



The Cydonis Chronicles: Accidental Explorers.

The air in Times Square vibrated with the joyous cacophony of a late summer parade. A thousand strong, a cross-section of New York's vibrant citizenry, they waved miniature flags and cheered as marching bands blared and oversized floats lumbered past. Children perched on shoulders, their faces painted with patriotic symbols, while elderly couples held hands, their eyes twinkling with shared memories. The sun beat down, but the energy was infectious.

Among the crowd was Maria, a retired librarian with a penchant for people-watching. Beside her stood David, a young tech entrepreneur glued to his phone even amidst the revelry. Across from them, a group of high school students joked and took selfies, capturing the vibrant scene. They were just ordinary people enjoying an ordinary New York afternoon.

Then, the extraordinary happened.

A ripple appeared in the air above a particularly ornate float depicting the Statue of Liberty. It shimmered and expanded, growing into a swirling vortex of colours that seemed to defy the laws of physics. A collective gasp rippled through the crowd. The music faltered, and the cheers died down, replaced by a stunned silence.

Before anyone could fully comprehend the anomaly, a powerful, invisible force seemed to emanate from the swirling portal. People near the edge of the crowd stumbled forward, as if pulled by an unseen rope. Maria felt a strange tugging sensation, her feet lifting from the ground. David, mid-tweet, felt his phone fly from his grasp as he was yanked towards the swirling colours. The high school students screamed, their laughter turning to terror as they were sucked into the vortex.

In a matter of seconds that felt like an eternity, the entire group of roughly a thousand parade-goers was gone. The wormhole winked out of existence as suddenly as it had appeared, leaving behind an eerie silence and a scattering of dropped flags and forgotten belongings.

The next moment, the thousand New Yorkers found themselves blinking in the dim, artificial light of a vast, cavernous space. The air was cold and dry, carrying a faint metallic tang. Gone was the cacophony of the parade, replaced by a low, persistent hum that seemed to vibrate through the very floor.

They were standing on a smooth, metallic platform that stretched out into the gloom. Above them, a network of glowing tubes snaked across the ceiling, casting an unsettling blue light. The walls of the cavern were smooth and dark, disappearing into the distance. There were no windows, no signs of the outside world.

Panic erupted. Screams echoed through the vast chamber. People stumbled over each other,



their faces etched with confusion and fear. Maria clutched her chest, her heart pounding. David, disoriented, frantically patted his pockets for his phone, a futile gesture in this alien environment. The high school students huddled together, their bravado completely shattered.

"Where... where are we?" someone cried out, their voice trembling.

A young woman, a nurse named Sarah who had been volunteering at a first-aid booth along the parade route, tried to take charge. "Everyone, calm down! Let's try to figure out what happened." But her voice was lost in the rising tide of fear.

As their eyes adjusted to the dim light, they began to notice details. Strange symbols were etched into the walls, unlike any language they had ever seen. In the distance, they could make out the shapes of massive, intricate machines, their purpose utterly incomprehensible.

Then, a collective gasp rippled through the crowd once more. In the far corner of the cavern, a faint light flickered, growing steadily brighter. As it illuminated the space, they saw it – a colossal, metallic door, easily the size of a skyscraper, slowly grinding open.



Beyond the door, they could only see darkness. But the low hum in the facility intensified, and a new sound reached their ears – a faint, rhythmic clicking that seemed to be getting closer.

The thousand New Yorkers, moments ago celebrating a sunny afternoon in the heart of their city, now stood stranded in a mysterious, underground facility on Pluto, facing an unknown future. The parade was long forgotten, replaced by a chilling reality they could never have imagined. Their adventure had just begun, and the only certainty was that their lives would never be the same.

The colossal door continued its slow, grinding descent, revealing not more darkness, but a brightly lit corridor that stretched far into the depths of the facility. The rhythmic clicking sound grew louder, and soon, small, wheeled robots, no bigger than household pets but with multiple articulated arms and glowing sensors, began to roll out. They moved with a purposeful efficiency, their sensors whirring as they approached the bewildered crowd.

