

# Spectrum is Black

A Captain Scarlet story by Adrian Kleinbergen

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It was a cold winter night as Captain Blue of Spectrum flew back to a meeting he was already late for on Cloudbase while rain and sleet lashed the silver-blue hull of the passenger jet. Captain Blue was not nervous, only frustrated and impatient that the sudden storm had caught him by surprise and had now put him behind schedule. More importantly, the woman in the passenger cabin behind him was going to be late also and Colonel White hated delays.

"Are you alright back there, Doctor?" Blue touched the communicator button after a particularly hard updraught.

"I'm okay, Captain. I'm a little unsettled by the turbulence but it can't be helped." a voice replied from the speaker. Blue smiled and activated his personal comm system.

"This is Captain Blue to Angel escort. Keeping up with me, Symphony?"

"In your dreams, hotshot. I don't know how you can stand flying those tubs," shot back a sassy young voice. Symphony angel flew a lazy circle around the larger transport plane, seemingly unaffected by the storm outside as they began their final approach and climb away from the weather. The rain ceased abruptly and the wind died down to a gentle whisper as the dark, ominous shape of Spectrum Cloudbase loomed before them.

"This is Lieutenant Green to Symphony Angel and Blue wing; you have clearance for landing."

"Thanks, Lieutenant. Sorry I'm late."

"Tell it to the Colonel, Captain." The voice chuckled, "He's waiting for you in the briefing room with Captain Scarlet and Doctor Fawn."

"S.I.G., Lieutenant." Captain Blue angled the plane and brought it in smoothly, the narrow landing strip coming up to meet it. On the far side of Cloudbase, Symphony Angel closed in on the interceptor landing pad and switched to hovering flight, slowly dropping onto the centre. The pad lowered into the deck of Cloudbase and sealed itself off. Meanwhile, a telescoping metal tube clamped onto the outside of the passenger jet and the airlock opened to allow Captain Blue and his guest to enter.

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Colonel White strode from viewport to viewport in obvious impatience, while Dr. Fawn quietly reviewed his documents. Sitting silently and calmly, Captain Scarlet waited for his long time friend to arrive. Ever since the incident that had made him indestructible, or even before, Captain Scarlet had been a loner. As Paul Metcalfe, he reached the rank of Spectrum Captain without a single individual to attend the modest ceremony. It was ironic that he had been forced to alienate his immediate family by joining Spectrum. He had achieved a great deal of personal success within the World Army Corp and had won much approval from his father, retired General William Metcalfe. When the time came to leave the army for an even more rigorous life within Spectrum, he found he could not reveal this fact to anyone outside the organization. Paul Metcalfe had to do the one thing that hurt him more than anything he had previously experienced; he had to tell his father that he was leaving the military to pursue a private business career. His father, bitter and disappointed, disowned his only son and the rest

of the family followed suit. Metcalfe was heartbroken by the act even though he understood well the fierce pride of a military family. He vowed that if he survived the Mysteron threat, he would return to them and finally reveal his true profession. Scarlet smiled sadly at the thought. Would he really reveal his secret life to them? Why? To try to gain back their gossamer loyalty and affection? They had shown their true colours by dumping him because they believed that he had abandoned the military life that they cherished above all else, even family values. To be sure, this was a line of thought that hit Scarlet often when he had time for contemplation. Would he go back to his family and see if his father would admit he had been wrong? The chances of that happening were slim. Scarlet realized that sometimes he hoped the War of Nerves would never end so that he could remain enclosed within the secure confines of Spectrum forever. Scarlet had to smile at the absurdity of this thought. He knew he had to belong, either to an organization or a family or somewhere. For the present time, he belonged with Spectrum and he would always ensure that his prime task was to vanquish the Mysterons in whatever way he could. He realized that it was this thought alone that gave him strength and he found himself relaxing, the tensions of uncertainty draining away. So far, this was where he was truly happy and he decided to leave it at that. He thought about the only man that could be called his friend, Adam Svensen. The rebel heir to a vast fortune who seemed to delight in risk-taking and adventuring scorned his father's billions and preferred a life of excitement and danger for which Scarlet was forever amused. Svensen, who now was called Captain Blue, shared one thing with Scarlet... they had both been alienated from their fathers, a fact which led to their initial friendship and continued on to this day. Their first mission together, a routine mission to Central Africa to investigate a diamond smuggling operation at the single largest mine in the world ended successfully but not before each had saved the other's life. This was in the comparatively simple days before the Mysteron threat, when Spectrum's purpose was to provide maximum security and investigative resources for the world's political and industrial resources instead of staving off invasions from space. It was also the beginning of a bond that had endured many triumphs and disasters including the fateful day Svensen was forced to shoot the Mysteron-enthralled Scarlet in order to save the World President's life so long ago. Scarlet was finally roused from his reverie when the briefing room door finally slid open to reveal a rushed, slightly-mussed Captain Blue and his charge, Dr. Penny Tracy.

"It's about time, Captain. You're fifteen minutes late, and don't use the weather as an excuse." Colonel White said sharply.

"Yes sir. No excuses, sir," Blue said stiffly.

"Please don't blame Captain Blue, Colonel. It's my fault. I was still involved in preparing my final report when Captain Blue arrived. I'm afraid I made him wait till I was finished," Dr. Tracy admitted. The Colonel frowned as Captain Scarlet smiled behind his hand.

"Hmf. Well, you're both here. We had better proceed with the conference before we lose even more time;" Colonel White finally said, mildly grumbling. "Dr. Tracy, you have been experimenting with a broad range of physiological and circumstantial evidence concerning the Mysterons and their nature. Now that we have reached the fourth year of the War of Nerves, we have been effectively stalemated for most of that time. It appears that the Mysterons have the power to defeat us whenever they wish, but for some reason prefer the game they've played from the beginning; warning us of an intended target and then sitting back and watching us succeed or fail. They have never lied about an intended target, although they have misled us, like the 'President Roberts' incident."

Scarlet thought about that one. The Mysteron threat had been directed toward World

President Roberts and an all-out defence cordon was immediately erected in spite of his objections. It was only by way of a last minute admission that he was soon to be christening a ship named in his honour that Scarlet realized that the Mysterons might mean to sabotage the ship and not the man. As it turned out, the ship was indeed the target and Scarlet managed to clear the area before the Mysteron agent detonated a hidden bomb. A close victory.

Colonel White continued, "It appears that the Mysterons are enjoying the little game they have set up for themselves. It doesn't seem to matter to them whether or not they hit their targets as much as watching us race about trying to stop them. Why is this? Is it some perverse exercise to lead us into final exhaustion? How long do they intend to test our mettle? Or do the Mysterons actually have some peculiar code of fair play? Do they realize their obvious superiority over us and set up the challenges so that we have an even chance of victory? We have no way of knowing. That is why you have been brought here, Doctor. Your lengthy investigation into the Mysteron phenomenon may provide some clue as to their true nature, and ultimately, their undoing."

The woman paused as though a great weight had been transferred to her shoulders and she sighed.

"I hope so, Colonel. I've minutely examined all of the accumulated evidence and have slowly built a framework through which we can finally begin to make some concrete conclusions about the Mysterons and their behaviour."

"That's a hopeful statement, Doctor," Captain Blue replied with a grin. Captain Scarlet nodded neutrally and said nothing while Dr. Fawn prepared to take notes. Colonel White considered for a moment and then spoke.

"Proceed, Doctor." The room lights dimmed and a large projection screen lowered from the ceiling. The screen flickered into brightness and Dr. Tracy began to speak.

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Captains Blue and Scarlet strode down the corridor towards the lounge. They were tired and fell into the sleek red leather chairs that circled the low round table in the centre of the room. Colonel White soon followed and sat with them.

"Well, Captain Scarlet? Captain Blue? What are your reactions?" The Colonel asked.

"Well Sir... I'm not an analytical expert like Dr. Tracy, but my own personal experiences with the Mysterons give me some points to differ on," Captain Blue answered first. Scarlet nodded silently.

"I have to agree with Captain Blue, Colonel. Some of the Doctor's conclusions don't add up to what I've seen either." Colonel White pondered for a moment, weighing the remarks of the two men.

"Do you think that the Doctor is generalizing some details? Drawing conclusions where there are none? Where do you think her possible errors lie?" Colonel White finally posed the question. Captain Blue tried to articulate.

