

F.A. 3 6 5: Deep Expedition 195

Inspired by the work of H.P. Lovecraft, set in the Battletech Universe created by FASA

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Comstar: 3059 October 31st, Planet U339 Deep periphery, ComGuards

Expedition 195: Deep periphery X -900, Y -709 Nadir point

Acolyte Muriel Focht "Specs", entry 13

Oh Blake, what have we wrought on ourselves? If only we could possibly fathom the folly we have wrought upon our lust for starbound adventure, we shall have never left the sweet comfort of Terra.

I know now that ultimate understanding comes at an ultimate price; and with it the reward of eminent madness.

I write these last few entries not in hope of survival, but in the odd account that whoever shall find this, burn what you find, this along with the infernal planet as the Smoke Jaguars did to Turtle Bay, leave not a scrap of cloth nor ounce of flesh standing. Perhaps if we had not stumbled upon this... no! The horror inside must be known! Perhaps there is still time, perhaps if you, you who survive us all can somehow utilize the message I send to you on our very last beam of light, that someday this might make it to you that perhaps my crew and I may be vindicated yet! Oh Blake, forgive us all of our deeds, and I take solace in knowing that all lives extinguish for a reason...

Now, please steel yourself for the remaining account I upload to you now, the fate of deep periphery expedition 195,

and our decent into madness...

Entry 1: October 4,th 3059

My stomach turned as the world spun around me. It seems no matter how many times I venture forth into the abyss of space, the sensation of a faster than light jump has never become normalized for me. As my mind became clear my vertigo exchanged for an unwelcome buzz as I slowly walked towards my room's narrow window.

Now, for one not accustomed to space this next part may sound very obvious indeed but believe me when I tell you that all I could see was darkness. True, absolute, darkness. Space is indeed a dark place but as anyone who has fancied themselves a backyard astronomer knows space can actually be overbearingly bright as well. Especially if your mode of transportation across the stars is by moving from predetermined jump point to jump point, you tend to spend the vast majority of your time near brilliant

lights if either they are a small star, the reflective light of a moon, or even the multitude of surrounding stars, millions and billions of light-years away.

But this was dark was pure. I looked out the window to see absolutely nothing. I worried that our small *Magellan* class Jumpship, *The Amber Dawn* could run into some sort of hidden debris out in this uncharted portion of space. Our nearest vestige of civilization we knew of was the periphery states bordering the Free Worlds League. Some couple million light years away.

I thought about how far that was, about my stuffy confines of the cathedral on Terra. How I longed to be out of the damp atmosphere and constant study of technology an Acolyte of Comstar must do, but now, so far from home, all I could desire would be the very thing I had spurned.

A ray of light shone forth in the darkness behind me as a thin and delicate hand reached out for me in the incandescence, and grabbed my idle shoulder.

"Muriel... why are you just sitting in the dark?" Came a soft and kind voice with a slightly Russian accent, that nevertheless frightened me by sheer surprise.

"Natalya... oh so sorry my lady I was simply observing our present situation. It... is very dark" I said meekly. My frail and scholarly voice matched my frail and scholarly body. I always wore my perfectly dark focuser goggles so that I may translate any form of script, but I had gotten into the habit of wearing them so often, I doubt others have seen my real face. A couple strands of my blonde bangs fell in front of my left eye, I should cut my hair soon.

"Well, turn on a light" She said, flicking the light switch on, my cabin was fully illuminated with artificial light, showing the mess I eternally lived in.

"Oh very nice, now I see why you keep it dark" Sergeant Natalya Mikiev said, putting a hand on her slender hip. She was in her late twenties, and far out of my league romantically. Not that an Acolyte such as myself should consider such things... but... one does wonder. Her long chestnut brown hair had a single wave to it, and her bangs that framed her thin face seemed to always enhance the look of concern on her face.

"So what is all of this stuff?" Natalya asked, looking at the various parchments, scribbles and tomes I had scattered about the floor, bed, and walls of my cabin.

"Ah... oh... oh this?" I stuttered, Natalya always flusters me when she bothers to pay attention.

I flapped my white robed arms as I shuffled through the mass of papers in front of me. "I have been interested in classic writing of ancient Terra. Look here from over two thousand years ago there was this absolutely amazing tome written by this author who's name I just can't quite make out, a Mr. Abdul Aza... aza... anyway it is highly referenced by *another* Terran author of apparently great importance a Mr. Howard Phillip..."

"That is really cool Muriel." Natalya said, clearly ignoring me. "But while your tomes will continue to be there, the meeting for our drop will not be in a few minutes"

"A drop... HERE?" I asked sheepishly

"Yes Muriel, if you have not noticed, it's dark outside, and there is nothing to gather our solar sail anytime soon. So we need to go find something we can use for the manual reactor and we need our chief Technical officer to do it." She said plainly.

"Oh... right, let us alight then" I said, putting down a large black tome with the name scratched off. As I turned off the light, I swore I saw a red light flash in the direction of the book... no never mind.

Entry 2:

I sat down in the briefing room as the expedition team assembled. Natalya sat down next to our expedition lead, Commander Arthur Sampras, a man as powerful as the name suggests. He was my eternal opposite, strong body and tactical mind. He had been blooded against the clans in the Com Guard and returned victorious. He was a good natured military man with a thin crew cut and the most classic lantern jaw. I swore I have seen his likeness an infinite number of times in old Terran comics. His strong values and adherence to honorable code and combat earned him the respect of his eternal friend, the even larger man to his left.

Wolf, that is all we called him. He was a man of incredible stature, far beyond that of any normal human being. He was a Clan Elemental, meaning he was raised in an advanced genetic laboratory in the far off space of the Clan homeworlds. Wolf stood at 8 feet, 9 inches with a perfect clan muscular build. He had physical power beyond anything I've ever known. I remember when a mech leg fell on Commander Arthur on a particularly hair-raising adventure, and Wolf simply lifted it off like it was nothing more than yard debris. He was a man of fair skin and hair with Germanic traits, originally from a Clan Wolf Elemental point he was taken as a bondsman by Arthur, but the two have since become close friends.

I suppose if I have bothered to do so much already, it would make sense if I explained the other members of our little crew. There are only six of us, leaving only two I have not yet named. There is a cool and calm man to my right, who always has provided me an intellectual partner in even the most vexing of academic quandaries. Kosuke Iatso is a former member of the Draconis Combine deep exploration group, now reassigned to us under the efforts of a renewed Star League. He was my closest companion on our crew, he tolerated my mess and actually helped me study. His eastern philosophy was fascinating to me as I would swap stories of Blake and western Terran Scholars for stories and fables of Mencius and Zhuangzi. He was a man of average height with shoulder length black hair he kept tied in a warrior's ponytail. He wore thin rounded glasses with bangs which framed his face, and always wore the most elaborate and beautiful silk garments. A good man, a wise man. My friend.

