

BATTLESTAR PROMETHEUS

EPISODE 7: CHILDREN OF THE EXILES PT 2

Sci Fi

PROLOGUE CAUSE AND EFFECT

“This is Commander Turner. Why have you surrounded my ship and launched fighters against us.”

The comm crackled with static for a moment before Thomasi’s voice broke through. “Commander Turner, this is Precentor Thomasi. I deeply regret the situation that has arisen here but your presence has been determined a direct threat to the security of the Terran Alliance.”

“I’m sorry too.” Turner replied. “However, we recognize the sovereignty of your space and will withdraw accordingly.”

“Very gracious of you Commander.” Thomasi answered, “But I am afraid that we have moved beyond that point.”

“What do you mean?” Turner asked, a sinking feeling beginning to permeate stomach.

“I am truly sorry, Commander.” Thomasi said, “In the name of the Terran Alliance I demand that you surrender your vessel.”

Turner cast a side long look at Colonel Ryan. The X.O. immediately knew that Thomasi has made a grave error.

“That’ll be the fracking day.” The commander mumbled, Turning to Maddie he commanded. “One M.C.”

Petty Officer Theresa Madrid flipped the switch that activated the ships announcement system. “You’re on sir.”

“This is the commander,” Turner began, his voice giving weight to the grave situation they were in. “As you all know, today was a great day in the history of the Colonies. We have found incontrovertible evidence that the Thirteenth Tribe did exist. These people that we met today are human, just like us. This should have been a day of celebration. Unfortunately, it isn’t.”

Turner moved from the situation table, bringing the wireless earpiece, over to the operations center where Lieutenant Halloran sat and studied the dradis read out there.

“These cousins of humanity have now turned against us. They have surrounded us with four warships and are even now launching fighters.” Turner said, “And moments ago, their commander contacted us and asked for our surrender. My answer to him will be NO.” He finished slamming his fist on the dradis console. “I have *never* given up, *never* surrendered to anything and I am not about to start now.”

As the commander cast his gaze around the C.I.C. he saw that everyone there, from the Marines guarding the entrance, to the Chief standing at his position behind the helm, to Halloran, Maddie and even the X.O. were nodding their heads in agreement.

“So long as I command this ship we will never surrender it to an enemy power.” He said. “So stand to your stations! Watch out for your shipmates! You have trained for this... you’re ready for this. We’re the best in the fleet and these *cousins* of humanity are about to find out why.”

The C.I.C. was silent for a moment as Turner finished. Then it started. One pair of hands clapping in rhythm... then two... then three, four five! Soon, everyone in the C.I.C. was clapping in unison and it was a thunderous sound that filled Turner with confidence and determination as the rhythm picked up speed until finally it was a loud and raucous applause, complete with shouts of determination.

Inside his heart, Turner knew that it might be a hopeless battle that he was entering into. He knew that he might be leading everyone under his command to their deaths. He also knew that these brave souls would follow him into the afterlife without a second thought.

“X.O.,” Turner said over the noise, “Let’s show these people what happens when you piss off a ship that’s named after a god!”

“Shouldn’t we be attacking?”

Precentor Rollo Thomasi kept the displeasure from his voice as he responded to the man who had asked the question. “I have my reasons for not yet attacking, Executor Cidious.” He replied calmly.

Moving from the back of the dimly lit command center of the Kraken, Executor Germanus Cidious, the official representative of the Conclave government, moved forward and stood next to Thomasi on his command dais.

“Our fighters are deployed, our ships are in position to attack and they are still in the act of responding!” The Executor snarled impatiently, “You are only giving them more time to prepare!”

Folding his arms across his chest, Thomasi turned ever so slowly from the read outs that were arrayed in front of him and fixed his laser like gaze on the eyes of the Executor.

“If you do not stop acting like a petulant child I will have you removed from my bridge, Executor.” Thomasi said in a low menacing tone.

The Executor’s face went pale as Thomasi stared him down. Swallowing hard he said, “Of course, Precentor. I apologize. I am simply... anxious over this monumental discovery.”

Thomasi smiled. “Of course Executor, as we all are.” He said turning back to the displays in front of him. “Nevertheless, we must choose our actions carefully. I have met Commander Turner and I can tell you that he is a determined man. He won’t give up.”

“Then, if you know we are going to have to fight him, why don’t we attack?” Cidious asked.

“Because,” Thomasi replied after a moment of thought, “Turner is an honorable warrior and as such I will treat him according to the traditions of the Alliance. Honor demands that he be given a chance to surrender first and so I have given him that chance. In a few moments, if he has not responded, we will take the appropriate action.”

“In a few moments he will be ready for you.” Cidious replied.

Thomasi chuckled. “So much the better.”

“Precentor, all fighter cohorts are in position to begin assaulting the target.” Came a voice from the front of the command center.

“What has the Prometheus deployed in response?” Thomasi asked.

“The target vessel has deployed sixty four light fighters and 18 heavy craft.”

“You see?” Thomasi said, “We out number them almost two to one in fighters.”

“What about the other two escort ships?” Cidious asked.

“They have withdrawn.” Thomasi replied. “It seems that Commander Turner doesn’t want them engaged. Once we have disabled the Prometheus, I intend to find out why.”

“Precentor!” the communications officer called, “The enemy commander wishes to speak with you.”

Thomasi nodded. “Put him on.”

“Precentor Thomasi, this is Commander Turner.” The smooth voice of the Prometheus’ commander filled the chamber. “Having conferred with my officers I must regretfully decline your offer of surrender. I ask that you reconsider this aggressive course of action before lives are lost.”

Thomasi smiled. “Commander Turner,” he said as he activated the hand mic he was holding, “You are out numbered and out gunned. I ask you to reconsider for the same reason.”

The comm was silent for a moment and then the commander’s voice returned. “I’m sorry Precentor, but no. I will not surrender my vessel.”

Thomasi nodded and his expression became grim. “Very well Commander. I am sorry it has come to this. May you die with honor.”

