

A Reveni - RETURN

December 23, 2225.

International Space Station – Launch Bay #1-A

“Congratulations, you’ve been hear by promoted to the rank of Second Lieutenant of the ISSAF. With this you’ll have access to second tier housing and third tier ration access.” I was changing into my re-entry suit while a uniformed woman read off my final rights before departure. “In the case of your death or a status of missing in action, these benefits will be transferred to your next of kin. If you have no next of kin, these benefits will be transferred to a family of your choice.” She was monotone, zero emotion, while reading off her mini-tablet to a person she most definitely thought would be dead after leaving the station. “Due to the high importance of your mission, successful completion will award you with a promotion to the rank of Captain of the ISSAF.” A two rank jump, something that hasn’t happened for over a hundred years. Though, they don’t expect me to even survive on the surface for more than a couple of hours and the GPS tracker along with the vitals tracker that have been planted under my skin will make them sure of that event. “You will be launching in two hours, please take that time to have your final meal and goodbyes on the station.” With that last statement the uniformed woman left me within the preparation room feeling like an inmate on death-row. This didn’t surprise me though, a handful of attempts have been made in the past to study the surface. All five attempts ended in failure within the first 10 hours of operation time. Razgriz 1, referred to as R1, ended with the pod burning up on reentry due to improper calibration in 2154. R2 got a man on the surface but he died due to suit filtration issues in 2156. R3 had somewhat better luck with lasting a whole hour on the surface before the last transmission relayed to the station identified an attacker, nothing else is known but fatal damage was taken, this was in 2160. R4 was a mission forced upon a selected resident due to no volunteers stepping forward, R4 died on impact with the surface when landing in a rocky terrain in 2174. Finally the latest mission attempted in 2204 required my father to launch onto the surface, he lasted longer than any other mission attempt for a total of 8 hours.

His status was changed to MIA when his GPS and vital tracker failed to relay with the station’s monitors. Though a final text transmission made it through, “*South-West Asian region tech 22-bFRYA29-FR4U3-CMU\R444-PIT412GO_FREEDOM*” though not much has been made of this transmission other than some hypotheses. My father was landed in the SW Asian region of what was Laos, Vietnam, and Thailand thus the first part being the automated system tracking. The long string of numbers and letters was the actual transmission my father sent; *FRYA* is thought to refer to Freyja the AI, *FR4U* can mean Frau which was a nickname some gave to Freyja, *CMU* was discerned as Carnegie Mellon University where she was created and held, *PIT412* means CMU’s location of Pittsburgh and its area code of 412, and *GO* meaning *Go to this place*. The message wasn’t received until the year 2222 but strangely from CMU’s ancient relay tower instead of the relay tower my father set up in SW Asia. With this possibly being a clue to returning to the surface the ISS Committee ordered preparations be made for another surface mission to investigate Pittsburgh and the CMU complex. Though with CMU being a technological powerhouse, the mission evolved into a tech scavenging mission to help the station be maintained while also attempting to build a surface forward operations base and drop point.

I finished my final meal, said goodbye to my mother for what was probably the final time, and proceeded to my drop pod. “We expect a many great things to come from you in the near future with this mission we set you out to complete.” A committee member shook my hand in

I loaded the weapon with its standard ammunition of 5.56 caliber rounds, almost all rifles used this caliber in the United States so finding more here on the surface shouldn't be too troublesome. A mini-map loaded up in the corner of my helmet display and pointed me in the direction of CMU. I decided to take out my mini-tablet and look at the GPS mapping for a better idea of where I was. I had landed in an area called *Cannonsburg* which had been a small community outside the city some twenty miles with CMU being about 25 miles away. I studied the map more on how I would make my way north into the city and came up with only two safe bet routes. The first would be to take what was called Interstate-79 North and then switch to Interstate-376 West (Though I would be moving East on it) which was closer but goes through areas recorded to have high flood risk. The other option was to walk some three or four miles East to reach a long stretch of road called US-19 which I could follow up North until reaching I-376 taking me into the city, this route was going through more communities that were formed outside the city with many of them being more affluent when society was still around. Having a more affluent area meant the possibility of having more structured homes so finding a place to hold out for a night wouldn't be very difficult and with many buildings called *Shops*, homes that carried different items that were exchanged for currency, being in these areas I could come upon proper supplies even after a hundred years. I decided on the slightly longer route along US-19, after gathering up my supply pack and setting up the pod's remote relay link with the station I left what was familiar behind and forged ahead.