Last, sitting at the back of the wall was a man who was most certainly not enjoying his time with us. Richard Dresari was a man who felt he deserved much better than his lot in life. He was assigned to us not by choice but rather because his father wished him to go forth and do something worthy of the family name, and seeking out new stars would be something a Desari should do. He was a man with sandy blonde hair, in classic crew cut with toned muscles he prided himself on and he was always seen wearing his drab green battlemech pilot jumpsuit with the sleeves rolled up. Impatient, but was not an unpleasant person to be with. He just made it clear he would rather be home.

As do we all...

"Ok, Ladies and gents" Arthur began "We have found ourselves in a very dark place. Sensors indicate that it will take at least 14 cycles to charge... granted that we do not even have that much food or electricity in the meantime, that is just not going to happen. So instead, we are going down here. Planet U339." He said as he pointed to absolutely nothing on the table in front of us.

"Um... commander" I asked sheepishly, not wishing to doubt my commander's sensibilities, but there was nothing there.

"I know, you can't see it. Activate Ultraviolet" He ordered to the computer. The hologram turned a deep purple as a planet appeared on the table. It was a dark world, information poured into my Electrooggles about what the early planetary probe was picking up.

"The planet appears to be absolutely covered in carbon... the nebulae's density seems to be falling to the planet over and over, allowing for compaction on the surface. Most of the carbon appears to be incredibly dense, so much so that in pockets at the bottom of the small sulfur sea on the southern hemisphere they have compacted into diamonds...

It gets more interesting though. The surface of the planet has very *low* gravity by comparison, I am also picking up a high amount of fluid carbon. Leading that there may actually be a high biomass on the planet." I said as I read off everything that came my way.

"Good, so we can use that. It may be archaic but we can use this old cosmic fossil fuel as a means to power for a secondary jump. I do not know how large this nebulae is or if our next point will have send us into an area without a way out like this one so... after this jump we are heading home." Arthur stated plainly.

There was an odd silence, we had been out for 13 months, a long time to be away from anything really. We have talked about turning back, but the actual *when* was never determined. Now it appeared we were actually going back. Richard smiled and said "Well, let's get this over so I can say I actually *did* something". Everyone laughed. It looked like our long journey was at an end.

Entry 3:

We detached from our main craft with our *Conquistador* class Dropship, the *Archimedes*. I really much liked the *Archimedes* as it was a beautiful example of Star League technology, and one of the

rarest pieces in the Comstar Fleet. The craft was large, easily accommodating us and our battle mechs, along with the amenities of a home barracks. Kosuke and I calibrated our mechs for the light atmosphere in the mech bay as Arthur piloted our craft towards the dark planet. I dare not look outside as we approach, I felt as if I could lose my nerve.

"You seem quite nervous Spec-san" Kosuke said in a mock exaggeration of his own accent.

"Oh, yes Ko, I am a little..." I said as I locked the final settings on my mech, a Star League era *Crab*.

"One should not hide from their fears, but see it head on. The fear is in not knowing, not in the knowing" He said wisely and offered his hand. I looked at it a second and took his hand to help me out of the mech. We walked down to the nose of the Dropship where an observation deck sat right below where the cockpit was and I saw U339 for the first time with my own eyes.

The only light available was the light created by our flood and landing lights. The dropship glided silently over black mountains with a sheen like pure obsidian. Every bit of the surface looked as reflective as a hall of mirrors as our craft glided over them. I could see our ships reflection in everything, the ground, the rocks, and mountains. We passed over the sulfur sea, the water was a bright green and cloudy as possible, the only thing to break up its glassy surface was a single diamond shaped island at its center. The ocean appeared like a gem on the pure black surface of the planet; a beautiful opposition of color in an otherwise lifeless world.

It was so beautiful I found I could not look away. Suddenly as I studied the shoreline for some time I realized I felt a familiarity that warranted further investigation. I suddenly left the company of my friend and rushed up the winding stairs to the cockpit.

"Commander! Please, can we turn back, I need to get a topographical reading for the sea and surrounding canyons, it is very urgent!" I yelled to him. He was startled by my appearance, but nodded in affirmation as he turned the controls at the helm to bring our vessel about. I stared intently not out the window but on the scanner's screen on our right. Kosuke finally caught up to me as we completed the second pass.

"Spec-san what did you find?" He asked intently. As the image sampling completed I found I could not speak. I moved slowly from the console as the image stared so deeply into my soul I feel I could not even breathe let alone comprehend the intensity of our discovery. I slowly raised my hand and pointed to the screen displaying the Topographical data of the southern hemisphere. Kosuke moved his hands over his heart in the symbol of a Christian cross, until that moment, I did not know he held any form of religion but my amusement was befuddled by my own inalienable panic.

"Well I'll be..." Commander Arthur said finally as he saw what we were so foolishly gawking at.

The sea and the canyons surrounding it formed a symbol of a star, drawn as if by a child's hand, and at its center, a single, glowing, eye.

On U339, we were not alone.

Entry 4:

I knew I had seen that symbol before, but the rest of my crew would not heed me. We had recently fought with a small cache of pirates not but three jumps prior. Commander Arthur had determined that it may have been the same group trying to turn away unwelcome travelers to the area, and explained that the large amount of diamonds on the planet were the reason, but I knew otherwise.

Wolf provided what comfort a Clan Elemental knew by dropping his firm hand on my back, smiling and nodding as we walked to our mech bay. I smiled and appreciated the gesture. Wolf immediately broke off to calibrate the Elemental dolls, one of my inventions he greatly appreciated. Wolf became increasingly upset about not being able to operate in a point, but rather as a lone elemental. So I used some captured Elemental Armor and calibrated them to operate independently through a short wave radio system to Wolf, they fight as he fights, they do what action he thinks of, just like a mech does with its pilot. So although he is one, he fights as five. Something which has saved us on more than one occasion.

But he was staying behind. Only the Commander, Ko, and myself were going into the darkness today... tonight? It does not matter. As I slid into the cockpit as my canopy snapped shut I patted the book I had taken with me from my cabin. I was certain I had seen that symbol before in this book. Perhaps after we had found our energy source, I could inspect my tome again.

"Specs, Ko, you ready to head out?" Commander Arthur said as his *Mercury* came to life. It was a squat mech with a saucer like body, a relic of a time gone by, but he was always so reluctant to part with it.

"Just a minute... do not open the airlock yet!" Ko said, procrastinating as usual. He hurried into his *Warhammer* and slammed the canopy shut. "Ok, ok... good!" he said quickly. I thumbed on my *Crab's* 360 cockpit view screen to see Wolf in his battle armor, shaking his head slowly at our "Freeborn" incompetence.

