

# UC Riverside

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Goodbye Planet Eurydice

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**Author**

Vasquez, Sabrina

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Dr.  
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Dr. Richard Cardullo, Howard H Hays Jr. Chair, University Honors

## Abstract

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## Chapter 1

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The screening of the newscast at ARTOD headquarters served to remind employees why planet Eurydice's existence was a secret in the first place. At least, that's what Joy claimed when the other department heads asked her why her coworkers were laughing Director Melvin's humiliating answers.

The man was blight on the company's existence. Joy knew for a fact that most of the company heads agreed. The meeting she attended while Director Melvin was at the press conference cemented that. Despite ARTOD's claims that Director Melvin would be let go once the news surrounding Eurydice died down, Joy knew better.

Reporters, professionally dressed with tablets and recorders in hand, eagerly waited as Director Melvin browsed through the crowd to pick a reporter that might ask a question not terribly invasive. He failed.

A reporter, a young woman with dark hair and wide facial features, asked: "So are you saying that you are absolving your involvement in the Cohoba's launch?"

"No. I'm saying that I wasn't in control in the company during the time of the launch. It would be inaccurate of me to say that I had a direct role with the launch."

"That's inaccurate. According to company records, you were head of the Research Division when the Eurydice plans were being developed."

"Was it? I had no knowledge of it. If the plans were kept from the public, then it's no surprise that it was hidden from the directors."

"But once you assume power, you have access to what the company is doing."

“Why would I look into company actions over thirty years prior to my ascent as Head Director? As Director, I look to the company’s future--not the past.”

Though ARTOD was a company that was in a perpetual state of hurry, Joy could see that her employees were unhappy. Throughout her tenure with the company, she’d seen many employees come and go because of actions that occurred years before their employment. It was foolish to believe that CEOs, managers, bosses, and whatever other higher ups in the company didn’t dig into the past. It’s business strategy to do that. She would know--she had to do her fair share of digging and secret spilling in order to become the Media and Communications director. And because of her, she’d highlighted the best parts of the company and had been receiving positive impressions about the company until the Eurydice reports leaked, of course.

“So it was a gross oversight on your part?” Another reporter continued on screen.

“Oversight!” Director Melvin scoffed. Eurydice is the company’s future!”

A series of uproarious protests followed Director Melvin’s statement. Hands flew up to ask more questions. Reporters stood up and tried to call his attention. Director Melvin, though red in the face, looked entirely unruffled and unbothered by their queries. Joy even swore she saw a hint of a smile every time he finished a sentence.

“Now why would you say that if you had no knowledge about that?” Another reporter asked.

“Because now that the documents are leaked and the public--including myself--are aware of the planet, I will say that the company’s past actions regarding the mission to Eurydice were correct. Planet Eurydice is everything that Earth isn’t. It’s thriving and alive. We deserve to have that too.”

“So a private company, notorious for asteroid hoarding and land grabbing, gets to make that decision without confronting world leaders?”

“There’s no law governing properties outside Earth.”

A series of uproarious protests followed Director Melvin’s statement. Hands flew up to ask more questions. Reporters stood up and tried to call his attention. Director Melvin, though red in the face, looked entirely unruffled and unbothered by their queries. Joy even swore she saw a hint of a smile every time he finished a sentence.

She sneered at the projected press conference. Unable to hear any more, Joy turned away from the company floor and went to her private office. Director Melvin was possibly the worst person to represent the company. Though the man was brilliant with working numbers and figures, his media presence left much to be desired. But who was she to judge? She had her job, and she was going to do it. Speaking of doing her job...

Joy stepped outside of her office. She cleared her throat and called out to the office. Dozens of heads turned, expectant. “We had our fun, team. Now that you saw Director Melvin’s spectacular failure of an interview, y’all got your jobs cut out for you.

“Now, this is our goal: you’re gonna flood our social media pages with photos we received from Eurydice. You’re gonna put up profiles of company employees, specifically our researchers and other directors, of the organizations they donate to, the schools they’ve funded, the economic statistics we’ve done to improve the state of the US economy. We have to make it seem like this mission was done so that we can make the US as great as possible.

“In fact,” Joy started, a wicked grin on her face, “You’re gonna make this company out to be the best damn thing since air quality control. Now, if anyone needs me, I’ll be in my office.”

And just like that, Joy turned and went right back to her desk. Guiding the media team wasn't easy. Most people tended to assume that managing ARTOD's social media presence was just about making good company jokes--well, that too. Humor was a good way to get on the public's good side. For Joy, she worked with and coordinated deals with other companies, like land holders. Other employees under her fact-checked Earth's available land. Her job was also to make sure that whatever ARTOD was interested in acquiring, that none of the data on it was fudged. Essentially, her job was to find the truth for the company's interests. Joy's work had her regularly meet with Lucas, the head of the Public Relations department. His job was fudging the truth. He managed the company's presence with news outlets, journalists, and other unlikable creatures--having two variations of truth-workers managing the company together was necessary.

Using her desktop, Joy browsed news articles as more interviews and questions came up after the conference. Ah, and speaking of Lucas. There he was, on TV, dressed in a three-piece suit. He was offering comments about the state of Eurydice and the reasoning behind the secrecy. And he was handling it much more impersonally than Director Melvin was.

As Joy watched Lucas's interview with yet another reporter, she heard a rap on her office door. She welcomed them in, glad for the distraction. Though she didn't recognize the entire group that came in, she did recognize one. Michael Patel, the head of the security department for ARTOD. If he was in her office, something had gone wrong. She hardly ever saw him outside of the mandatory monthly director meetings. The one time she did see him, it was for the arrest of someone for stealing a radio from the technologies department. So what was he seeing her for?

Joy eyed their weapons. The group of three, armed with tasers and nightsticks, paused in her doorway. Michael Patel stepped forward.

“It’s been a while, Joy,” Michael said, a disarming smile on his face.

“It has. The last directorial meeting, if I’m correct?”

Michael nodded. He put his hands on his waist, pushing his suit jacket behind him and exposed his own taser. Well, Joy thought it was a taser--it certainly didn’t look like one. The US banned all guns once the population reached a billion people back in 1123. The casualties were too high as the population grew. A lot of inner city folks, frustrated with the lack of homes and extreme poverty took to using guns to trim down the population. But it was ridiculous for Michael to be holding a gun--except for the military, security teams like the police or FBI didn’t even hold guns. It was barbaric.

It was probably just her imagination.

“Well, I’ll get to the point,” Michael said. “After a brief investigation, we’ve determined that the Eurydice files were leaked from this branch of the company.”

Joy’s hands shook. “If that’s true, do you know who the perpetrator is?”

“Using only our data tracking? No,” Michael said. “But with the security footage and tracking the employees work schedules, most of the data we tracked regarding the Eurydice files come down to one employee: one Luisa Menchú.”

“Goddammit,” Joy said. She lifted her hands to her face and pinched the bridge of her nose as if to relieve a headache. “She has been acting odd lately. She’s been coming into work more often and staying longer. I always assumed it was because she needed the money.”

“Most people do,” Michael said. “But that adds to our suspicion of her involvement. Do you know where we can find her?”

“She should be in her cubicle,” Joy said. She moved to her desk and grabbed her DED. She flicked through the office floor. “No, wait. According to this, she’s in the cafeteria.”

“Mind sending that over here?” Michael requested.

“Sure,” Joy said. She held up her DED and aimed it at Michael’s offered arm. She swiped over the holographic screen. Michael checked his DED. He nodded.

“We’ll be on our way, then.” Michael motioned his officers out of the office with orders to head to the cafeteria. “One more thing. I’m also requesting a lock down. There’s no telling if someone helped her leak the files. With a company as secure as ARTOD, it’s not far fetched to assume she had aid.”

Joy tsked in annoyance. “Of course. Please let me know when you catch her. I’d love to let the employees go home on time. Angry people make for terrible situations, don’t you think?”

Michael hummed.

“Besides,” Joy continued, “I can’t exactly get it out that one of my employees did the deed, you know? It’d be easier for the company if she was behind bars,” Joy said. She waved him out. “Now leave. I’ve got a busy day today.”

And he left without another word.

Joy sat down at her desk. She put her head in her arms. After a moment to gather her nerves, she grabbed her personal tablet and selected “end” on the recording. She sent the recording to Luisa.

“Now you know they’re after you, girl,” Luisa muttered aloud. She typed another message. It’d be her last, she swore. She’d lose her position in the company if Michael found out she was working with Luisa. But luck was on her side--the security team was woefully impotent. If they did even the slightest amount of digging into Luisa, they’d find out she harbored an intense dislike for Director Melvin. It meant motivation--expose the company and you expose the director. That was how Luisa got Joy to work with her in the first place.

“Get rid of a man like that and clean up the mess? Well, you’re bound to be considered for the next Head Director,” Joy remembered Luisa saying.

Joy shook her head at the memory. Well, the woman had guts. Joy would’ve helped her just on that--the Head Director position was just a bonus, really.

Joy swiped at her tablet and sent the message. She put it down and picked up her designated company tablet. With a wide grin, Joy resumed her duties as Director of ARTOD. Now that her side job was done, it was time to make herself look good to the rest of the company by working her ass off.

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## Chapter 2

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“That went well,” said Lucas, a short plump man of fifty. He closed the car door behind him and joined Director Melvin. He ignored the knocks and the flash of the cameras against the dark tinted car window. “You’d think that more people would’ve shown. Well, more than what we planned.”

Director Melvin's chauffeur, after seating himself in the driver's seat, offered the two men refrigerated bottled water. The Nevada air and constant talk didn't allow for anything less than that.

Director Melvin took a large gulp of water before he said, "C'mon, it's Nevada. The location was still close enough to ARTOD in case of emergencies and the location of the conference as far out enough that it tripped up even *The New Yorker*."

