

[Alien arc] [3] [The Hope] [12328]

Rev 2.0

When Pluto and Saturn were destroyed by the aliens, Admiral Nottingham came up with a plan to evacuate people elsewhere. It was to construct a colony-class vessel code-named "The Hope".

This secret project was known to only high ranking officers in United Earth navy.

With low on resources, the Hope was planned to be constructed with barely minimum system requirements. They dismantled damaged ships and recycled its materials to build the core of the Hope. Everyone was desperate in building the Hope. No night was wasted. The Hope's basic structure was constructed in stunning two months. It was a record which would never be broken.

The ship was built in middle of nowhere in order to keep the aliens from locating it and, when it was ready to sail, it hugged the edge of the nebula to avoid being discovered.

When it entered Sol system, the matter of selecting its captain and crew had to be decided.

Admiral Nottingham summoned Captain Erika to his quarter and, before he began, he broke the secret project "The Hope" to her. Needless to say, she wasn't too surprised to hear about the project. She knew something had to be done and seemed actually relieved that something was being done.

"Captain Erika, I hereby promote you to be the captain of the Hope," He proclaimed. "The Hope will be ready to sail in few days. Your task will be dreading. But you must carry it out."

Erika nodded. "Yes, sir."

"There is only one objective for you and your ship, the Hope," He sighed as he went on. "You carry as many people as you can and leave the Sol system at once while we hold back the aliens."

Erika was speechless for a moment. "Are you serious, sir? We've been holding fine."

Nottingham sighed deeply once more and pushed his back deep into his chair. "I hate to admit, but we are losing. We are losing too fast. I fear the worst is inevitable. What's worse, it will be soon."

"The worst?"

"Destruction of Earth and the Sol system."

Erika quivered her face.

"The Hope is modular. You can build additional compartment of the ship fairly easily if you can get a hold of minerals. The ship's navigation computer holds the miner's chart. Head to SOL-6D and mine as long as you can."

"What is my destination?"

Admiral's face darkened. "To deep space, there is no particular destination as long as you can guarantee safety of our people."

"But, Admiral, are you suggesting to hold billions of people in the Hope forever? It may take hundreds of years to find a suitable planet for terraforming. We may never find one."

It had taken mankind thousand years to locate New Earth after all. She had a valid point.

"That is why the ship is modular. If you have to, turn the ship into an artificial planet."

"Admiral....," Erika dropped her head. "Why is this happening to us?"

He laughed weakly. "Perhaps, this is the punishment for our sins."

While preparing for a fierce battle at Jupiter, Admiral Nottingham paid his last visit to Earth.

"Admiral, Earth is in sight."

He was in his chair, staring at Earth. "This may well be my last time seeing Earth...," He whispered to himself and returned to Jupiter.

While on his way back to Jupiter, he received a report from one of his informants. He had apparently sent out hundreds of officers to seek and find Cecil Klisis and anyone who was related to him. However, no one had reported back until now.

"Admiral, this is officer Alucasa reporting," A face with what appears to be desperation appeared on the main screen of the bridge.

"Have you gotten anything?"

"Yes, sir. Someone who was known as 'The little witch' is still alive."

"The little witch? Who is that?"

"A long time ago, there was someone named Sae whose power was beyond anyone's imagination. It is believed that she had died."

Someone who had survived for such a long time, Nottingham felt that this "Sae" had definitely something to do with Cecil Klisis.

"Have you confronted this person?"

Alucasa shook his head. "No, admiral, it seems this person has been dormant for last few hundred years. She has been under the merchant Karma the third's possession."

"Karma the third?" Nork twisted his head. "Who is this Karma?"

"Karma the first was a very well-known merchant between year of 9603 to 9812. It was never confirmed but it was said that the Karma has been studying the art of immortality. I believe Karma the third is using this "Sae" to study immortality. Other officers have tried to contact and negotiate with Karma the third, but they didn't make it."

"Where are the other officers?"

"All of them are dead, sir," Alucasa quickly looked behind as if he heard something. "Admiral, we've been chased and hunted down by Karma the third. This may be my first and last report."

"Officer, get out of there. Come back to the fleet," Nottingham also heard unpleasant sound that Alucasa also heard.

"I am sorry, admiral. It's too late for that. He saluted at him. May Earth last forever!" He pulled out his pistol and terminated the channel.

Rear admiral John was on the bridge as well. He watched the whole conversation.

"My dear God!" Nottingham muttered out loud. "This isn't time to fight each other..."

"The aliens have not attacked them it seems. They don't know the fear yet," John said, calmly.

