

THE MOON DREAM

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A legend is an imaginative work of fiction that purports to

be true.

Definition from a dictionary

1.

All his life was one long road to the Moon. All his life he was racing against time to reach it. Sometimes it seemed to him that he would be too late, the span of human life being short for someone who had had to start virtually from scratch, from a fragile glider, a plaything of winds, to gradually build up and

enhance his design into a spaceship capable of taking man to the Moon. He had built the glider when he was still very young, but even back then he was longing for greater things than just flying in the air, remaining a prisoner of the Earth's atmosphere.

Even back then, he saw the Moon in his dreams. There he was, opening the hatch, climbing down a short ladder in his cumbersome spacesuit, to put his foot on the rocky surface. The rocks flooded with a dazzling Sun set against the inky blackness of sky. A land of silent, dazzling, and dead beauty. The only relief for the eyes being a small blue sickle of Earth in the black sky. And, surrounded with all this boundless lifeless Nature, there She was - The Machine, The Ship, the material manifestation of human thought, a particle that had absorbed all the achievements of many millennia of the Earth's civilization, a small fragment of Home, that can shelter the cosmonaut from the abyss of Space...

The first time he experienced that feeling had been when he was trying out his glider - the vast emptiness of the sky might have been overpowering, but he was inside the womb of his Machine - and that made him invincible. His life in those moments totally depended on his Machine, and he loved her for that feeling of Salvation that She gave him. He loved his Machines and that love was an unending source of happiness to him. But in the moon dreams everything was even more vivid, even more delicious. The feeling of happiness was hundreds, thousands of times more intense ...

At first he himself did not believe that this dream could be transformed into reality. The distance from a glider to a spaceship was too great. To build a spaceship one would need the labor of hundreds, thousands, tens of thousands of people. And the people that were living around him did not know any moon dreams. There was nobody to build the ship with. "A dream, just a dream..." - thought he ...

But then, the wars came. First, the second world war, then a "cold" one. People suddenly needed rockets to hurl atomic bombs at each other. From one continent to another. Far enough not to see the millions one would kill. A nod of the Great Leader was enough to make tens of thousands of people start building rockets - not for moon dreams, for a crust of stale bread.

He was appointed Chief designer and he constructed a rocket. It could hurl a hydrogen bomb all the way to America, and that was what the generals demanded. The generals were quite happy. They did not know that the rocket could do something else as well, something which was not in the specifications. That "something" was only known to the "Chief" (as his subordinates came to call him). What he knew was that after a certain modification that rocket could put a satellite into orbit around the Earth, and even a manned spacecraft. It could even deliver a cargo to the Moon,

albeit a small one (a man with a life support system and an additional rocket to bring him back from the Moon would have been a load far beyond its capacity), but he felt that he had already traveled half way to his Moon Dream. Now, the critical factor was time. He was no longer young. He had to make it in time...

It was about that time that the Great Leader died, and to the power in the country rose a new ruler, who was known as a great liberal and who proclaimed peaceful co-existence with the other nations of the world. The Chief realized that to make his Moon dream come true, he would now have to become not only an engineer, not only an industrial manager, but a politician as well. "Let us," - he proposed to the new ruler - "demonstrate to the entire world our power, but also our peaceful intentions. Let's launch the most powerful rocket in the world, but without the bomb, for a purely scientific purpose - let it put into Earth orbit a satellite, and later, perhaps, a satellite with a man onboard." The new ruler took a fancy to the idea, regardless of the fact that he had a very vague notion of what a satellite really was. The most important thing for him was to cut Americans down to size. For several years those guys had been boasting about their plans to launch a satellite - without any visible result.

To spite the Americans, the new ruler gave his go-ahead for launching the first satellite, and then, the first man in space. What the new ruler especially liked about the latter was the fact

that the cosmonaut did not see any trace of God in heaven while visiting there, which, beyond any reasonable doubt, was to him a final proof of atheism and historical materialism, which, in its turn, augured well for the expected speedy arrival of the bright communist future.

Meantime, the "cursed capitalists" turned green with envy.

The handsomest and the youngest of American presidents summoned to the White House all his scientific advisors and told them:

"We, the richest and freest nation in the world, are lagging in space behind Russia, a country bled dry by its totalitarian regime! How can America ever wipe off this national disgrace? How - that's what I want to hear from you."