Lucas raised an eyebrow. "Really. I could've sworn I saw no less than three reporters from *The New Yorker*. Not to mention *LA Times*, *USA Today*, *The Economist*, *The—*"

"I get it," Director Melvin said, mood sour. "Dozens of reporters were there."

Lucas cleared his throat. "Right. You managed to get your message across at least but I thought the plan was to keep the details of the leak quiet?"

Director Melvin rolled his eyes. "Reporters are like homeless people. They ramble about shit nobody cares about and beg you to give them something. You gotta hand them some change to keep them satisfied."

"And this, Director Melvin, is exactly why I'm the head of ARTOD's Public Relations department," Lucas said. "Watch what you're saying, Melvin. If somebody can steal files from under your nose, you won't even have time to think in public before they catch you saying something controversial."

Lucas took a long gulp of water as he watched Director Melvin out of the corner of his eye. Director Melvin reddened, which, if given the opportunity, he would likely try to place the blame on Nevada. This man's big mouth could ruin ARTOD easily. It was a wonder it took six years for something to happen.

Director Melvin took a long, slow breath before he looked at Lucas, a wide grin on his face. He loosened the tie on his suit. "I'm not worried. It's exactly as you said. Why do you think the non-disclosure agreements I had the employees sign were in place in the first place? Better to say nothing than risk something."

"Sir, I don't think you quite understand..."

"Don't tell me what I do and don't understand, Lucas," Director Melvin said, sharp.

Lucas sat up in his seat, stiff. "With all due respect, this is my job, Director. I'm to keep you from making any more costly mistakes to ARTOD."

*"I hired you, Lucas."*

"No you didn't, *Melvin*. ARTOD's board of directors hired me, and for good reason, too. Now I'm a director in my own right. If a scandal like this is all it takes to shake your foundation, maybe you don't deserve to run the company," Lucas said.

Shit, he thought as Director Melvin through his water across the limousine carpet. Whether Lucas stepped too far, they were words Director Melvin needed to hear. Perhaps they would remind him of the importance of public relations.

"Get out of the car," Director Melvin said, voice cold.

"Beg pardon?" Lucas asked, stunned. They were hardly near a major city and what did Director Melvin think he'd do, walk?

"Get out. I will not have talk like this wasting my precious time. Tell me what I can do, don't tell me what I shouldn't do. That's not something a Director needs to hear."

Lucas sighed. He may as well speak his mind if he were going to be kicked out. "If you want to run your company to the ground, go ahead and do it. Just remember, you have people's lives in space because of your selfishness. Don't let them suffer for it because of your anger."

“Let's be honest with ourselves,” said Director Melvin, casual. He typed on his DED and projected into the center of the limousine, green lighting glowing in Director Melvin's eyes. The documents of the Water Crisis of 1126, The Brazilian Rainforest Shrinkage in 1079, and ARTOD's Asteroid Hunt of 1108. “Do tell me what you see.”

Lucas tensed. They were all projects he had worked on in the past. Contracted to several firms and companies, he was called in as cleanup for whatever illegal and morally controversial scam had gone on in each organization.

“Seems like you know exactly what they are,” Director Melvin said, a sick grin on his face. With one swipe, the green of the hologram disappeared, though the color had not yet faded from Director Melvin's eyes. “None of these scandals lasted more than two weeks. That tells me you're damn good at your job.”

“Sir, I—”

“I don't care whatever the fuck you are, I need ARTOD as good as dead to the people. A person,” Director Melvin scoffed, “A person's shit opinions doesn't accomplish anything. As soon as people bunch up together, however...”

Director Melvin sat, reclined in the plush leather seating, chin up and speaking his insensitive comments with swagger. One would think that the man had never come across an obstacle on his way to power.

Yet, Lucas was not very different. What sacred pieces of land had he participated in the erasure of, how many personal struggles had he depicted as ramblings of a foreigner, ramblings of a teen, uneducated and unfit to comment? This was Lucas's reality: go to work, cover up something, go home, and sleep in a silk-sheet California King bed made from sweatshops in

China, an object which he had gotten for free after coming to the aid of a mattress store's lawsuit.

Lucas looked at Director Melvin, at his round, pink face, and wondered if he looked worse or better than him. Though, it amazed Lucas that Director Melvin had not yet noticed the lack of participating on Lucas's side. Perhaps he liked the sound of his voice too much.

Though perhaps that was their difference. Lucas could understand when to and when not to speak to someone while Director Melvin bumbled through personal boundaries like an oil tycoon through government regulation.

Lucas also knew what he had done and what he chose to do in pursuit of future success. Take a bio hazard and make it disappear? Sure, as long as he got his paycheck and discounted products. Success took sacrifice. Lucas learned that in business school.

Had Director Melvin never learned that or is he just that dense?

"Is this why you wanted me to come to the press conference? To give me a basic public communications lesson?" Lucas asked, bored. "I don't give two shits what you want. I work for the board, not you. You got yourself and the company into this mess. As far as you look, your career in space exploration is as good as done."

Lucas paused to savor the quiet of the limousine. Director Melvin had gone silent, perhaps mulling or ignoring whatever Lucas had said. Though, it wasn't Lucas's job to ensure Director Melvin understood his mistakes. Lucas just had to scrub them away.

Lucas said, "I don't know the rules of ARTOD. I know the rules of Public Relations. I'll do what I can. But what I can do is limited by whether you can keep your mouth shut. Any more complaints?" Director Melvin opened his mouth. "No? Good. This is my stop."

Though not quite the ARTOD base of operations, ARTOD'S Public Relations facility, was much plainer and innocuous than the hidden-in-the-desert ground control. Right in the heart of Phoenix, Nevada, PR only recently expanded due to the leaked ARTOD documents. Though busy hiring and making sure the employees released no more information than necessary, Lucas had to baby his employees like they were Director Melvin himself. Did no one understand what it meant to send no more comments than what was released in the documents themselves?

The only other incident they'd had happened nearly twenty years ago, when they initially sent the astronauts. There was no issue with that—just call it an experimental flight program and bam, one and done.

Lucas exited the car and waved a cheery goodbye to Director Melvin, who remained blank-faced in the car. Lucas wondered, as he entered the PR building, if anything he said got the man, though decided it didn't matter. It just meant another paycheck for Lucas if more mistakes were made.

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### Chapter 3

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Thirty-five years ago, the *Cohoba* embarked on its maiden voyage to the planet Eurydice. It carried ton upon ton of construction equipment, fifty human embryos, fifty incubators, two monkeys, two dogs, and twelve astronauts. The *Cohoba*, with its many pounds in its belly, carried its inhabitants through Eurydice's atmosphere as smoothly as a bullet. *Cohoba*'s hot metal frame heated Eurydice's winds and left trails of smoke. It pushed through the many layers Eurydice's atmosphere and aimed for the earth. Thousands of miles before it could crash, *Cohoba* ejected parachutes and slowed its plunge. Below the ship lay long ranges of mountain peaks, sharp edges that had never fallen away to anything but time and rain.

Before Eurydice's sharp mountain peaks could consume it, *Cohoba* adjusted its course. It exhaled large streams of air, straightening the craft and pushing it towards a more peaceful landing zone. *Cohoba* touched the earth with no marks save minor dents barely the sizes of a grass blades, and even so, the scars were those gathered from the many years in space.

Inside the ship, *Cohoba*'s lights flickered. The air conditioning units powered on. The cryo-chambers hissed. The first human stepped out.

"Welcome, Captain Malina. We have arrived," said *Cohoba*. "Please, remember to take your time getting up. Your body has been frozen for many years. You may have difficulty walking."

Captain Malina wiggled her toes. Her muscles twitched in response. "Thank you for the warning, *Cohoba*. How was the journey?" Captain Malina imagined that if *Cohoba* could smile, she would have.

"Very good, Captain. The data I gathered on the planet indicates that every prior report ARTOD made is correct. This planet is very fertile and contains rich supplies of iron, copper,

"How about the elements? Can we walk out without oxygen suits?" Captain Malina asked, as if it were a concern for her to breathe. The suits were an annoyance--the many years of training she put into the mission gave her near-permanent chafes.

"The air is about 10% lighter than Earth's due the larger presence of natural oxygen and nitrogen. You should not experience any symptoms," *Cohoba* said.

Captain Malina nodded and slowly stood and stretched her limbs. She said, "In that case, wake the others. We have a mission to do." Accompanied by the hisses of air from the fifteen other chambers, Captain Malina marched towards the front of the ship. She ordered the windows open.

What she saw was green--a color she did not know could be so bright or so present. A large meadow filled with grasses high enough to hide an entire legion of people, pushed against *Cohoba*. The glass windows held Captain Malina back from reaching out and touching them just as a mother would hold back a too willful child. She continued to stare out further into the

meadow in an attempt to see why ARTOD was so willing to send a previously failed NASA astronaut out on perhaps the most important mission of Earth history.

“Wow,” said Major Wickham from behind her. “Can we just live here forever?”

Captain Malina turned and raised her brow at Major Wickham. “You’re just seeing grass and you already want to live here? Home isn’t that bad.”

“Oh, home isn’t,” Major Wickham said. “Earth is. Maybe if you stepped outside of the training bays for once you’d have seen it. Besides, look at all the color.” Major Wickham stretched out his arms as if to take the view. “If I could always look at something like this, I’d die happy,” he said.

“It’s a nice view, I’ll admit,” Captain Malina said. “We’ll be here awhile.” She clapped him on the back and turned away from the windows. “Best to take in the view while you can.”

“Yes, ma’am,” he said.

Captain Malina turned to face the rest of her crew members. Most had taken to stretching off the lingering stiffness of the cryosleep. Two crew mates, Anais and Cory, examined the dogs and monkeys they’d brought aboard. All four animals were caged behind them.

