

*Volume 2, Spring 2009*

# *Moonbeams*

*Tales from the High Frontier*

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Murder on the Tycho Express.....	1
Fred Hills	
Another Plymouth Rock.....	8
Richard Neale	
Letters Home.....	25
Mole .....	26
Don Jacques	
A Man Alone is in Bad Company.....	34
Charles Lesher	
Submissions Guidelines.....	46

**Editors Note:** This edition of Moonbeams, like that of previous editions, has a story that is not strictly moon related, but is so good that I wanted to share it with our readers. Other genre will be given consideration when there are no other submissions.

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## Murder on the Tycho Express

Fred Hills

Bessel is a small town located in the Sea of Serenity. Sunshine streamed through the rooftop windows in the railroad station and fell on the tiled floor. Doug Mason walked in from the adjacent town mall carrying a suitcase. He pulled a train ticket from his pocket, "One rider, Bessel to Autolycus, 4 June 2068" it read.

The station was part of the first lunar railroad system which now ran from Dawes in the Sea of Tranquility to the Town of Wallace near a crater of the same name.

The train was due in at 3:30PM CST. Doug walked over to a window, and looking down the tracks spotted a six-car train rolling toward him. He heard it pull into position, aligned with the boarding doors.

Soon the announcement came that passengers could proceed to the gates. This station only had two gates (the minimum allowed). He walked swiftly to gate B as specified on his ticket.

As he waited his turn, he gazed at the short passage and double doors ahead. The arrangement was much like that at terrestrial airports except that the tunnel was quite short and the doors at both ends were airtight.

The stewardess for the car checked his ticket and motioned him on. He walked onto the car and placed his suitcase in a tub next to the door. Immediately the tub with his suitcase disappeared and another popped up. (Baggage is handled by an under-floor system.) Seats are not assigned so he picked an

empty seat at the back of the car.

Doug had the look of an athlete at 6 feet tall and almost 200 pounds. He settled into his seat next to the window and gazed out across the Mare. The crater Bessel, for which the town was named, was out there beyond the horizon. Next he opened a novel that he purchased for the trip. It was about a seaman on a nineteenth century whaling ship out in the Pacific.

He read until the train slowed for the next station. New Phoenix was a sizable city and a station of commensurate size. Eight people boarded the car.

An elderly lady in a black dress was talking with a middle-aged woman right behind and they took seats together. Next came a young couple with two children. Two more people straggled in before the door closed.

Doug was an observant fellow. In fact he worked as a detective with local police and sometimes took work as a private investigator (PI).

He went back to his book but couldn't even finish the chapter before the train slowed to a stop. This stop was for the town of Sandwich. The station was on the left side of the train. Two people boarded. The first was a man who took a seat in the middle section.

The second, a middle-aged woman dressed in an orange sweater and white shorts, looked at Doug and asked, "Is this seat taken?"

"It's yours."

"I'm Amanda," she said settling into the seat.

"Glad to meet you. My name is

Doug Mason."

"Where are you going?"

"Autolytus"

"That's a strange name."

It's named after the crater that is about 40 miles north of the city. How long have you been on the Moon?"

"Three months. I was going to college in Boston."

"What are you majoring in?"

"Well, it was history, but after a year I switched to economics."

"Do you live on campus?"

"No. I was living in an apartment with a girl from India. She is studying economics and suggested that I try it."

"Do you like it?"

"No, it involves too much math. So I decided to move up here with my dad." She opened her purse and it fell to the floor as she removed a mirror. A lipstick rolled over to Doug's shoe. He picked it up as Amanda retrieved the purse and rounded up other contents.

"Thanks," she said.

Doug returned to his book as Amanda worked on her makeup. Soon the train stopped again. He looked out but saw only flat plains. The stewardess announced that they were picking up a passenger. She then came to the back and proceeded to pull the storage cart out of its berth. Doug got up and helped. Next she closed the door and activated the entry system.

He stood to the side and looked out the window. Below he saw a rover and two people in space suits. One picked up a bag and walked toward the train car.

Doug knew of stops like this but had never experienced one.

He heard the outer door open and then close. There was a distinct sound of air entering the chamber and soon the door opened. It was a woman with her helmet under her arm.

The stewardess handed Doug a large bag. "This is for the space suit," she said. The woman stepped out of the lower portion of the dusty suit and placed it in the bag. Next she removed the upper portion and put it in the bag followed by the helmet.

"Thank you," said the woman who was dressed in a simple jump suit. She then picked up her suitcase and took a seat in the middle section.

The stewardess closed up the bag for the space suit and put it aside. Next she vacuumed up the moon dust all around and pushed the storage cart back into place with Doug's help.

"You're very good at this," said Doug.

"I have had a few years to practice and she comes into town about once a month."

She thanked him as he returned to his seat.

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The train rolled on for some time and then the PA system came on. The stewardess announced, "There are two choices for dinner tonight: Roast beef with mashed potato and green beans, or catfish with carrots and rice." She got out a cart and began serving the first section.

She continued on until the cart was empty.

Amanda got up as the stewardess returned that cart. She bounced from side to side with each roll of the train.

Doug returned to his book.

A few minutes later Doug saw Amanda emerge from the rest room. She looked over her choices in the magazine rack while apparently waiting for the stewardess to return the cart.

"What have you got there?" said Doug as she sat down.

"The Ladies Lunar Review", she replied.

"What is it about?"

"I don't know yet, but it looks interesting."

Doug watched as she began scanning the magazine. She seemed most interested in the fashion ads.

Doug noticed that the stewardess was not busy now that dinner had been cleaned up. So he arose and went forward, approached her and said: "Hello, I'm Doug Mason from Bessel. I would guess you are from Fresnel."

"No, I'm from New Phoenix. Let me guess, you are in the building trades."

"Nice try. I work for the sheriff in Bessel most of the time. Here is my card."

"Very nice. Where do you get cards like this?"

"There is a very good print shop in Bessel. Say, I would like to take you out to dinner next time I'm in New Phoenix."

"Oh my. Well maybe, but now I have to answer a call."

She went and talked to someone in the middle of the car. Doug returned to his seat unsure of what kind of impression he left.

Amanda was still reading and one article caught her attention: "Global Warming" she observed. "Do you know the reason my father came to the moon? It was after four successive crop failures on our farm in Kansas. It was too

hot and rains few and far between. He saw an ad for people to run a farm on the moon, and, best of all the government would pay his way to get here."

"Yes, the global temperature on the Earth is up about two degrees centigrade, which is considered the critical point."

"How is he doing?" Doug continued.

"He is quite happy here, and he says his crops have been producing nicely."

Doug saw a woman ahead get up and move to the isle. It was the one that came aboard with the elderly woman in black. She wore a green skirt and a white blouse. She walked forward a few steps then groped for something hold on to. Several people tried to help, but she slumped to the floor.

A young woman in the mid section announced she was a nurse and went to help. She knelt beside the woman, examined her eyes, and felt the pulse in her neck and her wrist. After several minutes she announced the woman was dead.

The stewardess said aloud, "Can someone help me move the body out of the isle?"

Two men stepped in and moved the body under a nearby empty seat.

The stewardess made an announcement as few minutes later. "May I have your attention please. A woman on this car died minutes ago as many of you know. There is no reason to believe that anyone else here is in danger. The conductor and the police have been notified and will meet us at the next station where the body will be removed.

Thank you."

Doug walked forward a few minutes later and spoke to the lady in black. "Pardon me madam, I am a detective with the Bessel sheriff's department." He handed her his card and continued: "I don't know what your relation to the woman that sat here is but I noticed that the two of you were conversing as you boarded. Can I be of any assistance?"

"I just met the woman in the station. This is all such a shock. Yes, just talking with someone will help. Sit down."

They continued with small talk and gradually she relaxed. Then Doug asked: "Did the lady take any medicine with her dinner?"

"No. But she ate most of her roast beef dinner."

"Did anything unusual happen during dinner?"

Why, yes. A woman coming down the aisle dropped her purse and it landed right between us.

"I picked it up and handed it back to her."

"That's all?"

"Yes."

"Can you identify the woman?"

She stood and turned around.

"I see her. Last row on the left."

"Thank you very much."

Soon the train began slowing for the Boulder station. Doug got up to talk to the stewardess: "I am a detective with the Bessel sheriff's department. The passengers will need to stay put until the police have decided how to proceed here."

"I guess you're right. The conductor will be coming in, too."

She picked up the mike. "Due to current circumstances, please

remain in your seats. The conductor will come in shortly and give us further instructions."

The conductor and a policeman walked in as soon as the door opened. The former greeted the stewardess. She interrupted: "This gentleman is a detective and has something to say."

"I'm Doug Mason with the Bessel sheriff's department. I strongly suspect foul play in the death of one female passenger, and recommend that everyone here stay until we sort things out."

"We can't keep the train here," said the conductor.

They conferred for a while, identified six passengers who were to get off here and decided that none of them were needed for the case at hand. They were allowed to depart and the train went on.

Next, the conductor, the policeman and Doug cleared the last five rows of the car, reversed one seat and put in a table so four people could confer. The stewardess put up a Curtin to isolate the back rows.

Doug, the policeman, and the conductor sat down at the table. Doug proceeded to lay out his hypothesis. "It seems likely that the victim was poisoned by one of the passengers. Amanda, who was sitting next to me had, I think, opportunity. My hope is that by examining the victims travel companion, the victim's effects, and questioning the suspect we can unravel the plot." The policeman and conductor agreed to give it a try.

First they asked the nurse to join them.

She introduced herself as Lynn

McKenzie, a nurse with the hospital in New Phoenix.

"What can you tell us about the women's death?"

"It's pretty clear that it wasn't a case of losing her balance. She simply passed out and collapsed to the floor. Her breathing was shallow but regular. Her pulse was unusually fast and it got steadily weaker and finally undetectable."

"What was the cause of death?"

"I don't know since I've never seen a case like this. Some kind of poison seems most likely."

Thank you miss, you may go.

Next they met with the lady in black who reiterated everything she told Doug. She gave them the victim's purse and they let her return to her seat.

Doug opened the purse: "let's see what this tells us."

"There is a bunch of letters in here. This one is from a lawyer in Autolyucus. Would you look that over officer? This driver's license gives her name as Janet Clegg and an address in Bessel. Here is her ticket to Autolyucus but it gives her name as Janet Wilson!"

The officer put down the letter and said; "apparently this lady is recently divorced and won a substantial amount of money in the settlement. It also indicates she plans to change her will."

"Let's bring in Amanda," said Doug.

The conductor invited her in to sit at the table with them. She looked nervous but serious.

Doug opened with an introduction: "I am a detective; the man next to you is a police officer from Boulder; and next to

me is the conductor. We are examining the circumstances of the woman's death."

"What has that to do with me?"

"You were one of the last people to interact with her. Please give us your name."

"It's Amanda Clegg and I'm living with my dad at present."

"May we see your ticket?"

She handed it over, "I'm going to Fresnel to do some shopping."

"Do you know the woman who died here today?"

"Never saw her before," she declared.

Here is her driver's license. Please read the name on it.

Amanda stared at it and hesitated. Her face turned pale. She read aloud "Janet Clegg" in a shaky voice.

"Do you recognize the address on it?"

"Yes, it is the address of my Dad's apartment."

"Please dump out your purse on the table."

She did so. It looked like the usual collection of stuff in a woman's purse: brush, tissues, wallet etc.

Doug pulled out her driver's license. "Is this the address of the place where you and the girl from India lived?"

"Yes," she replied matter-of-factly.

"Do you recall dropping your purse by our seat?"

"Yes"

"There was an eyedropper bottle in there. Where is it?"

"It's empty. I threw it out."

"I'll check that out," said the conductor as he got up.

Soon he returned with an eyedropper bottle. "I think this

is it. There is a little fluid left in here - and it does not look like the stuff indicated on the label."

The officer opened his briefcase and announced, "I have an analyzer with me."

Amanda, feeling defiant, said: "Big deal."

The officer pulled out a device about the size of a typical novel and turned it on. When the green 'ready' light came on he carefully squeezed out a single drop and let it fall in to the receiving well. After thirty seconds the results were displayed and he read: "Poison - extract from the Cerbera Odollam tree found in India".

Doug looked Amanda directly in the eyes. "So it's cold-blooded murder! You killed your stepmother using poison obtained from India by your roommate. All over a little money!"

"She's a bitch! She deserved to die for trying to cut me out of her will!" screamed Amanda.

"We will let the court decide that," the officer said as he pulled a pair of handcuffs.

The police officer led Amanda off the train at the next stop, Linne'.

The stewardess approached Doug and said, "This is the end of my shift and I get off here. It was a pleasure to meet you." She handed him a card and left.

