

Entrenched in the Shattered Plains

Ignatius Blaeceth's sense of hearing came back first. The sound of an alarm getting louder and louder as he slipped back into consciousness. Then his vision returned. A blur of grey with a red flashing light.

He was still in a daze as he began to move his arms and legs. They sprawled as best as they could in the cockpit as they seemed to desperately try to get Ignatius on his feet but to no avail.

Eventually, after who knows how long, he finally had enough focus to register what had happened.

"Shit" Ignatius spat. His head throbbing with pain. A quick tap on his forehead confirmed a bleeding injury. It was at that realisation of his injury that the taste of iron was noticed in his mouth. Either he'd been there a while or the injury was so severe he was losing blood fast.

Ignatius looked around quickly as he tried to search for any obvious damage. The inside of his ship, a small shuttle provided by the BROTHERHOOD, was still mostly intact and if the outside was in a similar state then the old girl would be able to at least break whatever atmosphere he'd wound up caught in and get back help.

"How did this happen?" Ignatius pondered to himself as he tried to sit up before a sharp pain in his back put a stop to that. Was something broken or bruised?

Either way, muscle memory compelled Ignatius to reach for a medipack and quickly injected himself in his exposed neck with a powerful painkiller, reducing the pain to a numb feeling that gave him the relief to resume his motion.

"Wait" he groans as he slowly made his second attempt to pull himself out of his seat "what did Lottson say? Gravity wells? Shattered Plains?" His memory was foggy. If he could get back to the Brotherhood he could...

"Shit" he gasped with realisation "I need to get out of here" now he was scrambling where he remembered the communicator was located. He push the button, turning it red and he spoke.

"Mayday. Mayday. This is Ignatius Blaeceth of the Selen Training Corp. I've crashed in the Shattered Realm due to a gravity well. Requesting immediate assistance. Loop message"

Ignatius heard nothing but static in response.

With that final motivation he reached for his helmet, sealed it shut and finally mustered enough energy to make that first push to get to his feet, the painkillers doing their best to dull the pain enough for him to mentally push forward with the thought "I have to get out. I have to get back" ringing though his head like a bell.

The hissing sound of the cockpit opening broke the silence that blanketed the Shattered Realm before Ignatius climbed out of the Ashfall and gingerly slide down the small bars that

made up his only on and off the ship. His first order of business was making sure the thrusters were still working, or at least would work enough for him to get back to the others.

“Alright” he muttered to himself “let’s see what we got here then”.

Now he was out of the ship he got a better look at the surrounding area. The Shattered Plains were a wide open space filled with an interconnected web of trenches that varied in width and depth. Each space in between the trenches was a grey flat surface. The whole plain looked like it was covered in a thick fog that obscured anything that might be above the seemingly endless sea of grey.

“Seems... ominous. Would probably be claiming if not for the impending death” Ignatius peered at the trench the Ashfall had landed in. Not a big as some of the others but it definitely wasn’t going to get out with thrusters alone. It first needed to be pulled out. Other than that the trench was devoid of anything else.

Curiosity got the better of Ignatius and he quickly took a peek at a nearby trench. This one was deeper and he could see the ends of sharp crystalline growths that formed spikes. Ignatius was glad he didn’t end up in that trench or, even better, that he decided not to fly his own personal ship, The Ashfall, and settled for the small combat shuttle.

“Right” he sighed “Ethereal Plain. The Children”.

Ignatius focused his efforts again on the Ashfall and quickly made his way to the back of the ship. Underfoot it felt like walking on a slab of rock layered with frost. The crunching sound made by Ignatius’s boots providing further relief from what could be maddening silence if Ignatius stayed too long.

Ignatius found his way to the thrusters and gave them a quick inspection, far too quick for his liking but it was enough to know that whilst they were damaged they wouldn’t be blowing up any time soon.

“Thrusters look good enough. Should be able to escape the gravity. If only we weren’t nose first in a space trench?”

Ignatius slowly walked alongside the ship back towards the cockpit, a finger tracing along the Ashfall’s body as he felt around for further damage.

“Maybe I can refocus the blasters and use them to push the ship out. Gotta check they still work though” he muttered.

