

DEAD SPACE

Issue #2

by

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AUTHOR'S NOTES ON THIS DRAFT

1) Like issue 1, this draft has been written before the appearance of the marker crater has been finalised, so some of those scenes may have to change slightly to accommodate.

PAGE 1

PANEL 1

OPEN ON a CLOSE SHOT of DR SCIARELLO. He's making a speech, a eulogy for Katie, his assistant.

TOM SCIARELLO

Katie was my assistant for five years. She was devoted to her job, to helping people.

PANEL 2

CUT TO elsewhere in the colony. (These cutaways are quasi-flashbacks, bringing us up to speed on what NEUMANN and CORTEZ have been dealing with the past few days.)

NOTE that Cortez looks like shit in all of them. She's not sleeping, and is stressed.

So: ON Neumann and Cortez as they break up a fight between two miners, restraining them as Cortez struggles to slip cuffs onto one of the guys.

CAPTION

"But that devotion got Katie killed. She shouldn't even have been working that day. But with all the colony's problems..."

PANEL 3

BACK TO Sciarello. LONG SHOT to reveal the scene; we're in UNION SQUARE again, only this speech is a little more formal, more organised, than Abbott's in last issue.

Sciarello stands on a small platform, speaking to a crowd of people. The platform has a small mic on a modern-looking lectern. There are around a hundred staff attending - miners, engineers, executives, from all walks of life.

Beside Sciarello stand a few more people - other doctors and nurses from the colony.

LOCATION

Union Square

TOM SCIARELLO

As you know, everyone's stressed right now. Many of you are probably experiencing it yourselves. You can't sleep, you have bad dreams when you do...

PANEL 4

CUT TO Neumann and Cortez again. Yet another different part of the colony, this time a residential area. They are arresting a miner who's beaten up his girlfriend, a service staffer.

Neumann slaps the guy in cuffs as Cortez watches paramedics take the girlfriend away on a stretcher. A small crowd of people, residents in the same area, look on.

CAPTION

"The point is, my surgery has never been busier. So Katie stayed late one evening, to clear paperwork."

PANEL 5

BACK TO Sciarello. OVER HIS SHOULDER, looking out at the crowd.

TOM SCIARELLO

And that was the evening Brant Harris came to see me.

PAGE 2

PANEL 1

CUT TO Cortez, in her apartment, sitting on the edge of her bed wearing a vest and sweat pants. A single lamp illuminates the room. She pops a handful of SLEEPING PILLS.

CAPTION

"Katie saved my life. If she hadn't called P-Sec, I'd be lying in the morgue right now, and she'd be up here telling everyone I was a workaholic."

PANEL 2

BACK TO Sciarello. CLOSE ON him, looking out at the crowd as he continues his speech.

TOM SCIARELLO

I'd gladly make that exchange. And I--

VOICE OFF (GHOST)

I know you would, Tom.

PANEL 3

VIEW OVER HIS SHOULDER at the crowd. At the front of the assembled people stands KATIE'S GHOST, smiling sympathetically up at him.

Sciarello RECOILS at the sight of her.

KATIE (GHOST)

But there are more important things you have to do. You've got to stop them...

TOM SCIARELLO

Katie?

PANEL 4

Sciarello backs off the platform, his head in his hands. He knows it's a hallucination - miners have been coming to him with the same complaints all week - but it's still freaking him out.

One of the other doctors with him, WELLAND, rushes to Sciarello.

TOM SCIARELLO (SMALL)

No... No, this isn't real...

WELLAND

Tom! Are you all right?

PANEL 5

Welland's own nursing assistant helps Sciarello, now wide-eyed with fear, down from the platform. Welland himself steps up to the mic and tells everyone to go home.

WELLAND

Sorry, folks, Tom's not feeling too good.
Thanks for coming, and we'll be collecting
for Katie's family in the next couple days.

PANEL 6

ON Sciarello, quivering and staring into space as Welland's assistant tries to console him.

TOM SCIARELLO

Oh, christ... She's gone...

PAGE 3

PANEL 1

CUT TO the door of CORTEZ' APARTMENT. MORNING.

Neumann stands at the door, wearing his P-Sec jacket, dressed for work. Cortez, wearing the same vest/sweat pant combo we saw her in before, answers the door and squints, half-asleep, at Neumann.

LOCATION

Apartment 35, row A-7, D block

VERA CORTEZ

Bram?

(cont)

Oh, shit. What time is it?

BRAM NEUMANN

0950. Shift started 80 minutes ago.

PANEL 2

Cortez turns and pads back into the apartment, running a tired hand through her hair. Neumann follows her in.

