

# Eve Of Tomorrow

Stephen Cross



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# Author's Note

The following only includes the prologue and the first chapter; the entire story will stretch to about 15 chapters. More chapters will be released soon.

Nevertheless, please enjoy...



# Prologue

**June 7 2128**

“This is a now unquestionable conclusion, one that has been verified by the very best tools of science...”

“I think we should wait for the report from the EDC before we jump to any conclusions.”

“Jump?! We sent the Horizon probe, you denied it. Then we sent Olympus, at your instruction, and now you’re trying to deny that too.”

“All I’m saying is we need to verify this, and consider our options.”

“We have only one option.”

“Spare me professor, we all know the impracticalities. Not to mention you said yourself it’s barely inhabitable.”

“The conditions are changing rapidly; we’ve already set up several successful outposts.”

“Even if you’re right, the costs of rebuilding infrastructure alone would be prohibitive.”

“With all due respect, we won’t have any infrastructure if we don’t start right away. When Olympus arrives we’ll have the capacity...”

“I’ve seen your estimates: three, maybe three and a half, depending on the construction of the Gladius reaching its deadline. What of the other nine billion?!”

“They are...”

“Collateral damage?”

“Unavoidable casualties.”

A pause.

“Minister, you’ve seen the reports, read the conclusions. Earth has supported life for over three billion years, somewhere along the way we...”

Another pause.

“..we forgot that it would end. In fifteen years, twenty if we’re lucky, life on Earth will end.”

# Surrogate

## November 12 2141 - Laura Adams

“I mean, seriously, don’t you think its beautiful?”

Ross raised his head slowly and quietly laughed. “That’s not the word I’d use.”

I lowered my eyes to the planet. “What I mean is...we only knew how important it was to us when we sensed we would lose it. As if all the life, the landscapes, the complexity, only took its beauty when it was all destined to destruction. Maybe God wanted...”

“Um, sorry?” Ross interrupted, smiling.

Redirecting my focus from the window briefly, I smiled back. “Really though, I never believed in anything supernatural. Although this seems like a better time than any.” I returned to staring out the window.

“I’d say it’s the worst time, considering everything that’s happened to us.”

“I suppose.” I murmured in agreement.

Ross quietly slid off the table and sat down on the chair next to me. “Anyway, how are you holding up?”

“Fine, yeah...” I trailed off.

“Well, you’ve done a great job, and it certainly hasn’t been easy.” Ross paused and focused on the brightening edge of the planet, no doubt reviving his memories of the last two years. I smiled weakly, sharing his presumed thoughts.

We both sat still for a few minutes, wondering about the action below us, enjoying an awkward silence in between the occasional messages on the intercom.

Something had been bothering me...

“Is this our last trip?”

Our eyes met each other. More silence.

“I mean, we still haven’t seen any transport ships. We’ve been here a week and only picked up twenty seven people, and the ministry wants Gladius back to help with orbital construction.”

Ross’ face deflated and he fixated his eyes down on the table next to him.

“What? What is it?!”

“Laura, I’ve been tasked to the solar observatory program. They’re planning to build a network of satellites to observe solar ejections, and to analyse the long term effects of...”

“Yes,” I interrupted, “I know what it is. What about Jason? ...and me?”

“As far as I know, you’re to report to the council as normal. I overheard one of the communications saying they dug up something of interest and they want you and Jason to take a look.”

“Dug?”

“Their words.”

## Jason Mara

MLSRR stands for Mobile Land Search and Rescue Robot. Completely autonomous, the device consists of two extending arms fitted with freely rotating infra-red sensors and six legs to stabilise itself on the fractured terrain. Each one stands as tall as a person, and the otherwise barren cityscape was covered with them, their lights visible through the darkness of the night, each participating in a coordinated effort.

More notable were the myriad of craft floating above us, of various sizes, scouring the remains for signs of life. A six-man team, we were following three MLSRRs to an abandoned military base where a number of airborne robots had congregated, attracted to a strong subterranean heat signature. As we approached the base, I heard the familiar whirring sound of a small transport ship as it flew over us and landed in one of the northern courtyards.

“Looks like the commander wants to take a look.” One of the team members glanced over at the open hole and back towards the ship; I don’t remember his name. Colonel Davies was noticeably tall, even from a distance, and it wasn’t long before she was right in front of us.

“Ah, my favourite nerd. Get over here Jason!” she shouted brashly.

“Relax, Joanna” I retorted. No military personnel would dare call her by name. None of the soldiers around me would even pull anything beyond a smile.

“Just get to work.” She grimaced.

