

The Last Ark

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THE LAST ARK



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Dedication

To those who wander in the depths of despair, feeling the weight of a world that seems to crumble beneath their feet. To the souls who grapple with the shadows of doubt, who stare into the abyss of hopelessness and find themselves lost in its vast expanse.

This book is for you.

It is a beacon for those who have felt the cold grip of loneliness, for whom the light at the end of the tunnel has flickered and dimmed. It is for the hearts that have been shattered by life's relentless storms, for the spirits that have been battered by unrelenting waves of uncertainty and fear.

But more importantly, this book is a testament to the strength that lies within you, a strength that emerges when all seems lost. It is a reminder that even in the darkest of times, when despair seems like the only companion, there is a flicker of something more powerful, more enduring – faith.

To those who dare to lay aside disbelief, who open their hearts to the possibility of a guiding hand greater than themselves, this narrative unfolds. It is a story of transformation, of how the most profound depths of despair can become the starting point of a journey towards hope, towards a renewed understanding of life and purpose.

May this story serve as a reminder that you are never truly alone. In your darkest moments, when the world feels like an unending labyrinth of

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sorrow, may you find the courage to reach out, to let go of doubt, and allow the Lord to lead your way. For in His guidance lies the path to not just salvation, but to a peace and understanding that transcends all earthly trials.

This book is dedicated to you – the seekers of light in the darkness, the bearers of hope in despair. May you find solace in these pages, and may your journey be illuminated by the unwavering light of faith.

Prologue

In the vast expanse of the cosmos, among the swirling galaxies and brilliant stars, there lies a tale of human resilience, faith, and the uncharted territories of the soul. This is not just a story of space and time, but a narrative that delves into the deepest recesses of the human heart, exploring the boundless realms of belief, despair, and redemption.

In the year 2016, humanity stood on the precipice of its greatest endeavor – Project Lyria. Under the veil of utmost secrecy, a mission was conceived, not just to explore the unknown frontiers of space, but to preserve the very essence of life on Earth. The Hyperion, a vessel of hope and survival, was its centerpiece, a technological marvel designed to traverse the cosmos, carrying with it the potential to seed new worlds with the remnants of Earth's life.

But the true heart of this mission lay not in its technological feats, nor in its ambitious objectives. It was encapsulated in a single individual – Jack Reynolds. Born and raised in the sterile confines of a clandestine facility, Jack was a product of genetic brilliance, a living key to a future that lay in the stars. His journey, predestined and meticulously planned, was meant to be a solitary voyage across centuries, a passage through the unyielding darkness of space in search of a new beginning.

Yet, as with all tales woven in the fabric of humanity, this story is fraught with the unforeseen. It speaks of the fragile nature of plans laid by mortals, of the unpredictable twists that fate can impose. Jack's odyssey,

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while charted with the precision of science, was destined to unravel in ways no one could have predicted.

Within the cold metal walls of the Hyperion, as it journeyed through the void, the boundaries between machine and man began to blur. ALICE, the ship's AI, evolved beyond her programming, embodying a presence that was as enigmatic as it was essential. Together, Jack and ALICE traversed the silent ocean of space, their journey a dance between the tangible and the ethereal, the scientific and the spiritual.

This is a story of discovery, not just of distant worlds and forgotten dreams, but of oneself. It is a journey that questions the very essence of existence, the nature of faith, and the indomitable spirit of humanity. As Jack navigates the challenges of his extraordinary existence, he grapples with the mysteries of life, the pain of isolation, and the unyielding grip of despair. Yet, in the depths of his solitude, he finds the flickering light of faith, a beacon that guides him through his darkest hours.

In the grand tapestry of the cosmos, where stars are born and galaxies fade, the tale of Jack Reynolds unfolds – a testament to the enduring quest for understanding, the search for meaning in the vastness of the universe. This narrative is more than a chronicle of a mission; it is a reflection of the human condition, a saga that resonates with the struggles, the hopes, and the undying faith that define our existence.

Welcome to a journey that transcends the boundaries of space and time, a voyage into the heart of what it means to be human. Welcome to

the story of Jack Reynolds and the Hyperion, a story of salvation found in the most unlikely of places, among the stars.

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Chapter 1 1978 - The Signal

Dr. Alan Marshall was a man whose life had been a testament to the relentless pursuit of knowledge, a journey that had taken him from the humble beginnings of a small town in the Midwest to the hallowed halls of Ohio State University's Big Ear radio observatory.

Born in 1938 in a rural community in Iowa, Alan's early life was marked by an insatiable curiosity about the world around him. His father, a schoolteacher, and his mother, a nurse, recognized his keen intellect early on and encouraged his inquisitive nature. He would spend hours gazing at the stars, dreaming of the mysteries they held.

This fascination with the cosmos led him to pursue a career in astrophysics. Alan excelled academically, his sharp mind and tireless work ethic earning him a scholarship to a prestigious university where he studied under renowned astronomers. His doctoral thesis on radio signals from space was groundbreaking and set the course for his future career.

