

The Pirates Revenge

The Pirates Revenge

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Chapter 1

“Erm, excuse me Emperor, we have a problem”

“Do, we ever not” Greeny mumbled under his Breath.

“Sir?”

“Sorry Lieutenant, What is it?”

Greeny hated being woken up. He hadn't had a full nights sleep since he became Emperor.

“We have Admiral Aragon on the communicator, he says that he needs to speak to you urgently Sir.”

“Very well, give me 5 minutes to get dressed and then put him through here”

“Yes Sir” As the Lieutenant left Greeny pulled himself out of his bed. His living area was spacious, but it was nothing compared to the Imperial Palace on Earth.

Greeny activated the command console in his office. It currently displayed a completely unflattering image of himself, his award levels in various military skills. Several of which he had earned the highest honour in, the current status of the mines and colonies that had been placed under his immediate control and his personal mineral stockpiles and bank details.

He switched the screen the communications channel and activated a channel to the Command deck.

“Put him through Lieutenant” He said. His crew had been hand picked personally due to their efficiency, skills and experience, but he still found the efficiency of that particular lieutenant unnerving. He was a shy young man, but none the less very good at his job and could make it across the ship in remarkable time.

“Yes Sir”.

“My Lord” Said Aragon with a slight bow as he appeared on the screen.

“What is it Aragon” Said Greeny, slightly more angrily than he had intended to.

“Sir, we have just received a communication from the Hive, they want to see you immediately in Betelgeux”

“Do you know what about?”

“No Sir, you know the hive” Said Aragon leaning back in his chair slightly “They keep most things to themselves”

“Ok, thank you Aragon”

“See you later Sir” He said bowing his head again.

“See you” Greeny replied, shutting off the communicator.

“Commander, set course for Betelgeux” Said Greeny as he walked onto the Command deck. The Pride of Terra was no ordinary Invincible class Battlecruiser the cargo bay had been completely converted to house his expanded living area, several high class guest rooms, a conference room, and several extra features that weren't normally included on a Battlecruiser such as greatly enhanced shields, a long range transporter and several more weapons, including a second Super heavy laser. However all these extra systems require a lot of power and so an extra Antimatter Reactor had to be installed. This meant that the

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ship was quickly picked up on sensors as it had one of the highest outputs for a ship in the galaxy.

“Yes Sir”

“Now if you will excuse me” Said Greeny “I am going to catch up on some shut eye. How long until we arrive Commander?”

“Approximately seven hour’s sir”

“Good. Alert me in five hours then Commander, thank you” he said as he walked of the command deck.

Greeny was awoken with a start, he suddenly felt weightless. But that sensation ended as soon as it had started, but the gravity wasn’t restored the way that it should have been, he was shot across the room and straight towards the door leading to the corridor outside his living area. He hit the door with a loud thud and then it opened and he fell through but fortunately he managed to grab the doorframe and swing himself to the other side of the corridor which had apparently become the floor.

“Commander?” He said angrily “What the hell is happening?”

“We aren’t sure Sir” said the commander over the communicator that was just in front of Greenys feet “Artificial gravity, weapons and hyperdrive as well as several secondary systems are offline and we are being pulled towards the Wolf359 system.

“What?” Greeny was becoming increasingly worried about the situation “How far are we from the Wolf star?”

“We aren’t nearly close enough to be affected by its gravity Sir”

Greeny managed to run and crawl his way to the command deck, bashing his shins several times on door frames.

“Sir” shouted a small Ensign from the back of the Command deck “We are about to restore artificial gravity to the ship, you may want to lean against something”

Greeny felt odd in his night clothes on the command deck, with the entire crew with their backs to the floor which was now the wall. Yep, this was defiantly going to be a strange day.

“Restoring artificial gravity in five, four, three, two, one” Said the Ensign. And then as the artificial gravity came back there was a tremendous crash as everything that wasn’t held down flew back across the ship. Greeny stood up.

“Report Commander” he shouted through the noise of the ship.

“We are approaching Wolf Sir, we will be within the wolf system within 15 minutes”

“Concentrate on getting weapons online and see if you can find out what’s happening”

“Sir, I may have an explanation” Shouted a young engineering Lieutenant “I think that we may be caught in some sort of artificial gravity field”

“Hmm, I remember being given a report about something similar to that several years ago, but all our tests were failures” Said the commander.

“Not all of them Commander” Greeny said “There was one successful test. The engineers managed to stabilise the gravity field long enough to capture a ship. However the gravity was stronger than anticipated and the ship was crushed under its own weight. The remnants of the ship were super accelerated and were pulled straight into the gravity

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generator destroying it, and the ship it was built on. The entire event was classified and the Council decided that the technology was too unpredictable to spend more resources on.”

“Well Sir” said the Commander “It appears someone has perfected the technology”

“Five minutes until we are within the system”

“Go to battle status,”

“Ready available weapons,”

“Activate shields”

“Sir we are entering the system” Said the commander.

Greeny sat in his chair and activated the command console and selected the tactical screen. Pirates. He sighed.

“Three Kerensky class Destroyers, an Aurelius class Cruiser, 2 Battlecruisers, a Zealot and who knows how many cloaked ships” Said the commander.

“Sir the Aurelius class cruiser is emitting power levels well above those that are expected for a ship of that size”

“Ok, lock weapons, we will need to destroy that if we want to escape”

“Emperor Greeny, how nice of you to join us” Said a figure over the communications channel. His features were hidden by a cloak, but from the build Greeny guessed that he was probably a Genus.

“Oh, great another overdressed cliché bad guy. Well what do you want” Greeny said slightly bored. This clearly annoyed the Pirate, who had obviously expected his attire to have more of an impact. But he composed himself before he spoke.

“I want you. You and your crew would be worth a large amount of money to the Terran Empire don’t you think”

“I am going to enjoy collecting the bounty on your head” Greeny replied as he shut off the communication.

“What are our chances Commander?” Greeny asked.

“Well they clearly want us alive, or you at least” The commander said and Greeny could hear the slight amount of fear in his voice.

“If those Kerensky class destroyers are still fitted with the original shields and weapons that they have when they are built then they pose no threat, they could be destroyed in a single volley” Said Greeny “I doubt that the Aurelius class ship is factory standard, but with that gravity generator running I doubt it has much power for weapons and shields. However those Invincibles and that Zelly could be a problem, not to mention there are probably several cloaked ships within firing range.”

“We tried communicating with the Terran Navy but our communications are being jammed, however the hyperdrive is now online”

“Sir” a lieutenant shouted “Two energy readings to starboard and three to port”

“Cloaked ships?” The commander asked.

“Most likely Sir, however we can’t say what type of ship they are”

“Thank you lieutenant. Commander, what is the status of the weapons?” Greeny asked

“All operational except torpedo tubes 5 and 7”

“Good, prepare to open fire on the Aurelius cruiser”

“Aye Sir”

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“Firing Starboard Super Heavy Laser”

“Firing Distortion cannons one and three”

“Launching all available torpedoes”

It had taken the pirates a split second to realise that the Pride of Terra had opened fire, but they had responded in kind.

“Shields at 93% Sir”

Greeny had been correct when he had said that the Aurelius cruiser wouldn't fire, but the Kerensky class destroyers had significantly upgraded weapons.

“Aurelius shields at 23%”

“Good, I think that...” But Greeny couldn't finish that sentence as the ship was suddenly rocked by a huge explosion. “Report” He shouted as several ensigns grabbed fire suppression devices to put out the blazes that were tearing through the back of the command deck.

“Shields down, all starboard weapons are down, reactor two is offline, engines down to 34% efficiency.”

“By the Emperors crown, what happened?” Shouted the Commander.

“Unknown Sir. However reports from reactor control indicate that, well Sir, they indicate that we were sabotaged”

“Status of the Hyperdrive” Shouted Greeny over the noise of the flames and suppression systems.

“94% Sir”

“Is the gravity generator still online?”

“Yes Sir, but the shields on the Aurelius ship are down”

Greeny exchanged a glance with the Commander and then they both started to issue orders.

“Roll the ship, bring the Port weapons around”

“Seal off the area around the reactor and dispatch security teams, we need to find the saboteur”

“Shut all unessential access ports, I don't want any more systems to be sabotaged”

Then another explosion rocked the ship.

“All weapons are offline”

“Sir, that was one of the docking ports being blown, we have been boarded”. Greeny could feel the fear in the room, although no one showed any signs of it he had been a leader long enough to recognise it.

“Send all available security teams” he didn't have to shout anymore, all the firing had stopped.

Then there was an eerie silence across the command deck broken every few seconds by the sound of small arms fire and a door being exploded.

“Ok, everyone ready your weapons” Said the Commander, drawing his Pulse Rifle and kneeling down beside a console.

All the bridge crew drew weapons of various sorts, for most it was a simple bolt pistol, but a few had more advanced weapons.

Greeny could hear the screams of the security team outside the Command deck door and then a silence before a large explosion which knocked him back.

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“FIRE” he shouted but most of the crew had already started. The attacking force consisted of 6 preservers, all of them clearly damaged, 3 Orfine and a Genus.

“Commander!” Greeny shouted as he watched his faithful friend be torn apart by one of the Orfine.

“Damn Dog” he shouted as he unleashed several rounds into the Orfines head. He then suddenly felt very strange and then realised that he had been hit on the head. He spun round and tried to elbow the attacker in the face, but realised too late that elbowing a robot in the face would do more damage to him. The Preserver grabbed his arm and snapped it with a crunching sound between the elbow and wrist. As he fell to his knees he heard a synthesised voice but he was too delirious to understand what it said, then he blacked out.

Chapter 2

“Fifty years ago, by the Terran calendar that was the year 2623, Earth was devastated by what we have come to call the seven hour war” S117 said as he walked through the corridors of the Imperial Palace. “We don’t know who fired the first weapon but no attempts were made to make peace and every nation responded in kind. A cease fire was called 6 hours and 47 minutes after the first missile was launched but it was too late. There was little left standing, every one of earths cities lay in ruin. There were over 14 billion people on Earth on that morning, by nightfall there were just 2 billion.”

He had been tasked with escorting the Hive representative to the council chamber but when he had accepted he hadn’t expected the Hive in question to be so inquisitive. He hated taking about the war, he wasn’t there but he had often wondered what the Terran Empire would be like if the war hadn’t happened.

“But if we recall correctly, Müller didn’t start to take over until six years after that” stated the Insect.

“Yes, those that didn’t die during the war were forced to fight for survival in a living hell. The sun was blocked out for 3 years and so the entire planet was covered in complete darkness and all natural plant and animal life died. The Eurasian government was the only one which had not been completely obliterated, leading many to believe that they fired the first shot as they were the ones who were prepared. But instead of helping their people, they abandoned them, they just grew more and more paranoid inside their bunkers. Müller took command of what little was left of the Eurasian army and lead a coup to gain control of the government centre. He rallied the forces of the Eurasian Federation and the entire planet was under his rule in less than 11 years. He then declared himself Emperor and ordered the construction of the Imperial City over the ruins of his home city of Berlin with the Imperial Palace,” he said gesturing around “in the very centre.”

“What is the population of the Imperial City?” Asked the Hive in, what S117 guessed, was a Hive look of curiosity.

“Almost 3 Billion, the city spreads out for about 100kilometres in all directions.”

“Impressive, nothing like the cities on our home world” said the hive looking out of a nearby window.

As S117 and the Hive walked into the council chamber the rest of the council stood up.

“Good afternoon ambassador” Sonar said, sitting down again “Please, take a seat”.

“Prime Minister” The Hive said, with a bow.

The Hive ambassador looked around the room as he made his way towards one of the empty seats. It was a large circular room, the walls were about 20 metres high and lead up to a domed ceiling which seemed to change colour as you moved. Occupying most of the room was a semi-circular table. On the curved side of the table there was a large throne, and on each side of the throne were 7 seats. Along the straight side of the table were 5 seats, clearly for guests, thought the ambassador.

“What have you called us here for?” asked the Hive. The insect was alone but all members of the Hive collective thought together, so it was rare for one of them to refer to themselves as “I”.

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Sonar sighed “Approximately seventeen hours ago Emperor Greenys ship, The Pride of Terra, disappeared off of our hyperspace sensors on the way to Betelgeux from Vega. Its common for ships to disappear off sensors in the badlands, we usually regain sensor locks on them within a few minutes, or an hour at the most. But we never did with Greenys ship.”

“What is this ‘Badlands’ you speak of?” The Hive inquired.

“The Badlands” Narses replied “is the area of space surrounding the Wolf 369 and Hades systems”

“Pirate territory” JOEONE concluded.

“Ah, we understand, please continue”

“Well, at exactly the same time, all of our sensor relay stations in Wolf were disabled. We have already contacted the Orfine and Plexxan governments, all of their sensors went down in that system too” Sonar continued “It is probable that all of the other races sensors are down as well. However, your cloaking technology may have helped your relay stations in the area avoid detection.”

“We will check...”

“Oh and ambassador” JOEONE interrupted “The majority of the collective doesn’t need to know this, ok”

“We agree, the hive responded, in our interactions with other races, we have learned that not all things should be shared” the Hive responded.

“We have been told that all the sensors in Wolf went down” the Hive said, after several minutes of silence and twitching “Except one, it is the oldest one in the system.” Sonar sat up in his chair “It recorded some sort of energy pulse at the same time your sensors went down”

“Can you locate a source?” Demanded S117.

“No, however it came from the region around the asteroid designated WX-88”

“What about Greenys ship?” Asked Sonar.

“Our visual records are damaged, however our sensor logs from the relay station show that a large energy source entered the system just after the sensors went down. Power readings indicate that it was the Pride of Terra. After that there were several dozen weapons bursts many of them with a Terran energy signature. The power levels suddenly drop after a large explosion aboard the Pride and soon after that the weapons fire stops. However the Pride of Terra was not destroyed. All the surviving ships then go to hyperspace, including the Pride” The Hive said, avoiding eye contact with anyone at the table.

“Admirals Aragon, Phantom and Armageddon were dispatched 2 hours ago with a fleet of over 150 ships. They are going to Wolf to see if they can locate where Greeny is, if he is still alive at all” Sonar said gravely “Until we hear word from them we will continue as normal, I will send you all messages when we hear from them. Thank you Ambassador” he said, nodding to the Hive Ambassador.

“Glad we could help” He replied, slowly rising from his seat.

Greenys head spun. He tried to stand, but the movement caused his head to feel as if it was split in two and he collapsed back to the floor.

