



PROLOGUE

CHANGES

Commanders Ready Room
Battlestar Pegasus
In Orbit of Leonon
Six months prior to the launch of the Prometheus

Colonel Jonathan Turner, Executive Officer of the Battlestar Pegasus, entered his commanding officer's ready room with nervous trepidation, although he did his best not to show it.

He knew, of course, why she had summoned him. Today was the day when the newest promotion list was released. Today he would find out if he was being promoted.

He didn't expect it. After all, this was his fourth look in the primary zone for Commander. Many people said that it was his origins in the Colonial Marine Corps that held him back. That because he didn't attend the academy, but rather graduated Officer Candidate School three years into his first enlistment, he would never make senior command levels.

They also said that because he had turned down the command of a Gunstar twice in order to remain as the Pegasus X.O., that the Admiralty had a bit of a bad taste in their mouths for him.

Of course, that didn't matter to Turner. He had his sights set on one this: The command of a Battlestar. In his mind, a Gunstar was a dead end assignment. Sure, he would get to command a ship and probably be promoted to Commander along the way but those who commanded Gunstars rarely ever went on to command Battlestars.

No, if he took the Gunstar assignment he would probably make Commander the next year and then serve out the remainder of his days patrolling for smugglers or even worse, be transferred to some Admiral's staff as his aide de camp. Neither of which was appealing to Turner.

Seeing Commander Helena Cain standing in front of her table looking at the mounds of paperwork that awaited her, Turner took a deep breath and walked towards her.

Coming up behind her he came to the position of attention and snapped a salute. "You wished to see me sir?"

Helena Cain was only one year older than Turner, but had been promoted up the chain more successfully due to her lead from the front attitude, not to mention her political connections. As she turned to face him, Jonathan couldn't help but be reminded of why he held her in such high esteem.

The fire and determination in her eyes left nothing to doubt and the steel resolve in her voice always inspired confidence. It was something that Jonathan intended to emulate if he ever got a command of his own.

"Thanks for coming Jon, stand at ease." Cain said as she returned his salute. "Want a drink?"

"That depends," Turner replied with a sly smile, "Do you think I'll need one."

Cain returned the smile. "You might." She said pouring two glasses of Ambrosia. Handing one glass to Turner and keeping one for herself, she grabbed a sheet of paper.

"I just received the promotion and assignments list." She said.

Turner braced himself for what he knew was coming. "Well then sir, let's have the bad news so I can get back to the status reports."

"That won't be your concern anymore Jon." Cain replied with a look of regret. "You've been reassigned."

Caught by surprise, Turner took a moment before replying. "What?" he asked. "I've been, ah- what do you mean?"

"Exactly what I said Jon." Cain replied, "You've been reassigned to the fleet academy on Picon."

Turner took a step back for a moment, his disappointment turning into anger. "But why?" he asked. "I mean, I didn't figure that I would get promoted and I can accept that, but why are they taking me off the Pegasus?"

“Well if it means anything, I did everything I could to keep you on board as my X.O. but the Admiralty’s decision is final. They want someone younger and needing the experience to take your spot. That being said, you’re to report to Admiral Johnson in one week when we put in at Picon for crew rotations.” Cain replied.

Turner was quiet for a moment as he tried desperately to get his emotions under control. “Permission to speak freely sir?” Turner asked.

Cain nodded.

“What the frak and I supposed to do at the Academy?” Turner said. “I already served there three years ago as a nugget instructor. What do they want me to do now?”

“They want you to lead the development group on tactics and operations of the new Nova class Battlestar.” Said Cain.

Turner was taken aback for a moment. “They want... *me*... to develop the tactical deployment specs for the new Nova Class ships?” he asked. “Why?”

“Because,” Cain said, unable to hide her smile any longer, “You’re going to be commanding the first one out of the barn.”

To say that Turner was thunderstruck at that moment would have been an understatement. So stunned was he, that he never even noticed as Cain pulled out a box and opened it to reveal golden Commander’s ranks inside.

“Congratulations, *Commander* Turner.” She said.

“You mean?” he asked, not entirely believing it was happening.

“Yes.” Cain replied, “You are going to be commanding the first Nova class Battlestar.”

Turner fought to catch his breath for what seemed like an eternity. To not only be promoted, but to be given command of the first of a new class of Battlestar... it was almost more than he could comprehend.

“Why me?” he asked. “I mean, I’m honored but why did they choose me for this?”

Cain’s expression turned sly. “Well, someone told them about that little battle simulation you did a few months back. You know, the one where you were able to roll over two Battlestar Groups and retake a Colony from an entrenched enemy with only three percent losses?”

“You forwarded that to fleet command?” Turner asked, his expression incredulous.

“Actually,” Cain replied, “That entire simulation was set up by Admiral Nagala to see how you would handle command. To say he was impressed would be an understatement.”

“My gods!” Turner exclaimed in surprise, “I thought that my performance in that situation was horrible! I just got lucky and found a few mistakes to exploit.”

“The Admiralty disagreed.” Cain replied.

Turner was silent for a moment allowing the weight of everything that happened to sink in. Finally, after several moments of uncertainty, he accepted that it was really happening and smiled. “What’s her name? The ship, I mean. What is her name?”

“Prometheus.” Cain replied raising her glass of Ambrosia in a toast. “You’re going to command the Battlestar Prometheus.”

CHAPTER 1

OF GODS AND MEN

Combat Information Center
Battlestar Prometheus
In Orbit of Kobol
Mission Day 29

“So that’s it?” Colonel James Ryan said as he looked at the visual display of Kobol below. “That’s the land of the gods?”

“You sound disappointed.” Commander Turner said from next to him at the CIC situation table.

