

# ***DIARY OF A MARTIAN***

SOUL SOLDIERS

***STEPHEN B. HAUNTS***





# ADVENTURES IN WRITING

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# **PROLOGUE**

**Earth Date:** 20th September 2156

Flight Deck - Shuttle GSA Atlantis Enroute to Mars from  
Earth

“MARS ORBITAL SPACE STATION, this is Captain Drake of the GSA Atlantis. Permission to make the final approach for docking?” Captain Drake sat at the central command console in front of the large window. On one side of him was his first officer, Lieutenant Morris, and on the other side was the shuttle’s engineer, Lieutenant Deacon. The space station came into view as a silhouette against the vivid red of Mars. Small jets of gas fired from the shuttle’s retro-rockets, slowing their approach to a halt.

“GSA Atlantis, please confirm the crew manifest for your visit,” replied a voice over the intercom.

“Affirmative. We are transporting GSA ambassadors to

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meet with Commander Carter and Admiral Zhou,” replied Drake.

“Please maintain your current position and await further instructions,” replied the voice.

“Affirmative,” said Drake. He pushed a button on the command console to stop the transmission. Lieutenant Morris leaned forward in her seat.

“I’ll never grow tired of that view,” she said, looking at Mars.

“Amazing, isn’t it?” agreed Drake. “It will take a moment for them to get back to us. Coffee time?”

“I’ll get the drinks, sir,” said Lieutenant Deacon, standing up and walking over to a console on the far wall. Suddenly, the door to the bridge swung open, and three of the ambassadors from the passenger cabin strode in.

Commander Drake spun around in his seat. “You’re not allowed to enter the bridge,” he commanded. The intruders held up energy pistols and pointed them at the bridge crew, Drake, Deacon and Morris.

“Silence,” ordered one man, gesturing his weapon at Lieutenant Deacon. “Sit down.” Deacon complied and hurried back to his seat.

“General Gordon, what’s the meaning of this?” demanded Drake.

“This won’t take long, Captain. There is nothing to worry about.” One of the men carried a green crate, which he put on the floor. The three men stepped back, still pointing their weapons at the crew. General Gordon bent down and unfastened the latches at the front of the crate. He lifted the lid, revealing three black cylinders sitting in foam padding.

Drake looked down at the cylinders and then back at General Gordon.

“What are they?”

“Just sit back, Captain. There’s nothing to fear.”

“You’re a general for the Global Space Alliance. You won’t get away with” – Drake swirled his hands in confusion – “whatever *this* is.” The men holding the weapons smiled back at Captain Drake.

“Just relax, Captain. We mean you no harm,” said General Gordon.

The three cylinders glowed bright orange and emitted a low humming sound. Captain Drake looked at his first officer, Morris. She had a look of fear in her eyes. The low humming sound grew louder and started pulsing. The cylinders now glowed bright white.

A beam of light exploded out of each cylinder and shot towards each crew member. Their bodies convulsed as if they were being electrocuted. The pulsing sound was now a high-pitched screech.

The beams of light stopped and disappeared as quickly as they began. The crew sat in their seats, bolt upright. The bridge of the shuttle was now silent. The crew’s eyes glimmered as if covered with black oil.

A voice broke in over the intercom. “Shuttle Atlantis, you are cleared to dock at MOSS. Please proceed to holding position gamma and prepare for the autopilot docking procedure.”

Drake looked up at the general.

“Please proceed, Captain,” said the general.

Drake blinked, and his black, glimmering eyes returned to normal. He nodded at the general. All three members of the

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bridge crew turned their seats to face forward. Drake pressed a button to enable comms.

“Affirmative. Manoeuvring to holding position gamma,” said Drake. “Lieutenant Morris, please adjust our course.”

“Yes, sir,” said Morris. The retrorockets fired, and the shuttle moved forward.

General Gordon closed the lid on the crate and picked it up.

“The Hoomans are ready,” he said. The other two men nodded. They turned around and left the bridge.