"I'm not sure, Colonel. I don't doubt the facts she's presented... after all, we supplied most of them. I just feel that she is making some jumps in logic that she has no real justification in making... it's like-"

"It's like trying to describe what it's like to climb a mountain without ever actually doing so," Captain Scarlet finished. "All of Dr. Tracy's theories are just that - theories. She has no field experience at all and has never observed a real mysteron agent in action." Colonel White looked thoughtful.

"So what would you recommend, Captain?"

"Well, it sounds crazy but she should really accompany Captain Scarlet or me on a mission... I think that her evaluation of the Mysteron phenomenon would be greatly enhanced if she had some solid experience behind her."

"I have to agree with Captain Blue, Colonel. Dr. Tracy's theories on the Mysterons may prove to be the greatest weapon we have in our arsenal, but it won't be a loaded weapon unless the information at our disposal is accurate."

"I concur, Captain. Let's reconvene tomorrow. Well, good-night gentlemen." Colonel White stood and left the lounge, passing Dr. Tracy at the doorway.

"Goodnight, Doctor. I hope you find our accommodations satisfactory." Tracy smiled.

"They're fine Colonel. I'm just going to chat up the two Captains before I get some sleep. Goodnight, Sir." Dr. Tracy entered the lounge as Blue and Scarlet rose to greet her.

"Hello Captain Blue; Captain Scarlet... I hope I'm not disturbing you."

"Not at all, Dr." Scarlet said with a smile, "Captain Blue and I were just talking about you." She smiled back, arching one eyebrow.

"Nice things, I hope," she sat opposite the two men. "I'm not used to being the topic of conversation between two good-looking men."

"I'm sure it happens wherever you go," Captain Blue charmed.

"What a flatterer. Do you have a disarmingly gallant remark for me as well, Captain Scarlet? You seem to be the quiet one around here," Tracy teased.

"I couldn't possibly outdo him in personal charm... so I won't try," Scarlet said evasively, "and I think that it's appropriate to reveal our true names to you. That is, if you're interested in a proposition we would like to make to you."

Tracy grinned.

"Oh my, a proposition from two gorgeous men? Whatever am I to do?" She winked as Captain Blue laughed and Captain Scarlet had trouble with his coffee cup.

"All right, gentlemen. I'm ready to be serious now. Honestly, I know that the War of Nerves is a serious threat but everyone on this base is so grim. Well, not you Captain Blue-

"The name's Adam. Adam Svensen."

"Not you, Adam. Everyone else I've met here is so - so stiff. It's like being around my uncle Jeff. All work and long hours."

"In case anyone's interested, my name's Paul Metcalfe." Tracy paused and reached out for Scarlet's hand, grasping it.

"I'm sorry Paul. Please tell me what you wanted to say." Captain Scarlet hesitated for a moment, slightly startled by the woman's earnestness, and then spoke.

"Well, Ms. Tracy-

"Please, it's Penny."

"Penny, Captain Blue and I, with Colonel White, have been analyzing your theories concerning the Mysterons and, well, we feel that there is something missing from your summation. Something basic but critical in the perspective that you have used to understand the Mysterons seems to be missing. Don't misunderstand me; we're in no position to second-guess you on the core of your research. We just felt that some of your details would ring more true if you had shared some of our experiences instead of just quoting from them."

Tracy frowned for a moment.

"What exactly are you suggesting?"

"Captain Scarlet and I think that you should accompany us on one of our missions. Nothing hair-raising. Just a chance to see us in action and more importantly, to see the

Mysterons in action. With some first-hand experience, I think that you could refine your theories down to much more effective practical observations."

Scarlet continued, "Although risky, you would have an opportunity that no other researcher in your field would have... controlled access to your primary subject - The Mysterons."

Tracy frowned again. She appeared to be contemplating the offer the two men had laid before her.

"I'm going to have to think it over, gentlemen. I don't disagree that there may be some holes in my theories and I know that I'm entirely dependent on your reports and documentation to further my studies but I'm not exactly enthralled by the idea of getting close and snuggly with alien beings that want to wipe us out of existence. I'm also concerned about the kind of things that happen on some of your 'routine' missions. Things tend to blow up whenever you're around, Paul. The London Car-View tower, Glengarry Castle, Lunarville 7, K-14 Observatory - the list goes on. I'm not sure that I'd survive one of your 'routine missions.'"

Blue and Scarlet shrugged and smiled at one another before attempting to respond to Tracy's point. Captain Blue reasoned with her.

"I can't argue with you on that subject, Penny. We're doing a hard job and sometimes a lot of property gets damaged in the course of our objectives but I think that you're exaggerating. Some of our missions are quite peaceful. For instance, the 'Traitor' incident at Australia's Koala Base was resolved without a single shot being fired. Then there's the 'Diamond Pulsator' incident. That ended with no casualties or injuries." Blue leaned back, confident that his point was made.

"Peaceful, huh? Two cadets died in the initial hovercraft crash and both of you were almost killed in a fire at the base, not to mention narrowly avoiding certain death with two more cadets when the hovercraft you were all riding went out of control and crashed." she paused to let her words sink in. "The Diamond Pulsator incident? Are you forgetting the rather expensive Passenger jet that Captain Scarlet had to ditch over Greenland? Not to mention the admittedly unmanned Station House that was blown up courtesy of Captain Black. Did I mention the part where Cloudbase itself was nearly blown out of the sky by an exploding pulsator? Peaceful, Hah!" Tracy folded her arms and looked smug.

Captain Blue reddened and Captain Scarlet grinned as he now attempted to re-enter the fray.

"Dr. Tracy- Penny, I mean, I promise you that Captain Blue and I will do everything in our power to keep you from harm. After all, your research is vital to Spectrum. We can't afford to lose you." Tracy cocked her head and smiled thinly.

"If I were to accept your invitation to mayhem- I mean, observation of a mysteron agent at work, when would we begin... and where?" Blue winked at Scarlet and he explained.

"Well, there's no telling when the Mysterons will strike, but it could happen anytime. Lieutenant Green monitors communication lines all over the world using the same technology as your cousin John uses aboard Thunderbird 5."

"How did you know about John? Or Thunderbird 5 for that matter?" Tracy was surprised. Scarlet and Blue smiled modestly.

"We've helped each other out on occasion..." Captain Blue confided. "Strictly hush-hush." Tracy looked at the two men with thinly-disguised suspicion. She stood, her hands on her curvy hips.

"Alright, alright. Count me in. If you guys have worked with my Uncle Jeff and the boys,

I'd never hear the end of it if they heard that I turned you guys down. Call me when something breaks." With that, the small woman left the room, leaving Captain Scarlet and Captain Blue alone and pondering.

"Well, Paul? Did we do the right thing?"

"I'm certain of it, Adam. Penny's got some brilliant ideas and I'm certain that it will only take some real exposure to her subject to finally make the pieces come together. I also think that it will be very soon."

"In that case it only remains to be seen where the Mysterons will strike next." Blue rose and headed for bed leaving Scarlet looking out of the porthole, watching the midnight sun rise.

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Thunder boomed mightily, as if to punctuate the jittering strokes of lightning that split the early hours of the dawn. Rain lashed all below it and a gale-force wind smashed the downpour into a stinging spray. On a roadside, hidden from view by the dark of the storm and made visible only in split-second spans by the lightning, a black automobile lurked. Inside, a man with an even blacker aura gazed patiently through binoculars at the factory complex on the opposite side of the road. The pale man with the coal-black eyes lay the glasses down on the seat next to him and opened a thermos-flask. He half-filled a cup with dark, steaming coffee and drank it slowly. He drained the cup and stared at it with almost a look of despair.

"I can't taste it at all, now." He frowned ruefully, screwing the cap back on the flask and tossing it into the back seat.

He picked up the binoculars again and continued his observation of the factory. His gaze moved slowly over the details of the plant and his attention became fixed as he focused on the small, unobtrusive sign over the main gate.

"Armodyne Defense Systems" read the rectangle of sheet metal riveted to the chain-link, razor-wired barrier that was continually swept by roving searchlights. Conrad Turner lowered his glasses and narrowed his impossibly-black eyes. Consulting his wristwatch, he picked up a small but powerful military-issue twoway radio and depressed the 'send' key.