“I wouldn’t try to move too soon ‘Emperor’” Said a voice mockingly.

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“Who are you?” Greeny said scrambling back against the wall. He realized that his vision was blurred, but he didn’t squint. He pulled himself up against the wall. He was in a prison cell, there was no bed so either he wasn’t going to be here long or he was in for some uncomfortable nights. The man he was talking to was looking at a computer console, but Greeny couldn’t see what he was looking at.

“I will take you to my master soon” Replied the man, ignoring Greenys question.

“What happened to my ship” Greeny said angrily, suddenly remembering the events aboard the Pride of Terra.

“Your ship is...safe” Said the man, then he chuckled “I can’t say the same for you crew”.

Greeny slid back down the wall he was leaning against. What had happened in those final moments? He remembered gun fire, explosions then pain. He looked down at his forearms, his right arm was cut and bruised but his left was encased in a blue tube.

“What is this?” Greeny asked, holding up his arm.

“The toasters that boarded you didn’t realize how fragile Terran bones are” the man replied “We do apologize” he said in a manor that clearly showed that he was not the least bit sorry. “You will have to leave it on for a few days until your arm heals. I must admit I am impressed by how fast you heal”.

“One of the benefits of being an Emperor” Greeny gave a slight smile, even though he didn’t feel the slightest bit happy “You get the latest in bio-implant technology” He looked up, “Who is your master?” He asked.

Greenys vision was returning and he could see now that the man he was talking to was Plexxan. Most people couldn’t tell the difference between a Terran and a Plexxan, but Greeny had spent enough time amongst both races to know the difference.

“He would prefer it if you didn’t know.”

Greeny pulled himself up against the wall again. He made it to his feet and locked his knees to keep himself upright.

“We will go see my master now” The Plexxan said. He opened the cell door and grabbed Greeny, who nearly fell again. “Hurry up, hurry up, my master is not a patient man” he said, pushing Greeny along the corridor. Greeny recognized the structure of the ship, it was an older design Invincible Battlecruiser. This design was faster than the new designs but had often had random power failures in secondary systems. The Plexxan pushed him through the door to the ships conference room but he didn’t follow.

“Greetings Greeny” Said a voice.

“Who are you?” Greeny asked, the room was dark and he couldn’t locate the source of the sound. “Show me who you are” Greeny shouted.

“I suppose I might as well tell you” Greeny saw a figure appear from a particularly dark corner and clapped his hands together loudly activating the lights. This did little to reveal his identity however as he wore a long black robe with a large hood which left his face in shadows. “My name is Cold Fire” he said lowering his hood.

Chapter 3

“Sir” Aragon said “When we arrived in Wolf there was no sign of Greeny or the Pride of Terra so we sent a team to the Cove. According to the pirates there, a small fleet of ships arrived about an hour before the Emperor did and didn’t respond to any of the Pirates attempts to communicate. The Cove pirates were going to launch an attack on them but during the launch procedures one of the pirate’s ships was damaged. The captain of that ship started pointing fingers and a fire fight ensued. By the time they had realised what was going on the Pride had been captured and the Fleet was gone.”

“Do they know where they went?” Sonar asked over the communicator.

“From the angle of their jump to hyperspace we have calculated that they have moved to Pollux”

“Pollux was recently taken by the pirates. We were surprised by the strength and organisation of the Pirates I during that battle. The Union forces were overwhelmed easily. Our reports show that there is a state-of-the-art starbase there belonging to the pirates. It seems likely that they took Greeny there” Sonar said.

“Should we head there now?” Aragon asked, leaning foreword in his chair.

“Yes, but stay aware. We don’t know how large the force in that system is”

“Ok, we will make contact after we have arrived”

“Good luck Admiral” Sonar said, shutting off the communicator.

“What is he?” Greeny asked quietly. Cold Fire looked like nothing Greeny had ever seen before.

The Plexxan looked up from his computer console. “He is, well he is what he is.”

“Y’know, you aren’t very helpful Plexxan.” Greeny said, leaning against the wall behind him. “Do you plan to keep my locked up here forever? Because you know the Terrans will send a fleet to find me.”

The Plexxan snorted “You don’t think we know that, in fact, they are already on the way” He walked up to the edge of the cell and leaned foreword “Actually, the whole reason that we kidnapped you was to draw you fleet here” He said, just above a whisper “And when they arrive they will be slaughtered” The Plexxan smiled to reveal a yellow toothed grin.

Greeny jumped foreword with lightning speed and punched the Plexxan in the jaw through the bars. He hit the ground with a thud.

“Now, how to get out of here” Greeny muttered to himself. The lock was computer controlled, and the console was on the other side of the room. But at least he would have some quiet before the Plexxan woke up.

“Entering Pollux in 7 minutes Admiral” Shouted a voice from across the command deck.

“As soon as we enter the system start scanning for Greenys lifesign and Order the Fleet to fire on any pirate ship in range.”

“Yes Admiral”

“And contact the Imperial City. Tell them that we have arrived”

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Greeny began to pace, he needed to find a way out of his cell to contact the fleet. He had tried to rewire the controls on the lock, but all he had got out of that was a nasty shock. "Damn it!" he shouted as he swung round and kicked the bars. He had never felt so helpless. A loud ringing sound suddenly erupted from all around him. For a second he thought that he had set off the alarm, but he quickly realised that it meant that the Terran fleet had arrived.

"Captain, we have arrived in Pollux and are moving to the specified coordinates"
"Excellent, power weapons and activate shields" Fallen Angel said. Something didn't feel right, he had been involved in many battles before, but this one seemed different.
"Captain, we have hundreds of energy traces in the system" Said a lieutenant, from the side of the command deck.
"Get me one of the Admirals" Fallen said, suddenly very worried. This was supposed to be an easy mission.

Armageddon appeared on the communicator, and was visibly worried.

"Sir, have you sensors..."

"We see them Captain", he interrupted.

"What do we..."

"We need to rescue the Emperor, Captain."

"Yes Sir, sorry Sir" Armageddon nodded and disappeared from the screen. A few moments later Aragon issued a fleet briefing.

"The Pirates are stronger than we thought; there are at least eight hundred cloaked ships here, as well as a starbase and several dozen ships of various classes. But we must rescue our Emperor. Good luck to you all"

"You heard the Admiral" Fallen said "Bring us into firing range"

"Admiral, there is an Aurelius class cruiser near the starbase with abnormally high energy levels. It appears to have some sort of weapon built on it, our scanners can't identify it"

"What is it doing Commander?" Aragon asked.

"No idea Admiral, but its energy levels are growing". Suddenly PhantomGODdness's image appeared on the communicator.

"Aragon, those cloaked ships aren't moving. Our scanners show that they are too small to be manned craft. And the uncloaked ships are staying well back"

"I don't like the look of this Phantom, how long until we are in firing range of the uncloaked pirate ships"

"About ten minutes. Do you think we should call off the attack until we can determine what they are?" Phantom asked.

Aragon began to speak but was interrupted by several dozen communications channels opening at once.

"What the hell is going on Commander!" he shouted over the noise.

"Our communications are being jammed Sir"

"Shut that noise off!"

"I am trying Admiral" The Commander shouted back. "Done!" he shouted as the sound died away.

"Sir sensors report that the Aurelius is moving to a position directly behind the cloaked ships" The Commander said, slightly louder than he had anticipated.

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“What the hell is happening here” he muttered. Suddenly he had an idea. “Could those cloaked ships be mines Commander?” he asked.

“Possibly Sir”. Mines were pretty much useless in space combat. They were static and their cloaks gave off an energy signature so any ship with even the oldest sensors could detect them before they came within the blast radius of one. But this didn’t make any sense to Aragon. Why would the pirates have wasted time putting up this mine field if they knew that the sensors would pick them up from millions of kilometres away? Suddenly it dawned on him.

“Turn the ship, Order the Fleet to disengage, prepare to jump to hyperspace on my mark.”

“Sir communications are still down, we can’t contact the fleet”

“Well then I hope their sensor officers are paying attention. Turn the ship and go to full speed, don’t go to hyper until I say”.

“Yes Sir”

“Captain, Admiral Aragon’s ship is changing course and is heading away from the pirate fleet.”

Fallen looked at his Commander “Are communications still down?”

“Yes Sir, but all other systems are functional” The Commander replied.

“How long until we are in weapons range of the Pirates?”

“Three minutes Captain”

Fallen sighed, “I can’t believe that the Admiral is running. Continue on our current course Commander”

“How many ships are following us Commander?”

“Fifty six including both the other Admirals. The rest are still on course for the Pirates. Sir, may I ask what is going on?” The Commander said, looking slightly worried.

“When Greeny was captured he clearly didn’t enter Wolf through choice, he must have been pulled in somehow and I am willing to bet that it has something to do with that Aurelius. Here we have a mine field that we clearly aren’t going to fly into ourselves, but maybe we are going to be pulled in.”

The Commanders eyes widened. Aragon knew how he felt.

Fallen suddenly felt weightlessness but didn’t have long to come to grips with the sensation as he was thrown across the command deck to the front wall.

“What’s happening commander” He shouted, nursing his back.

“Sir the Aurelius cruiser has activated some sort of high powered tractor beam, we are being pulled directly towards the fleet of cloaked ships. The entire fleet except those that ran are being pulled in”

“Brace for impact” Fallen shouted, but he knew that they stood no chance. They couldn’t even reach the weapons command console from their position on the front wall.

“Sir, those aren’t cloaked ships, they are mines”

“Oh sh...” but he never got a chance to finish that statement.

“Sir, Communications are back online”

Aragon felt sick. Almost one hundred ships destroyed, several thousand Terran lives extinguished and they hadn’t even destroyed a single pirate ship.

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“Contact what remains of the fleet” he said quietly “Tell them to head back to Sol”

“Greeny” said Cold Fire, in his usual theatrical style “There is something I think you should see”.

“I think I killed your Plexxan” Greeny said nodding in the direction of the unconscious man.

Cold Fire shrugged “It was bound to happen someday” he said, unlocking the cell door “Follow me please”

“Where are we going?” Greeny asked, he knew that trying to escape would be futile, he didn’t even know where he was.

“To Sol” Cold Fire said, matter of factly “Just as soon as I show you the remains of your fleet.”

Chapter 4

As Greeny looked out over the wreckage he felt his heart sink.

“How many ships?” Greeny asked trying, and failing, to keep the emotion out of his voice.

“Over a hundred and fifty” Greeny couldn’t see Cold’s face, but he knew that he was smiling. Cold Fire laughed “That’s over four thousand Terrans, all killed without destroying a single one of their enemies.”

“This was just a fraction of the Terran Fleet, you can’t honestly expect your fleet to beat all the defences of Sol” He new that Cold Fire was no ordinary Pirate, but he was as overconfident as the rest of them.

“Who says we have to beat them?” Cold said turning his shadowed face towards Greeny “Take him back to his cell and prepare to enter hyperspace.”

“Prime Minister, the pirates are organised. Their capture of Greeny was obviously for more than a mere ransom demand” Aragon said, visibly shaken “Almost a hundred ships have been destroyed, and we never even fired a shot.”

Sonar leant forewords on his chair and rubbed his temples with his right hand. “Return to Sol for now. We will discuss...”

“But Sir” Aragon interrupted “We need to rescue the Emperor”

“I know Admiral” Sonar said calmly “I know. Dock at Utopia, I will send the Stormguards to meet you there”

Aragon opened his mouth to argue, but thought better of it. “Very well Prime Minister.”

Cold Fire is clearly preoccupied with something, Greeny thought to himself. Usually, on the way back to his cell he would be accompanied by six armed guards, this time there were only two. The one on his left was a genus, who was limping slightly and was wearing a similar device on his left shin as Greeny was on his arm. The man on his right was a Terran and seemed in perfect health.

As they rounded a corner the Terran moved in front and lowered his weapon and Greeny saw his chance. He kicked at the Genus’s injured shin and felt it give way, the genus went down and howled in pain. Greeny grabbed the Broods weapon and shot the Terran through the back of the head, and then turned and shot the Genus three times in the chest. It was all over in less than a second.

“Now to escape” He muttered to himself. The Genus weapon had enough power left for seventeen shots, and the Terrans had enough for thirty six, but he couldn’t find any spare energy cells.

Now Greeny had to make a choice. He could head to the command deck and attempt to kill Cold Fire and end this now, or he could go down to the docking bay and try to steal a fighter. Either way he wouldn’t have long until he was discovered. He decided on the latter as if he failed to kill Cold, then the Terran Empire would not know what was coming. But first he needed to find out what Cold intended to do. Then he heard a crackle and Cold Fire’s voice came over the ships communication system.

“Fleet this is Supreme Admiral Cold Fire” Greeny sighed, are there any pirates in the galaxy who aren’t full of themselves? He asked himself “Prepare to enter hyperspace, set

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a course for Earth. We are going to bypass the Terran Defences by dropping out of hyperspace in a low orbit around earth. As soon as you drop out of hyperspace open fire on the Imperial City. Happy hunting.”

Greeny felt very confused, one of the reasons that low orbit jumps were not usually attempted was that there is not enough space to slow down before the ships hit planetary shells. And Earth has dozens of them. But Cold Fire isn't a fool, he must have some plan, Greeny thought to himself. He would have to think it through later, for now he needed to get to the hangar.

“Prime Minister, there is a fleet of approximately fifty ships, mixed transponder signals. It looks like a pirate fleet Sir” Said a middle-aged Lieutenant with greying hair.

“How long until they arrive here?” Sonar asked. He was becoming increasingly worried, the Stormguards still hadn't arrived from Bootes.

“Three hours Sir”

“Activate the Planetary Shells and Dome Shields, and put all weapons on standby. Tell the Mars defence net to prepare for visitors” Sonar ordered.

Greeny was tired and cold. He had been sitting in the cockpit of the pirate Prism class fighter for several hours. He couldn't launch while in hyperspace without raising an alarm, and the guns on a fighter were no match for a Battlecruiser. He would have to wait until they dropped back into normal space.

“Sir the Planetary shells won't engage!” Shouted the greying Lieutenant “We are having problems activating power to the generators”

“What all of them?” There was no way twenty seven generators could go down simultaneously by coincidence “Dispatch security squads to each generator. Are the dome shields still working?” Sonar asked, rubbing his temples.