“Captain,” they saluted as she stopped in front of them.

“I trust that the animals are doing well?” Captain Malina asked.

“Yes, ma’am. They’re ready whenever you are,” Anais said. Behind her were the two monkeys, Jojo and Maxy. “The trip hardly seems to have bugged them. Pretty soon they’ll be at the top of the food chain.”

“Nobody messes with an earth dog,” Cory added. A monkey reached out from behind the cage and smacked him on the back of the head. “Or monkey,” he said as he cringed in pain.

Captain Malina smirked. “They do seem to have handled the trip well.” She reached into the cage and shook the monkey’s hand, after which the monkey saluted her. “You’ve trained them well, Anais.”

“Thank you, Captain,” Anais said. “We’re hoping that if we encounter other similar species, the monkeys will show them how to behave.”

“More like teach them how to throw shit,” Cory said.

Captain Malina rolled her eyes. “If ARTOD thought them necessary, then it’s necessary. Don’t forget that, Cory.” Anais and Cory, zoologist and botanist respectively, were brought aboard in order to examine if the plant and wildlife of Planet Eurydice were able to support other means of life besides humans. Cory often argued with Anais, seeing the animals’ presence as a waste of resources. He argued that there was no need for them since the rovers ARTOD had loaded for them rendered the animals useless. Anais argued that the animals could interact with the environment and their natural instincts were able to show them how to explore the planet the way rovers or AIs couldn’t.

“Yes, Captain,” Cory said. “With that being said, how long will it be until we can get off of the *Cohoba*?”

“Good question, Cory.” Captain Malina turned her head to the ceiling and said, “*Cohoba*, has the ship sufficiently cooled?”

“Yes, Captain,” *Cohoba*. “I’ve taken the liberty of launching rovers *Destiny* and *Future*. I can pull their footage as we speak.”

“Go ahead, *Cohoba*.” Following her command, *Cohoba* gave a low hum of power. Captain Malina returned to the front deck. The once clear windows, which reflected the tall grass and bright blue skies, instead displayed the camera feeds from *Destiny* and *Future*.

*Destiny* pushed through the grass in the area. Rolling over whatever was in its way, it left crushed grass blades and mud behind it the further *Destiny* went.

“It looks like we might not be getting much from *Destiny* for a bit,” Captain Malina said. “Launch *Destiny*’s drones. We need to redirect *Destiny*’s path to something a bit more fruitful.”

As Captain Malina commanded, small drones numbering close to a dozen flew from *Destiny*’s back and hovered around it like flies. *Destiny*’s camera captured their rapid take off as it continued cutting grass.

“Captain,” Major Wickham called, “*Future*’s got something.”

Indeed, it did. *Future* looked to be stuck before a creek.

Captain Malina stared at it. She didn’t recall seeing any source of freshwater back at her home. South Dakota had long-lost most of their forestry. Most of the lands that were free were made into homes to compensate for the increase in population. It was much the same for the rest of the US--even now, the Midwest and Central areas of the United States had populations that rivaled that of China.

But pure water... pure water was strictly regulated by the remaining native reservations. They were one of the few groups that held the last sources of freshwater on the entire planet. The rest of the United States took to recycling waste products in order to have enough to supply the country. If they could locate a sizable water resource on Planet Eurydice, the US might be the first country to reintroduce freshwater to the population. And that’s why the Cohoban crew was sent there--collect resources and distribute them to the needed populace. Water was just the first source. What else could be found?

“*Cohoba*, tell *Future* to collect samples of rock, dirt, plants, and water. Have it do a brief analysis of the materials as it makes its way back here,” Captain Malina said. “Launch the drones

from *Future* as well. Have them follow the creek in opposite directions. Let's see if we can find ourselves a lake."

"Don't forget wildlife!" Anais said aloud from further in the ship. Her voice echoed through the corridor alongside the barks and grunts of the animals. "Make sure to have the drones track animals or insects. They'll be important in finding out what's edible or where it's safe to go."

"You heard her, *Cohoba*. And don't worry, Anais. We'll explore the land once we have a proper camp set up," Captain Malina said. Anais' affirmation immediately followed.

"To be honest, Captain," Major Wickham said. "I wasn't sure how much we could get from this planet. First grass, now water? It's already a thousand times better than Earth."

"Can you believe that Earth used to be like this? I used to see pictures like this in our academy materials," Cory said. He hovered close to the camera feed. He lifted his arms, almost to touch the *Future*'s feed. "Even my grandfather's selfies--it's almost crazy to think that this planet is alive. Not a floating rock." Cory smiled. "I can't wait to get my hands on the plants here. Who knows what they'll tell me about the planet."

"You may be a scientist, Dr. Cory Matthews," Major Wickham said, "but you're not a college professor anymore. Your real priority isn't understanding out what the planet was. It's figuring out what the land can do for us." He squeezed Cory's shoulder.

Cory rolled his eyes and rolled Major Wickham's off of him. "You have your job and I have mine, Wickham. I'm the botanist here, not you. You're just the guy who's gonna get us home." Cory stepped closer to Major Wickham. He sneered. "Don't think I don't know what you're really here, Wickham. You think you're so clever, to be handpicked by the Director of ARTOD himself? Please. Both you and I know you don't deserve to be here."

Major Wickham's chest heaved. He bared his teeth and barely stepped up to meet Cory before Captain Malina intervened.

"Enough," Captain Malina commanded. She stepped in and shoved the two apart. "You both have jobs and I have mine. It's my duty to ensure the survival of this mission as well as the survival of my crew mates. I can't do that if you kill each other."

Major Wickham backed off. "Yes, Captain," he said without a hint of anger in his voice.

"Yes, Captain," Cory echoed. He stared Major Wickham down.

"Good," Captain Malina said. "Now go join our other crew mates in the cargo bay. We're going to unload our supplies soon."

Major Wickham and Cory saluted her and walked away.

"Captain," called *Cohoba*. "Did I hear something about unloading?"

"You sure did. Send down the survey bots to cut down the grass. It's time to set up camp."

"Yes, Captain. Might I suggest Rock Playlist Three?"

"Great suggestion, *Cohoba*. Play it. We could use a little bit of Earth culture on Planet Eurydice, don't you think?" Captain Malina asked. *Cohoba* agreed.

Captain Malina grabbed her tablet and began her patrol through *Cohoba*'s corridor. Accompanied by the loud thrums of guitars, various crew mates saluted her as she walked past them.

Outside of the ship, two survey bots, bulky ten-foot-tall machines, cut down the grass and plants surrounding *Cohoba*. It ground the plants to a paste-like substance which they then collected and burned. They made short work of the field, taking a mere twenty minutes to cut down the grass that was nearly as tall as the machines themselves. Before long, a kilometers

worth of grass, enough to house at least five tents, was cut down. The goal was twenty tents, one for each of the crew mates and eight to house the supplies to take back to Earth. At least four kilometers worth of field would be cut down before the Cohoban crew ever stepped outside.

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## Chapter 4

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Captain Malina picked at *Future's* underbelly. Dozens of branches and rocks had been scratching at the bottom of it. Some were lodged in its tracked legs, slowing its speed down. Though they had extra parts for repair onboard the *Cohoba*, the damage wasn't severe enough to

warrant a repair. All it really needed was a good scrubbing and cleaning to get all the dirt out and *Future* would be fine.

Captain Malina stood up. She stretched her arms. She felt good. Being on Eurydice had done her some good. Part of it may have been the long training she had with ARTOD but even with her job of directing the *Cohoban* crew, she felt much lighter. Freer. Maybe it was the change of scenery. Maybe it was the fresh air, which was deemed so clean that she wanted to bottle it and save it for herself.

Moving away from a facility where all she learned the mechanics of the ship and robots, memorizing the environment and analyzing the data of Eurydice to actually being there and seeing what she'd been dreaming about for months...she could ask for nothing better.

Captain Malina checked her wrist. Looking at her DED, which was strapped to her arm, she made to click something on the screen. *Future* whirred, it's lights and wheels resuming function. It turned its camera to look at Captain Malina, who looked at her DED and saw the footage it was taking reflected back at her. Setting *Future* to "follow mode," she made her way back to base camp.

She, by no means, meant to get there quickly. It had been two weeks since they initially landed. Two weeks full of Major Wickham and Cory's bickering. It was nice to be alone in Eurydice's forests. The towering trees and wild bushes wouldn't pull her into their arguments.

Anais was a blessing. Her positive attitude and natural curiosity made her invaluable to navigating their way around the planet. Even her companions, the monkeys and dogs, managed the landscape well.

"It tells us a lot about not only their adaptability but ours as well," Anais said. "The dogs have proven that the grass is non-toxic. The fish... if that's what we can call them... we've been

able to get from the rivers nearby are also edible. Bast and Set are actually picky eaters so it's awesome that they've eaten what they've had."

"How about the monkeys?" Captain Malina asked.

"The monkeys," Anais continued, "are roaming the area pretty well. I've established that they are to stay close to the campsite. They've pushed the boundaries on that, though."

"Do we need to put them back onboard the *Cohoba*?"

"No!" Anais panicked. "It's actually great that they want to wander! It means that they think that the area's safe. So no danger for us any time soon. And no putting them back on the ship."

"If you say so," Captain Malina said, entirely too serious.

"Like the dogs, Jojo and Maxy have been trying the natural foods that have been in the area. No negative effects either. If anything, they've gotten healthier. Goes to show how bad of a shape Earth was in, huh?"

"That's good news," Captain Malina said. "How long do you think until you can let the monkeys and dogs fully loose?"

Anais hummed. "Maybe a week. At least that, so we can let the rovers roam around somewhere and see if there's anything we missed."