"This is Captain Black relaying instructions from the Mysterons... "

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Captain Scarlet, disturbed from his contemplation of the last glimmers of sunset, looked around him in an aspect of expectation. Moments later, the deep, cavernous voice that he and his fellow agents knew all too well boomed out from around him.

"This is the Voice of the Mysterons... We know that you can hear us, Earthmen... " Scarlet stiffened in anticipation. Who or what would the target be this time? Would this be the moment they all dreaded? The threat that would finally be their match? Scarlet braced himself as the rumbling voice continued.

"We have watched how you have continually fought against our efforts in spite of our obvious superiority. You have demonstrated tremendous courage in the face of imminent destruction... It has been decided that the Judgement of the Earth and its Peoples be concluded... Our revenge is complete and our Honour satisfied... Now it is time to end this War of Nerves; Our time in this star system is nearly over and we are ready to continue our journey. It has been decided that a formal meeting of leaders in a neutral location is desired to forge peace between us. We have designated the place you know as "crater 101" on the far side of your moon to be the place where peace shall be formally declared. We request the World President and all other leaders who desire peace with us to be present along with the officers of Spectrum who have proven their courage and resourcefulness against us. The time

of this meeting shall be 48 hours from this moment. We look forward to ending this conflict... This is the Voice of the Mysterons."

Scarlet practically fell into a nearby chair as he tried to absorb the tremendous impact of the Mysterons' message. Could this really be it? The moment they all had prayed would happen some day in the distant future? The end of the War of Nerves? Scarlet pondered this as the door slid open to reveal a shocked and slightly mussed Captain Blue.

"Paul! Could this be on the level?"

Scarlet pursed his lips and slowly shook his head.

"I don't know, Adam. We've had these false alarms before. There's no way of telling if the Mysterons are in earnest this time. If only there was a way to be certain." The door slid open again to reveal a wide-eyed Dr. Tracy.

"Did you guys hear that? That was incredible! What are we going to do about it?" Scarlet smiled in spite of himself.

"Hold on there, Penny. At the moment we're not going to do anything until Colonel White gives the..."

"Captain Scarlet and Captain Blue... please report to the control room immediately." Lieutenant Green's voice boomed through the intercom system cutting off Captain Blue's statement and the two men quickly moved towards the door. Penny Tracy followed them through with a look of thrilled determination.

"Whoa, there! Penny, you had better stay put until we know what's going to happen-"

"What does that mean? You said I would be involved in one of your missions. What better time than this?" Tracy retorted.

"I know that's what we said... but this is different. The magnitude of this message, the importance of what this could lead to... well, it's an awful lot to do on your first 'mission.' How about the next one?" Blue waffled. Scarlet grinned at his friend's discomfiture.

"You blew it, Adam. Do you really think that Penny would let this opportunity go without a fight? I just hope she goes easy on Colonel White." At that, the control room door slid open and the three joined the group of Spectrum agents gathered around the desk of Colonel White. His back was towards the bulk of the group but his chair smoothly swivelled to face them all.

"You've heard the latest Mysteron message... this could be the moment we've waited for; a final, lasting peace with the Mysterons... or it could be the most devious trap they've ever devised. I'd like some of your reactions to the missive. Captain Scarlet, you first." Colonel White settled into his chair, ready to hear the opinions of his agents.

"Well, sir. They've attempted a false truce once before, which almost destroyed Cloudbase. I can't see them trying a feint like that again... so, perhaps they do mean it this time." Scarlet reasoned.

"We know that they never lie, at least concerning their intended target." Blue added.

"But they do twist their meanings around to deliberately mislead us," Tracy cautioned.

"And they never offered peace the last time... only that they would agree to meet our representative. So technically, they have still never lied to us" Scarlet continued. Colonel White considered these words. He looked at Dr. Tracy.

"Dr. Tracy. What do you think of this offer? Does it fit your profile of the Mysterons' behaviour? Of all of us here, you might be in the best position to know." Tracy frowned as she pondered for a moment.

"I think we're in a blank area Colonel. The Mysterons have never performed an action that did not serve their purpose of extending their War of Nerves. Now they are suing for

peace... it seems out of character for them. They have killed thousands of people without a shred of remorse or hesitation. There doesn't seem to be any reason for us to accept their word now. It's more likely that they want to observe our reaction to the message...to see how confused we become; how much time we waste trying to make sense of it. I would have to see some unprecedented event to convince me that this offer is genuine," Tracy concluded with a trace of sadness. Silence filled the chamber as Tracy's words hit home. Everyone wanted to believe that the end was in sight but the hard realities of Tracy's reasoning caused all of them to reconcile themselves to the very real possibility that this was only another Mysteron ruse designed to chip away at their eroding morale. Colonel White spoke with rehearsed confidence.

"Well, that may well be but you all know that we cannot let even a remote chance escape if it means that we can put a stop to this conflict. Are there any more comments?" Captain Scarlet answered hesitantly.

"This will be a difficult plan to follow, if we choose to do so. The last time I had only myself to risk but now we will be putting the World President and an entourage of diplomats on the line in a remote and dangerous part of the Moon. Maintaining security will be a logistics nightmare." Colonel White's reply never got further than his lips when Lieutenant Green's voice suddenly rose.

"Colonel White, unidentified aircraft approaching Cloudbase from North-Northwest, speed; mach 1.8."

"Launch all Angels, Lieutenant!" White barked.

"Angel One, Immediate Launch! Angels Two and Three, Prepare for launch! Launch when ready!"

"Sound Action Stations, Lieutenant!" White added.

"Yes sir!" Green hit the klaxon button as the agents scrambled to their stations. Scarlet and Blue ran down corridor 'A' to the starboard defense grid. Unnoticed by the two, Tracy followed and watched as they prepped the gun turrets and strapped themselves into the saddles.

"This is so cool. I didn't know Cloudbase was armed to the teeth like this."

"Penny, what are you doing here?" Blue almost yelled.

"You know you were supposed to go back to your quarters during an emergency!" Scarlet scolded.

"Well... That's where I thought we were going." Tracy reasoned, "you can't blame me for that. Anyway, stop fretting about me; pay attention to your jobs! Hup, hup! Man those guns!" Scarlet and Blue grimaced in frustration but turned their attention to their gunsights and waited.

Outside, engines roaring sweetly, Harmony Angel closed in on her target. As she approached, it became apparent that there was not much to fear from the incoming aircraft. It grew steadily within her gunsights and revealed itself to be an old Mig 242 fighter with its weapons stripped away and repainted in the variation of a trainer jet. Still, she knew far too well to trust in the obvious, so she set the plane well in her sights and prepared to make a mock attack. She switched on her transmitter and announced her presence.

"Angel One to incoming aircraft. You are entering a restricted airspace... you have 10 seconds to alter your flight path or I will be forced to engage your craft. Do you copy?" For a moment there was silence and Harmony resigned herself to inevitable combat. Her blood raced and fear turned to ferocity as she tightened her grip on her firing control. The errant aircraft

loomed larger in her sights and she gritted her teeth in anticipation of the fireball to come when a reply crackled through her radio speaker.

"This is Captain Black.... I request permission to land on Spectrum Cloudbase... I am here to surrender." The unmistakable grating voice of Captain Black sounded through Harmony's radio as well as through Lieutenant Green's console. Everyone within earshot looked shocked and even Colonel White had to compose himself. Thinking briefly, White instructed Green to reply.

"Let him land. Send a maximum security team to landing bay one. Make sure it's led by Captains Scarlet and Blue. Do it!" Lieutenant Green swallowed with difficulty but carried out the order.

"Incoming aircraft, you have clearance to land. A docking module will connect with your craft and you will be brought to Landing Bay One-"

"I know where Landing Bay One is, Lieutenant Green." The harsh voice softened slightly as the last syllables were sounded and Lt.Green and Colonel White stared at each other in puzzlement. The unremarkable aircraft made a smooth landing and was lowered into the interior of Cloudbase where the lone occupant was transferred to his final destination.

Captain Scarlet stirred uneasily, restlessly pacing the deck in front of the sealed doorway. Captain Blue smoked a cigarette far too quickly as he tried to look relaxed.

