

TITAN RESOLUTE

Bob Nelson



Brick Cave
Film Festival 

A 2019 Brick Cave Film Festival Category

Titan Resolute

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“Roger that, Launch Control, *Xi’an* has Drone away, I repeat, we have Drone away.” A man sat watching his monitor intently, with data about a newly launched Drone moving off from the IOP *Xi’an* Station . He turned to a woman standing close behind him.

“Captain Guerin, the drone is away. Estimated time to Titan is 122 hours, 16 minutes, 22 seconds. Do you have any idea what that is about? I’ve never seen request go through so fast.”

“Thank you, Darrick. No, I wish I could say- but you are right, this was highly unorthodox. Message me hourly status updates just to make sure we know what’s happening if we are asked.”

“Yes, Sir.”

She turned to one of the other officers in the room. “Commander Mathews, I am overdue to get planet side. Please advise shuttle Endeavor that I am en route and to prepare for departure. You are in command.”

“Thank You, Captain. Safe travels.”

A short time later Hanna Guerin was strapped into her seat of the Space Shuttle Endeavor, watching as it floated out and away from the International Orbital Platform *Xi’an*, one of four large space stations in orbit around the earth, designed to facilitate scientific, military and commercial payload launches from orbit and minimize the number of rocket launches from the surface.

As more and more people started getting into space and plans for permanent settlement on the moon and beyond accelerated, the United Nations was tasked with creating an organized system of movement off planet. Originally budgeted for one platform, disagreements emerged about the platform’s size, control and location. Eventually, a system of 4 Platforms was settled on and a new organization, the Global Stellar Authority, was created to manage them.

The *Xi’an*, named after the first capital city in China following the country’s unification, was the third station completed, and Hanna Guerin was it’s second commanding officer.

She felt the sudden jolt of the shuttles maneuvering jet as it rotated and the Station fell out of view, leaving the Earth to fill most of her window. Traffic to all of the Orbital Stations

had been increasing like crazy, and she noted the two small dots indicating ships coming from the surface with the Station as their destination.

The shuttle was moving now, accelerating towards the atmosphere. She gave herself the privilege of nodding off for the ride in.

* * *

Landing at Cape Canaveral in the dark, Hanna made the quick switch to a military transport for a flight to Washington and NASA Headquarters. The sun had just started rising over the city when she arrived at the facility, passing through security checkpoints and moving to a third floor meeting room for the first briefing of the day. On entering the room, she was given a pleasant Surprise.

“Evelyn, Hello! I am surprised to see you.” She moved to greet her friend, and Evelyn stood to greet her back.

“And I you, Hanna. But it’s good to see you, Captain.”

“How are things on the Pandy?” Evelyn gave her a stern look.

“*Paris Dans Le Ceil*, my dear, we do have to get your French in order. “And everything is fine. At least I thought it was. As much as I am glad to see you, bringing two station commanders together like this without telling us is a bit unorthodox.”

“Make that three” The voice came from behind them.

“Captain” they both said in unison as they turned to greet Rodrigo Antione, the captain of the IOP-2 *Jaipur* Station.

“I suppose that this saves us the time of meeting later.” he said, “This seems a bit... odd?” They shook hands.

“We were just noticing the same thing. Very unusual.” Hanna replied. The pleasantries were short, as a tall woman entered the room, in uniform, trailed by several aides. They recognized her as Aisha Robert, the director of Homeland Security for the United States. Following her among the aides was NASA deputy Director Randy Finley.

The station captains took seats around the long table, with Robert, Finley and her aides sitting on the opposite side.

“Director Robert, Deputy Director Finley, it is a pleasure to see you.” said Captain Neff. Evelyn Neff, as the tenured Captain of the group, was recognized to speak for them when they were

together.

“You will forgive our curiosity about this meeting and for noticing the absence of Captain Coffey. Is everything alright?”

Robert shifted in to her seat looked right at Evelyn.

“Captain Coffey is ‘indisposed’.” Her tone sent chills down everyone’s spine.

“Shall we begin?” she continued. “Deputy Director Finley?”