It was the business card, which he had given her, but on it she had written "Linda NP7-3329" in flowing script.

PS: Three months later she changed her name to Linda Day Mason.



[Werner von Braun](#) was the driving force behind the US space program, as well as the design and realization of the German V-2 rocket during World War Two.

**Murder on the Tycho Express**  
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Frederick L. Hills has been fascinated by space since he first saw the Moon through his father's telescope. One of the earliest models built from scratch was that of Werner Von Braun's proposed space ship. Later he studied electrical engineering and participated in many space related projects including the development of XM satellite radio.

Fred believes fiction is the best way to help people think past putting yet another lander on the Moon to the day when large numbers of people live and work there. One day it will seem no stranger than living in remote spots on Earth such as Alaska or the Antarctic or Los Angeles.

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## Another Plymouth Rock

Richard Neale

### Part 1 of 2

San Diego, California 2096

Frank Finley was late to church. He sped north on Fourth Avenue in his mini electric car. He didn't want to disappoint his wife who was already there. As he approached the church, on the northeast corner of Nutmeg and Fourth, the light turned yellow. Remembering his last photo ticket, he stomped on the brakes, and slid to a stop. "Damn it," he said aloud.

A child's safety seat was strapped in next to him; a

reminder there wasn't enough time to remove it when he left his infant son at his parents' home. The last time Mark was in church, he cried, and Frank had to take him outside. It didn't bother Frank to miss the service because he knew exactly how his son felt. It was a little embarrassing, however, in spite of the fact that he believed in the old adage, "Come to church early and get a back seat."

Typically, his wife, Mary, didn't say anything about Mark's crying, and she was never late for anything, as prompt as the

predicted sunrise. He could barely hear the parishioners singing Onward Christian Soldiers and thought he should be there, next to Mary, belting out his favorite hymn.

While tapping his fingers on the steering wheel, a large pickup truck roared through the green light heading east on Nutmeg Street. It had a bunch of barrels tied down in the back. Frank chuckled; he must be late for a beer party. The truck turned slightly left and headed straight for the church. Frank blinked; he couldn't believe his eyes. But there it was, bouncing over the curb and up the steps. The next thing he knew it crashed through the large front door. Splinters sprayed down the steps and the truck disappeared into the church.

There was a large explosion. The windows in Frank's tiny car shook. Startled, he jumped up against his seat belt. Stained glass spewed out of the church windows, the roof pitched up and collapsed inside.

Frank was stunned. He sat for a second or two until he realized what had happened. Leaping out of his car, he bolted toward the church. "Mary! My wife's in there, Get help!" he screamed. Passing a blonde woman with her back to him he turned to see if it might possibly be Mary. Please let it be Mary.

It wasn't. She was in the church!

Avoiding the small fires, he ran to the pile of rubble and climbed up on it. Paper debris and shingles continued to fall.

Frank bellowed, "Mary! Mary!" Over and over.

He got his foot caught between two beams and pulled as hard as he could. His shoe and sock came off. He started to dig where he thought Mary would be. To make it worse, someone was screaming just underneath him in the rubble. "I'm coming Mary," Frank yelled with a large lump in his throat. He dug frantically through the trash where the screaming was coming from, not knowing if it was Mary or not.

There were large roof beams where he dug and he couldn't move them. "Oh God!"

He moved a small distance away to an area where there weren't any beams and threw trash in all directions. His stomach felt like he was going to vomit any minute and sweat stung his eyes.

Fire engines and police cars appeared within minutes, sirens blaring. Frank didn't hear anything but the screaming under his feet. It was fainter now.

The firemen and police swarmed over the burning church like ants on a dead bug. A large fireman, wearing the traditional yellow outfit, ran up to a pile of trash and looked at a box he held in his hand. Then the fireman yelled, "Everybody out of this area, it's hot as hell. This was a dirty bomb."

Frank, oblivious to the firemen and the people scrambling to leave the site, continued to remove rubble throwing it right and left, still yelling, "Mary! Mary!"

The large fireman shouted at him to leave. Frank ignored him and continued digging. The fireman climbed up and took Frank by the arm. He jerked away saying, "My wife's in there."

A police officer joined the fireman and they dragged him kicking and screaming over the rubble to the street. Frank, with one bleeding bare foot, wept openly while struggling to get loose. They carried him to an ambulance and handcuffed him to a bar inside. He was hoarse by the time they drove away.

~ \* \* ~

Two weeks later a yellow cab drove up to his parents' home and Frank got out. He was wearing his original clothes and hospital slippers. He shuffled up the walk. His mini car was parked in the driveway. It didn't appear to be damaged, but it reminded him of the explosion and how he'd jumped up against the seat belt. He sobbed, but stiffened his back and went on.

The doctor had advised him to avoid scenes that reminded him of the explosion, and his wife. He looked in the opposite direction from the car.

Frank didn't want to alarm his folks by just walking in so he knocked on the door. His father answered.

"Frank!" His father shouted in surprise, throwing his arms around his son. "We tried to visit you in the hospital last week but they wouldn't let us. They said you weren't ready for visitors. Come on in." His father spun around and yelled, "Helen, Frank's home"

"That's because they had me on a suicide watch in the ICU of the mental ward where they don't allow visitors," Frank explained.

"I thought they knew about your terrific loss. What's the matter with those people anyway?" his father said.

"I know, but I was in bad shape. I guess they really thought I might do it even after I told them about Mark.

Helen hurried across the foyer and threw her arms around him, "Oh, Frankie, it's so good to see you." She hugged him tightly and laid her head on his chest.

He could smell the flowery scent of her shampoo. As a boy it always made him feel safe and secure. Now it seemed as though nothing could do that. Nothing but work on his project. He had to immerse himself in it and forget the horror of the last few weeks. But how could he tell them this? They would expect him to stay awhile with his son.

They went into the living room and sat down. The familiar surroundings of his childhood home didn't soothe him.

"How's Mark?" Frank asked, "I'm sorry I've imposed on you so long."

"No imposition, we love having him, he's so cute trying to walk and all," Helen said.

Frank took a deep breath, he wanted to see little Mark, but wondered that if he were told about his mother, could he conceive what it really meant. As his father, it was his responsibility to tell the boy, but could he face up to it? What would it be like to grow up without the love and protection of a mother? Frank's own childhood had been one of stability. Now Mark would lack that. In fact, it was possible he would have to grow up without a father also. Frank was thankful his parents loved Mark like their own son.

"Are you all right, dear?"

You're as thin as a rail and must get something to eat," Helen said.

"I'm okay Mom, and don't fix me anything to eat please, I had lunch before I left the hospital."

"We're so sorry about Mary. She was a wonderful person and will be missed by everyone who knew her," Helen said.

There was an awkward silence during which Frank had trouble swallowing. A little voice inside kept ordering him to ask the question to end all questions. And for the longest time, he ignored the voice and listened to the grandfather clock ticking away on the wall. He was counting the ticks when he heard his father clear his throat Frank became alert and blurted out, "I have an outrageous request."

"What outrageous request?" his father asked.

"The doctor told me the best way to get over this tragedy is to bury myself in a project that is very important to me. Mary was everything to me and now she's gone." He choked a little. "I've always wanted to join the PHOPASS society, which stands for 'Place Humans on a Planet in Another Star System.' Many people think it's a pie-in-the-sky project and poke fun at it, calling it 'the faux pas society.' Most scientists believe however, the earth is moving into another Ice Age and it's imperative that humanity save itself by populating other planets. They're talking about terraforming Mars right now but that's going to take many generations. The possible Ice Age won't be fully developed for about two hundred

years. Many people want to join this society and the competition is tough, but with my qualifications, I should have a good chance to get in. My request is," he took a breath, "will you look after Mark? I'll send for him as soon as I can. I know you care for him. I'm not sure this is fair to you or Mark."

"Of course we will, dear. We'd love to have him regardless of how long," Helen responded immediately.

"Anything we can do to help you get over this tragedy, we will do," his father added. "This war with the Moslem's has been on and off for a hindered years and it's getting particularly cruel when they set off bombs in the U.S. with radioactive material so no one can help the injured."

Frank grimaced, put his head down and his hands over his face.

"Oh, Howard, what a thing to say," Helen piped in.

"It's okay," Frank said, throwing his head back and brushing his blond hair out of his eyes. "I'll have to learn to handle it. I didn't come back from the Philippines with a stress disorder like many other marines did, but when I saw that bomb go off and knew Mary was in the church, it was another story. In any case, I'll put grad school on hold for a while and go to Houston next week where they're processing applications for the society. This is the first program where the government is working directly with industry to accomplish a major project. They have to do it that way because of the amount of money involved. If I get in, the training program will last six months. After that,

I don't know what will happen. I have an appointment with a realtor in a half-hour. I can't live in our house anymore."

"Frankie, are you sure you want to do something that radical? You might regret it," Helen said.

"I know Mom, but that house has too many memories, I just ...can't live there. I better think about leaving. Thanks so much for taking care of Mark; I'll send you money for his care." Frank got up and took a step toward the door.

"No need to do that, son," Howard said.

"No, Dad, he's my boy." Frank choked back the familiar lump. "Can I see him before I leave?"

"Certainly, I just got him to sleep in your old bedroom," Helen answered.

"I'll just look in on him for a minute," Frank said.

When Frank walked down the hall to his old bedroom, he heard his mother say, "He looks terrible. Didn't they feed him at that hospital?"

"It's going to take him some time to get over her," Howard answered.

In the bedroom, Frank gazed down at his son who was sound asleep. Looking up, he saw his old baseball glove in the corner and realized it's possible he would never have a chance to teach Mark how to play.

Frank wiped tears from his eyes and returned to the living room. He hugged his mother, shook his father's hand, and left.

~ \* \* ~

He drove his mini car to the cottage in Old Town. He almost lost it when he looked up at the

house, and dropped to his knees on the front walk. Feeling stupid, he looked around, got up, and walked to the door.

Hesitating, he found a small package on the front steps about the size of a shoebox. It was wrapped in brown paper and had a return address of some official department in the state of California.

He wanted to listen to the messages on the answering machine first, but in reality he was delaying the inevitable--afraid to open the box. He went into the house, laid the package on the phone table, and poked the button on the machine.

Most messages were from his folks, but one came from the medical examiner's office. A man's voice said, "We found your wife in the church and need to talk to you about it. We will send her personal possessions by mail if we don't hear from you in a few days." They had already talked to him about it in the hospital just before he left. Frank thought it was a test to see how he would react. His face twisted in pain and he choked back the familiar lump in his throat.

He quickly picked up the package off the phone table. Opening it, he found her scorched tiny light blue handbag, and several other items. He held up Mary's wedding band. It was identical to his, a simple thin gold band. He tried to buy her something more elaborate, but she wouldn't have it. He took out the next item, her chain necklace, so thin and fine, Frank didn't know how it withstood Mark's incessant tugs. He had bought it for her on

their first wedding anniversary. She wore it constantly.

He fastened the chain around his neck. "I promise you three things, Mary, I'm never going to take it off. I'm going to help settle another world and I'm going to fight the people that took you away from me wherever and whenever I can."

There was a knock on the door. The realtor's here. He went to the door to let her in.

#### One week later

Frank walked into the large amphitheater in Houston. Many people were already there, although the conference didn't start for another fifteen minutes. It was a large room that could hold about three hundred people, yet it wasn't even half full. There were no windows. It had seats on a slanted floor and a podium in front.

He stood in back, next to the door, looking around to see if he might know someone. The lights went out and the room became pitch black. A male voice from somewhere in the darkness said, "Throw the emergency power switch next to the door will you? We've been having trouble with the lights ever since the power station was bombed."

"Okay," Frank answered and he groped for the door to find the switch. He felt something soft he knew couldn't be the switch. Suddenly the lights came back on. He gazed in horror at his right hand. It was on a beautiful young woman's breast. She stopped in the doorway and looked very surprised. His face burned slightly and he knew it must have been as red as his tongue. "S-s-sorry," he stuttered, and jerked

his hand away. "I was trying to turn on the lights."

"Oh, I thought you were trying to turn me on," she answered, smiling.

Frank heard laughter from a few people in the room. He turned and smiled sheepishly. Immediately he liked this young woman, she had a sense of humor.

"Is this the conference for the faux-pas society?" she asked.

"Can't you tell from the way you were greeted?" Frank responded.

She smiled again and he thought she looked a little bit like Mary. She was small and had big blue eyes, but long brown hair tied up in a ponytail instead of short blonde hair like Mary. Mary had a great sense of humor too. He had a sudden sinking feeling in his heart.

The young woman moved into the room and Frank asked, "Do you mind if I join you? I don't know anybody here and would like some company."

