

BATTLESTAR PROMETHEUS

EPISODE 9: DESPERATE TIMES

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.

Precentor (XII) Romano Jamis: Commander of the Alliance Battlecruiser Fire Hellion.

PROLOGUE

CATCHING UP

Jonathan Turner shook his head in frustration as he listened to the report from his lead Raptor pilot, Captain Michael ‘Archangel’ Johnston.

“I’m sorry sir.” Archangel continued, “It looks like we missed the ship by about three hours based on the decay rate of the isotopes left behind.”

“Damnation,” Turner growled. “It’s like they know every step we’re taking.”

“Is it possible that they have a spotter out there following us?” asked Colonel Ryan.

“I don’t think so sir.” Replied Slider, the acting CAG. “We’ve been at this for two days now. Even if they could elude our sensors, our jump capability is over three times what their ships can do. We would have left them behind a long time ago.”

“Well they have to be tracking us somehow.” Said Sheba. “There’s no other explanation as to how they are staying one step ahead of us.

“*How* is what I want to know?” Colonel Ryan asked.

“People, I don’t care *how* they are tracking us, I just want it stopped-- *now*.” The Commander said. “X.O., you and Lieutenant Halloran begin a stem to stern search of the ship for anything that looks like a tracking device. I’ll be in my quarters planning our next move. Captain Johnston, Captain Allen, you’re with me.”

“Yes sir.” The X.O. replied as he turned to face Lieutenant Halloran. “Mister Halloran, contact all sections and have them begin assembling search teams from all non-essential personnel.”

“Yes sir.” Halloran replied.

“Maddie, pass the word: All off duty personnel are to assemble in the starboard hangar bay for search detail.” Colonel Ryan commanded.

“Yes sir.” Petty Officer Theresa Madrid replied.

“Sheba, Shooter, I want your pilots rested in case we have to get dirty. Tell them they need to be in their racks sleeping if they’re not in the cockpit or working on their planes.”

“Yes sir.” Both Captains acknowledged.

Ryan nodded to himself, satisfied with his actions. “Ok people,” he said as he turned to address the entire C.I.C., “We’ve got a lot of work to do and not a lot of time to do it. Based on our latest intell, we have ninety six hours to find the ship that took Major Horvath and Doc Creighton before it is able to rendezvous with other Alliance ships. I don’t have to tell you that our chances of successfully rescuing them will go down exponentially if that happens. Focus on your jobs. Watch out for your shipmates and we will get through this.”

Looking around the C.I.C. Ryan could see that his words had impacted the members of the Command Crew. A Battlestar crew was a family and nobody liked the thought of a family member in enemy hands.

Satisfied with what he saw, Ryan began looking over charts of the ship to determine the pattern of search he would have the teams conduct. It might take a while but he would find that damned tracking device.

CHAPTER 1

THE HUNTER AND THE HUNTED

“The operation proceeds apace sir.” The voice of Precentor Romano Jamis said as Precentor Rollo Thomasi listened intently from his command chair aboard his flagship, the *Kraken*. “We are en route to your position as we speak and are continuing to evade the enemy attempts to contain us. We will make our next report as scheduled, barring any unforeseen events. Hail Sae’tzar!”

Thomasi nodded as the transmission went to static and his second in command, Centurion Harall, turned off the speaker.

“It would seem sir, that Precentor Jamis has been successful beyond your expectations.” Harall said with a note of pride.

“You are mistaken, Centurion.” Thomasi replied. “He is performing exactly as I knew he would.”

“Of course.” Harall replied apologetically. “I did not mean to...”

Thomasi held his hand up and Harall went silent, watching as his commanding officer stood and moved towards him with calm grace.

“One thing you must understand about me,” Thomasi said quietly as he leaned in to whisper in Harall’s ear, “Is that I plan for every alternative both positive and negative. Do you know why I do this Centurion?”

“I wouldn’t presume to know your mind sir.” Harall replied diplomatically.

Thomasi began to walk slowly around the deathly still Centurion, like a Martian Sand Panther who was stalking its dinner. “You *should*. If I wanted *yes-man* as my second, I could have promoted anyone. I wanted someone who *thinks*, Centurion. I wanted someone who is intelligent and can understand the subtleties of my plans. So far, you have demonstrated these traits but it could be that I was mistaken. Am I mistaken, Centurion?”

“No sir.”

“Then tell me why I plan for every alternative.” Thomasi said as he came to a stop in front of Harall and looked him in the eye.

Harall knew fear at that moment. He had been promoted only recently and he knew that it would not be beyond the Precentor’s power to simply remove him from his new position and reassign him to some unpleasant duty on some backwater planet where he would never again see the light of day. As the thought of failure loomed in his head, the answer suddenly broke through the darkness. Harall held back a smile. After all, the Precentor wouldn’t have promoted him if he didn’t see some glimmer of potential, some spark that he thought he could use. He exhaled slowly.

“Because you don’t like surprises, sir.”

Thomasi smirked. “Correct. Now tell me why.”

His confidence gaining momentum, Harall stood taller. “Because surprises cause one to react, Sir. You like to remain in control and reaction always leaves a degree of control out of your grasp.”

Thomasi smiled. “Correct, Centurion. Therefore, Precentor Jamis’ performance has not exceeded my expectations because I expected as much from him.”

Thomasi gave his second one last parting glance before moving back to his chair and Harall understood immediately the unspoken message. *Don’t open your mouth unless you have something intelligent to say.*

Taking his seat again, Thomasi picked up his cup of tea and raised it to his lips, taking a long sip from it. “Record the following,” he commanded once he was done, “To Precentor Jamis from Precentor Thomasi: I have received your recent report and I am satisfied with the progress of your operation. Continue as planned and report to me when you reach nav point Omega. Hail Sae’tzar.”

“Done sir.” Harall reported as he punched the button that stopped the recording.

“Very well. Helm, plot a hyper-light to nav point Omega and notify me when you are done.”

“Yes sir!” The helm officer replied.

“Centurion Harall, alert all commands that they are to execute order twenty one alpha immediately.”

“Yes Precentor.”

Thomasi leaned back and took another sip of tea as he contemplated the outcome of his plans. All had gone well thus far but his plan was one that depended on speed and violence of action. The longer he stretched out the chase, the more obvious it would be that he was goading the Prometheus into a trap.