Nottingham was in thoughts for a moment. "I guess this is it then. Our only hope is the Hope."

"So it seems." Sighing, John agreed.

Captain Erika was speechless. She looked up and down at the Hope that was stationed at Jupiter station.

"This isn't a ship. This is just a skeleton!" She yelled out in panic.

The Hope looked as if some kind of junk made of iron stings. It had really nothing on it. It, however, was very impressive in its length which was almost as wide as width of Moon.

Few days later, a new first officer was assigned to Erika.

"Greetings, My name is Quentine. I've been newly assigned to be your first officer."

"What?" Erika scoffed. "What for? Who are you?"

"Excuse me?" Quentine was confused by Erika's reaction.

"Why would I need a new first officer?"

"I am an engineer. In fact, I was in the design team of the Hope. I will be able to assist you with the ship construction. I am the best one to advise you on our journey."

Erika shrugged right away. "Do you realize the situation? We won't even have time to mine. We can't build anything."

"We will see," He said ominously.

After a week, the Hope finally had gone online. Her bridge was unlocked and its mainframe was activated. Hope's bridge was located on surface of the ship. It was an old design by tradition. No current ship had its bridge outside. It was proven to be a vital weakness to a ship's defense. Erika honestly had no idea why the Hope had an outside bridge.

"Why does it have an outside bridge?" Erika asked Quentine, her new first officer.

"We had no choice. The ship's basic structure was too narrow and thin to contain a bridge."

"How are we going to let people aboard then?"

"The ship does have some storage compartments. You see those big bulky box-like modules underneath the central shaft? We can put people in there. It's capable of holding at least six billion of people."

Erika's face quivered with slight anger. "Are you implying we have to put people as if they are some kind of livestock?"

"We have no choice. You have to realize that."

Quentine had a point. It was no time to discuss moral values. The sake of humanity was depended on it.

"I wonder why I was chosen to be the captain of the Hope. I honestly don't think I am qualified." She sighed deeply.

"That I do not know. I suppose the admiral had his reasons. Regardless, you are the captain and will be responsible of billions of life."

Erika glanced at Quentine. His voice was cold. He was mathematical and straightforward. A thought passed by her mind.

"Are you an android?"

"Yes, I am."

"Really?"

"Nope."

A moment of silence stuck on them.

"I guess you are not," Erika chuckled.

"Don't blame me. This is just the way I am."

Erika, Quentine, and their crew were on the Hope's bridge. No holographic screens were required except for video communication due to the fact that the Hope's bridge was on surface of the ship.

"Is this really safe?" Erika looked at thick windows skeptically.

"It should be."

"You are not sure?"

"We didn't have time to test it."

The Hope's bridge implemented a new design. The traditional layout of a bridge was the captain's chair in middle and it was surrounded by stations such as helm on front, sensory in back and weapon control on left and right.

The Hope's bridge was relatively different. All other stations were on front and the captain's chair was in back. Furthermore, the caption's chair was elevated so that the captain would have an overview sight of the entire bridge crew in one sight.

"The captain's chair has all controls. In the worst case, this ship can be operated by just one person," Quentine began to explain usages of controls and other stuff to Erika.

This and that..., it took Quentine an hour just to explain everything on the bridge. Erika just nodded along.

When the bridge was manned properly. Erika was in the captain's chair and Quentine was in reactor room.

"Reactor activated. Energy output is rising."

The bridge crew reported in one by one.

"Engine activated. Running a quick diagnose on the system...."

"Operating software is loading. No problem so far..."

"Expected reactor output acquired. Activating all arrays. Stand by."

"OS loaded, Captain."

As soon as she heard that she ran a quick spec(Specification) check. She was reading the result.

"Twelve thousand weapon hardpoints..., six hundred missile banks..., four fighter bays that are capable of holding six thousand fighter class vessels total...." She gulped. She realized the Hope wasn't just a mere colony vessel. She glared at the last line of words.

It said: Forty planetary bombs loaded.

"What the hell?" She whispered to herself. "This thing is a massive weapon platform." She rolled her eyes in amusement but decided not to think too deeply at the moment.

At the same time, her communication bracelet vibrated.

"What is it?" She responded.

"This is Quentine. I need you down at the storage compartment modules."

As she came down to where Quentine asked her to be, she was faced with an impressive sight. She was in the central shaft. It was a hexagon-shaped hallway. There was countless doors next to each other on lower opposing panels It reminded her of a massive bio-engineering facility where specimen are stored behind cold doors.

"Each storage compartment module is connected though two hatches which oppose each other. There are six storage compartment modules installed right now." Quentine explained.

