

Sapphire City

The briefing

It has been about five minutes since the last new recruit entered the briefing room. Although filled with hundreds of people, there is an uncomfortable silence in this auditorium. Everybody is sitting quietly, waiting, wondering, not really knowing what to expect. They are all dressed in the same kinds of uniforms, and yet they all look so very different with all the elaborate colour schemes. Every thinkable bright colour is in use somewhere on one of the uniforms. It varies from bright red, all the way to white, and each having a name tag on the chest and various codes attached on black patches which are placed on the left shoulder of every individual. There is no real form or sequence to these codes. Some are very long – “SZ-1121MMN-3”, others are much shorter – “M5X”. People are sitting, looking around, but nobody is even attempting to make conversation.

The room with its high roof and seats all pointing to one corner where a podium is situated reminds of a classic congregation hall layout. The podium is almost out of proportion with the rest of the room as it is clearly designed to only ever allow for one person to be the speaker. On the front of the podium is a crest that everybody is familiar with – a circle divided into 5 sections, each having an emblem inside and the letters “SC-001” etched into the shiny metal which makes up just about every piece of furniture in the room.

The only door, which is situated at the back of the room, shuts loudly and as everybody looks behind them, they can see a team of three individuals making their way into the room. The lady in front makes her way down to the podium while the other two are starting to hand out briefing booklets to all the recruits.

After making her way up to the podium, the lady pauses for a couple of seconds as to familiarise herself with her audience. She starts to speak, but nobody can hear anything. Her eyes focus on a small window at the rear of the auditorium and nods.

“That’s better. Let me do this again. Welcome to the SC-001 or more commonly known as Sapphire City and in your case, a place you will call home for the next four years. As you know, Sapphire city is one of five large capacity mobile mining units that are used for the extraction and also the transportation of mostly iron and copper ore from nearby planets back to Mother Earth. We do this to supplement the little iron and copper deposits that are left on Earth currently. Everything that I will tell you today is in your briefing guides, so no need to make notes.

My name is Angela Walker and I am part of the team that looks after new recruits for this take-on. My two assistants will introduce themselves later during the day.

We will be docking on an unnamed planet – only known as CI235. Mineral scans revealed large copper deposits mainly in the northern hemisphere of the planet. There are no vegetation and also no running water on the planet. The soil itself seems fairly fertile, but further tests needs to be done to establish whether it can sustain plant growth in a docked environment.

Some interesting facts about Sapphire city – powered by nuclear power, weighing in at about 4500 tons when empty, carrying a crew of 1200 people with the capacity of transporting about ten times her own weight in minerals. She never enters the earth’s atmosphere, so the weight is not really an issue for her.

Upon docking on CI235 in a weeks' time, she will extend eight pillars into the crust of the host planet, which is what she will be standing on for the four years. Once drilled into the earth's crust, these pillars will give us a five meter gap between the surface of CI235 and Sapphire City. This process takes about a week to complete and once this is done, will the thick side walls be lowered to form a closed off area of about a square mile which we call the mining zone. Temperature, atmospheric pressure and humidity will be adjusted in this space so that it is the same as that of the ship. You can therefore move freely between the ship and the mining zone.

These walls are what are closing off the windows to the outside world currently, so your first view of CI235 will be once you are firmly docked."

Angela proceeds to explaining every fine detail of the ship, the mission and basic rules and regulations to her intake group. As this is not her first intake group, she expects the group to start losing interest after about two hours of detail after detail being communicated and then typically calls a break.

"Okay guys; let's take a thirty minute break."

As people are starting to make their way out of the conference hall, she notices somebody going against the flow and making his way towards her. She instinctively focuses on his arm pad to find his ID number and without anybody noticing, she locates his personnel record on the podium information centre display. He is nearing her, so she doesn't have much time to study all his details and so does a quick scan of the vital facts: Frank Deleon, Nuclear physics and Archaeology PH.D Honorary doctorate from university of Fort Worth, TX, 23 years of age, first mining mission, worked at NASA previously. Lives in Houston, Single.

In the corner of her eye she notices him coming to a standstill in front of her. She looks up and Frank's facial expression speaks of a confused toddler on the first day of primary school.

"Excuse me..."

She interrupts him.

"Two PhD's and an honorary doctorate, and you're only 23 years old. I'm impressed. The name's Walker, Angela, how do you do?"

"Frank Deleon: pleased to meet you. I couldn't help noticing that I am the only one in this room wearing a uniform such as mine and I couldn't help but wonder if I am in the right place?"

"Yes you are. All the initial briefings are the same. You will all be assigned to your work stations tomorrow where you will receive a more in-depth brief of what you all will be doing."

"Oh, I see."

"I need to tell you that you are the only one on this ship wearing that uniform though: So much for fitting in. Somebody will fetch you from your room tomorrow morning and take you to the main command centre where you will meet the ship's captain for breakfast. The way I understand it is that you came along to do an analysis on a new compound rock type found during the mineral scan. Other than that, I have nothing more for you."

"Thank you Angela."

“You’re welcome”

The rest of the recruits are making their way back into the briefing room and as everybody comes to rest, Angela starts off the session:

“I am now going to call one of my colleagues, John Mc Fairland to the podium to discuss health and safety, and when we are done with fire drills and the like, will our entertainment commander join us to brief you on what you will have available in terms of recreation on board Sapphire City.”

A mediocre applause fills the room as Angela makes way for John. She immediately makes her way out of the briefing room.

Meeting the Captain

Absolute quiet. The sleeping quarters are all sound proof so that the people on board Sapphire city can at least have decent rest. Room M5X is pretty much the same – Frank’s room that is. At precisely 04:45 AM a loud alarm is activated in the room.

“How am I going to get used to this centralised wake-up system? My dairy has the meeting with the Captain logged as starting at 06:00 and I have to wake up 75 minutes early? Madness.”

Showering is not much fun either. In a cubicle, three sets of laser scans and every piece of dirt, sweat and dead skin cell is removed from your body. No need to shave either. The lasers take care of that too.

Frank gets out of the sterile booth and a clean uniform is located in his locker. After getting dressed, he makes his way back to his room. Strangely enough, he should be slightly anxious about meeting the Captain, but for some reason he’s not feel anything of the sort. Maybe because the Captain is only one of many new things that Frank has to deal with in this new environment.

As he makes a turn into his corridor, a personnel carrier is waiting for him at his door. The carrier is floating about five inches off the ground, and the boy in Frank starts thinking what a nice toy this could make. The soldier on the carrier however, does not look like he is in in the mood for playing around.

“Frank Deleon, MX5?”

Oh wow, so much for being nice.

“Yes, that’s me.”