"Not everyone can be as sterling as you my Clan space friend" Kosuke said as his mech stepped forward. I brought up the rear as we stepped out into darkness.

Entry 5:

My first step onto the planet was an experience in itself. My mech sank its foot into the soft surface, my gyro buckled slightly from the unexpected sensation as I wobbled to my right. I gasped as I fumbled for stability, almost falling right on my mech's pointed face. Just a moment as I had passed that hair raising adventure I stepped forward to discover a large stalagmite that nearly impaled my mech.

"Gah!" I cried aloud. I heard our commander laugh.

"Quit playing around men, make sure *all* your lights are on." he said plainly. I sighed, I must have looked like a fool to him. I hung my head and flicked on the runner and searchlights, the world around me became illuminated.

I enjoyed my comfortable seat in my mech. I also enjoyed the full and spacious 360 degree cockpit. I sat proudly in my command couch with a ring of controls around me, other than that, it might as well have looked as I was floating if someone else could see as I did from a distance, as I could see all around me as if I were outside.

Although I would hardly want to be outside. According to scans the temperature was so cold, I might as well be in space itself. I was curious about the biomass readings earlier, but I had seen no signs of life. I was almost certain that if there was something here, it would have come to inspect the sources of light, but then again, if they are native, then these creatures would have never experienced such a thing before, and had developed no need to see it.

"Illumination on a dark world..." Kosuke said poetically as we followed our commander away from the dropship.

"We will definitely have to take some pictures, no one's going to believe this place" Arthur said

"It's almost too beautiful..." Natalya's soft voice purred over the radio "I'm looking at all of your feeds, it's pretty spectacular out there"

Indeed it was too beautiful, I found my eyes wandering at my mech's reflection in the carbon spires which gathered all around us. the we decided our best effort to procure the best fuel source would be to collect large compacted carbon fragments from just under the sulfur sea. Kosuke would use his *Warhammer's* PPC's to bore off particles, which I could procure for Arthur to ferry back and forth with his light mech. If there was enough fuel as anticipated, we could be done and gone within half a day.

If only.

"So...once more into the breach?" Kosuke asked me as we glanced at one another at the edge of the sea. The jade green water lapped at our mech's feet as we sank slightly into the spongy floor.

"If we must tomodachi" I said, using the Japanese word for friend. We stayed for a good couple seconds, staring into the murky water. The water lapped quietly at our feet again. Neither of us moved.

"Just go" Arthur said, exasperated. "The quicker you get down there, the faster we get home"

"He is correct" Kosuke said with a nod.

"Yes, he most certainly is..." I answered.

We nodded our mechs with resolve.

"GO!" Our Commander said, losing patience.

"Fine" I said finally, and stepped forward into the water.

Splash

My readings were inaccurate, the area I had once calculated as 2 meters deep turned into a long drop down into dark water. I reached out my mech's arm and dragged it along the sheer wall as I slowed my decent. I heard a myriad of communications as my onboard computer beeped and yelled at me. After the immediate panic I remembered the planet's reduced gravity, and used my mech's claws to stabilize myself, drifting gently to the bottom with a small thud.

"Specs! Specs are you all right!" Natalya called out in pure concern.

"Yes lady, I am well. It was a bit of a start but it appears I have made it through with not a scratch. Well commander, I am successfully at the bottom, there are indeed large amounts of compact resources here" I said, trying to make the most of the situation. In front of me I saw a large wall of compact carbon just like the surface, but this far under the sea it was much weakened to the point where we might be able to chip off a significant amount to bring back to the dropship.

"How's the water?" Richard asked openly.

"Fine enough, although I can barely see my mech in front of my face... but the view to the top..." I said as I moved my spotlight upward. I revealed the nature of the sea around me. The whole world was bathed in jade with a murky bottom and murky surface, but the space in between was a glittering corridor of dancing particles of rainbow light from my spotlight. It was breathtaking in its eldritch beauty. I saw my friend in his *Warhammer* descending a long slope to my left.

"While you take the elevator, I choose the stairs" Kosuke said as he walked up to me. "Shall we begin?" He said calmly. I nodded my mech and we began our necessary deed.

I watched as Ko went to work on the wall in front of us. He leveled his mech and took a steady stance as two incredible beams of lightning burst forth from his arm mounted Pulse Particle Cannons. The lightning tore into the underwater cliff side. A large sheet of the fuel rich rock slid off of the wall and impacted on the murky sea floor, momentarily spreading the murky sediments off the bottom.

Life! I could see small creatures all around, most of them looked to be some sort of strange amalgamation of various insects and arthropods crawling about a sea floor rich with tube worms who were eagerly grabbing up whatever organic sediment our demolition caused.

"Amazing, a biologist could spend his entire life down here and not catalogue the menagerie we see right here" Kosuke stated accurately. I made a note of the locations of the congregations of organisms, as I did not wish them harm with my plodding mech.

"Commander, I am coming up!" I informed him as I grasped the carbon slab with both of the mech's claws.

"All right Specs, easy does it, remember the gravity will be getting less intense as you come out of the water, remember to account for it" The commander warned me. I steadied my mech's gait as I walked slowly up the long curved slope to the surface.

"Something concerns me..." Kosuke said to me.

"What is it?" I said as I proceeded upward while he continued to chip away useable fuel for us.

"The slope, it seems almost too convenient" He said with a hint of caution "Like it was engineered."

"Yes, that and the star we saw on landing lead me to believe that someone had come here some time before..."

SHARK! I was cut off by the most horrible creature I had ever set eyes on. It had the body shape of a shark but it's face was so horribly mangled by its own design that I hesitate to describe it. It had a shovel like structure that jutted out where a snout should be, and below it two chainsaw like orifice that I can only assume to be mouths. The entire creature was roughly half the size of my two story tall Battlemech! It slowly reached forward and back with it's snagged and rugose teeth towards my mech, like the grasping of a hand, while one was pulling the other was grabbing, like a team of maggots working on flesh. It raked at the metal of my *Crab's* cockpit, and it had no eyes.

"Jesus!" Richard cried in surprise, obviously watching my video feed intently. The beast grabbed hard onto my mech's right arm and shook intently. I saw the damage warnings flash as the hideous teeth sheared into the metal arm. I struggled to shake it loose but my mech was still gripping the large slab of carbon. I tried to let go but my arm's actuator was stuck on the undulating horrendous teeth.

"Ko, I can't let go of this slab and it's too close for my center laser!" I called out, but my good friend was already on the way.

