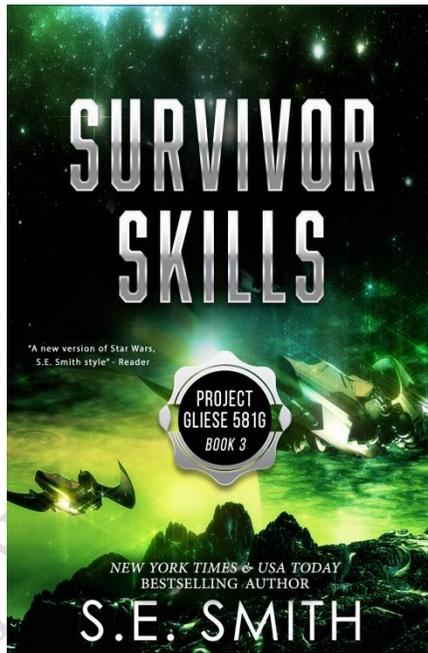


**Survivor Skills:  
Project Gliese 581g Book 3**



**By S.E. Smith**

## Acknowledgments

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—S.E. Smith

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Summary: A member of the Project Gliese 581g wakes on an alien world and joins forces with a rebel fighter to locate other missing crew members.

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## Synopsis

### **Two warriors— one mission: Survival....**

Sergi Lazaroff is a weapons expert and a member of the Russian FSB, also known as the Federal Security Service Bureau—a nice term for his true profession as a spy. Assigned to the Project Gliese 581g exploration team, his job was supposed to be simple—find out what was in space, retrieve the technology, and return home with it, if possible. When he wakes up on an alien planet, Sergi knows the last part of his mission will be impossible. Instead, he must use his military training and skills to survive in a world where he doesn't know the rules.

La'Rue Gant's search for the mysterious occupant of the pod that landed on the assassins' planet of Turbinta quickly turns into a game of predator versus prey. She found what she was looking for—and discovers that the ancient legends may be true when the tables are unexpectedly turned, and she becomes the hunted. What she doesn't expect is the powerful reaction she has to this man from another world.

When word reaches them that another member of the Gliese's crew was found, Sergi and La'Rue embark on a mission to save that crew member at any cost. Caught in the middle of an alien civil war, two fighters from vastly different backgrounds must come together to fight for the survival of the Knights of the Gallant Order, even as the Legion forces close in around them. Can they slip through the traps set up

to snare them, or will the Legion Director finally capture not one, but two of the prophesied ancient Knights of the Gallant Order?

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# Chapter 1

## One Earth week later:

The alarms had pulled him back to consciousness. Now he was suddenly aware of a steady downpour, making the world outside the pod look distorted and dismal. His eyes swept over the digital readings. Oxygen was dangerously low. The system was showing a leak in one of the tanks. He lifted his head, and noticed the small portable tank with a mask attached. He read the oxygen level.

Thirty percent....

He had less than five percent in the capsule and thirty percent on the portable tank. He laid his head back and stared through the glass covering. At least the capsule didn't completely feel like a casket – if only for the moment.

Above him, Sergi could see the remains of the parachute that would have deployed once the capsule broke through the atmosphere. It was tangled in a large tree.

Four things registered in his brain. First, he hurt like hell, so that confirmed he was alive. Second, he was no longer on the Gliese 581. Third, wherever in the hell he had landed, there had to be some type of atmosphere if there was rain and trees – preferably the kind that wouldn't melt the flesh off of his bones. The last was the one that concerned him the most. He wondered if any of the others had made it out alive.

Sergi grabbed the mask, held it up to his face, and slammed up the emergency release lever. Nothing happened.

“Open, dammit,” Sergi ordered in Russian, violently working the lever again.

“Warning, current oxygen levels are critical. The system diagnostic has detected a leak in the main oxygen tank. Please replace the tank,” the computer voice stated.

“You think I don’t know that my oxygen is almost depleted? If you would open this casket, I would gladly remove myself,” Sergi growled in profanity laced Russian.