The rescue operations had presented numerous problems to the crew of the Olympus, among which it was difficult to accurately locate the bodies of people trapped under rubble. Extraction was actually a fairly simple task, but part of the process required the use of very precisely targeted explosions; a few millimetres were between life and death. Then there was the problem of significant subterranean pockets, underground rivers, soft rock versus harder rock...so it was difficult stuff.

Fortunately we had found a solution. I opened my bag, and pulled out a small case, placing it on the ground in front of the hole. Within seconds thousands of ant-sized creatures emerged and begun burying into the ground. Together they formed a complex network, each taking their own position to dig through the earth and reporting their findings to the surface. I still found it impressive to watch as the data accumulated on the display and the calculations begun.

I think I was the only one. One hour to go.

## Laura Adams

After concluding our meal, Ross and I continued monitoring data from the numerous satellites and drones that were surveying much of the Eastern continent, focusing on the cities where we had previously found the most survivors. Or, what were originally cities. Now

they were desolate, and signs that humans had ever been there were disappearing, so it was hard to determine where the city ended and the dead countryside began.

Our immediate neighbours were two crew members monitoring and directing communication between the teams on the surface. Most communications were dull, reporting the movement of each team and announcing areas that had been cleared. Occasionally we would transmit the coordinates of anomalies that might be survivors, but out of the almost one hundred reports we had made on that day *not one* had turned out to be right.

The only respite from the depressing and tedious process were the amusing remarks by Jason that the soldiers never seemed to understand. Sometimes, at our most jaded, we'd start a conversation over the radio, irritating colonel greatly, but the men monitoring the radios next to us were very relaxed and seemed reluctant to cut us off. Jason and Ross were particularly unafraid to have long conversations, discussing topics from video shows to food. We were lucky; we would've been in serious trouble if we were under her command, and no-one else dared to join in.

The situation had fallen in our favour due to the structure of the government. More precisely, the sections of government. The council was one of those sections, an influential one, which managed various scientific and engineering projects and had amassed a capacious budget over the past few decades. Gladius was run by the military, but most of the technology it used was developed by the council and therefore assistance was often required to maintain them and handle some of the problems that might arise.

However military commanders had treated the scientists as if they were soldiers, and many became unwilling to participate in operations with the military. It reached a peak when problems emerged

in the docking procedures of the *Gladius*, which led to over fifty crew members being stuck aboard two transport ships for almost two days, in which time they had depleted their water reserves and were heading towards serious dehydration. The message was clear and the ministry placed great pressure on the military to cooperate effectively with the council.

After about an hour, the message finally came over the radio: the day was over. Furthermore I had discovered, just a few hours earlier, that this was the last day.

So after seven years of evacuation operations and three years of search-and-rescue missions the *Gladius* was going to Mars for the first time, leaving Earth behind. For some, like Ross and myself, we were simply returning to our homes, but for others like Jason, who had been working on the *Gladius* right from the start, this was an event unlike any other. I couldn't imagine living on board a ship for over a decade, and his time on Earth must've been a strange relief.

I quickly snapped myself out of my line of thought, sat up and stared into the screen in front of me. There was a lot of technology down on the planet, and the next few hours would involve a complex sequence of steps to bring it up to the ship.

## Ross Summerfield

Once the video feeds came up all the nearby crew surrounded our terminal, watching in amazement as the robots packed themselves up, slotting together with incredible precision.

A considerable part of the mission, there were twenty three airborne drones and eighty four land robots. They would all pack up into just four particularly large ships, which would then be propelled

into space and would hopefully dock with the *Gladius*, so we could take them with us. After all the investment in the project, the council was understandably keen to re-use the technology for something more relevant back home. Being responsible for the kit made us very nervous and the deadline of the sunrise didn't help at all.

"How's it going guys?" I turned round to see the second-in-command, Captain Jones, pushing his way through the crowd. "Ah, that looks great. Pretty cool stuff." He pulled an interested grin.

"Pretty cool?!" I smiled back.

"Just keep up the good work." He laughed and started walking towards the communication operators. Suddenly he turned round. "Hey, you know, your friend Jason is on the first ship up here."

"Oh yeah?" I was bit surprised. It also seemed to attract Laura's attention and she briefly peered across at us, before focusing back on the monitor.

"Yeah, we just thought he might be useful to help you guys out. I mean, we know you've got it, but..."

"No," I interrupted, "that's great, thanks".

He nodded his head, smiling in acknowledgement, before promptly leaving. Laura anxiously glanced across again for a second; the crowd around us was bothering her.

"Relax, it'll be fine. Anyway, Jason will be here in a couple of minutes." I tried to calm her down. My estimate wasn't far off; I could see the first transport ship was already docking.

“Thanks.” She feigned a smile. I wasn’t helping. Laura was pre-disposed to stress and no words would defeat that. I just hoped it all went smoothly, otherwise she’d feel responsible.

