

Freespace 2: Devastation

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Disclaimer: Freespace 2 is the property of it's creators, not mine. I simply write this as a tribute to a great game that I still play today (I know, that's a really long time)

Squadron Members of the 77th Swords

Commander Christopher Manstein (Squadron Leader, Alpha 1)

Lieutenant Anya Mitchell (Alpha 2)

Lieutenant Louis Alba (Alpha 3)

Ensign Jack Johnston (Alpha 4)

Captain Amy Junique (Beta 1)

Senior Lieutenant Gordon Zimmerman (Beta 2)

Lieutenant J.G. Franz Albertz (Beta 3)

Ensign Alexander Junique (Beta 4)

Captain Nick Hothsteen (Gamma 1)

Ptah Lieutenant RaNah (Gamma 2, Vasudan Pilot)

Ensign David Truman (Gamma 3)

Ensign Nicole Farseen (Gamma 4)

Time: 15:00 Hours, Galactic Standard Time

Place: Alpha Centauri Repair Yard

Location: Near Jump Node to Vasuda Prime

Commander Chris Manstein was no stranger to conflict. He had served onboard the GTD Aquataine only a few months earlier in Capella. Since then he had been reassigned to the 77th Swords. The Swords were not the best squadron he'd ever seen, but they were diverse, and each pilot was one of a kind.

The Swords had been formed during the Great War, and were considered for just about any job. They had been everything from a bomber squadron, to a interceptor squadron, to a general space superiority squadron, and had even been a heavy assault squadron during the Capella Crisis. However, due to the severe economic crisis that had befallen on the GTVA since the loss of Capella, they were now flying ancient Ulysses fighters and using only the most basic weapons in the GTVA's arsenal, the Subach HL-7 and the tempest dumb fire rockets.

During the Capella Crisis the Swords had been almost wiped out. They were far from alone on that fact. However, the squadron's roster had been filled as part of the restructuring of the GTVA

military. Their pilots had been drawn from the GTVA academy and other pilot training schools. There was one odd ball in the squadron, a Vasudan pilot by the name of RaNah. RaNah flew in a specially modified Ulysses. The assignment of a Vasudan to the Swords was not uncommon, officer exchanges being standard operating procedure even after Capella, but the duration of his assignment was new. He was scheduled to remain with the Swords until his next assignment, which was not listed anywhere, at least not in any files Chris had access to.

Chris banked his Ulysses around the massive repair ring that housed a badly damaged Orion destroyer, the GTD Inspiration. Off to his right was Lieutenant Anya Mitchell. Anya was a headstrong, dark haired woman in her 20s. Anya's combat record was almost non-existent, she had been assigned just as Capella had been lost, straight from the academy. An outspoken individual by nature, she spoke her mind, whether anyone cared to hear it or not. She regularly debated tactics with Chris. However, in the two combat engagements she had been in, she had been cold and calculating, never questioning his judgment during the fight.

Only Anya was with Chris on this routine patrol. Routine patrols generally never amounted to anything, making them the most boring assignments of all. The Repair Yard was almost defenseless, the only defenders being the Swords and a Vasudan Sobek corvette, the GVCv Megaurute. Right now, the Megaurute was slowly circling the repair yard, an old Arcadia Installation. The Arcadia was old and obsolete and in desperate need of repair. Most of the primary systems, communication, life support, and sensors, still worked but the secondary systems, the docking clamps, the tractor beams, numerous elevators, and even some systems Chris hadn't ever seen didn't work all the time. However, supplies for such a large project as the rebuilding of an Arcadia installation were as rare as the sands of south Florida from Earth. In non-metaphoric terms, there simply weren't available. The station held air, and that's all that mattered to the GTVA.

The repair yard had four large Ganymede repair rings, each with a destroyer parked in it. A standard patrol counted as going to each ring four times in sequence. Chris glanced at his sensor board and noticed that the GTC Muridin, an Aeolus cruiser was departing for in-system patrol. Another three freighters were also busy dropping off their cargo, a monthly supply of basic provisions. However, he noticed something strange. A small subspace disturbance was beginning to form near the first repair ring.

"This is Alpha 1 to control," Chris stated through his microphone. "I've got an odd subspace disturbance near the first repair ring."

"Acknowledged Alpha 1," came the ever reassure voice of the control officer, safe on the installation. "Move in and give it a good scan. Our sensor system is acting up and not getting a good reading. It's probably nothing but the GTVA will have our heads if we don't follow procedure, especially with four destroyers in our docks."

"Roger that." Chris banked his fighter and activated his active scanners. He was only a few kilometers from the disturbance when the disturbance quickly expanded, becoming a full sized subspace vortex. An unmarked Fenris cruiser and a wing of Hercules fighters popped out of it. The Fenris immediately opened fire on the Inspiration.

"Alpha wing, those are pirates! Engage them."

"This is the GVCv Megaurute," the Vasudan commander on the Megaurute stated through the automated translator, "moving to engage." The Megaurute's large engines began to push the corvette into firing position.

Chris led Anya through the flak maelstrom that the Fenris was putting up, and then targeted the lead Hercules fighter. The Hercules fighter was another old fighter, much like the Ulysses, but it was much stronger, a true heavy assault fighter. To be honest, Chris would prefer to be flying the Hercs to the Ulysses any day. The Hercs were attacking the Battlehound as well. Chris opened fire with his primary gun bank, pouring red laser bursts into the Herc's shields. He also toggled the secondary trigger on his control stick, sending groups of eight tempest missiles into the Herc's depleted shields. The fighter exploded in only seconds.

