

## Chapter 1: The Setup

### Introduction:

It has been 27 years since the Second IncurSION. Technological advances have allowed us to return to our home planet using a Vasudan designed Knossos device. Within hours of opening the portal to Sol, cries of joy filled the hearts of every Terran throughout the galaxy. Within hours of making contact with Earth, the cries of joy were brutally twisted into those of confusion and concern. Without access to surrounding systems, the economy of Earth had collapsed, and the planetary government has disintegrated into dozens of small nations, each involved in a brutish war with survival. When the first transports arrived on Earth, Terran and Vasudan officials were greeted by crime-stricken cities, poverty, and war. Shortly after the first encounter, a meeting was held between the high ranking Vasudan and Terran officers of the GTVA, to decide the fate of Earth.

For the sake of saving a planet held sacred by the human race, the GTVA began the Sol Reconstruction Project. Even though the SRP seemed doomed to fail from the beginning, billions of credits were thrown into the plan for a trial time period of six years. Last month, the trial period ended, and after concluding that enough resources had been wasted on the futile efforts, lead Vasudan officials decided to cease their involvements in the project. Without the backbone of the strong Vasudan economy, all efforts to revive Earth and her economy did indeed fail, and the planet once cherished by millions slipped into the deep chasm of financial ruin and civil war. And the Terran fleet, still clinging to the SRP, began to be dragged down with it.

Yesterday, Terran Commander Admiral James Garret contacted the Vasudan High Chancellor begging for a renegotiation of economic trade deals. Chancellor Ryshal agreed to a meeting at Terran Headquarters in Delta Serpentis, but no guarantees have been made. However, while this should be good news, the majority of Terran officers and enlisted men are not happy about renegotiations, including Garret's three immediate subordinates: Admirals Kohler, White and Wulf. Many SRP-supporting Terrans, including these three Admirals, claim that the Vasudans used the terrible situation to bleed the human race dry of resources during trade deals, and that with nothing left to gain, the Vasudans ended the trade deals. Garret is viewed by most such thinkers as a weak leader, not worthy of his position. Some of the more vocal such believers have vowed to prevent tomorrow's much needed negotiations at all costs, saying that begging for "mercy" is beneath the human race and more drastic actions should be taken.. If these radicals do indeed follow through on their promises, Terran pride will be the end of the GTVA.

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**Terran Headquarters**  
**Delta Serpentis**  
**06-20-2391**

Admiral Daniel White's feet were quickly burning a hole in the reception room rug. "How much longer?" The question was directed at a young Captain across the room. "The Vasudan Transport just entered system. She should be docking within a few minutes."

"Good. The sooner these negotiations are finished, the better... Hand me another one of those, will you Michael?" His cigar had been burned down to a small stub, which he tossed into a small nearby waste basket. As he lit the next stogie, a transmission came through from the command deck.

"Admiral, the transport is signaling. She's ready to dock." The Admiral and his Executive Officer moved into the hallway where armed guards stood in wait outside the docking bay doors. As they opened, a team of well-armed Vasudan guards moved in, followed by two Vasudan Admirals."

"Admiral Ryshal, Admiral Mi'kal, I am Admiral White and this is my XO, Captain Michael Perry. Welcome to Terran Headquarters." Admiral White gave the obligatory two cent tour, taking the Admirals around the new Callisto type installation. When the tour was finished, the negotiators and their escorts moved back to the reception room, put aside for special guests as it was much more elaborate and comfortable than the main conference room.

"Admiral Garret runs a tight base. It is agreeable to see that in the midst of economic despair, the Terran empire is not at a complete loss. How is your ship, Admiral? And by the way, where is Garret?"

"The Atlantis is in perfect order. You probably saw her in the shipyards coming into base. Admiral Garret is occupied for the moment. He has brought me in to oversee our end of the negotiations. While I may not always agree with him, Admiral Garret knows that I am loyal and feels I am qualified enough to make the decisions at hand."