“Yes Sir.” The Imperial City was covered by a network of nine dome shields. Eight covered the city and a highly focused one was shaped around the Imperial Palace, its profile following the surface of the Palace at approximately three meters from its surface. This shield was as strong the combined strength of the shields on two hundred Battlecruisers and was never deactivated.

Sonar looked out of one of the windows overlooking the city. It was night outside but the city was not dark, every part of it was illuminated by artificial lights of all colours and sizes. It was beautiful.

Sonar sighed “I hope that Mars has the power to stop them” he mumbled under his breath.

“Prepare for the low orbit jump” Came Cold Fire's voice over the ships communication device. “Fighter pilots board your ships, and prepare for immediate departure, all weapons on standby. Fire as soon as we enter the system.”

Greeny knew that this wasn't going to go well for him. On the one hand if Cold's plan worked then the Imperial City would be under attack. But if it failed then Cold Fire's entire fleet would be destroyed, along with Greeny. He suddenly felt very angry at himself for wanting Cold to succeed.

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“Sir the pirate fleet will be dropping out of hyperspace in five, four, three, two, one...”
“Lieutenant?” Sonar asked “Where are they?” The sensor screen showed no sign of the pirates, but suddenly it lit up.

“Sir! They are directly above the City!” Shouted the Lieutenant. “Fifty six contacts, no, wait, almost two hundred contacts. They have launched fighters”

“They jumped out of hyperspace too late, they are going to hit the Planetary She...” It suddenly all clicked in Sonar’s mind. “Launch defence fighters, recall the fleet from Mars and bring all planetary weapons online”

“Sir they are firing” Said the Lieutenant as a stream of blue, white and green energy bolts fell from the sky.

Greeny scanned the fleet. Most of it had slowed to speeds that meant that the ships wouldn’t burn up in the atmosphere. But there were three carrier class ships which had not decelerated. The sensors showed that there were no living organisms aboard the ships but there were several Preservers.

“They are going to ram the City!” Greeny said out loud as he pushed the ship to its maximum speed and headed towards the Imperial Palace. He could see the faint blue glow of the city’s shield domes far below him.

“This is Emperor Greeny to the Imperial City” Greeny said over the ships communications device “Please respond”

“Greeny? We thought we would never see you again” Sonar replied.

“No time for that now Sonar” Greeny said “There are three carrier class ships about to ram the City, can the shields take it?”

“I doubt it” Sonar said bleakly “Can you ascertain where they will hit?”

“No” Greeny replied. “I am going to land near to the Imperial Palace. Inform the planetary defence net that I am not hostile”

“Yes Sir” Sonar said as he shut off the communicator.

Suddenly several of the fighters behind him opened fire “This is going to be a long day” he muttered to himself.

Chapter 5

“Sir, the Shields in the north-west sector are critical”

“Order the people to evacuate that area. Dispatch security teams and tell the fighters to concentrate on bringing down any ships that move into that area.” Ordered the Prime Minister.

“The Shield is down Sir.”

Sonar sighed, “How long until the Fleet gets here?”

“Seventeen minutes” Replied the Lieutenant.

Sonar looked out of the window again, he watched the exchange of fire between the Pirate ships and the Terran defence fighters for a few seconds. “Prepare my ship” He said as he turned and headed for the door.

“Get off my tail” Greeny shouted angrily. He slammed down on the reverse thrust pedal and shot backwards past his pursuers. As he opened fire one of the pirates tried the same trick that Greeny had done but went straight into Greeny’s line of fire and was destroyed by one quick burst. The debris from the destroyed fighter caused Greeny’s shields to spark and glow, it took him a few moments to realise that he was being shot at from behind. The console in front of him flashed a black and white image of the ship and showed that his shields were inoperable.

He flipped the ship and heard the hull creak, he would have to be more careful, atmospheric combat did not leave a lot of options regarding manoeuvres. He opened fire and watched the blue streaks of light fly from his weapons ports to the attacking fighter. One of the blasts sheered straight through the pirate fighter’s wing, whilst the other pierced the cockpit, causing the fighter to explode violently.

Greeny hated atmospheric combat, everything was so loud. In space, battles were silent except for the hum of a ship’s engines and the sound of the occasional explosion. But here everything was deafening, the fighters had not been developed with noise concerns in mind.

Greeny looked over the city. He could clearly see that the shield in the north-west area was not active, many of the buildings were destroyed or burning, in several areas the ground was penetrated deep enough to expose the lower levels of the city. The Imperial City was built on two levels, on top were the living areas, the markets and the gardens, and underneath were the huge training areas for the Terran Navy and Army.

“Imperial Palace this is Greeny, what is the status of ground defence forces?” Greeny asked over the communicator, but he was replied only with static. He opened the channel to broadcast to any Terran communicator “Can anyone hear me? This is Emperor Greeny”. Again he was greeted with the faint crackle of static. “Damn pirates” he muttered to himself as he turned his fighter to face the Imperial Palace again.

Dennis looked up over the pile of rubble that he was using for cover. The pirates had teleported down immediately in front of his squad. He signalled to the rest of his squad on the other side of the road to provide covering fire.

“Get down!” One of them shouted, and Dennis hit the ground without thinking. It took him a split second to realise that they weren’t talking to him as a plasma grenade

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exploded above. The building his squad were sheltering in collapsed and Dennis was sprayed with fragments. He started to move to run across the road but was forced back by weapons fire. He turned to look at what remained of his team.

“Crap” he said, wiping some blood from the side of his mouth. He could hear the heavy boot steps of the pirates and so he prepared to stand and make his final attack.

Greeny wiped the sweat out of his eyes and brushed his hair out of his face. His engine had been shot and he was concentrating on keeping the fighter level, he knew that if he lost control it would end badly for him. He kept his eyes on the Imperial Palace but knew that he would never make it. Smoke began to fill cockpit and he felt his eyes begin to water. He decided that he would have to land, but to do that he would have to reach the north-west area where the shields were down. He pulled open the compartment behind him and began to rearrange wires.

Dennis was about to stand and fire when he heard a crash come from behind him. He looked around and dived out of the road. The fighter screamed down the road and went straight through the pirates and slowed to a stop about three hundred meters further along the road. Dennis saw the canopy blow and a figure climb out of the ship. The figure ran towards him and he suddenly realised that it was the Emperor. He was clad in the bottom half of standard Terran night clothes, and they were ripped and burned in several places. But he didn't have time to stop and stare, he ran over to the collapsed building and looked for any signs of survivors. A Commander lay on top of the rubble with a trickle of blood running down from his left temple, he checked his pulse and was relieved to find that he was just unconscious.

“Captain, do you have any kind of transport vehicle?” Greeny asked, he didn't look at Dennis while he did this, instead his eyes darted back and forth around the sky.

“No my lord” Replied Dennis, bowing low “We were helping with the evacuation of this sector when pirates teleported down and destroyed our transport. There are other teams helping with the evacuation, but they are probably far away by now, and our communicators don't seem to be working.”

“Yeah I know, how many of your team are left?” Greeny asked.

“Three are uninjured, including myself, Mustysohi over there is unconscious” he said, pointing at the Commander “and about twenty minutes ago Ensign Jamming was hit by a stun shot. I don't know what happened to him exactly, but it messed with his head.

Since he regained consciousness he has claimed to be the leader of the Hive, Kolari and Terran Empire. We were going to take him to one of the medical areas.”

“Ok, well, first you need to help me get some weapons. Where is the nearest entrance to the training areas?” Greeny asked.

“I will take you there” He said, gesturing for his men to pick up Jamming and Musty.

“We just passed an entrance about ten minutes before we were attacked”

“Ok, lead the way” Greeny said, picking up one of the dead pirates guns. He checked the power pack and smiled, it hadn't been fired once.

Chapter 6

“How are we going to get past Sir” asked Dennis.

“I don’t know, got any grenades?” Greeny asked, peering round the corner of the building he was leant against. They were just a few meters away from the entrance to the training areas, but there was a large group of pirates guarding the door.

“No Sir, we weren’t issued them for the evacuation as they decided that collateral damage would be too much of an issue,” he paused as his eyes wandered over the burned and ruined city streets “Though I suppose it really wouldn’t have made that much of a difference”.

Greeny gave a small smile. “Ok, well there are twelve of them and only six of us, so I think we can take them, but, hang on, where is Jamming?” Greeny asked, becoming increasingly worried about their situation.

“He was right behind us a minute ago” replied a still groggy Mustysohi. Greeny leaned around the corner again.

“None of you were watching him?” Greeny said, “Oh, never mind, lets just find him.” Greeny stood up and started to edge away from the pirates, but was almost knocked from his feet. His head spun. “What’s happened?” He shouted steadying himself.

“Looks like they have blown out the door to the training areas” Said Dennis, looking round the building.

“Damn, ok well we should be able to avoid them if we...”

“Sir,” shouted Dennis “It’s Jamming, he is talking to the pirates!”

“What?” Said Greeny angrily. He moved to the edge of the building and watched Jamming moving towards the pirates.

Jamming was angry, why were the pirates attacking without his permission, he was after all the lord of the pirates.

“What are you doing you scum?” Demanded Jamming as several of the pirates raised their weapons. “Don’t point those at me, do you know who I am? I am Jamming, Lord of all the Pirates, you will do as I say or you will face the consequences”.

Some of the pirates looked confused, others started to laugh, in their own races unique ways. One of the Genus Pirates stepped forward.

“Oh master Jamming” He said mockingly, “If you are the lord of the pirates, why are you wearing a Terran Security Force uniform?” The question didn’t seem to even register with Jamming.

“Don’t mock me”, he said angrily “I am the lord of the pirates, you should fear me! Now do as I say or...” But he never got a chance to finish that sentence, as the pirates had become bored with him.

Jammings death was not completely pointless however, Greeny saw that the pirates were now facing away from the door to the training areas, and decided to make his move.

“Ok, on my mark jump out and start shooting” he said the four remaining Terrans that he had with him. “Ok...Mark” Greeny said. They jumped out and began to fire, seven of the pirates went down before they even knew what was going on whilst the other five dived for cover. ‘That evens the odds’ Greeny thought to himself as he continued to fire

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at where two of the pirates were taking cover. One of the pirates held his gun up and started to fire in the general direction of the Terrans. Greeny took careful aim and shot the pirates hand, he dropped the gun and started to scream.

At this point there were only two pirates left, including the injured one. Greeny signalled for the team to advance. The uninjured pirate stood up and fired a shot off straight into one of the Terrans head, and he fell down dead. Dennis finished off the pirate with a quick burst to the chest.

“Don’t kill the last one” Greeny said “I want to talk to him. Go inside and find one of the weapon storage rooms, I will be down in a few minutes.”

“Yes Sir.” Dennis said, signalling for the remaining two Terrans to enter the tunnels. Greeny walked over to the pirate who was crouching on the ground, cradling his ruined hand, the man was a young Plexxan. Greeny walked up to him.

“Why is Cold Fire attacking us?” Greeny asked angrily. The pirate didn’t respond, instead he spat at Greeny. “I am going to ask that again” Greeny said, wiping the saliva of himself with his left hand whilst keeping his pistol pointed at the man with his right “Why is he attacking us?” Again the man didn’t respond, so Greeny shot him in the right ankle. The Plexxan screamed and tried to scramble away from Greeny, but Greeny slammed his foot down on the mans injured ankle, the man screamed again. “Tell me!” He shouted.

“I don’t, I don’t know” shouted the man between screams. Greeny took his foot off the man.

“Ok then, how did you defeat our planetary defences with such a small fleet?” Greeny asked.

“I don’t know, I wasn’t in the main fleet” Moaned the man “Please, I don’t know anything, let me go” he pleaded.

“I believe you” Greeny said, as he shot the man in the head.

Greeny ran down the corridors of the training areas until he came across Dennis’ team.

“Sir” Dennis said with a slight bow “This weapons locker needs a councillor’s fingerprint and iris scan.”

“Ok,” Greeny said, brushing his hair out of his face. He leant foreword and put his eye against the iris scanner, whilst he put his hand on the fingerprint scanner. The door opened and several lights were activated. Greeny walked over to the weapons racks and picked up a Pulse Cannon, he gave it to Mustysohi. “This is a powerful rapid-fire weapon, but it’s not very good against heavy armour, so aim for vulnerable spots.” The Terran nodded.

“This” said Greeny, picking up a large weapon “is a Microlauncher. It’s basically a small rocket launcher that can fire multiple rockets at once. Don’t fire it inside, it’s mainly used to take out tanks and other vehicles, so we might need it later” Greeny said handing it to Dennis. “And here are some grenades” Greeny said giving two to each man “I don’t think collateral damage is that much of a problem anymore. Now I am going to put some armour on” Greeny said, gesturing at his ripped and burned night clothes.

Greeny looked around, it had been along time since he had worn the standard armour of a Terran so he decided to go for the lighter armour, as it would slow him down less in combat. He then started to pick up weapons and examine them. His favourite weapon was the Disintegrator, but these were far from standard issue to Terrans so he decided to

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go for the both the Assault Shotgun and the Strobe Laser. He strapped the Strobe Laser onto his back. "Ok" he said, "Let's go".

Greeny looked up through one of the holes that had been blown through the roof of the tunnel. The Sun had risen and he could see several squadrons of Terran fighters, probably G-47's harassing an Invincible, and a few smaller pirate ships attempting to land.

"I don't get it" Greeny said "Fleets a hundred times as big as this one have attacked Sol before and failed, why did this attack succeed?"

"I don't know Sir, but these pirates must have some sort of plan, because they wouldn't have got this far without one." Responded Dennis.

"We need to get to the Imperial Palace" Greeny said "I don't understand why one of the fleets hasn't got here." Greeny signalled for the men to follow him and began to run down the corridors.

"Sir" Said Mustysohi catching up with Greeny "There is a tram system nearby which will lead us directly to the Palace"

"Lead the way" Greeny said, slowing down to allow the young Terran to go in front.

Greeny looked out of the window on the tram, they were heading towards the Palace now, and he knew that he wouldn't like what he found there. By now most of the shields protecting the city would be down, millions would be dead. The Tunnels were almost totally empty in this area, as it was only used during training and was kept locked the rest of the time. As they passed into the area that wasn't locked, Greeny felt his heart sink, there were thousands of Terrans, many injured, huddling together. Dennis' hand rose to press the button to open the door.

"Don't" Greeny said, "If you open that door they will flood in. Most of them won't have any military training and none of them will have weapons, they will be killed in the first battle we get in."

"But Sir" Said Dennis, slightly angrily "If we leave them here all they can do is wait for death."

