

Survival

Unknown Orbit Unknown System

The bridge of the *Retribution* was silent as the Mauro Wynter sat and waited. Silence within, silence without. The black, bleakness of space surrounded the VT-49 Decimator as it circled idly around the emerald green planet below. The distress call should have long ago been answered. The fact that the ship was able to stay in orbit after colliding with an asteroid field was a small miracle. The concussive trauma the impact had placed on the pilot, however, was not.

The human pondered where he could have gone wrong, how he could have wandered so far off course as to not have any beacons input. Wynter took mental stock of his supplies. Minimal, at best. His fuel reserves were steady, however, and he considered how long he may be out in space.

The decision to land a vessel is never easy in uncharted territory. Scanning the topography and looking for electromagnetic pulses turned up nothing of value. He decided to put his craft down at the peak of a plateau in a hilly continent on the northern hemisphere. The planet looked to contain a breathable atmosphere and had some traces of water. Perhaps he could eek out survival for a time. He keyed in a few dials at the helm and manually began the descent.

Entering atmosphere the approaching sky took him by surprise. He was confronted with a vibrant gold and deep purple. As the *Retribution* slowly descended he could detect no aerial fauna, and below only the outline of stubby flora were visible. He considered himself content for a second to not maroon others with him and then cursed his isolation as the craft made landfall.

Planetside Much Later

Daytime was easier for Wynter. The beautiful purple and golden sky cheered him in his solitude, and helped him forget that despite his wanderings and treks through the streams and fields of this unknown world, he was utterly alone. Nighttime was more problematic. Not even the low humming and guttural noises made by the native reptiles and small mammals put him at ease. He had found no apex predators, to be sure, but he had found no sentient life to help him find his way.

And so he slowly became accustomed to daily field navigation and marking off a grid perimeter to thoroughly search his new world. He cursed not having a speeder. He cursed his isolation. The silence and loneliness was not helped by the dull palatability of the reptiles and rodents he was able to catch and cook readily. He would not starve, and the *Retribution* made for a luxurious retreat from the elements.

One day, during his travels, he came upon a beautiful field of purple knee high plants. He reached down to admire one, and breathed in the intoxicating aroma. Instantly, his nerves became overwhelmed with pain and a noxious, black gas began to radiate from the plants. Wynter ran, as fast as he could, but soon his limbs became heavy as wood and his lungs burned with searing pain. He barely had time to return to his craft and seal the hatch before he blacked out.

Mauro awoke to a slow blinking on his console. He slowly moved to his communications array and flickered on the incoming message. "*Sky Breach Base, this is Lieutenant Colonel Mauro Wynter. Ship badly damaged, please send location beacons, I am coming home.*"

He did not move, not yet. He did not look up, not yet. He simply sat and waited. Slowly, tears began to flow freely down his face as he repeated the words over and over in his head. He was going home. He had survived.