Space Showdown
By
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You'd think that venturing out into space would bring the people of Earth together with a shared sense of achievement and pride in humanity.

You'd be wrong.

Greed.

Greed is what's catapulted us into space, and greed is what's turning my dream job of being an astronaut into a nightmare of hypervigilance, trying to protect the Alliance's moonbase from sabotage and attack.

Oh, and have I mentioned the outright dirty tricks and lying from unholy coalitions of corporations, unscrupulous governments and dark money trillionaires?

Everyone is on the moon now, and no one is abiding by the Earth-bound agreements made about space. Sure, there are a few entities that follow the rule of law; but enough are running roughshod over it that it feels like anarchy up here.

Past diplomatic solutions, like sanctions, aren't a drop in the bucket compared to the profits there are to be made in space. Truth is, there are plenty of resources out here. I don't know why every a**hole country is seeing it necessary to cheat and try to monopolize every resource on the market.

This should be a time of plenty for the human race, but… Greed.

On my patrol this morning, I've already removed 20 illegitimate red-and-gold claim-stake flags. The red-and-gold, along with the nefarious and powerful ilk that support them, think they can take anything they want on the moon and no one will stop them.

Well, we will. If we can. The Alliance is made up of 37 peace-mongering countries, 7 green MegaCorporations and 2 somewhat ethical trillionaires. We're the closest thing to law enforcement the moon's got.

A flashing red light on my HUD just made this morning's patrol a lot less routine. Structural breach in a pipeline.

I checked what the line was carrying: *water.* At least it wasn't deadly, like ammonia or something.

I pilot my lunar skipper to the edge of our energy dome that protects us from meteorite strikes. The breach was a few hundred meters out.

It could be a malfunction. It could be sabotage. And it could be a trap.

I'm a pilot and a mechanical engineer. I did not sign up for this.

I pulled up the satellite view. I have to admit, I was surprised when I saw two spacesuit-clad figures messing with the pipeline. I expected them to be gone by now.

A scan of the area showed no one else; but recent advances in stealth tech by that Soviet-nostalgic trillionaire's corporation made me cautious. I'm not going to risk my neck on this one.

I called out the dogbots, and in minutes the dynamic machines raced past me to neutralize the threat. I watch the scuffle on the satellite feed. The saboteurs didn't see the dogbots coming. Even though they're programmed to deter and not kill, if possible, it wasn't pretty.

It's only after they signal the all-clear that I pilot the skipper out of the safety of the energy dome to investigate.

A selection of hastily abandoned pipes and tools lay scattered around the frozen water breach, now guarded by the dogbots. These idiots were trying to steal water. Did they think we wouldn't notice? Or follow the pipeline straight to their base?

There was plenty of water up here.

The need to steal it would only come from one entity. 1.5 billion people in their country on Earth, and they seemed to want to send half of them to the moon. No wonder they had shortages. Truth was, they could've asked. We're the good guys. We would help if we could.

I pinged Alliance Base and requested a repair bot and a human assistant. With the pipe busted the way it was, this repair was going to be tricky.

A glove from one of their spacesuits lay a short distance from the pipeline. I know that modern spacesuits were self-sealing, but someone was heading home in pain destined to receive a mechanical arm.

It made me glad that the asteroids were being mined by robots and AI. Everyone was still breaking the rules, but at least real people weren't getting hurt.

The Moon was another story. Oh, and I can't even imagine how it's going to go on Mars. They're going to have to get some enforceable laws in place, or the colonies are going to be chaos.

The problem is that no one's in charge. Any country that can build a rocket can create a colony or base — and rockets are getting easier, and cheaper, to build.

A bright flash assaulted my helmet visor, and it instantly darkened to protect my eyes. The explosion was huge.

My heart leapt to my throat. Was that from the direction of Alliance Base?

I jumped in the skipper and flew toward the explosion.

If the scene had been chaos, I would have been relieved. But there was no chaos. No movement. Just destruction.

I landed anyway and started searching the ruins for survivors. I'll spare the grisly details and simply report, there were none.

Ships from other bases were starting to arrive. Mostly allies. I was almost back to my skipper when I spotted something in the distance.

A single claim-stake flag. A fucking red-and-gold claim stake flag.

I lost it then. I dropped to my knees and sobbed.

Vacuums turned on in my helmet to keep the fluids I was emitting from choking me.

I didn't care.

People came to me, talked to me. Lifted me into a medical unit.

I didn't care.

All the way back to Earth. In the hospital, through the rehab. I'd lost my voice. I didn't care.

I didn't even care to counter the lies — that it was improper storage of helium-3 that caused the explosion; that the Alliance was doing nefarious things that brought on retaliation; that the red-and-gold flag had been planted and they weren't responsible.

Okay, I cared. My blood boiled at the disinformation campaigns. But still, I couldn't speak.

Two months after the destruction of Alliance Base, the news barely mentioned it. There were other attacks on satellites and life support systems and the like, which were much fresher to report on.

Though somehow the story about the red-and-gold suddenly having a near monopoly on helium-3 supplies evaporated shortly after appearing, despite them manipulating the market. I didn't doubt that the tanks under Alliance ownership had been thoroughly pillaged. I wonder how long they'd been planning that attack. Not revenge. Greed.

One thing would bring the media attention back to the disaster. I'm getting out of the hospital today.

The press had been warned that I was still mute, but the camera drones would be everywhere trying to get the most tragic shot of the miserable figure I'd become. The wretched sole survivor from Alliance Base.

In a conference room, with the cameras hovering and a bevy of Alliance officials surrounding me, I found my voice.

"The lawlessness in space has got to stop. If humankind is going to survive traveling to the stars, we need to stop fighting each other and work together."

The room fell as silent as space.

Then it erupted into chaos as reporters suddenly wanted to be seen interviewing me. Everyone lurched forward and my Alliance team closed ranks to protect me. Bless them, but I was not as weak as everyone thought.

In that moment it became my life's mission to do everything I could to bring about cooperation between the Earth's nations in space. I have no idea where this commitment will take me.

1 Year Later

They're opening Alliance Base 2, and they asked me to be there to cut the ribbon, so to speak.

I refused.

No amount of money, security guarantees or begging would ever get me back to the moon.

A lot of government officials gave lip service to working together when I spoke to them, but no one was actually making changes.

5 Years Later

My voice has only gotten stronger, and I'm joined by millions of Earthers who hate the idea that our future is being ruined by greedy countries and corporations.

In response, depending on the voting cycle, committees are being formed to study options for decreasing lawlessness in space.

Many more nation alliances have made it to the moon, as well as the asteroid belt. Some of the countries that seemed like they would dominate, like red-and-gold, have not. Yes, that makes me happy.

10 Years Later

Rare and precious metals from the moon and the asteroids have filtered back to Earth in quite an abundance. Helium-3 is plentiful, and every country with an outpost in space has solved their energy problems with fusion reactors. Some, like the African contingent, are making sure all of their neighbors are benefitting as well.

The time of plenty has arrived, and market prices for space materials that are now easily available are dropping.

With everyone's eyes turning to Mars, and people envisioning families in the colonies — their families. Governments are now ready to discuss options for lawful cooperation in space.

Tomorrow I will be addressing the first meeting of the 203 countries of the Earth Government Coalition.

My voice is finally being heard.