

A Hymn FOR THE CURIE

A SHORT STORY BASED OFF
FRICTIONAL GAMES' SOMA

BY KIERA "FRENCH ROAST"

THIS WAS WRITTEN AS A SUBMISSION FOR THE FRICTIONAL
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THE *MS CURIE*, PATHOS-II AND ITS ASSOCIATED FACILITIES,
THE TELOS COMET, THE FLESHER/JIANGSHI MONSTER, SOME
INCLUDED DIALOGUE AND THE NAME OF CREWMAN
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PROLOGUE

9 April, 2104

The North Mid-Atlantic Ridge

"The sky is pitch black with smoke. The ocean is dark, incredibly dark. In the distance I can see land. According to navigation - it's Lisbon and the coast of Portugal," a man says, his voice unsteady.

Another man responds. *"Any signs of life? Over - Hopper?"*

After a moment's hesitation, the first man, Hopper, answers him with despair in his tone. *"It's on fire. Everything is on fire. The flames, they're reaching all the way into the sky, it's unreal."*

"Any signs of life? Over."

"No. Nothing but a massive firestorm covering the continent."

The sound of the two men's conversation, repeated over and over by a computer in a decaying room, is the only thing to break the silence. The monitors in the crew room are lit up in the darkness, their screens flickering with still images of the apocalypse that had claimed the earth above. Scorched land, a hundred-foot tidal wave crashing down upon the city, a skeleton half-buried in ash. A single red light glows faintly in the corridor outside the room.

It has been a year. The *MS Curie* sits silent and undisturbed. It is a tower of rusting, broken metal looming above the ocean floor. Red signal lights still illuminate its antennae, reaching out into the water. Occasionally its metal frame groans, echoing across the rocky plateau, threatening to finally give up and collapse. Within its claustrophobic halls, just as in the crew room where the memorial to the two departed crewmates plays endlessly, pale red and blue light illuminates the relics of the derelict ship's disappeared crew. It is a maze of halls, with ladders running along ceilings, railings jutting out from walls, staircases stretching sideways across decks, and rooms both upright and sideways like strange mirrors of themselves. They are occupied only by waterlogged clothes and bedsheets suspended in the water, motionless. Kitchen utensils, empty containers, a long-forgotten crew-member's favorite coffee mug -- these are the artifacts left behind, the only surviving memory of most of the former inhabitants.

Several piles of bones lay scattered upon the mossy, barnacle-crusted decks, picked clean of every last sinew, a morbid addition to the myriad items slowly being overtaken by nature's decay. Occasionally, a humanoid shadow slowly stalks past. It mocks the human form and all that had been lost. Sightless to its surroundings and without intelligible thought, it gives no consideration to the bones or the artifacts they left behind. It wanders the halls of the *Curie*

without a driving force in its head beyond the desire to sustain whatever demented form of life still possesses it, planted there by the misguided force that has created it.

But its inhuman hissing and moaning is the sound to break the silence. The haunting cry echoes through the corridors, the only new song to mourn the lost.

TELÓS

12 January, 2103 | 4:31 AM

Hopper was braced in the corner of the bridge, his hands gripping onto the beams beneath the staircase above him. He had not slept at all, but he did not feel tired under the circumstances. His knuckles were white and his stomach churned as the *Curie* slowly lurched at a nauseating angle, the ship pitching down nose-first into the ocean depths. He watched across the bridge as the viewports above the consoles were slowly dragged beneath the waves. He had experienced this sensation many times before, and had come to think little of it. But this time, he could not help but feel like he was being lowered into his grave as the *Curie* submerged, turning vertical so that only its stern remained above the water. Starlight was the only thing he could see, before they too were swallowed by the ocean. Eventually as he found himself staring into the abyssal void, he turned his gaze away.

First Mate Alvin Hopper was a burly, middle-aged man. He possessed a stocky build that was largely muscle, his rounded face adorned with a bushy black beard, his hair shaved down and close cut. His grey crewman's jacket, bearing his name HOPPER on the left breast and the ship's name, MS CURIE, emblazoned across the back in large white, blocky text, hung open so the sweat soaking through his tank top beneath could dry out some. He also wore matching grey crew pants and black utility boots with heavy treads that gave good grip on the diamond steel walkways of the *Curie*.

Hopper had been aboard the *Curie* for fifteen years, nearly since it was first commissioned, and had been first mate for three. He knew the ship inside and out. What was more, he had no family to speak of back in the States. For the past fifteen years, the *Curie* and the ocean had been the only thing he knew. It was his home, the crew his family, and he would happily die with it.

He looked over towards Palander, the only other person who was with him on the bridge. The rest of the crew would be in their own quarters, except for Colenso, who had to be in engineering to monitor the submerging process from there. Mikael Palander, the Finnish man who had commanded the *Curie* for the duration of its service, kept his own gaze set on the helm console towards the center of the room. He said nothing, but Hopper knew without words being spoken that he was far from certain this would work.

Palander had always been respected by the crew, or at least they did before the pending disaster was made public knowledge. While he was fairly serious and not particularly talkative or amicable, he was also even-tempered. He would join the crew in the mess hall for meals, and though he did not say much, the crew could generally tell that he was happy to be there simply listening. Besides this, he also clearly loved his ship -- to the point where sometimes the crew wondered if he cared about *Curie* more than its crew.

It had started two weeks earlier, from what Hopper could tell. Ever since the collision course of the comet Telos was made public knowledge, the crew had been on edge. Some had simply given up and stopped following orders, falling to melancholy. Others were made irritable and, at times, borderline insubordinate, trapped in their own denial and refusal to die at sea, away from their families. Ever since the whole crew took a vote and narrowly decided to stay out at sea in the hope that they could survive the comet impact by submerging, they came to see the rest of the crew, including the captain, as standing between them and their loved ones. Many of them threw orders back in Palander's face and accused him of only caring about his ship. The chain of command had rusted and broken under the stress the impending doom put on the crew.

From the beginning, Schulze and Queally had taken it as bad as anyone. It was difficult for anybody to hold it against them. Schulze, an aquaculturist stationed on the ship, had a wife back in Germany. Queally, a veteran crewman, desperately wished to spend his dying days back on land in his beloved Ireland, where he would have retired to one day.

