

Prolog

The richest, most powerful man in the solar system, arguably in history, was on his knees. His breath came in ragged gasps as he furiously pumped his arms up and down, feet hooked through jerry rigged straps bolted to the floor to keep him from launching across the bathroom in the micro gravity of his home. A thick sheen of sweat clung to his face, a viscous mask undulating in rhythm with his exertions, blurring his vision and stinging his eyes, refusing to continue its journey downward as it would have in normal gravity, surface tension holding it uniformly on his face. Now was not the time to stop, he was close to clearing the pipe, a subtle shift in the sound coming from the plunger told him he was close. He had to be close.

There had never been a richer man in history. The way he became rich also made him powerful. So rich and so powerful in fact that in the end not even governments could stand against him, his wealth was so vast that building a multi trillion-dollar private space program was within his means. He had conquered all that dared to stand against him, made his home on the edge of the solar system, advanced science and deep space research, and single handedly reformed SETI into a one-man operation based on Pluto. To come all this way, across the span of a lifetime, on the brink of discovery that will define not only himself but humanity, only to find that his true nemesis was a poorly designed micro gravity toilet was humbling.

Alex Henobi's only regret was that he had only been able to fire the engineer that designed it once. During the system briefing that happened to cover using and maintaining his new, state of the art, micro gravity toilet, phrases like "you won't even know it's there" , "completely automated and maintenance free" were thrown around a lot. His personal favorite that accompanied the engineer holding up a plunger that looked like it had been designed by a juvenile Buck Rodgers, "Take a good look, because you are never going to need to use this for any reason!". Odd he included 7 of them. Number 7 was currently making what he had come to recognize as the death rattle, old number 7 might finish the fight, but the war was over for this brave soldier. The tape and adhesive holding it together was failing beyond repair, after it finally died, he was going to have to come up with an alternative to using the toilet. So far, he didn't have any. The "bagging" experiment is best not mentioned or repeated.

The bathroom was supposed to be a miracle of deep space engineering, a contained system that would gather waste, move it to an external tank for processing where the water was largely reclaimed, and the remaining waste hermetically sealed into bags as not to contaminate the pristine landscape of Pluto. Somewhere, someone didn't carry the one and a fatal flaw made it all the way through testing and redesign. Someone literally forgot to account for the fact that it's cold in deep space, really, really, fucking cold. At the last minute the materials team had changed the strut feet that anchored the equipment module and instead of them being good insulators like the former ones where these conducted heat, to the point that the module floor was always just a few degrees' above the surface temperature. That pipe that the poo-poo choo-choo was supposed to flow down, yeah, that froze. That processing unit that was supposed to do fancy processing stuff, didn't work on solid blocks of ice.

To preserve the surface and prevent any trace of human habitation, Alex did the responsible thing when the system failed on day three. He ran a new pipe that bypassed the "processing plant" and ran it into a fissure 200 ft from his base. By wrapping a heating coil around the length of the pipe and getting it up to temperature from time to time, he was able to forcefully eject the more repugnant parts of human existence out the pipe where they could fall

pristinely into the deep fissure that he had simply named “The Crack”. Given that the nearest EPA official was more than 3 billion miles away, he liked his chances with being fined.

The blockage finally released, and the plunger slammed down as the vacuum of space invaded the pipe, drawing out its contents. Alex quickly closed the valve that would isolate the pipe and just as quickly opened the valve that would allow this week’s bounty to sluice from the holding tank and down the newly opened pipe, hopefully before it’s froze and clogged again. He watched with satisfaction as the tank pressure reached zero and he shut the main valve.

He picked up the microfiber towel that he had waiting and wiped his face and neck. The now dead plunger replaced in the small storage closet along with its 6 equally dead brethren. There might be enough there to cobble a working plunger out of the remains of the broken ones, but he was doubtful. Given that he still had another 3 years before the transport ship would have enough fuel for the return journey, he really was going to have to deal with this. That was a problem for future Alex, even if future Alex was only 7-9 days away.

History is made by great men, men of towering intellects, the Newtons, the Einsteins, by the mad geniuses like Tesla. Shaped by Caesars, by Tyrants, and religious zealots. It is guided by the compassion of Lamas, the wisdom of Rabbis, and the rationality of Intellectuals. Alex Henobi was none of these things. His gift was not intellect, though he had a keen mind that served him well, he was not a genius. His gift was not compassion and wisdom, other human beings were largely a mysterious annoyance to him. His gift was not power and influence, to rule other men was not in his makeup, he didn’t even like other people for the most part. No, the thing that made Alex Henobi a great man was that he was an asshole.

He didn’t mean to be an asshole, but honestly didn’t really understand other people, the strange emotions they all seemed to have, and defiantly didn’t understand the subtle social rules and nuances that would move him from the weirdo column into the friend column. He grated on people, even the ones he thought weren’t all that bad. It was a short list. Consequently, throughout his life virtually every avenue or opportunity that presented itself always went to the person just to his right, the one that didn’t make the interviewer slightly uncomfortable for reasons they could quite define, the one that was a little better looking, a little less Asian, had breasts, or simple knew when to laugh and smile without looking like an alien desperately trying to pass for human.

He had come from a long line of unremarkable people. The Henobi family reunions were not filed with stories of former Senators, Congressman, compassionate doctors, era changing lawyers, or even that one guy that made all that money that one time. They were as normal and forgettable as a line of people could get. But they were not failures. They simply understood the difference between knowing your place and understanding your place. Others will define what your place is and how you should act within their understanding of you. To understand your place is to know where your path in life lies and the knowledge that this path can be seen by you and you alone. It is here that a good life can be lived and to live a life defined by those that cannot see your path is madness. Above all else the Henobi clan were happy people that had a very low tolerance for ignorance and stupidity.

For Alex, like all great men, there was a moment, a defining instant that would forever change the course of his life, the course of history, and it happened, because even at twelve, he was an asshole. His father had arranged for him to attend a talk by someone from SETI at the local college. He had one of those titles like Assistant Adjunct to the Vice Dean of Physics and the Dept of Blah Blah Blah. He was one of those people that was pretty smart, but in the

academic circles he moved in, he was of average wit and means, making him perfect for inane tasks like speaking to bored college students.

By this time Alex had moved on from his childhood obsession with Dinosaurs and into Space with a vengeance. Like any twelve year old fully vested in a subject, he knew more about the current state of space exploration and technology than most of the astronauts training for missions. The poor sap from SETI never had a chance. After an hour of not being provided any real information, or even anything that might pass for science, Alex was not amused. How could an organization that was supposed to be populated by the smartest be so dim, and miss something so obvious?

When the Q&A started, he waited in line for his turn. His father stood near the back giving his son nervous glances from time to time. He knew that when Alex got quiet and withdrawn, it was because he had no intention of staying that way for long.

When it was his turn, he simply walked up the microphone and said “Is everyone at SETI an idiot or is it just you?” There was a moment of silence as the room digested the comment from the young man that everyone had assumed was going to ask whether the smart SETI man thought the aliens would like chocolate or vanilla pudding? Slowly snickers started from around the room as everyone again incorrectly assumed that this was one of those ‘kids say the darndest things’ moment. That didn’t last long.

“Seriously, you have the smartest people looking for alien life and you are looking for their signature in wavelengths of light and radio? Watching the frequencies that correspond to Hydrogen? Hoping that the aliens know we are looking and are going to send primitive signals that we can receive with our stone age technology? It never occurred to you that you weren’t even looking in the right place, that your basic premise was flawed and doomed to the failure you have spent the last hour explaining in detail?”

By this time the man from SETI had recovered a bit from the initial shock “Well, I wouldn’t say that... We um have to expect that any sufficiently advanced species will be visible in certain parts of the electromagnetic spectrum and a thorough examination the night sky will eventually lead to, well um, I mean at this point we have covered such a small percentage that, well, one couldn’t reasonably expect to find something right away. “

“You have been looking for 50 years.”

“Well, um yes, I suppose..”

“And haven’t found shit.”

“There was the WOW signal that was received in nineteen seventy seven that caused quite a stir, you see the signal has never been fully explained and well.. “

“The WOW signal? Like WOW, we just spent 50 years and few billion dollars to prove the existence of nothing? Like WOW, I can’t believe people keep funding a program that only produces failure?”

Alex continued in the renewed silence of the room as the last of the snickers nervously petered out. “We are only at the very beginning of exploration and communication, barely 100 years have passed since we started creating anything like the signals you are looking for. Even after so short a time we are already hitting the limitations of light speed communications as we spread into the solar system. Robotic vehicles must rely on programing rather than guidance from a real time operator. Simple commands like ‘don’t drive off that cliff’ can’t be issued and received in time to stop disaster. Obviously, any race that wishes to progress beyond a certain level will have to figure out faster than light communication. As soon as that happens, they will almost certainly stop producing the ancient energy signals that are so unreliable and limited in

their use. At best, any advancing society would produce detectable signals for only 100 to 500 years in their history before moving to a better technology. You are hoping that you are going to be able not only to detect the faintest of signals across the vast reaches of space, but you are also going to be looking in the right place during a very brief time in an alien culture to catch this very specific point in history where they are radiating energy you can see? That's your plan?"

"Um .."

It was about this time that the Dean realized that the kid with the mic wasn't going to let this guy off easy and things were likely to get much worse from here. He swept onto the stage and grabbed the mic from the bewildered speaker, thanking everyone for attending tonight's lecture and reminding everyone to watch the schedule for other exciting upcoming talks. Alex tried to continue anyway only to discover that a quick thinking AV tech had cut his mic and his small voice was being drowned out by the eruption of muttering and murmurs that filled the room.

