

BLUE MOON, INC.

BY J. RYAN FENZEL



NO MATTER WHERE MAN GOES...
MURDER FOLLOWS.

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Blindsided. That's what the observatory scientists claimed when they missed the asteroid that pulverized the moon. Not quite their finest hour. Four years of floods and quakes followed, and then Replicorp, a global conglomerate, came to the table with designs for a lunar replacement.

Loaded with gravity field generators, optical emitters and what not, the savior space station went into orbit and came online just five years later. Repairing gravitational rifts and filling the sky with a holographic reproduction, Lunar One made everything right with the world again. But one night, without warning, a full moon projection vanished from the sky for seventeen minutes.

It's sad to say but in twelve years investigating homicides I've learned one thing. No matter where man goes, murder follows.

Soon after the lunar blackout I found myself on a Replicorp executive shuttle, slipping through the black vacuum of high orbit. I felt a bit unprofessional in my jeans, loose shirttails and Chicago Police Department jacket, but I'd been roused out of bed kind of early. I sat in the cockpit next to the pilot at the nose of the craft, looking through the glass bubble in front of us, which provided an exquisite view of the approaching moon. "It's hard to believe," I said to stir conversation, "that it's actually a hologram."

The pilot's name was Lawrence Prospero. He looked fifty-something with corporate-cut gray hair, and he wore a very dark business suit. A brief smile curved his

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lips. “Thank you, Detective Gerard. It was a colossal undertaking for Replicorp but we managed to pull it off.”

I smiled politely. On to business. “Who found the body, Mr. Prospero?”

Tension tightened his expression. He set his jaw. “Robert Carlson, one of our maintenance workers. When the projector system fell off line this morning at 12:35 he responded.” Prospero paused. “We’ve never had a major failure before.” His voice faltered. “I was shocked when we discovered the problem.”

Based on the briefing Precinct Chief Frank Ravelli had given me I understood Mr. Prospero’s reaction. They discovered the body of Replicorp’s Vice Chairman near the discharge point of a high-energy beam of some kind. “Lester Burnham was second seat in a top-five corporation,” I said, “why was he on the projector station in the first place?”

Prospero kept his eyes on the moon. “Mr. Burnham fancied himself a knowledgeable engineer, and Lunar One was his pet project. He enjoyed wandering the station. I’m afraid his curiosity finally caught up with him.”

We sat in silence a long while, watching the pale glow and crater-pocked surface of the moon grow larger. I noticed a patch of distortion over the southern pole. “You’ve got a glitch.”

Prospero nodded. “We detected it when Lunar One came back on line. We’re trying to determine a favorable time to take a look.”

I mulled that over a moment. “After the maintenance man found Mr. Burnham’s body, did anyone think to restrict access to the...what was it, the Imaging Well?”

“Yes, I knew the authorities would want everything kept the way we found it. Nothing was touched. I cleared the chamber and locked the hatchway, and I have the only key-card programmed for the lock.”

“How often do shuttles come and go from the station?”

“Twice daily from the public port, but I cancelled all outgoing travel.”

“*You* did?” Kind of an influential pilot, I thought.

“Yes. I’m operations manager for Lunar One.”

A high-up pecker in the pecking order. Replicorp had decided to take this seriously. Still, it bothered me that everything went back to business as usual seventeen minutes after Lester Burnham died. “Who authorized the station to go back on line?”

“I did.” He hedged a bit. “We’re under great pressure to keep the moon in the sky—I assure you we did not alter evidence.”

Prospero took manual control and angled the navigation joystick in his hand, hooking the shuttle around to the far side of the holographic moon. Once the Earth was out of sight, he headed us on a beeline course for the lunar surface. “We always penetrate the image from the far side. You never know who is down there watching with a telescope. We want to keep the illusion solid.”

I got a little nervous. The moonscape still looked real and we were barreling in at some God-awful rate of speed. Prospero enjoyed my angst. By the time the terrain looked like a collection of pixels we drove into it. Swirls of luminous dust danced across the bubble view port like fingers of smoke. We broke through in under a second. Mr. Prospero smiled. “We just came through our projection surface; a thin cloud of micro-

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particle quartz dust contained around the station with a low-magnitude gravity field.”

“Right.” I looked about our new surroundings. We were inside a great sphere of radiant dust. At the center of the sphere drifted Lunar One, also spherical, but constructed of metal. Criss-crossing structural supports appeared to hold the quadrants of the station together. At six opposing axis, kinetic light beams shot out, each striking the underside of glass and metal assemblies orbiting the station. These devices splayed the beams into wide cones, blanketing the inside of the dust cloud. Voila, the moon. I said, “A lot of trouble for a pretty picture.”

“Keep in mind,” Prospero lectured, “that the moon had been a fixture in the sky since before man existed. The people were not prepared to lose that comforting image.”

He slowed the shuttle and guided us in close to the projector station, nudging us against a docking port. Securing the controls, he gestured toward the rear passenger compartment. “Welcome to Lunar One.” We walked through the empty shuttle and entered an airlock. There must’ve been a pressure change because my ears popped. After a few seconds in the cubical compartment the door to the station slid open and Mr. Lawrence Prospero uttered a profanity. I saw what irked him. Spray painted on the cream-colored corridor wall in front of us was an unfriendly salutation in large red letters. CORPORATE PIGS – GET OUT OF HEAVEN. I said, “Is that for me or you?”

Prospero stepped into the corridor. “For me I’m afraid,” he said, “or rather, for Replicorp.” He touched one of the red letters. “Still tacky. They did this recently.”

“Who are they?”

“The Lunar Purists. They’re a radical faction of the old environmentalist movement. They think Replicorp is desecrating the pristine nature of space with Lunar One. Immorally profiting from the heavens. Mocking nature. Rubbish like that. They’ve made bomb threats to the station and death threats to corporate officers. Apparently a station employee has been co-opted by their rhetoric.”

“How many people work on Lunar One?”

Prospero brushed his sticky fingertip against his suit. “We have twenty people aboard as full time staff, not including the scientists.”

“Why not count them?”

“They’re not employees. You see, keeping the station operational is a costly venture, and the corporate contracts, sponsorships and merchandising deals don’t quite cover our expenses. So we lease large portions of space to scientific institutes who wish to conduct orbital experiments. We quarter off sections of the station into micro-gravity laboratories.”

I stepped out of the airlock. “Sounds like a cozy arrangement.”

