



AUTHOR'S NOTE: Due to some requests that I have had lately, I have decided to include the following section to bring everyone up to speed on who the characters are and what their role in the story is.

Special Thanks to Matt Campagna for the suggestion to remedy this problem and to my new Editor, Theresa Madrid, for their hard work and support in making this story the success it has been

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

Commander Jonathan Turner: Commanding Officer of the Prometheus and Battlestar Group 22

Colonel James L. Ryan III: Executive Office of the Battlestar Prometheus

Major Karla 'Ice Queen' Horvath: Commander, Air Group (CAG) of the Prometheus air wing

Captain Jason 'Slider' Allen: Commander of Ace Squadron

Captain Stacie 'Sheba' Percival: Former Commander of Knight Squadron, now serving as the Prometheus Intelligence Officer.

Captain Joshua Wakefield: Current Commander of Knight Squadron

Lieutenant Allain Halloran: Prometheus Operation Officer

Master Chief Petty Officer Thomas Palmer: Chief Of The Boat (COB) for the Battlestar Prometheus

Petty Officer Theresa Madrid: Communications Specialist for the Prometheus.

Precentor (I) Rollo Thomasi: Commander of the Terran Alliance Battle Cruiser Kraken.

Galaxus Lucius Verenos: Commander of the 7th Legionary Battle Group of the Terran Alliance Expansionary Fleet.

PROLOGUE

SLIPPING THROUGH SHADOWS

Pilots Ready Room
Battlestar Prometheus
System 474
Mission Day 191.

“Listen up!” said Captain Jason ‘Slider’ Allen as he strode into the pilot’s ready room of the Battlestar Prometheus. Around him in the tiered seats that faced the dais where his podium sat were the members of Ace Squadron, who stood to attention as he entered. “Sit down.” He said, forgoing the traditional military command of ‘as you were’.

Reaching the podium, he placed a stack of folders on the table beside it and looked out over the assembled group. Some of the faces were new, having been transferred over from Knight Squadron to fill out his ranks while Captain Joshua ‘Shooter’ Wakefield trained up the newer flight recruits, or Nuggets as they were not so affectionately known to the more experienced pilots.

“Ok, we have a change of plans,” Slider began, “we won’t be launching CAP in twenty minutes, we’ll be making a jump.”

“A jump?” Asked Lieutenant Carl ‘Tick Tock’ Salter from the back row. “We weren’t supposed to be jumping until tomorrow. What the frack happened?”

“The Sentinel was scouting the system we were supposed to jump into and got jumped herself.” Slider answered.

“Did she take any damage? Were there any casualties?” Asked an anxious Ensign.

Slider smiled. “No *lover boy*, there were no casualties. Your girlfriend is just fine.”

Tyler sat back in his chair and breathed a loud sigh of relief while the rest of the squadron chuckled at him.

“Shut your holes.” Slider said, bringing the heckling to an end. “We don’t know if the Alliance was able to get a trace on the Sentinel’s jump, but it’s a sure bet that they’ll have ships closing on this area fast. That being said, we are going to make a series of six jumps as fast as the computer can spit them out to try and throw them off our trail and to also put a little distance between us and them.”

The moans and groans of disapproval began to overtake the room and Slider waited for them to fade away before continuing. “Needless to say, combat launches and landing will be the order of the day so check your gear and try not to smash yourself up. We’re still going to have a CAP to fly when this is over and I don’t want any one to have to bow out, especially since P.E.R.’s are due.”

The mention of Pilot Evaluation Reports elicited another round of groans from the squadron. Slider, banged his fist on the podium and brought a stop to it. “Ok meat heads, we only have fifteen minutes until we jump. I want everyone in the saddle and ready to go in ten. Any questions?”

Seeing no questions he made an impatient gesture of dismissal and watched as his pilots quickly and quietly filed out of the room.

“You’re getting pretty good at that.” Said a voice from behind him.

Whirling around, he came face to face with Major Karla Horvath, the Prometheus CAG. “Sorry for startling you. I came in the back door and didn’t want to interrupt.”

Shaking off his surprise he offered a weak salute and took a breath. “No problem ma’am.”

Horvath, known among her pilots as the Ice Queen for her strict professional demeanor, took a moment to look around the ready room before returning the salute.

“You know, I originally gave you this command as a punishment,” She said “I figured I would give you all of the headaches that you seemed to enjoy giving *your* superior officers.”

“Well you have succeeded in that, ma’am. I tell you, sometimes I just want to...” he stopped and brought his hands together mimicking a choking gesture.

“Now you know how I feel.” Horvath replied flatly. “Despite it all though, you have whipped these knuckleheads into a cohesive unit. You’ve proven yourself to be a good leader.”

This caused Slider to smirk. “Don’t go saying that too loud, Major. I have a bad reputation to protect.”

If Horvath found the comment amusing, she gave no sign of it. “I’ve spoken to Commander Turner and he’s given me permission to begin training you to handle CAG duties.”

This caught Slider by surprise. “Say again?”

“The last engagement taught us a few lessons Captain, one of which is that there is a distinct possibility that some of us aren’t going to make it back from this mission.”

Slider nodded absently but said nothing for a moment as the importance of what she was saying stuck home with him. “I understand where you’re coming from Major but I have to ask: Why me?”

“Because you’re the best I have.”

“What about Sheba?”

“Sheba has her own issues to deal with right now, Captain.” Horvath replied. “All you need to know is that after this next series of jumps you’re going to be shadowing me so get your number two up to speed.”

“Yes ma’am.”

“Now get going. We jump in ten minutes.” Horvath commanded.

Slider nodded and fired off a quick salute before turning and jogging out of the ready room.

Satisfied that she had accomplished her mission, Horvath turned and walked out the same way she came in.

CHAPTER 1

POLITICS AND PERIL

Pantheon of the Grand Conclave
City of Romalin
Terra

Galaxus Lucius Verenos, commanding officer of the Alliance Third Fleet, waited patiently in a side access way that led into the Grand Conclave Chamber as Primus Marcus Antonius, Supreme Commander of the Terran Alliance Militia, completed his address to the assembled members of the governing body of the Alliance.

“Distinguished delegates of the Conclave, the concerns you have voiced have been brought to my attention and I assure you that I am giving them all due consideration.” The Primus said from the raised dais in the center of the semi-circular room.