“Your escort to the command centre sir”

“Yes, I know. Give me a minute”

Frank enters is room, places a couple of belongings in a locker, attaches his tracker on his arm and gets on the carrier.

A low humming noise comes from the carrier as it slowly starts to make its way forward. Out of the sleeping quarters, the carrier follows a narrow path and suddenly they enter the main living area of Sapphire City through a duct about thirty feet in the air.

Frank is so amazed at what he sees that he almost forgets to hold on and subsequently he nearly slips off the carrier.

“Hold on sir!”

“Oh yes, yes, I will. “

Frank looks around him and only now realises how majestic Sapphire city is. Although this space has a strong industrial feel to it, it is clear that efforts were made to add a homely feel to this area.

“Where exactly are we?”

“This is the main Town square sir. It is one of the main relaxation areas where people can shop, watch movies, even frequent a pub if they so wish.”

A flashing light down below catches Frank’s attention: “Virtual Sex – 3 for 2 – Tonight only”

“What’s that?”

“Virtual brothel sir – not really frequented by anybody”

“And that?” - Frank points to another weird billboard down below.

“Kids crèche.”

“But there are no children on board..”

“Not yet.”

The carrier makes a left turn and enters another duct. On the left of the entry is a sign reading “Entry for M staff only”

Instinctively, Frank looks at the pad on the arm of the officer and notices that his ID also starts with the letter “M”.

“Why this complex identification system?”

“We have lots of people on board who perform multiple duties, so the identification system should allow for proper identification and assignment of all 1200 people, who fulfil over three thousand distinct roles.”

The carrier starts to slow down as Frank’s eyes are fixed on a door in the duct that is about thirty meters away.

“Is that it?”

“Yes, Captain’s quarters. He has everything on the other side of those doors – he can practically stay in there forever. Fingerprint and iris scan should get you in. I’m off.”

Immediately after Frank disembarks the carrier, it leaves without the officer saying another word. Frank is keeping an eye on the officer who starts scanning a display on his carrier, probably for locating other people in need of transportation. The corridor has a slight bend in it as the carrier disappears around the corner; Frank promptly places his hand on the fingerprint scanner and his left eye into the iris scanner. A second goes by until a small indicator light turns green and the door opens up with the sound of some liquid being forced through some hydraulic mechanism.

The room which Frank just entered has the same feel to it than a five star penthouse. It is exceedingly large, almost too big for the furniture that it houses. The design is modern with white polished marble tiles. Three golden chandeliers hangs from the roof, each having tens of little lights which fill the room with a soft toned mildly yellow light. In the corner on the left, is a grand piano standing in an opened-up position. A piece of sheet music is visible on the five meter long white Schimmel. Frank recognises the distinct arrangement of notes on page three. It is Sonata No. 20 in A major.

On the opposite end of the room is a contemporary styled formal lounge. A large electronic display forms the focal point of this section of the room. On the display are various facts about the ship which updates every couple of seconds or so. Frank pauses to take in as much of the information as he can – Speed 18 000 Miles per minute, ETA 73 days 4 hours 23 minutes and 15, 14, 13 seconds, Destination CI235, Location 23.56545 degrees east - 84.4553 degrees north. A photo of the landscape of the destination is point is briefly displayed. Ground temperature estimated to be at 84 degree Celsius. Gravity at the location is 0.9 times that of Earth's gravitational force.

"Sounds pretty cosy" He says to himself in a very soft voice.

The wall opposite Frank is intentionally left without any fixtures or furniture. Nothing is really needed there as it houses a window that allows for a clear view into outer space. The window covers about 80 percent of the total surface of the wall.

Frank stands amazed at the sight for a good couple of minutes. The sight of space bodies flowing past to either side of the window is truly spectacular. In his head, he is actually able to name some of the more familiar planets that he spots with the naked eye.

"I must be right in the middle of Sapphire City, Top floor, best view in the house. I wish I could just let the window zoom in by oh, let's say a factor of 200." He is taken aback by how much faster the planets start moving through the window as the zoom factor of the window adjusts automatically.

"Zooming in and out is only a couple of commands that the plasmic space view glass responds to."

"Captain!"

After turning around and looking the Captain straight in the eye, Frank pauses for a second to take a good look at this hardened man who clearly spent many years on this ship already. His face has a large scar starting on the left cheek and moving all the way underneath his glasses, close to his eye and ending on his forehead. The scar overwhelms any other facial feature that the man may have that is of relevance. He is neatly dressed in a uniform resembling a mixture between a classic formal suit and the uniforms everyone else is wearing. Clearly a rough start in life, the Captain now has a sophisticated presence.

"I do apologise. I was so occupied by the view that I forgot for a moment where I was or who I came to meet with."

"My dear Frank, I would expect nothing else from you, seeing that which is on the other side of that view is what makes you tick"

"Oh yes, Indeed sir."

"Please do join me for breakfast Frank"

The two gentlemen make their way around a semi luminescent glass partition where a breakfast table is neatly laid out. The table is about the size of a standard sized desk, but has a peculiar off-centred oval design. A set of plates and cutlery is located on either side of the table, and the centre is laid out with a full continental choice of pastries and the like.

"I hope you don't mind the vegetarian meal – I'm not into consuming meat at all"

“Not a problem captain, I actually prefer a lighter meal to start the day off with.”

Assuming their seats and starting their meal, Frank is the first to come to the point.

“So, why did you want to meet with me so early into the voyage Captain?”

The captain looks up, swallows the piece of fresh grapefruit he had in his mouth, wipes his mouth with his serviette and responds to Frank’s question:

“Frank, when we did our scans of CI235, there was an unusual high reading of radioactivity, combined with a strong magnetic field about 34 miles south east of where we are going to anchor and set up the mining zone. It could be that we discovered a combination of two known minerals close to one another that caused this reading, or we could be faced with something brand new. I have a scheduled a visit to the site during the first twenty four hours after establishing the mining zone for purposes of collecting samples and doing a more thorough scan. Samples will be brought to your lab and I need you to head up the investigation of this anomaly.”

“I have my own lab?”

“Oh yes. Maybe I should have started there. You will be working in and heading up sector C35. It is an ultra-modern on-site research facility equipped with twelve assistants. You should find the facility more than adequate for your work. Coming back to the anomaly – there is also an odd pattern on the surface of the planet where the readings were made.”

The captain turns his head slightly so that he faces another large display situated on the dining area.

“Show surface scan CI235 section 1152 on three.”

The screen takes a second before all the information about the ship and the journey fades out of view, making way for a photo of section of the planet. A couple of seconds in the room pre-empts Frank’s response.

