

Myrtillus

Bradley never thought it would come to this.

The truck coughed its way to a stop at the gates of the Baikonur Cosmodrome. Bradley lowered his windows and gave his papers to the guard, as he had done countless times before. The interaction was simple, repetitive, almost choreographed, but Bradley's arm betrayed just the slightest hint of a tremble as he reached out to get his papers back. It was late, close to midnight; the complex was patches of pitch dark, interwoven with dim yellow lighting, and the occasional blindingly bright, harsh white spotlights doing their patrols. The numerous shadows hid the beads of sweat on Bradley's forehead from the sight of the guard.

Surely this was too much? They had always operated covertly, the UFSA. A stolen blueprint here, a smudged number there, the Federation had always been subtle. *He* had been subtle, trickling critical data ever so slowly out of the database of Soviet space agencies and into their own. He signed up for a desk job, dammit. Not this nonsense.

The dark green truck rumbled on through the complex. Not far beyond the various administrative buildings and warehouses, stood the N1 rocket, a towering silhouette glinting in the distance, quietly venting vaporized oxygen as it's being fueled.

The N1 was the pride of the Soviet aerospace industry, its thousands of tons of kerosene and oxygen ready to blast through its thirty engines and lift this gigantic monstrosity of a vehicle, all the way to the void of space, and carry a lunar lander, a tiny speck compared to the entirety of the rocket, to its destination. It was 1969; tensions were high, stakes were high, and the Soviet Union desperately wanted to keep up its record in the Space Race, after the first satellite and first man in space. The N1 was their moon rocket, built with haste and held together with hope. *But hope was not enough for Soviet engineering*, Bradley thought as he parked his truck near a small lookout tower. He pulled the tarp off of top of the trunk, and a metallic glimmer shone underneath. Covered by the drone of machinery and the darkness of the night, he quickly assembled the contents. A high-caliber anti-materiel rifle.

Footsteps clanged through the ladder as Bradley ascended the tower, rifle strapped to his back. He reached the top and adjusted his breath. A single bead of sweat rolls down his cheek, which he hastily wiped away. He set his weapon and pointed it towards the rocket standing a kilometer away. He looked into the scope as he turned a knob, gradually creating a clear image of his target. He looked away from the scope and looked at his watch.

Five minutes until launch. Right on time.

There were no passers-by beneath Bradley's tower. All personnel were evacuated to miles away, out of the range of the blast of energy and high velocity gasses that was about to come. It was only the whistling of the air, the gushing of fuel and oxidizer in the pipes, whirring pumps and the ever-present drone of machinery that accompanied him.

One minute to launch. Bradley double-checks his course calculations. *What an interesting career I had chosen for myself*, he mused. A double agent working for the KGB within NASA, turned agent within the United Federation of Space Agencies, now undercover again, back in the Soviet Union, but now working for not a country, but a spaceflight-focused paramilitary group. *But then, the CLA always had a hand in these things; hell, the CLA probably has a hand in this too.* "Bradley" wasn't his real name, it was his American identity – given by whom, really? He wondered.

The loudspeakers in the distance buzzed to life. "Ten seconds to launch," came the announcement in Russian. Bradley shook off his train of thought and fixed his sight on the scope.

Three, two, one.

The flash of light hit him first. He came prepared, however, as he continued to

squint through the specialized darkened scope. Then came the blast of noise and wind. A shockwave hit him as he stood bracing for impact. Debris was blown around like leaves in fall. The almost unbearably loud roar of thirty first-stage engines threatened to tear apart his eardrums, even through his industrial ear plugs. He could feel the heat of the takeoff now. The vibrations shook him and shook the scope. He strained to steady himself against it.

The rocket was lifting off the ground, the support structure around it falling away. It was accelerating upwards, a tower of fire, metal and light, casting dancing shadows on everything around it. But he stood firm, his scope steady, his finger on the trigger.