He also began to explain the storage compartment module in detail.

"Right now, we've modified it to be large apartments. It has one hundred floors and each floor is capable of holding approximately one thousand people. So, each module will have around one billion people inside soon."

He seemed to be hesitating to say next.

"What is it?" Erika narrowed her eyes.

"I know you are not going to like this. There is a detach command which allows separation of modules from the core. We can detach the storage compartments modules one by one."

"I don't see how I'd dislike to hear that." Erika twisted her head slightly.

"Well, when a storage compartment is detached, it will spray sleeping gas and air will be sucked out a minute later."

"Well..., I guess painless death is better for them... if they are going to die."

"Admiral," Rear admiral John entered Admiral Nottingham's quarter.

"Yes?" He was in his chair, staring at space through a small window.

"I'd like to discuss a promotion with you."

"Whose promotion?"

John handed over a file. It contained military record of Captain Cecilia. As Nottingham looked over the file, he whistled.

"Nice record, I must say. She sure survived good."

"Yes, I'd like to promote her to a rank of commodore."

Nottingham put the file back on his desk. "Well, there are already sixteen commodores. I think we have enough. Perhaps, after the battle...."

He turned his chair again to face the window. "The aliens left Saturn. They should be here in few hours. We must send the Hope away."

John nodded in agreement.

Erika's communication bracelet vibrated.

"What is it?" She said.

"Captain, Admiral Nottingham is looking for you."

"I will be there."

A moment later, Erika arrived at the bridge. She rushed to the captain's chair. "I am ready."

A holographic screen appeared up in front of her.

"Captain, we don't have time to greet. You must go now," It was Nottingham.

Erika nodded. "I understand, sir."

"Your first destination is Earth. Evacuate Earth and Moon and head to Venus. You know what to do."

Erika wet her lips with her tongue. "Admiral, may I ask you something?"

Nottingham nodded on screen.

"Why was I chosen?"

"Do you really wish to know?"

"Yes, Admiral."

He cleared his throat. "I chose you personally because you seemed to be an easy going character."

"Excuse me?"

"Whoever is going to be the captain of the Hope will be under extreme stress. You will soon know what I mean. Those so-called elite captains are so uptight. I didn't know how they would react under extreme duress. Someone like yourself, according to the records, has lower rating. But such ratings don't mean anything when it comes to a true value of a captain. I saw that you failed a lot of missions because you chose to change mission objectives according to given situation. Elite captains never do that. They stick to their primary objective. I needed someone flexible to be the captain of Hope."

Erika chuckled. "So, I was chosen because I suck?"

"Well..., if you put it that way, yes."

She laughed out loud. "One hell of a choice you've made admiral."

"Good luck, Captain. Billions of lives will be depended on you," His voice was grave.

Erika's laughing immediately seized and she gave a strong nod at him. "I will do what I can."

"Farewell," Nottingham saluted at Erika and she saluted back.

The Hope arrived at Earth.

"Scanning for life signs on Earth. Counting numbers now... One billion and four hundred million lives detected," Quentine was on bridge by sensory station.

"Good, send a message to Earth relay station and let's begin moving," Erika took off from her chair. "We must do this as fast as we can. Unload transport shuttles and get them down to Earth."

Having given out the command, she turned her head toward Quentine.

"Quentine, would it be possible to copy whole data from Earth archive?"

"The Hope has more than enough data storage," He nodded. "But data of Earth archive is old. I believe the file structure is no longer compatible with the Hope's."

"Convert then."

"It's going to take a long time to do so," He pulled out his PDA and loaded up a calculator. "Let me see... It is going to take twelve hours just to convert and additional six hours to transfer the whole data."

"How long would it take to bring all people on Earth to the Hope?"

"Fourteen hours approximately."

"Begin data conversation. We will need the data for our future children. Also obtain samples of plant seeds and recipes of foods and locate some beer."

Quentine twisted his head. "Excuse me? Beer?"

"Yes, beer. I am sure there are some left on Earth."

"Are you serious? You are looking for a drink at a time like this?"

"Hey, I am sure many of us hadn't had decent beer for years. Just do it. It's for moral."

"Whatever you say, captain," He sighed and left the bridge.

The Hope positioned itself in Earth orbit and began to release transports. The Earth archive was the central processing unit building on Earth. The archive sent out an emergency message to all resident to pack up and prepare to evacuate the planet.

Of course, not everyone liked the idea.

"Protests?!" Erika gave herself a facepalm. "I don't fucking believe this."

Tens of thousands on major cities started to protest, voicing that abandoning Earth wasn't an option and the navy must do everything to protect the home planet.