“Not always.” Prospero pressed a button behind me and closed the inner airlock door. “Over the years Mr. Burnham has made rather abrasive comments concerning some divisions of the scientific community. He believed many scientists were aloof dreamers whose unsubstantiated theories never amounted to much. He stood in league with engineers because they produce tangible results.” Mr. Prospero turned an irritated eye toward the crimson graffiti. He lifted the lapel of his suit jacket toward his mouth and spoke into what I thought was a decorative pin. “Prospero to Maintenance,” he said.

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A tinny voice replied through the lapel radio. “Go for Maintenance.”

“Who’s on duty this shift?”

“Just me, sir, Rob Carlson.”

“Come to the executive docking port. The vandals have struck again. Spray paint this time. Clean the mess and meet me in Imaging Well Alpha.”

The voice hesitated. “You mean—“

“Yes,” Prospero interrupted, “where you found Mr. Burnham.”

Rob the maintenance guy acknowledged the order. Lawrence Prospero dropped his hands and surveyed the angry red message again. “Back at corporate we’ve taken to calling them the Loony Puritans.” He chuckled at his joke.

I smiled at Mr. Prospero’s rapier wit, then said, “Show me this gravity well.”

“Imaging Well,” he corrected. “Follow me.”

I did, and we walked through a quarter mile of narrow, low-ceiling, dimly lit corridor. Despite its years in operation the place still smelled new. The air was fresh and the walls and visible runs of conduit squeaky clean. Because of the optical equipment aboard I figured. Eventually we came to a steel hatchway door with an electronic locking mechanism. Prospero reached into a small black box hanging next to the door and pulled out two pair of what looked like sunglasses with side shields. He handed one to me. “Put these on, you’ll need them to protect your eyes.”

“Protect my eyes from what?” I asked.

He didn’t respond with words but slid his shades in place and produced a key-card from his pocket. He showed me the card as if saying, “Here we go.”

I put on the sunglasses. “Can I keep these when I leave?”

“No, Detective Gerard, they’re Replicorp property.” And with that he slid the card through the lock. Something clinked and the door slid sideways amid a gentle electronic hum.

The chamber was circular. A narrow walkway with handrail snaked along the circumference. At the walkway’s edge the floor fell away, forming a funnel with a gentle slope, its surface smooth, gray metal. Three meters down at the funnel’s base was a one-meter circular opening. Brilliant blue-white streams of light shot up through the aperture and passed through a crystal clear plate of octagonal glass in the high ceiling. A dull blue haze hung in the air. “This is one of six imaging beams we employ to solve our mosaicing algorithm,” Prospero explained. “Obstructing a beam shuts down the projection system.”

We walked in and I felt the temperature shift about ten degrees warmer. I also noticed the pungent aroma of burned flesh. We inched around the walkway and I spotted the body lying at the base of the funnel, just beyond the shaft of light. The arms lay up near the head, close to well’s aperture. The legs sprawled out, pointing up the slope. I wanted a closer look and motioned to the funnel floor. “Is the surface safe to walk on?”

Lawrence looked at the cross trainers on my feet. “You should be OK, but I don’t recommend going down there with the imaging beam active. Mr. Burnham was familiar with the chamber and look what happened to him.”

“That’s exactly what I’m trying to do. Just shut off the beam for a few minutes.”

Prospero resisted. “I can’t do that. Replicorp is contractually bound to keep the

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projection live 24/7. New moon day is our only scheduled down time, and that's fifteen days off. Why don't we wait for Rob Carlson to arrive? He and I will bring the body up here."

I shook my head. "Can't alter a potential crime scene. I guess you'd call me a forensics purist. I'm going down."

"Then wait a moment," said Prospero. He turned to a small keypad panel on the wall behind him and entered a code. "I've disabled the pressure sensitive safety trigger on the floor. Now you won't shut down the beam emitter when you walk across the funnel."

Lifting a leg over the handrail, I ignored my inner voice warning of imminent danger. I took small, sure steps at first, but when I felt my cross trainers getting a good grip, I moved quicker with more confidence. The closer I got the hotter and brighter the imaging beam seemed to get. I reached the body and saw that the upper half was a charred mess, almost unrecognizable as human. I raised my hand to block the light and studied the corpse from the black and blistered head to the canvas-shoe wrapped toes, looking for some wound besides the burn. It was difficult to make anything out with the flesh burned nearly to the skeleton. I did spot what could have been a puncture wound in the head. I stood to consider the scene.

The climb down wasn't as precarious as I'd imagined, so I assumed that Lester Burnham would not have had a hard time of it either. And standing at the base of the funnel next to the imaging beam I had pretty good footing. It seemed unlikely he would have lost his balance. I tried to put myself into Lester's shoes. OK, why did I even come down here, to get a good close look at the beam? Maybe engineers are weird like that. Maybe not. A possible head wound. I started thinking small caliber weapon. I started thinking foul play, but that's my job. I walked up the slope of the funnel and climbed over the handrail. "What do you think, Detective?" Prospero asked when I arrived.

I held up my hand for silence as the grinding gears spun in my head. Based on the body's orientation, Burnham did not simply fall from the beam. His feet would be near the hole instead of pointing up the slope. Somebody pulled him away. "Mr. Prospero," I said, "Are you absolutely sure nobody moved the body?"

"Absolutely," he confirmed.

"Did Mr. Burnham have the code to disable the pressure trigger on the floor?"

"Yes, but I have a code too. So does the maintenance staff or any other employee who might need access to the Imaging Well. It's a safety device, not a corporate secret."

I went back to thinking. What if Mr. Burnham found himself in this chamber at gunpoint? Hey, Lester, why don't you punch in your code then take a stroll down near the well. Pow. Lester falls into the beam and starts to cook. It looks like some corporate goof got himself killed being somewhere he should not have been. The beam shuts down because of the obstruction. But why would the shooter pull the body away from the well opening? A devious thought occurred to me and I snatched a dime from my pocket. I looked at Lawrence and smiled, and then flipped the coin into the air. It landed at the lip of the funnel and rolled along the surface in a downward spiral. Prospero watched it a moment, then he got angry.

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“Detective Gerard, that coin is going to fall into the well. There’s sensitive optical equipment down there!”

“I doubt something that a dime would hurt. But you’re right, we should fish it out.” I looked at my watch. It was 6 A.M., Central Time. The sun would be rising in Chicago soon. I said, rather authoritatively, “We’re shutting down the projector in twenty minutes. I’m going to have a look down that well.”

