larger living room.

The family that moved from next to them shoes a smaller unit, since their children were older and leaving the nest.

Josh had a roommate for a short while after Mark moved out, but eventually moved into a single unit a month or so later. His roommate and he were the same age, and both needed their space.

It was still a few days before Mark and Maddy were married. The reality of it is, he and Skye are getting closer and very serious, and most of the colonists are expecting the next wedding to be theirs. Skye is still living in the community home where they first met, but she spends a lot of time at Josh's place and has a side of the closet of her own.

"Knock knock" Jim Shannon said as he opened the front door and walked in; not a lot of private space in the colony, but the doors do have locks for such an instance.

"Come on in Dad. We're just getting ready for dinner, wanna stay?" Mark Reynolds asked his Father in Law.

"No, wanted to let you know we are instituting a rotating schedule. No reason for all of us to be on duty all the time. We're doing a 3 days on, 2 days off rotation for the next couple months. Give you both a chance to get used to each other. I put you on the same rotation. Laura is on the other, I guess she can cover for both of you!" He smiled at Mark.

"Really. We talked about this a few months ago and it sounded good. Now that we have more people in the Sheriff's department. A couple of the new deputies are learning fast. I would like to put a couple of them in charge of something and see how they do." Mark said.

"I like that. You and Laura are their TO, make the decision together, keep me posted, and let me know how it turns out. I trust you two.

Before Mark could reply, "Sheriff, this is Shannon. We need you at the office."

"Be there in 10." he replied tapping his comm.

Then he pointed to Mark as his daughter's voice said over another comm, "Reynolds, we need you at the office."

"Be there in 10." He replied.

"That sounds interesting...." They said together.

They made sure no fire would start and walked out together. "Let's ride." Reynolds had a couple bikes parked outside.

So, they did. Got there in 4 minutes. Parked the bikes and headed inside. The interesting thing about the motorcycles is most people have no interest in using them. If you need one, and you see one, you are free to use it if you know what

you are doing. So, most stay away from them. Guzman likes them, so he brought a bike and parked them in various locations around the colony, and in a couple places OTG also; well hidden mind you.

“What’s up?” The sheriff asked.

A moment later Commander Taylor and Guzman walked in.

The Commander said, “What’s up?”

Everyone smiled and Maddy started the briefing.

“We think we know the reason the pirates disappeared. They found a rift that took them directly to the east coast of our land mass. Close to 15,000 or more kilometers away. It is one-way as far as we can determine, so they cannot return; and since they do not have a terminus, they can’t force a two-way connection. Therefore, they are no longer a threat.”

Laura took over, “My personal feelings are to send the EMP through and destroy all of their tech. If they are within the 2 click radius of the blast that is. Not sure if the exit is being monitored or not, but if not, we can send a mini drone through to take a look. If nothing else, we’ll get a good look at the area from the air. Be nice to see more of our home planet.”

“How about using a balloon to get the drone high enough before starting the engines to not be noticed. It can start at 1,000 meters and not be seen or heard.” Reynolds thought for a moment. “If the balloon is black and we send it at night they have a slim chance they will see it.”

“But they may see it still. We need a diversion.” The Sheriff thought for a minute. “I got it. Let’s use a critter.”

Taylor looked him in the eye, “You are nuts, aren’t you?”

“A little.” He replied.

Maddy nodded her head and mouthed to Taylor, ‘A LOT’

He smiled at her and nodded, opening his eyes wide as he did. Jim saw and grinned back at Taylor.

“Since this rift is at ground level, it’s entirely possible for a critter to accidentally run through the vortex. They’ll be so focused on the critter they won’t see the black balloon rising from the top of the rift. It will just float up. If we put a weight on

the bottom of the balloon and mount the drone to the top with a quick release of some type, we can set it to release at say a thousand meters. The sound should be invisible.” He smiled. “And once it did its job the balloon will come down somewhere, very far away from where it was launched.”

“That’s brilliant Sheriff.” Reynolds said.

“No need to kiss up, I already like you.” The Sheriff said back to his son in law. “You’re like a son to me.” Everyone closed their eyes and slowly shook their head.

Guzman, on the other hand, said. “Nice one Sheriff.”

“Don’t encourage him Lieutenant!” Taylor replied.

Guzman came to attention, saluted, and snapped, “YES SIR!”

It was Mark and Jim’s turn to shake their head slowly.

Moving on, “We already know the rift can support bidirectional communications, so we can keep tabs on them from now on. The mini has a massive lifespan, if never landing for maintenance, three years or more. Three years from now we can send another one.” Laura added.

“OK then, it’s settled. What diversion can we use to fully get their attention? A baby carno?”

“No, I got just the thing.” Mark grinned.

Taylor looked at him, “You too. What are you holding, Shannon grinning lessons or something?” Taylor looked at all three of them, same damn grin. “Laura, we’re outnumbered.”

“Sorry commander, I’m in the next grinning class.”

Taylor smiled. They were becoming quite a group, nearly finishing each other’s sentences at times. This group, all of them, were one family.

Mark spoke, “I was thinking. We only found one very large flock of gallasaurus and they are really good eating. The pirates know about it also and they know how good they are, so if they saw 5 or 6 of these things come running through the portal, they would chase them if for nothing else but to have them for dinner.”

Mark paused.

“You gotta figure, they most likely have had a seafood diet for the past year with occasional meat. I would love to watch them chase turkeys.”

They all laughed at the thought of the mercenaries running around chasing a bunch of turkeys. “I’ll save the video for us then.” Maddy replied still laughing a little.

“OK then, let’s do this next week. All we need is helium, balloon, a release, an altimeter, a drone and a counterweight; that goes to Laura and Maddy. As for the turkey, I can think of no one better than my favorite turkey, my newest son in law.” Jim Shannon said. Reynolds shook his head.

“It’s about a 2-day drive to the flock, so 5 or 6 days all total. We need a portable cage or three. I need four security types and Skye.” Reynolds said.

“Security I understand, but why Skye?” Taylor asked.

“She is the best turkey hunter I ever met. Who do you think started the smoked turkey craze in the colony?” Reilly replied.

“Between her and Casey, they managed to create the perfect smoker that can hold 15 of them. 24 hours later, SANDWICHES!” Mark said.

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“We’re heading out. See you in a week honey.” Reynolds said to his wife.

“Be safe.” She said back, and they kissed.

Skye passed them as she was heading for the rover, “Eeeewwwwww.” She said.

Maddy said to her, “Skye, bring him back in one piece!”

“No one told me that was part of the plan.” She smiled at Maddy. “He’ll be fine. I’ll be protecting him.”

“No, you’ll be hunting turkeys, I’ll be protecting him.” Josh said as he entered the immediate area of where they are staging to depart.

“Josh?” Skye said.

“Skye!” Josh replied.

“Why are you here?”

“I volunteered. My only brother and my girlfriend are heading into danger! Of course, I want to be on the protection team.”

Reynolds and Maddy walked over to him, standing near Skye. Mark and Maddy hugged him at the same time. As they parted, Skye grabbed him and kissed him.

“OK, now that that’s over, can you head out?” Taylor said.

“Yes sir!” The security types all answered.

“OK, on this run Deputy Reynolds is in command and Deputy Tate is his second. Security team make sure the carno’s don’t eat them.”

They were all dressed in security armor, Reynolds and Skye carried the standard weapons but they each also had a mini as a third weapon. The security team carried their standard weapons, but two also carried a plasma rifle. Overkill for most of the critters in the forest, but if a big boy attacks, they could make short work of them and press on.

The truck got loaded with everything they needed, and they headed out.

Two uneventful days later they reached the Galla Mountains. Since it was the only place they ever saw a gallasaurus, a turkey, and it was a mountainous area.... well, it fit ok.

They had already camped two nights and on the morning of day three they woke up and set to work. By sunset they had more than 30 birds in the trailer cage but kept adding more. The limit was 50, since there was no way to fit any more in there safely.

“We’ll head back in the morning after breakfast.” Reynolds said.

Josh put his hand up in a closed fist and everyone froze. He put on his NVGs and looked around. “I see 6 nicos in the tree line. Security team, slowly, get up and stand ready.

Everyone stood and put on their Night Vision Glasses. Nico’s alright, a pack of them and they looked hungry. The security detail charged their weapons, Skye and Mark grabbed the plasma rifles.

Four of the nico’s broke out of the trees and headed for the group.

“Skye, fire between the two on the right, max power and I’ll do the same on the left.” Mark said. “Security stand ready to take out the other set if they charge.”

“On one.” Skye said and counted down; when she hit one, they both fired. The blast removed the entire side of the nico’s as they blast went between them, killing all four creatures instantly with a single blast.

The other two broke out of the trees at a dead run and security managed to kill them also. A little bit more difficult, but they never reached the trailer, their target, or the group of hunters.

Josh walked up to Mark, “Can I trade this in for one of those?” motioning to his and Reynolds rifles.

“We’ll see. You checked out on these yet?”

“No.”

Reynolds thought about it and looked at Skye who nodded back to him in agreement. He handed Josh her plasma rifle and went to the trailer. “Everyone gather round.” As the security team gathered around Mark, “OK, class time. Advanced weapons training. Plasma rifles.”

Skye and Reynolds trained the four security types in the plasma rifle and they were carried on the night watch. Two teams of two, four-hour watch. Mark and Skye did not stand watch, but they did drive the vehicles. So, they needed their beauty sleep.

They rolled back into the gates just before lunch on day 7. Rover issue made them hold up an extra night a full day away. The repeater they set up on the waterfall allowed them to stay in contact the entire time they were OTG. Everyone felt better for that.

As they entered, and Taylor saw 50 giant birds, he looked at Reynolds and Skye, “I see you did a little extra shopping?”

“Yes sir. I thought, we all thought, a good turkey dinner could be on the menu for a lot of us. We have more than 300 kilos of extra turkey.”

“Good thinking.”

“By the way Commander, the security team is fully trained on the plasma rifle. Ran into a pack of nicos and it did the trick. Last night, we learned that Josh here is pretty good. He discovered if you hit it in the neck the head falls clean off and its friends start eating it, and leave you alone.”

“Good to know. Josh huh, good work.” Taylor winked at Josh Shannon. Looking at the Sheriff as he approached, “You Shannon’s are everywhere.” He said flatly. He turned away and went back to his office. The Sheriff arrived to take charge of the turkeys and get that ball rolling.

“What was that all about?” Jim asked Reynolds.

“Well Dad, it seems that Maddy is not the only good shot in the Shannon clan. My brother Josh here can remove the head off a nico at 200 meters.”

“Really?” Shannon stopped and looked at Reynolds who was just standing there nodding.

Breaking himself out of the thought about how good a shot Josh was, the Sheriff started issuing orders to pull 15 of the turkeys out and put them into five cages.

