



PROLOGUE

SECRETS

“She’s the mother of my son.”

Commander Jonathan Turner arched his eyebrow in surprise. Major Karla Horvath looked incredulous and MCPO Palmer only shook his head in sad disbelief at the revelation of Captain Jason Allen.

“Say that again?” Horvath said.

“I said, sir, that she is the mother of my son.” Allen replied.

For a moment, all was quiet around the CIC situation table aboard Prometheus and Jason knew that he had probably just destroyed, not only his career, but Stacie’s as well.

“Would you care to explain this to me?” Turner said looking at Allen.

“Sir,” Allen began, “When Captain Percival and I broke off our engagement in flight school she was already two months pregnant with our son. I didn’t know at the time and wasn’t informed until after he was born. Since then he has mainly stayed with his grandparents on Leonon, but she gets back to him as much as possible to visit.”

“And why wasn’t this listed on your official records captain?” Horvath asked, the irritation in her voice evident.

“Because I’m not on the birth certificate.” Allen replied.

All eyes focused on him for a moment until he said “It was Stacie’s idea. She and I... well we didn’t part on great terms after flight school and...”

Turner held up his hand to forestall anymore explanation. “That’s something we can discuss after we deal with this situation.” He said.

“Yes sir.” Allen replied. “But I still want to go sir. Stacie... well she may not be a full time mom to the boy, but she’s all he has right now. I just want to make sure that he still has her when this mission is over.”

Turner nodded understandingly. “Very well,” he said, “Go gear up and meet the rescue team on the port deck in fifteen minutes.”

“Yes sir.” Allen replied wearily.

The CAG and the Commander watched as Allen left the CIC, only then did he turn to Horvath to speak.

“This is going to complicate things.” Turner said quietly.

“I know sir and I accept full responsibility.” Horvath replied, “I should have screened his file better.”

“Nothing was done wrong Major.” Turner said, cutting off her apology. “However, we’re going to have to discuss reassignments when they return.”

Horvath nodded in agreement. “Yes sir.”

“But I don’t want any negative recriminations from this. Understood?” Turner said.

Horvath kept her composure but Turner could tell by the long pause in her response that she wasn’t in agreement with him.

“Speak your mind Major.” He said before she could answer.

Horvath shook her head. “Sir, it’s not my place to question command decisions.”

Turner gestured for Horvath to lean closer. When she was almost face to face with him he said “An old commander of mine once said that anyone who doesn’t have his orders questioned from time to time starts to think he can do no wrong. You know what happens when an officer starts to think that?”

Horvath nodded. “People die.”

“Right.” Turner replied, “Now tell me what’s on your mind.”

Horvath opened her mouth to answer when she was cut off by Lieutenant Halloran. “Sir, I have Eagle Base on the secure channel for you.”

Turner nodded and looked at Horvath as he picked up the receiver closest to him. “We’ll continue this later.” He said as he brought the phone to his ear. “Eagle Base, this is Prometheus actual.”

“Prometheus actual this is Eagle Base,” the static filled voice of Colonel James Ryan replied. “We have two teams moving out right now but the weather went bad about five minutes after Sheba went down and it’s preventing us from putting Raptors in the air. The best we can do is using the two skimmers we brought along for the mission.”

“Understood.” Turner said. “I want you to use your skimmers to get to the tomb and get the mission accomplished as quickly as possible. I have a search team coming down, lead by Captain Allen. He’ll worry about finding Sheba.”

“What about the hostiles?” Ryan asked.

Turner’s face turned grim. “You worry about finding that tomb, I’ll deal with the hostiles.”

“Understood sir. Good hunting.” Ryan replied.

“You too Jim. Actual out.” Turner said.

Hanging up the phone Turner looked to his operations officer. “Mister Halloran, do you have a fix on the location of the hostile ship?”

“Yes sir.” Halloran replied.

“Good. Feed their ten digit grid down to me here.” Turner ordered.

“Ten digit sir?” Halloran asked seeking confirmation. Turner’s steel expression was all that he needed. “Aye sir, ten digit position should be on your screen now.”

Turner studied his screen closely making the mental calculations he would need. Next to him, Horvath leaned in close.

“What are you doing sir?” she asked quietly.

Turner looked at her, his face an expression of cunning and guile. “I’m bringing the enemy to us.” He said

“Mister Palmer, bring the ship to an altitude of three eight kilometers.” Turner commanded, “And prepare to execute a thirty degree starboard roll.”

“Z minus seven thousand meters, thirty degree starboard roll, aye sir!” Palmer replied.

“Mister Halloran, bring battery four online and target these coordinates.” Turner said. “And patch me through on the 1 M C.”

“Yes sir.” Halloran replied flipping a switch. “You’re on.”

Turner paused for a moment as he considered what he was about to do. Commander Cain had always told him that keeping his emotions in check was the hardest thing to do as a Commander and at this particular moment, he couldn’t agree more. Having one of his pilots shot down by a bunch of unknowns made him angrier than he had been in a long time so he waited, reexamining his decision process to make sure he was doing the right thing.

He was.

“Now hear this:” he said, the weight of his actions bearing down on him. “All hands, this is the Commander... prepare for combat maneuvers. This is not a drill.”

