

DANILO CLEMENTONI

THE WRITER

*THE ADVENTURES OF
AZAKIS AND PETRI*



Danilo Clementoni

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«Tektime S.r.l.s.»

Clementoni D.

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Danilo Clementoni

The writer

The adventures of Azakis and Petri

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THE WRITER

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This is the third volume in the series

"The adventures of Azakis and Petri" To fully enjoy this exciting adventure, before starting this book, I would advise reading the first two volumes entitled respectively "Back to Earth" and "Intersection with Nibiru"

(Author's note)

To my wife and son, for their patience and their invaluable suggestions, which helped me to improve both my story and myself.

A special hug for my mother and a huge kiss for my father who, although ill and suffering, motivated me, with his presence and his gaze, to put all my heart into this wonderful story.

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Introduction

The twelfth planet, Nibiru (the planet of the passing) as it was called by the Sumerians, or Marduk (king of the heavens) as it was referred to by the Babylonians, is actually a celestial body orbiting our sun with a period of 3,600 years. Its orbit is significantly elliptical, retrograde (rotating around the sun in the opposite direction to the other planets) and distinctly tilted in relation to the plane of our solar system.

Each cyclical approach has almost always caused huge interplanetary upheavals in our solar system, both in the orbits and the conformation of the planets it consists of. It was during one of its more tumultuous transitions that the majestic planet Tiamat, located between Mars and Jupiter, with a mass approximately nine times that of the Earth as it is today, rich in water and endowed with eleven satellites, was destroyed in a cataclysmic collision. One of the seven moons orbiting Nibiru struck the gigantic Tiamat, effectively splitting it in half, and catapulting the two sections into opposing orbits. In the following transition (the *second day* of Genesis), the remaining satellites of Nibiru finished off this process, completely destroying one of the two parts formed in the first collision. The debris generated from multiple impacts created what we now know as the *asteroid belt*, or *hammered bracelet* as it came to be called by the Sumerians. This was partly swallowed up by the neighbouring planets. It was Jupiter, in particular, which captured most of the debris, thus noticeably increasing its own mass.

The satellite artefacts of this disaster, including those surviving from Tiamat, were mostly *fired off* into outer orbits, forming what we now know as *comets*. The part that survived the second transition then positioned itself in a stable orbit between Mars and Venus, taking along with it the last remaining satellite and thus forming what we now call the Earth, together with its inseparable companion, the Moon.

The scar caused by that cosmic impact, which occurred approximately 4 billion years ago, is still partially visible today. The scarred part of the planet is now completely covered by water, in what is now called the Pacific Ocean. This occupies about a third of the earth's surface, extending over 179 million square kilometres. Over this vast area there is virtually no landmass, but instead, a large depression extending to a depth of over ten kilometres.

At present, Nibiru is very much like Earth in its conformation. Two thirds of it is covered in water, whilst the rest is occupied by a single continent that stretches from north to south, with a total surface area of over 100 million square kilometres. For hundreds of thousands of years now, some of its inhabitants have been taking advantage of the cyclical close approaches of their planet to our own, making regular visits, each time influencing the culture, knowledge, technology and the very evolution of the human race. Our predecessors have referred to them in many ways, but perhaps the name that represents them best has always been *Gods*.

Background

Azakis and Petri, the two lovable and inseparable aliens who are the protagonists of this adventure, have returned to planet Earth after one of their years (3,600 earth years). Their mission? To retrieve a precious cargo, they had been forced to hastily abandon on their previous visit, due to a fault in their docking system. This time however, they have found a very different terrestrial population to the one they left behind. Customs, traditions, culture, technology, communication systems, weapons. Everything was very different to what they had seen on their previous visit.

On arrival, they came across a pair of terrestrials: Doctor Elisa Hunter and Colonel Jack Hudson, who welcomed them enthusiastically and after countless adventures, helped them bring their delicate mission to an end.

But what the two aliens would have preferred never to have to tell their new friends was that their own planet, Nibiru, was rapidly approaching and in just seven earth days would intersect the Earth's orbit. According to their Elders' calculations, one of its seven satellites would come so close as to almost touch the planet, causing a series of climate disruptions comparable to those of its previous passage, which had been summed up in a single definition: The Great Flood.

In the two previous books ("Back to Earth" and "Intersection with Nibiru"), despite countless difficulties, the protagonists of this adventure managed to save the Earth from disaster, but now a new adventure awaits them. Azakis's and Petri's return journey home has been sabotaged and an even more terrifying threat is about to befall the entire solar system.

In the last book we left the occupants of the majestic Theos grappling with the sudden activation of the spacecraft's self-destruct sequence and that is where we will resume the tale of this fantastic new adventure.

Theos spacecraft The evacuation

"Abandon ship" shouted Azakis desperately.

The Captain's peremptory order spread simultaneously over all the levels of the Theos. After a brief initial hesitation, the few crew members automatically followed the evacuation procedure they had simulated so many times during emergency drills.

"Eighty seconds to self-destruction" announced the warm, calm female voice of the central system again.

"Come on Zak" shouted Petri. "We haven't got much time left, we must get out of here."

"But can't we do absolutely anything to interrupt the sequence?" replied Azakis incredulously.

"Unfortunately, no, old chap. Otherwise, don't you think I'd already have done it?"

"But it's just not possible," said the Captain as his companion in adventure dragged him along by the arm, in the direction of internal communication module number three.

"Well actually we could try to manually interrupt the procedure, but it would take at least thirty minutes and we only have more or less a minute left."

"Wait, stop!" exclaimed Azakis, yanking himself free from his friend's strong grip. "We can't leave it here to explode. The wave of energy the explosion generates will reach Earth in just a few minutes and the exposed face of the planet will be struck by a gigantic shock wave that'll destroy everything in its passage."

"I've already set up remote control of the Theos from the shuttle. We'll move it once we're on board, as long as you get a move on," scolded Petri as he again grabbed his friend's arm and bodily dragged him in the direction of the module.

"Sixty seconds to self-destruction."

"But where do you want to move it to?" Azakis continued, as the internal communication module door opened on the shuttle's bridge, on level six. "A minute won't be enough to make it reach a sufficient distance to..."

"Will you please just stop babbling on?" Petri interrupted him. "Shut your mouth and sit down there. I'll handle this now."

Without further comment, Azakis obeyed the order and sat down in the grey armchair at the side of the central console. As he had already done dozens of times before, in equally dangerous situations, he decided to rely completely on the skill and experience of his companion. While Petri feverishly fumbled with a series of three-dimensional manoeuvre holograms, he thought he'd check on the result of the evacuation of the rest of the crew, simultaneously contacting the individual pilots. In a few seconds they all confirmed the successful detachment of their shuttles from the mother spacecraft. They were moving rapidly away. The Captain drew a big sigh of relief and went back to giving his attention to his friend's skilful manoeuvring.

"Thirty seconds to self-destruction."

"We're out" shouted Petri. "Now I'll move the Theos."

"What can I do to help you?"

"Nothing don't worry. You're in good hands," and he winked at him with his right eye, as his terrestrial friends had taught him to do. "I'll position the ship behind the moon. From there it won't be able to do any harm."

"Gosh," exclaimed Azakis. "I hadn't thought of that."

"That's why I'm here, isn't it?"

"The wave of the explosion will break on the satellite which will absorb all its energy. You're a phenomenon my friend."

"And it certainly won't do any damage on the moon" continued Petri. "There's nothing but rocks and craters there."

"Ten seconds to destruction."

"Almost done...." said Petri faintly.

"Three... Two... One..."

"Done! The Theos is in position."

Precisely at that instant, on the moon's hidden face, at the decimal degree coordinates latitude 24.446471 and longitude 152.171308, in correspondence to what the terrestrials had called the Komarov crater, there was a strange telluric movement. A large, deep slit with incredibly perfect edges opened on the crater's barren, rough surface, as if a huge invisible blade had suddenly been stuck into it. Immediately afterwards, a strange ovoid-shaped object darted out at incredible speed, as if it had been shot directly from inside the crater and headed into space, with an inclined path of about thirty degrees with respect to the perpendicular. The object remained visible for only a few seconds before disappearing forever in a flash of bluish light.

On the shuttle, through the elliptical opening giving a view of the exterior, a blinding flash lit up the black, cold outside space, flooding the inside of the shuttle with an almost unreal light.

"My friend, what about getting out of here?" suggested Azakis worriedly, as he watched the wave of energy expand and rapidly approach their position.

"Follow me," shouted Petri into the communicator, to the pilots of the other shuttles. Then, without adding anything else, he manoeuvred his vehicle and quickly moved it to shelter behind the side of the moon that always faces the Earth. "Hold tight," he added, as he firmly gripped the armrests of the command seat where he was sitting.

They waited, in absolute silence, as interminable seconds went by, their gazes fixed on the central display, hoping that the sudden movement of the Theos had managed to avert a catastrophe on Earth.

