

# ***DIARY OF A MARTIAN***

THE DISCOVERY

***STEPHEN B. HAUNTS***



**ADVENTURES**  
IN WRITING



# ADVENTURES — IN WRITING —

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Developmental / copy editing, and proofreading by Scribendi

Manuscript version 1.1

Cover: © (2023) Ivan Zanchetta & bookcoversart.com

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Hardback: 978-1-9169067-4-7

Paperback: 978-1-9169067-8-5

Ebook: 978-1-9169067-9-2

# PROLOGUE

Earth Date: 9th January 2154

## Mars Orbital Space Station (MOSS)

[Reconstructed from declassified camera footage, systems logs and reports.]

“SHUTTLE ARCHIMEDES, you’re cleared to dock at hangar seventeen.” Lieutenant Sarah Taylor’s voice came through the comms system in the control centre of the Mars Orbital Space Station (MOSS), floating high above the Martian surface.

“Affirmative, engaging autopilot and beginning docking procedure,” replied Captain Ramirez.

“Autopilot confirmed. We’re bringing you in.” Sarah watched the shuttle dock from her command console.

“Sarah, now the formalities are over, come and meet me when we’ve docked. I have that package for your son,” said Captain Ramirez.

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“Thank you, Sam. Elliot will be thrilled.”

The Archimedes turned around on its final approach, ready to reverse into the docking clamps. Guidance rockets puffed small jets of gas to keep the shuttle on target. The gap between the shuttle and space station shrank until the docking clamps snapped shut, locking the shuttle in place. Captain Ramirez knew what he was doing. This was his sixth time docking at MOSS.

“Docking procedure complete. The hangar bay is now pressurised, ready to unload your cargo. Welcome back to MOSS, Captain Ramirez,” said Lieutenant Taylor.

“Affirmative. Starting shuttle unloading. It’s good to be back.”

Sarah turned to her colleagues in shuttle control. “Permission to supervise the Archimedes’s unload.”

Captain Ronson looked up. “Permission granted. Sam has the gift for Elliot?”

“He sure has. Elliot’s going to love it.”

“Your next shuttle rendezvous is in three hours, so take your time.”

“Thank you, sir.”

Sarah entered the corridor that extended the entire length of the space station’s rotating gravity habitat. On her way to the elevator, heading to the cargo bays, she stopped to look out the giant window. She never tired of the view of Mars. Here in the space station, they levitated high above the northern hemisphere, looking straight down at the Olympus Mons volcano, home to the New London and New Beijing colonies.

She called the elevator. A few seconds later, the doors opened, and she got in. A voice came over the speakers.



“Warning, you are about to leave an artificial gravity area. Please enable magnets and hold on.”

Sarah lifted her arm and tapped on the screen to enable the magnets in her boots. They snapped to the floor with a satisfying thud. She held onto the rail, and the elevator sped up. After a brief ride, she could feel herself becoming weightless, though her feet remained stuck to the ground. The door opened when the elevator stopped.

The magnets in her boots activated with each footstep, keeping her planted to the ground and preventing her from floating away. Outside the artificial gravity confines of the rotating gravity habitat, walking felt more like creeping. Sarah tried to coordinate her feet and keep her body stable. She reached the entrance to the hangar. The security sensor on the door recognised her as she approached it. It opened automatically.

“Sarah, great to see you again,” said Captain Sam Ramirez.

“Hey, Sam,” said Sarah as she gave him a hug. “How’s the unloading going?”

“Not bad. I should finish in a few hours.”

“When are you headed back to Earth?”

“A few weeks. I have some holiday time, so I thought I’d spend it down in New London. A shame to come all this way and not stay for a while.” Sam reached into a crate, which was secured to the floor with magnets. “That reminds me. Here’s that gift for Elliot. I had to call in a few favours to bring it with me.”

“He is going to love this,” said Sarah as he handed her a bag. She opened it and pulled out a large hardback book. “*The Collected Works of Sherlock Holmes*. He’s really into these old

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stories. He'll be so excited." There were no trees on Mars, so physical books and paper were rare.

Sam grinned. "You're welcome."

Suddenly, his smile dropped. "Hey, who are you?" He started striding past Sarah. She turned to see a man wearing a balaclava over his head. The man pulled out a small black cylinder from the bag. He pressed a button on the side, and a red light flashed. He thrust the cylinder onto the side of the cargo hatch on the shuttle. It started beeping. Then the man turned around and grabbed a crate. He disengaged his magnetic boots and launched off the ground hard, floating fast towards the cargo bay exit.