Immediately he hung up the hand mic and turned to his officers. Here, the weight of what he was about to do began to come down on his shoulders. The people of the Alliance had wondered for years if it were true that they were the only humans in the galaxy. They had wondered if it were true that the other tribes had killed themselves with foolish wars. Now they had their answer and he was about to destroy it.

“For the good of the Empire.” He mumbled to himself. Then, straightening to his full height he said the words that would dictate his legacy.

“To all commands: begin the assault.”

CHAPTER 1

SPOILING FOR A FIGHT

Nat Tubanos gathered her things quietly while watching Gaius Baltar sleep in his bed. It had been a fun night, and she had no regrets using the methods she had to get the information that she needed. Still, she wanted to get going and be back in Caprica City by mid-day.

Pulling her shoes on and grabbing her purse she stood and wrote a quick note for Baltar saying that she had had a wonderful night and morning with him and that she hoped to see him again soon.

The last part was a lie of course. She had no use for men in her life other than the occasional need for sex and the information they could give her. No, her first and only love was her career and she was adept at using men to get what she wanted.

As she quietly closed the door to Baltar's house and stepped outside into the fresh Caprican air, she didn't notice the two tall men standing by a black hover transport.

They wore dark suits, sunglasses and imposing expressions on their faces.

"Miss Tubanos." One of the men called out, startling her.

Turning around she took in her surrounding quickly. She was alone with these men, at a cabin in the mountains, far away from any help. Looking at the hover transport she saw that it was as nondescript as they came. It could mean only one thing:

Government agents.

The thought of going back inside and waking up Baltar for help crossed her mind momentarily but she quickly dismissed it. She had never needed a man to help her out of a tough situation before and she wasn't about to go crawling to one now.

"That's my name," she replied as nonchalantly as she could. "What's the problem?"

"Come with us." One of the men commanded.

Nat smirked. They obviously didn't know her well. "I'm sorry," she said walking towards her own hover transport, "But I don't just go anywhere with strange men that I've never met. Here," she flipped a business card at them, "Call my secretary and set up an appointment."

Suddenly, Nat felt a pin prick on her neck and her legs turned to water beneath her. Lightning quick, the two agents were at her side guiding her to the waiting transport as two others got out of the back seat and moved towards her.

“Take her transport back to her house and leave it there.” One of the agents said as another fished the keys out of her hand.

“Hey...” Nat tried to protest through sluggish vocal chords, but her body wouldn’t cooperate. Her vision began to swim and darkness was encroaching on her.

Looking at the face of the man now putting her into the backseat of the transport, she tried to commit his features to memory, knowing that if she lived through this she would want to remember what he looked like.

“Don’t worry Miss Tubanos,” the man said, “No one is going to hurt you. We’re just going for a little ride.”

They were the last words she heard before the darkness claimed her.

Jason ‘Slider’ Allen looked out through his cockpit at all of the arrowhead shaped fighters that were arrayed in front of him and shook his head. “Boy we’re in it deep this time.” He mumbled.

“Slider, Shooter.” Came the voice of Captain Joshua ‘Shooter’ Wakefield. “Knights are in position and holding.”

“Roger that.” Slider replied switching over to the command frequency. “Prometheus, Slider: All elements are Red Con One.”

“Copy that Slider.” Came the voice of P.O. Madrid, “Be advised that Ice Queen has finished her refueling operations and is en route to you time now.”

“Copy that.” Slider replied. He would be happy when she rejoined the rest of the Vipers arrayed in defense. He still wasn’t used to the idea of leading a squadron, much less the entire air group.

“Slider, Freestyle!” came the anxious voice of Ensign John Phelps. “I have movement on my left flank.”

“Easy boy,” Replied Slider, “CAG, did you copy?”

“I copied.” Came the cold and steely voice of Major Karla ‘Ice Queen’ Horvath, the Prometheus CAG. “I have lead again. Take your flight and fall back to a reserve position where you can get eyes on what he is talking about.”

“Copy that.” Slider responded as he pulled back on his stick and touched his throttle, causing his Viper to do an end over end flip. “Tailspin, you’re with me.” He said.

Moving quickly, both Vipers made their way to the left flank of the defensive line, towards the stern of the ship. “I’m in position.” Slider reported, “It looks like the enemy fighters are trying to probe the line.”

“Stay in your position.” Ice Queen ordered. “We’re still on weapons hold.”

“Why aren’t we attacking?” the pilot known as Tailspin asked.

“I guess the Commander is trying to work this out diplomatically.” Slider replied as he gave his instruments the once over for the tenth time. “Doesn’t want to start an incident with our long lost cousins.”

“Think it’ll work?” Tailspin asked.

“I have no idea.” Slider said as he looked out over the defensive line, “Just be...”

“Attention all Vipers,” the voice of Ice Queen said, cutting off Slider’s reply. “Negotiations have broken off. Stand by to engage.”

Immediately, Slider began activating his active targeting system. “Ok kid, this is it.” He said to Tailspin. “Follow my lead and watch my ass.”

“Got it.” Tailspin replied.

In front of them, Slider saw the line of fighters begin moving forward and the targeting alarm began to ring in his helmet signaling that someone was trying to get a lock on him.

“Break! Break! Break!” he shouted, pitching his nose over and rolling his fighter to the left, narrowly avoiding a missile that shot through the space he had just been occupying.

“Ace Squadron, weapons free!” he commanded as he slammed his throttle forward. Like a scalded animal, his Viper leapt into the fight; Tailspin close on his wing.

“Now you pissed me off.” He growled targeting the fighter that had shot at him. “See how you like this!”

Hearing the lock tone inside his helmet he flipped the thumb selector that switched his weapons from guns to missiles. “Fox one!” he shouted as the missile streaked away from under his left wing.

Looking out of his cockpit canopy he watched as the arrowhead shaped fighter attempted to juke away from the missile to no avail. He smiled as the fighter came apart with a flash.

“Splash one!” he announced.