In addition, he had commandeered almost an entire fleet task force to execute his plan, with many of his ships coming from patrol duties in heavily populated systems that were under the control of influential members of the Conclave. Soon they would demand that the ships return to protect their trade shipments from ever increasing smuggling and rebel activities that had begun to plague the Alliance of late.

Yes, he thought to himself. It is time to begin the endgame.

Major Karla Horvath awoke to the sensation of cold pain running throughout her entire body. Her legs were stiff and felt like they were made of wood. Her arms, bound tightly behind her, ached from being in such an un-natural position for so long and her head felt like it was about to explode from behind her eyes.

At least I'm still alive, She thought to herself as she winced. *The pain reminds me with every breath.*

Squinting into the darkness she realized that she was still in the same cell that she had called home for the last two days. It was a disappointing realization for her as she had been dreaming that both she and Doctor Creighton had been rescued and were back aboard the Prometheus.

Opening her mouth and taking a breath, Horvath used her tongue to feel around her cracked and swollen lips. She tasted dried blood and the memories of her most recent interrogation at the hands of Precentor Jamis came flooding back on her.

She had been stretched out on a metal table stark naked and subjected to the cruel and leering stares of the enemy. While there she had been pumped full of narcotics and truth serums, touched in places she didn't care to think about by prodding steel rods that

were electrically charged, beaten into unconsciousness and then had her head slammed into buckets of water that were alternately near freezing or skin searing.

Every time they had asked her questions and every time she had refused to answer. Now, as she lay naked on the cold steel floor of her cell, she allowed herself to weep quietly and release the pent up anger and frustration she felt.

Deep inside she felt like screaming with rage until her voice was hoarse but she held it back, refusing to give the satisfaction to those whom were her captors. In the back of her mind she made a solemn promise that she would save this fury and rage for the time when it would be most useful and it could help her the most.

Until then she would endure.

“She’s awake.”

The sound of a gruff voice startled Horvath back to reality and she steeled herself for another round of questions. The door to her cell swung open and her interrogator, a large muscular man with hard eyes named Curatis, entered dragging a Steele chair behind him.

Closing the cell door, he swung the chair around and took a seat, crossing his legs slowly and then opening a file. It took several long moments for him to flip through the pages and while he did Horvath gathered her strength in preparation for what was to come.

“Well Major,” Curatis stated after a long silence, “I must admit that I admire your strength. You have been true to your government and their confidence in you is justified.”

“So glad you approve.” Horvath snarled as she attempted to sit up. She made no attempt to cover her nudity. To do so would only be a sign of weakness to her captors and she was determined not to show weakness in the face of her enemies.

“It is unfortunate that your loyalty is so misplaced.” Curatis said, ignoring her as if she had never spoken. “Even now, your ship is heading away from us at high speed. Seems that your commander has decided to cut his losses and move on.”

“Good move.” She replied, a sly smile forming across her cracked and swollen lips. “I would have done the same. No one is worth the risk of an entire crew.”

Curatis looked up from his files and stared hard at her for a moment. “You don’t find it disheartening to be left behind?”

“Not really.”

Horvath and Curatis both stared at each other for a long moment before Curatis finally stood and moved towards the door without saying anything. She watched him leave and then collapsed back to the floor, exhaustion overcoming her.

She knew for a fact that Commander Turner would never leave one of his crew in enemy hands, yet she couldn't help but wonder if what Curatis said was true. They were a long way from home and mounting a rescue mission would most certainly be dangerous.

Logically speaking, Turner should cut his losses and move on like she had stated to Curatis. She knew he wouldn't though, which meant that she had to be ready to act when the rescue attempt came. It would be up to her to find doc and get them both to a place where they could be recovered.

To do that though she would have to do some things that she personally abhorred. It didn't matter though. She was a soldier and soldiers sometimes had to make sacrifices. The Doctor would just have to owe her one.

A BIG one.

Jonathan Turner took a deep and steadying breath, feeling the heat from his muscles radiate away from him, as he raised his wooden sword to guard position and nodded to his opponent. Across from him, dressed in the same protective clothing that he wore stood Master Chief Palmer, his own wooden sword raised over his head for a slashing attack.

Moving with a speed and grace the belied his size, Chief Palmer brought his sword down in a powerful slashing motion, but halfway through, stopped and turned the sword sideways, sending it angling for Turner's neck.

Turner, having been trained in the seven forms of martial sword play by some of the greatest masters currently living, wasn't fooled by the Chief's attempted ploy. Keeping his blade upright he shifted his stance and moved the sword to easily deflect the Chief's blow.

Seeing his opponent off balance for a moment, Turner stepped forward, into the backward arc of the curved blade and slipped behind the Chief, all the while bringing his own mock blade up and resting it on the chief's shoulder, next to his neck.

"Quarter." The chief grumbled.

"Given." Turner replied, doffing his protective head gear.

With the match over, Turner collected his wooden sword and walked over to the locker that rested along the bulkhead. Opening it, he hung his training sword up in its rack and began to remove the protective padding he wore while training.

“Thanks for the workout Chief.” Turner said as he toweled the sweat off of his head.

“No problem sir.” The Chief replied as he stowed his own gear. “Next time though, pick on someone your own size.”

“Sorry Chief,” Turner chuckled, “It’s kind of hard to find anyone who actually *knows* any of the martial forms much less someone who is rated at my level.”

“Colonel Alexander is a 3rd Degree Master Swordsman, if I remember correctly.”

“Yes he is.” Turner replied with a smile, “I trained and tested him.”

“You trained Alexander?” Chief Palmer asked.

“He was my first student. It was just after I had finished competing in my first Martial Olympiad.”

Turner smiled as Palmer, a man who had known Turner for over ten years, and who prided himself on knowing the details of everything going on around him, adopted a shocked expression. “You competed in a Martial Olympiad?”

“Three actually.” Turner replied closing his locker and pulling on his uniform tunic. “Won a Bronze medal in the last one.”

Palmer looked ready to ask another question when the voice of Lieutenant Halloran blasted from over the intercom. “Pass the word throughout the ship: Commander Turner, contact C.I.C. please. Commander Turner, contact C.I.C.”

Buttoning the last button on his tunic, Turner walked over to the comm set on the wall and picked up the handset. “This is the Commander.”

“Sir,” replied the voice of Colonel Ryan, “We found the tracking device.”

CHAPTER 2

THE ENEMY WITHIN

“Sitrep.” Commander Turner ordered as he strode into the C.I.C.

“Sir, we’ve found out how the Alliance is tracking us.” Reported Colonel Ryan.

