

# ASPEANS

THE BEGINNING

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*To my wife and my two Aspean kids  
for their unconditional love and support*



# I

SEATTLE, WASHINGTON—GEORGE

George just stood there, enjoying his cigarette as he stared at the black, forty-foot sphere. The spaceship almost seemed to transmit tranquility as it rested on three metallic legs. But what impressed George was the smell. The spaceship had been placed in an underground bunker the size of a football field, which the guards called the Cave. Yet, despite the size of the bunker, there was always a scent of fresh rain in the air.

“What the hell are you doing? You know you can’t smoke in here!”

George turned around to face the man in charge of this project, a red-haired thirty-year-old who tried desperately to hide his insecurity and youth behind a dense beard.

“Look, Wade. I’m tired and cranky, so let’s pretend you didn’t see me smoking. Do you think you could do that?” George asked.

George noticed that Wade immediately avoided eye contact. *What does NASA see in this guy anyway?* he wondered.

“Try to be reasonable, George. You know the rules.”

“OK, let’s be reasonable. I was summoned to be part of this project because of my expertise in biomedical engineering. I left my

job at the NSF, where I held a very influential position among all academic institutes operating in Seattle. Every university there depended on me to receive their funds. So I was naturally expecting to be head of this operation. Don't you think that's reasonable?"

"But you're in charge of every detail regarding the alien pilot. That's why you're here," Wade responded as he pulled at his beard.

"That would make perfect sense if I actually had access to the alien pilot!"

"We are trying our best to open the inner compartment. You just have to be patient."

"That doesn't cut it, Wade. I'm not a patient man, and being responsible for analyzing the alien pilot is not enough. I want your position, and I'm eventually going to get it. It's just a matter of time, that's all."

Wade opened his mouth as if to say something, but nothing came out. He then turned around and left the premises as George stood there smoking.

*Maybe I overdid it this time,* thought George as he took two more drags from his cigarette. He was becoming impatient. They had managed to open the spaceship's outer hatch, but somehow they couldn't open the inner compartment where they believed the pilot was. *This is too ridiculous to be true.*

He took two more soothing pulls from his smoke and let his mind wander. Soon enough, he ended up thinking about Rachel, his best friend's wife.

He couldn't avoid it. No matter how hard he tried to convince himself that he had lost the battle to his best friend, that she had fallen in love with Allan and not with him, strange things kept telling him not to give up. Just three days ago he had been in a meeting in Portland, and when he entered a random diner for a coffee, whom did he find having coffee in that same diner? Rachel. She had been in Portland renovating a hotel.

*What are the odds?* he thought. It couldn't be a coincidence, and he couldn't keep ignoring the signs.

But Allan was his best friend, and despite his attraction for Rachel George had always respected Allan. He even got him a job at Seattle University and Rachel a job as the lead interior decorator at Creative Concepts Interior Design, and he did this to prove his loyalty, his friendship towards Allan.

At least, that is what he kept telling himself, but he knew that the only reason he did what he did was to be near Rachel.

"Holy shit! It's open! Mr. Silva, it's open!" shouted Marvin, one of the engineers assigned to open the compartment.

George quickly put out his cigarette on the sole of his shoe and headed for the sphere. He climbed the small ladder, and the first thing he saw was Marvin, staring into the dark compartment.

"How did you get it open?" George demanded.

"I don't know," the man said. "I mean, it just opened!"

"You had to have done something. It wouldn't just open like that."

"I swear, it just opened!"

"OK. OK. That's not important right now," George said. "Get Dr. Wade to come here immediately and bring me a set of protective gear."

Marvin quickly did as he was told, leaving George alone in front of the compartment, staring into the darkness.

Marvin reappeared with Wade and three other NASA scientists. They all geared up, and George said, "I'm going to be the first one to go in, and once inside nobody can touch anything without my consent. Do you all understand?"

Everybody nodded, so George turned around, faced the compartment, and then stepped inside.

As he entered, the compartment lit up. George heard the sound of decompressing air as his ears popped. The lighting was very bright and reflected off the white walls, making it difficult to keep his eyes open.

As his eyes adjusted, he saw a man lying on the ground fifteen feet ahead of him and dressed in a white uniform. He walked up to him and stared at his motionless body.

“It’s human. I mean, it looks like a human,” whispered Wade.

“Yes, it does look human, and judging from its shoulder patches, and its military haircut, it was here on a mission,” George then kneeled next to the alien body. “I want to take the body to one of our observation rooms. I’m going to remove his clothing, and I want to dress him in a hospital gown, and I’m going to need help. Is anyone registering this?”

George turned around expecting to hear an answer, but there was no answer, Wade and the other scientists were just standing there in silence, and as George stared at their astonished faces, he instinctively became aware of why they were so silent. He quickly turned back to face the alien, and as their eyes met, George started slowly to back away, maintaining eye contact, staring into the alien’s humanlike eyes. The alien was obviously in pain, dragging his body across the floor, trying desperately to reach George. George began to panic; everything seemed to be happening in slow motion. His heart rate started to accelerate, and he was having difficulty in breathing. No matter how hard he tried, he wasn’t able to drag himself fast enough. The alien was determined, focused, and George was scared, hopelessly vulnerable. He tried to get up, but couldn’t. He wanted to reach Wade and the others, but the alien was getting closer and closer, yelling something incomprehensible. Then it shook its head and seemed to repeat itself, but this time in English:

“They shot the ship down for a reason. The third visit is essential! You must keep them safe. Promise me that you will keep them safe!”

Now the alien was only two feet from George, blood leaking from its ears. It stretched out his hand and grabbed George’s arm. George was able to read the despair in its eyes, and then it let go. The determination was gone, and the alien just lay there, looking at George in disbelief,

“It is you! How can this be? It is you! You will be the cause! Because of you, man will fall! It is you!”

The alien seemed to have no more strength left in it, and after

a deep breath, it rolled over, hitting its head hard on the metallic floor.

George just sat there, trying to recover from this unexpected experience. He was shaking and desperately in need of a cigarette. He kept his eyes on the alien as one of the other scientists slowly approached it and pressed fingers to the alien's neck.

"There's no pulse. I think he's dead."

George then slowly got up and stared at its motionless body, "We can't let this affect us. The alien is dead. We just have to proceed as planned."

Wade shook his head. "What about what the alien said?"

George grabbed Wade by the shoulder. "It's not important. He was bleeding from his ears, delusional. What he said is meaningless. Let's just take him to an observation room."

George then kneeled next to the alien body and helped one of the scientists undress it. As they turned the body over, George ended up staring at its naked back.

*How could this be happening? What are the odds?* he wondered as he let himself fall backwards in disbelief. His heart rate was starting to accelerate again, but now it was for a completely different reason.

"Are you OK?" asked Wade with a concerned look.

George got up slowly and faced the program's leader. "It's vital that I invite a friend of mine to be part of this project. He is a trustworthy person, and the success of this project depends on it."

"How did you reach that conclusion all of a sudden?"

George stared one last time at the alien's back. He couldn't help feel a little guilty for what he was about to do, but he couldn't let his friendship get in the way. This was more important. It was his duty, and he had no choice, and once again there was Rachel.

"If bringing him on doesn't result in a major breakthrough, I'll leave, and I'll put that in writing."