That conversation took place a week ago. Today was the day that Anais was to let the animals wander. Captain Malina was sure they'd be fine. Anais wouldn't let them go if they wouldn't be okay. That was her job.

As Captain Malina neared base camp, she felt ecstatic. The *Cohoba* analyzed the planet's landmarks perfectly and situated them in the best and safest location possible. Soon, they'd send

the rovers to analyze specific landmarks--like the mountain range several dozens of miles to the South--and set up a second camp for mining.

Captain Malina entered the camp. She waved hello to her crew mates, who walked back and forth between the tents and the *Cohoba*. Many were lugging machine equipment off of *Cohoba* and many more were taking samples of dirt, grass, bark, and leaves into the tents.

She moved into the nearest tent. A tall man, hunched over his desk, was analyzing dirt samples. That's what she assumed when she looked over the waist-high tubs of earth.

"Dr. Antoun," Captain Malina called. His eyes stayed glued to his desk. The

"You scared me, Captain!" Dr. Antoun said, clutching his chest. He pointed his finger at Captain Malina. "And I told you to call me Fahim. If we're going to be living on Eurydice, we may as well use first names. And will you please let me use yours?"

"I do have to maintain some form of decorum, Fahim," Captain Malina said. "We will be here a while, just like you said. Some of us will get complacent during the time we're here. I have to remind people that I'm in charge."

Fahim nodded vigorously. "Still, even you can't work forever."

"You're one to talk." Captain Malina pointed at the soil samples. Fahim had the decency to look chagrined.

"Well, it's great stuff. It's almost like seeing a puppy for the first time," Fahim said, looked entirely charmed by the soil. He jogged over to a barrel of dirt. He put his gloved hand in it and felt it run through his hands. "It's got a great porosity. It retains water very well and the amount of nutrients... well, suffice to say that a cow couldn't produce manure better than this."

"So you feel good about it?" she asked.

“Good? I feel godly!” Fahim exclaimed. “The possibilities with this soil... I’ve been watching the results of the soil mixtures for a week now and--”

“Soil mixtures?” Captain Malina asked. “I never heard about that.”

“Oh, well, I got the approval from Major Wickham,” Fahim said. “He told me I had permission to do so. Besides, the experiment is totally safe. I’ve got it right there on the table.”

Captain Malina frowned. Major Wickham never notified her or sent the approval forms. It was what their DEDs were for. “Very well. Continue.”

Fahim ran back over to his desk. He took off his dirtied gloves and put on clean ones. “I’ll run you through what I see on the microscope. First, I’ll tell you about how Earth fertilizer works.”

Captain Malina peered at the desk. Different microscope slides were on the desk. Some were labeled as belonging to Earth and others Eurydice.

“What people normally do, and Midwest farmers do fervently, is put down fertilizer when the soil is missing vital nutrients for the plants to grow. But that’s basically giving them shots of energy drinks when what they really need is a good diet.

“But this dirt is unlike any of the organic fertilizer we can produce. It doesn’t lose it’s effectiveness--or at least it hasn’t yet--even with the varied sands I’ve used. It’s like it adopts the dirt.” Fahim grabbed a clear cylinder and shook it.

“Smell,” he said. Captain Malina did as told. “Now this one.” He offered her the same can. And then a third, which was certainly the foulest of the bunch.

“The first sample just one with Eurydicean soil. The second was Eurydicean soil and Earth soil.”

“They smelled exactly the same,” Captain said.

“Exactly. And they look exactly the same on the microscopic level too!” Fahim exclaimed. “The third is Earth soil. Terrible, right?”

Fascinated, Captain Malina said, “So the Eurydicean soil converted that horrible mess and basically changed its composition? That should be impossible.”

“We’re looking right at it, Captain. It’s definitely possible. Can you imagine the possibilities for Earth? We could revolutionize conservation efforts! Turn deserts into forests! We could stop lakes from drying out!”

“Slow down, Fahim.” Captain Malina said. “You said it yourself. It converted Earth’s soil into Eurydicean soil. If we did all that, all of Earth would be changed.”

“What’s wrong with that? Earth is a shit hole.”

Captain Malina bit her lip. She took a closer look at the soil samples. She shook her head.

“That’s not for us to decide. We’re scientists. Adventurers, I would even say. Our job is just to get these samples, do the research, and send them back home. ARTOD will talk to the government, and then we’ll see if any of those things will be possible.”

“The government? ARTOD is a private company, Captain. Private companies aren’t known for talking to governments. They hate them, in fact,” Fahim said.

“ARTOD will do the right thing,” Captain Malina insisted. “In the meantime, continue working. You’ve done well so far.”

“Thanks, Captain.” Fahim began turning back to his desk only to look back at Captain Malina. “If you don’t mind, I’d like to get your approval on working with our agrologist. I’d like to see the effects that Earth crops have on Eurydicean soil.”

“Permission granted. And you mean Archana Pentela, correct? Still can’t say her name, can you?” Captain Malina teased.

Fahim rubbed the back of his head. "I'm afraid if I say it, she'll appear and beat me over the back of the head."

"Do you still call her a farmer?" Captain Malina asked. Fahim turned his head to the side and pouted. "Then that's why." She patted Fahim on the back. "I'll send her to you when I do rounds."

With a brief goodbye, Captain Malina left the tent and began doing rounds, exactly as she said she would. She checked in on her other ten crewmembers, and she never left disappointed. Progress with Planet Eurydice seemed to be going incredibly well. The only real trouble that existed was the conflict between Cory and Major Wickham. She eyed them as they bickered across camp. As soon as she saw Anais, perhaps she'd go for a walk. Captain Malina very much enjoyed the serenity of the forests. The gargantuan trees shielded her from the ridiculous responsibilities her job required. And speaking of Anais...

Anais made her way to separate Cory and Major Wickham for the umpteenth time. Captain Malina joined them. She only caught the tail end of Cory's argument.

"--and you think you've got authority around here. I'm only following the Captain's orders. If you think you're in any way equal to her--"

"You're under my orders too, Cory. What I say goes," Major Wickham said.

"He's right, Cory," Captain Malina said. "He is your superior." Major Wickham smirked. "That being said, if you receive an order and you question its integrity, you have permission to bring it up to me." Cory turned his nose up at Major Wickham. "That does not mean," Captain Malina continued, "that you may bring me into your petty disagreements. Am I clear?"

"Yes, captain," they both stated.

"Dismissed."

Cory and Major Wickham left, though not without elbowing one another. Captain Malina only shook her head at them. Anais stifled a laugh. Captain Malina turned to Anais. Anais immediately began laughing at Captain Malina's raised eyebrow.

"Is something funny?" she asked.

"No, no," Anais gasped. "It's like you're their mom or something."

Captain Malina's nose wrinkled. "I've never had a child nor do I intend to."

"That's not what I'm saying, Captain." Anais slowed her laughter though she did not quit smiling. "They only know how to act properly around you, Captain. They really respect you."

"I'm afraid that's not entirely true," Captain Malina replied. "Major Wickham is known to being a bit of a rebel. He likens himself a captain."

"Oh, so he's been going behind your back again? Let me guess, he's giving some people orders they don't agree with. I thought Cory was just exaggerating again," Anais said, thoughtful.

"Close," Captain Malina said. "He's granting permission to everyone who thinks they know what's best for Earth."

"I would think that most people here like him for that. You don't?" Anais asked.

"Not really. It's dangerous to the mission if people go around doing what they want."

"Maybe you're too much of a stickler for rules," Anais said. "I think that everyone is just really happy to be here. It's hard not to get excited about the planet. It's so unlike Earth, you know?"

"I know," Captain Malina said, voice hoarse. "I do. I grew up in some of the worst conditions. The East Coast got hit by some of the worst hurricanes in history. They even had to create a new category because they became so violent. I practically lived in underwater ruins."

“I grew up in Arizona. We didn’t get hurricanes. We got droughts. Eternal droughts,” Anais said. “So while I don’t exactly know what you went through, I do know struggle.” Anais gestured to the camp. “I talk to the crew a lot. Almost all of them see Eurydice as a chance to start over. Experience something safe for the first time in their lives.”

“Safe is addicting,” Captain Malina said. “I know because I feel it. I already feel a part of me that wants to stay. I feel it everytime I walk into Eurydice’s forests.” Captain Malina rubbed her arms, pushing back the goosebumps. “But if we do our jobs right, we’ll come back someday.”

“If we do our jobs right,” Anais repeated. She frowned though Captain Malina didn’t seem to notice.

“Once we get enough samples and resources collected, we’ll have to head home.”

“Do you know when that might be?” Anais asked.

“Six months, maybe.”

“So soon?”

“Most likely,” Captain Malina replied. “We’ve already been gone for what, thirty-five years?” And that was just the departure. Thankfully, they’d developed cryotechnology. It made it easy for the astronauts to make the trip but incredibly difficult for ARTOD ground control to make sure everything was alright.

“Earth can’t wait any longer. If ARTOD could have us back in a week, they’d have us do it. But our machines can only analyze data so quickly. And besides, Chidi has been sending messages back to ARTOD consistently, too. They know exactly how far along we are.”

“I think I’ll go talk to Chidi, then,” Anais said. “I’m curious to see what kind of data he’s been sending.”

“You’d be staring at decades worth of data. It’s a waste of time,” Captain Malina said.

“Time better off spent doing your job.”

“And we had a nice heart to heart too,” Anais said. “I’ll see him anyway. I talk to him the least out of all my coworkers.”

Anais began walking away before Captain Malina called out, “Your job first. Didn’t you tell me the monkeys and dogs would be let loose?”

Anais paused her gait. She sighed and joined Captain Malina.

“So I did.”

