

## Freespace: The Great War

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# Chapter 8: Last, Desperate Grasp

“Alright, listen up Freespaceers!” yelled Bull. Behind him an icon representing the SD Eva appeared. “With the Lucifer now in Deneb, we have no choice but to eliminate the Eva. The GTD Legion is being sent in to assist in our defense of Vasuda Prime, but it will take some time for it to get here. Thus, you have been tasked with the destruction of the Eva.” Bull looked at the his silent pilots. “Now don’t get excited.”

“Should we be excited?” Coyote yelled. Everybody laughed.

Bull rolled his eyes. “Okay, so here’s the plan. Alpha wing will take Medusa bombers with Tsunami bombs and destroy the Eva. Beta and Gamma will fly escort. Beta will use Ulysses and Gamma will fly Heres. Delta, you will perform a strike on a nearby cargo depot to hopefully drag some of the Eva’s fighter cover away.” Bull turned to Joe. “Player, you will be in charge of the strike mission. You launch in thirty minutes, suit up.”

Joe got up and headed out the door. “Hey Player,” Roach yelled as he caught up to Joe. “So, how’d you manage to get your cluster back?”

Joe gave a short laugh. “Sorry,” he said. “That’s classified.”

“Hey,” Eishtmo yelled from down the passage. “Where do you two think you’re going?”

“To suit up,” Joe yelled back.

“First things first,” said Eishtmo.

“What are you talking about?” asked Joe.

Roach now laughed. “Eish wants us to have a shot of Repellent before we go.”

Joe looked at Roach. “Well I don’t know. . .”

“Aw, come on,” said Eishtmo. “The worst its going to do is kill you.”

Joe thought on this for a moment. “What the hell,” he said and he and Roach headed for the rec room.

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“Double up your bombs and follow me in,” Joe said.

“Roger that,” said Lucy.

“Beta, keep those Dragons busy, Gamma take down the Manticores.” Joe gave the orders with a confident, unwavering voice.

“Copy that,” said Rock.

“As you wish,” Ma’ka responded.

Joe smiled at the fact that Ma’ka hadn’t contradicted him. “When we’re within 500 meters, launch bombs,” he ordered.

“That’s cutting it kind of close, isn’t it?” asked Eishtmo.

“Less chance of them taking them down,” Joe responded. “Unless you have a quicker way to destroy a Demon.”

“Not really.”

Joe watched the beetle shape of the Eva grow larger. The distance indicator read 1000 meters. Laser blasts from the Eva’s many turrets began flashing all round his fighter.

“Damn!” yelled Lucy.

“Are you okay Babe?” asked Roach.

“One of those damn blasts knocked me off target,” said Lucy.

Joe checked the indicator: 700 meters. “Stay on target people.” Joe’s HUD flashed a lock on the Eva.

“I have a lock,” said Roach. “Let’s launch and get the hell out of here.”

“Just wait a second,” said Joe. He watched the indicator slowly wind down closer to 500. “Now!”

Each of Alpha’s eight bombs roared down toward the Eva. A few of the Eva’s laser turrets turned toward the small, highly destructive targets, the rest continued to hound the bombers. Joe pulled his bomber up and away from the Shivan destroyer, his afterburners shaking the heavy bomber. The launch warning flashed on, and the yellow indicator showing the location and distance of the missile heading toward Joe lit up. He turned his Medusa toward the missile, and charged at it. Then, at the last second, he pulled up and dropped a counter-measure right in the missiles path. Joe now turned to a nearby Manticore and began blasting away.

“Woo wee!” yelled Roach. “Look at those bombs blow!”

“What’s the status of the Eva?” asked Joe as he desperately tried to track the Shivan fighter.

“AHHHHHHH!” screamed Rap.

“We have lost Rap,” Rock said.

“Team up on the Dragons,” said Ma’ka. “Gamma two, assist Beta.”

“Yes sir,” said Gamma two.

Joe followed the Manticore close to the Eva’s hull. The grey-black hull cast a shadow on his bomber, sending a chill down Joe’s spine.

“The Eva’s hull is down to twenty-two percent,” Eishtmo responded. “It shouldn’t take much to take her down.”