“Looks like a boy played with a stick in the sand close to the beach, wouldn’t you agree Captain?”

“Yes, only the picture you see covers an area of three square miles so it must have been a very big boy.”

“I noticed that yes. Do we have a chemical composition of the area?”

“Not yet – I would rather we do a close-up accurate composite scan and deal with fact than speculate about it now.”

“I see, do we have anything on the history of the planet?”

“There are many Petabytes of information stored on the planet, its history and even its origin. That however, is for you to work on while we are on our way there. You and your team, twelve brilliant scientist, some of whom you may know. The problem is this: If the radioactive source is a liquid, it may be that we are going to have to deal with it during our mining expedition, something we cannot afford. Radioactive protection is heavy and makes my men less productive.”

“I understand sir, I will get going on the research today still and will feed back any information that I have, once I have it”

“You do that!”

Frank finishes his meal without much further conversation from him or the captain as the captain got distracted by an issue from an unhappy group of miners – some salary dispute.

“Keep you posted captain.” Frank heads for the door and signals on his locator for a personnel carrier. As he leaves the captain quarters he hears the captain shouting with a loud voice:

“If that radioactive junk is a liquid, you need to stop it you hear!”

“Yes Captain. Understood!”

By the time Frank is on the outside, a similar carrier awaits, but another driver behind the controls this time.

“C35!” Frank gets on without much small talk. The carrier starts moving after the usual low pitched humming sound emerges from underneath the rectangular base.

They enter the town square again, this time making a dive for one of the lower ducts. The sign reads “Access for M and X only” Instinctively, Frank looks on the officer’s shoulder for the required M and surely it is there. They enter the duct and immediately the officer starts to slow down.

“Why so slow?”

“This is Sector C35 remember. Maximum speed is only 2 miles per hour – fire hazard.”

“Well then, how far to go still?”

“Around the next bend”

“Okay”

They get to a silver door marked C35 and the words “Individual access only” on the left. After the typical fingerprint and iris scans, the same hydraulic sound forces the door to open to the left.

Two short steps down to the laboratory floor give Frank a larger than life look as he enters. He quickly realises this, and decides to take advantage of these steps and remains standing on the top stair. There is enough space for the lift to close behind him.

Twelve assistants, each neatly dressed in white overalls are lined up, all facing Frank.

“Morning, I’m terrible at names so I’m not even going to try and remember them now. I’m Frank for those of you that do not yet know. I am younger than most of you – just get over and it let’s get to work. I want to have an action plan communicated to the Captain by the end of the day.”

One of the assistants wanted to reply to the fall in the door with authority approach that Frank had, but didn’t have much time to speak, as Frank continued talking. Pointing from left to right to groups of assistants, he issues short and to the point orders:

“You two, start by locating the surface picture of the planet and run a profile trace on the patterns found”

“Yes sir”

“You three, start a time trace analysis on the planet. See if the planet was ever close to a cosmic event of level five or higher”

“Okay”

“Third team, request the original scan that identified the anomaly and get the data in a presentable format.”

“Good. Should we also include supporting data?”

“Yes. Last team, start estimating times to deal with a couple of scenarios, including solid, semi-solid and liquid nuclear matter ranging in depths from surface to our anticipated mining depths for the whole four year period. Questions?”

A raise of hand of almost everybody indicates overall confusion. Frank points to a random assistant somewhere in the middle of the line-up.

“Yes?”

“Which planet sir?”

“Oh, you weren’t briefed. CI235, Section 1152. Initial surface scans picked up an anomaly with regards to radioactive levels and magnetic forces. I was summoned by the Captain to investigate - anything else?”

The team disperses after a couple of seconds and Frank sighs of relief as clearly everybody had the same question. Two minutes after Frank entered the quiet lab, the place is bustling with activity. He joins the first team as the picture he saw earlier really made him curious. Initially he merely observes the two assistants performing routine pattern matching routines onto the surface patterns, but his level of irritation with the process gets the better of him.

“If you two just go by the book on this one, it will take you ages to find something. One of you continue this scan against all planet surface pictures and the other planet surface data we have, the other, determine the age of the markings, find cosmic events in the same era and compare planets involved in or near those events.”

Once happy with the progress made, he moves to the next team, correcting actions along the way. About four hours into the day, Frank announces a lunch break and suggests that they have a meal together so that they get to know him.

“I sensed by your body language this morning that you knew each other respectively and that is why I divided you into the groups as I did. People who know one another are far more productive than complete strangers.” Is Frank’s reply to a question regarding the way he divided the team into smaller work groups.

“I also studied the resumés of all the other scientists on board Sapphire City before accepting the offer, so I know who all of you are. I’m a bit of a late comer to this expedition and hence I had access to most of the resumes.”

Work on the anomaly continues after lunch. All thirteen lab staff members are furiously trying to get to more relevant information so that they can report back to the Captain as promised. At 11:24 PM, Frank sends a message to Captain Smith:

Captain,

Progress update:

Sixteen modelled scenarios are in process and should be complete by mid-day tomorrow. We have insufficient data to come to any concrete conclusion as to possible origins of the anomaly, largely due to hypothesis test failures due to long distance scanning. On-site inspection and sample collection may be the quickest way to ascertain the origin of high radioactive levels and magnetic fields. Closer inspection of the surface patterns indicate that it might have been caused by activity underneath the surface of the planet. We have been able to reproduce similar patterns in the lab.

Sector C35

Shortly after sending the disappointing message, Frank and his team retires to their sleeping quarters.

Halfway there

“Sapphire City spent the last 37 days warping towards CI235 at a constant speed. So far we have encountered no issues on the journey. All generators and actuators are functioning well after scheduled maintenance was performed during the last maintenance shift. We should be entering sector 23 in about 14 hours. Approval for all space sector crossings until the end of the journey is in place”

Captain Smith completes the entry into his daily voice diary by listing all necessary facts about progress on the journey, as well as reporting vital statistics about the ship.

“Progress on identifying the anomaly has been uncomfortably slow. The team was able to determine that we are dealing with some liquid form of nuclear matter. More accurate composition scans of the planet indicated that the level of nuclear activity at the anticipated mining site is well within acceptable limits. As a precaution, Sapphire City will conduct a nuclear decontamination on the mining zone before we will allow humans to enter without protective gear. This is Captain J.W. Smith signing off from SC-001 Sapphire City.”

The large displays in his living quarters revert back to displaying information which the ship’s Artificial intelligence engine deems to be the most important. A report of a lightly injured kitchen worker is displayed for a couple of seconds.

Captain Smith authorises a medical crew and a condolence card.

