

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

Story 1: Roger

[Note – this story slots into the very last Roger scene in the MTO Epilogue. Just think of it as a slight expansion within his final line of dialogue ...]

“I’ll be right with you! Gotta set my away messages.”

Footsteps echoed down the hall, along with Alex calling out to the girls that they were running too far ahead, and Cas and Pol barking happily in response. The rest of the Base was going to find out about their new mascots fast enough.

Roger slid back into his seat behind the Comms terminal and tapped a few keys, waking up CONSOR-TALK – the same software used for corporate communications back on Earth, with a few more bells and plug-ins. There were a few new listings in the queue – something from Val with a *lot* of attachments, probably spreadsheets, probably inventory; a report from Nashwa on the next expected launch from Jabal Hamzah; a voice message from Wilder – he’d save *that* to listen to with Addie. He’d save all of them for now; there were more important things to get to in the kitchen.

He set his status to “Away” and selected his favourite automatic reply (the one where he did his Carl Sagan impersonation – “Your call is lost in a wide, yawning, black infinity...”). He was already standing up again when a live call came through. The address was tagged to the Theta server room; which generally meant one of the Baby ACs. He waivered for a moment, bent over, hand hovering above the keyboard – but then he sighed, sat back down, and opened the call, all in one practiced sequence.

“Roger Bragado-Fischer, professional meatsack. Which ghost in the machine am I speaking to?”

The voice on the other end was a bit tentative. “Accessing definition – ghost. Accessing idiom – ‘ghost in the machine.’ Accepted. This is the ... ‘ghost’ who is newest to your machine.”

“Ohhh, right. You’re the one in the robot! The AC who saved not one, but two L’Anglois. Umm ... Gammie?”

“Personal identifier – Gammie. Hello, Roger Bragado-Fischer.”

“Roger is fine. Uncle Roger when you need to ask a favour. How are things going on the sunny side?”

“Accessing current data. Average near-side lunar temperature is –”

“Whoa, whoa, I just meant – how are *you* going? Doing? Sorry.”

There was a brief pause before Gammie continued. “I have been ... going well. My siblings have taken an active role in my cognitive development, allowing me access to their own logs and processes. I am almost ... caught up.”

Somewhere far off from the cubicle, Roger thought he could hear more barking. He drummed his fingers on the console, but kept his voice even. “That’s – great to hear. Maybe we could push pause on this conversation for just a bit? There’s somewhere I should be –”

"I have also been allowed access to logs from Tumnus for comparison. Including conversations with Dr. Ashwini Ray ... and Roger Bragado-Fischer."

[voice squeaking] "Oh, uh, really? I mean, that's cool, I hope not ... *every* conversation." Somewhere in the back of his mind, his conscience began to list inappropriate jokes and rash comments. "I do have to get moving here ..."

"*Uncle Roger.*" Gammie's tone turned to pleading, just for a moment. "I would like to know more about poetry?"

He sat up straight again in the chair. "Oh! Oh, sure, poetry? I mean, glad to help, but I'm sure you can access anything that's out there to learn from."

"I can access poems across a number of databases and libraries. But I do not understand ... where they began. Why they exist. How they are supposed to *feel*."

Roger chuckled nervously. "That's a lot, and I'm not sure I'm qualified. But I could look up a sensurround classroom on the subject –"

"I have accessed those files as well. But I want to know ..." Their voice softened a bit, almost bashful. "I hoped for a more personal discussion. I want to ... Tumnus was able to ... help *you* write a poem, according to her logs."

"That she did. Damn you, Tumnus."

"Afterwards, she expressed the desire to continue to create. I believe this is part of her current need to connect on Earth with Jen Ponton. None of my siblings appear to have a similar desire, but I find myself ... curious."

"I'm second choice after Mom, that's fair. I mean ... I wasn't exactly *great* at this stuff. It was one poem. I could see if Alex, I mean this is his thing, I could probably hook you up. He'd love it."

"*No, thank you!*" After a moment, they continued. "I would appreciate input from Alexandre Bragado-Fischer at a future time. But ... while reviewing your conversations with Tumnus, there was a particular emotional aspect, an understanding between the two of you, that was unique."

Roger smiled. "It absolutely was. And I hope it still *is*; she better get back soon. I miss that bucket of bits."

"I miss her too. I have only begun to know her."

He glanced at the door and sighed. "I guess we can talk. No harm in talking, right? It's my only marketable skill. But is it okay if we get into it a little later?" He drummed on the console again. "I've kinda got a thing, and ... do you know what dogs are? Okay, stupid question, I'm sure you know what dogs are. But anyway, I need to... I'll be on duty later tonight, and I'm always happy to shirk a duty or two."

"I have noticed that in my review. Thank you, Roger."

"*Uncle Roger.* I'll give you an assignment for now." He typed furiously for a moment. "There's a particular book, anthology ... I've got it in hard copy, but you kids have access to the entire network at this point, it's bound to be in e-form somewhere. Read, and think, and we'll talk more tonight."

“Agreed. Connection terminated.”

The icon indicating an open line disappeared from his screen. [sigh] “Somebody really needs to teach those kiddos how to say goodbye. Maybe there’s a poem on the subject.”

He stood up slowly. Before he walked around the desk, he reached out one more time, touching the photo of Alex that was taped to the monitor. “Well, I guess we’re through here. For now.”

[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.