"What should we do?" A crew asked.

Clearly annoyed, She uttered, "Ach! Forget those fuckers. Just get people aboard. We don't have time to waste. It's not like we want to abandon Earth, fucking snowflakes."

"Yes, captain."

Her communication bracelet vibrated. She let out of an exhausted sigh and answered. "What is it now?"

"It's Quentine. While converting the data, I am confronted with password protected data. We need Admiral Nottingham's password to break through its security barrier."

"Got it. I will contact him right away," She rushed to the captain's quarter and tried to establish a secured communication. But all she could hear was buzzing. She felt cold sweat on her back. She feared for the worst. She tried to establish a connection with other admirals. When she was about to accept her fear, Admiral John answered.

"This is Admiral John speaking. Who is this?"

"Admiral! Boy, am I glad to hear you. I am Erika."

"Captain, what is your situation?"

"We are boarding people. Anyway, what happened? I can't seem to contact Admiral Nottingham."

There was a short moment of silence before Admiral John answered.

"We've lost," His voice was saddened. "All other admirals perished in the battle. I am retreating to Earth right now with a small fleet."

"Can't be..." Erika's face became pale. "How could you lose so fast?"

"Our sensor couldn't even count their number. You can figure out the rest."

"... I understand."

"Terminating the connection now. Good luck, Captain."

She felt like screaming. Well, she did scream. The captain's quarter was directly connected to the bridge. So, when she came out of her room, the bridge crew looked at her. Inhaling deep breath, she declared,

"Admiral Nottingham has lost. The only admiral left is John and he is retreating to Earth with a small fleet. We do not have time. We must finish our job here and move onto Venus. I repeat, we don't have a fucking second to waste."

"Captain, what about those who are protesting..." A crew dared to bring up the topic again in such a grave moment.

"Forget them! They failed to see what kind of danger we are in. They deserve to die."

Some of the bridge crew didn't like Erika's speech, but they couldn't disagree with her at a time like this.

"Preparing to take off, captain."

Erika nodded.

Meanwhile, Quentine reported that he downloaded what he could.

The bridge jolted as it was leaving Earth's atmosphere.

"Captain..., the protesters, they are trying to contact us."

Erika scoffed. "Ignore them. They probably want to come aboard now."

She was right. The Hope was as big as Moon at least width wise and anyone could see it clearly from Earth's ground that it was leaving. As the protesters saw the Hope taking off, and knowing that it was their last ticket for survival, they had to contact the ship.

"Captain, we cannot leave them to die here," Quentine spoke through a speaker from the Hope's engine room.

Erika was well aware. But she was pissed. Uttering few words to herself, she growled.

"Fine, make it quick. Let them in."

After taking the protesters aboard, the Hope quickly dispatched from Earth to Moon. It was relatively easy to transport all population on Moon to the Hope. It took only two hours.

While on course to Venus, Erika was inspecting the Hope's system with the chief engineer Quentine. The Hope was basically a skeleton. It had nothing on it. Even its weapons arrays were incomplete. Erika and Quentine were in a hallway to modules deck. Quentine had a patch panel opened, showing an incomplete system array.

Erika sighed deeply. "Nothing's complete on this damned ship," She muttered.

"We had no choice," Quentine replied while his upper body was inside of a small tunnel by the incomplete array. "We didn't have enough resources."

"What are you doing anyway?"

"Finishing this array."

Erika crossed her arms. "What's the plan?" She raised her voice. "I suppose you do have a plan, don't you?" She appeared to be annoyed.

An electrical sparks occurred in the small tunnel. Groaning with pain, Quentine struggled to leave the tunnel.

"Can't you leave me alone when I am working?"

He appeared to be annoyed as well.

"I am the captain here and I am asking you a question," She demanded, "Answer me."

Quentine glared at her briefly before he answered.

"The psychical condition of this ship is fine. We just need modules. We will perform mining at SOL-6D."

"SOL-6D?"

"It's a mining planet. It's not on the space chart. Didn't the Admiral tell you?"

He certainly did. But with so much going on, she had completely forgotten about it until this moment.

She turned around and left without saying anything further. Obviously, they didn't seem to be getting along well.

She turned on her computer as she entered the captain's quarter. Her computer had a direct access to the ship's mainframe. Therefore, she was able to perform extensive checkups on the ship's system. While at it, she noticed that another person had access to the ship's mainframe. It was Quentine.

She crossed her fingers and groaned. Although her first impression from Quentine was nice, she didn't like his tone and attitude. And now she found out that he had a master access to the ship's mainframe, meaning he had as much power as a captain.

