Lieutenant Commander Trevor Anthony Barnabas sat silently, flipping through the journal. He was exhausted; he’d spent the entire night before – after speaking with that insane old man – copying everything from the worn journal into a fresh new book. He was careful not to exclude anything from the tome, as unbelievable as it all might be.

“You alright, Sir?” Slover asked, standing aside him. Barnabas quickly closed the book and smiled weakly up at him.

“Oh yes, I’m fine Lieutenant,” Barnabas slid the book under one arm.

Slover looked at him skeptically for a second, and then half returned the smile. “Very well, Sir. See you at the briefing in an hour.” The Lieutenant nodded and left to dispose of his tray. The other pilots were milling about, waiting for Slover, and Barnabas felt was overcome with sadness.

“There’s so much more to do here.”

\*\*\*

The MS engines had kicked up an enormous amount of dust and ice from the rings of the planet they orbited. Barnabas’ senses were frayed, but he had his training to lean on, at least. He adjusted his track over the *Starlight* and leaned to look out the window of his Mosquito. Three MS’s were escorting the piece of the gate back to the ship, while Bol’shaya of the Phaestyn and Kalu Venn of the Cydonians kept an eye out for enemies.

Barnabas checked the time. *Five minutes*, he thought. An alarm sounded, and McNeil called out over the communication channel.

“Watchers! Type three!” Eerie, humanoid shapes began materializing seemingly out of nothing and McNeil began laying down destructive blasts of cannon fire at the targets. Slover and Lopez disappeared hastily into the sortie tube with the massive gate piece.

Barnabas, meanwhile, brought up his radar scope. Small red and green dots moved over the hologram, and he called out target locations over the radio. There were at least five Type Three Watchers, and several type 1s coming out of the dust and ice of the planetary rings. The Starlight executed an emergency reverse maneuver just Slover and Lopez came back into sight.

*It’s all happening… just like…* he didn’t have time to think much more, doing his best to aid in directing the fire and maneuvers of the defense. He allowed his Mosquito to drift back with the *Starlight*, keeping an eye on the aft of the ship, making sure no Watchers attacked them from the blind side.

A wild whooping went up from the MS pilots across the comm as McNeil pulled off an amazing feat of gunnery. *I’ll have to add that to his ‘greatest hits’ reel* Barnabas thought. Slover had just limped back to the *Starlight* after taking withering fire from the Watchers, and Barnabas relaxed a bit.

His reverie didn’t last long, and as another piercing alert sounded. Another type 3 appeared, looming over the ship’s engine section. The glowing red power core in its chest pulsated menacingly.

Barnabas keyed his comm and shouted “Too close! You son of a bitch-” his finger slipped off the button before he could finish his message back to the ship “-you were right, old man.”

Barnabas spun the Mosquito towards the Watcher and punched the throttle. “Starlight, get out of here!” he shouted as the front of his Mosquito slammed into the Watcher. The two vessels careened towards the engines of the Starlight and pain shot up through Barnabas’ leg as the structure of the Mosquito collapsed around him from the gravity well. *How did it come to* this was his last thought as the Watcher’s power core collapsed next to him.

\*\*\*

A computer screen flickered weakly back to life. *Calculating position…* appeared and a small circular icon spun as the navigation computer began its calculations. *Warning Re-entry imminent*.

A piercing alarm sounded in the cockpit and Barnabas’ eys fluttered opened. The pain in his leg was unbearable but he had to push through it. He grabbed the controls and looked around him. A large terrestrial planet took up most of the view out his window, and the fused wreckage of the mosquito and watcher listed slowly in one direction. He deployed an airbrake and the vessel stabilized a bit as it interacted with the upper atmosphere of the planet.

The skin of the ship began to slowly heat up, and Barnabas pulled gently back on the controls, trying to keep from hurtling face-first into the atmosphere. The wreckage burned a line across the alien sky, bits and pieces of the remnants of the Type 3 that had brought him here breaking away first from the aerodynamic stress.