"The wave of energy is dispersing in space," Petri said quietly. He paused briefly then, and after checking a whole series of incomprehensible messages that had appeared in the holograms in front of him, he added, "and the moon absorbed the portion directed towards the planet perfectly."

"Well, I'd say you did a really excellent job there, old chap," commented Azakis after he had begun to breathe again.

"The only thing that really suffered was the poor moon. It took a proper beating."

"Think what might have happened if the wave had arrived on Earth."

"It would have burnt up half the planet."

"Are you all okay?" Azakis hastened to ask all the other pilots through the communicator, who, following Petri's manoeuvres, had also positioned their shuttles in the shelter of the satellite. Comforting answers came back in sequence and, after the last captain had also confirmed that both his crew and vehicle were in perfect condition, he let himself slump back against the back of his armchair and let out all the air in his lungs.

"That went well," commented Petri satisfied.

"Yes, but now what do we do? The Theos no longer exists. How are we going to get back home?"

Tell el-Mukayyar â## Flash in the sky

At doctor Elisa Hunterâ##s base camp, after jumping out of the archaeologistâ##s arms, LulÃ¹, the little kitten, had begun to prowl around nervously with her gaze fixed towards the sky. The sun was going down and a beautiful, almost full moon was already high on the horizon.

"LulÃ¹, whatâ##s the matter?" asked Elisa a little worried, looking at the restless kitten.

"She must be sad because sheâ##s realised our friends have left," commented Jack laconically, trying to comfort her by stroking her gently under her chin.

The little cat initially seemed to relish the attention, purring and rubbing her nose against the Colonelâ##s big hand. All of a sudden however, she froze, made a strange sound and turned her eyes straight towards the earthâ##s pale satellite. Both of them, intrigued by that bizarre behaviour, instinctively, also turned in the same direction. What they saw after a few moments, left them both breathless. An abnormal glow seemed to wrap around the moon. A brilliant white light, that extended about ten times the diameter of the satellite, then formed a sort of crown around it. It only lasted a few seconds, but it was almost as if another sun had suddenly appeared in the sky at dusk, illuminating the whole area with a decidedly unnatural light.

"But what on earth ..." managed only to whisper the stunned Colonel.

Just as it had appeared, the abnormal light vanished, and everything seemed to return exactly as it was before. The moon was still there, and the sun lazily continued its descent behind the dunes silhouetted against the horizon.

"What was that?" asked Elisa in amazement.

"I havenâ##t the faintest idea."

"For a moment I feared the moon had exploded."

"It really was quite incredible" exclaimed the Colonel while, with his open hand resting above his eyebrows, he scanned the clear sky looking for clues.

"Azakis.... Petri..." said Elisa suddenly. "Something must have happened to them, I can feel it."

"Go on, give over. Perhaps it was just the effect of their shipâ##s engines starting."

"Itâ##s not possible. That seemed like a real explosion. You should know more than me about these things, no?"

"Darling" the Colonel said patiently. "To see the effects of an explosion like that from all this distance, there would have to have been at least a hundred atomic bombs explode simultaneously on the moon or maybe even a thousand."

"So, what happened then?"

"We could try asking our military friends. After all I am still part of ELSAD. With all that equipment always pointing at the sky, an event of this kind will not have escaped them for sure.â##

"Even LulÃ¹ noticed it."

"I think this kitten is much smarter than the two of us put together."

"Felines are a superior race," said Elisa as she picked the kitten up again. "Had you still not realised?"

"Yeah. I think the ancient Egyptians adored them too, almost like deities."

"Exactly, my love," said Elisa, happy that the discussion had moved into a field in which she was well versed. "Bastet, for example, was one of the most important and venerated deities of ancient Egyptian religion, depicted as or with the appearance of a woman with a catâ##s head or directly as a cat. Originally Bastet was a deity of the solar cult, but with time she became more and more a goddess of the lunar cult. When Greek influence extended to Egyptian society, Bastet permanently became a lunar Goddess, as the Greeks identified her with Artemis, the personification of the â##Rising Moonâ##."

"Okay, okay. Thank you for the lesson, eminent doctor" said Jack ironically, emphasizing the phrase with a slight bow. "But now let's try and understand what the devil just happened up there. I'll make a couple of phone calls."

"Any time darling, I'm always here for you," replied Elisa, gradually raising her voice as the Colonel walked away in the direction of the laboratory tent.

Lul¹, calm once again, her eyes closed, was enjoying the petting her human friend was dispensing without parsimony.

Shuttle six â## Lunar inspection

After the invisible hand of fear that had gripped his stomach, finally disappeared, leaving him in peace, Azakis had begun to pace nervously around the shuttleâ##s bridge muttering unintelligible phrases.

"Will you stop going around and around in circles like a spinning top?" Petri scolded him. "Youâ##ll wear the floor out and weâ##ll end up drifting about in space like two old disused satellites."

"But how can you be so calm? The Theos has been destroyed, weâ##re millions of kilometres from our own planet, we canâ##t contact anyone and, even if we were to succeed, it would be impossible for someone to come and fetch us, and what do you do? You lay there slouched in your armchair as if you were on holiday, sitting on the cliff at the Gulf of Saraan enjoying the view at sunset."

"Calm down old chap, calm down. Weâ##ll find a solution, youâ##ll see."

"At the moment I can think of absolutely none whatsoever."

"Why are you so upset. Itâ##s the gamma waves that your poor tired brain is emitting, that are preventing you from reasoning with lucidity."

â##Do you think so?"

"Of course," replied Petri with a lovely big smile. "Come and sit down beside me, take some deep breaths and try to relax. Youâ##ll see, before long everything will seem very different."

"You may well be right, my friend" said Azakis as, following the advice of his companion, he threw himself heavily into the second pilotâ##s grey armchair, "but at the moment I can do everything but relax."

"If you promise to calm down, Iâ##ll even let you smoke one of those filthy smelly things you always carry around with you."

"Well, actually that might be a good idea. Iâ##m sure itâ##d help me a bit." Having said that, he pulled a long dark hand-rolled cigar from a pocket and, after having cut the ends with a strange multicoloured contraption, put it in his mouth and lit it. He quickly inhaled several puffs letting small bluish smoke clouds disperse into the room. With a slight hiss, the shuttleâ##s automatic air purification system was activated. In a few moments the smoke vanished and with it also the pungent sweetish smell.

"But, this way, thereâ##s no fun," exclaimed Azakis who was already in a much better mood. "Iâ##d forgotten how efficient our purification systems are."

"You designed them," answered Petri. "They couldnâ##t be otherwise."

The tension seemed to be slowly melting away.

"Letâ##s take stock of the situation," proposed Azakis as, with his cigar still between his lips, he enabled a series of holograms which positioned themselves in mid-air all around the two aliens. "Weâ##ve got four operational shuttles including our own. The Theos-2 has now landed on Nibiru and both are outside the range of action of the optical vortices communication system." He puffed out another couple of little clouds of smoke, then he continued, "Propellant and food stocks are at ninety-nine percent."

"Well done, I see youâ##re taking control of the situation again. Go ahead" Petri urged, satisfied.

"All the remaining six members of the crew are in perfect condition. Shields and equipment are at maximum efficiency. The only problem is that we no longer have an H^COM to contact the Elders and report on the situation."

"And thatâ##s where youâ##re wrong" exclaimed Petri.

â##What do you mean?â##

"I mean there's still one working H[^]COM."

"But if the only one we had was destroyed with the spacecraft."

"What about the one we left with the terrestrials?"

"Gosh, you're right! I hadn't thought of that. We'll have to return and get them to give it to us."

"Calm down old chap, calm down. We've got time for that. First, I'd go and have a look on the moon to see if we can recover anything from our beautiful ship that you merrily smashed into pieces."

"Me? What have I got to do with it? It was you who made it explode up there."

"And who was it who lost the remote-control system?"

"But that was your fault. The clasp was defective."

"All right, all right! What's done is done. Now let's try to get to grips with this situation. Although I'm an incurable optimist, at the moment, I can't see any brilliant solutions."

"That'll be the gamma waves" retorted Azakis, repaying his friend with the same currency. "Assuming of course that those four neurons lurking in your empty head are still able to emit them."

"After that pitiful joke, I can finally announce that the old Zak is once again amongst us. Welcome back."

"So, can you manage to get this shuttle to the explosion site without crashing into some lunar elevation?"

"Certainly sir. At your orders," exclaimed Petri, imitating the military ways he had often seen used by his terrestrial friends. "Destination moon" he added cheerfully, after having started the engines and set the course towards the satellite.

It took only a couple of minutes to reach the place where the Theos had disintegrated. The shuttle began to slowly fly over the area of the hidden face of the moon that had suffered the impact of the explosion. The ground, normally very bumpy and full of craters caused by ancient impacts of hundreds of meteorites that, over millions of years, had literally riddled it, now appeared incredibly smooth and flat for about six hundred square kilometres. The wave of energy generated by the explosion had swept everything away. Rocks, craters and depressions no longer existed. It was as if a giant steamroller had passed over the area, leaving behind it an endless expanse of soft grey sand.