“Right,” said Joe. He fired a final shot bringing down the Shivan fighter. “Who’s got an opening to launch another salvo?”

“I’m on it,” said Lucy.

“Give me a sec to get out of here,” said Joe. He pointed the Medusa away from the Eva and kicked in the afterburners putting as much distance between him and the destroyer as possible. Suddenly, his fighter shook as his rear shields took a beating. “What the fuck?” Joe yelled. He pulled his bomber around and began turning and twisting to shake the attacking fighter. “Can somebody give me some cover?” he begged.

“Hold your current course,” said Ma’ka.

“What?”

“Just do it.”

Joe held his course. That’s when he saw Ma’ka’s Hercules fighter pointing straight at him. Joe watched as Ma’ka launched a pair of Interceptors at Joe’s attacker. “Dive now,” Ma’ka yelled.

Joe hit his burners and dove away. He watched as the targeting indicator on his attacker vanished along with the fighter. “Thanks,” he said.

“You earned it,” said Ma’ka.

Joe wondered what exactly Ma’ka meant for a moment, but soon shook it away as another Manticore flew into his sights.

“There she goes,” yelled Roach.

Joe turned around in time to see the Eva go up in spectacular fireball. A shock wave flew out and shook Joe’s bomber. He regained control and pulled up to the running Shivan fighter. “Good work people,” he said. “Let’s go home.”

That’s when Command came screaming. “All fighters, report back to the Galatea, we’re under attack!”

“You heard the man,” said Eishtmo. “Let’s go.”

Joe punched the jump controls. The blue-white vortex opened and swallowed Joe’s bomber. Moments later, the vortex opened revealing the Galatea and a hell of a battle.

“Welcome to party,” greeted Hound.

Joe scanned the sky. “Where are the Hell Bats?” he asked.

“AHHHHHHHHHHH!” came a scream.

“That was the last of them,” said Wolf. “All Freespace, protect the Galatea!”

“Pilots,” said Command. “The first bomb hit damaged the launch bay. As soon as it’s fixed, we’ll launch the Poker Faces to assist.”

“Well isn’t this just dandy,” said Roach.

Joe locked on to the nearest Shivan bomber and charged forward, guns blazing. The bomber hardly moved off course. A Dragon suddenly flew right up into Joe’s face. He dove away and began wildly turning to escape the Shivan. He glanced back to see his secondary turret blazing away at the fighter.

“I got him,” yelled Fox. The Dragon shook as Fox fired a volley of shots into it.

“Thanks,” Joe said as he turned back to the bomber. He watched as his target let out a streak of white. “They’re launching bombs!”

“I am on it,” said Rock.

Joe target one of the bombs and began blasting away, desperately trying to take out the bomb. When it finally blew, his bomber was shook by the shockwave of the blast. Rock shot past him taking out another pair of bombs. “Command, where’s our backup?” Joe asked.

“The flight deck is in bad shape Alpha one,” said Command. “We’re working on it.”

“Well hurry up!” Hound yelled.

Joe finally destroyed his target and moved on to the next. For a moment, he stopped and

watched the firefight. Fighters and bombers twisting and turning on a black background. Green, red, yellow, and blue beams of light shot out of almost nowhere, creating an great light show. Joe turned away, back to his Shivan target.

“Remember me!” screamed Gamma four as the Vasudan’s fighter exploded.

“Damn it!” screamed Coyote. “These Dragons are everywhere.”

“Forget the Dragons,” Eishtmo said. “Take out the bombers first, we’ll worry about the fighters later.”

“Eish, lookout,” Lucy screamed.

Joe concentrated on his target. After a few moments the Shivan bomber began spinning wildly and finally exploding. Suddenly, a Medusa shot in front of him followed by a firing Manticore. Joe turned to the Shivan and began chewing into it. The heavy fighter’s pilot didn’t like that and pulled up and away from its quarry. Joe followed, jabbing the afterburners down as hard as he could to get that extra boost of speed. He followed the Manticore up and continued firing until the Shivan died in the fiery explosion of its fighter.

“Thanks kid,” said Eishtmo.

“No problem,” Joe said as he turned to another bomber and began blasting away.