CHAPTER 1

FIRE FROM THE SKY

The gun batteries of a Battlestar are strategically located across the hull of the ship to make best use of the weapons' range and overlapping fields of fire. The goal being to be able produce a field of fire that no ship, whether it be fighter or capital class, would be able to penetrate. This was accomplished using, for the most part, Naval Auto Cannons of the Class five variety. This meant that they shot rounds that were fifty centimeters across at their widest point and one meter long from tip to tip.

At several places along a Battlestar, however, were located the 'main guns' for the ship. These are the batteries that are used in long range fights with capital class ships, or for orbital fire support missions. Their rounds were of the class ten variant, which mean they were twice as large and packed more of a punch.

Battery number four was located on the top side of the Prometheus' transverse hull on the starboard side close to the edge of the main hull, which was where the ship's flared head began. From this position the battery could put down fire from the twelve o' clock position of the ship (directly ahead) to the four o' clock position slightly over halfway down the starboard flight pod where it's field of fire overlapped with that of battery number six.

By rolling the ship thirty degrees downward, Commander Turner brought battery number four into the perfect position to fire on the planet.

Of course, planetary bombardment missions were rare due to the chance of civilian casualties inherent in such a mission. For that reason, the commander had to use the same key he used to authorize nuclear missions, to unlock the targeting computer and allow it to get a solution on the ground target.

This he did without a moment's hesitation.

"Feed the firing solution down to the battery crew." Turner commanded.

At the operations station, Lieutenant Halloran did as he was told activating the com system that was directly linked to the crew in gun battery number four. He knew as well as the rest of the crew the significance that mission had. It would be the first time that the Prometheus had fired her guns in anger.

"Batt four this is Combat," he said, "Fire mission number one..."

Down in the crew pit of gun battery number four, Petty officer first class Adrian Simms answered the com from the CIC.

“Batt four this is Combat, fire mission number one follows.” Halloran’s voice said through the speaker box.

“This is batt four, send your mission.” Simms replied activating her targeting computer.

“Mission number one: grid eight-four-seven-five-one slash zero-two-niner-one-one. Map reference point: alpha-two-niner. Target: ship in the open. Load one H.E. round and await command. How copy?” Halloran’s voice said.

Simms punched in the number and figures for the mission and touched the button that would open her com back to combat.

“Combat, batt four: fire mission accepted.” Simms replied, “Awaiting commander’s authorization for ground fire mission.”

A moment later, Turner’s voice spoke to Simms. “Batt four, this is the commander: On my authority, the use of orbital bombardment tactics has been authorized.”

“Understood sir. Loading the mission now.” Simms replied switching off her com. “Ok you meat sacks! Load one H.E. round and three charges!” she shouted to her crewmen below. “It’s time to show someone what a Battlestar does when she gets angry!”

“What the frak was that!?” Marcus Darby shouted as he bounded over a small hill towards Dr. Hal Creighton. “What was that?” he asked again.

Turning to face the freighter captain, Creighton took the missile launcher he had just fired down from his shoulder and placed it on the ground in front of him. Working quickly, he opened the rear access panel and looked at Darby. “Quick, hand me another missile.”

“What!?” Darby exclaimed in horror as realization dawned on him. “Oh my gods no! Tell me you didn’t just shoot at a Colonial ship!”

Creighton smiled proudly. “Not only did I shoot at a Colonial Viper, I hit it!” he said. “Maybe I missed my calling; maybe I should have been a soldier after all.”

“Oh for frak sake! You gods damned idiot!!” Darby shouted as he snatched the doctor up in by his shirt. “You just fraked us all real good you stupid ass!”

Creighton tried to wriggle free of the captain's grasp but Darby's grip, like his rage, was far too strong. "Unhand me you barbarian oaf!" the struggling doctor said.

Darby shook the doctor one time and then pulled him so that his face was just inches from his own. "You know what's going to happen now?" He growled. "Those Colonial warriors are going to send Marines to find their pilot, Doctor, and once they do, they're going to come looking for us! Do you know what Marines do in hostile situations? They shoot first and ask questions later! Now give me one good reason not to drag you to their camp and throw you on their mercy."

Most men, when confronted by someone of Darby's size and musculature, would find a way to back off and ease themselves out of a possible confrontation. Creighton, so convinced of his own mental superiority, had no such thoughts. "You won't do that," he said smugly, "Because if you do, you don't get paid."

Far above in the Prometheus' number four battery, the three man crew under Petty Officer Simms used the pneumatic lift to load the heavy high explosive, or H.E., round into the breach of the enormous cannon that was about to send it screaming towards the planet below.

"Ram it." Simms commanded.

Crewman Jefferies, the nineteen year old boy from Aquarion who manned that cannon ram, turned to the switch that operated the ramming device and activated it. A metallic arm with a flat plate on the end of it made contact with the round and pushed it gently into the breach until they heard a click. Then Jefferies flipped the switch again and the arm retracted back.

On the ground, Captain Darby held onto the doctor for a moment longer and fought down the urge to knock his smug expression clean off his face. Finally, after what seemed like an eternity to those watching, he dropped the doctor who collapsed into a heap as he hit the ground.

"I'm about this far from not caring anymore doctor." Darby said holding his thumb and index finger apart about an inch. "And if you do something stupid like that again, I'll make sure that the only price in blood that gets paid on this planet... is yours."

Creighton smiled and stood up, dusting himself off. "Of course captain." He said.