Looking around he saw that the two distinct lines of fighters had now merged into one jumbled mess of a melee. Bullets and missiles disrupted the darkness of space as the fight gained momentum.

Outside of the melee, the four capital class ships began to move in to attack.

And then the Prometheus opened fire.

“Have batteries three, five and seven concentrate fire on the nearest vessel. Let’s take it out of the fight if we can.” Said Commander Turner as he pointed to the digital image on the situation table that represented the nearest Alliance Battlecruiser. “And get Lucas Verenos up here immediately.” He said to Stacie, “He might have some insight as to what weaknesses these vessels have.”

“Yes sir.” Stacie replied.

“Sir, batteries three five and seven have a solution on the nearest ship.” Said Halloran from the operations stations.

“Sir! CAG reports that enemy fighters have engaged!” Maddie reported from the comm station.

“All Vipers weapons free!” Turner commanded. “X.O., send a tight beam to the Vigilant and the Sentinel to initiate the battle plan we coded to them earlier.”

“Right away.” Ryan replied, picking up his earpiece.

“Sir, the enemy ships are maneuvering on us.” Halloran reported. “Weapons batteries are requesting instructions.”

“Range on target vessel?” Turner asked.

“One thousand, sir.” Halloran replied.

“Just outside medium range.” He mumbled to himself, then turning to Halloran, he said “Weapons hold until they reach nine hundred then open fire. I want to see what kind of range they have on those ships.”

“Yes sir.” Halloran replied.

“Sentinel and Vigilant are preparing to jump out sir.” Said Colonel Ryan as he rejoined Turner at the situation table. “Colonel Alexander says to leave something for him to play with.”

Turner acknowledged the report with a nod and pointed to the display on the table. “They’re going to try and surround us.”

“That’s what I would do.” Ryan agreed. “Questions is: What are we going to do about it?”

“Range is nine hundred sir.” Halloran announced.

Turner looked up from the display to Ryan who was watching him intently.

“Watch this.” The commander said turning to Halloran. “Open fire. All batteries, weapons free.”

Outside, the huge muzzles of batteries three, five and seven, belched flame as they spat the huge NAC 10 projectiles that they had loaded. The rounds looked like streaking meteors as they shot across the vacuum of space.

All three rounds slammed into the nose of the first Battlecruiser, causing massive sympathetic detonations inside her hull. The Battlecruiser seemed to stagger and come to a complete halt as she began to list to her starboard side.

“Direct hit!” Halloran announced happily, “Scopes report massive damage to enemy ship. She’s listing to starboard.”

“What are the rest of the ships doing?” Ryan asked.

“Enemy ship’s are maneuvering to counter.” Halloran responded.

“I didn’t think it would work twice.” Turner commented. “All batteries, weapons free.”

“Enemy ships have opened fire sir!” Halloran announced suddenly.

“Range?” Ryan asked.

“Eight hundred sir.”

“So that’s their maximum range.” Ryan said. “Now we know.”

“Now it gets ugly.” Turner replied.

CHAPTER 2

STRUGGLE

Nat Tubanos awakened to find herself lying on a plush couch in a lavish office. In front of her was a coffee table made of glass that had a pitcher of clear liquid on it. The pitcher was fogged over with condensation indicating that the liquid was cold. Next to the pitcher was a glass.

Rising slowly so as not to aggravate the pounding headache she had, she composed herself and began to take stock of her situation.

The office was small and by the look of the sun rays that were coming in through the blinds, it was about mid day. Looking around she found her purse and examined it, finding her notebook and her mini-recorder missing.

“Damn it.” She sighed. Her conversation with Baltar about the Prometheus project had been recorded on it. “I slept with him for nothing.” She grumbled to herself.

Suddenly the door opened and one of the men who had taken her strode in with another man closely behind him. She couldn’t make out their faces though since she didn’t have her contacts in.

The first man brought a chair over in front of the coffee table then took a respectful position behind it. The second man took a seat in the chair and fixed her with a pleasant smile.

“I apologize for the manner in which you were brought here Miss Tubanos.” The man said. “But we needed to talk and it was vital that I got you here as soon as I could.” He gestured to a pair of pills on the table. “The water is cold and the pills next to it should help with the headache.”

Nat nodded and picked up the pills, following them by a glass of water that the man in the chair poured.

“Did you take my contacts too?” she asked after downing the whole glass.

“No.” the man replied. “They’re inside your purse.”

Reaching in her purse, Nat found the case and opened it. Working quickly, she put her contacts in and focused her eyes on the man in the chair.

His face left her almost stunned.

“You’re...” she began

“Yes,” the man replied offering her his hand. “I’m President Adar. A pleasure to meet you.”

“That’s four!” Slider announced to his wingman as he flew his Viper through the expanding cloud of debris that was his most recent kill. “Better get with the program Tailspin or you’re not going to even make the boards tonight.”

“Can’t do much sitting back here and looking at your ass.” Tailspin replied.

“Both of you shut the frak up.” Ice Queen’s voice said inside their helmets. “Slider, what’s your squadron’s status?”

“None down and three damaged but hanging in there. Slider reported. “Enemy fighters are clearing out of this sector and pushing in towards the port flight pod.”

“Send half your group to pursue and take the rest to bolster Knight Squadron.” Ice Queen ordered.

“Copy that.” Slider replied, “Ace two, take Aces twelve through twenty four and pursue the enemy. The rest of you meat heads come with me.”

Slider barely heard the acknowledgements of his pilots as he focused his eyes on the bow of the ship where Knight Squadron was fighting for its life.

“Frack me.” He breathed as he took in the situation.

The entire fighter battle looked like a huge ball of arrowhead shaped fighters surrounding a smaller ball of Vipers that were doing everything in their power to avoid being hit by the multitude of ammunition being fired at them.

“Pour it on kids! The Knights are in trouble.” Slider said jamming his throttle full forward.

Slider’s Viper led the way as his half of Ace Squadron shot towards the massive fighter melee that was steadily moving towards the Prometheus.

“The Gorgon has lost all power and fires are encroaching on her ammunition holding areas!”