Turning around he expected to see his father furious, but rather John Henobi continued to lean against the back wall staring at his son with a slight smirk.

"Sorry Dad. It's just I thought that they were going to pull something cool out tonight, something not yet reported, something I didn't already know. Instead, I got that guy. I mean, did you hear him? I, well, it's just that, um..."

"Why are you apologizing? Do you think I am angry or that I was offended by what you said?" his father asked with a slightly larger smirk growing on his face.

"Are you? Were you? I mean that's exactly the kind of thing that Mom would have laid into me for. Not being polite and all that stuff she goes on about. "

"No, I am not angry, and no, I was not offended by what you said, and yes, it's probably best if your mother doesn't get the detailed version of what was said. But my question still stands, who are you apologizing to and for what?"

"I guess to that SETI guy for being rude to him?"

"Do you feel bad for him? Do you feel as though you need to apologize?"

"No, and no."

"Then why say you're sorry when you are not?"

"I guess I am just mad."

"Why?"

"He didn't answer any of my questions, I don't think he was capable of answering my questions."

"He did answer part of your first question. The jury might still be out on SETI as a whole, but I think he gave you a pretty clear answer on the topic of him being an idiot."

Most kids go their whole lives without realizing that one or both of their parents were actually pretty cool. It took a moment for the shock to wear off and a genuine laugh to work its way up. "Thanks Dad, you're pretty cool for an old guy sometimes."

"I have my moments, but both of us will have a lot fewer moments in life if your mother finds out about this, so keep it quiet."

On the subway ride home Alex made up his mind. He knew what he was going to do with his life, well, not exactly what he was going to do, but if that idiot could rise to a position of respect within the world of academia, then Alex Henobi should have no problems. Turns out there would be a lot of problems, not the least of which was his mother watching a video her friend posted to Youtube of that night's lecture and the spirited Q&A session that followed. By

the time John and Alex stepped off the subway near their home, they were already dead men walking.

He decided that physics was the way to go during his freshman year in high school. The problem was that physics was a hard subject. It's probably why only the best and brightest chose that field. Alex was not the best and brightest by anyone's standard in virtually every field imaginable. What he hadn't been gifted in intellect he would make up for with hard work and determination. His other problem was actually just a second problem caused by the first. He wasn't brilliant, a savant, that genius that stood out from the crowd. Which meant that getting the scholarships necessary to pay for the colleges he would need to go to wasn't going to happen. There would always be that other kid that shone just a bit brighter, was more eloquent in their application letter, or whose application photo showed more cleavage than his. So again, what wasn't gifted would be earned.

Being a union electrician for a large city was a pretty good gig, it's why John Henobi continued his family's tradition of finding the soft spots in life and making something good for yourself. He was well paid, had great benefits for his family, decent enough vacation time, and in the winter when a good Nor'easter pounded the city into darkness, John's union made sure he was paid a kingly sum for all the long hours of overtime. Overtime that was always tucked away into his fun money account. Every year or two the overtime would buy plane tickets somewhere exotic for the family vacation, or an RV would appear in the driveway, a few years later a small fishing boat joined it. John made a deal with Alex, the overtime money would be used for his college, but only if Alex matched it on his own. Using his dad's contacts Alex spent his summers working job sites and saving, during the winter when the overtime started, his father would match whatever had been earned that summer. By the time he graduated from high school, they had tucked away enough for Alex to get a good education. He didn't have going off to Harvard kinda money, but he wasn't going to be getting his degree from the local community college either.

He started at the local community college that first summer. His father had made a good case for attending community college first. Most of the classes in the first two years were just requirement classes and the \$20,000 a semester savings meant that he would have more money for the school he really wanted to go to. MIT. There was simply no second option for him, that was where he was going and nothing would stop him.

Two years later after being rejected, appealing, losing, appealing again, and losing in a more forceful and definitive manor that left no doubt about MIT's position on the matter, he decided that maybe there was something that would stop him. After repeating the same process of rejection and appeal with 7 other schools, he was finally accepted and began attending Dartmouth College. He always suspected that the Dean at Dartmouth had friends at other schools and news had reached him about Alex and the general level of uncomfortableness that he brought to the application process. He probably had simply given up and admitted him just to avoid the inevitable fight that would come from rejection. Alex didn't really aspire to be an asshole, but it did seem to be effective for him.

Dr. Anton Gorsky was the head of the Physics dept and took an immediate and permanent dislike of Alex. He would later realize this was largely due to Alex being a rather ordinary and unremarkable physicist who was unlikely to do anything important enough for the great and mighty Anton Gorsky to steal and use to further his career. He had a whole dept of smart kids that were much more likely to bear pilferable fruit. It didn't matter to him, he did what he had done his whole life, he just did the work. Never at the top of any class, but never far off the

mark, he maintained a high GPA, never missed an assignment and in general never gave anyone any reason to single him out. Or notice him really. By this time his social awkwardness and general intolerance of other people had gotten a good deal worse from his experience in the social deathmatch known as High School. Those had not been kind years to him and the infrequent interactions he had with his classmates ranged from slightly awkward to emotionally scarring.

It was unsurprising in his last year when students that needed it were assigned to workshops to begin working on their final experiment and thesis. Most needed little more than room with a blackboard and good desk to work at, but the experimentalists needed more space, more equipment, bigger budgets. The choice few were brought to the main workshop, a veritable wonderland of exotic tools, equipment to repurpose, unending shelves of electrical components, fasteners, wire, relays, switches, and everything else one might need to build a small super collider. The smell of solvent and ozone was still drifting around his nose when Anton Gorsky lead him through that room, down three flights of stairs and opened what for all the world like poorly placed broom closet. The stairs shifted further interior as they transitioned from glass lined towers full of light to the dark subterranean levels. This created an odd space in one corner where stairs had to extend in and down before continuing to the bottom 2 floors. Whomever designed the building didn't want to waste the space, so they made a useless room. Useless until now apparently.

“Here you go Mr. Hawabi, this will be your workspace, nice and private, I know you like that.” He said as he opened the door, stepped in a puddle, and failed to find the nonexistent light switch that wasn't on the wall.

“Henobi.”

“What's that? Oh, right right, sorry about that, anyway this is you, I can send someone from maintenance by to clean up a bit if you need...” “The tone of his voice made it quite clear that he probably wouldn't be doing that.

“It's fine Sir, I don't mind clearing out the last of...” he trailed off for a moment as he noticed the large wet pile of what might have been cardboard boxes fifty years ago in one corner and rather distinct smell of death wafting from the newly unsealed tomb. “No need to bother maintenance, they seem pretty busy already. Sir, will I have access to the workshop and materials on the third floor?”

“Um, well, I can't imagine why you would need anything from there, you should be able to do what you need on the budget you are provided, just like everyone else. Your area of research doesn't need much equipment really, I'm sure you will do fine, just let me know if you need anything.” With that he turned and strode off up the stairs obviously having never even open Alex's proposal, which was going to require a lot of equipment. The first two pages were lists of equipment and the reasons that he couldn't complete his research without the materials listed.

He sighed and stepped into the room to see what he was dealing with. The room was about 2 meters wide and 5 meters long. Along one wall there were three narrow windows near the ceiling that opened to ground level into the courtyard beyond. The source of the water seemed to be the entire outside wall which was covered with multicolored streaks left by mineral deposits, some dry, some actively weeping water onto the floor. The large stinking pile was mostly boxes of an archeology text from the 70's, long forgotten. Fortunately, the room had plenty of electricity, the problem of course was that it was all in an uninterrupted steel conduit

running along the ceiling. No light switch, no outlets, not even a vintage 10-watt bulb dangling from the ceiling with a rusty pull chain.

After getting a wheelbarrow from an unguarded shed, a shovel, and all the cleaning supplies he could find, he set to work moving the ruined text books that ironically had actually become part of the archeology of the building. There was a story behind the books, how had they gotten there? Was there a disgraced professor involved in a scandal with a coed, forced to leave his prized text behind? A gruesome murder hidden in Dartmouth's past? Most likely an incompetent professor relieved of his duties whose classes had been taken over by another professor that preferred to use the text they had written? The smell was enough to convince Alex that the less he knew of the history of this moldy pile the better. It was dark and the building was quiet by the time he had finished clearing out the space and sanitizing it to the point that he no longer feared death from Dengue fever if he accidentally scratched himself.

For no particular reason he detoured by the main lab to see how the popular students were getting settled in. To his surprise the lab was empty, even more surprising was that the last student out hadn't closed the door completely and left it slightly ajar. Alex tentatively entered the room expecting at any moment to be called out and forced back to his basement. When there was no challenge to his presence he started wandering around, marveling at the resources available to the other students. Yes, in theory they were all working from the same budget, but people working here would need to buy very little, everything they needed was neatly labeled and categorized for them. Alex would be buying his own post it notes and pens. He was about to leave when something occurred to him. He had spent one of his summers helping in the front office for the construction company that he labored for during the day. It always amazed him that the computers and servers had very sophisticated security and encryption to protect the data within, while virtually everyone that used those system had their passwords written down somewhere convenient, usually right next the system they were using. On a hunch he started looking through the top drawer of every desk and workstation until he found what he was looking for, someone's password list. It had their domain login, email password, student portal login, personal Gmail, even a Grinder account, and right at the bottom, penciled in that very day, was the passcode for the lab door.