“Well... I guess I am.” Ryan replied, his eyes riveted to the view screen. “I mean, all my life my daddy taught us about the great ‘land of the gods’ and how it was supposed to be a paradise. I guess I just expected more than a typical A-Type planet.”

Turner smiled but didn’t continue the subject, instead turning to the Chief of the Boat, MCPO Palmer. “Mister Palmer, bring us into a low orbit over the coordinates that Doctor Z specified.” He said, “Mister Halloran, have the Sentinel and the Vigilant take up positions to provide support should we find our friends from M-71 here.”

Both men acknowledged his commands as Turner moved to a console on the other side of the room where Major Karla Horvath, and newly promoted Major Harrison Lewis stood awaiting him.

“Major Lewis, I want you to get a detachment of Marines ready to go down to the surface and set up a base camp.” Turner said. “I want enough boots on the ground to deal with any surprises that may arise.”

“Yes sir.” Lewis said. “I’ll have the men assembled and ready to go within an hour.”

“Good.” Turner replied, “Major Horvath, I want you to put some Vipers on the ground as well to provide close air support, should it be needed. I also want Archangel and several of his best Raptor pilots down there to any emergency extractions we may have to pull off.”

“I’ll send Knight Squadron down sir. Ace is on CAP rotation this week and they need something to do.” Horvath replied.

Turner nodded and faced his X.O. “Colonel Ryan, you’ll be in charge on the surface. You’ll have Doctor Z with you as well. Your primary mission is to locate the

tomb of Athena and use our arrow to open it. Your secondary mission is to investigate our mysterious friends from M-71 and find out just what the hell they are up to.”

“I can do that.” Ryan replied pulling up a map on the view screen in front of him. “Doctor Z believes that this is the site of what was the City Of The Gods. This is where we’ll put down and set up our base of operations.”

Turner nodded approvingly. “I want you to be careful on this one.” He said, “I’m not a big believer in ancient curses but we’d be fools not to believe that something couldn’t happen to us down there, even if there weren’t unknown people running around.”

“Yes sir.” Ryan agreed. “I, for one, am not in any rush. The tomb has been there for four thousand years and I’m sure it will wait for us just a little longer if needs be.”

“Ok, so that’s the plan.” Turner said, “You’ll depart in one hour. I’ll want situation updates every three hours once you’re on the surface, understood?”

Everyone nodded.

“Good hunting.” Turner said.

Captain Stacie Percival, known to her fellow pilots as Sheba, checked her kit bag one last time as she loaded it into the storage compartment on the shuttle that was carrying her squadron’s gear down to the planet’s surface. Satisfied that she hadn’t forgotten anything, she zipped it up and handed it to the crewman inside the compartment.

“Now don’t go losing that.” She said with a smile. “I know how you guys are about losing luggage.”

“I’ll do my best ma’am.” The crewman replied returning her smile.

“Yeah, after all, you wouldn’t want to be down there without your makeup.” Came a voice from behind Sheba.

Turning, she saw Captain Jason Allen, callsign Slider, standing there, his flight helmet in his hand. His hair was sweaty and matted, indicating that he had just come out of the cockpit.

Immediately her mood soured.

“What is it now?” she asked as she moved past him to where her Viper awaited her.

“Actually,” Jason said turning to follow her, “I just wanted to wish you good hunting.”

Stopping in her tracks, Percival spun to face him. “Good hunting?” she asked, her eyebrow arched in that typical way she did when she was skeptical of something someone was saying.

Jason smiled and held his hands up in mock surrender. “Ok, maybe that isn’t my only reason.” He said.

“Then what?” Sheba asked, her voice betraying her impatience.

“I just wanted to say...” Jason began, his voice faltering for a moment.

“What is it?” Sheba demanded, “I have to fly in three minutes.”

Jason stepped close to her and looked down at the delicate features framed in her sandy blonde hair. It brought back memories. “Look, just be careful down there ok? I have a bad feeling about this.” He said gently.

For a moment Sheba’s features softened, but they quickly returned to her normal hard expression. “I’ll keep that in mind.” She said finally. “Just try not to screw up anything while I’m gone. I don’t want to have to clean up any of your messes.”

Jason shook his head. “I’ll do my best.” he said. “Good hunting, Captain.”

With that, Slider turned and walked away. Sheba watched him go for several moments until he was out of sight. Only then did she turn back and move to her Viper.

The experience left her feeling cautious and a bit worried. After all, Jason Allen rarely got ‘bad feelings’ and when he did, it was usually worth paying attention to.

Doctor Lucian Zylman smiled as he stepped aboard the Raptor that would be taking him down to the planet’s surface. Sitting inside in one of the jump seats was Colonel James Ryan.

“Good morning Colonel,” he said with a smile, “It’s good to see you.”

“Doctor Z, a pleasure as always.” Ryan replied returning the smile.

“Shutting the hatch.” Michael ‘Archangel’ Johnson announced from the pilot’s seat. “Strap yourselves in back there.”

Complying with their instructions, Ryan and Zylman fastened their restraint harnesses and sat back in their seats. “Ready back here.” Ryan called.

“Very good sir.” Archangel replied, “I’m going to seal my helmet now so if you want to talk to me you’re going to have to use the speaker box on the panel sir.”

“Understood.” Ryan replied with a smile.

After waiting a few moments, the ship began to vibrate as it moved over to the massive lift that would take it to the launch deck. It took only a moment to reach the lift and when it began to move upwards, Ryan checked the speaker box to make sure it was off.

“I enjoyed dinner last night.” He said leaning in so that only Zylman could hear him. “Whatever it was that you fixed was great.”

Zylman smiled at the compliment. “A dish I learned to cook while on vacation on Aquarion. It’s called Chicken Parmolea.”