Panic flared anew. People backed away, unsure whether these machines were hostile. However, the robots simply stopped a few feet away from the group, their sensors blinking. Then, a synthesized voice, calm and surprisingly gentle, emanated from one of the robots.

"Greetings, citizens of Earth. Welcome to Facility 7, a research and development outpost of Cydonis Heavy Industries, Ltd."



A collective murmur rippled through the crowd. "Cydonis?" someone whispered.

The robot continued, its voice unwavering. "Your unexpected arrival is... noted. Please remain calm. Instructions for your temporary accommodation and orientation will follow."

More robots rolled out, each carrying small, glowing tablets. They began to distribute them among the stunned New Yorkers. Maria cautiously took one. The screen flickered to life, displaying a simple interface with a welcome message and a series of icons.

David, ever the tech enthusiast, quickly navigated through the tablet's menus. He found a section labeled "About Cydonis Heavy Industries, Ltd." His eyes widened as he began to read aloud.

"Cydonis Heavy Industries, Ltd. was founded in the mid-21st century by the visionary scientist and inventor, Professor Amanda Hariette-Scott. Driven by an insatiable curiosity and a belief in humanity's potential beyond Earth, Professor Hariette-Scott dedicated her life to pushing the boundaries of science and technology. Cydonis quickly became a global leader in fields ranging from advanced robotics and materials science to theoretical physics and interdimensional travel. Professor Hariette-Scott currently serves as the company's CEO."

"Interdimensional travel?" Sarah repeated, her voice laced with disbelief. "You mean... that wormhole?"

David nodded, his gaze fixed on the tablet. "It seems so. The company bio goes on to talk about Professor Hariette-Scott's groundbreaking work in manipulating spacetime and her long-term vision of establishing a permanent human presence throughout the solar system and beyond."

As more people explored their tablets, fragments of information began to paint a picture. Professor Amanda Hariette-Scott was portrayed as a reclusive genius, a modern-day Marie Curie who had seemingly solved some of the universe's greatest mysteries. Cydonis Heavy Industries, though largely unknown to the general public on Earth, was apparently a colossal organization with facilities scattered across the solar system.

One of the icons on the tablet led to a virtual tour of Facility 7. The holographic projections that sprang from the screen showed a vast, self-sustaining underground city, complete with living quarters, hydroponic farms, research laboratories, and even recreational areas. It was a marvel of engineering, a testament to the incredible capabilities of Cydonis.

"This place... it's like something out of a science fiction movie," one of the high school students breathed, his fear slowly being replaced by a sense of awe.

Another section on the tablet detailed the facility's primary purpose: the study of Pluto's unique geological and atmospheric conditions, as well as research into potential resources and the development of technologies for deep-space habitation. There was no mention,



however, of why a wormhole device would be deployed to randomly transport a thousand people from a parade in New York.

The robots, meanwhile, began to guide the group towards designated transport pods. The synthesized voice explained that they would be taken to temporary living quarters where they would receive further information and medical evaluations.

As Maria was gently ushered towards a pod by a polite, multi-armed robot, she couldn't help but feel a sense of profound bewilderment. Who was Professor Amanda Hariette-Scott? Why had her company brought them here? Was this some kind of elaborate experiment?

Inside the transport pod, which glided silently along magnetic tracks, David continued to pore over his tablet. He discovered a log entry detailing a recent "temporal anomaly detection" near Earth, coinciding with the location and time of the parade. There was also a cryptic note about a "calibration malfunction" in a newly developed transport device.

"Guys," David said, his voice filled with a mixture of apprehension and excitement. "I think... I think we weren't supposed to end up here. It might have been an accident."