"Incredible," exclaimed Petri. "It's like flying over the immense Sihar desert on Nibiru."

"We've made a big mess" said Azakis dejectedly.

"No. Can't you see how beautiful the view is now? Before the surface had more wrinkles than our Supreme Elder, now instead it's as smooth as a baby's skin."

"I don't think there's much of our beloved spacecraft left."

"I'm running a full in-depth scan of the area, but the biggest piece I've found is approximately a few cubic centimetres."

"There's no denying it. The self-destruct system worked really well."

"Hey Zak" exclaimed Petri suddenly. "In your opinion, what's that?" and he pointed to a dark spot on the main screen.

"I wouldn't know... You can't see it very well. What do the sensors say?"

"They're not picking anything up. According to them there's nothing but sand there, but I think I can see something else."

"It's impossible that the sensors can't pick something up. Try doing a calibration test."

"Just give me a second." Petri fiddled with a series of holographic controls then sentenced, "The parameters are within normal range. Everything seems to be working properly."

"Strange ... Let's try and get a little closer."

Shuttle number six moved slowly in the direction of that strange object that seemed to emerge from the layer of dust and grey sand.

"Maximum magnification" Azakis ordered. "But what is it?"

"From the little I can see, it looks like part of an artificial structure" Petri tried venturing.

"Artificial? I don't think any of us have ever installed anything on the moon."

"Perhaps it was the terrestrials. I seem to have read somewhere that they've completed several expeditions to this satellite."

"What is decidedly strange is that the sensors are not picking up anything of what our eyes instead are seeing."

"I don't know what to say. Perhaps the explosion has damaged them."

"But if you just ran a test and everything is working," answered Azakis perplexed.

"Then that stuff we're seeing must be made of some material that is unknown to us and therefore that our sensors are unable to analyse."

"Are you trying to tell me that the terrestrials have managed to invent a compound that not even we know about, they've brought it up here and they've built a base or something with it?"

"And, moreover, now we've even destroyed it for them," commented Petri dejectedly.

"Our friends never cease to amaze us, do they?"

"That's true... Well, we've had a look around here. I'd say we should leave it for the moment. We've got rather more important things to do right now. What do you say boss?"

"I'd say you're absolutely right. Considering that there doesn't seem to be anything usable left of the Theos anymore, I think we can leave."

"Heading for earth?"

"Let's return to Elisa's camp and try using her H^{COM} to contact Nibiru."

"And our travelling companions? We can't just leave them up here" said Petri.

"We'll have to organise a support base on earth. We could set up a sort of camp close to that of our friends."

"Sounds like a good idea to me. Shall I inform the rest of the crew?"

"Yes. Give them the coordinates of the excavation site and ask them to organise the preparation of an emergency structure. We'll go down there first, and we'll set about contacting the Elders."

"Let's go" said Petri cheerfully. "And to think that, until a little while ago, I was getting worried about how I was going to overcome the boredom of the return journey."

At the same time, at a distance of about 500 U.A. from our sun, a strange ovoid shaped object appeared practically out of nowhere, preceded by a streak of bluish lightning that tore through the absolute blackness of space. It moved in a straight line for almost a hundred thousand kilometres at an incredible speed before disappearing again, swallowed up by a sort of huge silvery vortex with golden reflections. The whole action lasted only a few seconds and then, as if nothing had happened, that place so remote and desolate, deep in space, plunged back into the total quiet in which it had been immersed until then.

Tell-el-Mukayyar Contact with Nibiru

"Yes, Colonel," said a very refined voice on the other end of the phone. "We have received reports, from several observation points on earth, of an unnatural flash presumably given off by the moon."

"But the moon doesn't give off flashes," said Jack vexed.

"You're right there, Sir. All I can tell you is that our scientists are still analysing the data we've received in order to identify who or what caused it."

"So basically, you haven't the faintest idea what it was."

"Well, I wouldn't have put it quite that way, but I think your inference can be considered a fair one."

"Just listen to this guy," said Jack, turning to Elisa who had joined him, as he covered the microphone of his mobile phone with his hand. "Okay. Thank you for the information," he continued. "As soon as you have further news kindly contact me immediately."

"Yes Sir, with pleasure. Goodbye have a good day," and he ended the conversation.

"What did they say?" asked the doctor.

"Well, it looks as though something strange actually happened up there, but nobody has found a decent explanation yet."

"I'm increasingly convinced that something happened to our friends."

"Come on, don't say that. With their fantastic spacecraft who knows where they'll have got to by now."

"I really hope so, with all my heart, but I still have a strange premonition."

"Listen, to get rid of any doubts, why don't we use that thing they left us and try to contact them?"

"I don't know ... They said we would only be able to use it after they arrived back on their planet ... I don't think ..."

"Just go and get it," the Colonel cut her short. Then realising he had perhaps been a little too abrupt, he added a gentle "please", followed by a dazzling smile.

"Okay. At worst it won't work," said Elisa as she set off to retrieve the portable H^{COM}. She returned almost immediately and, after rearranging her long hair slightly, she put on the kind of weird and bulky helmet.

"He said to press that button there," said Jack indicating the button. "Then the system would do everything by itself."

"What shall I do, shall I press it?" asked Elisa hesitating.

"Go on, what do you think is going to happen?"

The archaeologist pushed the button and, perhaps exaggerating the words a little too much, said "Hello? Anybody there?"

She waited but didn't receive an answer. She waited a little longer, then tried again. "Hello... Hello... Petri, are you there? I can't hear anything."

Elisa waited a few more seconds then spread her arms and shrugged.

"Press the button again," suggested the Colonel.

They tried repeating this process several times, but the communication system failed to give them even a measly rustle.

"Nothing doing. Perhaps something really did happen to them," whispered Elisa as she removed the H^{COM} from her head.

"Or perhaps they still haven't arrived within this thing's range of action."

The Colonel hadn't finished his last sentence when a strange noise from outside caught their attention.

“Jack, look!” exclaimed Elisa amazed as she looked out of the tent. “The spheres... They’re being reactivated.”

With their hearts in their mouths, they both ran outside and, to their amazement, saw the virtual landing pyramid that was again taking shape. Their friends were returning.

“See they didn’t explode,” said Jack greatly cheered-up.

“Perhaps they forgot something.”

“The important thing is that they’re okay. Let’s try and keep calm. We’ll soon find out what really happened.”

The landing procedure went ahead without problems and, in no time at all, the large figures of the two aliens appeared on the descending platform.

“Hello guys,” bellowed Petri, waving his big hand above his head.

“What on earth are you doing here again?” asked Jack, as the two aliens were carried down to ground level by the moving structure.

“We were missing you,” replied Petri jumping down from that sort of lift, even before it had touched the ground, immediately followed by his travelling companion.

“We were worried” said Elisa finally reassured. “We witnessed a strange event that occurred on the moon a little while ago and we seriously feared that something terrible had happened to you.”

“Unfortunately, my dear, something terrible really did happen,” said Azakis with a forlorn air.

“There you are, I knew it,” exclaimed Elisa. “A little voice inside me kept telling me so. But what happened?”

“It all happened really suddenly.”

“So, are you going to tell us? Come on, don’t keep us on tenterhooks. Just tell us everything, now.”

“Our spacecraft no longer exists,” Azakis announced all in one breath.

The two terrestrials looked at one another for a moment, absolutely stunned. Then Jack spoke, saying “Are you joking? What does “no longer exists” mean?”

“It means that, right now, the biggest piece of the Theos could quite easily fit on the tip of your index finger.”

“But what happened? And the rest of the crew, where are they? Are they all well?”

“Yes, they’re fine, thank you. Right now, they’re on the other three shuttles and very soon they’ll be here too. If you don’t mind, we will set up an emergency structure around here and we’ll try to organise ourselves somehow.”

“But of course, that’s not a problem,” said Jack. “We’ll give you all the help we can. You don’t even need to ask.”

“So,” blurted out Elisa who could no longer hold back her curiosity. “Are you going to tell us yes or no what the devil happened up there?”

“It’s rather a long story,” said Azakis seating himself on an upturned tin pail. “Make yourselves comfortable.”

After about ten minutes, the alien had pretty much told them the whole story. From the loss of the remote-control system, to the attempt to deactivate it. From the recklessness of having given up on its recovery, up to the sudden reactivation of the instrument which had then caused the launching of the self-destruction process.

“But that’s shocking,” said Elisa appalled. “Whoever can have caused a disaster like that?”

“Probably,” said Azakis, “somebody must have found that strange object and began to study its features. Then they must have found some information among all the data we downloaded onto your servers and, somehow, managed to turn it back on, so causing the result we now know.”

“For crying out loud!” exclaimed the Colonel upset. “It seems such an absurd story... And, knowing the danger of a device like that, you didn’t do anything to recover it?”

"It was my fault," said Petri, joining in the discussion. "I thought I'd completely deactivated it and that no terrestrial, even if somebody did find it, would be able to reactivate it."

