

[Alien arc] [2] [Captain Cecilia] [12328]

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It was sudden and that was an understatement.

They appeared out of nowhere. They came in billions and they came down hard on mankind, and again that was an understatement.

Mankind and the alien race had been in war for seven years. Mankind had been able to stand against the aliens. However, the price was heavy. Billions died; Planets were destroyed; Tens of thousands of ships were destroyed during battles. Even with such huge sacrifices, mankind hadn't been able to repel the invasion, rather mankind was slowly being pushed back as resources were drained and quantity of trained crews became scarce.

No one knew where they came from. However, it was said that they appeared from the neutral zone allegedly. The neutral zone was thousands light years in radius and it was near impossible to pinpoint their exact location.

Their origin didn't matter. What mattered was that they spread like a plague.

Most of planets in Andromeda union were destroyed. There were only Venus, Earth, and Jupiter in Sol system. Pluto was still intact, but the planet was bombarded and no life lived there.

The aliens, which yet to have any name to it, were certainly not biological creatures. Little studies had been done but, on surface at least, they appeared to be metallic sentiment beings. Their ships resembled different sizes of steel sheets on top of each other. Humans had yet to have any sort of communication with it.

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I can't help to think that, if I had used my powers, I could have easily stopped the invasion. However, I feel that my powers, let alone my presence, is not needed for main kind. I am not a human. I don't belong here. But here I am still as a captain of a ship. No one knows me that I was once a person called "Cecil the crimson wizard". Ever since I gave the body back to the original Cecil, I haven't used my powers. I often feel strong urge to use my powers, but I've been under good control.

I've been to the battles. I fought against the aliens. I know how powerful they are. Mankind will be annihilated at this rate. It is only a matter of time.

I am certain of it.

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A disabled cruiser was floating aimlessly in middle of space. It bore great scars on its hull some of which seemed to be fatal and would have caused the ship to lose its core functionality. The disabled ship was floating among vast sea of debris which indicated that there was a fierce battle here. A bombarded planet was seen afar which was experiencing violent volcanic activities.

All of the ship's crews were dead. Majority of them were sucked out of the ship when its hull was torn apart. Those who somehow managed to remain on the ship died of suffocation.

A figure appeared on the ghost ship. It was Cecilia. She still had the face of Cecil and still wore the symbolic crimson robe. She acted as if she had gravity around her and walked around the outer hull of the ship, inspecting its scars. Eventually, she descended herself into a fatal scar that tore the ship's hull. Where she descended was a cafeteria where there were two frozen floating corpses. The exit of the cafeteria was sealed firm with a deep red icon hovering over the door's control panel. Meaning that the ship's system was active and functional but apparently the ship's life support was completely gone. She did not bother tinkering with the control panel and simply walked right through the firmly locked door. Her body was half-transparent.

Passing through a series of sealed doors, she eventually reached the bridge where they were a frozen body of the ship's captain along with four other crew members, also frozen and dead. With only emergency red lights on, the bridge was best described as creepy.

Not minding the bodies, she walked toward a console nearby. The console was locked and asked for a password. She turned around and immediately left the bridge.

Where she ended up next was the reactor room.

Again, with only emergency lights on, the place was creepy. Upon inspecting A.C.M., it was out of fuel. Having seen there were few dead bodies floating around the room, she dragged a body into A.C.M. fuel tank and went back to the bridge. By time, she arrived, emergency light was no more and regular light was on. Apparently, the ship had run out of his energy completely and the console she approached prior no longer asked for a password. She tinkered with the console for a good hour before the ship jolted and balanced itself.

Furthermore, life support seemed to have been restored partially at least. Air vents became active on the bridge and the bodies fell to the ground.

"Critical system errors resolved," A computerized voice stated. "Mainframe rebooting."

A moment later, the computerized voice continued on. "Mainframe online. Running systems check."

Main screen became active and the voice stated, "Errors detected. Outputting on screen."

Main screen showed outline of the ship with red circles where it detected malfunctionality. At this point, she took a step away from the console. Making a fist, she punched through the console, effectively smashing the whole thing. She went down on her knees and carefully inspected a smashed stand that supported the destroyed console just a moment ago. Eventually, she grabbed a yellow wire and simply struck into her flesh.