# **CHAPTER 1**

## **FOOTBALL PRACTICE WITH THE VEHNI**

**Earth Date:** 20th September 2156

**Football Stadium - New London**

MY FOOTBALL TEAM—THE Martian Rovers—ran onto the pitch from the changing rooms, ready for practice. The stadium lights flooded the field, and the sweet scent of the grass freshened the recycled air. The sun was setting behind the mountains, casting a pink glow through the giant dome that covered the stadium. Everyone seemed tense. Coach had us running in volleys, up and down the pitch to warm up.

He blew his whistle hard.

“Okay, team, fall in.”

I ran over, but I was out of breath and welcomed the break. Everyone else was wheezing and panting too.

“I hope everyone has gotten over our loss to New Beijing,” said Coach. We all groaned. The defeat still stung. “I know it’s disappointing, but we need to move on and

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continue improving.” He jumped up and down on the spot, trying to motivate us. “I thought we would try something a little different today. We have some guests.”

My teammates and I looked at each other to see if anyone knew what was happening. I certainly didn’t, but then I saw two very tall forms running through the tunnel from the changing rooms. It was two Vehni: Varga and Olpho!

“Today, we are going to introduce our Vehni friends to the practice of football,” said Coach. Alina’s hand shot up, but she didn’t wait to speak.

“What position are they going to play in, Coach?”

“Well, they are nice and tall, so I thought we would try them out in goal.”

When they reached us in the centre of the pitch, Olpho started jumping up and down as if warming up. His tall alien body and greyish-blue skin was covered with an ill-fitting Martian Rovers football kit. We really need to make some kits in their size. Varga stood still, glaring at Olpho with the irritated look of someone who had been roped into playing without really wanting to.

“I am excited to join you in your game of football. I have studied it extensively. We cannot wait to play. Right, Varga?” said Olpho in a partially distorted voice through their translation technology.

Varga grunted. “I should be tending to security matters.”

Olpho faced the team and smiled, exposing his razor-sharp Vehni teeth.

“Ignore Varga. He is excited, really, but he does not like to show it.”

Everyone laughed, except Varga. He grunted again.



“Okay, Olpho, you have the nearest goal, and Varga, you take the other goal,” said Coach.

“What am I supposed to do?” asked Varga.

Coach was about to reply, but Olpho beat him to it.

“You stand in front of that box they call a goal and stop the ball from entering it.”

“That sounds easy,” replied Varga.

Coach gave a loud blast of his whistle. The sound took Varga by surprise, and he hunched his shoulders, giving Coach a side-eye stare.

“Okay, everyone, organise yourself into two teams and take your positions,” said Coach, ignoring Varga.

We organised ourselves into two teams. I pressed a button on the front of my football shirt, and the colour flickered to blue. My teammates did the same. The other team was playing in red today. As we waited to start the game, Dimitri ran over to me.

“Did you know they were joining practice today?” he asked.

“No, I didn’t. It’s fun, though. Gets the Vehni involved with our customs, I guess.”

Dimitri laughed. “This should be hilarious!”

“Yeah. Olpho seems into it, not so sure about Varga.”

Dimitri sprinted off to take his position in defence.

Coach blew his whistle again, and Mikey kicked off from the centre spot. He launched the ball down the pitch towards Varga, but Alina took possession and dribbled it back up the pitch. She booted the ball towards Olpho, who dived to the right and caught it. He got up from the floor and waved his long alien arms in the air, looking very pleased with himself.

Olpho booted the ball from the goal, but Dimitri inter-

cepted it and dribbled it down the pitch. He passed the ball to me, and I carried on towards the goal. I took the shot and propelled the ball towards the goal. Varga raised his arm. His defensive cuff weapon activated on his wrist and rotated into position. As the ball flew through the air, Varga took a shot and scored a direct hit. The ball exploded into small fragments; a whiff of white smoke rose into the air.

We stood in stunned silence staring at Varga and fragments of the ball spread out on the ground. Olpho shook his head in disbelief.

“Varga, this is football, not target practice.”

Varga grunted again. “You said I had to stop the ball from going into the goal. I did.”

I walked towards Varga. “You’re supposed to catch it with your hands. Or dive towards it,” I said.

“That was not specified. I fulfilled what was asked of me.”

Coach just stood there, with his whistle balanced on his lower lip, trying to make sense of what he just witnessed.