"And yet it happened," said Jack. "Do you have any idea where it was lost?"

"We honestly thought we'd lost it while retrieving the Zenio crystal but, most probably, it must have ended up somewhere else, that was much more crowded. There was no one at all down there."

"Zak, I've had an idea," said Petri standing up. "I think that if I worked on it a bit, I might be able to backtrack and trace the moment the remote control was unhooked from your belt."

"It's not all that important now, but I must admit I too am a little curious about it."

"Good. So first of all, let's try and inform the Elders about our situation and as soon as we're organised a little, I'll try and retrieve this information."

"Elisa," said Azakis. "Unfortunately, the only H^COM we had was destroyed with the Theos. Would you kindly lend us the one we left you before we took off?"

"Do you mean the helmet? But of course. I'll get it for you straight away."

"Unfortunately, the situation is serious," whispered Azakis turning to the Colonel, as soon as Elisa had moved far enough away to be out of earshot. "Even if we do manage to contact the Elders, the chances we can get back to our own planet are virtually nil now. "

"But can't they send someone to pick you up? Hasn't Zaneki also got a ship like yours?"

"Unfortunately, the engines installed on his ship are considerably less powerful than the ones we had on ours. That's why he had to leave almost immediately after Kodon's passage. If he hadn't, he wouldn't have been able to reach Nibiru anymore, because it was moving rapidly away. We were able to stay here much longer precisely by virtue of our experimental engines. Unfortunately, the Theos was the only ship in our fleet with that type of engine. The production and installation of two more new ones like that could take a lot of time. A lot of our time."

"You mean you might have to stay here until Nibiru's next passage?"

"Here it is," said Elisa as she came hurrying back towards them.

"Unfortunately, yes Jack," said Azakis in a whisper, as he rose to take the H^COM helmet that the archaeologist was holding out to him.

"Thank you, Elisa," said the alien as he put it on. "Let's see if it works."

"Actually, we tried it ourselves, but we didn't manage to talk to anyone."

"That's my friend's work," commented Azakis looking towards Petri. "Nothing he does ever works."

"Nice as always," said Petri with a serious air. "I'll remember that when you ask me to fix your bathroom."

"Oh yes," exclaimed Elisa smiling. "I remember only too well how your bathrooms work. A truly unforgettable experience."

All four broke out into a roar of laughter at the end of which Petri slipped the helmet out of Azakis's hands and said, "Wait, you ungrateful old thing. First, I need to change a setting. The system was programmed to call us on the poor old Theos and I don't think anybody will answer you there now."

The alien fiddled around for a bit with the controls of the portable H^COM then, when he was satisfied with his work, he passed it back again to his companion saying "Try now. Hopefully my memory hasn't betrayed me, and I've been able to configure it to connect you to the right person."

Azakis didn't doubt his friend's memory even for one moment and put the helmet on. He pressed the start button and waited patiently. Almost a minute went by before the three-dimensional image of the bony face of his direct line Elder was projected directly onto the retina of his rather tired eyes.

“Azakis, how nice to see you,” said his white-haired contact, raising his slender right arm in greeting. “But where are you calling me from? Your picture looks a little strange and rather distorted.”

“It’s a long story,” answered the alien. “I’m using a makeshift device for long distance communication.”

“But aren’t you on your ship? Don’t tell me you still haven’t left. You know that your time limit for reaching us has almost run out now, don’t you?”

“That is exactly what I wanted to talk to you about.” He paused briefly to try and find the most appropriate words then continued saying, “There’s been a setback... Our spacecraft’s gone.”

“Gone? What do you mean?”

“It exploded. The self-destruct system was activated, and we only just made it to safety in time, before everything exploded into thousands of pieces.”

“But only you could activate that procedure with your personal remote-control system. How could something like this happen?” asked the stunned Elder.

“Let’s say there were a series of particular events, and I must have dropped it.”

“And someone else found it and activated it for you?”

“We still haven’t been able to determine what really happened but that’s a distinct possibility.”

“And now? How do you plan to get back here?”

“That’s exactly why we’re contacting you. We could do with a nice quick solution to this little problem.”

“Little?” replied the Elder jumping to his feet with surprising nimbleness. “Do you realize what you’re saying? Your time frame is already almost at its maximum limit. You should have already left and you’re telling me that the Theos no longer exists and you’re pretty much stuck on earth. What are we supposed to do now?”

“Well, I don’t really know. You’re the Elders. We’re trusting that, with your experience and your infinite wisdom, you’ll be able to help us out of this unfortunate situation.”

The old man sat down again, letting himself fall heavily into his soft grey chair, then he leant his elbows on the table in front of him and put his hands in his long white hair, remaining in complete silence. He remained still for a few seconds then he lifted his gaze again and said, “I’ll try summoning the Council urgently and I’ll put all our best Experts to work. I hope to be able to give you good news very soon” and he ended the communication.

Pasadena, California ## The nerd

"Is that all?" exclaimed the big, decidedly overweight guy, as he observed the strange device that the young nerd was holding in his hand. "You##re not going to tell me that you##ve made us wait more than a month just to show us this thing flashing."

"I can assure you it##s working" replied the terrified boy. "Indeed, I think it##s already done what it was designed to do."

"Yes, but are you going to tell us what?## yelled the tall thin guy as he jumped to his feet. "Now I really am losing my patience."

In the basement bulging with equipment, monitors and computers of all kinds, lit by a dim led light which was reflected off the worn walls, the boy##s emaciated face looked even paler than it really was.

"Listen here, if you don##t tell us what this thing##s really for, I swear I##ll make you swallow it whole" exclaimed the fat guy grabbing the nerd by the scruff of the neck.

"But I told you" answered the ever more frightened boy. "It##s a system to activate a procedure remotely."

"But what procedure? What is it?" continued the big guy, as he shook the boy as if he were mixing Margaritas.

"I'm not sure## the young man tried to answer. "But I think we##ve activated something very particular and dangerous, given the protection systems I had to bypass."

"Explain yourself," said the fat guy still continuing to shake him.

"If you let me go, I'll show you.##"

"Okay. But I hope it##s convincing, or else the biggest bit of you that##ll be found will only be visible under a microscope."

The boy straightened his shirt, readjusted his long hair that hadn##t seen any shampoo for quite a while and headed towards a workstation with two keyboards and a series of half-dismantled computers. He quickly typed several incomprehensible commands and, after a few seconds, a three-dimensional image of the strange object that slowly revolved upon itself, appeared on a giant screen that hung from the ceiling.

"This is our mysterious remote control.##"

"Ah, now it's become a remote control?##"

##Well, considering its function I think we can safely call it that."

##Go ahead,## said the thin guy as he settled himself on a shabby chair in order to better observe the large monitor.

##Well, the main problem was how to reactivate it. I struggled quite a lot because, most likely, not only had it been turned off but the owner did not want anybody to ever turn it back on again.##"

"See it wasn##t the batteries that had gone flat, you silly old fool," exclaimed the fat guy, turning towards his crony.

"No, there##s no batteries inside,## continued the nerd. "I think it works with an external power source, a sort of electromagnetic flow that it manages to capture and transform into pure power.##"

"Interesting" commented the skinny guy. "But what##s its scope?"

"In theory, perhaps even several hundred thousand kilometres."

"Blimey" exclaimed the fat guy as he held the strange object in his hand. "Are you telling me that this little thing might be capable of transmitting a signal from here to the moon?"

"I think so and it probably already has done."

"And what##s it supposed to have transmitted?"

"Well that's the interesting bit" continued the boy as he brought up a new picture on the big screen. "These are the symbols that appeared on the front of it after it had been reactivated."

"It looks like some sort of ancient language" commented the thin guy. "I'm sure I've seen it somewhere before."

"In fact, it's cuneiform. The Sumerians used it several thousand years before Christ."

"And what's it doing on such a technologically advanced instrument?"

"It's the language of our alien visitors."

"Are you telling me that those brutes who captured us speak cuneiform?" asked the big guy somewhat surprised.

"Well," the boy tried to explain, "it's not exactly that you speak cuneiform. It's a form of writing. But I think this is their language."

"And have you managed to translate it?"

"Actually, for the command to be sent, I had to insert a kind of password. In practice, by touching the symbols in the right order, I entered operational mode."

"Basically, like the system you use to unlock your phone?"

"More or less, yes" said the nerd smiling, happy that the two guys had finally understood what he was talking about.

"You've done a really good job," said the fat guy looking pleased.

"Yes, but we still haven't understood its true function yet," replied the thin guy rather disappointed.

"I could hazard a guess which I think might be quite realistic," said the boy, softly.

"Well, what are you waiting for? Talk," replied the fat guy, moving within just a few centimetres of his nose.

"I think it's a system to activate the self-destruct procedure of a spacecraft, as well as who knows how many other functions."

The two buddies looked at one another in amazement for an instant then, as if someone had just given him the most wonderful gift in the world, the larger of the two exclaimed "Please, tell me we've blown them up."