“Why five cages Dad.” Maddy asked.

“Wait, you read the books, and you don’t know?” He looked at Josh and Mark who were standing there in the dark just like Maddy. “Now, think about the outcome we want, and the fact I said FIVE cages.”

Maddy thought for a moment, “Oh, I see. If you stack the cages on top of each other and open them all at the same time, it could appear organic in nature and that they were being chased.”

“Excellent.”

The work progressed and the 15 were split up, three in each cage. A Gallasaur is quite a large animal know to grow to 150 kilos or more. Thankfully, they are stupid. They can be coaxed into a cage as easily as they can be coaxed into a moving blade. IQ maybe negative 60. They are pure instinct. If you are calm, they are calm.

It was more than a three-hour flight to the area where they know the portal was located, and before they did anything, they scanned the area and found a few toys the pirates left. If they had just walked up to the portal, a series of antipersonnel mines would have gone off and ruined their day.

“OK, when do you guess it will get dark where they are?” Taylor asked.

Laura looked at Maddy, “Well we know our location on the planet and extrapolating the south east line of the rifts, they should be at a southern point of the land mass. We are located at about where....”

“Maddy?” The Sheriff said.

“Oh, sorry. Just working it out in my head.” She closed her eyes, “Sunset here is in a couple hours therefore it is already dark there, if we wait 90-minutes it would be the equivalent of midnight there.”

“T minus 90-minutes everyone. And in case you’re interested, the T stands for Turkey!” There were groans in the crowd and Jim Shannon smiled at them all. “Thank you.....thank you.” He said to everyone nearby.

Taylor laid back against a tree, “Sheriff Shannon, you’re in charge. Wake me in an hour. I need a nap.”

“Good idea.” Shannon said to him. “Guzman!”

Guzman walked up to him. “If you have any of your guys that did not get any rest last night, for whatever reason, tell them to take a nap. This may be an all-nighter and the more tired you are, the more dangerous you are to others.”

“Gocha Sheriff.” Guzman grinned.

About an hour later his com beeped, startled him. He was sitting on the ground leaning against the ship. Very quickly, he realized he had dozed off. Mainly because the comm alarm was chirping and Maddy and Mark were standing over him. He did not remember setting the alarm.

“Can I help you?” He said.

“Just wondering when you would hear the alarm.” Maddy looked at her watch, “Six minutes and forty seconds.”

“I won!” Josh yelled.

“Won what?” He asked his daughter.

“The pool. Guessing how long the alarm was going to ring before you woke and shut it off.”

Mark tossed him a bag and by the sound it had a few Terras in it.



“OK, let’s get this show on the road.” Taylor said as he walked up to the group. “Sheriff, good morning to you. Feel better?” Taylor jibed.

“As a matter of fact, I do. Thanks for asking.” He replied to Taylor.

The cages were already stacked near the portal opening ready for the big event. Once the balloon went through, they would receive the telemetry back and know exactly where the pirates were living. Not only that, but they should be able to keep tabs on them through this rift, since RF signals travel both directions instantly.

Maddy and Laura set up the balloon launch ramp and prepped the drone. It was a mini drone, about the size of a couple comm units. The noise level was such if they launched it through the portal someone would hear it and know what it was, but since it was on the top of the balloon, and the balloon would take it a few hundred meters up quickly, they would launch it. The balloon had a telemetry pack on the bottom to both counterbalance the drone on top, and once the drone launched, the balloon would fly free and they could get a larger view of the world and some weather data. The tech pack had a camera on the bottom to get a bird’s eye view of the ground. This oversized black balloon should reach new heights

They sent up weather balloons before, but nothing like this. A black balloon launched before daybreak would hit its max altitude fast, but when the sun rises, the heat would let the balloon go all that much higher.

Since the telemetry could travel through the portal, they would be in contact with it for several thousand kilometers.

“We’re ready.” Laura said.

“So are we.” Mark and Guzman said.

“Let’s do this.” Taylor said.

Guzman released the first cage and a single Gallasaurus went through without a hitch. A moment later he released the second cage, and 10 seconds later they opened the rest of the cages one second apart.

“Releasing balloon.” Maddy said.

The balloon went up the tube and through the portal. Taylor and Jim were watching it on the screen, and they saw the other side pretty clearly. Everyone was

chasing the turkeys, and no one was looking at the top of the portal, so it made it through without being noticed.

“100 meters.” Maddy said. “150 meters, releasing drone.” Maddy kicked in the drone systems and it launched off the balloon, moving off in the direction it came so as not to cut the balloon with the blades. She took the drone straight up and set it to auto, it scanned the area around the portal exit, and they saw a live feed of the area. Then it scanned away from the portal and they realized there was a colony set up near the shore.

They saw the pirates, saw Lucas and Mira and several other people they hoped had already been eaten by the local wildlife.

“Coordinates coming in.” Laura paused. “Wow, 18,000 thousand kilometers and quite a bit more south than we are; I would guess they are south of the equator but not much. Current temp is 23C, humidity is 51%. Comfortable at least. Let’s see, scanning the horizon.” The drone did a slow 360 in weather scan mode and they saw a very large and potentially deadly storm on approach to the area.

“I count 68 people between the settlement and the portal area. In the woods all I see is wildlife.”

“The storm, when will it hit them and how bad will it be?” Taylor asked.

“Tomorrow afternoon most likely and it will be horrendous.” Laura said.

Taylor smiled, “Awwww, too bad.” He looked at Maddy, “Find a place to safely and securely park the drone before the storm hits. Afterwards, we can see if they made it.”

Laura added, “There is a cave system the drone can easily get to, at the top of a peak about 20-minutes away inland. Humans can’t get to it, too sheer of a cliff climb but if they know about the storm, they may be able to get to the area for safety.”

“I have no intention of warning them. If we do, they will know they are under surveillance and that is not an option. So, let’s see how smart they are?”

Maddy felt bad for them, but at the same time she felt like it was justice. They attacked with the intent to kill everyone she knew for the sole purpose of taking the resources back to 2149, profit. Not exactly an honorable profession, so she thought about it a minute and ordered the drone to monitor the approaching storm.

When the winds calmed it would leave the cave on its own and make its way to the portal, then to the camp at a high enough altitude to remain covert, sending images back through the portal on its own.

Her and Laura had programed the parameters of the mission into the drone a few days ago. It has a basic artificial intelligence and understands it is a covert surveillance device and its on board logic table will get it through any autonomous decisions it needs to make.

## *Chapter Fifteen*

A couple month ago they managed to get the spy in the sky with a diversion. They waited a while and repeated the scam, sending a second drone, a second EMP, and a little surprise. They managed to drop a listening device on the roof of what they thought was their strategy hut. Another storm just cleared; pretty bad one too.

The lightning was continuous, devastating, and on target for their little colony. The drone was able to keep tabs on the pirates camp from the cave in the cliffs as the storm hit. It was the worst thing anyone had ever seen. Taylor talked about setting off the EMP during the storm to make it look as though something in the storm killed all their gear, but he felt sorry for them and did not want them to get the idea they needed to come and get restocked with tech at Terra Nova. Why does he feel sorry for them?

“Commander, several of their structures were hit by lightning and one seems to have been a storage area that contained explosives. The building exploded and killed 5 in the colony. We can get a visual momentarily.” She maneuvered the drone high into the clouds and trained the camera on the colony. At this altitude, they can see the portal and the colony. Not a lot of resolution but the fires are easily visible.

“Zoom in on the colony. Try to get faces if possible.” Sheriff Shannon said.

Laura reacquired the colony and zoomed in. The computer began to catch the faces and identify those it knew or had in its database.

“STOP!” Taylor said, as one face passed the view. “It appears my son was injured in the storm. He is lying in the dirt and appears to be hurt. What a shame.”

Although Taylor sounded like he was dispassionate, those in the room heard the sound of his voice and he was a bit concerned his son would die. Odd feeling, wanting someone dead but at the same time, not.

“No physical injury evident. Maybe he was hit by lightning?”

Everyone smiled at that thought.

“Is the ear damaged?” The Sheriff asked.

“No.” Laura replied. “Just no one in that structure at the moment. We can hear yelling and other sounds in the distance.”

“If they knew we had this capability,” Taylor said quietly, “They would not be too happy.” He paused. “No risks. If it even appears that they know we are monitoring them, back off fast. Hide for a couple days and return slowly from a different angle.”

“Yes Commander, we know the drill.” Maddy said frankly.

“Good.” Taylor replied. “Now, as for this new improved EMP. What can we do with it?”

The EMP was revamped several months ago using some of the new tech they found in the storage areas around the colony left by the pirates. This new device was brought to the area using the exact same method as the first. They referred to it as the Turkey Project. Yes, they were not happy they gave food to the enemy, but in this process, it meant greater control in the form of a covert spy device, which can save lives in the colony ultimately. The newest EMP is about the size of a softball. It looked like a rock and Taylor had a thought.

“Maddy, can you place the new EMP in an area that will not be discovered, safe and secure, but close enough to the rift and the colony so if we needed to, we can set it off?” He paused a moment. “The older one, the smaller one, place it in their storm hiding area just in case. If nothing else, we can hide it there and free up the first drone to other duties.”

“I can, just need to find a good place. Somewhere they would not go but within a couple kilometers of the Pirates.” She studied the area map a few minutes. “Here! This spot is perfect. There is a peak here that allows for max height of the detonation allowing for greatest dispersal, but the peak is high enough to make people think twice about climbing it for fun, and since they can see the top from the ground easily, there’s really no reason for them to go up there.”

Maddy maneuvered the drone to the tip of the peak and dropped the rock. It did not move and would sit patiently until it was deployed.

“Done!” Maddy said. A Green star appeared on the display to mark the location of the device. Green for safe mode. If they set it off, it would truly blow the pirates into the stone age. All of their tech would be unusable.

“This is a last resort weapon.” Taylor said to the group. “We few are the only ones in Terra Nova that know it is even there. If we set the device off now, they may look for and find a way back to Terra Nova in the hope they can be resupplied with new tech, our tech; but if we have it as our ace in the hole, we can avoid something they may start in the future. We can keep an eye on them for now.”

Taylor looked around. These people, he has come to appreciate and respect all of them. They are family.

He walked out of the command post and stopped on his deck, his post. He stood tall, with his hands on the railing, and just looked at the people. Some saw him and waved, he nodded back. This is the place where he feels like he’s watching over everyone. Sometimes the weight of the world is on his shoulders, not today. That is distributed and shared.

The sheriff walked out and stood next to him, resting his elbows on the railing. They looked around and finally Taylor spoke.

“So, Jim. What should we do about this situation?”

“The pirates?”

Taylor gave him that look, Sheriff Shannon stood tall and looked the Commander dead in the eye and said, “Nothing.”