The implications of his words hung heavy in the air. A thousand ordinary people, accidentally snatched from their lives and transported trillions of miles to a mysterious facility on a distant dwarf planet. The genius of Professor Amanda Hariette-Scott and the power of Cydonis Heavy Industries were undeniable, but the reason for their sudden, involuntary journey remained a perplexing and potentially dangerous unknown. As they delved deeper into the digital breadcrumbs left behind by this enigmatic company, the New Yorkers knew one thing for sure: their understanding of the universe, and their place in it, had been irrevocably changed.

The transport pods delivered them smoothly to a large, well-lit chamber that resembled a cross between a hotel lobby and a medical triage center. Rows of comfortable-looking cots lined the walls, and several more of the multi-armed robots were on hand, offering water and what appeared to be nutrient bars.

The initial shock was starting to wear off, replaced by a mixture of exhaustion, fear, and a growing sense of surrealism. Small groups began to form, sharing their experiences and the information they had gleaned from the tablets.

"So, this Professor Hariette-Scott," Maria said to David and Sarah, as they sat on adjacent cots. "She built all this? On Pluto?"

David nodded, scrolling through more information on his tablet. "Apparently. The company has been operating in secret for decades. There are mentions of asteroid mining, research stations on Mars and Europa... this facility on Pluto seems to be one of their more recent and ambitious projects."

Sarah, ever practical, was trying to maintain a sense of order. "Has anyone seen any... actual



people? Besides us?"

So far, the only inhabitants they had encountered were the robots. The efficiency and advanced nature of the technology were both impressive and unsettling. It felt like they were in a meticulously designed ant farm, with no clear idea of who the architects were or what their intentions were.

Suddenly, a section of the wall shimmered and dissolved, revealing a spacious room with comfortable seating and a large holographic display. The synthesized voice from the robots announced, "Please proceed to the orientation chamber. Professor Hariette-Scott will address you shortly."

A wave of nervous anticipation rippled through the group. This was it – their chance to finally get some answers. Cautiously, the thousand New Yorkers filed into the chamber, their eyes fixed on the empty space where the holographic image was expected to appear.

Moments later, the air in the center of the room crackled with energy, and a figure materialized. It was a woman, appearing to be in her late fifties, with intelligent, piercing eyes and a determined set to her jaw. She wore a sleek, utilitarian jumpsuit with the Cydonis logo emblazoned on the chest. This had to be Professor Amanda Hariette-Scott.

Her holographic image was remarkably lifelike, and her voice, when she spoke, was clear and commanding. "Greetings. I am Professor Amanda Hariette-Scott, CEO of Cydonis Heavy Industries. I understand that your arrival here was... unexpected."

A nervous chuckle rippled through the crowd. Unexpected was an understatement.

Professor Hariette-Scott continued, her expression serious. "Preliminary analysis indicates a critical calibration error in our newly developed long-range transport device during a routine test. It appears the intended target was a secure holding facility within this complex, but due to the aforementioned error, the device locked onto a significant energy signature in your vicinity – the combined electromagnetic output of a large gathering of people and numerous electronic devices at your parade."

A collective groan went up from the crowd. So, it was an accident. A monumental, life-altering accident.

"I want to assure you," Professor Hariette-Scott said, her gaze sweeping across the holographic representation of the room, "that your well-being is our utmost priority. We are fully aware of the disruption this has caused to your lives, and we are committed to rectifying this situation as swiftly and safely as possible."

She went on to explain the capabilities of Facility 7, emphasizing its self-sufficiency and the advanced medical facilities available. She promised them comfortable accommodations,



regular communication updates, and full cooperation in finding a way to return them to Earth.

“Our teams are already working tirelessly to analyze the transport malfunction and develop a stable return portal,” she stated. “However, I must be frank. The technology involved is complex, and the distances are vast. It will take time.”

A palpable wave of disappointment washed over the crowd. Time was a luxury they hadn’t planned for on a Tuesday afternoon parade.

