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deep in the lair of the tasmanian devil

LCTN: BETELGEUSE-11 (alpha-Orion)
CORD: SAO-113271.NC (129pc from SOL)
DATE: 2319ce-MAY-5-MONDAY
TIME: 09:03zulu (local 24:08mst)

The astronomy community, mainly the Orion Trust, has been reporting that Betelgeuse went out in a Type II Supernovae, even though it had all the earmarks of a Type Ia event. What was worrying everyone, to keep the cover up covered up, was the remnant...

What was going to be left behind?

There were all kinds of pots and side bets on the outcome, ranging from black hole to Earth-sized white dwarf, but if the core was in a carbon/oxygen fusion stage, less than a thousand years from the one-day iron death phase, then maybe they'll get that neutron star they were crossing their fingers and praying for.

In a span of a short hour, the brick from the QP-Gun shot had succeeded in crushing the core into that neutron star they wanted instead of falling short and making a mess of things.

What they didn't want was a mystery that defied the theories, but here they were left with an even greater mystery, and that was how in the hell did it work out so damned well? Nobody really thought they'd get an actual neutron star out of the deal, but here it is in all its blisteringly-hot and spinning glory. The thing they have to come up with an explanation for is why the remnant is following the bulk of the nebula that is expanding out from the nova event? They've seen this before but the neutron star has always flown away from the nebula after an asymmetrical supernova. Here it's chasing after it?

The models the Trust builds to explain this will be designed to confound and mollify the public, but any expert who would challenge them are already in on the secret, so they'll get their cover up!

What they wanted to uncover was the star itself, and the pics

from the reconnaissance flights into the nebula, F308 Grigori operating as pathfinders, with a 32" Ritchey-Chrétien telescope in the missile bay and a roof-prism binocular spotting scope, also sporting three separate R-G-B spectral analysis cameras, that can all operate simultaneously, they got some crazy-spectacular pictures! It's not the star itself, as neutron stars go the size, spin, temp and luminosity are about average here, which surprised everybody, yes, but it's what's swirling around it that made the astronomy paparazzi drop their jaws.

Filaments of gas from the nebula have already bounced back and are dropping in towards the neutron star. With a dozen strands spiraling in close to it like a dusty tornado, backlit by light reflecting off the nebula, the science community is already calling the core remnant, the Tasmanian Devil.

Now, with the leading edge of the nebula just a smidge past 4,000au away from the nova's origin, and the back wall of that nebula at just under 3,800au away, the Tasmanian Devil will never catch up to it, but the thing just blew past Cocytus by ten-million kilometers. Point being, even though "Cue Ball" has already decoupled from its gravitational bond with what was Betelgeuse, the neutron star whizzing by has slingshot it back around and it's drifting towards where the supernova took place—which is now pretty much empty space.

The Orion Trust already wonders what they'll name the nebula as it expands and pulls apart through the centuries to come, but it will always be called the Betelgeuse Nebula, which is fitting. The neutron star will continue to pull strands of debris back from the nebula and the Trust is already banking on it becoming an accretion pulsar.

On this they're crossing their fingers and toes...

The troopers of The Pale Horse, Forth Battalion of the Co-op SOG Seventh AirCav Brigade, known as The Reapers, have been stuck on Cocytus for the last 125 days with the five surviving Annex ghost droids they were fighting to the death last December, but instead of worrisome animosity, they actually had a blast with each other. The N2 instance here in Raccoon City was fired up and both sides had a lot of fun diving into it to recreate, reboot and whore about together.

The cases of booze the troopers from The Pale Horse brought down to the lower levels for new year's didn't last a week but, with the R&R levels still intact after the hot-nebula from Betelgeuse had passed over, the troopers scrounging around found another couple of stashes of spirits that featured gin, rum, tequila, brandy and cognac. Here they had way more than enough to get them through to the pickup.

When the last of the pathfinders blew in and surveyed the expanding nebula and neutron star yet again, from the inside the nebula on the week of the twenty-eight, they radioed Griego and told

them that the pickup would be today on the fifth.

Anticipating that, the troopers from the battalion moved the entire stash of 330 pallets of bullion held for the Bank of New Sydney, one ton per pallet, from the vault on mining level 25 up to a dock that is still intact. Since the doors to the outside of the dock are holding, and they still have atmosphere, it was decided that it'd be better to play it safe and not open these doors just yet and, because of that, they have no idea what awaits them on the surface.

At 08:00zulu, everyone from The Pale Horse is in their ACE suits and now await the Annex to show up. At 09:03, they get an open coms saying that they are landing outside the dock. With the crews from the Annex on the outside starting to breach the doors, the atmosphere from the unsealed dock now escapes into space.

It takes twenty minutes to get the doors cut and pried open.