"Spec- san, drop your torso down NOW!" Kosuke yelled out as his *Warhammer* slowly approached behind me. I did as he instructed and crouched my mech's body and stretched out my hands. The infernal shark still held onto the now ragged arm, almost wearing completely through. I felt the surge of water pressure as Kosuke's mech closed in behind me. With the most supreme concentration he raised his mech's arm, took aim at the creature and fired lightning from his PPC, tearing into the side of the vile beast. Black blood as viscous as the most thick ichor came billowing out of the creature as it released its terrible grip on my mech. The creature writhed in the pain of death as the shot was indeed fatal, but long before it would have a chance to die of its own blood loss even more predators of the deep arose to claim their fallen compatriot.

Eels, easily fifteen meters long and each with the thickness of a standard tire came wriggling from the abyssal gloom. Their heads were enormous and flat like a frog who had been crushed by a mech's mighty talon and like their prey they had no eyes. One of the eels reached the wounded shark before the others and proceeded to devour the now unfortunate creature. Much to our surprise he did not tear into it like we would expect, but rather swallowed the gigantic beast in a single gulp as it

stretched its terrifying mouth wider and wider until it could accommodate the entire creature. We saw a torrent of green liquid jets pouring onto the shark as the eel closed its mouth. The shark's final actions were to writhe in agony as the horrifying acid seared down its flesh.

With a mouth that wide... it could eat a mech.

"Specs, Kosuke get your asses out of the water now!" Our commander barked as the eels turned to face us. I focused myself on the task at hand and sprinted my mech as fast as it could possibly go, turning the slab of carbon forward to cut down on the resistance of the water. I ran as hard as I could into the eel in front of us, using the sharp edge to snip it off past the head, clearing a path for Kosuke and I to the surface.

With an intense rush of sulfuric water we burst through the cloudy surface of the sea. I tossed the carbon slab onto the shore and spun around to make sure my friend had made it. I saw his *Warhammer* only a couple paces behind me as he ran hard to the right of me to make sure not an ounce of his mech was still in the water.

"Are you two all right?!" Commander Arthur Sampras yelled in a concerned tone. I slipped forward with my mech and he quickly moved his *Mercury* to catch mine and set me back upright.

"Fine enough commander, my right arm has just about had it and I've lost power to my laser, but we have the carbon here." I said, pointing my mech's claw to the large slab I managed to carry.

"Guys..." Kosuke stated

"Wow, that's amazing," The commander said "well done, ok, we will take this back to the ship and perhaps we got enough for us to"

"GUYS!" Kosuke interrupted. We turned to see what he was so intent about to see that our eels had not deserted us. They had been circling at the water's surface, but what they did next I could have never anticipated. The eels had been gasping air from the thin atmosphere, building an infernal pocket on their backs like a large and pustulous boil. The eels then started to swim upward, *into the air*. They did another circle in the air before slowly wriggling towards us.

"Oh Kerensky save us! Ok, I got the slab, everyone move asap back to the *Archimedes* double time!" Arthur yelled as we did as he said. His *mercury* grasped the slab expertly under one of his very flexible arms and sprinted with a speed worth of his Battlemech's name. My concern was for Kosuke with his slow moving *Warhammer* we hoped his plodding speed of 75kph would be enough to stay just ahead of the writhing eels.

"Kosuke, keep running!" I said as Arthur and I turned around. I lifted my still operable large laser on my left claw and fired it at the nearest eel, shredding it into ribbons like a hideous balloon. Arthur expertly struck down two of them with his medium laser, there was a reason he came back from Tukkayyid alive.

"Thanks, that should be enough of a lead!" Kosuke said as we continued to run. A second wave of eels ascended from the sea and gasped at the air to follow us. They made a rasping sound like a wounded crow as they started their pursuit.

"Hang in there guys! We're coming!" Richard said as we detected a friendly mech ahead of us. In the distance ahead we could see a single beam of light in the infinite void of the planet. Richard Dresari's mighty assault mech, a *Zeus*, came striding into battle with the eels. Wolf rode on his shoulder in his elemental battle armor.

"All right you sons of bitches, try eating this!" Richard said as he unleashed everything he had at the eels, lasers, missiles and ballistics came showering overhead, for a shining moment the dark planet was illuminated by heavy weapons fire as we ran past his *Zeus*. I heard a sound of heavy metal landing on me and looked up to see Wolf's magnetic boots fastening to my mech's top.

"They can somehow detect your mech is injured, let us lure them away from the others!" Wolf commanded as I banked off from the main group. Indeed he was right, they were pursuing only me. I knew I was leaking fluid from the injured arm. Do these creatures only seek out the blood of the fallen?

"Keep your heading up, watch for rocks and deviations, I will attend to the foes." Wolf said in his cool and calm clan way as he turned around to stand inverted directly above me. I obeyed and ran at full velocity. Leaping my mech over small canyons as the eels closed in around me. Wolf bravely fired at them with his arm mounted laser as they nipped at my heels, waiting for them to get close enough to sear off their heads. My pulse raced as the eels kept up their horrific pursuit. I was a mere trip from instant death and putrefaction for myself and my Clan friend! Steady now! I cannot differ!

The stalagmites and crevices raced at me as my *crab* sprinted at over 100 kilometers an hour and yet the eels kept up their pace! After just a couple of minutes we had sprinted a considerable distance in a well calculated arc. My companions should have made it back to the *Archimedes* and to relative safety, now I must make my long arc back. Surely the heavy weapons on the drop ship should keep these dog of hell at bay!

"Wolf how are you?" I yelled as I shifted course "I am bringing us home, hold out for as long as you can!"

"Aff, Sir Specs." He said, using the clan word for affirmation. He completely focused on his task at hand, swatting down all of the hellish eels that came our way. There must have been over three dozen before the last swarm gathered and as suddenly as they first appeared.

They scattered.

"Now I worry..." Wolf said as we sped away from the site of our nearest demise. As we sped off into the darkness he finally relaxed his gun arm, nodded, and rested on the top of my mech.

"Specs, Wolf, are the two of you all right?" Natalya's concerned voice whispered over our radios

"Yes lady, we are fine, the eels have broken pursuit. We are on our way home." I stated with a long sigh of elation.

"Good, Kosuke and Richard are back at the base, Arthur and I are coming out to get you, keep up your heading" Natalya informed us as I slowed the mech down to return home. I will have to repair my poor *Crab* for weeks, the entire thing was taxed to its core today. I am very fortunate I was able to keep it so well maintained.

"Thank you Wolf, I would not have made it today without you" I said.

"Aff" He said plainly.

We said nothing further as we listened. We could not see but what was right within our now meager search lights, and the sensors on my mech only scan things attached to the ground, not aerial beasts like the ones who had just accosted us. We drew nearer to the *Archimedes* without incident and finally began to relax.

