

# EVELYN'S STORY



Drew Wagar

Dedicated to Evelyn Faye Roy

6<sup>th</sup> August 2008 – February 26<sup>th</sup> 2020

*Exploratio, ad astra*

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## Thanks

This story was created in memory of a young girl who touched the hearts of many people.

It exists because of the love of her family and friends, and started with a message left on the Elite Dangerous video game forum; a space game of endless exploration in a real scale galaxy. There were many expressions of support and sympathy from the Elite Dangerous community worldwide.

The cover artwork was provided by Antony Taylor.

Evelyn had a great love of exploration and science; she will be remembered for it.

This is her story.

## Evelyn's Story

By Drew Wagar

*Some stories start and stop. Others are never quite finished. Some may be put on hold for days, weeks, even years or centuries. But, just occasionally, another chapter is added to a story that has long been thought to be complete. To do that, one must push beyond the boundaries, travel out and explore the darkness and throw light upon mysteries thought to be unsolvable.*

*Such a story awaits you, another tale of the void between the distant stars. Another legend to be told and a heroine to remember...*



A bright pulsing light cast sharp but swiftly moving shadows.

There was a brief actinic flash. A ship appeared in the darkness.

It was a deep space exploration vessel, used to flying through the endless night of space, its ship class somehow appropriate for the strange depths of the void.

A Krait Phantom.

The ship was triangular in overall shape, with a sharply pointed prow and two long range antennas jutting out from its flanks. Thrusters flared on the ship's exterior, adjusting its course. The paintwork of the vessel was scored and tarnished, clearly a ship that had been travelling for many months.

A faint red light shone through the cockpit windows.

Two people could be seen within, both dressed in the mandatory flight suits common to space travellers. Even out here, far from the core worlds, space was dangerous. A hull breach or a cockpit failure and all your air would be gone in seconds. A flight suit, with the mandatory RemLok survival mask, would give you a chance to stay alive.

'Secure from jump.'

Commander Sebastian Knowles didn't seem to be listening. He was staring out of the cockpit windows of his ship, the *Longshot*.

'Never gets old,' he said. 'Does it?'

The ship was pointing directly at the flickering pulsing light. It was incredibly bright, but so small as to be almost invisible, yet the two vast spiralling beams of energy blasting out from either side of it gave away its identity. A spinning remnant of a long dead star; a pulsar.

'It's very pretty, Seb,' said his companion. Jenna Levalle was sitting across from him, checking the instruments. 'Just make sure we don't get too close while you're admiring it.'

'It's like a gem,' Seb said. 'So small and yet...'

'...more than capable of ripping this ship and everything aboard into atomic shards,' Jenna replied. 'Beautiful, but deadly. You get too close to that exclusion zone and we're history. No one will know what happened to us, we'll just be another statistic in the Universal Cartographics database, under the category of 'missing, presumed stupid'.

Seb gave her a look and adjusted the course, angling the ship away from the glorious sight outside.

'I know, I know,' he muttered. 'We're thousands of light years further out than anyone has gone before. We're on our own.'

'Not even the Thargoids would bother coming out here,' Jenna said, with a grin. 'This western quadrant is still mostly unexplored. You wanted to make a name for yourself. Nearest ship...'

She checked the instruments.

'...is so far away I can't even get a confirmation on where it is.'

Seb smiled. 'So no one has ever been here before,' he said, leaning back in his pilot's seat. 'That's something right? In the whole history of humanity, we're the first to see this. Worth remembering that.'

Jenna looked at him.

'You're such a romantic,' she scolded, only half seriously. 'While you're dreaming away, I'll do the science shall I?'

Seb nodded. 'Do your thing.'

Jenna fired up the system scanner and began taking readings. Seb watched the holofac images out of the corner of his eye as she tuned the scanners to different frequencies, making an inventory of the different worlds in the system.

'Two giants,' she said. 'A few icy worlds, asteroid belts. Nothing too exciting.' She continued scrolling through the frequencies, making adjustments to the instruments. 'Hang on a minute...'

Seb looked across from her, catching the change of tone in her voice.

'What is it?'