“How?”

“They’ve been tracking a tracer signal that we’ve been broadcasting.” Lieutenant Halloran said.

Turner, who had been moving towards the situation table, came to a sudden stop. “Say *again?*”

“Sir, we’ve been transmitting a tracer signal that’s been buried in our navigation relay beacon.” Halloran explained.

Turner’s face took on a new shade of color as the implications of what Halloran reported struck home.

The navigation relay beacon was an automated signal that the Prometheus navigation computer sent out on a special low band frequency. It was used by the navigation computer to update its position and drift calculations and also to cross reference the information by communicating with any other Colonial ships or navigation beacons that may be in communications range.

“How did you find it?” The Commander asked.

“I noticed a glitch in the navigational update program sir.” Halloran said. “It was taking twice the time to update and the information buffer seemed to have excess information. I notified the X.O. and he ordered me to do a line by line code diagnostic on the program.”

“He found the code buried in the update subroutine sir.” Ryan said. “Which means...”

Turner nodded his head in understanding as he felt his stomach tighten with the implication. “We have a saboteur aboard.”

'Slider' whistled in appreciation as the ebony black fighter known as the Stealthstar was rolled out of its storage bay and into the middle of the hangar deck by a crew of knuckle draggers under the watchful eye of Chief Davis.

"Nice ship." Said a soft voice from beside him.

Turning, Jason saw Sheba standing by his side. Again, he was forced to admire how she could sneak up on him at any given moment.

"Yes she is." Slider replied folding his arms across his chest and turning his head back to the fighter.

Both pilots watched for several moments as the ground crew worked to remove the engine cowlings and begin the process of preparing the ship for flight.

"I didn't know we had any of these aboard." Sheba said after a moment.

"We have two." Slider replied, keeping his gaze fixed on the ship. "X.O. gave me authorization to deploy one to the alpha seven three seven system. He seems to think that whoever has the Major is going to pass through that system soon."

Sheba nodded. "So you're taking her out to try and get the drop on them?"

"No," Slider replied, "You are."

Sheba was silent as she let what Slider had said register in her mind. After a few moments, she said, "You want me to take the Stealthstar?"

"The Major, you and I are the only ones rated on her. The Major is out and I'm playing C.A.G. for the moment. That leaves you."

"You could still take the ship out yourself."

"I could, but I want my best pilot out there on this one."

Sheba's eyes widened in surprise but Slider waved it off. "Don't go getting any ideas about me getting soft, kid. I can still fly circles around you any day." He said with his cocky half smile.

"Sure you can," Sheba replied. "Want to put some Cubits on that assertion?"

Slider smiled and turned to walk away. "Nah, you have a mission to prep for. Besides, I'd feel bad for taking your money."

Sheba shook her head as she watched Slider walk away, then turned back to see that the deck crew was beginning the primary power up sequence on this Stealthstar.

“Chief!” Sheba called out approaching the ebony fighter, “Run me through the checklist on this thing. I have a mission to fly”

Karla Horvath was awakened to a searing pain coursing through her entire body. As her eyes shot open she saw Curatis standing above her, his face impassive as he pressed what looked like a cattle prod in her side.

Fighting the urge to scream, she locked eyes with the stony faced man and kept them there even as tears began to cloud her vision. Finally, after what seemed an eternity, the pain stopped as Curatis removed the pain inflicting instrument from her ribcage.

Horvath gasped for air as the pain subsided into a powerful ache in her side.

Seemingly impassive, Curatis pulled a chair up and sat down, fixing his eyes on her again. “Time for another chat.”

“Oh goodie.” Horvath growled, her anger threatening to get the best of her.

“How many functional fighters does the Prometheus currently have in service?” Curatis asked without preamble.

Horvath smiled and her teeth showed the red stains of blood. “Enough to kick your ass from here to Olympus and back.”

“Exact numbers please.” Curatis continued, ignoring her comment.

“Frack off.”

Curatis shook his head. “It’s apparent that typical measures won’t work with you.” He gestured to the door. “Therefore, I am forced to become creative.”

The door to her cell creaked open and the limp and bloody form of Doctor Creighton was dragged in. He was naked and his body showed signs of bruising and burns. His face was a swollen and bloody mess, so much so that Horvath could barely recognize the man.

“He too has proven difficult but he isn’t the one I am concerned about.” Curatis said as he calmly stood and walked over to where the doctor now lay. “You, on the other hand *are* concerned about him.”

Reaching down to his belt, Curatis calmly un-holstered his pistol and placed the gleaming barrel next to Creighton's temple. "You will tell me what I want to know or he will die. I will give you three millicentons."

"Wait a damn minute!" Horvath said as Curatis cocked back the hammer on his gun.

"One."

"You can't do this damn it! It's inhuman!"

"Two."

Horvath looked from Creighton's limp form to Curatis and back again knowing in her gut that his life hung in the balance. Looking one final time at the doctor and then back at Curatis she knew two things for certain.

The first is that no matter what Curatis did, she couldn't allow herself to reveal any information to him. To do so would mean the death of everyone she knew back on Prometheus.

The second, and more important fact, was that even if she did tell Curatis what he wanted to know, the ice eyed man was going to kill the doctor anyways. Looking at his eyes she knew that he had decided to end the innocent man's life even before he had been dragged into the room.

Feeling her rage well up inside her she instantly knew that she would have to act if she wanted to save the doctor's life. Unfortunately the electrical impulses from her brain that would have caused her to act came too late.

"Three."

The crack of the gun shot was drowned out by the frustrated scream of primal rage that issued out of Horvath's throat. Straining with all her might she launched herself at the ice eyed man who had just murdered her comrade, but in her weakened state Curatis was easily able to bat aside her attack and send her sprawling across the cell into the bulkhead.

Through blurred vision, partly from the impact, partly from the tears welling up in her eyes, Horvath swore that she could see the ice eyed man smile ever so slightly. "Get that out of here." He said to one of the guards.

Curatis followed the body as it was dragged out of the cell, leaving a long bloody streak behind it. "We'll talk again soon."

With the smell of gunpowder and fresh blood surrounding her, the emotions of seeing someone killed right before her eyes could no longer be contained. Karla finally broke down and allowed herself to cry.

On a monitor not far away, Curatis watched as the sobs racked her body. Smiling to himself he turned to Precentor Jamis. "I told you it would work. She is broken now."

Jamis nodded approvingly. "Good. Question her again as soon as you can."