"I noticed that at the door, but ditto about not knowing anybody, and joining me is okay, if you tie your hands behind your back."

He put his hands behind his back and followed her down to a seat. He noticed she had an hourglass figure like Mary and she moved gracefully, especially between her waist and knees. A whistle came from some wise guy in the room. Frank ignored it.

Frank introduced himself and the young woman said her name was Karen McMann. She recently graduated from Purdue University with a Major in Architecture and a Minor in Agriculture. She had just started grad school and was

working toward a Master's in Architecture. She looked too young to be in grad. school.

"What do your friends think about you joining this project?" Frank asked.

"They think I'm too adventurous. My folks think I'm crazy, but aren't worried because of the competition. They're sure I won't make it. That just goes to show you, they never did know me, I'm a liberated and determined woman."

"Good for you. What subject did you like best in school?"

"I liked AutoCAD, it fascinated me, but I heard about this project years ago when they were fighting for funding. Then I designed my college curriculum around what I thought they would need. My little brother followed me to Purdue and is taking agriculture, so he can assume the responsibility of my folks' farm when they get too old to maintain it."

Frank thought of Mark and how his folks may become too old to take care of him. His expression changed.

"What's wrong?" Karen asked.

"I'm sorry; I was thinking of my son, Mark, he's almost one and starting to walk. I left him with my parents and I'm feeling a little guilty."

"Is he your only child?"

"Yes, my wife was killed in a church bombing in San Diego a few weeks ago."

"Oh, I heard about that, thirty two people killed what a terrible thing. I'm so sorry."

By this time the room was full of people. The meeting began and the moderator spoke.

"I hope you all know this is a

meeting of the society to put people on a planet in another star system. Most likely none of you will ever set foot on another planet. It will take at least seven years to build the starship. The space hotel, presently under construction, will be used to house the starship workers. But, most importantly, it will take at least thirty years to reach the first star, Epsilon Indi 209100. If we don't find a satisfactory planet there, then we'll go to Tau Ceti, and that will take another twenty years. If Tau Ceti doesn't have a home for us we'll go home to Earth, another twenty-five years."

A slight groan came from the assemblage. The moderator smiled and continued. "The engines, presently being tested, will allow us to travel at an average of 40% of the speed of light. These two stars are within 12 light years of the earth and are in approximately the same line, which is why we chose them. We know there are terrestrial planets in the comfort zone at the proper distance from each of these stars as well as a breathable atmosphere and lots of water. We would send probes to investigate them, but that would take over fifty years more and we couldn't be sure of their success. If we build a starship that people can live on indefinitely, eventually we should find a satisfactory planet. We're building the Rutan Space Hotel for the starship workers as well as the tourists. Revenue we get from the tourists will help fund the project."

He stacked a bunch of papers

on a small table next to him.

Answer the questions as honestly as possible, and remember there are no right answers. The correct answer is your honest opinion, so there is no need to look at your neighbor's paper." The audience snickered. "I know what some of you are thinking, 'I'll answer the questions the way I think they want them answered.' Don't do that, you'll be doing yourself, and everyone else, an injustice."

Several assistants passed out the test. Frank opened it up and glanced at it. Multiple choice, he always aced this kind of test. His attention was captured by the first question:

What is your opinion on religion?

- a. My religion is the only true religion, and I will always be loyal to it.
- b. My religion has taught me a good moral code, so I will always obey it.
- c. I will honor the teachings of all religions, unless they ask me to hurt someone.
- d. I am an agnostic, or an atheist, and do not honor any religion.

Frank circled the letter "c" thinking it was an interesting question. During his time in the hospital, he'd thought a lot about how the conflicts between religious fanatics have caused most of the trouble in the world.

After the tests were gathered up, they passed out the applications and the moderator said, "When you finish, put it in the box on the table. Check the bulletin board in three days to see who has been chosen to take

the training course for the PHOPASS project. Good luck everyone."

Frank stood up and walked out when he finished. Karen was still working on the application and he didn't want to look obvious by waiting for her. He did want to talk to her, so he stopped just outside the doors until she came out. A few moments later, she exited the room, sandwiched between a black man who looked like a boxer and a little guy wearing glasses and a pocket protector in his shirt.

Frank walked up, making an exaggerated motion of putting his hands behind his back, "I'm going shopping tomorrow morning, would you like to join me? Lunch is on me."

"I'd love to. I'm staying at the Broadway. How about ten?"

"I'll be there." He saw Mary; not Karen as she walked away with her natural hip motion that seemed familiar and pleasing to him.

~ \* \* ~

Frank picked up Karen at ten and they took his rented car. Then he asked her, "Did you notice the first question about religion on the test?"

"Yes, that was weird and way too obvious, don't you think?" Karen answered.

"It probably wasn't obvious to a zealot, and I think it was designed to weed out the zealots. I answered 'c'."

"Me too, because neither of us is a zealot." They both chuckled.

He pulled the necklace out of his shirt and showed it to Karen. He'd shined up the cross and it glittered in the sun streaming through the windshield. "Mary, my

wife, was wearing this when she died. I believe she died because of the conflict between the zealots in organized religions. For example, the Moslem's keep referring to the Crusades when they're trying to justify their actions. The Catholics are responsible for the inquisitions and witch-hunts. The holocaust and the Palestinian conflicts are other examples of conflicts due to religious prejudice. I was brought up Catholic, but have never been a good one. My wife was an Episcopalian, and a devout one. Even when my folks told me I must raise my son as a Catholic, I knew Mary objected, but she didn't say anything. Apparently the man who killed her was a Muslim and anyone that would blow themselves up, has got to be a zealot. I believe the conflict between religions is the major problem in the world today. That's why that question on the psychological test was so pertinent to me."

Karen turned her head slightly and wiped a tear away. "Wow!" she exclaimed. "That's touching, you're wearing her cross, but it's kind of unusual for a man to wear a necklace, isn't it?"

"Not if you've been in the service, they're called dog tags," he answered with a smile. "I'm going shopping to look for a few small religious symbols to place on this necklace, indicating I embrace all religions, as long as they don't ask me to hurt anyone. Then we can go to lunch."

"I'm not big on any religion, even though I was raised Catholic also. I admire your attitude about your wife; you must have

loved her very much."

"Amen, if you'll pardon the expression. How about the Steak House for lunch? I had supper there when I first came into town, and it was good."

"Okay, if they serve salads, I'm on a perpetual diet."

"You don't need to be on a diet," Frank said.

"Thank you, my weight is a constant struggle."

At lunch, Karen spoke first, "From what you said earlier, it sounds like you were in the service."

"Yes, an MP in the Marines for three years, I served in the Philippines fighting the Moslems. I don't think we're ever going to get them out of there completely, we'll never find them in the jungles and all those islands. I took my mustering out pay and GI Bill benefits to go to Cal Tech. I graduated a few months ago with a BS in mechanical engineering. I met my wife at school during our freshman year. We got married at the beginning of my senior year. But enough about me, tell me about you."

"My story is very mundane. I was born in New Castle, Indiana, went to grade school and high school there. I was pudgy and didn't have many friends. But when I went to Purdue, they kept me too busy to eat or have a lot of friends. I always had a desire to become an astronaut, that's why I'm so interested in this program. But, I don't understand certain things about the program. Why are they building the starship in space and where are they building it?"

"They're building it in space because it will be so heavy, they

would never get it off the ground if they built it on earth, or even at the moon base. They'll construct it at the Lagrange L-5 point next to the hotel."

"Where's that?"

"There are five points in space where the pull of gravity of the moon equals the pull of gravity of earth. The first three are unstable and anything that's placed there will eventually fall toward the earth or the moon, but L-4 and L-5 are stable. If you place something at either of these points in space it will remain there rotating around the earth in the orbit of the moon. It will be very easy to launch a starship from either of those points. They were considering L-1 that is directly between the earth and moon. It is 33,000 miles from the moon instead of 240,000 miles like L-5. But they plan to deliver material from the moon base to the construction site, and are afraid if they lose control of a delivery rocket, it will impact earth. They are also in the process of building the hotel in the same location. Tell me about yourself."

"Okay, in a minute, but what sort of engines will they use if the ship's so heavy?"

"The engines are being tested right now. There will be twenty-four efficient linear accelerators that use liquid hydrogen for the superconducting magnetic systems on the accelerators and on the magnetic nozzles. Hydrogen atoms used in the accelerators are bombarded into a special material that produces antiprotons. These antiprotons are directed out the rear of the engine where they

come in contact with normal protons in a blast shield. The resulting explosion causes a force to act on the shields, thus pushing the starship along. Magnetic nozzles are mounted behind the blast shields to add to the thrust and direct the dangerous pions and gamma rays away from the ship. The engines and blast shields will be mounted in a circle behind the main ship and two engines a hundred and eighty degrees apart will be fired at the same time. The acceleration they expect to get from these engines is only about 0.07 G's with such a heavy starship. But, when you do that for about six years, it will result in a very high speed. After they reach a speed of 10,000 km/sec, they remove the plate and let the hydrogen atoms pass through at near the speed of light and at a much more rapid frequency. This is an efficient method of powering a starship, next to a solar sail, which is impractical for transporting thousands of people.

"What will they use for fuel, and will they have enough?"

"That's the most interesting thing of all; they'll have a very large compartmentalized tank in the center of the ship about one hundred feet in diameter and two hundred feet long, full of water. They will separate the water into hydrogen and oxygen by electrolysis. The hydrogen will be used for fuel and the oxygen will be used for breathing. Both hydrogen and oxygen will be used for the fuel cells in the ship. Additional water will be used to grow plants, all the water will be reprocessed and recirculated."

"Wow!" Karen said. "How are they going to get all that water up in space?"

"They'll melt the ice at the polar regions of the moon and transport it in tanks using monopropellant rockets on transporter frames." Frank took a breath and continued, "A magnetic rail catapult, 40 miles long, similar to what is used on the monorail trains will be used to launch the tanks of water from the moon. They'll use radio control of the transporters to maneuver and stop them when they arrive at the construction site or at the moon base. They'll also transport pre-assembled steel and titanium components up to the construction site in the same manner. These components will be fabricated in the foundry being assembled right now at the moon base.

Then Karen asked, "I thought they were going to use a large screen on the front of the ship to collect hydrogen in space?"

"Some consideration was given to the use of a screen, but there's some question about how much hydrogen you can collect that way. They are considering a scoop to collect hydrogen and methane from the atmospheres of the gaseous planets"

"What an ambitious project," Karen said, "I understand they're going to use a two large rotating cylinders to produce artificial gravity."

"That's right, Von Braun cylinders; they plan to mount them in tandem. This should solve the gravity problem for the starship. They're using the Stanford Torus for the Hotel Rutan. Each cylinder on the

starship will be about a thousand feet in diameter and fifteen hundred feet long. They'll rotate two times per minute so the centrifugal forces provide enough gravity and the people may stand up on the inside. The engines will be located outside the cylinders and sticking out the back. They won't rotate."

I heard one of the cylinders would be used for workshops and farming. That's where I can contribute. I did a lot of research in hydroponics. How come you know so much about the project?"

"It was going to be the subject of my thesis at school. I'm worried about the problem of people getting along on such a long voyage." Frank said. "What about those experiments where people were penned up in a closed building trying to grow food; they were constantly fighting."

"That's why it's critical we get the proper selection of people," Karen said.

"I understand about half the people have already been selected. They bought their way in," Frank added. "But, we won't worry about that, because the final selection won't happen for years."

"What are they naming the ship?" Karen asked.

"I think they're going to call it Mayflower City."

After lunch, Karen said she had some letters to write so Frank took her back to the hotel and they decided they would do the town the next day. Both wished each other luck to be selected for training with the society. Frank leaned over to kiss her and she stopped him.

"It's not that I don't want to, but I don't think I can compete with Mary," she explained.

"How can you compete with her? She's not here. Besides, you remind me of her."

"That's exactly the point; I want you to care for me, because I'm me, not Mary. For example, the day you'll give me your dog tags is the day I'll believe you'll care for me as much as her."

Frank's face twisted a little and he said, "Okay, we won't argue about it now, is tomorrow still on?"

"I'm looking forward to it. Think of something exciting to do."

#### Two days later

At 9 a.m., Frank knocked on the door of Karen's hotel room.

Frank heard a muffled voice from inside the room. "Coming."

The door opened and his heart skipped a beat when he saw how good she looked, Mary all over again.

"You look great this morning," he blurted out, feeling instantly embarrassed.

"Thank you. I feel great and I had a good time yesterday on the tour of NASA."

"Where would you like to eat breakfast?" Frank asked.

"There's an old Denny's in the lobby. It's convenient, let's eat there."

"Good, I'm hungry."