'Got to be an error,' Jenna replied. 'I'll rescan, hang on.'

Her fingers flickered around the holofac displays, swiftly changing parameters. The three dimensional displays shifted and moved. Seb could see the frown on Jenna's face was deepening.

'You going to tell me?' he asked. 'Or do I have to guess?'

Jenna shook her head. 'The scanners are showing a USS.'

'Unidentified signal source?' Seb asked. 'Out here? But there's nothing out here, we're supposed to be the first...'

'Supposed to be,' Jenna replied, squinting at the displays. 'Nope, there's definitely something there.'

'Could it be...' Seb swallowed. 'Aliens? Thargoids? Guardians? Maybe even something else, something new?'

Jenna shook her head. 'No, don't get too excited. It reads as a human signal, just announcing that it's there. Like a beacon.'

'Show me.'

Jenna swept her arm out and the holofac display moved across in front of Seb. He could see a targeting reticle marking out one of the small ice worlds, the closest one to the pulsar.

'It's on the surface,' he said, peering at the image.

'Yeah,' Jenna said. 'Nothing else down there of interest as far as I can see. Just your average icy rock in the middle of nowhere.'

'You can't tell me anything else?'

'Not from up here,' Jenna said. 'If you want to find out what it is we'll have to land and use the SRV.'

The SRV, or surface reconnaissance vehicle, was packed up in the hold of the ship. It was rarely used; there were few things that required an exploration ship to make planet-fall other than stocking up on the odd mineral or making repairs.

Seb nodded.

'I'm getting what looks to be a signal of some kind on top of the beacon,' Jenna said. 'Listen...'

Jenna gestured for the audio system to pick up the feed from the scanners. A computerised voice spoke, repeating the same words, over and over again.

*Echo Foxtrot Romeo. Echo Foxtrot Romeo. Echo Foxtrot Romeo...*

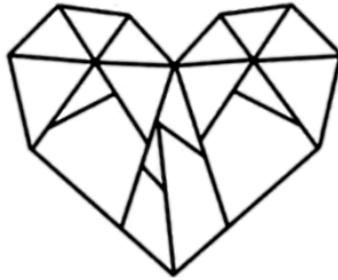
'What does that mean?' Seb asked.

'Sounds like a call sign to me,' Jenna said. 'E.F.R. Other than that, I don't know...'

'This is just weird,' he said. 'We're thousands of lightyears further out than anyone is supposed to have gone. Doesn't make sense that anyone could be out here before us! We should have heard about them...'

'Looks like they did though,' Jenna replied, with a shrug.

'Finish scanning the rest of the system,' he said with a heavy sigh. 'There goes our first discovered bonus. I'll plot us a course. Let's see what it is.'



The *Longshot* drifted down from orbit, gliding down from space above the surface of the icy world. The terrain below the ship looked completely unremarkable; craters, valleys, rills and empty frozen plains, nothing the pair of explorers hadn't seen a hundred times before.

The faint but steady beep of the tracking computer was different though. Something was there, Seb could see the range indicator counting downwards.

'Altitude is good,' Jenna called out. 'Gravity looks to be pretty marginal, surface might be unstable, keep a look out.'

Seb toggled the undercarriage controls and a faint thump echoed through the ship.

'Nice and easy...' he said, his hands tightening on the flight controls. The *Longshot* slowed, thrusters firing to keep it level, blasting up clouds of icy particles around it. The ship nosed down, bounced gently and came to rest.

'Not bad,' Jenna observed. 'You're getting better.'

'You're never going to forgive me for that business back on Achenar 3, are you?'

Jenna shivered and wagged her finger at him. 'We agreed not to talk about that. Ever again.'

'I only crashed... a bit...'

'Doing a victory roll, flight assist off, on a high gee planet,' she replied. 'We're lucky to still be alive.' She glared at him. 'You will never do that again.'

Seb chuckled.

'You happy to stay here while I check it out?'

'Be my guest,' Jenna replied. 'I hate those cramped little mud crawlers. Give me space flight over driving on the ground any day of the week. I'll monitor you from here.'