“Welcome home, everyone.” Finley said. “I apologize for the short notice of this meeting. Approximately six days ago CDSCC Complex intercepted a series of gravitational waves being emitted from a location near Saturn’s moon Titan. The CDSCC team sent the data on the discovery to KSC, who determined that the waves were not created naturally phenomenon.”

He looked up to make sure that everyone was paying attention.

“You said, ‘intercepted?’” asked Hanna.

Finley continued. “As we had no assets in the area to confirm the origin of the waves, we dispatched an observation drone to be launched from the IOP-2, the *Ciudad Del Cielo* to investigate the area and provide visual and gravimetric data on the source of the waves.” He looked at Robert.

“About 80 hours ago,” continued Robert, “after the drone assembly arrived at IOP-2, a pathogen was released on the station, forcing the station to be quarantined and the mission canceled.” She paused,

Finley continued. “We were able to get a duplicate assembly to IOP-3 and the *Xi’an* was able to get the drone launched without incident.”

“Are you suggesting someone didn’t want that drone launched?” asked Hanna.

“What happened on IOP-2 was no accident. Three people have died, and Captain Coffey has reported several more illnesses,” stated Director Robert. “The matter of security on all four IOP stations has been referred to the Department of Homeland Security.”

“As soon as you left your stations, we instigated administrative overrides and sealed your stations from any traffic.” offered Finley, holding up his hand to prevent a rush of questions. “Once you return, you will not be allowed to leave again until the quarantine is lifted. That was a directive from the Secretary General.”

“Assistant Director, While those are very sensible precautions, who on earth would want to sabotage the platforms?” asked Captain Aintoine. “And if you think that this is connected to Gravity waves emanating from Titan, that makes no sense. No multinational or government or military organization has anything bigger than a breadbox past the moon right now, and surely, we would know if those kinds of payloads were moving off planet.” The others nodded in agreement.

“Captain” offered Robert, “all we know is that we believe the lives of you and your staff are in danger. And until that probe reaches Titan and does it’s job, we won’t know much else.”

“No one else knew about the second probe, did they?” suggested Hanna.

“No,” responded Finley. “The truth is, a probe was in the recent cargo launches to all four stations and while manifest was declared to each station so you could properly handle the cargo, only on the *Ciudad* was information available to the public regarding the cargo manifest.”

“What did you find in that gravimetric wave data from the CDSCC?” asked Captain Neff.

“That information has been turned over to the DOD, we are not at liberty to discuss it at this time.” replied Robert, standing to leave. “I suggest that you each return to your stations and await further instructions.” She turned to leave, but stopped. “Oh, and each of your facilities has been assigned a DHS Officer for the foreseeable future. They will meet you at your launch, and they will report directly only to you. Captain Guerin, your assigned officer is here in D.C. and will be meeting with you shortly.” She left the room, her trail of officers following behind.

As soon as the door closed behind them, Rodrigo stood up.

“The DOD?! Randy, what the hell? and we suddenly have DHS stooges to trip over? This is ridiculous.” The assistant Director could see the concern across the faces of his Captains.

“I know, and I’m sorry- it was the best we could do short of a DOD takeover of the stations. You don’t know how crazy things have gotten down here in the last three days.” Finley offered.

“Is Antonietta OK? What happened?” asked Evelyn.

Finley sighed, running his hand through his hair before responding.

“A virus was stowed in cargo, disguised as air filtration equipment. Antonietta is alright. Thankfully, her team followed

protocol and tested the equipment remotely first, so it's just one part of the station that was infected. But it was very clearly both intentional and intelligently conceived and executed. We are going through the chain of supply to see if we can find the culprit."

"Do you know what they found?" asked Hanna.

"I don't." Replied Randy. "CDSCC has been shut down for our use, the Australian military has moved in and quarantined the base. A lot of DOD technical staff have left town. I assume they are going there, but everything went top secret." He stood up. "The safest place for you guys right now is your own stations. You should get going."

"Hanna, can I talk to you for a second?" Randy asked as the others filed out.

As soon as the door closed behind the others, Randy sat back at the table. "Hanna, the DOD wanted to take control of the *Xi'an* to manage the Drone mission. Director Quiroz convinced them that with your military background and NASA experience you were the best person for the task. We're not interested in committing treason, but..."

