

Tristan looked at the planet as the ship flew a slow circuit, scanning for...anything. The book described what he was looking for as being held within a mountain when the days and nights could be so long as to not be measurable.

Even without the year spent at the sanctuary, Tristan would have associated the description with the poles. The planet's axis of nearly forty degrees would allow for a longer period of true night, and it was possible the person who had written the entry was either being poetic, or hadn't had access to a method of keeping time.

He knew from his experience within the jungle how easy it was for time to lose meaning without a method of keeping track of it.

One pole was a mountainous area, while the other less so. But if the author didn't have access to time keeping, would they be able to differentiate between a mountain and a particularly tall hill with a broken top? Considering what was supposed to be possible here, something should register as out of the ordinary on the scanners.

"Anything?" he asked.

"Nothing that's acting as an arrow with a 'here for the cure' sign attached to it," Alex replied. "Although, since Hart never bothered installing the kinds of deep scanners we need, I'm not getting much on that side. Visuals are fine, so I can ask if that text talked about the planet being inhabited. I'm seeing settlements, although I can't say how old they are from this far. Once we get within the atmosphere, I should be able to get the kinds of details that'll tell me if they're ruins, or we're going to have to worry about the inhabitants."

"What can you get of what's under the surface?"

"Something's interacting with the planet's magnetic field there." An image appeared on Tristan's screen with a stretched line in red, marred with black and fainter shades of reds.

"How are you getting magnetic reading without deep scanners?" He zoomed out until he made out the area surrounding it. Not a mountain. He switched to the regular spectrum and made out the scar in the landscape.

"I'm not. I got that using heat sensing and a couple of extrapolation programs. What do you think it is?"

"Possibly a meteorite that contained a high concentration of ferrous material." It was near the pole with the hills someone without instruments might think are mountains.

"Although for the scar to be this elongated, the entry was shallower than usual."

"A ship?"

Tristan called up what reading he could from where they were. The person who had written the book had talked about crashing, but if that was their ship... "Unlikely." He couldn't get anything telling him what materials weren't reacting with the magnetic field. "If a ship did this, it would be with the size of the largest passenger cruisers. Its absence would have been noticed and investigated."

"So you think that's what you're looking for?"

"It doesn't fit the area, but I'll bring us in for closer pass. We might be able to get details that will tell us."

"So, if it's not it. We'll just do a close scan of the planet until something pings?"

What other choice did he have? The Source had made it clear it wanted them here as

part of helping Alex.

Or was that how he decided to interpret its silence? The one item he found in his hand when he demanded answers?

Why was he here if he didn't believe it?

"We'll find it," he stated, doing another pass around the planet to set the ship on approach.

"Wait," Alex said, sounding puzzled. "You aren't going to drop us in like a rock, then wait for the last moment to keep us from making a crater of our own?"

"I only use maneuvers like those when they're the only way to reach the ground without being detected."

"Right, because—"

The ship shuddered, and Tristan's board flickered.

"What is that?" Alex asked.

The screen flickered, chaotically altering between showing the actual view before them and the screens with the view he'd been using to navigate, as well as the data he'd been studying and making the whole unusable.

Another shudder, accompanied by the gut wrenching sensation of unexpectedly being without gravity.

"I think we're losing life support!"

"This can't be that." If the dampener system failed, they'd be pulled toward the front since Tristan was slowing them. And if the deceleration had ended, as part of this odd system's failure, they were will within the planet's gravity well, they would feel its pull. For them to be in this condition meant the gravity generator had created a 0-field, but it needed a properly functioning computer to maintain that.

"What is the computer saying?" he asked Alex.

"I don't think it's there anymore. The little I make out doesn't sound sane, and I can't get anything about its code to appear on my screen."

Without the generator, it only left—the screen cleared of all computer-produced chaos to show the ground approaching far too quickly. Tristan tapped the command to activate Alex's cryo, but the systems weren't responsive.

"Alex! Get into cryo, now!"

The field shimmered into place around Alex and his chair as Tristan pushed himself out of his. They were going too fast. The stasis cryo would ensure they survived, but if he couldn't lower their angle of approach, there was no telling how deep they'd be, or to keep the surface from collapsing over them afterward.

Altering anything about their course, without a working computer, was going to require old fashion kinetics. Unfortunately, all he had to work with were the power generation and storage systems on the ship, and limited amount of time to work in.

He grabbed onto a cabinet's handled and lowered himself so he remove the panels and access the capacitors.

He didn't know the planet's gravity, but when he'd glanced at the readouts, it hadn't registered as outside what humans could comfortable support, so at worse he had only over a minute to arrange the discharge and get himself into the chair behind him.

He smiled.

This wasn't going to be his best work.

He manually shut the capacitor's power relay. From there, the capacitors' wires went through a junction so they could be balanced and each of the gravitational generators used in atmosphere would get the correct amount of power. He opened it and cut the wires with his claws.

What he needed was a push to give them enough horizontal motion, so they'd skid over the planet's surface instead of piercing it.

He reconnected one capacitor to each anti-grav generator.

The one thing they had going for them was that the ship's design was keeping them stable with the generators under them. They would give a push as they received power, but Tristan wasn't counting on that to change their angle of descent. It was when each exploded he expected sufficient forces to throw them toward a more horizontal motion.

He turned the relay on and threw himself to the other side of the cabin, grabbing onto the chair, pulling himself in, and turning the stasis system on.