They walked into the restaurant and a couple was waiting to be seated ahead of them.

"Didn't I see you at the meeting of the faux pas society a couple of days ago?" Frank asked the good-looking muscular man

standing in front of them.

"Oh yeah, I remember you guys, the couple at the door, the entertainment at the meeting," the large man answered with a smile.

Karen giggled and said, "I'm glad you were entertained."

"How do, I'm John Mills and this is my wife, Millie."

Millie curtsied slightly, making herself even smaller than she already was.

"I love your name, it's alliterative," Karen said.

"What?" Millie responded with a quizzical look on her face.

"You know, poetic," Frank explained, "your last name sounds a lot like your first, Millie Mills. I'm Frank Finley, maybe that's alliterative too. This is Karen McMann. Why don't we eat together and talk about this wild project?"

"Good idea," John replied.

Just then the waitress appeared and John said, "It'll be four now."

After being seated, they all ordered coffee.

Frank pointed out a swarthy, bearded busboy to Karen. He appeared too old to be a busboy. He was laying out dishes of saccharine packets on all the tables.

"That's unusual for Denny's," she said. "Back home they don't give out saccharine unless you ask for it."

Karen pulled up the sleeve of her blouse and laid her arm on the table. She had a micro electronic system strapped to her forearm with a mini screen. The system included a camera, computer, video player, cell phone, and watch. She pointed the

camera up. When the busboy came to lay out the dish, she took his picture. Then she picked up one of the packets and opened it, held it to her nose and smelled it.

"What are you doing?" John asked.

"I don't like the looks of that busboy and as I said, they don't normally lay out saccharine at Denny's."

"What could be wrong with it?" Frank asked.

"Well for one, it could be laced with cyanide."

"What?" John said, loudly.

"Sodium cyanide or potassium cyanide. Either one is so poisonous it would kill you in a few minutes."

"Oh my goodness," Millie said.

"Why do you think there might be cyanide in the saccharine?" John asked.

"Well when I held it up to my nose, I smelled burnt almonds, a sure sign of cyanide. If any of you have put it in your coffee, don't drink it. My folks tried to grow apricots on their farm and warned me about eating the seeds."

"Holy shit!" Frank blurted out and he felt his face flush. He gritted his teeth and the muscles in his jaw began to stand out.

John laughed. Frank got up and said, "I'm going to talk to the manager about this. Don't use any of the saccharine until we straighten this out."

"It's only a theory, Frank," Karen warned.

"Can we afford to take a chance?" He turned and walked rapidly to the front counter.

"May I speak to the manager?"

"I'm the manager," a rotund

man behind the counter replied.

"Your busboy is laying out dishes of saccharine on all the tables."

"Abdul is new and doesn't know our policy, but why do you object?"

"Where is he?"

The manager looked around the restaurant and said, "In the john, I guess."

"Do you have an employee restroom?" Frank asked.

"No, but what's the big deal, sir?"

Frank wheeled around and walked briskly to the restroom. In a few seconds he went in, slammed open the stall doors and returned to the front counter and said to the manager, "He's not in there."

"Maria, where's Abdul?" the manager shouted over his shoulder. Then he turned to Frank and said, "If you tell me what's wrong, maybe I can help."

"We have a food expert at our table and she thinks there's cyanide in the packets of saccharine Abdul laid out."

"Oh my God! Joseph, collect all the dishes of saccharine," the manager said to a young man standing next to him. Then he shouted, "Don't anyone use saccharine!"

Maria walked up behind the manager and said, "I can't find him anywhere."

"Call the police and ask them to bring a HAZMAT team," Frank said.

"Wait a minute, that's kind of radical, isn't it?" The manager responded.

"You call them, or I will," Frank said and he returned to his table.

"What did he say?" John asked.

"They can't find the busboy and his name is Abdul."

"It gets worse every minute," John said.

Frank sat for a few minutes, fidgeting with his silverware and looking over at the manager. Then he said, "Karen, will you call 911? Ask them to bring a HAZMAT team."

A few minutes later a fire engine pulled up in front of the hotel and firemen hurried into the restaurant. Frank explained the situation and the fireman said they had a quick test for cyanide.

Frank rejoined the party. They were sitting there staring at their breakfasts. The manager came up to the table and said, "The franchise people and the hotel are going to be all over me about this."

"What if Karen here is right, how many customers would've died? How would the franchise people like that?" Frank responded.

The manager spun around and went back to the counter.

A police officer came up to the table. "I understand you're the party that called 911. The saccharine was pure sodium cyanide," he said. "We want to thank you for catching it."

Frank felt his face get warm again. He squinted and gritted his teeth. Another killer of innocent people, like Mary.

"Mary here caught it," Frank said nodding in Karen's direction.

"Who!" Karen responded immediately.

"Oops," Frank said as he felt his face flush again.

"Would you like a picture of

him?" Karen asked the officer. She held out her arm with the cell phone attached holding up the screen for him to see.

"Old Moses, they've been trying to catch him for years. This was a terrorist act," the officer said. "Thanks again. I need to get your names and how we can contact you." With that, he passed out a pad and pencil. They all wrote their names and addresses and passed the pad back to the officer. He walked away.

"We never did talk about the project," Millie said "It's been nice meeting you guys and maybe we'll see you at the bulletin board this morning. I wouldn't mind spending more time with you, I feel safe."

"You're safe with me," John countered.

"I hope all of us make it," Karen added.

They left the restaurant with the untouched food still on the table and without paying.

~ \* \* ~

Frank and Karen stood behind a group of people in front of the bulletin board looking for their names. They were too far away to be able to see the small print. John and Millie pushed through the crowd and Frank called their names. Millie was crying and when John turned, he had an angry look on his face.

John walked up to Frank and said; "They took me, but not Millie. I'm going to tell them they can stick it if they don't take her."

"What did you do before you came down here to join the society?" Frank asked.

"I had a contractor business. We erected steel buildings."

"That's why they took you; they want people who can assemble structures."

"What did Millie do?" Frank asked.

"She was my secretary and accountant."

"On the application, did you say you were married to Millie?"

"I said I was married, but didn't mention Millie's name. I have an interview in a couple of days. I'll tell them about her and that I can't be part of the project unless she is too."

"They want married couples and need people who know construction. I think there's a good chance they'll reconsider," Frank said.

Karen had worked her way through the crowd by this time and was moving back toward Frank.

"We both made it," she said with a smile, "And to make it better, we each have an interview tomorrow morning within a two hour period."

"Hot damn!" Frank responded. "Let's go get some lunch, when I'm nervous, I'm hungry."

"You must get nervous frequently," Karen said smiling.

They drove to the Steak House, entered, and were seated quickly.

"We've worn out our welcome at Denny's," Karen said.

"Yeah, isn't that weird? Think of the lawsuits that they'd have if someone died. Besides, there are probably press people just waiting for us to show up."

"When I checked the list, I didn't see Millie's name. Too bad, she's so sweet, her folks should have named her Candy," Karen said.

"They're married. The project managers will probably find a

place for her. Which brings up another problem, we're not married," Frank said, smiling.

"Let me have your dog tags," Karen responded immediately.

Frank chuckled and changed the subject. "What would you rather work on, the design of the starship details or the methods used to grow food?"

"What are you going to work on?" Karen asked.

"They probably will have me working on the design."

"I told you earlier, I love AutoCAD. I'd like design too."

"They'll probably put us where they need us the most."

Frank saw another busboy exchanging the salt shakers on all the tables. "Maybe I'm paranoid, but does that busboy look familiar to you?" he said.

"He certainly does but I'm not sure because now he's clean shaven. He's replacing full salt shakers with full shakers." Karen observed "Not again!"

"Excuse me; I'll be back in a minute." Frank got up and walked to the front counter. He asked the receptionist how long the busboy had been working at the restaurant. She said he'd just started at noon.

"Did you hear about the incident at the Denny's this morning?"

"Yes, terrible thing. Why?" the receptionist asked.

"I was there. It was that particular busboy who poisoned the saccharine. Why is he replacing full salt shakers with full shakers?"

The receptionist's face dropped. "You're kidding."

"Not on your life. Don't say anything, just call the police,

and tell them to come without sirens. Also, without him seeing you, find out if he's supposed to be changing those shakers and collect them all right away."

The receptionist hurried off and Frank returned to the table.

"Don't look now, but I think we have the same terrorist doing his dirty work," Frank said.

"Ouch," Karen whispered.

"I asked the receptionist to call the police. I'm going out to talk to them before they come inside." He got up and walked through the front door.

The police drove up and parked in front of the restaurant.

Frank explained what happened and how he was involved. They decided to get some backup and waited until more officers arrived. They were there in minutes.

Two officers decided to go into the restaurant while several others covered all the exits. Frank accompanied the two officers inside and pointed out the busboy.

The busboy saw the police and bolted out an emergency door. An alarm rang and Frank heard a man yell, "Halt! Stay where you are!" followed by several gunshots.

There were screams from a few women in the restaurant. The two officers ran through the emergency door with Frank close behind. The busboy lay on the sidewalk with blood pouring out of his chest and a pistol in his hand.

An officer said to the man standing next to Frank, "He

pulled his gun when he came through the door, Sarge. We had no choice."

Frank went up to the body, and said "You'd better shut down the restaurant until we can find out what's in the salt shakers and anything else he might've poisoned."

When the police told the manager what needed to be done, she threw up her arms and yelled, "Why me?"

Frank said to one of the officers that he should get a HAZMAT team to examine the salt shakers. Then he gave him his name and how he could be reached. "Please don't leak my name to the press."

By this time, a crowd had gathered and the police were moving them back into the restaurant. Karen was in the crowd.

Frank elbowed his way through the crowd and said, "It was Moses."

"My father told me the terrorists poured over the border with the illegal's years ago," Karen said.

"I guess this one can have his seventy virgins in heaven now. Let's get out of here," Frank suggested.

Richard Neale was born on the island of Corregidor in the Philippines in 1927, a time when the area was still under control of the United States. Born into a military family, Neale spent much of his childhood traveling and lived in nine different states while growing up. It was an ideal childhood to foster a lively imagination and a daring sense of adventure.

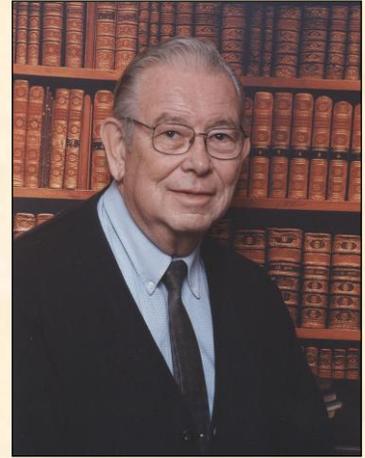
Neale graduated from Purdue University in 1951 with a bachelor's degree in mechanical engineering. In 1964 he attained his master's in mechanical engineering from San Diego State College and earned a professional engineer's license in California. With this expertise, he went on to explore the nuclear and aerospace industry working for companies including Paisecki Helicopter, General Atomic Co. and Rohr Aircraft. Neale also worked as a civilian engineer with the U.S. Navy. There, he tested catapults and arresting gear on aircraft carriers and was recognized by the Navy for his meritorious work.

Neale's adventurous spirit and experience in aviation also led him to the skies. As a hobby, he began flying lessons and soon became a skilled light plane pilot. This love for action, coupled with his vast knowledge in science and technology, inspired Neale to write short stories. He wrote about everything from space travel and aliens to war and terrorism and soon found he had collected a volume of tales.

[Sci-Venture Anthology](#) (Infinity Publishing, February 2006, ISBN 0-7414-3012-6, \$12.95) is a collection of fast-paced adventure and science fiction stories that take readers from the moons of Jupiter to the battle lines of the Vietnam War. Inspired by authors like Tom Clancy and Isaac Asimov, Neale hopes to put the "science" back in science fiction. Neale's expertise enriches each story with vivid scenes and detail. Rapid plot development and likable, even humorous characters make these stories appealing to a wide audience. His goal is to teach readers, while entertaining them at the same time.

"I include a lot of action, humor and contemporary science in my stories," says Neale. "The style may be simple, but I want anyone to be able to pick it up and understand the language."

Neale is retired and currently resides with his wife in the San Bernardino Mountains in southern California. He is the father of three grown children and in his spare time, he continues to write and fly light sport aircrafts.



## Letters Home

**Moonbeams invites you to contribute a micro story. See the [Submissions](#) page for details.**

From: Silas Pak  
To: Henry Pak  
Subject: Oct. Moonbase app.

Hi, Uncle Henry!

I've just been informed that my application to October Moonbase has been accepted! Three of us will be making the trip. I'll be going as a cook, and the other two are a programmer and a mechanic. We'll be there for a year. So I'll be writing to you regularly to keep you informed of my time there.