"Paul, will you quit pacing? You're driving us all crazy." At that point the door activated and slowly slid open. Everyone froze as the panels parted to reveal their arch-nemesis in all his glory. Half a dozen automatic weapons were noisily cocked and raised to await their cue. What they all saw surprised them; Captain Black had reached an iconic status among the core of Spectrum personnel and was openly feared by most of them. Now that he was in their midst, the true nature of this particular beast left most of them almost disappointed. Instead of the gaunt, sinister giant most of them expected, the real man stood only five-foot-six, scarcely a giant at all. His pallid complexion and dark eyes made him look more anemically ill than a serious threat. He had worn a simple grey flight suit that he now held rolled up under one arm and only a black t-shirt and overly large black trousers beneath with cheap black tennis shoes. His hair was mussed from wearing a helmet as he had not smoothed it down and his face was covered with grey whiskers. He dropped the bundled flight suit and put his hands in the air.

"Captain Black, you're under arrest," Captain Scarlet spoke with grim satisfaction. Black made no comment and showed no emotion whatever as he was lead off the Maximum Security holding cells. Penny Tracy watched as the small dark man was escorted away and felt something she would not have anticipated... pity.

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Colonel White stood at one of the observation ports in the lounge area and stared at the shifting cloud patterns. He would soon be heading towards the holding cell containing Captain Black and he was trying to calm himself for that inevitable confrontation. Conrad Turner as he was known when he was a Spectrum agent had been close friends with Colonel White in the early days of Spectrum, before the Mysteron threat. The two of them had been with the first group of recruits and had attained the rank of Captain in the same graduating class. Turner might have been promoted to command Spectrum himself if he had not turned down command commissions to remain an active field agent. White smiled sadly as he remembered Turner laughing at the idea of commanding Spectrum.

"Right, Charles. I really want to be chained to a command chair and peering through the portholes when there's action to be had. You can have the promotion and everything that goes

with it. I just want to be able to get out and do the job." White shook his head and wondered if what had happened to Turner had been inescapable. His constant need for action and danger would have led to death at some point only it had finally led to a fate much worse than death... literal walking death as the Mysteron's chief agent on Earth. White shivered with the thought. He turned away from the tranquility of the billowing clouds and decided it was time to meet his prisoner.

White met Scarlet, Blue and Tracy as he left the lounge area but only nodded in passing as he made his way to the brig. Two of them sat down as Scarlet poured coffee from a dispenser and handed the cups around. He remained standing, unable yet to completely relax and sipped his coffee impatiently.

"Well, Penny? Is this the 'unprecedented event' that you needed to convince you?" Captain Blue spoke first.

"Are you making fun of me?" Tracy answered uncertainly.

"Not at all. If this is some elaborate trick of the Mysterons it must have high stakes if they're willing to sacrifice their most important agent. All I know is that we had better keep a close watch on Captain Black at all times," Blue continued.

"If that's the case then I had better be the one doing the watching. This is an opportunity to really get some solid intelligence on the most infamous Mysteron agent of the War. I can't afford to lose this chance so I would appreciate if both of you will do whatever it takes to get me into that observation room." Tracy's eyes were burning with avarice as she considered this sudden windfall. Blue smiled at Tracy's determined enthusiasm but frowned when he glanced at Captain Scarlet.

"Paul, what's wrong?" Scarlet turned to face them, his face lined with worry.

"We still have to determine if the Mysterons want a legitimate truce or not. Captain Black showing up on our doorstep is certainly an major incident but I can't look at it as any kind of guarantee... only as a diversion."

"A diversion? In what way?" Blue countered.

"To throw us off-balance. If we're mucking around crater 101 waiting for the Mysterons to show up with a fruit basket and champagne while wondering what kind of mischief Captain Black is up to back here, then we'd be in a position of extreme vulnerability. Remember what Captain Black is capable of; a foot-thick security door might not represent much of a barrier to someone who can dematerialize at will."

"All the more reason for me to be observing him and recording my impressions." Tracy piped up. Scarlet looked uncertain.

"Penny, this is exactly the kind of extreme hazard that I was trying to keep you away from. This man is the most dangerous being on Earth. The only reason he's in the brig at all right now is because, for the moment, that's where he wants to be. The minute he decides to act, I'm not sure what we can do to contain him. It's our job to face this kind of danger but it's not yours. I can't deny that your observations wouldn't be of great value, but I can't stand the idea of you being so close to... him."

"Why, Paul... you're jealous? I'm so flattered. Adam, what about you? Are you concerned about my honour as well?"

"Penny, I'm serious! Captain Black has been known to kill and retro-metabolize a victim by doing nothing more than looking into their eyes. You ought to know all this; you've been studying the records." Tracy now looked angry.

"Look, boys. I'm in this up to my neck just like you. I might not be a Spectrum agent and

get to wear your nifty little rainbow costumes but I'm as serious about countering this threat as you or Colonel White or anyone on this base. Are you ready to argue with me on that point?" The two men looked at her in silence.

"I'm as afraid of Captain Black as I need to be. He came here voluntarily, knowing what his reception would be like. I'm ready to gamble that he's here on his own volition and not the Mysterons. If not, then it's our job to find out why. Now I'm heading down to the brig. I would appreciate it if one of you would escort me there so I won't waste time getting lost." Captain Scarlet nodded at Captain Blue and took Tracy's arm to lead her out. Blue smiled and returned to his duty station.

Captain Black sat on a utilitarian metal chair that had been welded to the deck plating. He was not restrained and he smoked a turkish cigarette which filled the upper air of the room with a dramatic haze of smoke. There were no windows in the room; only a seamless door and an armoured camera with a wide-angle lens that scanned the entire chamber. Colonel White watched the seated man silently for a few minutes, just watching and assembling his line of questioning. White noted the track marks on Black's arms indicating intravenous drug use and was surprised. The dark filterless cigarettes were unusual as well. White would not have associated such serious substance abuse with a mysteron agent, especially one of Black's stature. He decided it was time to start asking questions.

"Conrad, can you hear me?" It was a rhetorical question, White knew the comm system worked fine. It was merely to see what Black's first response would be.

"Of course I can hear you, Charles. I can hear anything you have to say." White frowned at the absolute deadpan of the voice.

"Why are you here, Conrad? What is your purpose?" Black pondered for a moment as though looking for the right words.

"To end." White stiffened slightly but he pressed on.

"To end? What does that mean? Are you referring to the truce with the Mysterons?" White's hands clenched as he patiently waited for the answer.

"I am no longer of any use to the Mysterons. Their work here is nearly done. I have been... discarded."

White was speechless for nearly a minute as he digested this revelation. He watched the image of Captain Black slowly and methodically grind out his cigarette stub in the palm of his hand and drop the butt to the floor. He withdrew another cigarette and lit it with his last match and sat quietly, waiting for the next question.

"Conrad... do you remember anything of your life before-"

"Before I was turned into this?" Black gestured with his cigarette. "It is my curse that I remember everything! Innocents that were callously slaughtered, friends that I've been forced to murder... former allies that I've betrayed..." Black's face showed no emotion but his voice finally trembled at the end. By this time, Colonel White was aware that Captain Scarlet and Penny Tracy were in the observation room with him.

"Did you hear what was said just now? White whispered.

"Yes, Colonel," Tracy replied, never taking her eyes off the screen, "discarded by the Mysterons... because they no longer need his services? That would give more credibility to the idea that the Mysterons really are packing it in. May I ask him a few questions, Colonel?"

"Yes, go ahead. Your observations may be critical. I must return to the control room. Keep me informed, Capt. Scarlet." Scarlet acknowledged the Colonel's order and turned his attention to Tracy.

"Penny, be careful. This is as unknown a territory as anyone's ever trod." Scarlet looked at the image on the screen and pursed his lips.

"I agree Paul, but this new knowledge could increase our understanding of the Mysterons a hundredfold. Perhaps it might even be possible to remove the influence from Captain Black altogether."

"Don't hold your breath, Doctor. This man's the devil himself. You can't let your guard down for a second. He's written the book on devious and underhanded-"

"Don't try to flatter me, Captain Scarlet... I'm afraid it's rather lost on me. I don't blame you, my most dangerous opponent, for not trusting my intentions. I also don't blame you if you dispute my remorse over my actions. I'm not asking for forgiveness although what's left of my soul cries out for it. I only know that my forced allegiance with the Mysterons has been terminated and I now have nowhere else to go. I ask no mercy, only justice." Scarlet looked at the graven face of Conrad Turner and had no answer to his statement.

