

Moonbase Alpha is under alert: Measurements indicate that beneath the Moon's surface resides a hidden ship of an alien, space-faring people. Commander Koenig sends an Eagle to investigate.

Three inhabitants inside the alien ship have just awakened from a centuries-long deep sleep. They don't comprehend what has happened with the Moon, and seize the Eagle...

THE IMMORTALS OF LUNA

MONDSTATION 1999

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MONDSTATION 1999

**THE
IMMORTALS
OF LUNA**

THE SCIENCE FICTION NOVEL

DIE EWIGEN VON LUNA

BY H. W. SPRINGER

CHAPTER 1

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The surface of the Moon was a landscape of endless, oppressive isolation. Everywhere, only jagged, sharp edged rock, whose repellant outlines had never been eroded by wind or water, enormous mountain ranges, barrier walls and craters, employed like the stone sets in some absurd play, rubble and meteorite dust, which covered everything with its grey-black, cosmic shroud. Without light, without air, without warmth, the dead scenery presented itself to the artificial eyes of the humans living under the lunar surface inside Moonbase Alpha. No living person could exist there, no primitively developed organism, no spore, no virus.

Therefore, the crew of the Command Center was all the more surprised as the detectors of one of the small monitoring satellites, which orbited the Moon in a circular trajectory, suddenly announced the discovery of a bioplasmic field.

Life...

In a few instants, the monitor that showed the unexpectedly discovered lifeform readings in computer symbols on its view screen, was surrounded by confused and excitedly talking Alphans.

Everyone let loose their astonishment. And as always, in such cases, the most daring speculations stood equal to the rational. Naturally, none of the ideas were based on any real information.

Commander Koenig pondered the problem with his own calm consideration. He could read the computer symbols too, but nevertheless, he considered it prudent to let the specialists deliver their judgment first. He looked on to Doctor Helena Russell, the chief of the Medical Department.

"Helena?"

"Three completely independent life forms", said the doctor, just confirming what he had picked out from the symbols.

"What type of life?"

Helena Russell shrugged her shoulders. "If I didn't know that it's impossible, I would say... human life."

While the words of the Doctor opened new doors and avenues of speculation, John Koenig thought sharply. And if the humans were actually... Alphan? It was highly routine that crewmembers would be out on the lunar surface. Research teams, patrols, geologists and prospectors, who dug for the vitally necessary Tiranium. However, such excursions from the Command Center were usually announced, and that was not true in the current situation.

The Commander gave instructions for each individual Alphan to check in from their place of residence. Within a few minutes the messages from the different departments came in. Then he was certain, free of any doubt, that all crewmembers were within the base complex.

Inevitably, Koenig as well had to retreat to speculating. Actually, the only possibility that was probable was that an alien spaceship had landed. As this should have registered on every monitor in the base, this left him completely puzzled. Normally a meteor could not impact on the Moon's surface without having already been detected beforehand. In this instance, nothing could be read from the optical observations. None of the satellites, nor any of the remote stationary cameras had registered any approaching spaceships. Additionally, the infrared pictures relayed by the satellite near the location where the source of the puzzling life impulses were originating, did not differ from the barren, lifeless desert all around. No spaceship, no organism, no movement, only undisturbed rock and dust.

But nevertheless, something had to be there, something mysterious, unexplainable, which had come out of nowhere.

The monitoring satellite continued to move on its circular path around the Moon, slowly losing the desired area from its artificial eyes. Soon its sensors were no longer able to catch the emissions of the unknown bioplasmic field. Gradually, the discussions in the Command Center died down. The crewmembers had seen that they would get

nowhere with assumptions and vague theories. Certainty was not to be gained in this manner. However, the Alphans required certainty, because everything that happened on their rudderless Moon that was racing through space, directly affected their vital interests.

All eyes were directed toward John Koenig. He was the man who had to decide what would happen.

The Commander cleared his throat.

"Ready Eagle Three for launch on an investigation flight", he ordered with an imperturbable voice.

That everything else was not just as imperturbable in his heart, he could not let on.