“Well it was fantastic.” Ryan replied.

“So was that Ambrosia you served up.” Zylman said. “That had to have been the smoothest I have ever had.”

“It was aged thirty years. I save it for special occasions.” Said Ryan with a sly smile on his face.

Zylman nodded but said nothing, allowing his expression to speak for itself.

“We’ll have to do it again once we get back to the ship.” Ryan said.

“Definitely.” Zylman replied.

As the Raptor lifted off the deck and sailed into space, the two men continued the rest of the trip in silence, dwelling on the memories of their previous night’s experience, an experience that both of them intended to repeat at the soonest convenience.

CHAPTER 2

ON HOLY GROUND

Port Side Hangar Deck
Battlestar Pegasus
In Orbit of Picon
Six months prior to the launch of the Prometheus

“Attention on deck!”

At that command, the assembled officers and enlisted men who had gathered on the flight deck of the Pegasus for the ceremony all snapped to attention. They looked splendid in their uniforms and boots, all pressed and shined, their ranks all dressed and covered with the military precision that Commander Cain was famous for.

“Colonel Turner, front and center!” Cain commanded loudly, her voice echoing through the hangar bay.

Moving out from the front rank of the assembly, Jonathan walked forward and stood in front of his commanding officer. Looking at the bright and shiny Rear Admiral’s rank on Helena Cain’s collar, he smiled. The news that she had made it into the Admiralty had been the second of Turner’s surprises on the day he found out that he had been promoted.

“You’ve waited a long time for this Jon.” Admiral Cain said as she stepped forward. “Post the orders!”

“Attention to orders!” Major Jack Fisk shouted, “Be it known that the President of the Twelve Colonies of Kobol has reposed special trust and confidence in the patriotism, valor fidelity and professional excellence of Jonathan Romo Turner. In view of these qualities and his dedicated leadership potential, he is hereby promoted from Colonel to Commander in the Colonial Fleet, with all the rights and privileges hereto.”

Removing the Colonel’s rank from Turner’s collar, she reached back and threw the rank across the hangar. “You won’t need those anymore.” She said with a smirk as she pinned on the new Commander’s rank.

When she was done, Turner snapped a smart salute which Cain returned. She then shook his hand. “I have never been more proud than I am right now.” She said, “You’ll make a hell of a commander.”

“Coming from you Admiral, that means the world.” Turner replied.

Turning around Jonathan faced the assembled crowd as Admiral Cain stepped forward. “I give to you, the newest commander in the fleet, Commander Jonathan Turner!”

The crowd erupted in applause as Turner stepped forward to speak. For a moment, he waited and allowed the applause to wash over him.

Finally he held up a hand and the applause died down. “You know, I was starting to think I would never get these.” He said, eliciting a chuckle from the crew, “But I did and I have all of you to thank for it.”

“Admiral Cain, I can’t thank you enough for being an excellent mentor and friend.” Turner said, “And I can’t think of anyone who deserved to be promoted to Admiral more than you.”

The crew applauded again for a moment and Turner joined in celebrating Cain’s promotion. “I know I’ve been a hard ass on you guys at times.” Turner said after the clapping had died down again, “And I know that we haven’t always had it easy here on the Pegasus. I also know that this crew is the best damn crew in the fleet and to bring out anything less than the best in you would have been a crime.”

Jonathan paused for a moment as his eyes threatened to tear up. “I want to thank you all for the hard work you did for me.” He said at last, “And as I and Colonel Ryan depart today I want to let you know that our time here on Pegasus has set some high standards for how a Battlestar crew performs, but have no doubt that the Prometheus, under my command, will carry on the tradition of excellence that I have learned from all of you here.”

As Jonathan finished his speech the crew erupted into cheers and applause. Turning to Admiral Cain both he and Ryan, who stood next to him at attention, snapped off smart salutes. “Permission to depart the ship sir?” Turner asked.

Cain smiled, tears of pride welling up in her eyes. “Granted, Commander.” She said returning the salute.

Suddenly, she turned to face the assembly. “Attention on deck!” she shouted, bringing the applause and cheering to a quick halt.

Turning back to face the two men she said “Present ARMS!”

At that command, the entire assembly saluted the two men who stood on the wing of the Raptor that would take them to Picon.

“Commander, Battlestar Prometheus now departing.” Cain said.

Turner, his heart swelling with pride, returned Cain's salute and stepped inside the Raptor closing the door behind him.

In the days, weeks and months that followed, whenever Jonathan Turner felt frustrated or that he wasn't living up to his potential, he would think back to that moment of pride when the officer he respected most in the entire fleet had saluted him.

It reminded him that he had earned the respect of those whose opinions he valued, the respect of the men and women with whom he served. It reminded him of whom he was and that he was doing the right thing.

Office of the President
Quorum Tower,
Caprica City,
Caprica

"So they've landed on Kobol?" President Adar asked to the two Admirals present in the room.

"Yes, Mister President." Replied Admiral Roswell, the Colonial Fleet Exploration Branch Chief. "They landed this morning and have begun setting up a base camp there."

Richard Adar, President of the Twelve Colonies of Kobol, smiled and sat forward behind his desk, satisfied in the report. "That's good news." He said, "How long until they find this tomb that Doctor Zylman is looking for?"

"Hard to say." Roswell replied, "There's a lot of ground to search, Mister President, it could be some time."

"Define 'some time' for me Admiral." Said the President. "Are we talking about a few days here? A week?"

"If I may," the female voice of Admiral Helena Cain said, addressing Admiral Roswell.

The elder and more senior Admiral gestured for her to go ahead, happy to not have to go over the same argument with the President for the hundredth time.