And one of his advisors said: "It's 1961 now. If we get down to work immediately, before the 60s are out we can land a man on the moon. Hopefully, the first in the world."

- "Let's do it!" - said the Handsome President.

- "But what about the enormous appropriations that will be need..."

- "I'll bring the Congress around." And he did bring them around...

Two years later the Handsome President was assassinated, when

he was going around the city of Dallas in a beautiful automobile, sitting next to a beautiful woman, his wife, who then beautifully mourned him in front of a world-wide television audience (the funeral of the Handsome President turned out to be the first world-wide TV broadcast in history transmitted via a communications satellite), but soon thereafter recomposed herself and married a Greek multimillionaire.

One more year passed, and the Soviet Ruler, known as a Liberal and a Peacemaker, who liberally gave away the Soviet taxpayers' money for cutting Americans down to size and for anti-religious propaganda, was deposed by his former deputy, who used to hold medal boxes while his boss was awarding the Gold Stars of the Heroes of the Soviet Union to the cosmonauts.

But although the Handsome President and the Liberal Ruler had both left the stage of history, the process that they had started, by that time, was already unstoppable, and became known as The Space Race. The prestige of the two Superpowers was at stake. The funding unlimited.

Here is your chance, Chief. The only thing now was to make it on time. And it wasn't even the race with the Americans. He was racing against Time itself, the time that was left for him to live. How much time had he left? For the last few months he had been feeling a strange pain in his stomach. And the Moon Dream was

so close...

2.

The preparations for the Soviet lunar mission were conducted in great secrecy. Work was under way on the giant rocket that was to deliver to the Moon everything, including cosmonauts with a smaller rocket that was to be launched from the Moon to return them to Earth. But in parallel with this project, which was so similar to the American Apollo program, in even greater secrecy, one more lunar mission project was being worked upon - the simplified project, just in case we are not on time. Even in a country which had not long before that passed through a gory ordeal of war and terror, even in that savage country, the mere thought of that back-up project made most of those few people let on the secret feel uneasy. The project was breathing a chilling breath of Death down their spines.

That project was a one-way manned mission to the Moon. Such a mission would not need a smaller rocket to be launched from the Moon to return to Earth, it would not need a heavy heat shield for re-entry into the Earth's atmosphere. Such a mission does not need many things, it carries along very little cargo, and that's why it could be launched on a relatively small rocket. It could be

launched right away, and there would be no need to wait until the Big Rocket, similar to the one that the Americans were building, was ready.

One cosmonaut in a small capsule, equipped with retrorockets for soft landing on the Moon. He would become the first Man to set his foot on the Moon. He would conduct all the necessary scientific experiments, and radio the results back to Earth. And when the air supply ran low, he... well, let's put it this way: he would swallow a pill. And would go to sleep. Forever. And he would live forever in posterity's grateful memory. The Hero, who sacrificed his life for the Good of Science. For Soviet Science, the most progressive and advanced science in the world.

- "Well, let's hope it won't come to this" - those let in on the secret tried to reassure themselves - "We'll prepare a real there-and-back mission ahead of the Americans, and there'll be no need to sacrifice a human life in the name of science."

- "But what if we still don't make it on time?" - "In any case, it must be a Soviet man who will step on the Moon first, proving by his heroism the superiority of our system over the capitalism. Only our system can create a man who puts the interests of the society before his personal interests, even before his own life... And then, surely they'll select for that mission some terminal cancer patient, who is doomed anyway. Rather than dying in hospital... How does that song go: "it's bad to die

in one's bed, it's good to die on the field of battle". Even death is beautiful, when the world is looking on you..."

But, in spite of all such reasoning, everybody tried to keep away from the sealed warehouse, where the flight-ready one-way lunar mission capsule was stored. If the rocket for the there-and-back mission were ready ahead of the Americans, that capsule would be scrapped. But if there were any threat of Apollo coming first in the race, this capsule would be installed on the already existing launch vehicle...

3.

In mid-November of 1965, the designer of the non-returnable lunar capsule was summoned by the Chief Designer who told him: "Immediately check the condition of the one-way lunar mission capsule and send it to the launch site. In ten days, both the capsule and the launch vehicle must be ready for launch."

The capsule designer, surprised and frightened, looked at the Chief. The Chief was looking very ill. He was said to have undergone a very serious surgical operation. Cancer.

