

Chapter 2: Battle For Deneb

GTD Atlantis

Deneb (Vasuda node)

06-31-2391

“Admiral, latest intelligence reports on the Vasudans just in.” Immediately, White was at the officer’s station, getting the reports.

“Their really mounting up for this invasion in Vasuda, aren’t they? Well, we’re ready for them. Any reports from the Vasuda node on the Mjolnir II placements?”

“Captain Leight says he’ll have the node defenses ready by the end of the day. I believe the count on Mjolnir II sentries is up to twenty, but I can check.”

“You do that. Meanwhile, get in contact with the fleet from Betelgeuse. Find out where, exactly, they are now.” Five fleets had been assigned to the Deneb system: Deneb, Betelgeuse, Polaris, Sirius, and Regulus. The three larger fleets, Deneb, Regulus and Sirius, had all been assigned to the Vasuda node, the expected primary route of attack. The other remaining fleets had been assigned to the Sirius node. The three larger fleets had indeed reported for duty during the systems evacuations. Betelgeuse, however, had still not arrived. Last reports had them somewhere in Beta Aquilae, and the time for battle was drawing nearer.

GTD Erikson

Deneb (Sirius node)

07-03-2391

1200 Hours

“Sir, Betelgeuse fleet has just arrived in system.”

“It’s about time. What’s the ETA now?”

“They should reach the Sirius node in three hours give or take”

“Tell them to really get a move on then. We may not have that long. Everything indicates a move by the Vasudans in the next couple of hours. Get in contact with Admiral White. See if he can’t spare some of his ships until the Betelgeuse fleet gets here. By the way, engineering, what are the reports on those Mjolnir Two’s. How are they holding up?”

“All tests indicate they are operating functionally.”

“Well, test functionality isn’t going to do me any good when the Vasudans start coming in. Ten oversized Watchdogs aren’t what I asked for. Now, will they fire?”

“We believe so, sir.”

“You believe so?” Captain Ropert walked over to the intercom and smashed down on one of the buttons. “Docking bay, launch a couple of cargo bins out toward the node. And I’d appreciate it if you gave them a hostile IFF.” An affirmative answer came back over the intercom, and a few minutes later, two cargo boxes were drifting quietly towards the node. “Okay, they’re in the node. Why aren’t the beams firing?” The engineering officer just frowned at the question. “See, this is what I mean by test functionality. It doesn’t do many any good if the machine is crap... I need an

answer other than confusion. Now, drag one of those things in here and figure out why it won't fire." Almost an hour later, a disappointing answer came from the engineering lab. "Can you fix it sometime today? Then forget about it. Communications, contact Admiral White and tell him these new sentries we got are junk and that I advise him to check his own supply."

"Very well, sir."

Roport strode back to his chair, muttering curses under his breath. "This can't be a good sign."

GTCv Kingu
Deneb (Vasuda Node)
07-03-2391
1500 Hours

"Weapons Control, make every shot count when they get here. ETA is three minutes"

"Captain, a communication from Admiral White."

"Put him through." The conversation was short. Admiral White informed Leight that the Mjolnir II sentries had malfunctioned in a live test and that they were being disabled. It would now be up to the front lines to bare the full brunt of the opening attack. "We'll be ready sir. Just don't leave us alone up here." As the communication ended, Leight gave an order to his communications officer. "Order the other ships on the lines to move forward. We're going to be the sentries."

As the last of the ships had finished the move forward, the first Vasudan cruiser came through, an Aten. The Vasudans were really scraping the bottom of the barrel for their attacks. Atens hadn't been in circulation for years. Another one came through, just as the first was already being destroyed. As Atens began to trickle in, Mentus joined them. And then came the newer Renenets. Corvettes also joined the mass. First a Sobek, then a Neith, and more followed. Then came the destroyers. Hatshepsuts, Typhons, Besets, and a Naunet. Terran ships on the front were kept busy destroying cruisers and corvettes, letting some of the larger ships slip through to be taken care of by Terran Hecates, Princetons and Dominators. Even with the massive amount of ships jumping in, the scale seemed tipped heavily in the GTA's direction.

"There's something wrong here." Leight brought up communications with the Atlantis. "Admiral, there's something wrong here."

"What do you mean, Captain?"

"This is too easy."

Admiral White's face took on a look of confusion. He motioned for his scan officer and turned back to the communications display. "My scan counts close to forty Vasudan vessels, Captain."