BRAM NEUMANN

Third day in a row, Vera. I can't keep covering like this. I mean, we're all exhausted right now, but--

VERA CORTEZ

I can't sleep, Bram. The doc gave me some pills, but they don't always work.

PANEL 3

Cortez turns to face Neumann and shouts at him in frustration.

BRAM NEUMANN

You realize you sound like every other miner we've arrested this past week.

VERA CORTEZ

I know, dammit!

PANEL 4

Neumann raises a sarcastic eyebrow. Cortez turns away, simmering with anger.

BRAM NEUMANN

You hallucinating, too? Getting visions of your precious marker?

VERA CORTEZ

That's not fair.

BRAM NEUMANN

I'm just saying. Seems odd, doesn't it?

PANEL 5

She's had enough. Cortez frogmarches Neumann to the door. He tries to shrug it off, remind her that they still have a job to do.

VERA CORTEZ

All right, that's enough. Get out!

BRAM NEUMANN

Vera, come on. We've got a shift to work.

PANEL 6

But Cortez is having none of it. She hits the door pad inside her apartment, and the door begins to close, leaving Neumann outside.

VERA CORTEZ

So go work it. I'm gonna take a sick day.

PAGE 4

PANEL 1

CUT TO the office of HANFORD CARTHUSIA. He looks out and up at us, wide-eyed with anger.

HANFORD CARTHUSIA
This is outrageous!

PANEL 2

WIDE SHOT to reveal the scene. He's talking to someone on the vidscreen again, like his conversation with Captain Mathius last issue. But this time he's talking to DEAKIN ABBOTT. Behind Abbott we can see one of the colony's VEHICLE BAYS.

Carthusia slams his hand down on the desk, clearly outraged. Abbott wags a finger at the screen.

LOCATION
Office of Hanford Carthusia

HANFORD CARTHUSIA
That site is of major archeological importance! You can't just walk around it like a tourist attraction!

DEAKIN ABBOTT (JAGGED)
It's a sacred object, not some rock to be mined. A marker! You know what that means!

PANEL 3

ON Carthusia. He turns to look out his large window, looking out across the wasteland of the planet.

HANFORD CARTHUSIA
That's still to be determined. By the proper authorities, not some transport engineer.
(cont)
Touch that artefact again, and you'll be on a shuttle back to earth before you can say "Altman be praised".

PANEL 4

Abbott is incensed that a fellow member of the church is being so unreasonable, at least by his standards. Carthusia turns back to the vidscreen, waving his hands in frustration.

DEAKIN ABBOTT (JAGGED)
I don't believe this. You're devout! You of all people shouldn't try to stop us practising our faith!

HANFORD CARTHUSIA

You blustering idiot, I'm not telling you to stop believing! I'm telling you to stay away from that marker!

PANEL 5

CLOSE ON the vidscreen. Abbott allows himself a SMALL SMILE.

DEAKIN ABBOTT (JAGGED)

"From that marker", huh? I knew it.

PANEL 6

Realising he let his temper get the better of him, Carthusia touches a button on his desk to cut the line. The screen winks off.

In background we see Carthusia's middle-aged secretary, ALICE, enter with DR SCIARELLO in tow.

HANFORD CARTHUSIA

Good-bye, Abbott.

SFX

Klik!

PAGE 5

PANEL 1

Alice announces the doctor, and Carthusia beckons him in.

ALICE
Dr. Sciarello to see you, sir.

HANFORD CARTHUSIA
Thank you, Alice.
(cont)
Come in, doctor. What can I do for you?

PANEL 2

Carthusia sits down at his desk, and Sciarello sits opposite.

TOM SCIARELLO
Sir, we need to make this problem--the
depressions, insomnia, all of it--our top
priority.

HANFORD CARTHUSIA
I should hope you already are, doctor.
Productivity is down 15 per cent.

PANEL 3

ON Sciarello. He shrugs, admitting that the current remedy just
doesn't seem to be working.

TOM SCIARELLO
Not just medically. I doubt handing out
sleeping pills is going to solve this. I
think there's a deeper root to the problem.

PANEL 4

Carthusia looks confused.

HANFORD CARTHUSIA
Don't we have a clinical psychiatrist?

TOM SCIARELLO
Dr. Welland, yes. But that's not what I'm
talking about.

HANFORD CARTHUSIA
Then I don't follow you.

PANEL 5

Sciarello leans across the desk, emphasising his point.

TOM SCIARELLO

This all started after we found that
artefact. And I don't believe in
coincidences.