“All due consideration?” said a man dressed in the traditional white toga of a Conclave member. “That is not exactly reassuring to us, Primus.”

“I understand why *you*, Count Iblis, would think that I am attempting to evade the questions this conclave has raised but I can assure you all that the good of the Alliance is my top priority above all else.”

“Primus Antonius, I don’t like your tone.” Count Iblis said from his seat in the tiered chamber.

“And I don’t like someone like you, a man who never served one day in uniform, a man born into privilege, questioning my patriotism sir.” The Primus replied menacingly.

“Enough!” a deep voice boomed from behind The Primus.

Recognizing the voice, all the members of the Conclave rose to their feet and the Primus came to rigid attention as the assembled men shouted in unison “Hail Sae’tzar!”

Striding into the room, dressed in the traditional white toga with five golden chevrons on the sleeves came Claudio Maximus, the supreme ruler of the Terran Alliance.

Maximus was a tall and broad shouldered man who wore a short beard that was shot through with gray. Towering over the black armored guards who flanked him as he

entered the chamber, the man who held the title of Sae'tzar made his way quickly to the dais where his throne like seat awaited him.

Taking his seat, he gestured for the members of the Conclave to do the same.

"Distinguished delegates," The Sae'tzar said. "The Primus and I have spoken at length about his recent decisions to redeploy the fleet and I am satisfied that he has done so with the best interests of the Alliance in mind."

"So the Primus has told us," said Count Iblis, as he stood and made a bow towards the ruler of the Alliance, "and as always, great Sae'tzar, we trust in your wisdom in these matters. However we simply wish to glean the same understanding that you have in this matter so that we might better accommodate the Primus in his mission."

"Of course." The Sae'tzar replied with a knowing smile. "No one here doubts your patriotism, my good Count, and it is well that they should not for your family has always been a staunch and loyal supporter of the Alliance."

Mild applause broke out at the Sae'tzar's words, followed by a few cheers of "Here, here!"

"Primus Antonius, I am ordering you to prepare an outline of your plan and to present it to the Conclave no later than the end of this week." The Sae'tzar commanded.

"Meus audio atque pareo, Sae'tzar." The Primus replied bowing deeply.

"Good. Does this satisfy the Conclave?" The Sae'tzar asked. When no one objected, he gestured for the Primus to depart. "I believe that you have more important matters to attend to Primus. Go with the blessings of this Conclave."

The Primus bowed once again and began making his way out of the chamber towards where Verenos stood in the access way. Seeing his superior approaching, Verenos stood to attention and snapped off a salute.

"Follow me." The Primus said without preamble.

Knowing that it was wiser to remain quiet than to try and speak, Verenos followed quietly as they made their way through the capital building of the Alliance and down the stairs into the command center where the Primus controlled the movements and actions of the entire Alliance Militia.

Moving down several flights of stairs and into dimly lit hallways the Primus made his way past soldiers who all snapped to rigid attention and saluted as he passed them by. Trailing him closely, Galaxus Verenos kept pace with his superior until he finally entered through a double door into the situation room.

“Group, atten-SHUN!” announced one of the armor clad guards who stood watch at the door as the Primus and Verenos entered. Immediately, the senior officers in the room came to attention and saluted, only to have the Primus gesture in dismissal at them as he made his way to his office at the back of the great chamber.

Entering the plush office, Verenos closed the door behind him and took a seat opposite the desk where Primus Antonius sat down.

Both men sat in silence as Antonius visibly calmed himself. Finally, after what seemed an hour, the Primus spoke. “It’s becoming difficult to justify these redeployments, Lucius. The Conclave is becoming quite a nuisance about it in fact.”

“I am... aware,” Verenos stated carefully, “of the delicate position that this project has put you in, but *believe* me when I tell you, sir, that this could be the biggest discovery in the history of our nation.”

“Larger than the discovery of non-human life?” The Primus replied sarcastically, “Larger than the discovery of Kobol ten years ago?”

“Yes.” Verenos replied flatly. “If the information we have received is correct then this...”

“Yes,” The Primus cut him off, “*If* the information is correct.”

“Primus, the information comes from one of *your* sources. How can you doubt its validity?”

“It’s not the validity of *my* source that I doubt.”

Sensing where the conversation was going Verenos steeled himself for a strong debate. “Primus, I know that you and Precentor Thomasi have had your... differences, but that doesn’t...”

“Thomasi is a career minded opportunist who seeks his own aggrandizement at the cost of the greater good.” The Primus snapped.

Seeing that argument with the Primus on the subject would do no good, Verenos decided to change his tact. “Be that as it may, he has confirmed what your source has told us and even elaborated on it somewhat. This Battlestar, as they call it, is the most impressive warship I have ever seen.”

“Yes, I have reviewed the battle ROMs sent in by the Kraken and I am forced to agree with you. This ship is impressive. I am just not comfortable with you assigning Thomasi to capture it.”

“He is quite capable of the task, Primus, and has already devised the plan to make it happen.”

“Yes, a plan that, at your behest, I am putting into action and taking much criticism for in the Conclave.” Antonius replied. “I am just concerned that Thomasi will use this for his own political ends.”

“Primus, if we can capture this ship intact his political ambitions will be secondary to the acclaim that *you* receive for orchestrating it.”

“Yes, yes.” The Primus said waving off Verenos attempt at flattery. “And yours too, of course.”

“Primus, I live only to serve the Alliance.”

The Primus smiled knowingly. “As do we all.”

A blinding flash of light heralded the Battlestar Prometheus’ appearance in space, followed shortly thereafter by two other flashes which brought the Gunstars Sentinel and Vigilant into being on either side of the massive warship.

Floating in the blackness, the massive warship, fresh with battle scars from her recent encounter with Terran Alliance forces, was a massive military bastion in space.

Inside the Combat Information Center, or C.I.C., which served as the nerve center of the ship, the crew moved busily about performing their post-jump operations. Standing calmly at the center of this great performance was their maestro, Commander Jonathan Turner.

“Report.” Turner commanded.

“Jump six thirty one complete sir. The Sentinel and the Vigilant are in position on our flanks.” Lieutenant Allain Halloran reported from his operation station.