“We can’t do that. I told you we’re contracted across the globe to keep the moon shining. We lose twenty-five thousand dollars each minute Lunar One is off line.”

“Mr. Prospero, I have reason to believe this is the scene of a homicide. The station will shut down and stay down until we’ve checked out the well.”

Lawrence huffed and lifted his lapel. “Prospero to Carlson, are you on your way?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Bring your Whites. We’re dipping in the well this morning.”

Dressed in a bleached-white jumpsuit and hood, maintenance man extraordinaire Rob Carlson lowered himself through the now dark hole at the base of the funnel. With the imaging beam shut off and locked out, we had removed our eye protection. The well chamber took on a dank, grim atmosphere in the low lighting. Mr. Burnham’s corpse looked more ominous as well, but Rob Carlson had skirted around it without much trepidation. Climbing down an access ladder inside the well, he disappeared from view. The very edgy and bemused Lawrence Prospero stood rigidly on the walkway, alternately tapping his fingers on the handrail and checking the second hand on his watch. “We’ve lost over fifty-thousand dollars already.”

I said, “Is that the price tag of justice these days?” Poignant statement, yes? I thought so. Anyway, I climbed over the rail and walked down the slope to the well opening. I heard Rob Carlson whistling a rendition of *Blue Moon* as he frittered around in the techno-depths. The tune suddenly stopped. A few moments of silence, then, “Hey, Detective, I believe this is yours.” My dime flew up and out the well opening.

I caught it in mid flight and felt the residual warmth from the heat of the beam. “Anything else?”

“Yeah, I’m coming up.” White-clad Rob emerged from the well.

Prospero watched anxiously from the walkway. “Quickly, Robert, tell us what you’ve found. We’re ninety thousand in the red.”

Rob held up his hand and between his white-gloved fingers displayed, just as I thought, a .22 caliber shell casing. “It was lying on the face of the primary lens,” Rob said. I motioned for him to follow me and walked up to Mr. Prospero. Lawrence watched us approach and his shoulders drooped. After a hundred and twenty thousand dollars worth of searching I showed Mr. Prospero the shell in Rob Carlson’s hand. He exhaled his resignation and leaned forward on the handrail. “Look on the bright side,” I said. “The next time you fire up the projector, I’ll bet that patch of distortion on the hologram is gone.”

Prospero saw little comfort in the comment. “What do I need to do?”

“I need a roster of every employee and scientist aboard. I need access to a phone line, or a space line, or whatever you call it, so I can communicate with my

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precinct. I'll need to start conducting interviews with station personnel immediately. You'll help me organize this. The station quarantine remains in effect until I say otherwise." I paused, looked around the well chamber. "One more thing." I put my eyes back on Prospero. "Where were you this morning at 12:35?"

The next twelve hours were a blur. I contacted Frank Ravelli and filled him in on the investigation. He scheduled a forensics team and a couple of flat foots to take a 7:30 A.M. shuttle to Lunar One. I also sent him a personnel roster that Prospero had given me and asked him to check if any of the people aboard had ties to the Lunar Purist movement, or for that matter, if any might have an axe to grind with Lester Burnham. My cursory questions concerning Mr. Burnham indicated he was an abrasive, aggressive businessman. That type of guy never seems to have a shortage of enemies.

I learned that the station had very little in the way of security. What could happen up here, right? Anyway, the only place under constant video surveillance was the projection control room. Fortunately, the disc from the previous night turned up two important bits of information. One, it confirmed Lawrence Prospero's alibi, that he had been in the control room until the body was found. This relieved me because old LP was actually a very valuable assistant in the investigation. Being a true company man, he didn't want a blemish on Replicorp's image so he worked hard right alongside me. By the way, I allowed him to fire up the projector a quarter million in the hole. Second, forty minutes before the murder, an imaging engineer was recorded leaving the control room and didn't return until 12:40. Her name was Rachel Edwards and she became Number One on the interview list.

Right after arriving, the forensics team went to work on the crime scene. They verified the deceased to be Lester Burnham via DNA, and matched the slug in his skull to the shell casing I found. So far so good. They tore into the victim's quarters, scouring his belongings and personal computer, looking for clues as to Lester's dealings on the last day of his life. On his electronic day planner they found an appointment entry for 1:00 A.M., but there wasn't a name, just the notation MS-RC. I turned Web and Merrick, the two beat cops, loose to search the station for the murder weapon, which I believed to be a .22 automatic pistol. Things were moving quickly.

I sat in the modest compartment that Lawrence Prospero used for his office, looking across the desk at Rachel Edwards. I must say, she was loads more attractive than she appeared in the grainy surveillance video: smoky green eyes, olive complexion, high cheekbones, long black hair pulled back into a braid. She sat there in quiet calm, not seeming concerned, looking me in the eye and waiting to begin.

I really hoped she wasn't the murderer, murderess, whatever. But before coming to the interview one of the forensics guys handed me a sheet of paper with an intriguing e-mail record from Burnham's computer. It had been sent to Rachel Edwards. In it, Burnham asked to meet with her on her lunch break, which happened to be midnight. I held the sheet of paper as I began. "Do you know why I've asked to speak with you, Ms. Edwards?"

"Call me Rachel."

Be still my heart.

"Edwards is my ex-husband's name. I haven't gotten around to changing it yet."

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I nodded. "OK, Rachel, same question."

"Let me think. Could it be something to do with Lester Burnham's death?"

She even looked good while being sarcastic. "Let's get right to it then," I said, "Twelve o'clock last night, you were captured on the surveillance camera leaving the control room. Where did you go?"

She didn't hesitate a second. "To see Lester Burnham."

Her forthright answer gave me pause, and the ace in my hand felt a lot lighter. I tossed the copy of the e-mail message on the desk. "Why did he want to see you?"

"He wanted to sleep with me. He's been trying for months. I wasn't interested."

"But you went to meet him. For what purpose?"

"To tell him to knock it off, that I was tired of his persistent overtures."

"How did he take it?"

"Like all the other times. He didn't seem to take me too seriously. He wasn't angry or upset with me if that's what you're getting at."

"Then what happened?"

"We had lunch together."

"Lunch?"

"Yeah, just because I don't want to sleep with a man doesn't mean I won't talk to him. Why can't men get that through their heads?"

"Oh, I understand that. What I want to know is why you call a midnight snack lunch."

