

The New Guy in Moon Base Twelve

By Tom Lichtenberg

Copyright 2012 by Tom Lichtenberg

Chapter One

They weren't exactly the crew President Spud Goodman had in mind when he first announced his intention to establish a permanent base on the moon just so the Chinese wouldn't get there first. Goodman was not just a Republican, he was an ultra-Republican, the very distillation of antique notions of values and morality. If there was an old-fashioned bias to be had, Goodman had it in spades, so to speak. He loathed everyone not Caucasoid, Christoid and Heteroid, which was just enough bigotry to swing him the particular swing states he needed to get into office. Once ensconced, he set about launching his bold, grandiose (and micro-managed) ideas as if the presidency was a game of Frisbee golf, just tossing stuff out there to see what happened. Moon Bases One and Two were among the first eagles to land.

The settlements had to be staffed, of course, and according to Goodman's precise calculations the chosen crew were meant to remain there for at least ten years at a stretch. He formed a commission to determine the bestest and mostest qualified persons to meet his audacious requirements. The commission worked very diligently, took their task quite seriously, and eventually came to the conclusion, after numerous conferences and meetings, that the proper candidates would need to meet four essential criteria; they would have to be bisexual, atheist, socialist vegetarians. Their reasons were multiple and their logic quite unassailable.

Since there were to be relatively few persons on the base, bisexuality would be a highly adaptive quality, ensuring the most possible partnerships among the population. Atheism was considered extremely desirable due to the tendency of religious persons to argue amongst themselves as to which of their fairy tales was the least incoherent, and which of their imaginary friends the least prickly. Also, the landscape of the moon was one of the most god-forsaken places in which it humans had ever attempted to live, and it would help to have no god to blame this forsakenness on. Socialist, even Communist, was highly regarded in a similar way because of the limited quantity of goods that would be distributed, and the lack of quality of same. People with a will and desire to share and share alike on principle would get along much better than those perpetually looking out for number one. Vegetarianism, the final

consideration, was perhaps the most obvious. There was to be no meat on the moon, excluding cannibalism, of course. The settlers would be growing their own food hydroponically and developing additional nutrients chemically. The commission decided not to tempt fate by letting the President in on these requirements right away; in fact they managed to keep it all secret for just long enough to staff and propel the original crew of twenty six souls into space. Among them were fifteen men and eleven women, and together they were commissioned to construct exactly two moon bases within three hundred yards of one another. The commission arranged for everything and everyone to get shipped off all at once. They didn't have a lot of confidence in the staying power of this particular program. They had the feeling, which was later borne out to be prophetic, that the President would lose quickly interest and drop all funding altogether. The commission did not want to leave the bases either half-staffed or half-equipped, and so it was that in one single week, more than twenty launches carrying men, women, tools and equipment blasted off, along with an assortment of potentially useful odds and ends that seemed to have randomly occurred to one commission member or another. Thus there were volleyball nets but no volleyballs, pool cues but no tables, decks of cards, chewing gum, battery-powered flashlights without the right kind of batteries, and many other surprises which made those early days feel like Christmas-in-a-foster-home for the crew, who from the start referred to themselves, only half-jokingly, as Loonies.

They worked hard in those early days. Quarters were cramped in the rockets so they were in a hurry to build Moon Bases One and Two. In the end, those buildings resembled cube farms more than anything else, with each resident allotted an eight by twelve gray area to decorate in their own idiosyncratic way. The cubes had ten foot walls but no ceilings, gaps but no doors, and were laid out in four-by-three grids, twelve per base. Each base also had a large, open common area so that the cubicle region occupied about a third of the total space. The rest was filled with tables hosting lab equipment, kitchen-type gadgets and setups, two conference rooms apiece for more private communications, and large common seating areas for general meetings and entertainment. The buildings themselves were basically metal boxes all around with heavy doors and flat roofs dotted by occasional skylights.

They were not much to look at, but after the first, hectic few months, there was no one to look. There had been twenty-four hour video coverage of the camp, and for a time an audience on Earth that was interested in the goings-on up there - the busy construction, the novelty of the thing - but as they got to know the personalities of the crew, and as the crew settled in to a life of

everyday routine, the audience lost interest, as did the President, and soon there were only a handful of die-hard Moon Base addicts watching their daily activities. The truth was the settlers were rather boring. They all got along pretty well with each other, and made a point of avoiding conflict at every turn. And then the ratings had fallen through the floor in a hail of protest and outrage once Americans fully discovered the root belief systems and sexual proclivities of the Loonies. They didn't mind the bisexuality too much - at least the girl-on-girl stuff was fairly popular for a time - and they could deal with the whole sharing thing as long as it was couched in Jesus-like terms. It was the Atheism that broke the whole show.

