

Dark Mission Profile 3

Awake

...

Dark.

Who?

I.

(We...)

'Awake. You are safe. This is Ship.'

Coming back. Something coalesces against infinite silence.

Self.

Alive. But body is somewhere else. Still frozen, still dead.

A bright splash of images fills awareness. Sharp, too sharp for dreaming. There is comfort in them. Comfort and safety.

That's Ship. Waking you.

Ship? Ah, *Dakini*. You remember.

Ship beams its briefing straight into your ocular nerve. Mission status, position, bearing.

That can't be right.

But it is: the message is too clear, too cruel for any confusion. A new mission. Sweet Krishna. Everything.... changed.

Changed to all fuck.

You're not decelerating into Gateway GSO, delivering the prisoner to the World Court. Instead, you're deep in the Oort Cloud, nearly eight light months from Sol.

Deep in the abyss. Deep in outer dark.

Not many ships could have done this. *Dakini* is one of the few. The orders come direct from Board, from **csiro-billington** in Jakarta. From Earth. Executive Override.

As you all lay sleep-dead in cryo, *Dakini* received a change in orders. The ship dropped into sub-c, a dangerous manoeuvre, then initiated a wild high three-gee burn into the big empty, sixteen hundred tonnes of momentum bucking against Newton's First.

Dakini is looking for something.

Dakini is looking for... signal termination.

Termination.

And now *Dakini* is decelerating. Now *Dakini* has woken you.

Dakini has found something in the dark.

This is the big one.

And here is why...

DARK

Ip-Bryce

14:36:07 - 12/02/2175 GMT

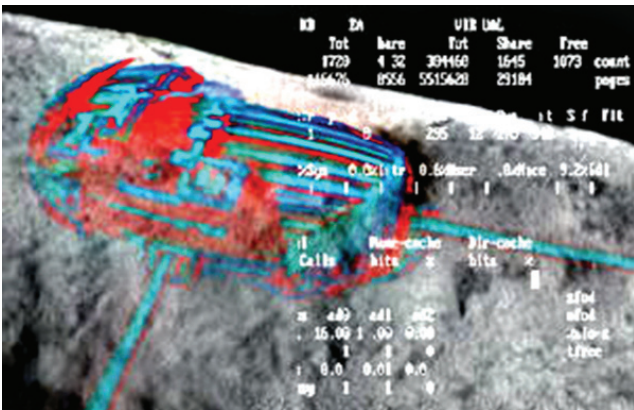
The probe: *La Perouse XIX*: a deep-space cometary survey swarm. Thousands of tiny intelligent nanotech splinters spread across several light seconds. Patient. Thorough. The swarm falls far beyond Neptune, one hundred and eight years into its mission.

The clue: a strange tightbeam signal on the 21-cm hydrogen band. Repeating every 3.4 seconds.

The source: a trans-Neptunian Kuiper Belt Object named Ip-Bryce, an otherwise unremarkable frozen snowball, a comet.

Scanning reveals the presence of a subsurface artefact consisting largely of refined iron.

The artefact is not of human origin.



The flyby: As the swarm approaches, Ip-Bryce is destroyed by an explosion at its core. Detonation occurs as the swarm begins subsurface radar probes.

As it dies Ip-Bryce screams. Another signal. Tight. Concise.

A signal. Directed precisely. Into dark.

Follow to termination.

Dapto II

Dapto II was an unimportant mining colony in a very strategic system. When the four thousand colonists started agitating for independence, Weyland Yutani came in all guns blazing.

The Company could do this sort of thing in its sleep. Sleeper agents polarised the colony's politics, initiating acts of sabotage and terror. The company offered to restore peace. Weyland Yutani forces came in under a Colonial Marine flag.

It was a textbook exercise: everything was locked down, rebels disarmed, the colony secured. But the troops had 90 days until excision. They got bored. They wanted... diversion.

Weyland Yutani's research extends across a range of legal and illegal technologies: nanotech, genetic engineering, behaviour modification. The troopies had the tech: the troopies got to play. First they did things to the prisoners. Then they had the prisoners do things to each other, to animals, to themselves. Then, as even obscenity passed into boredom, they tried out an experimental fibrodysplasia retroviral: ossification with a metabolic bypass. The surviving prisoners began growing new skeletons.

An acute Golem outbreak. Death, though it came slow, was a merciful release.

A guided asteroid bombardment might have wiped out the evidence forever. But it didn't. **csiro-billington** intervened, liberated the colony, secured evidence, captured the expedition leader. The greater game of politics began.