Seb jabbed his chest harness release and got to his feet. The gravity was marginal, hardly noticeable at all. His magboots activated automatically and clunked down onto the decking. He trudged to the back of the bridge and made his way down into the hold of the ship.

The SRV was packed away there, looking rather insect like with its eight wheels bunched up and its six articulated arms folded away. He clambered aboard and pulled himself into the driving seat, flipping switches to activate the onboard systems. As he did so the arms and wheels unfurled.

'Drop me down!' he called.

The hangar doors below opened with a rumble, showing the icy surface of the moon underneath the ship. A moment later the SRV was lowered down, landing with a gentle thump.

*Low Gravity Warning!*

Seb pushed the throttles forward and steered the SRV out and away from the ship.

'All clear,' he called.

Jenna's voice was attenuated by the radio connect.

'Looking good,' she called. 'Steer course 143 degrees, target is about 2 kilometres away.'

'Got it.'

Seb turned the SRV to the right and continued on.

The cold frozen landscape about him was relatively flat, with just a little undulation to test the suspension of the SRV. A few large boulders of ice caused him to make the odd detour, but he was able to keep a pretty straight course.

Above, the stars were moving. Seb could see them change position as he watched.

'This little planet has quite a rotation speed,' he said.

'About forty minutes,' Jenna replied. 'Amazing it holds together really.'

The scanner showed he was closing on the location.

'Coming up on it now,' he called.

Ahead, Seb could see the rim of a crater growing closer. He slowed the SRV as he reached the edge, leaning forwards to get a better look.

'See anything?' Jenna's voice called.

The interior of the crater was dark, it was impossible to see anything. Seb tried the headlights, but they didn't help a great deal.

'Nothing yet,' he replied. 'Switching on the night-vision.'

He toggled another switch and the illumination of the cockpit faded away, replacing the view with a computer enhanced schematic of the landscape ahead.

'...there's something there, maybe a cargo canister, or a pod or something.'

'Be careful.'

He slowly rolled the SRV down into the crater, keeping a wary eye out for unseen holes or chasms. The floor of a crater could be dangerous to a small craft like his.

There was an object there for certain. As he closed the remaining distance he could make out it was indeed a cargo canister, an old one by the look of things. A third of it was buried in the icy surface, with a small antenna affixed to the other, pointing upwards into space. It was sitting perfectly upright.

'It definitely human,' Seb replied. 'Just scanning it now.'

*Scanning – Target contents : Improvised Components and Mechanical Scrap*

'What is it?'

Seb shrugged. 'Still no idea, reads as components. Looks safe. I want to bring it onboard.'

'Onboard?' Jenna argued. 'What do you mean, it looks safe? You have no idea what it is!'

'There's no radiation,' Seb said. 'We can't just leave this mystery unsolved. We're explorers, right?'

'If we get eaten by killer alien bugs I'm blaming you.'

Seb chuckled and activated the cargo scoop. Within a few moments the strange canister was secured aboard and he was making his way back to the ship.



'Well,' Jenna said. 'You were right. No idea what it is. It's old though, been in space a while.'

The canister had been secured in the hold of the *Longshot*, alongside the SRV.

'Looks like it been cobbled together out of bits,' Seb said. 'It's a cargo canister, but that antenna is off a ship, and the scan shows it's got all sorts of components inside.'

'Gonna open it?'

Seb looked at her. He nodded.

'Ready?'

There was an access port on the side of the pod. Seb prodded at it and was rewarded with a small holofac display appearing before him. The word 'UNLOCK' was clearly visible.

Jenna moved slightly behind Seb as he gestured at the display.

With a faint hiss the pod cracked open.

A blast of icy mist flooded out, causing Seb and Jenna to step back.

As it cleared they could see that the inside of the pod was filled with dozens of small sample containers.

Seb stepped forward, peering in to get a better look.

'It's a ... catalogue of stuff,' he said. 'Soil samples, atmospheric readings, planetary data, all sorts of stuff. Someone has done a massive exploration mission out here...'

'But who?' Jenna demanded. 'And why does nobody know about this? There's nothing in Universal Cartographics about it... like you said, we're supposed to be the first out here.'