"Very probably the aliens will have had ample time to get to safety, but their vehicle might have come to a really bad end."

"Son, you're a genius," exclaimed the big guy. Then he pulled a USB memory stick out of his pocket and added, "Put all the data you've got on this thing and then cancel everything. If we discover you've kept even a single byte..."

"I know, I know. You'll make mincemeat out of me."

"Well done. I knew you were a smart guy."

The copy process only lasted a few seconds. Then, after removing the USB stick from his computer, the nerd held it out to the big guy who quickly snatched it out of his hands. Then, after also grabbing the strange object and putting them both in his right trouser pocket, he said to his partner in crime, "Let's go old chap, perhaps our dreams are about to come true."

They had almost reached the threshold when the young man exclaimed, "Hey, aren't you forgetting something?"

"What are you on about?" asked the tall skinny guy.

"Err! the rest of my money."

"Money?" replied the fat guy. "Thank the Lord we haven't broken your neck" and he banged the door behind him.

Taurus constellation - Planet Kerion

At almost sixty-five light years from earth, the red giant named Aldebaran dimly illuminates a barren planet known by the name of Kerion. Its surface, which nowadays features only arid deserts, parched rocky landscapes, deep dry gorges and smooth plateaus, was not always like this. The planet began its slow decline about ten thousand years ago when, for reasons as yet unknown, the metallic fluid which constituted its core began slowly but inexorably to reduce its speed of rotation, causing a relative progressive reduction of its magnetic field.

Nowadays, Kerion's atmosphere, once composed mainly of nitrogen and about twenty percent methane, is virtually inexistent. In fact, the harmful rays from its star, no longer shielded by the powerful planetary magnetic field, have gradually dissolved it and reduced it to about 0.1 percent of what it once was. Seas of liquid hydrocarbons used to occupy almost half the planet. Lakes of methane and countless expanses of iced water were dotted around the land above sea level and life flourished luxuriantly. But the catastrophic event apparently marked the destiny of Kerion. For millennia, its inhabitants tried to find a solution to restart its core but without success. Since the start of the slowing down process, they have also tried venturing into risky and extremely long interstellar voyages in search of a planet, similar to their own, to which they could move, but none of these missions has ever been successful.

When their vital resources were almost at an end, they became more or less resigned to their inevitable extinction when, one of the brightest minds on the planet proposed what for most of the population appeared to be an absolute folly: get rid of everything that could "die". The Kerian in question began a series of experiments which, within a few decades, led him to extract what we might call their "soul" from the material bodies of his fellow beings, thus releasing it from its bond, until then believed to be indissoluble, with the physical body. The very essence of some volunteers was separated from the living matter and implanted in new, fully mechanical structures. This gave birth to a new species, based entirely on cybernetic bodies but equipped with their own intelligence and that cosmic essence called soul or, more simply, life.

The separation of the souls of all the inhabitants was completed in just a few years but, given the scarcity of suitable materials for making the new cybernetic bodies, the transfer went ahead far too slowly. So, it was decided to organise the conservation of the "essences" in special dedicated egg-shaped casings, so as to be able to preserve them from destruction until their new exoskeletons had been made.

The first new beings created, now virtually immortal, therefore began a new saga of exploration of the cosmos searching, this time, for planets that could provide them with the necessary raw materials for the completion of the project. Ten were identified, even at distances of several hundred light years from their home planet, on which actual real laboratories were built where the resources of the planets were extracted and used on-site for the creation of new bodies. The presence of helium-3 which, through a complex system of nuclear fusion, would guarantee each individual new Kerian's structure a virtually inexhaustible source of energy, was paramount. To reach all those so very distant planets, veritable interstellar portals were created through which the containers with the souls of the inhabitants and the necessary equipment were transferred to the assembly workshops. The creation of each individual body, the implanting of its soul and its complete activation required a very long procedure each time but, for them, time was no longer a problem.

"We've received a strange message from planet Lambda announced the Kerian in charge of transmissions.

"What's the message?" replied his commanding officer, who answered to the name of Supervisor RTY and whose body shape greatly resembled a kind of very long-legged arachnid with a massive body.

Strangely it was interrupted before completion. This is what reached us, and he transmitted the communication fragment in sub-light.

Laboratory attacked. We're sending back ...

We're sending what? Attacked by who?"

There wasn't anything else. Since then communications with Λ have been interrupted."

Let's try to re-establish them as soon as possible and find out what's happened ordered RTY. "There are more than ten million souls in that laboratory waiting to be transferred."

"I'm well aware of that," said the transmissions officer. "But, for the moment, the only thing I'm receiving is the signal from container (I) which is going through the intercommunication tunnel."

"Perhaps that's what they're sending back to us."

We'll soon find out. It'll be here in three hundred and twenty cens."

Tell-el-Mukayyar The pyramids energy

“There they are, they’re coming,” said Petri indicating the three shuttles that were rapidly approaching the excavation site.

“Standard positioning,” Azakis ordered the pilots of the vehicles through his hand-held communicator.

The two aliens, together with Jack and Elisa, remained silent as they observed the shuttles as they completed the fast and precise landing manoeuvres.

“We should activate a dome-shaped forcefield to create an atmosphere more suited to our respiratory systems,” suggested Petri.

“I agree,” replied Azakis. “I’m already fed up of wearing these damned things,” and he pointed to the two little breathing tubes inserted in his nostrils.

“There’s too much oxygen here, for us. Perhaps it would have been better to organise our emergency base high up in the mountains.”

“No. At least not for the time being. The forcefield will be more than sufficient until we get ourselves organised a little better.”

“Ok, you’re the boss,” said Petri, emphasising the phrase with a kind of military salute like he had seen the terrestrial soldiers do.

“Shuttle two. Activate the containment dome,” said Azakis into his communicator.

Starting from the top of the central shuttle and betrayed only by a slight vibration in the air, a sort of almost invisible veil spread rapidly with a radius of about a hundred metres, forming a hemisphere-shaped hood which extended from the apex of shuttle two’s virtual pyramid straight down to sink into the desert’s sandy soil.

“That looks like a good job to me,” said Petri satisfied.

“Why have they positioned themselves like that?” asked Elisa intrigued.

“Like what?” replied Azakis. “What do you mean?”

“The shuttles. The pyramids they’ve formed are almost in a straight line and positioned with one side facing south. The two most external ones are apparently aligned while the central one looks slightly more off-axis.”

“You have an excellent spirit of observation” commented Azakis.

“The fact is they remind me greatly of something else.”

“What exactly?” asked the Colonel who had suddenly shown great interest in the discussion.

“Have you ever been to Egypt?”

“A long time ago.”

“And have you visited the Giza plateau?”

“Obviously yes,” answered Jack. Then, slapping himself on the forehead he exclaimed “but of course! They’re positioned just like the three largest pyramids.”

“Cheops, Chephren and Mycerinus,” pointed out the doctor.

“I don’t know what you’re talking about,” said Azakis perplexed.

“Wait a minute,” Elisa answered. “I’ll show you,” and she walked quickly towards the laboratory tent. She emerged less than a minute later carrying a large, well-thumbed book. As she drew near the other three, she quickly leafed through the pages. “Here we are. Look” and she held it out to the alien.

“Interesting! What are they?”

“Let me see,” said Petri, sliding the thick book from his companion’s hands. “Ah yes. I’ve seen this sort of construction. They’re like that one,” and he pointed to the Ziggurat behind the field. “But they must have been built by another people and in a different era.”

"Well done Petri. You're right, of course. Since the day they were discovered, our scholars have been racking their brains to understand the reason why they were built and why they were arranged that way."

"But it's very simple," said Petri flashing a beautiful smile. "Can you see those stars up there?" and he pointed to a constellation in the middle of all the others, in the space left by the setting sun.

"Yes, certainly. We call it the Orion constellation. It takes its name from the Greek demigod Orion" said Elisa. Then, as she traced its profile with her index finger in the clear desert air, she added, "If you join up its stars with a virtual line, the head, shoulders, belt and feet of a man appear. According to Greek mythology, Orion was a giant born with superhuman abilities, a mighty hunter who killed his prey with an unbreakable bronze sledgehammer. When the Greek hero died, he was placed among the stars for eternity."

"Your stories are always very evocative," said Petri enraptured. "However, from what the Elders have taught us, all the constructions of this type, and there are many scattered all over the earth, are linked to us."

"You, aliens?"

"We Gods, who came down from heaven to start the human race specified Petri.

"And wouldn't you just have guessed that you had a hand in that too" blurted out Jack. "It seems as if everything we have done up to now is solely and exclusively down to you."

"Well, coming to think of it," commented Elisa, "I must say he does have a point."

"I just wanted to say," added Petri quietly "that our shuttles are simply positioned like the three stars in your Orion "belt"."

"And so, the same would apply to the pyramids in Egypt?" asked Jack shocked.

"I'd say so."