Just as soon as she had done that, everything went offline. Lights went off. Air vents went off. Screens went off. Everything was shut down the moment she struck the wire into her flesh on her arm.

After a short moment, perhaps few minutes at best, a lone holographic screen popped up in middle of the bridge.

It said: "Installing Puppet..."

And then after few minutes later, lights came back on and the ship jolted again as it re-balanced itself again.

Pulling off the wire that struck deep into her flesh, she strided to the captain's chair and sat in it. Crossing her legs, she gave out her first commend.

"Conceal the OS and mark it as WASP. Locate the nearest UE station and head there."

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A large fleet was gathered at Jupiter assault station. Admirals didn't admit, but this was man kind's last defense line. After each battle, significant amount of ships were destroyed and resources ran out. They couldn't build and repair ships anymore. There was no way for mankind to regain resources. Earth, Venus, Jupiter have ran out of resources thousands years ago. They had been relying on outer planets for resources. Since they were either conquered by the aliens or destroyed, there was no shipment for resources.

Seven years of war...., it has drained too much of everything.

"Captain," A crewman called Cecilia.

She eyed at him from her captain's chair and responded stoically, "Yes?"

"Long range sensor is detecting huge fleets. It's them."

"How many?" She had a feeling she could predict his answer. In fact, there wasn't even a need to ask that question.

He hesitated to answer. "It's beyond sensor's capability."

The crew on bridge began to whisper. Fear..., she could feel from them. Out of sensor's capability..., they were using recently developed, so called improved, sensors. She was told that its limit was boundless. Just how many....

"Captain, Admiral Nottingham is broadcasting a message, I am putting it on the screen."

Supporting her head with an index finger, she relaxed as Nottingham's message went on, which lasted for only one minute. He didn't say much except that they had to fight until the last one of them. Their number was sixty thousand. It wasn't a small number. In fact, this was an extremely large fleet. However, considering how powerful the aliens were and how many there were, the situation looked only grimmer.

About half an hour later, the alien fleets were within visual range of human eye. It was as if enormous black cloud was coming directly to the human fleet.

"Plague..." A crew murmured.

Indeed, it appeared like a plague cloud.

"All is lost..." Another whispered in despair.

Despite of doom and gloom, she gave out the usual order stoically. "Red alert, prepare for battle."

Technically speaking, mankind and the alien were about the same level in technological advancement. However, their technology happened to utilize weakness of human's technology. It was as if their whole technological development was planned to exploit human's technology.

Of course, humans weren't fool not to realize such. However, their advantage in sheer numbers meant humans never did really stand a chance from the beginning. It was only a matter of time. In fact, Cecilia felt humans had done remarkably well holding them off for 7 years.

It didn't take a genius to figure out that they were losing. Few hours into the battle, they saw the Jupiter station being bombarded and there were barely few thousands of vessels left.

Admiral Nottingham was already killed in action and other admirals appeared to be killed as well. However, Rear admiral John was still alive and was in charge of command.

"This is rear admiral John. All other admirals are dead. I am taking command of the fleet." His hopeless voice resounded in the bridge. "We must retreat. All set course to Moon. We will prepare our last line of defense there! John out."

As soon as his speech was over, Cecilia gave out an order to retreat.

"Captain, I don't mean to sound absurd but I am detecting a large amount of life signs in the docking bays of the station."

"How many?"

"Few thousands at least."

Millions of people would be killed when the station is destroyed. Few thousands of people were a tip of iceberg. Besides, going back to the battle was suicide.

"Captain? What should we do?"

The bridge crew were looking at her. Due to the size of this ship, even if they did bring the ship back and managed to get into one of the docks, this ship wouldn't

be able to carry many. This was a cruiser-class vessel. Its cargo space was occupied with food and missiles. Even if cargo was empty..., barely one hundred people could fit.

"No, we will not risk. It will be suicide going back there. We are not changing our course. Withdraw at once."

No one objected. They all knew that their captain had no choice but to continue withdrawing.

"The station is going to blow! I am activating gravitational shields."

The Jupiter station... It's few thousand years old. When the Hammers were alive, when Gair, Ksa, Kesper, Karl, Tuhina, Vakha, Maeve, and Dante were alive, the station was known to be the fortress of the universe. Now, few thousand years later, I see it going down. I feel as if an important historical artifact is gone, a piece of my memories...

