

## Through the Depths of Hell and Beyond

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I was not even sure how I got here. As my ship exited sub-space I quickly checked my wingmen status to make sure everyone made it. The four green dots glowed brightly. I quickly manoeuvred my fighter to the Sobek class corvette designated GVCv Enkai.

"Delta moving to escort position" I said as I my fighter next to the ship was a charged with protecting.

"Delta, our sensor capabilities are greatly impaired, please provide sensor support by advancing deeper into the field"

Leaving two of my wingmen behind, I moved my ship deeper into the redness. The optimum range for sensor support was three thousands metres or at least what the crew chief told us. This field was nothing like the nebula environment that I had a privilege of flying in. The area split into two red regions with a dark horizon dividing the two and the occasional thundering sparks that caused sensor malfunctions. To be perfectly honest, this place was simply annoying. The field was so dense that I had to recalibrate my shields to cope with the intensity. I knew this because I could see a panel peeling off the Sobek earlier. Must be quite scary going without shields.

"This is Delta One, we've reached optimum distance, is everything alright?" the familiar Vasudan speak came through with the translation trailing behind.

"Reads are normal; continue with your escort Delta". Damn spooks never talk much, huh?

"Oh man, this place gives me the creeps"

"You and me both" I was more scared than him. There was something about this place that made me feel uneasy. Maybe it is human nature to fear the darkness and the black streak in front of me just made the air more suspenseful. Command said nothing was expected so I set my fighter into autopilot and took a look at the task force the GTVA put together. First was the Sobek, followed by a Deimos, the GTCv Dominance, and just behind her was, to me, a shocker; a Hecate-class destroyer followed us, the GTD Echo. All together, I guess there were six wings of fighters guarding the convoy.

"Wonder what we're looking for out here?"

"No idea, Command just said 'go' and here we are now" I left my radio on.

"I bet squad leader knows, but he's been tight lipped about the whole thing."

"So what'd they tell you at the briefing?"

"Same thing you heard, escort the ships and follow orders, blah, blah, blah" I will be honest, I really want to know why the hell am I out here in this god forbidding place.

"Delta, be advise to leave these matters to the Security Council and focus on your mission" NOW he talks to us. Keeping our traps shut, I made a minor annoyance at the Sobek and continued my escort. Taking out an old porn mag I always keep with me on my fighter, I flipped through the pages and pretended to read it even though there was no one else to pretend to. But in the corner of my eye, I found an odd signature on the radar. Setting my computer to target the ship, I was surprise to

find a Vasudan AWACS ship tucked away in the back of the convoy. Why the hell is it not providing sensor support?

"Hey Echo, why aren't we using the AWACS?" I was fully expecting a 'mind your own business' response.

"Sit tight pilot, they're trying to calibrate their sensors for this soup. You can go back to your normal escort position once they're finished" a satisfactory response for once.

"This is the GVA Mirth, we've completed calibration to our sensors, all fighters, you may return to your normal escort positions" Just ten seconds after he said that, my sensor range shot up and it was in complete disarray; every little detail picked up, but it did give me some of that anxiety that had built up.

"Echo, I'm picking up hostile signatures, but it may be interference from the field. Hey Mirth, could you tone down the sensitivity?"

"We are addressing the problem as we speak, Terran. The interference is not the effect of the field"

"Alpha, investigate one of the points and send back all sensor data" the Rear-Admiral was quick and commanding. I watched as Alpha pulled out and moved out to the left. Within a few minutes Alpha wing's dots disappeared from my radar.

"Alpha, do not stray far from us, our sensor range is still greatly impaired and you may not find us with your reduced range" There was no response from Alpha. I felt an eerie force creeping over us.

"Alpha? Alpha respond! This is the GTD Echo, Alpha please respond!" Once again the radio remained silent. Delta, move to Alpha's last known location, but this time, remain within sensor range, if you cannot find anything then return to the Enkai"

I wanted to shrivel up at the thought. What if we disappear like Alpha? Oh god, I have never felt this tense before. I was very careful in moving my fighter into the way point that the Mirth so generously made for us. As we approached the point, I kept an eye on the radar to make sure the Mirth was still within range.