Precentor Thomasi nodded to acknowledge the comm officer’s report. “Inform Precentor Judatius to abandon ship and dispatch rescue vessels immediately.” He ordered.

“This isn’t going as planned.” Said Executor Cidious from beside him.

“Calm yourself Executor. Everything that has transpired has done so according to my design.” Thomasi replied calmly. “Jamis, have the Cerberus provide covering fire for the rescue operations of the Gorgon.”

“Yes, Precentor.” Replied Centurion Jamis, the battle coordinator.

“According to your design?” Executor Cidious asked incredulously. “Was it also in your design to lose a Battlecruiser against this foe?”

Thomasi cocked his head sideways in a thoughtful gesture, then shrugged. “There are always losses in war Executor.” He replied nonchalantly before turning his attention back to the battle. “Jamis, our fighters are concentrating too much toward the enemy’s bow. Tell Kommandant Sellatous to send groups three and four to attack their portside flight pod while the rest of his fighters concentrate on containing their fighters.”

“Sir, groups three and four are gone and Kommandant Sellatous is missing in action.” Jamis reported.

“Really.” Thomasi said, arching his eyebrows in surprise. “How many fighters have we lost thus far?”

“Fifty eight sir.” Jamis replied, “We have ninety two that remain optional.”

“And how many enemy craft have been destroyed?” Thomasi asked.

“Sir, we count thirteen confirmed enemy kills.”

“Almost a one to four ratio!?” exclaimed Executor Cidious. “Jupiter’s Roding Stone! That’s outrageous! Precentor, I demand...”

“You will demand nothing.” Thomasi growled, spinning on the man and forcefully pinning him against the bulkhead. “And while you are on my bridge you will maintain the proper decorum. Use of such foul language will not be tolerated. Am... I... Under... stood?”

Cidious swallowed hard in the face of Thomasi’s barely controlled anger and nodded. “Of course, Precentor. My apologies for allowing my emotions to overwhelm me.”

Thomasi eyed him for a moment longer and then smiled, releasing him from his iron grip and allowing him to stand on his own. “Of course, Executor. We all have our moments.”

Turning back to the battle Thomasi picked up a handset. “To all commands: begin phase two.”

Inside the Combat Information Center of the Prometheus, the tension in the air was thick as the deck reverberated from the impact of enemy fire underneath the feet of the command crew.

In the crew stations behind Chief Palmer, subordinate officers relayed their commands to their various sections in hushed but urgent tones, everyone doing their best to keep the C.I.C. a calm environment so that the leaders could think.

“Sir, two of the enemy ships are closing on us.” Lieutenant Halloran reported from the Operations station, breaking the low level of noise.

“They’re trying to get inside our flak envelope to engage us at point blank range.” Commander Turner said as he studied the display on the situation table. “Have all main batteries switch to salvo fire and shift target to the lead vessel.”

“Yes sir.” Halloran replied tensely.

“X.O., what’s our damage?” Turner asked as another hit shook the deck beneath him.

“Mostly armor so far.” Ryan answered as he studied the printed reports in his hands. “None of their missiles have gotten through our ECM system so we’re lucky on that front but their guns have made some impact. We have hull breaches on decks fourteen and fifteen. We’ve sealed off the emergency bulkheads forward of frame six on those decks. We also have some damage across the portside dorsal intercooler that might come back to haunt us if we have to jump out.”

Turner considered the X.O.’s report for a moment. The ship was only moderately damaged and escaping with a jump would be a tactically sound decision but the thought of retreat was antithetical to his nature. It was a quality that Commander Cain had praised him for often.

A good commander must know when to back off and not to be afraid to do so, but a great commander knows when to push it just a little farther. Cain had once told him. More importantly, though, never doubt yourself. If you truly know your enemy then, so long as you don’t doubt yourself, no matter what else he does, you’ll be a step ahead.

“We’re not retreating.” Turner said coming out of his reverie. “Mister Palmer left full rudder, twenty degree up angle on the bow planes. Bring us head to head with the lead vessel. Mister Halloran, instruct batteries one and two to fire as they bear.”

“Aye sir!” Came the chorus of responses.

“Sir,” Colonel Ryan said leaning in close and whispering into Turner’s ear. “We have no idea as to what he has in reserve. He could have reinforcements on the way.”

“He doesn’t.” Turner replied.

“How do you know?” his X.O. asked curiously.

Turning, the commander looked Ryan in the eyes and gave the X.O. a reassuring half smile. “Because I *know* him. He showed me his hand when he was aboard.”

Ryan looked confused and Turner pulled him aside, out of ear shot of the rest of the C.I.C. staff. “You watched him while he was aboard ship,” the commander said. “What was he doing?”

Suddenly, like someone flipping a switch, a light went on in Ryan’s eyes. “He was looking around and watching us closely. He was gauging us, evaluating our responses and seeing what made us tick. He had already decided to attack before he ever stepped foot on Prometheus. That explains his piecemeal strategy too.”

“Exactly.” Turner replied pointing to the display on the situation table. “He’s probing us, seeing what kind of defenses we have and how well we employ them.”

Ryan nodded in understanding and the two stepped back to the table as Sheba entered the C.I.C. with Lucas Verenos in tow.

“Sir,” she said gesturing at Lucas, “Captain Verenos, as ordered.”

“Thank you captain.” Turner replied facing the freighter captain. “Glad to see you up and about.”

Lucas nodded in response. “Glad to be up and about.” He replied as the deck shuddered under their feet. “Seems like you’re a bit busy just to be checking up on me though. I assume that there is a reason I was asked to come up here?”

“There is.” Turner replied. “I was wondering how much you know about Precentor Thomasi and about the forces arrayed against us.”

“And what makes you think I am going to answer that honestly?” Lucas asked.

Turner smiled slyly. “Because it’s you and your friend in the brig that we are fighting to protect right now. We could very easily turn you over to Thomasi and call this a day.”