The aliens..., I know them. They were the result of Project Marat. In that sense, I am directly responsible for this. My patience... is being tested, I feel.

When the fleet reached Moon, there was a colony vessel stationed in Earth's orbit.

"Where did that ship come from?" A crew wondered.

A colony vessel could carry millions people and provides living spaces for them. In short, a colony vessel was a moving star with people living in it. It was even bigger than Moon itself. The ship was so large that its signature radius was as big as Sun. Perhaps, it had something to do with the ship not being complete. The colony ship appeared to be just a skeleton with basic essential modules installed. They probably did not have the time and resources to go further.

"Captain, they are evacuating! They are abandoning Earth!"

She narrowed my eyes. "I want you to initiate a deep scan on the vessel. Let's find out how that ship has arrived here without a scratch."

Her first officer nodded. Deep scanning would take approximately an hour.

Waiting was a game she was too familiar with. She gradually closed my eyes and became dormant, letting herself fall into whirlwind of memories of the past. She wished that she could sleep.

"Captain, you have to see this." His voice dragged her back from the pool of memories.

The first officer was reading ship analysis on main screen. She read through as well. The ship came through the nebula and it appeared to be equipped with a cloaking device. No cloaking device had been developed to cloak such a large vessel. That was what everyone thought. Cloaking was useless to the aliens if range is close. But if a ship kept a certain distance from them, cloaking was effective for hiding.

“Desperate time calls for desperate measures,” She concluded.

It was a very risky adventure indeed but an understandable choice. Since they did not have the resources in Sol or around, they must have chosen to build it near the nebula which was far away from anything. The building crew must have been isolated as well in order to reduce risks of being discovered.

“Admiral John on an open channel, Captain.”

John spoke with determination in his voice. “We are abandoning Earth. The colony ship will depart from Earth after receiving every single person from the planet and will head to Venus to pick up the rest of the humanity. We cannot go with the colony ship. It is the only ship equipped with the latest cloaking technology and only it can hide from the aliens from a distance. We are going to stand our ground here at Earth. Our last battle will start and end here.”

“Captain, Admiral John is contacting us through a secure channel.”

“Put it through.”

But the crew hesitated. “Shouldn’t you talk to him in your quarter?”

“True,” She agreed, “However, at this stage, do you think it matters?”

Realizing her point, he established the connection to the bridge and Admiral John appeared on main screen.

“Greetings, I am Admiral John. With all other admirals gone, I needed to rebuild the chain of command and thus promoted myself to the rank of Admiral. I’ve

assigned a new vice admiral and a rear admiral and I would like to promote you to a rank of commodore."

Not impressed, she inquired him, "Why me, Admiral?"

"I've been reviewing your history and I must say I am impressed. You've survived seventeen battles against the aliens. Your ship has the longest history against the aliens. A small fleet of one hundred will be assigned to you. Do you accept?"

Her answer was quick and simple. "No."

"May I ask why?"

"No, you may not."

The Admiral was speechless for a moment. "I see..."

"May I give you a suggestion though?"

The Admiral twisted his head slightly. "What is it?"

"If we are to fight against them more effectively, I suggest we load Earth with planetary bombs. We will withdraw to Venus and wait them to approach Earth and then..."

"Are you implying that we should destroy Earth?"

She had to sigh. He decided to abandon Earth. Yet, he was unwilling to use Earth for a tactical advantage. Ruthlessness was sometimes required in delicate situations although, for Cecilia, perhaps she used her ruthlessness a little too often. "If successful, we might be able to reduce their number to even half."

"No!" He raised his voice. "Earth is our home. It is every human being's home! We will not destroy it by our own hands!"

"Then why are you abandoning it?" Her voice contained sarcasm. "The aliens are going to destroy it. Look at what they did to other planets they've come across. I would rather use it as our advantage rather than let it be destroyed by them."

Wincing, he dropped his head. "I can't... I just can't ..."

His reaction was fully understandable. Therefore, another suggestion was made.

"Would it possible for me to proceed with the idea if I accept my promotion? History won't record you but me."

