

**Chapter Eight:** *'Ooh, I just know that something good is gonna happen. I don't know when. But just saying it could even make it happen'* Kate Bush (Bush K, 1985)

Peppard decided on balance that he would discuss his discovery with Cavendish, he'd get some additional points banked in his favour, and more importantly, whatever was going on was much bigger than he could handle alone. *Even he had limits, although he hadn't found them yet*, he thought with a wry smile. Hence, he was sitting opposite Cavendish at breakfast the following day, with the three jackals sitting at an adjacent table. Peppard knew he ought not to keep riling them, he could not help himself, 'You were right Cavendish, they do have table manners,' he said in a loud enough voice for them to hear.

They were clearly pissed, but had to restrain their ire. Cavendish was watching the interaction, keeping score, and thinking Peppard was just a tad too cocky for his own good. 'So, what is your theory as to why Madame President is aboard, Peppard?', the British gangster asked, in between mouthfuls, cutting off the interaction between his boys and this Lifer. 'Cavendish, I've thought this over, I can't as yet fathom why she'd be on a one-way trip to Mars with a load of Lifers, but I don't think it smells fresh,' he responded.

'Well, if she sticks around, and we'll have to see over the few weeks left before we disembark to our future holiday camp, we can sniff around, um, you can sniff around,' Cavendish instructed. Peppard nodded assent, 'Indeed I will, but also consider this, she would have had to be in transit for months herself, from Earth or Lunar, this wasn't spontaneous, it is related to something that has been an issue for some time, nothing new. No surprise we don't have the full picture here,' and with that he left, nodding to three jackals as he did. It was not reciprocated.

Cavendish sat pondering, then nodded after the departing Peppard, while looking at his boys. The unsaid message was clear: Peppard will follow Madame President, and his boys will follow him. They slunk off to initiate their surveillance. The British gangster relaxed for a little while longer after breakfast, none of the guards would interfere with him, and he let his brain free associate on developments. Finally, with a smile to himself, he moved off to his first session of the day. Mars and the President of the Inner Planets, this could be all very, very helpful to his plans. *Oh, yes indeed.*

The Captain of the Schiaparelli was ordering minor course corrections as they entered the final phase of their journey to the red planet, the last few million miles of this wretched transfer. A keen history buff, he felt he could empathise with the old convict ship captains between Britain and Australia. The stink of these Lifers would take an age to clean off his ship. Unannounced, one of the two administrator types with Madame President entered the bridge, a marine guard from the President's close protection squad too. The Administrator looked classically pompous and tight-assed, the Captain christening him Tweedle Dee, which meant the other one not on the bridge was Tweedle Dum. 'Not allowed on my bridge without my specific authorisation,' he stated quietly to the two, still looking at the forward screens and viewing ports.

Tweedle Dee looked at the Captain, said nothing, but handed him a small tablet before turning on his heel and leaving with his marine companion, without saying a word. The tablet was on, the President's seal visible. Official, thought the Captain. He pressed his forefinger to the screen, and the seal was replaced with a short, succinct set of commands. The key one made the Captain's eyes widen with incredulity, 'What the fuck? This cannot be serious, she's mad!', he exclaimed to himself, but his Ex-O and a number of the bridge crew could clearly hear and see his reaction.

'Captain?', prompted the Ex-O as he sidled next to his Captain. That Captain seemed to be lost for words momentarily, before he whispered, 'The President instructs me to change course under her personal authority. We're to divert from Mars trajectory to establish a geostationary orbit in close proximity to one of the two moons, Deimos, post haste. What the fuck is going on?'

*Let's hopefully find out in Chapter Nine...*