"Captain, I need to speak to him face to face. I think that-"

"Out of the question, Penny! It's far too dangerous. If we lose you now we lose possibly our most effective weapon; knowledge." Scarlet voice was a harsh whisper but his face belied his very real fear.

"Don't worry, Captain Scarlet. I'm no threat to your Dr. Tracy. On the contrary, it's been a long time since I entertained a young lady... a very long time." Captain Black's voice rumbled as he extinguished his last cigarette between his thumb and forefinger.

"Well, Colonel, I was as shocked as you were when we heard the Mysteron message here in Washington. I'll tell you that I'm as ready for peace as the next man but can we trust them this time? Sending their most dangerous agent into your custody makes a good example but dare we comply with this request? What might the consequences be if we refuse? We have to explore any possibility that might bring this War of Nerves to a conclusion. I for one, am ready to try just about anything." President Roberts was a man of incredible personal power and Colonel White could feel the confidence radiating off him even through the comm screen.

"I think we had better go along with it... I'll expect topsecurity from your men, colonel, and I'm requesting Captain Scarlet to attend me personally."

"Of course, Mr. President. I'll arrange security immediately. Will you send the response to the Mysterons from your present location?"

"No, Colonel. I'll be transported to a high security transmission station where I will broadcast. My writing staff are already at work on the response and I'll run it past you before we send it out."

"Thank you Mr. President. I'm glad to be of service."

"Thank you, Colonel White. If it weren't for you Spectrum boys, I'd really be worried. You haven't let me down yet. Roberts out." The screen flickered and the roundel of the Spectrum logo replaced the image of the President. White sighed and rotated his desk.

"We'll do our best, Mr. President." He whispered.

Within the holding cell, a thin but strong sheet of perforated lexan slowly slid down from the ceiling, effectively bisecting the room. It lowered to the floor and its bottom edge slipped into a groove between the deck plates. The room was now sealed into two secure chambers. Captain Black did not react as the transparent wall was erected nor did he when the door of the opposite room opened tentatively. Captain Scarlet emerged first trying to keep his hands away from his pistol and was followed by a cautious but alert Doctor Tracy.

"Good day, Doctor Tracy, and to you as well, Captain Scarlet. This is really the first time

we've met."

Scarlet said nothing but instead, checked the seal between the floor and the barrier. When he was satisfied that it was secure, he let Tracy approach.

"Alright Doctor. The barrier is solid. Do your stuff but stay beyond arm's reach." Scarlet whispered as he undid the clasp that secured his sidearm. Black remained seated as before but for the first time his eyes betrayed a flicker of emotion as he watched Tracy walk back and forth beyond the barrier.

"Mr. Turner, may I speak with you?" Tracy began tentatively.

"You may call me Conrad, Doctor Tracy."

"How do you know the Mysterons are finished here on Earth? Did they tell you as much?"

"I was given a final assignment and then instructed that it was to be my last... I accomplished the task and was... abandoned. The Mysteron presence that had been within me for so long simply... was not there any more." Black's voice faltered slightly and he seemed not to notice the two figures watching him.

"Captain Black, what was your final assignment?" Scarlet asked ignoring Tracy's gesture to leave Black alone. Black's eyes refocused and he turned to face Captain Scarlet.

"All business as usual, Captain Scarlet? All work and no play make Paul a dull boy... Very well, my final assignment was... was to..." Black hesitated, lost in thought as he struggled for recall. "I... can't remember. I can't seem to remember any of my past assignments... only their aftermath.. feel so tired..." Captain Black wavered for several seconds and proceeded to slide off the chair onto the greasy metal floor.

The hissing and beeping of Medcentre always made Captain Scarlet uncomfortable and even more so with its current occupant. Scarlet had frequently lain insensate and torn on the leather bed that now supported an unconscious Captain Black. Dr. Fawn strode back and forth, examining readouts and checking fluid pressures. He silently conferred with his support staff and finally turned to face Scarlet and Tracy.

"Captain, Dr. Tracy... this is quite amazing! The physiological analysis of Captain Black is identical with the tests performed ten years ago when he first joined Spectrum. I've analyzed retro-metabolized Mysteron agents as well as yourself in the course of operations and the cell structure and molecular composition are different from the readings that I'm getting here. It's as if the Mysteron influence has vanished. Conrad Turner seems completely human." Scarlet's eyes narrowed in distrust and Tracy's jaw dropped.

"Are you certain, Dr. Fawn?" Tracy managed to say.

"As certain as I can be with the experience I've got."

"Is he awake? We've got to question him immediately." Scarlet spoke with urgency and he turned towards the operating theatre window to peer in.

"He's conscious. There's nothing really wrong with him except for malnutrition and dehydration. Go ahead but don't work him over too hard, Captain." Scarlet nodded and motioned Tracy to follow him into the sterile chamber.

The pallid man strapped onto the bed seemed small and shrunken, hardly the sinister mastermind in the employ of the Mysterons. Now, he seemed old and used-up and that may well have been the truth, Scarlet thought. How could he have been responsible for all those deaths and all of the destruction that had resulted from the War of Nerves... and now, it seemed, it was finally coming to an end. Or was it? Why had Captain Black been discarded so completely? Why did a peace treaty have to be signed on the moon, of all places? Was this all

another elaborate trick? Scarlet didn't know but maybe Black did.

"Hello Dr. Tracy... Captain Scarlet..." Black stirred and coughed drily. "Forgive me for collapsing like that. I haven't been eating lately... can't seem to taste anything anymore." He sat upright in the bed and reached for a glass of water on the side-table. He sipped thoughtfully as Tracy and Scarlet sat down.

"Well, Captain Black-

"Please, Captain. Conrad will do fine. It seems disrespectful to use a title that I no longer have any right to use. You may ask anything you like. The Mysterons have released me from their bidding and I have retained nothing from the experience except... the memories of my actions." At this, Turner's waxy face screwed up into a mask of total despair.

"Oh, God! If you only knew- Thousands dead! Thousands more maimed and crippled. Entire cities levelled. All because of me! I knew what I was doing and I couldn't stop! Why did they make me remember? After all I did for them- sacrificed my SOUL! They let me go and made me remember... Oh God..." Turner wept openly, burying his head in the rumpled sheets.

Scarlet and Tracy looked at each other and shook their heads. They got up and allowed Turner some privacy as they conferred quietly away from the bed.

"What do you think, Paul?" Tracy stole a glance at Turner, who lay back again, staring at the ceiling.

"Don't think me paranoid, but I'm still not convinced that this isn't a trick. Don't look at me like that. I've been through a lot during this war and there's nothing the Mysterons won't use in an attempt to fool us; you ought to know well enough. Until we can be certain, we can't afford to trust him. He may not look like much now, but he was once Spectrum's most dangerous enemy. No matter how docile he seems to have become, we can't forget how dangerous he can be."

"He seems to have calmed down for the moment." Tracy observed.

"All right. Let's try again."

"Colonel White, I have a priority transmission from the World President." Lieutenant Green announced from his console.

"Put it through my private channel, Lieutenant." White swivelled his chair and activated the secure line.

"Colonel White, This is President Roberts. I now have a prepared statement ready in response to the Mysteron's message. I've also gone over the details of the lunar rendezvous and my security advisors have come up with some ideas that I'd like to run past you." White stared hard at the small flat screen as he realized that the future of the Earth itself may well depend on the exchange about to take place between he and the World President.

Scarlet and Tracy reentered the small, sterile room and Turner looked at them with rheumy eyes shot with red. Scarlet opened his mouth to resume his questioning when he stopped short.

"Doctor Fawn, would you come here, please?" Tracy looked at Scarlet, a question forming on her lips. Before she could speak it, Scarlet took her aside as Doctor Fawn entered.

"Doctor, would you please examine the patient's eyes?" Fawn withdrew a shiny instrument emitting a bright beam and Turner allowed his eyes to be examined.

"Well, Doctor? What do you notice?" Scarlet frowned and seemed impatient.

"They seem as before, Captain. Basically normal except for a slight astigmatism in the left orb-"

"Doctor, I mean look at his eyes! They're blue! When he arrived on Cloudbase, they were

jet black!" Tracy looked stunned.

"Colonel White, You had better come to Medcentre. There's been a development." Scarlet spoke briefly as he watched an amazed Doctor Fawn take a second look at the eyes of Conrad Turner. Tracy waited until Scarlet had received a reply from White before she spoke.