“Nothing.” Taylor said back.

“Nothing.” Shannon said, “Leave them alone, keep an eye on them, but other than that, nothing.”

Taylor grew a slight smile, “My thought too.”

From inside the command center, “Commander, Sheriff. We found something interesting.”

Taylor and Shannon walked back in and looked at the monitor. It was the makings of a very large boat. “It looks like someone has commissioned a navy.” Shannon said.

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Keeping an eye on the boat was not a priority and it seems as though they made a lot of headway on construction in the past few weeks since finding it.

They harvested the wood from near the camp using chainsaws and det-cord, cut it to length using lasers and mounted the planks to the hull using a variety of technologies both old and new.

Taylor was interested in where this would lead, perhaps a colony in the other continent. He was rather unnerved by the idea of letting these guys get away, but in the long run it may be the best idea. Who knows, maybe the boat will sink. Taylor thought silently, perhaps this will be the first boat in history with a built-in bomb on the keel.

Life settled down and the colonists, who jokingly refer to themselves as Novans, went back to their normal routines. The Sheriff's office has 30 people working full time and a few part timers who do it more for fun.

Maddy calls them the Sheriff's Auxiliary. Mostly volunteers who have a full-time job in the colony already, but want to contribute in another way, when they find a need. He put Casey in command of the auxiliary detachment.

Mark and Laura are the lead investigative deputies, does not really mean much but it sounds good. Casey and Skye have become an amazing team of office organizer and dispatcher. Sheriff Shannon does as he normally does, finds new and different ways to make his people think of things they would normally not see.

It's paid off several times, especially when the cloud cover hit a while ago. No one thought anything of it until they noticed the birds all heading away from the clouds.

Mark and Laura grabbed a rover and headed to the cloud line that was approaching at a snail's pace and took a few readings and found the clouds were composed of a large percentage of CO₂, carbon dioxide. Not good for anything that breaths!

Maddy sent a drone high into the upper atmosphere, above the cloud layer, and found its footprint. Too big to run away from, but thin enough to survive.

Taylor stockpiled oxygen tanks, and everyone stayed in their homes for 35 hours. Some did get sick, the older and the younger people, but most faired the storm well. The Sheriff's department was mobilized to help as needed. Not a single serious illness occurred, and Taylor told Jim Shannon it was due to the fact the Sheriff's department investigated the storm and allowed the colony to prepare for three days. It was enough.

After it passed, they found an active volcano chain. The gasses it spewed were bad, but they were far enough away to mostly dissipate before they reach Terra Nova.

Life returned to normal. Families grew, new families started, people were born, and people died. But all this time no one has had any contact with the pirates, except for the drones keeping an eye on them.

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“Oh, and you have not taken a full week off together in months; so, there’s an outpost that has an alarm sensor that’s activated. We sent a drone and no heat sources in the area, with the exception of a few locals.” Shannon was speaking to Reynolds; they were alone in the office.

Mark stared at him. “Two people on a week OTG is not normal SOP.”

“Good catch, I guess Josh and Skye will need to go as support staff.”

“Josh and Skye?”

“Of course, Skye knows OTG better than anyone here, and Josh is in security and someone from security needs to go on any double date, I mean OTG activity.”

“Right.....” Mark laughed. “When do we go?”

“Day after tomorrow. You can leave after breakfast. Taylor and I will ride a day or so with you, near the shore. Trying our hand at deep sea fishing again. Maybe catching enough to share.”

“A fish story, nice.”

“Do the others know yet?”

“Nope.” And there’s that famous Shannon grin. “I’ll make sure they all know before the end of the day.”

“OK, I’ll pack a few things tonight. One vehicle I take it?”

“Yep, and Taylor and I will be on bikes.” He thought for a minute. “On your way back, you may need to swing by the fishing hole in case we caught something too big to strap to the bikes. We should be in radio contact the whole time, so we can let you know well before you veer off course.”

“So, what exactly is this place we’re headed to?” Mark asked.



“According to Malcom it’s a remote lab of some sort. Last time I went to one of those we nearly lost 20 years. But this one is supposedly, or at least was, setup to do research on the smaller critters. Mice, rats, snakes, things like that.”

“Snakes?” Mark said pretending to be afraid.

“Uh huh, well, the alarm is some sort of freezer that malfunctioned so either something thawed out and is going to eat you, or the place is going to stink to high heaven. Either way, I’m glad it’s you and not me.” Jim Shannon turned, “Gotta run. There are three others I need to talk to this afternoon.”

They said their goodbyes and he left his office. Laura was out walking the perimeter and when the Sheriff is away, this office is his. He and Laura take turns sitting in the big chair.

The Sheriff managed to run into the others and let them all know about the OTG assignment, and as he completed the circle, he found himself at the main gate. As he looked up, he saw Taylor at his railing, on his deck. He waved up to him and Taylor motioned for him to join him.

Climbing the stairs, he saw a few of them still looked new while others looked older and a few looked like they had been there for a decade.

“So, what’s the word Shannon?” Taylor asked.

“Maddy, Mark, Skye and Josh are heading OTG the day after tomorrow to check out the freezer alarm.” The Sheriff said.

“Quite a drive. I make it as a five-day trip, maybe six.”

“Well, since you and I will be out fishing, Guzman, Riley and Casey will take the reins. I already talked to Casey, he knows not to make changes.”

“Have you thought about if we catch something? We need to bring it home with us.”

“Yep, the OTG crew will stop by and pick up our catch if we catch anything.” He smiled at Taylor, “Well, gotta run. Got a date tonight.”

“As do I.” Taylor replied.

“When are you two getting married? You talk about it all the time.”

“I plan to bring that up this evening. After dinner.”

“We can talk about it over the campfire while we’re cooking fish.” He waved as he left, and Taylor waved back.

“Good attitude Sheriff, you sound like to believe we will make a good catch on this trip?”

“I do, for some reason. Maybe we’ll need to call for the trailer to bring it all back.”

“That would be a good thing.” Jim Shannon nodded and waved, then went about his business. He and Elisabeth had a date tonight, and they had the house to themselves.

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“Zoe, are you ready yet?” Elisabeth said rather loudly.

“Almost.” She replied to her mother.

Zoe is almost 9 years old now and ready to take on the world. She has plans to join her mother as a nurse and learn to be a doctor one day. But she will need to discover the wonderful world of internship first and try a few things she has not thought of; Taylor and Shannon have an order of intern positions. You do a week rotation in each and when you complete the process, you pick three and spend a month in each. After that you can choose where you want to be and learn all about it for yourself.

At 8 years old, Zoe already knew she wants medical, and her other two will be anthropology and law enforcement.

“You ready?” Mom asked again.

“Coming...” she said as she exited her room.

“We need to get you to the Miller’s. They have a rover and will take you and Rebecca to the field. They’re astronomers and physicists and planned this for all the school children. Josh and Maddy will be there too to watch all of you, and you will be sleeping in the grass in a sleeping bag.” Are you excited?”

“Yes I am. But space is not my favorite thing. Even through it is fun.”

“What is your favorite thing?”

“Doctor stuff. I want to learn to be a doctor. Can you teach me?”

She smiled and had a tear in her eye, “One day, but not today. See me again in 10 years when you are ready for your internship and we will talk.”

“That’s 9 year. I am 9 now. Just had a birthday, remember.”

“No, just want you to stay little forever.”

They left the house as Jim arrived home. “You off already?”

“Yes Daddy. I get to go on a campout and look at rocks burning up as they hit the atmosphere.”

“You make it sound so fun!” He said to her.

She smiled, cocked her head to one side, and gave him a hug and her and Elisabeth left the house.

Chapter Sixteen

The group left at 0830 hours from the main gate and traveled together for the day. With the comm units in the upper chest area and stationery, and with the connection to the speakers and mic in the helmet, the six of them stayed in constant contact the entire day.

Guzman called in every few hours for a health and welfare check, and Elisabeth called to ask if they find any of a certain plant, a really long Latin name, on the trip to bring it back, roots, soil and all. Maddy knew exactly what she was looking for and they had a container they could convert to a flowerpot if needed. Maybe if they find it, they can bring back a few of them.

It was nearly 6pm, “Let’s look for a place to stop for the night. Get a fire going and get something to eat. I could eat a T-Rex!” Jim Shannon said.

Taylor responded. “Well, if we go a couple more clicks ahead there’s a really nice spot to camp. You remember Jim, the midway point from the last fishing trip.”

“Yep, great spot. I wonder if it’s still there?”

Mark replied, “What’s still where?”

“You’ll see when we get there, Deputy.” Taylor replied.

“Yes sir.”

Maddy, on the other hand, sent the drone that was above them to the place they were talking about and used all of its sensors to scan and search. “That area is clear, nothing out of the ordinary.” She said under her breath, but everyone heard it.

“So, you scanned the area and found nothing. Couldn’t wait?” Maddy’s father said.

“I like a puzzle, Dad. I see nothing.”

“Good.”

“We should be there in 3 minutes.”

The Sheriff spoke, “When we get there I need for Mark and Maddy to collect firewood, Skye to set up a perimeter alarm....”

Taylor took over as he paused, “...and Josh to scan the area for any security concern. Josh, also see if you can collect a few items for dinner.”

“Yes commander.” Josh replied.

A few minutes later they rolled up on what looked like a field, then noticed the burned area, so a fire pit. Taylor walked over to a bush and pulled the brush off a small metal structure.

“Nice!” Skye and Mark said at the same time. “I forgot about these.” Mark said.

“That’s because all of them are placed, and none of them are in the colony.” Taylor said.

Josh opened his mouth, and nothing came out.

“You know Commander, my son is so eloquent.”

“I see...” Taylor said smiling.

“OK, what is it.” Josh finally asked.

“Reynolds, you remember the access code?”

“I think so commander.” He walked over to the keypad and pressed a lot of buttons. The door slid open and he had to move out of its way.

Looking in, Josh said, “A bunkhouse?”

“That’s right. In the event of some danger, this shelter contains food, water, environment, and a comfortable bed for ten people. Can last a week, longer if you acquire an additional food source.”

“Excellent Commander, a vacation house near the beach.” Jim said.

Taylor shook his head, “OK, on that note, let’s get to work. I’m hungry too.”

Within an hour a good fire was lit, and Skye and Mark took inventory in the bunkhouse. Taylor and Josh headed into the woods and the others heard gunfire. Single rounds every few minutes. They were hunting.

When they returned, they had enough meat for all of them to have a good meal, and Taylor poured the potato’s out of his backpack.

Everyone cleaned and cooked their own meal, and they ate well. The Sheriff and the Commander remembered to bring seasoning. Salt, dehydrated garlic and onion and shared it with everyone. The critters were really good. Better than the ration packs they planned to eat.

Maddy looked at her plex, “No movement or heat sources for 4 kilometers.”

