Star Bun: The Next of Kin

The Elder Bunstronaut held a bag, and each of us—the five left from our crew—slowly hopped by and dropped a paw full of our pellets into it. Zeph would reach into the bag, draw a pellet, and run a test to match it to its creator.

The last time we had done this was when the experimental trash sweeper Hopper-Alpha-1 lost one of its flight engineers during an emergency EBA.

Of course, we would all visit young Sharpfoot’s mom, but we had to have a spokesbun. We knew Fate could take anybun of us at any time, that she didn’t care about the rank of the bun or who their commanding officer was. We just wanted to be fair when picking the spokesbun.

A charred and blood-stained fragment of Sharpfoot’s suit, a piece of his helmet’s visor, his sextant, and other personal items rested in a basket next to the potted seedling of a willow tree.

Zeph looked up from his DNA mapper and fixed his gaze on Joey. The Elder Bunstronaut became quiet as he emptied the bag of pellets around the seedling and gritted his teeth in sadness. Scars and spots of worn-out fur on his ears bore witness to adventures long forgotten. One could be forgiven for thinking he was spending his days in the garden, napping and taking in the summer breeze. His eyes cut through that notion. Sharp and brilliant, resurrected by the tender paws of doctors, his eyes craved more starlight.

He remained still for a long time, communing with the memories of friends and flights past, then whispered, “Tough pick, Joey.”