It quickly got worse. Six days before the impact was projected to occur, Hopper walked onto the bridge to find Schulze arguing with the captain. "Captain, please, if we turn around now, we could make it--"

Hopper could see the bags under Captain Palander's hazel eyes, his age showing on his pale, once-handsome face, now covered in stubble. His black hair, usually so neatly cropped, was an unkempt mess. Even their captain, known for his even temperament and his strong will, was falling apart. Although the comet had not yet hit, it was as if everyone on the ship was already dying, their souls slowly decaying from within. Palander responded as evenly as he could, "If we go that close to shore, the ship could be destroyed by the impact, we can't--"

"We're all going to die anyway, why try to delay it? You can't make me die here alone, I want to go back. I need to see her. Please." Schulze's teary-eyed expression was pleading and desperate, though he knew what the captain's answer would be before he even opened his mouth again.

"Schulze, I'm sorry," the response came, evenly measured, doing his best to try to be sympathetic and reassuring. "We took a vote. We're not going ashore. Even if we can make it into dock, the ship would not survive impact. We have to be far from shore and submerged."

Schulze looked like he had just been hit with a sledgehammer for a moment, his face contorting in pain. Then his expression swelled with anger, and he lunged at the captain, grabbing him by the collar and slammed him back into the helm console. "Turn this fucking ship around, Palander! Turn it around!"

Hopper was already moving when Palander grabbed Schulze by the arms and tried to pry him off. Schulze removed one arm on his own, bringing it back and swinging a punch hard into the side of the captain's face, sending him sprawling. Hopper managed to come up behind him and grapple him, holding him back in a bearhug. Schulze kept cursing and screaming in anger and desperation as the first mate dragged him back off the bridge, then gave in, reduced to tears as Hopper less forcefully escorted him to his sleeping quarters without a word.

Queally was less volatile, but otherwise no better. Two days earlier, he had done nothing all day but sit on deck, staring off at the horizon where the dark blue of the ocean met the pure white clouds. Nobody knew what it was he was thinking, but Hopper guessed that he was debating whether or not to throw himself overboard and hope he could swim ashore on his own, or else die trying. He had come so close to retirement, to being able to live out the rest of his life back home after a lifetime at sea, and now that was being taken away from him so close to the end. Nobody had the heart to pull him away until late into the night when the horizon was indistinguishable. Hopper feared that he would freeze to death. Queally did not put up a fight. He did not say a word, but Hopper did not need any. He saw the tears streaking the broken man's face.

It should have been no surprise when the following night, Queally and Schulze stole an emergency vessel and abandoned the ship.

The dozen crew-members who remained, including Hopper and Palander, were doing their best to dutifully prepare for the comet impact. It was projected to occur at roughly 5:13, assuming the failure of the final attempts to knock it off course or destroy it with ballistic missiles or rockets. Palander had decided to start the submerging process well beforehand in case something went wrong and needed to be repaired. Things had been breaking ever since they lost Chief Engineer Soares.

After three minutes, the ship gradually levelled off, its bow now pointed down at the ocean floor kilometers beneath them and the viewports through which Hopper and Palander could see completely engulfed by the oceanic void. Palander moved over to the communications readout without a word, tuning it to the designated Carthage emergency broadcast channel which was providing live updates on the situation with the comet from the headquarters in Lisbon. He kept the volume low. His hand rested upon the voice receiver for the ship's intercom system, his fingers drumming upon the metal console. Hopper moved over to the engineering readout to ensure that everything was functioning properly, trying to give himself some assurance. Neither man said a word to the other as they awaited either the word that the comet was destroyed, or the message that would herald the apocalypse.

It felt like an eternity as they waited. The captain was motionless, his eyes closed. Sweat was beading on his pale face, looking like he was about to throw up or pass out, but he stood still

as a statue as he was leaned forward on the console. Hopper checked, double-checked and triple-checked the engineering readout, before looking up at the black void in front of him, then back once again to the monitor, his fingers tapping quietly. The engines were shut off, the air intakes closed. The ship was running on its own reserves. Reactor levels were stable. Life support was functioning nominally and the main lights were shut off to preserve power to be routed into the vertical stabilization engines if they were needed. Again and again, Hopper went through it all. He trusted Colenso, but his paranoia was inescapable.

In the lower left corner of the monitor, it indicated the time at 04:52:02. Hopper heard a single shaky breath from Palander, and quickly his gaze flitted over to the captain. Slowly, Palander's gaze returned to look at the first mate, and he shook his head slowly. Hopper knew what it meant. He took in a shaky breath, his gaze lowering back down to the monitor, his trembling hands slowly clenching into fists. Out of the corner of his eye, he saw Palander pick up the voice receiver and slowly lift it to his mouth.

"Attention crew, this is your captain speaking," he started. It took him a moment to find the words before he continued. His words were heavy as he submitted to the reality of what was about to happen.

"The final efforts to stop the comet have officially failed. Impact is imminent."

7 January | 2:54 AM

Electric, buzzing alarms blared. Red lights pierced through the darkness. The ship shuddered threateningly for a couple moments, and then it was still.

The chaos cut through Hopper's dreams and assaulted his senses as he jolted half-upright in his bunk. He rubbed his eyes with a hand, slowly regaining his sense of reality. He looked over towards the viewport in his room and saw stars outside. The small clock monitor fixed on the wall indicated in pale blue numerals just how early in the morning it still was. He stood up from his bunk, the cold metal ship deck chilling his bare feet. Still only wearing boxers and a tank top, he carefully stepped over to the door to the sleeping quarters and leaned out of the open bulkhead to peer into the corridors of the ship. As he looked around, he quickly realized something else in his still-waking mind: the power was out. The ship was not moving, and he could not hear the engines. The *Curie* was dead in the water. Between the slow pulses of the red emergency lights, he was plunged into darkness. He anxiously stepped back into the sleeping quarters and opened his locker. As he was in the middle of quickly pulling on his work pants and boots, he heard unsteady footsteps approaching in the hallway. His gaze was drawn to the doorway to see Molstad leaning there, taking heavy breaths. His black hair was a mess, the sweat leaking through his tank top beneath his open jacket. Blood ran down the right side of his face.

“Chris, what the hell’s going on? What happened to the power?” Hopper spoke urgently as he finished getting dressed, pulling on his jacket.

“It’s Queally and Schulze, they were... the lifeboat, Hopper, they were trying to take it... they’ve lost it...” The Norwegian lowered his head and slowly leaned forward, looking like he was about to collapse. Hopper’s eyes went wide for a moment and he rushed over, grabbing him by the shoulders to guide him over to a bunk. Fumbling with shaking hands, he opened the first aid locker on the wall, digging out a roll of gauze. He wadded the gauze up and placed it in Molstad’s hand, guiding it up to hold it over his bleeding head.

“Just keep that there, and don’t move- don’t go to sleep, okay? I-It’ll be alright. I’m going to get the captain and send Jouberts down here for you. Okay?”