'We're not though,' Seb said. 'Let's find out who beat us. There's a commtab here, look...'

He reached out to touch it, but as he did the holofac projection expanded, brightening, casting an image before them.

The display flickered for a moment and then steadied into the form of a young woman. She was tall and thin, seeming to be looking at them with a pair of distinctive bright green eyes framed by a pair of old fashioned gold-rimmed circular spectacles. Fair skin with a dash of freckles completed a pretty and friendly face framed by short, spiky and ruffled strawberry blonde hair.

She was looking aside, fiddling with some controls out of sight of the camera.

'... is it working? Computer? Record it. Come on... oh... it is! Ha, cool.'

The woman looked into the camera, seeming to gaze directly at Seb and Jenna.

'Right then, I suppose you're going to want to know what this is all about, right?'

Seb and Jenna looked at each other.

The woman continued.

'If you're listening to this, it means you found the pod. Bet you weren't expecting that, eh? Sorry if it came as a bit of a surprise. So much stuff to tell you, you won't believe this, bet you won't... I mean, who would right? Strange stuff happens deep in space!'

The woman grinned at the recorder, running a hand through her hair.

'Sorry... got carried away, so exciting!' she said. 'So... what will you want to know first... Oh! Me, yeah! I suppose I ought to introduce myself. I'm Evelyn, Evelyn Faye, last name is Roy. Don't forget that... I have a favour I'll ask you later on...'

Seb touched the commtab, pausing the holofac recording.

'Evelyn Faye Roy?' he asked. 'Heard of her?'

Jenna shook her head. 'No, but that doesn't mean much.'

'She must be somebody...'

Jenna was already checking the computers, quickly scanning through some text that appeared as she searched.

'Evelyn Faye Roy,' Jenna read. 'She's listed as an explorer, owns a Dolphin class ship called the *Calgary Dawn*, last recorded location was the Eulexia system in 3303... looks like she went on some kind of exploration trip, but there are no subsequent records. Never been heard from since. She's listed as missing/lost.'

'She's been out exploring for three years?' Seb asked. 'in a Dolphin?'

'Seems that way.'

'Why?' Seb asked.

'Well, let the girl talk,' Jenna said, gesturing at the paused recording. Seb tapped the screen.

'You'll probably have been pretty surprised to find this pod out here,' Evelyn said. 'I had to cobble it all together from bits and pieces – was a bit fiddly. Not everything went to plan you see. I've no idea who's going to see this message, or who you are... Hello by the way! But I need your help.'

Jenna and Seb exchanged another glance. Evelyn continued.

'I've been out here, exploring for almost three years,' Evelyn continued. 'Been looking for something... found it, but ran into a bit of a problem. You probably noticed the pulsar in this system? I had to do a close range scan as part of my mission, got caught in the exclusion zone, damaged my ship a bit... well... quite a lot really. Fixed most of it, you should have seen all the wiring I had to sort! But the shock of hitting the pulsar blew out the nav computer memory...'

'That's not good,' Jenna said, her face going pale.

'Can't use synthesis to fix it, so I can't store any new data,' Evelyn said. 'Worse, I lost all the previous nav fixes too, my galaxy map is dead... and out here that means... well, I'm a bit lost. Don't know where home is right now. It's just me and the stars.'

'Stuck out here?' Seb said, drawing a gasp.

On the holofac recording, Evelyn leant forward. 'Now, don't be worrying about that. I'm more than happy being out here, there's more to see than can ever be seen, right? I'll make manual notes of all my discoveries, just like in the olden days. No need to come looking for me, I'm

alright and I'll find my way back home in my own good time. I've got my ship, more food than I'll ever be able to eat and hey... I've got Henrie for company...'

'Henrie?' Jenna asked. 'What's she talking about?'

On the holofac, the camera panned away for a moment, revealing the sight of Evelyn's ship's console. On top of that was a small fluffy ball. As they watched the ball wriggled around and purred. They could just make out two big soulful eyes.

'What is that?' Jenna asked, peering closer. 'It's cute...'