(cont)

I want to examine it thoroughly. Maybe it's
radioactive in some way, or--

PAGE 6

PANEL 1

ON Carthusia. He leans back in his chair, spreading his hands in a world-weary gesture. The answer seems obvious to him.

HANFORD CARTHUSIA

Out of the question. Come on, doctor, this is all just down to stir-crazy miners who've been cooped up with bad recycled air for too long.

PANEL 2

Sciarello gets to his feet, planting his hands on the desk, trying to stare Carthusia down. But the executive won't let a doctor's concerns come between him and his orders.

TOM SCIARELLO

Sir, with respect, I've never seen anything like this before. If I could just examine--

HANFORD CARTHUSIA

I said no.

PANEL 3

Carthusia turns to his computer, blanking Sciarello. The doctor throws his hands up in despair and heads out the door.

HANFORD CARTHUSIA

Now please, see yourself out. I'm a busy man.

PANEL 4

But before he leaves, Carthusia stops him with one last question. Sciarello turns in the doorway to answer.

HANFORD CARTHUSIA

By the way... your nurse. What did you do with the--with her body?

TOM SCIARELLO

She's in the morgue, of course. The Ishimura will take her back home when it leaves. Why?

PANEL 5

Carthusia raises his eyebrows in mild surprise at the mention of a morgue.

HANFORD CARTHUSIA

I didn't even know we had a morgue.

TOM SCIARELLO

It's pretty small. Deaths on colonies are still rare.

PANEL 6

Carthusia turns back to his computer and waves the doctor away.

HANFORD CARTHUSIA

Interesting.

(cont)

Good-bye, doctor.

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PANEL 1

CUT TO outside. CLOSE ON NATALIA and JERRY, wearing full pressure suits. They both stare outward.

JERRY COOPER (JAGGED)
You did tell Carthusia that door wasn't our fault, right? He knows that?

NATALIA DESHYANOV (JAGGED)
He knows, Jerry.

PANEL 2

WIDE SHOT to reveal the scene. We're at the MARKER AREA.

NATALIA, JERRY and a half dozen other guys from their engineering team stand in a loose semi-circle in front of a LARGE CORDON surrounding the marker at a distance, blocking access to it. They've been assigned to guard it, after Abbott's little soiree last issue.

Jerry isn't happy about it in the least. Natalia is resigned to it, however - she knows there's no point in arguing with Carthusia.

The symbols on the marker and surrounding stones glow in the dim light of the planet's atmosphere.

LOCATION
Dig site GL-426

JERRY COOPER (JAGGED)
Well, then, Natalia...
(cont)
You mind explaining to me why the fuck we're standing out here instead of P-Sec?

PANEL 3

ON Natalia. She turns to look back at the marker.

NATALIA DESHYANOV (JAGGED)
Quit griping. Think how important this is. The first real marker we've found in two hundred years, and we get to safeguard it.

PANEL 4

DEAKIN ABBOTT and about a dozen people, all in full pressure suits, arrive and step out of four land vehicles.

Natalia steps forward, to approach them. Behind her, Jerry is coming to a sudden realisation about Natalia's attitude.

NATALIA DESHYANOV (JAGGED)
Hey, here's Abbott.
(cont)
Over here!

JERRY COOPER (JAGGED)
Wait a minute, what did you say? Since when
did you convert?

PANEL 5

Natalia reaches Abbott and his compatriots, and holds out a hand to indicate they can't come any closer. Behind her, Jerry shakes his head in disbelief.

NATALIA DESHYANOV (JAGGED)
Sorry, Abbott, but you've all got to stay
behind the cordon.

JERRY COOPER (SMALL, JAGGED)
Un-fucking-believable.

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PANEL 1

Abbott thumbs back over his shoulder at the people with him. They're all staring past him, at the marker.

But Natalia is stubborn. She reiterates that no-one is allowed through.

DEAKIN ABBOTT (JAGGED)
Natalia, I've got a dozen people here, all wanting to see it. To experience it.

NATALIA DESHYANOV (JAGGED)
And they can. From behind the cordon.

PANEL 2

Abbott keeps pushing, with the zeal we'd expect of a religious devotee. Jerry is confused by Abbott's question.

DEAKIN ABBOTT (JAGGED)
You don't know what you're denying us. Have you seen them yet?

JERRY COOPER (JAGGED)
Seen what? The symbols? You can't miss them.

PANEL 3

ON Abbott. He places a gloved hand on Natalia's shoulder, talking to her like an old friend.

DEAKIN ABBOTT (JAGGED)
The visions. When I came down here a couple of days ago, I saw... something incredible. This is the real deal.
(cont)
Come on, let us through.