With a vague, tired nod in reply from Molstad, Hopper turned and moved back into the hallway, wiping sweat from his forehead as he passed sideways doors and underneath a hallway entrance, a ladder running parallel to the floor above him on the wall. Hopper was not about to see his ship go down now, a week from the apocalypse, due to some men who had broken in despair. He could not allow it.

There was pounding and shouting up ahead. Hopper quickened his pace, and rounded the corner to find two crew-members slamming their fists on the door to Chief Engineer Soares’ quarters. “Surroi, Colenso, tell me what’s happening.”

The two junior engineers abruptly turned to look towards Hopper. Surroi looked completely panicked. Colenso spoke with anger in her voice. “Soares locked the door, he isn’t answering!”

Hopper quickly cut in, his pace not stopping as he continued past towards the captain’s quarters. “There’s no time- Surroi, go get Jouberts and take him to my quarters, Molstad is hurt, and then get to engineering-”

Surroi cut him off, stammering, “Wait, what do you mean Molstad is hurt, what happened?”

Hopper stopped, and turned on a heel to face the Estonian engineer. He kept his voice as even as he could given the circumstances, but he could not hide the slight tremor there. “Schulze and Queally attacked him trying to get an EV, he may have a concussion. I need you to listen to me, Surroi. Go get Jouberts, take him to my quarters. And then get to engineering and see if you can’t get us power back. Am I understood?”

Surroi swallowed nervously and gave a slow nod. He lowered his head and turned away, the uncertainty still clear in his expression. But all the same, he started off down the hallway, before the urgency of the situation crept into him and he broke into a run.

“Colenso, you’re with me,” Hopper did not hesitate, immediately turning to continue towards the captain’s quarters. Colenso nodded, hurrying to keep pace with him. They moved up a staircase to the deck above and were greeted by the sight of the captain moving with urgency down the hallway towards them.

“Hopper, talk to me,” Palander said, continuing past them towards the bridge.

“It’s Schulze and Queally, they’ve-”

The captain cut him off immediately, his voice exacerbated and tired. “I don’t care what Schulze and Queally do anymore. What’s wrong with my ship?”

“I don’t know, I-I haven’t had the chance to look. They hurt Molstad trying to get to an EV, he couldn’t say much.”

As they stepped onto the ship’s bridge, Colenso moved down the small flight of stairs to the engineering readout and Palander went to the helm console. He quickly punched in his credentials and disabled the alarm. The red emergency lights stopped flashing, now glowing steadily instead. The pale white light from the console, running off emergency power, illuminated Colenso’s face, flickering as she quickly scrolled through the readouts. “The EV by engineering is gone-”

“Fuck the lifeboat, Colenso, tell me what happened to my ship,” Palander interjected.

“I don’t know! I’m looking,” Colenso said, just shaking her head slightly. “T-There’s damage somewhere in the reactors, that’s Soares’s job, I’m not-”

“Well then get Soares and fix it! Am I the only person on this damn ship that has a clue what to do anymore?!”

Colenso stared silently at the captain. Anger slowly replaced the shock in her expression. Hopper stood with his face hidden in his hand, massaging his forehead with his thumb and index finger. The three of them stood in silence for a long moment as Palander slowly closed his eyes, brushed a hand over his face and took in a slow breath. “Colenso... I apologize. Just... get the power back online, please. I’ll be in my quarters.”

At this, he moved briskly off the bridge, keeping his head lowered to avoid the gaze of either of the two. Hopper watched him leave, then looked slowly over toward Colenso. “... You all right?”

She nodded, her own gaze directed at some corner of the floor to avoid Hopper’s gaze, her arms crossed over her chest. After a moment she drew a deep, shaky breath. “I’m going to try to get Soares up again... try to get the power back...”

Hopper nodded slowly. “I’ll keep an eye on things here and let you know if anything changes...”

Colenso returned a brief, curt nod and ambled slowly towards the doorway. Hopper stepped to the front of the silent bridge, leaning forward and resting his forearms on the blank console screens that lined the wall in front of the large viewports.

12 January | 4:52 AM

“Attention crew, this is your captain speaking. The final efforts to stop the comet have officially failed. Impact is imminent.”

Masika Colenso heard the announcement over the intercom. She was bracing herself on the railing to the catwalk which oversaw engineering. The reactors humming with power nearby were the only thing to break the silence up to this point. As she heard the announcement, she could do nothing but close her eyes and wait.

Half Tanzanian and half South African, Colenso stood short but with a toned, athletic build typical of the regular crew-members aboard the ship. Her skin was a deep brown, and her young, vibrant brown eyes made her the most youthful presence on the ship. She had been a junior engineer aboard the *MS Curie* for four years. Luckily for the remaining crew, she was also as sharp as a tack. She knew the ship like the back of her hand and had picked up on a lot, with and without Soares's instruction, enough to at least keep the ship afloat. Chief Engineer Soares had locked himself in his room and hung himself six days earlier. When they got the door open, they just found a note saying, "We're all dead anyway. Not going to prolong it for myself or CURIE, you shouldn't either. Let her rest."

She had done everything she needed to ensure the captain's plan would be carried out successfully. Life support was running enough to keep them all alive and main utility power was shut off. Power was ready to be routed to the vertical stabilizers. Normally the ship could handle powering everything, but she dared not put too much strain on its reactors now. She only barely managed to patch them up after the incident with Queally and Schulze. She did not know if they would survive another power surge.

Now all that was left was for her to stand by and wait for the end of the world.

In their case, the crew of the *Curie* was lucky that the comet was impacting on the far side of the planet, in the Pacific Ocean. If it had hit their side, their chances of survival would have been substantially lower.

The clock on the monitor across from her ticked to 5:14. Everything was still. For what felt like forever, there was silence. Long enough for Colenso to almost believe that Telos had, by some miracle, missed the Earth. Then she felt it. The ship lurched and slowly surged upwards. It groaned as a massive shockwave rolled through the water around it. The deck began to list beneath her feet, threatening to cast her down on the ridged diamond steel catwalk beneath her feet. Then she heard the vertical stabilizers kick in. The deep hum of the engines picked up and the whining from the reactors grew louder, and then stayed steady. Gradually, the ship righted itself again. There were no alarms, no explosions or sounds of the ship crumpling. Just the groan of the ship around her as it settled and steadied itself in the water.

She let out a deep breath as it passed, very slowly loosening her grip on the railing and stepping over to the monitor to look at the ship's status. She had heard that there would be aftershocks following the initial impact, but she knew that if the ship could handle this, then there should be no problem dealing with those. Relief washed over her as everything appeared to be normal, and she picked up the voice receiver which was tuned to the bridge. "Captain, everything appears normal. The *Curie* is all right."