Meanwhile, in C35, Frank is spending an hour with his assistant Alice whom he grew very close to in the last month of travel. Although the main topic of discussion is the anomaly in question, frequent jokes and fooling around is at the order of the day as the team cannot progress by much without being closer to CI235. That is pretty much the way things are throughout the ship. General household tasks are divided up amongst all crew members, which have the effect of only about 10% of the work force being actively busy at any given point in time. Statistically, the second half of the journey to the destination planet is the biggest reason why Sapphire City has a Child care centre on board.

The Town square is a twenty four hour hustle of activity. Once on CI235, a full cycle of day and night will only be 15 hours. The crew is therefore conditioned during the trip to have alternating sleeping patterns but remaining in a twenty four hour cycle. At every given point, a third of the crew is sleeping, another third is having breakfast and the last bunch is partying the night away. The psychologists on board are having an interesting opportunity to study the social effects of a group of isolated people affected like this.

The City’s AI engine is also responsible for all advertising campaigns in the town square. It is fascinating to see an advert change to that of a diet drink, the resident gym or the cycling track once a slightly overweight man walks by. Similarly, beauty ads are only displayed to women and men who have their spouse’s birthdays coming up. Currently there are no adverts to be seen anywhere that targets young children, but apparently the new-born ads are about to start rolling soon. The same carbon chip that is responsible for this weirdness in the advertising space also has access to various biological samples that are constantly taken from every individual without being noticed. SAM (Sapphire Artificial Machine) therefore knows that somebody is either pregnant or is about to have a common flu before they even know it themselves.

In general, life has settled down into the Sapphire City routine. There is a level of anxiety caused by the anticipated landing that is growing ever more intense as the days goes by. On day fifty three, CI235 was visible by the naked eye. Various studies were continued as the planet was now close enough for more detailed analysis.

On day fifty five, a repeat mineral composition scan was done on CI235 just as the landing spot was in sight and after thorough analysis is wat found that the exact location of the high nuclear and electromagnetic reading shifted slightly to the east. A distance measured on the surface of about twenty two miles.

It's Alive!

Frank's laboratory was closed for the last three days due to inactivity and on-going model analysis, but the news of the shifting fields changed all of that very quickly.

On day 56, the whole C35 crew was dressed in white overalls, standing in line at 05:56 AM, awaiting the arrival of Frank. Even the order of the assistants was the same as on the first day that they met him.

"You heard what happened! Get on with it." Frank enters the room and heads for his desk without even looking at any of the lined up assistants. The teams all start to look for answers, each focussing on their respective areas of expertise. Team one focussing on locating new surface patterns, team two tracing the events through time and the final team stopped all models and is altering the source data to incorporate the fact that the epicentre of activity is actually dynamic. There is not enough data available at present to indicate that the movement is anything other than random.

Three scans of the magnetic field and the nuclear epicentre during the course of day 56 indicate only slight movement. As the data increases, so does the amount of theoretical models taken into consideration decrease.

One of the models indicates the possibility of a large moving mass of organisms, probably a swarm of some kind, and probably contaminated by nuclear waste.

"..which means that the origin of the nuclear trace is probably situated elsewhere on the planet.."

"or on another planet.."

"Or we could be dealing with something similar to a species that came across a couple of years ago.."

"Are there any other scan data available on other planets?"

"what species?"

"How far should we look for nuclear activity on nearby planets?"

"Guys!" Frank shouts out on the highest and loudest voice that he can.

"Listen to you! Where is the professional approach to all that guessing? Focus on gathering facts so that we can make informed decisions and leave the guess work for another day!"

The next two weeks are spent carefully tracking the nucleus of the magnetic field and sample scans are done to ensure that the nuclear matter is moving with the electromagnetic field. Careful analysis is applied to the whole set of data.

The landing

Forty eight hours before the estimated landing time, all shops and entertainment facilities are closed down – orders from the captain. The crew is called into full operational action and the random activation of sirens throughout the city is a reminder to all that the days of being laid back are over for now. Various messages are communicated over the public address system and to people's tracking pads:

"No member of the crew is to return any non-working activity until such time that Sapphire City has landed safely."

"All personnel, to your base stations = Crews N to Q on full alert!"

"All fire crews to move down to the level L0, touchdown to commence in forty two hours."

"Mechanical crews to attend to pillar stations one to eight. Initial pillar extension sequence to commence in thirty hours."

She is getting ready to come to rest. Images projected from various external cameras on Sapphire City shows how she is busy transforming from this massive box-like structure into a dome-like resemblance – to maximize the amount of planet surface that she can cover. Structurally, there are quite large shifts happening, but the effects on the living area of the ship is barely noticeable.

She is also in the process of slowing down. She cannot enter CI235's atmosphere faster than 780Km/ hour or the touchdown will be too harsh and she might break a pillar or one of the side walls. This is a risk that the crew cannot afford due to the presence of nuclear matter on the planet.

Captain Smith is planning on spending the next two days with the navigational teams to ensure that everything is executed exactly as planned.

She comes to a stop at a height of about fifty meters above the surface of CI235. A last surface scan and she slowly descends onto solid ground. Crew are alerted to the first pillar making contact as a slight jolt was felt throughout the city. A second jolt could be felt as she realigned herself to the planet surface.

"Drilling sequence to commence in three minutes!" Everybody is alerted to this fact as the ship typically has intense vibrations during this step of the docking procedure. A slight disruption in the power supply grabs the attention of all crew members as the drilling into the crust of CI235 commences. Members of the crew who are standing by, are monitoring the imagery from outside fairly closely as they are the first human visitors to this planet.

In Sector C35, Frank and his team are busy with the last preparations for the surface mission to section 1152 so that samples can be collected. The captain has authorised the use of an H7 for this purpose.

With origins on earth as a primitive war vehicle, this carrier is truly purpose built for rough terrain. This massive 18 wheeler can transport eleven crew members and a load of four tons. Its outer shell is made of a strong Kevlar-carbon compound that is heat and bullet proof, but weighs almost nothing. Each wheel is about the size of a human being standing up. For this trip various external robotic collection arms were attached to this H7. As a precaution, Frank is not allowed to

accompany the mission and decided to send three of his assistants to perform the analysis of sector 1152.

Captain,

We are good to go! Confirmation not yet received that a ramp is extended to the surface as of yet. Mission to commence once we can leave Sapphire City.

C35.

“Stay on course and keep an eye on the instruments. Any sign of abnormality and you bring this beast to a stop. We will assess the situation at base and provide you with instructions”

Frank closes the last loading bay and passenger door behind the three members of the crew that has boarded the H7. Although he cannot see her, he looks in the direction of where the driver is seated and Alice notices this gesture from the inside.