Inside battery four, Simms watched as Jefferies rammed home the three powder charges that would propel the round they had just loaded into Kobol's atmosphere and to the target.

"Combat, batt four: Ready to fire." She reported via the com.

A moment later she got the reply she was waiting for.

"Batt four, combat: FIRE." Came Halloran's voice.

"Fire in the hole!" Simms shouted as she slammed her fist down on the large red button that activated the firing sequence.

Inside the breach, a small spark ignited the three powder charge bags that were snugged tightly up against the round. Immediately they exploded, the high pressure inside the tube building until it began looking for a way out.

That way was by pushing the H.E. round out of the barrel of the gun. Once the momentum of the blast began, it pushed the round past the vacuum doors that protected the crew while the gun was being loaded and finally out into the cold of space, where it continued its journey towards its target on the planet.

It didn't stay in space very long though. Already parked just above the ionosphere of Kobol, it wasn't a long trip from the business end of Battery number four to the upper layers of the atmosphere where the round began to heat up from the friction of re-entry.

A thunder crack from over head suddenly got everyone's attention. Looking to the sky they all saw a flash of light in the clouds... only the flash didn't go away. It was getting brighter.

"Seems like the storm is kicking up some serious lightning." Creighton said.

"That's not lightning." Darby said breathlessly as realization dawned on him.

The rumbling in the sky grew louder and a high pitched whine began to be heard...

As if something was falling through the clouds.

"Run!" Darby shouted. "Run like your life depends on it!"

The crew of the freighter all began to run as fast as their feet could carry them. Creighton, on the other hand, stood still looking confused.

“It’s just a little lightning.” The doctor said.

“That’s not lightning you dumbass!” Darby said, snatching him up by the collar as he ran by him. “The Battlestar in orbit has fired on us!”

“What!?” Creighton said horrified, as he began to run himself.

“It’s a-“

Darby’s answer was lost in the noise as a Naval Auto-Cannon round from the Prometheus slammed into Darby’s ship.

In the space of half a second the massive round punched through the top hull of the ship, tore through the living quarters, immediately incinerating those few crewmen who were sleeping there, and then punched out the bottom of the old freighter.

Then it detonated.

The Naval Auto-Cannon class 10 shell, or NAC 10, was a round fired from the main guns of a Battlestar, as only a Battlestar was equipped with guns of that size and caliber. It was two meters long and 100 centimeters across at its widest point. With several different configurations, it could be used for almost any mission.

For this mission, Commander Turner had ordered that one high explosive, or HE, round be loaded into the number four battery on the starboard side of the ship and fired directly at the freighter.

With the armor piercing capabilities of the NAC 10 round, it went through the hull of the grounded ship like a hot knife through butter, waiting until it passed through the ship to detonate.

When it did, the ship was immediately broken in two as the explosive force of the round blasted upwards and ripped the two pieces of the ship apart, turning it into so much confetti.

Needless to say, there wasn’t much of the ship left.

Laying on her back some two clicks away, Stacie Percival was awakened from unconsciousness by the sound of the explosion. Opening her eyes she saw the plume of flame reach into the sky, taking with it the remains of the destroyed freighter.

“That’s what you get for fraking with a Battlestar.” She said with a smile.

Only then did she notice that her right leg was bent at an odd angle. Reaching down to touch it a jolt of pain so powerful it made her scream out, shot through her leg, up into her spine and seemed to explode behind her eyes.

Only after she stopped screaming did she taste the blood in her mouth.

It was then that she realized that she was hurt far worse than she had feared.

“Great Stacie, just great.” She mumbled to herself. “Not only did you manage to get yourself shot down by not paying attention, but it looks like you’re gonna die here too.”

Reaching up she unfastened her helmet and slid it off her head, taking in a deep breath of clean air. *Well at least I won't suffocate.* She thought to herself. Then she laughed. “No,” she said to the still air around her, “You’ll just die of exposure, or internal bleeding or the unknown hostiles, who are undoubtedly looking for you now, will find you, torture you and kill you.”

Shaking her head she wondered, not for the first time, how the hell she wound up in a situation like this.

CHAPTER 2

TANGLED WEBS

Matthew Campagna, one of the two co-hosts of the Colonial News Network’s popular morning show ‘Caprica Dawn’, yawned as he walked into his office. Even though he had been doing this for several years, it was still a challenge for him to be up and in the office by 3 in the morning so that they could broadcast by 6.

Reaching his desk he activated the coffee maker and turned on the power to his computer.

Rubbing his eyes to help them adjust to the light he watched as his e-mail messages came up on the screen. Scrolling through them quickly, he stopped as one of the messages caught his eye.

Immediately, his mind came awake as he opened the file titled Prometheus. A smile spread across his face as the meaning of the words he was reading registered in his brain.

“Oh yes!” he hissed as he picked up his phone and dialed the number of his co-host. “Nat!” he said before she could even finish answering, “Come to my office quick!”

You gotta read what I just got in my e-mail. No, no, no! I can't just forward it! Just... just get down here ok?"

Hanging up the phone before she could attempt to talk him into forwarding the message, Matt returned his gaze to the screen. If what it said was true, the implications could be tremendous.

A few minutes later Nat Tubanos, Matt's co-host for the show, arrived in his office yawning away her own tiredness. To say that she was irritated would have been an understatement, but since it wasn't often that Matt became this excited about something she decided to play along.