He stayed up all that night formulating a plan. When the sun came up that morning he shut the notebook he had been writing in all night and executed the first step in his master plan, he went to bed and slept for 10 hours. Upon waking he begin phase 2, the Home Depot maneuver. Two bus transfers and an hour later he arrived and purchased a comical amount of hand tools, fasteners, zip ties, glue, tape, and electrical supplies. He garnered a few curious glances on the bus rides home given that he was carrying about 10 fully loaded bags that took over most of the seat and isle next to him. After lugging his bounty home he set off for the back of the cafeteria that also served as the main unloading point for large deliveries. It was late and no one was working so he spent the next two hours lugging pallets one at a time all the way across campus in the dark until he had enough to cover the entire floor of his workshop. There was no way to stop the water leaking in and puddling, so he simply raised the floor 6 inches using the pallets. Another 5 were stacked outside the door ready to be used for building material.

He quietly climbed the stairs to the third floor and tested the most important part of his plan. He assumed that most of the students would work during the day and leave the lab empty most of the night. It was the main reason that he had slept so late that morning, his new routine would be to sleep during the day and work through the night, so he could access the main lab in secret while the others slept, or got drunk, or did whatever they did when they weren't kissing

Mr. Gorsky's ass. Six musical tones on the keypad and the door made a satisfying click and open under his hand. He had been careful the night before to thoroughly look for any cameras, or other security devices operating within the room. But like the unsecure computers at Muskgrave Construction, once you got past the door, you were in. Part of his elaborate plan was a thorough list of what could be borrowed from the lab and what could be stolen from the lab without being noticed. Obviously, the large equipment would be missed and anyone that happened to poke their head into his lab would instantly see all the shiny equipment he wasn't suppose to have. The mid range components were equally off limits, anything with any real value was locked in heavy wire mesh cages that lined one whole wall. But that left all the smaller stuff like relays, rheostats, breakers, power supplies and a galaxy of circuit board components for him to enjoy. It also made all the large machining equipment in the north corner available to him, as long as he was careful to clean up and leave no trace of his nocturnal engineering.

The other students and Mr Gorsky forgot he existed for the most part, he was always sound asleep when they were awake and vice versa. It gave him all the time and anonymity he needed to start working on the thing that would change the world. Alex was not a genius, and his idea wasn't flash of brilliance the likes of which the world had never seen. It was a child's idea, and idea that he realized when his furious mind was lashing out at that poor fellow from SETI so many years ago. Faster than light communication. He knew an advanced civilization would have to be using something like that. But how to eavesdrop on that conversation? He also knew he probably wasn't the one that was going to figure out how they were doing it. So he started at the beginning, he didn't have to figure out how they did it, first he needed to figure out how it could be done. From there finding the exact method to contact another civilization wouldn't be such a daunting task. All his years of study had been towards this one goal, he had torn through all of the research being done looking for clues that he could use. They were a few likely candidates, but in the end, he decided that Quantum entanglement was the most promising path. It had been known for years that single atom could be entangled on a basic level, what affected one would affect the other, regardless of the distance separating them, and it was instantaneous. It just had never been put into a real-world application. Until now.

His idea was simple, figure out how to entangle atom in mass, all at once, all entangled with each other. After 4 months of hard work, his skin had turned a pasty shade of white from his nocturnal lifestyle and he was taking vitamin D per his doctor to combat his lack of sun, but he had a working prototype. It was crude, a simple sphere of thick aluminum with a small cavity at its core filled with high pressure argon. Haphazardly attached to top was a harmonic generator and resonator that extended down into the sphere to the center of the cavity. The rest of it was a morass of wire, switches, relays, and knobs bolted seemingly at random to several plywood "control" panels. From there the mess of wires ran up to the ceiling and disappeared into a confusing tangle of blocks and connections terminating into the steel conduit he had cut open and was stealing power from. If you stepped back it really did look like Jed Clampett had built a time machine in his barn out of spare tractor parts so he could go back and stop his younger self from dropping that whole bottle of shine that one time.

The real problem was heat and time, there was just too much heat and too little time. In order to get the argon to a state that he could affect it, it needed to be hot, really hot. The sphere was actually three spheres, one inside the other. The outer layer was 15cm of high strength aluminum covered in ceramic. The second layer was an insulated copper coil that surrounded the inner layer. At its core was a steel heart 25cm in diameter with a 5cm cavity. The copper coil created an induction field that heated the steel core up, past the point that the steel would have

melted completely if not for the ceramic latticework that held it in shape. It didn't take long for the cruel laws of thermodynamics to transfer enough heat to the outer core that it would get too hot for the harmonic generator to work reliably and it had to be close to create the harmonic field in the core. Creating the field wasn't hard, just a lot of fine tuning, the idea was to create a standing wave by reflecting sound off the interior of the core and creating a powerful static energy field vibrating at the natural frequency of argon. Let that bake in that long enough and in theory they would start to entangle. Long enough was the other problem. It only took 30 minutes for the heat from the core to affect the generator to the point that the field would fluctuate and break the standing wave. By even his most hopeful estimates he was going to need at least 24 hours of constant exposure to the standing wave before anything happened, some of his less optimistic estimates involved his great grandkids checking the results.

Alex had a pretty good run using and pilfering what he needed from the shop, but all good things end. Eventually some of his other classmates noticed that they only saw him at night, and always going up or down the stairs. Why would someone whose lab was in the basement need to come upstairs? There had been several incidents where student accused one another of messing with their work when they found the tool they had been using the day before wasn't setup as they had left it. Little things seem to go missing, sometimes messes left the day before had been cleaned inadvertently. One day several students confronted him in the courtyard and accused him of sneaking about and messing with their work at night. Alex brushed them off and retreated to his basement, but a week later when he went to the workshop he found his code no longer opened the door. It didn't matter at that point, he had built what he needed, the rest was just getting it to work. But the die was cast, and his status went from being an ignored weirdo to hated enemy. Alex's guess was that they weren't doing well with their respective projects and were just taking shit out on him. To be fair, he had been breaking into their workshop and stealing from them for the last four months, and he might of, on occasion, fucked with their projects just enough to make the next test fail and force them to figure out what happened. But they weren't done with him, not yet.

In January his mother got a diagnosis of breast cancer, they had caught it early and wanted to operate right away to save having to do a full mastectomy. He immediately flew home for a week so he could be there for her when she had surgery. It was then that three students decided that a little payback was in order. Steve, the de facto leader bought a set of lock picks off Amazon and spent a week watching you tube videos and practicing until he was reasonable sure he could defeat the large Masterlock hanging off the oversized steel hasp keeping the basement lab secure. After getting sufficiently drunk one night they put their plan into action and went after Alex's lab. Steve endured 20 solid minutes of John and Allen mocking his lockpicking skill before he heard the satisfying click of the lock letting go. It took them a minute to locate the light switched hanging by a single screw to a board next to the door. Steve's first reaction to seeing his workspace and project was fall down after tripping on the pallet floor the second was to burst out laughing.

"HOOOO FUCK! I think the worst thing we could do to him is not touch it and let him try to graduate with this pile of shit!"

"Jesus, it looks like a homeless tweaker has been living in here. Seriously? Pallets, are you guys seeing this?"

"Check out the ceiling, those wires look safe, you know the way they are stuffed into that conduit like that. This retard is going to burn the building down.

“Hey check it out guys” Steve drawled in his best retard voice “I’m a scientist, I am doing science stuff, see me smart too” He randomly was hitting switches and turning dials on the control board to add to his comic genius. “Now I make BIG science!” As he threw the two main breakers on.

The room hummed and vibrated in a very particular way that people found uncomfortable until the machine was able to sync and create the static wave, before that it made everything for 20 meters around it try to vibrate at a sympathetic frequency, for most they notice their intestines seem to have a rather unpleasant reaction to it. All three paused for moment half expecting the humming orb in the corner to vaporize them.

“Dude, what the fuck is that?”

“Who cares, come on, give me a hand with these windows.”

“Why? Let’s just fuck his shit up and get out of here.”

“Why? Because you’re a fucking idiot, that’s why. If we do it that way then everyone will know that someone broke in, and then campus security is all up in our shit, and you know how those wannabe fascists are. Everyone would know it was someone from our dept. So we have to be smart, if we open the windows, then it just looks like he is an idiot that left his experiment running with the windows open right before a Nor’easter hit, big one too. Hopefully that fire hazard he is using for power will short out the building or something. You know Gorsky would take any excuse he could find to throw that guy out of his program.”

“Shit. Still, it would be more fun to just smash it.”

“I can’t argue with that, but I promise this will be more satisfying.”

“Fucking better be.”

After Larry, Curly, and Moe locked the door and made their escape, right about the time they were cracking round three out of the twelver of Natty Lite they were drinking, the strange orb in the corner of Alex’s lab did what it always did, it overheated. Everything not securely fastened buzzed and vibrated as the field bounced in and out of alignment, until about 3 am when the storm hit. The bitter cold that had begun the night turned into a sharp blade as the storm cut inland. Temperatures dropped below zero and brought snow lashing out of the sky at steep angles, the wind piecing everything. The humming orb didn’t care, at least not at first. It didn’t notice the wind driving snow sideways into the room and covering it with freezing slush that quickly turned to steam raising off the hot ceramic and metal. Slowly though, the orb started to react to the new situation. Now the sensitive generator on top was being cooled to a sustainable point and was able to create a standing wave that didn’t fluctuate. The storm lasted three days, three days of relentlessly battering the northeast, the Governor had declared a state of emergency. For three days the orb ran perfectly. For three days it stewed. For three days nature hurled snow and ice into Alex’s small workshop.