"It's better than seeking it out. Don't touch that button Captain, that's an order." Greeny said sternly, whilst raising his weapon slightly.

"Yes Emperor" He said, bowing slightly and turning away.

Greeny knew that Dennis was right, one stray torpedo or fusion cannon blast would kill all of these people. But they would slow him down, and the longer he delayed the more people would die.

Dennis was angry, these people would not live much longer, and Greeny didn't seem to care.

"Wait!" Greeny shouted "Open the doors". Dennis responded immediately and slammed his fist into the button. The tram slowed rapidly and the doors slid open. Greeny raised his weapon. "Ok, everyone listen to me, stay back or I will have to shoot you. Captain." Greeny said, pointing into the crowd at someone who Dennis couldn't see "Come here".

"Emperor!" Said Chad, as he got to Greeny "What are you doing here?"

"Never mind that, how much of your squad is left?" Greeny said, pointing his weapon at one of the Terrans who was slowly advancing towards the tram.

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“All of us. We were helping with the evacuation of this area, but the tunnel behind us collapsed. We tried calling for a tram, but communications are down.”

“Yeah I know” Said Greeny. At that point several Terrans tried to run into the tram. Greeny fired a shot into the air “Get back, or I will kill you”. The Terrans stopped and Dennis stepped out of the tram to help, he raised his weapon and stood next to Greeny. Greeny looked at Chad again “Get your squad in the tram now, Captain”.

“Aye Sir” Chad signalled for his squad to approach.

“Ok get on” Greeny said, and then he looked at Dennis “When they are in we will move backwards into the tram, as soon as you can shut the doors and start us moving. If anyone tries to get in, shoot them”

Dennis looked away from Greeny “Yes Sir”.

“Three, two, one, now” The pair backed into the tram and Dennis slammed the button again. The doors closed and the tram started to move off.

Greeny looked at Chad “We are heading to the Imperial Palace, hopefully we will be able to figure out what is going on from there”.

“Aye Sir, by the way who is attacking us?” Chad asked.

“A pirate” Greeny replied “Named Cold Fire” Greeny looked out of the window again “He is no ordinary pirate, and that is why we are headed to the Palace, to find out what we can about him.”

The tram information console alerted them that they would be arriving at the Palace in one minute. Greeny readied himself and instructed the others to do the same. Then the doors slid open.

Narses looked up from his console at the Lieutenant who had just entered his office.

“Sir” Said the Lieutenant “Greeny has entered the Palace”.

Narses eyes widened and he stood up. “Thank you Lieutenant” He said, as he ran out the door. He ran into the Command Room and collided with JOEONE.

“Greeny is in the building” he said, picking himself up “Use internal transporters to get him up here.”

“He has a group of Terrans with him” JOE said, his fingers flying around the console.

“Bring them up as well” Narses replied.

Greeny looked around and smiled “JOE, Narses what’s going on?”

“We just beamed you out of the tram station” JOE replied, rising from his console.

“I know that” Greeny said, “I mean what happening in the City?”

“Well,” Narses said “All four shields on the northern side of the city are down, the south side is not being fired upon at the moment, mainly because we have destroyed most of Cold Fire’s fleet.”

“Wait,” Greeny said, confused “How do you know his name?”

“He contacted us and told us to surrender or die, naturally we told him to shove it” Narses said with a smirk “But anyway, I did some research, and there is no mention of anyone called Cold Fire in any of our databanks, however, there is a reference to a Project Cold Fire.”

“Go on.” Greeny said, looking out of one of the windows at the burning city.

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“Well, there isn’t much data on it, it seems that most of it was erased. But about ten years ago at an institute in England there was an experiment to make some sort of super soldier, the details are sketchy. But apparently it was to have the speed of an Orfine, the strength of a Genus, etc. Y’know, all the best bits from every race. But for some reason the scientists stopped the experiment and tried to kill all the specimens. However that day a cargo ship in the area was stolen. That happens all the time so it’s nothing special. However several of the witnesses said that they saw a ‘Monster’.”

“And you think that Cold Fire may have been made there?” Greeny asked.

“I don’t know, I would suggest that we try to find a way to get there. But I doubt we would find much, that lab was turned into a reactor room for the Torchwood weapon.”

“Ok, well I think the first thing we need to do is find a way to get back into the fight.

How many Pirates are on the ground?” Greeny asked.

“At least two hundred thousand” JOE said gravely.

“What! How in Müller’s name did they get that many down in so few ships?” Greeny was suddenly very worried that they would lose this battle.

“We have no idea Sir, but we think it may have something to do with the long range transporter on the Pride of Terra.” Narses said, avoiding Greeny’s gaze.

Greeny suddenly felt very ill, “We have to stop them” he said quietly “Get me my armour and weapons. And tell every Terran capable of using a weapon to get ready to fight back. The Terran Empire will not go down without a fight.” He said, as he walked out the room to his living quarters.

Chapter 7

Greeny looked at himself in the mirror. He had always enjoyed wearing the armour of the Emperor. The armour was incredibly tough, in fact it was a common myth that if you were wearing that armour whilst a Battle cruiser landed on you, you would suffer no lasting damage, although Greeny had no intention of testing this theory. It looked deceptively weak to the untrained eye, as it was thinner even than the light armour given to cadets at the academy. It was completely black except for the Golden eagle on the left hand side of the torso, although this was usually hidden by the sleeveless black trench coat that Greeny wore over the armor to give him a more imposing look. He walked over to one of the windows and looked down on the city. The north side was heavily damaged, but the south side was untouched. He stood there for a few seconds before turning around and walking over to the weapons rack in one of the side rooms. He picked up a bolt pistol and strapped it to his right hip, and then picked up his custom disintegrator. Disintegrators were far from standard issue, and even when they were occasionally used they were massive weapons. However this one had been custom designed for Greeny himself, and so was no larger than a standard plasma rifle. He checked that the power pack was charged and walked out the door back to the rest of the councilors.

“You there!” Cold Fire said, pointing at the Terran standing behind a console at the front of the command deck “How long until the entire army is transported?”

“At the current rate, about an hour. Master,” Said the Terran pirate “Two hundred thousand pirates can easily be destroyed by the Terran Empire and even if they cant muster more than a few thousand defenders, ground based weapons can destroy that kind of army easily...”

“What’s your name Terran?” Asked Cold Fire, leaning back in his chair.

The Terran turned and looked directly into Cold Fires hooded face “Reaper” He said, shifting uncomfortably.

“Ironic” Said Cold Fire, producing a bolt pistol from his robes and firing off a single shot into the Terrans forehead. “You there” He said again, this time pointing at a Genus who was sitting at a side console, obviously doing his best to look busy. “Take over his job”.

“Yes master” The Genus said bowing slightly and hastily moving to the console.

“How many of our ships are left in orbit?” Cold Fire asked.

“Seven” The genus responded, “All Invincibles”.

“Ok, alert me when the army has been transported”. Cold Fire said, standing and strolling out of the command deck.

“Yes master” Replied the Genus again.

“Ok, well communications are still down, and so we can’t efficiently tell the army where to be or even what they are up against.” Greeny knew this wouldn’t be easy, Terrans weren’t famed for their ability to fight in close combat. And the city’s army was mostly reserve troops with little, if any, real life combat experience. But at the same time he was sure of victory. This was the Imperial City, the heart of the Empire, and Greeny knew that every Terran would fight to the death to save it. “Plus the Stormguards haven’t got back from Bootes yet. I have no idea what has happened to them, but we must assume for now that they are not coming. So, what does that leave us with?”

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“Well, we have the defense fighters, and the army, but they are scattered and unorganized, they will be slaughtered by the pirates.” Narses said gravely.

“But a single Terran is worth a dozen of their pirate scum, we have the best fighters in the galaxy!” Shouted Dennis from the back of the room.

“Yeah, don’t believe every bit of propaganda you hear Captain. Terrans are weak in close quarters, why do you think we like to smash our opponents from our Invincibles?” JOE said, looking out of one of the windows at an explosion in the city.

“In any case” Greeny continued, “We need to get...” But he was interrupted by a massive explosion. “What was that?” He shouted out.

“Palace shield at seventeen percent sir!” Called out an Ensign standing by a console.

“How many ships do they have left?” Narses asked.

“Only one Invincible, it heading to the palace.” The Ensign said.

“Do you think it can be destroyed before it gets here?” Asked JOE, scratching his eyebrow.

“No Admiral, it has diverted all power to its engines and shields.” Replied the Ensign “It will be here in two minutes.”

“They are going to ram us!” Chad said, following the path of the Invincible across the sky. Greeny half-ran over to a communications console, he pushed the button to transmit a message.

“Sir, communications are still down” Narses said quietly “We need to get out of here, the shield can’t take being hit by that much force.” Greeny looked at Narses, and then looked out the window at the rapidly approaching Battle Cruiser. He sighed.

“Very well, we won’t be able to get out in time through the main exit, we will have to use the teleporter device in the throne room.” Greeny said, turning and running towards the throne room.

“How long until the shields around the Palace are down?” Cold Fire asked.

“The Invincible will hit the shields in about one minute, Master.” Replied the Genus.

“Good, when they are down transport me to the Pride.” Cold Fire said rising from his seat and moving silently off the command deck.

“Impact in seventeen seconds Emperor” Narses said, looking at his chronometer.

“Damn, we aren’t going to make it out in time” Greeny said, stopping, he could clearly see the Invincible now. “Shoot that window” He said, pointing at a window directly opposite from where the Battlecruiser was rapidly approaching.

“Sir, we don’t...” Started Chad.

“Now!” Greeny shouted drawing his bolt pistol and firing at the window.

“Yes Sir” Several of the Terrans said in unison as they opened fire on the window with their standard issue assault rifle.

“Five seconds Sir, I am activating the teleporter, Good Luck” Said the genus pirate.

“Same to you Captain Darius” Said Cold Fire, emphasizing the last few words.

The window cracked and then shattered.

“Three seconds ‘til impact sir!” Narses said looking over his shoulder “Err, approximately”.

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“When the shield collapses jump” Greeny said, as his hair danced around in the wind. The Building shook and Greeny turned around. The battlecruiser hit the shield and began to break up, the noise was deafening. The shields glowed a pale orange before collapsing.

“Now!” Greeny shouted at the top of voice. He jumped out of the window and was blown forewords by the force of the explosion behind him. He knew he was dead either way, but at least this way there was a tiny chance of survival. Greeny flipped over in the air and watched the top half of the Palace begin to collapse.

Chapter 8

Greeny couldn't hear anything over the rush of air around his body, the wind stung his eyes so he closed them and prepared for the inevitable. He hit the ground with a thud.

"When we enter Sol our communications will probably go down, no doubt they will have a communications disruptor." Aragon said over the communicator "Fire on what I do until I give the order to break, even if you come under fire. We will be useless if we can't talk to each other."

"Admiral," Called Aragon's Commander "We will be entering Sol in less than one minute."

"Thank you commander." Aragon said, sitting down in the command chair and strapping himself in.

Greeny looked up from his position sprawled out on the floor.

"You alright Sir?" Came a familiar voice. Greeny looked around and picked himself up, he was suddenly aware of how dry his throat was.

"Sonar," he said, in a raspy voice "Where are we?"

"We're in the Council hangar, on The Champion Warship, we teleported you here from your fall" Sonar replied "Elvis won't be needing it at the moment, as far as we know he is North of here fighting the pirates, possibly with Doomlord, but we don't have confirmation due to the communications being down. Any idea when the cavalry is getting here?"

Greeny looked down at the floor for a moment "Frankly I have no idea, I hardly even know what is going on. Our forces are scattered and we have no way of talking to them. Can we take off?"

Suddenly Dennis spoke up from behind them. "There were twenty seven of us when we jumped out that window."

"Standard procedure in a situation like that is to save the highest ranking officers. This Invincible can only teleport four people at a time. That's me, you, Narses and JOE."

Dennis looked at the ground and slowly slumped down until he was sitting on the floor, but Sonar and Greeny had already left the room.

"No, we can't" Sonar said ignoring Dennis "Both exit tunnels have collapsed, along with half the hangar who ever this pirate is he knew exactly where to hit us so that we can't fight back well. Whilst on the surface I spoke to a group of Terrans, most of our surface weapon and vehicle stores have been destroyed."

Greeny sighed "It's not looking good. I think we need to go to the ISC."

"Will they even think about helping us?" Sonar said with a frown, "I imagine that having the Terran Empire out of galaxy would let most of that scum sleep easier."

"But the Terran Empire won't be gone, Earth will be. If we are lucky the core systems will remain allied and elect their own leader, but the outer systems will split and be ruled by the various Lords and Admirals who currently watch over them. It would be chaos. I think they will help us, but our real problem is getting out of here. How many soldiers do you have?" Greeny asked.

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“Soldiers? None, my security teams are all dead, all we got left are pilots, gunners and engineers, but no one experienced in fighting in close combat.” Sonar said.

“So that leaves the four councilors, and Captain Dennis. Well, this is going to be fun.” Greeny said sarcastically.

“Everyone prepare for incoming fire.” Aragon said over the communicator. He pushed himself against the back of his chair “This is going to be a bumpy ride” he muttered.

Greeny walked over to one of the many consoles on the command deck. Do you think that the fighter bays will still be operational?” He asked pressing a few buttons and then scanning through a list of numbers and letters.

“It is, we sent a team up there to take a look. We were going to use the fighters but very all the pilots we have are trained for vacuum combat, not atmospheric.” Sonar replied.

“Get your people ready, we are going up there.”

“No ones here” Aragon said uneasily. He quickly checked his straps with one hand and scanned through a report with the other.

“Sir, we are not detecting any cloaked ships.” A Lieutenant said uneasily “But we are also not detecting any communications from Earth” The Lieutenant looked at Aragon.

“Not even Utopia is responding” he added.

“Ok”, Aragon said “Chances are that there is just a communications blocker between here and Earth. If we head directly for home we should run into it.” He looked at his commander. “Set a course for the Imperial City” he said, once again leaning back into his chair.

“Good luck Sir” Sonar said, as he passed a flight helmet to Greeny. “We will be waiting for you when you get back.”

“Thanks Sonar” Greeny replied, with a weak smile. He looked up at a few of the other Terrans “I expect to see each and every one of you when I get back.” He said, as he closed the cockpit. The engines of the fighter started and then Greeny shot off into the sky.