“Like hell you can.” Lucas replied, his own sly smile crossing his expression. “The moment that Thomasi got a look at all this advanced technology on your ship here, I became a secondary concern, and you know it. So again, my question to you is: Why should I tell you anything?”

Turner shrugged. “I assumed that since you were in your predicament due to Thomasi’s actions, he would be your enemy as well. The enemy of my enemy is my friend and all.”

“He may be my enemy,” Lucas said, “But he is still my countryman. If he’s right, and what the government says about the other twelve tribes is true, then you guys are war mongering barbarians who would trample us underfoot just as soon as look at us. If that’s the case, then I don’t want to be the one who sells out my people to you.”

“I understand your concerns.” Turner replied, “I wouldn’t want to be a traitor to my government either.”

“Oh, I’m already that.” Lucas said with a chuckle, “But I’m not a traitor to my *people*. There is a distinction.”

“Indeed there is.” Said Turner, finally understanding where Lucas was heading with the conversation. “So ask the question you want to ask.”

“What are you really doing out here?” Lucas asked without hesitation.

“We’re searching for Earth.” Turner replied.

Lucas watched Turner for a long moment, scanning his face for any sign of deception. It was only when Lieutenant Halloran announced from the operations station that batteries one and two had firing solutions that the freighter captain finally nodded, accepting what Turner said at face value.

“We have some things to discuss then Commander, but that will have to wait.” Lucas said as he stepped up to the situation table. “For now, we have a fight to win.”

CHAPTER 3

MANEUVER

“Sir, the Prometheus is shifting fire to the Hydra.” Centurion Jamis reported.

Precentor Thomasi nodded. “As I thought they would.” He said as he stroked his goatee. “This Commander Turner has a keen grasp of space warfare. By attacking the Hydra, he hopes to divide our attack”

“That’s nice to know *now*.” Executor Cidious mumbled angrily from behind Thomasi.

“We would never have known until it was too late had we not probed his defenses Executor.” Thomasi replied leaning forward and studying the battle closely. “But I believe that we have discovered something of even greater value.”

“What would that be?” Cidious asked as he stepped closer.

Thomasi continued to study the visual feed of the Hydra for a moment, ignoring the Executor. He knew it would anger him but Thomasi knew that the Executor was now well informed as to his place on the ship and also that he wouldn’t survive another outburst

The Precentor finally spoke. “They have inside information at their disposal.”

“How so?” The Executor asked, his voice betraying his fear.

“Look, Executor.” Thomasi said pointing to the display and to the damage reports coming in from the Hydra. “They are targeting the Hydra’s thermal exhaust ports.”

“So?” Cidious snorted, “What does that have to do with anything?”

Thomasi smiled at the Executor much in the same way that a parent would who was trying to explain something to a particularly dense child. “You see Executor,” he began, his voice dripping with scorn, “The Conqueror class Battlecruiser has one major weakness-- It doesn’t have enough heat sinks to dissipate the heat generated by the massive engine plants we use. By targeting the exhaust ports he is seeking to cause the Hydra’s engines to overheat and shut down.”

“And if that happens?” Cidious asked.

“Then the Hydra is powerless and defenseless.”

“It’s working sir!” Halloran excitedly announced from his station. “The lead ship’s engines are starting to overheat! They’re breaking off!”

A great cheer went up in the C.I.C. as Halloran made his announcement, but it was quickly cut off by Colonel Ryan. “Stow that shit!” he angrily shouted over the raised voices. “We’ve only turned back one ship and you guys are acting like we won the entire fracking battle! Get your minds right and focus on the remaining ships!”

The C.I.C. was silent for a moment as everyone reeled from Ryan’s tirade, then as one they began moving again with their subdued sense of urgency.

“Sorry about that sir.” Ryan apologized.

Turner waved it off. “You did the right thing Colonel.” He turned his attention to Verenos who stood to his right. “Seems you were correct, Captain. The thermal exhaust ports are susceptible to attack.” The Commander said his expression still serious.

“Of course I was,” Verenos replied with a cocky smile of his own, “but it won’t work a second time. Thomasi is a fast learner; he won’t let you use that on him again.”

“Will he continue to press the attack?” Ryan asked.

“So long as he thinks he can win, he will continue to press on. Only when he thinks that the fight is un-winnable will he back off.”

“Then I guess we’ll have to convince him of that, won’t we?” Turner said turning to face Petty Officer Madrid at the comm station. “Maddie, send on coded channel two four to Colonel Alexander: Fat lady’s curtain call in five.”

“Aye sir.” Petty Officer Madrid replied. “Sending now.”

“I assume that you know why you’re here?” President Adar asked.

“I have an idea.”

Still struggling to shake off the grogginess she felt after being drugged and kidnapped, Nat’s mind was still foggy. Still, she was sharp enough to know that she was in deep trouble and that if she didn’t navigate her way through the next few moments with great care, things could become very ugly.

“Good.” Adar said pouring some more cold water into her glass from the pitcher on the table. “The pills should take effect immediately. Are they helping?”

Nat nodded as the throbbing in her head reduced quickly to a dull ache. “Yes thank you.”

“Miss Tubanos, you’ve put me in a very delicate situation.” He leaned forward and fixing her with an intense stare. “You know things that are of a vital nature to the security of the colonies.”

“You mean about the Prometheus and its mission to Earth?” She asked.

Adar chuckled. “Yes.”

“Care to explain how knowing that is vital to the security of the Colonies, Mister President?” Nat asked, her intense and demanding nature beginning to assert itself.

Adar leaned back and gestured to the man at the door who brought a manila folder over and dropped it onto the table in front of her.

“In there,” Adar said gesturing to the folder, “You will find everything you need to know about the Prometheus mission.”

Trying to contain her shock, Nat quickly grabbed the folder and opened it. What she found inside made her initial shock seem minor.

“My gods,” she breathed, “they’re really that far away?”

“Yes.” Adar nodded. “By our estimates, the Prometheus and her support ships are now over one hundred thousand light-years away from the Colonies. Even with the hyper-pulse generator technology were using in their message buoys, it takes over six weeks to get the latest reports from them.”