"So, the assumptions of our scientists were true," said the doctor almost in a whisper. Then she held her chin between her thumb and forefinger and added, "However, I've still not understood the real reason for that arrangement."

"Simple my dear," exclaimed Petri. "Energy."

"You'll have to explain this to me properly," replied the doctor, straightening her back and crossing her arms.

"Even we don't know very much about it," Petri hastened to clarify. "But it seems that, a pyramid-shaped object is able to generate a kind of positive energy that is beneficial to all living things that are close to it. Obviously, the larger the object, the more energy it generates. Then, if it's also in connection with a heavenly body or better still, with a series of them, everything is amplified in an exponential way."

"But what kind of energy are we talking about?" asked the archaeologist.

"Like I said, it's not clear even to us. Many of our Experts have studied it but we still don't have reliable data."

"Finally, something that even you don't know," said Jack satisfied. "That's almost a miracle."

"There are lots of things we don't know, my friend. On a global scale, we are only slightly more evolved than you. There are so many mysteries in the universe. You didn't think we knew them all did you?"

"I confess, for a moment, I really thought you did."

"There are concepts that we will never understand. We must resign ourselves to that."

"But we're intelligent beings, imaginative, curious. What can prevent us from understanding?"

Then Azakis entered the debate saying, "It's just a question of levels of perception."

"This I really haven't understood," exclaimed Elisa puzzled.

"Although you may think that our brains are who knows how "evolved", there are some dimensions so far away from our structures of thought that we cannot even begin to make suppositions, at least with our current knowledge."

"I'm sorry but I'm not following you."

"Take a cell of your liver as an example," continued Azakis patiently. "Imagine it intent on reasoning about its status, about its work, about the cells close to it. Who knows how many times it will have tried to understand what's beyond that reality it experiences. Will there be other groups of cells? Will they be like me? Perhaps it will also have tried to postulate the presence of a God. It will also have tried to get in touch with him following goodness knows what complex rites, praying for his intercession in solving its daily problems. But who is its God? Your gallbladder? Your heart? You? What perception can a cell ever have of your liver, of you, its God? How could it ever come into direct contact with you? And if it does not perceive you, could it ever perceive me? And the sea, the sky, the sun, the galaxy... This is what I mean by different levels of perception."

"Blimey," exclaimed Elisa, as if she had just come out of a trance. "I really hadn't ever thought of this... So, we might never be able to contact beings of higher levels or imagine what could be outside the dimension in which we live."

"That's not necessarily true. It would seem, including thanks to the peculiar energy we were talking about earlier released by pyramids, that some people may already be able to jump one or more levels. Unfortunately, even our knowledge in this very particular matter, is still very limited."

"Fascinating," whispered the doctor completely enraptured. "So, you too are in search of your God."

"Actually, it's a topic we've been studying for a long time."

"And, if even you haven't worked this whole thing out, just imagine how much hope we have."

"Often the most important intuitions appear randomly" sentenced Azakis. "Our races are very similar and I'm sure that both ourselves and you, have the same chances of discovering how this mysterious mechanism works, through which we could get in touch with higher beings."

Petri clasped his hands behind his back and began to slowly walk around in circles. He thought for a few seconds then added, "But, actually, if the cell mentioned before doesn't do its work well, there would be problems for me and I would realise. Basically, this is also a form of contact, isn't it?"

"You're right. All of us are here for a very specific purpose and we should simply try to do our work as well as we can. This is precisely why on Nibiru, from the moment of our birth, our Educators strive to identify what our main peculiarity is. Each of us has one, as I think you terrestrials also do. The biggest problem is to discover it and then make the very most of it. As well as giving us all the basic knowledge, the Educators, do precisely this. It is they who, after carefully analysing our strengths and weaknesses, direct us towards the group which comes closest to our personal aptitudes such as the Artists, or the Artisans, or the Experts and so on. We don't have to do anything other than always give the maximum in the activity in which we excel and complete the path that was thought out for us."

"Okay guys," intervened the Colonel. "How about we just forget about all this philosophical talk and seriously get down to trying to solve the small problem we have right now?"

"True" added Petri. "In fact, while you brainiacs were discussing the mysteries of the universe, I downloaded the data from your personal recorder."

"What are you talking about?" asked Azakis perplexed.

"To tell the truth I'd forgotten it as well," continued the Expert. "But, before leaving, I activated a personal recording system which would have stored all the actions of every member of the crew."

â##Yes... yes I remember now. Youâ##re talking about this little thing that you fixed here behind me, aren't you?â## replied the captain, as, twisting his torso, he tried to point to a little black rectangle fixed to his light grey belt.

â##Precisely old chap.â## And you can't imagine how well it worked. I managed to find out what happened to your remote-control system."

"Oh, really? And what did happen to it?â##

"Youâ##ll never guess!"

Pasadena, California ## The News

"And now, what are we going to do with this little trinket?" asked the thin, lean one, as he climbed into the driver's seat of a brand new, bright red, Chevrolet Corvette.

"Are you talking about the car or the alien thing?" asked his chubby crony as, with great difficulty, he also tried to get into the fast sports car.

"I was talking about the remote-control, although I still haven't understood why you decided to buy a car like this, seeing as you can't even get into it."

"I'd say you're also in a little difficulty, my dear tall, thin lamp post."

"Precisely. Couldn't we have got something a little more comfortable for both of us?"

"When you put your foot down on the accelerator of this beast, the reason will be clear immediately," and after slamming the door a little too violently, he added, "Come on, let's go."

"Go where?"

"Let's go back to base. I want to analyse the data our nerd friend gave us carefully and discover all the secrets of this bit of alien kit."

"Now you're not going to tell me, you know more than him. The guy seemed very knowledgeable to me."

"I have to say the boy did an excellent job, but I've also done my research."

"What are you talking about?" asked the thin guy, perplexed.

"What do you think I've been doing every night for the last month, in front of the computer, while you snored like a bear in hibernation?"

"Looked at porn sites?"

"Where oh where did I find you? I often wonder that of late, you know?"

"It's fate that united us," replied the thin guy as he floored the accelerator, and the Corvette leapt forward leaving two black tyre marks on the tarmac.

"Hey, slow down," yelled the fat guy, as he was thrown back against the seat by the sudden acceleration. "You'd better not destroy it immediately. I've only paid the first two instalments."

"Wow," exclaimed the skinny guy. "It goes like a missile. This little gem is a real beast."

"I knew you'd like it. But now, try not to run that little old lady over," said the big guy, indicating a frail lady who was slowly crossing the road. "Let's try and let her enjoy a little more of her pension."

"Don't worry my friend. You're in good hands," answered the guy at the wheel while, with an abrupt manoeuvre, he narrowly missed the little old woman.

"Yeah right," exclaimed the big guy. "You almost tore the clothes off her back." Then he turned around and seeing the old lady who, shaking her handbag, was shouting all sorts of things at him, added "Another series of insults like that and it'll be you who won't be enjoying your pension," and he broke out into a peal of laughter.

"Leave it. I'm not superstitious."

"You should be. What if she practices voodoo? You might find yourself jumping around like a cricket while the old woman sticks pins in the butt of the little doll that represents you."

"Will you just stop all this load of bollocks and instead tell me what we're going to do with that thing?"

"Okay, okay. Don't get worked up. I was just kidding, no?" The burly guy placed the alien object on the palm of his left hand again and said, "The nerd might well know a lot of people but, I can assure you, I used channels for my research which he certainly hasn't had the possibility to access."

"Sometimes you scare me."

"Do you want to see something?"

"Well, it depends what."

"In the various files that I had the opportunity of consulting regarding this alien technology, I discovered that this little object, as well as blowing up spaceships, can do a lot of other things that are just as nice."

"But are you sure it really has worked?" asked the guy at the wheel, as he took a bend at full speed, slamming the passenger against the door.

"Hey, can you just slow down? That's all we need, the police chasing us and arresting us again."

"I've had an idea," said the thin guy. "Turn the radio on."

"Do you think this is the time to start listening to little songs?"

"No, of course not, you idiot. Put the news on."

Although somewhat dubious, the fat guy decided not to ask any more questions and, having put the radio on, began to scroll through the various stations until he found one that was transmitting world news.

After breaking into the central bank, the four criminals with masked faces, holding guns and automatic rifles, ordered the employees to fill the bags with cash. The entire operation lasted a little less than five minutes. When the police arrived, the robbers had already got away. Checkpoints have been set up on all routes into the city."

"What do we care about this stuff?" asked the fat guy, more perplexed than ever.

"Patience my friend, patience."

And now let's return to our headline news. There appear to be some interesting updates. Let's go over to our Washington correspondent, Fred Salomon."

Thanks Lisa. I'm in the conference room at the White House where the President has just arrived and is about to release an official statement. Let's listen to him live."

A few moments of silence followed and then the unmistakable voice of the President of the United States of America came through the Corvette's powerful speakers.