Sonar looked at Narses and JOE “Lets get out of here, we need to find a way to disguise ourselves so we can move about unhindered.”

“Aye” They said in unison. The trio watched the fighter for a few seconds and then jogged out of the hanger.

Sonar looked up at the remains of the Imperial Palace. Cold Fire stood triumphant upon a pile of rubble and looked down at the crowd of Terrans who had been forced into the Plaza. Pirates were at every exit and Sonar knew that this would not be good. He raised his hood and stood next to Narses and JOE.

“Less than an hour ago” Cold Fire said, his voice amplified many times to the point of being almost deafening “A single person fighter craft attempted to leave this planet. To cut a long story short we commandeered your ground based weapons and shot it down”. Sonar felt his heart sink.

“But the pilot wasn’t killed in the crash. Some of my men found him and brought him to me. I give you” He shouted “Emperor Greeny”. Several Pirates dragged Greeny up to

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Cold Fire and forced him onto his knees. “This marks the end of the Terran Empire” he said, drawing a bolt pistol. Sonar could hear his own heart beating, the entire crowd was deathly silent. Cold Fire put the gun to Greeny’s head, but Greeny did not flinch or turn away. He simply stared up into Cold Fires eyes. Then Cold Fire pulled the trigger. Greeny’s head snapped back and then he slowly fell foreword.

For a second the crowd collectively held its breath, then all at once they charged foreword with a mighty roar. Cold Fire simply looked at the crowd. “Kill them.” He said calmly as he walked away “And burn that” he said, pointing to the body of the Emperor.

Chapter 9

“Roll the ship” Aragon shouted, “Bring the port weapons around, fire as soon as you have a target”

He felt the ship shake violently. “Sir, we have lost control of the engines, the hull is breached in the cargo bay.” Shouted Aragon’s Commander.

“Are sensors still down?” Aragon said, as the noise level dropped.

“Yes sir,” the Commander replied.

“Do we have any idea where we are headed then?” Aragon asked, resting his forehead on his hand.

“No sir” Said the Commander, avoiding Aragon’s gaze.

“Status of the hull” Phantom shouted over the sound of an explosion.

“Seventy six percent Admiral” Shouted Lieutenant Ithiel, as several more explosions shook the ship.

“Hurry up Aragon” She muttered “We need that communications blocker down now”

“Admiral” Came a voice over the communicator “a fighter has just landed and reported that we are heading directly for a Terran Invincible.”

“Can we turn?” Aragon asked.

“No Sir” Came a reply from an ensign who was under a console doing repairs.

Aragon looked around “Fine, abandon ship.” He said, hoping that the escape pods were still working.

“Admiral” called Ithiel to Phantom “There are several small objects just off our starboard bow, they look like escape pods.”

“Can you teleport the passengers aboard?” Phantom asked.

“Yes Admiral” Shouted the Lieutenant over the noise of another explosion.

There was a few seconds of silence and then the communicator activated “Phantom, is that you?” Came Aragon’s voice.

“Aragon? Get up here, we need to find a way to get out of here, we are losing bad.”

Armageddon looked at the tactical screen of his HUD and felt a chill go down his spine.

“Get me the Admirals on the communicator” He shouted, despite the fact that the command deck was quiet.

“Sorry Sir,” Said an Ensign from behind him “The communications jammer is still up”.

Aragon walked onto the command deck and stood behind Phantom.

“What’s going on?” He whispered.

“No idea, we need to get out of here, the hull is at thirty nine percent.” Phantom replied.

“Turn the ship, get us out of here.” She ordered. But her voice was drowned out by a large groaning sound. It took her only a split second to respond “Close off the Command deck doors” She shouted as loud as she could. All the doors slid shut noiselessly however one jammed with an inch gap separating the wall and the edge of the door. Aragon flew backwards and disappeared through the gap, leaving only some blood

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around the edges which itself rapidly disappeared into the gap. Phantom felt the straps of her seat cut into her chest. She felt the air rushing from her lungs and then passed out.

Armageddon watched as the two Admirals ships collided and smashed his hand down onto the chair. "Prepare to jump to hyperspace" He ordered, as he slumped back into his seat.

Narses fell to the ground and watched as several dozen Terrans were riddled with bullets. He discarded his cloak and drew both of his bolt pistols. Sonar and JOE followed suit. The trio ran towards a group of pirates and opened fire, JOE fired of two shots and killed a pirate with each, he had always been an expert marksman. Narses fired a number of shots at a Genus pirate, hitting him in the chest and abdomen repeatedly. Sonar finished off the other two with a number or shots to the chest.

Narses jumped behind a pile of rubble as the remaining pirates realized that they were fighting back. JOE and Sonar had dived into a crater in the ground and were firing at the pirates. Sonar signaled for Narses to try to get behind the group of pirates that were bearing down on their position. Narses leaned out and fired a few shots off at the pirates, one of the Fed pirates was hit in the arm and fell down moaning. Narses was about to run out when he heard a number of Terrans screaming. This was no place to fight these pirates, they were out gunned and too many Terrans would die.

Narses put his back against the rubble and called out to Sonar and JOE "We need to get out of here and bring the pirates with us, these people are dead if we don't!"

Sonar called back but Narses couldn't hear what he said as he was drowned out by the sound of several tanks coming into the courtyard. They were Terran tanks but Narses couldn't make out who they currently were being controlled by, they glided through the courtyard ramming through pirate and Terran alike. Several seconds later a second set of identical tanks glided around the corner. For a second Narses thought that all was los, but then he heard a voice boom out from one of the tanks communications systems.

"This is Admiral Doomlord" It shouted "The path that we have just come down is clear, run...now!"

Narses felt a sigh of relief, until he realized that he was stuck in the middle of the two groups of tanks. They opened fire on each other and several hundred Terran soldiers appeared from behind the tanks, they opened fire on the pirates. The Pirate tanks regrouped and opened fire on the Terrans. The shells rammed into several of the Terran tanks and destroyed them instantly.

"Let's go!" Shouted Sonar to JOE and Narses. The Trio ran out from behind their rubble, and headed towards the tanks. But none of them noticed the arrival of several troop transports behind them, dozens of pirates spilled out and opened fire in the direction of the Terrans.

JOE fired several shots over his shoulder but he didn't look back to see if they landed. He wiped the sweat off of his head with the back of his hand and so didn't notice the dead Terran on the ground in front of him until he had already tripped up. He pushed himself up but dropped again when he heard the sound of bullets hitting the ground just feet from his position. He looked up just in time to see both Sonar and Narses fall to the ground.

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Neither moved and JOE knew that he would suffer the same fate if he didn't get to the tanks.

Elvis looked at the tactical screen in his tank just in time to see Narses and Sonar fall, he pushed a few buttons and began to glide foreword, several other tanks followed him.

JOE jumped to his feet and ran towards the tanks, several of them were moving towards him and jumped onto the top of the closest one to him. As soon as he was on top it turned and glided towards one of the exits. JOE sat down and stared at the bodies of Sonar and Narses until the tank rounded the corner and his old friends left his sight.

Narses woke up feeling very groggy. He tried to get up but then realised that he was strapped to a surgical bed.

"Where am I?" He called out with far more fear in his voice than he intended.

"You are in a Terran medical bay." said a deep voice from the gloom. "We found you in the Imperial courtyard, you were shot up badly so we brought you here."

"Who are you?" Narses said, this time maintaining his composure.

"I am Cold Fire." Said the voice.

Narses began to struggle against the straps.

"Don't bother," said Cold Fire "Even if you could get out of those straps you couldn't get far." Cold Fire began to laugh. Narses looked down to his legs and felt his blood go cold as he realised that both his legs now stopped just above where his knees should be.

"What have you done to me?" He shouted, with none of his usual strength or composure.

"I saved you!" Said Cold Fire, with mock hurt in his voice "The bullets claimed your legs, I stopped them from claiming your life as well."

"What do you want?" Narses said, as Cold Fire activated the surgical lights.

"I want to know everything you do Narses," Cold Fire said, as he placed a number of surgical objects on the table next to Narses.

Chapter 10

Greeny closed his eyes and rubbed his temples with gloved hands. ‘When was the last time I slept?’ he asked himself. He looked at the tactical screen on his fighter and sighed, he was approaching the ISC headquarters, and he had never enjoyed going there. The Interstellar Council never managed to get anything done. It had been formed during the chaos following the fall of the Hive’s rule over the Galaxy to stop another faction truly owning the Galaxy, but the only thing it had ever achieved were a few, generally ignored, rules about what constitutes a target during war. Very few Terrans were on the station as Greeny had no faith in the system and preferred his people to be doing useful tasks. Greeny sighed again, this was going to be another long day.

Womble scratched above his eye with an outstretched claw. It had been a long time since Greeny had been to the ISC headquarters and Womble found himself becoming increasingly anxious as he watched Greeny’s ship land. ‘He comes to the ISC and does it in a single person fighter, clearly something bad has happened to the Terrans’ he thought to himself, as he approached Greeny’s ship.

“Greeny!” He called out as the Terran pulled himself out of the fighter, “Good to see you my friend.” Standing a full two feet taller than even the tallest Terran, Womble usually felt confident when talking to them, but something in the way Greeny looked at him made him stop in his tracks. Womble had always had great difficulty understanding human body language but he knew what he saw was not anger, he didn’t have time to think about it however as Greeny composed himself. The Terran smiled a weak smile, and nodded wordlessly. The pair walked into the main facility when Greeny glanced at Womble and finally spoke.

“The Empire has been attacked. I need ISC help.” He said, without looking at the Orfine, clearly asking for help from non-Terrans was not something he was used to, but Womble didn’t dig at that, he knew he would feel the same if the roles were reversed.

“I see,” Growled the Orfine, as the fur on his back rippled “Who attacked you?”

“A pirate, his name is Cold Fire, he has a fleet and by now probability has Earth. At the time of me leaving there seemed to be little hope.”

“A pirate?” Said the Orfine, in a voice which obviously sounded to the Terran like he was mocking him. Greeny’s hand moved towards the pistol strapped to his hip, but he did not draw it.

“Yes a pirate.” Greeny said, anger in his voice. “If...”

“Forgive me, my friend,” Womble said, holding his hands up in an imitation of what he had seen Terrans do when they got defensive “I meant no offence, I was merely surprised that Earth was lost to a pirate.”

“Yeah, well,” Greeny said, his arm moving away from his pistol “Earth’s shields went down before they even got in the system, and they hypered into Sols atmosphere directly. Bypassing the Mars defence net completely.”

Womble knew not to press the issue, and instead decided to simply walk with the Terran. “The council will be convening shortly. Would you care to join me for a drink or something?”

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The Terrans eyes widened slightly for a second and then he regained his composure again. “No, I need to plan something to say to the council, I don’t want this to turn into a ‘lets-all-laugh-at-the-Terrans-incompetence’ meeting. Will you help me? You have spent far more time around the ISC than I ever have.

The Orfine nodded, and started to head towards Greeny’s room.

“Give me twenty minutes, and then meet me in my quarters, Ok?” Greeny asked, cutting in front of Womble.

“Of course.” Said the Orfine, bowing. Greeny repeated the move and then walked off towards his quarters.

Womble decided to go back into the Orfine section of the station, the low levels of oxygen in the Terran section was beginning to tire him.

Greeny walked into his quarters and looked around. I had been a long time since he had been here. It was spacious, but not nearly as comfortable as the Imperial Palace or The Pride of Terra. He chuckled to himself morbidly as he placed his bag on the desk. ‘Two places I will never see again’.

“To work.” He said aloud as he sat down at his desk.

Womble arrived at Greeny’s quarters. He had suddenly realised whilst in the Orfine section that he had no idea how long a Terran minute was. After searching for a Terran chronometer for a while, he had decided to simply go and wait outside Greeny’s quarters for a while until the Terran invited him in.

Orfine weren’t a patient people. All of their buildings had been designed to give them the ability to move about freely and how they pleased, the corridors felt tight and cramped to Womble. He began to pace, and eventually knocked on Greeny’s door. The Terran called for him to enter.

As Womble entered he sniffed the air. It was far moister than the Terrans normally liked it and it made the Orfine feel very hot.

“Sorry,” Greeny said “Just had a shower, been moving about none stop for a few days now.” Greeny pushed a button on the wall and Womble heard a fan activate as the air became cooler and drier. He relaxed and sat as best he could on one of the Terran chairs.

Greeny walked to the Council chamber thumbing through the notes on his datapad. Near to the Terran entrance the Orfine had bid him farewell and walked to his own entrance. Greeny stood alone for now, he had been informed by Womble that high ranking representatives were present from every race at the moment, including several race leaders. Whether this was due to his rare presence or just coincidence was not clear to Greeny, but he knew that he would have a tough crowd. Greeny took a deep breath as the door ahead of him slid open silently.

Greeny walked in and took a quick look around. In the centre of the room sat a large circular table with eight seats surrounding it. Between each seat there was a waist high wall. Greeny knew that a force field would be active at all times above that wall, and he was grateful it was there. Most of the beings in this room were physically stronger than him and could probably kill him in a second if they wanted to. ‘A primitive form of defence’ he thought to himself as he sat down. He looked around the table at each the representatives. Womble sat two seats over to his right and was growling softly to the

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Orfine standing behind him. To Greeny's left was an empty seat, looking around the room he could see that it was the Hive representative who was missing. After a few minutes the various aides of the representatives left and there was a brief silence. Greeny picked up the translation device on the table in front of him and saw the other representatives who actually had ears place theirs on too. The Genus representative stood up and began to talk in the Genus language, it was a beautiful language, and Greeny had always felt that it sounded wrong coming from such an ugly creature 'But then again, it's not their language' he reminded himself. It took a few seconds for the sounds the Genus was making to be translated by the devices.

"Representatives, we have come together today at the Terran representatives request. He will be taking over from here."

'Oh, great.' Greeny thought to himself sarcastically as he stood up 'Today's moderator is a Genus, yup, this is going to go well.'

"Thank you Walt. A few days ago Earth was attacked by a highly organised group of pirates under the command of a man named Cold Fire. Earth's defences were overrun and the Imperial Palace was lost. I require your aid in releasing my people from this Pirate." There were various sounds from around the room and Greeny took a lot of them too be laughter. "You all know my...contempt, for this council, but right now..."

"And what makes you think you will get any support at all?" said the Kolari representative. The Kolari had no physical bodies and so did not actually have any way to vocalise their thoughts. They could communicate with each other fine but had great difficulty with the other races and so had developed sophisticated mechanical bodies to use whilst dealing with others. But the voices of the mechanical bodies were always completely even, making it very hard to judge their mood.