If a mere captain did something like making Earth a huge bomb and use it for tactics, its superior officer, who'd be the Admiral, might be blamed. But if a commodore were to do the job, the story might become different. A commodore would have enough authority to proceed with such a plan, given the dire situation.

"Are you certain? Are you willing to be a villain in history?" He asked her earnestly.

I already am.

"I'd be glad to do it."

Then everything occurred swiftly. Planetary bombs were secretly delivered to her fleet. Everything had to be done secretly which wasn't actually hard to accomplish given the chaos of evacuating Earth.

A crew reported, "Commodore, the bombs are set. Once we turn them on, we can't turn them off. The range is five clicks from Earth orbit. If a ship enters the range, the bombs will explode at once after a minute. The blast radius will at least thrifty clicks from Earth. Moon will be destroyed as well. After the bombs are done, Earth is expected to go supernova instantly. I hate to admit this, but this is going to do serious damages to the alien fleet if we can get them close enough."

"They will get close enough." Cecilia was certain, for she was aware that they had been studying human culture. Earth had been one of few places they were unable to fully infiltrate. To be more precise, they were never able to hack into the Earth archive due to Cecilia's own program "Puppet".

"The colony vessel is departing. I am still detecting some life signatures, but I suppose those are animals."

They were watching the colony vessel leaving. Later, they found out that the ship's name was Hope, an ironic name perhaps but fully understandable.

Whatever left of the original fleet remained fully alert by Earth. It was peace before storm. But why not enjoy the short peace. She went to the cafeteria only to find that quite a bit of people were there.

"Captain." The bartender welcomed her gleefully. "No, commodore. Would you like a drink?"

"Captain is fine," She said, "Yes, red wine?"

He shrugged. "Red wine has been out for months."

"Then I suppose white wine is out as well?"

He nodded. "Actually, alcohol is almost out. You know how it is."

"I didn't know people would use the cafeteria actively like this."

"Well, snacks have been out for some time. But people come here for chat. I am more surprised to see you here. You almost never come here, Captain."

She beamed a weak smile at him. "Well, that's me, I guess."

People were casually chatting in the cafeteria. Most had simply water cubes to drink from since they were on duty. She could tell that they were trying to be positive and make the best out of the short peace they were given. Perhaps, this was the quality that sets humans apart from other sentimental beings.

Long range sensor detected the alien fleet, and Admiral John ordered retreat to Venus. The Earth was getting smaller. This would be the last time seeing Earth in real. Earth will only be able to be seen from images after the war. She stood up from her chair and saluted at screen. The crew on bridge saluted at screen as well.

Farewell, Earth.

"Activate the bombs," She ordered.

"Activated, commodore."

Deciding Earth's fate was as simple as that...

When they arrived at Venus, a series of strong shockwave struck their fleet. It was the indication of Earth was destroyed by the bombs.

Everything was ... running out.

The colony vessel, Hope, was in Venus' orbit. Hundreds of shuttles were going in and out of the colony vessel. It was revealed that the outpost would make a last stand and not evacuate and its small fleet of few hundreds would stand by it.

A pointless sacrifice, she felt, but each to their own.

"Put Venus on screen."

"Aye, sir."

Venus..., it's such a beautiful planet. Illy O'ren developed it thousand years ago and she, as Cecil, polished the planet after her. That was a long time ago. After she resigned from ruling Venus, her stepson, Gair, took over. After he died of age, his son and daughters took over the planet... By this time, she had lost interest and chose not to keep a track.

Crossing legs and folding arms, she continued to stare at Venus on screen.

Even if Sol fleet was annihilated, all would be not lost. She could sense that Sae was still active. Her mental integrity may be questionable though. Wherever she was, she was reasonably certain that humans would make a comeback, eventually.

"Commodore, the admiral is contacting us through a secure channel, voice only."

His voice resounded in the bridge. "Commodore, your plan has worked. Probes I've sent indicate that more than forty percentage of their fleet is completely destroyed. We may be able to put up a fight this time."

I think not. It is over for Sol.

"Good, Admiral. We will fight to death right here at Venus," Despite of her thoughts, she sounded positive.

"That is right!" The admiral sounded energized. This must have been good news for him in a while.

The colony vessel, Hope, departed within a day. Its plan was getting as far away as possible and avoid any detection. While its destination was never revealed, it was easy to guess.