“Command,” Wolf yelled. “Where are those extra fighters?”

“Three minutes,” Command said simply.

Joe watched as a bomb hit the side of the Galatea. The blue shockwave shook everyone in its range. “They better hurry up, or there won’t be a ship to launch from,” he called.

Then a voice no one expected to hear buzzed in each pilots ears. “Pilots, this is Admiral Wolfe. We have taken heavy damage. We are evacuating all none essential personal. See that they make it to safety.”

“It looks like we’re in deeper shit then I thought,” Eishtmo said.

“Alpha,” Wolf said. “Cover the escape pods, your extra turrets will give them some extra cover.”

“Copy that,” said Lucy.

Joe targeted the first escape pod and shot up close to the Hermes. His computer locked onto the pods nearest attacker and Joe jumped on the fighter. The Shivan pulled away and began weaving to avoid Joe. Joe flipped back to the pod and then targeted its next attacker. He went back and forth, occasionally seeing the other members of Alpha doing much the same.

“I’m detecting a massive jump signature,” said Lucy.

“Holy fuck!” Roach gasped. “It’s the Lucifer!”

Joe looked up in time to see the massive hull of Lucifer complete its jump into normal space. Less then a second later, a beam of energy ripped out of the one of the Lucifer’s “arms” and arced towards the Galatea. The beam collided with the Terran warship, tearing into the ships fighter bay.

“They destroyed the hanger!” Command said with despair.

“Looks like we’re on our own,” said Fox.

“Wolf,” said Joe. “We still have Tsunamis left, we could use them on the Lucifer.”

“Good idea,” said Wolf. “Gamma, take Alpha’s place. . .”

“That’s a negative,” Bull’s voice came over the comm. “Alpha, stay on station.”

“What the hell are you doing on the comm?” Wolf asked.

“Keeping you in line,” said Bull. Another beam from the Lucifer smashed into the Galatea. Bull groaned with the impact. “The Admiral has something special in mind for the Lucifer.”

“What are you talking about?” Wolf demanded.

Joe looked back at the Galatea. Its massive body turned toward the Lucifer, as the blue glow of its engines lit up brighter. Joe’s eyes widened as he realized the Galatea’s quest. “No way,” he muttered.

“Marky, what are you doing?” cried Eishtmo.

“The only thing we can do,” said Admiral Wolfe. “Quinn, I hope we’ll meet again someday.”

“I know we will,” Eishtmo’s voice quivered.

Joe tried to take his mind off the tragedy that was unfolding by targeting another Shivan fighter. He burned his frustrations into the alien’s hull. He turned for a moment to see another beam shoot out of the Lucifer and hit the Galatea. A lump formed in his throat as the Galatea, that great and beautiful ship, exploded due to the force of the blast. There were no screams, just an deafening silence.

“She’s gone,” Hound said.

“This is the escape pods, we’re jumping out now. See you on the Bastion.”

Joe watched as the debris of the Galatea move away from the ships final position. The Lucifer jumped out, untouched. Joe swallowed.

“Okay people,” Wolf said. “Let’s get out of here.”

Joe reluctantly hit the jump controls and the horrid scene disappeared.

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“Admiral on deck!” someone yelled. Joe and the other Freespacers lined up in front of their newly arrived fighters. Joe felt something, but he wasn’t sure what it was. It felt like a lump deep in his soul. It weighed heavily, so heavily that he almost wanted throw up. Admiral Shima walked up to the group. To Joe, it looked like she had the same feeling he did.

“Welcome to the Bastion,” the Admiral started. “You did well in defending the Galatea’s escape pods. You saved many lives. I know that you lost many good friends on the Galatea. We all feel your pain, but there was nothing you could do.”

“Mom,” Lucy blurted out. “We know, we know.”

Admiral Shima looked at her daughter for a moment. “Yes, of course you do. Captain Koppel will escort you all to your new quarters. A new Vasudan representative is being sent over as we speak.” She looked at the small group. “Marcus Wolfe was a good commander, and good friend. We all have something to morn today.” She then turned and walked away. Lucy didn’t wait to be dismissed and ran to catch up to her mother.

Spook looked at the group. “Come on, I’ll show you to your quarters.”