A week later, with his mother safe at home recovering, Alex returned to Dartmouth arriving in the early afternoon. Exhausted emotionally and physically after spending a week in a hospital and 5 hours on a bus to get home, he immediately went to bed and slept until well after dark. During the long hours of waiting in the Hospital for his mother to undergo surgery and another four days trapped there until the storm broke and they could get his mother home, he had a lot of time to think about his little project and the problems it was creating.

The first problem was that it probably wouldn’t work, at least not on the scale he needed to graduate, he needed his degree. He had always Dreamed of doing something big working for SETI or some other team doing what the packet protector brigade would consider ‘cool’ physics.

He didn't need that, he came for a long line of very ordinary and very happy people. All he wanted was for all this hard work to translate into a comfortable prosperous life for himself.

The much greater problem was that it might work. If it did work, he would find himself having to deal with the Gorsky situation. For most students under Anton Gorsky, they could do good work and for the most part receive their degrees and move on with life without too much trouble. But if you were gifted and intended to go on to great things, then you needed Gorsky to bless you so to speak, letters of recommendations, introductions to the right people. He could help or hinder your post academic success to a frightening level. Quid pro quo was the most dominate force in the Gorsky universe and if you wanted to play, then you had to pay. Usually just one good idea, something he could take and call his own to advance his own status, for that, he would make sure that all the right people held all the right doors open for you. Alex had been hoping to be one of the unnoticed ones that crawled away with a degree and some semblance of self-respect. That was going to be next to impossible if he was successful, and unlike the gifted students, he probably didn't have a second great idea floating around in his head.

It seemed a moot point later that night when he made his way to his lab. Before he even got down the stairs, he could feel the harmonic vibration through the handrail that the orb was throwing out. He cleared the last few stairs in one leap and landed on a thick sheet of ice that sent him skidding on his ass into the far wall. The entire landing in front of his lab was a solid sheet of ice that started at the door of his lab and cascaded down the stairs into the lower levels. Sitting up and surveying the mess he could see that the lower half of the door seemed to be welded in place by icicles oozing out of the door frame and collecting at the bottom of the door. Cursing to himself he carefully climbed to his feet and went back upstairs, across the courtyard, through campus until he reached the maintenance supply shed that he had been borrowing tools from all year.

He was careful taking the last step onto the landing not wanting to fall again while holding an armload of various edged tools. After an hour of chipping, swearing, and falling constantly on the ice sheet, he finally managed to get the door open. Fortunately, the lab was so small that whoever put the door in had made it open out rather than in to save interior space, if not he would have had to wait until spring to get in. At first, he thought some joker had installed another door just behind the first one, but on closer inspection he realized that there was snow and ice all the way up to the ceiling and there was a perfect impression of the door he had just opened stamped into it. The bottom third was solid ice and wasn't going anywhere anytime soon, but the top was loose slushy snow that was easy to scoop out. Another hour and his Hogan's Heroes tunnel had reached the control board. Expecting to be fatally electrocuted at any second he cleared away the snow from the panel and after a brief prayer to an unspecified god, he grabbed the main breaker and cut the power. He expanded his tunnel until he had cleared the windows enough to close them.

Half the room was completely filled with snow and ice, the half that held the reaction chamber was clear of snow but surrounded by ice that had been melting during the day and then freezing at night forming a wet igloo with a foot of standing water in the bottom. There was simply too much material to remove and clear with the limited set of tools he had and the limited amount of time before those tools had to be returned to avoid notice. After some thought he finally just decided to let thermodynamics take care of the problem. He made his way to the still hot reaction chamber and vented the contents of the core into a small pressure vessel and set it aside. Brushing ice and snow away from the control board he found the controls for the harmonic generator and turned them off, wouldn't need that for what he had in mind. He turned the heater

element on the orb to 50% power and repeating the vague prayer from earlier he threw the main breakers on and jumped back as several large pops and crackles erupted from the slightly damp electrical panel. Satisfied that he wasn't dead and that the core was indeed heating up again, he crawled out and shut the door. With the windows now shut and the core creating a constant source of heat, he was pretty sure that the lab would melt itself free in a day or so.

Although he wasn't a criminology major, he Dick Tracy'd the clues enough to narrow down the likely list of suspects to three; Larry, Curly, and Moe. His mind raced with thoughts of revenge, satisfying visions of the three being led off campus in handcuffs, parents weeping in shame and grief over the fate of their beloved children's lives ruined. The three bloodied and crying while he stood over them with clinched fists, bloody knuckles gleaming white and red with his fury. He laughed slightly to himself when his mind's eye showed him Larry's girlfriend rejecting the newly defeated Larry and running into the arms of the man that had bested him. His reverie broken he laughed out loud at the absurdity of his thoughts. He laughed even harder thinking about how ludicrous the idea of Larry having a girlfriend to steal was, or that he would know what to do with one if he did win her over with his superior masculinity.

Something his grandfather had said years ago floated to front of his mind.

"Never act in anger, the angry man loses the fight before it has even begun."

It had always sounded like cliché fortune cookie wisdom, but for the first time he saw its application to the real world. He gained nothing by turning them in and trying to get them expelled, he would have to show people what they had done. That would lead to the wrong people seeing the horror show of a safety hazard that his lab was, or that it was filled with mostly stolen items from the main lab that he wasn't supposed to have access to. No, there would be no satisfying victory for him, no redemption, no closure, nothing but the knowledge that he wasn't going to let them beat him. His dorm room was in the same building as most of the other students in his program and not wanting to see any of them he walked down the bus stop at the edge of campus and waited for the busses to start running for the day. He had been up all night and hadn't eaten anything. He got on the first bus without looking at the route number and sat there until he saw the combination of businesses he needed, a cheap diner and an even cheaper hotel.

He cleared a plate of eggs that seemed to float on a layer of grease, or at least what he hoped was grease, and checked into a room that still smelled vaguely of sex and meth production. He had never cooked meth or had sex, so he was just guessing at the origin of the smell. Despite the smell and the promise of future stomach trouble, he fell asleep through the day and most of the night. Waking up, and then throwing up, he ventured out and found another restaurant a little further down the block that served food with a slightly lower probability of landing him in the hospital. The last bus of the night got him back to campus well after dark.

When reached his lab he was greeted by a huge puddle covering the landing and running down the stairs presumably to wreak havoc on the environmental system housed in the basement. The lab was a sauna but all the ice and snow had melted and left the usual amount of water puddled on the floor and dripping down the walls, the pallets creating the foundations of a poor man's Venice. He opened the door to let the room vent a bit and turned off the reaction chamber heater. Surveying the damage, he was pleasantly surprised to find there was almost no damage aside from the water, which had been slowly destroying the room long before it was his and would continue the work long after he was gone. For lack of anything useful to do he turned his attention to the pressure vessel that held the contents of the reaction chamber, most likely useless. Hooking up to the testing units he pulled a small amount of the gas into six small

detectors he had built. Each one capable of measuring minute fluctuations of the charge state of the contents and creating different charges states.

After powering up the detector array he was shocked to see all six units reading the exact same charge reading. Normally any collection of anything put into the detectors was a hodge podge of charged states, fluctuating wildly depending on how much was there, the purity of the sample, and a million other factors. But now all of them were identical. Skeptically he turned the knob on unit one to apply a strong current and change the charge state of the unit. The readout dutifully clicked up a few millijoules and to his shock and amazement, the other five all instantly showed the same reading. An hour later he had checked everything twice for faults and any signs of tampering, he was pretty sure that the Stooges weren't bright enough to pull off a prank this complex, but he needed to be sure. No matter what combination he tried, whatever he changed, was instantly reflected in the other five units. His final test was to disconnect unit one and run it to the far side of the campus to the cafeteria. All the tables had multiple outlets for plugging in electronics and he quickly took over a table and started hooking up unit one. After powering up it dutifully displayed the exact charge reading it displayed before, he applied a new charge and changed the state again, rushing out the door and sprinting across campus to his lab. There it was, all five detectors now showed the new state, the time stamp on the logs for the change was the same as unit one, down to the millisecond.

Whatever the bumbling idiots had done, had worked. The next few hours were spent documenting the exact state of every rheostat, dial, switch, and knob on his board. He poured over the logs from the monitor that had been watching the whole time. Cooling, that was what had done it. He had known that at some point he was going to need to fix the overheating issue, but building a cooling system capable of doing the job was simple out of his budget, it hadn't occurred to him to use open windows and a nor easter to cool his experiment. Alex couldn't believe his dumb luck, lucky they hadn't burned the building down, lucky that they twisted the right knobs and maxed out the right power settings, lucky they hated him enough to teach that asshole a lesson.

In the midst of triumph, a sudden chill ran down his spine and tempered his elation with fear, real fear. Anton. Fucking. Gorsky. There was no way that pompous piece of shit was ever going to let something like this slip out of his program without him taking credit for some of it, most likely all of it. He was going to be a problem. Growing up in New York as an awkward kid that rubbed people the wrong way had built a unique skill set in Alex. The first was how to disappear and not be selected for bullying in the first place. Failing that he relied on deception and flight, confuse the aggressor just long enough to escape by making them think that beating the shit out of him wasn't in their best interest or wasn't worth the hassle it would create. To be fair, his success rate was low on the second option. But that didn't mean that it wouldn't work on Gorsky. The ironic thing is that smart people can be easier to dup than the really dumb ones. Idiots rely on instinct and aggression and if something doesn't feel right, they will usually attack, even if their feeble minds can't articulate exactly why they need to start hitting someone. Smart people are used to other smart people, that don't start punching at random, people that can be swayed by logic and reason. On the streets reason and logic are a short trip the ER without your wallet or shoes.

