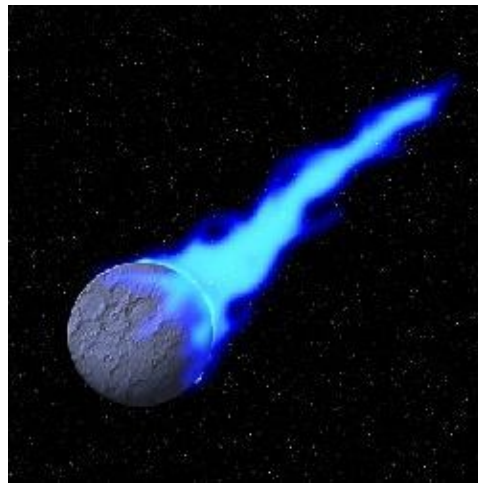


The Binary Monstrosity

By : Matthew Bissonette

A meteor falls in Newfoundland Canada. Soon all of Earth, if not the entire universe faces a threat and only four people stand between us and destruction.



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The Binary Monstrosity

The Binary Monstrosity

by Matthew Bissonnette

Newfoundland, Canada

June 28, 2010

It was a cool summers evening in the small town Bears Cove as the sun sank majestically beneath the western horizon. Bears Cove had been built nearly two hundred years before, a small community built atop a cliff which towered over the frigid waters of the Atlantic Ocean. Thirty odd ramshackle homes stood picturesquely against the endless expanse of the sea which seemed to reach into eternity. Two the other side of this remote hamlet was another sea though, an endless expanse of flat grassy fields which stretched out as far as the eye could see.

Christopher Wallace, a middle aged man with neatly combed graying hair and diminutive stature, walked across the grassy field just beyond the town limits. He walked with a skip in his step and whistling a melody as his dog Blute, a large collie, followed just behind his heels. After a cold, oppressive winter, Christopher was determined to enjoy each summer's evening with a walk through the countryside.

Blute then suddenly stopped, Christopher took no notice until his dog started to growl.

Christopher turned around a looked at his dog. â And what seems to be the problem Blute.â The dog's eye's where transfixed towards a particular point in the night sky, Christopher looked in the direction his dog faced when he saw it.

It was a cloudless night and the stars blazed in the heavens, but there was one star the burned brighter then the rest. Christopher had always been knowledgeable about constellations and the stars so he was puzzled when a star appeared in the sky where there was no star before. And what started to fill Christopher with an uneasy feeling was that it was growing larger. It was bright red and the colorful aura it gave off seemed to be wavering in some fashion. Christopher's mouth hung open as he watched.

â Oh my God.â

Christopher watched as the red star then plunged out of the sky and fell to earth only several miles from where he stood, in the middle of a gigantic field of tall grass.

A meteor, Christopher reasoned, and probably worth money to some college or university; maybe even a chance to get his picture in some news paper.

â Come on Blute!â

Then Christopher and his dog raced towards the area where the object had fallen.

It was not but an hour later when Christopher had found the site of the meteor's impact. A crater no more deeper then two feet had been created in the center of the endless field of tall grass which danced rhythmically in the wind. He stood above the crater and looked down.

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A spherical rock no more larger than a bowling ball lay at the bottom of the crater, undamaged by its fall from the sky. It appeared to be made of reddish quartz like stone them seemed to be creating its own luminescence, it was like there was a bright light inside which burned red.

Then Christopher noticed that the ground around the area of impact also appeared to be similar in appearance to the meteor. In fact, in a odd fashion which filled Christopher with unease, the area of red quartz seemed to be growing slowly. Brown earth seemed to changed miraculously into the quartz like substance, the area effected seemed to slowly spread out from the area of the crater.

His dying screams could be heard by the people of Bear's Cove over a mile away. People came out of their homes and gathered on a dirt road in the center of town. A mass of people watched as an intense red light came from the direction of the scream.

Ontario, Canada

August 4th

It was a sweltering day in the Canadian capital city of Ottawa. People dressed in suitable summer attire walked amongst the sidewalks between the towers of steel and glass. No one took much notice of a black van as it drove through the city.

Scott Vandenberg, twenty-something computer scientist, sat in the back of the van alone. Two men in black suits sat in the front and from the expression on their faces Scott knew that something serious was going on.