PANEL 4

Jerry moves between them, placing a polite but firm hand on Abbott's chest. Natalia's conviction is faltering, but Jerry's is not.

JERRY COOPER (JAGGED)
No-one gets through the cordon, and especially not you. Carthusia singled you out.

NATALIA DESHYANOV (JAGGED)
Maybe he's right, Jerry. What harm can they do?

JERRY COOPER (JAGGED)

No.

PANEL 5

Abbott walks back to his group.

DEAKIN ABBOTT (JAGGED)

Then we'll stay here, and we'll pray, and
we'll wait.

(cont)

You'll see.

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PANEL 1

CUT TO another vehicle crossing the wasteland of the planet's surface.

FROM VEHICLE

Thanks for helping me out, Sergeant.

PANEL 2

CUT TO inside the vehicle. NEUMANN and SCIARELLO are inside, wearing pressure suits but not helmets.

Neumann is driving.

BRAM NEUMANN

No problem. I'm with you, there's some weird shit going on with that rock.

TOM SCIARELLO

You have no idea how glad I am to hear someone not call it "the marker".

PANEL 3

Neumann sneers as he peers through the front window to see where they're going. Sciarello looks at him questioningly.

BRAM NEUMANN

Ah, it's bullshit. Trust me, I know a thing or two about Unitology.

TOM SCIARELLO

Your partner?

BRAM NEUMANN

Hell, no. I didn't even know Cortez was a member until last week.

PANEL 4

Sciarello leans back, looking out at the scenery. Neumann's expression darkens.

TOM SCIARELLO

Where is she, anyway? I thought she was going to join us.

BRAM NEUMANN

She's got whatever headfuck is freaking out the rest of the colony. We kind of fell out.

TOM SCIARELLO

Because she's a Unitologist?

PANEL 5

CLOSE ON Neumann, grim-faced.

BRAM NEUMANN
Because she's an idiot.

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PANEL 1

SPLASH PAGE!

They arrive at the marker site. HIGH VIEW to show us the whole area - the marker, the cordon, the tram tracks and lifting platform, several parked vehicles, and Neumann's vehicle pulling up in a cloud of dust.

Abbott and his group of pilgrims are still here, and they've already increased in size. Not only are there now about two dozen people with him, but they've erected some tarpaulins as simple, makeshift tents for shelter.

FROM VEHICLE

There you go.

FROM VEHICLE

Holy shit. Now I see it with my own eyes...

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PANEL 1

Neumann and Sciarello get out of the vehicle, now wearing their helmets. Sciarello is carrying what looks like a medium-sized flightcase, industrial-looking.

He gestures at the group of pilgrims.

TOM SCIARELLO (JAGGED)
What's going on here?

BRAM NEUMANN (JAGGED)
I heard about this. Pilgrims, coming out to worship.
(cont)
Got your kit? Then let's get down there.

PANEL 2

They approach, but as they reach the cordon, Natalia steps in their way. Neumann looks off to the side, toward the pilgrims, and is surprised at what he sees.

NATALIA DESHYANOV (JAGGED)
Sorry, guys, this is as close as you get.
You want to join the prayers, Abbott's leading a group over there.

BRAM NEUMANN (JAGGED)
Can't say I'm surprised--

PANEL 3

NEUMANN'S POV, looking at the pilgrims. They are all sitting on the ground in front of Abbott, as the lay preacher leads a prayer.

One of the pilgrims is CORTEZ. She looks up at us as Neumann shouts her name.

BRAM NEUMANN (JAGGED)
Cortez!

PANEL 4

Cortez gets up as Neumann approaches. He's forgotten all about Sciarello - this is beyond the pale.

NOTE: he has, but we haven't. Throughout this scene, in background we occasionally see Sciarello crouching over the flightcase, now opened and filled with complex machinery.

BRAM NEUMANN (JAGGED)
You're supposed to be laid up sick!

VERA CORTEZ (JAGGED)
Abbott said I should come here, instead.
And I feel better already.

PANEL 5

Neumann grabs Cortez by the arm, pulling her away from the pilgrim group. He's furious.

But Cortez is calm, collected - not like the stressed-out woman we saw earlier at all - and looks at him sympathetically.

BRAM NEUMANN (JAGGED)
This is crazy. What the fuck happened to "I don't let it affect my work"?

VERA CORTEZ (JAGGED)
The marker changes everything, Bram.
Honestly, I feel sorry for you. You don't understand what you're missing.

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PANEL 1

That comment strikes a nerve, and Neumann leans in at Cortez, bellowing at the top of his voice.