“Come on.. hold together… 30 more seconds… come on.” Barnabas kept his eyes on the flickering re-entry calculations as the remains of the mosquito threatened to break apart. There was a loud bang As an air brake sheared off and it was all he could do to keep the mosquito from oscillating dangerously out of control. The roaring sound outside the cockpit began to dissipate and the hull surface temperature started to drop. The biggest danger from re-entry was over, but now he was 50000 meters up and falling with little control over the decent. Barnabas was able to use what was left of the air brakes to rotate the craft, so what little thrust was left in the engines could be used to slow down.

In the final minute, the Mosquito’s parachute emergency deployed, whipping it the ship around. Barnabas blacked out.

\*\*\*

Barnabas realized he couldn’t have been out for long, as the wreckage of the spent ship was quiet safe for the pinging of cooling metal. The whole mess had come to a rest leaning to one side. The glass of the canopy had completely shattered and Barnabas grabbed the extra pack he had stuffed around his legs in the cockpit. He pulled hard and pain shot up his right leg again. He yanked once more screamed from the pain as the pack wrenched free.

*No time to waste* he thought, tossing the pack outside the cockpit. Taking a second to observe the damage to his leg, the flight suit was completely shredded, and it was covered in blood. *Hopefully it looks worse than it is*, he thought, *but definitely broken*. He grasped the remains of the canopy and pulled himself up, pushing with his good left leg against the control panel. The computer flickered to life one last time *Position calculated: Theta Boötis Colony*. Barnabas didn’t even notice before the screen went black.

He tumbled out of the cockpit, next to the wreckage of the mosquito and let out another scream as the broken leg slammed into the ground. Barnabas unzipped his flight suit and pulled out the book he’d stowed in the inner pocket. Written on the front a single word “*Starlight”*, and studied the map on the first page. A five mile walk was ahead, and with a broken leg in these hills, there was no time to waste.

Barnabas crawled about the wreckage and started ripping bits of metal and insulation off the ship. An hour and several painful mistakes later, he’d put together a crude leg splint, and had taken another length of metal and insulation to craft a rough crutch. It took another 15 minutes to stand up, but that allowed him to hobble to the rear of the wreckage, where he extracted another duffle bag filled with supplies. He dug into this bag and found a stimpack on the top along with a survival knife. Sinking the needle at the end of the stimpack into his calf provided welcome relief to the throbbing pain. He picked up the pack and secured both to his torso. He extracted a small compass out of the butt the knife studied the map for another moment, then started on his way.

\*\*\*

The sun was almost down by time he made it to the small cave situated in a rocky outcropping, just where the map had shown. Barnabas picked up firewood as he’d come across it on his trek, and he would need it soon. A chill was in the air, and the small 4.5 square meter cave would warm up nicely, as long as he tended the fire. He grabbed a box of matches from duffel bag and got to work.

Once the fire was burning nicely, Barnabas emptied the contents of both bags and took stock of his supplied. Three weeks of dried rations he could probably stretch it out to 6 if he really tried. His service pistol, and 300 bullets. Socks, spare clothing, several canteens, a small camping stove – how the old man managed to get all this stuff…

Barnabas looked around the cave and picked up a small white rock. He scraped the rock against the cave wall, leaving a single downward slash, and let out a sigh. He then burst into tears.

\*\*\*

The first few months were the worst. Once his leg secure enough to walk on he was able to venture out into the wilderness and hunt some of the local fauna. It was a welcome change from the dried granola and nuts of the survival packs. His hair and beard began growing out of control, and sometimes wondered why he hadn’t thought of at least packing a razor. When he wasn’t clawing to stay alive, he busied himself with reading through the book, memorizing its passages, and writing extra little notes and musing in the margins. At the end of each day, he slashed another mark on the wall.

He made frequent trips out to the mangles mess of his Mosquito to salvage more parts. A nice flat piece of armor plating to serve as a door meant he slept a lot easier at night on the woven grasses and hay bed he had fashioned. Several more long pieces to fashion into spears for hunting – the bullets wouldn’t last forever. He counted the marks on the north wall (which he cleaned off after 360) and the marks on the south wall (which he put there after cleaning off the north wall) and estimated the bullets had lasted two-and-a-half years.