She heard a sigh of relief from the other side, and after a moment the captain's reply.
“Good. Prepare to surface, we're charting a course for Lisbon. Let's see if anything's left.”

A Final Autumn

7 January, 2103 | 3:07 AM

Hopper had been on the *Curie* for fifteen years, and still its bizarre mirrored construction made his head spin at times. It was like something out of a fever dream. In the darkness outside of the ship, faint, pale white lights lined the hull of the ship that stretched out for fifty meters before him, reflecting off its narrow, gunmetal surface. The dark shapes of railings and catwalks occasionally broke the line of lights, some of them upright and some of them perpendicular, facing instead back towards the bridge where Hopper observed silently. Out beyond the bow of the ship, the spots where soft starlight and stray light from the ship faintly revealed wave crests served as the only indication of something occupying the otherwise empty void.

Hopper lifted his gaze upwards after a while, scanning the starry sky that hung like a curtain above the ship, stretching out in every direction above them and disappearing behind the ship's tower overhead. Of all the things he loved about being on the ocean, this had always been one of his favorites. The pure darkness of the sky this far from civilization let the true beauty of the heavens shine above him. Billions of stars, the galaxy itself, revealed in the absence of all else. But now, it was only with fear that he looked up to the sky as he searched it intently.

The broadcasts said that the Telos comet was still barely visible, nothing more than a pale pinprick if even that. Right now with his naked eyes, if it was there, he could not spot it. He still had not fully taken in the reality of it, wanting in this moment to believe that because he could not see it, it was not there. In the nights since the comet was first acknowledged publicly, he had spent many sleepless hours on the observation deck, using the instruments of the ship to scan the night sky. Several times he did manage to spot it, and when he did, he would let the instruments track it, sitting back and watching it until he passed out in his seat. It seemed like such a harmless thing. It was beautiful, slowly making its way across the sky, a tiny pebble barely visible, enveloped in a pale shroud stretching into a tail, reaching out and fading into the endless velvety darkness of space. It was difficult for him to comprehend that something so mystical and seemingly distant was soon to bring possibly the end of the world.

From the beginning, governments had declared that they would do everything they could to try to stop the comet. But it was doubtful that any of their plans could have succeeded, and most people, including Hopper and the crew of the *Curie*, were aware of that. They had built a rocket that could supposedly course-correct enough to intercept it, but since they launched it there had been no news of that. The rest of the attempts since had felt more like false hope than anything. After all, what could they have done in less than a month? There was never much hope

for humanity's survival. Now, with less than a week to go before impact, Hopper was certain that there was none. All he cared about now was keeping the *Curie* and its crew safe for as long as possible.

His attention was torn from the sky by a soft beeping from the communications panel. He looked over towards it, then to the engineering readout and saw the time. It had been fifteen minutes since Colenso left him alone on the bridge. He quickly moved, fumbling with the voice receiver for a moment as he opened the channel and pressed the button to talk. "Hopper here."

"Hopper, I figured out what happened," the response came. It was Colenso. "There was a power surge when Schulze and Queally's EV launched, it destabilized the reactors and triggered the emergency shutdown. This thing hasn't been in good shape since Soares has been... well, you know. Over."

"Do you think it can be fixed? Over."

"Affirmative, but..." Colenso's voice hesitated. "It will take some time between just Surroi and me."

Hopper let out an irritated sigh, running his hand over his face. "Colenso, you have my permission to kick Soares' ass, we *need* that reactor fixed or we won't be able to sub--"

"Soares is dead, sir."

Hopper went numb. His stomach sank, and suddenly he felt cold and heavy, like the weight of the ocean was pressing in around him, trying to claim him. He pressed the button on the receiver again. "Say again... Masika, what did you just say?"

There was another long moment of hesitation from the other end, before the shaky response came. "... Soares hanged himself in his room, Hopper. He must have done it when he got off his monitoring shift. We forced the door open... he's dead."

The words punched him straight in the gut. He turned quickly, leaning back against the console and staring at the dark doorway that led out into the hall. His breathing was heavy, hot anger and despair swelling through him. He felt weak, like his legs were about to give out from under him.

"... Alvin?"

He lifted the receiver again and spoke into it, his voice shaking and heavy. "Roger that, I'll come handle it. You and Surroi just focus on getting power back, please."

"Yes, sir... Over and out."

He let go of the receiver, letting it fall against the metal siding of the console, slowly sinking down to a sit against it. Hot tears welled in his eyes, and he choked back a sob. He turned and slammed his fist into the metal side of the console, screaming in anger. As he began to cry, he drew his knees into his chest and hid his face against them, leaning against the cold console.

In all of his years, Hopper had never felt more powerless. He could feel the life force of the crew dying, falling to what was inevitable and yet he still wanted to deny, and in that moment, he knew that he could do nothing to stop it.

25 January | 1:23 PM

6 nautical miles west of Lisbon, Portugal

Hopper was seated in the observation room, ready to pilot the remote drone. Colenso and Molstad stood behind him, watching the monitor in front of his seat. Right now, it was dark except for the metadata, showing the date and time, velocity, coordinates, and power level, along with details of the visual feed. The captain waited on the bridge on the other end of an open communication line to monitor the surveying. The rest of the crew was likely observing from the crew room.

After the impact, they had pulled the ship up as close to the coast as they dared. Aftershocks still rattled the ship occasionally, debris that had broken off from the comet colliding late, or thundering through the sky as it burnt up. The ship had still avoided any damage, but the captain dared not risk changing that by taking it too close to the devastated land. They could not surface anyway, or else the toxic atmosphere would flood into the ship and slowly suffocate them all. They were preparing to launch the *Curie*'s remote drone to survey the coast of Portugal with it. None of the crew were very hopeful as far as what they would see. All of them had seen the photographs the ship received in the last moments before the satellite network went down.

"Everything ready to go up there, Hopper? Over." The captain's voice rang out over the observation room's intercom.

"Affirmative," Hopper replied through his headset mic. "Should be ready to go. Over."

"Go ahead and take off when ready."

With the press of a button, the visual feed sprang to life, the drone shooting out from the back of the ship. The horizon was obscured, dark grey ash making the entire sky appear overcast and drifting on the wind like the snow of death. But even through the thick curtain of ash, the drone's cameras already picked up faintly the distant glow of fire.

On the first day after the initial announcements of the comet's projected collision, Hopper had tuned into a special panel of UN scientists who held an open conference to answer questions about what would happen following the moment of impact. One of them had mentioned that the collision and firestorms would hurtle an enormous amount of ash into the atmosphere, and that when the firestorms finally died down, this would bring about a new ice age. Hopper had tried to envision this in his mind, a sort of storm that would propel the Earth eventually into a planet-wide winter, but he could not wrap his head around it.