## Jason Mara

After half an hour and many games of cards, we had finally arrived at the ship and seemed to have a greeting party. One of the best parts of the *Gladius* was its air conditioning, after three months of intensive heat working through the night, and days so hot that it had been near-impossible to sleep.

Scanning the crowd, I didn’t notice Ross or Laura anywhere, but I soon remembered they’d be handling the robot packing process. The friendly captain informed me I’d been brought up early so I could help them, if required. As second-in-command he was strikingly different to the colonel, not least because almost everyone tended to like him, and he made me feel better despite my growing fatigue.

Designed to be a battleship, *Gladius* was anything but small. Fortunately, the two docking points for transport ships were relatively near to the control rooms and a short stroll later I found myself in the second control room, where I had been told they were working.

With the large crowd orbiting their control centre, I could imagine Laura was tense, petrified of anything going wrong, so I knew better than to approach from behind and potentially surprise her. Instead I dodged round to the left side and gratefully accepted a chair one of the crew had offered after recognising me, right next to Laura.

“Hey, you okay?” I tried to attract her attention, still trying to not surprise her, after she didn’t notice me sit down.

“Hi!” She was pleased to see me, but she was obviously distressed. She was even shaking slightly.

“Do you want me to take the wheel?” The seat I was in was as good as hers for operating the system, and this part of the process was just observation anyway, so it was more the matter of lifting responsibility. Still, I moved to the edge of my seat as if ready to take hers. A bit of moving around would probably be good for her.

“This is my job, Jason. You’ve been working all night.”

“As have you.” Ross quickly pointed out to her, having just noticed me.

“I don’t think sitting at a terminal really equals what Jason has been doing.” Laura seemed unusually serious.

“Well, it’s not like we can’t all watch this together. It’s just observing after all.” I tried to calm her down.

“Someone has to be responsible if something goes wrong.” She responded slowly, struggling to maintain the conversation with her focus on the various images and data points appearing in front of us. There was certainly a great deal of truth that getting this right, in the time given, was extremely important.

Naturally, the procedure had been tested repeatedly and I was sure nothing would go wrong. Even if it did, nobody would blame Laura; the process was supposed to happen almost entirely on its own so unless we intervened and caused something to go wrong, we weren’t really responsible. At worst, the colonel might target me for venting her irritation.

“They’re going!” One of the crew members noticed the countdown clock for the rockets appearing on the screen, starting from twenty seconds. This was the real test of the process and the part that really did need to go right. Even Ross was starting to look quite tense, as the clock reached ten seconds, with the crowd counting down, apparently finding it quite exciting.

Ground-based rockets had been around for a long time, and most launches used more modern methods, but occasionally, when required, rockets gave the necessary power to do the heavy lifting, and few people had ever seen them launching.

The countdown reached zero, a number of messages started appearing on the left side of the screen and all four rockets erupted into action. As far as I could tell, everything was going to plan, even though it was difficult to track the individual messages as they flew up the screen. Surely enough, the ships were propelled upwards, rapidly accelerating away from their launch sites.

Further launch reports emerged. As expected, it had been a complete success; we could breathe a sigh of relief.

## Laura Adams

“So, with a little of luck...” Jason broke off, his attention buried in playing with the small device in his hands. “And...”, I paused, waiting to hear something, “...no wait...”. He turned to the terminal next to him and after little more than a couple of key presses, the device produced three clicking sounds followed by a beep. He glanced up at me, looking slightly hurried, “...there we go.”

How he had managed to find the time to work on the ‘Hoverdrone’ was beyond me, as was how he’d managed to persuade me to obtain

the necessary parts and tools from the tech stores around the ship; I had to make the request with the resources manager, which required *stretching* the truth. The project would happen regardless of my involvement; this way I could at least keep some control over the use cases Jason and Ross would no doubt propose.

“It’s been...how many failures so far?” I broke into a smile and even giggled briefly.

He looked up at me with an amiable glare and pulled a stretched smile. The light on the side started flashing and he pushed it into the middle of the table. “Okay, that’s it. Prepare to be amazed.”

I had a quick thought: “You did lock the door, right?” Jason’s smile wavered, transforming into a sarcastically exaggerated look of concern. I continued with emphasis. “Person walks in unexpectedly, small flying object goes nuts, person doesn’t realise until too late...”

“Okay okay.” Jason interrupted and, to his agitation, swiftly jumped up, locked the door and then flew back down into his seat. We both then promptly fitted our masks, with him denouncing my silent teasing as I attempted to fit a second mask.