As he continued in way towards the front blasters his fingers traced over the scratches on the shuttle “humm. Outer shell looks intact, if slightly damaged” he let out a long sigh “seems to be the theme of the damage. Well, at least I won’t have to worry about the vacuum killing me”.

Upon seeing the metal barrels of the blasters Ignatius could see that they hadn’t suffered any damage, likely being shielded by the surrounding body of the shuttle.

“YES!” Ignatius cheered at the first bit of good news he had “Never doubted you, you beautiful hunk of metal”.

What came next Ignatius could never describe. It felt like a whisper, or like a breath had crawled up the back of his neck. But there was trigger, no sound, no breeze. Just a shiver that ran through Ignatius’s soul.

Ignatius snap around “Who’s there” he reached for his blaster by instinct. All he could see was the endless grey.

“Fucking Ethereal Plain” Ignatius sighed “This place must be crawling with defences from the Children. God knows what they got here. Need to get out before one of them actually finds me”.

He focused his attention back onto his ship. Moving down to the legs that, in a normal landing, would have opened up and provided a softer decent. Seeing that they were already damage Ignatius began to ponder.

“Ok. Maybe I can wedge the ship upwards with its legs and perhaps I can....”

The damage to the legs meant that the first job, getting them out, was achieved. All that was now needed was to get them under the ship itself. Ignatius knew that meant the nose of the ship had to be lifted and whatever gravity was working on the plain would do the rest.

Ignatius sighed once more, moving straight The nose “ok, let’s do this”.

Adrenaline and a slowly fading painkiller was all Ignatius was running on. He had to move quickly if he wanted to get the ship in the best possible position for an escape. He gripped the end of the ship tightly, dug his feet into the trench, causing the sound of crunching ice to intensify, as Ignatius began to heave.

The ship made a loud groaning sound as Ignatius lifted the nose. He could barely see the legs beginning to move as they’re moved into place. Progress was slow but steady.

The suit Ignatius wore was great at keeping him alive when atmosphere was nonexistent but one of its drawbacks was its effect on his grip. Happening too quick for him to stop the nose of the ship slipped out of his grip. A loud thud echoed in his ears.

Even with the painkillers Ignatius felt that “ah... shit... fucking damnit” he yell, flicking his fingers whilst moving around the trench. Eventually he buried his hands in his armpits to apply pressure before giving the ship a kick as he made his way back to the cockpit.

Another chill ran down his back. Ignatius swung around quickly in response. Nearly losing his footing and falling over.

“Show yourself!” He yelled. Convinced someone, or something, was watching him. There had to be. This plain was far too important for the Children to not have something that resembled a garrison.

“I can see you” he lied, hoping that would scare whatever it was that was out there. Ignatius scampered to the cockpit, nearly throwing himself inside to reach the communicator.

“Emergency transmission. This is Ignatius Blaeceth of the Selen Training Corp. I’ve crashed in the Shattered Plains and I’m under attack by an unknown entity. Requesting back now”.

Nothing. Again. But static.

“Lottson. This is Ignatius. Do you read?” Ignatius’s voice was growing desperate “Anyone?”

“Damn this fucking plain!” Ignatius yelled. Slamming his fist into the control panel “blocking the fucking signal”.

Ignatius’s frustration distracted him from what came next. An invisible force seemingly slammed into him and threw him out of the cockpit and through the misty air. When he hit the ground he struck with a hard thud. It seemed the painkillers weren’t working as affectively as they once did. His back was now in pain again.

Ignatius groaned as he tried to pull himself up. Only for another invisible wave to again throw him across the grey plain. As he slowly pulled himself to his feet he could see ripples in the air that seemed to form a humanoid shape.

“What are you? What do you want?”

The ripple form was slowly approaching him. Ignatius reached for his blaster. He had no idea what it was going to be able to do to this thing but it was all he had.

Once the blaster was in hand Ignatius darted for a nearby trench. Hoping it would provide cover to buy time getting back to the ship. The trench was shallow and required him to crouch in order to be unseen.

Hiding a voice rang in Ignatius’s head *how typical of you.*

Ignatius knew that voice. It was a voice he hadn’t heard in years. One he hoped hearing again would bring joy rather than terror.

This creature spoke in the voice of his brother, Phobos Blaeceth.

“Oh, I see” He said out load as he slowly crept in a direction he hoped would lead back to the ship “You rummage through my head and whisper in stolen voices. Neat trick.”