Isolated from the noises in the lab, there is hardly a sound in the cabin. Shortly after the doors are closed the automated interior lighting is activated.

In the vehicle is Alice, who is heading up this surface mission. Accompanying her are Frank’s two top assistants. Their collective knowledge spans a vast array of research areas, Archaeology, Biology, Physics, Nuclear science and also cross disciplinary knowledge.

To the left of Alice is Marcus - a German war veteran who is in charge of on-board weaponry and safety. Weighing in at 132 Kilograms, he is dressed in a field uniform and he doesn’t have a single visible hair. Looking at the thick folds at the back of Marcus’ head is Edwin.

Edwin is in charge of navigation and in control of sample collection robots on board.

Alice proceeds with activating all of the on-board control systems one by one and confirms with Frank that communications are operational.

The team gets conformation that the access ramps have made contact with the surface and proceed out of C35 to level L0. The H7 slowly moves into a decompression chamber that is only in use until such time that the mining zone is established. A door closes behind the H7 and decompression takes only a couple of minutes before the metal door in front of the crew opens up. They proceed down the ramp and are taken away by the view that they now have of C1235.

The planet’s only sun is barely touching the horizon with its tip. Rays of light penetrate through the dust clouds and onto the mountain range that they see to their left. The shape of the mountains is unlike anything that is located on earth. The lack of wind and water erosion on these rocky hills causes for much sharper contours and spikes. Thick layers of an orange to purple coloured dust can be seen lying dormant on flat areas of the mountain range.

“Those dust sediments are a Composite dust containing mainly Palagonite and Dibromoindigo. Outside temperature is 85 degrees Celsius and atmospheric pressure on the surface is 0.942 times that of earth.”

Apart from the protruding mountain range, the rest of the planet has very little of interest on the surface. Orange dust with purple layers interwoven as far as the team can observe with the naked eye.

As the vehicle moves slowly out of the cover of Sapphire City and into the sunlight, the glass panes making up the roof of the H7 automatically darkens so that very little natural light can reach the passengers. As they make their way to sector 1152, the view behind them is breathtaking.

Sapphire City is busy drilling her eight pillars into the surface of C1235. The high speed at which this happens causes eight dust columns to rise up from where the pillars are in contact with the surface. Amongst the overwhelming orange, there are traces of the occasional purple dust. The view looks strikingly like eight high-rise building that are on fire at ground level. This view quickly starts to grow smaller as the vehicle accelerates towards sector 1152.

“Entering Sector 1151 – 13 miles from sector 1152” Edwin is constantly updating the crew, as well as Frank’s team on any information that may be of relevance.

“Nuclear readings are picking up slowly.”

Silence.

“Stop! Spike in nuclear readings. Went up to dangerously high level but subsided. Base, please advise!”

Silence.

“Proceed with caution.”

“Copy that.”

The H7 moves forward at a speed of three miles per hour. All crew on board and at base are on full alert, analyzing every bit of information that may have the slightest bit of importance to the mission. As they enter the section where the anomaly was detected, all readings are normal and they proceed to the site where the disturbance in the surface was detected.

Marcus was in the process of looking out the window and scanning the surface of any signs of the weird patterns they saw in the initial imagery of the planet.

“There it is guys.” Alice announces the first sighting of the lines. What appeared to be lines in the sand were actually formations in the sand standing up to three feet high and spanning an area the size of a football field. The vehicle slowed down – almost to a complete stop.

“Proceed with caution team.” Frank’s voice sounds over the communications lines in a soft but frightened tone.

“No sign of electromagnetic, nuclear or any other high reading in the area.”

“Request to go around the structure for full three dimensional, X and gamma - ray analysis.”

“Request denied. Approach the far left corner of the line structure; ensure that your vehicle faces towards Sapphire City”

“Copy.”

Alice makes a left turn and approaches the far left side of the structure after turning to the right. The H7 is located about a foot from the structure on its left and Sapphire city is now visible through the front window, although appearing a lot smaller than it actually is.

All three crew now leans over to the left of the vehicle and is staring at the sand wall for any sign of a clue as to why the sand is arranged the way it is. The wall of sand consists of the same orange looking sand with a dark purple overlay on the one side. The two types of sand have blended together slightly, probably when the channel was formed.

“There must be something below the surface. What else would keep the structure in tact? Edwin, could you start retrieving samples for the structure, along the edge, every twenty five inches.”

“Will do.”

The robotic arm starts to extend away from the H7 and collects the first sample as far to the back as it can reach. Every sample is deposited in external canisters before the arm proceeds to collecting the next one. This process occupies Edwin for a good three hours.

The initial fright of working with this unknown is wearing off in the H7 as time goes by. Marcus is relaxed from a security point of view and Alice is beginning to question the value that will be gained out of this. Apart from the spike, all readings are normal and have been for all the time that the team have spent in this sector.

“All the samples are collected Frank. Should we return to base?”

“No, let’s take a look inside. Make use of two robotic arms to dig a hole in the side of the structure. Dig about 10 inches or so and then take another sample.”

“Got that.”

Another arm extends from the vehicle and the two arms starts working in sequence to remove some of the surface dirt from the structure. The process is slow as one operator now has to deal with two sets of controls. About ten minutes into the process, something catches Edwin’s eye on the set of number on the display panel in front of him and immediately stops the excavation.

“What?” Marcus senses the issue and is immediately alerted by the change in behaviour by Edwin.

“Rise in nuclear readings.”

Silence.

“Rate of change is increasing.”

Edwin notices a piece of dirt falling down from the top of the hole where he was busy excavating for a sample below the surface.

“Ground is vibrating.”

As the team is trying to puzzle together the weird readings and the tremmers in the structure, Frank aborts the mission with a clear instruction for the team to return to base.

“We can observe this change from here. No need for you to be exposed.”

“Affirmative, we are retracting gear and will commence back to base.”

The two robotic arms immediately start to retract back into a position that will allow the team to leave the site. While this operation is in progress, everybody is preparing for mobilization and the team loses interest in the small hole that the arms were able to make in the time they were digging.

The base of the hole started falling in deeper as if the structure is starting to fall into itself and a couple of seconds later a wall of sand about thirty feet tall hits the side of the H7, knocking it over on its side. The wall of sand is the result of thousands of flying creatures bursting through the edge of the sand bunker from underneath the surface. Nobody in the vehicle was able to see any of this as the sand covered most of the H7.

Alice and Marcus were shot out of their seats as a result of the impact and were lying on the side panel of the H7. Edwin has a safety harness attached, and was hanging sideways down onto Marcus. All three the crew members were unconscious and a pool of blood was forming below Marcus on the side of the H7.