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## Chapter 5

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Route 208 cut through the Wilson Canyon rock cliffs and Luisa, car speeding over the limit, checked her buzzing watch. She knew enough about spy on companies to leave the office belongings—like the PAD—back at the office. If she still had that thing, she was sure ARTOD would've been able to find her relatively fast. At least the nighttime cover and tall rock cliffs hid her car from view. Even billion-dollar companies would have a hard time following her. And if ARTOD security teams tried to get to her once she reached the Plata Paiute Colony, they'd never be let in, never mind regular American citizens. Her people, the Namu of the Plata Paiute Colony, would never allow a company that takes over lands and turns them in for profit inside their own land.

Her watch buzzed again. She gave her watch a command.

"Thanks for the help," the message read.

Luisa hummed. There weren't many who knew her number, and she certainly hadn't done anything kind lately to prompt such a message. That really only left the last person she benefited... Joy, huh? The woman was a good boss, for the short months Luisa worked with the company. Without her ID and password info, Luisa never would've been able to access the Eurydice files. While those files certainly weren't what she'd been after, they were the next best thing. Who knew when the files would have been released, if ever—when the planet's lands, resources, and animals were being sold on the market? When ARTOD built an amusement park and wanted people to visit? She hoped the media wrecked ARTOD's image. Even better if they burned their buildings down.

She'd amuse those thoughts later. She'd just arrived to the city of Plata. Small buildings, once still hand-made made from brick and concrete and not printers, told her that. She remembered running through the same streets and being surprised when she went off to college.

Luisa was often made fun of by her classmates when she expressed amazement or wonder with the new and clean buildings, the ones that had good ventilation and didn't suffer from regular dust storms. They made her feel like she was disadvantaged to live in a city like Plata.

But she loved her city. No one could take that away from her. That's why every time she returned from her interviews, reports, or whatever else she needed to investigate, she always went home. Eating her brother's fry bread and fish freshly caught from the reservation's river felt cleansing to her body. With ARTOD, with most cities she's been too, really, she relied on freeze-dried foods or things that had a longer shelf life. With most of the farmland gone in the US, it was hard to eat something fresh. It did help the Namu make a good profit. Catching fish and farming sustainably kept the land in good shape. The struggle was the poaching that occurred. Several tribe members were posted around the river and farmland to keep people from trying to steal what was rightfully the reservation's.

Luisa waved to a shop keep, who waved back. Some stores were just starting to open up. More people were around as well and while it wasn't unusual for Luisa to see people around early in the morning, it was unusual to see construction workers. Their bright orange and yellow vests burned brighter than the morning sun and the desert that surrounded the city. She wasn't aware of any buildings being remodeled. She might have to do some asking around the city.

Luisa heard the crowd as she neared the entrance to the reservation. Long lines of people, many with brown faces like hers, chained their arms together. The people, with their border-like bodies, prevented any movement from the construction vehicles or construction workers. Luisa grinned. She was proud of her people and remembered doing the same when she was younger, back when the Great Lakes dried out and the government wanted to use their lands for

freshwater. She remembered standing in line with her people, hooking her arms through her Brothers and Sisters, and the tribe all chanting together, refusing to let their land be taken.

Now they shouted at the construction workers, their “leave”’s, “que se vayan”’s, demands of dismissal in what might have been as many as fifteen different indigenous languages. After some lands had been claimed by the government with the drought of 2122, lots of indigenous groups banded together in support of one another. The reservations were allowed to grow bigger and reclaim more lands. Including Alaska, they numbered almost as many as ten million and yet were still considered the smallest ethnic group in the US. Luisa herself was a child of at least three nations. The Namu was the nation she was raised with and identified with the most. Now her lands were being threatened again.

The voices of the protesters aided the strength of the crowd. Moving construction crews paused, intimidated, by the large crowds. Some groups were even performing hakas, the dances of warriors, and the construction crews backed off against the might of the protesters.

Luisa, still in her car, looked around the group of workers. There were at least one hundred of them though their paths and vehicles were blocked by the much larger protesting groups. Two construction vehicles were overturned. A third, a bulldozer, drove into the crowd. The people converged around the bulldozer and pushed against it. The driver yelled as the protester’s rocked the machine, forcing them to stay seated to prevent being knocked over.

Luisa hurried out of her car and joined the crowd pushing the bulldozer. She raised her wrist and keeps parallel to her chest. Using her watch, she began recording the scene. She forced her way through people and made her way to the front of the crowd, to the ones that were pushing the vehicle. She climbed on top of the vehicle, making sure to record the protesters.

“Get out, you filthy animals!” yelled the driver. “We have permission to be here!”

The crowd rocked harder against the machine. The driver yelled louder. Luisa rolled her eyes. Moving to the opposite side of the bulldozer, she peeked at the driver inside. Their back was pressed against the door. They didn't seem to notice her. Luisa tested the door. She heard a click. Unlocked. Luisa swung the door open and the driver tumbled to the ground. The driver was smaller than Luisa and made it easy for her to grab them.

"Let me go!" They yelled. "You have no right to do this!"

Luisa said, "You're on Namu property. This crowd wouldn't be here if you were allowed on our property."

The driver pushed themselves up and onto their feet. They pressed themselves against the bulldozer, which had ceased rocking. The crowd thinned around the bulldozer thinned. Seeing the absence of the driver. They raised their chin at Luisa, defiant.

"How long have you and your company been here?" Luisa asked.

"If you were with the crowd, you'd know," the driver said.

Luisa took a threatening step towards the driver, who flinched.

"A day! We literally just got here today," they said.

Today? So they arrived the day after the Eurydice files were leaked. That couldn't be a coincidence.

Luisa said, "Alright. You're also gonna tell me who employed your company to work here."

"That's private info," the driver snapped.

Luisa asked. "Do I really have to threaten you with the crowd?"

The driver glared at the ground. "I don't know. And it's not like everything is done in

person. Our company got the order from some huge company. Sounds something like arcane... artsy... rotund..."

"ARTOD," Luisa snarled. Of course, it was ARTOD. They were a major force in the land resource game. They made a living in the market with selling natural environmental products to people who weren't familiar with wooden products or animal fur. There'd been several talks and visits from the ARTOD CEO's on indigenous lands to see if they could acquire land titles and deeds.

"Yeah, ARTOD! Please, let me go. I can't breathe," they begged.

"Well," Luisa said, "I've just got one more thing to ask you." Luisa let go of the driver. They rubbed at their neck. "Why would a simple construction worker know all about this?"

They cleared her throat. "You ain't the only woman trying to do something good. I got a family and siblings to feed. I can do that a lot easier if we get into those fishing pools y'all have got over there." She rubbed the back of her wrist against her eyes. The dirt on her arms caught the tears in her eyes. "I'm a construction supervisor. I don't get money if I don't supervise the work."

Luisa sighed. "I get it. It's not easy."

"It ain't. All I do is go to work, try to make something and give my family something that is real. Not freeze-dried or artificial tasting." She raised her head to the brown sky. "Remember when it was blue? I used to pretend I was at a Lake Erie. I'm from that area. My family moved when it dried out. I used to eat some Chinook. It was one of the best fish I ever had. Better than salmon."

"It is better than salmon," Luisa said, grinning.

The driver continued with hardly a pause in her breath, “We barely get salmon anymore, you know? Lots of freshwater spots dried up. But I got to visit a lake when I was little. I just wanted to give my kids that same taste. Tell them what it was like to grow up in a world where you couldn’t only see the wild animals but taste ‘em too.”

Luisa bit her lip. “Hey, what’s your name?”

“Shania,” she said, quiet. “Shania Whelan.”

“Shania,” Luisa said. “I understand why you want all that for your kids. But you can’t do that at the expense of others. If your company gets into our lands, you’re going to ruin the land. You will build homes and businesses that will pollute everything around it. These rivers will dry out too.”

“We’ve got Clean Water Initiatives, the Green Act, the Game Regulation System—”

“And how long have all those been around? A hundred years? Guess where that led us.” Luisa pointed to the surrounding environment. The dirt roads lacked any more of green. Even for a high-temperature area, cactus or patches of grass sagged and seemed to want to disappear back into the earth. The sky, a dim brown, tinted the earth and nearly matched the color of the ground.

Luisa continued, “You have to understand that as long as there’s some greedy companies, nothing is safe.”

Shania stayed quiet.

“Shania, I need you to help me.” Luisa grabbed Shania’s hands and held them. “I need a copy of the work order. If you don’t help me, those things will die out forever. Not just the fish but the very things we love, the lands, the rivers, they’ll be gone.”

Shania looked at Luisa. She nodded. “I’ll give you the order.”

Luisa let go of Shania's hands. Luisa watched as Shania typed on her DED, one similar to the one that ARTOD gave their employees. Pointing their DED at Luisa, she swiped and sent the document to Luisa.

"There," Shania said. "I know you probably think I'm despicable for working for a group like this."

"I don't," Luisa said, quiet. "I think you're someone who's just trying to survive."

Shania looked at Luisa. After a brief moment of silence, she asked, "Is there anything else I can do?"

Luisa shook her head. "It'd be good if you can take your company and leave..."

Shania grimaced. "I'll see what I can do."

"...but other than that," Luisa said. "It was nice meeting you, Shania." Luisa reached out her hand. "Good luck with your family."

They shook hands. "Good luck... in general."

Luisa chuckled. "Word of advice, before you go. Take off that construction outfit. The crowd probably won't notice you if you look like them."

"Guess you're right." Shania took off her neon orange vest. She stuffed it under her shirt. "See ya."

Luisa waved goodbye as Shania peered around the bulldozer before joining the protesting crowd. Even as the sounds of the protesters quieted, Luisa stayed with the bulldozer.

