

Freespace: The Great War

Posted on March 20th, 2011

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Chapter 10: The Ancient Light

“We have lost ground to the Shivans in Antares and Sirius,” continued Admiral Shima. “The number of systems between the Shivans and Earth are dwindling fast.” Behind the Admiral appeared a node map. Shivan held systems seemed to fill the map. “Fortunately, we were able to save the Beta Aquilae communications terminal. Aside from that single post, we have lost all contact with the outer colonies.”

Joe rubbed his eyes. The last few days had been a chaotic run, and this Command Briefing had rudely interrupted his sleep.

“Tired?” asked Lucy. Joe nodded. “Me too.”

“At 2230 yesterday, the comm terminal received the following transmission,” Shima stepped away from the main screen. A garbled picture of a Vasudan appeared, the translator working on its speech.

“...are a group of Vasudan refugees seeking assistance of any Terran ships. We were on board a science outpost when it was destroyed by the Shivans. We managed to escape to an uncharted planet. It is uninhabited, but we uncovered evidence of an ancient civilization of an unknown origin. After careful study we have determined that it is not of Terran, Vasudan or Shivan in origin.”

“Great, more aliens,” moaned Roach. Lucy elbowed him angrily.

The communication continued. “What we have determined is that this world seems to have been destroyed by Shivan weapons. This is difficult to believe, considering the age of the remains, but the evidence is conclusive. What scanning equipment we had managed to locate a storage device of some sort. It is heavily protected, which suggests it stores something quite valuable. Initial translations indicate it may hold information about the Shivans and more specifically, the Lucifer itself.”

Everyone began muttering at once. There was excitement and disbelief echoing from the crowd. “Pipe down people,” said Spook.

“What we ask is for rescue and escort away from this planet. Our scientists are not normally a superstitious group, but having one’s homeworld destroyed tends to shake your beliefs. Please send an armed rescue as soon as possible to these coordinates.” The transmission ended.

Admiral Shima retook her position in front of the room. “Along with that transmission, the Vasudan’s managed to send us data relating to their find. Command has classified the information, but has ordered the Bastion to organize an effort to rescue the refugees.” The Admiral took a deep breath. “Because of the recent Shivan advances, I can only ask for volunteers to perform this mission.”

“I wonder who’s gonna get volunteered,” Roach said rhetorically.

“I bet I know,” said Joe and he stood up. “Sir,” he said out loud.

“Yes Lieutenant,” said the Admiral.

“I believe I can speak for the entire Freespacer squadron in saying that we would be more than happy to volunteer.”

Admiral Shima looked at Joe with disbelief. “Is this so?”

“Yes sir,” said Wolf. “I will defiantly go, even if the others do not.”

“I cannot let you go alone,” said Ma’ka. “I have sworn to it.”

The rest of the Freespacers stood up in support of the offer, except Lucy.

“Ensign Shima,” the Admiral said. “Are you the lone decenter?”

Lucy took a deep breath and stood up. “No sir, I am not.”

Admiral Shima smiled at her daughter. “I didn’t think you were. Very well. The 6th Freespacers will be part of the rescue operation. Freespacers, stay here, everyone else, you are dismissed.”

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“Where the hell are they all coming from!” Roach screamed.

Joe watched as Roach’s fighter shot in front of him, desperately dodging a persistent Shivan. “I got him,” Joe said as he jumped on the Scorpion with everything he had. The green glow of his Prometheus’ dug into the light fighter, eventually tearing it apart.

“Thanks,” Roach called. Joe watched the Ulysses dive away for another target.

“Command,” Joe said. “Any chance we can get a little more help here?”

“Negative Alpha one,” Commands voice boomed. “We have no available forces. You are on your own.”

“You’d think they’d support the mission to save the world a little more,” Coyote said with disgust.

“That’s Command for ya,” Eishtmo said. “Sometimes I wonder if they ever know what’s going on.”

Joe snapped his fighter around and faced another Shatian bomber. After a short lock time, he let loose a cluster of Hornets that knocked the Shivan for a loop. A quick volley of laser fire finished the alien.

“This is Omega two, we’ve finished docking operations.”

“Good work,” said Wolf. “Rossetta, get out of here.”

“Don’t have to tell us twice,” said the Rossetta’s comm officer. The Faustus powered up its jump drives and slipped into subspace.

“Alright,” said Wolf. “Alpha, Beta, cover Omega one. Gamma, Dogs, let’s take care of two.”

“As you wish,” said Ma’ka.

“Someone help me,” yelled Fox. “I got a pair of them on me.”

“I got ya,” said Hound.