The Entry

The lab is thrown into a state of total chaos and disarray as images from what happened outside reaches Frank and his team. Instinctively, Frank flies over the one corner of his desk to reach for the red alarm activation panel and hits one of the buttons with the back of his left Hand. The laboratory is thrown into semi-darkness as the precautionary measures of the laboratory automatically activates. In the middle of the roof is a red light that starts to flash.

Frank uses his localizer to issue the command for a rescue team to assist Alice, Marcus and Edwin. Focussing on the largest display, he slowly moves back into his chair.

“The rescue team will be mobilised in about five minutes. Play back the live feed so that we can see what happened.”

The image in the screen comes to a stop and the smoke and dust starts to retract back to the accident sight as the feed is rewind. The truck in the view starts moving back onto its wheels and just as the last bit of dust settles back onto the neatly formed shape it was, a dark spot appears in the top right hand corner of the screen.

“There! Zoom in and enhance the image.”

The black spot increases in size and the image gets more distorted. As the enhancement process is complete, a clearer image overlays the distorted one and silence fills the lab.

“Species identification please.” Frank is so taken back by what is displayed in front of him that he barely moves his lips.

“Excuse me sir?”

“Species identification! Run a species identification analysis so that we can see what did this dammit!”

“On it”

The image on the view changes as a single animal is outlined and overlays of thousands of animals flashes over the outline to try and find a match.

“This is taking too long!”

“It’s all we can do now Sir”

“No! Do we have another feed that covers a wider area?”

Silence.

A couple of seconds later one of the general wide angle views of the close vicinity of Sapphire city is displayed. Just as the dust rises from behind the horizon the view, the black cloud can be seen heading towards base. As the cloud nears the ship, the animals disperse and almost disappear from the view.

“What are the dimensions of the outline that you are using in the species ID?”

“About 25 Inches wingspan and a length of about 28 inches”

“So they are too small to see on that image feed.”

“Affirmative”

“Where did they go?”

“Look at this view from down below, and this feed from the northern side”

The display splits in two and the creatures are clearly seen as they enter the ship at various openings. Some entered through the air intakes, others at cavities that are open where the pillars emerge from Sapphire City.

Once again, Frank jumps across the same corner of his desk, reaches for the same panel, but this time spends a couple of seconds focussing on the sequence of actions he needs to perform to launch a Ship-Wide alert.

As he makes his way out of the Lab, he signals for a personnel carrier and makes his way to the Captain for a briefing. On his way to the Captain, his locator begins to vibrate.

“On my way Captain. We have hostile creatures on board – indications are in the region of about three hundred.”

As Frank disembarks the carrier, Captain Smith is waiting for him at the entrance door.

“We are meeting with the safety board in sector 43 now to discuss the matter.”

The two gentlemen gets on the personnel carrier and heads off to the safety Head Quarters.

The Rescue

Edwin is slowly busy regaining his consciousness after being knocked out for a couple of minutes. Looking down, he notices the state that the rest of the crew is in. He tries to release his safety gear, but is incapable of doing so due to his whole body weight resting on the harness.

“Alice! Marcus! Are you okay? Wake Up!”

He tries to reach them and notices three vehicles speeding towards them before he loses consciousness again.

The rescue team is swift to recover all three crew members and send them back to base with one of the vehicles. The other two focuses on recovering the vehicle, together with all equipment and debris that is lying scattered around the H7. For the knock that it endured, the H7 is still in remarkably good condition. All systems are still operational and the rescue team is able to drive it back to base.

Edwin comes by in the cab of the rescue ambulance and finds comfort in the fact that he is surrounded with many medical personnel attending to him and the other crew members.

“What happened?”

“You were knocked over by an unidentified swarm of creatures of unknown species and origin. They emerged from the anomaly that you were busy investigating and some of them managed to enter base. The creatures’ size was below the Ships’ shield activation threshold.”

“How long ago was this?”

“Roughly about seven minutes ago. Your mission vehicle is intact – initial indications is that little or no data loss occurred. The recovery arms were severely damaged however.”

“And what about our samples?”

“I cannot confirm or deny that it is in place.”

Edwin focuses his attention to Alice who also waked up in the meantime and was listening to the nurse explaining what he knew about the accident.

“Are you okay?”

“Slight headache, but other than that I’ll be fine. How is Marcus?”

“I’m afraid he is not as lucky as you two. He has several deep cuts to his back and along his ribs. I also expect a severe concussion based on the large bruise he has on his head. We will commence with a full scan of his state immediately upon reaching base.”

The heart rate monitor attached to Marcus starts signalling heart failure and after a frantic attempt to get him revived, he is pronounced dead before even reaching base.

Alice turns her head away from the dreadful sight in the ambulance and focuses her eyes out the window. Although she stares at the view of the mountain range, the shock is clearly visible on her face.

The ambulance slows down as it makes its way up the ramp and into Sapphire City. It makes its way to the sick booth and a full staff compliment is on standby to assist the injured crew members. The team works slowly and with a great deal of caution to prevent further injury or pain. Although maybe not the last, Marcus is definitely the first casualty on this mission and his body is incinerated almost immediately after being taken to the casualty hall.

In Sector 34, Frank prepares his fact sheet while rising from his chair and moving towards the podium of the same auditorium where he was briefed at.

“Aaah... Thank you for the opportunity. A swarm of about a thousand creatures yet to be identified appeared out of anomaly that the team were investigating on the surface in sector 1152. The impact of the dust being kicked up as a result of this, caused the mission vehicle to capsize and land on its side. It skidded for about 15 metres after landing on its side, so the force of the impact was massive. One crew member died on the way to base, and the other two are only slightly injured.”

A member of the safety board slowly raises his right index finger.

“Question?”

“Yes. Why was the mission launched before we established the mining zone and before we established what the risks were?”

“This crew was part of the risk team, dealing specifically with the abnormal nuclear and magnetic readings we picked up before landing.”

Frank spends the next hour answering questions regarding the mission and all the events that pre-empted the visit to the sight. He leaves the podium and the crew talks among themselves for a couple of minutes before a tall man with long black hair stands up and walks to the podium. His long straight hair completes the straight lines of his thin, almost undernourished body.”

“Herewith the announcement of the way in which we will be dealing with this situation.”

The head of safety on board Sapphire City explains how the creatures will be identified, then caught and disposed of. Various additional safety measures will be put in place until such time that the mining zone is established.

Shortly after he finishes the announcement of his plan, about thirty five armoured vehicles surrounds Sapphire City just outside the perimeter of the proposed mining zone. Drilling operations was suspended for a short while, but the operation has commenced again.