I was slowly getting used to the alien landscape of U339. The mech was now adjusting for the soft floor well as I maneuvered my mech across the dark world. The darkness was not quite so frightening as well. I always had my trusty battlemech and its lights were fusion powered so there was no need to worry about a burn out. We had survived a terror and won. I was beginning to think that our time here would not be quite so terrible after all.

I stopped paying attention.

I slammed the mech's brakes suddenly as I nearly walked straight into a large stalagmite that suddenly appeared in front of me. Wolf slid forward slightly but grabbed on using his Battle armor's claw.

"...Kerensky! What are you doing Sir Specs?" Wolf grumbled, obviously upset with my driving.

"I am so sorry Wolf, I did not see the rock formation on my sensors, as a matter of fact I STILL do not see it. It's almost...as...if..." I slowed to a stop. Wolf held his tongue as well. The rock formation turned slowly, my main searchlight stayed fixed on the object in front of us. It turned slowly until the center of my light focused on a gigantic black shape, with a single blue, piercing, eye.

The eye was simply that, a pool of blue, I saw a series of membranes slide over it, it must be adapting to my light. The creature slowly lifted off the ground. It looked like a floating bell with eyes. It just hung there in the air, it was so haunting, so petrifying, that I dare not move. The bottom of the bell opened slightly, and the drained corpse of one of the eels we saw earlier dropped down, white and lifeless. This must be why they did not chase us.

"I would advise a tactical withdraw" Wolf said without hesitation.

"Aff" I said, copying his way of speech, and angled my mech to the side and jammed the throttle.

The second we started to speed away the bell like creature gave chase. It undulated the lower part of the bell at such a speed that it was quickly gaining on us.

"Evasion is impossible brace for impact!" Wolf warned as the creature descended upon us. I steeled myself for the impending horror of yet another demonic creature birthed on this dark planet. The bell creature certainly did not disappoint my compulsory exposure to the macabre. The bottom of the bell flipped inside out, revealing eight tentacles laden with teeth with the length of ship nails, dripping with unctuous fluid that would no doubt be fatal to the touch and at its center, a spiral of teeth that seemed to continue into an everlasting abyss. Clearly the creature's horrible mouth.

"I am engaging" Wolf stated plainly as the beast charged to devour my Clan companion. It not only caught up to us without the smallest effort, but it dropped upon us with the most horrifying intensity, lashing towards Wolf with the deplorable tentacles.

I heard the sound of metal leaving a tube as Wolf fired the two short ranged missiles kept on his Battle Armor's backpack. The rounds shot up into the creature, detonating against two the tentacles, shearing them off. The beast howled in agony and fell backwards out of the air. Before it struck the ground, the bell creature flapped it's bottom membrane again, pulling into the air once more.

"Assistance requested" Wolf stated. The SRM's were a one time trick...

"Hang on Wolf" I said, and twisted my *Crab's* torso to fire on it with my operational laser. I fired at it, but the shot went wide.

"Good effort" Wolf said, clearly sarcastic.

"Wolf duck your head!" Arthur shouted as he and Natalya arrived on the scene, we had made it back to the *Archimedes!* Arthur's *Mercury* fired its lasers with a greater effect than mine as Natalya got between me and the monster with her captured clan Omnimech, a *Summoner C*.

"Quickly, get inside, once it cannot detect living tissue, the eidolon will let us go!" Natalya notified us as we continued to run to the drop ship. I hesitated for a second. Something wasn't right now...

"GO!" Arthur commanded. I obeyed and returned to the hangar. Arthur was quickly behind me and Natalya blasted off another tentacle with her mech's Gauss rifle before slamming the hangar shut. We all stopped and held our breath as the creature banged and raged against the mech hangar door, after a few seconds, it gave up and soared away...

"Many thanks friends..." I said, exasperated.

"Operation complete, I have returned with your missing member" Wolf stated to Arthur.

"Thank you Wolf..." Our commander said as he exited his mech. "Specs are you still with us?"

I sat there in my mech, shaking uncontrollably. What horrors I experienced today. Do they plague me and me alone? After mustering enough courage, I exited and made my way to my small cabin room. Needless to say I did not sleep soundly that night. I kept my bed far from the window, and never turned out the light.

Entry 6:

I cannot say morning, as there was no dawn, but nevertheless I awoke after a time of some very erratic sleeping. I found myself reviewing the events of yesterday over and over again, coupled with the horrible dreams which followed. I had nightmares, terrible nightmares. Ones that defied logic, reason or sheer comprehension. There was a voice, and darkness, and it called to me over and over yet I did not answer. It reached for me in nothingness, and though I could not see, I knew it was reaching to strangle me...

I suddenly remembered something I had forgotten in the rush and terror of yesterday's excursion. The landing! I was certain I had seen that symbol before that we analyzed when we first entered the planet's thin atmosphere! I pushed aside the junk and papers that accumulated on the second, unused bed in my cabin I effectively repurposed to a desk and searched for my tome! I found it, and grabbed the heavy book, fishing everywhere for its key. I suddenly remembered it was in my pilot's jacket, which was hanging from my cabin door.

Wham! I was struck hard by the opening door, digging my goggles into my forehead. Occasionally protective eyewear, isn't.

"Specs! Oh goodness I am so sorry!" Natalya said as she helped me back to my feet.

"Never the worry dear lady. I was just in a hurry and was not paying attention" I said, dusting myself off.

"Oh look you're bleeding. Here you poor thing..." She purred as she pulled out the small medkit she keeps in her utility belt. She removed my goggles, I was blinded by the onset of light.

"My goodness, you're so dirty under there. " She said to me "No wonder you never take them off."

I blushed slightly from the embarrassment of it all. Natalya escorted me back to the bed and proceeded to fix my minor wound. A gesture both calming and beyond kind on my so very weary soul.

"Hmm..." She said as she finished patching me up. A large adhesive band was placed on my forehead. "I never knew you had blue eyes, so pretty, you should show them off more often"

Now I really flustered.

"Thank you lady! I appreciate the medical attention!" I said as she stood up, I quickly hid behind my goggles once more and saluted. She smiled, returned the salute and said.

"We are all expected right away, the Commander says it is very urgent"

Entry 7:

"So. Does anyone have anything they want to tell me, and the rest of the crew? Something important?" Commander Arthur Sampras said in an unusually cold and foreboding tone. The entire crew spare Wolf, of course, glanced around nervously. "Wolf, care to explain?"

"We were never scheduled to jump here." He said in his deep, Elemental voice.

"What do you mean?" Natalya asked in a very concerned tone.

"What he means" Arthur said, standing and pacing slowly around us all "That our navigations were tampered with, charts and courses altered, so that we would arrive here, instead of the Comstar expeditionary path intended for us. We are now on a hostile world, clearly the flora and fauna do not agree with us, and as it stands we lack the fuel or capacity to leave. Someone really wants us to be here, and it is someone in this room, and I want to know *why*."