"Mister President, according to the data I was presented this morning, there could be over one hundred square miles for this search team to cover and that's if they're starting in the right place to begin with." Cain said, "Not to mention that there is a

possible hostile force on the planet. Knowing Commander Turner like I do, he'll see to the possible threat before launching the search mission.”

“Yes, yes I understand that Turner needs to make sure his people are safe first.” Adar said rising from his seat and moving towards the window that over looked the Caprica City Peace Park. “It’s just that I was hoping to hold a news conference to announce that Turner had found Kobol.”

“I don’t think that would be such a good idea.” Said Jon Baxter, the President’s Chief of Staff.

Adar turned away from the view and fixed his steel gaze on his friend. “Why not?” he asked. “This is a chance to tout what the Prometheus is done. The whole reason I’ve waited until now is because I wanted to hold off until after they had found Kobol, and I don’t need to tell you how an announcement of this sort could help our poll numbers.”

“Yes, Mister President, I understand your position. However, the general elections for Quorum representatives is only two weeks away and the Geminon representative is a close ally of yours. If you go announcing that we’ve set foot on Kobol, a world that is, as they say, cursed by the gods, it could hurt his chances for re-election.” Baxter explained.

“Surely they wouldn’t vote him out because of this.” Adar said.

“Never under estimate the power of religion, Mister President.” Admiral Roswell said. “The Geminose are very spiritual people and take any slight against their beliefs very seriously.”

“I know.” Adar said rubbing his temples, “Before the unification of the colonies, they started four wars with Caprica all because they said that the Gods told them to.”

Adar shook his head and then fixed his gaze on Admiral Cain. “What’s your opinion on this Admiral?”

Cain kept her expression neutral as she replied. “Mister President, I’m a soldier, not a priest or a politician.”

Adar smiled at Cain’s attempt to evade the question. “I know you are, Admiral, and a damn fine one too. Nevertheless, I would like to hear your thoughts. Should I make some sort of announcement or should I keep it quiet?”

Cain considered her answer for a moment before replying. “Mister President,” she began, “Like I said, I don’t care about politics or religion, but I do care about operational safety and I think that by making an announcement, you will be putting Commander Turner and his fleet in jeopardy.”

Adar arched his eyebrow. This wasn't the answer he was expecting from Cain "How so?" he asked as he leaned against the edge of his desk.

Cain sighed, her voice sounding almost exasperated, "Although we haven't seen or heard from the Cylons in thirty nine years, we would be fools to think that they don't somehow monitor our news and free wave radio broadcasts and I for one am not apt to give the Cylons any more information they can use against us. By broadcasting the whereabouts of the Prometheus and the fact that they are so far from home and support, we might be inviting an attack against them."

Adar nodded, conceding. "I see your point Admiral. Thank you."

"Anytime, sir." Cain replied.

Outside the Quorum Tower, Admirals Cain and Roswell walked along together to the landing pad where a Raptor awaited Cain to take her back to the Pegasus.

"He really is a moron." Cain said without preamble.

Roswell chuckled. "Nobody ever said that being intelligent was a pre-requisite to being President."

"That's the truth." Said Cain as she rolled her eyes, "How do you stand reporting to that guy every week?"

"I remember that there is an election coming up in just over a year." Roswell replied with a smile. "I'm fairly sure a better candidate will come along in that time. Hell, if he is successful in his mission maybe we can convince Commander Turner to run."

"Not bloody likely." Cain said with a chuckle. "The only thing Jon Turner has ever wanted to do is command a Battlestar. Hell, I doubt we'd even be able to promote him unless we offered him a field command."

"Probably not." Roswell agreed. "It would be nice, though, if we got a President in office who had some military experience."

"Unlike the one we have now." Cain commented.

"Yeah, good ol' Dodger Dick." Roswell replied with a smile.

Arriving at the waiting Raptor, Cain shook Roswell's hand and then tossed him a salute. "Keep in touch sir." She said, "And if you hear from Jon, tell him I'll have his Cubits when he gets back."

Roswell nodded and watched as Cain closed the hatch.

“Prometheus actual, this is Eagle base. We have landed and begun site set up.” Colonel Ryan said as he stood inside the newly erected command shelter. Outside it was raining as the Marines worked furiously to set up their own shelters that they would use as barracks space for the next several days.

“Eagle Base, this is Prometheus Actual.” Came the voice of Commander Turner. “We’ve sighted the scout ship that we saw leaving M-71 approximately seventeen clicks south of your position. Keep on the look out and advise Prometheus when you’re operational.”

“Understood actual. Will check back in with you in three hours. Eagle Base out.” Ryan said handing the handset to a Marine private.

“Ok Major, we need to get this up and running as quick as we can.” Ryan said to Major Lewis who was standing close by. “Let’s get your teams working on the primary operations shelters once their done getting the sleep tents up.”

“We can start now if you want sir.” Lewis replied.

“No,” Ryan replied, “I want the troops to have someplace to get out of this shitty weather in case it gets any worse. Have them finish the sleep tents and get their gear stowed, then get them to work on the infirmary tent and the chow tent.”

“Yes sir.” Lewis said snapping off a salute and moving to comply.

“Sheba,” Ryan said turning to the blonde pilot, “I want you to take a Viper up over the site where Prometheus said they saw scout ship and get a good look at it. If you think it’s safe, then call in a Raptor to get a good close in shot.”

“I’m on it sir.” Sheba replied picking up her helmet.

“Be careful Sheba,” Ryan said as she turned to depart, “This weather is a nasty bitch.”

Sheba smiled. “So am I sir.”