Now, before him on the visual feed, he witnessed it firsthand.

He sat in solemn silence for a long time as the drone continued its approach, before he finally spoke. "The sky is pitch black with smoke. The ocean is dark... incredibly dark. In the distance I can see land. According to navigation-" he glanced away at another monitor beside him. "It's Lisbon and the coast of Portugal."

“Any signs of life? Over.”

Hopper could make out the remains of the city in the distance. He shook his head slowly in horror. Molstad closed his eyes, taking in a heavy breath. Colenso muttered quietly, “Dear God...”

The captain’s voice came through again. “Hopper?”

He forced his lips to move and lamented, “It’s on fire. Everything is on fire. The flames, they’re reaching all the way into the sky... it’s unreal.”

“Any signs of life? Over.”

“No... nothing but a massive firestorm covering the continent.”

After a long moment of silence, Colenso spoke up. “Can you move in any closer?”

Hopper nodded slightly, piloting the drone down. He kept it close to the water where it could better escape the intense heat of the flames, and flew it along the coast of the city, surveying for any sign of even a single survivor. But he only saw ash blowing across piers and streets, building windows blown out, fires blazing wherever there was something to burn.

“There,” Molstad tapped a finger on the monitor suddenly, pointing at a building that looked relatively intact from this angle beside the water. Distinct against the concrete wall was a small but distinct detail which the navigator’s keen eyes immediately picked up. “Can you get an angle on it there?”

Hopper halted the drone’s sideways panning and instead moved it in as close to the burning coast as he dared, rotating it to get a view of the side of the building where Molstad had pointed. As he zoomed in the camera, he gasped slightly and took his hands off the controls. Molstad turned away slowly, rubbing his face in his hands, and Colenso looked on with an expression of horror.

A charred skeleton leaned back against the wall as if in submission. They could also distinguish more bones, half-buried in the ash and debris, scattered in the streets nearby.

Hopper dropped his hands from the controls, leaning back in his seat with a defeated expression. “They’re dead, Palander... all of them. There’s no way anybody survived this, it’s a furnace. A living hellscape.”

7 March | 4:23 PM

Hopper looked at the video feed in front of him. A horse skeleton laid on its side next to a fence in what used to be a grassy field, now reduced to a burnt wasteland. Just like everything else.

The first mate sat alone in the observation room piloting the drone. Palander now served as his sole companion, sitting quietly on the other end of his comms link to the bridge. The rest of the crew could not handle watching the visual feed of the devastated landscape constantly, and

Palander lacked the heart to try to force them. They opted to take turns piloting the drone to share the burden. Today, that burden once again fell on Hopper's shoulders.

"Nothing... Still nothing," he sighed. By now, his reaction shifted from shock and despair to subdued melancholy. This dreary purgatory which they spent their days hopelessly scouring for life pressed down on what remained of his crumbling soul. It felt inescapable.

Palander's silence said everything. Hopper knew that the captain would not easily give up on the prospect of some remaining safe haven being out there. Weeks ago, he had talked about venturing inland. He only dropped it when he was reminded of the deadly atmosphere that waited outside of the submerged vessel cycling its own air. Eventually he finally responded tiredly, "How much have we covered?"

"Everything, Mika," Hopper said, the frustration clear in his voice. "We've surveyed everything from Gibraltar up to the English Channel! There's nothing, not a single soul. The only people who might be left are on submarines or underwater facilities."

"What do you want me to do, Alvin, give up? What else are we supposed to do now but keep looking?"

Hopper leaned forward, resting his face in his hand with his elbow propped on the console. "Listen, Mika. We're running out of rations. No matter what we do, we need to find something. We know where Pathos-II is, that's the best chance of us finding both food *and* survivors. I think we should return there and keep our fingers crossed things are all right there."

A heavy sigh and another long silence followed before Palander's weary acknowledgment, "Okay. We'll do that... tell the crew, please. I'll be in my quarters."

11:48 PM

Palander did go to his quarters. But he found himself unable to sleep once again. Pacing slowly on the metal floor, he could not stop thinking about everything they had seen. He monitored the surveys from the bridge, so for the most part he did not see the visual feed himself. But he listened to everything the crew had reported back. The devastation, the firestorms, the death. He did not want to believe it, even though he knew Hopper was right.

He stopped in his pacing and lifted his gaze to the small viewport in his room behind his desk. The ocean water enveloped it completely, the same as it had been for the past two months. Hopper was right. It was much darker than it used to be. Palander had seen this before, but it still seemed abstract to him. He had seen little else. The ship had not surfaced once since the comet hit. It slowed their movement substantially, but they had been in no rush. It was not as if they had anywhere to go. It also meant that for the past two months, his viewport had been full of ash-covered ocean water. What did some dirty water prove?

Palander let out a heavy sigh and stepped out of his room, and ambled down the corridors of the ship. He looked around slowly and took in the details of the ship's strange construction as if it was his first time seeing it. He had been on the ship for so long, and yet now it suddenly felt unwelcoming. It was no longer the home he had known for twenty years. It was cold, like a metal sarcophagus around him, a maze which was to be his grave. As he walked, he saw Schulze and Queally passing by him, talking happily. He heard sparks, an electric crackling, and as he passed a room, there was Soares repairing a busted circuit behind a wall panel. The engineer paused in his work to lift his welding mask, and flashed a thumbs up to the captain. Palander lifted his hand to signal back, and Soares was gone. He looked back and there was no sign of Schulze and Queally. Where their jolly voices should have been echoing down the hallway, there was a silence like death.

The captain stood still there for a long time. He suddenly felt very old, lowering his head as he slowly turned to continue on his way up. He stepped into the silent observation room and down the stairs to the pit, surrounded by consoles. Large, square viewports looked out over the ocean surface. Even the water looked like it had been burnt in the faint light emanating from the *Curie*. No stars could be seen through the thick haze that still enveloped the atmosphere. A single small spot in the sky glowed pale white where the moon was suspended, almost completely obscured. He turned to look at the dark console screen with a seat in front of it, where Hopper and the others had sat piloting the drone for the past two months, reporting all of the destruction they had seen to him through the headset which now sat on the console.