“Good. But why are you concerned about the area? Is there something you want to say or ask you really don’t want to say or ask?” Jim knew his daughter well.

“Well, I had an idea, but it is out there.”

“Say it, you speak your mind normally. Don’t stop now.” Taylor said.

Maddy looked around and Skye nodded to her. They tossed the idea around, but it was her idea, so Skye wanted her to present it. “I was thinking. If we molded a block of C-47 into something, and attached it to the hull of that ship, we could ensure wherever they landed it would take them a while to leave from again. If we really wanted to have some fun, we could send the drone with an EMP to follow them, drop the EMP nearby and during the night when a storm hits, set off the EMP and let them go prehistoric.”

“Fun huh.” Jim said. “Well, let’s say it’s a good thought. We may be able do something like that, but it would take a lot of coordination. Possibly sending someone there to plant the C-47, which means they will be stuck there.” He looked up, “Unless we send someone, and they hide. Plant the explosive and the detonator and once they are on the high seas, we can send a vehicle through the rift.”

“They could be a team. It will take them a while to get back, a few months most likely.” Taylor added.

Reynolds said, “The rover can hold enough rations and water for 2 months for 2 people.”

Jim asked, “Are we considering this?”

No one spoke for a minute, then Taylor said. “Let’s table this discussion.”

Maddy said, “One last thing. We have the shuttle. It would take a few hours to get there, but it can be done.” She looked at Taylor. “Commander, that ship can hit space, right. We should go up and take a look. Maybe find out how the actual

land mass or masses are configured right now. The globe we think may not be a good representation. Who knows, maybe we can put a satellite into orbit.”

Skye jumped in, “If you go into space, I want to be there. Always wanted to go into space.”

They talked about space and orbit and the ship for a while, adapting one of the drones to be sub-orbital was an interesting topic. To remain in geosync orbit, it would need thrusters and a lot of electronics. An hour later they went into the bunk house and got ready for bed.

Skye started stripping as did Josh, Reynolds and Taylor. Maddy and Jim, on the other hand, were a little timider. Jim, after a few minutes shrugged and did the same. Stripping to his skivvy’s and crawling into his bunk. “Much more comfortable than the ground.”

After a minute, Maddy did the same. “This is a pretty comfortable bunk!” She exclaimed.

“Maddy, FYI. In Security you got used to showing everyone your business. They may look, humans and all, but it is never mentioned.” Mark said

“Correct Mark.” Taylor added. “You live in very close quarters with your squad, they know everything about you, literally, and you know everything about them. Not a big deal.”

They all quieted down knowing nothing could surprise them. There bunkhouse was completely secure. One last thing needed to be done.

“Taylor to base.”

“Dunham here sir.”

“We’re in a bunk pod for the night, talk to you in the morning. Go get some sleep Corporal.”

“Yes sir. Good night.”

They fell asleep fast.

As morning came the roof of the pod started to glow. It was artificial light, but made it look as though the outside was illuminating the inside.

Everyone woke up and Shannon said, “Now that is cool.”

Reynolds replied, "I set that up last night. Must be sunrise outside."

"I forgot they could do that, good idea." Taylor said. "Meal pack for breakfast then we head out. You four one way and us another."

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Taylor was the first dressed and out of the remote bunkhouse. He looked around to make sure nothing wanted to eat him, then headed to a tree. The rest of the crew did pretty much the same thing. Maddy was able to put her gear on correctly herself, but first, she needed to find a place for some private time. Skye motioned for her to follow.

"Commander, you and the Sheriff get something good and we will be there with the trailer to bring it home for you."

"Confidence, nice attribute." Taylor said and he put himself back together.

After a short time, Maddy and Skye returned. She looked at Mark and rolled her eyes. Mark understood. Women had a different outlook on life in the woods than men. Not her first time, but life in the woods is interesting.

"OK, the Sheriff and I are heading out. You four take care of the alarm but be careful. Not sure what this is about, just that it is."

Taylor and Shannon mounted their bikes and waved. Starting them up, they headed out.

"Well, just the four of us left. Do we want to get moving? One more night before we get there and there is a bunkhouse where we are going." Mark said.

"I say get moving. If we can make good time, maybe we can get there tonight and avoid the whole campsite thing on the way there. My calculation is we are 19 hours away." Maddy said.

"The Mathasaurus has spoken!" Josh said.

In unison, "All hail the Mathasaurus."

Maddy just smiled and shook her head. She knew that nickname would haunt her.

Reynolds put the bunkhouse back to sleep and secured the door. Covered it with the stink weed bushes since they scare off critters, something in their nose is



sensitive to them and to humans it is not all that bad. He hopped in the passenger side of the Rover. Skye was driving.

She turned to everyone, "I say we give it a try. Swap out drivers and just plain get there."

They all agreed, and she headed out. It should be just after dark when they get there.

Maddy transmitted Mark's inventory to Laura at the colony. Whoever came out this way next would resupply the pod.

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Taylor and Shannon made it to their fishing spot. As they arrived, they set up their camp and perimeter. 200 meters for level one and a thousand for level 2. If anything approached, they would know.

On a past trip, they set up a tree house where the local critters would not be able to get to them easily. Small ground fire keeps most of the wildlife away, the smoke deters them from getting too close. But those are not the one's they are concerned about.

Jim Shannon made some coffee and set up a couple chairs. "Commander, take a minute and relax." He held out a coffee cup to him.

"Good idea, Jim."

"Any issue me calling you Nathaniel." Jim asked.

"No, not one. But a few people I permit to call me Nate. You can be one of them, at least in this situation."

"Nate, I like that!"

"Glad to hear that I did not disappoint you. I'm stuck with it, Jim."

Taylor was sitting and sipping on his coffee. He was looking relaxed and at peace pretty much.

"Got a question. If you are the one getting married, who's going to marry you?"

Taylor almost spit out his coffee as he started laughing. "Well, I thought about that. I asked our resident minister to stand in for me, she said marriage is a union of two people. If you state, out loud and to the heavens that you are married, then

you are married in heaven. A minister or officiate is only there leading it to make the audience feel better.”

“I like that.” Jim said.

“Speaking of which, I need a best man, you up for the job?”

The sheriff was a bit surprised, he put his hand on his heart and said, “I would be honored.”

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“Starting to get dark. How much farther?” Maddy asked. She was not the best driver, but good enough and this was valuable training time for her and her driving skills.

“No clue. What language is this in?” Josh said looking at Maddy’s plex.

“Mine. What is in the upper right corner?”

“A lot of stuff.”

“In red.”

“A14-598”

“Excellent, thanks!”

Skye asked, “could you enlighten us please.”

“1.4 kilometers, approximately 6 minutes and a jungle density of A. A is good, mostly clear so in ten minutes or less, we should be there.”

Finally, they arrived and stopped. Surveyed the area before getting out of the rover. Mark walked over to the cage and opened it, and the inner door, being very careful as to not let anything escape, or eat him.

Josh was right behind him ready to fire at any threat.

They opened the door and discovered a room with a couple terminals. Maddy went to one and saw it was offline. She verified the system and made sure no one entered a virus.

“ALARM. Someone was messing with this terminal. Give me a minute....” She paused and tapped a bunch of keys. “Found it. Someone planted a virus. If we

were to have reconnected it to the colony network without verifying it was clean, this thing would have erased everything.”

“Pirates?” Mark asked.

“Yep, it was timed to go offline at this time and reboot the system. The problem is, or maybe the best thing is, that Laura and I redesigned the network. This terminal did not have the new protocols.”

“Can you clean it up, make it usable again?”

“It will take the better part of a day, but yes. I brought a backup made during the last PM on this station. I can reformat the core memory and reload it to what it was before the Pirates arrived.”

“Wait, you have a backup from a periodic maintenance conducted a couple years ago, and it will be OK?”

“Yep, I am copying the core to a blank storage module then wiping it, making a backup of this core will take a while, I’m guessing 10 hours; the wiping will take another 6 and reloading will take maybe 14. So, in 30 hours we could leave.”

Reynolds tapped his comm, “Terra Nova, this is Reynolds.”

“We got you Mark, go ahead.” It was Laura.

Reynolds reiterated the verbiage to Laura that Maddy had just told him.

“Great. Keep us posted.”

“Has the Commander checked in?”

“Yes, they have. They are at their destination and getting ready to begin their mission. You should be able to contact them directly.”

Maddy took over the conversation. “Laura, just in case, run a heuristic scan of all primary systems. This one is pretty nasty. It takes the system offline, wipes the core, and stops. Most people would restart the system in this case and that leaves you a blank system.”

“Will do. Command out.”

Maddy contacted Taylor directly on a private channel and passed on what she knew. As far as they could tell, nothing else was amiss in the facility.

Taylor spoke to the group, “What’s in the freezers?”

“Nothing actually. We found a few boxes of food product, if the Pirates were here messing with the computers, I would not trust eating the food.”

“Good thought, burn it.” Taylor said. “Stay in touch, Taylor out.”

The group found all of the edibles in the facility and put it in a cargo net and hung it from a tree. Reynolds grabbed the plasma rifle and set it to max, aimed, and fired. It disintegrated the net and its contents completely.

Skye spoke as they were all sitting around Maddy and her terminal. “So, we’ll be here another two days and the only one with anything to do is Maddy?”

“Actually, I have nothing to do either. Push a button and wait.”

“I say we make this a productive trip. Josh and Mark, head outside and scout around, see if you find anything out of the ordinary. Just checked IR, nothing within 8 clicks. Maddy and me, I am thinking we can start a good cleaning of this facility, beginning with the bunk house, then the freezers, the offices and ending in this room.”

“I like that.” Maddy said. “It has not been done in a while.”

“OK, then...let’s hit it. We got another hour of light, and we can come in and help you clean up. In the morning maybe we can go out and recheck the area.”

## *Chapter Seventeen*

Dinner consisted of ration packs. Choice was some kind of pasta, or a chopped steak. To drink, a bottle of hooch and a couple glasses.

“I’ll take the meat thing.” Taylor said. “Really wish we caught some fish today.”

Jim smiled, “We caught several, they just escaped.”

“True.” Taylor said. “Tomorrow we will have better luck, I’m sure of it.”

“So am I!”

Pulling the tabs on the autoheat they put the meals on the ground, and both reached for the hooch. Taylor won, and poured half a glass each and handed one to Jim.

“Thanks Nate.”

“Wonder how the fix it crew is getting on?” Jim asked.

“Let’s find out.” He tapped his comm, “Josh, report.”

A moment later, “Commander, found a virus issue installed by the Pirates and Maddy is cleaning it up. We’ll be here another 24 hours, so we are giving the place a thorough spring cleaning.”

“Good, we got time to catch a few, bad luck today.”