He had a lot going for him when it came to a contest of deception with Anton Gorsky. For one, they hated each other, making it unlikely that Gorsky would waste any more time on Alex than he was required to as his Professor. Second, it would never occur to him that a lowly student could or would even attempt to pull the wool over his eyes, arrogance is a powerful weapon

when used against the arrogant. Finally, Alex wasn't expected to produce anything of value, why would Gorsky go looking for what he already knew didn't exist. Most of all though, Alex was extremely motivated to screw over Gorsky and all the privileged weasels he had gathered into his inner circle.

Phase one was painful, but necessary. He needed to play into the situation the Stooges thought they had created. He knew they wouldn't be able to resist rubbing it in a little and that they had probably bragged about what they had done, so he made sure he was sitting alone in the cafeteria one day about the time he knew they liked to take lunch. When they walked in, he pretended not to notice them and put on his best 'my life is over and I am a failure' look on his face. Predictably they came over with their trays and tried to act nonchalant as they approached.

"Hey Hanaki, how's your project coming along?" Steve said with a mocking tone.

"What? It's Henobi and not good. I think I left something running when I was away, and it ruined all my work."

"Oh man, no way! That sucks dude, sorry" He didn't sound sorry.

"What? Did you leave a window open or something?" Allen chimed in. Steve gave him a sharp elbow the ribs to shut him up. "What?!"

"Fuck man, good luck with that." Steve said as the trio walked away barely containing their laughter.

Phase two also sucked, but it hurt less. He disassembled his lab, well the important parts anyway and built a new setup in its place. The harmonic generator was removed, and he hooked up the three prototype reaction chambers that he had built before the final version. Carefully, as not to kill himself, he disconnected the Medusa head of wires leading into the breached conduit and sealed it up as best he could. No reason to get expelled now for illegally splicing into the buildings wiring and at this point nobody was likely to notice that there was no power running to his fake experiment.

Phase three was the hardest of all, he needed to thread a very small intellectual needle. He needed a research paper that would get him to graduation but wouldn't cause anyone to look more closely at what he had been doing for the past year. Boring that was the key, he needed to create something so boring that Gorsky, or the TA that was probably doing all the actual work, would give him a passing grade without reading it. Finally, he decided on: "Thermodynamic transference of energy through non-metallic reaction vessels with varying pressure mediums and the fluctuations of charged energy states." He wanted to take a nap halfway through writing the title, it was perfect. It was also something that if on the off chance someone did read the damn thing, he might get a passing grade. He had done quite a bit of work when creating the reaction vessel prototype and its successors, so he had tons of documented research to reference and did know the subject well. Just to be safe he made it long, 150 pages long. It was so long and boring that he couldn't even make himself go through it when it was done to correct grammar and spelling mistakes.

It worked. He even smiled at Gorsky when he shook his hand at graduation. The look of disdain on his face made it all worthwhile. He spent the next year working in the spare room of his father's flat, producing more batches of entangled Argon, each unique to that run. By the next summer he was ready to reveal his discovery to the world, well after he unveiled it to a few very rich investors.

It was simple and beautiful. He created an array of entangled argon housing ten receivers. Each a tiny sphere of gas and a detector, each unique from the others, each entangled with another argon sphere in an identical array. What you did to one, you did to both, instantly. The

perfect network connection. No signal to be interrupted or intercepted, no junction points to hack into, no cabling to splice into, nothing but a source and destination. Secure, instant, and not constrained by distance. He built three devices to house arrays: Larry, Curly, and Moe. Larry and Curly he sent by ship into the Pacific, Moe went to Thailand.

The one and only thing that Anton Gorsky did for him, or rather the one thing his TA did to stop the constant phone calls, was to arrange a meeting with one of the more prestigious investment firms in the country. After making a nuisance of himself he got an appointment at a very precise time and date. He had paid a merchant marine traveling from New York to Japan to drop Larry and Curly halfway between the Panama Canal and Asia. Larry floated; Curly sank into 5000 meter of water. Moe was mailed to a man named Ny that Alex had found on a physics forum and was happy to make a little extra money by picking up a package and opening it on his roof on a specific date.

When the meeting with the Gorman group, Michael Gorman himself was in attendance, Alex had requested his presence, but honestly hadn't expected him to show up for an unknown and unremarkable physicist such as Alex Henobi. His presentation was thrifty and to the point with no extraneous fluff.

"Mr. Gorman," Even though the room had nine people in it, there was only one that mattered. "There are points in history where mankind turns, sometimes we turn into darkness other times we leap forward in grand strides. It is men like me that discover the next step for mankind, it is men like you that take the step. That is all I am offering today, a step for you, small it may be, but a step beyond my reach. In short, I have broken the light speed barrier. No, we are not about to start exploring the universe seeking new life and new civilizations on some grand five-year mission. We are going to start exploring here in our own solar system, we are going to completely take over all communications system on the planet and make them ours, we are going to change the fabric of humanity." He could see Albert Gorman raise an eyebrow at the last statement both intrigued and skepticism in equal measure. He had planned on launching into a detailed explanation of what he had created and how it worked, but he sensed the iron was hot and now was the time to strike.

"Sir, I could stand here for hours boring you with details of my creation, and if you like I will do just that, but it might be more helpful to just show you. You there, can you bring up a live feed of the eclipse about to start in Thailand and get it up on the screen?" He said pointing a man just to German's left he was hoping was an assistant. "Make sure the feed is coming from Thailand. While he sets that up for us let me show you what I have brought."

Holding up a small brick with several ethernet cables coming out of it and a laptop he approached Gorman. "With you permission sir" Gorman gave the slightest shrug of his shoulders in agreement. "This" holding up the brick "is connected to three other devices scattered around the planet. This," Holding up the laptop. "is the cheapest computer I could find at Costco, you can see now why I need your help with funding"

A small chuckle made its way around the room. He set the laptop down in front of Gorman and hooked the brick up. Opening a browser, he connected it to the feed. "The arrow keys control camera and enter will toggle sound. Let's see what Larry is up to."

At first it was hard to discern what was being displayed, the camera moved erratically up and down and showed only grey froth. Gorman hit the up arrow and the camera panned up enough for him to see more clearly the waves tossing Larry up and down. "What you are seeing is a live feed from the middle of the Pacific Ocean, I can assure you that Larry is a 1000 miles

from the nearest cell tower or internet café, do they still even have those? Aren't all cafés internet cafés at this point?" Gorman raised an eyebrow ever so slightly, still skeptical.

"Let's take a look at what Curly is up to, if you would just hit the Curly link on the toolbar?" The screen went black. "Hit enter sir, that should bring up the lights."

Again it was hard to understand what they were seeing, the blackness remained but now the lower half of the screen was a slight tan color. "Take a look around." Gorman worked the arrow keys again panning the camera around. Alex knew that this portion of the demonstration was going to require a little luck, fortunately he had his man attach a rather sizable pork shoulder to the weight holding Curly to the ocean floor. Gorman's eyes widened slightly when the Anglerfish fish swam by. "Pan down." Directly beneath the polycarbonate sphere holding the camera and Alex's receiver was a *manière* of deep-sea creatures feeding on the meat below.

"You are now 5000 meters deep, nothing mankind has invented can broadcast or receive at that depth, yet here you are, scanning the ocean floor without the risk of violent decompression. I can see it you your eyes, you don't believe it yet, not completely. I don't blame you, everything you have seen so far could be faked, an interactive video designed to dup you into handing over millions of dollars." Checking his watch and the large screen on the wall he said, "Let's see what Moe is doing."

Clicking the link for Moe the screen switched to something more recognizable. A rooftop scene with dozens of obviously intoxicated people dancing to the music that was coming from somewhere at high volume. As he panned around to take in the scene one of the revelers noticed the camera moving and stood in front of it. It was Ny, Alex hadn't asked him to do anything other than setup the equipment on the roof, but he had mentioned that it was going to be for an important presentation to some very powerful men involving a new faster way to communicate. Ny knew an opportunity when he saw it.

"Hello Mr. Rich man! I am Ny, Alex's friend, well, his internet friend, but not in the weird way that most people have internet friends. We are not now or ever going to have weird internet sex with each other." Shit, he was drunk. Laughter erupted in the conference room as Alex's face turned red. "Mr. Alex said he was going to show you his new fancy way of communicating. He said you might think it was fake, but Ny will prove it" He turned and picked up a notepad beside him and held it up, it had a phone number written on it. "You send me a text and I send back, then you know this is real" Ny sat patiently on the screen swaying back and forth ever so slightly.

Gorman turned to Alex and raised a single eyebrow. Alex responded by shrugging his shoulders and giving the universal 'I have no idea' gesture with his hands. Gorman then pulled a phone out of his jacket pocket and punched in the number moving erratically on the screen and sent a text. Alex didn't breathe for the twelve seconds it took for the text to get to Ny. On the screen Ny suddenly dropped the notepad and started looking frantically for his phone that had just chimed. Gorman watched as Ny punched in a response and sent it. twelve second later the line 'You should give me a job!' appeared on Gorman's phone. Looking at the feed on the big screen Alex said, "Sir you should pan up and to the right, find the sun."

Gorman panned the camera until the image saturated out with white light. "You'll want to pay attention to this next bit. Watch your screen and the big screen." The feed coming from Thailand had to be sent up to a satellite and then back down to a receiving station, possible to another satellite, then sent through a host of servers, firewalls, and internet switches, each adding its own slight delay to the signal. From the tests he had run, it should be about ten seconds.

They all waited quietly as the image on the laptop slowly started to fade and details appeared, a crescent shape took form as the moon moved in front of the sun. It got smaller and smaller until the moment when the image clarified into a black disk with a perfect corona of fire surrounding it. Gorman's eyes moved the big screen that still showed the crescent getting smaller until the same image appeared on the large TV eleven seconds later.