He sat down at a console in front of the viewports and powered it on. After entering his credentials, he flicked through the files to the images the *Curie* had received just before external communications were lost. A tidal wave, hundreds of feet tall, loomed perpetually in the moments before it crashed down on Los Angeles. Enormous swirling dust clouds covered the entire planet, the glow of bright orange-yellow flames burning through them threateningly. The comet itself crashed down through the atmosphere with a massive plume of smoke billowing behind it, suspended permanently just above the horizon. He had seen these pictures before, but now as he looked at them again, they seared into his memory in a way they had not before. He began scouring through the recorded visual feed from the survey flights the drone had taken. The flames of Lisbon burned bright and reached into the sky. The skeletons Molstad had spotted lay motionless against the concrete near the water, as if they had died desperately trying to make it to safety. Fire obscured a broken bridge that was slanted in the foreground, the street devoid of its usual traffic. A forest burned violently. The horse skeleton laid motionless along the fence.

Palander leaned back in his seat slowly, just staring at the images flicking past on the screen. As he watched, it fully hit him. This was the final autumn for humanity. Nobody was safe from it. The *Curie* and its crew would be claimed by the coming winter, and he could not change that.

He squeezed his eyes shut, no longer able to take it, and quickly jammed his finger on the key to close the recordings. Rubbing his face with both hands, he sat there in silence for a minute

before opening his audio recording logs. He knew that nobody was left to listen to it, but he had to hear himself say it. He picked up the voice receiver slowly and pressed the recording button. His lips moved on their own, not really thinking about the words as he formed them. He was absent-minded and his body was heavy with the weight of it all. It wanted to rest.

He had stopped talking thirty seconds ago. He reached his hand forward to stop the recording, and then leaned back in his seat again as he played the recording back, beginning to drift off.

“Curie is safe while submerged. The crew - what’s left of it - is still okay. For the rest of the world, there’s no good way to describe it. The destruction is absolute. The surface is just gone.”

REST

12 January | 4:15 AM

Hopper stepped wearily into the engineering room and climbed the stairs up to the reactor deck. Colenso was leaned over the monitors, busily scrolling through the engineering readouts. At the sound of footsteps, she stood up and turned to face him.

“Hopper. Shouldn’t you be asleep right now?”

Hopper gave a faint grin and a weak chuckle. “Shouldn’t you be?”

She returned an exasperated grin and shook her head. “Can you blame me? I want to make sure everything’s ready to go. One thing goes wrong, and... well. You know.”

“Yeah...” He lowered his gaze slightly, moving forward to lean against the wall nearby. “How’s the reactor looking?”

Colenso turned her attention back to the engineering readout for a moment. “It will hold. Surroi and I figured it out... That power surge from the EV nearly destabilized the whole reactor, I’d be hesitant to push it much. But if we conserve power for only when it’s necessary, it should be fine.”

Hopper nodded slightly. His gaze drifted down to the monitor in front of Colenso. She was looking at the crew roster. Nobody had bothered to update it since the incident six days earlier. It still showed Schulze, Queally and Soares as on active duty. “... How are you holding up?”

She turned her head slightly in his direction and closed the crew roster as if it was a secret she had not intended to show him, the power levels for the reactor taking its place. “I’m fine...”

“Colenso, nobody expects you to take his place completely. Palander didn’t mean-”

“Yeah? Well, don’t have much choice, do I?” Her voice turned bitter, returning the monitor to the general engineering readout and turning to face Hopper again.

Hopper sighed. “I didn’t mean... You know the captain didn’t mean what he said. He cares about this ship, he cares about all of us.”

She nodded after a moment’s hesitation. “I know. But it doesn’t change the truth. Soares is gone, so someone has to pick up the slack. Even if it won’t matter in the end.”

“Colenso...”

“What?” She looked back at him, her eyes squinted slightly. She crossed her arms over her chest. Hopper watched her for a long moment before sighing again and waving a hand dismissively. He looked down at his feet where he was leaned against the wall. Colenso watched him a moment longer before her expression softened, pacing over to the wall near the console and leaning against it.

“... Do you ever wonder if Soares was right? About letting the ship die, I mean.”

Colenso stayed quiet for a few seconds. She drew in a deep breath and looked up at the ceiling. “I love this ship, you know? Since the day I first set foot on it, I have. And... even though everything’s going to shit, I wouldn’t dream of letting it die. Soares was jaded, and gruff, but he loved it too. I think... I think he thought of this as prolonged suffering. He wanted to go out on his own terms, and he wanted the ship to go out that way too... But I don’t have the heart to do that to *Curie*. Not to mention, I know the rest of the crew would never agree to that either anyway.” She gave a small smile.

Hopper returned the look. “You’re damn right about that. Nothing’s taking down this ship while I have anything to say about it.”

She actually laughed a little. That was a sound Hopper had not heard in what felt like an eternity. “You’re starting to sound like Queally.”

“Yeah? Well I guess the old man’s rubbed off on me more than I thought,” he chuckled, looking down at his feet again with a slight grin lingering on his face.

“... Hopper?”

He lifted his gaze to her again. “Hm?”

She returned a small smile. “It’s good to see you smile again. The rest of the crew know this too, even if they won’t say it, but I don’t think we’d have kept it together this long if it weren’t for you. So... thanks.”

He gave a single chuckle and his grin grew slightly. He lifted his hand up and gave her a small two-finger salute, and she laughed again. Then both of them looked towards the loudspeaker in the corner by the doorway as they were interrupted by the captain’s voice on the intercom.

“Hopper, I need you on the bridge. Everyone else, prepare to submerge.”

The two looked back to each other, and Hopper stood off the wall. “I’ll see you on the other side, Masika.”

She returned a slow nod. “See you on the other side, Alvin.”

27 March | 3:17 PM
Near PATHOS-II Site Lambda
Mid-Atlantic Ridge

Static broke the silence on the bridge. The entire crew was gathered around, with Palander sitting at the communications console. He pressed the talk button on the voice receiver again.

“Lambda, come in, this is Captain Mikael Palander of the *Curie*. We are requesting permission to dock. Is anyone there? Over.”

This was the third time they had tried to contact Lambda in the past hour. The *MS Curie* was able to dock at the sight while submerged, reaching beneath the waves far enough to connect with a mooring tower. Before the apocalypse, they did so regularly to deliver shipments and crew changes. Lambda's staff almost felt like an extended part of the *Curie*'s own crew. But where normally the *Curie* received a warm welcome from their friends at Lambda, now they were greeted with silence.

The captain turned in his seat to face the crew. "Molstad, did it look like the base was damaged when you scanned the area?"

Molstad shook his head. "Nothing terrible, all things considered."

Palander furrowed his eyebrows and turned back towards the communications console. There was no signal coming from Lambda. "Their relay must be down..."

Hopper spoke up. "That or they pulled everyone back to Theta. Not much point in maintaining the entryway if they didn't expect us back. It isn't like anyone else would be coming."