Another of the pilgrims, KARLL, hears the commotion and comes over.

BRAM NEUMANN (JAGGED)
I know exactly what this bullshit is about!
I lost my wife to your fucked-up cult,
remember?

KARLL (JAGGED)
Hey, hey! Is there a problem, here?

PANEL 2

Cortez remains calm. She really does just feel sorry for Neumann, not angry with him. But Neumann is still furious.

VERA CORTEZ (JAGGED)
No, Karll. My partner just hasn't seen the
light yet.

BRAM NEUMANN (JAGGED)
"Seen the light"? If Commander James
catches you out here, all you're gonna see
is your severance!

PANEL 3

Cortez smiles at him, like she's humouring a child. Karll steps between them, placing a firm hand on Neumann's chest. (A parallel to the earlier scene between Abbott and Jerry.)

VERA CORTEZ (JAGGED)
Some things in life are just too important,
Bram. Don't you see that?

KARLL (JAGGED)
Think you better leave the lady alone,
buddy.

PANEL 4

Bram is incensed. He pushes past Karll, beckoning for Cortez to come with him.

BRAM NEUMANN (JAGGED)
"Buddy"?! I'm P-Sec, you moron! And so's
she!
(cont)
You're coming back with me, Cortez. I'm
booking you in for a psych eval.

PANEL 5

Neumann tries to pull Cortez away, by the arm, but she resists and shouts out.

Abbott, with the pilgrims standing behind him, starts to walk over and shouts at Neumann.

VERA CORTEZ (JAGGED)

No!

DEAKIN ABBOTT (JAGGED)

Let go of her!

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PANEL 1

Abbott calmly pushes Neumann's hand away from Cortez. Neumann throws his hands up in despair.

DEAKIN ABBOTT (JAGGED)
You have no right. Vera is here of her own free will.

BRAM NEUMANN (JAGGED)
Free will? My ass! Just what kind of scheme are you pulling here, Abbott?

PANEL 2

Abbott and Neumann face off, neither prepared to back down.

DEAKIN ABBOTT (JAGGED)
No scheme, Sergeant. This is our sacred calling.

BRAM NEUMANN (JAGGED)
Sacred bullshit. You don't even know if it's really a marker!

PANEL 3

But then the odds change. Neumann sees Natalia and Jerry approaching, and waves over to them for help.

But the answer isn't what he expected.

BRAM NEUMANN (JAGGED)
Hey, you guys! You're supposed to be guarding this thing. Give me some backup, here!

NATALIA DESHYANOV (JAGGED)
You're disturbing the prayer group. You should leave.

PANEL 4

Suddenly, Neumann finds himself surrounded. Abbott, the pilgrims, and now the marker guards. They're all against him.

BRAM NEUMANN (JAGGED)
What? It's these idiots who should leave!

JERRY COOPER (JAGGED)
No, I don't think so.
(cont)
Now get back in your crawler and go home.

PANEL 5

Sciarello has got what he came for. With the flightcase now closed again, he pushes his way through the crowd surrounding Neumann and beckons to him.

Natalia takes Cortez by the arm and gently pulls her away from Neumann.

TOM SCIARELLO (JAGGED)
Come on, Neumann. They're not listening.

NATALIA DESHYANOV (JAGGED)
Sensible man, the doc. You should listen to him.

PANEL 6

Neumann knows when he's beat. He and Sciarello back off, back toward their vehicle.

BRAM NEUMANN (JAGGED)
What the fuck just happened?

TOM SCIARELLO (JAGGED)
I don't know... But I don't want to be around it a second longer.

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PANEL 1

CUT TO Neumann and Sciarello in the vehicle, heading back to the colony.

Sciarello has the flightcase open on his lap, revealing the complex machinery inside. He's reading a small screen.

TOM SCIARELLO

Not a thing.

PANEL 2

Neumann looks over at him in disbelief. Sciarello shrugs in response.

BRAM NEUMANN

You're shitting me. Maybe you need a better scanner.

TOM SCIARELLO

This is what they use on survey digs.
Alpha, beta, gamma, black band, shockpoint,
you name it. As far as science is
concerned, it's just a rock.

PANEL 3

Neumann shakes his head in disbelief. He just can't reconcile what he saw back there with his partner. Sciarello agrees.

BRAM NEUMANN

I've worked with Cortez on three colonies.
I'm telling you, that just wasn't her. And
the miners...

TOM SCIARELLO

I know. They're always rowdy, but I've
never seen staff act like that before.

PANEL 4

ON Neumann. He turns back to looking out the front window, his expression determined.