Professor Hariette-Scott’s image remained, her expression softening slightly. “In the meantime, I encourage you to explore the amenities of Facility 7. Our robotic assistants are programmed to answer your questions and provide any assistance you may require. We understand this is a difficult and disorienting experience, but please know that you are not in danger. We will do everything in our power to ensure your safe return home.”

With that, her image flickered and disappeared, leaving the thousand New Yorkers in a stunned silence. They had their explanation, of sorts. A calibration error. A scientific mishap of epic proportions. They were on Pluto, in a secret underground city built by a brilliant but apparently fallible woman, and the only thing certain was that their lives had been irrevocably, and accidentally, rerouted. The journey home, they now realized, was just beginning.

The holographic address left a strange mix of relief and unease in its wake. Relief that their situation wasn’t malicious, but unease at the sheer scale of the accidental displacement and the uncertainty of their return. The initial panic had subsided, replaced by a weary acceptance and a quiet hum of conversation.

Maria found herself talking to a young couple, Ben and Emily, who had been watching the parade with their toddler back on Earth. The thought of their child, now thousands of light-years away, brought a fresh wave of sadness. “I just... I miss my cat,” Maria confessed, a tear tracing a path down her wrinkled cheek.

David, meanwhile, was surrounded by a small group of the high school students, their earlier terror replaced by a morbid curiosity. They peppered him with questions about the technology, the wormhole, and the possibility of alien life. David, though still processing everything himself, found a strange comfort in explaining the scientific concepts, his tech-savvy mind grasping the basics of what they had been shown.

Sarah, the nurse, had already started organizing a makeshift medical station, using the supplies provided by the robots. There were minor injuries from the initial transport – bumps, bruises, and a few cases of shock – but thankfully, nothing serious. Her calm demeanor and practical approach provided a much-needed anchor for many in the group.

The robotic assistants proved to be remarkably efficient and helpful, if somewhat impersonal. They answered questions patiently, guided people to their assigned living quarters (small but comfortable modular rooms), and provided access to surprisingly good food synthesized in



the facility's kitchens. The tablets served as their primary interface with this strange new world, providing information, entertainment, and even basic communication channels within the facility.

Days turned into a week. The initial novelty of their surroundings began to wear off, replaced by a growing restlessness and a deep longing for home. The virtual tours of Facility 7, while initially fascinating, now served as a constant reminder of their isolation. They learned about the hydroponic farms that provided their food, the recycling systems that sustained the facility's environment, and the advanced research labs where Cydonis scientists (still unseen) conducted their work.

Communication with Earth was limited. Professor Hariette-Scott appeared in holographic form periodically, providing updates on the progress of the return portal development. She explained the immense energy requirements and the delicate calculations involved in creating a stable wormhole that could bridge the vast distance. Her tone was always reassuring, but the lack of a concrete timeline began to weigh on everyone.

Small communities began to form within the larger group. People gravitated towards those with shared interests or similar backgrounds. The New Yorkers, once a random collection of parade-goers, were now bound together by this extraordinary shared experience. They told stories of their lives back on Earth, sharing memories of loved ones, favorite places, and the simple routines they now desperately missed.

However, beneath the surface of this forced camaraderie, tensions began to simmer. Some were angry, feeling like they were being held captive, even if unintentionally. Others were fearful, worried that the return portal might never be stable or that something else could go wrong in this alien environment. A few even started to express a strange sort of fascination with their new reality, wondering about the possibilities that lay within this advanced facility and the secrets of Cydonis Heavy Industries.

One evening, David discovered a hidden directory on his tablet, accessible only through a complex series of commands he had accidentally stumbled upon. Inside, he found more detailed technical schematics of the transport device and some internal communications between Cydonis engineers. The language was highly technical, but one phrase caught his eye and sent a chill down his spine: "Unforeseen temporal distortions... potential for cascading failures..."