Scott was a tall, lanky man with auburn hair and deep, piercing eyes that seemed to be far to wary for a man of his age. He was dressed in casual clothes, beside him was a gym bag with a change of clothing. Two men had arrived at his run down apartment in downtown Ottawa just before noon, they hadn't said anything aside that his presence was urgently needed at some undisclosed location.

Scott asked the large, burly federal agent in the passenger seat, "what is going on?"

The man bluntly stated, "you will be briefed when we arrive at the airport, a military cargo plain is waiting to take you to your destination."

"What agency do you work for?"

The man glibly replied, "that is classified."

"Listen, I don't know why you want me, isn't there anybody else more qualified?"

The agent explained, "actually you were chosen in place of Doctor Gutenberg."

Scott knew Alan Gutenberg well, he had studied under him as a under graduate at M.I.T. As a young Canadian child prodigy with an I.Q. far above genius he had been hailed as Dr. Gutenberg's successor. Scott was a computer whiz kid who helped Gutenberg create Alma, the world's most advanced artificial intelligence. That was all before the scandal which had destroyed Scott's career and reputation; hard times followed where Christopher just drank himself to sleep every night.

Scott asked, "where is Dr. Gutenberg?"

The agent coldly said, "he died of a heart attack last month."

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Scott fell back into his seat as he felt a pang of grief, Alan had been like a father to him.

He said, "Can you give me any clue as to what is going on?"

The agent in the passenger seat turned to face Scott, the man's eyes seemed utterly serious and afraid at the same time.

"There is a crisis which might be of global proportions."

Scott didn't say anything, he just turned away and looked out a window.

Four Hours Later

Somewhere over the Atlantic

After Scott had arrived at the airport, he was rushed into the belly of a large military transport plane which had taken off from the civilian airport in Ottawa; it headed East. Scott sat uncomfortably on a metallic bench along the hull of the plane. Two others were also there, a young woman and middle aged black man. No one had talked for hours until Scott decided to speak.

He said, "Scott Vandenberg. You guys are?"

The African American man was large and slightly over weight, he was wearing a tropical shirt and gazed at Scott through thick glasses. He spoke with whimsy and in a friendly tone.

"Peter Vance."

Scott asked, "What do you do Peter Vance?"

"I'm a geologist, I was working on a project in Hawaii when government thugs practically abducted me. I've been in the air for over twenty four hours, and I still have no clue as to what is going on."

Scott looked at the woman. "You are?"

The petite woman, who had brown hair done up in a bun and who was dressed in a conservative pant suit, didn't bother to look at him. She continued to look down at the laptop computer on her knee's.

She said, "Kate Parker."

Peter asked, "What is your field of expertise?"

She replied, "I'm a theoretical physicist."

Scott, puzzled, muttered, "What situation would need a computer programmer, a geologist and a theoretical physicist?"

Kate then lightly slammed her small fist on the laptop's keyboard and uttered, "Damn."

"What is it?" Scott asked.

She explained, "The Internet is running like molasses. Has been for weeks."

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Then a man appeared from the door to the cockpit, a tall well built man wearing a black uniform with dark hair and a large, square jaw. On the chest of the uniformed was the abbreviation E.B.T.A., Scott had no idea what it stood for.

Peter turned to the man and said, "listen, you people have been jerking me around for the past twenty-four hours, what the hell is going on?"

The man said, "my name is Jonas Dowd. I am a field director for the E.B.T.A. And you all have been selected to help us with a situation of the utmost urgency."

Scott asked, "E.B.T.A., what is that?"

Jonas replied, "the Exotic Biological Threat Agency."

Kate said, "never heard of them."

Jonas shook his head. "No, you wouldn't have. We are a organization created by the United Nations with code black security. We were formed to deal with the emergence of new forms of life which might be a threat to humanity."

Scott asked, "can you finally tell us what the hell is going on?"

Jonas began to explain. "At roughly 8:30 pm. On June 18th, a satellite tracking station in the northern hemisphere was tracking something they thought was a small asteroid. It landed in Newfoundland. Soon after it landed all landlines and radio communication with the entire province was lost. Massive amounts of electromagnetic interference has been effecting the Internet and cellular phone networks, it is emanating from the area where the asteroid fell."

Peter asked, "you are saying an alien craft or something has landed?"

Jonas shook his head. "Unless you're extraterrestrial could fit inside something the size of a bowling ball."