“All of us are looking forward to a fish fry, no pressure sir.” Taylor smiled at the jibe.

“Is there anything in the freezer units?”

“No sir, they are running, but empty. Lot of trash in them we removed and burned but nothing I would feed anyone I like.”

“Burn everything you need to, all of you will be filing a report when you return. We want to see who the best report writer is.” Skye, Mark and Josh all looked at Maddy at that moment. Taylor continued, “Oh, and Maddy is not writing a report, she will be judging yours.”

Jim Shannon started laughing and it could be heard loud and clear through the comm.

Skye spoke up, "What's the prize Commander?"

"A day where you can do or go anywhere you want, within reason."

~~~~~

The facility is cleaned from top to bottom. The last room is nearly finished, and Josh is just wiping down the last wall.

As he was wiping, he felt a small indent and stopped. No one else was watching him so he investigated. He lightly felt around the indent then he pressed. The wall opened and the panel slid into itself and made a unique sound. The other three stopped and stared at him, only seeing his back. He completely covered the now open hidden storage area.

"What the hell?" Josh said.

Skye was closest and walked up next to him. There was a storage module in the cubby, and she reached in to grab it.

"Skye Stop!" Maddy yelled. Skye turned to her with her head cocked to one side like a puppy wondering what you mean. "I just want to scan the space in case there are any traps.

"Oh come on Maddy, you've been working with Reilly too long."

"Humor me please." She approached and scanned the opening. After a moment she picked up the wooden broom and slowly poked the handle into the opening. It went in the length of a hand and a laser cut the end of it off clean.

"Thank you miss paranoid!" Skye said to Maddy.

She tapped a few keys on her scanner and after a minute or two the interior lights of the cubby lit. "I think that means the security field is off." She used the broom again and nothing happened. Josh reached in and grabbed the storage module and handed it to Maddy, who connected it to a stand-alone computer.

Mark walked over, "So, what's on it?"

"Holy shit, the holy grail!"

~~~~~

Taylor was packing up the catch of the day and Shannon was cleaning up the camp area. They were just about ready to leave and had just enough fillet of cretaceous to feed the group plus a few, maybe 20 kilos or so, and Taylor had it all packed into an old pack he lined with plastic and a portable freezing unit to keep it fresh.

Since the kids were going to be late and the haul was not enough to warrant them bringing a rover to carry it back, they were getting ready to head out. They should be able to make it back to the bunk house around nightfall.

“Nate, need any help? I’m about done here.”

“No Jim, I’m done too. Saved us a kilo for dinner, well actually, it would not fit in the pack, so we need to eat it. I’ll cook.”

“Sounds good, I’ll collect some firewood and get the skillet out of my pack.”

Cooking the fish was relaxing and they shared a pot of coffee. Of course, they had potato’s and Jim found some of the things they call beets. Not sure what they really are. But they are red, somewhat round, the size of a bowling ball, and very sweet when cooked.

Just as they were finishing up their meal Maddy called.

“Sheriff, this is Shannon.”

The two looked at each other and nearly in unison, “So formal!”

“This is the Sheriff, go ahead Shannon.”

“We need for the two of you to be here as soon as possible.”

“Is it that urgent?” Taylor asked.

Josh responded, “Yes Commander.”

Looking at each other they start getting up off the ground. “We will be there in 7 hours.” Taylor said.

Together they put out the small fire and packed up all the gear, Jim cleaned the skillet as best he could at the shore and wrapped in in a cloth towel and stuffed in in his pack.

The bikes were all packed and ready to go when he returned, so they started up and headed off into the woods.

~~~~~

“Biological weapons?” Josh and Skye said at the same time looking at Maddy.

“Yes, it seems the sixers were using this facility for their own purposes. From what I can see Lucas and Mira visited multiple times and they do have a couple science types in their fold, and they wanted a way to erase the colony fast. They developed a very fast acting disabling agent, not deadly but the next best thing. A little in the water supply, perhaps airborne and the entire colony would be in a coma in a matter of minutes. The antidote is the only way to wake people up.”

“So, where it is?” Mark asked.

“We burned most of it, it looked like the frozen food. The reason they never used it was because the facility lost power for quite a while and it all thawed out. After 36 hours it becomes inert. They reestablished the power systems and were about to start making a new batch when Lucas notified them all to return to their camp. So, they all left this facility and headed back before the Pirates showed up.”

Skye spoke, “So, the reason we are all not dead or in a coma is because the Pirates showed up to blow us to hell. In a way, I want to say thank you.”

They all nodded at that thought.

“Sheriff to Shannon.” Came from the comm.

“Shannon here, go ahead Dad.”

“The Commander and I will be there just after midnight. Anything else we should know before we arrive?”

“No, we’re good for the moment. Just need some guidance and advise on a matter before we head back.”

“Understood.”

As they rode through the woods it was beginning to get dark. Automatically, the visor in the helmet enhanced the light and they never noticed just how dark it really was getting.

“That is Maddy’s way of telling me this is very important, very sensitive, and most likely will be classified.”

“That has piqued my curiosity, Jim. We should be there in a couple hours. How is the power level on your bike?”

“Just above half.” Jim said.

“Mine too.”

“We should be good and can recharge at the outpost.”

“Yep, that is true.”

Taylor activated the global positioning in the visor. “According to the GPS, there’s a deep stream, 3 meters, up ahead a click or so.”

“How wide is it?”

“Looks to be 5 to 10 meters or so I would guess. Why?”

“I’ll wait till we get closer.” Jim was in the lead. A few minutes later, he said, “Excellent!”

“What?” Replied Taylor.

“Follow me Commander.”

At that moment Maddy called. “Hang on a sec.” He said to his daughter.

To the right of the trail there was a slight upgrade to the edge of the stream. Jim Shannon accelerated and hit it, as he did, he pulled up lightly on the handlebars and sailed across a few meters above the stream.

“Yeeeeeeee Haaaaaaawwwwww!” He yelled.

“Dad?”

A moment later Taylor said the same thing.

“OK, you two sound like you’re having fun.” She said.

“Just jumped over a deep creek. Now that was fun!” He paused a moment. “What did you need?”

~~~~~

Skye and Josh were lying on the floor opposite the entry door. Mark was starting to doze off in the chair next to Maddy, who was busy reviewing the data on the storage device. The sound of the bikes broke the silence and all of them heard and woke up. A moment later Jim and Taylor walked through the door.

They walked up to Maddy and before she could speak, Taylor looked around. “This place is clean! Great job, all of you.” He looked her dead in the eye, “Deputy Shannon, you have something to report.”

~~~~~

Maddy finished her report in about ten minutes and told everyone she found the file the cubby uses to approve access. She cleared out the DNA files currently in the system and added hers and the rest of the gang including the Commander, Sheriff, Laura, Guzman and Dunham in case they were ever out here.

They spent the remainder of the night reviewing the data and inspecting all of the walls for more hidden cubbies. Nothing else was found with the exception of a fully charged sonic pistol and an old school 40 caliber projectile pistol with three extra clips. Taylor placed them in the cubby for safe keeping and reclosed the panel, hiding the cubby again.

Jim was looking at him, Taylor said, “In the event any of us are stuck out here and needs a weapon, we know where they are; the rest of the facility is cleared, cleaned, and very empty.”

Jim Shannon walked over to the freezer and found a small block of ice and placed it on a cart. Took a terra out of his pocket and placed it on top of the ice. It just sat there.

“What’s that all about?” Taylor asked.

The Sheriff looked at Maddy who was thinking about it.

“I get it. To test to see if the temperature in the freezer rises above freezing; if it does the terra will be in the ice and if the terra is in the ice, we know something happened here. Maybe someone left the door open or the power failed.”

“Good for you.” Jim said to his daughter.

“Hang on, I can set a camera to monitor the terra.” She tapped out on the keypad a bit, “There, it appears that the camera is monitoring the interior of the freezer, but we can use it to monitor the terra from the colony.”

Taylor spoke, “Good thinking. Now then, this data needs to be reviewed by the doc and Malcom in the event they find anything useful. But I want the storage module bobby trapped so if someone unauthorized attempts to use it, it becomes unusable. Also, it needs to be placed in the other vault on the special manifest.”

“Understood.” Maddy said. “Laura and I can set that up when we return.”

There was a chirp from Maddy’s pocket. She removed a small plex and looked, “It appears we have company.” She said, “A rover is approaching. Be here in 20-minutes.”

“Normally I would state it was Mira’s people, but they are all on the other side of the continent?”

“Let’s make it look like we ain’t here then. Skye, Reynolds, hide the rover and the bikes in the woods. The rest of you, gear up.”

~~~~~

They put the building to sleep and waited in the dark. From the drone all they could make out was there were two people. They approached the facility very fast and locked up all four wheels to stop. Jumped out of the vehicle and dashed for the door.

Reynolds and Josh were outside the facility and watched intently. He thought the taller person was Guzman, and wished he had his NVGs. Josh looked through his scope and said ‘Mom’.

“Mom! What are you doing out here?” Josh said to his Mother as she sprinted for the building. Those waiting inside for them to enter were well hidden, well-armed, and ready. “Commander, the new arrivals are Dr. Shannon and Guzman.”

“WHAT!” Taylor said.

Mark, Josh, Elisabeth, and Guzman went inside.

“Dr, may I ask just what the hell you and my second in command are doing pulling up on a facility several days from the colony?”

“You may Commander. When you all left, I thought nothing of this place. The next day I queried the computer and found a few files I did not have the permission to open. I asked Malcom and he tried but was not able to open them either; so, we recruited Deputy Reilly. After a time, she managed to open them, and we discovered this facility was being used to design and manufacture some type of toxin that puts the person into a coma.”

“Mom, we already know this. I have all the research on this module and cleared all of the systems in this facility.” She handed the module to her mother. “Here, you take it. You will be doing the review anyway.”

“So, Guzman. Why the field trip?” The Sheriff asked.

“Well, Dr. Shannon brought this to my attention, and we agreed not to take the chance over the comms. She found the antidote and needed to bring it here in the event you were incapacitated.”

“Oh, a rescue mission?” Jim smiled at his wife.

“Yes Jim, a rescue mission.” Elisabeth said, smiling. She looked at everyone, “Consider yourself rescued!” Everyone laughed.

Taylor spoke, “How many bunks are here?”

Skye replied, “10, I cleaned that room personally.”

“Turn down the beds and put a little chocolate on the pillow too?” Jim asked jokingly.

Skye just looked at him and rolled her eyes.

Jim looked at his wife, “What?” she said to him.

“You look different in soldier clothes. I see Casey made you a holster for your mini.” It was under her left arm to be as far out of the way as possible.

“It is rather comfortable, more so than I thought actually.”

Maddy added, “And no bra!”

“There is that too, yes.” Dr. Shannon replied to her daughter.