Sam turned around in confusion. "Bomb!" someone shouted, and the room, full of cargo workers, erupted into panic. The man had disappeared.

"Everyone out!" shouted Sam. "You too, Sarah."

Sarah stood firm. "I'm in charge of this shuttle when it's docked. We get everyone else out first." The workers disengaged their magnetic boots to reach the door faster. The beeping became a long single ring.

Next, came a deafening bang. The bomb had exploded. A fireball rose inside the shuttle. The metal docking clamps around the shuttle's cargo doors creaked and screeched. A cargo loading arm holding a large crate buckled and collapsed. It pinned Sam to the ground by his leg.

Sarah rushed over and tugged at the loading arm. "I can't move it."

"You need to leave. Now," Sam shouted.

"I can't just leave you."

"You have no..."

There was a massive crunch, and the shuttle shook. Sarah

and Sam looked at each other. The shuttle shook again as the clamps disintegrated under the pressure. The shuttle separated from its clamps, exposing the cargo bay to the empty vastness of space.

The loading arm pinning Sam to the ground moved with the sudden change in pressure. It blew Sam out of the hole and into space. Sarah clung to a handrail with all her strength. Escaping air rushed past her like a hurricane.

With one hand, Sarah managed to open a first-aid box attached to the side of the loading arm, yank out a respirator and shove it in her mouth for some emergency oxygen. The pressure door leading to the corridor outside the loading bay was wide open, exposing the station to the vacuum of space. Sarah reached to the computer on her arm and issued the command to seal the doors.

Relieved, Sarah clutched the handrail, but some debris broke loose and flew towards her, striking her arm. Sarah lost her grip and flew towards the gaping hole made by the destroyed shuttle docking clamps. She clutched at the grating on the floor, her lungs burning as the emergency air supply ran out. Her fingers could no longer hold on, and she was sucked towards the hole and out into space.



## **CHAPTER 1**

# **FOOTBALL PRACTICE**

**Earth Date:** 10th December 2155 - *Nearly two years later*

### **Football Stadium - New London**

“OKAY, team. I want to see your best effort today. Ready for team selection,” said Coach as we finished changing in the locker room. Coach jogged on the spot. He was wearing his Martian Rovers football shirt and shorts, with socks pulled to his knees. The Martian Rovers team is just one of many teams in the colony. We love our football here on Mars. I don’t think I’ve ever seen Coach without a whistle around his neck.

“Yes, Coach!” Our entire school team chanted in unison.

I love the game, but I’m not great at it. Coach says I have two left feet. As I said, football is very popular here, as it is on Earth. Some of you reading this on Earth call it soccer. Not sure why, since you use your foot to kick the ball. I’d love to go Earth one day to see a real game played by my favourite team, Manchester United. I’ve only ever seen recordings. But nobody from Mars goes to Earth because the gravity would

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kill us. Gravity on Mars is about a third of Earth. Anyone born on Earth would weigh a lot less here. But for us to go to Earth, we would weigh a lot more and our bones would be too weak from our lack of Martian gravity. For now, all I could think about was the day's important match with a school team from the New Beijing colony.

I finished tying the laces on my boots and lined up with the rest of the team.

"One thing," said Coach. "The Chinese team will not have access to their personal A.I. assistants when they join us, so we've agreed that our players will disable theirs, and that starts now. So, no real-time tactical advice." Everyone groaned. Turning off your personal A.I. was like cutting off your arm.

"Watson," I instructed, using my voice to activate the chip implanted into the bone behind my left ear. "Go silent for two hours." I call my assistant Watson because I love old Sherlock Holmes stories from Earth, even though they were written nearly three hundred years ago.

"Standby mode activated," replied Watson. Only I could hear him.

"Show me what you've got," said Coach as he led us out through the tunnel. The pitch sprawled out in front of us. The grass was a vivid green, and its sweet aroma blocked the stale smell of the recycled air from the life-support system. Twenty thousand people surrounded the pitch in the stadium, which was covered by a vast glass dome that looked out on the Martian landscape. To one side was the gigantic Olympus Mons volcano.

The atmosphere in the stadium is electrifying when all the seats are full on match days. All the teams in New London

play in a league each year. The Martian Rovers won last year. That's who I support. The stadium is one of my favourite places in the colony. It has the second-largest dome in New London. The largest dome is the main atrium and, from it, you can see for miles when a dust storm isn't raging.