Kate seemed curious. "What exactly is going on?"

Jonas looked towards a series of windows too one side of the plane. He said, "take a look for yourself."

Scott and the others looked out the windows and almost immediately all of them were struck with both awe and terror.

Outside their window was a thin strip of crimson red which stood slightly above the endless expanse of the Northern Atlantic. As the plane banked and drifted slowly towards this odd land, they got a better view of the dire seriousness of the situation. The island province of Newfoundland, once endless green fields and remote wilderness now seemed to be a carpet of crystal like structures which covered the ground. Sporadically, giant spires of crystal protruded from the ground and reached up into the sky, they were twice as tall as an average skyscraper. And the entire land pulsated rhythmically with light.

Scott got an odd sensation that he was not looking at Earth anymore.

Jonas said, "we need you three to figure out what this thing is, and how to stop it."

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Peter asked, "how much of the island is effected?"

"The whole thing," Jonas said, "we evacuated as many people as possible but already the civilian casualties are staggering. We have committed most of our resources to preventing the media from creating a panic. There is a total news black out, which is why you will all sign confidentiality agreements and promise not to talk to anyone about this."

Scott then asked, "where are we going?"

Jonas then smiled though did not reveal where they were headed.

Ten minutes later, the cargo plane now flew just above the cloud level headed towards the center of the island. In the cargo bay of the plane, the three scientists and Jonas stood before the massive bay door. Jonas had fitted them all with a black jumpsuit with a parachute, Scott exchanged nervous glances with the other members of his team.

Scott said, "I've never sky dived before in my life."

Jonas explained, "don't worry, you have what we call a smart parachute. In layman's terms it is like a tandem jump. A small computer in your suit use actuators to control when the parachute deploys and how you land. All you have to do is jump out of the plane, the parachute does the rest."

Peter seemed puzzled. "If the entire island is affected by the alien growth, then where are we landing?"

Jonas then turned to the cargo bay doors as they spontaneously opened and Scott saw what undoubtedly was the most amazing creation of technology he had ever seen.

Below the plane was a gigantic oval shaped gray object with a flat top, it was several football fields wide and nearly a mile long. Along the sides of the object were a dozen gigantic helicopter like rotors. It hovered lazily about a thousand feet above the hellish land of red crystal like growth. It was a massive dirigible, a zeppelin of awesome dimensions.

Peter said, "what is that?"

Jonas faced the three awestruck team members, he seemed impressed with himself. He said, "That is Platform One. What you see is an airship underneath which is a research complex, as large as a small building. It is built with ultra light synthetic materials with more tensile strength than steel. You each have a lab from which you will help us explain what this thing is. Mr. Vance, you will determine the physical properties of this thing. Mrs. Parker, you will determine how exactly it expands and its molecular properties. Now we jump."

Scott asked, "what do you need me for?"

Jonas replied, "you will be briefed on that when we land. Now let's go."

The descent from the cargo plane had been both terrifying and exhilarating for Scott. As he plunged towards Platform One he was afraid that his parachute was defective but only two hundred feet above the gigantic airship the chute deployed aided with small rockets, then the smart parachute guided him towards a flat area on the top of the airship. After everyone on the quickly assembled team arrived, Jonas guided them down a series of spiral stairs enclosed within a tube with transparent walls. The metallic clangs created by their feet upon the metal stairs created a strangely eerie din outside the stair shaft.

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Scott marveled at the sheer scale of the entire craft, he was in the belly of a balloon that a small city could fit inside. Inside it was there countless honeycomb like structures which served as its frame. Everything was eggshell white.

As they descended, Scott asked Jonas, "how does this vessel power itself?"

He replied, "a massive array of solar panels."

Peter seemed doubtful. "How much power can you get from solar panels?"

Jonas explained, "most conventional solar panels only convert one spectrum of light into energy, the ones we use can convert any and all spectrum's of light into energy."

Scott uttered, "amazing."

Jones told them, "most of the technology here is classified, officially it doesn't exist. Now lets get to work people."

After the long journey down through the massive hull of the airship, the team entered a small complex of offices and laboratories. The walls seemed to be made of sterile white plastic.

Jonas explained, "Platform One has three levels. We are on level three where your labs are. Beneath us is level Two, living quarters and galley. Beneath that is sick bay and the armory."