"Say no more, Randy. Darrick is sending me hourly status reports on the Drone- I have the Director's secure channel. I'll make sure he includes her."

"I'm sorry I don't have more to offer, Hanna."

"Something in the Solar System just scared the shit out of the military and someone else is willing to kill to keep us from finding out what it is. Right now, I think I have all the information I need." She smiled at him, he was visibly worried. "Don't worry, Randy. We'll figure it out. Let me know if we can send some help to Antonietta. I need to get back." She moved to leave.

"They've sealed her up tight, Hanna."

She looked back at him as she walked out the door. "You really think the four of us haven't figured out how to help each other in spite of you bureaucrats?" She let the door close behind her.

"Of course you have," he whispered to himself with a smile.

* * *

While Hanna was in a car heading back to Joint Base Andrews, she received an update from Lt. Arnett, "No surprises."

At least that was going as planned. She responded in code telling Arnett to include Director Quiroz on future updates via her secure channel. She used a code that she and her senior staff had developed together for these types of scenarios.

Since NASA created the Multi-National Space Administration, the math was a little fuzzy on a lot of administrative domain, whether it was the US or the United Nations. The New MSA still answered to US departments in most matters, but where the bureaucracy was nebulous, the four Captains had forged their own way to create common sense policies that neither NASA or the UN could argue with. Hanna figured it wouldn't be long before the United States decided to be rid of the whole MSA infrastructure, hand it off to the United Nations with a check, and let Evelyn become it's first official Director.

"Driver, is everything OK?" Hanna notice that they had stopped- which was not normal for this time of day in DC traffic- at least it wasn't the last time she drove these freeways, which admittedly was some time ago. With all the vehicles being automated now, she was surprised that they had assigned her a driver. Ahead, they saw a vehicle off to the side, creating the slowdown as the automated sensors of the other vehicles discerned what was happening.

"Looks like someone is pulled over and slowing everything down. Should be just a moment, ma'am," was the response. Hanna realized for the first time that her driver was a woman.

As they grew closer a man was clearly visible by the side of the road looking off to the side, distracted and on his phone. Hanna's driver stared intently at him, as if looking for something specific. As if on cue, the man turned toward their car, squinting his eyes to see them inside.

There was a ping in the front dash. The driver pushed a button. The dash board lit up red. Outside, the man let go of his cel phone, letting it drop, and with his other hand pulled a gun up and started to point it at them.

"Captain Guerin, I'm going to need you to get down." The driver's voice was firm. Hanna unbuckled her seat belt and dove for the floor of the car.

The driver accelerated, the autonomous cars in front of them parting for the emergency signal the driver had initiated. The man got off two shots, Hanna heard them as dull pops

through the skin of the car. Hanna poked her head up to see the Driver activating the communications console and start speaking.

“JBA- this is Agent Jen Casillas escorting Captain Hanna Guerin to JBA Flight 622. We have had an incident. Initiated Easy Access Protocol. ETA 2 minutes. Over.” she turned to look back at Hanna. “Captain, are you OK.”

The radio responded. “Roger that, Casillas, we have eyes over route. Understand you are coming in hot. Easy Access Protocol engaged at Gate 3. Over.”

“Understood. Over and out” the driver responded. Again turning to Hanna, “I suppose I should introduce myself. My name is Jen Casillas, I will be the DHS agent assigned to the *Xi’an*. I’d shake your hand, but we’re a little busy.”

“Understood, Agent Casillas, and thank you.” The base came into view. Hanna was going to suggest that perhaps they slow down until she realized that the gates were open and no one was standing in the way.

“This protocol lets us drive straight to the tarmac uninterrupted.” Casillas explained as they flew through the check in point unabated. “Security here at the base has been watching us overhead from a drone this whole time.”

The car finally slowed as they reached the tarmac. A large, black space plane in the distance, several armed guards standing at attention. Hanna recognized it immediately as an SR-144, it’s four engine ports clearly identified it.

“Interesting, I did not think we were allowed to operate space planes from DC?” asked Hanna.

“You are apparently a very important exception, Ma’am.” Jenn offered back as they approached.