"Exactly! And most of them are cruisers! Does that sound like an army that knew they were approaching three of the largest Terran fleets in the galaxy? Does it, Admiral?" The question was met with silence for a short time, bombs rocking the decks of both decks during the silence.

"No it doesn't... This is a decoy. Communications, contact the Erikson. Find out what's going on at the Sirius node." A reply could barely be heard in the background of the transmission. They couldn't raise the Erikson. "Well, try another ship." Once again, the voice could be heard in the background. None of the ships from the Sirius node were answering...

GTD Erikson

Deneb (Sirius node)
07-03-2391
1506 Hours

“Captain, a fourth Naunet super destroyer has jumped in, and there’s the tenth Beset! Our front line is falling apart!”

Ropert ran to his communications officer. “Order our destroyers to move forward! Contact Admiral White! We need back-up.”

“Sir, communications has been hit. We can’t get anything out to Admiral White.”

“Incoming!” Ropert looked up to watch a Thoth fighter heading straight for the bridge.

“Evacuate main command deck! Everyone get to secondary!” The bridge crew moved out of the command deck and sealed the doors behind them. They could hear the fighter crashing through the deck and hitting the support beams as they transferred to the secondary bridge. “Get communications up now!” Ropert once again began to mutter under his breath. “That’s the problem with fighting with former allies. They know your weaknesses.” He settled into his command chair and stared out at the battle. More and more of his ships were being destroyed by the second. A blinding light flashed across the screen as two Hecates were taken down simultaneously, two of the last destroyers in the fleet. “Evasive maneuvers!” A Naunet had decided it wanted a piece of the Erikson. The Princeton was almost a match for her, but with the damage she had sustained, defeating the massive ship would prove difficult. “Weapons, concentrate all firepower on that Naunet! Get the fighters on disarming it!”

“We’ve lost another beam cannon, Captain!”

Ropert thought about the situation for a brief moment. “Engineering, do we have schematics on the Naunet?”

“Not a complete one.”

“Bring them up here anyway.” The schematics were barely laying across the small table in the secondary bridge, before Ropert was smashing his fingers down on one of the coordinates. “Here. Concentrate fire here!”

“Sir, capital beams aren’t meant to be tools of accuracy. Hitting those exact coordinates will be a hundred to one shot.”

The battle outside shown like fire in his eyes. “I don’t care how impossible it is! You’ll do it! Or we’ll die!” Gunnery got on it immediately. Coordinating the beams would prove far easier said than done. The bright energy weapons carved all over the hull with no luck in hitting the small objective. But finally, the beams hit within range of their target and a small explosion on the hull of the Naunet could be seen from Ropert’s bridge.

“Sir, what did we just destroy?”

“Primary weapons controllers. We’ve got about a minute before the secondary controllers come on line. Do we still have short-range communications? Good. Contact the Excellence and the Providence. Get them attacking this destroyer, now!” Within seconds all three ships were concentrating fire-power on the nearby destroyer. The secondary weapons controllers finally came online and beams lashed out in every direction. The futile attempts of the Naunet were too little and too late, and the massive ship was finally gone. “How many ships do we have left?”

“Maybe twelve.”

“Twelve... Order retreat! We’re going back to the Vasuda node.” The order was hardly given out before two Deimos corvettes were taken down in the shockwave of their quarry. “Do we have

long-range communications yet?!”

“No, sir. We still can’t contact Admiral White!” The ten remaining ships continued racing through space, their enemies in constant pursuit. “Fighters have taken down a Fenris, Captain!” The event would play over and over until they were within communications range of the main battle group, fighters and bombers still pecking at them like hundreds of buzzards on the bleeding wounded, waiting for them to die. When the Erikson reached the main fleet alone, the buzzards turned back, back to their home with the Vasudan fleet.

“Admiral White, this is Ropert. We”

“Captain Ropert, what are you doing out here? And where is the rest of your fleet?”

“We are the rest of our fleet!”

GTD Atlantis
Deneb (Vasuda node)
07-03-2391
1804 Hours

The words rang in White’s ears for minutes. While they had been reducing a insignificant convoy to debris, an immense Vasudan force had broken through at the Sirius jump node, obliterating all but one ship. He could barely force himself to believe it. The Betelgeuse and Polaris fleets were gone. “Communications, get all ships back from the node. Tell them to prepare for an attack from inside Deneb, from the Sirius node.”

The voice of Ropert rang over the communicator. “That isn’t good enough, Admiral. Order the fleets back to Vega! At least we can join up with more ships there.”

White snapped out of his state of disbelief. “Do not tell me how to do my job, Captain. If they can make it past these three fleets, they are unstoppable, and there is no use in retreating to Vega.”