- "Don't be afraid," - said the Chief, having noted the frightened expression on the face of the other man - "it's just a test flight. We are going to send to the moon an ape ..." - he stopped for a moment, as if contemplating something in his mind's

eye- "yes, an ape.. We've got to see how he's going to survive a soft landing on the Moon."

The Chief noticed that the other man was looking at an envelope lying on his desk. Without saying a word, the Chief reached for the envelope and turned it face down. It was a large manila paper envelope. The kind of envelope a surgeon might use to send a surgery report to the physician in charge of a patient. The capsule designer even thought that he had caught a glimpse of a seal of some hospital on the face of the envelope.

- "In ten days we won't even be able to transport the capsule to the launch site." - he started to protest to the Chief - "The railroads are now..."

- "Two weeks" - said the Chief, interrupting him, and it was clear from the tone of his voice that the deadline was final. Knowing from his previous experience that it was no use to haggle with the Chief, the capsule designer said goodbye and left the room.

Left alone, the Chief picked up the open envelope, and, for the umpteenth time went over its contents. "It's a death sentence..." - he whispered inaudibly - "A death sentence. To me. Can it be that I won't make it on time?"

And the Moon Dream was as close as never before...

He escaped from all of them !!!

On the frosty morning of December 3, 1965, two of the Chief's closest associates, who were let on the secret, rolled a huge container with an "ape" into the launch gantry elevator and took it to the top of the rocket. They helped the Chief out of the container and seated him in the capsule. After that, everything was just as he had imagined it to be, just as the first cosmonauts had often described it to him: the shudder running along the rocket body as it was lifting off, the roaring of the engines, the g-loads... The g-loads weren't high though, the trajectory was not very punishing, since the original plans called for the one-way mission to be manned with a terminally ill pilot.

Post-operative seams were aching, his blood was throbbing in his temples, and at his side a tape recorder was running, transmitting to Earth faked telemetry data on the pulse and respiration rate of the ape, which, of course, was absent from the capsule. The ape, which had once been bartered from a "progressive" African state for a crate full of Kalashnikov machine guns, and which had already been written off in the official documents as lost in a space experiment, remained on Earth. According to the secret plan devised by the Chief in collusion with his associates, that ape was to meet a sad, but honorable fate: its ashes, encased in an urn, were to be entombed in the Kremlin wall under a plaque bearing the name of the Chief

Designer. But the name was just a name, a convention invented by man. What mattered was that his ashes would never be buried in the same wall with the ashes of those who had ordered his arrest back at the time of the Great Purge of 1938, of those who, throughout all his life, had been interfering with his work, pestering him with idiotic government orders and absurd secrecy, those who had been plotting against him and snitching on him - all those generals, politicians, academicians. Let them lie buried in the same wall with an ape!

He had escaped from all of them! He had escaped from practitioners of medical "science" incapable of curing a man, but quite capable of protracting his misery, suspending the already doomed in a semi-dead/semi-alive condition with the use of medication and state-of-the-art equipment, making him suffer the agony, from which he would have been long ago delivered by the merciful Death, had the practitioners of the medical profession not committed an outrage upon Death Himself. He had escaped from the humiliation of a slow death, when a man dies gradually, piece by piece. First he becomes incapable of walking, then he loses the faculty of speech, and finally his consciousness is destroyed. A grown, intelligent, proud man reverts to a condition of a diaper-soiling baby - no greater indignity could be imagined. But he escaped from medicine, and now he would die a quick, beautiful and dignified death, in his right mind, being at the very summit he had been climbing to all his life!

Of course, it might have been easier to go to the Moon

without hiding under the guise of an "ape", to go there officially, as a hero sacrificing his own life in the interests of the Soviet science. But then, while on the Moon, he would have had to take soil samples, make some primitive chemical experiments on them, and send reports back to Earth. The last few hours of his life would have been spent in going through an absurd charade, entirely useless, since anyway in a few years the Moon would be visited by a two-way mission (whether it would be a Soviet or an American mission was wholly immaterial to the eternal High Science), which would bring back to Earth moon rock samples which can be much more skillfully studied by professional geochemists in their well-equipped labs on Earth. All his bustling around would have boiled down to one thing: to give the government news agency TASS a chance to trumpet the news about the advanced Soviet science and technology having beaten the Americans to the Moon. And that would have been a great lie, since the Americans could also have sent a one-way mission to the Moon long ago, had such a perverted, verging on paranoia, idea as sending a man to certain death in the name of national science prestige occurred to them.