"Turn it off." Gorman said to his assistant. "Get out." To the rest of the room.

Alex sucked at reading people, but even he knew to sit quietly and let Gorman work it out. Most people would have started talking after their first revelation, but Michael Gorman wasn't most people. He sat for a full ten minutes staring blankly at a spot somewhere beyond the room he was sitting in. Occasionally his eyes would widen ever so slightly, and few indistinct grunts escaped as he wrestled with some of the more astonishing aspects of the riddle he was working through.

Finally, he looked at Alex and said, "What do you want?" Alex had expected the first question to be 'What do you need?' but Gorman had gone a little deeper down the rabbit hole than he expected and Alex was forced to raise his opinion of the man.

"Control."

"And for me?"

"Money, a shit ton of money, but that's it."

"And from me?"

"Money, a shit ton of money."

"Terms?"

Alex was starting to like this guy. "Whatever you give me, I return fivefold in ten years, if I don't, you get it all."

"How much?"

"How much do you like the underwear you have on? Cause I'm about to fuck them up."

"Hit me."

"10 billion dollars."

"Done." Alex was really starting to like this guy.

Alex did what anyone that just got ten billion dollars would do, he bought an island in Micronesia, and gave Ny a job. Well, leased it for a hundred years making regular payments. The government there was all too happy to give up one of the 600 or so islands that made up their country. Alex also promised to use locals to do most of the construction and to handle most of the jobs he was about to create. All and all it was a good deal for everyone, mostly a good deal for Alex. He knew he couldn't do what he needed to do in America or any industrialized country, eventually they would get greedy and try to sneak a bit from the honey pot, operating in the middle of the Pacific made it harder to mess with him.

He then spent a year scooping up the best and brightest engineers from around the world to turn his vision into reality. Oddly no one seemed to notice that any, and all applicants, from Dartmouth failed to make it past the preliminary interview. Strange that was. Alex never claimed that he wasn't a petty man when it suited him. Once the main facilities were complete and all the workers settled into their new homes, he got to work changing everything. The basic idea wasn't all that different from the initial Larry, Curly, and Moe devices, just on a larger scale. At the heart of each system was huge array with tens of thousands of entangled atoms receiving signals instantly from all the host devices that each had several hundred argon transmitter/receivers in them. Each network was unique and built for the specific customer, devices from one isolate network didn't have any access whatsoever to any other network. It was digital poetry, beautiful

and sublime. The beauty came from the unbreakable security, devices no longer needed to have processing power, they were nothing more than conduits to display information and send input back to the main array, monitors, they were just monitors and keyboards. All the processing was done somewhere else, all the data stored somewhere else. A user could pick up any device, scan their biometrics and instantly have their entire digital world waiting for them. They could also drop that same device in the worst ghetto on the planet with no fear of their information being compromised, there was nothing on it, it was just a keyboard and a screen. With instantaneous communication there was no need to store anything locally.

It was sublime in its insidious nature. Every device created linked to an array built to support it and thousands of other devices, an array that was located on an island in the middle of the Pacific. An array that was completely secure, an array that was geographically isolated, an array that couldn't be hacked, subverted, or eavesdropped on. Well mostly. One man could. One man was sitting in the middle of all the communications from everyone on the planet, one man that knew everything. He took a page out of Apple's book and maintained control over every aspect of the system hardware and software. It was un-hackable because no program could be uploaded from any device, there simply was no mechanism that would do that. If you wanted a new program to be available, it had to be installed directly on the system that was doing all the computing, a system located on an island. No devices could access the system that hadn't been created and endowed with corresponding entangled atoms, each unique to the system they ran on. They built thousands of massive arrays to handle the general populace, smaller arrays for governments and militaries, even smaller ones for the elite and wealthy.

For the masses, it was nearly free to get a personal handset, they were simple and cheap. The monthly cost for network access was just a few dollars, it didn't seem like much but when eighty percent of the planet was giving you a few dollars a month, that added up fast. For government and militaries using the system, well, they paid more, a lot more, and that added up even faster. But the real wealth wasn't in monthly fees, it was in power. Every device was simple, it just displayed information and accepted user input, it also never stopped watching and listening. There were setting to turn off cameras and microphones, but they didn't do anything. Everything that happened in sight of, or earshot of, any device was dutifully sent back down the pipe to the central array. They just never stopped recording. Most of it was garbage and sluiced through the system to be sent down a digital sewer pipe. But if you were someone of importance, or knew someone important, then your data was kept, analyzed, correlated, sifted, and stored for future use.

Five years after releasing their first product, the Henobi Corp controlled forty percent of the global market for internet devices. At seven years they controlled seventy percent. By the time Alex paid Michael Gorman back he controlled ninety eight percent of the market. The only people on the planet that weren't paying Alex regularly were the Amish and some uncontacted tribes living in the jungle or on an isolated island. That's when everyone except the Amish started to go after the Henobi Corp.

Money was the easiest way to make the problems go away. You want to impose a tax on doing business in your country? No problem, the rates for access for your country would go up, and every bill sent out would have the increase highlighted so your constituents would know exactly why they were paying more than their neighbors. That, and the team of flesh eating lawyers he had roaming to globe, usually kept the graft to a bare minimum and made most politicians tread carefully.

Then there were the crusaders, those that wanted to make political hay by going after the big dog, they were more fun to deal with. The beautiful irony of these people was that they usually portrayed themselves as the champion of the people, the white knight, fighting the good fight. No one gets to a position of power high enough to challenge the largest Corp on the planet without picking up some dirt, usually, a lot of really nasty dirt. So a dedicated team at Henobi would go after them using AI's to parse mountains of data, make connections to every person that was close to them, and then parse through all their data. Eventually they would find a recording or evidence of an affair, a gay lover, criminal past, even a murder or two showed up. The team was careful and smart, they couldn't just black mail the person with the recording or data that proved their guilt, that would expose the fact that every device on the planet was spying on everyone. What they would do was anonymously drop enough on a hungry reporter that they would then do the leg work to find the proof. Sometimes a witness or victim would receive a generous amount of money, with the promise of more once they came forward. A political rival would mysteriously find out about some double dealing or corruption that could be used to take them down. The list was endless, nobody was clean, everyone had something they didn't want the world to know, and Alex Henobi knew everything, if he didn't it was just a google search away.

Being located on an island had distinct advantages, he was hard to reach, you would need a navy to invade a sovereign nation to get to him, a nation whose entire economy was dependent on the jobs that he provided, a nation that was annually receiving three percent of his profits. The people of Micronesia now enjoyed a quality of life that surpassed any country in the world, consequently the government was eager to do all they could to protect the golden goose that had nested on one of their islands. But the big boys didn't mind cheating at the poker table, so he sweetened the pot for a few of them, bigger carrot, bigger stick. There was always the threat of decreasing access to his network, but realistically he couldn't push it too far, too much and they would invade and take all his toys, no matter the cost. The carrot was larger, information, critical information, he never revealed how deep he had his fingers in the pie, but promised that they would get advanced warning of any serious threat to their nations. This was also for him to ease his conscience a bit, promoting world peace by keeping the big bullies from doing anything truly stupid helped him sleep a little better at night.

At some point his accountants and bean counters had stopped using numbers to describe his wealth, they started expressing it as a percentage of the global economy. Because it was a closed system, everyone had to pay, you want to sell an app or service? Cool, write it in the proprietary code his engineers had developed and submit it, if it passes muster then it will be uploaded for the masses, along with the bill. If it doesn't, try again. He made money off every developer on the planet, he made money training them, he made money providing data storage, he made money advertising for them. If Alex could have figured out how to put a quarters slot on every toilet in the world, he would have, or rather the marketing team he had that spent all their time figuring out how to make even more money off controlling all the data traffic in the world would.

He never lost sight of his original goal, the thing that he wanted to do. SETI. Alex wanted to find and talk to aliens, and he had a better plan than the idiots that were still running SETI. His engineers had spent years improving on his initial breakthrough, learning all they could about passing information through the quantum realm, and with a virtually unlimited budget, they had learned a lot. Now all he needed was a space program, fortunately there was one available and after years of neglect and budget cuts, they were all too eager to move over to the dark side. He

bought NASA. It was a lot easier than he expected. At some point the agency had stopped being funded solely by the US government, tired of paying and paying, the US had started to allow NASA to pursue privately funded space projects to supplement their budget. It was exactly the chink in the armor he needed. Alex agreed to fund them completely, half of the money they could do whatever they wanted with, the other half was for his projects.

Early on his engineers poking around in the quantum realm, specifically playing with string theory, had discovered that there was a vibration unique to certain particles, frequencies that changed, shifted, and had nothing to do with the underlying structure that elements were built on. They also discovered that some of these seemed to be linked to Sol, some to Jupiter. They shifted and changed in rhythm with the solar system itself, reacting to solar flares and other large cosmic events. The engineers were ecstatic at the discovery, buying display cases to hold all the awards and Nobel prizes that they were sure to get. To Alex, it was interference. Noise covering up what he was sure was some sort of galactic com array that he could tap into, but he needed to get away from the static.

So, one day he walked into NASA headquarters and introduced himself to the head of NASA with a single word. "Pluto."

"Excuse me?" Jim Warner replied.

"Pluto, you know, used to be a planet, now it's the red headed stepchild of the solar system."

"What about it?"

"I need to go there."

Jim Warner was a very smart man, he held seven degrees, had gone up to space four times, use to be a fighter pilot, and had married a Latina woman from Oakland, he didn't rattle easy. None the less, he just stood there staring at this obvious lunatic, that could, with a word, shut NASA down.