Murmurs accumulated around the room. I looked to Kosuke, who shot me a confused frown as I raised my eyebrow. We had no idea that anything had been tampered with.

"What do you know?!" Richard said suddenly, grabbing me and lifting me up out of my chair. I gasped as Kosuke moved around to try and put himself in between me and Richard, but he held hard on my Comstar robes. "Tell my mystic boy! What do you want here?"

"I... I don't know! I never knew anything had been changed!" I cried aloud, was it / who was under suspicion? Wolf stepped forward to entice Richard to let go of me. Natalya cringed at seeing me lifted up. Richard finally let go.

"Stop it, all of you." Arthur said. "Now, Wolf and Kosuke do not have access to the navigation system, and Specs, you *do* have a fascination with the occult and those old earthen tomes..."

"But it isn't me Commander, I promise on my honor as a member of Comstar, under the light of Blake I promise!" I said in earnest, I hoped my tone would exude sincerity.

"All right..." Arthur said, "We don't know who did it, but I will investigate fully once we are off this godforsaken rock. Now, Natalya, Richard, Kosuke, you're with me today. We are checking east, there's some scanning anomalies which might be a more mech friendly source of fuel to collect. Wolf, keep an eye on Specs while we are gone, and as always, keep us posted for anything"

"Aff, Commander" Wolf saluted. I was a prisoner in my own circle of friends. Kosuke patted my shoulder as he left.

"Let us find our fuel, so we can be off, and past this" He said with a smile.

"You know I didn't do it" I said.

"I know" He said, and walked to the mech bay with the others.

Entry 8:

I sat at the briefing room table with all my tomes and calculations on the planet in front of me. Wolf stood behind me, in Battle Armor, watching my every move. His mobile dolls were stationed around the windows of the dropship to keep an eye on any visitors, and he kept video tabs on our Lance though the many displays in his suits iconic visor.

"Wolf, I promise you it was not me" I said.

"I know Sir Spec, I do not suspect you" He said. I suddenly felt both surprised and relieved.

"Nor do I suspect you" I said. He moved back slightly in his armor. I don't think he ever thought that he could possibly be considered a suspect.

"Well... that is good. What is it that you are studying?" He asked, in a strange bit of conversation. Clearly he was uncomfortable with the idea of his noble Clan Warrior lineage being questioned of sabotage.

"This book, or rather tome" I said, cracking open the heavy leather book. "Most of it is written in a language I barely understand, and it far predates humanity's departure from earth." I remembered when talking to him to try to avoid contractions, as it bothers Clan Warriors.

This caught his attention, and he moved over my shoulder to glance at the book. Like all Clan Warriors he was utterly fascinated with anything to do with earth, and the older the better. I could see his eyes twinge with a bit of childlike wonderment as I flipped through the pages of the archaic tome. Strange symbols, charts and creatures filled its pages as I read him a few scrawled notes one of the book's previous owners had written in the margins.

In the back there was a small insert I had not seen before. It was apparently written by another member of the Comstar Exploration corps, some couple hundred years ago. It was a series of page numbers followed by a map of the inner sphere. There was a series of dots I've come to recognize as stars, followed by a circle with a single word pointing to it. It simply said "Azathoth"

"What is an Azathoth?" Wolf asked. I grabbed the page out of the tome, and turned to one of the underlined page numbers, and what I found was positively horrifying.

I read aloud. *"Outside the ordered universe, that amorphous blight of nethermost confusion which blasphemes and bubbles at the center of all infinity—the boundless daemon sultan Azathoth, whose name no lips dare speak aloud, and who gnaws hungrily in inconceivable, unlighted chambers*

beyond time and space amidst the muffled, maddening beating of vile drums and the thin monotonous whine of accursed flutes" I said, trembling as I read. Wolf shook his armored head in confusion.

"So it is some sort of creature?" He asked for clarification.

"Azathoth was apparently some sort of evil cult god back in ages past on terra, people in the time actually used to sacrifice humans to the god in order to receive amazing boons of terrible power,...according to the text though, Azathoth promises nothing, only utter destruction to all live in existence, stated in this text, it seems to reside " I could barely breathe..."on a world of complete darkness far out of the reaches of the inner sphere..."

"There" He said, pointing at a portion of the hideous cacophony that counted as a picture of the infernal beast. There was a symbol of a star with an eye at its center. The very thing we saw upon landing.

We were in the lair of the infernal beast the antithesis of life, Azathoth.

"This planet is not a place we should linger" Wolf said with the closest thing I could possibly attribute to fear.

"This is a place we should have never come" I said.

"Why did you not see this before?" Wolf said, slightly testy.

"I didn't know! I only just acquired the tome before we left and I just two weeks ago got around to deciphering it!" I said in earnest. Wolf bristled, clearly not happy with my explanation.

"Then why do you have two copies for study?" He said irately, believing he had me cornered in conversation.

"What?" I said, immediately very surprised.

"There are two copies of this book, one in your possession, the other in the private locker of Natalya Mikiev!" He yelled at me, still bent on getting the "Truth" from me. I gasped as the blood drained from my face completely as he finished his sentence. I could see his own expression drop in reaction to my surprise, he figured it out as I did. We said nothing.

The radio clicked on the *Archimedes'* PA system.

"Guys you're not going to believe this. We have found a gigantic building, the whole thing looks like an ancient version of the temple of Blake, we are going to check it out, Sampras, out."

They were about to be sacrificed to the evil god.

Entry 9:

"Do not hold back your speed on my account! I can withstand the force with ease!" Wolf yelled to me as I gunned the throttle of my *Crab* towards the crew's last known location with Wolf riding once more on top. He had set his mobile dolls to operate the drop ship's functions and joined me on my effort to rescue our friends from certain doom. We had tried hailing them over and over, yet they did not answer.

"Commander, Kosuke, Richard are you there! Get out of there I repeat get out of there!" I called over and over again. I neglected to say anything in regards to Natalya's betrayal, I could not believe it for myself, I *would* not believe it for myself.

A rasping sound filled the air, dread eels descended from the black sky again, but we had not the time or patience for them today.

"Begone creatures, do not impede us!" Wolf barked as he fired off his ER Laser, shredding the creatures' flesh as they descended. I sheared away the remaining eels with my own arm mounted laser, my other arm was still damaged from yesterday, but I could fight one handed if I must.

They were not as adamant about attacking us today, I dare hoped it was not because they have already eaten. I ran through the darkness, gliding past the rocks and fissures that dotted this accursed planet until we arrived a place that was unmistakably the point of entry for our friend, a monolithic, black, temple.