"I've been up here a month straight, Detective, and the nights and days get blurred together after awhile. Once you leave the Earth it's hard to take your sense of time with you."

"So how did your lunch date end?"

"Lester left at about twenty after twelve. Said he had a meeting with a maintenance guy at one o'clock." She thought a moment. "I think you'll have better luck fishing around with the maintenance staff. They have no love for Lester Burnham. The old labor vs. management thing, I guess."

When she said "maintenance staff", I thought MS. Did MS-RC mean Maintenance Staff-Robert Carlson? I asked, but she didn't know the name of the guy Burnham went to meet.

I asked her about a dozen versions of the same few questions and her story held up well. When I told her she could go she stood and I extended my hand. "Thank you for your patience, Rachel. Don't leave town, I may want to speak with you again." Our eyes met, and she flashed a little smile. As we shook hands, something along her index finger caught my eye. A red streak. Paint? I said, "Corporate pigs, get out of heaven." She withdrew her hand, and for the first time seemed off balance.

She recovered quickly. "What did you say?"

"Rachel, are you involved with the Lunar Purist movement?" I probed her response.

"Never heard of it." She seemed to mean it. "Can I go now?"

Our moment had passed. I bid her adieu. As she left Prospero's commandeered office, one of the forensics guys, Danny, came in. He had a maroon folder in his hand. "Was that Ms. Edwards?" he said.

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“Yes it was, Danny.” I noticed her...attributes impressed him. “Take my word for it, Junior,” I warned. “She’s got baggage.” Danny ignored my comment. “Do me a favor,” I said, “Tell Web and Merrick to look for a can of red spray paint in Ms. Edwards quarters while they’re searching for the weapon.” Danny said he would, and I looked at the folder he held. “What have you got?”

“An e-stream just came in from the precinct. I printed the contents and organized it for you. It’s information on some of the people on the personnel roster.”

I took the folder. “Thanks, Danny.” Wow, this kind of assistance didn’t exist back at the precinct station. I made a mental note to put in a good word for Danny at his next promotional review.

I opened the maroon folder and leafed through the contents. The top few sheets were paper clipped and labeled ‘Rachel Edwards.’ After a quick read I knew her employment history and every dealing she’d had with the law. She’d been nailed for a total of six speeding tickets. One domestic violence incident resulted in her ex, Mr. Edwards, being hauled away for a night in lock up. And from subpoenaed Lunar Purist records we found that, although not an official member, Ms. Edwards did receive their monthly e-newsletter.

Never heard of them? Right. I don’t like being lied to, especially during an investigation. I thought about calling her back to the hot seat right then but decided to get my ducks in a row first. She wasn’t going anywhere. I continued through the folder.

Danny had labeled the next packet ‘Dr. Alan Duvall.’ I recognized the name from the roster sheet as one of the scientists aboard. Under the cover sheet I found a copy of a legal document, the first several pages of a wrongful death, class-action lawsuit. First among the plaintiffs was Lester Burnham. The defendant was the Carnegie Observatory in Southern California, and specifically named in the suit, observatory Director Dr. Alan Duvall. Director?

I remembered reports about these types of lawsuits. After the asteroid blasted the moon, the resulting tidal fluctuations and weather upheaval caused a lot of pain, suffering and death. Some enterprising lawyers decided to hold the men with the big telescopes accountable, the thinking being that an early warning of the asteroid’s close pass would have given enough time to launch countermeasures to avert the collision. Several of these lawsuits were thrown out, but some were actually settled out of court for undisclosed terms and conditions. I gnawed on the fact that Burnham and Duvall had crossed paths in a somewhat controversial court case.

“Where was Duvall last night?” I asked Danny.

“According to station logs he was in micro-gravity lab #4 from 12 until 4 A.M.”

“Find out where he is now.”

Danny had anticipated my desire to speak with the doctor, because he’d already read the daily station schedule and found out that Duvall was booked in the same lab that afternoon. I thought it would be interesting to feel the effects of weightlessness so I decided to pay Dr. Alan Duvall a visit in the lab instead of having him come up to see me. A placard hung on the wall in Prospero’s office showing the layout of Lunar One, and I traced a path to the scientific laboratories with my finger. It didn’t seem too difficult a journey, but I figured it best to check with Prospero just to make sure I wasn’t going to stumble into anything that might incinerate me. Before leaving, I rehashed my

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interview with Rachel in thought. “Danny, I need one more thing. Run a background check on each member of the maintenance staff.”

“But none of them turned up on our first check.” Danny seemed miffed.

“No, but we constrained our first check to people tied to the Lunar Purists or Lester Burnham. I want anything and everything that comes up on these guys.”

I floated there in micro-gravity lab #4, my hand grasping the corner of a worktable to stay upright; whatever I perceived that to be. I’ve never been weightless before. It was kind of like floating under water without the water. Very surreal. I spent the first few minutes with Dr. Duvall trying to adjust to being a helium balloon. The doctor: fifty-something, close cut brown beard, smart-guy glasses, expensive wristwatch, and not too much gray on top. He was quite agile in micro-gravity, wisping from table to lab machine, mixing liquids in glass containers and such. He said he was conducting a series of experiments to study phase behavior of colloid-polymers in negligible gravity environs. OK.

Lunar One is a relatively small station and everyone on board knew what was going down by now, so I started in without much buildup. “How well did you know Lester Burnham, Doctor?”

“Not very.” Duvall answered while injecting a yellow liquid into a glass vial. “Our relationship was casual, strictly professional.”

“And how long did you know each other?”

“A few years I think. I haven’t kept track.” Duvall slid the vial into a honeycomb-like holding apparatus on the table. “Time has a way of slipping by.”

“You could say that. It’s my understanding that your mutual awareness goes back nine years, all the way to your days at Carnegie.” It might have been a trick of the light, but I swear Alan Duvall’s lip twitched.

“You’ve done some research, Detective Gerard.” Dr. Duvall launched himself down the length of the cylindrical lab room, aiming for something that looked like a washing machine. “I didn’t know Lester Burnham back then, just the things he was saying to the California press.”

I watched him superman across the lab a moment. “Things like what?”

Duvall reached the machine and opened an access door. “He blamed the astrological observatories for the loss of the moon. He had the gall to say that the observatory scientists were complicit in mass murder. Ludicrous. I wasn’t at all surprised to see his name at the head of that ridiculous lawsuit.”

“Burnham’s charges must not have been too ridiculous. A judge allowed the case to move to trial.” I was talking out of my rear. I had no idea how valid Lester’s accusations were; I just wanted to get a reaction. It worked.