Before the negotiators reached the reception room, the sound of gunfire interrupted the procession. Admiral White turned to see one of the Terran guards violently unloading her automatic weapon. After being struck himself, the Terran Admiral witnessed a tall Vasudan fall to the ground. With blurred vision, he couldn't tell who it was, and after a few moments of continued firing, everything went black.

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## **GTVA Daily News** **06-20-2391**

"Ladies and Gentlemen, thank you for joining us here at GTVA Daily News. First, the main story:

A sad turn of events in the economic negotiations this morning when a Terran guard opened fire on the chief negotiators during a meeting at Terran Headquarters. Before being killed by a Vasudan guard, Rachel Lazure shot and killed Vasudan Admiral Mi'Kal, three Vasudan guards, and one fellow Terran guard. Admiral Ryshal, heir to the Vasudan empire, was also killed during this tragic event. Survivors include Terran negotiators Admiral Daniel White, knocked unconscious when a round grazed his skull, and his Executive Officer Michael Perry. Both men are in critical condition at the base's medical unit.

Speculators are very concerned with this morning's events, specifically the death of Chancellor Ryshal's son. They worry that this could further the difficulties between Terran and Vasudan fleets even farther. Some of the more fringe thinkers are even speculating the end of the GTVA. This reporter doesn't think so. I think we have a long way to go before it gets that drastic. And that's the story.

Now for "Crowd Control", thanks to you viewers, the most popular public feedback segment on the air:

Reporters from Vasudan fleets say that the feeling there is almost unanimous. While they understand the feelings Terrans hold toward their own planet, they believe that the economic problems causing this civil unrest lie squarely at the feet of the Terran fleet for "continually throwing money at failing SRP programs." Many Vasudans have also commented that the Terran Fleet has failed to keep control of its own fleet and that they are directly responsible for the death of Admiral Ryshal.

Terrans aren't exactly silent on the matter, either. Most say that the SRP programs are not an

option. "They must be continued at the sake of preserving human culture" argues one young officer who goes on to say that "the blame is clearly the Vasudans for taking advantage of our situation and now leaving us to collapse."

Well, that's all for "Crowd Control." GTVA News will be following the negotiations very closely. Stay tuned for more stories after these words from the GTVA."

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### **Secure Transmission**

**To: Admiral James Garret, Terran Commander**

**From: Vasudan Chancellor Ryshal**

**Subject: Further Economic Negotiations**

Admiral Garret, this message is to inform you that I have agreed to continue Economic Negotiations, in spite of recent events. It is my opinion and that of my advisors that if negotiations are not resumed quickly, the relationship between Terrans and Vasudans will deteriorate to an unacceptable level. However, due to unnecessary security risks, further meetings will take place on Vasudan ships and installations, rather than Terran. This stipulation is non-negotiable.

It is my wish that further negotiations take place between you and myself, rather than intermediary parties. This is also non-negotiable. I have already called for the first meeting. Tomorrow, at 1700 hours, the Meret, a Sobek class corvette, will be in the Vega System. I will be on that ship. I expect you to arrive by transport no later than 1900.

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### **Terran Headquarters**

**Delta Serpentis**

**06-21-2391**

"Admiral Garret, transmission from Vasudan officials. Marked for your viewing only." Garret okayed the transmission and read the message displayed on the personal communicator fixed to his desk. Generally, it was only for transmissions that were of the highest importance and security. He had rarely used the machine before, but it seemed that since yesterday's incident, staring down the small blue screen was all he had done.

Vega, a neutral meeting spot. I can't say that I blame him. Garret reread the message several times before signaling his first officer. "Tell me, what is Admiral White's condition?"

A grin covered most of the officer's face after the question. "He woke up early this morning, 'ready to eat a Lucifer for lunch.' The medical staff said that they could barely restrain him, and decided that he was definitely in good enough condition to return to duty."

Garret managed a chuckle at the story, too. "God bless him. Is his ship still in the shipyard?... Good. Signal him and tell him I want him to escort an Omega Transport to the BetAq-Vega node tomorrow at 0800 hours. I'll give a full explanation of the situation when we get there. I just want to make sure he doesn't leave the system yet."