Pulling up and stopping, Agent Casillas motioned for Hanna to wait in the car. As soon as the agent departed, the car locked again. Hanna wasn’t going to get out even if she wanted to. Jenn approached the lead guard, spoke with him and satisfied with the answers, looked back at the car, which unlocked, and motioned for Hanna to emerge. As Hanna got out, Jen scoured the field for any sign of snipers or others that may have ill intent.

As Hanna moved to the door of the jet, Agent Casillas made note of two vehicles entering the tarmac behind them, and shouted to one of the guards.

“Are you aware of any other parties coming?”

“No Ma’am.”

“Assume these are hostile!” Agent Casillas pulled a gun and took aim at the lead vehicle. “Captain, I need you to get on board!” She fired off a round, but was too far away to deter their progress.

Hanna climbed the ramp into the aircraft, followed by Agent Castillas who closed the door of the plane behind them.

“Ma’am, I can do a lot of things, but flying is not one of them.” Jenn offered.

“Say no more, Agent. Strap yourself in, it will get rough fast.” Hanna, moved to the pilot’s seat, and once in it, started flipping switches and activating the engines. Flying was second nature to her, and the old SR-144 Space Planes were her bread and butter. Fashioned after the even older SR-71 and A-12 spy planes, these next generation hypersonic aircraft were much larger than their predecessors and designed not for the original clandestine surveillance missions but to transport passengers into orbit. Now they were old their own right, but they could do one thing better than just about anything else.

She made note of the engine status as she dawned her headset and peeked out the window at the approaching vehicles. “Agent Casillas, are you there.”

“I am, Ma’am.”

“Hanna, please, I believe you have earned that courtesy.”

“Then Jen, please. I’ve never been fond of ‘Agent.’”

The soldiers had raised their rifles at the approaching vehicles- thankfully, they would not be caught off guard.

“Jen, I assume our clearance is assured as part of the protocol?”

“The airfield is all yours, Hanna- all other air traffic has been diverted.”

“Just the way I like it.” She releasing the brake and began accelerating the atmospheric engines. The jet responded well, moving fluidly at Hanna’s request. As the plane turned away from the scene behind them, Hanna made note of two military trucks emerging from a nearby hangar to support the guards on the tarmac.

“That was not going to end well” Hanna said to herself before punching up the Tower.

“JDA Tower, this is Captain Guerin in the unmarked SR-144 moving to runway... whichever, Checking for clearance”

“Captain Guerin, This is JDA Tower. You have the entire airfield at your command. You may take off from the parking lot if you so choose.”

She chuckled. “Thank you JDA Tower. Please be advised that we are leaving a situation on the tarmac that may require security.”

“We are aware, Captain. Just get that plane in the air, please. You are go for flight plan *Xi’an*.”

“Understood. Out”

She was almost to the end of the runway and turning the plane. There was a reason that the 144’s were not allowed to fly out of many airports, and as she throttled up the engine, the reason became clear.

The noise was beyond deafening. Hanna reminded herself that she and Jen had no gear on to save them from compression risk if they accelerated too quickly.

The jet leaped forward as if it were impatient to get off the ground itself. Hanna had missed flying more than she’d realized as she guided the plane into the air. She tried to look over and see if she could see the scene on the tarmac, but things moved way too fast.

“JDA Tower. SR-144 is airborne and plotting rendezvous course with the *Xi’an*. All systems are nominal. Thank you for your courtesy.”

“Safe flight, SR-144, and you are welcome.”

Once airborne, Hanna changed frequencies to dial in to the *Xi’an*.

“IOP-3, this is Captain Hanna Guerin piloting an unmarked SR-144. Departed JDA making for your position. Please confirm lock and approval.”

Darrick’s voice came back. “Unmarked SR-144, lock is confirmed. Please be advised, by UN authority we are not allowed to accept ships at this time- please verify your identity with vocal command code, over.”

“Command Code Bravo-Romeo-Charlie-Kilo-Two-Zero-Zero-Six, over.”

“Command code confirmed. Captain, I hope you are well, I have you on lock, and you may approach. I can take control when you are ready. Over.”