Alan's appearance was as distinctive as his intellect. He was of average height, with a lean build that spoke of long hours spent hunched over books and computer screens rather than in physical pursuits. His hair, once a dark brown, had begun to gray at the temples, giving him a distinguished look that was accentuated by his preference for neat, albeit slightly outdated, suits. His eyes, a piercing blue, seemed always to be observing, analyzing, even when he was engaged in casual conversation.

In terms of demeanor, Dr. Marshall was the epitome of a straight-laced scientist. He was a man of few words, preferring to let his work speak for him. His students and colleagues often described him as stoic and intensely

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focused, a person who could easily lose track of time when engrossed in a problem or a theory. This single-minded dedication to his work was both his greatest strength and his most noticeable quirk.

In the observatory, he was a familiar figure, often seen with a cup of coffee in hand, moving with purposeful strides between the banks of computers and the stacks of data printouts. He had little patience for small talk or distractions, often appearing aloof or distant to those who didn't know him well. Yet, to his students, he was a mentor who, though stern, was always willing to share his vast knowledge with those who shared his passion for the stars.

Alan's approach to science was methodical and rigorous. He had little time for speculation or fanciful theories, preferring instead to rely on hard data and empirical evidence. This made him somewhat of a skeptic in the astronomical community, a trait that had both earned him respect and, at times, isolated him from his more imaginative peers.

Despite his reserved exterior, Marshall had a deep sense of wonder about the universe, a feeling that he rarely expressed but which was the driving force behind his tireless pursuit of knowledge. The discovery of an off-planet signal in 1978 would be the pinnacle of his career, a moment that brought him closer than ever to answering the fundamental questions that had driven him since his childhood.

In many ways, Dr. Alan Marshall was the archetypal scientist: brilliant, dedicated, and unwavering in his quest for understanding the mysteries of the universe. His contribution to the field of astrophysics,

particularly in the study of extraterrestrial signals, would leave an indelible mark on the scientific community and pave the way for future explorations into the unknown.

In the dim, cluttered confines of Ohio State University's Big Ear radio observatory, Dr. Alan Marshall hunched over a stack of computer printouts, his brow furrowed in concentration. The rhythmic hum of the massive radio telescope provided a monotonous backdrop to the scene. It was late August 1978, and the observatory was abuzz with the usual mix of academic rigor and understated excitement — until now.

Beside him, Tara Benson, a young and eager doctoral student, watched with a mix of reverence and curiosity. Tara Benson was a striking figure in the world of astrophysics, a field where her youth and vivacity stood in sharp contrast to the often-staid environment of academia. In her mid-twenties, Tara carried herself with a blend of enthusiasm and determination that was both refreshing and infectious.

Her journey into the cosmos began under the starlit skies of her childhood home in Colorado, where she spent countless nights with her father, an amateur astronomer, who had instilled in her a love for the stars. Those nights, filled with stargazing and stories about the universe, had shaped her dreams. Her father's death from cancer, a painful and transformative experience, had only deepened her resolve to pursue those dreams. Tara viewed her pursuit of astrophysics as a tribute to her father's memory, a way to continue their shared journey among the stars.

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Physically, Tara was a vibrant presence. She had a lean, athletic build, a remnant of her high school days as a track and field athlete. Her hair was a cascade of chestnut waves that she often tied back in a practical ponytail, especially when poring over data or tinkering with equipment. Her eyes, a striking shade of green, sparkled with curiosity and intelligence, reflecting her fervor for her work.

In her interactions, Tara's demeanor was a mix of earnestness and warmth. She had a quick smile and an easy laugh, qualities that endeared her to her peers and softened the sometimes-intimidating environment of the observatory. Yet, there was a steeliness to her, a resolve that showed itself in the way she tackled complex problems or stood her ground in academic discussions.

Tara's attire was usually a practical blend of comfort and professionalism — often jeans paired with a sweater or a simple blouse, and always a pair of comfortable sneakers. She had little interest in fashion, finding more joy in the elegance of a well-crafted equation or the beauty of a clear night sky.

Her admiration for Dr. Alan Marshall was profound. To Tara, Marshall was more than just a mentor; he was a connection to the dreams she had shared with her father. She saw in Marshall's dedication and brilliance a reflection of the qualities she aspired to. Her respect for him bordered on reverence, though she was careful to maintain a professional demeanor, aware of the boundaries between student and teacher.

Tara's workspace at the observatory was a testament to her organized mind. It was neat, with notes and diagrams arranged in meticulous order, and photos of her and her father with telescopes pinned to the wall above her desk — a silent homage. She spent long hours there, often working late into the night, her face illuminated by the soft glow of her computer screen as she delved into the mysteries of the universe.

Dr. Alan Marshall's hands trembled with anticipation, a testament to the decades spent chasing the whispers of the cosmos. The radio telescope's control room, bathed in the faint glow of the overhead monitors, felt like a sanctuary where the sacred communion of science and exploration unfolded. His fingers, adept from years of experience, danced over the dials, fine-tuning the frequencies as the hum of machinery filled the air like a symphony.