"I can't pick up anything"

"Let's go back, or else we might end up like Alpha" There was no protest from my wingmen and we quickly formed back up with the Enkai.

"We didn't find them" I said in a grim voice.

"Very well, we will carry on. Let us hope that they find us. Mirth, drop a navigation beacon here with our heading and direction, let's pray Alpha finds it"

"Affirmative" No one spoke after that. We were all eager to hear Alpha return and complain about wandering too far; but they never came back, not for ten minutes, not for thirty minutes.

"Echo, I'm picking up some unusual transmissions" Delta three said.

"I'm detecting nothing, probably a communication murmur. Nothing to get jittery about"

The silence was broken but now, in my silent fighter I could hear noises too. I turned up the volume on my radio and listened closely to the sounds. It was there, a low hissing like growl. I kept turning up the volume but the sound remained low.

"Hey!"

"Ah!" I screamed loudly, the volume blasted my ears and I lost the noise.

"Something the matter?"

"I was just startled" Annoyed, I turned down the volume of the radio and slapped myself out of my stupidity.

"Everyone stop!" Delta three put a full stop on his fighter. However, the Echo did not heed his advice.

"Is something the matter Delta?"

"Listen!" He sounded like he was trying to focus on a sound.

"Delta three, if you are having a nervous break down, we have a psychiatrist on the Echo and plenty of space for you to rest"

"No, just listen to this!" he made his fighter's internal microphone audible to all ships. To my horror, it was the sound I heard not long ago.

"Delta three, this could be anything, just-" Delta three was silent. I peered into his cockpit and used a camera zoom to look at him; his face was twisted with horror.

"Hey Taka, are you alright?" he did not respond, I turned to the direction he was staring at and saw a dark sharp pike disappear into the redness. I shook my head in disbelief. Maybe it was the calm before the storm, but this place became more and more dangerous. I looked at my radar again, this time I could see a distinct red dot in the direction where the pike disappeared to. A shiver ran down my spine. I was so fixated on the fading red dot I did not notice a Terran signature came into sensor range.

"-questing- a-s-tence, any-, -ease! Rep-! Th- -s Alpha four requesting assistance!" the frantic voice of a squad mate came through. I quickly targeted his fighter only to find it was in critical condition.

"Shivans are coming; we have to get out of here now!"

"Alpha four, return to our hanger, we'll deal with the Shivans"

"You don't understand, there's something else out there! Something is making the Shivans run wild! Please, we have to get out of here, before it finishes the rest of us off!"

"Oh my god... Ahhhh-" his voice was cut off. Alpha four's fighter was no more.

"Pilots, get ready to engage Shivans"

I turned on all the combat systems in my fighter and pulled closely to the Enkai.

"Delta, stay close to us, we will provide cover for you"

For the first time, I was relieved to be escorting a Sobek. The anti-fighter on this ship is not laughing matter and it could probably defend itself without us around it. We picked up a load of hostile signatures and we prepared to fire on the first thing to appear, but instead found Alpha One's ship heading towards us. I was breathing a sign of relief when I saw something I did not want to see. A strange looking Shivan fighter had a long metal pierced through Alpha One's fighter, and from the angle of it, it went right through the pilot. A truly disgusting sight awaited me. The ship was almost like a bird, with wing spanning out and the prize of an Erinyes heavy assault fighter on his helm. I pushed my own fighter to engage it. It was a tough thing to take out. It took my entire wing twenty seconds to kill it and it did not resist us firing on it. It was a dangerous opponent.

"Echo, if anymore of these show up we won't be able to fend them off!" I said. We were careful, the Erinyes was still intact but severely damaged.

"We're sending a support ship to retrieve Alpha One, we need all the information we can get about this enemy. Pilots, if anymore show up, do not engage them, instead lure them into the flak turrets of our capital ships; we'll take them out for you"

I REALLY do not want to be here right now. I watched as the support ship tow the wrecked fighter back into the Echo where they replayed Alpha One's final moments.