All this would have been an exercise in falsehood and vanity, and falsehood and vanity shall not defile the mystery of death.

The Chief chose to leave earthly life quietly, without fanfare.

Of course, that didn't mean that TASS wouldn't have to release an official announcement about the launch, since the Americans had surely detected the rocket launch through their spy

satellites, and their electronic surveillance was now eavesdropping on the telemetry data. But that would have to be an announcement about the launch of an unmanned lunar probe of the Luna series. What was the last probe's number? Seven? That makes this one Luna 8...

... The g-loads ended. The Chief suddenly felt a wonderful freedom in his body that is only possible in zero gravity. Luna 8 had been injected into a trajectory aimed at the Moon. Visible in a porthole was planet Earth, light blue, with blindingly white spots of clouds. Slowly, very slowly, almost imperceptibly to the eye, it was getting smaller in size. There were people left behind on that planet. He had escaped from all of them! He had escaped from General Secretaries and Presidents! From KGB men and CIA men! From cabinet ministers and shift foremen! From all kinds of inspectors and commissions of inquiry! From physicians and funeral directors! From wives and mistresses! From everybody! For the first time in his life he was absolutely free! He no longer had to report to his superiors, and to give directions and administer rebukes to his subordinates, he no longer needed to struggle to obtain funds... The only thing he had to do now was to relax and enjoy the fruits of his lifetime of work. Left there, down below, were grimy stack-furnaces and noisy trains, hydrogen bombs and napalm-drenched jungle, junkyards, sewers, polluted lakes, jails, labor camps, safe cabinets, files classified "top secret", thousandsof kilometers of barbed wire and whole armies of armed guards. Who might have thought that from high above, all this hell

looks so beautiful, so white and innocent, and even with a blue rim of its atmospheric veil!

Like an angel, the Chief made his ascension above the wicked planet Earth.

To meet his death, he was flying to the Moon, the dead planet, which henceforth was to become the planet of the dead. He was to find a communion with the heavenly purity. The heavenly bodies are pure because they are lifeless. Where there's no life, there's nobody to foul things up, hence the purity.

The Moon Dream, which had seemed impossible, was finally coming true. Thousands upon thousands of people had piled up the pyramid from the top of which the Chief could reach for the Moon and touch it. Among these people were, to use a cliché from official TASS announcements, "the Soviet workers, scientists and engineers, who, through their dedicated labor have achieved...", etc.. Other people, who also had had a hand in this achievement, were the Great Leader who had decided to create a rocket shield for his country, and his successor, the peace-loving liberal Prime Minister, and the Handsome President, with his hurt patriotic feelings. The Chief thought that he had outsmarted all of them. He even thought that he had outsmarted History itself, by making it work for him, for him alone, for making his Moon Dream become reality. As a true Engineer, who, out of dead materials available from Nature, creates a machine capable of translating into action the will of its creator, he, out of materials available from

History -out of Cold War, out of national pride, out of personal traits of leaders of the Superpowers - had created a Mechanism, which turned his dream into reality...

5.

On the next day, December 4, the Chief was awakened by a slight jolt.

The capsule was almost imperceptibly vibrating, and there was a muffled rumble of an operating rocket engine - a trajectory correction was being performed on commands from Earth. With a feeling of detached sadness, the Chief thought about those people on Earth who were now staying up late to calculate the trajectory, who were working so that an "ape", whom they had never even seen, could successfully reach the Moon, and the next day, the 5th, payday, they would go to the paymaster's office to receive their pittance of a salary for this work. "Or rather, they won't, since December 5 is a holiday, Constitution Day. That means they'll be paid today. And those who are on duty tomorrow will be paid extra for working on a holiday." Strangely enough, that thought brought him comfort, and he stopped pitying the people who were working to provide ground support for his flight.

He glanced out the porthole. During the time that he had slept, the capsule had traveled a long way from Earth, and now the Earth looked no bigger than a saucer. What he could see was, for

the most part, the night side of the Earth, faintly illuminated by moonlight - a mysterious dark surface with sparsely scattered cities glowing in the night like embers. On one side of the Earth, the Sun lit a thin bluish-white sickle, while on the other side the Earth was rimmed with a lurid, blood-red line of dawn. And, next to this dark nightly planet, a sun hung in the sky - an insufferably bright, harsh sun, blinding the eyes like a lamp during an interrogation. And all this against a backdrop of space blackness. A creepy sight.