His jaw clenched with determination. Grabbing the release handle, he pulled on it again. This time, the very noticeable click of the lock releasing swept through the interior of the pod. With his free hand, he pushed against the hatch until he had enough room to sit up.

He shivered in the icy rain as he cautiously looked around, though the parachute gave him a small measure of protection from the downpour. Barren trees surrounded him. The area was desolate: there was no life – and no other escape pods to be seen. He slowly pulled the mask away from his face, and gingerly inhaled a deep breath. A slight cough escaped him as the swirling mist swept through his nose and down his throat. The air felt heavy, but he could breathe.

He dropped the mask to the side. His gloved hands gripped the side of the capsule and he rolled

over the edge. A silent curse filtered through his brain when his booted feet sank into the dark gray mud.

“This feels like home,” he muttered under his breath, taking in the freezing rain, thick fog, disgusting mud, and dreary landscape.

Unsure of where he was or how he had gotten there, his first focus was on getting out of the bulky spacesuit and into something that he could move in. He bent and reached along the interior near where his head had been. Pulling free the material, he withdrew the military-grade NRS-2 Scouting knife that had been cushioned in foam where he had stored it under the fabric.

Sergi used the knife to gut the interior of the capsule. He had been very careful to modify the interior after it had been stored aboard the Gliese. He had camouflage clothing, weapons, a portable oxygen tank that came standard with each pod, and a survival pack with a limited number of rations, medical supplies, and the essentials for the most dangerous covert operation.

Sliding the blade along the edge of the fabric of the bedding, he retrieved his SR-1 9mm pistol along with several clips. He did the same along the bottom, removing the parts for the VSK-94 Special Purpose Silent Sniper rifle. The rifle was perfect for Urban Warfare if he needed to strike without being seen. While he'd never expected to need any of the items he had stored in the capsule, his training and experience had drilled into him the necessity to be prepared for any event – including a trip into space.

Within minutes, he had stripped himself of the bulky spacesuit and dressed to blend in with the environment around him. He quickly packed the camouflaged grey and tan backpack, remembering at the last minute to remove the video camera that was recording his every move, and slid the straps over his shoulders. He tucked the pistol into the waistband of his pants against his lower back, making sure he could easily reach it.

He reached up and closed the lid of the capsule, then turned to face the gloomy forest. He had no map of the area or knowledge of his environment, which meant that, for now, he had to classify everything as hostile to himself.

Sergi held the rifle ready as he left the shelter of the parachute and moved into the freezing downpour. His hat protected his head from the cold rain while the high-tech goggles gave him the ability to search for any other heat signatures. He moved like a wraith through the woods, searching for evidence that he wasn't alone.

\*.\*.\*

La'Rue Gant flipped up the shield of her visor, looked at the circuit panel for a moment, then took off her helmet and turned toward the storage unit. In the background, loud music played. While it might not be the smartest thing in the world to do at the moment, La'Rue had never really cared what anyone else thought. She lived by one rule – hers.

“Which isn’t such a bad idea, La’Rue darling,” she muttered to herself, “considering you are on a planet of assassins. Why *not* go to a place where the residents would love to slit your throat just for the fun of watching you bleed out? But, hey, it might be more profitable for them to hand me over to Bog. My face is probably plastered on every screen in the galaxy. Fuck Slate and his fucking thirty thousand credits owed.”

She wouldn’t be in this mess if she had listened to her head instead of her gut. Yeah, it was way messed up and should have been the other way around. Her gut was what had kept her alive this long, but this time she swore her internal warning system was fried.

“You just *had* to listen in on a secure transmission. You should have ignored it, La’Rue. People who cross the Legion end up dead. If anyone knows that, it should be you. Then, being the really smart person that you are, you decide you need to follow one of the signals that they were talking about – to Turbinta! Who the hell lands their escape pod on a planet full of assassins? I’ll tell you who, the same kind of dumbass who lands their freighter and burns up their front shields in the process, that’s who,” she muttered.

For the past two years she had been monitoring both the rebel groups and the Legion. Lifting a hand, she wiped her nose along her long sleeve. Even with the environmental system working, she could still feel the chill in the air.