"Captain, this must mean something? I mean, this could be the proof of what Conrad has been saying. People's eyes just don't change colour. The physiological change that has just occurred must be a result of the final passing of the Mysteron influence." Scarlet's eyes narrowed.

"Maybe... but he might also have shaken out a set of contact lenses when we weren't looking. I'm not convinced yet. You should try a little healthy scepticism, Doctor Tracy."

At this point, Colonel White entered the Medcentre.

"Well, I see you have offered yet another mystery, Conrad. How do you feel?"

"Guilty..." Turner murmured.

"I was about to continue questioning him about why he got fired from the Mysteron's team when this incident with the eyes occurred."

"Captain Scarlet thinks it was just a trick with contact lenses", Tracy said with a hint of irritation.

"Easy enough to confirm or deny by checking the security monitors," White replied and Captain Scarlet moved off to one of the console panels to do just that while White posed another question to Turner.

"Conrad, Can you tell me anything about your last assignment? I have reports that state that a black saloon registered '101-X238' was rented to a man matching your description and was seen parked near the Armodyne Defense Systems factory outside of Detroit, Michigan. What were you doing there, Conrad? What's the connection?" Turner looked puzzled and looked at White with nearly beseeching eyes.

"Charles, if I remembered, if I knew, I would tell you. I have no loyalty to those soulless vampires that stole my humanity. I just don't know. I was only left with memory of the results of my handiwork, not the details leading up to it." Turner grimaced and stared at the ceiling in an attitude of despair.

Scarlet returned to the small group with the results of his search through the security camera's records.

"Nothing," Scarlet said with an exasperated tone, "There's no sign on the taped record that suggests Turner was using contacts. The change in his eye colour is genuine."

"I told you," Tracy said quietly.

"I'm concerned about his story that he doesn't remember the details of his last assignment," Colonel White spoke, "Clearly it's related to the current situation but in what way? We can't yet dismiss the possibility that we're dealing with a ruse. All we can do is continue to monitor Turner's condition and see what develops. Doctor Tracy, I'm going to leave you in charge of him. Recruit whoever you need to assist you and keep me informed. Captain Scarlet, I need to speak to you alone".

Tracy watched the two men speak in whispered tones at a distance and then confined her attention to Turner. He looked back at her with glazed eyes, and said nothing.

White took Scarlet aside and lowered his voice.

"Captain, I've been conferring with the World President and there is a plan in the works. I'll tell you more presently but I'm informing you now that the President has insisted that you personally accompany him to the location of the truce." Scarlet frowned.

"Me? But why? His own crack team of security agents is formidable enough."

"He's a little superstitious, Captain. You're sort a goodluck charm to him since the atomic liner affair. There will be an official briefing in two hours. You'll know more then. Take a break, Captain. I'll see you then." White took a last look at the pale, slack face of Conrad Turner and strode down the corridor. Scarlet pursed his lips and wondered what they were going to do with the once-lethal arch enemy of Spectrum.

"Penny, can I help in any way?"

"I don't think so, Paul. I can manage with a few assistants and I think you've got some important work ahead. Take care, Paul." Tracy's eyes looked worried but she smiled.

"I will, Penny. I'll see you later." Scarlet smiled in return and left the Medcentre.

An hour and a half later, Scarlet emerged from the room of sleep, fully rested and awake. He met Captain Blue on the way to the briefing and the two of them arrived together. Seeing Penny Tracy already there, the two seated themselves close to her. Colonel White swivelled around in his chair and addressed the group gathered before him.

"Ladies and gentlemen, This may well be the most important meeting ever held on Cloudbase. We are here to discuss the final details of possibly the last campaign against the Mysterons. Although they claim that peace is their goal, we will proceed with this operation with the caution of a military action. The plan, now called 'Operation Trident', shall now commence. It will be initiated in three distinct operations. The first, which includes the World President and the representatives of the World government will be under the supervision of Captain Scarlet and his team of agents. The second arm of the operation will be the tactical team headed by Captain Blue. They will track and follow the A team and provide immediate support if treachery is suspected. The final prong of Operation Trident will be here on Cloudbase, in the form of Doctor Penny Tracy, Doctor Fawn and his staff who will continue to observe and question Captain Black to see if any new clues can be found. Captain Scarlet, take your support team and equipment and set out immediately. President Roberts' agents will transmit landing instruction when you are airborne. Captain Blue, a World Army Tactical squad is waiting for you at Vandenberg Airbase. Take whoever you need and whatever ordnance you think you'll require. Take Lieutenant Green with you as your second in command." The Lieutenant grinned as he rose from his usual post to accompany Blue.

"Thank you, Colonel." White permitted himself a trace of a grin.

"Don't thank me, Lieutenant. I just don't want your field work to get rusty." The room began to empty and Colonel White turned his attention to Tracy and Fawn.

"I don't expect miracles, Doctor, but something may yet come of your study of Conrad Turner. Some integral clue may still be evading us so I want you both to do whatever it takes to procure that clue. Get back to Medcentre and see what you can find." White then turned to address Captain Scarlet, leaving Tracy and Fawn to look at each other in near-exasperation.

"Well, lets get back to work, Penny. I don't know what we're looking for yet, but we had better find it in a hurry."

"You said it, Doctor Fawn. Let me speak to Captain Scarlet and Captain Blue before they leave. I'll join you in a few minutes ."

"Of course. See you there." Fawn strode off leaving Tracy to look at the scene before her in amazement.

"So this is finally it..." She said softly to herself as she approached Scarlet and Blue.

"Well, Penny? This is the final curtain. I'll wager you never thought that you'd be a part of it when it happened." Blue winked at her as he smiled.

"How can you be so cheerful at a time like this?" Tracy questioned. Blue laughed as Scarlet spoke.

"It's just his way, Penny. I'm sorry we won't be able to work together on this, but Colonel White is very serious about your work here concerning Captain Black. I hope you and Doctor Fawn can find something that will help us before zero hour. Considering how quickly this came upon us all, I don't think any of us is as scared as we should be." Tracy frowned.

"At least you shouldn't be scared." She said in a low voice.

"Just because I can't be killed doesn't mean I enjoy dying," Scarlet said with a trace of bitterness, "the risk is now increased because if the Mysterons are really leaving, I can't guarantee that my powers of retro-metabolism will remain. Doctor Fawn has been examining and studying me ever since my first 'death' and he's no closer to explaining the phenomenon now as he was four years ago. All anyone is certain of is that the effect comes from the Mysterons themselves and might be removed by them at any time; just look at Captain Black. If the tests you've run so far are any indication, he's been reduced to an ordinary human, just as before. We have no way of knowing if the Mysterons can simply remove my abilities just as easily: for all we know, the Mysterons have simply allowed me to retain these powers to give us a fair chance during the War of Nerves. Now that it may be over, they have no reason to allow me to keep them. I have to be doubly cautious from now on." No one spoke and the mood grew dark. Blue tried to reassure.

"C'mon, everyone. This will all work out. Captain Scarlet's team will be in safe hands with my security squad watching over them. It's all under control." Blue's affected cockiness made Tracy smile a little and even Scarlet rolled his eyes at the comments.

"Don't worry, Penny. Adam and I are planning on taking you out to dinner at a nice restaurant in Paris when this is all over. You can count on it." Scarlet smiled at her in a way he had not before and her eyes stung with tears. They really are afraid, she thought to herself. They're making light of it for my benefit. At that point, she very nearly cried when she saw the two old friends clasp hands for the last time before they proceeded to their fates. She turned amidst the bustle of people making preparations and started down the corridor towards the Medcentre. Before she reached it, however, she stopped momentarily in the alcove of a doorway and appeared to adjust her wristwatch. It was the act of a moment or two and she then continued on her way.

Captain Scarlet, Captain Ochre and Captain Magenta Strapped themselves into the well-padded seats of a Spectrum passenger jet and Scarlet began his pre-flight checks.

"Scarlet wing, you have launch clearance. Launch when ready." The voice of Lieutenant Cobalt crackled over the comm unit.

"S.I.G. Lieutenant. Powering up now." Deeper within Cloudbase, Captain Blue and Lieutenant Green were boarding their own jet. Inside, a Spectrum Tactical team awaited, already secure for takeoff.

