

The Peculiar Case of the Novus Crew Disappearance

Pedro Peterson (2022)

My name is Darrel Clark, and I was the first to settle a new planet, Novus, which involved a year long journey. Now before you say it—no Earth didn't explode and, no, we didn't wreck the planet. We set out to colonise a new planet because of overpopulation. Earth was just too small to sustain us all. So, that's the story of how we moved on from Earth—not what you were thinking, am I right? Well, I'm sorry if it didn't end in a giant battle in space that resulted in our planet being obliterated by a ray of death, but that's just what happened.

I wasn't alone of course, at least not initially. They sent up our ship with a team of five on board. We were the best of the best, with various qualifications and skill sets. I was supposed to be a scribe, writing down all sorts of stuff—from pictures that I took, to drawings and observations. But as you might imagine, being cooped up with four others for a year leads to people getting on each other's nerves. And you'd be right. At first everyone was excited to be the first people to colonise a new planet but, as the days rolled, by even the littlest of things would make people go ballistic. For instance, the biochemist, Eileen, left a package of food open, and Ross, another crew member, started yelling, telling her that she should be replaced with someone more competent. And that's just one example. It went on like that for months. The tension was becoming unbearable.

Don't get me wrong, there were good things about space, but the bad things couldn't be discounted.

It was all going well until that one fateful day.

The crew were fighting like always but something around us had changed. The black void that was space seemed different. Like something was missing. And that's when the fighting stopped.

Ross, who was the engineer on board, had gone to the bathroom and the rest of us were left to share theories on the recent discoveries we'd made. I went back to my notebook as the others continued their discussions. But Ross had been absent for quite a while, so Anne went to check on him. She knocked on the door and called his name but got no response. She grabbed the keys to the bathroom, fumbling to find the right one. She unlocked the door and pulled it open.

Ross was nowhere to be found.

'Did anyone see Ross leave?' Anne asked.

No one answered.

We searched everywhere, even on the outside of the ship, but Ross was nowhere to be found. We didn't talk for the rest of that day. Just thinking about it made me ill. I tried to stay calm, but I knew we were in all sorts of trouble.

We sat in silence in the engine room. No one dared to move. I glanced out the window at the stars that littered the vast blackness.

'What do you think happened to Ross?' The voice that broke the silence came from Jamie, the botanist.

'I don't know,' Eileen replied.

It was what we were all thinking.

A muffled sound came from the bathroom. Jamie crept over to the door and pushed it open. The toilet lid shut with a thunk as soon as light hit the room.

'What the hell was that?' Jamie yelled.

We all jumped to our feet and stared, waiting for him to go in. He gave in to the pressure and entered the bathroom. We heard a scream as he desperately tried to get out of the room. A black liquid-like creature clamped its arm around Jamie's ankle and pulled him backwards.

'Help!' Jamie yelled. He frantically tried to save himself. Anne ran to his aid, but it was no use. The creature stretched out its arm to trip Anne, then clutched onto her leg.

At this point I was looking around for anything that could ward off the creature.

Meanwhile, the creature had swallowed Jamie whole and was starting on Anne. She clawed at the tentacles wildly, trying to free herself from its grasp. Eileen grabbed my notebook and pegged it at the creature. The notebook disappeared into its tar-like body like a diver sinking into water.

Eileen charged and punched it in what looked like its mouth. It threw her against the wall, causing it to dent and unveiling exposed wires. The creature latched onto Eileen, who was unconscious, and engulfed her.

I grabbed a screwdriver on the table and stabbed the beast. It let out a screech and grabbed onto my arm. I pried its arm off me and grabbed onto the exposed wires. I shoved the wires into the creature, electrocuting it. Luckily, the suits we had were fire-proof and made of rubber. It screeched wildly then gave one last groan and dropped to the ground.

I fell back onto the hard metal floor and let out a sigh of relief before realising I was the only left on this journey. I had to make it to that planet all on my own.

I was sure I was going to die.

After I had cleaned up the ship it looked as good as new. That is, if a wild animal had been let loose. I managed to recover most of the equipment damaged in the commotion.

Unfortunately, I had lost some pages from my notebook and a thick layer of the creature's black goop coated a few of the remaining pages. I managed to scrape most of the substance off with a screw-driver but some remained. I figured, when I arrived at the planet, I could run some tests on the liquid and find out what that thing had been made of. It certainly didn't look like anything I'd seen before. Perhaps someone else out there had encountered the exact same creature, or maybe my crew had been the first to find it. Whatever it was, I made sure to describe its appearance in my notebook and to include a small diagram.

The ship was much quieter now that I was the only one there. But I worried for my sanity, being locked in a tiny metal coffin by myself. I stared outside the ship at my destination. I was approaching a planet covered in red dust and clouds. It wasn't Mars but it was similar and resembled a giant desert. There were bodies of water, but they were rare—that wouldn't be easy—and it would be better to drink the filtered water from the ship. Before the trip we had to study the planet, learn everything about it. The information was now drilled into my brain.

For the next week, I drew closer and closer to the planet, until eventually my craft entered the atmosphere. I strapped myself in my designated seat, ready for landing. The ship rocketed toward the planet's sandy dunes. I braced myself for a rough landing. With a thud the ship hit the ground, and everything was thrust forward, including myself.

After landing safely, I left the ship to set up the transmission device.

The planet was covered in sand and alien plants. The air was rough and hard to breath. I felt like I was getting a bucket full of sand blown into my lungs. I took a deep breath of the non-filtered oxygen. Wasting no time, I set up the transmitting device on the ground and pressed the button located on the side. It let out a series of beeps. Text displayed on the screen at the front, reading:

'Transmission received.'

Now all I had to do was wait for people to come. That meant I'd have to survive out here for at least a year. As I came back inside the ship, I could have sworn I saw a flash of black movement outside. I told myself that it was probably nothing. I didn't know just how wrong I was.