“Right, let’s send it to these coordinates.” He held the tracker at a random point above the table, and pressed another key on the terminal, the hoverdrone beeping to signal its recognition. “And...” Jason was careful to move his arm out of the way, “...go.”

The device propelled into action, carefully rising into the air towards the previous location of the tracker. After a few seconds it seemed to be exactly where it was supposed to be. “That’s the easy part over; now to see if your sensory stuff works.” Jason remarked.

I gasped. He was referring to ACSS, short for Autonomous Control Sensory System, a long-existing system that I had worked on for the past year. The purpose of the system was to use a number of data inputs, which could be gyroscopes, accelerometers, photo-sensors etc., and use these to generate some useful results, as well as planning manoeuvres. It was used in almost all of the airborne drones and the weapons systems of the battleship and its fighter jets.

“My stuff is all that’s working in that thing.” I followed with an excited laugh, something I was trying to overcome, but I was encouraged when Jason joined in.

Jason took a long strip of metal and held it up vertically a small distance from the suitably hovering drone. “Ok...” He pressed a button on the terminal, pulled the control pad in front of him and held his finger down on its top edge.

Promptly and unexpectedly, the drone increased in altitude.

“Shit! Wrong configuration.” Jason’s face well represented his surprise and he hurriedly withdrew his finger from the pad, and the robot stopped moving.

Amused, I shook my head and laughed. Jason smiled back, and gave me a playful stare.

“Okay, let’s try this again.” He brought the drone back into its original position, switched the configuration and sent the drone towards the metal strip he was still holding in place.

## Jason Mara

Various important personnel slowly filed into one of the larger conference rooms, past three well armed guards. The seats were arranged in a curve facing the screen, indicating a conference call was about to occur, but real-time communications would only be possible with the two transport ships ahead of us, which was unlikely to be useful. I took my pre-allocated seat next to Laura; Ross hadn't been invited.

The ministry representative stood up to talk first. "Okay, before this begins, I'm obliged to inform you that the issues discussed in this meeting will be considered top secret." Laura and I gave each other glances. I had dealt with top secret information before, but it wasn't normal. In fact, it was highly unusual.

She continued. "Basically, we're keeping this all secret until we know we don't need it to be." She paused to gauge the response, before finishing. "All right, I'll hand over to the captain."

A man in full military uniform took over from the representative. "A few hours ago the ship received a fairly strong high frequency signal from the direction of the Sun that seemed to represent some sort of information. It only lasted for a few seconds and so not knowing what it was, we recorded it but ignored it. It seemed fairly uninteresting..."

He glanced up from the report in front of him, drinking some water to clear his throat.

"...but, it wasn't long after that we received a message from the science and engineering council on Mars. According to them, this signal is very interesting. It was related to a project they've been working on, officially named Project Eve, about some sort of satellite

they discovered. They asked for this consultation with a few of their members we have on board, specifically the individuals who are now present; according to the project team leader, the members here had already been assigned to Project Eve following completion of their duties on board this ship.”

He took a moment to scan his eyes across Laura, myself and two logistics personnel. As his focus left us, Laura twisted her head across at me, and mimed out her surprise. “Assigned?”

The captain concluded. “As you’re all aware, we’re less than a third of the way through our journey. Unfortunately that means the ship is far too distant from Mars for real-time communications, so the project team have prepared this video that they sent over to us.” He retook his seat as the room darkened and the large screen facing us activated.

Immediately, the project leader appeared on the screen. His name was Rupert Harper, and he was part of the senior executive of the council. In other words, he was an important scientist, and widely respected.

“Firstly, I haven’t had the chance to brief any of you on the project itself, so we need to do that first. We did plan to brief you once you’d arrived, but as you’ve probably already guessed things have changed.

“Eight weeks ago we discovered some sort of device buried in a small mound that was being flattened out for construction. At the time we assumed it was one of the many probes we sent over here decades ago, and so we told everyone that.”

He cleared his throat.

“Well, we were wrong.

“Since then the whole project has become top secret and we’re still telling everyone it’s ours. The truth is we really don’t know where this thing came from; it certainly wasn’t made by us. And by us, I mean humans. However, we have started to figure out what it is. To put it simply, it’s a satellite, which seemed fairly obvious given the large sails of solar cells.

“The project was therefore to figure out its purpose, and well...

“...we’ve made some progress.

“I know this already seems shocking, but things really got scary after we played around with it.

“It seemed like the satellite had depleted its power reserves, so we decided to charge it. We did the simplest thing that came to mind, and just directed a load of light onto it, simulating the sunlight it would experience in orbit.

“Well, it powered up and then immediately sent out a message.

“We still don’t know what was in the message, but...

“...and here’s the scary part...

“...that message that you received a few hours ago...

“...it’s a reply.”