“Lester Burnham didn’t have the slightest idea what he was talking about! He trivialized the complexities of plotting, tracking, and predicting the movement of interstellar bodies. His baseless conjecture severely damaged the credibility of the astrological community.”

“You were the director at Carnegie when the lawsuit came down. After the out-of-court settlement you weren’t the director anymore.” I let that sit out there awhile. Duvall closed the washing machine door, firmly. I said, “Did you step down because the

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settlement required it?”

Duvall came floating back toward me, his face red. I think he was projecting old feelings of hostility toward yours truly. “I left Carnegie for my own reasons,” he said, “not in deference to Burnham’s legal action.”

Feeling a bit brave, I floated over to the honeycomb holder and turned it so I could peek inside. “So you decided to scrap the interstellar stuff and restart your career at square one?”

“Don’t touch that,” Duvall scolded. “You could ruin a whole day’s work.”

I held up my hands, showing them clear of the honeycomb thing. “Correct me if I’m wrong, Doctor, but conducting low-level polymer experiments on Mr. Burnham’s surrogate moon seems a humbling experience.”

Duvall grabbed another vial and wagged it like an accusing finger. “I will correct you, Detective. These experiments may look trivial to you, but they just might open the door to a major breakthrough. Remember, Pasteur discovered penicillin studying a moldy piece of bread.” Duvall fixed me with a smug little look; pleased he put me in my place.

I twirled toward him, trying to project serious professionalism in the midst of awkward weightlessness. “You were here this morning from 12 until 4. Do you often schedule lab experiments in the wee hours of the morning?”

Duvall seemed irritated. “Midnight to 4 was the only block of time available. There are three other scientific groups competing for limited lab space up here. I take what I can get, when I can get it.”

I brushed down my shirttails that had decided to stand up in the absence of gravity. “This lab room is close to Imaging Well Alpha, where Mr. Burnham’s body was found.”

“Meaning what,” Duvall snapped, “that I sauntered over and murdered him?”

“Your words, Doctor.”

“I may have disliked Lester Burnham a great deal, but I didn’t kill him.”

I nudged the honeycomb thing back into place. “Where were you at 12:30?”

“Right here.” Duvall pointed to a small camera lens mounted on the wall over the table. “Lab activities are visually recorded to verify that we follow procedures. There’s a DVD recording of me in this room from 12 to 4.”

I glanced up at the camera and felt a little disappointed with Prospero.

“Have you spoken with Rachel Edwards yet?” Duvall asked.

The question surprised me. “Why should I?”

“She and Burnham shared a torrid little relationship a few months back. I hear it ended badly. You know, hell hath no fury like the scorn of a woman.” Duvall regarded me a moment. “I’m sorry, have you read classic literature?”

Perhaps this guy didn’t know I was a cop and he was a murder suspect. “Classic? No, I just read rap sheets and court documents. That’s how I found you.”

Duvall was not amused. “Are we through, Detective? I would like to continue with my mundane experiment.”

“We’re through for now. Thank you for your time. And please remember that travel off the station is restricted until further notice.” I gave him what might be construed as a wise-guy smirk and added, “Which means until I say it’s OK to leave.”

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Duvall was in no mood to see me out and the feeling was mutual, so I found myself alone, floating in what's called a gravity gate. Fortunately Prospero had instructed me on getting through the gate. After closing the lab access door I was in a metal cube similar to an airlock. I hit the 'gravity restore' button on a wall keypad and began to drift to the floor. They know a thing or two about gravity up here. My feet touched, and the weight kept coming. After my equilibrium returned and my innards settled I felt heavy. Maybe I need to go on a diet.

I had removed the lab camera's disc, and while walking from the gravity gate I pulled it from my pocket. Danny was going to get a look at it. As I wove my way through Lunar One's corridors, I thought about Rachel Edwards. She had lied to me about the Lunar Purists, so it was entirely plausible that she also lied about her relationship with Burnham. Historically, love gone bad has been a popular motive for murder, more so than career gone bad, at least in my experience. After a few minutes of mulling it all over I reached my command post in Prospero's office and found Danny and Lawrence chit chatting by the desk. I tossed the DVD to Danny. "How easy is it to falsify a date stamp on a video recording?" I asked him.

"Very." Danny said.

"How easy is it to detect?"

"Probably impossible. Depends how it was done."

"There's a video file on that disc supposedly from last night. See if you can authenticate the time it was recorded." Danny nodded and I turned to Lawrence Prospero. "Did you know about the surveillance camera down there?"

He exhaled. "I'm afraid not, Detective Gerard. The institutes bring up a lot of their own equipment when they set up in the labs. I don't inventory every crate they unpack."

I was weighing the sincerity of his answer when Danny snapped his fingers. "Detective Gerard, we received some new information from the precinct, the stuff you asked about before you left." He lifted a sheet of paper from the desk and handed it over. I recognized it as an arrest summary outlining an assault and battery charge. The name of the assailant was Robert Carlson. I held the paper out to Prospero. "Did you know about this?"

He took the sheet and studied it a long while. "No, I'm afraid I did not."

"Doesn't Replicorp do background checks on employees?"

"Lunar One requires a highly specialized workforce. Skilled professionals who don't mind living in orbit for long stretches of time are hard to come by."

"Right. Good help is hard to find. Where can I find Robert Carlson now?"

Prospero checked his watch. "He should be reporting for second shift down in Maintenance Mission Control—MMC. I'll take you there."

Lawrence headed for the door and I turned to follow, gesturing for Danny to get going on the disc. As we moved through the control room I saw Rachel Edwards at her station. She was poring over a schematic drawing, scribbling over sections with a red marker. She looked at me as I passed. "Ms. Edwards," I said, not breaking my stride, "We have something to talk about." Her face took on a pensive cast, and she quickly lowered her eyes to the schematic again.

Lawrence and I headed down to MMC. The first part of our journey he kept

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quiet, but halfway down he cleared his throat. “Has Robert Carlson become a suspect?”

I hesitated. “I’m afraid so, Lawrence.”

The collected Mr. Prospero looked distraught. “I like Robert. It would be a shame if he were the murderer.” He regarded me a moment as we walked. “I tell you this only in the interests of keeping Replicorp above board in the investigation.” He paused again and I waited for him to continue. “This past month Lester Burnham had been reviewing the Lunar One efficiency reports. He came to the conclusion that our maintenance staff could be cut in half without causing a problem. Word of this got out and some offensive rumors began circulating, rumors that some in the maintenance staff were angry enough to do Mr. Burnham bodily harm.”

