

The Defection Gambit

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A mistake here could and would be fatal. Lieutenant J.G. Douglas Remmington didn't care. He had had enough of this. Enough of war.

Back on Earth, before he had signed up with the GTI in the Terran-Vasudan War, he had read stories where the hero of the tale was often convulsed with the horror of killing another human, one whom he had never met. That the war he fought was not his war, but the war of his elders. They were those old, decrepit politicians and generals who sat in occluded conference rooms and decided how many of their young men they would send to their deaths. This conflict would inevitably drive the protagonist to madness.

This war wasn't like that.

Here, a different kind of madness had consumed Douglas Remmington. The madness of loneliness and hostility, but above all, the madness of utter and damning helplessness.

A song, a relic from the previous century, was blaring in his flight headphones, in an effort Remmington had set up to distract himself. Damn humanity, he thought. It can survive without me. If it can't... then it doesn't deserve to live.

An interesting place to finally snap, he noted with reluctant irony. Nobody would expect it here. Nobody would expect it at all, as he had been careful not to let any signs of his madness out into the realm of notice.

His modified Hercules-class heavy fighter ceased to maneuver as Remmington dropped the controls. The fighter continued heading directly past its assigned waypoint. Dead ahead was the Orion-class Terran Destroyer whose name escaped Remmington.

Remmington decided he didn't care if his fighter collided against the massive hull of the friendly destroyer. It would be a spectacular and unexpected blaze. And it would be an end. The technicians would assume it had been a technical breakdown inside the fighter, not a mental inside the pilot.

One of his wingmen's inquiring voices was audible over the soundtrack. Remmington turned up the volume of the music to completely drown out the distraction.

Behind the Orion-class Destroyer was visible the ultimate threat against humanity. The Shivan Super Destroyer, designation Lucifer. Remmington gazed at it peacefully, and could detect the faint engine traces of faraway enemy starfighters closing on his wing's position.

He could remember his final briefing before the mission embarked. The Lucifer, equipped with shields impervious to weapons fire, and an extremely powerful version of the standard Shivan Beam Cannon aptly designated the Superlaser, was virtually unstoppable. And it was headed directly towards Delta Serpentis, where the Jump Node to Earth was located.

The Lucifer had run through the gauntlet of blockades the allied forces had erected with ease. No weapon either the GTI or the Vasudan's PVN had seemed capable of

penetrating the shields of that beast. The Shivan's versatile beam cannon had mercilessly cut down every capital-scale ship that had challenged that mammoth monstrosity. And Remmington could sense that the Orion destroyer directly ahead was about to join the list of casualties. The Shivans, the Destroyers, would once again slaughter thousands in a single, horrifyingly efficient stroke.

An oddly appropriate song, Remmington reflected. He couldn't remember where he had first heard it, but it had stuck with him.

The prow of the Lucifer began to light up with a hellish glow. The beam cannon was powering up. Remmington's fighter continued forward, helpless.

The streams of light and energy gathering in the Lucifer seemed to reach its climax, and a vast, quarter-kilometer diameter beam shot out from it. It sunk into the hull of the Orion cruiser at light-speed. The impact point was invisible to Remmington due to the angle, but he could see fire and molten metal spew away. The entire cruiser seemed to shudder with the sudden violence, while the beam continued to ravenously chew through the ship.

The other side of the destroyer, the side that was visible to Remmington, began to shine a bright, unnatural yellow.

The beam burst through the opposite side, spraying the Hercules fighter with white-hot melted shrapnel and debris. The beam ripped through the vacuum close enough to Remmington's craft for him to feel the vibrations of the titanic amount of energy only meters away. A whine began to build up in his speakers, growing with intensity.

The Orion destroyer, now with a hole punched cleanly through its center, began to gyrate out of control, spinning in slow motion away from the Lucifer, spewing molten metals and life-giving oxygen from the interior.

The exterior lights on the destroyer blinked off.

The high-frequency noise now drowned out the antique music, and Remmington could feel his eardrums shiver in angry protest. He ripped off the radio headphones, and threw them on the floor of the cockpit in a misdirected rage.