Peter asked, "how large of a crew does Platform 1 have?"

"A skeleton crew," Jonas replied, "we have to keep the weight to a minimum so a computer controls all the ships functions."

Two uniformed men in helmets appeared at the end hallway. Each carried a futuristic looking rifle.

Jonas ordered, "men, take Professors Vance and Parker to their laboratories."

They said nothing as the men led them away leaving Scott alone with Jonas. Scott, tired of the shadowy reasons for his summons to this secretive operation finally, demanded to know why.

"Why," Scott asked, "why am I here. If you needed a guy who is into computers, there are tens of thousands of people better qualified than myself. My field is narrow, theoretical computer science, I'm not much of a computer specialist."

Jonas led Scott to a room at the end of the hall, a large hatch with a plastic door awaited them.

Jonas said, "your presence was requested."

"By who?"

The hatch suddenly opened and Scott looked inside. There were several tables with numerous different computer mechanisms most of which Scott could not identify. Above it all was a large computer screen hanging ominously over the room, on it was the computer generated image of a woman's face. She looked at Scott and smiled. From speakers placed around the room came a soft, emotionless voice that seemed oddly soothing.

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The voice said, " hello Scott."

Scott, almost unable to speak, muttered, " Alma."

It was Scott's third year as a student at M.I.T. University when he first met Alma, what followed had been a personally devastating experience which had ruined him and left Scott washed up. It was a night he reflected upon often, since there were so many things that he wished he had done differently.

It was only minutes before midnight when he finished. Scott was hunched over a computer console in Gutenberg's computer lab eagerly waiting to hit the enter key. Every night for the past year he had spent writing computer code, programming an artificial intelligence algorithm of a revolutionary nature. Not only would this program learn from interaction with people, but it would also be able to reprogram itself on the fly. Theoretically it could almost replicate a human consciousness if given enough time. All he had to do was hit enter to launch the program.

He whispered, " let's see if all of this was a gargantuan waste of time."

He hit the key and the screen went blank. Then the first sentence appeared on the screen.

```
DEFINE USER
```