"I'm glad for this chance to see some action, especially since we may be obsolete by morning. Poor lieutenant Cobalt; just graduated and he may already be out of a job." Green chuckled. Blue nodded with a grin.

"I, for one, hope you're right, Lieutenant. Fighting hostile alien invaders has certainly lost its novelty by now."

Green, laughing, sealed the hatch and strapped in as Blue activated the deck elevators.

Colonel White stood by the large circular port and watched the two aircraft speed away to their destinations. The wheels had now begun to turn and could not be stopped. For better or

worse, the crossroads of Mankind's fate would be in the shadows of crater 101... on the moon.

Scarlet met with the World President and his staff at the appointed location, launching safely from Glenn Field Spaceport within an hour of their arrival and would arrive at Lunarville 6 three hours hence. Captain Blue and his team launched from Vandenberg Launch Facility two hours previously and would land in Lunarville 3 to assemble a defense grid sufficient to protect the president and his entourage. By the time Scarlet and the president greeted the controller of Lunarville 6, a squadron of lunar tanks and armoured moon mobiles were heading for the rendezvous point at the site of the ruins of Lunarville 7. The complex machinery of fate was now running inexorably towards whatever was awaiting them all in crater 101.

Penny Tracy entered the doorway of the Medcentre and stopped in astonished shock. Before her, laid out senseless on the deck was Doctor Fawn and two of his assistants. She rushed to his side and he groaned in pain.

"Doctor Fawn, are you all right?" He coughed and turned his head to reveal a purpling welt. The others began to stir and Fawn sat up, gingerly rubbing his wound.

"Unnh! Caught us by surprise... had no idea..."

"Doctor, what happened?-" Tracy suddenly realized that the rumpled bed was empty and that there was now no sign of- Captain Black.

Colonel White was startled by the sound of an emergency klaxon and he turned sharply towards Lieutenant Cobalt.

"Emergency in the Medcentre, sir. Captain Black has escaped!"

"Put all sections on alert, Lieutenant. Seal off Cloudbase!"

"Yes sir. Security teams are conducting a level 10 search sweep now."

"Take the Comm, Lieutenant. I'm heading for Medcentre. Inform me of any new contingency."

White entered Medcentre to see Doctor Fawn and Penny Tracy applying bandage to the contusions suffered by Fawn's assistants while Fawn himself sported a large white patch on his temple. White shook his head ruefully.

"Well, Doctor. How do you explain this?" Fawn looked sheepish as he tried to explain.

"Turner asked if he could wash and shave. He seemed so weak I let him up and was going to help him when he lashed out and knocked us all senseless. Doctor Tracy found us moments after he escaped. I don't know where he found the energy." Fawn mopped his brow with a handkerchief and had to sit down as he reacted to the shock of the blow. Tracy looked at White with a trace of fear.

"He must know he can't get off Cloudbase, Colonel. What would he be thinking? He must know he's trapped."

"Don't be so sure", White answered, "Conrad Turner knows every inch of Cloudbase; he was on the design team when it was built. If there's a place to hide on this base, he'll find it." White was interrupted by Lieutenant Cobalt's voice on the communit.

"Colonel White, I just received a report from the one of the search teams. There's a rocket pack and oxygen rebreather missing from storage... and there seems to have been a small hull breach in one of the lower deck maintenance conduits."

"Call off the search, Lieutenant. Captain Black has given us the slip again. Try to make radar contact with the rocket pack if you can." White looked tense and Tracy slumped in a chair.

"What now, Colonel?"

"There's nothing to be done unless we can track his flight but I don't give that much hope. The rocket packs we use are strictly short range devices. No one has ever jumped into the open air at this altitude. Turner must have had to freefall most of the way down to conserve his fuel, so there won't be much to track. Still, I don't think he will have any time to alter the plan at this point."

"I hope you're right, Colonel. Just in case, though, I've taken the liberty of preparing some insurance." White's eyes narrowed dangerously.

"What do you mean? What have you-"

"Take it easy, Colonel. Listen to me carefully..."

Captain Scarlet and security team finished inspecting the room and he activated his commlink.

" Mr. President. The room is clear. you can enter." The door hissed open and President Roberts entered with the rest of the Asian and European representatives. Scarlet spoke briefly.

"Ladies and Gentlemen, we have only an hour to discuss the impending conference and then we must move on if we are to be at the appointed place in time. I suggest that you get as much accomplished as you can while the moonmobile is being fuelled and prepped.

Afterwards, the trip to crater 101 will take about two hours and you will be able to get some sleep if you need it."

"Thank you Captain. We all appreciate you presence here and I, for one, feel a lot better having you around." Roberts smiled.

"Your welcome, Mr. President. Please excuse me while I check on the moonmobile."

Scarlet walked down the curved corridor and approached the doorway to the main airlock when he heard his name called out.

"Captain Scarlet." He turned and smiled. It was Controller Linda Nolan, chief officer of Lunarville 6.

"Hello, Ms. Nolan. It's been a long time." He took her hand and squeezed it warmly.

"Hello, Captain. It's so good to see you. It's been, what, two years since you were up here last. I've appreciated your letters." Nolan, an attractive woman with bright eyes and a strong will, smiled again in open affection for Scarlet.

"By the way, do you still have the -"

"The lucky charm? I'm wearing it now. I've worn it since you gave it to me. It must work... I'm still here." He grinned again and squeezed her hand once more. Her voice lowered to nearly a whisper.

"I know what's at stake today and I'd like to help in any way that I can."

"You're doing everything already, Ms.Nolan. One way or the other, this will be over soon. If this works out like I hope it will... well, would you care for dinner in a nice Paris restaurant." Scarlet reddened slightly as Nolan looked at him with near amazement.

"Oh- of course, Captain."

"It's Paul, actually."

"Oh, Paul, I'd love to. I never thought that- well, I wasn't sure I even see you again much less-"

"I'm afraid I've got to go now, Linda. There's still so much to do. I'm glad I got a chance to talk to you. I'll see you again when I get back." He smiled again and headed towards the airlock to check on the moonmobile.

"What restaurant?" Nolan called out

"What? Oh, ah, Le Petite Hostellerie. 35 Rue de la Harpe." With that, Captain Scarlet

vanished into the hatch of the moonmobile. Linda Nolan looked on and said quietly,

"Rue de la Harpe... oh my."

One-and-a-half hours later, the moonmobile was speeding over the lunar surface, with a dozen lunar tanks racing to keep up. Inside the moonmobile, Captain Magenta and Captain Ochre manned the controls as Captain Scarlet and the president conferred at the rear. Around them, the rest of the representatives spoke in hushed murmurs trying not to concentrate on what might lie ahead.

"Captain, I'd be a liar if I told you I wasn't afraid of what we may find at crater 101. I'm just glad we don't have Captain Black to worry about as well." Scarlet's face sank.

"I didn't want to bring this up until I had to... but Captain Black has escaped from confinement." Roberts made a strangling sound.

"What? How could that be?"

"Easy, Mr. President. Don't get alarmed. The condition he was in when I last saw him assures me that he won't be a bother...at least I hope not." Scarlet's voice trailed off. Roberts looked at Scarlet with visible doubt.

"I hope you're right, Captain." A sharp beep sounded within Scarlet's moonsuit and he tapped a comm button in response.

"Scarlet here."

"This is Captain Blue. we're all in position around your convoy. Everything's secure on this end."

"Thanks, Captain. Give my regards to Lieutenant Green. I just remembered that I owe him a coconut."

"Hah! I'll remind him. Blue out."

Magenta carefully checked the map coordinates and signalled the convoy.

"We're nearly there. The crater rim should be visible over the horizon in a few minutes. We're here, folks." The lunar tanks began to spread out to circle the perimeter of the small crater while the main convoy carefully scaled the rugged rim into the interior of the pit. Amidst the dust of their passage Scarlet and the others could see strange, multi-coloured buildings rising out of the broken ruins of the previous Mysteron complex. Scarlet frowned in wonder.

"A new complex... It must be very new, or we would have seen some evidence before now. I wonder if-

"This is the voice of the Mysterons... welcome, Earthmen. You have honoured our request and soon we will begin the final chapter of this war of nerves. You may approach." Scarlet and the rest of the group froze.

"Well, this is it, people. Whatever is going to happen here, is going to happen here," Magenta said mildly.