"Well John, he already has mine." Said Womble smoothly, looking at Greeny. Greeny smiled back and nodded his head.

"Yes well, your pathetic people are the Terrans pets!" Shouted the Genus. The room immediately descended into name calling and threats so Greeny slumped back down onto his seat and buried his face in his arms.

Womble looked at Greeny apologetically, or at least as close as he could get to that look. "Sorry Greeny, it's going to take days to..." Womble started.

"Days!" Greeny shouted, laughing slightly "In just a few days Cold Fire managed to take Earth and kill hundreds of thousands of my people. In a few more days I many not have a planet to save."

"Then we will have to speed things up. The Slah'ke and the Plexxans are sitting on the fence. However the war between the Slah'ke and the Genus means that we won't get much of their fleet, and we defiantly won't get both of them to help us. Not that the Genus were thinking about it anyway, I have heard that they may use this opportunity to strike at your outer systems, stealing them whilst you are weak."

Greeny frowned. "What about the Kolari and the Matrix?"

"Well you know them," Said the Orfine, growling softly "They don't give anything away."

Greeny looked up at Womble suddenly. "That just reminded me of something someone said to me about the Hive, where were they today?"

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“No idea, they should have been there. I was not notified that they wouldn’t be, but then again I wasn’t the moderator so I didn’t need to know.”

Greeny nodded and stood up. Most of what I wanted to say I didn’t get to today so it will still be of use tonight. I am going to try to get some sleep. Take this,” Greeny said, walking over to his bag, he put his hand inside and pulled out a data pad. “It’s all the data I downloaded from...” But Greeny was cut short from finishing that sentence by the sound of a large explosion. Greeny looked at Womble who had jumped to his feet, he had his claws out and looked as if he were about to pounce on something. Greeny and Womble shared a glance and then walked swiftly out of Greeny’s quarters and towards the where the sound had originated from.

“This has to be the work of Cold Fire,” Greeny said, “That bomb was clearly meant for me. Forensic analysis has confirmed that the bomb was placed on my fighter. When a Plexxan maintenance crew were making sure my ship was fit to fly they turned it on.” Greeny eyed the Plexxan official at that point. “This caused the bomb to go off. I think that Cold Fire has people here.”

“Yes, yes, we have all read the reports.” said the Plexxan official, clearly eager to change the subject away from his people’s severe breach in protocol.

The Genus representative stood up “How do we know that it wasn’t your incompetence, Terran, that meant that you didn’t know that the bomb was there? It could have been planted on your ship whilst you were on Earth and you were just too stupid to notice.”

“Surely the bomb would have gone off on Earth then.” Hissed the Slah’ke in perfect Terran.

“My thoughts exactly Mach,” said Womble staring daggers at Walt. “On Earth there would be a lot of Terrans killed along with Greeny. It would be far more logical.”

“There is a chance that it could have malfunctioned on Earth and Greeny got lucky.”

Chimed in the Preserver, speaking for the first time since Greeny had been present in the meetings “But the chances of that are small.”

“Damn it I don’t have time for this!” Greeny shouted slamming his fist down onto the table. The move had far less of an effect than he had hoped however as it made very little noise and simply hurt Greeny’s hand. “My people are dying and if you aren’t going to help me then just give me a ship and let me go home.”

Machinehr stood up, he turned to face Greeny head on and bowed. “You have whatever support that we can spare Emperor.”

“Thank you.” Greeny said with surprise in his voice as he bowed at the Slah’ke.

“You have what we can spare too Terran.” Said the Plexxan.

“Thank you StarRaider. Greeny said. A slight smile of victory came to his face, but he quickly killed it. He looked around the table “No one else?” The room remained silent.

“I have what I came for,” the Terran said as he turned to the Genus, “You may end the meeting Moderator.” Greeny said in a mocking tone.

Greeny walked with Mach, Star and Womble to the ship that had been assigned to him. Walt had definitely got his revenge. Greeny had been given a ‘Kerensky’ class cruiser. They were small and weak but the Terran Empire had allowed them to slip into enemy hands so that Terran officers could kill Kerensky in a way. It also served as a constant reminder that betrayal wouldn’t be tolerated, even by an ex-Emperor.

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“Great.” Greeny mumbled. He turned to face the other men. “How many ships will you be able to mass for us?” He asked.

“The Orfine fleet is currently busy fighting the Nexus so we will only get a small number of ships. Maybe, thirty cruisers and four hundred fighters.” Womble said. ‘Not many big ships, but the Orf fighters will be very useful’ Greeny thought to himself. Orfine made good fighter pilots, despite their size, due to their quick reactions. A few hundred of them would be sufficient to do some heavy damage to any fleet.

“Most of our fleet is also caught up in fighting, however we do have seventy six Zealots ready and waiting to be deployed. I need to contact them soon or they may be deployed elsewhere.” The Slah’ka bowed and departed.

“We don’t have much in the war of ships I am afraid, Emperor” Said StarRaider, “However my scientists and technicians could upgrade the shields on the Orfine and Union ships.”

“Ok, where will we need to stop to pick up those crews?” Asked Greeny, he could feel time weighing down on him. Millions of his people would be dead by now.

“I will order a convoy of transport ships to meet with us somewhere along the route.” Said the Plexxan, striding off powerfully towards his quarters.

“By Müller’s ghost I can’t wait to get off this facility.” Greeny said turning to the Orfine. Womble gave him a toothy grin “Me neither my friend.” Womble saw in Greeny’s eyes the same things which he had seen earlier, on the landing pad when Greeny had arrived. But this time he realised what it was, Greeny was not the man he once had been, he had been worn down, his ideals shattered. “Don’t give up Greeny, we will get Cold Fire and you will kill him yourself whilst his pirates run around like headless Hive.” Greeny looked at Womble and stared directly into his eyes. “I am not going to give up Womble, not until every last smoking pirate is dead.” And Womble knew that it was completely true.

Chapter 11

S117 smashed his fist into the armrest of his command chair aboard the Longsword.

“Have we been able to contact Earth yet?” He asked over his shoulder.

“Sorry Sir,” Came a voice from just behind him, “In fact, we haven’t had any contacts from outside Boötes for several days now.”

“Damn it!” S117 shouted, he already knew about the communications jammer, and the lack of communications with Sol, but he had not given up hope yet. “Keep trying, we need to warn them about this invasion.” He said, regaining his calm. “Now bring us around, its time to take down some more of these damn bugs.”

Greeny felt very awkward. He had never flown with an entirely non-Terran crew before, let alone gone to battle with one.

“Emperor.” Growled an Orfine. Greeny couldn’t tell the age of the being, but his fur was greying in several patches on his back and arms which Greeny took to be a sign of age.

“There is none of the usual comm traffic coming from any of the Terran systems, in fact, it’s a communications black zone here, nothing...”

Greeny closed his eyes for a moment. ‘How can this be happening?’ he asked himself.

“What is the closest system to here?” He asked, his face an expressionless mask.

“Boötes.” Called a Slah’ke from the tactical console. Greeny hesitated.

“Take us in,” he ordered “And tell the fleet to follow.”

“All hail Emperor JOEONE!” Shouted a chorus of voices. At any other time this would have been a joyous occasion, the appointment of a new Emperor usually came with weeks of celebration, but today even the smallest smiles were struggling to show themselves.

“The previous Emperor and Prime Minister are dead,” Said JOE flatly “Half the council are dead, or at least missing in action, including several people who should have been Emperor long before me. But there will be time for mourning and remembering after Earth is ours again.” The room shook and there was the muffled sound of an explosion. JOE ignored it. “My first act as Emperor is to appoint Elvis as Prime Minister.” He glanced at Elvis and the newly appointed Prime Minister stood forward. He bowed his head.

“Thank you Emperor. Our reports show the city to be almost completely destroyed now, its just rubble and wrecks everywhere. We don’t have an accurate death toll yet, but if the destruction spreads out beyond the Imperial City then it is likely that billions are dead. For those of you who don’t know it seems that this pirate bombarded the planet from low orbit, and somehow they are pushing us back at every turn. It also seems that the Hive may be in on this, they have been seen all over the city. So to sum up, we have no ships, no tanks, limited weapons of any kind, and even less power packs and clips to go with them, and very little in the way of hope. Any questions?”

“So what’s the plan then?” Said Speed Shot softly.

JOE sighed. “We don’t have one. By no means are we going to give up, our short term aims are going to be to cause as much devastation to the pirates as possible, bombing them where we can, ‘liberating’ supplies and ambushing groups of them when the

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opportunity arises.”

“Let’s get going then.” Said Elvis, with the hint of a smile on his face.

“Sir! There is a fleet of ships coming in, mixed identification signals, Orfine and Slah’ke mostly, one Terran. S117 jumped out of his chair, and shot over to the Ensign. He looked down at the tactical display.

“Head to that fleet!” He ordered, and fire on anything that gets in the way.

“Fire!” Greeny shouted. “The Hive, what are they doing here?” “Shoot that one.” Greeny said, highlighting a ship on the tactical screen. From their position on entry they had flanked the Hive quite nicely, all the bugs long range and more valuable ships were in easy firing range.

“Sir, there are almost three thousand Hive ships here.” Hissed a Lizard, “One of them is a communications jammer, and another I cannot identify, Aurelius class, but with some kind of weapon on it.

“Shoot it!” Greeny shouted, “Shoot it now, or we won’t be able to escape.” The communicator crackled softly and then buzzed. “Is the jammed destroyed?” Greeny asked.

“Yes!” Shouted an Orfine over the sound of an explosion somewhere in the ship. “Not much good it’ll do us though,” he barked, “That blast took out our communicator.” Greeny slammed his fist onto his view screen, but it didn’t break.

“Keep an eye out.” Greeny said, as he sprinted off the command deck.

“Communications are back online Admiral.” S117 didn’t even bother to reply, instead he pushed a few buttons on the communicator.

“Everyone pay attention, move to the new fleet in the system, prepare to enter hyperspace. We can’t win this battle.”

JOE climbed to the top of the rubble and lay down. He aimed his sniper at the head of one of the pirates at the entrance to the weapons cache. He pulled the trigger and the pirate fell dead, so quietly that the other pirate didn’t even notice, so JOE finished her as well. He turned around and gave the signal for the others to move in.

Greeny wove the fighter through the massive dogfight between the Hive and the Orfine, it was no G-47, but it did the job. All the while the Longsword grew in his sights.

“Sir, an Orfine fighter is requesting permission to dock, the pilot claims to be Greeny.” Said an Ensign, obviously not believing it.

“Teleport him aboard.” S117 ordered, “If he isn’t who he says he is, shoot him, we don’t have time for games.”

The trio of Councillors, JOE, Elvis and Speed Shot moved quickly but stealthily towards the door. As they approached Elvis pulled out his last remaining clip and loaded it into his gun. Then he leant around the door and fired off a number of shots into the darkness. There were two wet thumps. He shined his torch into the black and saw a couple of dead Orfine on the ground.

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“Clear, lets get the stuff and get out of here.”

Throughout the fleet Greeny’s voice echoed.

“Listen to me now, forget all the targets you are currently firing at. There is a pirate Aurelius class ship here stopping our withdrawal, concentrate all firepower onto that ship. The second it is destroyed go to hyper and set a course for Sol.”

“Sir, if we leave now then everyone who lives in this system will die.” Said S117 firmly.

“People are already dieing on Earth, we need to save them before we can save the colonies.” Greeny replied coldly.

“There are nine billion people on Earth.” Shouted S117, “In this system there are fourteen billion, more than half of whom are children. If we leave then we are condemning them to death!”

Greeny swung around and punched S117 in the side of the face, the Stormguard spun and landed sprawled out on the floor.

“Don’t be an idiot. They are dead either way, the difference is that if we leave now then we won’t share that fate. Do you really think that the six hundred ships we have here can fight the thousands that they have?” Greeny regained his composure and watched as the Aurelius ship blinked out of existence on the tactical screen.

“Go!” he shouted into the communicator.

“There’s nothing here!” Shouted Speed Shot, shoving empty boxes off of shelves in frustration.

“No wait,” Said Elvis, “there are some crates over there.” He said, pointing into the corner. The trio walked up to them and forced the lids off. “Empty.” Mumbled Elvis.

“Let’s get out of here.”

“Run.” Said JOE, calmly, as he looked down into one of the crates. “Bomb.” He said as he sprinted out the bunker.

Speed Shot stumbled as he ran out and fell into the back of JOE, just as the bomb went off. JOE was flung forewords by the blast and his head hit a small pile of rubble with a sickening crunch. Speed Shot hit the ground hard and covered his hear with his arms whilst Elvis dived behind cover. Several small pieces of debris cut through Speed Shot’s armour and into his chest. Blood streamed out through the holes in his chest. Elvis ran over to JOE and checked his pulse, he was relieved to find it as strong as ever, but that feeling was soon lost when he looked up and saw a dozen pirates aiming various guns at him.

Chapter 12

“As soon as we are in range teleport us down to the City Commander” Said Greeny. He sat perfectly still in his command chair issuing orders, despite the fact that the ship was being heavily pounded by weapons fire.

“Emperor,” Called an Orfine “Scanners are offline, we can’t teleport you down, we are blind”

Greeny sighed and then let out a low growl that caused the ears of several Orfine to twitch. “Tell Womble to lock on to the signal of my fighter, prepare to teleport it into the atmosphere of Earth” He said, departing from the command deck.

Elvis stood with his hands tied firmly behind his back. He was blindfolded so he couldn’t tell where he was going. He suddenly felt his heart sink ‘Even if I could see, I wouldn’t recognise the streets, they are mostly just rubble now’. Suddenly there was an ear splitting roar followed by gun fire. Elvis dove for cover and began to crawl on his hands and knees along the remains of a wall until he found a section which was jagged enough to cut through the makeshift bonds holding his hands.

After they were free he tore off his blindfold and looked around. Most of the pirates lay dead or dying. JOE was still unconscious and it looked as if he had been dumped as soon as the shooting had started. Elvis looked up, a few miles above his head he could see hundreds of ships, Orfine, Slah’ke and Hive. For a few seconds he was greatly relieved, someone had obviously managed to get help, despite Greeny’s death, but then he realised that the ships were firing at each other, he couldn’t see who was firing at whom, but he knew that in a few minutes there would be hundreds of tonnes of debris falling from the sky.