BRAM NEUMANN

Whether you can detect it or not, that rock
is behind this somehow. If I wasn't sure
before, I am now.

PANEL 5

ON Sciarello. He closes the flightcase, and looks equally grim.

TOM SCIARELLO

As a doctor, I'm always loathe to deny
science.

(cont)

But I agree. This can't go on.

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PANEL 1

CUT TO Carthusia's office. CLOSE ON him, tight-lipped with anger.

HANFORD CARTHUSIA
That's the last straw.

PANEL 2

WIDE VIEW of his office. Once again, he's talking to someone on the vidscreen. This time, it's a miner wearing a full pressure suit, named CARVER.

Carver is clearly outside, and talking to Carthusia on a mobile vidlink. This, plus the general communication problems, means the picture is very poor quality, with interference lines and dropouts.

HANFORD CARTHUSIA
I expressly told him to stay away from the artefact.

CARVER (JAGGED)
He came with a guy from P-Sec, sir. Newman, or something?

HANFORD CARTHUSIA
Neumann. I know him.

PANEL 3

ON the vidscreen. Carver looks concerned.

CARVER (JAGGED)
But that's not really the problem. You asked me to keep an eye on the pilgrims, and... Well, they started threatening the P-Sec guy.

PANEL 4

Carthusia dismisses Carver's worries, and reassures him that he'll do something about it.

CARVER (JAGGED)
It got pretty heated. If him and the doc hadn't left, there would have been a fight.

HANFORD CARTHUSIA
Overzealous idiots. All right, I'll talk to Abbott and bring them all in.

PANEL 5

But the news that the guards were also involved gets Carthusia's attention back. He looks thoughtful.

CARVER (JAGGED)

But sir, it wasn't just the pilgrims. The guards were getting aggressive, too.

HANFORD CARTHUSIA

Hmmm.

(cont)

Thank you, Carver. Leave it with me.

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PANEL 1

CUT TO Marla's den room at P-Sec HQ.

ON Marla - we look out from a viewpoint on top of her main screen. The light from the screen illuminates her face. She stares at the screen (so downward, as we look at it) with an expression of awe.

Behind her, NEUMANN enters the room.

LOCATION

P-Sec HQ

MARLA JANSSEN

Hey, Bram. Have you seen this?

BRAM NEUMANN

What is it?

PANEL 2

REVERSE THE ANGLE. Marla is looking at a vidlog of the marker - a clear picture, taken from close-up - obviously from within the security cordon. It shows the marker, and its symbols, in clear detail.

Neumann moves behind Marla and looks at the screen over her shoulder.

MARLA JANSSEN

Been going round the intranet all day. Someone got past the guards and made a vidlog of the marker, up close.

BRAM NEUMANN

Or one of the guards made it. Who's it from?

PANEL 3

ON the screen, showing the glowing symbols carved into the marker. Marla's hand comes in from off-panel, gesturing at the image.

MARLA JANSSEN

Nobody knows. It's a handheld, not a helmet cam, and the ID was wiped.

(cont)

Look at these symbols... Do you think they're carved into it? It's like they're glowing.

PANEL 4

Neumann shrugs, unimpressed. But Marla is - she turns her head to look up at him, surprised.

BRAM NEUMANN

They are. You can see them from two hundred metres away.

MARLA JANSSEN

How would you know?

BRAM NEUMANN

Went there with Doc Sciarello yesterday.

PANEL 5

Her surprise quickly turns to annoyance. Neumann should never have left the colony without informing her first. But he shrugs off her concern.

MARLA JANSSEN

You went outside, without logging it? Jesus christ, Bram!

BRAM NEUMANN

Relax, it was only for a couple hours. Anyway, what do you care? Please don't say you're converting.

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PANEL 1

Marla turns back to the image (which has now moved slightly - the camera moves around the marker, showing it from all angles).

She peers at the screen. Behind her, Neumann laughs.

MARLA JANSSEN

As if. But look at this. A lot of the symbols are repeated, and on the rocks around it, like it's a code, or language.

BRAM NEUMANN

Oh, I get it. You're geeking out! Ha!

PANEL 2

WIDE SHOT of them both. Marla stares intently at the screen, letting her enthusiasm and curiosity get the better of her as she rambles on.

Neumann, unseen by Marla, puts a hand over his mouth and tries not to laugh.

MARLA JANSSEN

Of course. This is incredible! I mean, it looks like there are similarities to cladistic math in there...

(cont)

I dunno, it could be coincidence. There's only so many ways to mark a 2D symbol, and old human alphabets often showed odd similarities between disparate cultures...

