

Silent Blue

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Silent Blue

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Summary

Commander Hernandez and her away team enter an alien research complex, searching for the individuals who sent the distress signal that the Enterprise picked up a few hours earlier.

SPACE

The Enterprise NX-01 held a standard orbit around a small moon, a frozen world resting in the shadow of a massive red gas giant.

ENTERPRISE NX-01 E-DECK - LAUNCH BAY

Ever since the alien distress signal was detected, the Enterprise had been on high alert. Though Zefram Cochrane's first warp flight was nearly 90 years in the past, contact with other alien civilizations remained rare. However, with the development of the warp five engine, the universe lay wide open to humanity. It was an exhilarating time to be an explorer, but the thrill of discovery was tempered by the knowledge that the unknown could harbor dangers that threatened the very survival of humanity.

Fully aware of the risks that might await them on the moon below, Captain Edison had assembled the best and brightest amongst his crew for the first away mission under his command.

Lieutenant JG Vivienne Mayweather, clad in a full EV suit, sat in the cockpit of Shuttlepod One, meticulously going over the pilot checklist, as was standard procedure before leaving the ship. Behind her, on the port side, sat Commander Erika Hernandez and Armory Officer Lieutenant Malcolm Reed. Opposite them were Doctor Adanna Soong, head of Enterprise's medical department, and Ensign Skon, the communications officer who had deciphered the alien distress signal that originated from the moon's surface just hours ago.

Out of the corner of her eye, Hernandez noticed Skon's discomfort. Beads of sweat formed on his forehead, and his pallor had grown more noticeable. Looking up from her control station, she asked, "Are you feeling alright, Ensign?"

Skon shifted uncomfortably, aware that the others had noticed his restlessness. "I've always had trouble adjusting to cramped rooms," he admitted, his voice strained.

Reed glanced at doctor Soong with a smirk. "Doctor, you don't happen to have a tranquilizer in your medical kit for our Romulan friend here, do you?"

Soong placed a reassuring hand on Skon's shoulder. "Just close your eyes for a moment and take a few slow, deep breaths," she advised.

Skon complied, his breath hitching as he followed her instructions. Soong's voice was calm and steady as she continued, "Now, focus on your breathing. It will help ease your anxiety and calm your nerves."

As Skon's color slowly returned, Soong shot Reed a serious look. "Not every problem requires sedatives, Lieutenant. They can easily lead to addiction."

"All right, everyone," Mayweather interjected, "we're ready to launch. Buckle up."

The away team strapped themselves in, feeling the slight jolt as the magnetic docking arm latched onto the shuttlepod.

After the shuttlepod was lowered through the doors of the Enterprise's launch bay and released into the vacuum of space, it slowly set course for the frozen moon below.

INSIDE SHUTTLEPOD ONE

The shuttlepod rocked back and forth as they entered the moon's atmosphere, jostling the passengers slightly. Hernandez looked up from her control station, unfazed, while Mayweather quickly swivelled in her pilot seat.

"I apologize, Commander," Mayweather said, "We're encountering some atmospheric turbulence. It's just a bit of bad weather, nothing to worry about."

Doctor Soong, maintaining a steady voice, added, "I'm sure we're in capable hands, Lieutenant. If you can fly a ship at warp five, piloting a shuttlepod must be child's play."

Mayweather chuckled as she focused on stabilizing the shuttlepod. "Thanks for the vote of confidence, Doctor."

The shuttlepod continued to descend, piercing through the thick atmosphere and setting course for the alien complex on the moon's Southern Hemisphere. The layout of the complex, devoid of visible defense systems, suggested it was a scientific research station. Mayweather circled the complex a few times, giving Hernandez time to scan the area.

As the shuttlepod's searchlights illuminated a small landing platform, Mayweather expertly guided the shuttlepod in for a smooth landing.

INSIDE THE ALIEN COMPLEX

The away team, fully suited in their EV gear, moved cautiously through the complex's dimly lit corridors. Lieutenant Reed led the way, phase pistol in hand, set to stun. Despite his transition from Earth's Stellar Navy to the United Earth Space Program Agency six years ago, his instincts leaned towards a 'shoot first, ask questions later' attitude.

Commander Hernandez followed closely behind, holding a portable scanner rather than a weapon, embodying the mission's focus on exploration and understanding. Trailing them were Ensign Skon and Doctor Soong - the oldest member of the crew, yet driven by an insatiable curiosity that had led her to this mission instead of a comfortable retirement.

Lieutenant JG Mayweather had been ordered to stay behind in the shuttlepod, ready for an emergency extraction if necessary.

As the team advanced, Hernandez pointed out plaques on the walls, covered in alien script made up of curved horizontal lines and circles. "Anything familiar?" she asked Skon.

Skon examined the writing, but shook his head. "I've never seen anything like it before, Commander."

Suddenly, Reed halted, raising his hand to signal silence. Whispering into his comm unit, he informed the team, "There's a door about five meters ahead. Do you have anything on the scanner, Commander?"

Hernandez aimed her scanner at the door. "Negative. No biosigns, nothing unusual."

"Let's take a closer look," Reed suggested.

The team approached the doorway cautiously, backs pressed against the walls. Reed was the first to peek inside. "Looks like some kind of office," he reported. "Nothing out of the ordinary. I suggest I go in first to secure the room."