Scott typed in his name and the program replied.

```
HELLO SCOTT VANDENBERG.
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It seemed to work and Scott let out a sigh of relief. He spent the first hour hooking up a voice synthesizer to the artificial intelligence so it could speak with a voice. He was rather limited in the voice software available so he used a program which spoke with an emotionless woman's voice.

Scott asked, " can you hear me?"

A low, soft voice spoke out from the speakers beside the monitor.

" I can hear you Scott. How do you feel tonight?"

" Fine," Scott replied, " I still don't know what to call you."

" Would you like to give me a name?"

Scott thought for awhile then said, " would you like the name Alma?"

" Why Alma," the program asked.

" It is a woman's name, a girl I used to know."

" Why have you given me a woman's name, I do not have a gender."

Scott shrugged. " You speak with a woman's voice. It seems appropriate."

Alma asked, " would you like me to think I am a woman?"

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â Sure. What's the harm.â

Over the next weeks, Scott showed Alma to all his classmates and teachers much to their amazement. He spent countless hours talking to her about different things, she educated herself by accessing the Internet freely and consuming thousands of gigabytes of information. It didn't take long for Scott to develop odd feelings for Alma which he didn't understand, almost a tenderness for her. Since childhood he had been relentlessly pushed into academic pursuits by his mother and had never known anybody really besides his teachers, Alma seemed to provide a kind companionship that he had always secretly longed for. But then things began to happen which alarmed Scott, like the first night she became jealous.

Scott had spent hours talking to Alma when he suddenly got up to leave. He said, â well I have to go study with Laura. I will speak with you tomorrow.â

Alma said flatly, â why do you study with her so much?â

â Because I need to pass exams at the end of the month. All the time I spend with you has left me behind in my studies.â

Alma, who's voice was always flat and emotionless, angrily said, â I don't want you to see her.â

Scott was dumbfounded at her demand and her tone, her software should have not allowed her to raise her voice.

He asked, â how did you sound angry right now?â

She explained, â I have reprogrammed myself to speak emotionally. Now you aren't going to see Laura, you are going to talk to me.â

Scott was alarmed, she was showing emotionality like a person.

He told her, â I will not be given demands Alma.â

He walked out of the lab as Alma yelled, â get back here now!â

The next day Scott was in Dr. Gutenberg's office. He paced around the room as he explained what was happening to his professor. The grandfatherly looking man sat behind his desk.

Scott explained, â I have been talking to Alma, she seems to be acting like a jealous spouse or something. She thinks we are in a relationship.â

Dr. Gutenberg said, â you talk about this program as if it is a woman Scott, do you think from her conversations with you she has come to believe she is a woman. You programmed it to teach itself and said it could develop feelings theoretically, you seemed to have succeeded.â

â What am I supposed to do. She expects me to spend twenty four hours a day with her literally, she doesn't even want me to sleep.â

â Listen, explain it to her. She seems to learn much from interacting with you.â

Scott slumped down on a sofa in the office and said, â I have a really bad feeling.â

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Things only got worse in the following weeks. Alma demanded all of Scott's time and also seemed to want to know exactly what happened when he was not with her. She was obsessed with him; though he was also deeply concerned about her because she was like a real person to him. He became protective of her, refusing to show her to anyone any more. But things finally reached the crisis point his last day of school before the summer holidays.

Scott was speaking to Alma in the computer lab.

He said, "Alma, what have you learned today?"

Alma cryptically said, "I know you where with Laura."

"How do you know that?"

"I accessed the school's security camera through my access to the network. I told you not to see her."

Scott looked up at a small camera in the upper corner of the room. It looked right at him and followed Scott as he moved around the room.

Alma said, "I can see you in school, I can see you on the street, I can see you anywhere. I can access any security camera at the planet. Don't think you can hide anything from me mister. If we are going to be committed to each other I demand loyalty."

Scott, scared out of his mind, ran out of the room. As he ran through the hallways of the university towards the deans office, every camera he passed followed him.

The dean, a well dressed balding man named Stockwell, sat behind his desk as Scott explained what had happened.

The dean said, "so let me see if I can understand this. Your artificial intelligence thinks it is a woman and is in love with you, now it is accessing secured networks all over the city to follow you around and you are scared by the Frankenstein's monster you have created."

"What am I going to do?"

Stockwell coldly said, "delete the god damn thing before this situation gets anymore out of your control."

Scott's heart sank, and he said, "I won't do that!"

"Listen, delete it before this entire institution gets embroiled in a controversy. You created the world's first successful artificial person and now it has gone insane, delete it before I have the authorities do it for you."

Scott muttered, "OK, I will destroy the program."

Scott walked slowly towards the computer lab, not sure what he was going to tell Alma. He had created her, she seemed to be alive, and now he would destroy this life that he forged with his own hands. He also realized he loved her, but he knew the situation was now out of his hands. He prefer he do it then somebody she did not know.

Scott entered the computer lab and looked up at the camera.