The building was nearly without feature, It was a single black spire that curled high above what our meager lighting solution could acquire, the doorway could easily fit five or six assault mechs standing side by side, clearly this was built for something gigantic. A few lines of the same archaic text that was scrawled throughout my dark tome. I did not have to understand the text to know what it read, this was a place of death of the most incredible horror, and if my friends were to ever see light again, I must go within.

"Commander! Ko! Brace up! I'm coming down!" I called to the darkness as I stepped into the dark abyss below.

Entry 10:

The temple was a long series of stairs of immense size, all spiraling down. My hands trembled at the controls as I marveled at the eldritch wonder around me. The floor cracked slightly as the heavy weight of my mech's gargantuan feet made footfall on this most unusual building material. I could make out odd shapes and scribbles along the wall, it was only when I had descended further did I realize they were languages, scrawlings of people long past. Possibly worshippers from long ago, but how could they have possibly gotten out here?

"Sir specs... look..." Wolf said as he pointed towards an odd light in a room that deviated from the winding stairs.

The room was a long grand hall of darkness, I could only make out the area in front of me, I dare not venture to quickly, or risk falling off what looked like an edge. It appears this room contained some sort of bridge.

In the room was a series of... mouths. Yes, that was the best way I could describe them. They were amorphous, simply floating in the air in a chaotic formation, opening and closing with a horrid slow and deliberate fashion. Every time one opened I was slightly blinded by an incredible light. Within the light were... places... many of them at complete random but a couple of them were familiar sites. The Palace at Luthien, the rolling hills of Terra, these were places in other points of the galaxy... could they be a form of transportation to these worlds?

Wolf thought as I did, but with more Clan like pragmatism. He fired his ER Laser from his suit into one of the portals, as it scorched the ground on the other side.

"They are passages" He said plainly. "We can gather the others, and escape"

"Yes... YES, we can! We must hurry!" I stated and turned my mech to leave.

Clink

My mech's foot struck something metallic, Wolf jumped to the floor while I whirled my mech to face the noise. I gasped as the metallic glint in front of me slowly illuminated into a ghastly familiar shape, the commander's Mercury lay lifeless on the floor in front of me.

"Commander Arthur!" Wolf said aloud, leaping to the cockpit of the fallen mech. The entry hatch was ripped open, there was no one inside. Wolf bent down in front of the mech and smashed his clawed hand against the obsidian floor.

drip

The sound of liquid on metal sounded in Wolf's headset microphone. I could hear the echo on my own comm unit. Wolf sat up when he heard the sound, and suddenly realized he was standing in a sort of puddle. The light on his claw illuminated his right knee.

It was covered in blood.

drip

We looked up to follow the source of the blood, immediately wishing we had not. Above us, on metal hooks dangling from the jagged ceiling hung the body of our Commander. Skinned and ravaged, He hung upside down so that the blood would collect on his skinned head and drop into a hideous black mouth that protruded from the wall. With every drop, another portal opened.

"Blood of Kerensky..." Wolf said, finally losing his Clan calmness.

"Oh god... Wolf... " I could not finish my sentence, I could not move. This was madness! What could have driven us here? What if the legends are all true? Azathoth... the dark god, he will bring all life to an end. What has been made will be unmade! All that has been created shall be destroyed! Oh god, oh Blake, we are damned! In what folly have we brought about our own inexhaustible demise? There is no hope... there is no hope. Oh god... oh god...His eyes, they're staring at me! Stop staring at me!

"Mechwarrior Specs!" Wolf screamed at me, slapping the metal of my *Crab's* center torso hard. I jumped in my seat. "Focus, if we do not hurry we will lose the others, now, let us leave this place and continue down. Let the Commander's sacrifice not be in vein, we have a way out. "

"Yes... yes. Let us continue" I said, hanging my head so I would be certain not to gaze upon the eyes of our dear commander on the way out...

Entry 11:

We had succeeded in descending to the last flight of stairs in this infernal spire. As the area around the stairs began to open up, we heard the crackle of radio and a familiar voice.

"...ommander Arthur. Sergeant Natalya! Please come in. Where are you?" Kosuke yelled into his radio.

"Kosuke, Richard! Muriel here! Come quickly! We have to leave NOW!" I ordered back. We approached the end of the stairs and at last we found them. The *Zeus* and *Warhammer* were waiting in front of a large, golden, circular door in a dimly lit antechamber. Bioluminescent lichens covered the roof, illuminating the area with a ghastly blue glow.

"Spec-san! What are you doing down here?" Kosuke replied, obviously surprised.

"Specs! God, I'm sorry about earlier man, are you all right? I'm beginning to think the traitor is.." Richard said, I cut him off.

"Natalya, we know, and do not worry about our quarrels, we need to get out now" I said.

"Natalya? I was going to say Wolf!" Richard said. Wolf snorted in disapproval.

"Natalya! Natalya is with the commander!" Kosuke said with sudden realization.

"The commander is dead, but we have a way out. Come quickly and we may make it in time. We do not have time to explain, follow me!" Wolf ordered. Leaping off me and moving up the stairs with his jump jets. We nodded to one another and followed our companion back up the dark stairs.

A large stone slab slammed shut at the top of the antechamber, nearly crushing Wolf in the process. We were sealed in.

"No... there is no escape from him" Natalya's voice echoed over the area. She sounded... different. Her sultry and sweet voice was not replaced by a grim gravel tone, as if her voice had gone horse quite some time ago.

"Natalya? Why are you doing this?" Richard asked. "C'mon let us go, let's all get outa here."

"Ha ha... why would I leave? This is the destiny of all. Why deny it?" Natalya began. "We are all damned to die. There is no escape from it. Look at us, look at the world around us. We cross the stars and explore the universe for what? To find more battlefields, to create more death, to bring chaos and disorder everywhere. We are no different from he who cannot be named, we are but a mirror image of the great old one. We are his eidolons of destruction, his sentinels of death. We inflict nothing but pain and suffering on all the world, consumed by anger and hatred. There is no point in life, only peace in death.

That is what our lord brings, he will bring about the ultimate peace and understanding, in death we shall all be equal. In death we shall all be free. Come, come lord Azathoth, baptize this galaxy in your righteous destruction! Bring on the eternal age of darkness! Yes, the greatest of old ones shall return, and he shall pour out upon every world through his glorious open portals, he shall exist in every quadrant of the galaxy, not a soul shall escape judgment!"

"She's gone mad!" Richard exclaimed suddenly, Natalya appeared on all of our video communications. She had blood smeared across her body. She wore only a tank top and undergarments, but we could see she had carved Eldritch runes and incantations into her own skin across her body.