Exactly three days later, long range sensor started to detect signatures.

"Sensor is counting their number," At first, he reported positively, knowing that the bombs had taken a large portion of them. However, he stammered to make his next statement. "S...Seventy billion..."

“Well, at least the sensor is counting them now,” She joked crudely. Obviously nobody got on with the joke.

The crew on the bridge looked at her. When she had brought what was a broken ship to a station, everyone was shocked that the ship made it. Since then, the cruiser received new crews and she had been with them ever since.

She had gone through many battles with them and she had always managed to survive. She felt as if they were counting on her. Do something, do your magic whatever it is...

Whatever the fuck it is.

She would be lying if she said she did not have the urge to assist humans at this point. However, she felt all was not lost. Sol may be lost but humanity had spread vastly in clusters. she was certain that there were other human settlements somewhere in unknown sectors. she felt that, given enough time, a new era of mankind would emerge and eventually defeat the aliens.

Hopefully thinking perhaps, but her wishful thinking was based on the human history as well as the current situation. There were various reports of alien activities in Sol and Andromeda cluster. However, she had yet to see any reports from the Nebula.

She declared, "We are going to fight. Red alert, prepare for battle." She stood up from my captain's chair and told the crew. "Everyone, it has been pleasure knowing you all."

Everyone on bridge knew what she exactly meant. They all knew that they did not stand a chance.

They saluted at her and she saluted at them: This was how the battle began.

They fought commendably. They were fierce. They had nowhere to retreat. If there was anything they could do, it was to fight as long as we could so that the Hope can get away further.

"Arrrrgh!"

An explosion occurred on the bridge. The vessel was shaking and jolting.

"Damage report!"

"Front shield is down! We are taking direct hits!"

"Turn the ship around!"

They were busy on my little bridge. They were bound to lose. Yet, they still fought as if they had a chance.

"Frontal thrusters are damaged! We are having troubles maintaining balance. We are losing gravity!"

"Captain! The reactor is overloading. We must cut down on energy usage!"

She exclaimed. "Cut the life support and lights!" The bridge became dark all the sudden and red lights replaced the usual light. Amid the chaos, the bridge suddenly turned upside down and loud explosions were heard from a distance.

"The reactor...!" An officer tried to report damage, but he was soon pierced by metal pieces from an explosion nearby. A rather large metal piece literally cut off his left lung. He fell hopelessly. She dashed from the captain's chair and took over his station. The reactor was shot. All shields arrays were completely down. Hull integrity was dropping rapidly.

"How is the reactor?" She pushed a button on console and tried to communicate with the engineering room.

"Captain...! The fire...! Arrrgh!" That was the end of the channel with the engine room.

Suddenly a computerized voice resounded in the bridge. "Reactor has been damaged beyond repair. A.C.M. core is starting to consume the ship's internal system. Detaching the engine deck. I repeat, engine deck will be detached in 60 seconds."

Losing the engine deck would mean losing the primary ion engine. That had to to be prevented. At the risk of losing the whole ship, an override was made.

Switching to auxiliary power didn't help as the power consumption was simply too high to maintain any stability. Fanatically looking around the bridge, she accessed the situation. Only few were alive. The rest were dead.

Sensors indicated that Venus was being bombarded and the outpost was already gone.

"So, all is lost," She mumbled. At the same time, she recalled a hidden base she constructed. It was a secret base equipped with cloaking. She ordered to build it when she was Cecil Klisis. It was never used and should still be functional.

She attempted to open a communication to Admiral John. Amazingly, the channel was answered. Before I could say something to him, he spoke.

"Commodore..., we are lost. There is no hope," His voice was in labor. He must be wounded. "All is lost..."

"Admiral, are you alright?"

"Yes, I am fine..."

"Admiral, listen to me. Can you order the fleet to retreat?"

I could hear the admiral laugh hysterically "Retreat? To where? To hell?"

"There is a small cloaked base where Mercury used to be."

He stopped laughing at once. "How do you know this? Who are you?"

"That is not of importance. Will you order retreat or not?"

"What if I don't?"

"I am going to destroy your ship and other admirals' ship so that I can take over the command."

The channel was quiet for a moment. "Say what?!"

"All is not lost yet. We must retreat."