Dimitri began clapping. “Well, Varga, I thought that was cool. Perhaps the start of a new sport. Shotball? Gunball?”

“Boomball,” shouted Mikey.

“Yeah! I like it,” said Dimitri.

Everyone on the team began laughing. Coach put the whistle back in his mouth and blew it, although less vigorously than last time. He didn’t want to upset Varga any further.

“I think that’s enough training for one day,” he said.

“I am glad that is over,” said Varga.

“That was a lot of fun. We will do it again,” said Olpho.

“No!” said Varga as he stamped his foot on the ground. He didn’t look happy at that suggestion. Not one bit.

“We have to embed ourselves in Hooman culture. That is part of our mission. Arrek’s orders,” said Olpho.

Varga marched away from the goal towards the changing rooms. The rest of us followed.

“If Arrek commands it, then I will do it,” barked Varga.

“You may even enjoy it,” I said.

“I am not here to enjoy myself.”

“What a party animal,” murmured Dimitri.

Varga stopped walking and faced Dimitri. “What is a party animal? Is it indigenous to this planet? I was not aware of other life forms?”

Dimitri laughed. “It was a joke. Calm down.”

“I prefer hostile beings. Easier to deal with. You know where you stand with an enemy.”

“I will help you adjust, Varga. You will be fine,” said Olpho. I’m not familiar with Vehni facial expressions, but it looked like Olpho was trying to restrain laughing at Varga. Laughing at a commanding officer is never a great idea.

Back in the changing room, Dimitri and I hurried to get cleaned up as we were being interviewed live on a news broadcast tonight.

## CHAPTER 2

# THE INTERVIEW

### TV News Studio - New London

I WAS FEELING VERY relaxed about the interview, until about five minutes before I was standing at the side of the stage with Mei and Dimitri. Everyone on Mars would watch live, and everyone on Earth would see the broadcast in the next few days. No pressure.

The audience clapped in a thunderous rhythm as the intro music for the show started. Drone cameras whizzed around, capturing various angles as the intro music played. The music died down, and the host, Trevor Jones, strolled on stage to a roar of applause.

“Hello, and welcome to *Mars Today*. I’m your host, Trevor Jones.”

The audience went wild. Trevor was enjoying himself as he basked in their attention.

“We have three special guests on today’s show. They have become instant hits both here on Mars and back on Earth. Please welcome the author and stars of the new book *Diary of*

*a Martian*: Elliot Taylor, Mei Ling, and Dimitri Petrov.” Trevor dropped our formal colony titles as people of Earth, who don’t have ranks, find them strange. Although we are a civilian colony, we observe strict ranks and discipline to ensure safety. Mars is a dangerous place, and safety is always the highest priority. That’s why we have so many rules.

More music played as bright lights above the stage flashed through multiple colours as we walked onto the stage. My stomach was twisted in knots, and I felt sick with nerves. I thought I was okay until the music played, and we walked on stage. We each waved at the audience and drone cameras and sat on a couch on stage next to Trevor. The music stopped, and the lights settled into spotlights. They were so bright that I could only see the first few rows of the audience, which helped settle my nerves a little.

“Welcome to each of you. I first want to congratulate you, Elliot, on the success of your book, *Diary of a Martian*. It’s been a massive success here on Mars, and it’s a number-one bestseller on Earth. How does that feel?” asked Trevor.

I couldn’t help but smile as the realisation of my book’s success hit me.

“Thank you, Trevor. I still can’t believe how successful the book has been. It’s a dream come true, but I couldn’t have done it without Mei and Dimitri, our parents, and everyone else in the book.”

“That’s very modest of you, but I think you can enjoy the success. *Diary of a Martian* has been in the number-one position in all charts on Earth for weeks now, and it’s showing no signs of slowing down.”

“That’s wild. I hope it gives people on Earth a good idea of what it’s like to live here on Mars,” I said.

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Trevor stared straight at a drone camera hovering in front of him, and his face took on a more serious expression.

“I’m sure it will. I want to ask you about one part of the book, if I may?”

“Sure.”

“What was running through your mind in that standoff with General Simms?”

I shifted my position on the couch. I had expected questions about Simms.