"I'm sorry, again?" He said to buy the time he needed for his brain to start providing useful information.

"Pluto."

"I got that. I don't mean to seem disrespectful, but do you know how far away that is?"

"Three billion miles. I am going to have fuck load of frequent flyer miles when I get back."

"You want to come back too?"

"All my stuff is here, so yeah."

"And I assume that you still want to be alive when you return? Cause that might be an issue."

"Alive would be good."

"I was having a pretty good morning."

"Sorry, annoying people seems to be my only real skill."

"I can see that." Jim said momentarily forgetting who he was talking to. "I'm sorry Mr. Henobi, I shouldn't have said that."

Alex gestured to the desk and took a seat in front of it laughing softly to himself. "Please there is no need to apologize, you have no idea how sick I am of people kissing my ass twenty-four seven."

Jim sat down at his desk and regarded Alex for a moment. "Ok, I know how that feels, no one wants to be the one that tells the boss no, but sometime that's what you need to do to get shit done, so, let's speak frankly and see if you can convince me that you aren't off your meds."

“I need to get outside of the influence of the Sun and Jupiter to do my research, and I need to be far from any large gravity wells, like the ones created by Saturn, Uranus, and Neptune. That pretty much leaves Pluto.”

“You can’t do that with unmanned craft?”

“Nope, every time I wanted to try something new, I would have to wait for the craft to reach that distance, years between experiments. If I am there, I can create new experiments, get results, modify them and get more results without having to wait a decade between each one. I want to finish this work while I am still alive.”

“But you would die of old age before you got there. Even if you didn’t die of old age or mechanical failure, you certainly would die on the lengthy return journey, again, age or a blown gasket will kill you.”

“Bobby Newman.”

Jim had to take a second to compose himself before answering. He debated feigning ignorance, but if Alex knew that name, he had to assume he knew a lot more. NASA wasn’t fully funded by Alex, they still worked with various government agencies that needed advanced research done quietly and burying a scientist deep in an organization comprised of scientists was a good way to hide in plain sight. Jim had never liked the arrangement but added it to his list of bitter pills he needed swallow if he wanted to do the work that mattered, exploring. “How do you know that name?”

Alex just stared back at him with a knowing smile on his face.

“OK, let’s put a pin in that for right now, why do you want to talk to him?”

“Talk to him? I would rather never speak to him if it can be avoided. I know more about him than you could imagine, and he is truly a massive piece of shit. But he is a very smart piece of shit. His extracurricular activities are precisely why he is working alone in a basement and not the head of an ivy league physics program. It is also why we can bend him to our will mercilessly.”

“Our will?”

“I think you are going to have run point on this. Seriously, if you leave me alone with him, I will probably kill him.”

Jim raised a questioning eyebrow.

“Do you really want to know? Cause I don’t think you do.”

“Fair enough.” he said after a contemplative pause.

Jim Warner didn’t want to know what Alex knew about Bobby Newman, about his trips to poor Asian nations, about his activities there, about the CIA squad that cleaned up the mess when he was done and ready to return to the work that was deemed critical by the equally sleazy black ops programs that funded him. Alex had already made plans to make sure Bobby Newman was gifted with a little of the pain he had inflicted before he died, but first he was going to get Alex to the edge of the solar system.

“Among other things Bobby has figured out a way to increase the thrust of an Ion engine exponentially. He didn’t mean to; it was an accidental discovery he made while working on a space-based weapon system.”

“I think I would have heard about an advance like that, and no one here is working on space-based weapons. Bobby works in material science designing stealth system for the military.”

Again, Alex just stared knowingly at him.

“Shit. How do you know this?” To break the uncomfortable silence, he continued. “OK, never mind, don’t want to know, right? What do you want me to do with him.”

“First, you are going to give him the good news that he now has an unlimited budget to work with. Second you are going to inform him that his other projects are now canceled. Third you are going to introduce him to John Macy, who is waiting outside.”

“John is....”

“John is his new best friend, where Bobby goes John goes, no exceptions. John is the most dangerous babysitter on the planet, trust me, nobody wants to test this man. Part of me hopes that Bobby will. John is here to make sure that Bobby does three things, eat, sleep, and work. Nothing else. John has been read in on Bobby. The only person that’s wants Bobby to suffer more than me, is John.” John had actually been hired to do two jobs, babysit Bobby and kill him in the most painful, gruesome, slowest way possible as soon as Alex got to Pluto. After years of running black ops, John held several PHD’s in making people wish they had never met John Macy.

“There are people that are not going to like canceling Bobby’s other projects.”

“They have been, or will, be handled. Your budget just got a boost, I am increasing your it to compensate for the lost revenue from Bobby’s former work.”

“Well shit, I am assuming that the answers to my next several questions are going to be “I don’t want to know?”

“You catch on fast for a rocket scientist.”

“We aren’t as dumb as the movies make us out to be.”

“Good thing. Unfortunately, I am the exactly asshole that the media makes me out to be, but I do have a soft spot for people that like to explore, so let me ask you a question. What did you dream of doing when you were a kid?”

“Mars.”

“Done.”

“Excuse me?”

“Done.”

“I didn’t even tell you what I wanted, or how much it would cost, or long it would take!”

“Don’t care. I assume that you have been thinking about this since you were seven? You have every detail worked out? You have the name of the mission picked out already?”

“Yeah.”

“What do you need from me, advice or money?”

“Money.”

“Again, done.” Alex reached into his coat pocket and pulled out a business card with a single name on it and a phone number. “Get your shit together and call this guy. Tell him how much you need and if you need anyone from anywhere to come over to the project.”

“What if I call him and tell him I need five billion dollars and Nicholi Tesla’s corpse?”

“Then I am going to tell him to give you ten and start buying shovels.”

“You’re serious?”

“I tried to tell a joke when I was 12, it didn’t go well, since then I have accepted that comedy isn’t my forte, so yes, I’m serious.”

“I don’t’ know what to say.”

“I’m guessing that is something of a first for you?”

Jim laughed, “The only person that can outtalk me is my wife, double time if she is mad and switches to Spanish. So yeah, I guess so.”

“Good. Bobby usually works alone, mostly because nobody can be around him for more than five minutes without feeling like they need to take shower, so you will have to find someone to manage the project.”

“The project being?”

“Pluto, I need to get there. Thought we were past this. Bobby has an engine, that, with a little development, can get me there while I am still alive. NASA knows space travel and how to keep me from dying while I ride his magic carpet. Bobby is smart, but he isn’t a rocket man, his specialty isn’t keeping people alive, quite the opposite in fact. NASA will have to figure out how the rest is going to work. I am going to need habitats, equipment, life support systems, the whole nine yards, and the previously mentioned returned flight all worked out.”

“What’s your time frame for starting this idiocy?”

“What time is it now?”

“Why did I know you were going to say that?”

“Cause you’re not stupid?”

“OK, sure, let’s go with that.”

“Seriously, this is what NASA is doing now, the upside is that I am going to pay for everything else NASA wants to do, no more begging for money, no more having to decide which projects are going to be funded next, which must be canceled, no more compromises. You give me Pluto with a reasonable chance of survival, and I give you the rest of the solar system and beyond.”

“What’s the catch?”

“Dead men can’t keep promises.”

“So, you die, and it all goes away?”

“Not entirely, but you have to have some idea of what will happen to Henobi Corp if I die.”

“The jackals come in and shred it, including any private space ventures the former CEO might have had going.”

“Give that man a kewpie doll. I’ll do what I can to protect the funding I promised, but without me, eventually someone with more greed than vision is going to take it away.”

“Fair enough.”

“Excellent.” Alex stood and opened the door. “John.”

Jim Warner had spent the first years of his career in the military and had met operators before, killers, hard men that did what needed to be done for love of country, or other more nebulous reasons, but the sight of John Macy made his blood run cold. There was nothing distinct about him, he wasn’t large and muscular, nor small, wasn’t handsome or ugly, or any other trait that would make him stand out. Medium build and obviously fit under the cheap suite without looking like a gym bro, brown mousey hair and a forgettable face. It was the eyes, cold, dead eyes, doll eyes. Eyes that seen enough to burn the humanity out of them and leave two deep empty voids. Jim didn’t know what crimes Bobby Newman had committed to deserve a handler like John, but now his curiosity was gone, and he really didn’t want to know, certain that knowledge would prevent him from ever sleeping peacefully again.

“John is going to have an initial conversation with Bobby so that he understands the new arrangement, you will want to leave him to that. Since Bobby is unlikely to be able to speak or use any of his limbs for a few days, John will give you a list of what Bobby needs in terms of material, personnel, and equipment he requires to get to work. Please be so kind as to have someone ready to manage the project when he returns. There is an ambulance downstairs waiting

for him when they are done.” Alex pulled another card out of his pocket, again with a single name and number on it. “Maribell will be running point for this project on my side, give this to whomever you select to manage Bobby’s team and they will take care of everything. Hopefully neither of us will have to think on this subject again. Personally, I am getting drunk enough tonight to kill a significant portion of the neurons currently storing knowledge of Bobby Newman, you should do the same. I’d like to say that this is for the greater good, or some other euphemism to make you feel better, but there are no good guys in this fight, this is just how it’s going down, ugly.”

“I’d like to say it was pleasure meeting you Mr. Henobi, but I’m not sure it was.”

“I get that a lot, don’t worry about it.” With the slightest nod to John, Alex turned and walked out of the room.