"Hey, we should head back, the Dominance just dropped off my sensors"

"Alright, guys, lets get the hell outta here, the last thing I want is to get lost in this soup"

"Sir, something approaching!"

"Engage it!" "Move!" "I'm not going to make it!" "Michael!" "Rei, warn the others, we'll hold them off!" "Oh my god! They got Alpha One!"

The record ended. There was more and with Alpha two and Alpha three missing it was a frightening prospect.

"Sensor logs indicate at least five others and a large number of Shivan Maras"

I swallowed hard. It was as if that thing was showing off Alpha One's dead body. But why has it not attacked us yet was a great mystery on its own. I went over my flight records of it. It looked Shivan, but it was not Shivan. They never paraded their vanquished like this, they were destroyers, and they did not take pride in their destruction. But these things did, and they were much tougher than Shivan ships and much faster. The convoy continued its search as if Alpha never disappeared. What they were searching for was still beyond me but what ever it was, to the Rear-Admiral; it was valuable enough to put a destroyer, and two corvettes on the line for. I can see why they were so bent on find it. The hostile indicators were a lie. I could tell. They needed it that sensitive to keep a lock on this thing. In the distance, we were approaching a sun. At least, that is how I would describe it. But it was much smaller than a sun, spanning no more than two hundred kilometres. Placed in the middle of the black strip between the two red regions, it had a menacing glow. Maybe it was by chance, but I accidently began the warp out procedure, but I was horrified to find the jump drive cutting off. I could not jump. Hiding my intentions, I set some co-ordinates and initiated a jump out procedure. I only found the following error message: 'Unable to Motivate Jump Drives'. Playing it safe, I moved my fighter back into position and waited an eternity for us to reach the 'sun'.

"Shivans!"

Without warning a pair of beam cannons shot at the Echo and I could see the stream marks on the destroyer's hull. A massive Shivan force emerged from the fog and quickly began assaulting the corvettes. The face of our assailant finally came through; a Sathanas. The very embodiment of death now staring at me; it was the first time I had ever seen one up close. The pictures from sentry guns and flight records were all that I got to see of them, but being up close and personal was a different matter. The space between the main weapons was enough to fit a destroyer and those beams are known to have killed at least several destroyers without effort. But this was different, no; this Sathanas was different because it was damaged. I could see the marks of something ripping it apart, something blasting it until it could barely hold its shape together. It was running. The thought crossed my mind. The Shivans: The great destroyers that levelled civilizations, which crushed the Ancients, which ruined the Vasudan home world, and cut our Sol from us, was running. All the shouting was mixed together; numerous bombers running and the explosions rattling my ship like a jackhammer. Before I knew it, the Echo was ordering us to run to the sun and jump out there; before I knew it, the Echo, the Dominance, and the Enkai were nothing more than scrap metal; before I knew it, we were all separated, each trying to escape.

But I knew we could not escape. This place does not let subspace work and our only hope was perhaps jumping out at the sun, where a gravitational field or even a node may exist. Amongst the raging chaos, I could see. The creatures that killed our squad leader, was hunting and murdering the Shivans. They did not fire guns, they simply pierced their spoils then rip them apart by separating the two halves of their 'beaks'. They did the same with us as well. I frantically pushed my fighter to the sun. The Shivans would normally rip me to shreds. But not today; not right now. They two forces were equal in size but the Shivans were losing, their numbers shrinking faster and faster. For once, I was thankful to the Shivan's presence. Their thick cover allowed me to make it to the sun unscathed. As I engaged my jump drives, I was surprised to find they were working again. I looked back at the dying Sathanas staring at me as if it was trying to follow me, but in that moment, the pike I saw earlier made an appearance one more time. Only this time there were two and they were buried in the body of the Sathanas and finally ripping it apart. The resulting shockwave vaporised the creatures and some unlucky Shivans as well and it was well on its way to kill me as well, but my ship entered subspace before it had a chance to catch up.