CHAPTER 3

UNFORESEEN CIRCUMSTANCES

Lieutenant Alain Halloran, the operations officer of the Battlestar Prometheus, was glad his shift was over. After twelve hours in the CIC he needed a shower, a cigarette and some sleep.

Walking wearily to the head, he opened the doors and stepped inside. One advantage to working over your allotted shift was that the head wasn't as crowded. Usually, after pulling an eight hour shift, everyone made their way to the head first to shower and shave and generally relax before heading down the recreation rooms and enjoying some private time.

Since he was getting off four hours into the next shift, there was only one other person there, a Marine female he knew named Shelly Archer.

“Hey Al,” she said as he walked in. “How goes it?”

“I just pulled twelve hours in CIC. How do you *think* it goes?” he replied with a smile.

“I feel ya.” Shelly replied. “I just finished a training exercise with my platoon fending off a simulated boarding party.”

“So that’s what Doc Jones was complaining about down in the med bay.” Halloran said with a laugh. “He was calling up to CIC every ten minutes for over two hours complaining about the noise levels in the corridors outside. Said it sounded like a war was going on.”

Shelly laughed and doffed her top in preparation for the shower. “Yep, that was us raising hell down there.”

Even though Lieutenant York was an attractive woman with naturally curly red hair, Halloran didn't stare at her as she stripped off her clothing and got in the shower. After all, there was very little room for modesty on a Battlestar and people had to learn how to act like adults quickly, or face the consequences.

Besides, she was married.

“So,” Shelly shouted over the water, “What’s the good scuttlebutt up in CIC?”

“Nothing new up there.” Alain replied as he shucked off his shorts and stepped into his own shower stall. “I figured that you’d know something good before I did.”

“I got something,” she said with a mischievous tone in her voice.

Halloran laugh. “What now? You caught the cooks fraking on the prep table again?”

“Even better.” Shelly said as she turned off her water and wrapped a towel around her.

“Well then what?” Halloran asked as he stepped from his own shower stall and wrapped a towel around his waist.

Archer walked over close and leaned in as if to conspire with him. “Last night,” she said, “my platoon had the graveyard watch. So I was walking the corridors and checking up on them.”

“Yeah, yeah you’re a good little Marine.” Halloran said sarcastically, “Get to the good part.”

“I am!” Shelly said as she poked him in the ribs, “Anyways, I was making my way down through the senior corridor and as I round the corner I see Doctor Z leaving Colonel Ryan’s quarters.”

“That’s it?” Halloran said, “That’s your good scuttlebutt?”

“No,” Archer said, her face taking on a serious expression, “As he walked out they hug! I mean like full on hug!”

Halloran’s face twisted up into a scowl. “You mean like... *hug*?” He asked incredulously.

“Yes!” Archer hissed, “Like a man and a woman would after a date!”

“No fraking way!” Halloran said, “Not the Colonel. That dude is hard as nails.”

“I wouldn’t shit you.” Shelly replied, “You my favorite turd after all.”

Halloran shook his head but immediately became serious as another thought entered his head. “Have you told anyone else about this?”

“No.” Archer replied.

“Are you sure?” the operations officer pressed.

“Yes damn it.” Shelly said, “C’mon Al, you know me better than that. I know when to keep my mouth shut about things.”

“Good.” Halloran replied a very concerned expression on his face, “Because if something like this got out around the ship...”

“I know.” Shelly said, sharing his expression of concern. “It would be big time trouble.”

“Yes it would.” Halloran said. “Besides, this is all speculation. They could just be two old friends.”

“Yeah... sure.” Shelly said, her skepticism clear. “Either way, I can’t say anything. I have too many skeletons in my own closet.”

“Yeah...” Al replied as he slid his shorts and t-shirt on. “Hey look, I’m going to go get some rack time. You, uh, you take it easy ok?”

Archer nodded as she too began getting dressed. “Yeah, you too.” She said, “And if you get bored, come down to my room tonight. I got a fresh bottle of Ambrosia that’s begging for some action.”

“Thanks Shell.” Al replied. “I’ll keep it in mind.”

Cylon Homeworld Somewhere beyond the Armistice Line

“And so,” the Cylon known as Leoben said, addressing the other six members of the council, “By our estimates we can anticipate a two to seven percent casualty rate during the initial assault, provided that the sixes can achieve their goals in subverting the Colonial Defense network.”

“What would be the resurrection recovery rate of those casualties?” the model known as Cavil asked.

“We think that we could recover ninety percent of those casualties, possibly more.” Leoben replied.

“Ninety percent?” the blonde female known as D’anna Biers exclaimed. “Why can’t we get all of them back?”

“We’re worried that the radiation may cause a problem with the download process.” Six said, taking up the fight for Leoben.

“None of our simulations have indicated this before.” Cavil said, “Why are you worried about it now?”

“New simulations using the R type weapon system that we have developed has shown some deviance from the earlier simulations with the Q type systems.” Leoben replied bringing up the data from his work.

All of the Cylons looked closely at the display monitor as the simulation of an explosion occurred. They watched as the scales showed the levels of radiation and their effects.

“What is that?” Cavil asked pointing to one of the figures.

“That,” Leoben said, “Is exactly what concerns us.”

Enlarging the figure Leoben explained his concerns. “This is a radioactive side effect of the new isotope we have induced into the thermonuclear reaction.” He said. “We introduced the T-one thirteen isotope to increase the efficiency of the weapons.”

“How so?” D’anna asked.

“By introducing the isotope into the reaction, we lessen the blast damage but increase the short term radioactivity.” Leoben explained. “Less damage to the infrastructure of the Colonies but a higher lethality.”

“How much higher?” Cavil said with a gleam in his eye.

“We estimate,” Said Leoben, “That those not killed in the initial blast would die within seventy two hours, provided they didn’t have anti-radiation drugs.”