Hernandez nodded, giving him the go-ahead. Reed swiftly moved into the room, phase pistol at the ready. As he advanced, he noticed a silhouette slumped over a desk. He moved closer, and then called back to Hernandez, "Commander, you might want to have a look at this."

The entire away team entered the room and gathered around the lifeless alien figure slumped over the desk. Doctor Soong placed her medkit on the desk and began a preliminary scan. "Quite a remarkable species," she said.

"It looks humanoid," Reed observed.

"Yes, but those antennae... What purpose could they serve?" Hernandez mused aloud.

While his human colleagues were fascinated by the discovery, Skon felt detached. All he saw was a blue-skinned, white-haired humanoid with antennae. The wonder that his crewmates experienced was lost on him, and in a way, that brought him comfort. Just hours ago, he had feared that being around these emotional humans might lead him astray from Surak's path of logic.

Doctor Soong swept her medical scanner over the body once more. "The alien is female. Cellular decay suggests she died approximately twenty hours ago."

"Any idea what killed her?" Hernandez asked.

Soong scrutinized the scanner's readout. "Preliminary scans indicate an acute brain hemorrhage."

Suddenly, a stumbling noise echoed down the corridor, startling the team.

Reed's instincts kicked in as he raised his phase pistol and moved swiftly to the door. He peeked into the corridor, finding it empty, but the noise continued, coming from further down the hall. Reed glanced back at Hernandez, nodding to signal that he was ready to investigate.

Reed exited the office, followed closely by the rest of the team. They advanced down the corridor, reaching a door that led into what appeared to be the main research lab of the complex.

ALIEN COMPLEX RESEARCH LAB

As the away team spread out across the research lab, a heavy silence hung in the air, weighed down by the presence of the dozen alien corpses scattered across the room. The lab's interior was cluttered with workstations, computers, and various scientific instruments, all left in disarray as though whatever tragedy had occurred here had struck without warning.

Doctor Soong knelt beside one of the bodies, her face lined with concern. She gently passed her medical scanner over the alien's form, another blue-skinned humanoid with two antennae protruding from its forehead.

Hernandez approached her cautiously, her eyes scanning the room for any sign of what could have caused such devastation. "Doctor?" she asked, her voice edged with tension.

Soong's expression remained somber as she responded, "The cause of death appears to be the same as the first alien we found. Acute brain hemorrhage. But my scanner is just a basic diagnostic device. To understand what really happened here, we need to take one of these bodies back to Enterprise for a thorough autopsy."

Lieutenant Reed, still on high alert, interjected with concern, "Is it wise to bring a dead body on board? We don't know what killed them. It could be contagious, and we might risk exposing the entire crew."

Hernandez considered this, looking to Soong for assurance. The doctor nodded confidently. "If we follow decontamination protocols strictly, there should be no danger. This is part of our mission. Exploring new life, even if it's in death."

As the conversation continued, Ensign Skon became distracted by a faint, rumbling noise. It was subtle, but with his superior Romulan hearing, it was unmistakable. The sound seemed to be emanating from a closet across the room. Logic dictated that it might be malfunctioning equipment, but the unnerving atmosphere made him cautious.

He moved towards the closet with deliberate steps, hand hesitating over the door handle. Before he could even touch it, the door burst open, and a blue-skinned alien, wild-eyed and furious, lunged at him. The alien's antennae twitched erratically as he tackled Skon to the ground, screaming in a language that Skon recognized from the transmission.

Skon struggled against the alien, but the cumbersome EV suit hampered his movements. The alien was relentless, slamming its fists against Skon's helmet, desperately trying to shatter the glass.

The rest of the team reacted instantly. Reed raised his phase pistol, his military training kicking in. He carefully aimed and fired a yellow stun beam that struck the alien squarely in the back. The alien convulsed briefly before collapsing, unconscious, on top of Skon.

"Did you kill it?" Hernandez shouted, her voice sharp with worry.

Reed calmly showed her the phase pistol's stun setting, a faint smile of reassurance on his lips. "Just stunned, Commander. It'll have a headache, but it's alive."

Doctor Soong rushed over to Skon, helping him roll the unconscious alien off his body. "Are you alright, Ensign?" she asked, her voice filled with genuine concern.

"I am fine, Doctor. Thank you," Skon replied, his voice steady and composed despite the attack.

Relieved, Soong shifted her focus to the unconscious alien. She scanned him quickly, frowning at the results. "This one is male. He's suffered head trauma, but there are no external injuries. I need to get him back to Enterprise for further examination."

Hernandez nodded decisively. "Lieutenant Reed, you and Doctor Soong take the alien back to Enterprise. Skon and I will stay here to try to figure out what happened to these aliens. We need answers."

Reed hesitated, concern etched on his face. "Commander, I'd feel better if I stayed with you. There could be more of them."

Hernandez appreciated his caution but stood firm. "I can handle myself, Lieutenant. Mayweather can return as soon as you're back on the ship. We'll be fine."

Reluctantly, Reed agreed, though he made one last suggestion. "Mayweather should return immediately after the transfer. Without a shuttlepod, you'll be trapped here if things go south."

Hernandez nodded. "Agreed. But let's hope it doesn't come to that. Now, let's get to work. We have a mystery to solve."

As Reed and Soong prepared to return to the shuttlepod with the unconscious alien, Hernandez and Skon moved deeper into the lab, the unsettling quiet pressing in around them.

TO BE CONTINUED

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