“Confirmed, *Xi’an*. Advise I have one passenger. Slow and go, please Darrick, we are not geared for compression. Over”

“Roger that, Captain. I have control. Slow and go it is. Enjoy the flight, we will see you soon. Over.”

Hanna unbuckled from the pilot’s seat after verifying that Darrick had indeed, set up the remote pilot on the jet, and moved to the back to join Jen.

“Well, that was fun.” Hanna offered as she sat down near Jen. “It’s going to take us a bit to get there, but the station is flying us now. Thank you again for saving me today- twice apparently.”

“I was in special forces before I joined the DHS. I can see why they picked me for this job.”

“Do you know what’s going on?”

“Only that I have been assigned to the *Xi’an* as a ‘Special Liaison’ I’m not even sure what that means, except that I report directly to you. I am assuming that there is a security concern within the GSA. I got my orders two days ago and picked you up right off my own plane. You assumed I was the driver, so I went with it.”

“Well, isn’t this a box of unlabeled chocolate.” Hanna said.

* * *

An orbital flight and incident free rendezvous and docking with the Orbiting station *Xi’an* later, the senior staff were gathered in a meeting room, just off the command bridge.

“Everyone,” Hanna said, “This is agent Jen Casillas, she is with Homeland Security. Because of recent incidents planet-side and on other stations, Homeland Security has assigned Agent Casillas to monitor the safety of the station and its occupants. Please cooperate with her requests.”

“Captain, it sounds on chatter like something happened on the *Cuidad*, is that true?” Markita Savoy, in charge of global positioning for the station asked.

Agent Casillas stood. “What we know so far is there was an incident where someone has tried to sabotage IOP-4. Fortunately, they were not successful in their ultimate goal. Three people have lost their lives. Part of my job here is to try and prevent an attempt on this station.”

“Does this have to do with the probe we launched yesterday?” asked Ziyah Glaser, Director of Environmental Systems.

Hanna responded. "We're not sure right now, but it's too coincidental to ignore. I'll need staff on all sensing equipment 24/7. We'll need to know if anything hostile or unexpected is heading our way, from ANY direction. There are 500 people on this station that are counting on us to keep them safe. I'll be on the Command Deck shortly. Darrick, I'll need you to verify all lunar traffic with NASA control- full verification protocol on all communications until I say otherwise. Also, check in with *Cuidad*, and see if they need any supplies. If they do we'll send them over on *Endeavor*. Let's get to work, people."

"Aye, Captain."

The room cleared, save for Jen and Hanna.

"Jen, I'll have Lt Clancy arrange for quarters for you and an office to work out of."

"Thank you, Hanna. I have a confession, I have never been in space before."

"Not even on a tourist ride?"

"Nope"

"Well, welcome to space. You can head to the outer ring at some point if you would like to move around in Zero G. Can I have you ask Commander Mathews from the Command Deck to join us?"

"Sure thing."

Jen left, returning with Commander Mathews.

"Hi Olen, great work on the Drone Launch."

"Thank you, sir."

"Do you still have some good DOD contacts?"

"I do, what do you need?"

"The Drone we launched earlier is connected to something that happened at CDSCC involving gravimetric Waves. The DOD has sealed the site and confiscated all the data. Plus, people tried to kill me specifically, but all of us over it. I'm curious what they found."

"Shall I involve Mr. Kong?"

"Let's. See what you can find out, and be careful. There is all kinds of crazy attached to this, right now. Send Lt. Kong in and I'll share what I know."

"Yes, captain."

A few minutes later another officer came into the room.

"Captain, you wanted to see me?"

"Yes, Lt. Kong Thank you." The lieutenant sat.

“What do you know about Gravometric Waves.”

Well, captain, they are a Star Trek thing for starters.” He smiled, “But do you mean Gravitational waves?”

“That is why you are the Science Guy. Yes, thank you. Please continue”

“Gravitation waves are basically ripples in the fabric of what we consider space-time. It wasn’t until the 20th Century that we have really conceived of their existence. They move at the speed of light, it’s like dipping your finger into a glass of perfectly still water and watching the ripples spread outward across the surface.”

“Can they be artificially created?”