As I entered the subspace corridor it was different than the normal white, blue and black swirls. The entry point of the subspace corridor was certainly normal, but it was the exit direction I was worried about. There was no white-light at the end of the tunnel. It felt as though I was heading into a black hole. The blue and white swirls were thin around the 'end' and any that attempted to get closer simply faded into nothingness. I found myself staring at the 'end' for a long time before I finally came up with the idea to look for my allies. None, nothing, not even debris from anything. I had entered the 'node' alone.

Once before, I had a fighter equipped with an inter-subspace drive and had the pleasure of viewing the inside of subspace first hand. I forced all of my thoughts into that image. But my thoughts refuse to wander and I found myself staring into the darkness again. It unfolded itself time and time again and soon after, my vision turned to darkness. Am I dead? I wonder where I am. Heaven? Hell? Or the nothingness?

The soft dim light from my dashboard woke me up. All the systems of the fighter had gone into energy preservation mode so engines, shields and gun-energy reserves were all shut down. The only system still operational was life support. There was nothing outside my fighter. No light, no objects, nothing. I ran through my ship's sensor equipment. Even on the highest sensitivity I could get nothing. I set the range to as far as I could and found nothing. I felt panicked. I turned on the radio

to look for a comforting sound. I was even hoping to find that low hissing-growl. Anything to prove I was not alone. But I was. I am the only thing to have passed through that portal.

So this is how my life ends. Alone in some dark hole; everyone believing that I died with the rest. I thought about the Echo and the six thousand crew members on board. A small crew for such a large ship; I closed my eyes and relived their deaths. But then I realized the Sathanas was not the one that finished the Echo. No, it merely crippled it, as if it damaged it by accident. It was those things that killed the Echo. The countless swarming creatures flocking to a dying corpse, ripping it like savages. In fact, the more I thought about it, the more I realized the Shivans were not fighting us. They were holding their own against those things and we just happened to get caught up in their fight with them. And finally, the horrid image returned to my head. The image of that pike I saw when Paul froze up. The fact that it was buried in the Sathanas was no joke. It had the power to force itself into the body then rip it in half. To my knowledge, nothing in the GTVA arsenal could take that thing on. In fact, not even a steady stream of Prometheus cannons could do much damage to the little ones.

But none of that concerned me anymore. I was here, alone. Left to stew and rot in my own hopelessness. Whether I was moving at the speed of light or move at zero with respect the universe is beyond me. There were no stars or nebula, nor anything to gauge my location. Maybe that was a jump node into a black hole! To think, I am the first person to be in one. But no one will know. Only I will know; only I will know I am in this place. I sat limp in my seat. I will either die of starvation or suffocation, either way, these two were my fate. Maybe I should just shoot myself in the head? It will hurt less and I do not have to worry about starving. Heck, for all I know, I might be dead already.

"I wonder if heaven will have those banana cakes I like so much!" My ship made no echo.

"I'm sure they'll have something even better, huh?"

Yes, I understand as well. I am going insane; at least I am still sane enough to know it. I wanted to drown my sorrow with beer but since the crew chief had a 'no alcohol' rule on all fighters, I did not have a drop of the stuff to sooth my emptiness. Curse that straight haired pretty boy! I could care less about the hangover the next morning; just let me have my five minutes of piece! Then I thought of a way to lower my loneliness. I turned to the time display on my fighter. Five to Twelve, my normal guard duty of the GTD Aquinas would have ended and Lizzy in her rust-bucket of a fighter would take over my shift. But the Echo called on her and I was transferred to the Echo for this operation. If I had not been transferred here, I would still be in Beta Aquila, I would still be on the Aquinas, and I would still be with everyone else.

"Everyone else"

I stared blankly into the metal that held the windshield together. There was no one to talk to, and no one to confine to.