You think talking tough will stop what I’m going to do to you. Hiding will only make it worse

“What your plan here? Drive me insane by insulting me? Throw me around until I hit a spike?” Ignatius shot up and fired several bolts in the direction of the ripples “you know that voice just makes you a better target”

Ignatius crept along the trench. The feeling of the chill down his neck was near dulling his other senses. His eyes caught sight what looked to be the entrance to a tunnel.

Ah yes. Your hatred for me is radiate whispered the entity But why do you hate me so? We are bonded by blood. Blood does not hate blood.

Ignatius nearly broke into a sprint to get the the tunnel. He knew these things were dug all over the plain. One had to lead to the Corpse Field.

“Yes. And you betrayed that bond when you killed...”

A column of spiked crystalline growths burst out for the ground in front of the entrance. Blocking Ignatius’s path. He quickly severed as he changed direction. Quickly poking his head out from the trench and fired several bolts around where he saw the ripples were located. His instincts telling him to do it to spray the air with dirt to obscure his path.

Ah. A weakness in your heart

Ignatius knew that the entity could sense him and that it was just playing with him. However, he hoped that since it had copied Phobos’s voice then perhaps it copied his behaviours in order to make the illusion more believable. If so Ignatius planned to exploit the copied ego of his brother. Giving him the chance to get the ship.

“You’ve read my mind you should know this” Ignatius taunted.

Yes

Ignatius could feel the chill shifting. Life a parasite was moving inside his body. When the feeling seemed to settle again the entity spoke again.

I know that you let me die

Ignatius froze. That was not Phobos’s voice. That voice was kinder and more welcoming. Ignatius had hoped to one day hear that voice again but not like this.

The entity now spoke in the voice of his deceased beloved, Ophelia.

You know it, deep in your heart

If you hadn’t trusted your criminal brother. I’d still be here

You knew he hated me. You knew he wanted you to stay with him.

Ignatius shook himself out of instinct. He had to keep moving otherwise this thing would kill him. That had to be its goals.

“No, shut up. You’re not her”

You let me die. Just like how you’re gonna let them die.

Ignatius pushed forward. His body feeling like he was pushing through water. Every muscle in his body growing stiffer with pain and fear. “I said... shut up” he whimpered.

They will all die. Leaving you alone.

“Shut up” Ignatius’s grip on his blaster tightened.

Just like you deserve to be.

“I said SHUT THE FUCK UP!”

Ignatius burst out of his hiding place, blaster at the ready, only to be thrown backwards by an invisible force.

Ignatius held his blaster arm up first and fired into the grey mist “You think a few words and some spikes will scare me” he snarled “Ha, why don’t you do us both a favour and just kill me”

The ripples that made up the entity materialised before him. He felt like it had just kicked him and he rolled on the floor of the plain.

“Screw this” Ignatius groaned “I’m not dying to voices in the wind”.

Ignatius raised his blaster and aimed it at the ship.

He fired.

The ship exploded and Ignatius was thrown back into the trench.

A ear piercing scream rang through his head.

How long Ignatius lay in the trench phasing in and out of consciousness? He didn’t know. But eventually, his body became numb from the pain enough that he could pull himself to his feet. His knees, arms and legs giving out several times during the process.

It was then that he noticed his helmet had broken and to his surprise the air was breathable. He quickly removed the broken helmet and threw it to the ground.

Ignatius didn’t even need to look up at the ship to know it was beyond salvageable. Leaving nothing but a crater and scrap metal.

“Fucking... damnit” he whimpered “Lottson’s gonna kill me” he chuckled at the statement.

He did give the damage a closer look. His curiosity getting the better of him yet again. It was only then that he saw that the explosion had opened up one of the many tunnels dug within the plain.

“This tunnel has got to lead to The Corpse Field” he pleaded to himself “It has to”.

Ignatius proceeded to conduct the quickest inventory check ever conceived, his gear consisting of his blaster, one medic pack and the days worth of food and water he kept in his suit’s pockets.

Ignatius took a deep breath and noticed the strange absence of any notable smells, even with the ship right next to him. He simply accredited it to the nature of the plain itself and pushed his way into the tunnel.

Where it will take him? No one could say.