“Very well, launch all fighters and begin jump prep.”

“Yes sir.” Halloran replied.

“Colonel Ryan, contact Archangel and tell him to jump to waypoint delta. Have him report back as soon as it’s clear.”

“Yes sir.” Said Colonel Ryan, the executive officer of the ship.

Turner nodded and looked around the C.I.C.. Seeing that all was well, he turned around and made his way to the exit. "I'll be in my quarters. Let me know when we're ready to jump."

Sitting inside his cockpit, Captain Jason Allen checked his status readout for what seemed to be the hundredth time when suddenly the disorientating sensation that accompanied a faster than light jump washed over him.

Inside his mind he felt his consciousness expand so far that he felt like the entire universe existed inside his skull. He could look around and see the worlds that he called home in the palm of his hand, while the rest of the universe seemed to rush past him. Then, as quickly as it had happened, space seemed to collapse around him, rushing into his head and crushing the thoughts and life from him. He could feel his insides turning and tearing in his body and he opened his mouth to scream but only vacuum filled his lungs.

With a sudden lurch that left him momentarily disoriented, he blinked his eyes and found himself once again in his cockpit, firmly entrenched in reality.

Checking his instruments he confirmed that his mind wasn't lying to him. Only a second had passed since he had first felt the tingling sensation that accompanied the beginning of a jump.

"Slider, Prometheus: You are go for launch." The voice of Allain Halloran filled Slider's flight helmet.

"Roger Prometheus. Ace squadron, this is Ace lead: Launch."

Bracing himself against his head rest, Slider looked out the cockpit canopy and saw the launch officer, Lieutenant Harrison, throw him a quick thumbs up signal before he was slammed into the seat as his Viper Mark Seven was shot down the launch tube at high speed.

It took only seconds before he found himself in space looking out at a starscape that seemed to stretch on forever.

Switching his dradis from standby to active mode, he began scanning space in search of enemy craft.

"Prometheus this is Slider, all scopes are clear at Jump plus one."

"Slider this is Prometheus," Colonel Ryan said in his helmet, "Take your squadron and form a perimeter across the forward axis of the fleet. Report when in position."

“Roger Prometheus.” Slider replied switching over his radio to the squadron internal frequency. “All Aces form on me, weapons hold.”

As he listened to the acknowledgements from his pilots, Slider allowed his thoughts to drift for a moment back to the last conversation he had had with Sheba just a couple of hours before.

It was supposed to have been a routine intelligence update, but as was usually the case with them, other matters had interceded.

“This is the best chart that Archangel could get before he jumped out of the system.” Sheba had told him as she laid the chart of the system they were due to jump into out for Slider to see.

Slider nodded as he studied the chart but didn’t reply.

Sheba watched him quietly for several moments before finally speaking up. “You know, I’ve been meaning to tell you...”

“Ok, looks good.” Slider said interrupting her. “Thanks for the update Captain.”

Picking up his flight helmet he gathered it under his arm and made to leave but Sheba called out to him.

“Damn it Jason, I’m *sorry*.” She said, “I shouldn’t have...”

“Your right, you *shouldn’t* have.” Jason growled as he turned to face her, “But something as trivial as feelings never stopped you before so why the frack should it have stopped you then?”

Both pilots had stared each other in the eyes for a long moment, pain and anger clouded their expressions until finally Sheba had brushed by him in an angry huff.

The last acknowledgment coming in over the radio shook Jason from the last vestiges of his reverie but the feelings of frustration and anger still lingered as he issued the orders to put his squadron into a defensive position around the Prometheus.

“Fracking women.” He grumbled shaking his head.

CHAPTER 2

PLANS WITHIN PLANS

Precentor Rollo Thomasi stared at the tactical display on the bridge of the *Kraken*, with great interest as its status was updated to account for the report that had just been issued to him.

“So the *Prometheus* *has* changed course.” He spoke aloud to his second in command as he stroked his goatee. “Obviously, the run in with Precentor Ladicus and the *Fire Hellion* has alerted him to our presence.”

“But... sir, Precentor Ladicus thought it would be wise to probe...”

“Ladicus is as clumsy as he is stupid.” Thomasi growled, cutting off Centurion Jamis’ statement. “He always was and he always will be.” He inhaled deeply to regain control of his emotions. “Order Precentor Alcomb to take the Judicator to way point alpha four and begin monitoring the system for signs of activity.”

“Yes sir.” Jamis replied. “Do you think that Precentor Alcomb will find the *Prometheus* there?”

“No, but it is a move that Commander Turner will expect and that is what I want-- to lull him into a sense of security. Precentor Ladicus has been unable to understand that.”

“I see.”

Thomasi turned to Jamis and looked him in the eyes for a long moment and he could see that Jamis did indeed understand his strategy and the subtlety to it. This pleased him since he had taken a special interest in Jamis for sometime, actually developing him into a protégé of sorts.

“I believe you *do* see, Centurion Jamis.” The Precentor said with a sly smile. “Deliver those orders and then pack your kit. You are being transferred to the *Fire Hellion*.”

“Yes sir.” Jamis replied.

“I want you to take a shuttle over to the *Fire Hellion* and relieve Precentor Ladicus. Do with him what you will but he has failed me for the last time.”

“Yes sir.” Jamis replied grimly, crossing his right arm across his chest in salute.

Thomasi smiled as he returned the salute. “You are in command now, *Precentor* Jamis. Don’t fail me.”

“I won’t sir. Thank you.”

Thomasi waved away the newly minted Precentor and turned to his operations officer, Kommandant Harall. “You are my new second. Post yours and Precentor Jamis’ promotion orders in the fleet database and appoint yourself a successor to your position.”

“Yes sir!”

“Once that is done, alert all commands that we are redeploying the fleet to accommodate the new maneuvers made by the Prometheus. Oh, and one more thing Harall...”

“Sir?”

“Inform all commanders that the next person who engages the Prometheus without my express permission will answer to me *personally*.”

“Jump number six thirty five complete sir.” Halloran reported wearily from his station. “Sentinel and Vigilant are deploying in defensive formation and Slider reports that his squadron will be launched in two minutes.”

Commander Turner nodded his head and rubbed his eyes. “I’ll be glad when this is done.”