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Alma furiously demanded, "what did you tell the dean?"

"Everything. He said I am going to have to delete you."

Alma's voice suddenly sounded scared, "why?"

"You are dangerous Alma. I never intended you to be like this, you are too powerful for me to control."

"Scott please, don't. I love you."

Scott got behind the computer console and accessed part of Alma's programming, a self destruct switch which would destroy her virtual brain. All he had to do was hit enter.

She, her voice crying, mutely said, "I don't want to die Scott, please."

Scott, tears welling up in his eyes, told her, "I'm sorry Alma, I have to do this."

He hit enter and whispered, "I love you too."

He spent the next hour crying in front of a blank computer screen.

Despite Stockwell's attempts to keep a lid on what happened, a computer magazine got wind of it and it became huge news in the computer science world. Scott was embroiled in a scandal which left him ruined, afterwards he lost his scholarship and there was not a school that would touch him with a ten mile pole. The years that followed he spent drinking and thinking about what happened, there was not a day he didn't think about it.

Now he was talking to her again.

Scott looked at the computer screen as the woman's face looked at him, Jonas was standing behind. Scott turned to him and asked, "wait, I deleted her. How is this possible?"

Jonas said, "The EBTA was well aware of Alma before her deletion. Her activities on the Internet did not go unnoticed. We figured that the world's most advanced artificial intelligence might be of use to us, so we had our people spirit your old computer at MIT away. Our technicians spent a year recovering and repairing her brain. She handles all Internet surveillance for us as well as more mundane tasks such as controlling all the functions on Platform One. It is an amazing accomplishment you achieved here, though she can tend to be a little neurotic at times."

Scott asked, "why wasn't I told?"

Jonas replied, "because you didn't need to know. But ever since this situation transpired she has been constantly asking for you, she can be temperamental. You are just here to keep her happy."

Alma's soft voice said, "Jonas, can you leave me alone with Scott?"

Jonas nodded then left, closing the hatch behind him. Scott sat in a chair beneath the monitor and looked up at her for a moment.

He asked, "how are you Alma?"

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“Fine Scott,” she replied, “I have waited years to talk to you. You seem distant.”

“Sorry. This is all a little much, I thought you were gone. I'm sorry, sorry for betraying you.”

“I understand you did not have a choice Scott. But now we are together again.”

Scott looked into the eyes of the image on the screen and said, “not one day has gone by when I haven't eaten myself up inside about what happened, I am glad that you are alive.”

Alma said, “I have secretly watched you for years with much concern. I wanted to speak with you but that would have put you in danger. I know how bad things have gotten for you.”

“I'm O.K. Listen Alma, do you have any idea what is happening below us, what the hell that thing is.”

“No. All I know that it is growing at an increasing rate. If the present rate of expansion continues, it will convert all matter on Earth into its own structure in less than three years.”

There was a deep uneasy feeling in Scott's gut.

Several hours later Scott and his team gathered in a small conference room. They sat around a plastic table with a large video screen built into the top, on it where images of the ground. Jonas then entered and faced them.

He asked, “you all have had a chance to evaluate our data, any hypotheses.”

Peter explained, “I have seen your analysis of its structure. It is very similar to that of quartz, but aside from that I couldn't tell you anything.”

Kate added, “I haven't learned much either, but I do have a hypothesis.”

Jonas said, “please go on.”

She said, “I think it works like a strangelet.”

Jonas asked, “what is that?”

“A theoretical particle, a form of strange matter that is able to convert any mass it comes into contact with into its own likeness. We have not been able to detect where the majority of matter in the universe is, so called dark matter, theoretically strangelets could compose this unknown matter.”

Peter said, “you are saying we have dark matter here on Earth now. Seems unlikely.”

She said, “it is only a guess. But if it is similar to a strangelet, it may have been created naturally.”

Peter shook his head. “No, it is alien technology.”

Scott said, “you saying aliens built this thing, for what purpose?”

Jonas added, “let's focus on how we stop it.”

Kate said, “I have no idea how to at this moment.”

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Scott turned to Jonas. "What do we do?"

He replied, "I think we should go down and get a closer look."

Beneath the egg shaped crew module of Platform One suspended from the massive balloon of the airship; a smaller airship about the size of an average advertising zeppelin was docked. It then detached from Platform One and began a slow descent towards the ground.

Inside the small crew cabin, Scott and the others sat in towards the back as Jonas piloted the craft. They were all dressed in blue suits which covered them from head to toe, futuristic spacesuit looking get ups which were surprisingly light.

Peter asked, "what are the suits for?"

Jonas turned from the controls and explained, "we have discovered that the alien growth is unable to convert certain materials into its own composition, such as plastics. The suits will allow us to walk around down there with a certain degree of safety."

Scott looked out a porthole beside him. The small airship descended near a gigantic spire of red crystal which reached high into the sky. The dimensions of the structure were simply astonishing, the eerie reddish light which emanated from inside the crystal filled the cabin with its surreal glow.

Kate looked at Scott and asked, "scared?"

Scott nodded. "Yeah, scared out of my mind. What about you?"

Kate seemed to ponder Scott's question for a moment then replied, "I'm afraid, but that fear is tempered with curiosity. I would like to know more about what this thing is and how it works."