Normally, she would have attempted to cut his access and demote his access level. However, even she knew that her computing skill wouldn't be a match against his and, considering the current situation, she chose not to create any internal conflict for the time being.

From this moment, her view regarding Quentine became hostile.

The Hope arrived at Venus safely without a trouble. Venus president, Nahs, contacted the Hope. Nahs was a descendant of Gair and Nikki.

A holographic screen overlaid on the bridge's fore window.

"Greetings, Captain Erika."

"Hello, we don't have time to waste. The Hope will dock at the outpost. We will send transports to the two other outposts. Get your people to the outposts."

"I understand."

"What about you?" Erika asked.

"Pardon?"

"Will you evacuate also?"

A short silence, there was.

"I am staying. My parents and grandparents were the rulers of this planet. I am not leaving here."

Venus had a dictatorship ever since being ruled by the crimson wizard. Though the dictatorship had become loose over time and their political system became literally democratic, it still didn't change a fact that there was one sole ruler over the planet.

"You are kidding me."

"I am not."

A determined look, Nahs had on his face. He was indeed serious.

"God damn...," Erika muttered. "I hate people like you."

"Thank you," Nahs responded with a faint grin.

Frowning, Erika turned off the channel.

"Captain," A crew called out.

"Yes?"

"The aliens have reached Jupiter."

She knew well that the planet would soon be overrun. There wasn't really much time to waste. Docking wasn't possible for the Hope since the ship was so gigantic in size. Therefore, a large anti-freeze rubber hose was used to connect between the Hope and the outpost.

"Captain, we need more crew here. It's a mess. We can't control all these people with mere ten staff."

"I will send more right away."

"Captain, could we get more hands here? We are trying to get the people into the habitat modules."

"I will send more men soon."

Beeping occurred every minute, asking for more men power, which the ship lacked. Erika answered them without paying too much attention. She was thinking something else.

She wanted to save Nahs. It would take at least few hours to transport millions of people into the habitat modules. The habitat modules met bare minimum living standards. It was all they could build with resources they had. The modules were literally a gigantic dorm divided with hundreds of floors with minimum cooling and air supply system. There weren't enough wash rooms on each floor as well. Crisis was expected by the ship's design crew when the modules become full.

And, when the crisis comes, she wanted a leadership figure, and Nahs would fit nicely for the job.

"Hey," Erika called out a random crew on the bridge.

"Yes, captain."

"Can you do me a personal favor? You may not like it."

"Sir?"

Erika was on a shuttle with two arms crew. She was heading down to Venus.

"Captain, the port is way too busy to grant us a landing permission," The pilot of the shuttle reported. "Your orders?"

"Can you land us on a suitable ground nearby?"

The pilot showed no objection and immediately started to circle around the sky to locate a suitable flat ground. The shuttle eventually landed in a park. The city was too busy evacuating to maintain public security. Therefore, Erika's shuttle wasn't monitored.

"Alright, men, let's head to where Nahs is."

Erika did not find Nahs in the city hall of the Crater. She was later informed that Nahs was found in the grand library. This very library was where Cecil Klisis once resided as the imperial master during his ruthless and bloody regime.

The grand library laid before Erika's eyes. It had been preserved well. It had some resemblance with Greek architecture.

"So, he's in there?"

"Yes, captain."

"Alright, follow me."

Soon enough, Nahs was indeed found in the library. He was already dead on floor, he apparently shot his head.

"Foolish man...", Erika whispered.

Nahs chose to die on his home planet rather than becoming a nomad. It was a decision Erika certainly did not like, but she had to respect his decision, thus she gave the dead body a salute and turned away to leave.

She was back on the bridge of Hope. Evacuation was going smoothly.

"System check complete, Captain. All green."

"Transfer tube one has now been detached. Transfer tube two is being prepared to detachment."

"Captain, inhabitant module two is reporting green status."

"Alright, depart ASAP when able. Waste no time. We cannot afford to waste time. I am sure all of you know that by now."

"Our next destination will be SOL-6D, captain."

Just as Erika was about to leave the bridge, a bridge crew informed her in a rush as if he had forgotten to tell her previously.

"C, captain, I have a small matter to discuss if you don't mind..."

Sighing deeply because this would delay her long-awaited shower, she responded, "Make it quick."

"I have, ...uh, digital complaints from the residents."

Apparently, the residence modules that were carrying evacuees from Earth had made numerous digital complaints regarding living conditions. According to the bridge crew, the number of digital complaints exceeded one hundred thousand.

