

Prompt: Write a short, suspenseful sci-fi scene (under 300 words) in which two astronauts discover a bizarre phenomenon orbiting Mars. Include a snippet of dialogue that captures the shock of what they've found. End on a gripping cliffhanger that leaves readers craving more.

Claude:

Through the reinforced viewport of the Olympus II station, Dr. Sarah Chen squinted at the peculiar distortion warping the rusty Martian horizon. What had initially appeared as a mere sensor glitch now demanded their undivided attention.

"James, you need to see this," she called out, her British accent tighter than usual. "The anomaly's growing."

Commander James Harrison pushed away from his console, letting himself drift across the module. The movement scattered droplets from his morning tea, still hanging in perfectly formed spheres.

"Bloody hell," he whispered, pressing his palm against the transparent aluminium. "That's not possible."

Before them, a ribbon of what looked like liquid darkness threaded its way through Mars's orbit. It seemed to absorb both starlight and the dim sunlight reaching this far out, creating a visible tear in the fabric of space. More disturbing still, it was beginning to curl into a spiral, like water circling a drain.

Their instruments chirped in synchronised alarm as the phenomenon's magnetic signature suddenly spiked. The station's lights flickered.

"We need to alert Houston," Sarah said, already reaching for the comms panel. She stopped mid-motion, her face draining of colour. "James... look at the surface."

Below them, the Martian desert began to shimmer, as if viewed through waves of intense heat. The very ground appeared to be rippling outward from a point directly beneath the cosmic anomaly. And there, in the centre of the disturbance, something was beginning to emerge from the red soil.

"Mission Control, this is Olympus II," James managed, his voice barely steady. "We have a situation here. Something's..."

The transmission cut off as every system in the station went dark simultaneously.

Gemini:

The cramped cockpit of the *Ares VI* was silent, save for the rhythmic hum of life support. Astronauts Lena Reyes and Jackson Moore were on approach to Phobos, the larger of Mars' two moons, when something flashed on the external cameras.

"What was that?" Jackson muttered, squinting at the monitor.

Lena zoomed in. Orbiting Mars, not Phobos, was a structure unlike anything they'd ever seen. It resembled a colossal, shimmering Mobius strip, twisting and turning in the void, its surface reflecting the red planet in a dizzying kaleidoscope.

"Enhance image," Lena commanded, her voice tight with a mixture of awe and fear.

The image sharpened. The strip was composed of what looked like millions of individual, luminous particles, each pulsating with a faint inner light. It was beautiful, terrifying, and utterly alien.

"It's...it's organic," Jackson whispered, his eyes wide. "No known material can bend like that. It's moving. It's...alive."

"Alive?" Lena echoed, a chill crawling down her spine. "But how..."

Suddenly, the structure began to shift, its movements growing more rapid, more deliberate. One end of the strip extended, like a tendril, reaching towards their ship.

"It's... it's aware of us!" Jackson gasped, his knuckles white around the controls.

The tendril snaked closer, and the particles on its surface glowed brighter, faster, as if communicating in a language of light. It was coming for them. What did it want?