Using her watch, Luisa projected the word document and brightened the hologram, so she could read it clearly. She scrolled through the work order. Most of it was written in legal jargon and every page had several non-disclosure clauses. ARTOD clearly wanted to keep the whole

thing secret. Thankfully, Shania was easy to get information from. The protesters around certainly helped.

ARTOD wanted the lands and badly—badly enough to do so illegally. They were a successful company and with the Eurydice files, they had all the land they could want. Why take the Namu lands?

Luisa put her wrist down and made the files disappear. She pinched the bridge between her nose, frustrated. She'd look at the files in more detail later, after she spoke to the Elders about shelter. They certainly wouldn't approve of her infiltrating the company or exposing the Eurydice files, but they could understand why she did so. They'd take care of her—that's what family was. But could she just sit there and wait for ARTOD to pay off the right people and take over the lands? Luisa thought the Eurydice files were enough to get the company to slow down or get the government on their backs. They had a day to shut down the construction operation after the files were leaked. Since they let the operation continue, it meant that the news clips she saw of the company apologizing were lies. It meant that her effort in leaking the Eurydice files and putting herself at risk for being arrested was for nothing. ARTOD would go on existing like they hadn't endangered the life of Planet Eurydice.

"We're leaving!" Luisa heard. "We're leaving!" Several voices repeated the statement. Luisa grinned as she spied the construction workers waving their arms and driving their vehicles away. The protesters cheered. Some even began walking away and heading back to their homes. Her talk with Shania had clearly done some good. Shania must have talked the other supervisors into leaving. Now she wasn't a total failure. She stalled the Namu Armageddon!

Luisa sprinted back to her car. She needed to see her brother and the Elders, talk to them about a plan of action. Maybe see if they can mobilize the people to try to keep ARTOD from

bringing in any more construction crews onto their land. Maybe, Luisa hoped, they could appeal the US government for aid. It was illegal for ARTOD to invade their land and it was entirely within the rites of the Plata Paiute Colony to defend themselves.

Just as Luisa reached her car, she felt the ground rumble. Earthquake? It wasn't unusual. Natural disasters were fairly common in the world. She grew up with large bouts of dust storms and earthquakes. Other than a mild moment of surprise, Luisa ignored the rumbling. It was only when the shouts and screams of the protesters increased that Luisa paid it any more attention. Mechanic whirring and tires speeding over dirt overtook the volume of the protesters.

Luisa, in a rare show of being shocked still, watched as Shania managed a V-formation of bulldozers and crossed the Namu border. Shania, though far away and as small as she was, pointed at Luisa. She grabbed a remote from her bulldozer and spoke into it, the loud feedback of the PA system joining the noise of the construction crew.

"We get a sick-ass payday for this!" Shania yelled. Her whoops and hollers reminded Luisa of the very same ones she did when she fled from the ARTOD facility. "Move out of the way, bitches, we got some buildings to make."

Though not all the crowd had left at Shania's announcement, there was still a large amount present. But the protester's solidarity had diffused somewhat. Luisa, alongside her people, thought they had won. Shania took advantage of that and ran her crew through the crowds and into the land.

Many of the protesters chased them on foot. Some threw rocks. Only one got in her car and drove.

Luisa gripped her car's steering wheel, wishing her hands were around Shania's neck. Grinding her teeth and biting back expletives, Luisa started her car and began driving after the

crew. If Luisa had stayed with the company and hadn't sent out the files on Eurydice when she had, she could've found information on the construction plans—exactly the reasons she was there in the first place! Her hands balled into fists. There was no winning, no getting the upper hand with ARTOD. They were everywhere.

The construction vehicles, though slow, were large and intimidating. Luisa was able to catch up to Shania's bulldozer easily. Luisa didn't bother trying to talk down Shania—it didn't work last time. Now she would show no mercy.

Luisa drove until her car was right at the side of Shania's bulldozer. Luisa didn't bother getting Shania's attention before driving her car right into the side of Shania's. The right side of Luisa's car crumpled and stalled the bulldozer. The air bag blew up and the seat belt held Luisa in her seat. As soon as the vehicles stopped moving, Luisa unbuckled her seat belt and stumbled out of the car. Dizzy and confused, Luisa watched as people crowded around her.

Asking if she was okay, they pulled her to her feet. Several people put their foreheads against hers in succession and on instinct, Luisa did the same. Lifting her head to the sky, Luisa inhaled. Managing to clear her head, she looked around for Shania. She was passed out in her seat and looked as if nothing had happened to her except a rapid onset of a nap.

Hearing multiple crashes, Luisa peered over the crowds of people and spotted many construction vehicles and car collisions. It seemed as if they followed her example.

Luisa said, loud enough to make sure that the small crowd heard, "We need to protect our lands. Our people's lives and our lands are being threatened."

People murmured and whispered amongst themselves. Some cheered and whooped in agreement.

“After interrogating a worker, I found out that ARTOD—Allied Resources Towards Organic Discovery—is behind the scene that has occurred today.” The crowd, incited, began shouting in fury. “Planet Eurydice is not enough for them. They will take our land and pollute it as they have always done.”

People shouted: “I refuse!”, “They have no right!”, and “Why won’t they stop?”

“I say we take the fight to them!” Luisa yelled. “We’ll go to ARTOD headquarters, and we’ll show them what it really means to take away property.”

Luisa raised her fist in the air. Her people did the same. Luisa guided them back to the nearest city, the Plata City of the Plata Paiute Colony. The further the crowd walked together the more they grew and the more they grew the more furious they became. The people shared photos and videos of the incident were spread across the internet and media outlets.

Though the crowd had managed to stop the construction crew for the day, what would stop ARTOD from bringing more. Luisa refused to let that happen.

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## Chapter 6

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Anais led the way to where the monkeys and dogs were. Jojo and Maxy were lounging up in a tree above Anais's tent while the dogs, Bast and Set, were lounging underneath her desk.

"Would you believe me if I said that the dogs give me more grief than the monkeys?" Anais asked.

Captain Malina watched as Anais shook the dogs, who curled only tighter into themselves.

"I would."

Anais rolled her eyes at the dogs. Reaching into her pocket, she pulled out a whistle. She used, puffing as much air as she could into it. The dogs moved and stood to attention. Even the monkeys climbed down from their trees to do as Anais said.

"So, the problem here is that they might come back relatively soon. I'm hoping that if I establish that it's alright to move around without my being there, they'll roam around while I'm here at base camp," Anais said.

Captain Malina nodded.

Anais left her tent and walked the animals to the edge of camp. Pointing to the forest, she commanded that they go. They left, enthusiastic. Anais waited a couple minutes before turning to her DED. She pulled up her feed and after a minute, thoughtfully projected the image for Captain Malina to see.

All she got was a lot of shaky footage. The monkeys climbed and jumped from tree to tree, screeching in happiness. The dogs panted, their cameras bobbing up and down with the bodies.

One of the monkeys encountered something fascinating. Captain Malina thought it to be a boulder, a very large one, until the monkey attempted to climb it. Jojo stumbled down every time. Maxy, following her sister, jumped from tree to tree until she grabbed a large branch from the unusual tree. She, of course, fell. Only Maxy didn't get up.

The camera, which recorded her vitals, showed a brief spike in heart rate.

"I think she's hurt!"

Anais ran into the woods, following the direction that the animals went in. Captain Malina chased after her.

They saw the tree before they heard the animals.

"How did we not see this?" Anais asked, awed.

"The forest is so dense...it's hard to see through the foliage. I'm surprised that the rovers didn't catch it."

And the tree was magnificent. It must have stood at least five hundred feet tall--taller than the tallest tree on Earth. And it was cool to the touch... almost like stone. Captain Malina rapped her knuckles against it. It didn't feel like any bark she knew on Earth. It was almost like stone.

Maxy whimpered. Anais, forgetting the tree, ran over to see what was wrong with her. Captain Malina couldn't take her eyes off the tree. Taking photos of it, she sent the file over to Chidi. She figured that he could let ARTOD know what they just found.

"She's just in shock from the fall. Just bruised, nothing serious," Anais said. She tickled Maxy's nose. "She's just a big baby."

"Yes," Captain Malina said. Grabbing a toolkit from her suit, she scratched at the tree, scraping sections of it into a sample bag. "A big baby indeed."

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## Chapter 7

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Director Melvin had loose lips. ARTOD's entire board of directors knew that. And yet there he was, in ARTOD's headquarters, still the head director. Lucas was disgusted. He went through so much work to push through the negative publicity of the Eurydice files and yet there Melvin was, making more money for the company that he should have left long ago.

Joy, the head of the media and communications department, stood on her feet. She sneered at Melvin as he droned on about figures and the data received from Eurydice.

"I don't know about the rest of you pathetic lot," Joy said as she eyed each of the other five department heads, "But I demand the immediate expulsion of Melvin from this company."

"I agree," Lucas said as he also stood. Melvin pointed at him, face reddening as he choked on his anger. "Melvin is a danger to the company. We've all seen the damage his interview had with the press. It's ridiculous to assume that our company will continue to do well under his guidance."

The other directors nodded.

"So are we all in agreement?" Joy asked. "Raise your hand if you approve of Melvin's expulsion from the company." Everyone, except for Melvin, raised his hand. "Motion approved." Joy turned to Melvin. "With your loose lips, I'm sure you'll find a job in no time."

"You bitch," Melvin snarled. "You can't do this to me. I carry the future of this company on my back."

"Correction: you *carried* the company on your back," Lucas said with a slight upturn to his lips.

“And what about the rest of you, huh?” Melvin pointed at the other four directors, who sat idle. “If you fire me, who's gonna take my position? You haven't even started the hiring process!”

“Oh please, Melvin, don't act like you ever did your job,” Joy said. “Besides, I'd like to nominate myself. Objections?”