Colonel Ryan nodded in agreement. “When was the last time you slept? You look like hell.”

“Me? When was the last time *you* slept?” Turner countered.

Ryan chuckled. “I got some sleep during the last jump. Remember that two hour break you gave me?”

Turner nodded, remembering that he had given the X.O. some down time. “Ok, you win. Notify me when we’re ready for the next jump.”

“That’s only 30 minutes.”

Turner smiled. “Price you pay to be the big man.”

Doctor Lucian Zylman shook his head to get rid of the nauseous feeling he always had following an FTL jump. It helped only a little as the chicken dinner he had ate only an hour ago threatened to revisit him in a not so pleasant manner.

“Dear gods I hate that.” He complained bitterly to his counterpart, Doctor Hal Creighton. “I swear that if we ever find Earth I might just stay there so I don’t have to put up with this any...mmmfhhh.”

His words were cut off as he leaned over a nearby trash can and allowed his rebellious stomach to expel the recently ingested dinner, which he had actually complimented the chef on.

It didn’t, as the old saying went, taste as good coming back up as it did going down.

Across the room, Doctor Creighton laughed out loud as Zylman made agonizing sounds while vomiting up his meal. He actually laughed so hard that tears came to his eyes.

“Oh gods, that’s not very fracking funny Hal.” Zylman said once he completed his regurgitation task.

“Says you.” Replied a very amused Doctor Creighton. “I think it’s bloody fantastic! Besides, we only have one more to go so cheer up.”

Zylman was able to fix his colleague with a withering stare before his eyes went wide and he placed his head back in the trash can.

Smiling, Creighton turned back to his data console and tried to hide his surprise when a device in his pocket began to vibrate. Looking over his shoulder and seeing Zylman’s head still deeply buried in the trash can, Creighton slipped the small flat rectangular object from his pocket and saw that he had received another private message from his superiors back home. He then slipped it back in his pocket and stood.

“I’m going to call it a day for now. I’ll see you later?”

Zylman, engrossed with his riotous stomach, waved his fellow scientist away with an impatient gesture.

Chuckling to himself, Creighton walked out of the office and made his way to his quarters where he accessed the data from the device by plugging it into his private computer console. After reading the contents of the message he pressed the button on the device that wiped its memory.

He re-read the message on his display screen and then erased it from the computer.

Creighton leaned back mulled over the implications of his latest update. He had been an intelligence man all of his adult life and had spent time on every colony world that humanity occupied but his current mission had to be the most dangerous yet.

First his previous mission almost goes up in smoke right in front of him, and then he's rescued only to be taken into the heart of enemy territory and ALL without being compromised. Creightons' luck amazed him to no end.

The fact that his mission orders had been modified to include the Prometheus mission had only made things even more precarious for him, but if he succeeded, and he had no doubt that he would, the rewards for him would be great. Promotions and glory awaited him when he finally returned home.

He let that thought remain as he closed his eyes to drift off to sleep. He tossed and turned over the next couple of hours and strangely, his smile never left his face.

As soon as Jonathan Turner saw where he was he knew he was dreaming.

Looking around he saw not the streamlined C.I.C. that he called his own, but the one he had occupied on the Battlestar Pegasus as its X.O. just eighteen months prior.

"The view is a lot different when you're in charge, eh John?" said a voice from behind him.

Spinning around he found himself looking into the face of the woman who had been his commanding officer for so long.

"You weren't kidding when you said *that* Admiral."

She smiled. "I know. I remember what it was like when I was first promoted."

"Yeah, but you had an entire fleet support structure that you could count on. I'm out here all alone."

Admiral Helena Cain nodded in agreement but her eyes showed no hint of sympathy. "Yes you are John, but that's because you are at your best when working without a net. It's why I recommended you for this command."

Turner nodded remembering that she had told him the exact same thing in a communiqué a couple of days before the Prometheus had departed Scorpion Station.

"I hate to say this, but sometimes I wish I were still your X.O."

Cain frowned. "That doesn't sound like the John Turner I know."

"I know." Turner said quietly. "But it always seemed like you had all the answers, no matter the situation."

“That’s because I had you to help me find them John.”

Turner looked curiously at the Admiral, shocked by her answer. After all, this was Admiral Helena Cain, the greatest strategic mind to command a Battlestar since Commander Alexander Carlyle from the first Cylon war.

Carlyle had gone on to become Commanding Admiral of the entire Colonial Defense Force and had almost single handedly reorganized it into a modern effective fighting force and there were many who thought that Cain was the re-incarnation of Carlyle and that she would follow in his foot steps.

It shouldn’t have surprised him though as she had always done her best to live down the hype that surrounded her. She had, in fact, told Turner once that the secret to her success was that she surrounded herself with successful people.

Turner had never realized that she meant *him* when she had said that.

“Your X.O. is young but he has a good head on his shoulders John. Use that and you won’t go wrong.”

Suddenly, Turner felt the world around him become unsteady and he immediately knew what was happening. “We’re jumping.”

Cain smiled. “Guess you better get back to the C.I.C. *Commander.*”

Turner nodded and then his eyes shot open.

Sitting up on his bunk he looked around and found the call button for the line to the C.I.C.

“Combat.” The voice of Colonel Ryan said.

“This is the Commander, what’s going on?”

“We just completed our jump sir and we are deploying our forces as we speak.”

“Why didn’t you wake me prior to the jump?” Turner asked while trying not to sound irritated.

“You looked like you were ready to fall over sir and we were jumping ahead of schedule so I made the call. I apologize if I have upset you.”

Turner shook his head. “No, no you’re fine Colonel. I appreciate your concern too.”

“Not a problem sir. Will you be joining us?”

“Yeah, I’ll be there in a minute.”

Hanging up the handset Turner stood up from his bunk and stretched sending a silent word of thanks to the dream version of Admiral Cain for her advice. That done, he pulled on his jacket, buttoned it up and made his way out the door towards the C.I.C.

“Sir I have a report from the Battlecruiser *Avenger*.” The newly promoted Centurion Harall announced from his station behind the command chair of Precentor Thomasi.

“Proceed.”

Moving from his station, Harall walked over to stand in front of his commanding officer with a sheet of paper in his hand. “The *Avenger* reports that the *Prometheus* has moved into system M-717 and is in orbit around its fifth planet.”

