

The SOS of Almaz IX

By Konrad Cajgler

11th March 2088

Black on white static choked the screen until some semblance of colour image could be seen behind the flickering bars of grey haze. A man wearing a yellow jumpsuit sat upon the metal throne in the room surrounded by bright screens. Square buttons lined up below the screens, shining in prime coloured lights that at times turned off, then lit up again. The camera focused on the man, obfuscated by the static. The picture cleared. His square jaw trembled, then he spoke not to the dozens of heads of his crew members scattered around the room but to the camera.

‘Today marks the end of the first day of Almaz IX’s, our, mission—’ the woosh of broken feed distorted the screen, ‘—set out on our expedition against the recommendations of the U.G.—’ the man disappeared, only the last faded syllable played thereafter on this record: ‘—G.—’

25th August 2091

Screens all around the man in the yellow jumpsuit flickered. A flashing red light revealed lines on his face.

He spoke to the camera:

‘This is the New Union of—We have no weapons; our intentions are peaceful. I repeat, we are not armed!’

A great bang shaking the room turned the visual into a static storm of black and white.

‘Cease fire! —’ and even his voice drowned in the crunching harsh noise until all became silent.

The screen came back to life. The flashing red light stopped. Blood ran down his forehead. As he spoke to the camera, he patted his head with cloth. But his words were just a string of incomprehensible broken sentences mixed with the static:

‘—anyone that is listening—fired on us—times. We’ve taken—most systems affected, luckily back-up life support—navigational systems are down—Dot 71,013 AUs from the ruins of the International Space Station—sent out the distress signal—I pray to God they’ll listen.’

12th of March 2088

The man in the yellow jumpsuit sat in his chair in the middle of the room, surrounded by computers and people. He barked orders at them, looked around anxiously before he faced the camera and put on a smile.

‘As is always the case when technology developed by the Motherland is involved, issues present themselves in the middle of the project. As the Captain it is my duty to—’

A dark silhouette zapped across the screen, someone walked past the camera though their features could not be seen.

‘However, the Technicians assure me they’ve got this under control and apologise for the inconvenience.’

15th March 2088

The Captain in his yellow jumpsuit smiled at the camera as he ended the report:

‘Nothing else of note to reflect on today. Operations running smoothly, even better than before.’

14th April 2088

The screen showed about a dozen of tall, dark-haired men and women in burgundy and indigo jumpsuits either glued to their station screens or shuffling about on the Deck around the Captain. He sat on his great metal chair reading from a tablet illuminating his pale face. Bags under his wide eyes, he looked off camera. His voice was just one among dozens of scurrying status reports, commands and queries.

1st January 2090

The Captain strode into the view of the camera, looked around the room at the crew quietly working at their stations. He sat on his chair, almost puffing his chest as he spoke.

‘No one said this expedition was going to be easy, but the last couple of months have been especially hard. In spite adversity, we have persisted and I am confident the fruits of our labour will be bountiful.’ a smile stretched out his mouth. ‘Happy New Year and a happy New Decade!’

18th September 2091

The entire grey room was empty aside from a long-haired twig of a man in an indigo jumpsuit strapped to the captain’s chair. Floating around the air were computer keys, shards of broken screens and office supplies debris.

‘It has been,’ the man looked away from the camera, his eyes darted about the place as he covered his mouth with his hand.

His eyes gaped wide when he spoke again, ‘...Months. I fear the tensions between everyone are growing. Especially since that damned thing shot at us and just, disappeared.’ he shuttered.

‘I don’t know what it was, what it wanted. But whatever it did aside from fire torpedoes at us, it turned off our engine power and communications. We’re stranded out here.’

He leaned back on the chair, looked up as if he were a man praying to god looking up at the sky.

‘Food supplies are running low.’ he grabbed his arm as his face contorted into a pathetic show of agony, ‘No engines propelling us, no artificial gravity. At least I’m not the only one suffering like this.’ and he laughed as there was an echo of metal thuds.

The noises got louder and louder, but he laughed over them until he pulled out a gun and shoved it in his mouth. The metal thuds. The quiet pewpew noise of air forcing itself through a skull. A crunch. Brain splattered all over the walls.

19th January 2092

A woman, roughly in her late twenties, sat in the corner of the room under a computer console. She shivered. Her words were broken in the sound distortion. Some phrases made it through:

‘Fickle bones. Motions fear. Fickle bones. *Vneshniy mir.*’

The image became a mess of grey fuzzy bars and black and white flashing dots.

02 June 2095

The last record was a series of incomprehensible noises. The visual was darkness, as if all the lights in the room went out. A minute in there was a quiet moist munching noise. Someone was eating something, only to be screamed at by a group of loud voices until the record switched off.

THE END