Once the doors have creaked apart, opening up the dock, Angel Griego, and Angela Simmons step out in their ghost droids, along with Jordan Bristol, and are met by Michelle Kiel, Jessica Burke, and CDF Sergeant-Major, Emily Ryan.

Before them is a sight. The landscape has been both melted and then scoured away by the nebula hitting Cocytus. On the way out they'll hear that, by preliminary measurements, they lost just under eighty meters from the far side of the planet that faced the onslaught, but anywhere from about a millimeter to two centimeters here on the side facing away from where the nebula hit.

In the far western sky, at 2° over the horizon, and a smidge over an astral unit away, is the pinprick of light from the twelve-mile wide neutron star. It is so hot, with a surface temperature of 1-million Kelvin, it is as romantically luminous on Cocytus as a full moon is on the planet Earth however, in counterpoint, in the X-Ray spectrum it would be as bright as Sol is from Earth so it's not quite healthy to be standing there and gawking at for any length of time.

The JACC and ACE suits can only filter so much.

Griego laughs, "*Buenos dias*, Guns! Hey, Red Love!"

Michelle nods, "It's great seeing you, Angel!"

Simmons says, "You look great, Michelle! Hey Jessie, my god, how you've grown! Have to ask, how's my daughter?"

Jessica wonders, "You heard about Ny Hopen?"

"Sorry 'bout Nicole. You got Angela now?"

"Yea, I'm the mom, now." Jessica then asks, "You haven't heard anything about Little Klicks since when?"

"September? I'm sure my core instance has heard it all."

"She has, and I'll get you up to speed on the way out."

Michelle thumbs back at the neutron star, "Guys, we're being showered in X-Rays. It's droppin' below the horizon but our crews only have twenty hours, and since I got a bun in the oven—"

Angela points to her abdomen, "Shit serious!"

"Yea, I've just been told I'm roadkill now."

Griego laughs, "Retired on active duty?"

Michelle pats her belly, "Yup! Angie, you know I never start showin' until close to the end, and planning about had a shit fit when they found out about it this morning. So, here I am for my very last out on the town, deep in the lair of the Tasmanian Devil." She turns to Bristol and offers her hand, "Brigadier General, I'm Deputy Marshal, Michelle Kiel, and I am pleased to make your acquaintance."

Bristol reaches out to shake Michelle's hand, "Jordan Bristol, at your service, mum!"

"It is my pleasure, sir!"

"I gotta ask, you're the missing Kiel heiress, right?"

"Yea, that'll be me!" Michelle motions for Emily Ryan to step forward, "I take it you know the Sergeant Major?"

With the visor on her ACE suit going transparent, revealing the face of Emily Ryan, Bristol laughs, "Well, bugger me hatches in the dead of night! Emily, that is you!"

Ryan smiles, "I got me extension, sir!"

Bristol shakes her hand, "It's great to have you back."

Ryan sighs while saying, "You're not gonna like our orders."

"Now, why would that be, love?"

"Seventh AirCav has been attached to Security Services."

Bristol is taken aback, "What in the bloody hell for!"

"All three SOG Brigades have been transferred over to them."

"What the fuck is me-popy doin' is what I'd like to know!"

"We lost Polaris, sir."

"Still, the move doesn't make sense, Sergeant Major."

"Word is, from your father's mouth directly to me ears are, and I quote, 'This is to protect these assets going forward. Jordi just so happens to be conveniently in command of the Seventh!'"

"This means we're out of the bloody action!"

"Looks like it, sir."

"That's a load of bollocks if I ever heard it!"

"Pale Horse is being ordered to Second Hand."

"What, captivity?"

"No sir, R-and-R."

"We just got done with five months of fuckin' an' killin'!"

"Not my call, sir! And after two weeks there, the unit will be delivered to New Darwin where we'll be layin' low."

Jessica speaks up while offering her hand, "General Bristol, if I may? I'm sure you've heard of me, Jessica Burke?"

Bristol blinks with surprise, "Aye, I have!"

With him shaking her hand, she adds, "I want to thank you for the info on my grandfather. I was able to meet the child, and I'm convinced they all have good homes."

"Good to know, doll."

"The issue on the table, going forward, is rebuilding. The CDF will need the forces being squirreled away in Security Services to get back on their feet."

Bristol nods, "So, for all intents and purposes, it's over with?"

Jessica nods, yes, saying, "As was said to me, the realization of what will be, will struggle to catch up to that reality."

He smiles, "Aye, we read you five by five."

"Three years maybe? Four at most."

Michelle adds, "General, if I may speak freely. I don't know how well you know your father, but things are not adding up. If I didn't know any better, it's like your old man is intentionally driving the CDF and the Co-op into the ground."

Bristol shrugs, "That's above my salary grade, Deputy."