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### **GTT Omega Transport**

**Vega**

**06-22-2391**

Garret sat with the other negotiators in the cramped Omega class transport. Every few minutes he would call out to the pilot for a status report. He was sure that the transmission meant the Meret would be in vicinity of the jump node, but two clicks out, there was still no sign of the corvette. "There she is sir. Jumping in out in left field. Roughly four clicks away."

"It's about time. Send her a transmission. Ask Ryshal why he's late."

"Yes sir. Sending now."

The request was transmitted but for minutes only met with a cold static. Finally, a faint message came through. "Garret, \*\*\*\*\* renegade at \*\*\*\*\* Terran corv \*\*\*\*\* \*\*\*\*\* geddon \*\*\*\*\* cations damage \*\*\*\*\* Deneb. If \*\*\*\*\* \*\*\*\*\* prepare for dock." Garret listened intensely to the corvette's message. Most of it was muted by interference. "Is there any way we can clear that up?" One of the officers tried to reduce the static, but to no avail. The problem causing the interference was on the Meret. Trying to fix the message only managed to make it worse, but the last three words were clear. They would dock with the corvette. Then, hopefully, they would get answers to the questions all of them had.

"Sir, four Vasudan fighters on the starboard side."

"Must be an escort." Garret reasoned. Not a bad move considering all that had happened recently.

"Negative. Scan indicates they are not from the Meret. That's very peculiar."

"What is it?"

"Scans indicate the fighters are from a Terran ship, the... Sir, fighters are opening fire!"

Garret's eyes nearly fell from their sockets. "Contact the Meret. Tell her to order those fighters down. Tell her to shoot them down. Tell them anything. We can't last long against a fighter wing." The order went out just before the first primaries rocked the tiny transport. Then came missiles. The impacts ripped chunks of hull off to float in nearby space. "The hull is going critical. Has the Meret responded?" The final question had barely been uttered before a high-grade missile punched through what little hull was left.

From the deck of the Meret, Chancellor Ryshal watched helplessly and confused as the hull of the transport began to glow red and finally exploded. The entire destruction had not lasted a minute. Apparently done with their job, the fighters docked with a Terran Corvette that had entered the field during the conflict. Its name shone brightly with the reflection of the Vega sun. As the corvette approached, the Chancellor couldn't help but feel how appropriate that name was. "Ready the bombers. Launch the fighters. They've returned."

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**GTD Atlantis**  
**Beta Aquilae**  
**06-22-2391**

Admiral White sat in the command chair of his Destroyer, one of the new elite Princeton classes. Garret had personally requested that White and his ship take up a position to stop anyone from entering Vega from Beta Aquilae. It was Garret's belief that any resistance to this meeting would be coming from the Beta Aquilae system. "Admiral, a Deimos class corvette coming this way. Designation is Armageddon." The scan officer sent information on the ship as well as a visual view of it to the large screen at the front of the command deck.

"Very well. Communications, get me in contact with the Armageddon." White's orders, though somewhat casually given, were always followed immediately. His men knew his competence and knew that his orders were to be followed to the letter. Some even considered him to be better material for command than Garret, himself. But such comments were always kept within the confines of the enlisted men's barracks. "Captain of the Deimos ship Armageddon, our computers show you on course for the Vega jump node. You are hereby ordered to halt your advance."

The reply was abrupt and agitated. "By who's authority?"

"By authority of Admiral James Garret, Commander of the Terran Forces. Now, halt your advance immediately." The approaching ship complied with the orders immediately, coming to a complete stop just short of the node. "So, what is your business in Vega?"

"A fighter patrol we sent out at 1100 entered Vega but has not returned. We were going to investigate."

"That's impossible. This node has been closed all morning. No ships have entered or returned from Vega since. Now, what are you really doing here?" In response to the question, the Armageddon gunned its engines and jumped through the node.

