

Ambiguous Victories

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Author: PeachE

The battle had been raging for hours, and the flaming spirit that had burned at the beginning had all but died out. The morale of every man was nearly broken by the view in front of them. In the background, behind the battle, the Shivan monster continued to live. Seven months, four days and twenty-two hours, this ship's presence had been felt, its reactors holding the Capella node open, allowing Shivan ships to pass in and out of Alliance space as they willed. And now, as the GTVA finally reached the behemoth, they could not get close enough to kill her. But that was not what troubled most officers. Failure was not the thought that caused shivers down spines, not the dreams that caused grown men to wake from their nightmarish sleep screaming, not the terror that could be found whispering its tales into the ears of combat soldiers. No, there was something far worse than failure. Suppose, by some miracle, they should be able to destroy this ship. Their forces would be almost completely gone. Their defenses a bare minimum. What would stop the Shivans from returning again, and again, and again, wreaking havoc as they had in Vega? The horrific nature by which Shivans had dispatched their enemies on the surface of Vega II; the way they had ripped live bodies apart and almost playfully tossed them aside; those were the thoughts that plagued the minds of men...

And now it was upon them. The extreme losses had persuaded Command to order the Ambiguous to move into place. And as the ship moved forward in the ranks, the faces of officers went white. Perhaps it would be better just to die now. But the Ambiguous moved forward. Larger than even the Colossus, the ship was now not much more than a warhead with an engine. In case it could not destroy the enemy ship, a scenario that was beginning to look all too possible, the ship was loaded with Meson II warheads. From bow to stern, port to starboard, not even the shield reactor room was spared from the presence of a warhead. There were enough warheads in the ship to destroy the nearby planet Vega IV, enough to wipe out both Alliance and Shivan fleets if positioned incorrectly. But commanded by a skeleton crew of elite volunteers, the Ambiguous pressed on, in spite of all the risks.

With all commanders looking on, the Ambiguous broke through the rigid battle lines, taking with her the bulk of the Shivan fleet. Ship after ship began to follow the Ambiguous, attacking fiercely, intent on stopping this monstrosity for reaching their command ship. And as the ship continued to press on, it became suddenly apparent to everyone, including the crew of the Ambiguous, that the Shivans would succeed. The engines of the Ambiguous had stopped, just fifteen hundred meters short from her objective. Now numbering in the dozens, the Shivans were circling the ship as birds of prey tearing at a dying body. And the rest of the Alliance watched on helplessly and hopelessly, Shivan ships holding them back, keeping them from aiding the Ambiguous.

From the relatively quiet but restraining battle lines, the view was impressive; the massive Ambiguous sitting still in the midst of a hundred circling Shivan ships; hundreds upon thousands of fighters enclosing the fight in a black swarm; a field of black and red, green and gray, occasionally interrupted by small balls of fire and light. If not for the war, and the putrid ugliness that accompanies any battle, the sight might have been described as beautiful. And it was after one particularly bright flash of light that a glow began to show from the inside of the circular battlefield. A reactor was working overtime.

The glow became brighter and brighter and brighter. Vertical rays of light and balls of fire shot out of the battle's center. And just as the glow could not become brighter, just as the view could not become more impressive, a brilliant flash signaled the end of the battle. The Ambiguous had fallen. As fast as the balls of flame were shot forward from the ship, they were consumed as the dead ship's crews' hands and fingers, still clenched in fists ready to fight, reached forth in the form of a

horrific, transparent blue ghost. And in revenge, the ghost tore through the enemy ships, ripping through the killers of her crew. On quick feet, the ghost reached the Shivan command ship in seconds, and, with the help of following debris, dismembered the giant.

The node closed. The Shivan advance was once again held back. But even as the command ship was being rendered neutral, the shockwave and debris did not stop. Sparing no one, even the Alliance ships on the battle lines were battered and destroyed by debris and rocked by the blue ghost. Titanium meteorites dove into the surfaces of every ship within reach, leaving a trail of fire and destruction in their wake.

And when the battle was finally over, when the lines finally cleared, the Alliance crawled away from Vega system, victors of the day. As the first ships were leaving the system, Vasudan and Terran commanders alike, turned back and stared back at the presently calm battlefield. Not far away were two massive skeletons, one Shivan, one Terran, and before them, a graveyard of debris. The battle was over, and yet, there was no rejoicing. What was beyond those skeletons, waiting in the Capella system? How many of their descendants would be forced to fight the Shivans? How long would... could this go on? But two questions, above all the others, plagued the mind of every officer in the GTVA. When will the Shivans return? Not if, but when... and would they be ready in time for the next round? Unless a permanent solution could be found, these fears would haunt Vasudans and Terrans forever, or until their species were ground into dust by the Great Destroyers... whichever would come first. The fears would eat away at pilots and commanders alike until the day the Shivans again returned. And such is the nature of Ambiguous victories.