Curatis nodded and smiled. He had known that she would break under the sight of him killing her friend. Now she was an emotional wreck and would tell him what he wanted to know.

Of course, he was wrong.

Inside her cell Horvath sobbed, not only in anguish, but also in anger and soon he would realize just how much he had misjudged the character of this Colonial pilot.

The C.I.C. was a buzz with activity as Slider entered. Doing his best to avoid the rapidly moving crew, he made his way towards Colonel Ryan, who was deep in conversation with Commander Turner.

Seeing the expression on the Commander's face, Slider instantly knew that something was very wrong.

"Sir." He said as he gave the obligatory salute to his superior officers. "The Stealthstar is being prepared and Sheba is suiting up for her flight."

"You put Sheba on this flight?" Turner asked.

"Yes sir." Slider replied. "She's the only other person beside me that's rated on the STF-101."

"You realize that this is an inherently dangerous mission."

"With respect sir, I appreciate your concern but right now she's just another pilot."

"Told you he was the right choice." Ryan said with a smirk.

Turner nodded. "Very well. Brief me on your plan."

Slider moved forward to the situation table and brought up a chart of the surrounding star systems on the table display. "Sir, the X.O. and I have surmised that,

based on the contacts we have had with this Alliance ship, she's making a direct run for this system." Slider explained.

"Alpha seven four two." Turner said. "That's within ten light years of the Alliance border."

"Yes sir." Colonel Ryan spoke up. "And based on what we know of Alliance capabilities, it's only one jump away from help should they need it."

"Which is why the X.O. and I decided that we need to hit them there." Slider said

"The Alpha seven three two system has a nice cloud of particles that we can hide from their long range scopes in and it's within a one jump range of seven three seven." Ryan explained. "We have Sheba hide out in the seven three seven system until they show up, then she radios us and we jump in."

"How do we keep them from jumping out when we show up?" Turner asked.

"Sheba's going to hit them with a tactical nuke in their engine section."

Turner's eyes widened with surprise. "You want to use a nuclear weapon?"

"Yes sir." Slider replied standing his ground. "Based on the information that Lucas Verenos gave us, Alliance battlecruisers can handle a small, low yield tactical nuke without totally coming apart. We should be able to disable their jump drive long enough for the Prometheus to close with and engage them."

Turner pursed his lips and studied the charts carefully. After a moment of silence he spoke. "Gentlemen, so far we've been lucky. The engagements we have fought have been limited and casualties on both sides have been light. I was hoping to keep it that way."

"I understand sir." Ryan replied, "But the stakes have changed now. This whole operation is nothing but a trap. They're trying to lure us close enough to their border to bring overwhelming firepower against us."

Turner nodded his expression somber. "Unfortunately, I agree with you. Deploy the nuke."

Ryan and Slider nodded.

"May the gods have mercy on our souls." Turner said.

CHAPTER 3

STALKING THE PREDATOR

Sitting in the Auxiliary Navigational Control Room, Doctor Lucian Zylman wiped the sweat off his brow and took a long sip of water from the glass he had sitting next to his console.

“Thirsty Doc?” Said Lieutenant Halloran from the seat next to him.

“Yes.” Zylman replied. “Going through this code line by line and eradicating it is tedious work.”

Halloran, still bent over his console, nodded his head in agreement. “Has to be done though, Doc and you and I are the only ones who are qualified.”

“Unfortunately.” Zylman said, “However, I am still curious as to how it got in the system in the first place. I would think that the advanced electronic counter measures suite would be sufficient to keep anyone from remotely accessing our systems.”

Halloran nodded but said nothing, which piqued Zylman’s curiosity. “You know something don’t you?”

“I- I can’t talk about it, Doc.”

“What do you mean you can’t talk about it?” Zylman asked as realization dawned on him. “My gods, you think one of the crew did it!”

Zylman’s shock didn’t last long as, for in an instant, Halloran spun around and came just inches away from the doctor. His eyes were cold and serious and his expression was nothing less than deadly. “Look Doc,” he said quietly, “I like you. I think you’re a cool guy but this is sensitive information. Right now, all I know is that there could be a traitor aboard and that traitor could be anyone, *including* you.”

Zylman’s face went ashen as the implication of what Halloran was saying hit home. “You think that *I* did this??”

“If I did you would already be dead.”

“Dead?” Zylman asked trying to hide his shock. “Aren’t there certain procedures for these sorts of things? I thought that summary executions were only allowed in time of war.”

“Not for people like me.” Halloran said icily.

Suddenly, Zylman understood. Allain Halloran, the guy that everyone took for a gentle and kind soul, the guy that everyone thought was a bookworm and a computer geek, was nothing of the sort.

“You’re Special Operations aren’t you? You’re a fracking Black Beret!”

Halloran made no reply but, as he backed away from the doctor, his eyes gave all the answer that he needed.

“Who else knows?” Zylman asked quietly.

“The Commander and the X.O.” Halloran replied quietly.

“What is your mission here?” Zylman asked.

Halloran looked up and the change in his expression almost made Zylman gasp. Whereas before, Halloran had always adopted a mild mannered expression, he now wore the face of an experienced Spec Ops officer. A trained killer.

“My mission is to take care of any threats to your mission, Doc. Quickly, quietly and with as little fuss as possible.”

The room remained silent as Zylman took in what Halloran had revealed to him.

“Why?” Zylman asked quietly after several moments.

“The Admiralty wanted people aboard who could safeguard Colonial interests in the event that a situation arose where the mission could be compromised.”

“They didn’t need Black Berets to do that.” The Doctor replied.

Halloran nodded, understanding the Doctor’s point. The Colonial special operatives, known as Black Berets, were renowned as professional soldiers and silent killers. They were the elite of the Colonial Armed Forces, trained in infiltration, espionage, terror and counter-terror operations as well as assassination techniques. They were the silent killers of the C.A.F.

“Lets face it Doc, we didn’t know who or what we would meet out here before we left. The Admiralty thought it would be good to have a safety net and the President agreed.”

“The *President!*?” Zylman asked incredulously. “Are you trying to say that President Adar knows that there are trained assassins on board this ship?”

Halloran chuckled. “Doc,” he said locking eyes with Zylman, “By the 34th Amendment to the Articles of Colonization, Black Berets can’t be deployed without express Presidential authorization. He not only *knows* he was the one who *ordered* it.”

“My gods.” The Doctor breathed as he shook his head in disbelief. “A conspiracy that runs to the highest levels.”

