

## Freespace: The Great War

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# Chapter 4 Where Terrans Dare

A huge crowd mobbed Joe's Valkyrie as the Bastions launch claw lowered it onto the deck. Joe removed his helmet as the canopy slid off exposing him to a chaotic screams of joy and congratulations. Two crewmen grabbed Joe and ripped him out of the fighter and carried him triumphantly on their shoulders. Joe enthusiastically thrust his arms into the air and let out a whoop of joy. With all the cheering going on, it was a surprise to all when a single voice singled itself out.

"Admiral on deck!" someone yelled. The crowd instantly went silent. The crewmembers holding Joe up lowered him to the ground and snapped to attention, as did Joe. For a moment, Joe finally got a good look at the Bastion's flight deck. There was little difference between the two, other than the squadron patches lining the walls.

"Are you Ensign Joseph Smith?" a voice asked. Joe shook himself back to reality, and into the face of an Admiral.

"Yes sir," he said meekly.

The Admiral looked over him for a moment. "So you're the lucky bastard that shot down a Shivan, eh?" she said.

"Yes sir," he said with pride.

"Well then, it looks like you get this," the Admiral held out a small box. She lifted the lid off revealing a medal. "For your excellence in destroying a Shivan fighter, you are awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross. Wear it proudly." She handed the medal box to Joe.

"Thank you sir," he said.

"Alright then," the Admiral turned to the crowd. "Everybody back to your stations, there'll be plenty of time to celebrate when this war is won. Now get moving." The crowd began to disperse into the various passages leading from the flight deck. The Admiral turned back to Joe and Lucy. "Pilots, you have a mission briefing at 0900. Find your wingmates, tell give you details." She then marched off the deck.

Joe looked at Lucy. "A bit of a hard ass isn't she?"

"Don't I know it," Lucy said as she walked toward the deck lift.

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"Welcome to the GTD Bastion, pilots. For those new here, I am Admiral Judith Shima, commander of the Bastion."

Joe looked at the Admiral, the same one who had given him the medal only yesterday. Behind her, an image of the Ikeya system appeared with five cargo icons placed in various places. Joe's eyes wandered to the other pilots in the briefing room, all nineteen of them. Lucy elbowed him. "Pay attention."

"The Bastion is on a special ops mission to investigate and acquire Shivan technology. This includes weaponry, shielding, and stealth technology." Admiral Shima gestured to the vid-screen. "Intel has determined that at least one point of Shivan entry into our space lies in the Ikeya system. At least five cargo depots are located here. Since they are not in Terran or Vasudan formations, we must assume that they belong to the Shivans." The image focused on one of the cargo groups. The

icons representing fighters and freighters appeared with the cargo. “These depots provide a prime opportunity to gather more information on the Shivans. Long range scans reveal that the containers contain unusual electronics similar to the Shivans shielding and sensor systems. Of course, long range scans do little to reveal how these systems work. This is where you come in, pilots. Each of your wings will be assigned to cargo depot. You will drop in about six kilometers from the depot. You will then clear the field of enemy sentry guns and scan the containers. When you have determined the contents, freighters will be called in to collect them for further study. You will be given further details by Captain Koppel at 1200 hours. You are dismissed.” The Admiral turned to leave, and then stopped. “Ensign Shima.”

“Yes sir,” said Lucy.

“Come with me.” Joe watched as Lucy followed the Admiral out.

“Sounds like a trap to me,” said Eishtmo.

“Huh?” said Joe.

“The mission, its a trap,” repeated Eishtmo. “The Shivans are setting us up.”

“And how do you know that?” teased Roach.

“I just know.”

“Alright mister smarty pants,” Roach said. “If you know so much, then tell me why the Admiral wanted to see Babe.”

Joe looked at Roach. “I thought it was because they were related.”

“Pfft,” huffed Roach. “Yeah, right.”

“Actually,” Eishtmo said. “He’s right.”

“Excuse me?” Roach begged.

“Yeah, didn’t you notice that they had the same last name.” Joe wondered if Roach ever paid attention.

“That’s because the Admiral is Lucy’s mom,” Eishtmo teased.

“Hey, just because I forgot Babe’s name was Shima doesn’t mean I’m a idiot,” said Roach. “Just, unobservant.”

Joe and Eishtmo laughed at Roach’s vain attempt at defending himself. “Whatever,” said Eishtmo. “Come on, I buy you two a drink.”

Joe looked at Eishtmo. “I’m too young to drink.”

“You earned a medal, you earned a drink.” With that, Eishtmo headed for the ships main rec room.

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“Whoa,” Roach choked as he nearly fell off his stool. “What the hell is this?”

Eishtmo chuckled. “That, is a Reliant Repellent. The best stuff to keep you alive.”

Joe coughed. “You mean kill you, right.”

“Never,” said Eishtmo. “When I was on the Reliant, before every mission, we would down a shot of this and only those who didn’t drink it were killed.”

“That’s because the one’s who did didn’t know they were dead,” cried Roach. The others laughed as Roach took another shot.

Lucy walked in, a displeased look baked onto her face. “Hey, Lucy, pull up a seat,” called Joe. Lucy sat down next to Roach, the only seat available.

“So, how’s it going Babe?” asked Roach.

“Shut up,” Lucy said with disgust.

“Aw, did you have a fight with mommy,” Roach said with his best baby voice.