The crew had been advised to keep that topic on the down low, but what could you expect from wall-to-wall continual coverage? People are people, after all, and the subject kept coming up in emails from the folks back home in the U.S.S.A.. Could they see Heaven? Was there any audible harp music up there? And once someone down below caught on that nobody ever ever saw anybody praying up there, that's when all Hell broke loose and the demands came quick and fast to return those sinners and exchange them for more acceptably Believing settlers.

It was far too late, though. Contracts had been signed and decisions made. The Loonies Show was subject to boycotts and the producers to all sorts of threats, so after a time, though the cameras remained turned on for the sakes of history and security, the scheduled broadcasts ceased, and the Loonies were left alone to themselves.

The biggest problem they had was not what one might think. They had no issues of supplies - they were able to generate all the food they needed and had enough oxygen supply to last until they were able to produce more on their own. All in all they enjoyed a decent standard of living. They had no basic survival issues - moon life wasn't all that difficult given the proper equipment and pressurization. The latest advances in these areas provided them with very light-weight garments and headsets, and the bases were quite secure. They had no interpersonal problems at all in those earliest days. Without leaders or any political structure, they managed to hash things out pretty well amongst themselves. The biggest problem, indeed the only major one, was their utter lack of a job description. There was nothing they absolutely had to do.

It seemed obvious, in retrospect. There is nothing you can do on the moon that you can't do as easily - more easily, in fact - on Earth. There was no really good reason for anyone to even be there, aside from President Goodman's desire to beat the Chinese. As it turned out, the Chinese had already realized the utter

pointlessness of such an undertaking and had no plans whatsoever to do so. Yet there were certainly some things that could be done, and some of the crew set about doing them. One band of four crew members - the Farmers - had ambitions to cultivate the lunar surface, to develop a new kind of agriculture that might serve well on other planets. A group of three known as the Drillers began a mining operation to extract ice or water and whatever else they might find beneath the Moon's surface. The communications expert, an extremely tall woman by the name of Fydia Sooth, had her own pet project, seeking out extraterrestrial life forms by means of certain encoded broadcasts which often sounded suspiciously like Disco. These were not idlers, although there was a man by the name of Pete who, in the name of scientific research, began a project to see how long he could sleep, working his way up to several weeks at a stretch.

Then there were the Builders, the crew who had originally done most of the work of putting together the bases. Left without any specific tasks they began to plan construction of an extra base, made of spare parts and whatever they could find. These ad hoc architects scavenged whatever bits of rocket and rubble were laying around, and eventually put together a sort of structure which came to be known affectionately as Moon Base Twelve. No one inhabited the thing. It was thought that no one could, that it was not really suitable for human residence. It was just an ongoing pile of junk thrown together by a group of bored men and women, intended primarily to keep them from going entirely out of their minds. And so it was quite a surprise one day when one of the builders, a gentle, long-haired man by the name of Galen Harbid, found The New Guy living in Moon Base Twelve.

Chapter Two

The fact that he was living in Moon Base Twelve was not nearly as shocking as the fact that he was even there at all. No one had come to the moon since that first exciting week already so long ago that most of the settlers had effectively lost track of the time. They had remained in occasional contact with mission control back home, calling every once in a while just to make sure that everyone they knew was still alive and to reassure the folks back home that no one among them had cancer or anything. It would be a shame if they did, because there were no plans or money to send any rocket ships to bring anybody home. It was in the contract. Get sick up there and too bad, deal with it. Live and learn about death and dying on the moon. Someone would have to file a report and that was about it.