The captain sighed, closing the comm channel. "We need to try to dock anyway. We can't just sit on the ship waiting to starve. Hopper, take Jouberts, Colenso, Molstad and Laurent with you down to the airlock, I want the five of you to be the welcoming party. The rest of you, get to your posts. We're going to dock manually."

Hopper nodded, turning to move from the bridge at a brisk pace. The rest of the crew dispersed, with Colenso, Doctor Jouberts, Molstad and crewman Laurent following Hopper. The five of them climbed down the series of convoluted ladders and staircases which made up the descent down the ship's vertical hull. They passed various access ports, utility ducts and instruments, until they reached the hatch at the bottom. Hopper turned the wheel to open the sealed hatch, and they descended the final ladder into the airlock at the bottom of the ship. Metal grating beneath their feet hid the water pumps and pipes that could fill or drain the airlock of water, and in front of them was a massive circular bulkhead. A narrow strip of thick glass provided a window into the ocean outside.

Colenso closed the hatch behind them and descended the ladder last. Then there was little for them to do but sit and wait. Jouberts laid out his medical kit on the bench in the center of the airlock, sorting through it out of habit. Molstad was checking the instruments on his handheld scanner in case it was needed. Colenso and Laurent were just pacing anxiously. Hopper stood to the side by the bulkhead, peering out the narrow viewport. He could make out the lights from the docking site on the Lambda mooring tower as they approached, looming out of the depths.

For a brief moment, his gaze was drawn down to the rocky outcropping beneath the tower. He thought he could see a pale blue light pulsing in the gloom, distinct from the rock and the structure. "What's that?"

"Eh?" Laurent moved over, looking out the viewport. Then the flashing was gone. "What was what?"

"I thought I saw a light down at the base of the tower. It was blue."

Laurent pursed his lips. "Hm. Perhaps it's some instrument they set up."

The communications panel on the wall by Hopper beeped, and he pressed the button to open the channel. "Hopper."

The captain's voice came through. "We're preparing to dock, Hopper. On my count, be ready to seal the connection."

"Understood, sir." Hopper's hand lingered over the button to seal the connection when their airlock met Lambda's.

"Closing fifty meters... Forty... Thirty... Twenty..."

Molstad cursed, slamming his hand on the side of his scanner. "This damn thing is on the fritz all of a sudden."

"Ten, nine, eight, seven--"

Laurent shuddered through a gasp. "Oh my God, what is that?!"

Hopper looked out the viewport. Standing on the airlock across from them was a humanoid form. It had a naked, bloated body, grotesquely hunched over. Its head was encased in tendrils of black chitin with pale blue lights emanating from it in patternless form, pulsing and piercing through the gloom of the ocean water. Hopper moved his hand away from the Seal button and instead slammed it on the button to talk frantically. "Abort docking, there's something in the airlock."

The captain responded with a confused voice. "What? What do you mean something--"

He was cut off by a sudden noise like a sharp, crackling burst of static electricity. He could feel a current in the air, a slight buzzing that ran through his hair. Suddenly the monstrosity was in the airlock with them. Molstad's scanner sparked and blew out, and he dropped it quickly, backing away. "Fuck!"

Its bloated human body smelled of rot. It let out an inhuman hissing moan, like air being forced through multiple horribly distended airways, attempting to form words that were unintelligible. It shuffled with heavy footfalls towards Laurent, who screamed in shock as he backed away from it. Hopper again slammed his fist against the talk button. "It's on the ship, I repeat, it's on the ship!"

Palander's voice now sounded panicked through the speaker. "Hopper hold on, what do you mean? What the hell is happening down there?"

There was another sharp crack, and the creature vanished once again, only to reappear across the airlock in front of a terrified Laurent. "What the fuck is this?!"

Molstad picked up his scanner and ran forward, slamming it into the back of the creature's head. It did not move, letting out a horrifying shriek as it turned on Molstad. With a single motion, its arm reached out to grab his head and slammed him into the wall with a sickening crack. The man collapsed, and blood trailed down the wall. Colenso and Jouberts both were shouting in a panic to get out, moving quickly to the ladder as the creature turned on Laurent again. "Hopper, help me!"

Hopper watched with a horrified expression as the thing grabbed Laurent by the arms. The crewman let out a blood-curdling scream as its head opened into some form of gaping, asymmetrical vertical maw. Hopper started towards the ladder. "I'm sorry, Laurent... I'm sorry..."

At this, he ran to the ladder and began climbing frantically. Colenso and Jouberts had the hatch open and were quickly motioning him up. Laurent's screaming did not last much longer as he reached the top of the ladder and threw the hatch shut. He sealed it part-way and then turned to move up the stairs with the other two. In mid-stride, he once again heard the sharp crack that signalled the creature teleporting. He looked back to see it next to Jouberts, grabbing his leg. The terrified medic screamed as he fell on the stairs, and as Colenso and Hopper watched, he shouted at them, "Go! Evacuate the ship!"

Hopper felt like his heart was going to beat right out of his chest as he bolted up the stairs, Colenso right in front of him. He heard Joubert's pained screams for a moment longer, followed by only the monster's horrific shrieking and gasping. He could hear the sound of its teleportation and its heavy, pounding footsteps as it climbed the ship behind them, but he did not dare look back. The two just kept running until they made it to the upper decks.

The first comm panel they could reach by the time they no longer heard it was in the crew room. Hopper gasped for air as they stopped, leaning forward with his hands on his knees. Colenso was in a similar state. They looked toward each other, then back to the doorway to the crew room. "God damn it... that thing... it killed them, Colenso, it fucking killed them..."

Colenso looked back at him. "I know... Hopper, we need... to get everyone off the ship..."

Hopper nodded frantically, moving to the comm panel. "Watch for it, we need to run as soon as you hear it..."

Colenso staggered tiredly to the doorway and leaned her head out to look back down the corridor as Hopper slammed his fist against the button of the wall panel. "Palander, come in... this is Hopper..."

"Hopper, what the hell's going on?" Palander was audibly panicked.

"Something got on the ship... a monster... it killed Laurent, Jouberts and Molstad... we need to get off the ship..."

"A monster? What are you talking about? I just sent Romano down to-"

"No, no no no, you need to call her back, sir, we need to evacuate the ship!"

There was silence for a long moment.

"... Palander-"

"I heard you, Hopper. Are you sure that's necessary?"

Hopper slammed his hand on the wall furiously. "Yes I'm sure! Will you listen to me?! It *killed* them! It's strong, it can teleport, we need to-"

He was cut off by the faint sound of a burst of static. It came from above them. He looked up and heard heavy footsteps. And then came a scream. He and Colenso looked to each other.