Thomasi nodded. “The star in that system is a type J which emits a lot of radiation and makes sensor information unreliable at best. Turner is using it to hide his ships while he plans his next move.”

“But wouldn’t that put his ships and crew at risk from radiation poisoning?”

“Not if he hides them in a suitable mass shadow.”

“Like the one provided by the fifth planet.” Harall said as he caught on. “And with the advanced protection his ships offer...”

“He will be able to stay there indefinitely.” Thomasi finished.

“And we can’t go in after them because our ships wouldn’t last long enough in that radiation to engage them successfully.”

Thomasi leaned back and stroked his goatee thoughtfully for a moment, analyzing the problem in his mind before looking up at Harall, an idea gleaming in his eyes. “Are they still leaving behind scout ships in the systems that they have recently departed from?”

“Yes sir.”

Thomasi smiled. “Good. Establish a secure link with Jamis aboard the *Fire Hellion*. I think I have a plan to flush our quarry from its hiding place.”

CHAPTER 3

BAITING THE TRAP

As Slider climbed down the ladder from his Viper cockpit, he was met on the deck by his counterpart, Captain Josh ‘Shooter’ Wakefield who looked fresh in his flight suit compared to Jason, who felt every inch of sweat and irritation inside his after sitting in his cockpit for the last seven hours.

“Hey boss man.” Shooter greeted.

“Hey kid, how ya doing?” Slider wearily replied.

“Fair sight better than you I’d say.”

Slider nodded in agreement. “Yeah. Quick change and a refuel and back I go.”

Shooter shook his head in disagreement. “CAG ordered me to take my new nuggets on their first CAP, give you guys a bit of a break.”

Slider looked at his counterpart for a moment as the reality of what he said sunk in and then a small smile spread across his face. “Kid, I owe you one.”

“Don’t thank me, thank Sheba. She suggested it to the CAG. Said you guys had been up there for almost eight hours straight with all these jumps and that you guys probably needed some downtime. CAG and the X.O. agreed.”

“Well I’ll be damned.” Slider said, amazed at Sheba’s generosity. “I didn’t think she had that kind of kindness in her.”

“Well it’s not a totally unselfish thing.” Shooter said with a sly smile. “She also talked the CAG into letting her go up with me as an assistant instructor.”

“And the other shoe drops.”

Both men shared a chuckle as Slider shook Shooter’s hand. “I still owe you kid.” The older pilot said.

“Damn right you do. Now go get a shower. You’re smellin up the whole frackin deck.”

Slider smiled as he turned to walk away, only to find Major Karla ‘Ice Queen’ Horvath standing in his way.

“Don’t bother.” She said as Slider raised his hand to salute. “I just need to update you on some stuff before I go out on my mission.”

“Mission?” Slider asked, his curiosity aroused.

“Yes. The Commander has me taking a Raptor out to our last jump point to scan for pursuit.”

“Thought that was Archangel’s job.”

“He’s been up as long as you and your guys have so I’m cutting him some slack and doing it myself. You’re going to have the shop until I get back, ok?”

“No problem.”

“Give your pilots a few hours of downtime then start them on the usual rotation.” Horvath ordered. “If Shooter checks out his nuggets, you can assign each one of them to an experienced pilot to fly CAP.”

“Sounds good boss. Oh, one more thing.” Slider said as Horvath started to turn away from him. “If she’s up for it, I want to put Sheba on the CAP cycle this time. I think she can use a bit of stick time.”

Horvath considered the thought for a moment then nodded. “Fine, but I do *not* want you both up at the same time, got it?”

“Got it.”

“Good. Now go get your CAP cycle set up and then get some rack time.”

“Yes ma’am.”

Slider smiled as he turned and began to make his way to the pilots’ locker room. *Sheba should love this.*

“What are you doing here Doc?” Asked Ice Queen as she climbed into her waiting Raptor.

Dr. Creighton, in full flight gear, sitting in the rear seat usually occupied by an electronic warfare specialist, smiled as she stepped into the ship. “Commander Turner thought it would be a good idea for me to tag along on this mission since I have been able to decode some of their message traffic and I have a working translation of their language.”

“Sounds like a good idea.” Ice Queen said, “I just need to confirm it with him though since he didn’t give me any advance notice.”

“That would be appropriate I think.” The doctor replied turning to face his instruments.

Ice Queen made her way past the doctor and strapped herself into her seat, connecting her life support and communications lines to the ship as she did.

“Flight this is the CAG, patch me through to Combat.”

A couple of seconds later, the comm line clicked and the voice of Lieutenant Allain Halloran’s voice came through loud and clear. “Combat.”

“Combat, CAG: You have any information on my E.W.O. being replaced for this mission?”

“Stand by.”

Ice Queen took the time while waiting for Halloran’s reply to begin her second stage pre-flight operations. Checking her engine readings and seeing everything in the normal range, she switched the setting from standby to idle.

This had the effect of bringing more power into the firing chambers of the Raptor’s engines and bringing up the pressure in the propellant tanks so that they would be able to take off when clearance came.

“CAG, combat.”

“CAG, go ahead.”

“Roger, we just checked the rosters and we see that the X.O. pulled Cat Eyes off the mission an hour ago with no designated replacement.”

“Roger that Combat. Post on the board that Doctor Creighton will be riding backseat with me on this mission.”

“Roger CAG, Copy that the Doc is in the backseat.”

“CAG out.”

Completing her preflight checks, Ice Queen flipped the switch that closed the rear entry hatch and pressurized the cabin. “Buckle up Doc, it’s time to go.”

“Ready.” The doctor replied as he latched his seat harness.

“Ok, now don’t touch anything unless I tell you to. I don’t want to give our position away.”

“Understood Major, you won’t even know that I’m here.”

“Sounds like a plan.” Ice Queen replied turning back to her instruments.
“Prometheus, CAG. Raptor one two five is ready for taxi and take off.”

In the C.I.C. Allain Halloran checked his status display one more time and then turned to Petty Officer Theresa Madrid. “Maddie, tell the CAG she is clear and to report back once she is on station.”

Madrid nodded to acknowledge Halloran and keyed her comm system. “CAG, Prometheus: You are cleared for taxi and take off. Notify command when you are at jump minus one and again when you are on station.”