Also, no one had seen or heard an arrival. Maybe they'd all been asleep at the time, but even so, where was The New Guy's space ship now? There wasn't any sign of one. None of this occurred to Galen Harbid at first. He didn't know what he was thinking. One morning he'd gotten up and meandered over to Moon Base Twelve. It was a sort of habit. As a Builder, he was used to tinkering with the structure. He'd tighten a bolt here, loosen another one there, hammer out some folds in the corrugation, or move a little pile of junk from one corner of the unit's small room to another. He'd gone through the double-lock doors, removed his breathing tube, and started scouting around for anything to do. The New Guy was sprawled out on the red foam couch, snoring loudly through his open mouth. He was a regular sized guy, maybe five ten, a hundred and eighty-some pounds. He had short, straight dark brown hair, brown eyes and a decent crop of stubble around his face. He was wearing a t-shirt and jeans. The guy was nothing out of the ordinary; he could have easily passed for one of several other guys in the place. In fact, Galen thought at first it was Hardin Harwell, one of the Farmer crew, and assumed that Hardin had had a falling out with his regular cube-mate, the green-eyed botanist, Gayle Henderson.

That was okay. It wasn't normal, but it was acceptable, for a non-Builder to appear in Builder territory. There were no rules preventing that. Galen was prepared to step lightly so as not to wake up his fellow Loonie, and was tiptoeing past the couch when The New Guy awoke and sat up, looking startled himself. Galen froze in place as he realized he did not know who this person was. The first words out of his mouth were,

"Do what have a who?"

The New Guy regarded him suspiciously and scratched his chin for a few moments as Galen stood and gaped.

"Oh, that's okay," The New Guy assured him. "Everything is A-okay."

"A-okay?" Galen echoed the sentiment.

"Tip-top," said The New Guy, nodding vigorously in agreement with himself, and attempting what he must have thought was a smile. To Galen it looked like the guy's teeth were slickly sliding off his face.

"Okay," Galen murmured as it occurred to him that he had no idea how to handle this situation. Thinking he'd be much better off yelling for help and running away, he back-tracked toward the door, put his breathing piece back into his mouth, crept out the double-locked doors and took off leaping, as only a moon-resident can do, and in a dozen or so hefty bounds found himself back home in Moon Base One, breathlessly ranting about his encounter to the first people he saw hanging around.

These included Demaryius Ballantyne, the master chef, Rolanda Lin, the medicine woman, and Harriet Karat, one of the Driller's water specialists. They'd been clustered in the kitchen area discussing the genetics of a new mushroom the botanical team had come up with when Galen burst onto the scene, and they all sat calmly as he sputtered through several physical contortions and raspy attempts to emit a rational sound. These were people especially selected for their relative blandness and mild dispositions, which was one of the reasons why the television series had gone so badly.

The commission had had the opportunity to cash in on the process. They could have hosted a tournament of sorts, like those for singing talents or barbecue cook-offs. They could have held a nationwide lottery and picked ordinary clowns at random for the settlement, but they'd taken their job seriously. If a whole book had been written about the planning and execution of their mission, it would have been a dull one indeed, consisting mainly of meetings with psychologists and sociologists and former astronauts discussing the incredible boredom of space and the kind of people likely to be able to handle a scenario once and best described as 'sitting in a tin can, far above the world'. The most surprising thing, perhaps, was how well they had done their job. Blue ribbon committees like theirs were not famous for doing things right, but so far the people they'd stuck in those boxes on the moon were doing pretty well.

"And he's, and he's, and and he's ..." Galen sputtered. His audience of three looked at him expectantly, then exchanged glances among themselves as Galen, for the ninth or tenth time, ran out of gas.

"Sounds like he's trying to say there's a new guy over on Moon Base Twelve," Demaryius remarked.

"That was my interpretation, too," Rolanda agreed, "although it doesn't seem to make a lot of sense."

"We should check with Maya," Harriet added. Maya Nguyen was the official liaison and diplomat, the one who was most frequently in contact with mission control. She lived in Moon Base One, but worked most days over in Moon Base Two. Harriet tapped a code into the two-way transmitter on her vest and at the responding crackle, said,

"Maya? If you wouldn't mind popping by for a moment. Something's come up."
"Right-ho," came Maya Nguyen's voice through the yellow, penguin-shaped plastic tab.

"Maya's coming," Harriet said to Galen, to calm him down. He was still standing there before them, shaking uncontrollably, and now seeming to enter into a very uncharacteristic panic mode.