October Moonbase is a mining colony. It's located in Beer Crater, which is on the Mare Imbrium Plain. All of the mining is actually done by robots. Very few people are outside, due to the dangers of radiation. A tech will accompany a group of bots to a mine once a week just to monitor their performance.

The population of the colony varies. There is usually a minimum of fifteen to twenty people. Often it can swell up to fifty people. There are approximately fifty robots of various designs that are active at October Moonbase. There were around two hundred bots used in the construction of the base and its three mines. The majority of the bots were sent to other colonies and construction sites when the first people arrived there.

Anyway, in approximately one week I take a second physical. And in three weeks after those results, I'll be on a ship for the moon! Yippy!!!

Love, Silas

Dear Diary...

6/5/28 We are having issues with the two newest crew. They are both young guys without any experience and are having problems adjusting. I know Mission Control is supposed to do psyche tests on everybody but lately it seems they are sending us problems and not solutions. Jim got in a fight with Lu Ming yesterday and has a busted hand. Lu is going home with a busted head. He is the first to be sent home early and I hope the last.

Secure Email...

2/3 Shift Report, Sept 18, 2028  
Space Mining Inc, Central Highlands  
To: Shift Commander Jensen

We lost Judy Stevens today. Mining Central has been notified. She was changing out the electromags on 147 and somehow it fell on her. I will write a personal note to her parents. We are all in shock here at Far Point and will miss her terribly. She was very popular. We all looked forward to when it was her turn to cook. And her smile was such a joy.

In spite of the tragedy, we did complete our assignment. Adams is fully caught up and your next job is to start on Section 250. It's weak on ilmenite but we cannot bypass it without causing problems. It's dangerous terrain so be careful.

Good luck

DH



## Mole

Don Jacques

*In the first quarter of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, what became known as NewSpace had a fitful birth. Many of the broods siblings died early, but of those who survived, some presented special problems...*

"Please return to your seats and fasten your harness. We are approaching Asimov Transfer Station. With connections for Bigelow Resorts and Research International Space Station, as well as Aldrin Lunar Station. Please remember that all minors under 18 must be tethered to their responsible adult. There will be several adjustments and a bump as we dock. Please bear with us."

The cabin hum grew as the passengers anticipated the

arrival. When the bumps were over a new announcement began.

"Welcome to Asimov Transfer Station. Please exit slowly toward the front of the cabin. Be mindful of your feet as you float along, our staff will be happy to assist you, if necessary. As you move into the tunnel, please pull yourself along smoothly until you reach the central room. There you may pause to orient yourself and move toward your departure gate."

The message droned on, as he

reached under the seat and pulled his duffel out, easing his arms into the straps. He knew which gate he wanted. The station could be confusing - as it was just a collection of old BA330 modules on a grid. The docking gates were little more than the ports on the opposite side of the grid. The tunnel was wide enough for three but they only moved one person at a time - safety. Its ten feet took only moments to cross - especially when newbies were in a hurry to get a looksee out a portal. As the tunnel opened into the first chamber, he saw the kids and other newbies crowding the ports to see space, or earth. He remembered his first time, so long ago and smiled. He drifted directly across to the opposite tunnel. In the junction there were five choices.

Straight ahead took him to the Bigelow gates, mostly research labs up at OL320. Bigelow added Orbit Disney a couple of years ago so the tunnel saw a lot of traffic. He looked left. That took him to the ISS gate. Now expanded with their new BA500's, the station was becoming a construction yard and maintenance garage for the orbital traffic. He turned back to the right. That was the way to Lunar Aldrin Station. Mining had paid for expansions in research and this year Lunar Disney opened.

He looked upward to the business end of Asimov station - there the offices of Customs, Traffic Control, and the fledgling Consortium that directed operations in space.

Below were the quarters that housed them. Passengers never

saw the staff, mainly because the route was easy to follow, and the ATS staff kept connections tight. A noise from behind signaled time to move. He placed his feet across the left tunnel entrance and gently pushed himself down the right hand tunnel.

He passed three chamber entrances on his left before reaching the tunnel's end at a fourth. Following the left turn, he pushed solidly and floated through two more chambers and into the departure gate for Lunar Aldrin station. Some time past someone had painted an X over the word mining, and scrawled 'Aldrin'. The walls were stained with grime, and grit. The whole appeared gray and dingy. So what. Only workingmen and women came here. They kept the pretty part for when dignitaries and families came to ride on the commercial lunar shuttle.

He allowed himself to drift toward the bulkhead, and a view port beckoned him. There were two big companies operating the shuttles now. Virgin had leveraged its sub orbital and airlines into a lucrative earth to moon commercial passage. SpaceX operated the transport. His ticket bore the utilitarian logo of SpaceX. The slot or berth he would get on the X-shuttle would be little more than an acceleration bag. A far cry from the cushioned frills offered on the Virgin commercial shuttle. But then, the X-shuttle took a more direct, costly route. They ferried the cargo, along with the working crews; and it was the cargo that paid for their passage. The Virgin shuttle, took passengers on a smooth final

orbit of the earth as they built up speed to make the lunar transit. Less fuel, more time. Tourists liked it that way.

There was a double-ding, then again, and a third time. The X-shuttle was arriving. He studied the people around him. All floated just a few inches from the nearest bulkhead. They appeared comfortable; reading, sleeping, or like him, watching the others. A collection of solitary creatures; most lost a good friend - or several - by the end of their first tour. A torn suit, a stray space rock, or most often, misjudging the distance and plowing into a cliff face. The suits were tough, but there were limits. And they were wholly unforgiving. His own life-long friend had tripped, fallen backwards into scaffolding. Tools on the scaffolding fell - a drill punctured his shoulder. They had been over a click from the habitat. There wasn't time, and the decision was hard.

Pull the drill to patch the suit, and he bled to death inside; leave the drill and there was no way to stop the out-gassing - he would suffocate before help could arrive. "So just take the drill off the bit, and I'll work for as long as I can." He'd said. There were no tears, no sadness, just acceptance. They worked hard. Inside the cave they'd dug, there was only the light of their helmets, and the silhouettes they each cast under their lights. A half hour later, his friend fell forward, unable to catch his breath. "Don't be sad, Billy." He gasped. "I've had a good run"

he touched Bill's helmet. "Not many make it more than 6 months I - I - 6 years..." his voice trailed off in the microphone. The air was gone from the suit, nothing to transmit sound to the mic; nothing for his friend to breathe. The eyes closed inside the helmet and his friend was gone.

It was true, most newbies, have an accident, fatal accident within their first tour of 6 months. Six years was phenomenal. Mark Grayson had been one of the first miners on the moon. Though, Mark had shown Bill that it really wasn't mining. Yea they took the rock and processed it into components when it contained something worth it. Mostly it was used for bricks. It was the hollowed out cave that was useful.

They'd been creating caves in the sides of craters ever since. Bricks made on site created the seal wall, and an airlock allowed egress. Hard work for sure, but a hell of a lot cheaper than shipping a metal can from earth. Once the cave was closed, its inner surface sealed with mooncrete, and then pressurized, people could move in. After ten years on the crews, Bill had earned the right to enter a "hab-group" himself. That is, without paying cash.

Four people worked the hab-group homestead. Usually there were two men, and two women. Recruiters were signing them up in droves. Since they ran out of cons and opened it up to the masses, people had been arriving at the rate of a new group every month. Meant his work accelerated. "Good to be busy"

Mark had always said. Four double-dings sounded. It was time for boarding. No one spoke. These were all veterans of the hab-mines. They knew better than to make any new friends. The boarding official noted Bill's ticket color. Light green showed he had reached his ten-year mark. He was a free man now. There was a question, but the official never asked. Best not to, and waved Bill into the ship.

It was basically a three-foot diameter cylinder in the center, and the outer wall/ cylinder. Modeled after the old space shuttle dimensions it was nearly 60 feet long and 15 across. Less the center shaft that housed the life support, food, and passenger entertainment and communications terminals, there was a roomy 12 feet from console to outer wall. Along the outer wall were the "bags". They were spaced a couple feet apart to give everyone rolling room when sleeping. The head of each pointed toward the front of the ship. That allowed less discomfort during acceleration. It had a capacity of nearly 150 people, though these ships rarely carried even half that many. The ground launches just hadn't caught up with the capacity.

He pushed off to an isolated bag, and tied his duffel down, and slipped into the bag, zipping it up to his waist. The clock on the terminal showed 15 minutes until departure. He crossed his arms and glanced at his watch. It was 10pm Dallas time. He'd been up for 28 hours now. Time for some sleep - he closed his eyes and slipped into a dark slumber.

The dream was of her again. The smell, her touch, that look in her eye; then the screech of the tires and she was gone again. He jolted awake. It was quiet. He let his breathing calm. Closed his eyes, willing himself to relax. Then he opened his eyes again. The clock showed an hour to arrival at LOS, Lunar Orbit Station. He pushed his head against the wall. The three days had been quiet, that's for sure. He checked his bag to be sure all was stowed properly, then unzipped and floated to the center console. He found the compartment, and pulled out three of the damp towelettes and wiped his face, neck, and arms down; their coolness was refreshing after three days without a shower. Only a few hours more and he could get a bath.

Someone approached from his left. He looked over and nodded. So did the other.

The other miner, washed as Bill had, glanced at the display, then paused. He looked at Bill. "Aren't you old Mark Grayson's partner?"

Bill nodded.

"Heard he blew out his suit, worked till the air was gone. You sure did all right by him."

Bill nodded again watching the man.

"I was the recruiter that sent him up here." He seemed almost apologetic. Bill just watched and waited. "Felt kinda bad when I heard he bought it." He thrust a hand in Bill's direction. "Name's George, George Wilcox." When Bill didn't take the proffered hand he coughed and put his hand back on the bulkhead.

"You know he used to operate a family farm in Ohio. Kids all grown, wife gone, he sold the place, put the money in investments and volunteered to go be a miner." He was talking through his nervousness. "You know, he willed all that money to me." He shook his head. "Why he'd go and do something like that, I just can't figger. But I just found out. Y-see, he left it to me in trust. I earned 10 percent of it each year while I waited for you." He was fidgeting now. Bill's interest was piqued.

"Don't know why he trusted me with it, but he did." He looked Bill in the eye. "Look, Bill. Mark had no family left when he died. His will was very specific. He'd changed it just a few weeks before the accident." Bill felt his eyes narrow.

"Do you know how much 10 percent of 10 million is? Geez. Not as much as one would like, but hell. Look. Mark specified that in the event you survived to get your green Hab ticket, I was to bring it to you."

If there had been any gravity, Bill would have fallen on his ass. Stunned does not come close to his feelings. He closed his eyes and shook his head - and immediately regretted it, as he started to drift. He reached out for the console and grabbed a hook and steadied himself.

"Thought you'd be surprised." The other man chuckled. "He kept it hid, till the bank sent me the dispatch on the station. Well, they confirmed your info, and the money'll be yours soon as I acknowledge the transmittal here." He pointed to the console

screen, then tapped the submit button. A confirmation message shone. "Well, it's done."

A thought occurred to Bill. "So what did you get out of it all?"

He smiled. "Well, that's interesting. See, there's the 10 percent I got every year for watching the thing. Then, in the dispatch, the bank says I get a trip to the moon if I want it."

He smiled. "I've been recruiting for so long, I thought why not?"

Bill smiled weakly. "Yea."

"But then there was an add-on note. They added an extra million for my trouble. So I'm gonna invest in my own hab."

"Ungh." Bill swallowed hard. "So, how much was left?"

The other man smiled big. "You got fifteen million in the bank boy."

Bill felt his knuckles whiten on the handhold.

"Its all yours. Look. I may need a mole soon. Do you think you might be doing any consulting?" He reached into his pocket pulled out a card and held it out.

Bill looked at the card, then the man, then the card. He took the card and slid it into his own pocket as the man pushed off the console and returned the way he'd come. Bill pulled himself to the handhold then pushed off in the direction of his bag. Fifteen Million dollars - whoa.

He could feel the ship's final deceleration burn as he zipped into the bag. Fifteen Million. Damn! Just what was old Gray thinking, he wondered.

The deceleration burn was complete so they must have

reached orbit. He unzipped and gathered his bag and kicked off gently for the docking hatch. A steward was waiting, reminding all to use the handholds as they move through the 'ways.

Lunar Orbit Station, affectionately renamed LOST by the many who had passed through, comprised just three of the BA330's. The first was for the orbital crew operations; the last was for their quarters. In between was the docking and transfer center. Here it was a straight pass through to the waiting shuttle to take him to the surface.