My team ran onto the field, and I took up my position in midfield. Coach blew his whistle, and Mikey kicked the ball. Our footballs are heavier than the balls on Earth because of the gravity, so the ball hurtled down the pitch with substantial force. If we used the same balls as Earth, they would just flop around the pitch as they would weigh hardly anything. My team's strikers got straight to work and drove the ball up the pitch, dribbling around the opposing team's defence. Their defence was effective. They took possession of the ball and kicked it back down the pitch. My teammate, Jonny, got the ball and turned to face me. He kicked it, sending it hurtling towards my head. I raised my hands to protect myself. Next thing I knew, the ball was between my hands.

Coach blew his whistle hard. "Are you kidding me, Elliot? This is football. *Foot* ball. The clue is in the name."

"Sorry, Coach," I mumbled.

"It's not the first time, Elliot. You keep on doing it. If the ball goes high, jump and use your chest to drop it to the ground."

"Sorry, it was instinct."

"Instinct. Hmm. If you say so." Coach looked at Dimitri, who was in goal. "Dimitri, come out of goal and swap with Elliot." Dimitri always plays in goal because his size makes him good at stopping the ball. And everyone's scared of him. If you get near the goal with the ball, he just growls at you.

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“What? No. Coach, please. I like it in goal,” Dimitri protested.

“You’re a fast runner, so I want to try you in midfield,” replied Coach.

“But I don’t want to, Coach.”

“Do as instructed, Cadet,” ordered Coach.

“But Coach...”

“That’s enough, Dimitri. Give me five laps around the pitch.”

“But... but...” Dimitri’s face turned crimson with anger.

“Do you want to make it ten?” threatened Coach.

“No, Coach!” Dimitri left the goal to start his laps. He turned around and gave me a glare. I knew what it meant: you’re getting a mega wedgie for this. I needed to stay away from him. And I did feel a little guilty. I took my position in goal.

“Everyone else, resume the game. Tom, take the penalty.” Coach blew his whistle.

Tom placed the ball down on the pitch and took a few paces backwards. I positioned myself in the middle of the goal and crouched, ready to pounce at the ball. I locked my gaze with Tom, determined to prove to Coach that I had what it takes. I wanted to be on the team when we played the Chinese. It would be historic.

Tom took his run up and booted the ball. It went left. So did I. I leaped into the air and grabbed the ball, bringing it into my chest as I landed on the ground.

“Great save, Elliot,” said Coach. The other team members whooped. Seemed like I made a better goalkeeper than a midfielder. Dimitri was still running his laps. I caught a

glimpse of his scowling face. He didn't look happy. Soon, Dimitri finished and came back to the game.

"Swap your shirt, Dimitri, and join the other team," said Coach.

"With pleasure, Coach," he said through gritted teeth. His eyes were still eating into me. Suddenly the idea of being goalie made me feel queasy. What was Coach thinking? He may as well have just let Dimitri beat me up then and there and gotten it over with. I said nothing, though. I hate running laps.

The game continued and I saved three more goals. I was feeling pretty satisfied with myself. Then, as we approached full time, Dimitri got the ball. He charged up the pitch towards me, pushing over anyone who tried to tackle him. Coach blew his whistle, but Dimitri ignored it. He was the largest player on the pitch. Taller than anyone else in our year at school and built like a Martian boulder. All I could do was stand there and wait for the inevitable. He dribbled the ball past our defence, kicked it towards the goal and slammed it hard. It hurtled straight into my face. I dropped to my knees and fell forward. The stadium went dark.

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I woke up lying on the pitch. The team was staring down at me. Coach knelt beside me.

"You okay, Elliot?" asked Coach.

"I think so. My head hurts."

"I've given you a painkiller shot that will help with the soreness," said Coach as he helped me sit up. "I suggest taking



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it easy for the rest of the day. If it gets more painful and swells up, go see Doctor Temple.”

“I will.” I stood up and headed to the changing room to get my uniform back on.

“Okay, team, training is over for today. I’ll see you all soon,” said Coach.

Once I was dressed in my standard issue dark blue cadets’ trousers and blue shirt with the Global Space Alliance logo on the top left, I walked back to the apartment that I share with my dad. Tunnels connect most of the colony buildings. A life-support system that recycles the air we breathe runs through all of them. There’s no natural oxygen in the air here. The colony is one giant life-support bubble protecting us from the harsh, toxic Martian atmosphere.

“Watson, disable do-not-disturb mode.”

“Do-not-disturb is now disabled,” replied Watson, in his computer voice. I keep tweaking his voice. At the moment, he has a British accent, as that is how I imagine Doctor Watson sounding from the Sherlock Holmes stories. “Elliot, I am detecting pain and an elevated heart rate.”