Chapter Three

This was not like Galen, not at all, was Maya's first thought when she arrived on the scene, and she would know. She and Galen had been monogamous socio-sexual partners since the early days of the mission. Somehow they'd hit it off right away and kept on hitting it off every day. She had never believed in 'love at first sight', and Galen was not even what she would have called 'her type'. He was too tall, for one thing, at six foot two compared to her five foot tininess. He was kind of shaggy and messy, with his long brown hair and scratchy full beard. He dressed poorly - not that she was some kind of fashion maven herself, but she did value neatness at least. He was also Caucasian and she'd never had a thing for that kind before. But all those negatives were washed out by the friendly look in his eyes and the sound of his quiet laughter, and Galen had a way of blinking that somehow went straight to her heart. He reminded her of a pet rabbit she had treasured as a child. For his part, Galen was fascinated by Maya's endless theories and speculations on the very topics that interested him most - aliens, music, and stars - and her way of getting along just fine with everyone and everything all the time.

"Honey?" Maya approached cautiously. Galen was twitching in a most peculiar manner. She had never seen him like this before. He blinked at her as she put her arms around him and felt his heart pounding away like never before. Her presence certainly helped. In a short time he was able to breathe again, and, relaxing, let her lead him to a sofa where he sat down. She sat beside him and patted his arm while the other three remained attentive, if a little annoyed by the ongoing interruption. Harriet in particular wanted to get back to the subject of the mushroom, which could be grown in different shapes and colors, and added an interesting sense of variety to almost any meal. She was a foodie, and in her eyes Demaryius was a Kitchen God. An expert herself in nothing but water and deep wells, of which she was at least a leading one, Harriet was easily impressed by people who knew about more than just one or two things.

"He's over there taking a nap," Galen was saying when Harriet snapped herself out of her fungal reverie.

"What did you say his name was?" Maya said.

"Dang, I can't believe I forgot to ask," Galen threw up his hands in disbelief at his own stupidity.

"I doubt he's going anywhere anytime soon," Demaryius put in.

"But what's he doing there?" Rolanda directed her question at Maya. "Do you know anything about this?"

"No, nothing at all," Maya replied. "Mission Control never said anything about a new guy. Fact is, as you all know, there's nothing planned coming or going for another seven years at least."

Everyone nodded and shrugged. They'd known what they were getting into when they first signed up. None of them were in it for the money, which wasn't going to be much anyway. They weren't in it for the publicity or potential book sales once they got back home, assuming they ever did. It was pretty clear from the start that after the first wave of excitement had passed, they'd be pretty much on their own to do their best to wile away the time and make something out of nothing if they could. This was their focus now, in each of their individual ways.

"I'll check with HQ again," Maya added.

"I guess we ought to go see for ourselves," Demaryius muttered. He didn't seem too enthusiastic. He was not the most adventurous type, unless he was in front of a stove; then there was no limit to his boldness.

"Group meeting?" Rolanda suggested and the others sighed in agreement. No one really liked group meetings, but they were occasionally necessary.

Whoever called one would present their question for discussion, and everyone would come to some sort of conclusion as rapidly as possible. There hadn't been too many such meetings in the history of the colony. For example, they had assented within minutes to Marco Velez's proposal to blow up a few craters. They had once allowed themselves to be subjected to a barrage of probing, personal questions by the resident psychologist, Anita Frey. They had voted on the concept of voting on concepts, unanimously supporting the notion. They also had a rule limiting such meetings to no more than once every thirty days, barring an emergency.

"Call it," Maya agreed, and Rolanda tapped the special code into her transmitter.

Chapter Four

No one was thrilled with the summons, but as it was part of the protocol, those who were nearby ambled along and joined the group in Moon Base One over the next twenty minutes. There was no hurry. There was never a hurry about anything in the settlement, and fortunately the residents had been selected for their patience and equanimity along with the other useful traits. It may seem like a highly specialized collection of personality quirks, but the committee had found it wasn't too much trouble to sort it all out. One thing seemed to go pretty much with another. People who fervently believed in cooperation and sharing tended likewise to be tolerant of each other's faults as well as their virtues. People who volunteered to spend a decade or more in relative isolation (on the freaking moon, no less) also had in common the ability to relax and take things easy, more or less. Some were a bit too laid back, perhaps, and such minor temperamental differences were certainly amplified under those conditions, but the walls were plastered with various philosophical reminders, such as "the moon wasn't built in a day", and "was there somewhere you needed to be?"