"Ok Matt," she said, "What's so important that you couldn't just forward it to me?" she asked moving behind Matt's desk.

"This." Matt said pointing to the screen.

On the screen was a copy of a classified report bearing the Colonial Fleet insignia and addressed to President Adar.

"Oh my gods..." Nat said breathlessly. "This says that the Battlestar Prometheus has rediscovered Kobol, that they're in orbit of it right now!"

Matt smiled as Nat continued to read. "There's more," he said, "Keep going."

Nat continued to read finally coming to the part that Matt had hoped she would see. Her breath caught in her throat as she re-read the words several times to make sure she had read correctly.

"A secret mission objective..." She said reading down the file. "They're looking for Earth!"

"And it's all on Adar's orders." Matt said with a smile as he leaned back in his chair.

"You realize the implications of this?" Nat asked as she tore her eyes away from the screen. "This could shift the entire election that's coming up! If the Prometheus finds Earth, no candidate in the Colonies would be able to stand up next to Adar."

"But if this leaks early..." Matt said with a smile.

Nat shared his smile as the implications of the story came to her. "Adar will look like he's desperate and trying to pull a stunt to get re-elected. At the very least, he'll look like he's trying to hide something."

"This story could influence the political climate for the next ten years." Matt said.

“Yeah, but the question is: do we have confirmation on it yet?” Nat asked, her common sense coming back into play.

“No,” Matt replied with a smile, “But I know someone who *could* confirm it for us.”

“Who?” Nat asked anxiously.

“A friend who works for the Press Ministry at the Tower.” Matt said. “His name’s Doral, Aaron Doral.”

Captain Jason Allen grasped the massive ebony hand of Michael ‘Archangel’ Johnson as he climbed into the back of the Raptor that would be taking him to the crash site where Sheba had gone down.

“I see that they’re sending the best.” Archangel said nodding to the two special operations Marines who boarded the Raptor with Jason.

“Always.” Jason replied with a smile. “They had to send someone along to make sure I didn’t screw it up.”

Archangel chuckled. “Well you’re lucky the weather held me up on this courier run here or else you would have gotten some other pilot.”

“No way my man,” Jason said patting Archangel on the back, “If I have to ride in a Raptor, I’m riding with you.”

Dr. Hal Creighton pushed himself up from the ground and looked around. Next to him lay the body of the freighter captain, Marcus Darby. One look at him told Creighton that the man was dead as a large piece of metal was sticking out from behind the back of his skull.

“Cap’n!” a voice cried from the distance.

Looking up, Creighton saw that the three remaining members of Darby’s crew were all running towards them.

“Over here!” Creighton called, getting the crewmen’s attention.

Gathering his legs under him, Creighton was able to stand up just as the crew arrived. “They killed Captain Darby!” he said pointing to the late captain’s body.

“Why?” one of the crewmen asked.

“What do you mean why?” Creighton said as sudden inspiration hit him, “It’s what they’ve planned all along!”

“What do you mean?” another of the crewmen demanded.

“Don’t you get it!?” Creighton snarled, “They’re trying to beat us to the find and they’re willing to kill us to do it! That’s why they sent that fighter over head, so that they could locate us and blast us off the face of the planet!”

“Good thing you shot it down then.” One of the others said. “They’d probably have us zeroed by now if you didn’t.”

“Right...” Creighton said, surprised by the success of his plan. “Well they got the ship so we’re going to have to move fast if we want a ride off this planet.”

“What do we need to do?” the first crewman asked.

Creighton thought for a moment before replying. He knew his plan would be dangerous but at this point he had nothing to lose. “We find that pilot that I shot down,” he said “And then we hold him hostage until they give us a ship with a jump drive.”

“Two minutes!” Archangel announced as the Raptor he was piloting bucked and fought its way through the atmosphere of Kobol.

Hearing the announcement, Slider nodded and turned to the two Marine Special Operations troopers who were accompanying him.

“Ok,” Slider announced, “We’re going to have to do this HALO style because the winds are too harsh over the drop zone.”

“Well that ought to make things interesting.” Sergeant Randal Shugart, the team sniper, mumbled.

“Wouldn’t want this trip to get boring would you Randy?” his partner, Sergeant Gary Gordon, said with a smirk.

Slider chuckled. He liked Marines. Their sense of humor and ideas of what they liked to do for fun were about as twisted as his own. “Ok then. One minutes to drop. Final checks.”

Quickly and professionally, the two Marines checked each other’s equipment and parachutes, finishing by looking over Slider’s gear.

“Lose the second bag sir.” Gordon said as he pointed to the small bag strapped to Slider’s legs. “We won’t be down on the ground long enough to use them.”

Slider nodded, accepting the seasoned non-com’s advice as he removed the bag that contained the back up gear.

“Thirty seconds!” Archangel announced.

“Open the hatch.” Slider ordered, taking a deep breath to steady his anxiety.

Slider enjoyed parachuting and had even made orbital parachute drops on two occasions. Still, every time he made a jump he got nervous just before he went out the door. This time was no exception.

“Stand up!” he said gesturing to the two Marines.

All three men stood and made a line towards the door, Slider in the front.

“Get ready!” Slider said holding up his right hand and turning his eyes to the red light that was burning next to him.