"I want to die"

I despaired. The subspace drive would not work, the sensors could not pick up anything, and the distress signal may take years to be picked, if ever it can be picked up. All subspace communication cut. But then again, this is like the situation at Sol. Alone, left to suffocate but the difference is the people of Sol have each other. I only have myself. I sobbed, I cried my heart out; out here, I did not need to hide anything; my death is coming and I have the choice to take my own life, or to let it die out. I opened the cabinet and took out my sidearm. I loaded the magazine and pointed the tip at me

head. I closed my eyes and prepared to pull the trigger. But the strength to pull it never came. I opened my eyes one more time and as I opened them, I could see a faint light far off across the distance. I used my ship's zoom function to take a closer look. It took a long time, but once the image came into a comprehensible size it was the most spectacular explosion I had ever seen. I zoomed out to watch the shockwave, but there was no such thing. Instead it spewed out a thick gas that continued to expand larger and larger. I realized what I was watching. The beginning.

"This is the beginning of the universe"

That 'node' had shot me so far off into the void; I reached a place where the light from the big bang just reached. The emptiness and despair found no place in this spectacle. I, me, the one that sits here on this spot, am the first living being to see the beginning. Everything that ever was, is, and ever will be, started here. The Milky Way, the Sol system, the sun, the earth, the oceans, the lands, the cities, and I, all originated from this one singular event. My friends, my family, my co-workers, my enemies, all came from here. It meant my doom because no one would find me but the view of it all was just so beautiful that I could care less about it.

"The ultimate creation of Mother Nature: the Universe" I felt so proud and lifted.

I had front row seats to see it, to experience it, and to know that everything that could ever happen exists there, in that small, yet thriving light. I sat back into my seat and separated my thoughts from my body and viewed the light like a god. From my angle, I was the equivalent of a god; watching the greatest creation unfold before my eyes.

"Those Vasudans" I said.

"Those cheeking Vasudans"

I remember the joke we used to tell in flight school. There was an exchange program so we always had a laugh about when the Vasudan cadets were around. We would say that all Vasudans became lawyers at sixteen and it did not help their case when all three of them knew the BETAC like the back of their hands. But then again, I have to admit we enjoyed their company. They were a sociable bunch and unlike some of their higher-ups they often liked to talk to us about our day-time drama shows. But we both knew that both our higher-ups were as uptight and anti-social as possible. Now, it truly felt like I had become a god. Omnipotent, but forbidden to interfere with the lives of mortals.

Beep, Beep

My radar, which I left at max intensity, suddenly picked up an unknown jump signature. It checked the records and found that it matched the jump signature pattern as my own entry into this place. I turned on the fighter's engines and moved my ship to investigate. I targeted the object, but my database had no record on such a vessel. It was no larger than an escape pod, but the design was odd and it was moderately damaged. I parked my fighter extremely close to it and attempted a scan but the hull was deflecting the sensors. The darkness did not allow me to make out the actual design of the ship. Annoyed, I docked my ship with it and proceeded to cut open the thing. As expected, the hull was too thick. Then I came up with a brilliant idea, I removed one of the Kayser cannons and brought it back with me to the dock point. After locking the gun down into place, I opened fire and blasted a hole. I took out my side arm and prepared myself for the most horrible creatures to jump out and rip me to shreds. The interior glowed a soft red and I could detect liveable conditions. Taking off my helmet I walked deeper into the construct. From what I can tell, I struck the air lock and was now entering the main cabin. The design reminded me of the design of Shivans had on

their interiors so I was expecting a Shivan to jump out and kill me.

"Is anyone alive?" I asked; of course there would be no reply.

I pointed my light at a blue soft glow. And there, I saw a girl huddled up next to a reactor or some sort. The soft glow was warm and I could understand why someone would approach it. The rest of the ship was freezing cold and she wore nothing more than something just slightly bigger than a pillow sack. I cautiously approached the girl and turned off my light as not to stir her. Carefully I studied her in detail. She had light red hair and pale skin and appeared to be no more than sixteen.