PANEL 3

REPEAT PANEL. Realising Neumann is silent, Marla turns to see him (still trying not to laugh) and pouts, annoyed that he doesn't seem to be taking her seriously.

MARLA JANSSEN

What?

PANEL 4

Neumann holds up a hand in apology. He knows he shouldn't laugh when she gets like this - it's part of what makes her good at her job - but he can't help it.

Marla crosses her arms, annoyed at his dismissal.

BRAM NEUMANN

Sorry, I know this stuff gets you hot. But the church has been trying to decipher the Black Marker for centuries, and they've got squat.

MARLA JANSSEN

So they say.

PANEL 5

CLOSE ON the screen, showing the marker.

MARLA JANSSEN (OFF)

Anyway, I'm gonna try. Who knows, a fresh perspective might be all it needs.

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PANEL 1

CUT TO Carthusia's office. ON him, his hands clasped behind his back, staring out the big window at the planet.

HANFORD CARTHUSIA
You have your orders.

PANEL 2

WIDE SHOT to show the office. With him, standing behind his desk, is a tall, burly miner called CARVER.

CARVER
I'd feel more comfortable if you were coming with us, sir.

HANFORD CARTHUSIA
Out of the question. I'll speak to them directly when they return.

PANEL 3

Carthusia returns to his desk and plants his hands on it, facing Carver across the desk.

CARVER
What if they refuse? It sounds like they really want to stay...

HANFORD CARTHUSIA
Then don't take no for an answer. I've assigned you emergency weaponry.
(cont)
In fact, arrest them regardless, on my authority. I want to know who made that vidlog!

PANEL 4

Carthusia sits down and pinches the bridge of his nose. This is all working out to be much more trouble than he expected.

CARVER
I'll call P-Sec, ask them to accompany us.

HANFORD CARTHUSIA
No, you won't.
(cont)
I can't trust them, Second Engineer Carver. They're not devout.

PANEL 5

CLOSE ON Carver. Shoulders back, chin up, looking every bit the obedient servant.

CARVER

I understand. Very good, sir.

(cont)

Altman be praised.

PANEL 6

Carver leaves. Carthusia sinks back into his chair.

HANFORD CARTHUSIA

Altman be praised.

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PANEL 1

CUT TO the marker. The pilgrims have gone, leaving just Natalia and her team.

CARVER and a dozen other guys get out of three land vehicles. Natalia approaches them, waving her hands in the air.

NATALIA DESHYANOV (JAGGED)
Hey, get out of here! No visits to the marker! Carthusia's orders!

PANEL 2

Carver walks down to Natalia, followed by his crew.

NOTE all of Carver's men have bolt-gun like weapons strapped to their belts, but nobody's drawn one yet.

CARVER (JAGGED)
He's given us new orders, Deshyanov. You're all relieved of duty, effective immediately.

NATALIA DESHYANOV (JAGGED)
Bullshit.

PANEL 3

Carver and Natalia face off. Natalia is furious, almost manic. It's clear the marker has affected her deeply while she's been out here.

CARVER (JAGGED)
You're also all under arrest. Carthusia suspects one of you made that vidlog.

NATALIA DESHYANOV (JAGGED)
I said bullshit. The marker's protection is our duty. We are not leaving it!

PANEL 4

Natalia pulls a LINE CUTTER from her own belt, and levels it at Carver. Carver is more annoyed than scared, he doesn't think she actually means to use it. He holds out a hand for the cutter.

NATALIA DESHYANOV (JAGGED)
Now get out of here.

CARVER (JAGGED)
What the hell are you doing? You are under arrest! Now give me that!

PANEL 5

But Natalia does mean it. She fires the cutter, and Carver's head vaporises in a spray of blood. Carver's men gape in disbelief, and frantically reach for those bolt guns.

SFX

Fzzzzak!

MINER (JAGGED)

Holy shit!

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PANEL 1

The whole of Carver's crew levels their weapons at Natalia. She keeps the cutter up, ready to fire.

SFX

Ch-chk!

MINER (JAGGED)

Drop the cutter!

MINER (JAGGED)

Now, Deshyanov!

PANEL 2

Jerry steps up behind Natalia, trying to calm her down. But she's wild-eyed, still keeping the cutter levelled at Carver's team. She'd willingly die to protect the marker.

JERRY COOPER (JAGGED)

Natalia...

NATALIA DESHYANOV (JAGGED)

I won't let them hurt it, Jerry!

JERRY COOPER (JAGGED)

Natalia, they'll kill you!