He shared his discovery with Maria and Sarah, their faces growing increasingly concerned. While Professor Hariette-Scott projected an image of control and progress, these internal communications hinted at a far more precarious situation. The calibration malfunction might have been just the beginning, and their accidental journey to Pluto could have unforeseen and potentially dangerous consequences. The genius of Professor Amanda Hariette-Scott had brought them here, but it remained to be seen if it could bring them home. And more importantly, what other unintended consequences might arise from this incredible



technological leap?

David's discovery spread through their small circle, and soon, like a ripple in a pond, it reached others within the group. The carefully constructed facade of calm began to crack. The phrase "cascading failures" echoed in their minds, painting a grim picture of potential disasters within the facility or with the very fabric of spacetime.

A sense of urgency began to permeate their days. The endless virtual tours and synthesized meals no longer held the same allure. People started to question the robots more insistently, their inquiries now tinged with suspicion. The robots, however, remained programmed to provide only the information they were authorized to share, often responding with polite but unhelpful deflections.

Sarah, with her medical background, began to meticulously document any unusual occurrences within the group – headaches, bouts of dizziness, strange dreams. She worried if the "temporal distortions" mentioned in the internal communications were having any physical effects on them.

Maria, drawing on her years as a librarian, started to organize the information they had gathered from the tablets, creating a makeshift database of their situation. She hoped that by compiling everything, they might find some overlooked clue or pattern.

David, driven by a need to understand, spent hours trying to decipher the technical schematics he had found. He even managed to connect with a few of the other more technically inclined members of the group, sharing his findings and brainstorming potential implications. They speculated about the energy source of the wormhole, the stability of the artificial gravity within the facility, and the long-term effects of being so far from Earth's magnetic field.

The holographic updates from Professor Hariette-Scott continued, but her reassurances now sounded hollow to many. The promised return portal seemed to be perpetually "weeks away," and her explanations grew increasingly technical, filled with jargon that only served to widen the gap between the powerful CEO and her accidental interstellar guests.

One day, during a group gathering in one of the communal areas, a heated debate broke out. Some argued for putting more pressure on Cydonis, demanding more transparency and a concrete timeline. Others cautioned against antagonizing their hosts, fearing that it might jeopardize their chances of returning home.

"We can't just sit here and wait!" a young construction worker named Tony exclaimed, his voice filled with frustration. "They messed up! They owe us answers!"

"And what do you suggest we do, Tony?" replied an older accountant, Eleanor, her voice laced with pragmatism. "Stage a protest against robots? We don't even know where the control



room is, or if there even *are* any humans here besides us.”

The argument highlighted the fundamental power imbalance. They were completely reliant on Cydonis for their survival and their potential return. Any act of defiance could have unforeseen and potentially dire consequences.

As the days stretched into weeks, a sense of confinement began to take its toll. The vastness of the facility, initially awe-inspiring, now felt like a gilded cage. The artificial environment, while comfortable, lacked the sensory richness of Earth – the feel of sun on their skin, the smell of rain, the sight of a real tree.

One evening, Maria, unable to sleep, wandered into one of the facility’s observation domes, a large transparent structure that offered a panoramic view of Pluto’s desolate landscape. The dwarf planet was a breathtaking sight – a frozen world of icy plains and towering mountains, bathed in the faint light of the distant sun. But the beauty was tinged with an overwhelming sense of isolation. They were millions of miles from home, on a world utterly inhospitable to human life without the artificial protection of this underground facility.

Gazing at the alien landscape, a profound sense of vulnerability washed over her. They were at the mercy of a technology they barely understood, controlled by a woman they had never met before their accidental abduction. The internal warnings David had discovered echoed in her mind. What if the return portal failed? What if the “cascading failures” occurred within the facility itself?

Despite Professor Hariette-Scott’s assurances, the thousand New Yorkers were beginning to realize that their situation was far more precarious than they had initially been led to believe. Their accidental journey had thrust them into a world of unimaginable scientific advancement, but it had also left them stranded on the edge of the solar system, their fate hanging in the balance of a technology that even its creators might not fully control. The question was no longer just when they would go home, but if they would go home at all... TBC.