“Time to get out of here my friend.” He said, to an unconscious JOE, as he picked him up and stumbled back in the direction he thought that he had come from.

Greeny felt his fighter vibrate and shudder as he brought it in to land. He had no ladder to help him down so he jumped to the floor and as he stood up he looked around. There were a few dozen Terrans muttering and whispering to each other as their eyes remained fixed on Greeny. Greeny called out to the crowd.

“Do any of you know where any councillors are?” He asked.

“Yeah, I do.” Said one Terran, he was dressed in standard military gear but was lacking a helmet and his breastplate was stained heavily with blood. “Follow me, its not far from here, my Lord.”

Elvis stumbled into the temporary headquarters of the Terrans and carefully lay JOE down on a table. He walked off to get some bandages to dress JOE’s wounds. After a few minutes rummaging through what was left of the supplies he heard talking behind him from outside the door. He instinctively reached for a gun strapped to his hip, and it surprised him to find that he didn’t have one, so he grabbed his knife from his belt and slid up behind the door. He was about to strike when he heard a voice that made his heart skip a beat. Greeny walked in the door and looked around. From where he was he couldn’t see Elvis, so he walked up to JOE and checked his pulse. He then turned and

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spotted Elvis, who still had his knife drawn and ready.

“Elvis!” He said smiling lightly, then it faded, “What’s wrong?”

“You’re dead Greeny!” Elvis said, as if Greeny should know this already.

Darius turned to Cold Fire, “Has Narses told you anything useful, my Lord?” he asked. Cold looked him up and down for a second and then answered, his voice sounded drained, as though he were exhausted.

“No, he mainly just mutters gibberish now.” He said.

“I see.” Replied Darius, returning to his seat.

“I am going back up to the surface now, I am having difficulty concentrating here, I need some more fresh air and sunlight, too long I have been cramped up in places like this.”

Cold said, gesturing around at the dark room and its bland and sparse furnishings.

“Master.” Darius said with a frown “There is a battle going on up there, you might get killed!”

“That won’t matter if I lose my concentration Captain.” Cold said, slowly turning and walking out of the room.

“Excuse me?” Greeny said, placing a hand on his weapon.

“Cold Fire had you executed, I was there.” Elvis said, he lowered his weapon but he remained where he was.

“Look, obviously it was a deception.” Greeny said, “Now where is the Prime Minister.” Elvis froze and then straightened up, a mixture of pride and shame on his face.

“Sonar is dead Greeny.” He said. Greeny looked away for a few seconds and then turned back, his face knotted into an expression of rage and sadness.

“That’s the second time you have called me by my name, have we dispensed with titles now Admiral?” He said. He was ashamed to find that his voice cracked whilst he spoke.

“My friend,” Elvis said, clearly feeling very uncomfortable having to be the one to break the news to the ex-Emperor, “You don’t have a title. After your…death…we chose a new Emperor and he named me Prime Minister.” The sadness from Greeny’s face drained away and left only the anger. His stare caused Elvis to back away a half step.

“Who?” He said simply. Elvis responded by pointing to JOE’s unconscious body. “Will he live?” Greeny asked.

“I don’t know.” Elvis said, finally moving to JOE to deal with his wounds.

“Well, make me Emperor again, so that I can lead our men to kill Cold Fire.” Greeny demanded.

“Sorry, but I don’t have the power to do that, you know that.” Elvis said, not quite meeting Greeny’s gaze. “He needs to retire himself, or die like you did.”

“But I didn’t die!” Shouted Greeny, a few specks of saliva flying from his mouth.

“We know that now, but at the time we thought you were so it still counts.”

“Fine, then wake him up and make him retire, Prime Minister.” He said, making Elvis even more ashamed of his new rank.

“I have tried waking him up, Gree…erm…Emperor, he is in bad shape, I couldn’t make him regain consciousness.”

Greeny’s hands knotted into fists and he slammed them down onto a table. “I don’t have time for this!” He shouted.

“There is nothing we can do!” Elvis shouted, matching Greeny’s level of volume.

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“Yes there is.” Greeny said, drawing his pistol. He turned to JOE and fired two shots into the unconscious man’s head.

Cold Fire took a deep breath, closed his eyes and stepped out of the shadows into the sunlight. He lowered his hood and allowed the light breeze to wash over him. After a few moments he opened his eyes and looked up at the battle raging overhead. He focused on a Slah’ke cruiser and the Hive ships around it all concentrated their fire on it. Its shields flashed green and then blinked out of existence. It took only a few seconds for the pounding to render it to scrap metal.

Cold then concentrated on a squadron of Orfine fighters. He glanced at a Hive scarab and it cloaked, shutting down all of its weapons systems to minimise its energy output. Cold then concentrated fully on the squadron again and the nearest Hive ships began firing at them, but they weren’t aiming to hit them, they were simply leading them around in a turn towards the cloaked Scarab.

The first nine fighters impacted on the ships shields, destroying the fighters and collapsing the shield, the next ten could not react fast enough and slammed into the bare Hull of the scarab, tearing fissures and blasting holes in the ship. The Scarab began to break up and fall from the sky, allowing the final fighter to veer off and avoid the impact, but it was shredded by a lucky shot from another Scarab.

Cold smiled and walked back into the shadow. ‘I will let them handle the rest themselves’ he thought to himself as he walked off.

“What the hell are you doing?” Shouted Elvis, knife held ready again. “He was the Terran Emperor and your friend, and you would just kill him like that?”

“Make me Emperor again.” Greeny shouted, pointing the gun at Elvis. Elvis just stared at him. “You said that the Emperor has to retire or die for another to be appointed, JOE is dead, so I can become Emperor now. Do it!” Elvis hesitated.

“No.” Elvis said, firmly but quietly. Greeny’s eyes narrowed.

“So be it.” He said, his voice completely level. He raised the gun to aim at Elvis’ head but was suddenly thrown off his feet. He felt his body slam into a wall and passed out.

Chapter 13

The world swam in and out of focus as Greeny regained consciousness; he looked around and saw a figure standing over him. The man had acquired several new cuts and bruises since Greeny had last seen him, but Greeny had no problem recognizing him.

“Dennis.” He said, as he was helped up by the Captain.

“My Lord,” Dennis said, with a half bow, “We thought you were dead.”

“So I hear.” Greeny said, blinking a few times to try and focus his eyes. “What happened?” He asked, gesturing around at the half of the building that still stood.

“Looks like you were hit with the remains of a scarab, you are lucky to have survived.”

Dennis replied. Greeny sighed and looked out into the distance.

“That’s the story of my life Dennis.” He said, a vacant expression on his face.

“Where are we going, my lord?” Dennis asked, trying to keep pace with Greeny’s near-run.

“I want to visit some old friends, then we are going after Cold Fire.” Greeny said, without looking at Dennis. The pair continued on for a few more minutes and then Greeny hoisted himself up onto a ladder half hidden in shadows. Dennis followed. He looked around and saw that they were in the Imperial Monument. A tribute to all the fallen councilors and heroes of the Empire. It mostly intact, as it was several hundred meters below the surface. The room was a huge circle with dozens of pedestals arranged around the outside, each one projected a five meter tall image of the Terran it was built for.

Dennis walked up the pedestal for Elder Taveius and touched the plaque on its surface. Where had once been written ‘The Great Warrior’ now were scrawled the words ‘The Bumbling Coward’. He slowly walked around the room and looked at the other pedestals, each had been vandalized in the same way, insulting the heroes it was meant to immortalize. Dennis turned to Greeny to see his reaction to the vandalism. But Greeny was simply standing and staring at the plaque of the newest pedestal, the pedestal of himself. His face was full of sadness, but Dennis couldn’t make out the words on the plaque from where he was so he began to approach.

“I have seen enough. Let’s go.” Greeny said, his face looked haunted, and Dennis wanted to do something, but he felt helpless. On the way towards the exit of the Monument Greeny stopped and entered a small room.

“Wait here.” He said, as he walked off.

Greeny looked around, he was in the weapons room at the monument. He walked up to the centre display case and opened the lid. He placed his hands inside and lifted a plain katana out. He turned it over in his hands and slashed it through the air a few times.

“What is that?” Dennis asked as Greeny approached him, the sword still drawn.

“This is Müller’s sword.” Greeny said, “It is the sword he used whilst unifying Earth, since I have only three shots left and we seem to be running very low on ammo I felt that it would be a suitable weapon to defend Terra with once again.”

“So now we are going to kill the pirates?” Dennis asked.

“Yes, Womble should have found him by now.” Greeny said, as he reached for his mobile communicator. “Womble,” he said into it “Where is Cold Fire.”

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The Orfine growled a response “Teleporting down Greeny, stand by.” There were a few moments of silence and then Womble and what looked like most of his crew appeared out of the air.

“Emperor.” The Orfine said bowing, a move which Greeny didn’t return. “Our ship had sustained heavy damage, we had to abandon it.”

“But you know where Cold Fire is?” Greeny asked.

“Yes, he is not far from here, follow me.” The Orfine said, gesturing for his crew to follow as well.

It was not an uneventful journey. About a third of Womble’s people had been killed by the various pirates that they met along the way, and although the Orfine took care of most of them Greeny had still managed to bloody his sword. As they rounded the final corner Greeny heard Womble growl some orders to a pair of his crew and the two walked up to a wall and planted three blinking devices on it. They gestured for everyone to get back and a few seconds later there was an explosion.

“Go!” Shouted Womble, first in the Orfine language and then in the Terran one. The group jumped around the corner again and those who had guns opened fire into the new hole. Greeny and the unarmed Orfine jumped into the hole and began to fight the pirates in hand to hand combat.

There was little return fire from the pirates, they were obviously not ready for a fight and several dropped to their knees, hands held high and open, the universal sign of surrender, but that didn’t stop Greeny, he cut through all that he could reach, spraying himself in blood off various colors in the process. There were a few more seconds of combat and then an eerie silence filled the air.

“Cold Fire will have defiantly heard that.” Womble said, looking at Greeny, “Let’s go get him.” Greeny nodded and raised his sword. The pair ran off, leaving the rest of the Orfine and Dennis to cover their exit.

Cold Fire was sitting calmly in a chair, his eyes were shut and Greeny would have thought he was sleeping except for the fact that when he approached the pirate opened his eyes.

“Greeny. Good to see you again,” He said with a strangely genuine twist on his voice, “Oh and I see you bought your dog along too, how nice.”

Greeny ignored his comments. “Time for you to die Cold Fire.” He said, hate filling his voice and face.

“Yeah, we will see about that.” Cold said calmly. He then turned to Womble “You shouldn’t have come Orfine.” He said.

“What was I suppose to do pirate? Let you bomb more neutral areas?” Womble spat.

“What are you on about?” Cold Fire said with annoyance. Then a smile slowly spread across his face. “I knew you were low Greeny, but would you really go that low?”

Greeny looked down at the floor and then back up at Cold, a fire burning in his eyes.

“You did, didn’t you?”

Womble looked between the two of them “Did what?” He asked, then he realized “You set off that bomb at the ISC headquarters to get us to help you.” Womble’s face screwed up and he bared his teeth. “This is an outrage!” He shouted. Greeny didn’t say anything. “I am calling my troops off, you can save yourself.” Womble said, turning and reaching

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for his communicator. When his back was turned Greeny drew his sword and walked up behind the Orfine. Womble spun back as Greeny slashed up, the arm that was holding the communicator was severed just below the elbow. The Orfine yelled and dropped to the floor, cradling his stump.

“I don’t give a smoke about you or your people, dog! You are pathetic and just a tool to help me get back my Empire! If a million Orfine die to save the life of one Terran it won’t stop me sleeping at night!” Greeny shouted, just before he cut the Orfine’s head clean off.

“You’re slipping Greeny,” Said Cold, in his usual calm manor, “A month ago you would have kept that all under control.” Greeny ignored him again.

“Now it’s your turn to die.” He said, his voiced barely above a whisper.

“No, it’s yours.” Cold Fire said. He stood up and with lightning speed drew a pair of long swords from behind the chair. He jumped at Greeny and with the sword in his left hand struck at Greeny, Greeny moved his sword inwards to block to blow but it was wrenched from his hand and flung across the room. The sword in Cold’s right hand simultaneously was brought up and thrust into Greeny’s chest. It penetrated the armor and went into the wall behind Greeny pinning him there. Greeny kicked and screamed in pain, he could barley register Cold Fire bringing the other sword up level with his neck. But then Cold stopped, turned and darted down a corridor. Greeny saw Dennis run up in front of him. “Help!” He shouted. A couple of Orfine ran over and pulled the sword out of Greeny, causing him to lose consciousness with pain.

Chapter 14

Greeny opened his eyes and stared up at the ceiling, he couldn't quite focus his eyes. "Bout time you woke up." Came a raspy and forced voice from a few meters to his right. Greeny tried to get up but the pain in his chest threatened to make him pass out again, so he gave up the effort. He slowly turned his head towards the voice.

"Narses?" He asked, a look of horror on his face.

"Yup." Narses replied, simply.

"By Müller's ghost! What happened to you?" Every inch of the mans skin was heavily scarred and burned, he had no hair to speak of, each of his hands had several digits missing and his legs now stopped above the knee. Greeny would not have recognized him at all except for the fire in his eyes. He, like Greeny, lay on a surgical table.

"I could ask the same thing to you. Last I checked you had just been executed. Although I must admit, as I was lying here, I did begin to wonder if you were alive, and being tortured like I was. I didn't expect to ever see you alive again." Narses said, some of his words were almost incomprehensible grunts to Greeny.

Greeny grinned "Like a little thing like death would stop me." Both men laughed, and both quickly dropped into coughing fits. When Greeny stopped coughing, he turned to face Narses.

"Are you going to live?" Greeny asked, although his voice sounded concerned, his face was emotionless.

"I...don't know." Narses replied. He looked at Greeny "I hope so, I want that damn pirate to pay for what he did to me, and to Earth."

"He wins at every turn." Greeny said, failing to hide the emotion in his voice. "And now it seems that the Hive have joined him." Now Narses grinned.

"Ah, but they haven't, he conquered them. But not in the same way he is trying to conquer us. It was a bloodless conquest. But it gives us an opportunity to defeat almost all of his army in one swoop."