"Engine room, prepare the jump drives. Helm, get us to Vega. Now! We cannot let that ship interfere with the meeting. Weapons control, be ready to disable that ship. But be careful, we can't destroy her." The crew snapped to their duties and Atlantis followed their mysterious quarry into Vega.

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"Admiral, entering Vega system now. There's the transport." The officer's voice suddenly took a depressing turn. "Sir, a Vasudan fighter wing just destroyed the Omega."

"What? Get in contact with the Meret immediately. Find out what the hell is going on."

"Communication with the Meret are failing... Sir, she's releasing fighters to attack the Armageddon."

White turned to his scan officer with that last remark. A look of concern covered his face. "What is going on here? Is the Armageddon preparing for attack?" The question was followed by a long pause before the admiral repeated it. "Lieutenant, is the Armageddon attacking?"

"Yes sir. It too has deployed fighters and bombers to work over the Meret, and the Armageddon is moving in for the kill."

"Weapons control, consider that ship renegade. When we get within range, take engagement maneuvers to disable her engines." As the slow Atlantis closed to range, the Armageddon reached the Meret. Her starboard and forward beams opened up on the already wounded ship. "How long till we are within range?" The answer he got was not a favorable one. "We don't have minutes. Both of those ships are near critical. More power to the engines. Prime the beam cannons now!" The Atlantis finally reached beam range of her target, and opened fire. The Deimos didn't stand a chance. The bombers had already done too much damage and the final blow to her engines took her out of commission. When the Armageddon was finally disabled only meters away from her target, the ship was ripped apart. The shockwave sent the Meret barreling out into space before finally exploding in a horrid ball of flame. White closed his eyes, tore the small personal computer from the arm of his chair and flung it across the room. As a crewman ran over to extinguish the small flame, White burst out another order. "Do a scan of the area. Check for survivors... What the hell just happened?"

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**GTVA Daily News**  
**06-22-2391**

"Ladies and Gentlemen, thank you for joining us here at the GTVA Daily news.

Some very sad news in the negotiation efforts. Yesterday, a meeting was scheduled between Chancellor Ryshal and Admiral Garret, Commander of the Terran forces. No specific details have been released yet, but what is known is that a Terran ship designated the Armageddon ran a

blockade on the Vega system. Upon arriving in system, the ship was attacked by Vasudan fighters. In order to stop a conflict situation, the GTD Atlantis, the ship blockading the node, attempted to disable the engines on that ship. Unfortunately, the beams of the Atlantis did too much damage and the Armageddon was destroyed, taking the Vasudan ship Meret down with it. Sometime during this battle, the Terran transport Garret was on was also attacked by Vasudan fighters and destroyed. Both the deaths of Chancellor Ryshal and Admiral Garret have been ruled as an assassination. By whom is not yet clear.

As you may recall, yesterday, some of the more extreme conspiracy theorists argued that the new joint commanders (Kohler, Wulf, and White) may have been involved in the death of Garret, as they all shared opposing views with the late commander and would have much to gain by his death. Well, while reporters were laughing this option off yesterday, Vasudan investigators were doing their homework, and apparently some evidence has been found. Rumor has it that Samul, himself, has planned for a meeting with the three later this week. No word yet on what the evidence is or how it was obtained. No details have yet been released.

Tonight "Crowd Control" segment has been cancelled to bring you continuing, up-to-the-minute coverage of this extremely volatile situation. Please stay tuned through these messages from the GTVA.

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## **Civilian Installation**

**Beta Aquilae**

**06-25-2391**

**0600 Hours**

The three commanding Terran officers sat around the table in the small conference room, preparing for the meeting with Samul. Kohler seemed, for some curious reason, rather pleased with the current situation while the other two admirals seemed more nervous. They were discussing the upcoming meeting when Chancellor Samul burst into the room with armed guards. "Admirals, I have found something that needs explaining."

Kohler was the first to speak up. During recent investigative meetings, he had emerged as the mouthpiece of the joint command. "Very well, what is it?"