“I would hope that you aren’t that naive, doctor.”

“Call me an idealist.”

“Idealism is fine so long as you temper it with reality, Doc. The Universe is a nasty place and bad things happen out here.”

An awkward silence followed. “I assume you are going to have to kill me now to keep your secret safe.” The Doctor said finally, his voice betraying the slight fear he felt.

Halloran kept his face impassive for a long moment and Zylman began to truly think that his life might end right then and there. Then a smile broke out on Halloran’s face followed by laughter. “You’ve seen too many movies, Doc. If I thought you were a security risk, I wouldn’t have told you, besides,” he leaned in closely, his voice dropping to a mock serious whisper, “If I thought you were a security risk, you would have already had an accident.” He finished with a wink as he rose from his seat.

The Doctor looked aghast as Halloran moved to leave. “Seriously though,” Halloran said glibly, “Please don’t repeat any of this to anyone. Oh, and let me know if you find anything. I’m going to the head.”

His expression one of stunned silence, Zylman nodded and he watched as Halloran closed the door behind him and watched as Halloran closed the door behind him.

Only then did he start breathing again.

“Sierra one alpha, engines to idle, standing by for throttle up.” Sheba reported from inside the cockpit of her Stealthstar fighter.

“Sierra one alpha, core control: Pads down, maglock secure. You are go for throttle up.” The voice of the flight controller said into Sheba’s helmet.

“Roger that. Throttle to point five, standing by for clearance.”

“Sheba this is Prometheus Actual.”

Sheba raised her eyebrows in surprise hearing Commander Turner's voice. "Go ahead actual."

"Notify Prometheus when you get on station and be careful. This is a drop and pop run, not a dogfight." The Commander said.

"Roger Actual." Sheba replied thinking *What does he think I am? A fracking rookie?*

"Sierra one alpha, launch tube clearing. Five seconds." The voice of the controller said.

In her head Sheba counted down the seconds until she reached zero and then she was pressed back into her seat as the Stealthstar was hurtled out of the launch tube.

"Prometheus, Sierra one alpha is away. Maneuvering to jump coordinates." Sheba reported.

"Roger that Sierra one. Good hunting."

Turning to her side, Sheba flipped down the panel that controlled the jump drive of the Stealthstar. Flipping several switches in rapid succession she began to spin up the drive that would instantaneously transport her to another star system.

Even though she had tested out on the fighter, it was still strange to her to have a fighter with jump capability since normally Stealthstars weren't equipped with them. This one and her sister fighter, sierra one bravo, had been specially outfitted for the mission in the days before the Prometheus launched with advanced navigation and maneuvering systems as well as the added capability to carry missiles, such as the two that were attached under the wings of the fighter now.

Of course, the fighter had had to sacrifice the normal armor that protected the ship in order for it to be able to maneuver or fly at any decent speed and range. This meant that Sheba was effectively flying a ship that one well placed shot could destroy.

Seeing the status bar turn green, Sheba throttled her fighter away from the Prometheus and then entered the coordinates of her destination into the navi-computer.

"Prometheus, Sierra one alpha. The board is green and coordinates are set. Standing by for final jump clearance."

"Data set verified." Came the voice of Slider, the acting C.A.G. "Good hunting Sheba."

"You too." Sheba replied hitting the countdown button on her computer. "Jump in thirty seconds, mark."

Inside the Prometheus C.I.C., Slider, the X.O. and Commander Turner watched the dradis readout and listened as Sheba counted down for jump.

“Five seconds.” Sheba reported. “Four, three, two, one, jummmmmmmmm...” her words distorted as the Doppler shift of the jump disrupted her signal, finally ending it in static.

The three men stood silently and watched as her icon on the dradis screen blinked three times and then disappeared.

It took several seconds but finally, Commander Turner broke his gaze and turned to Lieutenant Halloran who was sitting at his operations station. “Action stations.” He said.

Halloran nodded and activated the alert klaxon. “Action stations, action stations! Set condition one through out the ship, this is not a drill. I say again: action stations, actions stations...”

“I believe you have somewhere to be.” Turner said as he faced Slider.

“Yes sir.” The C.A.G. replied as he snapped a salute.

Turner returned it and Slider jogged out of the C.I.C. “X.O., begin jump prep.”

“Yes sir.” Colonel Ryan replied. “All stations, begin jump prep.”

“Hang on Karla,” Turner said to himself as he turned his attention to the situation table. “We’re coming for you.”

Inside her cell, Karla Horvath gathered her strength and waited for her tormentor to return. The blood on the floor from Doctor Creighton’s brutal execution had dried and turned a sickly brown color and the room reeked of death.

None of this mattered to Horvath now though. She was determined to escape or die trying. *If I die though, I won’t go alone* She thought to herself as she pictured Curatis face.

Suddenly, the door clanged and swung open to reveal Curatis standing in it. “Time for us to talk again, Major.” He said with a smile.

“You’re right.” Horvath replied. “It’s time.”

For the next few seconds, time seemed to slow down for Horvath. Using the metal pin from the rank insignia she had managed to secret off of Curatis when she had attacked him earlier, she had managed to pick the locks on her shackles while he was away. They now only closed around her wrists because she had closed them for appearance and in a flash her hands were free.

His eyes widening in surprise, Curatis reached for his sidearm but was too late. His head was introduced at high velocity to the bottom of Horvath's heel.

Horvath watched with satisfaction as his head snapped back and he fell to his knees. Allowing the pain and rage that she had built up inside her for the past few days to finally explode, she lifted her leg and brought that same heel that had introduced itself to his left temple down on the back of his neck.

She smiled as she heard a satisfying crunch from his vertebrae and the man collapsed to the floor. Looking outside of the open door she prepared to fight or die but was surprised to see that the hallway was empty.

Thinking quickly, she dragged Curatis inside the doorway and rolled him over. Looking at his bloody face that was already showing signs of massive swelling, Horvath smiled and began to remove the uniform of the man.

As she removed his boots and pants, Curatis breaths began to sound like ragged gasps. Quickly putting on the clothing she looked him in the eyes, bringing her face only inches above his.

"You let them rape me," she growled, her voice barely containing the firestorm of emotion she felt "You let them beat me, torture me, and you killed one of my crewmates but you *never* broke me." She finished by spitting his face with all the hatred she could muster. "Think about that as you die, you son of a bitch."

Lacing up the overlarge boots and fixing the uniform as best she could, Horvath turned and walked out of the cell, closing the door behind her.

