

Burrowed Beacon

A Crisis of Alien Mind Control

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Chapter 1: The Quarry's Whisper

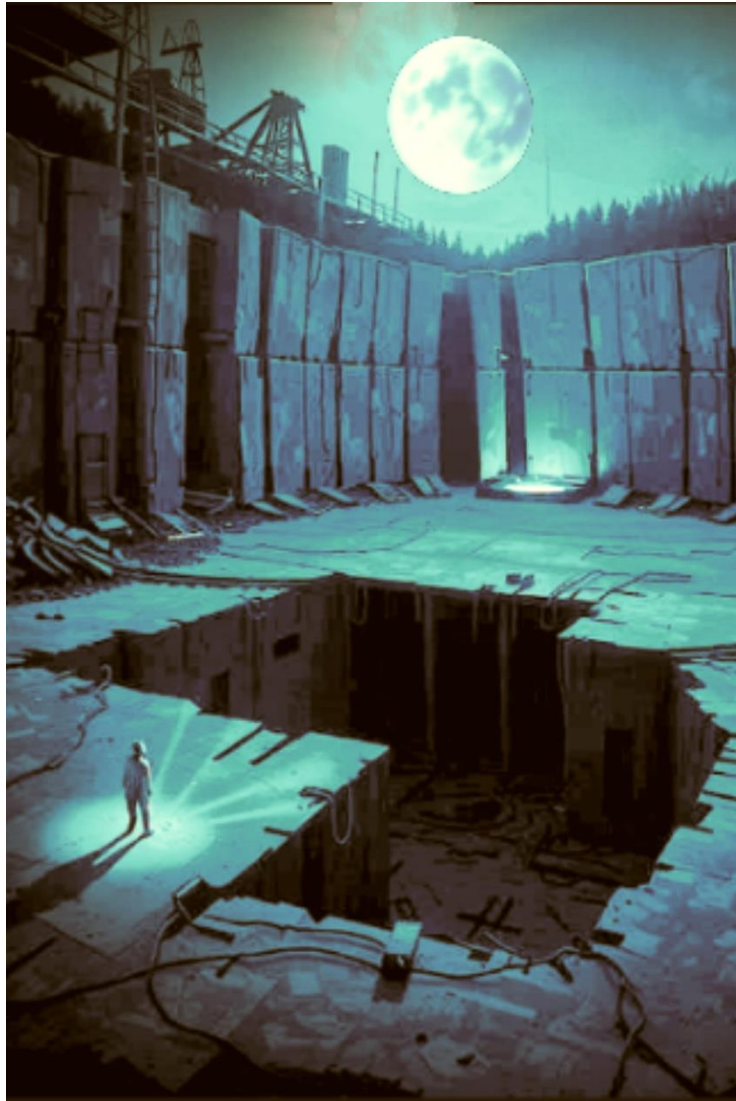
Cold Hollow, Maine, was a town that clung to life like a frostbitten finger to a glove—stubborn, but barely. The quarry at its heart had been dead for thirty years, its granite veins bled dry, leaving a jagged scar in the earth surrounded by pines that leaned inward as if guarding a secret. On a late October night, with the air sharp enough to cut, Jasper “Jaz” Cole crouched in the quarry’s shadow, her breath fogging around a scavenged radio receiver.

Jaz, sixteen and wiry, had the kind of face that could’ve been pretty if it wasn’t always smudged with grease or suspicion. Her hoodie was two sizes too big, stolen from a thrift store in Bangor, and her backpack held the essentials: a screwdriver, a half-eaten granola bar, and a notebook scrawled with circuit diagrams. She’d been squatting in an abandoned trailer on the town’s edge for three months, ever since her dad’s fists had gotten too heavy and her mom’s silence too loud. Cold Hollow was a nowhere place, but it had scrap—old mining gear, copper wire, stuff Jaz could sell to keep from starving.