“If they can, we don’t know how yet. A lot of that work is theoretical in nature, we are still missing pieces of that puzzle.”

“Was there a Gravitational wave detector in Australia, at CDSCC?”

“Sure, there are a few of them around the globe. I had thought of requisitioning one for the station at some point for the Science Division. We just don’t have a specialist that would be able to really use it.”

“Do you think someone could use Gravitational waves to communicate?”

“It has been hypothesized- because they travel at the speed of light, they would provide the fastest way to transmit a message across vast distances of space. If you could manipulate them correctly, it would be almost like Morris Code I would imagine. Are you looking at becoming a specialist?” The Lieutenant asked.

“No,” answered Hanna, starting to drift into thought. “Just looking for some answers.” She paused. “Lt. can you gather what you know, specifically about the CDSCC information and conduct a briefing at 0800 tomorrow?”

“I can, Captain.”

“Thank you, Lieutenant. You may leave.”

As he made his way out, there was a soft, “bing” overhead, followed by Darrick’s voice.

“Captain, you still in the briefing room?”

“I am, Darrick.”

“Director Quiroz on the horn for you, priority- want it there?”

There was a brief silence. Hanna, nodded to Jen who had settled quietly in the corner of the room, and closed the doors to

the room.

“Captain Guerin?” The Director’s voice was clear but there was no video.

“I am here, Director.” Hanna moved back to the front of the presentation room.

“Captain, I am glad that you made it back to *Xi* safely. We are all very concerned.”

“Director, Agent Casillas of DHS is here with me.”

“Understood, Hanna. Jen, how are you?”

Jen responded, “Well, Francesca, if this is your way of saying we need to stay in touch more, we need to talk about appropriate expectations.”

The Director laughed audibly, “Hanna, Jen and I have been friends for a long time. I suggested her as your agent. She is the best there is.”

“Clearly I needed that, Director.” responded Hanna, “Thank you. Are you receiving the reports from Darrick about the probe?”

“I am, Hanna, that is why I am calling. The DOD has decided to take over the mission- they feel that the *Xi* is in imminent danger as long as you are involved in this mission.”

“In danger, exactly from whom?” asked Hanna, “Who cares if we discovered gravity waves in the outer solar system?”

“Hanna, there is growing concern that there is a terrorist movement working to keep us from finding the truth.”

Jen stepped up, “Francesca, I’m not a scientist, but it seems to me like that is not about terrorism, it’s like someone doesn’t want us finding their dirty laundry. Is someone out there at Titan?”

“It’s possible.” replied the Director. “I don’t have all those answers”

“Humans?” asked Hanna?

Jen gave Hanna a sideways look. Clearly, the Director ignored it.

“Hanna, the DOD will be sending strategic personnel to all platforms and bases off planet- That will include you.”

“Director, we do not have facilities to host anyone else. We have no where to place them.”

There was a quick sound and then Olen’s vice broke in.

“Director, Captain, I apologize for interrupting. We have a problem.” Just then an alarm started.

“Don’t wait for me, Hanna, get to it. Check in after.” The

Director 's line went silent.

“On my way, Commander,” Hanna streamed out of the room, followed by Jen straight into the Command Deck.

Everyone else was already there, engaged in various tasks. Olen turned to face her as she entered.

“We have detected a missile with a lock on the station. It was launched from an atoll in the Pacific. ETA 32 minutes.”

“Who’s is it? Do we know it’s armed?”

“Scans indicated it is armed, no one is claiming responsibility- but it’s also not like anything we have seen.” responded Darrick.

“Well,” responded Hanna, “this is not turning out to be a very good day at all.”

About Author Bob Nelson

In 1994, Bob co-founded Anthology magazine with writer J.A. Giunta. The magazine would run for ten years and print a wide variety of up and coming poets and writers.

Also in 1994, Bob started the Essenzaslam Poetry Slam, which ran 13 years. In 1999, Bob founded Spokenworld.com, a pioneer internet radio station focusing on spoken word programming.

In 2001, writer Sharon Skinner and Bob founded Anthology, inc. as a 501c3 nonprofit organization.

Visit Bob Online: Boboratory.com

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