“That’s amazing.” Nat replied in awe as she turned a page in the folder. “This report says that they actually found Kobol. Is it true?”

“It is.” The President replied.

Nat continued to read the reports inside the folder for several minutes before finally putting it down. “Mister President, this is incredible but you still haven’t answered my question about why it is *vital* to the security of the Colonies.”

Taking a deep breath, President Adar leaned forward. “The people aren’t ready to know what we know, Miss Tubanos. Our government has only been centralized government for less than a hundred years. This information could cause factionalism on a scale not seen since before the Cylon Wars.”

“I think you underestimate the will of the people for peace, Mister President.”

“And I think you underestimate human nature, Miss Tubanos, but I’m not here to debate it with you. I’m here to offer you a deal.”

Nat leaned back on the couch and slowly took a sip of water. “I’m listening.”

“I will give you exclusive rights to the Prometheus story and keep you updated on it, however, you have to abide by what I say on when and how to release the story.”

“In other words, I get to be your puppet?” Nat asked scornfully. “Your *voice* for the Prometheus project? I don’t think so.”

“It’s better than the alternative.”

“And what alternative is that?” Nat asked, feeling ice creep into her stomach.

“You’re arrested and charged with treason for attempting to acquire secret military information with intent to distribute.”

“What?” Nat exclaimed, sitting up. “You don’t have any proof of that!”

Adar chuckled. “Miss Tubanos, I’ve had people tracking your and Mister Campagnas’ computer activity for months now. I know about all of the so called ‘discreet’ inquiries you both have made regarding this project. You’ve had sex with a dear friend and advisor of mine to try and gain access to the information and I have the data recorder from your purse in the other room to prove it.”

“So? That just proves I am being an aggressive reporter. It doesn’t prove treason.”

“It does when we present evidence that you intend to beam this information into space in hopes that the Cylons will detect it.”

“I never had such intentions!”

“No matter. You have the means to do so and we can supply the motive. You won’t stand a chance.”

Nat smoldered with anger as she stared at the President. “You really are the bastard that Matt portrays you as.”

Adar considered her statement for a moment then nodded in agreement. “Miss Tubanos, I truly detest tactics like this,” he replied, “But if it’s for the good of the people of the Colonies, I’m willing to sacrifice some of my moral fiber to see it done. Now, do we have a deal?”

“Not like there is much choice in the matter.” Nat replied as she extended her hand to the President.

Adar took her hand and shook it firmly then gestured at the agent who stood watch at the door. "This gentleman will want you to sign a non-disclosure statement. After that, he will take you to your home. Your hover-car is waiting for you there."

Nat watched as President Adar stood and walked to the door. "Oh," he said pausing before opening it, yet not turning back. "One more thing: I'm going to arrange an interview of Doctor Baltar for you. Consider it a... consolation prize... for all of the trouble I've made for you."

Without waiting for her response Adar opened the door and exited.

"That's seven!" Slider announced as he flew his Viper Mark Seven through his latest victims' flaming debris. "Keep pushing guys! We're driving them back."

"Slider, Shooter." Came the voice of newly promoted Captain Joshua Wakefield. "I've got it under control on my end now. Thanks for the help."

"You owe me a beer when we get back, kid." Slider replied.

"My pleasure." Shooter replied.

"Ok cut the crap." Came the harsh voice of Ice Queen. "Give me you're A.C.E. reports."

"Ace Squadron is amber on ammo, two casualties and twenty two Vipers hot and bothered." Slider reported.

"Knight Squadron is red on ammo, six casualties and eighteen Vipers ready to kick ass." Shooter replied.

Slider winced at the number of downed pilots in his counterpart squadron. He knew that if Sheba had been in command the number probably would have been less. Still, it couldn't be blamed on Shooter. He was new to command and inexperienced. This battle would be a lesson he wouldn't forget.

"Ok, Ace Lead take your fighters and hold the perimeter while I rotate Knight Squadron back for reloads." Horvath ordered.

"Roger that." Slider replied. "Ace Squadron, form up on me. We get to take out the trash."

“Look!” Executor Cidious said pointing to the tactical display. “Half of their fighters are disengaging! Now is the time to press the attack!”

Thomasi shook his head sadly. “No Executor,” he said in a patronizing tone, “They are pulling back that squadron because they are about to bring in the other two ships that jumped out earlier.”

“How do you know this?” Cidious demanded.

“Commander Turner knows that I am in an untenable position. He also knows I won’t back down unless I have no chance for victory. He is providing the excuse I need to withdraw.”

“Excuse to *withdraw*? That’s cowardice!”

Thomasi chuckled and then his hand flashed outward.

Nobody on the bridge of the Kraken even batted an eyelash as Executor Cidious dropped to the floor like a sack of potatoes.

“Remove the Executor to his quarters.” He said gesturing to the two soldiers guarding the entrance. “Jamis, send to all commands: Prepare to withdraw to rally point alpha.”

“Yes Precentor.” Jamis replied.

“I know everything about you now, Commander.” Thomasi mumbled to himself. “I know your strengths, I know your weaknesses and I know your strategies. Enjoy your victory sir... it will be your last.”

CHAPTER 4

CASUALTIES

Slider sighed in relief as his fighter canopy rose up and allowed his ground tech to remove his helmet. “Weapons on safe, engines ports closed, reactor to standby.” He announced to Chief Watts.

“Fighter is clear sir, welcome home.” Watts replied, entering data onto his personal pad.

“Yeah baby! That’s how it’s done!” Slider said as he feet touched down on the deck. “Nine kills baby! When you’re good, you’re good.”

“Yes sir.” Watts replied absently.

Slider smiled as he tucked his helmet under his arm. “Any word about Tailspin from the rescue Raptors?”

“Archangel found all eight pilots that punched out. Only six survived though.”

“Oh.” Slider said, feeling his post-battle euphoria disappear. “Tailspin?”

“Sorry sir.” Watts replied quietly.

