

# The Ashen Moon

by Caspian Reed

The station hung in orbit like a scar against the planet's pale surface. From the observation deck, Lieutenant Mara Voss couldn't look away.

"Still no response?" she asked.

Beside her, Captain Dane Tarkin shook his head. "Dead air."

Mara swallowed. "So it's abandoned."

Dane's jaw tightened. "Or someone doesn't want to be found."

The ship creaked under its own weight as the docking clamps locked into place. Through the viewport, the station's outer shell loomed larger, its surface pocked with impact scars and faded insignias.

Mara pressed her hand to the cold glass, her breath fogging the surface. "Why would they leave it like this?"

Dane didn't answer. He didn't need to.

The airlock hissed open, and the scent of rust and decay greeted them. Mara stepped inside, her boots echoing down the empty corridor. The lights flickered overhead—barely enough to keep the shadows at bay.

“Stay close,” Dane warned.

The team fanned out, weapons drawn. Every door they passed was sealed shut.

Until it wasn't.

A single hatch stood open at the end of the hall, a faint blue glow spilling out.

Mara's heart pounded as they approached. She stepped inside first, her light sweeping the room. It was a control center—or what was left of one. Terminals lay shattered, cables torn from the walls. In the center, a single screen flickered to life.

Incoming Transmission.

Mara froze.

“That's impossible,” Dane said, his voice tight. “There's no one here.”

The message began to play. A distorted voice crackled through the speakers.

“Don't let it out.”

And then the lights died.