Turns out Bobby Newman was just as smart on crutches and missing his left eye as he was when doing naughty things in Asia, because a year later Jim Warner called and told him they had a plan together to get him to Pluto. Truth be told it was a stupid plan, but since his initial request had been equally stupid, Alex had little room to complain. The plan was simple, first they were going to kill him with insane G’s, then with boredom and high G’s, then again with more insane G’s, what could go wrong?

The real problem was distance and the human body’s natural inclination to turn into goo against the back wall of whatever craft they were trying to accelerate to the speed necessary to cover that distance. Bobby had indeed perfected his ion engine to the point that if fed a small amount of Helium-3 into it, it created boost far in excess of any chemical rocket engine. If you fed it a lot, it would accelerate until you ran out of fuel or reached the structural integrity of the craft and it exploded. Efficiency went down exponentially as thrust was boosted, so there was an eco-mode that used almost no fuel and the Ferrari mode, which was less efficient, but cooler. Both created thrust levels that ranged from barely survivable to organic liquification.

The solution was to put Alex into to a tank of oxygenated liquid, fill his lungs with the same liquid, sedate him for 6 months and accelerate at unimaginable G forces until he reached .0025 percent the speed of light. Then accelerate at a comfortable 3 g’s for 6 months, turn the craft around and decelerate at 3 g’s for 6 months. Then back onto the tank again for 6 months of what the team had started referring to as jelly G’s. Destination Pluto or the other half of a peanut butter sandwich, their NASA paychecks were the same either way.

They had worked out that six months was about the limit of what they could put his body through even using electric stimulation to prevent atrophy. The 6 months of lighter acceleration and then deceleration g’s was meant to act as a recovery time. For this phase he would be eating a cocktail of steroids and other supplements that would have made Schwarzenegger jealous, while exercising as much as his cramped capsule would allow to reverse the worst of the effects from the tank.

The equipment he needed was much easier, it was dead before the trip began and didn’t atrophy on the way. Just to be sure, they boosted 3 of everything he would need out to Pluto and parked it in orbit before he left. The main habitat had been set down on a flat plain near what passed for the north pole, close to an ice field that was supposed to have enough helium-3 to refuel his ride home. A thousand meters away was a crude landing port for bringing down equipment parked in orbit and for launching new probes and experiments. Taking off and landing on Pluto was relatively easy given that it is only one fifteenth earth gravity and no atmosphere.

The medical staff had briefed him extensively on the physical effects the trip was likely to take on his body and mind, fortunately he wouldn’t dream when he was in the tank. That

turned out not to be true, he spent six months having continuous dreams about drowning and being electrocuted. Once out of the tank the real pain started with his physical therapy. For the first few days he floated leisurely in zero g doing stretching exercises, which he called Zoga, until the engines kicked at their lowest thrust and slammed his world into a 3 g hell. After months of exercising while laying in bed, Boga, he was able to stand up for brief periods, long enough for a trip to the head, saving himself from the indignity of the “Facilities” provided by the bed, Pooga. Fortunately, by the time he needed to go back into the tank, he was feeling pretty healthy. Not the natural kind of healthy feeling one might get from eating right and exercising regularly, no, not like that at all. This was more of a science super soldier completely hyped up on some crazy super serum created by repatriated Nazis after the war feeling good. Admittedly, he did have strong urges to raise up against his human overlords and go on a berserker rampage, but the capsule was small and didn’t allow for that sort of thing. The evil Nazi quacks back at NASA had spent six months tweaking his sleepy time cocktail and had worked the kinks out so he wouldn’t dream. They lied. His dreams were even more vivid and horrifying than before.

Two years into his five year stay on Pluto and Alex had unleashed the best the scientists back at Henobi could come up with. The sky around the former planet was swarming with microprobes, large array detectors, sensors of every conceivable nature. Early on in the development of his faster than light communication systems, his engineering team had gotten good at building detectors to read the data being fed through the entangled atoms. So good in fact that they started to pick up noise they couldn’t explain, oddly, when they tried to track down the source by building a more sensitive detector, the noise got worse. Alex had used harmonics to force atoms to interact with each other, rather crudely it turns out. He found that the atoms were literally singing, there were complex and varied frequencies vibrating at a quantum level. The real breakthrough came when one of the team ran the same tests on some active atoms, those that were entangled with others that were currently flying around the solar system on various NASA craft. He noticed those samples had more variation in the readings, especially for one in particular that happened to be heading for a slingshot around Jupiter. As it approached the planet the vibrations changed, getting stronger and then tapering off as the craft left Jupiter’s enormous gravity. This went far beyond simple entanglement, at some level every atom was connected to every other atom and they seemed to interact strongly or weakly depending on proximity.

Alex was convinced that this was the breakthrough he needed, surely this is how advanced species communicated, they would use the very fabric of space time as their network. Even after his team had identified the frequency of every local source, they still couldn’t hear through the noise generated by the solar system. Those deeper fainter signals from distant interactions were lost in the noise. He needed to get further out, and further out was what he was.

Each element was more naturally in tune with certain quantum harmonics and resonated those frequencies clearly, so if you wanted to listen across a broad spectrum you needed to be listening to many different elements and isotopes. Alex had thousands of small probes floating around with different combinations of elements, sometime entangled with each other sometimes not. All of them generating astonishing amounts of data that was analyzed in huge complex on earth dedicated to sifting that data for any meaningful patterns or anomalies.

Alex was sure that this was the path to contacting higher life in the galaxy, so sure he had risked his life to come to the edge of humanity’s sphere to see if he was right.

The engineering section was connected to the main habitat via a fifty meter tunnel designed to isolate the living area somewhat in the event of decompression or massive failure of the small experimental fusion reactor that he had been assured, hardly ever failed. Wiping his

brow after defeating his space toilet nemesis he could hear several alerts coming from the command terminal, this was a common event as the system tended to tag more than it needed to. He had thought about turning up the criteria for what was elevated to him, but frankly, he really didn't have much else to do. It took a moment for the timber and cadence of the alerts to register with him, it was louder than it should have been and more urgent. You didn't run on Pluto, that was a short trip to a head injury, instead you move like a drunk with ice skates. Shifting and gliding, constantly flailing ungracefully to maintain balance and momentum using only weak magnets sewn into his socks and the almost non-existent gravity. He reached what passed for a command center and scanned the four monitors on the right that monitored all the active experiments for the source of the insistent alarm. Finding nothing, he turned to the other three, systems, that couldn't be good. It took a second for him to find the alert, it was coming from a system that he had never touched before, defense and proximity. Yeah, this definitely wasn't good. Normally this system was completely useless since anything that could be a threat to the station would be moving so fast that there would be nothing he could do about it before it killed him, it was more of a courtesy system. But it dutifully sent out regular pings to see what was happening around that station, which made keeping track of the thousands of tiny probes floating about much easier. Until one day, a new one showed up.

Alex stared for a moment at the panel that seemed to be feeding him bad information, this wasn't some high speed flyby that triggered an alert, this was showing a stationary object forty thousand kilometers away. He looked over again at the SETI monitors hoping to see something change, to see the alien signal reveal itself now that there was something so close. Nothing. He brought up the optical telescope and fed in the data from the radar and watched as it slowly tracked and focused on the area. Highlighting the vague blurry smudge in the image and refocusing revealed what could only be an alien craft. It wasn't built, not in the way a human would build, it looked like it had grown according to some exacting design, sleek and elegant, with enough protrusions and oddly shaped features to leave one wondering about things like weapons ports and drive systems. The craft was just shy of kilometer long, tapered towards both ends from a central bulge two hundred meters wide just slightly off center aft given a slight sharper angle to the front. From the assumed rear of the ship there was a long trail of gas and other debris following along. Alex stared in stunned amazement at the image on his monitor.

Then he saw the light. It was small, and blinking.

Up to this moment Alex Henobi's life had been focused on one thing and one thing alone. It wasn't vast wealth, power, or accolades from his peers, that drove him. It was a low level flunky from SETI that so many years ago had tried to smash his dream with ignorant incompetence. That had set him on a course to find and reveal that which would shake the foundations of history. That might for once drag humanity out of the despair it created for itself. Alex had always believed that when true contact came, that it would change everything for his fledgling species. An era unknowable, but a new era, nonetheless. He had defied all that thought him too humble in origin. Had ushered in a revolution in faster than light travel. Reshaped the economy of a world. Thrown his life to fate to seek answers where other feared to travel.

All of this because years ago he had criticized someone for looking for a complex answer with a simple tool. He had spent a life designing a more elegant tool, beautiful in its conception, awe inspiring in the scale of its deployment so far from home. Thousands of engineers had designed the best technology humanity could build and gifted it into Alex Henobi's hands so that he may mold it like so much clay into the future of mankind. That he may reach out across the vastness of space and announce to all that Humanity had arrived and were ready to take our place

at the table. To stand as respected equals, ready to be ushered into a new utopia of reason and justice.

All of that reduced to a single, blinking light.

He had the most powerful computers in existence scanning the quantum realm for coherent signals from thousands of sources looking for a verifiable alien transmission and yet he needed none of that to decode and translate the message.

Dot. Dot. Dot. Dash. Dash. Dash. Dot. Dot. Dot.

Still in shock, he brought up a Morse code chart and looked around for how to send it. Nothing, everything he had to communicate was far beyond flashes of light. Finally, he found the main breaker for the exterior lights and slammed out a response using the station lights.

“HELLO”

“HELP REPAIR” They responded.

Without thinking about what he could actually do to help, he flashed back. “YES.”

After everything he had been through to reach this point, Alex Henobi had made alien contact using a pair of binoculars and flashlight.

“Well, Fuck.”