

2013



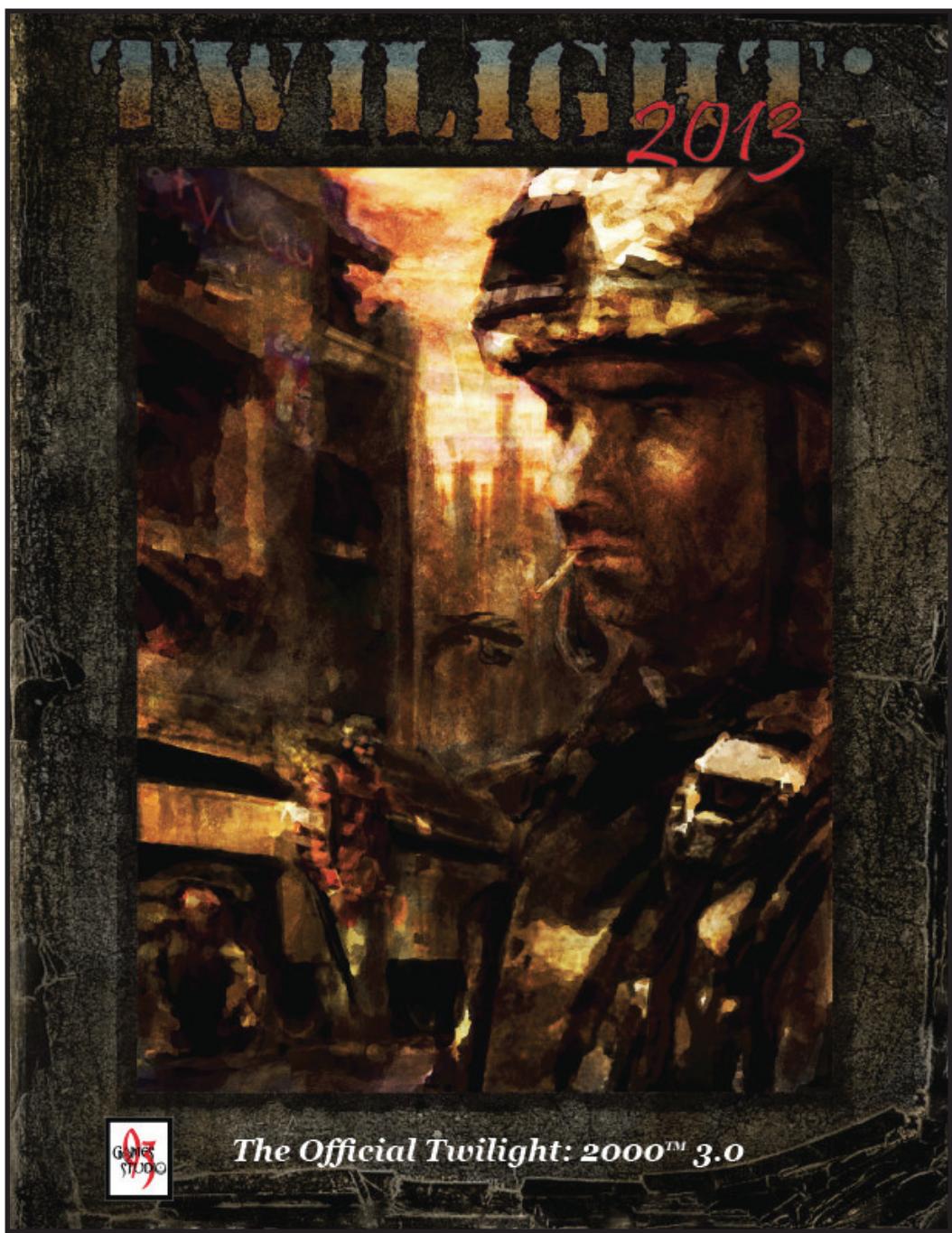
Shall Not Perish



The Official Twilight: 2000™ 3.0

TWILIGHT: 2013

Shall Not Perish is written for the
Twilight: 2013 RPG



TWILIGHT:

2013

CREDITS

G-1 (ADMINISTRATION)

Design: Keith Taylor

G-2 (INTELLIGENCE)

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Executive Order 13999

July 4th, 2013

The satellite races over the horizon at a speed that, by any terrestrial standard, would be blistering. It's in a fast, low orbit, covering ground hungrily as it speeds toward a rendezvous with destiny. The satellite's journey began eighteen hours ago when a scratch crew of technicians scavenged it from an assembly facility, mated it to the last remaining air-launched booster, and rolled it into the back of a hastily-converted former transport.

This is its fourth lap around the planet and will be its last. The orbital environment is a dangerous neighborhood these days. Two automated hunters are silently closing in, trading altitude for velocity as they burn hard toward self-immolation. Relics of the last war that never happened, they're more than adequate to finish the final space action of the current one. It's all right; orbital mechanics are in the satellite's favor, and it will fulfill its purpose several minutes before a collision with a cloud of ball bearings tears it into an equally small cloud of nascent meteors.

The coastline snakes along beneath the satellite, scattered pinpricks of light showing the few isolated communities that enjoy electricity this evening. No view of the night side from orbit has been so dark since man first looked down upon his world from above. The satellite, eyeless and unaware, cocks an antenna ear to listen for the voice of its masters.

Several hundred kilometers below, a ground station's own dish aligns. Technicians in a shadowed operations center report signal acquisition. Studio lights flare, and cameras come alive. Uplink begins. The satellite faithfully rebroadcasts every data packet, burning through its batteries at a prodigious rate to scream an electronic dirge.