The shuttle was a simple affair, basically a squat cylinder with legs and an engine. It was designed very specifically for its purpose: it held 9 passengers plus the pilot all seated facing the center. The passengers followed him into their seats, strapped in and waited as the pilot followed the departure checklist. Bill had overheard the checklist so many times he ticked off each item as the pilot went through it. He studied the other passengers.

Six were miners like himself, probably returning after their quarterly R&R at Asimov station. George, the recruiter was not among them. The other three, two men and a woman wore casual clothing. His eyes lingered on her for a moment. Red hair rested in a pony tail long enough to reach her shoulders, and cool green eyes were focused, and unconcerned as they returned his look. She held his gaze for a moment, and then continued her own assessment of the passengers. She was awful comfortable.

Somehow that seemed strange to him. The clothes. The few women who came "luny-side" were hardy feminists who wanted to prove something or whores. Oh to be sure, there were a few who might have wanted to come up to the "frontier" to snag a guy. But until they certified that the environment suited fertile women and babies, well, it hadn't been certified yet, so those types never got past the recruiters. This woman was a well manicured, business type -they never went passed Asimov.

The other two men - well, they were odd too. Polo shirts under their jackets, the usual denim jeans and sneakers, but something . . . He was getting uneasy about things. In all his 10 years, he had never had so many things seem so strange in one trip. I mean, you heard about stuff like this, but never, NEVER all on the same trip. And that recruiter... 15 million. He shook his head just as there was a click of the docking clamps releasing.

Routine flights took an average of 20-30 minutes. This one was routine. He could feel the effect of the gravity returning in the pit of his stomach as they approached the surface. There was a brief period that while his body adjusted, he felt a mild disorientation. The three newcomers never even blinked. Crap, Bill thought. Corporate types on the moon; His hand moved to his pocket where both the ticket and card rested together. Naw, he'd earned his green card. It was his. So what then were they doing here? There was a bump as the ship settled to the

ground. "Welcome to Aldrin Station, folks." Said the pilot. He bent over his seat to peer through the portal and verified that the tunnel had extended to the hatch. A red lamp over the hatch clicked off, and a green one turned on signaling air on the other side.

They filed slowly into the tunnel towards the far entrance. The quiet, except for their foot scrapings on the flooring, was welcome to Bill. Even so, he longed for the privacy of his quarters. He desperately needed to think. They passed into the open corridor and were directed by signs to customs to their right. Customs here was more about stopping infectious agents, insects, and contraband, rather than import/export duties. The bags were irradiated, then scanned, then returned to the owner.

Bill nodded at the steward. Bill had trained the guy his first week out. Not suited to mining. Made a great clerk though. It was Bill's recommendation that got him this job in customs. He was always willing to help Bill duck out through the staff exit when needed. This time was no exception. The clerk nodded back that the way was open, and Bill ducked around the corner and waited by the door. It buzzed and he stepped through.

When he reached his bungalow, he tossed his duffel toward the closet and lay down on the bed. Maybe tomorrow would let him get back to a normal day. He closed his eyes and almost fell asleep.

His com buzzed, announcing the arrival of a new message. He

opened one eye and looked at the display. Not readable. He sat up and squinted at the readout - no one that he recognized. He used the remote to acknowledge receipt, then turned it off, and lay back down, dropping the remote on the floor.

Two hours later, he was awakened to the buzzing of the com again. He looked at the time, and decided to get up. He took a warm cloth from the dispenser and washed himself as he scanned the messages that had come while he slept. Geez, three were from George. He wanted to get together to scout a spot for his hab. And five, were from a Morgan Madrean. It was nearly every half hour. The message said she would be at the cafeteria at local 7 pm. She offered to buy drinks. Not that he drank, but maybe she'd spring for a dinner. He checked the time. Thirty minutes, he had time.

As he entered the cafeteria, the redhead from the shuttle was seated in the far corner. Her two goons were nearby, sipping their drinks from straws. He ignored her, and went to the counter. When queried, they pointed to the redhead.

"I hope you don't mind if I stay seated. I'm still getting my moon legs." He nodded and she extended her hand. "Morgan Madrean." She was genuinely displeased when he didn't take her hand. "Bill Marsden, right?" He nodded as he slid into the chair opposite her. "You're the first to get your green hab card. I'd like to congratulate you."

"They'll be more soon enough."

He sipped gingerly from his straw. "Your offer of drinks - might you extend that to a dinner?" Her eyes looked into his, appraising him. Then she turned in her chair and signaled the counter. When she turned back, he nodded. "Ok, got my attention. Though you got till I'm done eatin to make your pitch."

"Fine," she said. "My group is interested in pushing forward a little faster. We'd like to hire you as a mole."

"Got offers."

"We don't want to do one at a time. We want to dig 10 at once."

Now that was just crazy, he thought. Waste of money to build something that'll take a long time to fill. "Awful waste of money." He said. A waiter placed the dinner container before him. "Thanks." He said to the waiter. "Not enough people coming across yet."

"We are changing that. We have contracts for a hundred people in the wings right now."

"So. Contracts have a habit of failing."

"Alright. So it's a waste of money. You want some of it, or shall I get someone else to do the job?"

Now that was direct, he thought with genuine surprise. And surprising him was tough. "Hmm." He chewed his veggies slowly. As he swallowed, "Ok, what timetable you got in mind?"

She waved to someone behind him. "George!" she called. He turned too quickly and started to drift. His hand caught the table to hold himself steady.

George Wilcox slowly bounded

into the room. He stopped himself at the table, and reached for a chair. "Hey, Bill." To Morgan, "Morgan. Thank you for the accommodations."

Bill's eyes narrowed. "Ok, this is a community project?"

It was George who spoke up. "Yes. Our organization is poised to push newspace to a new level. But we need your help to get it started. It's that simple."

With that, the discussion ended. They wanted Bill to build ten habs right away. He considered the task. He would need men, materials, and tools. He looked her over. He had noticed her corporate-type on the shuttle. It was money-they could get the men, materials, and tools. It meant work. He hadn't had much for nearly a month. He was itching to get back at it, but the rules said that once you got your green card, you retired. Did other work. Bull, he thought. "Okay, you've got me, for now. I'll listen. But you gotta do something better for the meals."

The other two smiled. "I don't think that will be a problem." Said George.

Morgan put her hand on George's arm. "Give him the general rundown. I have to go to another meeting. Could we meet again tomorrow at the same time?" She looked at Bill.

"Yea. I'll be here."

George took two hours to brief Bill. And his head was swimming when he finally crawled into bed. Crap, he thought, what have I got myself into? He drifted off into a troubled sleep.

**D**on is a lifelong fan of colonizing space and believes the final frontier is humanities biggest challenge. He worked for 15 years as a computer programmer and developer of artificial intelligence. He loves ancient history and contemplating the social evolution of our species. He currently resides in Scottsdale, Arizona employing his many talents as a maintenance technician where he prides himself at being able to fix anything. He serves as webmaster for Weavers of Dreams and is the President of the local Moon Society chapter. Don has two books being published this summer, Ancestors and Moonstone.



Don welcomes all correspondence.

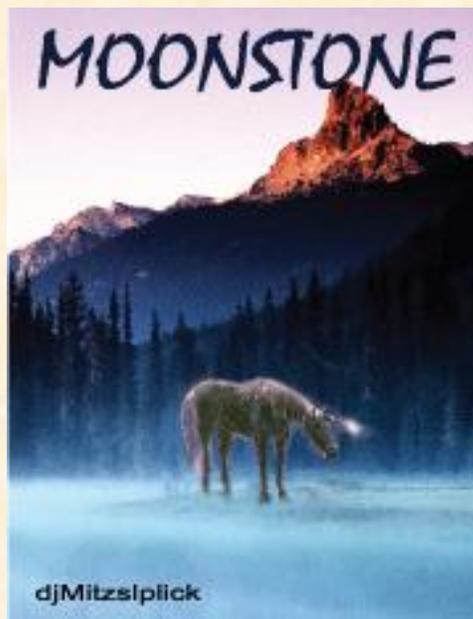
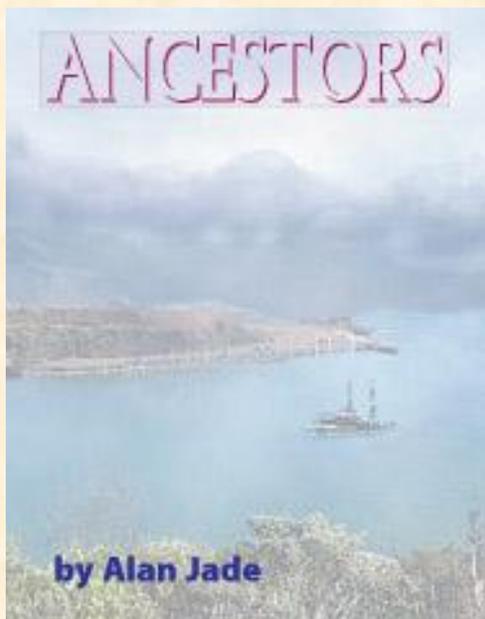
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## A Man Alone is in Bad Company

Charles Leshar

Rangers normally patrolled in pairs, but today Sergeant Christobal Calatrava rides alone. That's fine by him. He would much rather be out here, riding solo under the brilliant Luna sky, than manning some checkpoint. But what Lunarian is ever truly alone?

"It's almost a certainty she was in Lincoln County Hospital when..." Raw emotion chokes off his father voice, helpless in the face of reality. "Son, we must admit she's gone. We may never find any trace of her, but she was there... I'm sorry Chris."

Damn! Memories dance unbidden across Christobal's cerebral cortex. Tears blur his vision and the young Ranger instinctively backs off the throttle, giving his visor time to clear his eyes. His aching heart will take longer, much longer.

"Why don't you come home? Your moth..." His dad's voice abruptly cuts off.

"Pop?" Chris asks, a cold shiver runs down his spine. "Can anyone hear me?" The normal background chatter from the other Rangers and nearby citizens is suddenly gone, as well as the portion of his visor's sensor array processed by Magi. Even the ever-present 911 emergency

channel has vanished. He reaches up to touch his visor, assuming that something must have failed in the device. Not in his wildest dreams did he think that the Lunarian communications system could be so thoroughly shut down.

A flickering glare from somewhere behind him reflects off the cycle's control panel. Chris skids the bike to a stop, plants his boots on the compacted regolith, turns and beholds a sight never before seen on Luna. In a series of brilliant flashes, amid an ever-thickening cloud of debris, the razorback ridge of Rim Mountain is silently exploding as far as he can see in both directions.

He stares in disbelief, unsure for a moment just what he is witnessing. Even at max zoom, his visor cannot pick up any projectiles raining down from above but their effect is unmistakable. Abruptly, a huge section of the mountainside soundlessly gives way in a giant avalanche of rock and dust. He quickly realizes the bombardment is not limited to the distant mountaintop but is sweeping towards him in a terrifying wave of destruction.

Sizing up the situation, Chris twists the throttle, feeling the

powerful machine coil beneath him as it surges forward. Leaving Prattville Main, he guns the bike along one of many trails that crisscross the Highlands, a rooster tail of regolith shooting out almost horizontally behind him. In the complete silence of an airless world, he heads away from civilization at best speed. Born in Aldrin Station barely twenty years ago, he knows these paths like the back of his hand, having explored every square mile astride a two-wheeler much like the one he rides today.

Cursing with all his heart, Chris violently throws the bike into a curve, feeling its wheelbase shorten as it gathers power. First, his sister is missing and presumed dead in Luna's largest terrorist bombing, and now the Republic of Luna is under attack. Cut off from everyone for the first time in his life, he feels strangely free. He harbors no doubt as to who is responsible and vows to make them pay.

Coming out of the curve, Chris releases the pent-up energy contained in the cycle and launches into the night. Gracefully, he and the bike soar far through the lunar vacuum before again touching the surface of the moon.

