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One Small Step

The auditorium is full; all five thousand seats have people in them and another three hundred media people are set up along the walls and in the aisles. Looking out at the crowd is a very frightening sight. Never before has a single report on a research paper drawn such attention from outside the small academic research community that the researcher was part of, well not at the time of its first presentation to the world. My knees are trembling as I turn to Ali and ask, "Are you ready for this mate?" Ali gulps and nods his head, clearly as scared as I am and also as prepared to see it through.

The leaders of the academic community are being introduced to the audience as the Master of Ceremonies calls them out onto the stage and directs them to their seats so they can prepare to take notes as I present my research findings to the world. Although these presentations have always been open to the public, the small fifty person lecture theatre has usually been more than enough for the dozen or so people who turn up to listen. But when news of my research subject leaked, so many people registered with the committee to hear my presentation they decided to hire a major hall and sell tickets for the same value as a darned good meal for two at a top restaurant. I shake my head about how many people are prepared to pay so much just to hear me present my report.

The organisers have decided to milk this for all the media attention they can get and my financial sponsors are glad of being able to recoup some of their expenses as each media organisation represented today has paid the equivalent of two family cars just to be allowed in and record my presentation, no exclusive. Tonight Ali and I will be giving an exclusive interview to one media group and the decision on that will be based on who has lodged the highest bid immediately prior to my starting to talk. My sponsors are in the wings in a conference call discussing that right now. So far the highest bid would buy a very large commercial passenger jet. The attention is frightening. If I didn't have to get this message out I'd have walked away well before now.

It's time; the Master of Ceremonies is announcing my name and I walk out onto the stage and take my place at the podium. A professional media technician walks out and sits at the console to present the video files as I call for them. They'll be shown to the committee in small screens in front of them and to the audience on a huge screen displayed above my head on the stage. That screen is three times as big as I am. Taking a sip of water and a big breath I start my presentation, as I know I'll settle down once I start speaking and focusing on the report.

"Members of the Assessment Panel, Ladies, and Gentlemen. In this presentation on my Masters thesis and report I will present much evidence of my research and results in visual media format, thus the need for the technician on my right. The written references I'll be referring to are already copied in the files provided to you all. Copies of this report itself will be distributed at the end of this presentation as is the usual process for the university." I say with very little trembling. With greater confidence, I continue, "When I started to research this project I expected to find one of two possible results; prove certain claims of fraud to be true, or disprove them for all time. I didn't expect the

results I've found and was very shocked once I was able to confirm them. I have with me another presenter who'll be presenting the last part of the report as they helped me with the final information and research needed to complete this report." Turning the page I start to read the report summary that follows, while signalling to the technician to start his first file film.

The Report

"At the height of the Cold War the USA and the USSR entered into a major competition referred to as the Space Race. In this they competed by launching craft into space and having the crew do various tasks. Many people died in costly vehicle failures. The culmination of the competition was the landing of a crew on the moon and returning them to Earth safely. This was accomplished by the USA on July 20th 1969 with a crew of three in the space craft and two in the lunar landing module - Neil Armstrong and Edwin 'Buzz' Aldrin. As Commander Neil Armstrong exited the vehicle to first step on to the moon he uttered those immortal words 'That's one small step for man, one giant leap for mankind.' Both crew members then started a routine of collecting samples, conducting experiments, and filming various things - including each other.

Since that historic day much controversy has raged about the event being real or set up in a sound stage by NASA, as the conspiracy groups claim NASA didn't have the technology to do it then. Many have argued both sides of the issue and pointed to various technical aspects of the events shown in the film footage of the day to prove their points. Some of those points require great scientific knowledge to prove the validity of the moon rocks being from the moon. This hoax debate has raged for decades.

When I started this research I set out to prove or disprove the hoax theory by a thorough examination of the footage and records and seeking any other evidence I could, to confirm the landing or not.

The technical analysis of the film footage you've been watching during this report so far has proven inconclusive as the arguments for both sides are extremely valid and a full analysis of this old footage is inconclusive."

The technician ends the first video file and prepares the second to be shown when I call for it in a few minutes. I take another sip of water. I continue, "For many hours I went through the very thorough documentation that NASA has on the preparation and launch of the craft involved, it is most comprehensive and can easily have been faked. My next task was to interview those involved in the mission, both living space-crew and ground technicians. Their eyewitness accounts were all supportive of each other within the limits of acceptable variation to allow for their different task focus at the time and the dimming of memory for such a distant event. Again this information was inconclusive. I decided the only way to prove or disprove this was to arrange to visit the lunar landing site and to look at the physical evidence there as the crew claimed to have left many items of human manufacture, and their footprints."

A collective gasp from the audience as no one has returned to the moon since the 1970s and such a venture would be very expensive. Signalling to the technician to start the next recording I say, "After spending much time obtaining the required financial support from various research organisations I was able to organise a trip to the moon for myself in a private space craft. After the successful first space flight of "SpaceShipOne", I approached the people behind the company and offered the financial support of my other sponsors for a combined operation to build a variant designed to sustain the pilot and myself on a flight to the moon and back."

I pause for dramatic effect as the video footage shows the craft's launch and entry into space. I continue, "We filmed the whole voyage on a digital camera. But, as you can see, I'm only showing

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some snippets here. On reaching the moon we slowly over flew the site of the Apollo 11 landing and the other landings and filmed the materials left on the ground and the footprints in the dust." All gasp at seeing the equipment in the lunar surface below our craft. "We turned to land in the shadows near the Apollo 11 landing site. After a safe landing the pilot and I prepared to exit the craft to walk the surface and get closer footage of the relics." The file footage ends and the technician readies the third video file to play.

Shuffling the papers on the podium, I push them into a neat stack and put them to one side on the small table beside the podium. Lifting another small group of several sheets of paper, I place them on the podium ready to read as I say, "Now my special assistant will present the next part of this report." I turn and wave to Ali to walk out on to the stage as the technician starts the next bit of film footage.

Ali is not very tall, I'm of average height and he only comes up to my shoulder, and he takes small steps. Slowly he walks out with his face well hidden in the folds of the cowl he wears. He reaches the podium and steps to the side to place himself in the spot light, centre stage.

The audience gasps as the screen shows what looks to be a view of Apollo 11 landing on the moon, taken from the moon itself. Ali says, "This very old film footage of the Apollo 11 landing on the moon is a legacy from my grandfather." The audience turn to him in shock and gasp, and many leap to their feet, as he pushes his cowl back to show his green skin and three oval eyes. Smiling through his small toothless mouth, he says, "My friend here calls me Ali N because my real name is not pronounceable in your language and I come from a planet in the star system you call Wolf 359."

He stops speaking as pandemonium breaks out. Hundreds of people are staring in shock while hundreds more are trying to run screaming from the auditorium. Both Ali and I laugh.

They came here expecting a revelation, but none expected this.