

It had been two hours since their landing on the moon. Roosevelt was alone in the exit chamber impatiently watching the needle on the pressure gauge drop to zero. He no longer heard the pump sucking air out of the chamber and was eager to leave. "The gauge reads less than one half PSI," he spoke to the microphone inside his pressure suit. "Let's get on with this."

"Yes sir," responded the boat's captain, speaking to him from the other side of the closed inner hatchway. "In a moment the air pressure will be low enough for you to open the outer hatch."

Reaching up, Roosevelt grasped the door lock and began turning the large metal wheel counter-clockwise. The stiffness of his suit made this more difficult than expected. As he continued turning the wheel, the mechanism retracted pins holding the hatch securely into the hatchway. "The latch pins are free; I am going to open the hatch. Here goes." Roosevelt's voice trailed off as he gave the hatch two strong pulls. On the second attempt, the hatch swung silently open on its massive axle. The last traces of air inside the chamber carried a small flurry of dust out the ether boat.

Roosevelt climbed through the hatchway and then stopped on top of the boat when he saw the lunar surface and pitch black sky. If his intelligence was correct, the French fleet never made this stop. They instead left Earth directly for Mars. Roosevelt's advisors, on the other hand, recommended the American fleet practice a moon landing. Even if they wouldn't be the first to Mars, they would stand a better chance of successfully landing on the planet.

"Bully!" exclaimed Roosevelt over his voice circuit, "Signal the fleet that I'm about to climb down." Roosevelt climbed stiffly down the exterior ladder and halted at the bottom rung. The lunar surface was flat and gray, broken only by the occasional crater and jumble of rocks. Beyond was a tall mountain range with peaks and shadows far more jagged than any he had ever seen. Hanging above the mountain range was bright blue Earth. And nearby shone an orange star, a star Roosevelt knew to be Mars. They had just taken the first step in their long expedition to Mars.

The ether boats of the combined British and American fleet were parked before him. Each boat reflected the sun so intensely it made Roosevelt squint. The ether boats were Holland's submarines outfitted by Edison with Martian machinery left over from the war. Even though Holland and Edison did not fully understand how the machinery functioned, it had converted the submarines into vessels capable of traveling beyond the Earth. The sight of the ether boats on this alien world was a testament to their staggering achievement.

Gripping the ladder with only one hand, Roosevelt extended his right leg and pressed his boot upon the lunar surface. "The ground appears to be safe to walk on. So I'm going to step off the boat and onto the lunar surface."

It was easy for Roosevelt to move about in the moon's weak gravity, even though his modified diving suit weighed nearly 200 pounds on Earth. Roosevelt walked as far away as his air hose allowed before turning to face his ether boat, the San Juan. Then, as if the entire fleet could hear him, Roosevelt proclaimed, "I, Theodore Roosevelt, claim the moon as a territory of the United States. Our presence on this celestial world sends an unmistakable message to the Martians who attacked us - we are coming for you!"