The channel was quiet again. He must be confused. "This base you spoke of, what are the coordinates?"

"I am sending you its coordinates."

"I ask you again. How do you know this?"

"As I said a moment ago, it is not of importance. Order retreat now."

Few seconds later, Admiral John sent the fleet a message.

"This is Admiral John. I am sending you coordinates of an abandoned base nearby. I order you to retreat to there."

The bridge was a mess. Blood was everywhere and so did bodies. Just mere two crew were alive, barely. She had to operate the ship alone on the bridge for the time being. Setting the ship on the course, she made her way down to the engine deck where a loose A.C.M. core was slowly consuming matters in its vicinity. No crew in the engine room apparently survived. Some of their bodies were already being broken down by the core.

An A.C.M. core was a size of a soccer ball and it was capable of breaking down matters to atoms, generating power in progress. Since her existence wasn't any matter, it was safe for her to simply grab the core and put it back to the reactor. After performing few emergency repairs, power output became stable.

By time she arrived back to the bridge, a crew was in his seat.

"Captain..." His weak voice welcomed her. "The admiral is contacting us."

"Are you alright?"

"I am fine... for the time being. Punching him through."

"Commodore," His voice resounded on the bridge. "We've arrived at the coordinates you've provided. The sensors are detecting abnormality. How do you suppose we enter the base?"

"Give me a moment." She transmitted its master password. A moment later, it lowered its cloaking shield and a small base revealed itself. She was actually surprised that the base was still running. Given the length of time it had been dormant, there were bound to be bugs. Regardless, the station was operational.

The base was indeed very small. Only three ships could dock at its internal space dock. There were two external dock for quick unloading as well. The admiral's ship and her ship entered through its internal dock. The admiral's ship docked first and he went ahead with haste.

The fleet barely survived. Out of five thousands, seven hundred ships managed to survive. Most of ships were either lightly damaged or was on fire internally. Her ship had also suffered serious damages but she was operational.

Just as she was ready to leave the bridge to leave the ship, the lone crew stopped me after a short scream.

"Commodore, the alien fleet is spreading," He said.

"What do you mean spreading?"

"Their fleet has divided into six smaller fleets and each of the fleet is heading elsewhere. The navigational computer is analyzing their course."

"How about Venus?"

"They've bombarded, commodore. It is only a matter of time before it goes supernova."

"Are they after us?"

"So far, no," He shook his head. Then the bridge jolted. "We are docked, Commodore."

"Alright, I will be back soon. Make sure to run diagnostics. That is the top priority."

He nodded. "Aye, captain."

As she left the ship, she noticed crews attempting to patch the outer hull. Leaving them behind, she entered the station. The station was out of power, but the temperature was within acceptance. It is mostly due to its position being close to Sun. Air compression and composition appeared to be fine as well. For a two-thousand year old station, it had been operating fine.

"Who are you?!" As soon as she entered the bridge of the outpost, Admiral John aimed his pistol her.

She shrugged and played innocent. "What do you mean?"

"I've checked log files of this place. There is no log at all. As far as I can tell, this outpost was never used until now!" He exclaimed violently. "And operating software of its main frame is over two thousand years old!"

"..., Admiral," She decided to come up with a lie. "I was a pirate once before I joined the fleet. To be more precise, I was a Nebula pirate."

She was indeed a Nebula pirate once. That part wasn't a lie.

"This station was a joint project between the nebula pirate and the Venus government." This part was a lie.

"How are you going to explain age of its software?"

"If you keep listening to me, I will surely get to that, " She cleared my throat. "This station was built when Venus was being ruled by the wizard we seek."

His eyebrow quivered slightly. The wizard, everyone had been looking for him as he was the only known person with knowledge of "The Project Marat". However, they never managed to find even a single clue.

"The project Marat" was where they ended up while attempting to trace the origin of the aliens. However, even Earth archive had little information. It did, however, state who were involved in the project: President Mirren, his daughter Marat, Masu the sage, Cezary the inventor, and Cecil the crimson wizard. The first four people were dead for certain. However, there had been gossips of Cecil's sightings which led U.E., United Earth, to seek him out with great efforts. However, they never found a clue.

She continued on. "My grandfather built this station. His computer was passed down to my father and I happened to come across this station's information and its master password. I didn't recall existence of this station until the moment I told you."