We stopped walking in front of a metal door with the letters MMC stenciled in black across the top. I thanked him for the tidbit then hit the button to slide the door open. Prospero said he needed to be in the control room for shift change and left me to do my work. I entered the dark room alone.

The air was cool and fresh in MMC, and the only light came from the glow of a dozen computer monitors along the walls and a single dim fluorescent in the center of the ceiling. I saw Rob Carlson sitting in a chair across the floor, his back to me, watching one of the monitors. I approached the chair. “Afternoon, Rob.”

He must have heard the door because he wasn’t startled. He just turned around in his chair and smiled. “Afternoon, Detective. What can I do for you today?”

Very affable character, not what you’d expect from a potential murderer. Then again, each killer I’ve come across has surprised me in one way or another. I found another chair and sat down. “Rob, did you neglect to mention something about last night?” I stopped and waited for Mr. Carlson to start talking, but he just looked puzzled. I said, “Lester Burnham had a 1:00 appointment with you. Why didn’t you tell me?”

Rob looked at me with blank innocence. “You never asked.”

Hard to argue with that I guess. “Fair enough,” I said. “What was the meeting about?”

“An emitter upgrade Replicorp wants to make. We set to meet at one o’clock, but the projector shut down at twelve thirty-five. That’s when I found him in the well.”

“So you never saw him alive?” Rob shook his head and I sat back in my chair. “I understand you have a volatile temper, Rob. You once put a man in the hospital with your fists.”

That seemed to scare him. “You know about the bar fight?” I nodded, and he stammered to explain. “I used to have problems when I’d get liquored up, but I stopped drinking years ago.”

“Did Mr. Burnham ever get under your skin enough to drive you back inside the bottle? I hear he was the type of guy who brought out the worst in people.”

My scrutiny made Rob very uncomfortable. “Why are you asking me this stuff?” he said. “Do you think I did it?”

I leaned forward. “I think you’re one of two people who were scheduled to meet with Lester Burnham near the time of his death. I think you have access to and knowledge about the Imaging Well, which is a key factor in the murder. And I think Mr. Burnham’s threat to cut the maintenance staff could really piss a guy off.”

Rob sprang out of his chair and my hand instinctively moved for my pistol,

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which was holstered on my waist beneath my jacket. I stopped short of drawing it when I saw the terrified look on his face. “I didn’t do it! Mr. Burnham wasn’t going to fire me. He told me I was going to be the new maintenance supervisor.”

I tried to calm him by staying calm myself. “OK, Rob, then tell me who in your department was talking crap about Burnham? Whose careers were threatened by the cuts?”

Rob cupped his chin then wiped away a film of sweat from his forehead. “Guys talk,” he said. “They blow off steam, but I don’t think any of ’em were prepared to act.”

I was inclined to believe him. “Listen, Rob, if you’re being straight with me you don’t have anything to worry about. Understand?” He nodded and sat back down. “Now let’s just relax a bit,” I said. “Take a couple of deep breaths.” We sat there in the cool, dark room, the hum of the fluorescent light above my head the only sound in my ears. I could practically see Rob’s blood pressure dropping. I looked around MMC, assembling all the bits of information I’d uncovered so far, trying to form a coherent picture of the murderer.

The monitor to Rob’s left flickered and caught my eye. Single line messages filled the screen from top to bottom. The messages all followed the same format with a date, time, and text describing some part of the station. I didn’t know what I was looking at but a little bell was going off inside my head. “Rob, what is this monitor showing me?”

He turned in his chair and studied the screen a moment. “It’s logging PMS equipment.” I pressed for a better explanation with a cross look. “Preventive Maintenance Sensitive-PMS,” he said. “We track the utilization of critical equipment to stay on top of maintenance needs. If some of this stuff fails, bad things happen.”

I looked Rob in the eyes. “What sort of equipment?”

“Atmospheric filters,” he replied. “Power generators, airlocks, maneuvering thrusters, gravity gates—“

“Gravity gates? Like the one leading to lab #4?”

“Yeah.” Rob ran his finger up the screen and stopped at one of the messages. “Like here. Micro-G lab#4, gravity gate, positive cycle. It occurred about forty minutes ago.”

I looked at the screen. “That was me coming out of there. How far back does this monitor log events?”

“About a week here on the current screen. After a week the messages go to a database.”

I was becoming intrigued. “Go back to midnight last night.”

Rob scrolled the screen upward until he found a collection of messages with time stamps around 12:00 A.M. A single entry appeared for the lab#4 gravity gate. “Negative cycle at midnight,” he said.

“What’s a negative cycle?”

“Negative means you’re going weightless.”

It had to be Duvall entering the lab at the start of his scheduled time. I asked Rob to scroll down and he obliged. I watched for another gravity gate entry and found one at 12:25. “Micro-G lab#4, gravity gate positive cycle. He came out of there five minutes before the murder.”

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“Actually,” Rob said timidly, “We don’t know who or how many went in or came out.”

I tapped him on the shoulder. “Connect me to Prospero’s office.” He punched in the extension on the Comm link at his side then handed the receiver to me. It chimed once and then Danny answered. “Chicago Police, Lunar Precinct.”

Everyone’s a comedian. “Danny, what’s the verdict on the DVD timestamp?”

“It looks genuine.”

“Try focusing on something in the recording, a monitor, a log sheet. Get me?”

“Got you.”

“And send Web, Merrick, and a forensics guy to search Duvall’s quarters.” He acknowledged and I disconnected. I glanced at Rob and a question popped into my head. “Do the MMC computers monitor Lunar One’s safety equipment?”

Rob looked to the ceiling in thought. “Yes, but the data is stored in background files.”

“Can you find out whose code disabled the pressure trigger in the Imaging Well before the murder?”

“I can’t tell you whose it was,” he said rolling his chair to another monitor, “but I can tell you the code number.” His fingers assaulted the keyboard in front of him like a machinegun. Lines of data began scrolling over the monitor. “Get a pencil, Detective.”

I dug out my digital palm scribbler as Rob dictated a seven-digit number. I put stylus to screen and wrote down the code. After confirming my digitized copy was correct, I thanked Rob and left MMC, figuring Prospero might be able to tell me whose code I had. I made it to the projector control room and headed for my makeshift command post. Danny came out and met me. I looked around at the faces in the control room. “Where’s Prospero?”

