They came in too low over Sarpedon, its towering ice spires and cracks screaming before them as the lander ploughed its way through the thin but ice crystal laden atmosphere. Perhaps it was a miscalculation in the lander’s computer, but Pietrov, the technician furiously denied any wrong doing. Jackson, a grizzly of a man, their supposed specialist for the mission, commented that the weather patterns were not well known on the planet. A down draft near one of the massive ice plates that covered the planet might have forced them into a suboptimal landing trajectory.

Malacki, the supposed leader of this exploratory group listened to both of the two men and said nothing. Not because he didn’t know which one to trust, but because nothing like this had ever happened before.

He knew fully well it was patronage that earned him this position over these two veterans. His cousin was on the board of directors for the Trans-Steller Cartography Corporation and although Malacki wanted no special privilege, it would seem that friendly cousin decided to tip his hand anyway.

He stuck his head out of the land and quickly regretted it. Even suited up (the atmosphere was not quite breathable, 5 minutes and you’d be done, regardless of the cold) the chill hit him like a sack of bricks. He hastily closed the hatch.

“You’ll be wanting these”, Jackson motioned to a nondescript panel on the wall. Inside were suit add-ons, an exo-skeleton like attachment that was supposed to provide extra insulation and durability. Jackson had apparently given his manager a bit of trouble when the poor pencil pusher had tried to send their group down there without them. Jackson, without orders was already suiting up.

“It doesn’t matter what we go out in. ” Pietrov complained. “We’re almost 10 miles from where we were supposed to land. There’s no stable ground to deploy the station!” Previous explatory teams had substantial trouble with the mobile equipment lab, its design was top-notch, but its actual fabrication had been contracted out to the lowest bidder and due to some unforeseen error, it vibrated badly. So badly in fact, that teams on desert planets and the like had complained of sunken stations after only a half a day of operation. There was even a rumor, nothing substantial, that they had lost a team like that, buried alive suffocated under the ground.

Ignoring that last thought Malacki tried to bring some semblance of order to the group. “Its clear that we’ve had a bit of a set back, but blaming each other won’t help at this point. We have the turbo-sled for exactly this purpose.”

“The turbo-sled blows. You can’t even get 4 mph out of the thing” Pietrov complained again as he swiveled in his pilot chair.”

“Doesn’t matter ,” Jackson growled as he hurled the exo-suit at Pietrov, connecting with a dull thwack. “If you think we’re going any fast than that anyway in this climate, you’ve got another thing coming.” He said as he lifted open the hatch and disappeared into the outside.

“Need anything from the land?” Malacki offered as the two struggled into their exo-suits. “Everything is in the station. That’s the point.” Pietrov answered face obscured by the suit.

Actually Malacki did know that, something similar had happened on his other mission, but he certainly had not been in charge of that one. He had the honor of working under captain Underman, one of the original founders of TCC. Underman had been a space explorer before everything had become privatized and all fame left the profession. If it was just as simple as hauling the station a bit before setting up shop. “Piece of cake!” Malacki said to no one, realizing that Pietrov had already left the lander.

Scrambling out, trying to ignore the cold, he saw Jackson purposefully unbolting the station while Pietrov struggled with detaching the shielding around the turbo-sled. The three worked in silence amid the blinding snow until with a grinding of metal and a ice reverberating thud, the station dropped onto the ground, starting another round of complaints from Pietrov.

“What are you doing> We need to have dropped it onto the turbo-sled. How are we going to move it now?” He asked as the second to last bolt vanished into the snow. “Shit” Pietrov muttered as he dropped to his knees, looking for the piece.

“Forget it” Malacki said, “You’ll never find it and we don’t need it.”

“Are you going to dick around until we freeze? Unhook that damn sled and lets get going!”

Malacki scowled under his helmet but said nothing. The last bolt unriveted and the sled tilted into the snow. “How much power does it have?” Malacki suddenly asked as Jackson muscled the two out of his way and pushed the inert sled over to the station module.

Undeterred, Pietrov slipped his way into the driver’s seat and started powering on the sled. “Looks like plain batteries, so probably a couple of days if we take it slow.” Pietrov said, configuring the sled. Jackson stopped trying to push the station module and looked over his shoulder. “Are you kidding me? I specifically asked for a nuclear pile!”

“A nuclear pile for a turbo-sled? I’d be surprised if they even allow that! The station will have one, although we’ll need to deploy it to come out of hibernation.”

“Yeah, yeah, I know” Jackson growled above the wind, “Help me lift this onto the sled!”

Pietrov made no sign of moving as Jackson and Malacki positioned themselves at the corners of the metal cube.

“There’s no way we can lift that.” Pietrov said pointing at the station, but he lowered the sides on the flat sled anyway.

“Yes we can, even with you two wimps.” The massive man lowered his body, wrapping his gloved hands around the massive cube. “Just need…to move it a goddamn inch”

Malacki struggled to help the man as he slowly raised the station almost single handedly. Pietrov said nothing but helped by backing the now operational turbo-sled under the massive station. In less than ten minutes and with considerable effort on all three crew member’s parts, the station was now correctly centered and loaded on the sled., leaving barely enough room for the driver.

“There’s not enough room for us” Malacki noted. Jackson ignored the comment and peered over Pietrov. “You have the coordinates? ”

“Locked in. The lander will provide positional data, even buried under snow.” Pietrov said, looking back at the snow half buried lander.

“Lets go then” Malacki said and amidst the suffocating snow, the group set out, the turbo sled lumbering behind them.

For what seemed like forever, the group labored in silence, or rather none of them spoke, the wails of the thin Sarpedonian atmosphere ever present. Completely blinded by snow, the group could only rely on Pietrov’s occasional subtle course corrections to assure theu were not heading in circles, or worse, the wrong direction altogether.

In side his suit, Malaki listened to the plastic squeak of the joints with every stride and wrinkled his nose at the inevitable stench that arose from inhabiting the same suit for weeks at end.

Starved of conversation, he fiddled with his HUD in his suit. The read out was aparse, telling him useless biometrics and a few pieces