She wondered whether he'd buy it. If not, she was willing to kill him on spot and move on.

The admiral was quiet for a moment. He lowered his pistol eventually. At the same time, her communication bracelet vibrated. She was out of the ship therefore she established a channel instead from the bridge after activating auxiliary power.

"I am here. What is it?"

"Commodore, please come to the bridge. This is emergency. You must see this," His voice did sound urgent.

She glanced at the admiral. "Perhaps, you should come as well."

When they reached the bridge, the two officers on bridge were in front of the only working screen. They felt their presences. "Commodore and Admiral!"

"What is the matter?"

"A small alien fleet is heading this way, six thousand ships. Furthermore, a medium-sized fleet is heading to an unknown location."

"Unknown location? Explain." It was the admiral who spoke.

The officer pointed at a red dot on screen. The computer has analyzed its course.

The admiral raised his eyebrow. "Oh, no..., It's heading to SOL-6D."

SOL-6D, it was a barren planet. No life lived there, but the planet was rich with resources.

She winced. "Admiral, what is at SOL-6D?" And then she had a gut feeling that the Hope was there.

"The Hope is stationed there," He said, "It's mining."

"Why would it mine?"

"Because the ship is not fully functional and finished yet. We lacked resources to build a full colony vessel. We believed that SOL-6D had the distance to keep the ship from being detected."

"Can the ship mine while cloaked?"

He shook his head hopelessly. "No."

"What made you think that it could not be detected then?"

"Because the planet is not on space chart. It is only on miner's chart. Intelligence has proven that the aliens had obtained our space chart, but not miner's chart. A weak signal in middle of nowhere is normally ignored, you know."

That was true. Anything could cause a weak signal, even a small asteroid with radioactive materials. Thus, usually people ignore weak signals found in middle of nowhere. Of course, "people" might ignore. The aliens did not. It was clearly an oversight.

"The Hope is equipped with ECM. It should be able to weaken the signal enough to almost none existence from such a distance," He said.

It was troubling news. None the less, first thing first...

"We must abandon this base now. Check its storage compartment and take any resources we can. We will head to the nebula," She gave out commands.

"What about the Hope?" The admiral inquired.

"Do you seriously think the Hope can be saved with the help of this fleet?"

No one answered me and she continued.

"We must escape to the Nebula and leave Sol system at once. We will head to Andromeda cluster and rejoin with remaining human fleets."

The admiral objected at once. "What makes you think that there are remaining fleets there?"

"The alien fleet has divided into six smaller fleets. Something made them to divert. And the only reason I can think of is that they are being attacked from somewhere else. I believe a human fleet have initiated a counterattack."

The admiral turned around. "No, we are heading to the Hope."

"Admiral, we stand no chance there."

"That doesn't matter. We are going to the Hope."

Sighing, she attempted to reason. "Admiral, this is no time to be stubborn. We must..."

The admiral turns to her in a sudden burst of passion. "We are going to help the Hope!"

Silence struck the bridge. Soon the admiral broke the silence.

"My family is aboard the Hope...," He said. "My wife and two sons..."

She turned her head and looked at one of the officer. He escaped my stare and said, "My sister is aboard as well." She looked at the other officer. He dropped his head to escape from Cecilia's eyes.

The bridge became silent again.

So be it.

"You are the admiral." She shrugged. "You make the decision."

"My mind has already been made up," He answered her right away. "We are heading to the Hope."

The admiral left and the two officers were back to their stations. One of them was looking at something on his PDA. She could see that his eyes were slightly wet.

"Something wrong?"

He laughed weakly. "It's just a photo of my wife. She was killed in action some time ago. I vowed to exact revenge but..."

As much as she wanted to let him have some moment of silence, there was no time. "How many crew do we have available?"

Turning off his PDA, his attention turned to his station. "Only few, Captain. Twenty two survived so far which is far below the recommended level of ninety."

“Send everyone available into the station and order them to grab parts, supplies, and whatever we need in order to get the ship into shape. We have less than an hour.”

“Aye, Captain.”

The fleet was on a fast move. They wanted to find the Hope before the aliens did. In the meantime, Cecilia’s ship was in tatters virtually. It wasn’t exactly in a condition to fight.

