

Ares Life & Casualty

The CEO of Ares Life & Casualty played the vid-mail he planned on sending to all employees.

“This month marks the twenty-fifth anniversary of our company founded by George Ares in 2096. I want to take this opportunity to recognize his remarkable foresight, ingenuity and dedication to create a company that was unique in the industry.

“First a little background about our founder. As a boy, George was always reaching for the stars. His early interest was astronomy and his prize possession was a telescope. He turned that hobby into a college degree by working as a lab assistant at the University of Illinois where he earned degrees in astronomy, biology, and chemistry, eventually completing a PhD in astronomy. NASA then recruited him for a postdoctoral program in *Space Science: Formation of Habitable Planets* where he became interested in astrobiology: the origin, evolution and future of life in the universe. He spent ten years searching for habitable environments in our solar system and on planets around other stars that identified many possibilities but nothing tangible. Always hungry for a new challenge, George left NASA to run his own company which provided consulting services to governments and private enterprises interested in space exploration. After a long and rewarding career, he sold the company and served on various boards and not-for-profits until at age 60, he decided he needed a new challenge.

“At the time, the number of astronauts and the size of International Space Stations was increasing geometrically as the League of Unified Nations teamed up with industry to create more ISS, or international stepping stones as they were called, in the pursuit of interplanetary travel. The LUN built space stations housing dozens, then hundreds of astronauts and support staff. SpaceX joined the effort and developed more cost-effective means of transport so that

weekly shuttles made their way from station to station and back to Earth. It wasn't long before the tech and entertainment industries banded together to develop even larger stations for the travel industry. Fantasia Island was the grand-daddy of Low Earth Orbitals visited by thousands of people for a unique vacation in a low gravity environment. Now there are dozens of LEO celestial amusement parks and a few on Earth's moon.

“Although space travel was relatively safe, the developers recognized the need for insurance products for liability and accidental death or injury to tourists. They reached out to George to head up a company to underwrite the risks arising from loss of life and property. And that's how Ares Life & Casualty was formed. George hired the first astro-actuaries as our fledgling company developed appropriate premiums for insuring the various risks associated with running space-age amusement parks.

“We've come a long way since George took on that challenge. There's competition from other consortiums but none have the breadth of experience or products that distinguish ALC as the leader in our industry. It is with great pride and appreciation of your individual efforts that I mark this anniversary in honor of our founder by the unveiling of the George Ares Memorial Park. You will receive more details shortly with the plan for attending the ceremony.

“Thanks again for your contributions.”

Satisfied with the result, the CEO said, “Send,” and the video flooded the inboxes of all ALC employees. He swiveled his chair and looked out the expansive office window facing the massive mountain in the distance. How apt, he thought, that George's surname was Ares, another name for Mars. The CEO followed the outline of the fence guarding the memorial in the shadow of the Olympus Mons, the tallest mountain on Mars.

Several hours later the Chief Human Resource Officer knocked on his door and entered the office. The CEO motioned to one of the leather club chairs. “Have a seat. What’s the feedback on my vid-mail?”

The CHRO sat down and stretched his legs. “The video was definitely good for morale. I expect most employees will show up for the ceremony.”

“Have all the managers urge their direct reports to attend and instruct them to check all offices and work stations on the day of the ceremony to round up any stragglers. I’m hoping for near 100% turnout.”

“I’ve already started. As a fallback, I’ve also asked the managers to report any no-shows to security.”

The CEO examined a schematic of the ALC complex on his screen that showed the staffing levels for each department with total headcount and a red number in parenthesis. “The number of infiltrations looks sufficient to achieve our objectives. What’s the latest projection for the entire Mars settlement?”

The CHRO massaged his neck muscles. “We expect minimal casualties, well within plan.”

The CEO murmured, “Mm-hmm,” then glared at the CHRO and said, “The transition to slave camp will commence when all adult citizens are herded to the mine entrance behind the memorial. Our transport ships are orbiting, waiting for my signal to land. I expect to load the first shipment of precious metals in thirty days. See to it.”

The CHRO stood up, stretched his back and walked out of the office without looking back. The CFO said, “Scylla lock up,” and heard a click as the office door closed, then watched as metal blinds slowly shuttered the view of Olympus Mons until the room was dark.

“Scylla contact base,” he said and rolled up his sleeves. He removed thin elastic bands from around his biceps then reached down to pull up his pant legs and took off similar bands wrapped around his thighs just above the knee. He placed the bands on his desk and leaned toward the computer screen which illuminated an elongated oval face with enormous eyes and reptilian skin.