The gunshot was heard by no one. It was a mere pop against the screams of the beasts that powered the rocket. But his aim was true. It hit its heart. The bullet, traveling at hypersonic speeds, tore into the metal of the turbopump assembly, blowing open its fuel lines and jamming a pump. The pressure quickly built. The flames beneath engine #8 spluttered and died. Then, an explosion. The shockwave spread through the machinery, shredding apart fuel lines and lighting it on fire. It was a devastating chain reaction that could not be stopped.

As Bradley watched the rocket's guidance systems desperately trying to make light of the situation and correct its failing course, he couldn't help but feel just a tinge of pity. Such a work of engineering. Such an undeserved end. *But it was for our best interests, their best interests at least.* The fire spread, the systems failed, the fuel gushed forward into the welcoming flames. What Bradley didn't expect was the detonation.

A gigantic cluster of fireballs, brighter than the sun at noon, lit up the entire cosmodrome. The entire atmosphere shook as thousands of tons of volatile fuel mixture ignited and exploded. Huge chunks of concrete and metal were ripped from the ground and thrown in the air, higher than the eye could see. The shockwave wiped everything off its path. Bradley, his tower, the truck, all swept off like specks of dust and vaporized in the scorching heat. Warning sirens were barely heard as echoes of the blast continued in the air. It was almost beautiful, the red and orange glow of the fireballs and now completely flat ground around the epicenter. It was like a depiction of Hell itself.

When the Soviets came out of their bunkers half an hour later, they found what's left of the launch complex in ruins: smoke billowed, bent steel rebars were still red hot, and unburnt drops of fuel were still raining down from the skies. It was a crushing sight.

The announcement came inside UFSA headquarters that the most powerful artificial non-nuclear explosion had happened. It was a victory for the Federation. The Soviets would never be able to afford such a project again. They had effectively killed their moon program. The sabotage was a profound success. But the atmosphere was solemn. They had killed a dragon, at the cost of a human life. But now, as the Space Race enters a reign of chaos, they must build their own.

米尔蒂卢斯(**Myrtillus**)

布拉德利从未想过事情会发展到这一步。

卡车喘着粗气在拜科努尔航天发射场的大门前停下。布拉德利摇下车窗，像以往无数次那样将文件递给卫兵。这套流程简单、重复，几乎像编排好的舞蹈，但他伸手取回文件时，手臂却难以察觉地微微颤抖。夜已深沉，临近午夜；发射场内一片片漆黑与昏黄的灯光交织，偶尔有刺眼的白炽探照灯扫过巡逻。重重阴影

掩住了布拉德利额上的汗珠，未被卫兵察觉。

这实在太火了吧？UFSA（联合航天局联盟）向来行事隐秘。一份偷来的蓝图，一个模糊的数字——联邦的行动一向低调。他自己也一直小心翼翼，将关键数据一点一滴地从苏联航天机构的数据库悄悄输送到己方。他当初签的可是文职工作，该死的。不是这种荒唐事。

深绿色的卡车隆隆驶过发射场内部。穿过各类行政楼和仓库不远，N1火箭巍然矗立，高耸的轮廓在远处微微反光，加注燃料时液氧蒸发形成的雾气静静逸出。

N1火箭是苏联航空航天工业的骄傲，其数千吨的煤油和液氧即将通过三十台发动机猛烈燃烧，将这庞然巨物推向太空，并将一个与火箭整体相比渺小如尘的登月舱送往目的地。时值1969年；局势紧张，赌注高昂。在成功发射第一颗人造卫星并将第一人送入太空后，苏联迫切希望在太空竞赛中保持纪录。N1是他们的登月火箭，仓促建成，依靠希望维系。但希望不足以支撑苏联的工程，布拉德利将卡车停在一座小型瞭望塔附近时想道。他扯下车斗上的防水布，下方闪过金属的寒光。在机械的嗡鸣与夜色掩护下，他迅速组装起里面的东西——一把大口径反器材步枪。

布拉德利将步枪背在身后，爬上梯子，脚步声在铁梯上哐当作响。他到达顶部，调整呼吸。一滴汗珠滚落脸颊，他急忙擦去。他架好武器，瞄准一公里外矗立的火箭。他凑近瞄准镜，转动旋钮，逐渐看清目标。他移开视线，看了看表。