The reactor wasn't running at its full capacity and the main ion engine was damaged. Frontal thrusters were in wrecks and there were holes on outer hull. To make the matters worse, with only twenty crew members, the ship lacked the hands to make any meaningful repairs before it’d run into the aliens.

Alas, there was nothing that could have been done. The ship was going into a battle with its arms and legs crippled.

At one point, the admiral sent out a message.

"This is Admiral John. We will attack the alien fleet. This battle is different. This isn't a battle for survival or protection of mankind!" His voice was full of passion and determination. “Fear no death! Our family is aboard that ship! We will not fear death!"

Finishing his speech, the admiral's ship accelerated. Other ships accelerated as well. Cecilia glanced at a small panel attached on right to the captain's chair. The engine was being overloaded. Her crew were accelerating the ship as well.

The situation didn't look good. The alien fleet had diverted and it seemed only a small portion of fleet was here. However, the bottom line was that the alien fleet was still too big for this small fleet to handle. But that didn't stop the admiral from firing.

"Open fire," She gave out the order as well.

The battle went on for an hour and half; Everyone was busy in their stations. Cecilia was, too, busy with commanding the ship. Everyone was in a strange rhythm. The rhythm went on until it was distracted by a shout.

"Captain! The admiral's ship...!" He pointed at the screen. He was pointing at the admiral's ship in a corner. It was about to blow.

"Admiral," She contacted his ship. "Admiral, do you copy? If so, evacuate immediately."

He answered the call with a roar. "I am not evacuating!"

He crashed his ship against a nearby alien vessel. His ship began to explode rapidly with the alien vessel.

"Commodore! I leave everything to you!" The channel began to destabilize and then died.

Affected by the admiral's bravery, other ships that were severely damaged began to follow his path. They crashed into nearby alien vessels rather than retreating.

"You will not touch my family! Arrrrrrrrrr!"

"Farewell!"

"This is worth dying for!!"

"Hahaha...!"

They began to shout in public channels as they crashed into alien vessels. The screams didn't resonate sadness. Rather they were valorous. They weren't fearing death, nor were they being brave in fact. They were simply doing what must be done, the least they could do in order to perhaps, maybe perhaps, secure lives of their families.

It weren't selfless sacrifices; it were selfish sacrifices.

A debris struck Cecilia's cruiser. Everything turned upside down and light went out. Several explosions occurred on the bridge and then jolted.

"Warning. decompression. Evacuate the bridge immediately." A computerized voice warned. "Evacuate immediately."

"Evacuate the bridge...," Before she could finish, the ship jolted once more and then there was an explosion from somewhere behind.

“The engine’s blown! Completely!” A crew urgently shouted. “We are dead in water!”

"Evacuate the ship," She repeated. "Everyone, evacuate!"

The two crew slowly turned around and looked at her. They didn't say, but she could feel that they had no intention to evacuate.

Simulating taking a deep breath, Cecilia slowly closed her eyes. “So be it,” She said weakly.

And the cruiser, by using thrusters only, accelerated to ram a nearby enemy ship. However, the enemy wasn’t foolish enough to let a crawling ship to approach them. The ship was fired upon and it stood little chance. Just before the ship would blow, Cecilia teleported herself into one of the enemy vessels. This was the first time she had been to one of their vessels.

The interior had no light sources but that didn’t matter to Cecilia. Her vision worked regardless of illuminance.

“Hollow,” She said to herself. However, it was vacuum and thus no voice resonated. The interior was hollow as in empty.

She grazed her fingers against metallic surface as if trying to locate something underneath. At one point, she clawed her fingers and scraped the surface violently, burying tips of her fingers into the unknown material.

At the very same moment, her irises began to glow.

It's been thousands of years... since the last time I used it.

Worm-like strings emerged from tips of her fingers which penetrated into the surface. Within seconds, the metallic surface started to char and crumble at an alarming speed.

She would repeat this to other alien vessels one after one until every one of them was destroyed.

Cecilia appeared out of thin air onto a completely destroyed bridge of her ship. The two remaining crew had long been dead and the ship's power was completely out. Oblivious of the situation, she casually walked toward her captain's chair and sat in it. Crossing her legs and folding her arms, she relaxed in the chair.

Back to where I was, it seems...