Ladies and gentlemen, first of all thank you for joining us today. Unfortunately, the news I have just received is not at all reassuring. It seems that the unusual flash, seen almost an hour ago on the moon, was indeed caused by a huge explosion and that it did in fact involve the spacecraft of our alien friends. We still do not know if they managed to escape. A further announcement will follow as soon as we have more news in this regard. Thank you."

"For crying out loud!" exclaimed the fat guy shocked. "So, we really did blow it up."

"Aren't you pleased? When we were with the nerd it seemed to be the most important thing in the world to you."

"Well, yes... of course, ... But, now, deep down, I'm a little sorry."

"Incredible... I'd never have thought there was a heart under all that fat."

"Oh, leave off with all this crap," said the big guy with a contrite air. "Put your foot down and let's get back to base."

Planet Kerion ### The tragic discovery

"The (l) container has just left the intercommunication tunnel, announced the tiny Kerian in charge of coordinating manoeuvres. "It will reach the docking point in 0.1 cens."

"I want it brought here immediately to check its contents and analyse the memorised data, Supervisor RTY ordered his subordinate.

The strange egg-shaped object, from almost sixty-five light years away, had been intercepted by a sort of containment field that grabbed it out of the planet's orbit and quickly dragged it down in the direction of a large opening in the immense, completely metallic structure, that stretched for nearly two hundred square kilometres along Kerion's equator.

"Container (l) almost in position," said the coordinator.

"Hurry up and get it brought here," shouted RTY. "We absolutely must find out what happened on ^".

As soon as the casing reached the docking point it was immediately taken into custody by two Kerians with decidedly unusual shapes. One was very similar to a sort of trailer without wheels, while the other was more comparable to a huge crab with six claws. The crab gently grabbed the container and deposited it inside the Kerian/trailer which, after receiving confirmation it had been successfully loaded, without a single sound, set off at an incredible speed in the direction of the laboratories.

"Container (l) has arrived," exclaimed the coordinator. "Inspection team, carry out a full analysis of the content."

Four Kerians, also of somewhat bizarre shape, rushed over to the object and, after immersing it in a small docking area containing an ammonia-based solution, began scanning it internally. Only a few minutes had passed when the smallest Kerian of the four announced, "Nine-hundred and ninety souls present, all in perfect condition. I am sending the log of the events recorded by the capsule to the central system."

"On screen, ordered RTY peremptorily.

The images showed the surface of the moon rapidly moving away while a large, perfectly spherical object approached the area of underground laboratory ^. After a few moments, a blinding glare almost saturated the footage and immediately afterwards, there was nothing. The whole area was as if it had been hit by a giant hammer. The images showed only a huge flat area of lunar soil, incredibly smooth and polished. The recording continued for some instants showing the satellite increasingly distant, then it was interrupted.

"The laboratory," exclaimed RTY amazed. "It was completely destroyed."

"There's nothing else," commented the coordinator bitterly. "The recording is finished."

"This is a brazen and deliberate attack on our outpost. I knew we shouldn't have trusted that alien species."

"Do you think that spherical weapon was built by them?"

"There are only two inhabited planets in that solar system and there are beings of that species on both. We should not have established our base there."

"It's an appalling tragedy," said the Kerian coordinator sadly. "There were almost ten million souls in the laboratory ready to be transferred. Only the nine-hundred and ninety that managed to escape the disaster through capsule (l) were saved."

"I still can't believe it," exclaimed RTY astonished. "We must immediately notify the Supreme TYK."

Tell-el-Mukayyar ## The footage

Petri and his three other friends had meanwhile moved inside Dr. Hunter's laboratory tent.

"Now I really am curious," said Azakis nervously. "I really want to see what didn't work on your hook system."

"No, my dear friend. You'll see that things are slightly different," answered Petri as he made a three-dimensional hologram appear, about half a meter off the ground.

"This thing you do always amazes me," exclaimed Jack as he observed the images that were forming right in the middle of the tent.

"Now I'll go back a little," said Petri as he busied himself with a strange instrument and the scenes were reproduced the other way around. "This is the moment when we took General Campbell, Senator Preston and those two funny characters that attacked us when we were trying to retrieve the cargo, back to Area 51."

"Yes, yes. I remember that very well," commented Azakis.

"Now I'll show you something," and the hologram showed the fat guy approaching Azakis threateningly, then giving him a light shove with his shoulder.

"He thought he could frighten me," said the Alien captain. "He didn't move me even one millimetre. But what's this got to do with the loss of the remote control?"

"Wait a minute. Let me just enlarge this detail... What you're seeing is the fat man's hand as, with great skill, he slips the device off your belt."

"Incredible," exclaimed the Colonel. "A manoeuvre worthy of the best pickpockets who prowl around on the underground."

"With the excuse of giving you a shove he took the opportunity to steal your remote control," added Elisa. "It's an old technique that shoplifters hand down from generation to generation."

"He stole it from me?" asked Azakis astonished.

"Precisely, old chap," confirmed Petri.

"And how on earth did he reactivate it and run the self-destruct command? You had even disabled it completely if I'm not mistaken?"

"Yes Zak. The device had been deactivated. Probably, after they were freed, he and his crony must have started searching amongst the countless information we left the terrestrials and found the way to get around the blocking system."

"Those two destroyed our spacecraft and prevented us from returning home," blurted out Azakis, angrier than he'd ever been before. "When I get my hands on them, I'll make them sorry they ever came into this world, I promise."

"Calm down my friend. What's done is done now. We can't do anything anymore. Instead, what we should do, is track down those two lowlifes and get back what they stole from us before they also discover its other functions."

"Why, what else does it do?" asked Elisa intrigued.

"Never mind for the time being. It's best you don't know."

"Blimey, so many secrets," replied the doctor a little upset.

"Certainly, if they've managed to find out how to activate the self-destruct, they might also discover the rest," said Azakis worried.

"But shouldn't you be thinking about a way to get back home first?" asked the Colonel. "This doesn't seem such an urgent matter to me."

"You're right Jack, but that thing, in the wrong hands, could be very dangerous."

"And those are definitely the wrong hands," added Elisa.

"There may just be a way," said Petri almost in a whisper.

"Well? Talk? Do I have to get down on my knees and beg you?" exclaimed Azakis annoyed.

"That device is equipped with a special power supply system. If we were still on the Theos I could make a device that would be able to identify the trail of emissions it leaves behind."

"And you've only just remembered that?" Azakis was decidedly angry. "Couldn't you have done it as soon as we found out it had disappeared?"

"I'm sorry but this search system only works if the object is in motion and we'd taken it for granted that you'd dropped it somewhere."

"Now calm down boys," said the Colonel, reinforcing his words with sweeping hand gestures. "Anyway, from what I've understood, you can't do anything without the Theos, right?"

"Well, perhaps I could organise something, all the same," said Petri scratching his head.

"Forgive the outburst, my friend," said the Captain contritely. "I know it's not your fault. This really is a bad time for both of us." Then, laying a hand on his shoulder, he added, "See what you can do. I think it's very important to retrieve that object as soon as possible."

"Don't worry Zak. It's not a problem. I'll try to think of something, making do with the few things we have left."

"Only you can do that. We're in your hands."

"I'm off, and, without saying any more, the Expert left the laboratory tent leaving behind only a few small clouds of dust.

"Will he manage to do it?" asked Jack hesitantly.

"Of course. I don't have any doubts whatsoever. Petri has incredible skills. More than once I've seen him make things that not even a team of the best Craftsmen would have been able to do. He's an exceptional person. I'm sorry I was a little too rude to him. I'm incredibly fond of him and I'd willingly give my life for him at any moment."

"Don't worry Zak," said Elisa in a very sweet little voice. "He's well aware of that. It's a difficult time, but we'll get through it without problems. I don't have any doubts whatsoever."

"Thank you, Elisa. I really hope so with all my heart."

Pasadena, California ## The hideout

As soon as he opened the door, the decidedly overweight man was hit by a pleasant blast of fresh air. The room's air conditioner, left running since the previous evening, had done an excellent job.

"That's wonderful," he exclaimed. "I couldn't stand that suffocating heat any longer."

"Perhaps if you decided to go on a serious diet and got rid of all that fat you're carrying around; the heat wouldn't bother you so much."

"Why are you always so negative about my reserves?"

"Call them reserves. You could safely spend an entire month without eating," exclaimed the thin guy, breaking into a peal of laughter immediately afterwards.

"I'll pretend not to have heard that."

The décor in the small apartment that the two were using as a base was decidedly spartan. In the main room there was only a simple, light-coloured wooden table with four chairs of the same colour and a heavy dark grey sofa with worn seats and armrests. In the corner near the French window that looked out onto a dismal inner courtyard, a brown plastic pot contained the remains of a small *Washingtonia filifera* that despite its great resistance to dry climates, had died several weeks earlier due to lack of water. The tiny bathroom also showed evident signs of neglect. Several tiles had fallen off and large dark spots on the discoloured ceiling were evidence of unrepaired water infiltration. Two shabby bedrooms, each with a single bed and a cheap bedside table, together with a kitchenette with a cabinet that was at least twenty years old, completed the furnishings of that anything but pleasant apartment.