Samul took out a folded sheet of paper and flung it across the table. It was a message transcript, subject: Meret. "This transcript was found in the banks of a Vasudan communications relay station. It can be traced to all three of your offices and through the late Admiral Garret's installation. As you can clearly read, it calls for the destruction of the Meret, and with that, the assassination of late Chancellor Ryshal. It was sent to the Armageddon the day before the assassination. The trace clearly indicates that all three of you not only knew about the incident, but played a role in it. Could you have any possible explanation for this?"

"Clearly, this transcript is a forgery created by the Vasudans to incriminate the fresh Terran commanders, and is once again part of your plan to further your Vasudan empire at the cost of the Terran race. The Armageddon was a renegade."

"Spare me your propaganda Kohler! You know full well that isn't true! Now, can you"

"I do not know it isn't true, and to further that theories credibility, we have uncovered evidence to support it. The crew of the Atlantis has reported that Vasudan fighters were responsible for the destruction of Admiral Garret's transport and that the Meret itself deployed fighters and bombers to engage the Armageddon, before it even engaged. Now, unless you can"

"Are you saying that the Vasudan government is responsible for"

"I'm saying that the attack on the Omega transport and Armageddon were Vasudan attacks,

and the only Vasudan ship in the system was the Meret. Chancellor Ryshal, himself, even ordered the blockading of the Vega system that day. The only possible explanation is that Chancellor Ryshal, himself, ordered the assassination of Admiral Garret and the destruction of the Armageddon!"

"Those Vasudan fighters were renegades! And your own ship, the Atlantis, destroyed the Armageddon!"

"And where did these renegades come from?! Vega had been closed all morning! There is absolutely no possibility those ships were renegade! And the Atlantis destroyed the Armageddon in an attempt to diffuse a combat situation! They could not have fired on the Meret without provoking a war!"

"Enough! Your refusal to accept the facts and to try and direct the blame on the Vasudans is the closest to provoking a war I've seen yet! Until this matter is resolved, starting tomorrow at ten hundred hours; Vasuda, Alpha Centauri, Sirius and Regulus are off limits to all Terran ships. Any violation of no-fly zones will be considered an act of invasion, and that ship will be fired upon."

"We have ships in those systems already!"

"Then I suggest, Admiral Wulf, that you get those ships back to Terran space, and quickly."

Kohler once again took over the argument. "Very well! In turn, I advise you to remove all Vasudan ships from the Delta Serpentis, Beta Aquilae, Vega, Antares, and Deneb, as well as Talnia, Ross 128 and Laramis."

A furious Samul took aside a systems chart and mapped out Vasudan and Terran space. With the exception of civilian negotiations craft, after ten hundred the next morning, no ship would enter the other species' space. Kohler, loud but surprisingly calm, agreed to the terms, and Samul took his guards and ship out of Beta Aquilae to finish investigations in Vasuda. Kohler went to the window to watch the transport leave the system as Admirals Wulf and White stood at the table staring at the systems chart. Terran space amounted to Sol, Delta Serpentis, Beta Aquilae, Talnia, Antares, Vega, Deneb, Beta Cygni, Betelgeuse, Ribos, Ikeya, Ross128, Laramis, Luyten, Wolf 359, Alphard, Bernard's Star, Epsilon Eridani, Dubbe, and N362. All other major systems were considered to be Vasudan space. As soon as the meeting was over, Vasudan and Terran commanders sent orders out to all ships violating their specified domains, ordering them back to appropriate systems... For the first time since the Great War, space was segregated.

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**GTC Charon**  
**Epsilon Pegasi**  
**06-25-2391**

The commander read the transmission over and over. He knew exactly what it meant: the Vasudan and Terrans were on the brink of war and had unofficially ended the Alliance. It was all there in black and white. There was only one problem. An energy leak had been interfering with the engines for the past 24 hours and they were just now getting repairs under way. To get back to Terran space, they would have to travel through Polaris, Regulus and Sirius before getting to Deneb. They would have a record-setting pace to get the engine and leak fixed and get all the way back to Deneb. After calling a few of his officers over, the commander explained the situation as well as his feelings about the new relationship between Terran and Vasudan forces. He asked them not to reveal too much to the crew, and to just tell them that the ship was going back to Deneb to get new confidential orders. He knew that story wouldn't last long, but he didn't want his crew to think they could die just going back to Terran space.