Chris quickly shifted targets to the third Herc. Anya was already all over the second Herc. The third Herc dodged Chris's initial burst and abruptly turned toward Chris. However, Chris responded by ramming his throttles to full and using his afterburners to shoot past the Herc before the Herc could get a clear shot. He then turned his ship as fast as he could and opened fire, cutting through the Herc's shields and blasting both engine mountings off. The remainder of the Herc blew up in a fireball as the ship's powerplant blew.

The Megaurute opened fire just as Chris and Anya finished with the Hercs, its large beam cannons cutting mercilessly through the Fenris's hull. After only a single shot from both beam cannons, the Fenris broke in half. "Megaurute here," the commander of the Megaurute stated. "Target destroyed, three escape pods have been launched, but are without power. Rescue shuttles have been deployed."

Chris made a single pass over the area in which the two chunks of the Fenris still resided. A few bodies floated around in space. The remains of the Fenris were dark, with multiple hull breaches. Atmosphere could be seen still venting into space. Beam cannons shattered the hulls of their target ships so violently that multiple exterior breaches were usually blow open, instead of just one at the focal point of the beam.

He didn't make another pass. Chris took a deep calming breath, and then turned towards the installation. "Control, Alpha 1 and 2 request docking clearance"

"Alpha wing, you have clearance," replied the control officer. "Report to the debriefing room on the double."

"Affirmative control."

Chris and Anya landed their fighters in their respective fighter racks, the automated system for doing so had long since stopped working. Technicians then helped both of them out. The techs would go over the fighters with a fine toothed comb, cleaning every intake and every gun port. They would also re-install the guns and reload their tempest banks. Every time they went into combat, they could count on their fighters being well maintained. It was necessary to ensure nothing broke during combat, the fighters they were flying were built in the latter half of the Great War, decades ago.

Only a few minutes later, they were in the debriefing room, which was little more than a converted storage bay. The base commander was present, looking at a report on the video-screen. He motioned for them to sit without taking his gaze from the report.

The commander was a seasoned space veteran, having served in both wars with the Shivans. His hair was steadily turning grey, and there was a slight limp with one of his legs. Chris guessed it was a battle injury that had never fully healed.

"Commander, Lieutenant." The Commander spoke quickly, nodding to each in turn. "I must thank you two for the outstanding cover you two provided for the repair yard. We managed to save a few

of the crew of the Fenris. They're in the brig now. I must confess, you've definitely proven your worth to this installation and the larger GTVA."

"Thank you, sir." Chris replied for himself and Anya.

"Now, why don't you two get down to the bar and get yourself a drink, tell the bartender it's on me."

"Yes sir." Anya replied enthusiastically.

Chris and Anya joined the rest of the squadron's pilots in the bar. When they reached the tables the squadron had taken Louis Alba passed them both a drink. Louis was a rather tough guy, built with muscle and not much else. Louis was known as the only guy who could go head to head with a Vasudan in a fist fight. The truth being, RaNah regularly beat him in such matches, but Louis refused to acknowledge it.

Sitting next to Louis was Jack Johnston. Jack was the youngest pilot the squadron had, only nineteen. Jack was still very much a rookie, with no lines on his face that told of how much combat the person had seen. Louis had taken Jack as his protege, teaching Jack everything he knew. Jack was a quick learner and a natural pilot. He was also a polite and reasonable person.

At the table next to Louis's sat Amy and Alexander Junique. They were siblings, Amy being the older one and a space veteran while Alexander was fresh from the GTVA Academy. Amy had seen too much death in her career as a fighter pilot, and it showed from her out of focus expression most of the time, on any normal posting she'd be on medical leave. Somehow though, when placed into the cockpit of her fighter, she was able to concentrate and do her job. Alexander was her opposite in more than just gender. He was outgoing and excited, young and inexperienced. He didn't realize how much his sister protected him.

Also at that table sat Gordon Zimmerman and Franz Albertz, busy drinking beer. Gordon was a lean figure who lacked any real muscle mass but always seemed to be able to bring a lot of muscle to lifting a heavy load. Franz was Gordon's longtime friend. They had been flying together since graduating from the academy. However, Franz was sometimes rather blunt, leading to a demotion once, though he flat out refused to tell the story. Not that Chris couldn't look it up, but it didn't matter to him. All the pilots at that table were loyal, competent, and above all, willing.

The last table had the members of Gamma wing at it, Nick Hothsteen, RaNah, David Truman, and Nicole Farseen. Nick was a former squadron leader who had lost his whole squadron at Capella. He couldn't take the burden of command too well, so the GTVA had assigned him to another squadron as an assistant commander. The man didn't zone out much like Amy did, but the traumatic stress sometimes showed in combat, where he wouldn't always take the initiative. RaNah was leaning against the wall near the table because he was just too large to sit in a standard human chair. Since RaNah was Vasudan, all of the squadron had to always have their personal translators in their ears at all times. David Truman and Nicole Farseen were both fresh from the GTVA academy. They were both energetic and excited, ready to tackle the world. However, that's where the similarities ended, David was more of an introvert while Nicole would blurt anything she felt like saying aloud, and not even remotely care about the consequences.

"So, tell us about that juicy action." Louis stated, raising an eyebrow.

"Three Hercs and a Fenris drop out of subspace." Anya began. "We swoop down like bats out of hell and just beat the crap out of them. I blasted one, Chris got the others."

"The Megaurute cleaved the Fenris in two with its beam cannons." Chris added. "It's a sad waste of life."

"Yeah, it is." Amy added, in a very distant voice.

"So what's next?" Jack asked.

"We..." Chris never got to finish his sentence.

The intercomm voice boomed. "77th Swords to the briefing room. This is a full squadron call."

"Well, let's go."

All twelve members of the squadron got up and jogged down the hallways, heading for the briefing room, leaving their drinks behind. They zipped their flight suits and buckled their helmets down as they headed for the briefing room. Something had happened, something big. That knowledge made them run faster.