"What a pretty face" I thought. As she stirred from her sleep from the cold she weakly opened her eyes; her blue and red eyes. One reflected the light so clearly I could see my face the other so low in colour it appeared a reddish black. I could make out her features more: a small mouth, thin figure, and big sharp eyes with long light red hair. I broke off my stare when she began to shiver. Realizing the temperature was still dropping I took off my flight suit and placed it around her. She was still shivering but the warmth from the temperature control calmed her down a little. She looked at me with thankful eyes.

"Are... Are you alright?" I asked; I avoided her gaze.

I heard no answer. I turned back to look at her and she simply stared at me as if she did not understand my words. She made a few 'hum' sounds and tilting her head back and forth as if she was making an effort to understand my words. She looked off to the side and finally made a nod. I started shivering because it was really cold now. I tried to help her up to her feet but they were so cold she could not stand. Being the macho military person I am, I picked her up and walked back to my ship – which was not much warmer than the escape pod. But I had a trump card. In the space behind the cockpit was a hatch to enter the rear portion of the ship. From the hatch, the corridor of the ship extended twelve meters into the ship.

Certainly, an Erinyes, king of firepower with amazing speed and superior armour would never let any flaws be published. Yes, the one problem with the ship was it heated up like a stove even in cold parts. I opened a cabinet door about ten centimetre wide and twenty metre high and the cabin temperature of the fighter climbed to a hot twenty-seven degrees. Yes, what I am saying is that the Erinyes had a crappy cooling system and the reactor is not too efficient. Instead of sending power to the capacitors of the fighter, it heats up like bomb and combined with the crappy cooling system; you get a hot interior for the fighter. Now it was more a blessing than an annoyance. Opening another cabinet, I took out some of the food rations I kept. From what I can tell, the ship carried enough supplies to last a good three weeks. But that depends on what runs out first, oxygen or food. I offered her some dried fruit and a bottle of water. She took a small bit then ate the rest like she had never eaten before. She was almost choking when I offered her the water. She looked at me again and curled up and gave a light smile.

"Cute~"

I took out some sheets and wrapped her in it. I tried to think about something else other than her cuteness and pretended to look for other things. She looked as if she was interested in the object of my labour but I could think of nothing interesting to find; this is until a book fell from one of the cabinets. The book was titled: 'Earth: Geography and historical context'. She picked up the book and looked into the picture of the blue planet. It was a picture of the planet from Apollo 17 in the beginning of space-exploration era. Carefully, she opened the book as if she just figured out how to work it. The glossy pages illustrated the various areas of the planet. From the blue oceans, to the green forest cover; she saw the animals and proud cities. She stared at it as if it was her first time

seeing a book and earth.

"My home" I said.

It was a big lie. Well, most of it anyway. I was my home. I was born on the planet but my parents left when the Lucifer was approaching. They never saw their relatives again. This book which she had taken such interest in was a great interest for me in my youth. I heard stories of the planet, how it was a wonderful place. But as I got older I realized there is no paradise, just like every other planet, there was disease, famine and suffering. Even so, I want to return to it. It is my home and where I should belong.

"Ah" she let out a sound pointed to pictures of humans and she was laughing and smiling at the various pictures of nature.

I felt my soul at ease. She was pure and untainted; unknowing of the lives that I have taken. Yes, as a pilot of the GTVA, I too have taken the lives of NTF enemies and Shivan lives as well. But, in her eyes, I found my interest in earth once again. We looked at the book together and we pointed at interesting things. I then pulled out photos of my family. I showed her every picture I had of my friends and she smiled at them. Even if she could not understand my words, she could understand my feelings and my actions. To say the least, we established a form of communication that was much stronger and more complex than words could create. For hours we looked at the big bang from our ship and watched the miracle, and while she watched the creation, I watched her. When ever she smiled, it felt filling and I had completely forgotten about death. If I had die, then I had found my heaven. Here, in this scenic view, I found my significant other.

