

Welcome to **Phases**: a short story anthology following the events of Moonbase Theta, Out.

Story **3: Trina**. Narrated by Cass McPhee.

It took a lot longer than she hoped to find a way home. She'd missed out on the first wave of folks leaving the Moon, while the Megas were in an uproar and every major Enclave was rioting; she'd promised to wait until more crew members had been revived and their loyalties secured. The ACs had kept hold of the communications network, so she could at least send messages, hear Corin's voice in notes she played and re-played long into the night ... but sometimes that made it even harder to wait.

By the time things had stabilized enough that she could make the trip, it had become difficult again to get to where you might want to go on Earth. While still focused inward, the corporations had their eye on the Ryders and were carefully inspecting every vehicle granted passage. And most of the new Freeholds were still finding their way, with contacts yet to be trusted. Trina spent weeks with the NAC before they could spare an ultralight for the next step in her journey.

Stephen had improved the design of the ultralights so they could make it a bit further and were harder to detect; so, she was able to land in the Talladega Forest, closer than she'd hoped to Atlanta. But the Freehold that had carved out an airstrip there was abandoned; it was a rough landing over broken ground and the compound was half-bulldozed and open to nature.

Trina camped on a rooftop under the stars, thankful for the nanobots that still circulated through her system and the warmth they provided. When it was hard to get her thoughts to quiet, she caught up on recordings her fathers had sent her; every weekly gaming session she'd missed, from *Burrowing* (with Corin's interjections that they were too old for such kid's stuff) to *Cryptids in Conflict*, to a few much-debated sessions of *Wrathematical*, an educational board game that Pop kept in the mix but no one else had much patience for. Even the arguments over points of topology made them feel closer. When she finally fell asleep, their words kept going in her ears, and her hand was closed around the lucky D8 that she wore around her neck.

She'd expected that she'd have to wait until the next night to travel; but the trees grew so close together that she had no fear of being sighted by drones. She spent morning to afternoon hiking under their cover before the forest began to thin, napped in the underbrush until late evening, and was able to find a forest highway to follow for the night. Clouds had rolled in while she was sleeping, and while there was enough gradation in the shadows to keep track of where she was walking, the darkness above and around reminded her of a certain long walk through the tunnels of Moonbase Zeta.

When things began to turn towards day again she did have to hide – after so many hours of hiking, with her body still learning its full weight again in Earth gravity, every muscle ached with the need for a long rest. She listened to Corin explaining earnestly at length why their elbow had been jostled and they should get to roll the dice again until she fell asleep.

Another night's walk, and another day's sleep, this time inside an ancient charging station. She slept tucked under the counter; by now it was close enough to the Atlanta Enclave that the drone patrols passed hourly. *Every* hour, it turned out, but she'd stopped outside the range of the streetlights, and she stuck to the shadows until she reached her final outside stop – a utility hole cover leading to a sewer

overflow. From there, it was several clicks of poorly-lit, twisting tunnels to get inside the walls – but for Trina Haugen, that was just another night’s work.

She came out in an uninhabited area called The Gulch, stripped off the coveralls she’d been wearing to protect her street clothes, and put on a pair of glasses designed to obscure facial recognition. Using railroad crossings and side streets, she made her way east until, just before dawn, she hopped a fence to get to the alley behind a secured apartment building and entered through the utility door.

Inside, she leaned against the railing of the back stairwell for a minute and closed her eyes, almost unbearably weary. But then she straightened back up, shook her head and muttered to herself, “Come on now, that’s not really *badger behaviour*,” and took it steadily, step by step, up to the fourth floor.

At this hour, the hallway was almost silent – but there were voices from behind the door two from the end on the left-hand side, just where she’d most hoped to hear them. Trina smiled, and listened for a moment with her hand on the doorknob.

“You have to subtract four from your roll – “

“*Four!* Granddad!”

“Now cub – you wanted to play a copybara. I warned you that they’re not good diggers.”

“Ernesto, it’s five in the morning. Give the kid a break.”

“I want to change characters! I’m playing Poblano!”

“Your prairie dog? He’s not even in the party.”

“They can play the prairie dog if they want to ... anything that gets us out of this crater module. I don’t know what Trina was thinking.”

On cue, she tapped her key against the pad and opened the door. “Maybe I was thinking you need a badger back on your team to win!”

Corin’s jaw dropped – along with the handful of dice he was juggling. “MOM!” he cried out, and ran into her arms with a flurry of character sheets following him like cartoon smoke clouds. Before long, her fathers joined them in a full-party, full-family hug.

“Mom, mom, I can’t wait to show you everything! I can’t wait to tell you about the games, and I learned how to make an omelette, and so many things! Mom’s back, Mom’s back, Mom’s back ...”

Over their head, Trina met her fathers’ gaze with a wan smile. They all knew she’d have to turn herself in to Security the next day. None of them knew what would happen from there – she had information she was allowed to reveal to lighten her punishment, even a few things Michell had instructed her to “accidentally” let slip under questioning that might help in future negotiations. But it was unlikely that they’d let her return to normal life very soon after.

When her fathers let go, Corin kept clinging to her as she stumbled across the kitchen. Trina half-fell into a chair and hugged him back twice as hard. She ruffled their hair and kissed them soundly. “Of course I’m back, you silly cub. I made it across the Moon and through space, through tunnels you wouldn’t believe to get back to you. We’re in this adventure together.”

[END NOTES]

Thank you for listening to Phases: a Moonbase Theta, Out short story anthology. Written by D.J. Sylvis. Read, produced, and edited by Cass McPhee. Our theme music is Star, by Ramp - check them out at Ramp dash Music dot net. Our cover art is by Peter Chiykowski.

For more audio fiction from the creators of Moonbase Theta, Out, check out Waiting for October, a queer supernatural audio drama series about monster stories and the deep human needs they fulfill. Find it on your podcast app of choice, or visit Monkeyman Productions dot com to learn more.

And, as always, keep watching the moon.