PANEL 3

One of Carver's team, KASHIF, takes a step forward - keeping his bolt gun aimed at Natalia, but trying to talk her down. Natalia turns and smiles at Jerry. Death holds no fear for her.

KASHIF (JAGGED)

We're not going to hurt it. We're just here to replace you.

NATALIA DESHYANOV (JAGGED)

You'd see me again, Jerry. You know that now...

PANEL 4

Jerry steps up beside Natalia and gently takes the cutter from her. He's not as affected by the marker as the rest of Natalia's team, and he doesn't want to see her dead.

She looks at him with the bewildered, pleading expression of a child.

JERRY COOPER (JAGGED)

No, Natalia. You heard the man. They're just going to guard it, like we have.

NATALIA DESHYANOV (JAGGED)
But it needs us...

PANEL 5

Jerry hands the cutter to Kashif, and Carver's men start to lower their weapons.

JERRY COOPER (JAGGED)
It needs all of us. Everyone on the colony.
That's what you said.
(cont)
Let them have their turn. Right, guys?

PANEL 6

But Kashif isn't going to let them off that easily. He swings the cutter at Natalia, smacking her across the helmet with it. She recoils from the blow.

KASHIF (JAGGED)
Right on...
(cont)
Bitch!

SFX
Smak!

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PANEL 1

CUT TO the main office at P-Sec HQ. NEUMANN and COMMANDER JAMES stand in front of the large vidscreen we saw in issue #1.

They're talking to CARTHUSIA, who sits at his desk in his office, talking up to his own vidscreen.

NOTE: Despite the pilgrimage having been stopped, Cortez' desk at P-Sec remains empty.

BRAM NEUMANN

I'm telling you, we need to just leave that thing alone and get the hell out of here.

PANEL 2

ON the vidscreen. Carthusia gets to his feet.

HANFORD CARTHUSIA (JAGGED)

Officer Neumann--

BRAM NEUMANN (OFF)

Sergeant.

HANFORD CARTHUSIA (JAGGED)

--This is a very important find.

PANEL 3

Commander James speaks up. Neumann has filled him in on what's been happening, and he's no happier about it than his Sergeant.

COMMANDER JAMES

Important enough for people to die?

HANFORD CARTHUSIA (JAGGED)

You're reaching, Commander. Some miners get the colony crazies, and suddenly it's because we found a rock?

PANEL 4

ON Commander James. He jabs an angry finger at the screen.

COMMANDER JAMES

Don't pull that shit with me, Hanford. We've got two dead already, and things are only getting worse. Who knows what the toll will be by the end of the week?

(cont)

I strongly advise you call CEC and tell them we're pulling out.

PANEL 5

ON the vidscreen. Carthusia looks up at the screen like Commander James is insane.

HANFORD CARTHUSIA (JAGGED)

Let me get this straight. This operation has already cost hundreds of millions over two and a half years. Aegis VII has billions worth of saleable resources.

(cont)

But now, less than three weeks from planetcrack, you want me to abort... because a couple of miners died?

(cont)

I'll be very clear, Commander. Not a chance.

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PANEL 1

Carthusia turns away from the screen. Neumann looks at him questioningly.

HANFORD CARTHUSIA (JAGGED)
Besides, you'll get your wish, in a sense.
Just be patient.

BRAM NEUMANN
What are you talking about?

PANEL 2

ON the vidscreen. Carthusia adopts his usual stance of looking out his window, at the planet.

HANFORD CARTHUSIA (JAGGED)
In four days' time, the artefact will be
lifted and brought here, to await the
Ishimura.
(cont)
When the ship arrives, it will be
transferred on board.

PANEL 3

Neumann can't believe what he's hearing. He shouts at the vidscreen. Carthusia looks back over his shoulder at the screen.

BRAM NEUMANN
You're bringing it in to the colony? How
much fucking damage do you want to do?

HANFORD CARTHUSIA (JAGGED)
Don't get hysterical, Sergeant.

PANEL 4

Carthusia walks to his desk and leans over it, his finger poised over the button that will end the call.

BRAM NEUMANN
You mean just like everyone else around
here? Are you blind?

HANFORD CARTHUSIA (JAGGED)
Good-bye, gentlemen. Thanks for your input.

PANEL 5

The vidscreen winks off. Neumann turns to Commander James, barely believing what he just heard. James is walking back to his office.

BRAM NEUMANN
What the hell do we do now?

COMMANDER JAMES
Brace ourselves.

PANEL 6

CUT TO Carthusia's office. He touches a button on his desk comm and speaks into it.

HANFORD CARTHUSIA
Alice... Get me Captain Mathius.

//ENDS