Michael Gelano was the first to arrive. He was one of the closest things the group had to a 'leader' personality, aside from Maya Nguyen and the old guy, Rayburn Willis. Gelano was one of the Drillers and tended to be the guy who pointed at new spots, while the rest of the crew followed along and did their thing. It didn't seem to matter where they poked their equipment. The moon was pretty much what they thought it would be - a lot of rocks and dust, occasional ice and grayish surprises that were probably life forms of one kind or another, but nothing that anyone had figured out yet. The Drillers were perpetually bringing back specimens for the scientists to inspect. Gelano was also the biggest man in the group, at six foot six two forty, with an enormous bald head riddled with a plethora of dark pits and spots, resembling the moon itself more than anything else. He strode into the kitchen area and, sizing up the situation, suggested that everyone move over to the larger carpet area where group meetings were usually held, with most members sitting cross-legged on the ground.

Others soon arrived, and when they reached the quorum of fifteen, and the myriad greetings and murmurings were dying down, Maya stood up and began the meeting.

"Galen had an interesting encounter this morning," she began. "It seems there is a new guy living over in Moon Base Twelve."

"Impossible," blurted out Redmon Chanoo, a handsome young workout fanatic who was another of the Builders group. "I was just over there last night and didn't see anyone."

"Wait a second?" interrupted the resident artist, Helen Green Brush. Almost everything she said took the form of a question, but in this case there were legitimate ones to be asked. "How could there be a new guy anywhere? Was there a landing we didn't hear about?"

"Not that we know of," Maya replied in her customary even tone. As the resident diplomat and official go-between, she was a master of the art of conciliation. "I just spoke with Mission Control and they claim to know nothing about any arrivals."

"So has Galen gone crazy?", asked Fydia Sooth, examining him for telltale signs of space madness. Fydia was always on the lookout for people going crazy. It had been her intuition from the beginning of the mission that someone was bound to, sooner or later, and it was her intention to be the first to know about it. She had read up on all the symptoms and Galen was definitely exhibiting some of them.

"Go see for yourself," Galen sullenly responded from his spot on the floor, where he was rocking uncomfortably and occasionally scratching his left arm with his right hand. Fydia made a mental note of that particular move.

"You do seem especially agitated," Anita Frey observed.

"There's a freaking New Guy!" Galen nearly shouted. "What's he doing there?"

"I guess we ought to go ask him," Michael Gelano declared.

"Should we all go?" Rolanda asked and from the sound of her voice it was clear this was something she wanted no part of. Rolanda was much more comfortable peering into her microscope at moon rock samples.

"Maybe just a group," Gelano suggested. "Do we want to vote on it?"

Everyone present shook their heads. No one ever wanted to vote. That meant you had to take a side and it was better for all concerned if decisions were unanimous and there were no factions, not even on the smallest issues. If these people were religious about anything, it was this.

"Maya, for one, I'd think," Gelano continued. The group murmured assent. Maya was always the point of contact. Assuming they ever encountered alien life forms, it was already decided she would go first. Even Fydia Sooth had agreed to it, though she privately thought she would deserve the honor, seeing as she was the one most likely to draw the alien's attention to their presence with her incessantly creative broadcasts.

"And I'd like to go," Gelano added. Again there was a positive rumbling and a unison of nodding heads.

"Anyone else?" he asked, looking around. He would have been fine with just him and Maya. It was his opinion that the two of them were always the right choice for everything.

"Me," Fydia hurriedly said. If she couldn't be the official meeter-and-greeter, she at least intended to be there.

"Me too," piped in Rayburn Willis, the aging astrophysicist and all-around expert on everything. So far there had never been any subject he wasn't interested in, nor was there much about which he didn't already know the most among them all. Beside being the oldest and wisest and most experienced, he had also been the first settler selected, and had had a voice in selecting all the others. This was no accident. He was actually a founding member of the commission.

No one else volunteered. It was typical of the settlement that whenever they formed groups, aside from these general meetings, the group never exceeded the number four. It was a sort of unspoken arrangement. If anyone else had wanted to join in, they would have refrained, seeing as the quota had already been reached.

"Well then," Gelano said. "Is there anything else to talk about here?"