Joe turned onto the tail of another Shatian, when the bomber suddenly jumped out. “What the hell?” Joe said he followed the bomber as it entered the subspace vortex with laser fire.

“I guess we’re too much for ‘em,” Coyote announce with pride.

“Massive jump signature detected!” Lucy almost screamed. “It’s the Lucifer!”

“Great, that’s all we need,” moaned Roach.

Joe eye’s widened as he remember the oath they had made. “Ma’ka,” he started.

“It is alright,” Ma’ka said quickly. “This mission may lead to the Lucifer’s ultimate destruction. Let us continue this mission.”

“Easier said than done,” said Hound. “Fighters incoming, lots of them.”

“Goody,” said Roach.

“Stay on your transports pilots,” Wolf said. “If you have to, use yourselves to stop incoming missiles, the shields can take.”

“If you they haven’t failed already,” Joe piped in. He turned onto the nearest Shivan fighter, a Basilik, and charged towards him, firing all the way. The heavy fighter turned away, and Joe followed, his lasers leaving a trail in the sky.

“I wish I was in a fighter,” Rock said, dispare coming through the translator.

“I’m glad you’re not,” said Lucy. “A Lilith class cruiser has just joined the fray.”

“Jazz, Metal, Hound, and Fox, take out that cruiser,” ordered Wolf. “Clear us a path.”

“Roger that,” said Hound. “Let’s go kill some Shivans.”

“AHHHHHH!” screamed Beta two as the Vasudan’s bomber exploded.

“Damn it!” yelled Joe at the scream. “Babe, cover Rock’s ass, we might need him to finish off the Lilith.”

“Freespacers,” Command said. “We have confirmed that a Lilith class cruiser designated the Zenith is in the area, be advised.”

“It’s already here you idiot,” Roach said angrily. “I swear that’s the last time I get drunk near a recruiting center.”

“Roach, watch your six,” Lucy suddenly cried out.

Joe turned in time to see a Scorpion began to bear down on Roach’s fighter. Joe hit his afterburners and launched a cluster of Hornets into the Shivan fighter. It exploded almost instantly. “I got ya covered Roach,” Joe said. “Next time, be a little more careful.”

“I should have done that the first time,” Roach said with a huff.

Eishtmo chuckled slightly. “If I wasn’t fighting for my life, this would be really entertaining.”

“Maybe we should write a book about it when the war’s over?” Coyote suggested.

“Who says we’ll live that long?” Lucy said snidely.

“I will avenge Vasuda!” cried Metal. Joe looked out toward the Zenith, now only a couple of clicks away. He couldn’t see what was happening, but the transmissions said it all.

“What do you think you’re doing, you crazy Zod,” Hound said. Suddenly, the Zenith exploded, the impact of the Medusa bomber puncturing the hull, dooming the cruiser.

“That’s it!” Wolf yelled. “No more dying on my watch!”

“AHHHHHHH!” screamed Gamma three as her fighter went up in flames.

“Looks like you spoke too soon,” said Eishtmo with a chuckle.

“Shut up,” Wolf said angrily.

“This is Omega one, we are jumping out. See you in Altair.”

“Concentrate on protecting Omega two,” Wolf said.

Joe turned to see Omega one jump out with Omega two close behind. A lock alarm suddenly flashed, and before Joe could react, his fighter shook with a missile impact. “Shit,” he yelled as he forced his fighter down and away from the Shivan. With a quick flick of his fingers, shield energy moved to the back quarter where he had been hit.

“We have reached the subspace node. Jumping out!” Omega two said triumphantly.

“Pilots, this mission is finished. Jump back to base,” Command said.

“You don’t have to tell me twice,” said Lucy.

Joe fired a few more pot shots at the Shivan that had shot him, and hit the jump controls. “I hope we don’t have to do that again.”

“You will, kid,” said Eishtmo. “You will.”

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“What the hell is this?” Eishtmo cried out.

“Something wrong Eish?” Lucy asked as she climbed the stepladder into the new Ursa bomber.

“You’re damn right there is,” Eishtmo almost shouted. “I was trained to fly a fighter, not a goddamned capital ship!”

“Calm down Eishtmo,” Wolf said. “They’re the only ship that can carry the Harbinger bomb.”

“I bet this thing flies like a brick,” Roach said as he strapped into the cockpit.

“Excuse me sir,” a red shirted crewman said to Eishtmo. On a cart behind the crewman was a massive cylinder, some three meters long, and almost a meter in diameter.

“Sorry,” Eishtmo said as he stepped out of the way. He studied the bomb as it went by. “I wish we had those when we took on the Savior.”

“Well now you get your chance to relive history,” Joe said. “So are you coming or not.”