He turned to the opposite porthole. There he could see the Moon. It was still far away, but some of the bigger craters were already visible. It suddenly occurred to the Chief that he was the first man to see lunar craters with the naked eye.

- "And this is just the thin end of the wedge!" It was just three days before the full moon. The illuminated portion of the lunar disk was already almost round, and the ragged, twisted shadows of the mountains were only visible at its western edge. Over the rest of the disk, the sun was high, the black shadows were almost absent, and lively bright rays radiated for thousands of kilometers from Tycho crater, all over the face of the Moon. The moonlight seemed to emanate silence. Yes, this was the Moon - the Queen of Night, the Queen of Silence, the Queen of Purity... the Queen of Death. And it was to Her that he was flying...

6.

On the evening of December 6, the capsule approached the Moon so closely that the looming mass of the lunar disk filled up the entire porthole like a giant impending wall falling towards the capsule and threatening to crush it.

The Chief glanced at his watch. According to the mission plan, at that moment the Earth was supposed to be transmitting the last pre-landing instructions to the capsule's on-board control device. Yes, that was how they flew to the Moon in the good old 1960s - there was just not enough space on-board the spacecraft to install a computer for trajectory calculations, since at the time such a computer weighed at least several tons. The computer had to stay on Earth.

The Chief glanced at the control panel of the instrumentation box. Of course, it was only in his mind's eye that he could see electronic triggers switching inside that box, committing to their electronic memories a long sequence of ones and zeroes radioed from Earth. After that, the control device would send the received data back to Earth, and down on Earth they would check the returned message for errors that were almost inevitable when sending data over so long a distance, and would send corrections to the capsule, and would check the reception once again, and only after that the capsule would start the lunar landing sequence. Up till that moment, the Chief would have no knowledge of whether the capsule had received the instructions, or, let's say, its receiver

had broken down, and he was going to smash to atoms. Hours went by in agonizing suspense. The lunar craters in the porthole were getting closer and larger...

Finally, soon after midnight (Moscow time), when it was already December 7, he once again felt a slight jolt: preparatory to the main engine retro burn, the attitude control thrusters came to life in order to turn the spacecraft around so that the main engine nozzle faced the Moon. The Moon slipped downward out of the porthole's field of view, to be replaced by a patch of star-studded sky. The oppressive feeling of the overhanging wall was suddenly gone. The Chief moved closer to the porthole. Now that the Moon was below (even if "below" was just a matter of convention, since there was no gravity in the capsule yet), it felt distinctly different. It now felt as if he were soaring high above an unlimited expanse of plain extending for thousands of kilometers. Effortlessness and freedom. The Moon Dream was approaching its climax. The lyrics of an old marching song that had been very popular in the Soviet Union back in the 1930s, the "Aviators' march", were throbbing in his head:

"Yes, we were born to make the Dream come true!

We are the ones to bridge the chasm of space!

And we have wings of steel instead of arms

And our hearts are motors filled with flames!"

At 00hours 50 minutes 20 seconds Moscow time, the capsule began to vibrate, was suddenly filled with a low resonant sound, and the force of gravity, to which he had already become unaccustomed after the three days of flight in weightlessness, suddenly pressed the Chief into his seat - it was the retro engine coming to life.

"Here goes! Everything will be decided in a minute!" - said the Chief in an excited whisper. He glanced at the altimeter dial: 80 thousand meters altitude, 70 thousand, 60 thousand...

"Yes, we were born to make the Dream come true!"

50 thousand meters, 40 thousand, 30 thousand

"We are the ones to bridge the chasm of space!"

20 thousand, 10 thousand, 5 thousand, 3 thousand ... He wasn't singing, he was reciting, almost shouting in a voice hoarse with excitement...

"And we have wings of steel instead of arms"

2 thousand, one thousand, 800 meters, 500 meters, 300 meters ...

"Almost forgot!" - thought he. He reached to the radio transmitter power cord and yanked it loose. The ground controllers lost signal from Luna 8 at an altitude of 70 meters. But the spacecraft no longer needed ground control - it was descending in an automatic mode... 50 meters, 40 meters, 20 meters, 10, 5...

"And our hearts are motors filled with flames!"

The engine jet was kicking aside sheets of lunar dust. 3 meters, two, one, impact!... Silence - the engine had shut down...