The biggest haul was when he dragged the ship’s battered H3 generator back to his. The next day he retrieved several batteries and after a few hours sitting in the cockpit, the electronics and back lighting out of the main panel screen. Within a week he had a small series of lights strung up around the cave – it wasn’t much, but having light beyond a fire at night was comforting somehow.

In spare time he took to venturing out further and further from small camp, which he had expanded out from the cave with saplings roughly hewn into walls. He fashioned a rough rainwater shower, a hammock, a tended a small garden filled with local plants. At the end of each day, he would stand outside his little camp, to watch the sun setting, before making another slash on the north wall. Every day was filled with the routine of survival, every year a cycle of preparing for that year’s winter. Time marched on, and black hairs slowly turned to grey.

\*\*\*

Barnabas stood upon the rock, gazing at the setting sun. He was wearing a loose fitting fibrous tunic that went down past his knees, and was synched at the waist with a grass weave belt filled with knives and tools fashioned from the part of a long-ago rusted out Mosquito. He had his long grey hair tied behind his head and stroked a beard that went down nearly to his belly button. The sun set today was like the rest, but still he watched it descend to the west, and disappear behind the mountains.

Then he saw what he had been waiting for all this time; a light flashing with unnatural regularity in the dusk sky. For the first time in a long time, a smile cracked his lips and retreated into his little wooden camp, had a meal of berries and the smoked meat of a creature he’d named the “ugly pig” then fell asleep in his hammock reading through his *Starlight* book. He hadn’t slept so soundly in some time; tomorrow was going to be a big day.

\*\*\*

The next morning, he was awoken by a loud rumbling sound. The wooden walls of his camp shook and he practically fell out of the hammock in excitement. He ducked into the cave, and realized he’d forgotten to make his mark last night. It didn’t matter, though. He took the worn Starlight book and stashed it in a crack in the corner, sliding a rock over it to obscure its presence.

“Hello?” someone called out, a man with the accent of a fellow UK Stellar countryman. *Dorchester Block, if I had to guess*, he thought. “Hello, is- my goodness…” A man stood at the entry way of the cave, staring with bewilderment.

“My goodness old man, are you alright?” the man asked.

“Alright?” it was the first word spoken to someone else in a long time. “Well, I guess that depends on your definition of alright, young man.” He replied.

The man cracked a half-smile “Sorry, sir. I suppose that wasn’t the best question. I’m not sure what to say.” the man extended a hand, “I had no idea anyone was here.”

He took a studied look of the man’s face, a bit shocked himself at what he was seeing, and then gazed for a long second at the extended hand. Finally, he returned the gesture and pressed his hand against the man’s, shaking up and down in a familiar gesture. “Well met, young man. Well met.”

“I didn’t think this planet had been colonized. This is quite a situation…” the man started

“Colonized? No, not quite, young man” he replied. “See, I crash landed here on a survey mission several years ago. Was mapping this system, and well… who knows what it was, an asteroid, engine malfunction, who knows. But I crashed here, and have done my best to survive.”

“That’s astounding.” the man seemed at a loss for words. “My wife and I are the leaders UK Stellar Colony ship, the Dauntless. It’s our mission to establish a colony here, on Theta Boo, but it looks like you beat us.”

“No worries young man, no worries at all. I’m not greedy. It’s a lot of planet, and I’m willing to share.” He replied

The man relaxed a bit and smiled “I suppose you’re right. Goodness, where are my manners. The name is Anthony Barnabas. You can call me Tony if you’d like. My wife, Chrissi, will certainly be interested in meeting you. She’s a physician so perhaps we should go see her soon.”

He smiled widely looking at his father and at the thought of seeing his mother gain, “That’s a splendid idea, young man. Lead the way, please.”

“Sir, if I may, I didn’t catch your name”

“Oh, of course, Young man. I am Aaron. Aaron Stobulous.”

“Well met, Aaron,” Anthony replied. He turned and led the way out of the cave. “If I may ask how long have you been here?”

Stobulous tugged on his beard thoughtfully, “Well, that’s difficult to answer. Tell me what year it is, and I’ll tell you how long.”

Anthony stopped. “Well, the current year is 2275. It’s August 3rd back home.”

“Well then”, Stobulous replied, “I’d say just about 15 years.”