The captain's voice came through again. "I just heard a scream. Are you alright, Hopper? Is anyone else with you?"

Hopper pressed the button again. "Colenso's with me. Palander, you need to move, it's above us already."

"All right... Yes, I think you're right... okay..."

The line went dead. Then red emergency lights began to flash and the electric buzzing of the alarm cut through the heavy silence. The intercom buzzed to life.

"This is your captain speaking... An unidentified dangerous lifeform is aboard... All crew, abandon ship immediately."

Hopper looked to Colenso and then moved to the doorway, peering out one way and then the other. His heart pounded in his chest. His eyes were wide with fear. "Let's go..."

They started off down the hallway. Hopper squeezed his eyes shut for a moment as they moved, as if this was a nightmare that he could simply wake himself up from. Then a terrible thought occurred to him: this was not a nightmare. The crew was dead already, their souls long since decayed away. This rotting monstrosity was death come to finally claim their hollow shells. This time they would not escape.

He shook his head almost deliriously for a moment, forcing the hopeless thought out as he looked back toward Colenso, alive and well with him.

The two carefully made their way through the halls, staying deathly quiet as they tried to listen for the creature against the sound of the alarms. Occasionally, Hopper thought he could hear it above them. The ship was no longer welcoming to Hopper. Its halls seemed hostile. He knew the way forward, and yet he could not shake the feeling of it being an unfamiliar maze, the ship's dizzying layout threatening to turn him around and lead him to his death.

But it did not. The two arrived outside the emergency vessel. Looking in, nobody else had made it yet. Hopper looked back at Colenso. "Stay here, I'm going to see if I can find anybody else. If you hear that thing coming, you close this door and you get out of here."

"What?" She looked at him with an expression of disbelief. "No, I'm coming with you."

"Colenso, I'm not letting you die with me."

She frowned, giving him a hard glare. "I get it, Alvin, you want to protect everyone. That doesn't mean you have to be alone in that."

"Masika..."

"I'm going with you. If you're ready to die trying to keep the rest of the crew alive, then I'm with you."

Hopper looked at her silently. He was tired, and she had a defiant look in her eyes. He hated it, but he did not have the strength or the heart to argue with her right now. He sighed heavily. "Okay. Let's go."

It felt like jumping back into the fire as they moved back into the halls of the ship from the EV. As they reached the staircase leading to the deck above, they heard another scream cut short. Every muscle in Hopper's body shouted at him to go back to the EV, but he forced himself

to move forward. Colenso kept with him. The alarms continued to blare around them as they crept up the stairs and through the ship's corridors, looking inside every doorway, every nook and cranny they passed. But they found no one, only empty room after empty room.

As they passed near engineering, they spotted someone laying motionless in the hallway up ahead, curled up on their side facing away from the pair. They picked up their pace as much as they dared, dropping to their knees when they reached the fallen crewman. The back of the jacket said 'SURROI'. Colenso reached out a hand to her fellow engineer's shoulder and turned him over hesitantly. Then as she saw his condition, she gasped quietly, taking her hand away quickly. Hopper grimaced and turned away. He felt like he was about to vomit.

Half of Surroi's face was locked in an expression of horror. The other half looked as if it had been stripped clean of flesh, right down to the skull. The same strange wound ran down his neck and the top of his shoulder.

Colenso slowly stood. As Hopper looked up at her, he saw tears welling in her eyes. Quietly she said, "Let's go."

Hopper nodded and stood up. With one more brief look at Surroi, he stepped around him carefully and continued down the hall. Then he went completely still. A chill ran up his spine as he faintly heard an inhuman moan from the far end of the hallway. Just as he saw something emerging around the corner, he felt Colenso grab him by his arm and quickly pull him aside through the open doorway into engineering. She slid the door shut silently, backing away from it. Hopper moved with her and they ducked to the side, out of sight of the doorway. Pressed with his back against a console, Hopper found himself staring at the far wall. Viewports allowed the dim, grey daylight to filter into the room. He could see the vast expanse of the Atlantic. He tried to focus on it as he took slow, unsteady breaths, listening carefully.

Heavy footsteps approached the doorway, accompanied by the monster's haunting vocalizations. Its slow pace was uneven, but consistent, as if it was limping. Hopper saw the line of flashing red light projected across the floor by the crack in the door become obscured, and he moved a hand over his mouth, terrified of making even the smallest noise. His gaze stayed hard-set on the viewports. He desperately wished he could throw himself through it into the ocean and swim to somewhere safe, but he knew that even if he could swim forever, he would find no solace.

And then it passed. The line of light reappeared, slowly flashing on the floor. The footsteps continued down the hallway, its alien breathing growing quieter until it could no longer be heard. Only then did Hopper take his hand off his mouth, gasping and taking quick, deep breaths. He leaned his head back, closing his eyes. He could not force himself to go back into the hall. But then he slowly looked over and saw Colenso beside him. Her terrified gaze was staring at the windows as well, until she slowly looked over and met his gaze. He slowly gave a nod. She returned it. One deliberate movement at a time, they stood, and silently moved back to the door. Colenso leaned out and looked down the hall both ways, before looking back to Hopper. And off they moved.

They continued going through as much of the ship as they could. They found more dead crewmembers, all in the same condition as Surroi, parts of them stripped clean of flesh. Every corpse they passed stole a fragment of what strength Hopper had left. He did not understand how this could happen so suddenly, and he felt utterly powerless. But they forced themselves to continue on past all of them.

They found Palander while they were looping back down through the lower decks. He had not moved from the bridge. He laid motionless in front of the communications console, his back torn open in a hideously large wound. Hopper felt the color drain from his face, and his legs turned into deadweights. He forced them to move forward. He could hear Colenso moving with him. Every part of him simply went numb as he dropped down onto his knees beside his fallen captain. He slowly turned the limp man's body over to lay on his back.

Palander's face did not show terror, or despair, or pain.

In death, his face bore only calm, melancholic acceptance.

Hopper felt tears coming as he gently closed Palander's eyes. Despair welled up inside of him. He could feel nothing else. He wanted to cry out in despair at the alarms which still shattered the silence of the crew's grave. He wanted to cry out for anyone to make this stop. He could not handle it any more.

"Alvin, we need to go now... Alvin!" In the back of his slowly decaying mind, he could hear Colenso's panicked voice, indistinct against the gloom of the void that was reaching up to claim him. He could hear the creature, hissing as it slowly shuffled onto the bridge, growing closer. He could hear the alarms, whining on and on endlessly. But he could feel nothing. He could not move.

Everything faded to a blur, then faded to nothing as he gave in. The void claimed what was left of his crumbling soul. And death finally claimed the *Curie*.