Seb grinned at her. 'It's a trumble. I hope this Evelyn lady knows how to look after it. They have voracious appetites, they'll eat anything.'

The camera panned back to Evelyn.

'But, since you've found this recording, I do have a favour to ask of you,' she said, with a grin. 'If you're willing, please take the data scan of this system back home for me. I don't care about being credited with any other discovery, just this one. Just this system, that's all – I want my name on it. Will you do that for me? In this pod I've left all the other records I've accumulated so far, there should be about half a billion credits worth there now, that's all yours if you do this. That's all I'm asking, just credit me as having discovered this one system... yeah?'

Seb reached out and paused the recording again.

Jenna was already poking around in the pod.

'She's right,' Jenna said. 'None of these findings have an owner's mark on them, we can claim them all. Don't know how much they're worth, but she's probably not wrong; there's years of research here. We're rich, Seb. Rich!'

Seb was looking back at the holofac image of Evelyn.

'Why does she want to be credited with just this system?' he asked.

'Who cares?' Jenna replied. 'She's welcome to it. It's just a pulsar, a few orbiting rocks. What does it matter?'

'Got to be a reason,' he said, pressing the unpaue button.

Evelyn smiled at the camera.

'So...' she said. 'I bet you want to know why, right? Why this system? Why is it so important?'

'Yes...' Seb whispered. 'Come on... tell me...'

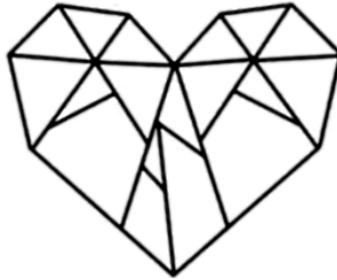
Evelyn's grin grew mischievous. 'Well... you'll have to take the data back for me. I've recorded another part to this message. Once you upload it to Universal Cartographics back home and give me the credit, it will unlock. Then I'll tell you. Fly safe, Commander!'

Evelyn winked.

The recording stopped and the holofac transmitter cut out.

'Cheeky girl!' Jenna said, looking around at Seb. 'What we going to do?'

'For half a billion credits?' Seb asked. 'What do you think I'm going to do?'



It took them several months of long duration hyperspace jumps to get back to the bubble, the core worlds of humanity, thousands of light years across the galaxy. Finally the last few jumps were completed and the *Longshot*, its paintwork scarred and ruined by the long distance, materialised in the Eulexia system and set course for the nearest Coriolis space station.

'Not been to this system before,' Jenna said, stifling a yawn and activating the scanners.

'Me neither,' Seb agreed, looking at the readouts. 'Space station is called Mad J Wagar's; what kind of nutter was he I wonder?'

'Some expedition back in the 3260s apparently,' Jenna said, reading the system map description. 'Ancient history. It's where our mysterious Evelyn left from though. This is where she started out. Hopefully we'll find out what was going on.'

Seb guided the *Longshot* towards the station, flicking on the comms and asking for docking permission. It felt odd to be back amidst the crowded space-lanes again, jostling with other ships for position. The Krait eased its way through the docking tunnel and landed with a thump on a nearby pad.

He called for the repair and refuel options, watching as the automechs deployed and began servicing the ship.

'Ready?' he asked.

'Do it already!' Jenna chided.

Seb called up the Universal Cartographics link from the holofac menu before him. Within seconds the facilities at the space station inventoried the data aboard the pod and presented him with a summary.

*Remote system discovered. Assign tag to CMDR Evelyn Faye Roy?*

Seb gestured at the 'Confirm' button.

*Tag confirmed. 478,543,566 credits have been transferred to your account.*

Seb let out a breath. Jenna looked across at him.

'She was telling the truth,' she breathed.

'Never doubted it,' Seb replied. 'Something told me she was straight up about all this... but now... I need to know... why?'

Seb had kept the commtab they'd found in the pod with him. He activated it and synced it with the Universal Cartographics data base.

After a moment, it pinged.

Seb and Jenna watched as the holofac image of Evelyn appeared in the air before them.