“I’m fine. Just a minor accident at football practice.”

“Okay, Elliot. I will keep monitoring your vital signs.” I continued walking to my apartment. “Elliot, you have an incoming message from Coach. Would you like me to read it to you?” My heart beat a little faster. This was it. Football team results. I closed my eyes tight and crossed my fingers.

“Okay, Watson, read the message.”

“Elliot, I have great news. You have made the team for our game against New Beijing. You will be in goal. That was some good goal keeping today. Try not to use your face next time.

It's much easier with your hands. See you at the game. Coach," repeated Watson.

"Yes!" I pumped a fist into the air. Other people walking past turned to look at me. "Sorry, I just had some good news." Some smiled, then turned around and went back to what they were doing.

"Well done, Elliot. That was the news you were hoping for," said Watson.

"Thank you. Now, I'm excited."

"I have recognised this. I am monitoring your heart rate and neurochemical levels," replied Watson, like a true computer.

"Always got my back," I said, smiling.

On my way to the accommodation block, I spotted Dimitri with another group of boys. I could feel his icy stare on me. He must have found out about the team results too.

"How's your face, loser?" he called over.

I ignored him and picked up my pace. I was not in the mood for a run-in with the school bully, especially with no teachers around.

## **CHAPTER 2**

# **CHIP RESET**

**Earth Date:** 11th December 2155

**Elliot's Apartment - New London**

“ELLIOT, THIS IS YOUR MORNING ALARM,” said Watson. Ugh, it felt too early. I wasn't ready to get out of bed. Five minutes later, Watson tried to wake me again. “Elliot, this is your second morning alarm. Should I schedule in the third and fourth alarms?”

“Okay. I heard you. I'm up. I'm up.” I pushed the covers aside and swung my legs off the bed. The daylight panels above my head illuminated, flooding the room with warm, simulated sunlight. A large screen on the wall switched on and displayed some mountains from Earth. Civilian apartments don't have windows, so I like my bedroom screen to show pleasant views when I wake up. I have a different view for every day of the week. Mountains meant it was Tuesday. As my feet touched the floor, the area behind my ear vibrated harshly, followed by a loud buzz.

“Ouch. What’s that, Watson?”

“I do not understand the request...” As Watson spoke, his voice buzzed, and I felt pain behind my left ear again. I rubbed the area, and the noise stopped. “Watson, can you book me an appointment at the infirmary?”

“Appointment booked with Doctor Temple for this morning. I have registered a pass from school.”

I pulled on my cadet’s uniform—an all-in-one suit, with a Global Space Alliance mission badge on the arm and my name and rank (cadet) on the left side of the chest. I walked into the bathroom to brush my teeth. Well, we don’t really “brush” here on Mars. Instead, I placed the sonic cleaner in my mouth and bit down to start the ultrasonic cleaning process. When finished, I checked to see if Dad was around, but he had already set off for work at the terraforming plant. He oversees our planetary engineers who are trying to make the Mars atmosphere breathable. His team drill deep down into the Martian surface to access deep pockets of carbon dioxide. Then they pump this into the atmosphere to warm up the planet and make life here a little more hospitable, although Dad said it could take over a hundred years to achieve.

We learned about the climate emergency on Earth in our ancestry lesson. Too much carbon dioxide was leaking into Earth’s atmosphere, which caused The Climate Disaster in the twenty-first century. It took a long time for them to reverse their climate problems. Now we are trying to put carbon dioxide into our own atmosphere to warm up Mars. Everyone who lives here can see the irony. Still, the work my dad and his team are doing is important. I am proud that we can live here better because of him.

I put my feet in the boots by the door. They cinched tight

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around my ankles as my heels touched the backs of the boots. I walked up to the apartment door and pressed the button. The door slid open. I walked out and the door closed and locked behind me.

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As I approached the infirmary, a man came out of the main doors. He was tall, with short black hair and a standard colony uniform. He barged past me, almost knocking me over.

“Careful,” I said as I steadied myself. The man stopped, turned his head towards me and sneered.

“What was that, Cadet Taylor?” he said with a low growl.

I stepped away from him, shocked that he knew my name. He broke eye contact and walked away.

“Watson, who was that?”

“Who was who?” Watson replied.

“The man we just passed.”

“There are no people outside the infirmary, apart from you.”

“But he was just there. He walked past me.”

“I am not showing any tracking beacons in this immediate area except from in the infirmary.” As Watson spoke, I felt the buzzing sensation again. I rubbed behind my ear.

“Well, that’s strange.” I pushed through the infirmary doors and approached the front desk.