"Well one thing's sure, in terms of taste in the choice of our hideouts, you really are great, huh?" commented the tall skinny guy.

"Why? What's wrong with this place?"

"It's a dump. That's what's wrong. Here we are always talking about making loads of money but, in the end, we always end up in these damned dumps."

"Oh, you're always complaining," replied the big one. "Let's try and clinch this deal then you'll see, we'll be able to settle down once and for all."

"If you say so.... I'm not all that convinced really."

"Come on, pass me the laptop and I'll show you something."

The thin guy pulled a black bag with a shoulder strap out from behind the sofa and took out a dark grey notebook. He looked at it for a moment then passed it to his crony who placed it on the table and turned it on. They both sat still for a while, looking at the screen as the system completed its start-up procedure until, at a certain point, the thin guy blurted out, "I can't stand these things any longer. I spend hours watching progress bars, hourglasses spinning, miscellaneous updates... Why can't they just make a computer that works like a television? Press the button and it turns on."

"Yeah, that really would be nice. Instead, what I hate most, is when you've finished using it and want to turn it off to go home, it presents you with a nice little message that says "Do not turn computer off. Installing update 1 of 325..." and you have to wait half an hour while it does what it wants. I mean couldn't it just do its stupid updates earlier? Must it really wait for me to be ready to leave?"

"Huh, that's IT for you. The programmers who design these systems probably enjoy seeing us poor mortals as we become more and more irritated when faced with their creations."

"Are you saying they do it on purpose?"

"If you think that nowadays, just to write a letter, we need a computer with a processing power billions of times larger than the Apollo missions used to send a man to the moon, I suppose something must have gone badly wrong in technological progress."

"Well, you're the expert," commented the thin guy. "For sure, they make us waste a lot of time, but we wouldn't even be able to go to the loo without these gadgets now."

"Let's just leave it at that shall we, it's better. Look instead at what I've discovered during my sleepless nights."

The overweight man pulled a series of images up on the screen that he must have taken from some archive that wasn't exactly public. He scrolled through a few then he said "Here we are. I think what you're seeing are a series of combinations of cuneiform characters, that are able to activate additional functions on this little device."

"And where did you get those?" asked the thin guy in amazement.

"If I were to tell you, then I'd have to kill you," answered the big guy with a very serious air.

For a moment, the tall thin guy remained as if paralysed, then he realised that his crony had obviously made a wisecrack and, after clouting him, exclaimed "What an idiot. Come on, let me see this ineffable discovery."

"Wait, first let me see what the nerd gave us," and he plugged the USB stick they'd extorted from the boy into the PC. He rapidly scanned through a series of files, occasionally opening one at random, until his attention fell on an image he'd already seen. "Look at this," he exclaimed.

"What is it?"

"It's a character sequence I know."

"I don't understand."

"You really are a dotard. This is the combination that activated the self-destruct command of the spacecraft and I'm sure I've already seen it in my personal research."

To avoid being reproached again, the skinny guy just mumbled something.

"Here it is," said the big guy again, showing the same series of images they had been looking at before, but highlighting one of them with the mouse. "It's this one."

"Yes, so what?"

"So, if this sequence has already worked, then the others indicated here are probably also active."

"Your reasoning makes sense."

"How about trying one?"

"But won't it be dangerous? I think we've already done enough damage."

"You're just a coward," said the big guy. "In the worst-case scenario, we'll simply blow up another one of their damn spacecrafts."

"And what if we were to blow ourselves up instead? We don't know anything about that thing."

"Come on let's try it," exclaimed the fat guy, with the expression of a little boy about to set off a firecracker under his grandfather's deck chair while he's happily sleeping.

"You do it. I'm going to hide behind there."

"You are brave, aren't you? Don't worry, I'll do it, you little sissy."

Then, after waiting for his crony to go and hide in the adjacent bedroom, the big guy took a deep breath and using his thick index finger, traced the first sequence shown on the monitor onto the object's surface. Immediately afterwards, he tossed the device onto the sofa and threw himself to the ground with his hands above his head. He waited several seconds without moving, but nothing happened. He stayed there a little longer lying on the floor and only after having definitively established that there didn't appear to be any imminent danger, he lifted his head slightly. The remote control was still lying on the seat of the sofa and didn't seem to be working.

"So? What's happened?" asked his crony, peeping cautiously around the semi-closed door.

"Absolutely nothing."

"Perhaps you made a mistake typing the sequence?"

"I don't think so. I think I did everything correctly," said the big guy as, very carefully, he stood up and approached the alien object again.

"Go on, try again. I'll stay here."

"Thanks for the help. What would I do without you?"

This time, the fat guy decided he wouldn't throw himself to the floor again and composed the sequence simply sitting on the chair. He repeated the operation several times, but there didn't seem to be any reaction at all from the object.

"Absolutely nothing," added the big guy.

"Perhaps we're destroying all their spacecraft," commented the tall thin guy as he peeped round the door again.

"Don't talk rubbish. The nerd said this thing only has a range of a few hundred thousand kilometres. Who knows where Nibiru has got to by now. Instead, I simply think this sequence isn't operational."

"So, let's try another, no?"

"Let's try another? I'd say it's only me doing all the trying."

"Oh, don't nit-pick. After all, who's the more technologically-minded between the two of us?"

"Okay, okay. I'll try the second one now."

The big guy spent the next ten minutes composing almost all the combinations that had been displayed on the computer screen, one after the other, but nothing strange happened.

Meanwhile, as the situation seemed anything but dangerous, even his crony had joined him, and they were making conjectures and assumptions of all sorts together.

"Perhaps the images are the wrong way around," said the thin one at a certain point.

"No. The cuneiform characters on the remote control are in the same order as those on the screen."

"Then your amazing sources must have dried up."

"That's not possible. It has to work. I'm sure of that."

"There's only two left to try. If they don't work either, we'll throw this thing in the bin and go and have a nice cool drink."

The big guy snorted and, without adding anything, composed the penultimate sequence, without much conviction. As soon as he'd touched the last symbol, he sensed a very slight shudder and an instant later, a sort of unnatural glow was released from the front of the device. There was a slight cracking noise and, a new, perfectly circular window, of about half a metre in diameter, opened up in the blank wall in front of them.

"What the hell..." exclaimed the thin guy with his eyes wide-open.

"For crying out loud..." added his friend equally amazed.

With their legs still trembling with fright, they stood up and cautiously approached the hole in the wall. It was the taller one who, having stuck his head inside the opening, exclaimed "That's incredible! The wall's gone, and we've even made a hole in that big advertising billboard for cars over there. It must be at least a hundred metres from here!"

Planet Kerion - The Supreme TYK

"Supreme TYK, announced RTY in the internal communication system of the planet's equatorial structure. "Unfortunately, I am the bearer of terrible news."

"RTY, my trusted friend. Fear not, nothing can disturb my serenity and that of our people."

The Supreme TYK was, in actual fact, the largest and oldest exoskeleton of all Kerion where, thousands of years earlier, the soul of the one who had ruled the planet in the pre-machine period had been transferred. With time, his physical structure had become immense. His current extension approached two square kilometres with a height that, in some points, exceeded five hundred metres. TYK was a multi-purpose technological agglomerate with the peculiarities and efficiency of a million Japanese factories all joined together.

"I'm afraid that, this time, what's happened is truly atrocious," continued the Kerian in charge.

"Speak, what's happened?"

"Laboratory Λ was attacked and destroyed. Ten million souls were annihilated. Only nine-hundred and ninety launched through container (I), a few instants before the explosion, were saved."

"Explosion? What are you talking about? Who was it?" TYK's voice, always calm and relaxed, had now taken on a decidedly much altered tone.

"You can view what was recorded by the capsule as it moved away from the satellite, directly on the central system, reference IΛ."

TYK remained silent for a long time as he repeatedly watched the images captured by the container, then he turned off the view and said, "That spherical bomb was designed by that alien race that inhabits the blue planet called lol."

"Or by the inhabitants of the other planet that belongs to the same solar system," added the one in charge.

"It was an attack brought without mercy by that primitive species on our race. Millions of our brothers were annihilated before they could transfer. Why?"

"We've always thought that those beings didn't represent a danger to us, even if I have always opposed the creation of Λ on their satellite."

"What's this other planet you spoke of?"

"We call it IOI. It's very similar to lol. But its orbit is considerably larger. It performs one complete revolution around the sun every 3600 revolutions of lol and its inhabitants are of very similar origin. Indeed, according to studies carried out some time ago, it would appear that the inhabitants of IOI genetically modified certain species that lived on lol to make them similar to them."

"So, we can say that they belong to the same race and are even more evolved?"

"Yes, I'd say so," replied the Supervisor. "I would also add that, in this period, IOI has intersected the orbit of lol passing really close to it."

"Therefore, the inhabitants of the two planets have seized this opportunity to form an alliance and attack our structure. It cannot be otherwise. What I still do not understand is why."

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