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The outputs of the sensors pointed the way for the investigation ship. The desired location, which they wanted to explore, lie to the north of the Curtius ring mountains.

Mark Macinlock steered the ship with calm and experience. The pilot was the type of man that did not become nervous quickly. John Koenig sat beside him in the copilot seat, while Doctor Helena Russell had taken a place in the passenger compartment to the rear of the cockpit.

The enormous north mountains of the Curtius chain soon emerged in the field of vision of the Alphans. These mountains belonged to the highest range on the Moon. At a height of eight thousand meters, they rose up into the dark, atmosphereless sky of the Moon, stone towers of frightening extent.

The pilot throttled the speed of Eagle Three, let the powerful ship change into a slow gliding flight. The area, which radiated the bioplasmic field, was directly under the Alphans, somewhere down there between the jagged summits of the mountains.

Concentrating fully, the Commander kept the indicators, which supplied a sharp picture of the Moon's desert mountain landscape, in his eye. If a alien spaceship should

have succeeded, in defiance of all expectations, to have landed unnoticed, then it had to now become visible. But although the Eagle rode nearly motionlessly on the fiery infernos of its engines exactly over the bioplasmic field, there was nothing to discover except the cold, lifeless Moon rocks. No intact spaceship, no wreckage, no organism could be registered by the on-board cameras.

"It's showing us nothing at all", murmured Mark Macinlock without understanding, "the sensors must be playing a trick on us."

That could be an explanation. However, it was not one in which John Koenig believed.

"Go even lower, Mark!" he instructed the pilot.

Macinlock let the Eagle sink, towards a small plateau that looked like a cone that had been cut through the center. The maneuver was very difficult. On the left and on the right, sharp edged points of rock threatened to slit the body of the large ship. But the pilot made it. Only a few meters over the plateau he stopped the downward movement. The tongues of fire from the engines brought the rock to a glow.

Suddenly, Commander Koenig joltingly bent himself forward. He had seen something.

"Mark!" He pointed to the viewscreen, which conveyed detailed views of the plateau surface.

The pilot stared at the viewscreen. His eyes widened with astonishment.

"Dammit, it can't be!"

Helena, who could no longer stay passively in the passenger compartment and had come forward, stated in words what the two men had seen.

"Footprints!" she said of the view on the screen. "Those are clearly the traces of humans."

"Yes", nodded the Commander, "It does look that way."

There was hardly a doubt. The thin dust layer, which covered the plateau, was stirred up. Isolated pathways, clearly visibly, showed without a doubt the form of human shoe prints.

John Koenig quickly considered. It was of course possible that these traces came from days long past. An early expedition from the Earth could have left them, during the time when humans had set first their feet on the Moon. Since there was no wind and no rain on the Moon, such prints would last thousands of years. But this explanation seemed to him too simple, particularly since he had never heard of an expedition into this area. And the question about the bioplasmic field still remained...

"Mark, we're landing", he instructed. "So that we can examine them close up!"

"Okay!"

The pilot concentrated on his armatures, looked for a suitable place for a landing.

But he did not approach close enough to bring the telescopic legs of the Eagle to the Moon soil.

A shout rang through the cockpit - a shout from the Doctor. Her trembling index finger pointed to the screen.

"That... that's not possible!" she stammered in a barely audible voice.

Macinlock and Koenig, who were not looking at the viewscreen at the moment, now saw what they had missed.

The picture, which was offered to his eyes, was unbelievable. On the previously empty plateau there now suddenly appeared three shapes. At first glance it was evident that they were humanoid shapes. But they were not Alphan.

They were alien!

The complete surprise of the emerging aliens was astonishing enough. What made John Koenig, and his companions, doubt their understanding however, was something completely different.

If humans exposed themselves to the vacuum of the Moon for just a few seconds, that would be sufficient to immediately kill them. Without a space suit, no living being could exist on the Moon's surface.

The three shapes down below could do it however. They

did not carry a space suit, nor helmet, nor any safety device against the deadly vacuum. They had draped their bodies in light clothing, but were completely free about their heads.

The Alphans had still not recovered from this surprise, when they were met by a new shock.

