

The Light Bringers

By Michele Dutcher

“So what in Darwin's name went wrong?” Arezou Campbell looked around the room at the almost frozen faces staring back at her. “Ideas anyone? - Thoughts? - babbling metaphors?”

The small man in the back, farthest away from her angry glare shrugged his shoulders before diving in. “There are just too many variables to even give an theory. The ship was deep into unexplored territory, the neutrino-converter had been vamped-up to allow access to the unexplored region, the lidar had been re-opted for clearer diagnostics. Separately, all these factors had a proven history, but thrown in all together, the combination itself could have proved fatal.”

Beb shot to his feet, banging his fist on the table. “Don't even go there, Sadgewick – the whole 'thrown together' inference, as if we just threw them out into the Leo Constellation without any forethought or planning.”

“I told you it was a bad idea,” the short man shot back, rising to his feet, looking at the taller man eye-to-eye.

Arezou's tone immediately became that of a counselor. “Gentlemen, gentlemen. Let's back it down a ratchet or two.” The two men sat down, giving a look towards each other briefly to be sure the other was responding appropriately. “I apologize for my acquisitive tone, I'm just at the end of my rope.” The CEO looked around the table and the 23 people gathered there.

“We're right there with you,” said Beb, a hulk of a man, whose calm demeanor was in abject conflict with his overwhelming harsh looks.

The CEO of Armastaw Industries took a deep breath. “I've been told that we'll be able to view the ship's final minutes momentarily.” Everyone sat back as though relaxing for the first time during the day-long ordeal since the loss of the starship. “Rachel, when can we expect that data?”

Almost as if by magic, a meter-tall holograph appeared over the center of the table. It was a picture of the inside of the ship. All the crew members were going about there normal tasks, checking panels and cracking jokes. It was as peaceful a scene as any of them could have imagined. It was too peaceful – perhaps. Maybe if someone had been more on guard...

“How far is this before the end?” asked Arezou to the computer running the holograph.

“36 seconds, 35...”

“Thank you, Jofer,” said Arezou, returning her eyes to the scene.

Suddenly the demeanor of the crew changed. “There's something out there, sir! - or not out there.”

“What is it, helmsman?” demanded the captain.

“It's an absence of material. It's absorbing the light from the Lidar instead of allowing it to bounce back. That's why we weren't receiving any information about its...”

“How large is it?” asked the captain, closing the gap between his console and the helmsman.

“It's amazing! It's as large as a planet – sir. Right here, in the middle of...”
Everything was gone.

Beb leaned forward towards where the virtual ship had been. “Did you see that? The ship exploded instead of imploded.”

“Are you sure?” asked Sadgewick.

“Play the last 3 seconds back at 10% speed,” instructed the CEO.

They all watched in horror as the center of the globe of virtual light began to expand, allowing the men to be pulled apart before the ship's hull lost integrity and was torn apart.

Beb was more steady now. “This was no accident – this was sabotage.”

Arezou was thinking out loud now. It's as if that black shadow sucked up the ship, tearing it in all directions.”

Suddenly the holograph flickered on, revealing a face whose contours could only be seen by its negative form. “We have followed the path of this message back into your world,” it proclaimed. “We apologize for any loss of life.”

All were silent now, no one spoke, no one breathed.

“Hello. Why did you kill our crewmen?” whispered Arezou to the dark form.

“We are a life form living here, in the absence of light and life. Time with us moves 1000 times slower than you can envision – and the light bringer was killing us, as one after another of us absorbed as much light as we could and then disintegrated of over exposure. Hundreds of us dissolved, and we had to fight back. Once again, we are sorry for your loss of life. We are death itself – but we had no choice.”

The CEO was beginning to understand now, amazed at discovering a new life form. “How can you be death?”

“Before your galaxy was formed, the tip of our galaxy collided with another one. Our people tried to escape away from the carnage, but all of those left in the stellar system were killed by the effects of the gravitational pull of the stars passing through the edge of our galaxy.”

“How terrible for you!” said Beb.

“It was even worse than that. All of the souls from our stellar system were pulled from our dead planet – out here, into the void. We are the dead now – floating here between the stars.”

“We are happy to meet you,” said the CEO finally. “May we talk with you further?”

“It matters not to us,” was the reply. “As we are the dead – the left behind.”

Sadgewick was excited now. “We have the ability to harvest mind-waves and save them in digital form. Perhaps we could allow you to live in a new reality – a virtual one – a virtual universe.”

The voice was silent for a moment. “We will talk again with you, bringers of life, bringers of light.”

And both cultures breathed easy for a moment, smiling at their discovery of each other.

The End