“Roger Prometheus, taxiing now. Take off in two minutes.” Horvaths’ voice said over the loud speakers.

Walking into the C.I.C., Commander Turner yawned and took in the scene in front of him. It was deep into the night shift, the C.I.C. was on minimal manning and all was quiet.

Normally, Turner wouldn’t be up at an hour like this one, leaving what was known as the ‘graveyard’ shift to the officer of the day. In tonight’s case, it was Lieutenant Halloran. For some reason though, he couldn’t sleep and after reading for two hours and then tossing and turning for another hour he had decided to walk the ship and see how things were going.

“Commander on deck!” Maddie announced as she came to attention.

“Carry on.” Turner said easily as he made his way to Halloran. “Report.”

“Sir, the CAG is rolling out on her mission now and will report in at standard intervals. All sections are on graveyard staffing and the dradis is clear.”

The commander nodded to acknowledge Halloran’s report and moved to the situation table, Halloran following him. “Any problems tonight?”

“No sir.” Halloran replied shaking his head. “Just a switch out on the back seat ride for the CAG’s mission, nothing we couldn’t handle.”

“What switch out?” Turner asked, his curiosity piqued.

“Doctor Creighton replaced Cat Eyes on the mission sir. It has your initials in the authorization block so I assumed you knew.”

Turner studied the flight report that Halloran offered and shook his head. It was uncommon for him to forget small things when things got hectic, like they had been recently. It wasn't, however, unheard of.

"I'm not usually too hot on replacing our people with civilians but since he's got a military background I suppose I'll let this one slide." Turner said handing the report back to Halloran. "Besides, he has been instrumental in decoding the Alliance signals we've been intercepting. I guess we can reward him with a little fun time in the cockpit."

Halloran nodded as he returned the report to the folder on his console then turned back to face the commander. "Will you be assuming command tonight sir?"

"Oh no, you don't get out of duty *that* easily Lieutenant." Turner replied with a smile. "I'm going back to bed. Notify me when the CAG gets on station."

"Yes sir."

With that Turner walked away and left Halloran to deal with the routine duties of the graveyard shift. As he cleared the entryway he heard someone report that the CAG had just made her jump. He smiled thinking that all was running smoothly for a change.

Two hours later, he would realize just how wrong he had been.

On the bridge of the Battlecruiser *Kraken*, Precentor Rollo Thomasi relaxed in his seat and watched the tactical display which updated every ten seconds based on the reports that were being automatically beamed in from the ships assigned to his command.

Slowly bringing his cup of tea to his lips he watched as the screen showed the latest updates from the remote sensor buoys that his ships had dropped in the systems where the Prometheus was likely to show up.

"Wait." The Precentor said calmly, lifting a finger and pointing to the display. "Right there, grid sector eight four. Enlarge and enhance."

"Yes Precentor."

Thomasi watched as the one inch by one inch display square expanded until it engulfed one whole quarter of the tactical display screen. "Back up the time index by one centon."

Moving quickly, the crewman at the tactical station did as he commanded. Thomasi paid him no mind as he focused in on a tiny, almost imperceptible blip on the screen.

“There.” He said as he stood and walked over to the display. “Run an E.M. analysis on that energy spike.”

The tech at the station immediately set to work and it didn’t take long for him to hand a sheet of paper to Thomasi with the results of the analysis.

“A point two spike in the lower Theta band.” Thomasi said to the tech. “What do you think this means?”

“Well sir,” the tech said, “Normally this would be looked at as a negligible jump in the background radiation.”

“Your tone tells me that you don’t subscribe to that notion.”

“No sir, I don’t.” the tech replied.

“Explain.”

“Based on what we know of Colonial technology sir, we have deduced that their jump systems use a radioactive isotope that emits a low level electromagnetic pulse in the gamma band.”

“Yes, but this is Theta band radiation.” Thomasi said, leading the conversation.

“Yes sir, this is true. However, Hevracite ore gives off a sympathetic Theta band pulse when exposed to a gamma source.”

“Indeed it does.” Thomasi said with a satisfied smile, “And the asteroids in that system are largely composed of Hevracite, correct?”

“Yes sir, which is why I think they have a small scout ship in the system watching for us.”

Thomasi smiled for a moment. “My thoughts exactly. What is your name?”

“Technician First Class Jarvo sir.” The tech proudly said.

“The Alliance needs intelligent men making decisions Mister Jarvo. Many technicians would have overlooked that small of an E.M. pulse. You, however, not only took notice of it but you also extrapolated its significance.”

“I am honored to serve in any capacity that I can sir.”

“Your patriotism and dedication is noted.” Thomasi said, placing a hand on the tech’s shoulder. “I hereby promote you to Technical Sergeant. Your new assignment will be as my Yeoman until such time as a slot opens for you at the Mars Naval Academy.”

The new Technical Sergeants eyes widened as the impact of his situation dawned on him. Not only was he being promoted, but one of the most senior Precentors in the fleet was going to personally nominate him to the fleet academy to become an officer.

“Sir, I-“ he stammered as he fought for control of his emotions. “Thank you sir. I won’t let you down.” He finally said.

“See that you don’t. Now, report to the Quartermaster and pick up the accouterments prescribed by your new rank and position. Centurion Harall,” the Precentor turned his attention to his second in command, “Notify the *Fire Hellion* to execute order twenty one.”

“Vero, meus domini.” Harall replied in Terran proper.

Thomasi smiled. By using the language of the Terran capital world and not the more common Kobali tongue, he had subtly reminded Thomasi that while the new Tech Sergeant might be the hero of the hour, he wasn’t from Terra.

This would, of course, work against the sergeant as he entered the academy and navigated his way up the ranks of the Alliance officer corps. However, even though Thomasi had been raised in an influential family in the Terran capital city of Romalin, he himself had never placed much stock in the old prejudices against people who were not from Terra. He considered it to be a counterproductive and short sighted policy.

Of course, Thomasi was considered a maverick in the Alliance military. A practical man and a brilliant strategist who believed that those who displayed the talent deserved the chance no matter what background they came from. His more conservative superiors, however, disagreed with him, though more out of a desire to maintain the security of their positions rather than the misguided perception that those from Terra were actually better than those from the other worlds of the Alliance.