"Mad? Nay I am the only one of sane mind here! I understand! The great old one has given me his tome and I have unlocked its secrets. I know the true fate of existence and only I can bring upon its salvation! Enough prattle, I grow weary of this mortal coil. It is time..." She roared and cackled with a strange sound to her voice, as if she was simply a puppet for another being. The Natalya we had known for so long was gone, and her husk was nothing but the harbinger of our own demise.

"This is going to suck..." Richard said as he whirled around towards the doors, bringing his *Zeus'* weapons to the ready on whatever shall come through that door. Wolf still worked on the obsidian slab sealing our exit while Kosuke stood by my side.

"Spec- san, I want you to know it has been my greatest honor having served with you" My dear friend said with a smile.

"Likewise, tomodachi" I said as I reaffixed my goggles and moved my mech to back up Richard's *Zeus*.

We heard the chants and shouting of Natalya "la, la!" she called as she muttered words far out of my comprehension, lastly, we saw her draw an archaic knife on the video screen and I knew exactly what she intended to do. She smiled as she turned the knife towards her, and I flipped off the video.

With another life extinguished, the door began to open.

Entry 12:

The golden door began to twitch, several large moving parts on the door began to turn, the star symbol on the door was broken, no longer would it hold back what lay within. Without further warning the door sprang open! We gasped at the prospect of what lay inside.

Nothing... there was nothing inside... it was a small dark hole with a bare wall. Nothing lay inside...

"Holy hell... this whole thing is made up?" Richard said.

"Perhaps?" I guessed. This could not be.

"Do not be so sure" Wolf said. "Remember the portal gates, I know not how they could have been fabricated. Expect our enemy soon. In the meantime, I have found a mechanism which will operate this gate. Give me the time I need to open it and we shall all return to the gate room."

"No idea what a portal gate is, but I like it" Richard said.

"The commander is dead isn't he?" Kosuke asked.

"Aff" Wolf said, they needed no further explanation, nor wanted one.

BAROOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO

"What the hell is that?" Richard asked.

"Trumpets." Kosuke stated.

"Here he comes" I nervously replied. I remembered the words of the ancient tome, and the sounds that accompany the arrival of the evil one.

We began to hear drums. Pounding, pounding in the deep. The back wall of the open door began to ripple, as if something was distorting it. A blue light began to creep up from the bottom, creating a fissure in the wall. We held our breath, and watched the chaos unfold.

With a tremendous crash the wall was torn open, we were given a glimpse of something no mortal should ever see. There was open space in some sort of infernal cosmic rift from which I dare not, out of sheer decency, clarify to no one. Out of that sea of infernal horror came a shadow, something both amorphous and ghastly in such a way that I cannot fully for what life I have in me describe nor comprehend. I saw only a horrid mass of flagella, mouths, and eyes as it oozed in our direction with an unearthly pace.

"I don't care what kind of mythological bullshit you hail from, but taste real Davion steel. Meet Zeus, bitch!" Richard Dresari bravely shouted as he stepped forward with his mighty assault mech. He brought down a force on that infernal creation like none other. We supported him, Kosuke firing off his

PPC's rapidly, showering the beast with lightning while I slashed portions off the body with the raking motion of my lasers.

We had no idea what we were facing, nor had we understood the horrible power that beast was capable of. The portions of it that we had seared off simply were gathered again as soon as the center mass passed over the other parts. The gunfire seemed only to slow its progress, not stop it.

"The gate is open! Quickly!" Wolf shouted as the obsidian slab relinquished its hold at the top of the stairs, he angled it to fall from the great height, and it landed on the infernal beast.

"Go!" Richard yelled "You gotta shut whatever damn portal this thing is going to get out of. You heard the girl it's gonna eat the damn galaxy!" He kept his guns on the hideous mass as it slowly writhed from under the obsidian slab.

The *Zeus's* heat was reaching critical mass as he fired time and time again at it.

"I can't hold it back forever... just GO!" He roared to us. Kosuke and I nodded and hurried up the dark stairs as fast as we possibly could. We ran past Wolf on the way up. He did not follow.

"It is the fate of a warrior to die in battle" Wolf said as we halted. "I will make sure this... creature, understands true pain before I do"

We nodded to Wolf, and continued up the stairs to close the portal gates. It was the last we ever saw of either of them.

I realized at that moment, this was a one way trip. I routed the controls from my mech to the *Archimedes* and by relay to the hyper pulse generator aboard our jumpship *The Amber Dawn*. With a sigh of deep and fatal resignation. I write my final entry.

Entry 13

Oh Blake, what have we wrought on ourselves? If only we could possibly fathom the folly we have wrought upon our lust for starbound adventure, we shall have never left the sweet comfort of Terra.

I know now that ultimate understanding comes at an ultimate price; and with it the reward of eminent madness.

I write these last few entries not in hope of survival, but in the odd account that whoever shall find this, burn what you find, this along with the infernal planet as the Smoke Jaguars did to Turtle Bay, leave not a scrap of cloth nor ounce of flesh standing. Perhaps if we had not stumbled upon this... no! The horror inside must be known! Perhaps there is still time, perhaps if you, you who survive us all can somehow utilize the message I send to you on our very last beam of light, that someday this might make it to you that perhaps my crew and I may be vindicated yet! Oh Blake, forgive us all of our deeds, and I take solace in knowing that all lives extinguish for a reason...

Now, please steel yourself for the remaining account I upload to you now, the fate of deep periphery expedition 195,

and our decent into madness...

*****BLACK BOX DATA NOV 1ST 3059: Mech CRAB Pilot MURIEL FOCHT*****

Muriel: It is done, tomodachi .

Kosuke: Let us continue, we are nearly there.

Shots fired

(Intermittent) Suspected Richard Dresari: Oh god... it's all around me. Wolf, shoot it!... Die you son of a...

Contact lost ZEU-9T Zeus Assault Mech

Shots fired

Shots fired

Shots fired

Animal Roar, unidentified

Contact lost Infantry Elemental Battle Armor

Muriel: We are in the room! Find a way to close the portals

Kosuke: Oh god... the commander

Muriel: Don't look at it! Fire, tear the entire thing down!

Shots fired

Kosuke: The gates are closing, its working!

Muriel: Keep at it, we cannot let a single portal go!

Animal sound, unidentified

Kosuke: There is not enough time...

Muriel: Where are you going? What are you doing?

Kosuke: What I can. Sayonara, Spec-san

Muriel: Kosuke!

Shots fired

Animal roar, unidentified

Shots fired

Unintelligible sound, possibly a scream

Contact Lost Warhammer WHM-6R

Muriel: It is done... mech power... gone... portals ... gone. I hear it... scratching... biting... trying to get in... it will never get out. I will never get out. I cannot see.

Thud

Thud

Thud

Muriel: It is here.

*****TRANSMISSION TERMINATED*****