They have to move out of the way as twelve cargo handling robots float past them on their way to the docks to fetch the pallets of bullion so, to change the discussion, Jessica points out, "General, just so you know, on Sapphire there is an air of comradery between our troops and your people in Security Services."

"I 'ear that's another rumor makin' the rounds."

"Well, we're hoping you'll be part of that cooperative effort."

"Rest assured, since it's a neutral zone you can count us in!"

Jessica smiles because the general is reading between the lines with clarity, "Good to hear, sir!" She turns to Ryan, "We need to get your people loaded up. They only have two weeks there!"

Ryan looks to Bristol, "With your permission, sir?"

"It's in your good hands, Sergeant Major."

With Ryan stepping off towards the dock, calling out for her warrant officer exec, Bear, and a ragged string of cargo robots starting to haul the bullion back to the dropships, Michelle says, "Angel, you droids are to ride back to the Church Key with us. Go load up in the one-oh-one and grab a seat anywhere."

Griego is stunned, "*No mames!* Not fetal-shutdown?"

"Nope, you're gonna do a straight transfer at the Spike with your core, before we scrap the droids. You good with that?"

Jessica adds, "You guys earned it." She then laughs, "Just be careful with my upholstery, okay? It's new!"

With Griego stepping away to collect the other three droids, he smiles, "You got it, Red Love!"

Jessica says to Bristol, "You and the Sergeant Major will be riding with us. Your father wants to have dinner with you two, Deputy Marshal Kiel and myself before you go to Second Hand."

Bristol wonders, "Isn't this all rather unconventional?"

"I'm not one to speculate? I'm just doin' what he asked."

With thirty engineers and twice the number of facilities robots passing by them for the docks, Jesus Zazueta stops and wonders, "Don't you fuckers have some place to be already? How 'bout you-all get the fuck outta here and let me do my job, hu?"

Simmons is laughing, "Hey there, Zaz!"

Zazueta double-takes, "Ten Klicks! Just so you know, *chica*, the day I cross over I'm gonna come bang you senseless!"

She snorts a chuckle, "Promises-promises!"

Zazueta steps on towards the dock and calls back, "If you didn't hook up with Rutledge when you did, I would have taken care of ya long before you got your blond ass killed!"

Simmons shouts after him, "Hey, ya fuck monkey, don't hurry on my account, but I'll be waitin' for ya!"

Michelle rolls her eyes at that and motions for Bristol to follow her to the ship, and as they walk off, she goes, "Since I'm in planning,

you and I will be seeing a lot of each other but, before we get settled in, with staffing the way it is, we'll need to identify all the bad apples in the ranks of the Seventh Air. Just a heads up, where Security Services falls short on spit and polish, they do not lack in discipline..."

With them gone, and the robots racing back and forth for pallets, and the troops from Pale Horse loading up on the drop ships, Simmons says, "So, we're chumming it up with Security Services?"

Jessica nods, "Working towards a greater future, Klicks."

She shakes her head, "What's the world comin' too?"

"We're thinking ahead, babe." Jessica breaths deep and says, "A lot has happened to Angela since last September."

Simmons nods then asks, "Good or bad?"

"Both, but the bad is far behind us."

"Okay, then I'll hear the good?"

"She has a career path now."

Simmons' face scrunches up, "She's...six?"

"Yea, but things happened."

"Like, the fuck, what?"

"Like Carlos Sanchez, what."

Simmons' droid shoulders actually sag, "Oh, fuck!"

"She's having fun with it!"

"I don't want that shit for my daughter!"

Jessica almost laughs, "Well, guess what, you don't get a choice here, you're, what, dead? Last I heard."

Simmons points at Jessica with a snarl, "Bitch, I knew you were gonna play that card! I just knew it!"

"Angie, she's having a blast. She thinks it's all stupid so she's having fun with it. The crazy thing is that the Aliens production team has to work around her and rewrite half the scenes because of the shit that comes out of her mouth."

"Aliens, seriously?"

"Yea, she's got 'em wrapped around her little finger!"

"This shit's gonna make her a narcissistic cunt."

"Nope, no chance of that happening."

"Okay, how do you know?"

"She's being represented by Monique Ribot."

Simmons' face scrunches up, "You mean—"

Jessica throws out, "Yea, that Monique Ribot."

Simmons rears back, "How does that happen, exactly!"

Jessica puts her hands out, "Trust me, when you get to the Church Key to upload, you'll be pleasantly surprised."

"Okay, then I'll chill and find out when?"

"When we land, in an hour, maybe? You'll be the first in the queue to upload to your core instance."

"Okay...then, what's the stupidest thing you can tell me that'll make me go—oh fuck no, no way!"

"You really want that?"

"Ya, give it to me!"

"Okay." Jessica thinks on this for a few seconds and smiles, "Okay, Monique and Angela...they're sisters."