“Hello, Elliot. Just take a seat. Doctor Temple will be with you soon,” said a voice that filled the room. Our chips track our locations. I was identified as soon as I walked through the door.

“Thanks.” I sat down on one of the black plastic chairs in the waiting room and stared at the silent screen on the wall showing the colony news. What is it about screens with the volume turned off that makes you want to stare at them? If you need to see a doctor, and it’s not an emergency, then you always wait here. When I was a kid, I once had to wait for hours to see a doctor. It was so boring; I never enjoy waiting here.

Soon after, Doctor Temple appeared in the waiting room. I enjoy seeing Doctor Temple. She was the same height as me, had green eyes and long blonde hair tied into a ponytail. Her bright personality makes me feel calm every time I come here. Doctor Temple has been my doctor since I was a baby.

“Cadet Taylor. Elliot, how can I help you?” She gestured for me to follow her. “I hope you haven’t been trying to stop footballs with your face again?” She smiled at me.

“Oh, you heard about that?”

“I’m afraid so,” she said with a grin.

It’s quite hard to keep any secrets in this colony.

“How can I help you?” she asked.

“I have been having a problem with my chip. It made a horrible buzzing noise that felt like it was echoing through my body.”

“It’s possible you dislodged it when you were hit by the ball. Let’s have a look.” Doctor Temple led me through to a treatment room and pointed to the bed. “Just lie back and relax.”

A robotic arm swooped down with a hemispherical attachment that covered my head. As it rotated around my head, I could hear a soft clicking sound. After a few seconds, the robotic arm moved back to its original position.

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“Ah yes, I can see here that the chip has detached from the bone a little.”

“Oh no, I’ve never heard of that happening before. Can you fix it?” I asked.

“It happens from time to time. It’s not a problem,” she said very matter-of-factly. “I’ll just disable it and replace it with a new chip. It won’t take long.”

Doctor Temple reached into a drawer, pulled out a small cartridge and scanned the label with a handheld computer device. She picked up a small wand-like device and waved it behind my left ear.

“Okay. I have disabled your current chip, so you won’t have access to your assistant. I just need to remove the old chip.”

“Will it hurt?” I asked. I hate surgery.

“Not at all. I will give you a local anaesthetic, and I can whip it out now.” Doctor Temple reached over, picked up an anaesthetic gun and put it over the chip behind my ear. She pressed the trigger and there was a quick hissing sound. The back of my head went numb. “You won’t feel a thing now.”

I didn’t feel the anaesthetic go in, but just knowing it was happening made me hunch my shoulders and wince. Visiting the infirmary is never fun. You just know something is going to hurt by the time you leave.

Doctor Temple picked up another device that looked like a gun. She inserted the new chip into the device and placed it over my faulty chip.

“This won’t hurt, Elliot.” Doctors always say that. “This machine will make an incision in your skin, extract the old chip and insert the replacement. The machine will also seal the incision.”

“I’m ready,” I said as I gritted my teeth and closed my eyes.

“I will count down from five,” she said. I nodded.

“Five, four, three...” Doctor Temple pressed the trigger on the device. I could feel a pushing and pulling sensation behind my ear.

“There. Done.”

“I thought you were counting down to one.”

“Was I? Silly me,” said the doctor, with a small chuckle. “How did that feel?”

“It didn’t hurt, but it felt weird.”

“Told you so. The anaesthetic will wear off in an hour.” She picked up her wand device and scanned it over my ear. “I have activated the chip, and it’s showing no errors. Try accessing your assistant.”

“Watson. Are you there?” I asked. I was nervous, as I was so used to having Watson with me.

“Yes, Elliot. I am active.” I exhaled and smiled. Watson has been with me since I was five years old.

“Thanks, Doctor. I can hear him.”

“Excellent. Well, you can leave now. If you have any other problems, book another appointment.”

“I will.” I pulled myself up from the bed. Then I remembered there was something else I’d wanted to ask her. “Oh, Doctor. I have one question.”

“Of course. What is it?”

“On my way in here, I saw someone leave the infirmary... someone acting suspicious, like he didn’t want me to see his face,” I said.

“Interesting,” replied Doctor Temple.



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“I asked Watson who it was, but he couldn’t detect anyone.”

“It must have been your chip acting up. I’ve seen no one else here this morning,” she replied. She raised her hand to gesture for me to leave the room.

“Oh. Yeah, maybe.” I walked towards the door. “Thanks, Doctor.”

“You’re welcome. Take care, Elliot.”

I left the infirmary and set off for school. If I was quick, I could make it in time for my ancestry lesson.