“And what would the range on these weapons be?” D’anna asked.

“Wait a minute!” Six said, bringing the conversation to a pause.

Cavil smiled at her. He always admired her for her compassion, even if it was misplaced. “You have something to add sister?”

“Did you not hear what we were just saying?” she asked. “The new isotope could affect our ability to resurrect. It could even affect our bodies in ways we don’t understand.”

“Like how?” The model known as Sharon asked, a concerned look on her face.

Cavil chuckled, “Worry not little sister. We’ll protect you from the big bad nasty radiation.”

“No, she’s right.” The model known as Doral said, “We need to know more before we go using a weapon that could possibly harm us as much as it harms the humans.”

“I agree.” Six said picking up on the momentum of Doral’s argument.

“As do I.” Sharon said.

Around the room, the rest of the Cylons nodded in reluctant agreement to the proposal.

“Very well then, the motion is carried.” Doral said, “We will continue our planning of Operation Reckoning while we do more tests on the R type weapon system to determine its safety.”

“But how are we going to test it?” Sharon asked.

“Well, little sister,” Cavil replied with a smile, “One of us is going to have to go out and be killed by it and see if she can be resurrected.”

Landing Zone of the free freighter Cosmic Castaway
Several kilometers west of Eagle Base
Kobol

Hal Creighton, Professor of Archeology at the University of Sagitairon, looked upon the high mountain peaks that framed the Tomb of Athena and smiled.

“That’s what we’re here for.” He said pointing up to the distant mountain tops.

The man next to him, a former Colonial Pilot named Marcus Darby, stood with his hands on his hips and scowled. “That’s a good two day walk from here doctor.” He said, “You up for it?”

“Walk?” Creighton protested, “Why are we walking? Surely your ship is small enough to find a landing zone up there.”

“That may be,” Darby said, “But we also have a Colonial Battlestar in orbit along with two Gunstars and any number of fighters and Raptors, and while you have paid us well thus far, your money isn’t worth our lives or my ship.”

Creighton felt anger rise in him but managed to keep his volatile temper in check. He hadn’t spent his entire fortune on this expedition only to have some spineless freighter captain throw away his greatest chance at glory.

“Captain,” he said slowly turning to stand eye to eye with Darby, “This expedition is my life’s dream. It’s all I have.” He explained, “And I am not going to allow these interlopers to come here and steal my glory.”

“These interlopers,” Darby said stepping closer to Creighton than the doctor would have liked, “Are Colonial warriors. They are trained soldiers and will kill us if we threaten them. In fact, if you had done as I suggested around that last world and contacted them, we probably wouldn’t have them hunting us now.”

“No!” Creighton shouted, “I told you why we couldn’t do that.”

“Yeah, yeah because you’re wanted for stealing from the University, I know.” Darby replied, “But it’s our asses on the line now.”

“Then I suggest,” Creighton said playing on the other man’s paranoia, “That you prepare yourself for the possibility that we might have to do battle with these people. After all, I don’t think they are going to stop to ask too many questions if they find us.”

“He’s right boss.” One of the other crewmen said, “If those soldiers find us, they gonna shoot first an ask question later.”

Darby considered the situation for a moment and then reluctantly conceded. “Ok, break out the air defense weapons and the auto-rifles.” He said, “And you better strap on your body armor too. This could get ugly.”

CHAPTER 4

STORM ON THE HORIZON

Colonial Fleet Academy
City of Rome,
Picon
Two weeks prior to the launch of Prometheus

Commander Jonathan Turner looked out over the assembled officers of the Nova class study group and smiled. In the six months he had worked with them developing tactics and strategies that would compliment the new equipment that was being deployed with her, he had come to know each of them well. Many of them he had had reassigned to the Prometheus as his senior staff.

Major Karla Horvath was just finishing up a stint as a senior flight instructor when he had pulled her into the group. Now she was going to be his CAG, and since fleet was allowing him the pick of anyone he wanted for his crew, he had extended that privilege to her. She would have the job of handpicking the two squadron commanders that would serve under her as well as the leader of the Raptor squadron.

Lieutenant Alain Halloran had been in transit between the Battlestar Solaria and the Battlestar Atlantia when Turner had offered him the job as CIC operations officer. As a newly promoted senior lieutenant it was a far cry better than what his duties would be anywhere else, since a captain normally occupied the CIC operations officer slot on a Battlestar.

Major Bart “Barty” Phillips was one of the best engineers in the fleet. It had taken Turner pulling in a few favors to get him reassigned from the Battlestar Agamemnon to the Prometheus, but Barty hadn’t complained. The chance to work on a completely new class of ship had been too great an opportunity to pass up.

Then there was newly promoted Colonel James L. Ryan III. He was a hot shot pilot who had risen through the ranks like a shark through a meal. Having been in the fleet only fourteen years, he was the second youngest man to ever make the rank of Colonel.

Turner and Ryan had served together almost Ryan’s entire career. He had been a young and green nugget aboard the Valkyrie when Turner had been CAG under Commander Adama. Turner had seen a lot of potential in the man so he made him a flight leader within six months. By the time Turner was promoted Colonel a three years later, he had shown enough promise that Turner had decided to bring him along as he moved to the Pegasus.

Once there it hadn't taken long for Ryan to prove that he was ready to lead and after his predecessor departed for a new assignment, Turner had convinced Commander Cain to promote Ryan to Major and make him the Pegasus CAG. In that position he had excelled. His pilots were loyal to him and he ran them like a finely tuned machine. Twice, they had earned top squadron of the fleet honors.

With all that history, it hadn't been a leap of logic for Turner to select Ryan to be his X.O., and when Cain had told him he could have anyone he wanted from the Pegasus crew to take with him, he had chosen Ryan.