One of the three aliens made a quick hand movement. The effect of this harmless looking gesture was, however, devastating.

In a fraction of a second, chaos broke out within the Eagle. The heavy spaceship jerked and yawed, as if an enormous, cosmic hand had seized it. Only the fact that they were buckled up saved John Koenig and the pilot from being torn from their seats. Helena, who had stationed herself behind the Commander, could not maintain herself. With a brutal force, she was hurled against the plastic lining of a computer console. She knocked against it with her head and went down with a groan.

The on-board systems revved up. The grips of the control armatures moved in an erratic, wild dance. Alarm lamps flashed, and the warning sirens shrilled out. Sparks erupted from various units, and the smell of charred insulating material rose up into the Alphan's noses. The automatic fire extinguisher system went into action, spitting white foam.

"Fly away!" instructed the Commander. He had to shout loudly in order to be heard over the sound of the chaos on board.

Mark Macinlock acted fast. In a flying haste, although handicapped by the reeling movement of the ship, he regained the controls.

Too late!

"Commander!" he moaned under the suddenly piercing pressure. "The engines don't react. I'm not getting any thrust!"

John Koenig slammed a switch, which activated the auxiliary power unit.

"Now?"

"Nothing!" the pilot groaned.

The inevitable happened. Without energy, the ship could not maintain its altitude against the gravitational forces of the Moon.

Eagle Three fell.

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"That was a major error, Kelemar F", said Halamon B harshly. "Why did you activate the suction field?"

Kelemar F made a consciously stricken face, when he looked up to the wildly gyrating terrestrial spaceship.

"You have me all wrong, Halamon B", he answered. "A pure reflex. I saw how the missile spat fire..."

"Retro rockets!"

"Yes, I know that now. But in that first instant... I thought they wanted to attack us. Finally, after thousands of their years, we can read their thoughts again. And it's not a simple thing to understand, on the first try, a species that previously moved itself only on the backs of onagers, elephants and horses, but which now has control of space flight."

"We have slept for a long time", threw in Dagarel E. "Perhaps long enough. The Earth people have made enormous progress during the last ten Argos, more progress than in the whole two hundred Argos before that."

"Perhaps we should have counted on that", pondered Halamon B. "as we withdrew ourselves the last time to the Moon, we had already noticed their development. They possessed rail-mounted vehicles, telephone transmission, explosives... And now they have obviously blown the Moon from out of its orbit around the Earth, without our even noticing it, and since then have been on an interstellar journey."

Dagarel E sighed. "If I am to be completely honest, I don't even regret this development of things. Our role as the eternal ones of Luna might be ending anyway. We should be content with the exhibition specimens, which we now

have in our possession, and finally return to Maragon. More than two hundred Argos is a long time, even for us."

"Back to Maragon, yes!" said Kelemar F, with a longing appearing in his eyes. "Halamon B, you agree?"

"Yes", was the responding answer. "I also consider it appropriate. Exhibition specimens from two hundred Argos, from the cave and into space - the culture advisors of Maragon will be content with the Terran species and will pay us so well that we can enjoy the next four hundred Argos without any troubles in our lives. But, of course, the crowning acquisition is still missing."

"You mean..."

"This space generation of the Earth humans, of course! Without them, our collection will be incomplete. I certainly hope that by your... reflex, that larger difficulties won't ensue, on our way to achieving our goal. The Terrans are now warned, and the whole extent of their technical development has not yet been revealed to us."

Dagarel E pointed upward. "Yes, the missile falls!"

The three Maragoner observed how the Earth ship smashed down onto the lunar soil and, badly crippled, remained lying there.

"What are the chances the Terrans survived that?" asked Dagarel E doubtfully.

Halamon B threw his head back. "We will see. Even if they didn't, others will come in order to check on them. In either case, they will accuse us of being responsible for the crash. We must be very careful to make sure not to enrage them against us even more."

"They will be powerless against our field technology", Kelemar F stated confidently.

"First things first! I would like to get this difficulty out of the way. Therefore, we will be very friendly to them, until we are completely sure of ourselves. And then..."

Kelemar smiled. "Do not forget, we need them!"