The capture of the Prometheus would change all of that. No one would be able to hold him back after he captured the most powerful warship ever encountered. With the Prometheus as his trophy, he would be promoted to Galaxus and then he would be able to affect change on a grand scale. By the time he finally ascended to the position of Primus of the Alliance Expansionary Fleet, a new more modern philosophy would prevail, catapulting the Alliance military into the current time frame.

And after that he would see the crowning achievement of his lifetime: the reunification of humanity under the wise aegis of the Terran Alliance.

With pride in his heart he would lead the Armies of the Terran Alliance back to the homes of their long lost brothers and reunite them with their brethren... whether they wanted to be reunited or not.

CHAPTER 4

OPENING GAMBIT

Raptor two one two, as it was officially listed on the Prometheus flight board, burst into real space in a flash of light and immediately began evasive maneuvers to avoid a large asteroid that was rolling through space towards it.

Inside the cockpit, Dr. Hal Creighton held tight on his arm rests as he fought the momentary surge of gravity produced by the Raptor's abrupt maneuver.

"Close one Major?" he asked.

"You could say that." Horvath replied as she saw the asteroid they had narrowly avoided roll by outside her cockpit window. "This is what I hate about pirate jump points."

"Indeed. I must say though, it is somewhat good to be back in a Raptor."

Somewhat surprised, Horvath turned and looked into the back of the ship. "You flew Raptors?"

"Why yes." Creighton replied proudly. "I spent four years in the Colonial fleet aboard the Battlestar *Atlantia*. The old *Atlantia*, mind you, not the newer Mercury class."

"Why didn't you tell anyone?"

"Well I suppose it's because no one ever asked me."

Horvath nodded taking the answer at face value. "Well the back seat position hasn't changed too awful much in the last twenty years. Do you think you can remember how to operate that equipment?"

Creighton smiled. "My dear Major, once I learn something I *never* forget it."

"Good. Then switch on the passive dradis sensors while I put us in stealth mode."

"Yes sir." The doctor said flipping her a salute.

The Raptor grew quiet as Major Horvath went about putting the ship into stealth mode. The only sound was her voice as she quietly went through the checklist.

"Engines from active to stand-by, check. Internal power systems to minimum, check. Radio from active to passive scan, check. E.M. Dampening field from stand-by to active, check. That does it." She said as the lights in the cockpit faded to a dim blue. "We're now on silent running."

“Dradis is set to passive scan, Major.” The doctor replied, “All other systems have been shut down.”

“Good to see that you were right about remembering everything, Doc. Makes it a lot easier when I don’t have to do everything.”

“Glad I could be of help.” The doctor said as he stretched out his legs. “I assume that now we sit here and see if the enemy has been tracking us?”

Horvath nodded. “Exactly Doctor,” she said, “Now we wait.”

“Precentor Jamis!” called Centurion Axalon, “Target ship has just entered our sector and the flag ship has given us permission to execute order twenty one.”

Jamis smiled at his second in command and nodded. Here is where he would prove worthy of Precentor Thomasi’s trust in him. “Inform Kommandant Jaeger to begin the operation and to notify me when he is in position.”

“Yes sir!” Axalon replied as he snapped off a quick salute.

“Helm, all ahead one third.” Jamis commanded.

“All ahead one third!” the helm officer echoed.

“Flight officer, stand by to launch fighters at my command.”

“All fighters are manned and ready sir. Standing by to launch at your command.” The Flight officer replied.

Jamis folded his arms across his broad chest and studied the tactical display closely, observing where their target was attempting to hide in the asteroid field. Suddenly, the blip that represented the target faded and disappeared.

“Sir, the target vessel has disappeared from sensors!” Came the panicked voice of the sensor officer.

“Calm yourself, lieutenant.” Jamis replied with a satisfied smile. “Our quarry has not yet escaped us, they have only activated their stealth equipment.”

“Yes sir.” The embarrassed officer replied. “I apologize for my outburst.”

“Noted, lieutenant. Now attend to your duties.”

The junior officer nodded and turned back to his station while Jamis continued to watch the display closely. After five minutes of silence he finally spoke.

“According to the information provided by our informant aboard the Prometheus, a Raptor FTL system takes approximately seven centons to cool down once they shut down in open space and takes at least two centons to emergency start.” He said as he stroked his beard. “How long until we are in position?”

“Sir, we will be in attack position in three centons at current speed.” Centurion Axalon replied.

Jamis nodded. “Very good. At this speed and with all of the interference from the asteroid field they won’t be able to notice us slipping up behind them.”

“Yes sir.” Axalon replied. “Two point seven five centons to target.”

Jamis smiled. Precentor Thomasi had shown great faith by giving him a field commission and handing command of a Battlecruiser over to him, especially considering how young he was at only thirty two standard yarins old. Today he would justify that faith by helping Thomasi draw out their prey.

“One centon to target sir.”

“Flight officer, standby to launch fighters and recovery craft.” Jamis commanded.

“Standing by sir.” Came the reply.

Yes, today would go down as a great day in Jamis’ history. Today would be the beginning of his trip to glory.

“Major, I’ve got something a bit strange back here.” Doctor Creighton reported from behind her in the Electronic Warfare suite.

“What is it?” Horvath asked tiredly.

“Well it’s hard to make out with all of this Dradis interference but it looks like there might be a ship in the system.”

Instantly, Horvath sat upright, all of her senses alert. “Transfer your data to my terminal up here.”

It took only a moment for the Dradis display to transfer to the cockpit and what Horvath saw sent her combat reflexes into motion.

Her hands became a blur as she brought the engines and power systems online. “Strap in Doc! We got company!”

Checking his seat harness, the doctor then reached forward and switched the Dradis to active mode. What he saw underscored Horvath's sense of urgency.

"I have one Conqueror Class Battlecruiser closing fast." He announced as he read the Dradis display. "It appears that they are launching fighters as well."

"Frack me." Horvath growled as she powered the engines and began maneuvering the Raptor out from the asteroid field. "Do you remember how to spin up the FTL drive on this thing?"

"I think so." The doctor replied as he hurriedly brought up the FTL screen on his computer and began trying to set up for a jump. "It's been a while though."