The alert tone is hauntingly, terrifyingly familiar, dancing along frayed nerves and bringing people leaping to their feet across a war-torn continent. But instead of the stylized eagle and shield of the agency normally responsible for broadcasting fell tidings, a similar but much more venerable symbol flickers from the few thousand surviving and powered television screens. Millions more listeners, with only battery-driven or hand-cranked radios, miss this first indication that the announcement is something other than another drumbeat in an inexorable rhythm of disasters.

The tone holds steady for an eternal fifteen seconds, and then abruptly falls silent. Static crackles, and the seal fills screens for a full minute as nightly tasks slither to a halt and crowds gather. The image flickers, going black just long enough to pull hearts into throats before it resolves into a man in a blue suit, seated behind a wooden desk. The office is familiar, as is the expanse of green outside the window behind the man, but the too-crisp lines of real-time computer-generated imagery can't conceal the lie. That office, its contents and surroundings are now so much bubbled glass and unrecognizable debris, smashed flat nine months ago beneath an incandescent hammer of preemptive vengeance. Those who know of emergency contingencies and continuity of government plans have their own beliefs about the man's actual location: perhaps airborne over the relatively unscathed mountain states, maybe deep beneath a mountain in Colorado or West Virginia, possibly aboard the rumored surviving super carrier somewhere in the Atlantic. Ultimately, it doesn't much matter. What matters is what he will say now, and ninety million survivors tense in anticipation.

"My fellow Americans," begins the President of the United States.

"This evening, on the two hundred and thirty-seventh anniversary of our country's founding, I come before you with a message of apology and farewell. When you chose me five years ago to lead this great nation, you did so because of your belief in my promises of renewed peace and prosperity. I promised to restore to this office the integrity that it once held, to prove it worthy of your trust once more. I promised to restore to America the fortune and certainty that we all enjoyed in happier times. Your government – no, I personally have failed to uphold those promises. And I am sorry.

"This past year brought you face to face with the greatest crisis our nation has ever known. You endured unimaginable losses and hardships not experienced since the first days of our republic. And through it all, you persevered, responding with magnificent spirit that has always defined America. I have never been prouder to be an American than I have been in this, the Last Year." A sigh rustles

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across a country at the implicit capitalization, as the President speaks the two words that have grown to symbolize the death of everything that came before.

"Tragically, I must now speak of failure. The past half-century has seen a diminishing of that spirit, and I have no choice but to accept the blame for this most terrible of losses lies squarely at the feet of myself and my predecessors. My countrymen, for two generations your government betrayed you – not through treachery or oppression, but through sweet seduction, by shouldering your burdens in a misguided attempt to buy your loyalty and silent consent with luxury and security. The events of the Last Year challenged us and found us wanting, and we all paid the price for this assumption of responsibility as your government failed to honor its obligations to you, its citizens. The most basic guarantee of a government to its people, of peace and safety, was a lie."

"My compatriots, I now call upon you one last time to rally, to march to the sound of the guns, to light the watch fires in this twilight of an age and to hold back the darkness that threatens to engulf all mankind. I call upon you to rekindle the spirit of explorers and colonists, tradesmen and statesmen, pioneers and citizen-soldiers who forged the United States of America upon the anvil of adversity. I call upon you to dream again the dreams that made our nation great and raised it to dazzling heights: dreams of liberty, equality, and justice."

The President bows his head over clasped hands for a moment, as if praying for guidance – or pausing to regain his composure. When he again looks into the camera, his face is lined with an internal struggle, showing the legacy of every sleepless night that he endured while cities burned. A nation holds its breath.

"There are times when it is necessary to tear down the ruins of the old before building anew. I spent the past weeks consulting with every one of your elected leaders who could be reached, and, with deepest regret, the consensus we reached is that this is such a time. The United States yet lives, and will so long as a single American heart beats, but it is deeply wounded, clothed in sackcloth and ashes. Any attempt to continue blindly in a single, centrally-determined direction would be doomed to failure. You could not and should not trust our guidance now when we have so gravely erred before."

"Therefore, my final executive order as President of the United States, duly authorized by the surviving members of Congress and the Supreme Court, is that the federal government and all agencies thereof are disbanded, effective as of this date, the fourth of July, two thousand thirteen. All former federal employees, both civil and military, who now stand on American soil are requested to place themselves and the assets they control at the disposal of the local governor or equivalent interim authority. All such personnel outside American territory are requested to return here as best they may, and may whatever God you pray to keep and protect each of you as you walk that long road home."

"Many years ago, in another time when this country was torn apart by strife, it was led by a better man than I. He called then, as I call now, upon his citizens to dedicate themselves to the unfinished work of their fallen brethren, to bring about a new birth of freedom, that government of the people, by the people, and for the people should not perish from the earth. In my last moments as your President, I call upon you to dedicate yourselves to the rebirth of this nation, to shelter and cherish our shared ideals until a time when America has the strength to raise itself up again on the hands of men and women who dare to dream."

"But this time must not be prematurely forced upon history by men who seek to maintain their own power because they know nothing else, nor by those who are guided not by reason but blind and misplaced faith in their own infallibility. It must be brought about by you and your children, by common consensus, through common wisdom, for common good, at a time when you as a people have healed the wounds of our betrayal and are ready to choose new leaders who will not repeat our crimes. Until that time, you must trust in yourselves first, remembering that America has always been made great by individual, exceptional, men and women."

"Good night, my fellow Americans... and good luck. You're on your own"