“Good hunting!” Archangel said from the front as he activated the switch that would turn on the green light.

“Next to him, the green light came on and Slider waved his hand forward in a ‘follow me’ gesture. “Tally ho!” he shouted as he stepped out onto the wing.

Slider’s foot never actually touched the wing of the Raptor. From the moment he stuck his foot out the door, the winds that were screaming by the Raptor ripped him from the passenger compartment and sent him tumbling into the frigid air.

CHAPTER 3

THE FOOTPRINTS OF THE GODS

“Ok,” Colonel James Ryan began as he addressed his assembled soldiers. “The rescue mission for Sheba is under way. We’ll be monitoring it from here and the old man has back up ready to assist them if needs be. Our mission is to get to the Tomb of Athena which we believe to be over there.” He finished by pointing to the mountain top where they suspected the tomb to be.

“With the vehicles we have we should be able to reach that area in a few hours.” Ryan continued, “Once there, Doctor Z will work his magic and then we’ll have what we’ve been looking for. Your jobs will be to protect the doctor as he does his work and bring him back here at all costs. Any questions?”

The negative responses from the assembled soldiers satisfied Ryan that his message was understood. “Then mount up.” He commanded, “You leave in ten minutes.”

Then soldiers filed out and Ryan watched them as they left.

“Jim...” Doctor Z said, cautiously reaching out for Ryan’s hand.

Ryan looked at it then took it in a firm hand shake. The doctor’s expression instantly told him that he had expected something else. Ryan looked the young doctor in the eye and nodded. “Good hunting doc. Be safe.”

Zylman nodded and released Ryan’s hand to pick up his carry along bag. “I’ll call you when we reach the tomb.” He said.

Colonel Ryan nodded but said nothing as he watched the doctor turn and walk out of the tent.

“Come on Aaron.” Matt Campagna said as he lifted his drink to his lips for another sip. “You know something about this and you’re not telling.”

Aaron Doral smiled at the young and eager reporter who sat across from him. *There are a lot of things I know about, but you’ll never find out... until it’s too late that is.* He thought to himself. To Matt he said, “You know I can’t talk about Defense Ministry affairs Matt. I’d get into a lot of trouble and so would you.”

“You mean to tell me that you can’t reveal the whereabouts of one Battlestar?” Matt pressed with a casual smile.

Doral shook his head. “Sorry Matt. That falls under the purview of ongoing military operations and those of us in the Ministry Communications Department aren’t allowed to comment on them at all. But of course, you know this already.”

Matt smiled knowingly. After being a reporter for several years he did indeed know that particular rule. In fact, it had nearly gotten him in trouble several times.

“Yeah, yeah, I know. You can’t blame me for trying though.” He said.

“I’d be shocked if you didn’t.” Doral replied with a laugh as he rose from his seat. “Thanks for the drink man, but I have to get back to the Ministry.”

Matt nodded. “Anytime partner.”

Campagna watched as the short man from Aquarion departed the small tavern that they had been drinking in, and as Doral walked out the door, Matt pulled out his cell phone and dialed a number. He was immediately greeted by the voice of his co-host, Nat.

“Well?” she asked impatiently. “What did he say?”

“The usual.” Matt replied flatly. “Can’t comment on ongoing military operations.”

“That’s a load of crap.” Nat said, “The military always uses that to cover up their tracks.”

“Don’t worry.” Matt said, soothing his partner, “We’ll find out what their up to. And when we do, we’ll hang ‘em out to dry for it.”

Stacie Percival awoke from her unconscious state to find three men in black Colonial field garb gathering her chute and equipment.

“Wha- what’s... going on?” she mumbled as one of the Marines reached under her and hoisted her to a sitting position.

“Just be still Stacie.” A familiar voice said to her, “We’re going to get you out of here.”

“Oh fraking great.” She sighed as she recognized the voice. “Of all the people they can send to rescue me, it has to be *you*?”

“Nice to see you too.” Slider replied as he pulled out an auto-injector with morpha in it. “And just for the record, nobody sent me down here. I volunteered to come save your ass so you could at least be a little grateful.”

Stacie yelled when Slider pressed the injector to her leg, but instantly relaxed as the painkillers made their way into her bloodstream. “Why?” she whispered.

“What?” Slider asked as he lay her back against a rock.

“Why... did you come... here?” Stacie asked again as she felt the darkness from the painkiller creeping in. “Why...do you care?” she breathed.

Jason considered his answer for a long moment. Stacie didn’t know that he knew about their son. He had kept the secret out of respect for her wishes, even though it had been her mother who had informed him of the boy’s existence.

“Why?” she asked again as consciousness faded from her eyes.

Jason smiled and looked directly down at her. “I did it for Tommy.” He said.

Stacie tensed slightly in surprise but the drugs were too far into her system to allow her any movement.

The last thought she had before she passed out was *Oh my gods! He knows!*

Then the meds finished their work... and the darkness claimed her once again.

Slider watched as Sheba faded into unconsciousness again and gently laid her back against a rock.

Suddenly, from out of nowhere a bullet whizzed by Slider’s head.

“Down!” he shouted as the three men took cover behind the rocks that surrounded them. “Where the frack did that come from?”

“Two o’clock sir, one hundred fifty meters.” Sergeant Shugart reported.