"Captain, I'm not sure that I like their choice of words. 'The final chapter in this war of nerves' doesn't exactly sound like a declaration of peace."

"Take it easy, Mr. President. We have sufficient backup in case we need it. I only hope we don't." Scarlet tried to reassure.

The convoy slowly tracked through the centre of the bizarre alien structures that studded the ruined landscape. Scarlet peered out of the ports, occasionally catching the metallic glint of the distant lunar tanks that stood silent sentinel around them. They soon approached the base of a huge multi-hued spire that seemed to glow with energy.

"Here is where destiny is made. Our war ends here, Earthmen. Leave your vehicles and let us end this conflict."

The men and women within the moonmobile looked around and silently began to don and seal their helmets. When all were ready, Scarlet cracked the hatch seal and he led them outside into the harsh, actinic light of cold vacuum. Scarlet slowly led the group towards their fate as he prepared for the worst. Would the surrounding tanks be able to react quickly enough if this turned out to be a trap? One way or the other, this would be the end, he was certain. He was ready for anything. What he wasn't ready for was what happened next.

"Good evening, Captain Scarlet," grated a hideously familiar voice. Scarlet whirled about to see the impossible sight of Captain Black moving out from behind a broken column.

"Don't reach for your sidearm, please. We have some business to discuss with you. The end of the War of Nerves, to be exact."

"You planned all of this, didn't you? You faked being dismissed by the Mysterons and now you're going to finish the whole mess yourself. How did you get here?"

"I stowed away on Captain Blue's jet when he left Cloudbase. I created a diversion which made Cloudbase security think I baled out with a rocket pack. That way they wouldn't institute a search of the support convoy. I arrived here the same time you did; and now it's all over."

"Well, don't count on it. Captain Blue, Spectrum is Black. Repeat, Spectrum is black!"

"Captain Scarlet, I can't get a response from the tank squadron. They won't answer." Captain Blue's voice crackled.

"It won't do any good, Captain. All of those lunar tanks around us will only take the Mysteron's orders now. They had all been fitted with toxic gas cylinders that had been tampered with at Armodyne Defense Systems. The Mysterons are indeed leaving the solar system; but they are a spiteful race and unwilling to forget a slight. You are all here for one reason... to be destroyed as a final lesson to humanity. They are now ready to execute their plan by bombarding the centre of this crater... if I let them." Captain Black held up a small transmitter and depressed a button. All around them, in the distance, silent plumes of flame bloomed up and shards of torn steel whirled as each tank was destroyed.

Scarlet looked amazed. Black seemed to smile but the distance and the glare made it hard to tell.

"Conrad Turner, you have betrayed us... In return for your freedom you promised the destruction of Earth's leaders. Why have you broken your word?" Black turned to face the erratically glowing structure and waved his fist at it.

"Releasing me was your mistake. I owe you nothing but hate and justice. I am a Spectrum officer!" Black trembled and tossed the now useless remote control away. He turned to face the stunned group.

"It's all over for me now, Captain Scarlet. You must leave this place at once. There is a high-yield nuclear device buried beneath the complex that even now is arming itself. I managed to reset the timing device to allow you all to escape but I can't be sure that it will be enough time. Captain Scarlet, you've got to save them. Go! Now! "

By this time Scarlet was moving the group back towards the moonmobile. His last view of Captain Black was his silhouette against the angry glow of the spire.

"Captain Blue, what's your position?"

"We're at the rim where you all drove down into the interior."

"You've got to get clear. The whole crater is about to blow and I don't know if there even is a safe distance. Get going now!"

The four moonmobiles containing the Leaders of the Earth sped at their limit towards the

imagined safety of the far crater wall. Behind them, the spire became a blinding glare which grew more and more intense. Scarlet was surprised by a message from the comm system.

"Goodbye, Captain Scarlet. The effective destruction perimeter of the device is thirty miles from the blast point. Good luck..." The message ended in a hiss of static and Scarlet shook his head in dismay. He drove silently as long minutes ticked away but was forced from his reverie by the ground tilting sharply upward as they scaled the grade. The engines of the moonmobiles whined in protest then smoothed off as each vehicle sailed over the edge and swooped down the opposite slope into shadow.

"All right, everyone! Full speed! We've got to get some distance behind us." Scarlet was sweating profusely. The others aboard didn't realize that there was no way they could cover thirty miles before the device went off. He stared at the geiger counter on his console and watched in horror as the indicator swept nearer and nearer critical mass. There was maybe five minutes before the blast and they would be swept away by it. He pushed the vehicle past its safety limits but it was no use. Even now the geiger needle was creeping ever closer to the deadly red mark.

"Captain Scarlet! Captain Scarlet! Do you read me?" Scarlet frowned at the voice. It sounded like-

"Who is this?" He demanded.

"There's no time to explain, Paul. It's Penny. Follow my transmission beacon as fast as you can!" Penny, he thought. What could she be doing here, unless- He swung past a mass of rock too fragile to give cover and was stunned by the sight that awaited him.

"Head for the open hatch. Just drive up the ramp and kill the engine. Captain Blue's vehicle is already aboard." The squat, powerful shape of Thunderbird 2 sat amidst the dust and rock of the moon, suspended on polished metal legs. The yawning cavern of the open transport pod was now an oasis. Scarlet gunned the motor and the moonmobile leapt up the ramp and settled on the metal deck alongside Captain Blue's vehicle. When all of them were aboard and settled, the main pod hatch swung upward and sealed. A low rumbling was felt through the floor of the pod and then a mighty shudder pulsed through the vessel as it launched itself into the starry black sky. When it had become a faint green dot in the distance, crater 101 flared up like a exploding sun spreading over the grey lunar surface, pounding a new crater into the old.

The moonmobiles were safely unloaded at Lunarville 6 and the President and his immediate entourage were soon ferried back to earth by Spectrum maximum security transports. The situation gradually quieted and the world got used to the fact that the War of Nerves was indeed over. Captain Scarlet and Captain Blue remained in Lunarville 6 as the job of arranging the return of the various remaining world leaders occupied them both. In a few days, when the last official they finally had time for reflection. In the lounge area of the station they joined Linda Nolan and Penny Tracy who were already fast friends and laughing.

"Well Captain. How does it feel to be out of a job?" Captain Blue smiled.

"It feels all right. I'm looking forward to diamond smugglers and terrorists. Good old-fashioned earthly crooks." Scarlet mused as he sipped coffee.

"Penny, how did you manage to get your cousin Virgil to come to the rescue, so to speak?" Blue asked.

"I thought an ace in the hole might be useful, so I contacted Thunderbird 5 and told Uncle Jeff what was up. He figured you might need some help."

"What did Colonel White think of your initiative?"

"He got a little steamed but he couldn't deny that you could use all the help you could

get."

"Since when can Thunderbird 2 fly in space?"

"Oh, that's something Brains has been working on for a while. Uncle Jeff always thought that one day he might need the heavy transport power of Thunderbird 2 in space so he had Brains come up with booster attachments that would allow it to reach escape velocity. My cousin Alan is really ticked off now that he has to share the glory with Virgil." Tracy laughed at the thought of her bickering cousins.

"It seems weird that I can close the book on the Mysteron menace. I guess I'm out of a job too. I never thought of it til now."

"Don't we have a dinner in Paris to concern ourselves with?" Linda Nolan finally spoke, eyeing Captain Scarlet coyly while Tracy winked at Captain Blue.

"That's right! La Petite Hostellerie, if I'm not mistaken." Scarlet looked back at Nolan with undisguised affection for the first time while Tracy and Captain Blue laughed together.

Later that night, before they boarded a Spectrum transport for Earth, Paul Metcalfe looked out at the planet he had fought so hard to protect. He felt a degree of melancholy when he thought of Conrad Turner, who had, in the end, saved them from the final Mysteron treachery. It was a tragedy to die as he did but he was his own man in the end... in control of his own destiny. Metcalfe would never forget his last defiant shout. Now it was over. Really over. That part of him that never relaxed now told him that there was no trace of the Mysteron presence left. They had left the solar system, perhaps to torment some other race near another star. He felt pity for them and wished them luck. For now, the future awaited. He realized that for the first time he began to believe there would be a future. At that thought he smiled in earnest and decided to find the others and board the transport. There was a life to finally live and he decided he owed a little of that to Conrad Turner, who ended as he began... a Spectrum Officer.