“There are” The communication with the Erikson ended abruptly as White mashed a button on the communications control board.

“Was that wise, Admiral?”

“I don’t need a third rate captain telling me how to do my job. We can take the Vasudans. We will take them” White turned to one of his intelligence officers. “Any news on their fleet?”

“They appear to be regrouping outside the Sirius node. A few more Naunets have arrived, along with eight more Besets. They mean to take Deneb at all costs.”

“And I mean to keep it... Open a communications with Admiral Kohler in Beta Aquilae.”

Terran Installation
Beta Aquilae
07-03-2391
1815 Hours

“Admiral Kohler, a secure communication from the Atlantis. Admiral White says he needs to talk to you.”

“Patch it through to my office” Kohler sat at his desk waiting for the message. The number of relay stations between Beta Aquilae and Deneb was causing a significant time delay. Finally, White’s voice on the other end could be heard.

“Nick, the Vasudans have wiped out the fleets guarding the Sirius node. Only Ropert’s ship made it out. We were wrong about their destination.”

“We can still stop them, Daniel. You know that. Assign Ropert to intelligence reports and investigate the Vasudan fleet and their activities. They’ll probably be heading your way soon. You’ve got more than enough ships under your command to combat them... Daniel, you don’t need help with battle policies. You’re the best wartime commanders I’ve ever seen. What is this really about?” Kohler drew up some computer files while the delay ticked by.

“I never was a good liar. I need some advice on some of our more covert activities. You’re sure this line is completely secure?”

“Yeah, Dan, I’m positive. Now, what is it?” The short delay ticked away twice before Kohler got his answer.

“During routine investigations into crew log entries, I found something. I’m sending it to you, but here’s the problem. One of the crew members know about the Armageddon. He saw the Vasudan fighters that destroyed Garret’s transport... he says he saw the fighters dock with the Armageddon. In the entry, he states he doesn’t want to talk to anyone about it. He doesn’t want to get into trouble. I think he’s the only one, but I’m not sure. I thought you should know about this development.”

“I see. Listen, Wulf says he’s got his end of the investigation tied up. He says it’s gone nowhere. Nobody at Intelligence knows where the orders to the Armageddon came from... This seems to be the only lead. Tell you what: have the crewman and any close buddies he has sent over to me. Tell them they’ve been personally requested by me for a mission. Tell them anything. Just get them on a transport here. I’ll take care of it from there.” The time ticked away again.

“Nick, I don’t”

“Just send them over here. If it makes you feel any better, I promise, nothing will happen to them here. I’ll just have them detained until this whole thing blows over. Okay?” The delay time clicked by for a final time.

“Okay. I’ll put them on a transport as soon as possible.”

“Great. Thanks, Dan. I’ll take care of it. Don’t worry. I have to go now, so, I’ll see you after you whip the tails off those Vasudans. Goodbye.” The communications ended and Kohler strolled over to the docking bay and approached one of the officers on the floor. “Lieutenant, come here a second.”

“Yes, Admiral?”

“A small transport of prisoners is being brought in from the Atlantis on sabotage charges. See to it they get transferred to the brig when they arrive.”

“Will do, sir!”

Kohler left the young lieutenant and headed for the command deck to strike up a conversation with his XO. “Oh I almost forgot.” Kohler reached over to the intercom and contacted the brig. “Captain, a group of prisoners will be arriving in the next few days from the Atlantis. According to Admiral White, they’ve already been tried and convicted of sabotage and willful acts of treason. See to it the proper sentence is carried out, will you?”

A gruff voice came back over the intercom. “The only good traitor is a dead traitor, sir!”

Kohler cut off the intercom. “That’s better... Oh yes, where was I?”

GTD Erikson
Deneb
07-04-2391
1200 Hours

“The Vasudans are grouping up here, near the node.” Ropert pointed to a sector on his system map. The small conference room was filled with communications screens, each one displaying one of the major ship commanders, including Admiral White. Ropert had been put in charge of gathering information on the Vasudan fleet and was answering questions for the various commanders. “While it appears to be just a standard regroup, I believe there is more to it.”

“Why is that?”

“Because, as you can all see on some of this footage captured by recon flights, hundreds of freighters have been entering the system, docking with the major ships, and returning to Sirius. It looks like a standard rearm, except that it has lasted so long. We’re not sure what they’re carrying, but it appears that they are only carrying only one item per freighter.”

“How can you tell?”