“I have dismounts approaching from the eleven o’clock position sir.” Gordon chimed in.

“They’re trying to surround us. They must want to capture us and use us as hostages.” Shugart said as he deduced their strategy.

“What makes you say that?” Slider asked

“Because Prometheus just dusted their ship sir. Taking us prisoner and using us to get a ship is the only way they have to get off of this rock.” Shugart replied.

Slider nodded, understanding the NCOs' logic. Reaching into his pocket he dug out his communicator. "Archangel this is Slider! We need dust off immediately!"

"No can do." The voice of Michael 'Archangel' Johnson replied. "You have a large cloud of electrical energy above you for about ten miles and I won't be able to get under it for a bit."

"That's not good news Mike!" Slider said as he ducked another incoming bullet. "We have bandits closing on our position and we're taking heavy fire!"

The line was quiet for a moment and Slider poked his head up to check the situation... and immediately slammed it back down as the crack of bullet being fired rang out.

"Damn it!" he cursed. "We need to do something about that fracking sniper!"

Shugart smiled as he reached into his bag and pulled a grenade launcher out. "I got it sir." He replied as he hefted the weapon up to his shoulder and took aim at the area he suspected the sniper was in.

The gun made a WHUMPH, WHUMPH, WHUMPH sound as he fired off three successive rounds. In the distance, Slider watched as a small grove of trees exploded into a fireball.

He could also hear screaming as someone burned alive.

"Got em sir." Shugart said grimly.

"Slider this is Archangel." A voice came through from Jason's computer. "Actual wants a SITREP."

Slider chuckled as the rounds from the now dead snipers' angry friends began to intensify. "Archangel, this is Slider. Our SITREP is that we are well and truly fracked."

Doctor Lucian Zylman saw from above, the fireball created by Shugarts' grenades. "What's that over there?" he asked the pilot of the air skimmer he was riding in.

"That's where Sheba went down." The pilot, whose callsign was Shooter, replied.

"Shouldn't we go assist them?" Zylman said.

"No sir." Shooter replied firmly. "Our orders are to get you to the Tomb of Athena sir."

Zylman looked back out the window as they skimmed the tree tops and moved away from the battle site. On the speakers he could hear the exchange between Slider and Archangel.

“What kinds of weapons are mounted on this thing?” the doctor asked.

“We have two Hailfire Rocket launchers and two 20mm machine guns.” Shooter answered.

“Our SITREP is that we are well and truly fracked.” Zylman heard Slider say over the radio followed abruptly by static.

“Turn the skimmer.” The doctor ordered.

“I can’t do that sir.” Shooter replied. “I have to get you to-“

“I know where you have to get me to damn it!” Zylman exclaimed, “And we’ll have plenty of time once we save your friends down there now turn the fucking skimmer.”

Shooter kept his gaze dead ahead but Zylman could see the thoughts going through his head. He could see that the pilot wanted to help his friends but that he also wasn’t one who was accustomed to defying orders.

“I know you want to go help them and so do I.” Zylman said calmly “Now let’s go save your friends. You can tell Colonel Ryan that I ordered you to do it.”

Shooter considered the doctors words for a moment and then nodded. “We’ll do it on *my* authority doc. After all, they can’t court-martial me for doing the right thing.”

“Dismounts are closing on my side!” Sergeant Gordon announced as he fired at the approaching mercenaries on his side.

“How many?” Slider asked.

“Seven!” Gordon replied.

“How about your side?” Slider asked to Shugart who was covering the left flank.

“I’ve got five over here!” the embattled Marine replied as he ducked an incoming round.

“Damn!” Slider cursed. “I don’t think-“

“Frack!” Gordon shouted as he fell backwards, blood pouring from a wound in his shoulder.

“Oh hell!” Slider said as he jumped into Gordon’s position and began firing. “You ok sergeant?”

“I’ll live sir.” Gordon said as he pulled out a bandage and placed it over his wound. “But I won’t be happy about it.”

Slider smiled at the man’s attempt at humor. “Just hang on sarge, we’ll get out of this.”

Suddenly from overhead, the sound of Colonial Air Skimmers could be heard approaching.

“Slider this is Stingray,” a voice said from Jason’s radio, “We’re inbound to you and should be on station in thirty seconds. Mark your targets with red smoke grenades.”

Reaching into his bag, Slider pulled out two smoke grenades and tossed each one to the Marines on either flank. “Air strike inbound!” he shouted over the sounds of weapons fire. “Mark your targets!”

Pulling the pins, the two Marines quickly chucked away the grenades that began spewing smoke almost as soon as they hit the ground.

“Everyone down!” Slider shouted as the Air Skimmers screamed overhead.

The ground heaved and trembled as the two Air Skimmers deposited their ordinance onto the approaching mercenaries with thunderous sound.

Slider looked out over the rocks to see the attacking men all lying still in the tall grass that burned around them. “Great shot Shooter!” he said into his communicator as a wave of relief flooded over him.

“Help me!” a voice shouted from across the field, catching Slider’s attention. “Someone help me!”

Jumping up and running, Slider dashed across the field towards the grove of trees that had been hit from Shugarts grenade launcher. Arriving there he found a man with a terrified look on his face cowering behind a tree.

“Don’t hurt me!” the man pleaded. “I’m not with them! I’m a prisoner!”