“Guzman, what supplies do you have in the rover?”

“Water, real and packed food, some ammo and a couple extra things. Grenades and a couple rifles.”

Taylor looked at him.

“We had no idea what was really happening and did not want to ask. In hindsight, we could have called and asked is everything was ok. But we reacted.”

“Actually, Commander. It was me who reacted, or rather over reacted. My entire family is out here. Sorry.”

“No need doc, you thought you were doing what needed to be done and dressed like a soldier to accomplish it. Very snappy.” He paused, “Guzman, is she a good shot?”

“Yes sir. It appears it is a Shannon thing.” He replied.

“Maybe tomorrow night we can have a shooting contest. See who is the best once and for all.”

“You know, Commander, when the pirates were about to be here Zoe asked to man the sonic cannon.”

“Lord help us all...” Taylor said.

They talked a while and Jim pulled out his adult refreshment and shared the remainder of the bottle. There was just enough.

“Let’s put this place to sleep. Josh, you get first watch. Wake up Guzman in 90-minutes. Follow down the line till morning. We can leave in the morning at first light. Head to the bunk house tomorrow night, then the camp and home.”

“Commander, a watch is not necessary. I learned how to secure the doors to this place. Better than a vault.” Maddy told Taylor.

Taylor raised his brow at her, “Well then. I say we all get a good night’s sleep then.”

~~~~~

After a full day of traveling they arrived back at the bunk house and Maddy and Mark went and woke it up. The rest of them set up a small camp, complete with a campfire lit by Elisabeth Shannon using her mini as she was instructed. The sun was about to set so the night creatures would be roaming soon.

“Nice fire.” Skye said. “One day we’ll have to show you how to start it the old fashion way.” She smiled at Skye and winked.

“I need 4 volunteers. You, you, you and you.” He pointed to Maddy, Josh, Mark, and Skye. “Go collect potatoes and onions. If I remember right, they are about 50 meters out there.”

They took off without a sound, just a salute.

Jim went into the bunk house and looked around. Eight people, ten bunks. He sat on one of them a moment and just looked at the wall, then he noticed a slight protrusion. He poked at it and tried to grab it and pull. Finally, after what seemed like too long for this simple task, he pulled the small cylinder from the wall.

Few centimeters long and a centimeter in diameter, about the size of his middle finger. He walked to the fire, which was nice by now. Potatoes and onions were on the perimeter of the fire and Commander Taylor just returned with Guzman, and they were carrying a very large, flat rock.

“Cretaceous Skillet”, Jim asked.

All Taylor could do was nod, it was quite heavy. They moved it into place with the assistance of everyone. Some leveling it by placing rock underneath and other lifting it, so they had the space to put the rocks where they needed to be.

Skye handed Taylor the root of a plant. He cut it in half and rubbed the cut sides on the rock.

“What is that?” Josh asked. Not the cook most of the others are, but a good eater.

“If I am not mistaken, the colonists call it the cooking root, can’t remember the real name of it but when heated it secretes an oil that is the best lubricant known. It is good for humans and works on machinery.”

Taylor winked at Josh and Elisabeth. “Josh, go grab the cooler bag. Time for dinner.”

They cooked maybe half a kilo for each person and still had enough to bring back and make several people happy. Taylor started smiling, “Maybe I need to give Boylan some of this fish.”

Josh smiled at the thought and shook his head.

“Josh, you got something to say?” Taylor asked.

“No Commander, it’s just that would make my night very long when he talks about it, complains, wonders why you did it. The theories, and the paranoia would be too much for this simple waiter to handle.”

Jim Shannon spoke up. “Commander, I say bring him a couple kilos. Tell him he was the first person you thought of and wanted him to have it. Even give him a recipe idea. Then,” He got that Shannon grin, “and only then does Josh here keep

tabs on the gift. How long will he talk about it before he eats it is the question. Josh can track the time and the closest wins the prize.”

“Ten terras each. Winner gets the pot.” Josh said.

“OK, ten terras each but Josh get ten percent for having to listen to him.” Josh smiled at his mother.

“Agreed” they all said and Maddy opened her plex and made the list.

Skye passed around a small bag, they had all seen it before for other wagers. “I guess everyone needs to toss in 10 terras but Josh, that’s your cut, your ante.” She paused, “Winner gets 70 terras.”

They all posted their guesses and passed the plex back to Maddy who shut it down after a scan of the area. “Nico’s a few clicks away, nothing much close. Small things mostly. OH, that’s interesting. A giant lizard.”

Taylor leaned over and looked, “Ancestral Komodo Dragon. Nasty beast. Bites you just a little but it injects a venom in you that makes you real sick. When you are weak and defenseless, it drops by and eats you. Although they look good to eat, they ain’t. Tried it once around day 45 after I got here. But thanks to them, I found the potato patch and survived.”

“Actually Commander, those potatoes you found are packed with everything you need. You can survive on a diet of just the potatoes for a somewhat extended period.”

“I know, I did. Felt great too. When everyone else arrived, they had no idea what had happened. I ran out of ammo after a couple months and made a few spears and a couple bows and a lot of arrows. Set a spoked perimeter around my camp by putting a point on trees about three meters long and burying them a bit in the ground. Kept a fire burning all the time and had leaves and wet wood near to make smoke.” He looked at the fire a moment, “Creatures treat smoke as danger and try to run away from it. That was how I survived out here OTG, before there were even gates.”

They talked a while and as the darkness fell, they heard stirring in the brush. “Is that purring?” Elisabeth asked.

“We need to get in the bunkhouse. There are no kitty cats now, but there are cats, big cats. If we hear one purring it is most likely a kitten and the parents can’t be far away.” Taylor said.

Everyone stood and walked to the bunk house. “Time for bed anyway.” Taylor said. “Reynolds, set the alarm.”

“Yes sir.”

Elisabeth was not taken by surprise as everyone started to strip and climb into a bunk. They were all in bed and nearly asleep in 10 minutes. Morning was coming in a few hours and they really needed to get back to the colony.

~~~~~

Morning appeared as the Sun shone brightly, apparently through the roof of the bunkhouse.

“Breakfast, and a little target practice.” The Sherriff said.

“My thoughts exactly. Doc, you OK with a rifle too?” Taylor asked.

“Not sure, never shot one. Can’t be too hard though, he can do it.” She pointed to her husband. Everyone laughed.

They spent an hour or so practicing, and the contest was 5 shots and various distances with the rifle; then three shots, fast, at 10 meters.

It went really well. The Sheriff went first, 100%. Taylor followed, 100%. Maddy went, 100%. Same for the rest including Elisabeth. Everyone in this group were marksman.

“I saw we call it a eight-way draw.” Taylor said.

“Agreed Commander.” Jim Shannon said, “Now, let’s get home.”

“Pack it up, move it out. I can do that.”

Everyone cleaned up, shut the bunkhouse down, and covered it, and packed the vehicles.



## *Chapter Eighteen*

The trip home was uneventful and as they approached the gates something looked a bit off. The number of guards on the tower was doubled. Taylor and the Sheriff noticed that instantly.

As they pulled in, Dunham approached at a very fast pace.

“Commander, we have a problem.” He said.

“Speak up Corporal.” Taylor said.

“It seems there is a large flock of carno’s out there heading our way.” Maddy looked at her plex. She tapped a few buttons and saw them.

“Commander, it looks like about 40 of them are gathered about 10 clicks straight OTG. Really surprised we missed them. They are stationary at the moment.”

“Whose idea was it to double the guard?” Taylor asked.

“Mine sir. Since we have the extra cannons, I put an extra in each of the towers. 3 cannons, 6-man team in each tower.”

Taylor looked at Dunham who was wondering if he did the right thing. “Good thinking. Now, we need to find out what these beasts are up to and why.”

“Commander,” Malcom said as he approached. “I’ve been watching them closely and they seem to be gathered for some event. Not sure what it is.”

At that moment, the Earth rumbled and several things on tables fell.

Maddy said to the group, “Of course. The carno’s can feel the sympathetic vibrations in the crust and are flocking to the safest area they can find. I need to run, meet me at HQ in an hour and I’ll have an answer for you.” She jumped into a rover and took off toward the orchard.

“I thought HQ was the other way?” Taylor said. Everyone looked at the rover, then back in the direction of HQ.

“I need a shower, see you in an hour at my place.” Sheriff said to the group.

“Reynolds tell everyone my place in an hour and not HQ. Including your wife.”

“Yes sir.” Reynolds said smiling.

They all left.

~~~~~

The Sheriff walked into the living room from his bedroom and Maddy and Laura were sitting on the couch talking in code. More of a shorthand really. They have worked together for so long they are like a single mind in some instances, this is one of them.

“What do you got?” Jim asked.

“A lot.” Laura replied. “We know at some point the tectonic plates need to adjust and the continents drift away. Looks like it’s starting. Nothing cataclysmic but the plates are beginning to move.”

“Are we safe?”

“Yes, we are. As a matter of fact, we calculated where we are to where we will be, and it seems that once the continents drift apart, we will be in what we know as Southern New Mexico.” She paused a moment. “but the pirates are feeling it a bit more intense at the moment.” She brought the drone camera online.

“The quakes destroyed several buildings and it appears a lava vent opened on the shore but far enough away from the boat, so it is safe.”

“They are ready to launch. It looks like in the next couple of days they will be off the landmass, and on the ocean. Where they plan to go is a mystery.”

“Is there any way we can plant a beacon on that boat?”

“Already did Dad. Took advantage of the situation. It is under the bow ornament, protected from the weather and the ocean, and easy access to the drone, then back here.”

The rest of the camping group entered. Maddy and Laura got them up to speed.

“So, you’re telling me the ground is going to shake from now on?” Taylor asked.

“No. Maybe on and off for the next few months. According to the readings, there should not be anything horrible. Scary yes, dangerous no.” She perked up and grinned, “On the upside, the local wildlife is scared to death of it so we should be relatively safe.”

They had a few drinks and as a group made some food, Elisabeth came home and joined in on the fellowship.

“Well, it seems the clinic endured without me.” She said. “A few minor injuries but nothing traumatic.” She chuckled at the comment, so did Maddy. “So, what did I miss?”

The group caught her up on the quakes and the ship.

~~~~~

“They got a lot more done in the last few weeks than I thought possible.” Mark said.

“I agree.” Laura added.

Commander Taylor walked in and just looked at everyone. Casey did not say a word when he saw the look on his face, he just sat there.

The Sheriff saw his face and asked, “What?”

“Your group needs to be a part of this classified operation.”

“Ten and down stay, the rest go to lunch.” Casey said loudly.

After a moment the room was cleared except for Taylor, Dunham, Jim, Maddy, Mark, Laura, Casey, Mark, Skye and Josh. Everyone took a seat and waited for Taylor to speak.