Now Ryan was aboard the Prometheus overseeing the final stages of preparation for launch.

Many people had said that Ryan wasn't ready for that type of responsibility; that he was still trying to be everyone's best friend. Turner had confidence though that Ryan would soon get the hang of it. And if he didn't well that was what a Commander did: mentor his subordinates.

"I can't tell you how much all of your input has meant to me these last six months." Turner said as he addressed the assembled officers. "We were told to figure out new ways to use our new toys aboard the Prometheus and, after meeting with Fleet Admiral Kristoff today, I can tell you that we succeeded beyond their expectations."

The group smiled and began to applaud but Turner stopped them short. "I was told today that the President himself has an assignment for us, one that could be more important than anything we could think of."

"What's the mission, sir?" Lieutenant Halloran asked.

"I don't know yet." Turner replied. "I'm catching a shuttle to Caprica this afternoon to meet with him and find out. All I can say is that Admiral Kristoff warned me to be ready for a long stay on ship."

The officers nodded, understanding what he meant. Long voyages on Battlestars were nothing new to Colonial Fleet personnel and Turner was confident that these people would be able to handle whatever was thrown their way.

"Ok then." Turner said concluding his speech, "You guys have forty eight hours of shore leave, and then I want you on board the Prometheus finishing up final prep. Report to Colonel Ryan and I'll see you in a couple of days."

As the officers all stood and filed out Turner watched them go. He smiled, wondering where this assignment would take them. He had no idea just what he was getting into, but he was excited nonetheless.

“Eagle Base, this is Viper one-one-four, outbound from you heading west.” Sheba reported as her Viper took to the skies of Kobol, “My speed is two three zero and my altitude is two thousand and climbing.”

“Roger Sheba,” came the voice of the flight controller back at Eagle Base. “We have you on our screens now. Continue on course and advise when you reach five thousand.”

“Roger that.” Sheba replied.

Looking out her canopy window Sheba took in the sights of this mysterious world. Not being an overly religious person herself, she wasn't inclined to ascribe to the planet the same sentiments that some of the other pilots had. To her this was just another unexplored planet with bad weather.

Suddenly, a glint of light from the corner of Sheba's eye caught her attention. Using her stick, she turned the Viper and dove beneath the clouds to get a closer look.

Seeing what she did brought her battle senses to full alert.

“Eagle base,” Sheba said opening her com channel, “this is Viper one-one-four. I have a surface contact approximately ten clicks west of your- AGGGH!”

An explosion from behind her suddenly threw Sheba forward, her helmet cracking up against the canopy. Clearing her blurry vision she looked down to see her instruments flashing red.

What she couldn't see was that a missile had shot into the air from the area of the freighter and hit her Viper dead in its engine, disintegrating the rear half of the fighter and sending it spiraling down nose first towards the planet's surface.

“Frak!” Sheba shouted in anger. “Eagle base this is Sheba! I've been hit! Ejecting!”

Pulling up on the ejection handles on the sides of her seat, Sheba was blasted hard back down as her cockpit canopy blew away and she was thrown into the air by the explosive charges in her cockpit.

In the air she spun around quickly, her vision becoming a mottled green, grey and brown blur as her seat tumbled through the air. Then as abruptly as she had been shot out of her cockpit, she was jolted upright as her escape chute deployed.

Taking stock of her situation she checked to see that she still had all of her equipment. She did. Only then did she look down to see how far off the ground she was. What she saw sent a cold chill running down her spine.

The ground was a lot closer than she would have liked.

“Oh frak me.” She mumbled to herself.

The last thing she could think of before the ground came rushing up at her, was to activate her tracer beacon.

The she and the ground of Kobol got well acquainted...

And everything went black.

Lieutenant Alain Halloran stood at the Commander’s door wondering for the one hundredth time if he was doing the right thing. After all, it wasn’t as if he had something against the Colonel. In fact, he thought rather highly of the man.

Still, as a Colonial officer he had a duty and a responsibility to inform the commander of situations that could affect the good order and discipline of the soldiers under his command.

And this was definitely something that could.

“I need to see Commander Turner.” Halloran said to the sergeant standing guard at Turner’s door.

“The Commander is sleeping sir.” The guard replied. “If you want I can take a message.”

“Sergeant,” Alain said leaning close, “This is an important matter that needs the Commander’s attention.”

The sergeant looked into Alain’s eyes for a moment judging the seriousness of the lieutenant’s statement then shook his head. “I hope so sir. He doesn’t like being woke up for anything other than an emergency.”

The Sergeant picked up a phone receiver and put it to his ear for a moment. Finally, Halloran could hear Turner’s voice. “It’s Lieutenant Halloran sir,” the sergeant reported. “He says it’s important.”

The sergeant nodded once then hung the receiver up in its alcove. “He says you can enter sir.”

Nodding, Alain reached out and opened the hatch. Moving quickly he entered the Commander’s quarters and closed the door behind him.

Halloran had never been inside Commander Turner's quarters before and was impressed by what he saw. All around him were models of early rockets and ships that ancient Colonials had flown in their quest for the stars. There were also models and pictures of ancient sailing ships, including a few photos with Turner in them.

What he didn't see were a lot of the 'I love me' plaques and framed certificates that many officers liked to adorn their walls with. In fact, the only military thing that he saw on Turner's wall behind his desk was a copy of the Colonial soldier's code.

"Lieutenant Halloran." Turner said grabbing Alain's attention.

Turner looked tired, dressed in only his house robe and a pair of slippers. His hair was disheveled and he had a bleary look in his eyes. "I hope this is good, for your sake." He said.