Joy turned to look at Lucas. She ignored Melvin's outburst. Lucas nodded his approval at her as did the other directors.

“Good. In that case, all of us will begin looking into our departments for someone suitable to take of the media and communications chair,” Joy said. “And security?” Joy waved over a guard. “Please escort this man to HR. They'll walk him through the exit process.”

As the guard took Melvin away from the room, Joy grinned. “For once, let's have a real productive meeting.”

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Melvin never saw his expulsion coming. He thought it was ridiculous and in most ways, believed that what had just occurred could not have been real. He was sure it was all just an elaborate prank, set up by the other directors. They were all jealous of him--they would never run the company as good as he did. But how to make sure of that?

The security guard dumped him at the receptionist's desk and gave him the order to call HR. As long as the security guard stuck around, Melvin couldn't go through with his plan. But as he watched the security guard and receptionist exchange contact info, Melvin remembered his own DED. He checked if he still had access to it and... yes he did. Perfect.

Typing in his pass code, he scrolled through the potential information he could release to the public. Since the receptionist and security guard were too busy flirting to notice him, he kept

downloading all the files he could and sending them to his personal tablet. He swept as quickly as he could through the documents and picked the juiciest ones.

Operation: Chinook? Well, he remembered that. He had the project approved and ready to go before the Eurydice files were leaked. Not that he could blame the mole, since he's getting ready to do the same.

Now to pick a skeezy journalist... ah, Luisa Menchú. Well-known social activist with a grudge against ARTOD. She was the perfect one to send the file to.

Thanks to his connections with Lucas, Melvin had the names of most reporters and journalists memorized and the contact info saved on his tablet. As director, who could blame him for having the need to know his enemy? And for moments like these, they certainly came in handy.

Melvin sent the file to Menchú. He was eager to see how quickly she'd be able to respond. He attempted to continue scrolling through the documents but in a fierce bout of paranoia, he felt looked up and away from his DED.

The secretary and receptionist were still speaking and leaning more closely into each other's space. Melvin looked away, disgusted, and managed to spot the HR's president heading towards him. Melvin rolled his eyes as her heels clicked against the tile floor.

"Direct--ah, Melvin Bernard. Come with me, please," the woman, Kim Choi, requested. Melvin only followed her after the security guard grabbed him by the arm. "Might I say, I wonder what I'm seeing you here for. Sexual harassment again?"

"Very funny, Choi," Melvin said. "You know damn well what I'm here for."

Choi grinned. "I do. Got fired, didn't you? It was just a matter of time."

Choi opened her office door and directed Melvin inside.

“Hardy har har,” Melvin said quite plainly. He sat down in a chair and was loath to admit it was comfortable. It was probably to get him to regret being fired. “Now just give me the damn paperwork before I bring over my lawyers to sue your ass.”

Choi closed the door and sat down in her office chair. Shuffling through paperwork, she picked out what Melvin presumed to be a documentation of the reason for expulsion.

“Hand over your DED, please. We’ll make this process quick and painless.” She extended her palm out, expectant.

Melvin unstrapped his DED and handed it over to her with great reluctance.

“Great. First, let me--do you hear that?” Choi asked.

Melvin’s brow furrowed.

“Hear what?”

“It sounds like... shouting,” Choi said.

Melvin shrugged. “Somebody’s probably listening to music or something,” he said.

“I... didn’t think I’d say this but you’re probably right.” Choi shook her head. “As I was saying--”

A large boom shook the building. Dust floated down from the ceiling. Melvin could hear the loud whispers of people in their cubicles even inside Choi’s closed office. The security guard lifted a hand to his earpiece.

Choi and Melvin stared at him as the guard listened. When the guard realized he was being stared at, he said, “Intruders. Nothing to worry about.”

Even as he said that, another boom, this time much louder, rocked the floor. The security guard’s eyes widened.

“Stay in the office!” he ordered. “We have people invading company property. We have no idea if they’re armed.”

Another boom.

“They’re blowing up goddamn bombs and you have no idea if they’re armed!?” Melvin yelled at the guard.

“Stay here!” the guard repeated. “I’m being called to the main floor.”

The guard opened the door. Thick plumes of black smoke followed him. The fire alarms went off and Choi and Melvin quickly became drenched with water.

“And here I was, thinking I’d never feel the rain again,” Melvin shouted over the sounds of the fire alarm. “Thank God it’s gone!”

Choi pushed him out of the office. “Just get out of the building, you idiot. Don’t bother coming back. Consider that your official termination.”

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## Chapter 8

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Luisa, with the crowd, stood outside of ARTOD’s property. With huge surge of people and power, they knocked over the chain link and stepped over it as if it hadn’t just barred them from entering seconds before. She and the crowd of people ran over to ARTOD’s entrance and forced their way inside.

Making it into the building, Luisa kept her watch recording. She needed the world to see what the power of a united people could do. Though, she frowned as she caught several members of the crowd looting computers and stealing DEDs, she could edit those parts out.

But she didn't just gather the crowd to serve justice to ARTOD. She was there for Melvin. She wanted to get him to admit the atrocities he allowed ARTOD to perform. But how was she supposed to find him? He was probably in the most secure part of the building!

Luisa coughed. She could smell smoke. Looking around, she spotted a small electrical fire. She tried to go over to stomp it out but the crowd, too heavy to get through, kept her from moving anywhere except forward.

The flames grew bigger and the smoke began to impede her breathing. She coughed but kept her wrist out, recording everything. When the smoke became totally black, she waved to the crowd to turn back, that they were in serious danger.

Only no one could hear her voice over the sound of the fire alarm and the sprinklers. Luisa abandoned the crowd, running to try to find the nearest emergency exit. She spotted two others doing the same.

--I told you, Melvin, the exit is this way!"

Melvin? Lucky day.

Luisa ran to catch up with them.

"Slow down! You're too fast!" Melvin yelled.

Her practice chasing down interesting leads paid off. She caught up to them quickly but now was hardly the time for an exclusive. Even with the working sprinklers, the fire kept growing, fueled by the sparks of the machines in the building.

“Melvin!” Luisa yelled out. “I’m a reporter! Please, what do you know about what’s happening?”

Melvin barely gave a glance at her.

“I’ve sent documents to the most notorious reporter I know. Try to find them, won’t you?”

Luisa frowned. She grabbed Melvin by his jacket sleeve.

“But--”

“Look, if you really want info, there’s an office with a DED. The code is hu8n20y. Now stop dragging me before you kill us both!”

Luisa stopped running. Turning around, she checked every office before she found one with a DED. She grabbed it and ran back out of the room. Looking the files, she started up her watch’s video camera. She had a lot to say to some very special people.

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## Chapter 9

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“Take me to the tree!” Archana demanded. “I’ve got to see what’s up. Do you think that if I introduce strains of Earth trees to Eurydicean dirt that they’ll grow to be that height?” she chattered. “Chidi showed me the pictures--that thing is ridiculous.”

“Major Wickham says ARTOD wants it. That true?” Anais asked. Unlike how she was usually, today she was quiet. Introspective.

They were back at base camp. Captain Malina had just dispatched the rovers to survey the Stone Tree and collect further samples.

“ARTOD would like the tree, yes. It’s very important that we do so. They’d like it to test to see if could be made into anything malleable, like--”

“Like jewelry?” Anais asked.

Captain Malina frowned.

“Perhaps.”

“Any way you look at,” Major Wickham said, “That thing is a treasure. I know a lot of people who would pay to have that thing in their backyard.”

“It’s not a trophy,” Anais said. “It’s a living thing.”

“A beautiful living thing,” Archana agreed.

When they received confirmation from ARTOD headquarters that they did, indeed, want the tree, they moved that night to tear it down. Captain Malina gave the order. With a nod, Major Wickham set a command on his DED. Rovers *Destiny* and *Future* opened a hatch on their boxed bellies, releasing very large chainsaws. The idea was that if they were ever caught in a tough spot or were encountered by an over-curious animal then they could literally fight their way out of it. ARTOD had thought of everything to ensure the survival of the mission.

But in this case, the Stone Tree was neither a threat nor an obstacle. It was just something cool, a trophy, that ARTOD wanted back at base. Despite Anais’s severe protests and attempt to run to the Stone Tree to protect it, other scientists held her back. Captain Malina felt for her. She was loath to see such a beautiful thing cut down but what could she do? She had to obey orders. If she defied them, chaos would ensue. Her leadership abilities would be questioned. Her crew

would believe that they could do anything they wanted. ARTOD chose her because of her sense of responsibility. She would never let the mission go awry.

“You’re a terrible captain!” Anais yelled. Her brown hair fell around her reddened face. She struggled against Cory and Fahim, who pinned her arms behind her back. “You’re destroying something that ARTOD has no right to take! You don’t know what purpose the Stone Tree has, and yet you’re taking it!”

“It’ll grow again, Anais,” Archana murmured. She moved to comfort Anais. “It’s naturally occurring. It’ll come back.”

“Not while we’re here. Not when we leave Eurydice and come back,” Anais spat. “We’ll just cut it down again and again and again.”

“This is just one we found,” Archana said, voice weak against the strength of Anais’s. “There’s probably more around that we haven’t found yet.”

“‘Yet.’” Anais quoted. “Keep telling yourself that. One day you’ll find yourself sitting in a wasteland and you’ll ask yourself, ‘Where did you go wrong? I thought there was more than this,’ and then you’ll wonder, ‘Did I do this?’ and the answer will always be yes.”

“That’s enough, Anais,” Captain Malina demanded. Her voice shook despite herself. “You’re going back to *Cohoba*. When you get a hold of yourself, I’ll tell you your punishment.”

Anais stopped fighting her captors. She sagged in Cory’s and Fahim’s grips.