Curatis didn't die quickly. When they found him later, he was described as having an angry expression around his eyes. Many who knew him speculated that he was angry for allowing a mere woman to best him and that was partially true. His last thoughts in the world of mortal men had been to wonder how in the hell a small woman, one whom he thought he had broken, had found the strength to beat him so easily. It was only as the light left his eyes that he realized that he had given her the strength by brutalizing her so, and that angry thought was what he carried into death.

CHAPTER 4

STALKING THE PREDATOR

Sheba blinked twice as the after affects of the FTL jump passed over her and then, shaking her head to clear it, she looked down at her instruments. Satisfied that she had emerged where she was supposed to, she took hold of the stick and throttle and began maneuvering the Stealthstar into the asteroid belt where she would hide and await her prey.

Slipping the fighter up close to a somewhat stable asteroid, she set the ship down and used the maglock pads on the skids to secure herself to the floating rock. Flipping the last switches required to put the ship into stealth mode, Sheba sat back and began the waiting process.

Lieutenant Allain Halloran entered the C.I.C. in a rush and made his way to the situation table where Colonel Ryan and Commander Turner were studying the charts of the system where they planned to try and rescue Major Horvath. “Sir,” Halloran said without preamble, “We’ve found the corrupted programming.”

Turning slowly to face him, Commander Turner was the epitome of calm. “Very good.” He said evenly. “Now, can you get rid of it? I would like to be able to reactivate the navigational beacons soon.”

“Yes sir.” Halloran replied, catching his breath. “The doctor and I are working on it now.”

“Good.” Turner said as he examined Halloran closely. “How long has it been since you slept?”

“I’m fine sir, thank you for asking.”

Turner arched his eyebrow. “I didn’t ask if you were okay lieutenant, I asked how long it had been since you slept.”

“It’s, uh, been a while sir.” Halloran replied quietly.

Turner nodded and turned to Ryan. “X.O., Lieutenant Halloran is on down time for the next four hours. He’s not to be disturbed until we jump.”

“Yes sir.” Ryan replied turning to face the young Lieutenant. “You heard the Commander, Lieutenant. Report to your bunk.”

“But... sir...” Halloran protested.

“*Lieutenant*,” the X.O. said, his tone becoming firm, “Did you suddenly forget what an order was?”

“Uh, no sir.” Halloran replied.

“Good. Report to your bunk. Now.”

“Yes sir.” Halloran replied snapping a salute.

Ryan returned the salute and watched as Halloran turned and wearily walked out of the C.I.C. “The poor kid is going to work himself to death.”

“Yeah, well he’s kind of taken it personally that someone was able to sabotage us.” Turner said as he studied the latest report from engineering.

Ryan nodded. “He needs sleep. We’re going to need him when we jump.”

“What do you mean that *we’ve lost them*?” Precentor Rollo Thomasi growled from his seat on the bridge of his flag ship.

“We’re not receiving the tracking signal from the Prometheus anymore, Sir.” The ships communications officer reported.

Fighting to maintain his composure, Thomasi took a deep breath then exhaled slowly. “Have the chief engineer bring the power plant up to one hundred ten percent and prepare to jump. Inform all ships in the task force to make their way to the rendezvous point with all possible haste.”

“Yes sir.”

“What’s wrong sir?” asked Thomasi’s second in command from next to him.

“Turner knows.”

“About the trap, sir? How can he?”

Thomasi slowly lowered his cup of tea and turned to face his number two officer. “If we have lost the signal to track the Prometheus that means that he has found the programming inside his computer that our agent placed. He isn’t stupid so he will know that we have been tracking him for a purpose. He also knows that we have one of his officers and that we have been managing to stay one step ahead of him. He’ll put the pieces together and know that we are leading him into an ambush.”

“So what do we do Sir?”

“We accelerate the time table. If he won’t come to us, then we will go to him.”

Ice Queen crept quietly down the hallways of the Fire Hellion and prayed to the gods that nobody noticed her disheveled look and uniform that was several sizes too large. Fortunately for her, the ship was on night watch and there were minimal crew moving around.

Hearing the sound of approaching footsteps, she ducked into a doorway with writing that she couldn’t read and closed the door behind her. Listening for sounds that she might have been discovered, Horvath prepared herself for a fight but then relaxed as the sounds of footsteps continued on past the door.

Finally, she turned around and took in her surroundings. Adjusting her eyes to the darkness she silently thanked the gods for watching over her and guiding her.

She was in a pilot’s locker room.

Quickly shucking off the uniform she had stolen from Curatis, she stepped over to a locker and opened it to find a full set of flight gear. Smiling at her luck, she grabbed the flight coveralls and quickly donned them.

“Battle Alert! Battle Alert! All personnel report to combat postings! I say again; Battle Alert! Battle alert! All personnel report to combat postings!”

Snatching a helmet from the locker, Horvath slid it on and secured the tinted face mask over her face, effectively shielding her identity. She then closed the locker and made her way out quickly as other pilots began pouring into the locker room.

The corridors outside the locker room were packed with personnel making their way to their battle stations and Horvath melted into the flow, following several other pilots in full dress towards the hangar deck.

She was halfway there, however, when she remembered an important fact: she had no idea how to fly an Alliance fighter. Thinking quickly she spotted an evacuation station and ducked into it, sealing the door behind her.

Looking around the circular room, she spotted four round entrances to what she assumed were escape pods. Making her way over to one she opened the hatch and climbed inside, sealing it behind her.

With the ship going to a state of battle alert she assumed that the Prometheus or one of the Gunstars had found them. That being the case, she would eject during the battle and wait until the battle had ended to call for help.

That is, if she could figure out the controls.

Reaching down she flipped what she hoped was the main power switch.

Then the entire ship bucked and she was slammed into darkness.

Sheba jumped as her dradis console beeped at her reporting a contact. Sitting up and stretching her stiff limbs she flipped the switch on her dradis to identify the contact.

CONTACT ALPHA FIVE
ALLIANCE BATTLECRUISER
CONQUEROR CLASS
RANGE: 21000
HEADING: 347 / 062

“Game time.” Sheba said to herself as she activated her long range radio. “Prometheus this is Sierra One Alpha; the game is afoot.”

Deactivating the radio and powering up her fighter, Sheba took a moment to check her dradis one last time to confirm that the enemy ship hadn’t launched it’s patrol yet.