"I-I'm sorry sir, but I think that this is worth the intrusion." Halloran said, his body rigid at the position of attention.

Turner eyed him up and down for a moment and then nodded. "Have a seat then."

Halloran sat in front of Turner's desk while the commander sat in his chair behind it.

"Ok Lieutenant, let's have it." Turner said.

"Well sir," Halloran began nervously, "I was in the shower today and I heard a disturbing rumor."

Turner arched his eyebrow. Alain knew that this wasn't a good sign.

"Sir, I'm not one to give rumors more than a cursory once over but this is from an eye witness." Halloran said.

"An eye witness to what?" Turner asked.

Halloran swallowed hard, knowing that what he was about to say was serious, especially since the X.O. and the Commander were old friends. Still, he knew it was his duty to bring it to Turner's attention and, in the end, that outweighed anything.

So he told Turner what Shelly had seen and then he waited for the Commander's reaction.

Turner was quiet for a moment, allowing the information to sink in. Then he looked Halloran in the eyes. "Have you told anyone else about this?"

“No sir.” Halloran said, “And I made sure to tell Shelly, I mean Lieutenant Archer, not to repeat it either.”

Turner nodded, satisfied in Halloran’s answer. “You did the right thing Alain.” He said.

“Thank you sir.” Halloran replied, the tension draining from him. “I just want you to know sir that I didn’t do this out of spite or malice. I actually respect Colonel Ryan a lot. It’s just that... if this got out to the troops...”

“I agree.” Turner said, “And like I said, you were right to bring it to my attention. But now I need you to do something else for me.”

Halloran sat straighter in his seat. “Anything sir.”

Turner smiled with pride at the young officer. “I need you to keep an open ear out for this rumor. If it starts to spread I need you to quash it ASAP.”

“I understand sir.” Halloran replied.

“Do you?” Turner asked. “Do you understand that you may have to lie about this to protect unit cohesion, good order and discipline?”

“Yes sir.” Halloran said without missing a beat. “If this got out it would completely undermine the authority of the X.O. and we can’t have that sir.”

“You’re absolutely correct.” Turner replied. “And you have my personal gratitude for this.”

Alain smiled. “Thank you sir, but I’m just doing my job.”

“You do it well, Alain.” Turner said. “Now, why don’t you go get some sleep?”

Halloran began to stand and leave but was stopped by the sound of Turner’s phone buzzing. “Seems I’m popular tonight.” The commander said with a half smile. “Commander Turner.”

Halloran waited for a moment, watching as the Commander’s face slowly adopted a concerned and then angry expression.

“Action stations.” He growled into the phone. “Have Major Horvath and Captain Allen meet me in CIC.” He finished hanging the phone up.

“Go get your uniform on Lieutenant, and then meet me in CIC.” Turner said looking at Halloran.

“Yes sir!” Alain replied shooting to his feet. “What’s happened?”

Turner moved to face Halloran and the young man could see a fire in his commander’s eyes, a fire that made Alain deeply concerned.

“It’s Sheba.” Turner said, “She’s been shot down about ten clicks west of Eagle Base.”

Halloran nodded knowing what this meant for him and for the rest of the crew.

“I’ll be in CIC in five minutes.” He said snapping off a salute.

EPILOGUE ACTION STATIONS

“I have a location on Sheba’s marker beacon.” Halloran reported from his station in CIC. “She’s nine point seven clicks west of Eagle base on a heading of two eight zero.”

“Good work.” Turner replied, “Now get me a secure channel to Eagle base.”

“Yes sir.” Halloran replied.

Around the situation table, Commander Turner, Major Horvath, MCPO Palmer, and Captain Allen had gathered to study a map of the area surrounding the camp known as Eagle Base.

“That puts her here.” Allen said, pointing to a valley on the map. “Behind this ridgeline that these guys tried to use to screen them from the base.”

“And about two clicks from the freighter itself.” Palmer interjected.

“Right.” Allen said, agreeing with the senior Non-Com. “If you give me a squad of Marines and a Raptor, I can have her out of there inside of an hour.”

“Wait a minute,” Major Horvath said. “All we need are the Marines to go down there. You don’t need to go along.”

“I’m sorry ma’am, but yes I do.” Allen replied.

Horvath shook her head. “No, you’re my only squadron commander left right now and you have responsibilities to maintain up here.”

“Responsibilities that Shiner can handle in my absence.” Allen protested.
“Besides, I’m only going to be gone for an hour at most.”

“But what if you’re not?” Horvath asked, “What if you get shot down like she did?”

“That won’t happen.” Allen replied.

“Captain, they had a surface to air missile that was capable of taking out a Mark Seven Viper, what makes you think they don’t have more where those came from?” the CAG asked.

“Sir I *have* to go down there.” Allen persisted, ignoring the Horvath’s argument.

“I said no.” Horvath said firmly, “What part of that don’t you understand?”

“It’s *you* who doesn’t fraking understand!” Allen shouted.

The CIC went silent as all eyes turned to the situation table where the outburst came from.

Allen immediately looked embarrassed and Horvath looked as if she had been caught flatfooted. Only Turner and Palmer seemed calm.

“This is officer business!” Palmer shouted to the gawking crewmen, “Get back to your fraking duties!”

The crew began to go back to their business and Turner motioned for all of them to lean in close.

“Obviously captain, this is important to you.” Turner said patiently, “So why don’t you explain it to us?”

Allen nodded and took a deep breath. “I’m sorry sir, I was out of line.”

Turner waved him off. “Save the apologies for later Captain. Tell me why you want to go on this mission so badly.”

“Because sir,” Allen said, mentally preparing himself for the worst, “She’s the mother of my son.”

TO BE CONTINUED...