“A week ago, we knew there was about to be a big storm hit the pirate’s area, and they would all be under shelter to wait out the storm. I dispatched the ship, if you remember, to drop off replacements for the guards at the opening to the portal; but at the same time, I sent the fastest rover we had, chock full of water and supplies, and with two passengers. One passenger was to wait with the vehicle on this side of the portal, the other was to covertly get to the shore and plant an incendiary device in the keel of the ship.”

He paused for a breath. “This is a last-ditch effort in the event it comes to them or us.” He looked at Josh. “My first thought was to send Josh; he has become a valued member of Security and is learning quite fast.” Josh smiled and Taylor winked at him. “But Guzman said he had the perfect person picked out to be his partner in this. He was the covert operative who planted the device during the storm, and then went up the shoreline a few clicks and back into the trees and hid,

waiting for them to leave. He chose Corporal Vic Marro to be his second on this mission.”

“Victoria, wait. If they head there, how are they getting back.” Skye asked.

“Vic will wait on this side for them to depart in the ship. They are about to leave, most likely in the next couple days. Once they are gone, she will take the rover through, pick up Guzman, and head back here. Could take a few weeks to a month.”

“If it comes down to it, we can drop them into the drink, and they would never know until it happened. The wood in the keel and around it would just disintegrate, and the ship would sink.”

“Malcom seems to think they are heading for the far southern tip of the landmass. If the portals are spaced out like they appear to be, and encircle the planet as we think, there should be another one there; they sure will not be heading for the portal we think is in the middle of the ocean, the point we used to call the Bermuda Triangle. There is no place near that area for the ship to land, but a week or so back this way, there is a large field with different crops. They wanted to grab plant samples on the trip; in a few weeks, we will go pick them up.”

“I had a dinner set with Vic.” Skye said. “She cancelled it and could not say why, only that she needed to go OTG for a while.”

“Guzman and I had lunch set to swap information.” Mark said. “He said he was going OTG, and when I asked where, he said it was classified. I had the feeling it had to do with the Pirate’s but didn’t ask.”

“I had that feeling also.” Skye added.

“You were both right.” He pulled a book out of his pack. Worn, weathered, tattered. Maddy looked at the cover. THE ART OF FLIGHT.

“Maddy, of all the people here there are no other pilots. So, I need to make one and you’re it. Only because I know for a fact if you read that book you will have the book learning necessary to fly the shuttle. After that, I think I can get you flying in a week. After three, you will be solo and lead pilot for the colony. Goal is, in three weeks you will be flying to pick up the covert team. Vic will head through and let us know when she does. She knows where to meet you and when. You have your work cut out for you.”

“I’m...wow....thank you Commander. It is my honor and pleasure. Besides, I always wanted to learn to fly.” Maddy said.

“That’s not all of it. Once you get good enough and experienced enough, you need to teach others. I asked a few others to create course books for specific career paths, like agro, mechanics, power, but Casey I need you to come up with something on organizing and managing. Laura, believe it or not, you need to create an electronics course.” He looked at the Sheriff. “Can you teach anything?”

“Not really.” He replied.

Taylor smiled, “Can you come up with something on law enforcement? Lord, knows why, but people want to work for you.”

“I may throw something together.”

“Good.” Taylor said.

He turned and left the room. Without a word.

Mark grinned the now famous Shannon grin, “My wife, the shuttle pilot. Cool! Maybe we can go into orbit and...” He stopped there and looked at the Sheriff who had his fingers in his ears and was humming.

Everyone laughed.

## *Chapter Nineteen*

“The pirates are shoving off?” Mark said

“See if you can zoom in on the top of the mast, let’s see if they got a skull and crossbones flag.” The Sheriff said.

Taylor just shook his head.

Skye spoke, “It took them almost 3 years to build that boat. Should fit all of them.”

“All 56 or them.” Josh added.

“Hard to believe they lost that many in the last year. But storms and critters take their toll.” Taylor said.

“That, and the fact where they are the winters are worse. They were not ready for it and some of them froze to death.” Mark added.

“Skye, take a really good look. Any weather coming their way?” Taylor asked.

Skye flew the drone up, to its limit and did a slow 360. “Nope. Blue sky as far as we can see. They are good for maybe a week on the water.”

“I’m just interested in where they’re going.”

“Guzman managed to get the ear moved from the hut to the boat during the last storm without being seen, so we can hear them.” Josh added.

“Too bad they have not been doing their planning in the boat recently.”

“Commander, it looks like their ready to shove off.” Guzman said through the comm. He was there watching in a treetop through a scope.

The drone was over the ocean and Skye moved it to encompass the entire shoreline. Little ants could be seen on the shoreline packing as much gear and food and water into the boat.

It looked more like Noah’s ark. Essentially a ‘boat’ shape, 14 meters long and 6 meters wide. Close quarters for sure but for what duration.

The Sheriff asked, “Zoom in on the deck and give me a slow once over.”

The camera scanned from bow to stern. Not ornate, but impressive. They made it by hand.

“I see a couple buckets attached to rope on the stern.” Taylor chuckled.

“What would those be for?” Maddy asked.

Her Dad said, “Ever heard the term poop deck?”

“Eeeewwwww.” Maddy, Laura and Skye said in unison.

They watched as they loaded packages and boxes onto the ship for hours. When they stopped, they returned to the camp and had a last meal. No idea what they were saying, but they got the idea.

They were passing on their thanks to everyone for pitching in, and making this possible. Mira sat quiet. Across the cooking fire and to her right was Lucas. She was facing the water, and the sun so it was very easy and clear to see her face. She did not just dislike him, nor did she hate him. It was deeper than that, much deeper.

If she could pull him from the jaws of a nico with a simple tug on a rope, she would drop the rope and watch what happens.

They finished eating their meal and rather than cleaning up they tossed everything into the fire, and let it incinerate.

Everyone grabbed a very large container, obviously water. They made their way to the boat and secured all hatches

A few hours later they cut the blocks holding the ship where it was built. It slid cleanly into the sea on the smooth timbers that held it in place and started its journey.

They watched as a sail was raised and it sped off into the early stages of sunrise.

It was still somewhat dark and Maddy was on the controls at the moment. She flipped it to IR and found only one heat source in the camp. As she focused on it, she saw it was the fire they failed to fully extinguish. The pirates were gone, they would never again be a threat.

Guzman has been there a few days, living in the woods alone. He came through before dawn local when the gate area was clear, thanks to the drone watching out for him. He is able to talk to his daughter, or anyone else for that matter, whenever he wants so it is a glorified campout to him.

He implanted the boat, on the forward edge of the keel, with a couple pounds of C-47, and a receiver/detonator. He hid it well and repaired the spot, it was undetectable. He also put the mini EMP in the stern, where they did not take a lot of care in making it look perfect or smooth. It too was well hidden, and ready to deploy when needed.

If the Novans needed or wanted, they could do them some serious damage, and it may come to that one day, but not today.

Maddy set one of the mini drones to follow mode and was worried as to the result if they hit a storm. The drone had no place to hide.

“Bring up the satellite view of that area.” Taylor asked.

Half a year ago they managed to get a drone retrofitted with an orbital maneuvering system and was able to control it from the ground. Maddy and a few others launched and went into orbit.

Once they were in flight Skye took over as a shuttle pilot trainee; after all, flying is easy, landing takes practice. Maddy went to the cargo area and placed the drone in the airlock. Using her plex, she calculated the altitude and speed to compensate for the Earth’s gravity, a real geosync spot in orbit and launched it. It hit open space and the sun’s energy would charge the batteries and they would never run low.

She pointed the camera at the shuttle and zoomed in on the airlock. She was waving at the camera.

It was all calculated and ready to fly and in the same light, they had the ability to slow it down slightly to allow the Earth to rotate under it, giving them the entire planet in living color.

To their joy when they made the images over a week, the planet cooperated, and the cloud cover was very close to zero

As the drone image of the airlock grew on the screen in the Commanders office, everyone watched.

“Looks like a monkey in a box.” Jim Shannon said through the comm system.



They returned to Earth and went about their day. In the last few years every couple has had at least one child and the census was a 42% growth since the 11<sup>th</sup>, or maybe the very late 10<sup>th</sup> timeframe. Maybe 5 or so came through on the 11<sup>th</sup>, and they were very very happy to not be dead.

Elisabeth was busy and was overjoyed when several came forward to accept medical positions, as midwives and nurses. Two men and a woman from the 11<sup>th</sup> who made it through were in the medical field. A doctor specializing in allergies, immunology, and dermatology. The two nurses, a married couple, were both ER nurses and fit in from day one.

Nurse Ogawa was given the title of colony head nurse and Dr. Shannon was head of medicine. Everyone in medical worked for one of them, and if Dr. Shannon was in medical taking care of people, Nurse Ogawa was there assisting.

A few months ago, she implemented a training program. She selected 4 top notch nurses to become Nurse Practitioners. In seven or eight months, the first NP class will graduate. She needs to consider something else. Does she refer to them as a Nurse, Nurse Practitioner, or Doctor. Terra Nova needs more doctors and other than surgery and dispensing narcotics, they all pretty much have the same job. In reality, the bed does most of the work. When they graduate, she will refer to them as doctors. Taylor agreed when she brought it up to him, left the ball in her court actually. She is, after all, in charge. That was 7 months ago.

With the ability to make proper map of the surface, they saw where they were, a true view of the colony.

Printing out the images of the surface, the entire surface, a few artists made renditions of a globe. Once such artist made a globe that was 7 meters across in the central square. From Taylors perch, it was magnificent. Something that he just plain enjoyed looking at.

“On screen.” She said.

The vid displayed and you could see the shore and the boat. A couple red blips on the boat where the C-47 and the EMP were located. Another red blip off to one side of the area.

“What’s that?” The Sheriff asked.

“Not sure?” Skye said and trained the camera on it.

At full magnification, “Looks like a rock?” She said.

Josh spoke. “Didn’t we drop the original mini EMP on top of some outcropping?”

“Yes we did.” Taylor said.

There was also another blip, this one green, and it was making its way to the camp. Taylor pressed a button.

“Guzman, it looks clear in the camp but be careful. These guys are assholes, expect traps that are intended to kill you.”

“Yes sir.” He replied.

He had a mini drone with him and sent it into the camp to look around. The place was stripped bare.

An hour after he last spoke to the office, “Commander, the place is stripped clean. I really don’t want to head in to look in the closed boxes, but I would guess there is nothing but pain in them.”

“I agree. Stop by that rock and pick up the mini EMP, then head back to the portal. Vic will be there shortly.”

“Understood.”

He tapped the console again, “Lieutenant are you sure you want to drive back. The shuttle can be there in 6 hours if we take our time?”

“I’m sure sir. We have a few things to talk about, and one on one makes it easy.”