Satisfied that she was undiscovered she throttled up the ship and broke free of the asteroid she was using as cover and maneuvered away on a direct course for the *Fire Hellion*.

“Let’s see how you like this.” She mumbled as she activated the active targeting system for the ship.

Immediately, a beeping noise began to fill her ears as the ship’s laser guided targeting system attempted to lock onto the engine section of the enemy battlecruiser. As this happened, she reached down to the console at her right side and flipped up the red protective cap that guarded the nuclear arming switch.

Hearing the solid tone that indicated a target lock, Sheba flipped the switch that armed the nuclear warhead she was about to fire. “So much for a nuke free career.”

Looking up she saw that the cruiser was perfectly aligned in her sights.

“Solid lock, good tone, fox two!”

Sheba watched as the missile she had fired shot from underneath her right wing and made it’s way quickly towards it’s target leaving behind a vapor trail from it’s expended fuel. She was so mesmerized by the sight that it was only as the missile

approached its target that she remembered to flip her fighter away from the blast. She did it just in time as a bright flash filled her canopy and the ship bucked hard from behind her.

Flipping her fighter back around she gasped involuntarily as she saw the damage she had wrought.

The entire upper edge where the engines had been housed was torn back like some giant god had peeled it back. The engines themselves were dark now and the lights from the rest of the ship flickered momentarily before going dark themselves.

It was then that the Prometheus, her escorting Gunstars along side, all burst into being in a flash of light.

The trap had been sprung.

“Jump complete sir.”

Precentor Jamis, nodded to acknowledge the report of his second in command. “Hold off on launching the patrol.”

“Sir?”

“It will take us longer to launch and recover the fighters than to just plot the next jump and go.” Jamis said, “We’re working against the chrono here. Speed is of the essence. Keep the pilots in their fighters but hold off on...”

“Nuclear detection!” a crewman announced.

“What!?” Jamis said standing. “Where is it?”

“Coming from astern sir!”

“Battle alert!” Jamis commanded as he sprang into action. “Launch the standby fighters and get a precise location on where that nuke signature is coming fr...”

Jamis was interrupted as he was lifted up and thrown forward violently. For just a moment he felt weightless as he flew through the air. That ended abruptly as his chest impacted hard on the console in front of him, driving the air from his lungs. Falling to the floor he gasped and tried desperately to regain his breath as he watched the lights on the bridge flicker and then go dark.

Immediately, the red light of the emergency lights filled the bridge and cast an eerie glow across the now smoke filled chamber.

“Report!” he choked out as he attempted to stand.

“Direct hit to the port stern quarter sir! Main power is out and emergency power is fluctuating.” His second in command reported.

Swearing under his breath Jamis stood made his way back to his command chair. “Get main power back online now!” he commanded, “Launch all fighters and send out a priority one assistance call to the flag ship!”

“Yes sir!” replied the second.

“Sir, engineering reports main power will be restored to fifty percent in three minutes.” A voice said from somewhere on the bridge.

“We don’t have three minutes! Tell the engineer to get that power plant back on line now!”

“Sir, flight leader reports that all launch systems are offline.” Another voice said.

“Damn it!” Jamis growled, “Tell Hauptman Critchell to get those launch systems back up or he’ll answer to me personally, and get my sensors back on line! I want to know what’s out there.”

“Yes sir!” came the chorus of answers.

Jamis sat back and did everything in his power to remain patient but he couldn’t help feeling like something terrible was about to happen and that there was nothing he could do to stop it.

Just then, main power came back as well as his sensors and his worst fear was confirmed.

Hanging in space not five thousand meters from his ship was the Prometheus.

And she was launching fighters.

CHAPTER 5

THE TRAP IS SPRUNG

“Sir, Slider reports that all fighters are away,” reported a well rested Lieutenant Halloran from his Ops station.

“What about the enemy?” Commander Turner asked as he studied the dradis readout.

“Enemy shows no sign of activity. They haven’t launched fighters and are not attempting to maneuver. It looks like the plan worked sir.”

Turner nodded. “Don’t celebrate yet. Maddie, contact Archangel and have him do a damage assessment on the ship and contact Sheba as well. Tell her well done and to come on home.”

“Yes sir.” Petty Officer Madrid replied.

“X.O.,” Turner said as he faced his second in command, “Contact the *Vigilant* and have them prepare for a boarding action.”

“Yes sir,” replied Colonel Ryan. “What are their rules of engagement?”

“That,” Turner said grimly, “Depends on the answer to my next radio message.”

Turner drew himself up straight and steeled himself inside. “Maddie, send to the enemy commander: Stand down and prepare to be boarded.”

“All flight leads, approach the enemy ship with caution.” Commanded Slider from his cockpit. “They haven’t surrendered yet and they might still put up a fight so keep your eyes open. Blue flight, you cover the port hangar bay. Red Flight, you cover the starboard bay. All other flights follow me as we make a fly by of the command module.”

As the various Viper flights broke off and headed in their respective directions Slider caught a glint of light out of the starboard side of his canopy. This coincided with a dradis alert on his console.

“New contact!” he announced as he looked down at his screen.

CONTACT ALPHA ONE
ALLIANCE BATTLECRUISER
CONQUEROR CLASS
RANGE: 13000
HEADING: 087 / 012

Feeling a sense of dread crawling up his back, Slider keyed his radio. “Prometheus, Slider! New contact bearing zero eight seven karem zero one two. Alliance Battlecruiser on intercept course, I think it’s the *Kraken*. I am outbound to bandit time now.”

“Slider, Prometheus Actual.” Said Commander Turner over the radio. “Take Ace squadron with you and establish a picket line. Prometheus is en route to back you up.”

“Roger that Actual.” Slider replied as he keyed over to the squadron’s internal frequency. “Knight Squadron, continue on mission, all Aces follow me.”

“Attention enemy vessel, this is the Battlestar Prometheus.” said a female voice over the speakers on the *Fire Hellion’s* bridge, “You are ordered to stand down and prepare to be boarded.”

“Not bloody likely.” Jamis growled from his chair in the center of the bridge. “What’s the status of the launch bays?”

“Sir, the launchers are totally out of commission. The nuke sent an EMP that caused a power surge and destroyed all of the relays on the hangar decks.”

“What about engines?”

“Sir, the main engines are out. We have maneuvering engines but we’ll only be able to reach one quarter speed.” Jamis’ engineer reported.

“Sir, signal from the flagship: They have arrived in system and are en route to render assistance.”