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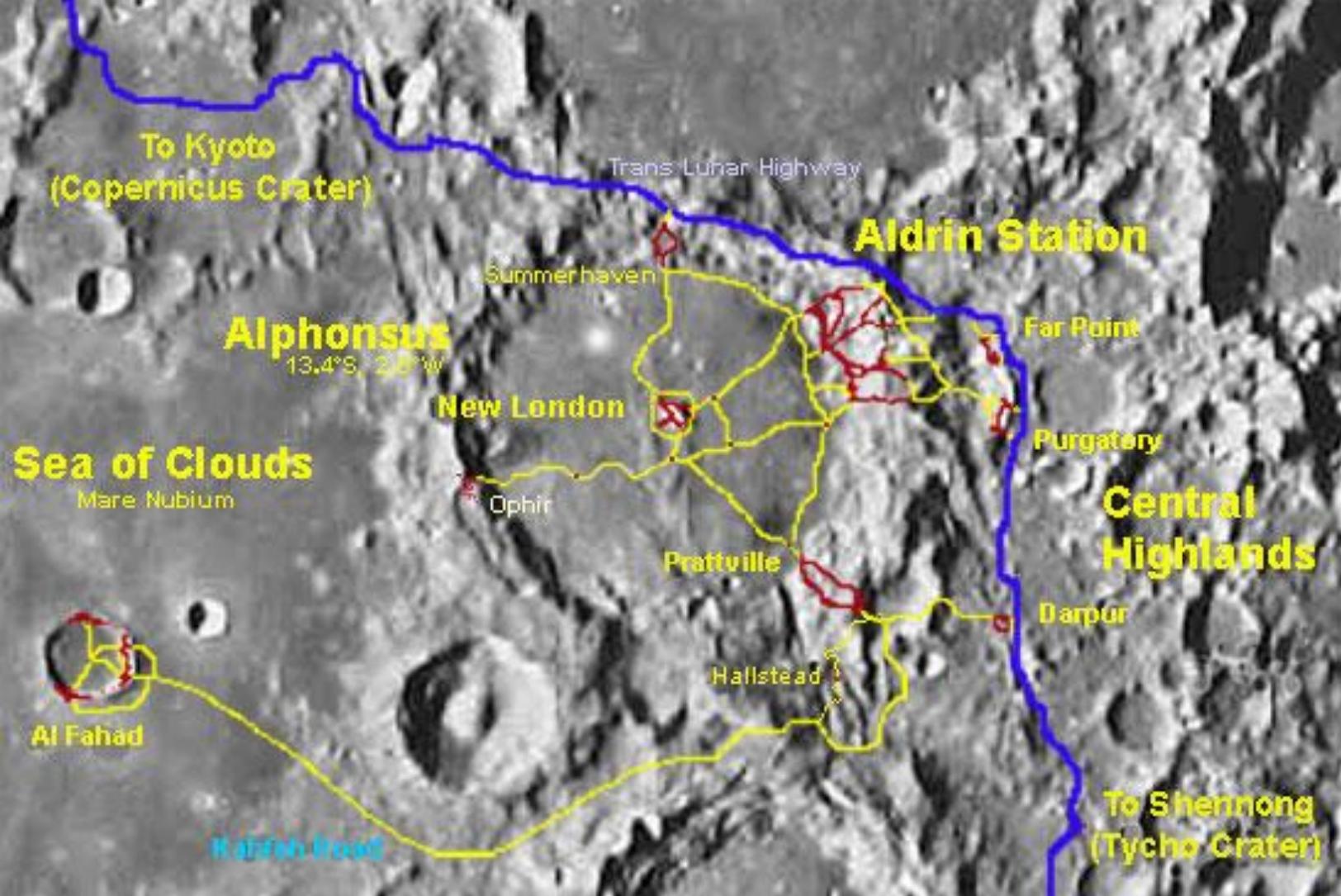
In 2092, the Republic of Luna has over 1.3 million citizens spread out among four major population centers. In the north, Kyoto is the largest city of Copernicus Complex (109K); Alphonsus Complex (495K) consists of four major settlements, Aldrin Station being the largest; and to

the south, Shennong is the dominant city in Tyco Crater Complex (607K). On the Far Side, Icarus Crater contains Gagarin (67K). Another 48 thousand citizens live in small settlements scattered along the Trans Lunar Highway, most clustered near the major complexes.

Located in the Four Craters Region, Alphonsus Complex is composed of New London carved beneath Central Peak, Aldrin Station hewn in the eastern section of Rim Mountain, Prattville in the rim to the south, and Summerhaven to the north. A myriad of smaller settlements and mining operations are scattered across the craters floor and eastward, well out on the mineral-rich Central Highlands.

The Highlands is 22,000 square miles roughly enclosed by the Four Craters, Ptolemaeus in the northwest, Albategnius to the northeast, Alphonsus to the west, and Arzachel to the southwest. Composed of thick layers of material ejected at the craters birth, subsequent smaller impacts shaped the Central Highlands into a tortured landscape of shear cliffs and deep fissures.

The Trans Lunar Highway forms the backbone of the Republic of Luna and is the only roadway wide enough for two mining convoys to pass side by side along its entire length. The TLH winds some 1360 miles, from Kyoto past Aldrin Station and south to Scottsbluff, Salvation Rock and Shennong. It transects the Central Highlands north and east of Alphonsus Complex.



TLH may be the biggest but there are literally hundreds of thousands of smaller routes crisscrossing the lunar surface. Some are no more than a single cycle track in the wilderness. Others are truck routes servicing mines and other more substantial settlements.

The Central Highlands is particularly dense with the imprint of humanity. For the last seventy years, miners and explorers have left behind a mishmash of trails marking their passage. Every footprint, every tire track, and every landing site are as pristine today as the day they were formed because once the surface is disturbed, there is almost nothing in the environment that will change it. There is no wind-borne dust to soften exposed edges, no rain to

scour away the detail, no ice to wedge apart the particles. Only the occasional meteor impact or lunar quake erodes the topography, a process taking thousands of years. Thus, there is no way to tell when a given track was made. It could have been yesterday or seventy years ago. Chris and his cycle disappear into this clutter.

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Chris heads south, putting Prattville at his back, staying off the main roads. This is rough but familiar territory, heavily mined long ago for its rich deposits of aluminum and magnesium. Just over the next rise is Hallstead outpost, a small family owned freehold carved in the rim of a small crater.

John Jackson Hallstead immigrated to Luna over thirty years ago and founded Jackson Freehold. Today, it supplies food to Darpur, Purgatory, Far Point and Aldrin Station. Hallstead also contains a boarding house, repair shop, and several saloons catering to independent miners in the area. It's home to upwards of three hundred citizens, depending on the day and time.

Before cresting the rise, Chris notices a haze over the horizon. He slows and edges the cycle up to a ridge overlooking Hallstead, careful not to silhouette himself against the sky.

The scene below is horrific. Bodies lay scattered amongst the ruined surface structures and shredded vehicles. The dead all wear Lunarian vacsuits. Body fluids still boil from several and hang over the settlement like a death shroud, red with the blood of citizens. The fight here had been brutal and one sided.

Parked in the main compound are four rovers and a truck convoy. This in itself is not a surprise, but what is unusual is the lack of identification on the vehicles. Usually, the mines plaster their logos on anything that moves. These vehicles are drab gray and black camouflage. But something else is wrong with them. A normal mining convoy has a truck and up to fifteen carriers strung out behind it like a locomotive and its cars. Carriers are by necessity open at the top to allow ore to be dumped inside, but these have sealed roofs with heavy weapons and sensors mounted on top of each. Airlocks and other elements identify these as human

transports, not ore carriers.

A number of figures move about the compound. Some are dragging bodies into one of the remaining buildings. Others are loading the convoy with supplies and fuel. Many more come and go freely through Hallstead's main airlock, all without the usual broadband chatter. They must be using laser line-of-sight communications. Chris zooms in but cannot see their faces, hidden behind helmets that do not transmit the wearer's expression. Instead, he sees two bulging sensor arrays, one at each apex of a long narrow triangular face. He immediately recognizes Brotherhood standard issue. Chris has great respect for the multifaceted sensor arrays that form the basis of the disparaging name, bug-eyes. Despite its grotesque appearance, the array provides its wearer with a full 360° multi-frequency scan. These bug-eyes aren't miners or truckers, they're clad in armored vacsuits and carry disrupters. They are soldiers.

Anger grips him as he puts it all together. Kahfah Road passes about ten miles south of Halstead as the crow flies. It's the main highway leading to the Holy City of Al Fahad carved in the rim of Lassell Crater well out on the Sea of Clouds. Al Fahad is the Islamic Brotherhoods biggest settlement on Luna, yet, no Lunarian has ever been inside. Access is restricted to Muslims. No one even knows how many reside within its walls. Factoring in the massive bombardment of Aldrin Station, Chris realizes the Republic of Luna is at war. He is at war.

Suddenly, several figures emerge from one of Hallstead's

out buildings and begin running from the compound towards the deep ravine right below Chris. The Ranger can see these are Lunarian's from their vacsuits, a man, two women and a child of about ten years. They are frightened. Behind them, the alarm goes up and the fleeing group comes under fire from the energy weapons mounted on the massive truck convoy. Just when Chris thinks they will all make it, the man's hit. Nothing anyone can do for him, the beam sears a hole through his chest, boiling his insides, killing instantly. The dead body limply comes to rest amidst the dust. The others disappear into the ravine with only a backward glance to their fallen comrade.

From his vantage point, Chris watches two rovers load up and start moving in hot pursuit. He calculates the vehicles will easily catch the Lunarians within moments and guns his cycle down the hill, taking chances he normally would not as he quickly closes the gap.

For the first few seconds, he's exposed to fire from the convoy but none materializes. By the time he reaches the ravine, his cycle is coiled and ready to fly. Timing it to perfection, Chris launches the bike and soars over the top of the oncoming rovers, firing his disrupter pistol pointblank at the soldiers inside.

Those in the leading rover are taken completely by surprise. Chris taps the driver once, his beam searing a pencil size hole through the man's armor and into his heart. His companion has time to point the rover's top-mounted cannon but before he can fire,

Chris kills him with a head shot. The vehicle careens off course and crashes into the side of the ravine.

The second rover swerves sideways, suddenly not caring about the fleeing Lunarians. It fires its cannon wildly several times, missing badly. In a blink of an eye, the cycle disappears down the ravine in the opposite direction. Slewng the rover about, they give chase, reporting to their commander as they go.

Not yet ready to quit the fight, Chris aims the cycle uphill and twists the throttle. The bike responds and easily climbs up and over a boney outcrop, putting him briefly in the sights of the convoy. Several high-energy shots churn the nearby lunar landscape, but none find their mark before Chris disappears once more below the edge of the ravine.

Unbeknownst to either, the cycle and rover are closing rapidly on one another. Coming around a bend, Chris is the first to react and fires, taking out the driver. With a dead man driving, the rover drifts sideways and hits a rock about the size of a duffle bag, flips over, and skids to a stop on its roof.

Chris twists in the saddle and targets the exposed underbelly, shredding the fuel cell storage tanks. The exposed toxic fluids boil into the lunar vacuum. A moment later, the hypergolic fuels mix and feed on each other, exploding in a monstrous silent fireball, pulverizing the rover with its force. Easily seen from Hallstead, the brief bright flame rising above the ravine says far more plainly than any verbal

declaration, the fight has only just begun.

He broddies his cycle about and heads east, deeper into the Highlands, making sure to leave a clearly defined trail. If nothing else, he can draw the Brotherhood away from the Hallstead survivors and give them a chance. The remaining two rovers pick up his trail and give chase.

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Hours later, Chris hides his bike amidst some rocks and moves carefully the last few feet to peek at Hallstead over the edge of the same deep ravine. Nothing much appears to have changed. The truck convoy is still there but no rovers. Chris grins, thinking about the two missing rovers lying in ruins at the bottom of a cliff several miles away. They will not be killing any more Lunarians!

Where is everyone? Chris pinpoints six soldiers standing guard but otherwise, nothing is moving. Only six? Chris angers as though slapped in the face. The Brotherhood commander is not taking him seriously even after losing four rovers, a decision he will soon regret.

Chris finalizes his plans and creeps over the edge, stealthily making his way into the encampment. Timing his moves with those of the guards, Chris lays his trap at the rear of the very last carrier.

As the soldier turns the corner, he walks onto the Ranger's sword. Starting low and aiming high, Chris drives the ultra thin blade between the ceramic plates layered on the vacsuit like fish scales. It takes all of his considerable

strength to penetrate the underlying puncture proof material, and all of his skill to keep the convulsing body from snapping the titanium at the hilt. The metal sings as it slides past the hard plates, sending a strange tone up his arm to his ears, the swan song of a man dying far from home. The sound is expected but disconcerting.

His aim is true, slicing through the heart, killing instantly. Chris eases the body to the ground, sliding his sword out with care. This sound is different, disturbingly like a baby's weak cry. Chris steels himself to finish the job. He wipes the blade on the arm of his victim then rolls the body under the carrier. The dead man's blood boils in the vacuum. He must hurry before it draws attention.

Chris waits for his chance then moves quickly to the outer airlock door and climbs in. Sword in one hand and disrupter in the other, he watches the inner door cycle open. Just out of sight to his right, the Ranger's visor picks up heavy breathing and elevated heartbeats. Stepping boldly from the airlock, he confronts two men in shirtsleeves sitting at a table only a few yards away. They are both looking at him like they have seen a ghost.