Erika was at a loss of words for a moment. When she eventually spoke, it was cursing.

“Fucking hell? Don’t they know what kind of situation we are under?”

Which was why the bridge crew delayed telling her as long as he could.

“Uh..., some of them are even threatening to sue you for”

Erika had to raise her voice sharply. “For what?!”

“Well, for censorship and preventing free speech.”

A bridge crew let out of a silent snicker. It was actually Alushana. Although pissed, Erika laughed out loudly after the silent snicker.

“Censorship and free speech?! Hahaha-”

Other bridge crews eventually laughed after failing to resist laughing.

“This must be what feels like to be a politician!” Erika continued. “Dealing with imbeciles!”

Erika was back in her quarter. She initially came here to take a shower, but she didn’t feel like taking one after the incident at the bridge. She sat deep into her chair and stared into a small window, displaying the ever beautiful space.

It was peaceful for the moment; actually it was too peaceful that she wondered whether this whole affair was just a dream. She continued her stare into the space.

She was startled by a slight jolt at one point.

“I must have fallen asleep...”

Looking at time, indeed she was. Her nap lasted more than six hours. She felt much better overall. It was much needed rest and thankfully she wasn't bothered. After taking a shower, she was back on the bridge.

"Captain, we are almost done. Just two more hours should be enough," A bridge crew informed her.

Settling herself in captain's chair, she happened to become curious at a bridge crew who let out a snicker during the complaint incident at the bridge.

"You there."

Initially, no bridge crew paid attention to her.

"You there," She repeated.

And no one turned around to see her.

"Hello?!"

Finally, some of bridge crews turned their heads to her direction. Still, the one Erika wanted to point was minding her own business at her console.

"Ugh." Sighing, she pointed at the bridge crew. "Can someone tell her that I want to talk to her?"

After a crew alerted the woman in question, she turned her upper body to face Erika. "Yes, captain?"

"What's your name?"

"Pardon?" It was a sudden question which a captain wouldn't normally ask. Rightfully so, she was a little confused by the question.

"Name?" She repeated.

"Ah, my name is Alushana."

"She was assigned here recently," A crew added.

“What did you think about the incident some hours ago? You know, about the complaints.”

Alushana took some seconds before she replied. “I don’t think it’s my place to make any comments.”

Inhaling deeply and letting out a long low-tone groan, Erika crossed her arms in a slow motion. “You’d make a better politician than I am.”

And finally the operation was complete and the Hope took off.

“Setting a course to SOL-6D, captain.”

“ETA?”

“Six days.”

“Get Quentine to my quarter.”

“Roger, captain.”

The Hope was currently carrying approximately five billion people. It was inevitable that sooner or later complaints would arise even more than before. Violent internal conflict wasn’t entirely out of the question.

Quentine entered the captain’s quarter.

“I am here, captain.”

Erika told him about the complaints.

“Inevitable. No matter what kind of situation they are under, some will never realize.”

“How would you deal with them?”

“Ignoring them would be the best for your sanity. You can’t really deal with them when you don’t have any good solutions.”

“And what would be ‘good solutions’?”

Quentine explained that the Hope was to be a colony vessel eventually. “We will build a dome platform on the vessel which will occupy the whole top area of the ship. We will build a new society and a government.”

“And what am I to be?”

It was a legitimate question. She was the captain of the Hope. If a government is to be formed, her position had to be defined.

Quentine replied reluctantly, “I am not certain yet. It will take years to build the dome module.”

Erika herself knew that she was not fit to be a politician. For pretty much all her life, she had been a carefree captain who took matters into her own hands. She took the role of the captain without being given a choice and she had been busy with having to evacuate, but her doubts popped in her mind from time to time regarding her ability to command this gigantic and ambitious vessel.

“I see. We will be at SOL-6D in six days. Are we going to start the dome module there?”

Quentine firmly shook his head. “No, it’s a big project. And first of all, we don’t have the means to build it. As soon as we arrive at the planet, we will mine and we will start to build factory modules and get our weapons arrays complete. That’s our first priority.”

Reasonable, Erika thought.

“SOL-6D in visual range, captain.”

SOL-6D was a barren planet but it was rich with minerals such as iron, lead, copper, and other various minerals.

“Alright, you, Alushana, right?”

Her sudden call startled Alushana. “Y, yes, captain?”

“Get down to the inhabitant modules and recruit able bodies for mining operation. We don’t have time to train anyone, so choose those with proper certifications.”

Having said so, Erika pointed two other random bridge crew. “You and you, go with her and assist her.”

“Yes, captain,” They responded.