Her radio, a battered relic from the quarry's office, hissed static as Jaz twisted its dials. She'd rigged it to a car battery, hoping to pick up a rogue station or maybe some trucker chatter to break the monotony. Instead, a low hum pulsed through the speaker, not static but something rhythmic, like a heartbeat underwater. Jaz frowned, adjusting the antenna—a coat hanger bent into a loop. The hum sharpened into a sequence of tones, high-low-high, repeating every ten seconds. It wasn't Morse code; Jaz knew that much from her dad's ham radio days. It felt... deliberate.

She scribbled the pattern in their notebook, the pencil shaking in her cold fingers. The quarry loomed above, its walls pitted and black, swallowing the moonlight. Jaz's head throbbed, a dull ache from the concussion she'd gotten last year when dad's bottle had clipped her temple. The doctors said it'd healed, but the headaches lingered, especially when she pushed too hard. Tonight, though, the pain felt different, like a needle threading through their skull.



The tones stopped. Silence pressed in, heavier than the dark. Then, a whisper—not from the radio but inside Jaz’s head, soft and alien: *Come closer*. Her heart stuttered. She yanked the headphones off, staring at the radio as if it could stare back. The quarry was empty, the pines still. But the whisper lingered, not words now but a pull, like a hook in their chest.

Jaz packed the radio, her hands trembling, and scrambled up the quarry’s edge. She didn’t believe in ghosts or God or any of that crap, but something about that hum wasn’t right. As she reached the dirt road, a dream flashed behind her eyes—a red sky, jagged spires, a city of glass that pulsed like a living thing. She stumbled, catching herself on a tree. The vision faded, leaving only the headache and a certainty: whatever was in that quarry wasn’t human.

Chapter 2: The Listener

Dr. Evelyn Marsh woke to the sound of static, her head pounding because she'd downed an entire bottle of bourbon the night before. The empty bottles on her kitchen counter told the story of many nights. At fifty, Evelyn looked like a woman who'd fought gravity and lost: graying hair in a messy bun, eyes bloodshot behind cracked glasses, a flannel shirt stained with coffee. Her cabin, a mile from Cold Hollow's center, was a shrine to her past—NASA plaques on the walls, a telescope gathering dust, books on astrophysics stacked like tombstones.



The static came from her old shortwave radio, a relic from her days at SETI, before the Mars mission went to hell and took her career with it. She'd been part of the team that lost a rover to a glitch nobody could explain, a failure that cost billions and her reputation. Now she was a pariah, scraping by on disability checks and the occasional lecture gig nobody attended. The radio was her last tether to the stars, a habit she couldn't quit.

She shuffled to desk, wincing as her bad knee protested. The static wasn't random; it carried a pattern, a sequence of tones that made her skin prickle. High-low-high, every ten seconds. She grabbed a notepad, jotting the rhythm, her scientist's brain waking despite the hangover. It wasn't a local broadcast—too clean, too precise. She tuned the dial, narrowing the frequency. The tones grew clearer, and for a moment, she swore she heard a voice, not in English but in something older, like a chant from a forgotten tongue.

Evelyn's pulse quickened. She hadn't felt this alive since her NASA days, when she'd scanned the cosmos for signals that never came. This was different, not a satellite or a prank. She checked her equipment, confirming the signal's strength. It was local, originating within a few miles. Her eyes drifted to the window, where the quarry's silhouette loomed against the dawn. Cold Hollow had no radio towers, no tech to produce a signal like this. But the quarry... it was a black hole, a place even the town's drunks avoided.

She poured coffee, ignoring the tremor in her hands. The signal looped, relentless. Then, a vision hit her—not a memory, but a dream she hadn't had yet. A red planet, spires piercing a crimson sky, a city that breathed. She gasped, dropping the mug. It shattered on the floor, coffee pooling like blood. The vision faded, but the signal didn't. Evelyn stared at the radio, her scientist's skepticism warring with a primal fear. Whatever was broadcasting wasn't just out there—it was in her head.