“Easy man,” Slider replied, squatting down next to him. “It’s ok, the rest of those men are dead. You’re safe.”

“Thank the gods!” the man replied with relief.

“Are you hurt?” Slider asked.

“No.” the man answered shaking his head. “The explosions killed my guard but didn’t hurt me.”

“Good.” Slider said as he helped the man to his feet. “Let’s get you out of here mister...?”

“Creighton,” the man replied “Doctor Hal Creighton.”

CHAPTER 4

LOSE ENDS

Colonel James Ryan entered Commander Turner's office and saluted the man behind the desk. Looking up, Turner returned the salute and said "Have a seat, Colonel."

Ryan dropped the salute and sat down.

Turner looked up from the paperwork on his desk and folded his hands. "I've been reading your report here Jim. Good work on getting the map from the tomb as well as rescuing Doctor Creighton."

"Thank you sir." Ryan replied. "He's down in sickbay now getting checked out. He's in relatively good shape considering how long they kept him hostage."

"Indeed." Turner replied, "And there were no other survivors?"

"No sir." Ryan replied, "It appears that all of the men who rallied after their ship was destroyed were killed trying to capture Sheba and our rescue party."

"Good." Turner said, "The last thing we need is to be hauling around a boat load of prisoners as we move farther away from Colonial space."

Ryan nodded in agreement but said nothing as his weariness began to overtake him.

"You did well Jim, and I'm proud of you." Turner said as he got up from behind his desk and moved around to a chair facing opposite the X.O., "We do have one problem though."

"What is it?" Ryan asked.

Turner took a deep breath and then said "It's you."

It took a moment for the words that Turner had said to register in Ryan's brain but when they did he sat up straight. "What do you mean sir?" he asked.

Turner rubbed his weary eyes wishing he didn't have to discuss this particular subject, but knowing that it had to be done.

"Before you left, a security patrol spotted Doctor Zylman leaving your quarters late at night." Turner said.

"Well, what's wrong with that?" Ryan asked. "We're friends and he comes to my cabin sometimes for dinner."

Turner sighed and then looked Ryan in the face. “Let’s cut the bullshit Jim, we’ve known each other too long.” He said.

Ryan was taken aback by the suddenly hostile tone in Turner’s voice but said nothing in reply.

“Look, I have no desire to meddle in your personal affairs but you know the regulations on same sex relationships in the Colonial Military.” Turner said.

“What are you trying to imply sir?” Ryan stammered. “That I’m...”

“I’m not implying *anything* Jim, I’m saying that I *know* about your sexual orientation.” Turner replied.

Ryan sat in silence, stunned that his secret had been so blatantly thrown out in the open. After a moment he finally found the courage to speak.

“How long have you known?” he asked.

“Since you came aboard the Pegasus, about six months after I did.” Turner replied, leaning back in his chair. “I just never said anything because you always kept it professional aboard ship. You never gave me a reason to say anything... until now.”

Ryan swallowed hard, knowing his military career was about to end. “So what do we do now?” he asked quietly.

“That depends on you.” Turner replied.

Ryan looked up at his commander. “How so?”

“I’ve managed to contain the knowledge.” The commander said, “But you’re going to have to fix this if you want to stay on as my X.O. You’re going to have to end your romantic relationship with Doctor Zylman immediately.”

Ryan nodded. “Yes sir, I understand.” He replied. “I’ll see to it immediately.”

Turner nodded and stood up. “Good.” He said, “I want you to know though that my opinion of you hasn’t changed. You were a good officer before we discussed this and you’re a good officer now as well.”

Ryan nodded and smiled slightly. “Thank you sir. It means... a lot to me that you think that.”

Turner waved Ryan away. “Go and get some sleep Colonel. You’ve earned it.”

Ryan, weary as he was, found the strength in himself to snap to attention and fire off a precision salute to his friend. “See you tomorrow in CIC sir.” He said.

Stacie Percival awoke to find herself in the Prometheus sickbay. Blinking her eyes twice to clear her blurry vision, she turned her head and saw Jason sitting next to her bed and looking at her.

“Hey kid,” Jason said, “How you doing?”

Stacie chuckled and then coughed a couple of times, wincing in pain as she did so. “You haven’t called me kid in years.” She rasped from her dry mouth.

“Well, I figure you could use a smile.” Slider replied.

“Yeah, I guess I could.” Sheba replied groggily. “How long have I been out?”

“Two days.” Slider replied. “Doc’s had you sedated until today. They had to reset the bone in your leg.”

Stacie looked down and saw her leg was no longer twisted, but straight inside a white fiber-cast. “How bad was it?” she asked.

“You broke your right femur and three of your ribs. You also collapsed a lung so you won’t be tap dancing anytime soon.” Slider replied watching her reaction. “But the doc says you should make a full recovery and you should be able to get back in the cockpit.”

Stacie closed her eyes and allowed a wave of relief to pass over her. Being a Viper pilot was her life and she was happy to know that she wasn’t going to lose that.

“Major Horvath has put Shooter in charge of your squadron until you’re out of here.” Jason continued. “She says she’ll let you take over again once you’re back on your feet.”

Sheba nodded. “Shooter is good, he can handle it.” she rasped, then asked “Can I have a sip of water?”

Slider reached out and grabbed his cup of ice water and held it to her lips while she sipped it. After she was done he replaced the cup on her stand next to her bed.