This time she looked a little different, her eyes wide, her cheeks flushed. It seemed that she had been crying just before she'd made the recording. They saw her wipe at her eyes before turning to the camera.

'I'm so grateful,' she said. 'I don't know who you are, or what you've been through to do this for me. All I know is that if you're watching this recording you've done what I asked. You've taken my message home for me. That's astonishing. You're amazing. So thank you so much!'

Evelyn blew her nose on a handkerchief.

'Sorry,' she said. 'Should have composed this a bit better really. I guess this might be a momentous occasion for some folks. Anyway ... I'd better explain what this is all about.'

Seb and Jenna watched as Evelyn perched herself against the console in her ship.

'Long ago,' Evelyn said. 'Nearly three and a half thousand years, back on old Earth, Sol system there was a story. Some said it was the greatest story ever told. This was long before we had space flight, long before technology really, civilisation was nothing like it is today. Humanity was just alone on that single planet. There was a man, he made some extraordinary claims, some called him a prophet, others believed he was the Son of God himself...'

Jenna looked as if she were about to say something, but Seb waved her to silence.

'When he was born, people came to see him from far away,' Evelyn continued. 'To mark his birth. The story told of a star that appeared in the sky and guided these travellers to him. Most people thought it was all myths and legend, but I wasn't so sure. The star was described as 'new', appearing in the sky for this very purpose. I wondered if it could be real, so I set out to track it down...'

Jenna interrupted Evelyn's explanation.

'Have you any idea what she's talking about?'

Seb nodded. 'My grandsire talked about this, it's an old earth religion, I can't remember the name, I'll look it up later, but I remember this story... shhhh!'

'...There were lots of theories, conjunctions of planets, comets... you name it,' Evelyn said. 'But I never thought they fitted the description. There was only one phenomena that did, so I went

looking for it. You've been there, it's the system you found the pod in. It's a pulsar today, but I checked it out, and there's no doubt it's the right place. You see... about eight thousand years ago that pulsar was a main sequence star at the end of its life. It went supernova, blasting out into space as much energy as the whole galaxy for a few days. Must have been amazing to see at close range! That energy travelled across space for thousands of years arriving at Earth three and a half thousand years ago, lighting up the sky for those travellers to see, a new star in the sky.'

Seb gasped.

On the holofac, Evelyn smiled.

'Look it up,' she said. 'And you'll understand why it's so important. Thank you for letting me put my name on it. I've got to go now, there's so much more to learn, so much more to see... fly safe.' Evelyn paused and then waved at the camera. 'I'll see you out there.'

The holofac faded away.

'I don't believe it,' Seb said, his voice low. 'She found it. She put her name on it.'

'Found what?' Jenna demanded. 'I don't get it. What did she find?'

Seb turned to her, his mouth open and his face wearing an astonished expression. He shook his head in wonder.

'Evelyn found the Star of Bethlehem,' he whispered. 'It's hers.'



It was going to take a week or so for the repairs to the *Longshot* to be finished. Seb and Jenna could see the ship being fixed up by the automechs from the comfort of the station bar, overlooking the docking area.

'Thoughts on what we're going to do next?' Jenna asked.

Seb looked wistfully out of the windows, past the ship and through the docking entrance, out at the star spangled backdrop of empty space.

'Sort of want to go exploring again,' he said. 'Follow in her footsteps, you know?'

Jenna nodded, taking a sip of her drink. 'I know what you mean. Someone like that, pretty inspirational right? Wish I could meet her. She must have been pretty smart to figure all that stuff out.'

Seb nodded thoughtfully and turned his drink around in his hand before raising it up, clinking glasses with Jenna.

'Here's to you Evelyn,' he said. 'Wherever you are.'



*There are many mysteries left to uncover, out in the endless stretches of space. Those that go in search of truth have to be brave, fearless, and face the uncertainty with courage and fortitude.*

*In blazing such a trail, there are many risks, but those who do so gain the admiration of all, and are never forgotten by those who know.*

*A galaxy of wonders awaits those with a kind heart, a fierce mind and a brave spirit.*

*That's how you become an Elite explorer.*

*That's Evelyn's story.*