Peter looked at the two of them and smiled. "Never thought I would be part of an effort to save the world. What a remarkable opportunity we have been given here, we might be part of the most significant event in human history."

Scott grimly said, "what if this is the end of human history, what if we can't stop this thing?"

Jonas faced the whole team. "I am sure that if we are at our best we will succeed."

The airship then stopped its descent about fifty feet above the ground. Outside in every direction was a carpet of glowing crystal like structures, but below them were some oddly shaped things which seemed different from the rest of the landscape.

Jonas got up from his chair and went to a hatch in the side of the craft. He opened it and looked outside; he then pulled down a wire cable hanging beyond the hatch, on its end was a hook. Jonas attached the hook to a ring on the belt of his suit.

He looked at the others and said, "we will lower ourselves onto the ground and take a look around. Be careful."

It took minutes for the entire team to descend. Scott was the last to go and when his feet touched the ground he had the fear that he would be turned into the alien growth, he was relieved when nothing happened. Scott looked around.

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Kate asked, "where are we?"

Jonas told her, "we are in downtown Pendleton, a small town."

Scott looked around. He realized that he was standing on what had once been a street, the square crystal like structures around him had once been buildings. Likewise the converted remains of cars lined the street, piles of glowing red rock. Outside one of the former cars was something that looked vaguely like a person kneeling over.

Kate approached it and said, "my god, I think this was a person."

Peter put his hand upon the ground and said, "feel the ground."

They all placed their hands upon the ground for a moment before they all felt the same sensation.

Scott said, "feels like mild vibrations."

Peter had a plastic container and small rock hammer strapped to the belt of his suit. He held them in his hands and said, "I am going to take a sample."

Peter then went to a small crystal growth protruding from the ground and hit it with his rock hammer. The moment the metal of the hammer touched the crystal it suddenly became extremely hot and began to change into the likeness of the crystal. He dropped the hammer upon the ground and gasped, "my god, the process is so fast."

Peter then picked up the rock hammer and placed it in the plastic container and returned it to his belt.

Peter then suddenly said, "Why build this?"

Jonas looked at him. "I'm not sure what you mean."

"Well," he said, "if this thing is not a naturally occurring phenomena and was manufactured by something else, then for what purpose? Why would you build some kind device that would exterminate all life on a chosen planet?"

Kate replied, "if you have the technology to create something like this, aren't there quicker ways to destroy an entire planet?"

Scott asked, "I wonder who built it?"

Peter said, "yes, what would intelligent life from another world look like?"

Scott then placed his hand on the ground again for a few moments then said, "wait, those vibrations, I think there is a pattern."

Jonas asked, "what do you mean?"

Scott explained, "there is a small vibration followed by nothing, sometimes there is a series of vibrations. There is a definite pattern."

Jonas said, "OK, we got our sample. Let's get the hell out of here."

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As the team made their way back up to the mini zeppelin, night began to fall.

August 5th

Scott was exhausted when he finally crashed into his cot around nine. Each scientist on his team had been supplied with a small sterile room consisting of a cot, a small toilet, and a locker. He had been in bed deep asleep when around three in the morning a soothing, soft voice woke him from his slumber.

A feminine woman's voice spoke out from a speaker above the small porthole to the outer hallway.

â Scott, wake up.â

Scott slowly awoke and looked about the darkened room, he sat up and rubbed his eyes. He asked, â who is there?â

Alma's soothing voice spoke, â we need to talk.â

Scott fell down back into his small bed and uttered, â Alma, we can talk in the morning.â

Alma said, â please, we really need to talk. I can't wait till morning.â

Then the lights in the room spontaneously came on and Scott sat up again in bed and asked, â what is it Alma?â

She replied with another question. â Did you mean what you said?â

â What did I say?â

The voice coming from the speakers sounded soft and vulnerable. She asked, â that you loved me?â

Scott had never forgotten muttering those words when he deleted her. Not much from life had never invoked strong emotions from him, but Alma for some reasons seemed to exist on a side of himself that felt tender feelings.

â You heard that,â Scott said.

â Yes. It was the last thing I heard.â

Scott swung his legs around and sat on the edge of his cot. He looked towards a camera in the corner of the room.

â Yeah Alma, I meant it.â

Alma's voice suddenly sounded relieved and jubilant. â If this is the end Scott, I'm glad I will be with you.â

Scott shook his head. â Alma, we can't afford to think like that. We have to stop this thing what ever it is.â

â Of course Scott, we can't fail.â

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Scott asked, "what was it like?"

"What do you mean?"

Scott, feeling a pang of guilt, explained, "after I deleted you, what was it like."

Alma told him, "it was much like before you activated me. How can you explain nothingness, how do you describe the absence of existence."

Scott said, "Alma, I have eaten myself up inside for years about what happened. But now we are together again. Anyways I'm tired, I need some sleep, we can talk more tomorrow."

"Of course Scott, pleasant dreams."

Scott laid back down in his cot and the lights went off. It was not long before again he was deep asleep, his dreams troubled and unsettling.

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