The beam finally began to narrow as the energy it had in store had finally begun to give out, until it pattered completely out of existence. The Lucifer began recharging its beam cannon, in preparation for the next shot.

Remmington watched in silent sorrow as the defunct Orion destroyer continued to spin away. There was now nothing in front of him. Except for the Shivans.

Half of his squadron had been stationed there. He would never see them again now, and he had not expected to. The destroyer had housed what he had called home for the past year. His family, his squad-mates, were where home had been.

Remmington had tried to mentally prepare himself for this moment, the moment he knew was coming when he had heard that the cruiser, whose name he now remembered as the Athena, was being redirected to the Deneb system to join a task force bent on the destruction of the Lucifer. But mental preparation had not helped in this case, and his face

distorted with helpless sorrow as a tear slipped down his face, and on to the control panel.

Dying seemed the only thing left to do. But Remmington was determined to fight that fate for as long as possible.

He pulled away from the rest of his wing at full throttle, and engaged his afterburners. At exactly 12 o'clock, the engine trails of three approaching Shivan starfighters, Manticore class, were visible.

He began reciting a childhood chant he remembered from whenever there was a school-yard fight. He chanted it over and over, as if mocking the Shivan enemies who could not hear him.

He squeezed the primary fire trigger. The Prometheus cannon underneath the fighter began spewing lethal green rays, that hit the shields of the lead fighter, weakening them. The Shivan began to pull away.

He hit the afterburners again, and did something the Shivan did not expect, and kept heading directly towards it. He continued screaming the children's rhyme, releasing and repeated pulling against the firing trigger as if he was bombarding the Shivans with burst of his own immense rage.

Remmington's fighter rammed the Shivan Manticore. The Shivan, would had little time to prepare for the blitzkrieg assault, went sailing away at a 90 degree angle. Remmington quickly recovered from the resulting spin. Half of his port engine had physically hit the Shivan, but at least it was still functional. However his hull integrity had been compromised.

The Shivan Manticore collided with the Shivan fighter on its starboard side. The two fighters hulls smashed into each other, ramming their hulls until the two had meshed into one due to heat. The interlocking energy cores within the Shivan crafts were instantly overheated, and reacted with a violent energy release outwards. A ball of flame consumed both enemy fighters, and knocked the third of the wing far off course.

Remmington exhaled sharply. He sighted the Lucifer, and turned his craft to face it. The Athena was not avenged. yet. "Next!" he shouted.

If his headphones had been on Remmington and active, he would have heard his the frantic shout from one of his squad, "On your six! On your six!"

The third Shivan Manticore fighter had spun around and was facing Remmington, a fact made dreadfully apparent when the fighter's lasers tore through the Hercules' shields.

"Shit!" Remmington maneuvered his fighter sharply to port. The Manticore was still in pursuit, firing frantically. One shot scraped more hull off the side where Remmington had collided with the other fighter, and the Hercules began to shudder violently. His grip was almost thrown off the flight controls more than once.

Remmington twisted his controls upwards, trying to shake the Manticore which remained obstinately on his tail. He slammed the rudder downwards again, violently changing the Herc's course, and he slipped past the Manticore's range of fire.

Remmington knew he could pull this off.

The Manticore fired a heat-seeking missile.

Remmington had no time to prepare. The missile impacted the damaged port section of the Hercules, cleanly shearing off all the engines on that side.

Remmington spun helplessly out of control towards the surface of the desolate planet below. The Manticore flew away calmly, and began concentrating on other Terran fighters.

Remmington was listed as KIA.

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From the surface of Deneb IV, in the gale-force wind that blew dust storms miles high, Douglas Remmington could just make out the last of the large ships jumping out of the system from his crashed fighter. He couldn't make out who had won, but he knew without a doubt that the Lucifer had once again emerged victorious, and was now headed towards the node in Delta Serpentis.

This planet was cold, and savage, with no visible form of life, but it was habitable. Remmington set about making a wind shelter, and knew that he would never be rescued.