“At the time? It was pure rage. I was seeing red. He’d shot my dad, and then I found out that he was responsible for my mum’s death at the Orbiter Station.”

“I can’t imagine how you must have felt. It’s awful to find out that way. Thinking your mum’s death was an accident, but, in reality, it was an attack to cause a diversion,” said Trevor, shaking his head in pity.

I looked down at the floor as he mentioned my mum’s death, but then I remembered how important it was to set the record straight that her death was no accident.

“Yes,” I said, staring straight at the nearest drone. “It was a diversion to smuggle illegal weapons down to the surface. The investigation is still ongoing to uncover everyone else involved.”

Trevor rested a calming hand on my shoulder.

“I can imagine, and everyone involved received swift justice. Did you have many suspicions before those events on the Martian surface?”

“I had suspicions that Simms was up to something, but I didn’t have enough proof. I couldn’t go accusing him of anything.”

Mei leaned over to interrupt. “He was a devious monster who was good at covering his tracks.”

Trevor seemed to love Mei’s sudden outburst, and he turned his attention to her.

“Indeed, he was. And, Mei, all the events in the book must have been quite scary for you?”

“Yes, definitely,” said Mei.

“You first met Elliot in school as part of the New London and New Beijing exchange programme?”

“That’s right. On my first day, our teacher, Ms Robertson, told me to sit with Elliot. He was meant to show me around and help me settle in.”

“And that was a very short introduction before all the excitement started.”

“I’m not sure I would say an alarm going off and evacuating the building during a dust storm is exciting. I think ‘terrifying’ describes it much better.”

The audience laughed, although I didn’t think Mei was trying to be funny.

Trevor raised a hand to quiet the audience. “It certainly was terrifying. You’re right there. I can only imagine how scary it was for you, being in a different colony.”

Mei smiled at Elliot. “Yeah, but Elliot was brilliant. He helped me through the evacuation procedure.”

“How did you feel knowing there were tensions about New Beijing uniting with New London?”

“I expected it, to be honest. The same thing was happening in New Beijing.”

Trevor looked surprised. “What, attacks?”

“No, I mean that some people were not happy about our colony joining the Global Space Alliance.”

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“I understand. But I will say that you and your fellow colonists are always welcome here in New London.”

The audience erupted into applause and cheers. Mei’s cheeks turned red.

“Thank you. That means a lot,” she said with a big smile.

Trevor turned his attention to Dimitri.

“Now, Dimitri, you have an interesting story in the book.”

“You could say that,” croaked Dimitri. He looked worried now that it was his turn in the spotlight.

“From class bully to friend. How did it feel knowing Elliot put that in the book?”

“I’m fine with it. It’s all true. I was quite horrible to Elliot, and I regret it now.”

“Were you happy about the entire population of Mars and Earth knowing, though?”

Dimitri shifted his position on the couch. He swallowed hard before answering.

“Elliot talked to me about it first and offered to exclude some of it, but I said the story should be told. The truth is part of my punishment.”

“You feel you need to be punished?”

“Elliot and his dad have shown me a lot of kindness, even with everything I did. They offered me a home once they sentenced my dad to prison. I will always owe them for that. Having the full story told is part of my payback.”

The audience whopped and clapped. They liked his honesty. Dimitri grinned from ear to ear; he had them eating out of his hands.

Trevor then said, “Well, everyone should have the chance to redeem themselves, and you have certainly done that. In



the book, Elliot describes how you shot your dad with a stun weapon on the Vehni shuttle to save everyone else. That must have been very hard for you?” said Trevor. Dimitri’s smile faded.

“Me and my dad don’t have the best relationship. He’s always spent most of his time being mean to me. It surprised me when he came on board the Vehni shuttle and pointed a gun at everyone, but then it made sense that he would be involved in a terror plot.”

“Oh, how’s that?” asked Trevor.

“He was always against New Beijing joining up with New London. Like, very against it. I should have guessed he would be involved, but you never want to think your dad is a terrorist...”

“I can understand that. Have you spoken to him since he was sent to prison at Pavonis Mons?”

“No, and I don’t intend to. It’s too late for him to play happy families.”

The audience fell silent. The atmosphere felt tense. The drone camera pulled in closer for a tighter shot of the three of us.