"Great. Well do your best and I will try and talk you through any questions you have." The CAG said as she struggled to maneuver around an asteroid that was in her path.

Suddenly the Raptor bucked hard, almost throwing the doctor and Horvath out of their seats.

"Oh my gods! They're shooting at us!" The doctor exclaimed.

"Keep your panties on Doc, I need you focused." Horvath replied, her tone icy and calm.

"Focused, right." The doctor said pulling his wits together. "I, um, I have seven, no ten small contacts on an intercept course."

"Where?"

"Everywhere! They're trying to surround us!"

Horvath nodded and threw the Raptor into a steep dive as she finally cleared the asteroid field. "Hang on, I'm gonna red line the engines!"

Creighton grabbed hold of his armrests and braced himself against the sudden surge of thrust from the engines. No sooner had he done this than he was jolted forward against the restraints as the Raptor seemed to crumple around him.

Alarms blared and the hissing of escaping atmosphere could be heard as he closed up his helmet and went to his self contained oxygen supply.

Looking up he saw that the Dradis board was caved in towards him and that smoke was pouring in from behind him. Knowing that the situation wasn't good he looked forward to see Major Horvath slumped over the side of her pilot's chair.

Reaching for the radio, Creighton prepared to broadcast a surrender message on all frequencies but instead chose to activate the automated distress signal first.

It was the last thing he did as he felt the Raptor jump under him one last time before darkness engulfed him.

Commander Turner was awakened by the sound of the Action Stations klaxon blaring over the ship's intercom.

Rising quickly he pulled on his uniform tunic, pants and boots and quickly made his way from his quarters to the C.I.C.

"Report!" he commanded as he entered, still buttoning the last button on his tunic.

"Sir, we just received an A.D.S. from the CAG in system 178 alpha." Reported Colonel James Ryan. "I put us at action stations thinking that this could be the prelude to an attack."

Turner nodded. "Good thinking Colonel. Get Captains Allen, Percival, Wakefield and Johnston up here and notify all ships to spin up their FTL drives."

"Yes sir." Ryan replied.

"Should I launch the alert Vipers sir?" Lieutenant Halloran asked from the Operations station.

"No," Turner replied, "Keep them hot in the launch tubes but don't launch yet."

"Yes sir."

"All sections are set at condition one sir." Master Chief Palmer said from his station behind the helm.

"Very well Chief. Stand by for combat maneuvering."

"Combat maneuvering, aye." The old non-com said as he turned to the two crewmen seated at the helm station. "Unlock the controls and set the zero on the scales."

"Report all contacts." Turner commanded, turning away from Palmer and the helm station.

"Sir, I have no contacts. The Dradis is clear." Halloran reported.

"No contacts sir, the scopes are clear." Said Colonel Ryan.

Turner nodded to acknowledge the reports as Slider, Sheba, Shooter and Archangel all arrived together and snapped off salutes.

“We got a distress call from the CAG a few moments ago.” Turner announced. “I’m going to assume the worst until proven otherwise. Slider, as of now you’re the CAG. Sheba, I’m putting you in charge of Slider’s squadron. Shooter, I want your squadron up and ready to deploy in ten minutes. Archangel, take an armed Raptor and jump into system 178 alpha. Do a quick assessment of the situation and then jump back and report.”

Turner received a quick chorus of “Yes sir.” From the assembled flight leaders and then he gestured for them to be on their way.

Sheba turned to leave but stopped when she felt a hand on her shoulder. Turning she saw Slider looking at her.

“Be careful ok?” he said quietly.

“Yeah.” She replied, not knowing what to make of his sudden tenderness.

As quick as it had happened though, it was gone as Slider turned back to the Commander to help co-ordinate the fighter strategy.

EPILOGUE

THE GAME IS AFOOT

Precentor Thomasi looked up from the report he was reading as Centurion Harall approached him and gave him a crisp salute.

“Beg to report sir.” The second in command said.

Thomasi nodded. “Proceed.”

“Sir, Precentor Jamis reports that he has accomplished his mission. Both members of the scout ship crew are alive and in custody.”

Thomasi smiled. “Pass along my compliments to Precentor Jamis and instruct him to begin interviewing them at once. Oh, and make sure they don’t suffer permanent harm.”

“Yes sir.”

Thomasi stood and walked across the bridge to his private office and entered, ensuring to close the door behind him. Once inside he sat down behind his desk and activated his secure channel radio.

“Were you successful?” the voice of Galaxus Verenos asked.

“Completely.” Thomasi replied. “We now have two members of the Prometheus crew in custody.”

“And you’re sure that this Commander Turner will attempt a rescue?” Verenos questioned.

“He will. It’s in his nature. He won’t leave anyone of his crew behind.”

The line was quiet for a moment, static and cosmic noise hissing in the background, before Verenos finally responded. “Very well. You may proceed with your plan. If it succeeds we will both profit handsomely from it. But if you fail...”

“I won’t.” Thomasi promised.

TO BE CONTINUED...

Alliance Military Rank Structure

PRIMUS- This is the highest rank in the Terran Alliance Military. The Primus is the Supreme Commander of both the Alliance Army and the Expansionary Fleet. He answers only to the Sae'tzar.

GALAXUS- The Alliance is divided up into Operational Theaters with a Galaxus controlling each one. A Galaxus' authority is over both ground and fleet units. A Galaxus' answer to the Primus.

PRECENTOR- Precentors command units at various levels, each level denoted with a numeral behind it. A Precentor (I) is the highest ranking Precentor in a group and is the nominal leader of that group. For fleet operations, a group usually consists of six to ten capital ships. (Example: A Precentor (VI) would be the 6th in the chain.) Seniority doesn't always make a Precentor superior to another as they are appointed by their superiors. Precentors command large capital class ships or army divisions.

CENTURION- One rank below a Precentor, a Centurion is usually in command of a regiment of foot soldiers or of a smaller capital ship (like a destroyer). They also act as second in command on larger capital class ships or in army divisions.

KOMMANDANT- One rank below Centurion, Kommandants are usually squadron commanders or senior command staff members on a capital ship.

HAUPTMAN- Equivalent to the Colonial Rank of Captain.

LEFTENANT- Equivalent to the Colonial Rank of Lieutenant.