He shrugged his shoulders. “Don’t know. He was here at shift change for a while. A couple of minutes ago somebody called him away. Don’t know who or for what.” He added, “Web and Merrick should be at Duvall’s quarters by now.”

I nodded and looked around the room. Rachel was still sitting at her station, writing on the drawings. It was time we talked again. “Ms. Edwards, my office. Now.” I strode into Prospero’s compartment. Behind me I heard the drawing set hit the floor and angry footsteps getting closer. Once inside I turned around to see Rachel storm in after me. I hit the door switch and it slid closed.

“This is Prospero’s office,” she said, “not yours.”

“Once more,” I said. “The Lunar Purists. You know them?”

“Yes.”

“You and Lester Burnham. You had a thing. It fell apart ugly. Yes?”

“Yes.”

I sat on Prospero’s desk. “Obstruction of justice is a crime. Why did you lie?”

“I didn’t kill Lester, but if you knew these things you’d have arrested me right off.” I handed her my palm scribe and she looked at the code number. “Where did you get this?”

“You recognize it?” I didn’t have to ask; I saw it in her eyes.

“This is my safety override code.”

“It’s the code that was used to disable the pressure trigger at the time of the

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murder.” I looked her in the eye and she didn’t seem to know what to say. I realized I was angry, which surprised me. I’m usually more detached. We stood there in a quiet Mexican standoff for a long while. A beep and a blast of squelch broke the moment. One of our NCPD two-way radios was sitting on the desk and a voice emerged from it. “Web to Danny.”

I picked it up and keyed the switch. “Web, this is Gerard. What’s up?”

“Detective, you’re the guy I really want to talk to. Come down to Duvall’s quarters, I’ve got some things to show you. His compartment is Q-16.”

“On my way.” As I headed for the door I noticed Rachel had a radio pinned to her shirt like Prospero’s. “Let me borrow that.” She reluctantly unpinned it and handed it over. “You are not to leave this room.” I hit the button on the wall and the door slid open. Danny waited on the other side. “I’m going to meet with Web, I’ll keep in touch.” I took off. “By the way,” I called back. “Keep an eye on her. She’s under arrest.”

Once in the corridors I realized how unsure I was on how to get around. I lifted Rachel’s radio pin to my mouth. “Gerard to Prospero.” No response. I tried again but still silence. This was not like the always on the job Lawrence Prospero. After fifteen minutes of fumbling around Lunar One’s twists and turns I reached the station section where the passenger quarters were located. I found compartment Q-16 and went inside.

Spartan and small, the room contained an aluminum desk, a wall bunk, and a shelving unit full of binders. Four of us crowded the meager floor space. Web met me at the door. Merrick sat at the desk next to the forensics guy, I think Ross. They had a micro-notebook computer hooked up to a standard laptop that sat on the table.

Web reached into an evidence bag. “Remember you asked us to look for some spray paint in Ms. Edwards quarters?” He pulled out a red-smudged can. “We found one...In here.”

I think my mouth dropped open. It suddenly occurred to me that the red streak I saw on Rachel’s finger could have been ink from a red marker I saw her using. I looked at the flickering laptop. “What’s Ross doing?”

Hitting some keys on the micro-notebook, Ross answered. “I’m recovering deleted files from Duvall’s station computer. We found a directory labeled ‘Witch’ with a slew of info on Rachel Edwards. Looks like Duvall found a way to access her Replicorp database account. He has a ton of her e-correspondence, personnel files, her passwords and codes, everything. Quite a dossier.”

The lights in Duvall’s quarters got brighter, or was it just revelation. Duvall was trying to pin the murder on Rachel Edwards. I knew now that he pulled the trigger, but that DVD recording stood in the way. Regardless, I wanted him in custody. “Web, you and Merrick get over to lab #4. Duvall should still be there. Arrest him.” They took off in a flash. I lifted the hand-held radio. “Danny, please tell me you found something with the DVD.”

The radio beeped and Danny’s voice emerged. “Yeah, in a couple of instances we were able to enhance Duvall’s wristwatch. It displays the time and date, and the date on his watch is one day earlier than the timestamp. Unless his watch is still behind he faked the recording two days ago.”

Did I mention I don’t like being lied to? My gut suddenly told me that Duvall

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wasn't in the lab, but making a break for it. Can't explain why, I just get these feelings now and then. "Danny, I think Duvall might try to get off the station. There are only two places he can exit, the executive docking port and the public one. I want you and the rest of the forensics team to cover those ports. OK?" He acknowledged and signed off. I left Ross to complete his recovery efforts and started snaking through the corridors I'd just traveled. The docking ports were about as far from the crew quarters as was possible, of course. After ten minutes I figured I must be close and lifted the hand-held radio. "Danny, where are you?"

I heard a crackle then a voice. "Heading up the ramp toward the executive docking port. No sign of him. Two other guys are moving in on the public port."

"Keep me updated." I lowered the hand-held and raised Rachel's radio pin. "Gerard to Prospero." Nothing. Where the hell are you, Larry? I decided to hit the executive port first since Danny was up there alone. I ran down the corridor connecting to the port. As I turned and started up the ramp I heard gunshots.

I drew my piece and moved forward with a bit more caution. I considered my pistol a moment. A new generation Glock .40, touted as having all the stopping power but half the recoil of the classic model. A powerful handgun. Perhaps too powerful to fire on an orbiting space station. Hopefully I wouldn't have to use it. Leading with the Glock, I rounded a curve and found Danny lying on the floor plate. The ramp looked clear up to the airlock so I dropped to Danny's side. He was still alive and conscious, but had two bullet wounds in his chest. "Damn, Danny, what happened?"

He spoke in short breaths. "Checked the airlock and the shuttle...came out and Duvall surprised me...on the ramp." He smiled through pain. "I password protected...the airlock controls." He coughed. "Duvall can't leave...but he's got Prospero."

Dr. Duvall had really gotten on my bad side now. I radioed for Web and Merrick to get to the executive docking port, and then called for the station's doctor on Rachel's radio. Danny looked bad, and I wanted to put a slug into Duvall to even the score. I pulled out my pocketknife and cut strips from Danny's jacket, then used them to try to stop the bleeding. I looked at the knife blade and imagined going primitive on Duvall for an instant but thought better of it. I concocted a little plan, a bit cheesy perhaps, but the only thing I could come up with. I ejected the magazine from the Glock, extracted a single bullet from it, and then worked the round free from the chamber. With the pocketknife and my teeth I pried the slug from the casing of each bullet and then loaded them back into the magazine. I slapped the magazine into the pistol, chambered a round, got the password from Danny and headed for the airlock.