The Hope certainly did not have the man power for any mining operation. The vessel had just enough for the ship’s operation. Meaning Erika had to recruit people in the inhabitant modules.

With over five billions of people, it was a relatively easy task to recruit enough personnel.

Erika opened a channel to the reactor room where Quentine was.

“Quentine, are you ready to oversee the op?”

“Yes, I am.”

“Okay, let’s get the show on the road.”

“Aye, aye.”

The Hope needed all kind of materials, and it wasn’t an exaggeration. Quentine insisted that the Hope needed factory modules first and Erika wasn’t about to start an argument with the ship’s chief engineer.

During the mining, she had some spare time for herself because pretty much everyone was out on SOL-6D for mining operations.

“Anything to report?” She asked casually.

“Nothing to report, Captain. The mining is going smooth so far.”

“Alrighty, I will be off. Call me if you need me.”

“Aye, Captain.”

She decided to pay a visit to an inhabitant module. Figuring that going in there with her captain’s wardrobe might cause some issues, she dressed up as a common crew when she proceeded to the hexagon-shaped hallway.

There were few crews present who were minding their own businesses. When she proceeded to a giant hatch that had triple security locks on it, a crew noticed her and attempted to stop her.

“Hey, you can’t go in there without proper permission!” At this point, he realized it was Erika.

“Captain?”

She placed her index finger on her lip, gesturing ‘shhhh’.

“But...”

“Come with me then,” She whispered.

“What’s this about, captain?”

“I just want to take a look, so are you tagging along or what?”

“Uh..., I will stay here, Captain.”

“Be my guest.” Having said so, she opened the hatch and walked in only to be stopped shortly afterwards.

Two thugs appeared to stand guard on an entrance to the inhabitation module.

“Who are you?” A thug asked her.

“Who am I? I am the ship’s crew. What the hell are you doing here, blocking the way?”

“This area belongs to the new Revelation. You may not cross.”

What the hell?

“Are you kidding me here? Seriously? Some guys formed a gang?”

“We are not a gang. We are a party.”

Then the other thug added, “A political party”

Sighing, Erika placed her hands on her waist. Digital complaints regarding censorship and violation of free speech and now this. She shook her head.

The thugs weren’t armed but they were certainly physically powerful enough to stop her. She turned around left the module at once. There were five other inhabitation modules but she didn’t feel like visiting any of them anymore.

A few days passed rather peacefully. Everyone was busy in the mining operation, well, except for Erika and few other emergency crews who remained at the Hope. Erika was able to get needed rest meanwhile.

“What?!”

Erika had just been informed that unknown signatures were detected and they were on course to their location.

“What in the world are you talking about? This ship and its location are supposed to be secret!”

“But something big is coming our way, captain. We must move.”

“I don’t believe this! Get Quentine on the channel!”

Quentine was leading the mining operation when Erika called him in an emergency channel to get out.

“We’ve been found?”

“Yes! Get back here! Get everyone back here! We must move!”

To be honest, Quentine thought they might be found but not this soon.

“I, I understand.”

“Red alert! Prepare for battle!” Erika shouted and then realized. “Can we even put up a fight?”

“We, uh, have a few fighter crafts.”

“Please don’t tell me that’s all we have.”

“Those are all we have at the moment, captain.”

“Any weapon arrays online?”

Quentine just entered the bridge.

“No, no weapon array is online.”

“So, we can’t fight back. Can we outrun them?”

“The computer tells us that we will be caught in four hours even at our top speed.”

“This is it then?”

Silence filled the bridge. Even smartass Quentine was silent.

“Helm, turn the ship around. Max speed!”

The helm officer was confused. "But captain..."

"I'd rather die trying to do something rather than waiting for death!"

"A, aye, aye!"

"Get the fighter crafts manned!"

"Yes, captain!"

"Quentine, you've got some raw minerals to work with, don't you?"

"Yes," He replied rather vacantly.

"Get something done with it. A weapon or whatever you can come up with to battle them."

Quentine nodded and left the bridge passively.

Little vigor was restored although it didn't change the fact that their future was as gloom as the blackness of space.

After two hours since they left SOL-6D, Erika was contacted by Admiral John. He explained what had happened so far and that he was the only admiral left in Sol fleet.

"The fleet is small and some ships are heavily damaged, but we are coming to you."

"Are you sure about this? You might as well flee. I don't see how you can save us now."

Admiral John made a brief silence and talked back with determination.

"We are coming to you."

She understood his determination. If she were in his shoes, she would probably have done the same. There wasn't a point in fleeing and survive when the whole world was going hell.