Slider nodded feeling his heart break inside. Tailspin. *His* wingman. He’d had been a good and eager kid. “Gods damn it!” he kicked over a tool box sending wrenches flying across the bay.

“Hey.” Came a voice from behind him, causing him to spin around.

“What!” He snarled as he spun to find Sheba’s eyes locked on him.

Taking a deep and calming breath he said “Sorry.”

“It’s all right,” Sheba replied. “I’ve been there.”

They both stared at each other uncomfortably for a long moment before Sheba finally broke the silence. “You did good up there.”

Slider nodded, his stoic expression unchanging. “Not good enough.”

“Yeah, I heard about Tailspin.”

“First pilot I ever lost.”

Sheba looked at Slider's face for a long time. Inside she felt his pain and wanted to reach out to him but the memories of her own experiences with him years ago jaded her thoughts. "Get used to it Captain, it doesn't get any easier."

Slider nodded, ignoring the veiled reference. In his mind, all he could see was that young eager kid who had flown on his wing. All he could think of was how they wouldn't be able to share that after flight drink that he promised and how it somehow felt like it was all his fault.

Seeing that Jason was in his own world, Sheba turned and walked away without saying another word. She had come to comfort him but again her own bitterness and anger over the past had clouded her judgment. *Someday*, she thought to herself, *I'm going to learn how to keep my big mouth shut.*

Commander Turner, weary beyond words from his hours of action in the C.I.C., collapsed into the chair behind his desk inside his quarters and rubbed his aching temples. "What's the final count?"

Colonel Ryan took a seat directly opposite of him and opened the after action reports from the section chiefs. "Including the pilots, thirteen dead, forty seven wounded. Of the Vipers, eight are a total loss and four are going to be down for third stage repairs for at least a week."

Turner nodded. "Have the float Vipers brought online to replace those we lost. Also, start looking through the records of our crew to determine eligibility for flight training since we're going to need more pilots to replace the ones we lost."

"Yes sir."

A ringing of the door alert interrupted Ryan and Turner's conversation.

"Enter." Turner said.

Slider, now dressed in his duty uniform entered the sliding doors and came to a halt in front of Turner's desk. "Captain Allen reporting as ordered sir." He said snapping off a salute.

"At ease captain." Turner replied as he returned the salute. "I was looking over your performance today. You did a good job."

"Thank you sir. The guys worked hard today, *they* deserve the credit."

“Indeed they do.” Turner replied opening a folder, “But you did a good job of keeping them in tight and reigning in their bad habits. No one from your crew had to rearm or refuel and you only lost two birds. That says something about you Captain.”

“That’s still too many sir.”

Turner looked into Allen’s eyes and when he did he saw something hauntingly familiar. He knew what it meant immediately and recognized the danger therein.

“Slider, you can’t blame yourself for what happened to Tailspin.”

“He was my wingman sir. I,” he paused as his voice began to crack, “I should have been there for him.”

Turner nodded and stood, walking slowly to where Slider stood. “That’s what I thought too when I lost my first pilot. I thought ‘I should have been there for him. I know I could have done something.’ Truth is though, that he would have died even if I were there.”

“But he was my wingman sir!” Slider hissed. “If I had been there...”

“Then we would all be dead.” Ryan said as he stood alongside the Commander. “The guy you took out while he was covering your ass was on a suicide run at the portside fuel cell. We had just taken a hit there not but a minute earlier. It weakened the armor enough that if he would have hit, it would have set off the cell and blown the entire portside flight pod off.”

“You saved us Captain, and Tailspin died knowing that what he did by keeping that enemy fighter off of you enabled you to do so.” Turner said.

Slider considered the Commander’s words for a moment then nodded, accepting them. “Then the truth is that *he* saved us all.”

“Yes.” Turner replied. “From a certain point of view, he did.”

“I would like his record to reflect that sir.” Slider said. “That he died saving us all from the one attack that could have hurt us.”

“I see no problem with that.” Turner replied. “Now go get some rest. We’ll have a full debriefing in the morning.”

Slider saluted and Turner returned it. When the doors had slid shut behind him he turned and faced Ryan.

“That kid is one of the best sticks I’ve ever seen.” He said.

“Turning out to be a not-so-bad leader too.” Ryan replied.

Turner nodded, agreeing with his X.O. “You know I gave him command of that squadron to kind of slap some responsibility into him. It’s amazing the changes it’s brought out in him.”

The next morning, Turner walked into C.I.C. to find his senior officers waiting for him there as he had directed, as well as Lucas Verenos and the alien he had called Squeaky.

“Sir.” Said Colonel Ryan as he snapped off a salute. “Senior staff assembled, as you ordered.”

Turner nodded and returned the salute. “People, we have a problem. Thanks to the map that Captain Verenos and his associate here have given us, we have been able to plot our position and see where we are and it isn’t good.”

“Where are we then sir?” asked Major Horvath.

“We’re at the edge of Alliance space.” Said Verenos from behind everyone. “And I guarantee you that now that Thomasi has now spread the word about you the entire Alliance Expansionary Fleet will be out looking for you.”

“How do you know that he has spread the word about us?” Slider asked.

“Because the Alliance is having internal difficulties right now.” Verenos answered. “And nothing unites a people like a threat from without.”

“What are these *difficulties*?” asked Colonel Alexander of the Sentinel.

Verenos moved up by the situation table and turned to face the senior officers of the fleet. “Quite simply, a rebellion is brewing. The first in our history.”

“A rebellion?” Asked Colonel Hall of the Vigilant. “Oh my gods we’ve stepped into the middle of a fracking civil war.”

“From what Lucas here tells us, this war has been a long time coming.” Colonel Ryan said.

“So what?” Colonel Hall said moving to the front of the crowd to face Ryan. “This isn’t our mission and it isn’t our fight! We should turn around and go back the way we came.”

“We can’t do that.” Said Doctor Z.

“Why the hell not?” Hall growled at the doctor.