A gentle swaying on the shock-absorbers. A cloud of slowly settling dust in the porthole. The capsule clock indicated 00 hours, 51 minutes 30 seconds, Moscow Time.

He was on the Moon. The first among humans. Still alive. The Moon Dream came true. "I made it. Made it! Made it!!!"

7.

Yes, everything was exactly as it had been in the Moon Dream. He found it quite an effort to struggle into the spacesuit within the confined space of the capsule. Then he squeezed through a hatch into the even more confined space of the airlock chamber, similar to the one that had been used not long before that, in March 1965 for the first spacewalk in history during Voskhod 2 mission - an inflatable chamber made of strong airtight fabric, compactly folded during launch from Earth. He closed the hatch to the cabin behind him. Switched on the depressurization pump. At first, the pump's swooshing sounds were clearly audible, then they grew softer, softer... Finally, the air from the chamber was gone, along with all the sounds. To open the opposite hatch in the bottom of the chamber, the Chief had to hook it with his foot - there was no way to do this by bending down, since the chamber was so narrow. In the open hatch, he saw a short ladder, a meter and a half long. The Chief started to climb down. When he got down to

about half a meter above the surface, the ladder ended and he jumped. The Moon's gravity is only one-sixth of the Earth's, and that was why the fall seemed to the Chief to be a little too long, although it actually lasted less than a second. But finally his feet touched the ground and slipped (the lunar soil turned out to be slippery). He would have lost his balance, had he not been quick enough to catch hold of a rung of the ladder. He then took a few steps and looked around.

Everything looked like he had imagined it to be, and at the same time it was different. There were no ragged steep cliffs. The terrain in this part of the lunar Ocean of Storms was smooth, and only in the north-east, barely rising above the horizon, were rounded outlines of some hills - probably belonging to the outer rim of crater Galileo, located a few kilometers from the landing site. He turned around and looked at his footprints. They were clearly imprinted in the lunar soil, except for the first two, which were a little blurred because of his having slipped. "That's a shame!" - thought he - "This is historic, isn't it? The first footprints left by Man on the Moon." And it was then that he really felt that he was on the Moon. Not understood it - he understood it all along - but really felt it. He felt that this footprint on the Moon, where there is no rain nor wind, would remain intact for millions of years, and that his body when he died would be preserved in the airless environment thousands of times better than the mummy of any of the pharaohs. None of the Egyptian pharaohs had been able to make his slaves build him such

atomb as the one built for the Chief Designer by Russianmoujiks .

He was on the Moon. The Moon Dream had come true. He suddenly felt fear.

He bentdown, picked up a stone. AMoon stone . He squeezed it in his gloved hand. Crumbs started to fall.They were falling slowly, very slowly. As if in a dream. In a moon dream. He suddenlyhad an urge to know how this stone felt to the touch. He bent down, collected an armful of stones and headed back to the capsule...

When back in the capsule he removed his helmet, he immediatelyfelt a pungent scent. Strange, alien scent of the moon dustthat covered the boots of his spacesuit in a thick layer. He removed the gloves, touched the stones. They weresoapy to the touch.Turned them in his hands. Theircolors varieddepending on the light's angle of incidence. And thatseemed to be it. He didn'tknow what else he could do. The excitement hadsubsided to be replaced by weariness. Post-operative seams werereaching with renewedintensity. He had a snack and immediately fell asleep...

8.

He woke up because it was hard to breathe.The instruments showedthat oxygen was running out. He was hearing a ringing sound inhis ears.

And it was then that he saw an apparition. The face of the interrogator, the one who had questioned him on that terrible night back in 1938, suddenly appeared in the porthole. "We know that you are a German spy anyway, but it would be better for you if you made a confession." - said the apparition in a very clear, distinct voice - "So, I am asking you for the last time: who are you working for?"

The Chief was somehow aware that all this was just a hallucination caused by oxygen starvation, and that the nearest security man was at least 380 kilometers away, if the astronomers were correct. And that's why he answered the interrogator with fearlessness and sincerity:

"I don't give a damn about your Germany! All my life I've been working for one man only - for myself!"

The apparition gnashed his teeth in rage and dissolved in the vacuum of space.

"However, it's time to end it all." - thought the Chief and started to don the spacesuit. He didn't want to die in a capsule that was as narrow as a casket.

9.