"Helm, as soon as the engineers finish those repairs, set course for Deneb. We've been ordered back to report for a new assignment."

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**GTVA Daily News**  
**06-26-2391**

"Ladies and Gentlemen, our top headline for tonight: Declaration of war between Terran and Vasudan forces.

Yesterday, during a heated meeting of top Terran and Vasudan commanders, all known systems were divided into Terran and Vasudan space for the first time since the Great War. Orders were given that no military ship was to be in an inappropriate system as of ten o'clock this morning. This morning at 11:05, the GTC Charon, a Terran fenris class cruiser that had been experiencing engine problems, and several other Terran ships from Epsilon Pegasi, were just entering Sirius when a Vasudan convoy happened upon them. Following direct orders from Chancellor Samul, the convoy opened fire on the small Terran force and destroyed every ship. When word began to spread, Terrans across the galaxy were outraged at the event. Millions called for an official end to the GTVA alliance and a declaration of war. Not more than fifteen minutes ago, that wish was granted, when both Terran and Vasudan forces resigned from the GTVA and reformed the old GTA and PVN respectively. The leaders of both sides are currently meeting with advisors and planning out the coming days.

Ladies and gentlemen, this marks a sad day in the history of the GTVA. We can only hope that this war can come to an end without too high of a cost for our pride. And so, I leave you tonight with this thought. 'Since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defenses of peace must be constructed.' And now, for the last time, this is GTVA Daily News, signing off."

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**GTA Headquarters**  
**Delta Serpentis**  
**06-27-2391**

"So, we're all agreed that a three pronged defense is the best possibility?" Kohler turned to his two colleagues.

Wulf gave a quick answer. "Oh yes, Intelligence clearly shows that the Vasudans are gearing up for attacks in three places: A two pronged attack on Deneb from both Sirius and Vasuda, and a single attack on the Antares system from Vasuda."

"Which do you think will be their primary attack?"

"It's hard to say. An attack on Deneb would be easier, given the two sided advantage, while a victory in Antares would prove a huge tactical advantage. But I'll put my money on Deneb. One system at a time has always been a safer strategy"

"Good. Then we'll organize most of our ready GTA forces in Deneb, while your GTI forces will stay in Antares. I've already given orders for all of our rear forces in Ross128, Luyten and the likes to move into Beta Aquilae and Talnia. Daniel, you'll be in charge of the defense in Deneb and Larry, you will command your forces in Antares. If no one has any objections, I will take up in Beta Aquilae to organize and mobilize the forces moving up from other systems. Should the defense in Deneb fail, those forces will pull back to Vega, where they will be joined by the bulk of the Beta Aquilae and Talnia fleets. Well, if that's all gentlemen, I'll leave you to organize your fleets"

As the meeting closed, Admiral Wulf was the first to leave, heading for communications to make sure all of his forces were moving up from Ikeya. As White was preparing to go, Kohler approached him. "So, Daniel, out of curiosity, why did you destroy the Armageddon? Not that it didn't help, but..."



A grin began to form on Admiral White's face. "Believe it or not, Nick, it really was an accident. We were just trying to disable her, when all of a sudden, the darn thing just blew up. I guess it had taken too much damage from the Meret... Just as well though. If those Vasudan"

"Not here. One of the guards might hear you."

"Very well... Nick, it's time to make those Vasudan bastards pay. They've been using us since the SRP began, and we've got all of the Terran forces behind us now." White picked up a glass that had been sitting on the table. "To... to retribution." Kohler repeated the toast and swigged it down. White was right. It was time to make the Vasudans pay.