“Shouldn’t you be on patrol or something?” Sheba asked.

“I finished my CAP rotation an hour ago.” Slider said with a smile. “Figured that you would like to wake up to a friendly face.”

Sheba chuckled again which brought on another fit of coughing.

“What’s so funny?” Slider asked.

“You being a friendly face.” Stacie replied. “After all that we’ve been through…”

“Yeah well, what can I say? I’ve always had a weakness for girls in hospital gowns.” Jason said with a sheepish smile.

Sheba smiled but said nothing, not wanting to broach the subject of their son. As it happened, she didn’t have to.

“The commander isn’t happy about our having a kid together.” Slider said. “He says it violates the family policy for this mission.”

“He can’t blame you.” Sheba replied quickly, “You didn’t know.”

“Yes I did.” Jason replied, “I’ve known since shortly after he was born.”

Sheba had thought that her shock in this matter was over. Now she realized that she was wrong. “How?” was all she asked.

“Your mom.” Jason replied.

Both pilots were silent for a moment until Sheba looked up.

“I should have told you.” She said, “But I was so damn angry…”

Jason waved her away. “We can discuss it another time.” He said gently as he rose to his feet. “You just worry about getting well. I don’t want to have to take up your slack forever you know.”

Stacie stared at him for a moment, not knowing whether to be angry, surprised, happy or any combination thereof. The sly smile on Jason’s face gave her her answer though.

“I’ll be back up in no time.” She said with a faint smile.

Jason nodded and turned to go but was stopped by Sheba calling out his name. Turning he saw her sitting upright, her blonde hair spilling about her shoulders.

“Are we ok?” she asked him.

“Yeah,” Jason replied after a moment of thought. “We’re ok for now. We’ll talk about it more when you get up and about again.”

EPILOGUE

NEW FRONTIERS

“So they have discovered Kobol and survived to tell the tale.” The beautiful Cylon woman known as Six said as he walked along with Leoben at her side. “When did you find this out?”

“I received the message from my counterpart this morning.” Leoben replied.

“And they still don’t suspect anything about him?” Six asked.

Leoben smiled. “No. They the rest of the crew thinks he is just as human as they are.”

“What about the communications difficulties you said you were having?”

“They are getting worse.” Leoben answered. “It’s the distance from us to him. Soon we won’t be able to hear his thoughts at all.”

“What is he dies?” Six asked, suddenly alarmed.

Leoben’s expression turned sad. “Then he will be lost to us. The resurrection process won’t work from that far away.”

“And the resurrection ship is still months away from completion.” Six added sadly. “Does he know?”

“He knew the risks when he signed on for the mission.” Leoben replied. “But no matter what, he’ll continue on. He’s a Cylon after all. He doesn’t know how to quit.”

*To: Admiral Roswell, Colonial Fleet Exploration Branch Chief.
From: Commander Jonathan Turner, C.O. Battlestar Prometheus*

Mission Status Report: With the retrieval of our last personnel from the surface of Kobol we are about to get underway and I for couldn’t be happier. The scriptures were right when they said that a return to Kobol would exact a price in blood. I lost two Marines down there when they sprung some kind of trap at the tomb, and I almost lost another during the rescue of Sheba from the surface.

Doctor Z retrieved the information we needed from the Tomb of Athena though, and has begun plotting a course for our first astrophysical landmark: The Lagoon Nebula. By our estimates it will take us at least six months to get there but I am optimistic and the morale amongst the crew is high.

Doctor Creighton has graciously volunteered to join our expedition after our rescue of him from his captors on Kobol. Apparently, they were treasure hunters who were out to find artifacts and bring them back to the Colonies to sell at a high price. They kidnapped him, forced him to steal some archeological artifacts from his university and then took him along to help them find what they were looking for. He too is an expert on the history of the Colonies and Doctor Z seems pleased to have his assistance.

I have to say that I am proud of how the crew handled themselves during this most recent crisis. I am disappointed, though, that we had to take the ship into combat so early in our expedition. I always knew that we would probably have to fight on this mission, but I never dreamed that this ship would fire her first shots in anger within the first three months.

We are about to execute our next jump. Will contact you in one week's time. Tell the President to be patient. He'll get his glory soon enough.

*Signed
Jonathan Turner
Commander
Battlestar Prometheus*

Colonel James Ryan watched over Turner's shoulder as he put the electronic signature on his report. "You really going to send that last part?" he asked with a smile.

"Of course." Turner replied, "After all, what can he do to me out here?"

Ryan chuckled in response.

"Besides, I know Admiral Roswell. He'll make sure that the last part gets omitted from the official report to the President." Turner added.

"Sir," Lieutenant Halloran spoke up from the operations station, "The FTL is spun up, the coordinates are set and we are ready to jump."

Turner looked at Ryan. "Let's get the hell out of here."

"I couldn't agree more, sir." Ryan said turning back to Halloran. "Lieutenant Halloran... execute jump."

**** This episode features guest appearances by two Special Forces soldiers who died defending a fallen comrade during operations in Somalia. For their heroic actions, Sergeants Shugart and Gordon received the Congressional Medal of Honor, the highest award given in the U.S. Military. Their appearance in this story is my way of offering a tribute to two great and honorable heroes who left this world far too soon.****