He was standing on the lunar plain and looking at the stars, which were just as distant as they were back on Earth. The capsule stood behind his back. "Face to face with the chasm of space, with

only the faithful machine around. A befitting death for a real man!" - thought the Chief and started to unlock the helmet...

... The helmet popped like a cork from a bottle of champagne.

The air puffed out through the collar of the spacesuit and condensed into a thick halo of mist around his head. The last thing that the Chief could see through the mist was the helmet, falling slowly, and slowly turning around, casting blinding reflections from the sun. The milky mist was quickly dimming behind a veil of blood - blood vessels in the eyes were bursting from the drop of pressure...

Space touched the head of the Chief and received him into the world of lifeless purity...

10.

...Headache. Darkness. A voice of a stranger: "He seems to be regaining consciousness..." The Chief opened his eyes. White ceiling. A face of a man looking down at him. A doctor. "So, how do you feel after the operation?" "Operation? Oh, yes, operation. Cancer... And what about the Moon? What about the one-way mission? A dream?! Must have been... Anesthesia... A dream, just a dream... Haven't made it, haven't made it, haven't really made it?! Must make it, must make it, must make it!

"He is hopeless..." - said somebody in a whisper...

11.

Extracts from official TASS announcements:

"On December 3, 1965, the Soviet Union conducted a launch of automated spaceprobe Luna-8. The purpose of this launch is the further development of elements of the system for soft landing on the Moon and scientific research...

.... On December 7 at 0 hours 51 minutes 30 seconds, Moscow time, Luna-8 reached the Moon in the vicinity of crater Galileo.

During the probe's approach to the Moon, an integrated functional test of all the systems supporting soft landing was carried out.

The test has demonstrated that the probe's systems operate nominally during all the phases of the landing on the Moon, except the final phase."

On January 16, 1966, all the national papers carried the official announcement about the death of the Chief Designer. The urn with the ashes was buried in the Kremlin wall.

On January 31, 1966, automated probe Luna-9 was launched. On February 3 it made the world's first soft landing on the Moon and transmitted to Earth a panoramic picture of the lunar surface, in which one could see a small lunar stone lying about a meter away from the spacecraft.

Soon after that, under the care of the Chief's successor, who was hurried along not by the Moon Dream but by pressure from

political leadership, a giant rocket for the two-way lunar mission exploded on the specially built launch pad that cost billions, and completely destroyed it. There was neither time nor money to build a new one. A decision was made not to send a manned mission. The Soviet Union quit the Moon Race.

On July 20, 1969, man's foot stepped on the surface of the Moon for the first time in history. That man was an American, the commander of Apollo 11. And it was this date that became the historic date. Nobody realized that the really historic date should have been not the 20th, but rather 24th of July, when Apollo 11 safely returned to Earth with live astronauts onboard.

For the consolation of the Soviet people, in 1970 the Soviet government used a low-capacity rocket to put on the Moon a robotic moon rover (a 'Lunokhod' in Russian), which was remotely controlled by ground controllers, and which, allegedly, was better than a live cosmonaut. At least, it didn't need to be brought back to Earth.

Americans visited the Moon six more times. The last mission was Apollo 17 in December 1972. Having realized that they had nobody to compete against, the Americans stopped the expensive and useless missions.

The last Soviet lunar probe to land on the Moon was Luna 23. This happened on November 6, 1974. After that, people left the Moon alone for decades.

One cannot fool history forever. The mechanism of the Space

Race, designed, built and started by the Chief designer, having been left without its master, became rusty and fell to pieces. The Moon Dream melted away, and it suddenly became evident that there were no material interests behind it. In the 20th century people were still not ready to approach the Moon from a practical angle.

They would never have been ready though, had it not been for that Space Race, which, at first glance seemed meaningless. A really innovative enterprise cannot generate profits in its initial phase, only losses. Only after the first steps have been made, a pecuniary interest comes into play, which makes such enterprise self-propelling. Pragmatic Americans would never have started space exploration by themselves. In order to draw them into this undertaking, History needed a country which was irrational to the point of absurdity, a country which would be willing to spend billions on space, even while its own people were starving. And History created such a country. A country which wouldn't have lasted a day with its incredible ways, had not some Laws of History, still unknown to us, protected that country from decay with its mysterious force field, until that country had fulfilled its Historical Mission.