Jamis shook his head. “They’ll never make it past the Prometheus and her escorts.”

The bridge was silent for a moment as Jamis considered his options. Then, with a sad but proud smile he said “Send to the flagship, top priority: Long live the Alliance.”

“Yes sir.” The comm. officer replied.

Understanding that what he was about to do would be his last act in the universe, Jamis turned to his second and said “Lock all batteries on the Prometheus and fire. Helm, all engines ahead, best speed.”

“Yes sir.” Both men replied.

And with an air of pride around him Precentor Jamis issued his final command.

“Rig for collision.”

In space, Sheba made her way quietly towards the safety of the Prometheus and the hangar deck that awaited her. Of course, she wouldn't be down long. As soon as she cleared the Stealthstar she intended to hop into her Viper and join her squadron in the air.

Looking out of her cockpit canopy as she lined up to land, Sheba couldn't help but be awed by the beauty of the Prometheus as she turned to face the new threat coming from the Alliance Battlecruiser that had just jumped in.

Suddenly, the side of the Prometheus began to light up with explosions as rounds fired from the stricken enemy ship began to burst against their targets.

Looking out of her canopy she saw that the Fire Hellion had begun making its way on a collision course towards the Prometheus. What alarmed her most though was the realization that the ship would hit and that the Prometheus wouldn't be able to dodge her.

It was then that she remembered that she still had one nuke left to her.

Yanking hard on her stick, she flipped the Stealthstar over and set it on a high speed run right at the nose of the Alliance battlecruiser.

“Prometheus, Sheba. I'm outbound to contact alpha five. Request authorization for release of nuclear ordinance.”

Inside the C.I.C. of the Prometheus, Commander Turner looked up and was startled to see that what he thought had been a derelict enemy vessel was in fact dangerously close to ramming his ship.

“All ahead flank!” he commanded, “Right full rudder, twenty degree down angle on the bow planes!”

“Frack! How did that thing get so close without anyone noticing?” Colonel Ryan snarled.

“We assumed.” Turner replied. “Maddie, send to Sheba: Use of nuclear ordinance is authorized.”

“I don’t think we’re going to avoid getting hit, even *if* Sheba is successful.” Ryan said, alarm creeping into his voice.

“I don’t think so either.” Turner said with sad eyes. “Sound collision, brace for contact.”

Inside her cockpit, Sheba lined up her targeting reticule on, what she hoped was, the command deck of the enemy vessel. Hearing the solid tone from her targeting system she flipped the switch that armed the nuke. “Solid lock, good tone, fox two!” she said as she squeezed the trigger.

Nothing happened.

“Oh frack me!” Sheba exclaimed as her fighter bucked from flak. Resetting the switch, Sheba rearmed the warhead and squeezed the trigger again. Nothing.

The ship loomed in her canopy and she realized that she had to pull up but something inside her knew that is she did, everyone on the Prometheus would die.

Making the decision wasn’t hard at all.

“Prometheus, Sheba: Tell Jason... tell him to take care of our boy.”

Flipping off her com system, Sheba began a silent prayer to the gods for a good life. Then she closed her eyes as she felt a tingling sensation come over her...

And then everything went white.

EPILOGUE

DEATH

Some say death is painful. Some say it is very liberating. Some say that there is a bright and warm light at the end of a long tunnel that ushers you into the next life where all of your friends and family who have passed before await you.

Jason Allen didn't know if any of it was true but as he struggled to hold back tears and concentrate on his mission, he said a silent prayer begging the gods to grant Stacie Percival those things and more.

Watching out of his cockpit he saw the glow of the nuclear explosion fade away and the entire front half of the ship once known as the *Fire Hellion* come apart like so much flotsam.

The edges of the metal still glowed and Jason could see all of the sympathetic explosions going off throughout what was left of the ship. He knew that hundreds of souls were now in their final agonizing seconds of life and that Karla Horvath was probably one of them.

Still, he could only think of the one bright soul in the Universe that he had once called his own, and how it had been quietly snuffed out in the vacuum of space in one brilliant second.

Turning back to the approaching enemy fighters, Jason felt a wave of anger, a red sheet of hatred fall over him. He saw every fighter as the sole reason that someone he had loved had died. He made his decision then. He would mourn later. For now, he would settle for revenge.

“All Vipers, weapons free.”

Jonathan Turner was silent for a moment, as was the rest of the C.I.C. as they watched on dradis as the *Fire Hellion* broke up into so many little pieces. In his mind, he said silent thank you to Stacie Percival as he wiped a single tear from his eye.

Finally, after what seemed like a pain filled eternity, the commander issued quiet orders. “All batteries, fire as you bear on the *Kraken*.”

The C.I.C. was still for a moment, all eyes fixated on him.

“Damn it! There's still a fight going on! Stand to your duties you ham heads!” Chief Palmer shouted, jarring the crew back into action.

Turner nodded a silent thanks to the chief as he turned to Colonel Ryan. “Any signs of survivors?”

“Don’t know sir.” Ryan replied, “I’ll have a Raptor crew start sweeping the debris as soon as possible.”

“Sir, Doctor Z is on the line, says he needs to speak with you!” Lieutenant Halloran reported from his Ops station.

Turner nodded as he picked up his handset. “Doc, this really isn’t a good time...”

“Sir, I have a program that will eliminate the tracking virus.” Zylman said.

“That’s good Doc. We’ll talk about it after...”

“NO!” Zylman interrupted again, “The virus has a hidden protocol sir! It’s also sending tactical data on the ship to the enemy ships!”

This grabbed Turner’s attention. “You’re saying that we’re broadcasting all of our tactical data to the enemy?”

“Yes sir. Whoever designed this virus knew what they were doing.”

“Deactivate it.” Turner commanded.

“Yes sir, but be warned: the virus might have other hidden protocols.”

“I understand Doctor and we’ll deal with those as they come. Deactivate it now.”

“Yes sir. Activating anti-virus protocol now.”

“Sir the *Kraken*’s fighters are withdrawing!” Maddie reported.

“Confirmed sir! The *Kraken* is powering up its jump drive!” Halloran confirmed.

Realizing that the battle was over, everyone began to cheer and celebrate.

Turner himself let out a large exhale of air as a sense of relief flooded over him.

“Sir, I’m picking up a distress call.” Maddie said, “It’s in Colonial code.... it’s Major Horvath! She’s in a life boat about twelve thousand meters off our port stern.”

Turner smiled.

And then everything went black.