“We can’t for sure. We can’t get close enough to scan. But we can guess by the sheer number of freighters involved, and the unusually long docking periods. We believe that either the objects being carried are unusually large or incredibly dangerous.”

“What do you think they are, Captain?”

“Well, like I said, Admiral, we can’t be completely sure. But we have limited it down to some kind of weapon, as none of the ships receiving the deliveries are in need of repair. Perhaps some kind of new bomb, warhead, or even a new type of turret all together. We really can’t be sure.”

“Is it feasible to plan an attack while they are regrouping?”

“Ordinarily, I would say yes, but they’ve got their destroyers sitting up front waiting for such an attack. Not to mention, they’ve plastered the entire area with sentries and some kind of missile sentry they’ve developed. No, I recommend another plan of action. I would say the best time to hit them is when they’re well on their way here.”

“And when do you think that will be?”

“They seem to have stopped transferring materials onto their ships. I would guess they’ll start to move in as little as six hours... Admiral, once again I would like to advise that we move to Vega”

“That’s enough Captain.” Admiral White spoke a final time to close the meeting and the commanders returned to their duties, readying their ships for the move. A few hours later, the ships had all lined up in formation. The ships were perfectly still for a matter of minutes before the final order was given out. One by one, the engines lurched into action, as the ships slowly made their way out to space to meet their enemies in battle.

GTD Atlantis
Deneb
07-04-2391
1614 Hours

“Admiral, Vasudan fleet coming into view.”

“Order ships to battle formations.”

Terran ships broke line to form up for battle as the Vasudans drew closer. Fighters and bombers were deployed by both sides, attacking each other and working over the larger ships. It wasn't long before the lines meshed with the Vasudan fleet; flak, beams, and missiles slowly cutting down the ranks. Small cruisers were easy targets for swarms of fighters and bombers, circling their prey and whittling them down to nothing.

Two Terran cruisers teamed up against a Vasudan corvette. As the cruisers moved in, their "victim" concentrated on only the closer one, ripping it's hull open in places. The battle was brutal. Casualties were inundating the halls surrounding the medical bay. As the second cruiser joined in on the attack, the tide began to turn against the single Vasudan. Slowly but surely, they carved the ship into small debris.

That mood seemed to encompass the entire battle. It was hours before an advantage on either side could be seen, but the Terran plan was slowly working. Their attacks were shoving the Vasudans backwards, back towards the Sirius node. Two Vasudan ships went down for every Terran, three Vasudan fighters for every human pilot. A Terran victory was imminent.

"My God. What is that?"

Admiral White couldn't tell if the turret he was staring at had only this minute been revealed or he had only now noticed it, but his jaw dropped just the same. The turret was as big as a small fighter, in diameter and length. White witnessed it collapse slightly in on itself, before shooting straight back out, a large object speeding out of the barrel as it did, a warhead. The Admiral watched in shock as the warhead moved as fast as flak to its destination. Detonating in mid-space, it wiped out every fighter inside its shockwave. As White was wiping the surprise from his eyes, a second round charged toward an already wounded Deimos. The shockwave of the warhead hit the corvette like a massive hammer, creating a massive impression as the hull buckled under the pressure. Oxygen could be seen escaping from various hull fractures. Even if the ship survived, the crew didn't have long. Four more rounds were quickly spat from the mouth of the turret, and the crew was spared from the agonizing death of suffocation, as the ship was violently ripped apart, exploding soon after the third impact.

White studied the rest of the field. Such turrets were opening on almost all of the Vasudan ships, eating away Terran vessels. Even now outnumbered, the Vasudans took the advantage, pressing the Terrans all the way back to the Vasuda node.

"Retreat." The order came whispered from the Admiral's lips. Not even his XO, standing not two feet from him, had heard the word. "Retreat! Order the Retreat!" The command went out immediately, and Terran ships were quick to follow. They didn't need to be told twice. "Send a communications to Admiral Kohler. We'll meet up with Beta Aquilae and Talnia fleets in Vega. We'll stop them there... We must stop them there!"

Admiral White kept watch at the Vasudan fleet as the Terrans neared the node. The Vasudans did not follow. They chose instead to regroup at the Vasuda node, allowing the Terrans, wounded in body, wounded in pride, to limp back to Vega. But the fighters and bombers, the hundreds of buzzards, still came, tearing the flesh of their dead enemies, sometimes to the bone. As the last of the Terran ships jumped out, the buzzards turned back and rejoined their fleet. They returned to the docking bays of the massive destroyers and corvettes. They had their fill for today. They could eat again tomorrow.