There wasn't, and the assembled folks were happy to get the meeting over and done with. Demaryius and Harriet returned to the kitchen to continue discussing their mushroom, while the other non-volunteers returned to their own various activities. Rolanda remained with Galen to question him further about his anxiety, finally giving him an herbal sedative. She was puzzled by his condition. He was normally a mellow guy, and there was something very unusual about his behavior. It almost seemed physical, like an allergic reaction. She decided to do some research on the physio-biology of initial encounters, and wandered off to her study area. Galen, meanwhile, fell fast asleep right there in the middle of the floor.

Chapter Five

The greetings committee made their way out of the building, through the double-lock doors and into the vacuum. All around them was the familiar sight of blackness interrupted by stars. To their left was the other official Moon Base, and a few hundred yards ahead lay the heap of scrap and junk known as Moon Base Twelve. They stepped along side by side, faces shielded only by their breathing masks and foil skull wrappers. Gelano opened the outer door of the hut and after the other three had entered this chamber, pulled it closed, and opened the inner door. As they entered, The New Guy looked up at them, startled. He had been turning over some metal plates, inspecting the pattern of scratches on their surface as if he could read them like a book. Now he lowered his arms and gazed at the newcomers as they removed their masks and hoods.

"Hello," Maya Nguyen said mildly, bowing slightly out of diplomatic habit. The New Guy awkwardly returned this gesture and the greeting, in a cracked voice that seemed unused to speaking. Maya introduced the members of the group.

"My name is Maya Nguyen," she said, slowly. "This is Michael Gelano, our Chief Engineer. This is Fydia Sooth, Communications, and here is Rayburn Willis, Science Officer."

"Hello, Chiefs," said the New Guy, looking mainly at Gelano, whose presence typically overwhelmed the scene, his shining dome nearly grazing the ceiling of the shed.

"What is your name?" Maya asked. The New Guy didn't seem to hear her at first. After studying Gelano, he had just begun to move on to the others when she'd spoken. She waited while he turned his attention to each of them, scanning them with focused eyes. When he returned his attention to her, she repeated her question. He didn't seem to understand it. She tapped her own sternum with her right palm and repeated her own name, then asked, for the third time, about his. The New Guy nodded, and said,

"Martin."

"Is that your first or last name?" interjected Gelano, despite Maya's attempt to wave him away from speaking. The New Guy studied Gelano's face again for a few moments, before replying.

"Martin," he said.

"Where did you come from?" Maya said rapidly, before Gelano could get another word in. The New Guy took a step toward them - they were all in a line a few feet away from him - and cocked his head slightly to one side.

"America," he pronounced.

"Or course America," said Rayburn Willis, shaking his head. "This IS an American base!"

Maya sighed. Her moment of first contact had come and gone, and she'd only gotten one question in. From here on she would have to take turns along with the others. She did think that sometimes the whole sharing thing could go too far.

"Do you know where you are?" asked Fydia Sooth, sensing that it was her turn to speak. She was picking up a weird vibe from The New Guy, then even more of one as he leaned his face toward her and said,

"Of course the moon."

"What are you doing here?" Gelano burst in.

"Who sent you?" Willis demanded.

"One at a time, please," Maya said to her own people, straining to remain calm. They were all beginning to show signs of agitation and distress, reminding her of Galen's condition.

"Oh," Martin said, "of course the commission."

"We've spoken with Mission Control," Maya said.

"Where's your ship?" Willis interrupted. "Where did you land?"

"What are you doing here?" Gelano repeated, taking a large step toward Martin, who retreated two steps and drew his shoulders together.

"People, please," Maya said again. "Let's take a moment, okay?"

Fidya, Gelano and Willis responded automatically to this familiar instruction, and fell into the standard yoga posture. This was the settlers' common tactic for handling any impending stress. As the others focused on their breathing, Maya sized up The New Guy for herself.

He was ugly, no doubt about that. He reminded her of a caricature of a cave man, though thinner. She couldn't determine his age. He could have been anywhere from mid-twenties to mid-forties, she reflected. He seemed uneasy, uncertain, uncomfortable. "I could call him the Un-guy", she inwardly joked. She tried but failed to place his origin by his accent. It was unfortunate that nearly all regional American dialects had been killed off over the previous century, replaced by the bland standard TV-speak. Still, there was something slightly off about his speech, something not quite conforming, but she couldn't place it.

"Are you hungry?" she asked him. He shook his head.

"Thirsty?" Again he gestured that he wasn't.

"Is there anything you want to tell us?"

"I don't think so," Martin said.