“Nothing is worse than knowing I could have done something but living with the fact that I did nothing,” Anais said.

Captain Malina shook, suddenly cold. She repeated the order to take her back to the *Cohoba*. She stood still, watching as Cory and Fahim took her back to the ship as the sounds of

sawing and breaking stone accompanied their steps. Captain Malina looked back up at the Stone Tree.

Sprouting from the base of the tree, the location where the chainsaw was cutting, large cracks cut upwards through the tree. The more the chainsaws worked, the larger the cracks became. Some split branches, which fell to the ground with a shattering thump. Even as the rest of the crew left, following to see what else Anais said, Captain Malina watched until the entire five hundred foot Stone Tree fell to the ground.

Even as she fell asleep that night, she swore she felt the shuddering of the earth like it was her own pain.

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## Chapter 10

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When she awoke the next morning, Captain Malina left her bed and went to go see Anais. After half an hour of searching the dormitories, she asked the *Cohoba* where Anais was.

“The animal cages, Captain,” the *Cohoba* replied.

Captain Malina hurried her way over to the cages. Thankfully, they were near the control center. As she made her way there, she heard loud snores that could have only belonged to Anais.

Following the snoring, she finally found Anais, hunched into a ball, on top of her thin mattress, hugging her pillows and blanket. Captain Malina knocked on the glass window.

Anais opened an eye. After a brief second in which Captain Malina knew Anais saw her, Anais closed her eye and turned her back. Captain Malina knocked again.

“I apologize. I didn’t realize that you were put here,” Captain Malina said. “It’s unethical and immoral.”

“So is invading a planet that we have no right to,” Anais replied, voice muffled.

Captain Malina hesitated before stating, “Yes. It is.”

Anais turned back around. She sat up on her mattress. She looked incredibly haggard. Her eyes, red and puffy, seemed just as full of defiance as the previous night.

“You do recognize that what we’re doing here is wrong, right?” Anais asked.

“I do,” Captain Malina said.

And she did. She knew it all along--she just ignored it. Just like she did everything else on Earth.

When she struggled as youth, she turned to studying. When she got hired by ARTOD, she ignored her crew mates in favor of analyzing Eurydice data. And now, when confronted by what seemed to be the very solution to Earth’s poor environment, she ignored the consequences of what being on Eurydice meant.

“I’m sorry,” Captain Malina said. “I’ll let you out.”

The cage opened. Anais didn’t move.

“What do you plan on doing?” she asked.

“I... what can I do? I’m helpless,” Captain Malina said.

“You’re the captain of the *Cohoba*,” Anais snapped. “You are not helpless.”

Captain Malina bit her tongue.

“If you do nothing, your recognition will mean nothing. What is the point of learning and recognizing your mistakes if you don’t apply that knowledge?”

Captain Malina’s eyes softened.

“You’re right. You’ve always been right. I was too much of a fool to see it,” she said.

Anais grinned. “Always listen to the youths, old lady. We know what the hell we’re talking about.”

The *Cohoba*’s message system sounded, interrupting the two women. Anais climbed out of the cage while Captain Malina helped. They both moved to the control deck, curious.

“Incoming message: Captain’s eyes only,” the *Cohoba* said.

Captain Malina authorized the *Cohoba* to read the message aloud. It detailed all the scandals ARTOD had done in the name of money, one of the latest being Operation: Chinook, a ploy to prepare the lands as a zoo for Eurydice’s animals and a farm for Eurydice’s plant life.

But that wasn’t all the message detailed. It included a video message from someone called Luisa Menchú.

“*Cohoba*, if you’re listening, I hope you understand the atrocities that ARTOD has committed in the name of wealth and prestige,” the woman said. Ash and dirt covered her face, and she covered every other word. Thick clouds of smoke swirled around her, making it difficult for her to keep the camera still and breathe at the same time.

“You must understand, the Earth is not safe from these predators. They will take Eurydice and kill her. These files,” several of which she mentioned popped. They detailed the plans for remodeling and construction. Shopping malls, parking lots, amusement parks...none of

the construction plans accounted for how the environment would be preserved. “These files... please, whatever you do, don’t let Eurydice become another Earth.”

And there the video ended. If Captain Malina didn’t understand the gravity of the situation before, she certainly did now.

“Well,” Anais started, “now we know that ARTOD is as skeevy as we thought.”

“And since we know that ARTOD is endangering the livelihoods of Earth’s citizens, it certainly has no right to dictate what to do with Eurydice,” Captain Malina added.

“But how do we stop ARTOD?” Anais said. “Chidi’s already sent Eurydice’s data to Earth. Even if we don’t go back, Earth has all the information and data it needs to take the initiative to come back.”

Captain Malina’s lips thinned. “You’re right. We may just be delaying the inevitable. But it’s just like you said. We have to do something.”

“I’m not as smart as you, Captain. It’s why I worked with animals,” Anais said. “I know I’ve got a big bark but my bite isn’t very good.”

“That’s what the Captain’s for.” Captain Malina pointed to herself. “We’re gonna make sure that no one takes the samples we’ve gathered to Earth. We’ve got to do this in secret. We’re going to unload the shipments at night. I know it’ll be hard but with enough time, we’ll--”

“Now hold on there!” a male voice interjected. “What do you ladies think you’re doing?”

Captain Malina’s head whipped to look at the intruder.

“Major Wickham,” Anais said, voice filled with so much contempt.

“Major Wickham,” Captain Malina said, voice much calmer. “I presume you’ve overheard our conversation?”

“I did and I’ve gotta say, I don’t really like it.”

“You don’t have to like it,” Captain Malina said. “If your captain tells you to do something, you do it.”

Major Wickham waved a finger at her. “You’re not my captain. You never have been. You ever wonder why I went around giving orders to your scientists?”

Captain Malina formed a fist.

“It’s cause they’re working for me. We’ve got some big paychecks waiting at home for us. If we don’t take the *Cohoba* back, we’re assed out.” Major Wickham whipped something out from his pocket. The only time Captain Malina had seen such a thing was from TV.

“Where the hell did you get a gun?” Anais whispered, afraid if she spoke any louder that it would go off.

“Let’s just say that the company gave me some insurance.” Major Wickham pointed it back and forth between them. “The ship’s on a timer. It’s set on an automatic launch date. But if I give it the correct code, it’ll launch. All I have to do is say the words.”

“What do you want, Wickham?” Captain Malina growled out.

“Oh, no more Major? I guess that’s fine. You can call me Captain now,” Wickham said.

Captain Malina repeated the question.

“Same thing as anyone else wants. Money. Security. An easy life. If I deliver what ARTOD wants, they’ve reserved a special spot on Eurydice for me. No more shitty Earth,” he said.

“If you expect them to deliver on that promise then you’re a complete fool,” Captain Malina said.

Wickham shrugged. “Maybe so. But as long as I send the ship and its contents, I know I’m good for life. That’s what happens when you make deals with corporations,”

“What happens is,” another person said, “you get turned into a complete psycho. I always knew you were a douche bag, Wickham, but this is low even for you.”

“Cory?” Anais asked in disbelief.

Wickham turned to point the gun at Cory. In Wickham’s distraction, Captain Malina lunged at him. Never was she so thankful for training so hard. Disarming him quickly, Captain Malina punched him in the face and knocked him right out. Cory ran over and kicked him in the stomach. Anais took his gun and stuffed it in the front of her pants.

“What?” Cory asked. “Always wanted to do that.”

“You’re freaking’ ridiculous,” Anais said, smacking Cory on the back of the head. “You could have lost your life.”

“You could’ve too,” Cory mumbled.

“Enough! We still have something to do,” Captain Malina said. “Who knows who else ARTOD has in their pocket?”

“There’s only so much we can do!” Anais yelled back.

Wickham groaned on the floor. He muttered a phrase. Smiling, he pretend to pass out again, hoping the Malina and the crew didn’t see him. The *Cohoba*’s lights began blinking rapidly.

“Preparing for launch,” the *Cohoba* said. “All bays closing.”

“Get off of the ship!” Captain Malina snapped.

After a brief moment of hesitation, Cory reached for Wickham. He yanked Wickham by the arm and dragged him away from the control room. Unsure whether to pretend he was conscious, he waited until the three were at the *Cohoba*’s exit doors.

He pulled against Cory, though his grip was weak. Cory punched Wickham in the face, knocking him out yet again, and pulled him off of the ship. All four people jumped to the ground.

Captain Malina hurriedly typed on her DED. The rovers, *Future* and *Destiny*, awoke from sleep mode at base camp. She drove them over and, activating their chainsaws, directed them to cut into the *Cohoba*'s engines.

The screech of metal was their only warning before the explosion overtook the back side of the camp. A fire, spreading from one tent to another, fueled by the malfunctions of the electronic equipment, grew fast.

Crew members ran from the scene. Captain Malina followed and everyone made their way to the river. Smoke and flying embers was their only sign of what had occurred. It was only fitting that the remnants of Earth be destroyed in fire.

But Earth's people remained.

Captain Malina looked around at the crew that managed to make their way to the river. Archana, Fahim, Cory, Anais... the others most likely found their way to some other form of safety. But now they were stuck on Eurydice. There was no hope of getting back.

"Well, that's some fire, eh?" Fahim said.

"Good riddance. I hated that camp," Archana said. "I always told myself that I'd retire to the woods and live out my life as a hermit."

Cory eyed her. "I have no idea if you're serious."

Archana insisted she was.

As Cory and Archana bickered, Captain Malina turned to Anais. Her eyes, glued to the fire, looked content.

“I know we’re stuck here... but you did a good thing, Captain,” Anais said.

Captain Malina turned to face Anais.

“We’ll see if that’s true, in time. After all, we’re still here. Eurydice isn’t totally rid of human influence,” she said.