They disconnected. A moment later he pressed the button again, “Corporal Morro.”

“Yes Commander.” She replied.

“You are cleared to proceed to pick up our lost boy. But before you do, do you see that box, the blue one, next to the tree?”

“Yes sir.”

“Put it on the rover and when you stop for the night give me a call. Then, and only then, can you open it.”

She walked over to the tree and saw the box, “Sir, it has an electronic lock?”

“Yes it does. Talk to you tonight.”

“Yes sir. Morro out.”

She loaded the box into her rover and said goodbye to the three soldiers who were with her and drove through the portal.

As she did, she came to a stop and got out of the rover. Guzman walked up and gave her a hug, and a kiss. “Man did I miss you.” He said to her.

She smiled, “A month in an RV traveling cross country. Sounds like fun.”

When they released each other, they realized Skye had put the drone 10 meters away at eye level. Guzman and Victoria were a few centimeters different in height, and the image on the screen was quite beautiful. Her thought was to use it as a wedding gift, to get someone to paint it for her and they can hang it in their home.

They got into the rover and went to the rock and got the EMP, it took a while to climb, safely, but Vic made it up and back without injury. She enjoyed rock climbing, and this was fun to her, Guzman hated it.

“Commander, Vic has the toy, we’ll be home in a month or two. Any sightseeing you want us to do?”

“Well, we were looking at your possible route and see that in a few weeks, maybe a month, you’ll come to a separation in the landmass. No real way around it so get there and we’ll fly out and pick you up.”

“I’m just glad the space drone can act as a relay for comm. Talk later. Guzman out.”

Over the next month they watched as the duo made their way closer and closer to home. They located a few new species of dinosaur; one was really good eating. A single plasma ball removed its head, Guzman named it the Shannon Shot to poke fun at Josh, Josh didn’t mind since he knew it was in fun.

Maddy learned she was pregnant, as did Skye. Skye found out a few weeks after Maddy, and in reality, a bit before her and Josh’s wedding. They started living together full time 5 months ago and planned to have the wedding when Vic and Guzman returned.

Elisabeth put her foot down though. “No space travel for either of you until after delivery.” Then she smiled and added, “Never in my life did I ever expect to say those words.” All of them laughed.

Taylor flew to pick up the team and their rover. They had some of the meat with them, frozen. When grilled it tasted like beef. Some analysis by the science teams discovered it was beef. Cretaceous cows!

The pirates ended up on the absolute southern tip of the continent. Destined to become Antarctica. They had no real idea where they were so no one told them. They still had the drone overhead, but it was beginning to show its age.

They considered an orbital flight to send another one there but decided against it. They did locate another portal just off the coast as they predicted and it went back to 2149, their 2149. Unfortunately for them it was more than 100 meters off the surface, and they would need to build a really long ramp from multiple boats to get to it. These would need to be huge to remain stable enough for them to get there.

Since it is a one-way portal, here to there, eventually Lucas could design a terminus to make it bidirectional when he returned home, but on the other end it is also over water and they had no idea WHERE that water was located. They were out of drones to toss through to take a look.

Skye and Laura were interested in this portal and decided to focus the space drone on it and record for 24 hours. They found an interesting bit of information.

The other end was definitely in 2149, or in reality 2155. They had been there long enough and realized time passed equally on both ends of the portal, so 2155. From what she could see the portal was in the middle of the ocean, Pacific Ocean somewhere between Hawaii and south America. This time of year, if they did go through, the water temp would kill them all.

They had no idea if they knew this, but at least they would be gone.

Josh and Skye had their baby first, it was early but not too early. They talked about names and Skye suggested they name their daughter Kara, to let her name live on. No one else had that name in the colony, it would be her legacy.

Maddy and Mark had a boy a few days later and named him Washington. Lt. Alicia Washington, Wash to most, gave her life so the Shannon family could escape the pirates when they took over the colony. She was killed by Lucas, and Maddy asked Mark if she could name their son Washington Reynolds. It sounds better to her than Washington Shannon. Too many repetitive sounds, she said.

Reynolds didn't care really. He respected Wash and thought she was a wonderful leader. He learned a lot from her and would enjoy telling his son about his name sake.

Taylor went and collected Victoria and Guzman, and, in a few months, Guzman and Vic too were married. A lot of that had been happening recently and the colony is becoming a community. Taylor and Deborah were married a month after Guzman, and Skye and Jim Shannon stood next to them. At the end of the ceremony, after they were 'announced' for the first time and he kissed the bride, Skye held up her hand and everyone got quiet.

"Family and friends, this is my Mom," she pointed to her mother who was on her right, "...and this is my Dad." She punched Taylor lightly on his upper arm, then gave him a big hug. Mom joined in and the onlookers exploded!

Taylor toyed with the idea of changing his title to governor during a fishing trip with Jim Shannon.

In 20 or 30 years, when he turns the position over to someone because he's too old, they can do what they want. Most likely that will be Guzman, he has become a worthy candidate. But he is a military man. The colony needs a military presence for safety and security, but it also needs someone who is in touch with people. Someone to give a friendly face to the leadership position.

Of everyone in the core group, about 40 people or so, his first thoughts were to Elisabeth Shannon, but he spoke to her and she said no. She liked being a doctor. Round two went to Skye Tate. Someone he considered a daughter, even before he married her mother. Skye looked scared to death at the idea but agreed as long as the people she trusted were there to advise her; they stood by her side as the colony voted yea or nay in a verbal vote. It was not unanimous, Josh, her husband, voted nay. His reasoning was he would miss her. Everyone in the colony gave a collective 'Awwwww'

Governor Skye Tate, first governor of Terra Nova. Her responsibilities included everything inside the gate and the Sheriff's department worked for her, for the most part. She was an equal to Taylor and was responsible to improve the lives of all colonists.

Her first order of business was to stop calling it a colony. They completely separated themselves from the future, so they are alone. As they are alone now, she was not sure if Terra Nova was a city, town, state, county or whatever.

Over the next couple years, they created a new city near the shore, 50 kilometers from Taylor's fishing spot. There was a very large clearing and work started in the spring. It took several years to get it to where it was secure, but they managed.

Zoe aged well and was as smart as Maddy, maybe more, and as physical as Josh. She spent a year as an intern learning command from the governor and the mayors. She interned with Taylor for a few months and thought she wanted to be a deputy.

But that lasted six months and she returned to work for her mother and became, eventually, a doctor. At the age of 23 she went into practice and moved to Taylorville to run medical, moving to Hope Town when it became necessary.

The drone over the pirates on the Southern tip of the landmass died and fell into the ocean. They managed to keep tabs on them with the space drone and a few of them went through the portal and something went wrong. They abandoned the attempts. Their numbers were down to about 40 now, not enough to sustain a viable camp for very long.

Lucas and Mira went through the portal first. Several more followed them and the rest stayed. They still used the boat as a refuge and a meeting place and most of it was intact. They did not find the two surprises and Taylor did not have the heart to pop off the toys and destroy their existence.

The main people who were the thorn in Terra Nova's side were all gone. These last 40 people were pawns, and pawns on a chessboard may be expendable, but not pawns as people. He let them be and decided in a year if they are still there and surviving, he may take a trip to meet up with them.

But for now, life on Earth is paradise. The city of Terra Nova is thriving, and the new city of Taylorville is doing well. He hates the name, never liked anything named after him. But the residents voted on it and decided for themselves.

Terra Nova and Taylorville each have a mayor, and Skye is the governor over both. She fits well into the job, and the job fits her well too.

On that fishing trip Taylor asked Jim Shannon when he retires, who will take over for him. "Well Nate. I thought about that recently and decided I won't retire." He grinned at him. Even after all these years that grin still gets to Taylor. "Actually, I'm leaning towards Mark Reynolds with Laura Riley as his second. He's my second now and Laura is our backup. Either of them can do the job. But he is better suited because he is not a techno-wiz. Laura, being the tech head, analyzes

things too much but Mark uses intuition. I like that. I also know that kills you, but in this job, it is a perk.”

“Well, Guzman is my replacement, with Dunham as his second.”

“How does your wife being the Mayor?” Jim asked.

“She hates it but loves it at the same time. Her daughter is her boss. Ironic.”

Life in Terra Nova finally stabilized the towns grew, spread out, new town were born, and new families were merged and increased. It was a wonderful time, peaceful time, to be a Novan. They decided to rename the planet to Nova. The city of Terra Nova was and is the center of humanity.

Nova, meaning new. New planet, new start, new life. This entire adventure revolves around newness. Taylor and a few others took the shuttle and headed to the pirate’s area. They landed in a field half a kilometer from their camp, and passed over before they did, purposely, to get them interested.

Carter was there in the lead. He was in command of this pocket of humanity.

“Commander Taylor. We surrender. We are hungry, cold, and broken. Life in your brig would be better than life here.”

Taylor looked around, “Where are the rest of your people?” He saw about 15 or so.

“This is it. Several did not survive the weather, cold, lightning, hail. Some were eaten by creatures, and a very large percentage were fed up with life here and wanted to go home, so home they went. Through the rift. No idea if they drowned or not, your son included.”

Taylor did not say anything. He saw Carter, a man you tried to kill him a few years ago, was sincere. “Dunham, grab blankets, water, food. Get these people in a better place.”

Taylor stayed there more than a day until everyone was medically sound. He spoke to everyone. “The sixers are no more. Phoenix is no more. All that’s left are humans. We have a new way of life in the city of Terra Nova and it was the governor who sent me here to offer you the chance to be a part of our community once again. We have three towns now. Terra Nova, Taylorville – not my idea by the way, and Hope Town. You will be transported to Terra Nova and spend some time in medical, under guard of course. After a time you can take your place in the

community and join any of the three colonies you would like. If you have a trade, there is a job waiting for you. If not, Carter, security is an option you can request. One rule. Be nice to everyone. If you follow that one simple rule, no other rules are needed. There is plenty in all three communities and life in any of them is good. Terra Nova is the easiest, and Hope Town is the roughest.”

Carter thought a moment. “I believe I speak for all of us when I say we agree.”

Taylor looked at the crowd, 12 people including Carter, they all nodded agreement. “Well then, gather your belongings and welcome home.

Not a single one of them went back and collected anything. They just all boarded the shuttle. As they flew home, he reported in.

“Shuttle Freedom to Terra Nova.”

“Freedom, this is Terra Nova, go ahead.” It was Maddy.

“Maddy, let the governor and the mayor know, the city just increased by a dozen people. See you in a couple hours.”

“Understood, you are clear to land in the big field since it will be dark when you get back. Medical has been notified. Any issues we need to know about?”

“Couple broken bones, infection, malnutrition, nothing too hard.”

“Roger that Freedom. See you in a couple hours.”

“Freedom clear.”

“Terra Nova out!”

---THE END---