

A White Wasteland

Site 76 - Communication Center - July 18 2027

Nathan sighed, looking over the report. *Korea Earthquake and Tsunami, Over 120,000 Dead*. He turned his head from the computer screen to gaze out of the window. The Earth was just barely above the horizon. He tried to gaze through the clouds and get a glimpse at the Korean Peninsula.

Nothing could be done from here though. The near-blinding lunar surface couldn't care less what happened on one tiny spot in the planet it just so happened to orbit. Nathan had work to do, and no tragedy would change that.

Thankfully for him, said work was easier than normal. A little bit of farming, but no moonwalks for him or the rest of the crew today.

He passed through the tunnel system connecting the comm room to their quarters. They were split in two, one for the "night" team and one for the "day" team. Not that the concepts had any real meaning here, it was just a convenient way to organize everything and avoid completely screwing up everyone's internal clock.

Most of the day team was already out of their bunks. Two were awake but still in bed, and a third was completely asleep.

Nathan pressed a button on the wall. A shrill buzzing played next to the three astronauts' heads, jolting them awake. Though he would have loved to yell something along the lines of "wake the hell up," the night team commander would not be happy for disrupting his astronauts.

Instead, the sound caused everyone on his side to wake up without any yelling. They were still groggy as they lumbered out of their bunks. Today was not supposed to be that tough— they didn't know why they were being woken up early.

"Comm room, when you're ready," Nathan instructed.

He ventured back into the network of hallways that connected the modules of Site 76. Three astronauts were returning from the farming area, which was the largest and most unpleasant to be in. Nathan had nothing but respect for the people who volunteered to work in it.

They were heading to the comm room as well, preparing to receive whatever news NASA decided was important enough to justify telling everyone at once.

A screen displaying the blue logo stared back at all 20 of the astronauts. Within a minute of Nathan entering, it faded, giving way to a group of very nervous scientists.

Site 22 - Communication Center - July 18 2027

"What do you mean the mission is concluded? This was supposed to be a long-term habitation."

“The situation in Moscow has not been friendly to space flight. After the Korean incident, there has been significant pressure to withdraw from the space race in favor of more local expenditures. When America announced they were decommissioning Site 76, we were forced to discontinue the program as well.”

“So you’re just going to give into pressure from the capitalists?”

“... It is in the capitalists’ interest for us to keep spending resources on trivialities such as this.”

Ivan stared intently at the screen. “When can we expect to return?”

The man paused. “Thank you for your service Comrade Ivan.”

Before Ivan could respond, the feed cut out, displaying its usual hammer and sickle. He banged his hand against the wall of the facility, before departing to inform the other cosmonauts.

Site 93 - Communication Center - July 18 2027

“So this is where we’re going to die...”

The ESA astronauts didn’t know how to react as the screen opposite them went to black.

“They’ll have to change their mind, right? There’s more humans on the Moon than there were in my hometown...”

“I... I’m not sure...”

A French astronaut balled her fist, then ripped the European Union flag off her uniform. Two Germans followed her lead, but most remained silent.

Eventually Sheffield, one of the only Britains on the mission, spoke up. “How long do we have on our current supplies?”

The crew’s botanist answered. “Maybe a few months? We got a resupply just last week, and the harvest should be ready in a few days.”

“What would it take to become sustainable?”

“... I don’t know. The farm is only meant to be a buffer for resupply... Let me do the math.” She departed for the farming module.

The Brit paused, before pulling up a map of the surrounding area on the main screen. “Site 08 is about 120 kilometers from here. Could Fido make it that far?”

“You mean you want to go to 08 in person?”

“Well does anyone here have a better plan? Because I’d much rather have to beg to the blokes down there than at 49 or 76.”

No one responded.

“Then it’s settled. Get Fido ready for a long haul, and we’ll see what their situation is like.”

Site 49 - Astronaut Quarters - July 20, 2027

The taikonauts held onto hope for a bit longer than the others. However, the People’s Republic of China defunded their moon colonies just like everyone else, only they did it two days later. Almost half of the station accepted their fate soon after the announcement, going for a moonwalk without any equipment.

The remainder simply wandered the much quieter facility, waiting for their supplies to run out, an event greatly accelerated by the majority of the farming team choosing to join the Moon’s landscape.

The monotony of their new routine was interrupted by a pounding on the wall of the entrance module. Only one taikonaut was nearby to hear it.

“Is someone there?” He called. After getting no response, he returned to reading the news, even though it was still just talking about Korea.

The pounding came back, prompting the slightly irritated taikonaut to look for the source.

As he grew closer to the airlock, the sound got louder. With a combination of curiosity and optimism, he got ready to step outside.

After suiting himself up, he entered the airlock. Directly outside was another man, wearing a slightly different space suit and a slightly different flag on his right sleeve.

Site 08 - Extra Vehicular Activity Bay - July 21 2027

“Ya sure it’ll work mate?”