“Yeah, yeah, I’m coming,” Eishtmo said. He climbed into the cockpit and strapped in. “This is still the biggest bastard I’ve ever flown.”

“Makes you wonder where they come up with these things,” Roach said.

Joe smiled as he began his pre-flight checklist. He looked up for second and saw some new Vasudans climb into their fighters. “What I want to know is where they the new Vasudans come from.”

Ma’ka looked up towards Joe. “We all wish to avenge Vasuda,” he said. “There are probably a hundred others just waiting to join us.”

“And they die trying,” Roach interjected.

“It’s because they aren’t drinking their Repellent,” Eishtmo said with a laugh.

“We do not believe in such silly things,” said Rock.

“Then why do you always have some?” Lucy asked.

Rock slipped on his helmet. “Well, it certainly could not hurt.”

Joe chuckled. “Makes a sense to me.” Joe closed the canopy on the massive Ursa bomber. “Command, this is Alpha one, I am ready for launch.”

“Copy that Alpha one, we’re loading you on the catapult now.”

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“Bombs away!” yelled Joe. He hit the launch button and a pair of the new Harbinger bombs at the Anvil.

“Let’s clear out people,” Eishtmo said. “We’ll be torn to shreds if we don’t.”

“Well, you’re the expert,” said Lucy.

Joe pulled around and made tracks for Omega one. “What have you guys got left?” he asked.

“I wish they would have given us more bombs,” Roach said. “We could defiantly take it down then.”

“They’re saving them for the Lucifer,” Lucy said. “Weren’t you paying attention during the briefing?”

“That’s what you’re for, Babe.”

“You’re asking for it,” Lucy said with a growl.

“We’re under attack,” screamed the pilot of Omega two.

“Beta three, take Leo two, I will take one,” ordered Rock.

Joe’s lock warning began flashing. He snapped the stick, only to watch the sky slowly roll to the side. “Damn it all,” he yelled as he hit his afterburners and dropped a countermeasure. The missile took the bait, and shook Joe’s bomber. “That was too close.”

“I told you these things suck,” Roach said.

“Oh shut up,” Lucy demanded.

Joe yanked on the stick as hard as he could, and began firing as soon as the Thoth fighter came into view. The green blasts of light flew out towards the fighter, missing as the agile Vasudan fighter spun and dodged. Joe made a low growl and fired off an Interceptor missile, which sent the fighter into a spin. The slight delay gave Joe just enough time to pound on a little more. The Thoth recovered itself, and tried to pull away, just in time for one of Eishtmo’s Interceptors to destroy the nimble little fighter.

“Thanks,” said Joe.

“You know what’s really sad,” said Eishtmo.

“What’s that?”

“Roach is right.”

“See?” Roach taunted Lucy.

“AHHHHHHH,” screamed Gamma four, her Hercules spinning and finally exploding.

Joe turned to see the fighter turn into a fire ball. Then he saw why. Instead of directly protecting Omega one, Gamma wing had been attacking the turrets of the Anvil. “What the hell are you doing?” Joe yelled.

“We are avenging Vasuda,” Ma’ka said calmly.

“What’s going on?” said Eishtmo.

“They’re attacking the Anvil’s turrets,” Joe said quickly.

“AHHHHHHHH,” screamed Gamma two.

“Damn it kid, call them off,” Eishtmo cried.

Joe look confused for a moment, then he remembered that he was in second in command. “Gamma wing, cease your attack, return to defending Omega one,” he ordered.

“As you wish,” Ma’ka said.

“Beta three, assist Gamma wing,” Joe quickly said.

“Yes sir,” replied Beta three.

“Player, watch your six!” screamed Roach.

Joe didn’t even look, he just shoved the stick down and slammed on the afterburners. A heat-seeker flew behind him, losing the heat lock. Joe circled up and locked onto the Horus that had fired on him, and pelted him with laser fire and his final Interceptor, destroying the fighter.

Omega two’s voice suddenly came online. “We’re jumping out now.”

“Beta assist Gamma,” Joe said.

“Understood,” said Rock.

“Don’t bother,” said Eishtmo. “Omega one has made it.”

“It looks like we made it. Jumping to Deneb,” Omega one said.

“All fighters, give us a hand against the Anvil,” Joe ordered. “Alright Alpha, let’s make history.” Joe turned his bomber toward the Typhon, only to watch the mighty vessel jump into subspace.

“Damn it!” yelled Roach. “Now I’ll never get in the history books.”

“Don’t worry, you will,” said Lucy.

“You really think so?”

“Yeah, as the dirtiness man alive,” Lucy said with a laugh.

Joe chuckled. “Let’s go home people, our work here is done.”