"This is ridiculous!" Gelano blurted out, unable to restrain himself any further. Maya reached out and put a hand on his arm. She could feel the tension in him as if he was electrified. This was not a good sign. Gelano was a person of enormous strength, which was useful for drilling but not so handy in emotional situations. Maya was thinking they should re-group, and re-consider their whole approach to The New Guy in Moon Base Twelve.

Martin showed no indication that he intended to respond to Gelano's question, but he did raise his arms and half-hid his face behind the piece of scrap metal he was holding. He seemed to be trembling just a bit. Maya stepped forward and then turned around to face her group.

"I don't think this is going very well," she said, quietly.

"There's something so wrong about all this," Fydia offered.

"I don't like it," Willis agreed.

"Let me squeeze it out of him," Gelano suggested with a grimace.

"No," Maya quickly replied. "Let's all think for a moment, listen to our bodies. It's having some sort of effect, can you feel it? Like with Galen."

"Yes, you're right," Fydia acknowledged after a moment.

"He's just pissing me off," Gelano grunted, and then added, "and I don't think I've felt this way in a very long time."

"We need more information," insisted Rayburn Willis. "We don't really know anything about this guy."

"I'm sure we all agree," Maya said. "The question is, how? What we're doing now doesn't seem to be working."

"We should get out of here," Fydia said, peering over Maya's shoulder at Martin, who was still semi-cowering behind the jagged plate.

"Keep him quarantined," Willis put in. "We can't let him get away."

"It doesn't look like he has any apparatus," Gelano said. "I don't think he's going anywhere."

"That's just impossible right there," Willis said. "It doesn't make any sense."

"I agree with Fydia," Maya said. "We should all leave now."

Everyone nodded, and Maya turned back around to face Martin.

"We're going now," she told him, "but we'll be back. Please be prepared to answer our questions."

Martin shrugged and opened his mouth as if to say something, but then seemed to change his mind and, blinking rapidly, felt behind him for the couch

he'd been lying on when Galen had first discovered him. He lowered himself slowly onto it as Maya and the others turned and exited the inner door.

Chapter Six

Once back inside Moon Base One, the delegation huddled just inside the outer door.

"I don't know," Willis said. "I don't like it, not one bit."

"There's a reaction," Maya countered. "We have to deal with that first. Something about contact. We saw it with Galen, now we've seen it in ourselves. We need Rolanda to check us out before we do anything else. I say we don't even move from here, don't go in yet."

"Okay," Fydia and Gelano said in unison as Maya tapped out the medicine woman's code on her transmitter.

"Rolanda? Could you please join us in airlock one? And bring your scanner."

"Roger," came the crackling voice of the resident medic.

"We need a plan," Willis insisted. "I've got some ideas. One, send out a scouting party to find any traces of his ship. Two, talk to General O'Nail at HQ. Three, scan the db's for any history of this Martin fellow. See if we can find out anything. I've got some snaps I took on the sly. I'll do that."

"All in good time." Maya nodded. "We can do all that, after Rolanda."

"Right," snapped Willis. "Of course you're right. I'm just a little antsy, that's all."

"Antsy?" queried Rolanda as she walked through the inner door. "Is that a professional diagnosis?"

Willis chuckled and relaxed a little as Rolanda brought up her device and waved it seemingly at random around the room. The group stood still as she meandered about them, tapping on the little black box and shaking it this way and that, all the while muttering like a fictional shaman might. Rolanda looked more like a librarian than a witch-doctor, though, with her round coke-bottle glasses, frizzy, short blond hair and oddly shiny little nose. She hopped into the air for a moment to get a read on Gelano's head.

"Anything, doctor?" he asked her after she'd landed.

"A lot," she replied, studying the small screen. "All of this and nothing," she murmured.

"Meaning?" Maya prompted after Rolanda had remained quiet for several moments. The doctor looked up at her and said,

"Like Galen, if that's what you mean. I thought it might be the case, so I brought these. Each of you needs to take some now. Just chew on it like a cow would grass."

Thank You for previewing this eBook

You can read the full version of this eBook in different formats:

- HTML (Free /Available to everyone)
- PDF / TXT (Available to V.I.P. members. Free Standard members can access up to 5 PDF/TXT eBooks per month each month)
- Epub & Mobipocket (Exclusive to V.I.P. members)

To download this full book, simply select the format you desire below