Sheffield paused for a moment, struggling to work through the Australian’s accent. On more than one occasion he had to ask the one of the Canadian crew members to translate.

“No, but we hardly have a choice here. Both of us will run out of food if we don’t.”

“Fair enough.”

The remaining crew of Site 08 were loading everything that could be salvaged into their own moon buggy, alongside the European’s.

Having the smallest colony, the remnants of the Commonwealth Space Agency decided to join up with their European counterparts. It meant abandoning Site 08, but none of the Canadians, Australians, or Kiwis were particularly attached to it.

It also meant getting new soil and crops to the more advanced ESA farming unit, which would extend all of their lives for another few months.

The drive to their new home was not an easy process. On the way there, Sheffield had the entire vehicle to just himself and some life support systems. Now he had to share it with two other astronauts and all of their stuff, along with making sure their rover was still following as well.

Regardless, the group kept pressing onward.

Site 47 - Common Room - July 23 2027

Site 47 was an abnormality among the lunar colonies. Whereas the others essentially brought the frames of their stations with them, the Indian base was created by digging into the lunar surface. While it allowed them to have much more space than their counterparts from other nations, it was usually not a pleasant place, with such little light and a solar array that constantly needed cleaning.

Despite their conditions and the knowledge that they were essentially left for dead, many of them remained in the facility. However, no one predicted the knock at the facility's airlock.

They opened the seal, and were greeted by two men: one with the Soviet Union's flag, the other with China's.

The Indian astronauts were shocked, as the two took off their helmets.

"Gathering survivors at Site 22," the Russian stated, in broken English. "Will you come?"

The site's inhabitants started running around, scrambling to inform the others.

Site 76 - Intra Lunar Communication Center - July 24 2027

Nathan looked tentatively at the computer in front of him. A technician stood at his side, making sure he wired it properly.

"This is illegal, right?" the technician asked.

"Absolutely. But it's also illegal to sentence 20 astronauts to their death, so I'm pretty sure it cancels out."

He resumed his work, adjusting the communication system. For reasons they did not know, contact with Mission Control dropped off entirely. Given that the communication center was now useless, they decided to repurpose it to match the radio frequency of Site 93.

As a result of some laws highly regarded as bullshit by virtually every individual who has set foot on the moon, the lunar colonies weren't supposed to contact one another.

Theoretically it was supposed to assist the Soviets, given that most of their allies took longer than the west to found colonies.

“Alright, it’s ready,” the technician informed, stepping back.

Nathan started typing into the computer and identified the Site 93 station. The few hundred kilometers between them would be significantly easier to manage if this worked.

“This is US Commander Nathan White from Site 76. Does anyone read me?”

There was a few moments of silence, before they received a response.

“Mr. White, are you aware of the flagrant violation of international law you just committed?” A British voice asked, sarcastically. *“You should know that we are not to communicate with each other.”*

“I’m more than happy to hang up,” Nathan answered.

The sarcasm left the Briton’s voice. *“In any case, what is the situation of Site 76?”*

“Well according to our lead botanist we have about two years before we run out of food. What about 93?”

“We recovered the remaining resources of Site 08, including its personnel. We’re still not self-sufficient, however our crew has enough food and supply to last for five years. Our belief is that the political climate will shift by then.”

Nathan paused for a moment, trying to remember which group ran 08. “Have you contacted any other sites?”

“No, the Soviet and Chinese sites are out of the range of our buggies, and their radio transmissions are more strongly encrypted.”

Nathan turned around and faced a map of the lunar surface. The closest station to themselves was the Russian’s Site 22, which was about 60 kilometers away.

“Got it.” He looked out to the horizon. “Nightfall is coming, and most of our equipment is going into hibernation mode. We may not be able to contact you again until sunrise.”

“Understood. Godspeed.”

The transmission cut out, leaving the American crew to themselves. They set to work readying the base for nighttime.

Site 01 - Command Base - March 19 2030

For the first time, the six commanders from the lunar colonies sat in a single room- the command base of Site 01. Site 01 was a Frankenstein of salvaged parts and incompatible modules from different country’s bases being forced together. Nevertheless, construction on the 80-person base was going well, despite all the challenges it faced.

Nathan watched the Commonwealth and Chinese rovers pulling the disassembled Russian EVA bay over the white turf.

Communication between the six was challenging. Most knew English, only half knew it well. Most of the planning for Site 01 was done by pictures, as specific crews from each nation worked together to design it.

There was no sign of the people back on Earth changing course— they haven't even received contact from anyone since 2028. However, if their estimates proved accurate, the extra space and capabilities of the new facility would be enough to be fully sustainable.

As the six discussed the rationing of the upcoming farm yield, some of the astronauts paused their duties to look up at the blue sphere over them, where they could see several small flashes forming over the Korean peninsula.