S117 sat down in his seat, he didn't like this. He didn't like it one bit. Every known Council survivor was here, minus Narses who was still in the medical area and there were also about three dozen officers present. Doomlord sat in a corner conversing with Armageddon, who had recently teleported down from his ship. He had been forced to retreat after a disastrous battle above Terra that had killed two of the other Councilors, he had then returned and set up a hard line communications network in the Imperial City, allowing the Terran army to talk to each other, and allowing Greeny to set up this meeting. Greeny walked out to the front of the room and faced the crowd.

"The way things are going the Empire will be lost." He said simply, several of the younger officers looked as if they were about to say something, but Greeny silenced them with a look. "The surface is lost, and the skies are too. However, we have found a weakness in Cold Fires army that will make it easy to destroy. Not many of you will know where we are, in fact, this place is so secret that it doesn't even have a name. It is the research and development headquarters for the entire Terran Empire. Fortunately it is so secure that Cold Fire and his people never managed to get in here, or else it is quite possible that many of us would be dead already. Anyway, Cold Fire wasn't created here,

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he was created in an even more secure facility in England. I didn't know about it because it was ordered by Taveius, when he was Emperor, to be classified and forgotten about. I am not going to go into the whole story of how Cold Fire escaped, but I will give you some background of his story."

"Emperor Taveius had become obsessed with finding a way of lessening Terran casualties in ground assault missions. He ordered a group of scientists to create a super soldier, using all the best features from whatever races they wanted. So that is exactly what they did. They genetically altered both the Cold Fire we now know, and seven other specimens to be the ultimate soldiers, they had the strength of a Genus, the speed of an Orfine, the regenerative properties of a Slah'ke, etcetera. But the important thing is that they gave them the Hive's ability to have a collective consciousness, only it was much more powerful than the Hives." Greeny stopped and thought about his next words.

"Cold Fire is a fool, he told Narses about himself, and how he was controlling the Hive. I guess he wanted to use it as revenge on Narses, to make him realize that it was our own fault that we are being destroyed, but all he has done is give us the information we needed. Since the end of the last Hive war we have been working on ways to disrupt their collective link, and one of the devices here will do exactly that." He pressed a few buttons on the large data screen on the wall behind him and the screen filled with images of a large machine.

"This device," he continued "is designed to disrupt the chemical processes that control the Hive mind. It is far too large to be put in a ship, so we had one built here on Earth. It has never been tested on a wide scale, but I am confident that it will work."

Armageddon spoke up "Then what?" He asked.

"Then we reclaim the Empire. Cold Fire killed Womble, he tried to kill me, and he has killed millions of your brothers and sisters. We will get him. Any questions?...No?...Good, let's go." Greeny said.

"You are not Emperor." Dennis said simply, as he approached Greeny, who was searching through stacks of old armor to find some that was suitable for him. Greeny stood and turned to Dennis. Dennis suddenly feared for his life. But Greeny merely shrugged.

"Has the device been turned on yet?" Greeny asked. Dennis nodded.

"You are not Emperor." Dennis said again, but this time more aggressively. Greeny put down the chest plate he was inspecting and sighed.

"They don't need to know that, Dennis. The news of my death was fairly widely known but the news of another being appointed was not. I can't take the chance that someone will resist me being re-appointed. You tell anyone, and I will kill you." Greeny said, his voice level the whole time.

"Is it done?" Greeny asked.

"Yes." Doomlord replied, "Let's go to the surface and find out if it worked." Greeny nodded and picked up the long sword that Cold Fire had stabbed him with. Despite the fact that the wound had been completely healed in the medical bay earlier that day he still felt a small amount of pain when he held the sword. He ignored it. He stepped onto the lift and felt it vibrate as they moved towards the surface. The door's slid open with a hiss. Greeny felt the cold air bite at his face as he looked around. It had taken only a few

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minutes for the Terrans to notice that the majority of the Hive were either standing perfectly still or going mad and already the population was fighting back with whatever was at hand. Greeny smiled.

Cold Fire's eyes widened. "We need to get out of here Captain." He said to Darius.

"Sir?" Darius replied, confused.

"Just find us a ship, any ship!" Cold Fire shouted.

"Yes master." Darius said, obediently.

"Emperor!" Said S117. "Communications are back online. We can talk to the Empire again!"

"Ok." Greeny said, only half listening to what S117 had said.

"What about the Hive?" S117 asked. Greeny looked at him.

"They are far more trouble than they are worth, kill them all." Greeny said. S117 hesitated.

"Yes Sir." He said at last, bowing at Greeny. Greeny responded by giving him a half salute, then he walked away. A few moments later Dennis caught up to him.

"Sir" He said saluting.

"What?" Greeny said impatiently.

"Cold Fire has escaped; his ship took off about an hour ago. But the ship he took has no hyper drive. He must still be in Sol, unless he has access to a hypergate." Dennis said, avoiding eye contact with Greeny. Greeny swore and lashed out at the nearest wall.

"I am going after him." Greeny said anger filling his voice. Dennis' eyes narrowed.

"You will abandon the Empire?" He asked rhetorically. Greeny didn't respond.

"Y'know, I went back to the Imperial Monument." Dennis said, "I saw what Cold Fire wrote on your pedestal 'Greeny - The Pirate'. If you leave now you will be exactly what it said."

"Fine." Greeny growled loudly, "If that is what it takes to bring Cold Fire down, so be it."

Dennis stared at him angrily "You have your Empire back now, your foes are dead, Cod Fire is running, chances are we will never see him again, and you want to abandon the Empire!" He said quickly, just before he turned and marched off.

"It's not enough!" Called Greeny after him. "It's not enough..." He repeated to himself.

Chapter 15

Greeny held Cold Fires sword at the Terrans neck.

“Get out.” He said. The Terran complied. Greeny climbed into the mans fighter and started the take off sequence. He felt the ship shudder and then vibrate as it rose a few feet into the air, then he hit the thrust and he flew out of the hangar. A few seconds later a voice erupted from the communications system on the ship.

“Imperial Might Four, this is Control. Return to the hangar immediately, you do not have clearance to launch.” Greeny ignored the voice. “Imperial Might Four, what is your status, I repeat, Might Four, what is your status?” Greeny reached down and pulled a panel open. He stared at the mesh of wires for a second and then traced the ones connected to the communications unit and pulled them out of their sockets. The comm chatter died instantly.

Cold Fire stretched his neck slowly, the silence he now heard in his head was deafening. He looked at the hooded Darius who now sat at the side of the small command deck on the only console. Cold Fire looked at him and bared his teeth.

“You should have got us a better ship.” He said, not bothering to hide the anger or exhaustion from his voice.

“Sorry master.” Darius said, not turning around. “This is all that was in the area, and at the time I thought the hyper drive was working.” Cold Fire opened his mouth to say something but Darius interrupted him before he could speak. “Sir, there is a small one person fighter heading for us.”

“Shoot it then.” Cold Fire snapped impatiently.

“Yes my lord.” Darius said as he opened fire on the ship.

“Where’s Greeny?” Asked S117 looking around, a movement that seemed exaggerated to Dennis.

“He has gone after Cold Fire.” Dennis replied simply.

“But we need him here!” S117 said “And why didn’t he tell us?”

“I guess that he was afraid that you would stop him, Admiral.” Dennis replied, there was a slight hint of defeatism in his voice, a tone that S117 had heard a lot in the last few hours, despite the fact that the pirates had been defeated.

“We would have!” S117 said. “As I said, he is needed here, and what if he goes off and gets himself killed, we have just got him back from the dead from what I hear, it wouldn’t be good to lose him again.”

“Well, what if he does return? He doesn’t seem to have the Empires best wishes at heart.” Dennis said. S117 looked at him.

“You’re out of line Captain. Greeny has been our Emperor for years, you are a mere captain, trust that the Emperor will not lead us down a dark path.” He said as Dennis nodded slowly.

Greeny rolled the fighter seemingly at random, he accelerated and decelerated at irregular intervals, anything to stop the Dominator that Cold Fire had stolen from getting a decent lock on him. But he knew all that it would take is one lucky shot and he would be Solar Worm food. When the fighters HUD showed the Dominator, a factory new one, lacking

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the hyper drive and shields that were usually installed a few months into the service of the ships of that class, at twelve million kilometres Greeny opened fire. As the G-47 was armed with a laser cannon, firing shots at the speed of light, Greeny couldn't actually see the projectiles leaving his ship. But he looked down at the tactical screen on the fighter and saw that the hull strength of Cold Fire's ship had fallen to eighty nine percent, but this number slowly increased as the materials that made up the ship started to repair themselves and knit back together.

A siren blared out of the command console warning Greeny that a shot had passed within one hundred meters of his ship. Instinctively Greeny rolled to port, away from the shot, but this broke his target lock with Cold's ship. Greeny swung his ship around a hundred and eighty degrees, a maneuver that would have shredded the ship in an atmosphere, and then dove, after a few seconds he pulled up and swung his ship around again. By now Cold Fire's ship had fully repaired and Greeny had lost his lock on the ship, but he was now under the firing line of the Dominator. The captain of the ship began to tilt the ship to get a lock on Greeny again, but that didn't matter the Greeny, he had a few seconds where he could accelerate to full speed without having to worry about avoiding shots.

Darius shouted and hit the console. "I can't get a lock on him, master, he is moving to fast and is too small." A siren suddenly blared to life and Darius looked at the tactical screen. "Not that it matters now. The Terrans have detected our weapons fire. We have several hundred ships incoming. The fastest will be here in weapons range within seven minutes." Cold Fire closed his eyes and leant back.

"Don't worry Darius, I never go anywhere without a back up plan" He said, then he opened his eyes again "We have reinforcement's incoming. About five minutes. Keep us alive Captain" He said.

Greeny's tactical screen lit up. Hundreds of Hive ships had suddenly hypered in around Cold Fires ship, screening it from fire. The siren in Greeny's ship started blaring very loudly so Greeny shut it off, he would need his full concentration if he was going to kill Cold Fire.

"The Hive and that Dominator are hostile." Said S117, aboard the bridge of a Battle Cruiser leading the charge against Cold Fire. "But that fighter is friendly. Transmit that data to the rest of the Fleet, Commander."

"Aye Sir." Replied the commander, saluting with military precision.

"Prepare yourselves Terrans." Said S117, "This is for Greeny!" And with those words a cheer spread through out the command deck.

Greeny looked out of his starboard window. The Hive ships had stopped shooting at him now and had turned their attention to the oncoming Terran armada. As he glanced down at his scanners he noticed that Cold Fires ship was fleeing, and was heavily damaged. Greeny slammed the fighter into full speed and pursued the Dominator.

"Sir, someone has just teleported onto the ship!" Shouted Darius, turning to look at Cold Fire. Cold had his eyes closed and his face was screwed up in concentration.

"Deal with it." He hissed.

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Greeny pressed himself against the wall by the door. As the door hissed open he readied Cold Fires long sword and waited.

“Admiral, we have taken heavy casualties! Almost two thirds of the fleet is gone. The Hive have started ramming our ships, we need to pull back!” Called a Lieutenant from S117’s left.

“Bah. Commander, I...” Began S117.

“He’s dead Admiral.” Said the Lieutenant.

“Fine, you then, tell the fleet to fall back.” Said the Admiral.

“Aye Sir.” Said the man.

Cold Fire heard Darius return and take his seat at the command console. He took that as a sign that the intruder was dead and so concentrated harder on making the Hive chase the Terrans. It wasn’t until a few seconds later when he realised that Darius was standing right in front of him did he open his eyes.

“What is it Darius?” He said to the cloaked figure. It responded by drawing a long sword and slamming it into Cold Fires chest with lighting speed.

“What is this?” Rapped Cold Fire, a small amount of blue blood dripping from his mouth. The sword wielder lowered his hood to reveal the twisted smile of Greeny. The Terran thought to himself for a moment and then spoke.

“This,” He said, twisting the sword slightly, “is The Pirates Revenge.”

The Pirates Revenge

Epilogue

Doomlords voice echoed through the sound amplifiers across the entire courtyard.

“I give you, Emperor Narses.” He said, bowing and stepping backwards away from the podium. Narses stood and took up his position at the podium. As he walked his mechanical legs whined and clicked, he moved slowly, he was still having trouble adjusting to these new legs.

“My brothers and sisters.” He said, when he final got to his position. “It has been two months now since we were brutally and viciously attacked, but as you can see we are well on our way back to having the City in working order.” He paused to look out over the half built buildings and half cleared debris piles. “So now, my Council and I have decided to tell you the full story of what happened in those days. It all begins with a Pirate named Cold Fire. He was a genetic experiment, made by the Hive to attack us. They knew that, despite their vastly superior numbers, we would beat them in any engagement, so they built a super soldier to lead them in battle. He came to Earth and, with the help of some traitors who disabled our Planetary Shell network; he tried to wipe us out.” Narses looked around at the sea of people, all of them obediently awaiting his next words.

“But we would not stand for that!” He continued. “We fought back. All of you saw Cold Fire execute Elder Greeny on this very spot, but what you don’t know is that it was not in fact our beloved Emperor. It was a plan, made by Elder Greeny himself, to make Cold Fire think that he was dead. My capture was also planned, we needed to find out about Cold Fire and so I was bait. Well, both of the plans worked and so we managed to push Cold Fire back and away from Earth, and this is when Elder Greeny made his move. He boarded Cold Fires ship and gave him one last chance to surrender and face trial on Earth. Cold Fire responded by shooting him. Despite his grave wounds Elder Greeny fought Cold Fire and eventually emerged victorious. However, the wounds he sustained were too much even for him, so he passed away on his way back to Earth and his people.” He paused for effect.

“We are going to build a statue right here, commemorating Elder Greeny and what he did for all of us. We ask that you remember him and his sacrifice; he was a true Terran Hero. We have wiped out most of the Hive in the galaxy, but there are still some that remain, and we are going to make them pay. Thank you.” He said, bowing and turning away from the crowd, as it erupted into cheers.

“All of what you just said was a corruption of the truth!” Said a man in civilian clothing, emerging from the shadows in the walkway behind the stage. He and Narses were alone.

“And you are?” Narses asked, not really caring.

“My name is Dennis, I was with Greeny through out the entire ordeal, he isn’t a hero, he is a traitor.”

“He isn’t dead either Dennis, he has simply disappeared, but we tell the people what they need to know.” Narses said, matter of factly.

“But its all lies!” Dennis shouted.

“Not according to the history books.” Narses said, then he put a hand on his gun and drew it. “We never did find any of the traitors, but we need the people to believe that someone did it, so I guess you will do.” He said, as he pulled the trigger.