For a split second, nobody moves. Then all hell breaks loose.

One soldier shouts something unintelligible and reaches for the pistol holstered at his waist. Chris shoots him in the chest as he leaps across the intervening distance. With one swipe of his blade, Chris cuts

the other man's throat, almost severing his head in the process. Blood fountains from the gaping wound, the look of shocked disbelief frozen on the face. The bodies hit the floor almost simultaneously. Neither had time to sound an alarm.

Chris scans the inside of the carrier. He is alone. Extending in both directions are triple-decker bunks designed for either sitting or sleeping, depending on their owners needs. A quick count reveals space for at least fifty soldiers and their gear. If all ten carriers in this convoy were the same, that put this contingent at about 500 soldiers.

Large lockers at each end of the carrier draws his attention. Opening one, he finds a wealth of ordnance, everything from to missiles to landmines. This is what he came for. Chris quickly fills two large bags.

Before he leaves, Chris sets the timer on one of the remaining charges and closes the locker.

Exiting the transport, Chris slips down the length of the convoy placing explosives under each carrier where they will set off the ammo lockers inside. Last, he attaches several ounces of SuperX on the trucks undercarriage near its fuel cell supply tanks, setting its timer to go off first. Along the way, he makes some interesting observations concerning the carrier modifications, things that will come in handy. Sergeant Christobal Calatrava did all of this without any of the remaining guards seeing him, a shadow in the night.

Moving quickly, Chris is soon securing the bulging bags on his bike. Gunning the machine, he

races down the ravine away from Hallstead. Moments later, he stops near the summit of a nearby hill that looks down on the compound.

Brotherhood soldiers are swarming around the convoy like a bunch of ants. One of them, crawling along on his knees, spots the device planted on the truck and begins waving his arms and pointing. Another bug-eye comes running up and squirms on his back under the hulking low-slung vehicle just as the device explodes. The charge ruptures the huge hypergolic fuel tanks letting vacuum atomize and mix their contents. The resulting massive fireball engulfs the truck disintegrating it into a million pieces. Chunks of aluminum and titanium shred nearby soldiers and rips open the first carrier.

The dust was just beginning to settle when the other charges begin going off. Chris watches as one after another, all ten carriers are torn apart in complete silence. Dust, gasses and human body fluids gather about the convoy in a thick blanket. With no wind to carry it away, dissipation takes time. The dead and wounded are scattered everywhere.

Secondary explosions are still soundlessly popping off as Chris turns away, his anger sated for the moment. Survivors will speak of a demon with a sword, a ghost with teeth.

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Chris uses his disrupter to drill the last of thirty-five deep holes straight down into the mountainside, his vacsuit protecting him from the blowback.

He pours a quantity of powdered SuperX into the hole then adds a detonator. It's an insurgency technique taught him by Captain Osaka at Aldrin's police academy. The charges are scattered along a half-mile stretch looking down on Kahfah Road.

Moving quickly, he makes his way across the razor edged landscape. Finding his pre-selected vantage point, Chris settles down against a boulder to wait.

A thousand feet below, the compacted regolith roadbed glows in the starlight. From where he sits, he can see several miles back towards Al Fahad. Kahfah Road had only opened a few months before and now he's going to shut it down, at least temporarily.

Chris doesn't have long to wait. The scouts come first, miles ahead of the main body. He lets them pass unharmed.

Behind them is a column of trucks, each pulling a single carrier. The massive vehicles bristle with heavy disrupter cannons. Chris has never seen anything like them. Their only discernable purpose is to destroy. He lets them pass as well.

Finally, what he has been waiting for comes down the road, the graders, compactors, and their support vehicles. These are the road and bridge builders, the Brotherhood's Corp of Engineers. Following them are troop convoys, similar to the one in Hallstead, as far back as Chris can see. He shudders as he realizes the full extent of what is coming at the Republic.

The trap is ready. His targets are in the kill zone. It's time to slow this parade down. Chris

transmits the signal that detonates all thirty-five charges simultaneously. He feels the shock through his ass and sees dust devils jet outward across the stricken mountainside. At first, it seems as if nothing else is going to happen, then the entire mass starts to slide downhill, slow at first, but gaining speed with each passing second.

Below, the vehicles are oblivious to the danger until hundreds of tons of basalt crashes down, crushing them like a boot stepping on an ant. It's over in moments.

Turning his attention to the main column, Chris begins detonating the landmines he planted in and around the roadway far below. He targets the trucks amid the chaos. The troop carriers are immobile without them.

For as far as Chris can see, the neat orderly single-line procession has degenerated into confusion. This stretch of road passes through some of the worst terrain on Luna, a land of shear cliffs and steep mountainsides, of fissures a thousand feet deep and big enough to swallow a convoy. They cannot go forward and the road is only wide enough for a single truck to pass in many places. It will be hours, perhaps days, before they will regain control and without their Engineers, they cannot simply repair the road, they will need another route. He knows of only one, and it's his next stop.

Chris triggers the last of the landmines simultaneously. Moving quickly, he turns his back on the hell he has created, already planning his next objective. The

movement catches the eye of the scanners below and shots begin to rain in around him. A few come close but he is too stealthy for the gunners to get a clear target, a ghost among shadows.

Just before disappearing, Chris gives them something to think about. He pulls his sword from its scabbard and holds it aloft over the ridge so only its stark silhouette is visible from below. Then he's gone.

\*\*\*\*\*

Chris stops the cycle next to the heavily damaged vehicle. It's one of the rovers sent to track him down after Hallstead. He needs what's inside its fuel tanks. He rummages around in the cycles small tool compartment until he finds the universal interconnect. Only then does he realize he's not alone.

At least two dozen heavily armed bug-eyes are confronting him. Chris whispers a goodbye into his visor, expecting to die in the next instant. If the device survived, at least his family would know he was thinking of them in his final moments.

Instead of opening fire, one of them transmits in broken English. "Remove your weapons!"

When Chris remains motionless, the voice repeats, "You will remove your weapons or die!"

They wish to capture him? Interesting. Chris shows them his hands then slowly removes and drops his disrupter. As he draws the sword from over his shoulder, an excited shuffle runs through the soldiers like wind across a wheat field.

They waste no time, binding Chris hand and foot, shoving a thick black hood over his head,

forcing him into a fetal position while stuffing him into a rover's empty tool locker. He barely fits. The bone-jarring ride takes the better part of three hours, only the last fifteen minutes on a smooth roadway.

The soldiers pull Chris from the box, letting him fall to the ground. They do not expect him able to stand after his brutal ride but the Ranger surprises them, gracefully arising from the ground to his full height with no apparent ill effects of his rough handling. Someone barks an order. Chris is grabbed and hustled forward. It ends when the soldiers force him to his knees. Only then does someone pull the hood away. The sudden lifting of the blackness was intended to disorientate him, but again, Chris handles it. His visor easily adjusts to the sudden change in brightness, recording everything for posterity.

The Ranger is at the center of intense floodlights bearing down on him from the tops of troop carriers. The carriers form a high wall along one side of the road as far as he can see. A steep mountainside defines the other.

Chris is in the midst of the invading army. All around him is a sea of bug-eyes. Thousands of soldiers have gathered on the road, on the tops of the nearby carriers, and well up the mountain creating a makeshift arena. Looking beyond them, Chris identifies this place as one of the doublewide segments of Kahfah Road, which one it is takes only a few moments longer.

Alone and kneeling in the dust of Luna, surrounded by enemies, Chris calmly looks around. He

settles on a particularly tall figure in striking black armor. Rising to his feet, he turns to face him. This man's vacsuit is different, the overlapping fish scale is finer with barely a reflection, and the helmet smaller and less bug-like.

"Bring me his sword!" the man says in Arabic, motioning impatiently. Usually, a subject cringes when going from complete blackness to intense light, but it doesn't seem to bother this infidel at all. Instead, a shiver runs down his spine at the inhuman coolness exhibited by the Lunarian. What can one expect from a being without a soul? It's further confirmation that these creatures are the devils handiwork.

One of the soldiers delivers the sword to the tall bug-eye.

"Where did you get this?"

"Made it," Chris answers.

"Unusually thin and much too fragile for a true sword. This could not possibly be used in a fight," the tall man says in English.

"There's only one way to find out," Chris responds.

The officer moves to confront Chris, throwing the Lunarian's blade at his feet. In a single fluid motion, the officer pulls his own broad curved blade from its scabbard and cuts the vacuum in a tight arc inches from the Ranger's face. Chris never flinches.

"This is a sword, infidel!" Motioning at the smaller blade lying in the dust, "That is a toy!" Speaking to someone behind Chris, the man orders, "Untie him!"

Addressing the crowd, the man continues, "You shall all see the

*will of Allah! This demon shall die by my sword!"*

Turning back to Chris, he commands in English, "Pick it up!"

Chris obliges and picks up his sword. The two men are roughly the same height but the officer is heavier and wearing an armored vacsuit. The Ranger is in Lunarian Police Department standard issue. While both vacsuits incorporate sophisticated puncture resistant materials, a determined blade will breach them. The crowd begins to press forward with excitement.

The officer attacks first, swinging his heavy blade in a mighty blow. Chris parries and sidesteps with speed and grace.

The Lunarian razor-thin blade is lighter than the scimitar and Chris skilled in its use, but one wrong move and his blade will shatter as though made of glass. Back and forth, the two men fight, each measuring the other, probing for weakness. As the seconds turn to minutes, the Brotherhood officer has a growing realization that for all the many hours of practice that lies behind him, he is not the master in this duel. He's never faced a blade so fast and now is fighting a defensive battle. It's all he can do just to stay alive.

Chris presses, never giving his opponent a chance to regroup, hitting the carbon based ceramic armor almost at will. Sparks fly at each blow in silent spectacle of this duel to the death.

Growing evermore desperate, the officer grabs one of his soldiers and shoves him at Chris, boring in behind to make the kill.

Chris is too fast, playing off the surprised soldier to mask his final assault. The officer never sees the one that gets him.

Like a striking viper, the Lunarian sword slides upward, forcing its way beneath and between the layers of armor, rending heart and lung asunder, then out again as fast as it went in. The Ranger takes joy in the sound it sends up his arm. He cannot see the face behind the bug-eye but in that moment, Chris knows the weight of hates full measure.

The Ranger thrusts his sword Earthward, mindless of the blood boiling from its length in a red

haze. Maximizing his visors transmission signal, Chris bellows in perfect Arabic.

*"Behold, the will of Allah!"*

The crowd's reaction is immediate. Those with a clean line of fire began bringing their weapons to bear. But they are too late.

Agile as a cat and much quicker, Chris leaps effortlessly over the nearest transport. Those gathered on its top uselessly scatter like a brood of chicks under the shadow of a hawk. Before a single shot is fired, the Ranger disappears into the darkness beyond.

**E**volution's Child is Chuck's debut novel and begins the Republic of Luna series. It is set in 2092 and explores the high tech society that will develop when people are separated not only by great oceans of water or massive mountain ranges, but the harsh unforgiving vacuum of space. It is available at all major bookstores and direct from the publisher at:

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**R**evelation's Child, the second novel in the Republic of Luna series, is due out late 2009. *A Man Alone is in Bad Company*, is the start of a subplot within it and is the story of how one Lunarian kept an army at bay.

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Religion collides with science in the late 21<sup>st</sup> century



# Evolution's Child

Republic of Luna

CHARLES LEE LESHER

# Submissions Guidelines

[editor@writerscramp.us](mailto:editor@writerscramp.us)

**M**oonbeams genre is primarily **Speculative Science Fiction** as it relates to colonizing space and the moon but we will accept other genre including nonfiction. You do not have to be a Moon Society member to submit.

Moonbeams is about two things:

1. authors getting their work published
2. making the case for space colonization

Successful submissions must stick to accepted physics: no faster than light warp drives, no worm holes, no time travel, no transporters a la Star Trek and no alien monsters. No magic, no fantasy. Last but not least, no social, political, or religious diatribes. Send us a plausible story about the colonization of space and the moon and we will publish it. But don't stop there. The subtitle "Tales from the High Frontier" indicates that stories can be set anywhere in the Solar System. Nonfiction submissions on science and technology must be thoroughly referenced.

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Submissions should be in electronic form. MS Word 2007 is preferred but we will accept text files or other common word processor formats. All submissions that need to be keyed in will not be considered unless prior arrangements have been made. The preferred method of submissions is via email with the subject set to Moonbeams Submission. We will accept mailed cd/dvd at the following address:

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Exchanging links is ok if your link is clearly space related. Moonbeams reserve the right to say no to any submission.

These guidelines are subject to review and will be adjusted as we go along. Moonbeams is *YOUR* magazine. Let's have some fun with it, shall we?

The Editor