As Frank leaves the auditorium, a quick movement in the corner of the large room catches his attention.

“There! One of them! Up there, in the corner.”

Three security officers storm into the room, produce hand guns and makes it impossible for the creature to get away from the top corner of the Auditorium.

Almost bat-like in its behaviour but featherless bird like in its appearance, the creature hangs upside down, one foot firmly attached to the roof. Its skin is filled with little pigmented spots of a light-grey colour against a beige-brownish colour. A generally longer and thinner bone structure is indicative of the lower levels of Gravity experienced on Earth. Its face has a general triangular shape with a nose and mouth that is visible, but not protruding at all – merely two visible cavities. No visible signs of ears, and with its tongue being pointed to the guards at intervals, it can be assumed that it has some sort of sensory organs located on its tongue.

Not sure how to approach the creature, the guards are merely standing, staring at it, awaiting further instructions.

Silence.

One of the guards receives a message over its earpiece, flicks a switch on his handgun and tranquilises the creature. It remains hanging for a couple of minutes, but as the effect of the tranquiliser sets in, it loses its grip and falls to the ground. The guards are careful not to see the creature being hurt, and catch it as it falls to the ground.

Destruction

“Frank Deleon. Chief Scientist on board Sapphire City. The time is now 18:34. The origin of this log is on location at Sector C35, Main Research Lab on Sapphire City. The creature now identified as a subspecies of SubCornivorous Lexoconia or also known as the common Radarbender bat has been asleep for over three hours now. Antidote to the tranquiliser was administered according to prescribed guidelines, but the animal does not respond in any way.

This subspecies has a significant larger brain than other Radarbender samples studied on known planets and also various moons. Little is known about these underground bats, apart from the fact that they possess the capability of bending light waves of varying wavelengths and amplitudes.

In some cases, they are able to alter radar waves so that it curves around their bodies and continues along its original path as soon as the light particles are past their bodies. This makes them impossible to detect by means of Conventional Radar as the waves doesn't collide with their bodies. It merely swerves around. Studies on the species have hinted towards them having the same capability, but with light waves in the human-visible range. Although not yet proven scientifically, this would make them invisible. Their ability to control light waves is also an ability over which they can exercise control – they can turn in on and off so to speak. This means that the same bat can be visible on a radar detector now, and a minute later it can appear to be gone. Most of the scanning devices used by Sapphire City make use of light waves of various frequencies and interferences by the bats could explain the nuclear and magnetic distortions of the planet scans lead to this investigation in the first place.”

--000000--

“Frank Deleon again. It is now two days since the creature was captured in placed under my custody por purposes of research. During the last six hours, the animal changed its position four times. The team is hopeful that these are signs of recovery. Sapphire city is now firmly docked to the surface of CI235 and mining operations are about to begin.

The crew on board the ship have been unable to capture any more Radarbenders even though footage clearly indicated to more of them being on-board. All staff members are on high alert and various search operations have been carried out – none without any success.

As I am sitting alone on the lab, observing the Radarbender, I cannot help noticing how helpless and fragile the animal looks in isolation compared to the damage they were able to cause when they work together in a group. Our mission vehicle is almost repaired, but nobody is allowed to venture outside of the mining zone until further notice.

The animal is starting to move again. It slowly turns towards me and opens its eyes. The Radarbender lies there, without any motion whatsoever, but his eyes are now following my every move. As I walk to the other side of his cage, he turns his head only and is capable of keeping me insight, even when I am behind him. Radarbenders can turn their heads around a total of 345 degrees without moving their bodies. I continue to move around the cage and study the animal's movements.”

Squuuueeeaaaakkkk...

“As I turn around and move away from the cage, the animal makes his first noise since the time of capture. His level of activity is also increasing at a steady pace now. Although my shift is coming to an end, and I need to hand over the observation role to one of my colleagues, I am contemplating whether to stay here as the next couple of hours may provide many answers about this animal.”

Frank continues to make notes about any observation that he thinks may be of value. The sounds that the animal is making are on the increase as he is still waking up from the long sedation that he was placed under.

After a further three hours spent with the RadarBender, Frank is summoned to his sleeping quarters and Alice takes over the shift.

Thirteen hours later, Frank is called back to the lab. He makes his way over to C35 in haste and almost bumps the door as he enters his lab.

“What is it?”

“We may have found a pattern Frank. We are still busy deciphering it, but the noises that the Radarbender makes consists of many frequencies which are all transmitted at the same time. In one of the frequency bands above human hearing capability, we picked up a pattern of fast successive pitch changes - about three hundred different tones a second.”

“What happens if you play it back at a much slower pace – let’s say about 4 pitch changes a second?”

“Hold on.”

The sound is played back at a slower pace and a number of music notes are clearly detectable by the human ear. Frank is sensing something familiar about the tune but he is unable to put his finger on exactly why. Various other options are considered which includes reversing the order and looking for other patterns in a wider spectrum of the sound.

As Alice makes one more adjustment to the tone, this time inverting the notes so that the high pitched sounds produces a low note and the low notes produces a high sound and there it is - A tune which makes perfect sense from a music theory perspective, but which nobody in the lab has ever heard before. A quick scan confirms that the tune is not known to humans and the notes are placed on a set of music bars on the main display.

“Well. I guess the real question now is whether we are looking at a random tune or whether there is there something more here? Animals are known to repeat the same tune in cases where a simple call is used. Analyse more of the sounds please, and let me know what you come up with.”

The randomness of these sounds causes Frank to let his attention go elsewhere while Alice starts the analysis of the other recorded sounds. He moves in behind his desk and starts looking at video feeds of the security system of Sapphire City for signs of the other Radarbenders who made their way into the ship.

Hours go by without anything interesting happening in the lab until a Scream from Alice breaks the silence.

“Destruction!”

“What?”

“That is what it means. I used all the data from all the patterns recorded so far to come up with a pattern in the tones and assigning a pitch to a letter in a specific sequence revealed that the first sound contains the word Destruction.”

“That is fascinating! What do the others say?”

“Well, they are all along the same lines. Destruction. You don’t destroy us. Not Destroying us. No destruction. Peace.”

“I am informing the Captain”

Captain,

Progress update:

We have just identified a means of understanding the Radarbender. He is advocating and declaring peace and is asking for us not to destroy him. We will attempt to communicate to him now.

Sector C35

“Can we send him a message?”

“I can try – what should we communicate to the Radarbender?”

“We come in peace.”

After the sound was communicated to the Radarbender, he seemed to be paying lots of attention to everybody around him. Looking around and studying each individual in depth.

“Squuuueeeaaaakkkk....”

All eyes are on Alice.

“What is your purpose here?”