距发射还有五分钟。分秒不差。

布拉德利所在的塔下空无一人。所有人员都已疏散到数英里外，以避开即将爆发的能量和高速气体的冲击范围。只有空气的嘶鸣、管道中燃料和氧化剂的奔流、泵的嗡鸣以及无处不在的机械噪音陪伴着他。

距发射还有一分钟。布拉德利再次核对了弹道计算。^{*}我为自己选择的职业生涯真是“有趣”，^{*}他暗想。一个为克格勃在NASA内部工作的双面间谍，转而成为联合航天局联盟的特工，如今再次潜入苏联执行任务，但效力的不再是一个国家，而是一个以航天为重点的准军事组织。不过，CIA（中央情报局）向来插手这类事情；见鬼，CIA恐怕也掺和了这事。“布拉德利”并非他的真名，那是他的美国身份——究竟是谁给的呢？他感到疑惑。

远处的扩音器嗡嗡响起。“发射倒计时十秒，”俄语公告传来。布拉德利甩开思绪，将目光牢牢锁定在瞄准镜上。

三、二、一。

首先袭来的是强光。但他早有准备，继续透过特制的深色瞄准镜眯眼观察。接着是震耳欲聋的轰鸣和狂风。冲击波袭来，他站稳身形抵御冲击。碎片如秋叶般被吹散。三十台一级发动机发出几乎难以忍受的咆哮，即使戴着工业耳塞，也仿佛要撕裂他的耳膜。此刻他能感受到起飞的热浪。震动摇晃着他，也摇晃着瞄准镜。他竭力稳住自己。

火箭正离地升空，周围的支撑结构纷纷脱落。它加速上升，化作一座由火焰、金属和光芒构成的高塔，在周围一切投下摇曳的阴影。但他岿然不动，瞄准镜稳稳当当，手指扣在扳机上。

枪声无人听见。在火箭动力巨兽的咆哮声中，它不过是一声轻微的爆裂。但他瞄准精准，击中了心脏。子弹以高超音速撕裂涡轮泵组件的金属，炸开燃料管路并卡死了一个泵。压力急速积聚。8号发动机下方的火焰噼啪作响继而熄灭。随后，爆炸发生。冲击波在机械系统中扩散，撕碎燃料管路并将其点燃。这是一场无法阻止的毁灭性连锁反应。

布拉德利看着火箭的制导系统拼命试图应对局面、修正失败的航向，不禁生出一丝怜悯。如此工程杰作。如此不应有的结局。^{*}但这是为了我们最大的利益，^{*}至少是^{*}他们^{*}最大的利益。火势蔓延，系统失效，燃料涌向贪婪的火焰。布拉德利未曾料到的是接下来的大爆炸。

一连串巨大的火球，比正午的太阳更耀眼，照亮了整个发射场。数千吨易爆燃料混合物被引爆，爆炸震动了整个大气层。巨大的混凝土和金属块从地面被撕扯开来抛向高空，消失于视线之外。冲击波荡平了路径上的一切。布拉德利、他的瞭望塔、卡车，全都如尘埃般被扫除，在灼热中汽化消失。爆炸的回声仍在空中持续，警报声几乎微不可闻。爆炸中心周围，火球的红橙色光芒和完全被夷平的地面，景象几乎有一种诡异的美感，宛如地狱的写照。

半小时后，当苏联人员从掩体中出来时，他们发现发射场只剩一片废墟：浓烟滚滚，弯曲的钢筋仍炽热发红，未燃烧尽的燃料滴仍在从天而降。这是一幅令人崩溃的景象。

UFSA总部内部宣布，有史以来最强烈的非核人造爆炸发生了。这对联邦而言是一场胜利。苏联再也无力承担这样的项目，登月计划事实上已经被扼杀。这次破坏行动取得了深远成功。但气氛是肃穆的。他们屠杀了巨龙，却付出了一条生命

的代价。而现在，随着太空竞赛进入混乱时代，他们必须建造自己的巨龙。