“The rebels have to be on to something this time,” she said as she replaced the helmet and welder in the

storage unit. She paused with her hand on a wrench and glanced at the circuit panel, a frown creasing her brow. "They have to be, otherwise why would the Legion be going crazy? Andronikos's prize Commander wouldn't have come here himself if he wasn't worried."

La'Rue shook her head and moved back to the circuit board, wrench in hand. She replaced the panel and tightened the bolts. Twirling the wrench in her hand, her lips twisted as she looked around the small but nimble freighter. It was the last of her heritage, a gift from her father. Sure, it hadn't worked when he'd given it to her, but it did now thanks to years of hard work, more illegal cargo runs than she would admit, and a few high stakes wins at the gaming tables.

Unfortunately, she might have pissed off a few of her lenders when she'd turned out to be a little savvier than they'd been expecting and had actually paid them off with her winnings. Her goal was to never have to borrow credits again, and one way to do that was to earn a lot – by cashing in on what the Legion wanted. If she could find even one of the strange pods the Legion was talking about, she had a chance of making enough off of the reward to last her a couple of years. She could ditch the lower end freighter runs, upgrade the *Star Runner*, and kiss Slate and his band of despicable, thieving pirates goodbye once and for all.

Her eyes darkened in anger and determination. She wasn't about to lose her only way of making a living because Slate had decided to put up *her* ship as

collateral for *his* bad decisions. She had argued that the debt wasn't hers, but unfortunately, Bog didn't want to listen. Slate had used her thumb imprint to guarantee the loan.

She grumbled to herself as she stowed the wrench in the storage unit, then strode through the freighter, ducking her head under a low hanging conduit. HL-9 followed her. She turned at the end of the corridor and bent to open a hatch. Pulling it back, she waited for the railing to rise before she slid down it. HL-9 gripped the railing on each side with four legs on each side and slid down behind her.

"I don't know when I'll be back, H. However long it takes, I guess. You have the position of the signal, right?" La'Rue asked. She glanced at the eight-legged bot before she turned and pulled open a storage compartment. "Where is the long barrel? Argh, I bet Slate took it. I have only two of the short barrels left and one of them doesn't work," she groaned, letting her head fall back to stare up at the ceiling in frustration.

La'Rue ground her teeth together before she looked down and made a face at HL-9. Slate had a lot to answer for and she planned on making sure that he did – if she survived this crazy quest of hers.

Opening the second cabinet, she pulled out the holster and the blaster that had belonged to her dad. Pursing her lips together, she swung the belt around her waist and tightened it. She pulled out the broken blaster and tossed it to the service bot.

“See if you can fix this while I’m gone,” she said, turning and pulling out a waterproof slicker and cap. “Let’s hope I don’t run into anyone. One lousy blaster meant for shooting field rodents isn’t going to do me much good against a well-trained assassin.”

La’Rue pulled on the slicker, sealing it over her black pants and shirt. Her matching black boots went almost to her knees and should protect her feet. Tucking the loose strands of her red hair into the cap, she pulled the padded strap tight under her chin. She grabbed the goggles and a stun rod last.

“I look like I’m ready to go out to the harvest fields instead of hunting for a mysterious pod on a planet full of assassins. I swear if a Turbintan sees me dressed like this, they’ll die from laughter,” La’Rue grumbled to her only companion. “Don’t let anything happen to my freighter, H.”

The small bot flashed its multiple eyes at her to let her know that it understood her order. La’Rue released a long, loud sigh before she stepped into the circle on the floor and reached up to press the green button on the control attached to one of the support brackets. Within seconds, the platform she was standing on descended under the freighter.

La’Rue jumped off the round platform down to the soggy ground, wincing at the splat sound. She pressed the remote on her wrist cuff, and pulled her goggles down, scanning the area. There was nothing out there – she hoped.

“H, show me the best path to the signal,” La’Rue softly ordered.

The display inside the goggles flickered and a second later a map appeared. Gripping the stun rod in her hand, La'Rue left the safety of her freighter and headed out into the pounding rain on a mission to find one of the mysterious pods the Legion was so interested in locating.

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