“Because,” Zylman said stepping closer to Hall, “Based on the map that Captain Verenos has given us, if we go back it will take us an extra eight months to circumvent Alliance space.”

Everyone was silent and Turner allowed the Doctor’s words to sink in before continuing.

“We aren’t turning back.” Turner said looking at Colonel Hall. “But we’re not here to help you fight a civil war either.” He shifted his eyes to Verenos. “We’re going to plot our course carefully and attempt to skirt Alliance space. It will be out of our way but it will add on considerably less time than turning around.”

“You’ve done more than enough for us.” Said a metallic voice from behind the crowd.

Turning, they saw the alien known as Squeaky moving his mandibles and a small box on his chest where the voice emanated from.

“I got his translator fixed.” Verenos said to alleviate any questions. “But he is right. You’ve repaired our ship and installed a new jump drive in it. That’s more than enough.”

“Least we could do after the information you gave us.” Turner replied turning to face his officers. “But my point is this: The next few weeks are going to get dicey. Start running battle drills frequently. If the Alliance attacks again it will be in full force and I want us to be ready.”

“Sir,” said Colonel Alexander “I don’t want to be the one who asks this but I feel compelled to: What about turning back and going... home?”

Turner shook his head firmly. “I’ve considered that course of action and my answer is no, we aren’t turning back. Our orders are to find Earth and that’s what we’ll do.”

EPILOGUE

EXPERIENCE

Nat smiled as Matthew Campagna entered her office. “Morning Matt.”

“What’s going on?” Matt asked as he took a seat in front of her desk. “You disappear for the entire weekend then call me and tell me you have something exciting to show me. I was worried about you.”

“That’s so sweet of you Matt.” Nat replied as she tossed the Prometheus file to him, “But I think this will make up for the worry I caused you.”

Matt took the file and opened it, his eyes growing wide with shock. “How... how did you get this?” he asked, his voice barely a whisper.

“I have my ways.” Nat replied with a sly grin. “I had to make a deal with the devil for it but rest assured that we now have the *only* exclusive information about this project.”

“Oh my gods Nat have you read this stuff?” Matt asked as he rifled through the pages of the file. “We have to go on air with this immediately!”

“We can’t.” Nat replied.

This brought Matt up short. “Wh-what? What do you mean we can’t? This is the greatest story since the Cylon Armistice and...”

“I signed a non-disclosure agreement with the government Matt.” Nat said, “We can only release the information when they give us the permission to.”

Matt’s jaw dropped. “You actually agreed to this?”

“I had to Matt.” Nat replied, her tone deadly serious, “They have enough on us to convict us of treason.”

Matt sat back in his chair stunned. “But... how? It’s not true so how could they...”

“Manipulation of circumstantial evidence Matt.” Nat replied. “I saw what they have and it’s real.”

“So we have to sit on this while Adar and his cronies do whatever they want?” Matt growled. “That’s just great!”

“Actually, it is.” Nat said. “We get exclusive rights to the Prometheus news releases and today is our first step.”

“What do you mean?” Matt asked as he turned to see a man behind him in the doorway.

“Good morning.” The man said.

He was dressed in a fine suit that would sell for over a thousand cubits easily. His hair, brown and semi long, was well groomed and his clean shaven face had the boyish good looks that he was known for. “I’m here for my interview.” Said Doctor Gaius Baltar.

Matt turned back around, a stunned expression on his slack jawed face.

Nat smiled and took great pleasure in her next words.

“I win.”

Precentor Thomasi offered a crisp salute to the image of his superior officer on screen in front of him. The officer, with large golden symbols that looked like five armed galaxies on his collar, returned his salute and said “Salvey, Precentor. What news have you for me?”

“Galaxus Verenos,” Thomasi replied, “I regret to inform you that we found your son aboard the foreign vessel as predicted and that he also played a large role in our defeat.”

The man on screen, blonde hair cut in the typical short Alliance fashion, frowned, his fair skin turning red with anger. “So it is true. My son conspires with enemies of the Alliance.”

“I am afraid so.” Thomasi replied.

“And your plan, did it work?” The Galaxus asked.

“Yes sir.” Thomasi replied with pride. “I can now say with certainty that I am familiar with the defenses of the Prometheus and how its commanding officer employs them.”

Galaxus Verenos nodded. “Good. And what of the other ships that accompanied you?”

“We lost the Gorgon sir but the other three are repairable.” Thomasi reported.

“Better than expected.” Verenos said. “Tell me Rollo, you have been on this ship. Is it worth the time and effort our agent her aboard has claimed?”

“Even more so, Galaxus. With a ship like that, nothing could stand before us.”
Thomasi replied.

“Good.” Verenos said. “Then you may continue with your plan. I will inform the Primus of your results.”

“As you wish sir. Hail Sae’tzar!” Thomasi replied.

At that moment, on the Colony world of Picon, at the fleet academy in that planet’s capital city, a brand new ‘nugget’ walked into the headquarters building where she was reporting for flight training.

Her hair was long and black, her skin olive in hue. She had the narrow eyes of someone who was born on Troy but she carried herself like a true officer.

Reaching the reception desk, she dropped her duffle bag and handed a set of papers to the desk sergeant. “Welcome to flight training ma’am.” The older man said as he logged her name into his computer. “Lieutenant Jackson is waiting for you in her office.”

“Thanks sergeant.” The nugget replied, picking up her duffle and moving down the hallway to where the door read ‘Lt. Jackson, Flight Instructor’. Setting her duffle bag on a chair, she raised her hand to knock feeling the nervous tension in her gut.

All her life she had wanted to be a pilot in the Colonial Fleet and now she was going to get the chance, albeit in a Raptor instead of a Viper. Still, even though she had fallen two points shy of the Viper program, she didn’t complain. She was going to be a pilot and that was all that counted.

Knocking gently she waited for a moment before a female voice from inside the door called out for her to enter.

Opening the doorway she moved inside and quickly approached the desk where she stopped and rendered a perfect salute.

“Sir,” she said, “Ensign Valleri reporting for duty...”