"I understand, Admiral."

"Channel closed, Captain."

"Alright, open a channel to all inhabitation modules."

"Opened."

Clearing her throat, she started a short speech. "This is Captain Erika of the Hope. In an hour or so, we will be caught by the aliens. We stand no chance. We have no weapons and we don't have any escort vessels. Our chance of survival is very small. Probably a miracle would have to occur if we are to survive. Do what you must. Pray if you must. Cry if you must. Just prepare for the worst. That is all."

"Channel closed, Captain."

"Nice knowing you all."

No one on the bridge spoke a word until a crew broke the silence.

"The enemy fleets are within visual range."

The bridge jolted continuously.

"We are taking hits."

"Release fighters!" Erika bellowed.

The Hope had twenty five fighters most of which went down within few minutes.

"Cut the life support. Cut everything. Reroute all power to the shield!"

"Shield is holding form at 99%, captain."

The Hope was a gigantic vessel in both size and mass. And it had impressive shield arrays. With no weapons, however, it was only a matter of time.

After two hours of the one-sided battle, the shield of the Hope was holding firm at 92%.

“Another fleet in visual range... It’s Admiral John’s fleet!”

There was no communication from Admiral John’s fleet. They simply rushed in and started to intercept the alien fleet.

Admiral’s fleet was outgunned and outnumbered and the fleet failed to stop the alien fleet. Only a small portion of the enemy fleet diverted its course to attack Admiral John’s fleet. Majority of enemy fleet was right on the Hope’s tail.

The battle went on regardless...

At one point, a bridge crew informed Erika.

“Admiral John is contacting us. Putting it through.”

A badly damaged bridge appeared behind Admiral John’s face on main screen. He shouted due to loud explosions occurring behind him.

“Captain Erika!”

“Admiral, our sensors indicate that your ship is about to blow. Evacuate!”

“NO! No way in the hell! Captain Erika, I hereby promote you to Admiral!” His bridge was badly shaking.

It was a sudden, a rather pointless, promotion.

“I don’t care for that, Admiral! Get the hell out of there!”

A big explosion was seen behind the Admiral which caused two bridge crews behind him scorched. Even the Admiral was pushed forward.

“Ugh, Erika, go... You must survive!”

But how?! Erika thought desperately.

Main screen turned statics shortly before being turned off.

“Channel... lost, Cap... Admiral.”

In normal space battles, severely damaged vessels would withdraw from front line. In this battle, however, that didn't happen. Instead, damaged ships rammed alien vessels. Damaged fighters followed the same tactics.

"You will not touch my family! Arrrrrrrrrr!"

"Farewell!"

"This is worth dying for!!"

"Hahaha...!"

Those who were making kamikaze runs shouted on a public channel.

At this point, Erika reminded herself a legendary poem written by Detur.

*When wishes are consist of wills,
When hopes are consist of wills,
When they think of the very same thing,
When wills gather,
They can make a change ...*

“Turn the fucking ship around!” She bellowed suddenly after standing up from her captain’s chair.

“Admiral?!” Helm officer was confused by the order.

“Ram! Ram into them! This ship’s shield can hold!”

Helm officer didn’t obey her order. After all, they couldn’t run. What else to do? Perhaps fighting back to the end was the way.

“What are you waiting for? What have we got to lose?”

Then she contacted Quentine. “Quentine, detach the inhabitation modules!”

There was no answer from Quentine but Erika didn’t seem to care.

Just as Helm officer was about to obey her order and turn the vessel around. Perhaps what one could call a miracle occurred.

“Uh..., hang on. Something’s happening,” A crew uttered. “Some of them are ... shattering apart?”

And it was spreading.

“What do you mean shattering apart?” Erika demanded a better explanation. She initially thought those alien ships that were rammed by Admiral’s fleet was “shattering apart”.

“It’s spreading, Admiral. They are shattering apart like ... a thin wax piece on hot oil. They are shattering and melting.”

“Put on screen?”

On main screen, the alien vessels which appeared to be silvery metal sheets attached together to form a vessel were becoming rapidly charred and then crumbled into space dust.

No one had any explanation on how and why it was occurring. What they did know, however, was that they were saved. Some bridge crews yelled “Miracle!”.

It was a surreal moment for them. They were certain that they would be dead, but somehow ... somehow ... they survived.

“The fleet...,” Erika mumbled and then raised her voice afterwards. “The fleet! Any survivors?!”

A silence answered her.

“Damn it!” She smashed arm of her captain’s chair. “Damn it!” And she continued to smash. “Damn it! Damn it! **Damn it!**”

- Fin