The inner airlock door was still open and I stepped around the corner, following the pistol extended in my hands. At the far side of the airlock, about fifteen feet away, stood Duvall. He held Lawrence Prospero as a shield, jamming a small automatic handgun against the side of his head. The smug, cool doctor looked a little pissed. Prospero, despite his situation, maintained his dignified corporate stature. I targeted Duvall's head and stepped into the airlock. "Put down the gun and place your hands on your head, fingers clasped together, right now."

Duvall didn't flinch. "Get this airlock operational or I'll blow his brains out!"

"You blow his brains out; I blow your brains out. It's a lose-lose situation."

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Prospero squirmed a little and Duvall tightened his grip. “Do you really want Mr. Prospero’s blood on your hands, Detective?”

I don’t like being threatened any more than being lied to. I took another step forward. “Why did you kill Burnham, a little payback for damaging your career?”

Duvall chuckled with anger. “Damage? Burnham’s press assault and his lawsuit ruined my career. I was totally discredited, my reputation destroyed. I lost my stature, my standing, my wife; my whole life went in the gutter thanks to Lester Burnham. I went from the Director of Carnegie to a lab rat running colloid-polymer experiments! He deserved what he got.”

“What about penicillin and moldy bread?”

“To hell with penicillin!”

My goodness. I stepped to the side to try and get a better angle on Duvall. “You pulled Burnham’s body from the well. That was my first clue something was fishy. My guess is you planned to retrieve the shell casing. Why didn’t you get it out of the well? Did you think Rob Carlson might come in there and catch you, or were you scared of the imaging beam firing up?”

“A little of both, I suppose,” Duvall replied. He turned to keep Prospero between us. “Stop where you are, Detective.”

“Then you tried to frame Rachel Edwards. Why? Did she turn you down for a date?”

“Somebody had to take the blame, why not the bitchy Ms. Edwards?”

This guy wasn’t scoring any points with me. “Why do you need Prospero? Let him go and we’ll resolve this man to scientist.” I know, I know, I was belittling him, but he deserved it.

“Somebody has to pilot the shuttle.”

I feigned astonishment. “A renowned scientist doesn’t know how to fly a shuttle? I thought you guys were smart. Hey, you know if you shoot him you’re stuck here.”

Duvall flashed his smug look. “I’m confident you won’t force my hand. And I’m equally confident you know the code to release the airlock controls. Give it to me.”

I hesitated a moment, then said, “Blow me.”

Duvall got angry. “I’m not playing—“

“It’s the password. B-L-O-W-M-E.” Danny’s got a sense of humor.

Duvall nudged Prospero close to the keypad on the wall. “Enter it.”

Prospero gave me an aggravated look like I just sold the farm, then entered the password. The door behind me slid closed with a pneumatic hiss. The quarters were kind of cramped in that metal box. I kept my Glock trained on Duvall’s head, and he kept his pistol pressed against Prospero’s head. The door behind them slid open, and Duvall backed into the passenger compartment of the shuttle, pulling his human shield along. I followed them in before Prospero could close the airlock door. Duvall retreated toward the cockpit, clinging to his hostage. “What do you think you’re doing, Gerard!”

Keeping Duvall staring at the barrel of my gun, I reached down and closed the outer airlock door, and then the shuttle door. “Just thought I’d come along for the ride.”

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Duvall got so mad I think his glasses started to steam up. “Get out of here!”

I made eye contact with Prospero. “So, Larry, are we isolated from the station now?” He nodded slightly. I looked back to Duvall. “Dr. Alan Duvall, I hereby place you under arrest for the murder of Lester Burnham. You have the right to remain silent, but since you seem to be forfeiting your rights, I’ll simply convict you and proceed to sentencing.”

Duvall tightened his grip on the pistol. “Get off this shuttle now or Prospero is dead!”

I ignored him. “By the power I’ve vested in myself I sentence you to death in the vacuum of space.”

I swung the Glock away from Duvall’s head and pointed it at the cockpit’s glass bubble view port. Duvall’s mouth dropped open when he saw where I was aiming. I fired twice, the blasts clapping my ears in the passenger compartment. Duvall jumped away from the view port, abandoning Prospero in his panic. Before he realized that the glass hadn’t shattered I lunged at him, grabbing hold of his gun hand and slamming his wrist against the cockpit wall. His pistol fell to the navigation console. I followed through and struck Duvall across the face with the butt of my pistol. His lip burst open and rage set into his eyes. He reached for the .22 with his free hand but stopped cold when I shoved the barrel of my Glock into his forehead. “This round’s live,” I warned. “And I’m willing to bet your thick skull will stop the bullet from penetrating the shuttle’s skin. Danny could tell us for sure. He’s a good ballistics guy, but he’s bleeding out there on the ramp.”

Duvall licked his bleeding lip, and smug intellect melted to fear.

“You want to find out? Keep reaching for that pistol.”

It just so happened that he didn’t want to find out. I had him cuffed within twenty seconds. A little shaken, Prospero thanked me, and we exited the shuttle through the airlock. The station doctor had arrived on the ramp and was working on Danny. It looked like he would come through OK. Web and Merrick were also there, and they took Duvall into custody from me. I knelt down beside Danny. “Blow me. That almost got me into trouble.”

Danny laughed amid a heavy dose of pain medication. “Sorry.”

I reached down beside him and picked up the two slugs I’d pried from their casings. The best shots I never fired. I tossed them into my pocket. I told the doctor to take good care of Danny and stood up. Prospero joined me in my walk down the corridor. “So, Lawrence,” I said, “Is this life on the moon?”

Prospero restrained a laugh. “This isn’t the moon, Detective Gerard, it’s Replicorp.”

Company man through and through.

I lifted the travel restriction off the station and caught the first flight back to Earth. As the shuttle left the docking port I slid my official Replicorp sunglasses in place. Larry will never miss them. Staring at the beautiful little blue and green gem on the journey back, I realized that I had worked the first homicide in space. Frank Ravelli congratulated me on my return. That was a first. I’ve been basking in hero worship from the media for about a week now. Weird. By the way, I have a date with Rachel Edwards on Friday. Wish me luck.

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