“Shut the fuck up you son of a bitch,” Lucy said as she gulped her drink.

“Hey, that’s no way to talk about my mother.”

“I wasn’t talking about your mother.”

“What the hell’s your problem, bitch?” Roach said. Joe’s eye’s widened as he realized a major fight was developing.

“Don’t make me hurt you,” Lucy said.

“Bring it on bitch. I’ll kick your ass from here to next Thursday.” Roach stood up and looked down at Lucy.

“Alright,” Lucy said. “Just remember, you asked for it.” She stood up, face to face with Roach. Eishtmo also got up and moved to get between them when Joe cried out.

“Would you cut it out already! You’ve been fighting sense the first day you met, and if you don’t stop now, I’ll kick both your asses.” Everyone in the rec room looked at Joe, who tried to catch his breath.

“He’s right,” Eishtmo said calmly. “Why don’t we all sit down and cool off.”

“Not with him around,” said Lucy. She then got up and marched out of the room.

“I’ll get you later,” yelled Roach.

Joe glared at Roach. “Don’t make me separate you, Roach,” he said evilly.

Roach stared at Joe for a moment. “Um, I think I’ll go check out the, um, things. Uh, I’ll see you guys at noon.” Roach rushed out.

Eishtmo sat down next to Joe. “Are you okay, kid?”

“Yeah, I guess so,” Joe took a deep breath. “It just they, uh, you know.”

“Oh yeah I do,” said Eishtmo. “I’ve seen this before. They’ll cool down after a while, or wind up dead.”

“It’s just that Lucy is always in such a pissed off attitude and Roach just loves to agitate her and it’s, uh, just so confusing. No, that’s not the right word.”

Eishtmo chuckled. “I know what you mean.” He looked at Joe. “I bet I know why she’s so angry though.”

“Oh, why?”

“Well, she’s a military brat, probably grew up not seeing her mom much. So, when she joined the service, she hoped to get assigned here so she could be close to her.” Eishtmo downed another Repellent. “When the Admiral met with her, she probably told her why she wasn’t assigned to the Bastion and that pissed her off even more.”

“And then Roach stirred her up.”

“Just like a hornets nest,” Eishtmo sighed. “With luck, Lucy will calm down soon and this senseless fighting will just be common bickering.”

“Is that suppose to be better?”

“Better then them killing each other.”

Joe thought about it for a moment and decided to change the subject. “So you really think this mission is a trap.”

“Oh yeah.”

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“More enemy fighters,” yelled Lucy.

Joe glanced down at the radar. Four more flashing red blips appeared. “Almost there,” he said. “Just keep those fighters off me.”

“Yeah Eish,” said Roach. “Shouldn’t you be the one to scan the containers?”

“Without cover when you three die, I don’t think so,” said Eishtmo.

“Ten seconds to the first container,” Joe said. Suddenly, the container exploded. “What the hell?” Several more exploded in order.

“Alpha wing,” said Command. “It’s a trap.”

“No shit,” yelled Roach.

“Alpha one, scan the remaining containers, then get the hell out of there. The rest of you cover Alpha one,” Command ordered.

“That’s one,” Joe said. He had continued to try to scan the containers, even as they exploded around him. “On to number two.”

“Those Shivan fighters are about a minute out, hurry up,” urged Lucy.

“Roach, Babe, follow me,” said Eishtmo.

“What for?” asked Roach.

“To give the kid more time, come on.”

Roach, Babe and Eishtmo’s Apollos shot off towards the nearest group of on coming fighters. Joe scanned the second container and moved on to the third.

“Hurry up Player,” Roach cried. “We can’t hold them forever.”

“I know, I know,” Joe flipped his fighter around and faced the next container.

“Hull down to eighty percent,” Lucy said with alarm.

“You only need to start worrying when its down to fifteen percent,” said Eishtmo.

“We stay out here any longer, and it will be a lot lower then fifteen,” Roach said. “Are you done yet, Player?”

“One more to go,” said Joe. His fighter turned toward the last container. As he neared it, laser blasts flashed between him and his target. Then a Shivan fighter followed the blasts. Joe was startled for a moment, but quickly regained his senses and finished the scan. “I’m done, let’s go!”

“Don’t have to tell me twice,” said Roach. The Terran fighters disappeared into the subspace vortexes.

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“An alliance?” said Joe in complete disbelief.

“That’s the rumor anyway,” said Captain Koppel. “Nothing’s finalized yet, though. We should hear more in the coming days.”

“That’s just weird,” said Roach.

“Never would have I believed after all these years,” said Eishtmo.

“In any case, you guys are to report back to the Galatea as soon as possible,” said Koppel.

“I thought we were going to be here a week?” Lucy whined.

Koppel shook his head. “The Galatea needs you more than we do. Get down to the flight deck, your transport is waiting.” Koppel then handed a bottle to Eishtmo. “This was made on the Reliant herself. Take care of it.”

Eishtmo smiled. “Thanks Spook, take care.” The two shook hands. Koppel turned and left.

“What’s that?” asked Joe.

“A bottle of Repellent,” Eishtmo said.

“Insect repellent?” asked Lucy.

“Shivan repellent,” said Roach.

“I wasn’t asking you,” said Lucy gruffly.

“Let’s just go,” Joe said. “You can have a taste on the way.”