Trevor seemed to sense the shift in atmosphere and changed the subject. “Elliot and Mei, you were both on the rover that went to meet the Vehni for the first time when they landed. What was that like?” he asked cheerily. I turned to face the audience, and a drone camera hovered down in front of me.

“It was brilliant ... and scary. We didn’t know if they would be friendly,” I said.

“You thought they could be hostile?”

“It crossed my mind, but my boss in Terraforming, Lieu-

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tenant Davidson, didn't think they would be. He said that if they were hostile, they would have attacked us from their ship in orbit." The audience let out a huge collective gasp. "But Lieutenant Davidson is always right about everything, so I wasn't worried," I said.

Mei leaned forward in her seat and stared straight at the audience as a camera floated in front of her.

"I also thought it was very exciting. When their shuttle opened for the first time, and they walked out, I couldn't believe how lucky I was to witness it. It's the best thing to happen to any of us on Mars," she said.

"How worried were you all that their friendliness would fade after the attempted attack on their shuttle?" asked Trevor.

"I don't think their opinion changed, to be honest. We don't pose a threat to them and their technology," I said.

"That's quite worrying, though, isn't it?"

"I guess we need to try to not blow up their shuttle again then," I said, smiling. The conversation was steering a little too far towards the Vehni being hostile. Commander Carter warned me that Trevor might try that. I wanted to make sure that didn't happen.

The audience caught on to my joke and laughed along. Thankfully, Trevor changed the subject.

"So, what's next for you all? Any new books on the horizon? The tricky sequel?"

"Maybe. We'll just have to see what happens over the next six months with the Vehni. They are sharing some technology with us, which is pretty exciting. I have to understand it so I can write about it."

The audience applauded.

“And you, Mei?” asked Trevor.

“Science for me. I want to work with the Vehni and their technology for New Beijing.”

“Dimitri, what’s next for you?” asked Trevor.

“I’m moving from the hydroponic gardens to start my training in security. If Simms can’t handle the job, then I’ll have to do it instead.”

The audience loved this and stood up, cheering. The drone cameras pulled back to a wide shot. Trevor Jones stood up, smiled, and clapped at Dimitri’s answer. Dimitri’s a real crowd-pleaser. I’ll take that over him being a bully any day.

“Before we go, I have one more special guest for you all,” announced Trevor. “Our next guest has proven to be a tremendous hit in the colony. Please give a warm welcome to my friend and yours, Olpho.”

The crowd erupted as Olpho walked onto the stage. Olpho was no longer wearing a football kit and was in a more formal Vehni uniform. The talk show music blared out, and the overhead lights on stage flashed in a rainbow of colours. The audience chanted, “Olpho, Olpho.” He had become a real hit during our last football game with New Beijing, waving a large foam hand around during the game. Olpho greeted the crowd and sat down, as did the audience. The music faded, and the lights changed back to spotlights illuminating us on the stage.

“Welcome, Olpho.”

“Thank you. It is great to be here.”

“I can’t believe I am talking to an alien,” said Trevor.

“I know. Me, too!”

The audience loved that. I couldn’t help clapping myself. Olpho had a great sense of humour.

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“So, tell me, Olpho. What was it like to receive that emergency beacon from your base after we entered it for the first time?”

“It was unexpected. We were the nearest Vehni vessel to your planetary system, so they sent us here first.”

“Did you have any idea what to expect?” asked Trevor.

“Yes, we were well aware of your presence here on the planet you call Mars.”

“But the incident with Simms must have been a surprise.”

“We were aware of Hoomans’ capacity for violence and destruction, so it was not too much of a surprise. We expected a hostile reception.”

“Well, I hope you feel welcome now that the unpleasantness is behind us,” said Trevor.

“We do, and we look forward to working with you all,” said Olpho.

“I’m sure it will be great,” said Trevor, who then stood up to address the audience. “Elliot, Mei, Dimitri, and Olpho, you have been fantastic, and I wish you all well, and I look forward to reading the next galactic best-selling book from you, Elliot. We’ll be back after the break.”

The music played again as the overhead lights did their rainbow dance, and the audience applauded. We rose from our seats and walked offstage to the green room.