“Tell him we’re on a mining mission.”

Two squeaks can be heard - one from the lab’s sound system and one from the Radarbender.

I will let his message be automatically played back to you and also yours to him so that you can engage in conversation. His last message read as follows:

“What are you here to mine? This is our only home. We have observed your species on earth. You destroy everything! By your very nature, you will also destroy our planet and even us.”

“That is not our intention. We are here to mine minerals for four years and then we will be gone.”

“..until a new ship arrives! You will not stop until this planet’s resources have been depleted. This is in your nature and you cannot change that. I demand to have a conversation with your leader!”

Captain,

Progress update:

Communications with the Radarbender have been successful. He wishes to speak with you sir.

Sector C35

Two minutes later, the lab door opens up and the Ship's captain, together with a group of guard enters the lab.

"Where is this animal who wishes to speak to me?"

"There Captain. Switch the translator to the Captain's voice. Captain, you can now speak directly to the Radarbender."

"My name is Captain Smith. I am in charge of this mining vessel SC-001 or more commonly called Sapphire City. I believe that you want to speak to me."

"I believe that you are here on a long mining mission. Captain, I will get to the point. You as humans by your very nature have a tendency to destroy everything around you and we will not let this happen to our home. You are therefore instructed to leave this planet or face the consequences."

"Ha! Like what? You are locked up in a cage remember. We are standing free. It looks to me like we are in control here."

"Captain. Look down at your left leg."

As the Captain looks down, a thick stream of blood can be seen spurting out of his body and disappearing in thin air.

"Stop this immediately! You will kill me!"

"Indeed we will if we have to."

The guards immediately carry the Captain out of the lab and presumably to the medical quarters. As the door closes, the Radarbender addresses all the people in the lab.

"What you have witnessed was one of us attacking one of you. The blood seemed to disappear as it was being consumed by one of us. I was quite amused to lie here in this cage for the last couple of days and listen to your observations of me. Quite superfluous I must say. Yes. We possess the ability to bend visible light as well."

Frank and his team are dead quiet for a couple of seconds before he walks over to the cage and looks closely at the animal.

"You claim that we destroy everything, but you almost destroyed our Captain!"

"He will be fine. Now, let me out of this stupid cage."

"No!"

“Show yourselves.”

The team of scientists are in total amazement as Radarbenders in the room make themselves visible one by one. They are everywhere. Some are hanging upside down from the roof; others are sitting on the floor next to Frank and his team.

At first there were only about ten of them, but as more and more become visible, Frank realises that they are at the total Mercy of these animals. He walks over to the cage and as he sticks his hand out to reach the lock, a couple of radar benders close to the case are coming closer to Frank. He pauses for a second then then proceeds much slower to the lock.

The Radarbender flies out of the cage and makes his way to Frank’s desk.

“There are thousands of us on board Sapphire City. We are everywhere, moving amongst your people. A single command and you are all dead!”

“Can we not reach a compromise?” The fear of how this might turn out puts Frank in a reactive mode to try and rather find a way of still making it back home.

“You have seen what we can do. Now go home!”

“I think you are playing a bluff. We only saw the same amount of you entering the ship as what is in this lab at present.”

The Radarbender pushes a button on Frank’s desk and utters a squeaking sound into the microphone. The whole of Sapphire City is thrown into chaos and disarray as all the Radarbenders makes themselves visible to the humans.

“Look at what you have done!” The Radarbender points to one of the large displays and short video is displayed of a Chinese fishing boat catching a whale. Following this scene is a brutal video of another eastern ship catching a shark, cutting off its fins and throwing it back into the ocean. Next is a video of a deforestation operation where large trees are cut down and turned into paper. The next clip contains a scene at a typical slaughterhouse. Hundreds of cows are led into the building one by one and killed for human consumption. The last video clip shown is a scene of a war where soldiers can be seen shooting at one another and many visible dead soldiers are lying all around.

“Not just do you destroy everything around you, but you also destroy yourselves. You are not welcome here! Go now!”

Frank reaches for his desk and starts to send a message to the control deck.

Control Deck,

Mission abort:

The ship has been infested with Radarbenders who demand that we leave this planet. Reasons for this include the fact that we as humans by our very nature are destroying everything around us. They do not want to see their planet being destroyed and they are threatening to kill the whole crew if we do not leave in haste.

We therefore have no choice but to abort this mission.

My I remind you that these animals can bend visible light. Only because we do not see them does not mean that they do not exist or are not close by.

The use of force is not an option. There are just too many of them.

Sector C35

“You have until sunset tomorrow evening to be gone!” The Radarbenders in the lab are slowly making their way out the door. Images of Radarbenders leaving the ship is evident everywhere. In the town centre alone, there must have been three thousand Radarbenders. It looks like a huge animal migration as they all move towards the ship’s main exits.

Sapphire City is dead quiet. Everybody is glad to have made it out of that alive. Nobody is going anywhere. Everybody is standing around and awaiting orders.

Frank calls for a transporter and makes his way to the Medical quarters.

“Sir! Are you okay?”

“Oh yes Frank. I will survive. We have been in contact with Earth who has instructed us to leave CI235 and head for another planet close by where we have mined before. The eight pillars have already started retracting and we will be on our way at about midday tomorrow. Look there:”

Captain Smith points to a display which shows rows and rows of Radarbenders keeping a close eye on Sapphire City. They are standing in neatly formed blocks on either side of the ship.

“They are watching us Frank. I have ordered a crew to close down the holes where the pillars are mounted and to repair any damage caused by us. They will perform this clean-up tomorrow. The status of this planet has been updated to a status 75 planet. That means we have no concern here anymore. This incident is well documented and we will respect the Radarbenders and their opinions.”

“Captain, tests have shown that the soil here is fertile and that there is enough moisture for certain plant species to grow here. Should we not inform them of this?”

“Frank, I would rather that we don’t. There are seeds in storage that we can share with them, but I do not want to provoke any more tension.”

“Very well then Captain.”

Final log

“This is Captain Smith on board SC-001 or Sapphire City. This will be the last log recording on planet CI235 and the Radarbenders are still keeping a close eye on us. The pillars have been removed from the planet’s crust and clean-up operations are almost complete. Indications are that Radarbenders have been living on this planet for thousands of years and yet, there no signs of life or any form of destruction on this planet. Everything is still as if nobody was living here.

We as humans can learn valuable lessons from this planet where it seems that sustainability is on the inhabitants’ highest priorities. As a human, I cannot help feeling ashamed and almost disgusted by our own. How sad is it that we are not welcome on other planets due to the way we have destroyed our own.

Signing off from CI-235 – Captin Smith.”