And it may well be that the Chief Designer has managed to accomplish everything (or almost everything), not because he outsmarted History, but because he himself was an instrument in the hands of History. One can hardly expect that people will ever realize the true scale of what has happened. They will always believe that the greatness of this or that event is measured in

the numbers of the casualties, and that's why wars, revolutions, and reigns of bloodthirsty dictators will always seem to be more important than scientific discoveries and technological advances. And the very idea that a revolution, a war, and a reign of a bloodthirsty dictator were, in the hands of History, just preliminary phases in a technological project, just a means of creating a people who saw a flight into space as a breakthrough to Freedom, such an idea will always look ridiculous, and even sacrilegious.

In the meantime, mankind's coming out into space became the second greatest event in the history of life on Earth - the first such great event being the emergence of life from the ocean, where it had originated, onto the land. But could the first amphibians ever realize the true meaning of what they were about to accomplish, and where would all this eventually lead to? From their own perspective, they were just trying to adapt to the drying-up of their local puddle, which must have seemed to them an event of tremendous importance...

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"Well, now we seem to have completely lost our way. Where are we now?"

- "Just a moment, master!" -replied the moon rover's on-

board computer, while it was using the rover's antennas to interrogate navigation satellites suspended over the Moon in the libration points.

- "O.K. It's 9 degrees 8 minutes north, 63 degrees 18 minutes west."

- "Where on the Moon is that?" - asked the human.

- "In the vicinity of crater Galileo." - responded the machine.

- "Oh, my god, it's in the middle of nowhere! I can't even see any human footprints here. How could it be that for an entire century of lunar exploration by man nobody has ever been to this place?"

- "Just a moment, master!" - via a communication satellite, the rover's on-board computer was rummaging through the central lunar database. - "It is true that people have never been here, but nevertheless, this location is worthy of note. An automatic lunar probe Luna-8 landed somewhere around here 150 years ago."

- "Automatic probe? You mean, one of those things they used to launch back in the 20th century?"

- "That's correct."

- "So, what do they have here now? A conservation area? A museum?"

- "Nothing of the kind. The probe impacted and is believed to have been destroyed. Present-day historians don't consider this particular ancient landing site important. The tourists won't come here. This is nothing even remotely like the Apollo 11 landing

site, where they had to erect elevated viewing walkways for tourists to protect historic first footprints of Man on the Moon from being trampled. Take, for example, the Luna-9 soft landing location, which is one hundred kilometers south of here. It's the first-ever soft lunar landing. It is an officially recognized historic landmark, they even installed a meteoroid shield over it. But the tourists almost never go there. This whole area is too far from anywhere - 800 kilometers from the nearest base. It is sad to see how we fail to fully appreciate our historical roots..." - said the machine with a reproachful note in its synthesized voice. It believed that the first automatic lunar probes were the direct ancestors of the entire lunar machinery. The object of especial veneration for the moon rovers was the first Soviet Lunokhod .

- "Does that mean that no one has ever visited the Luna-8 impact site?" - asked the human.

- "No one ever." - responded the on-board computer sorrowfully.

The human was doing some quick mental arithmetic. The craze for genuine 20th century artifacts was relatively new. One could safely assume that nobody had yet thought about recovering Luna 8. It didn't matter if it had been destroyed on impact - there still must be some loose parts lying around. There was an antique shop at the base in the Korolev crater where he could sell them at a good price. He would be able to buy a space tug, setup his own business carrying supplies from the Moon to the space stations in

low Earth orbit, and, if he was really lucky, there was even a chance that by the end of his life he would be able to permanently settle on Earth...

- "O.K." - said the human to the rover - "Since you say it's somewhere around here, start searching for Luna 8."

It didn't take much searching. As soon as they climbed a low hill, they saw something glittering in the distance. "Magnify." - asked the human, looking at the rover's display. - "Magnify more... But this cannot be..."

At that moment he realized that he would certainly be able to spend the rest of his life on Earth...

Korolev, Moscow region, Former Soviet Union

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* Author's Note: English is not my native tongue and I'm afraid that my grammar and style are, at best, barely passable. I would like to thank Nancy Steisslinger (USA) for being kind enough to read the first English version and suggest some grammatical

corrections, which were incorporated in this second revision of the English version of the text. If you have any suggestions that might improve the style of this text, please do not hesitate to contact me at lazarevicha@online.ru.

If you liked this story, don't forget to check out A. Lazarevich's home page (<http://webcenter.ru/~lazarevicha>), where some of my other stories are available.