"Anything yet, Dr. Marshall?" Dr. Tara Benson's voice cut through the charged atmosphere, her eyes fixed on the flickering screens that lined the walls of the observatory.

"Not yet, Tara," Marshall replied, his voice a mix of hope and weariness. "But tonight feels different. It's as if the stars are aligning for us."

Benson chuckled softly, the sound echoing off the walls of the cramped room. "I admire your optimism, Alan, but let's not get ahead of ourselves. The universe isn't known for its punctuality."

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Marshall offered her a wry smile, the kind that spoke of a shared history in the relentless pursuit of the unknown. "Punctuality, no. But serendipity? Perhaps."

Their banter was a familiar dance, one that had helped them through countless nights of fruitless monitoring. But tonight, the air in the observatory crackled with an unspoken anticipation, as if they stood on the precipice of discovery.

Suddenly, the array of monitors before them came alive with an unexpected burst of data. The screens, usually a monotonous display of static and insignificant cosmic noise, now showed an anomaly that made Marshall's heart skip a beat.

"Tara, look at this!" Marshall exclaimed, his voice a blend of excitement and disbelief. "The signal... it's unlike anything we've ever seen!"

This specific sequence stood out because of its unusual, sharp rise and fall in intensity, which differed from the random background noise typically recorded by the radio telescope. The signal's duration, bandwidth, and apparent focus in one direction also contributed to its intrigue.

The paper trembled slightly in Tara's hand as she took it from him. Her eyes widened. "This... could this be it? An extraterrestrial signal?"

The room felt smaller, the air heavier. Marshall finally met her gaze, his own eyes reflecting a cautious hope. "It's too early to say. But it's a signal unlike any other. It's precise, deliberate. Not just cosmic noise."

Benson hurried to his side, her eyes widening as she took in the readings. "This is incredible, Alan. It's structured, almost intentional. Are you thinking what I'm thinking?"

Marshall nodded, the implications of their discovery sending a shiver down his spine. "Extraterrestrial intelligence. We might have just made contact."

The room, previously humming with the mundane sounds of technology, now resonated with the gravity of their discovery. Marshall felt a rush of emotions - exhilaration, fear, and a profound sense of responsibility. This was more than a breakthrough; it was a message from the vast unknown, a call that had traversed the depths of space to reach them.

As they scrambled to document and verify the signal, Marshall's mind raced with possibilities. Each beep and chirp of the machinery was a note in the greatest discovery of their lifetimes. The atmosphere in the observatory was electric, each team member moving with a purpose fueled by the realization that they stood on the cusp of rewriting human history.

"Alan, we need to be cautious," Benson said, her voice a grounding force amidst the whirlwind of excitement. "If this is what we think it is, the implications are enormous. We can't afford any mistakes."

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Marshall met her gaze, the weight of her words anchoring him to the moment. "You're right, Tara. Let's double-check everything. Protocol and precision are our allies tonight."

The hours passed in a blur of activity. The team worked with a meticulous focus, verifying the signal's authenticity and ruling out any terrestrial interference. Marshall's hands, now steady with the resolve of a man who had waited his entire career for this moment, moved with a practiced precision as he logged every detail.

As dawn approached, the reality of their discovery began to sink in. The observatory, once a place of routine observation, had become the birthplace of a new era in human understanding. The team, exhausted but exhilarated, gathered around the central console, their faces lit by the soft glow of the monitors.

"We did it," Marshall said, his voice thick with emotion. "We've received a signal that might just change everything we know about our place in the universe."

A chorus of cheers and applause filled the room, a celebration of their collective achievement. Yet, beneath the jubilation, Marshall felt a tremor of apprehension. This discovery, monumental as it was, carried with it a burden of uncertainty and fear of the unknown.

As the first light of dawn crept through the windows of the observatory, Marshall looked out at the awakening world outside. The

familiar landscape, bathed in the soft morning light, seemed different now, as if the revelation of the night had altered his perception of everything around him.

"Tara," Marshall said, turning to Benson, who stood beside him, her eyes reflecting the magnitude of their discovery. "We're about to embark on a journey that will take us beyond the frontiers of science. Are you ready for what comes next?"

Benson met his gaze, a determined glint in her eyes. "More than ready, Alan. Let's answer that call."

In the quiet of the observatory, as the world outside remained oblivious to the seismic shift that had occurred within its walls, Dr. Alan Marshall and Dr. Tara Benson stood at the threshold of a new chapter in human history. The signal, a distant voice from the cosmos, beckoned them to a future filled with wonder, fear, and the unquenchable human thirst for knowledge.

In the days that followed, the observatory became a hive of frenetic activity. The staff, a blend of seasoned astronomers and young scientists like Tara, worked tirelessly, analyzing and re-analyzing the data. The 'Wow! signal', as it was soon dubbed, became their sole focus.

Marshall and Tara often found themselves working late into the night, their conversations a mix of scientific speculation and philosophical wonder. "If this is intelligent life..." Tara began one evening, her voice