I would say three days has passed since I found her. I still kept a sharp look-out for any subspace activity so I may return home. I wanted to bring her back with me. I wanted to show her my mother, my father, my squad mates, and I wanted them to meet her. Since I am a second-lieutenant rank I could get transferred to any system I wanted; provided I got the right paperwork done. I thought of a good place at Mirfak, it was a quiet system that had not had any major pirate activity since 2365. But this was nothing more than a distraction to keep me from doing something unforgivable to the girl. I found it increasingly difficult to entertain the girl with the things I had on board my fighter; which was odd because I normally keep my favourite series disc at hand. I was scrolling through the numerous manuals for the fighter when I heard her close the book. Her eyes were closed and she let out a smile before turning slightly to look at me.

Its fun

"Huh?" I heard a voice, a very distinct voice.

It echoed in my head as I was looking at the girl. Her lips did not move and she stared at me as if it was strange to be staring at her.

"So, what did you want to do?"

I want to see this 'Earth'

Once again, she did not speak. I soon realized this must be my imagination making a voice for her, to quell down the loneliness. I continued to speak to her in this manner.

"Sorry, I can't bring you there"

Why not?

"It's been locked away and I can't get to it anymore"

Sorry... It must be sad to lose your home

"We manage"

All the time I was 'talking' to her she looked at me as if she was the owner of the 'voice'. She responded to me as if she could understand my words, and I found this voice to be perfectly suited to her. A soft and soothing voice that matched that little mouth of hers, if she truly spoke like that I would fall for her right away. Well, I probably already have. I read to her the text in the book and she listened with great curiosity. Every word I said was like a song to her and she found it perfectly suited for the beautiful pictures of earth. She found everything in it wonderful, from the colourful fishes to the black and threatening scorpions; an odd girl but I liked her company. Her very presence brought calmness to my despair and companionship to my isolation. I was in her debt. I wanted to use what was left of my life to make sure she was happy in the last moments of hers. If I die with her, the very idea of it was acceptable and inviting. A pair of lovers drifting in nothingness, but the thought crossed me: what did she think of me? I wonder what my mind would create.

"So... What do you think of me as? I mean... Like a friend or... l-l-lover" I was scampering in my speech.

You're a special person to me. And... Much more.

"Thank you"

I had used a large number of sheets to make the ground on the fighter softer and here I made a bed for us. Like children we slept for as long as we liked. I remembered a story I read a long time ago, it was the 'Garden of Eden' I believe. I can say this story described my situation perfectly. A small piece of paradise just for me because quite literally, in this place I was god. I would say this was in our seventh day in this place and I being to think about the fourteen days before our expected deaths. But it seems our time may end much soon than that.

I awoke to find that she was moving the ship. I she was clumsily moving the ship to a point and making an effort to move towards that specific point.

"Is something the matter?"

No response came from her or the voice in my head. I looked at the radar and sensor equipment but there was nothing displayed on them. But however, this time I looked at the direction of her heading and could see a strange rifting texture in the darkness. Her inexperience with the fighter made heading in the pin-point direction difficult so I gave her some adjustments that she felt content with. We both continued to look on to the rift as we approached it. As we entered the rift I could see my jump drives working again.

"Is this...?"

I was amazed. The rift was difficult to spot and no sensor equipment could detect it. But I needed a set of co-ordinates and I did not know where I would end up if I entered a random set. Then I realized I may end up in that field again. That unforgiving place with those creatures and the Shivans with the corpses of my allies; I may end up like them. But most certainly it was our only

chance at survival. I wanted to think over my options but the girl alerted me to the shrinking rift. I could see my computers detecting the weakness in the subspace activity as well.

"You want to go?"

She gave me a proud and confident nod. I returned it and punched in the numbers 0, 0, and 0.

My ship entered the glowing light and I could see the colours and the patterns of a jump node again. The familiar swirls of blue, white and black were all balanced with the white light at the end of the tunnel. I was curious and turned to look back. I found something unexpected; instead of the blackness I saw when I entered the field, a massive creature in the same design as those creatures in the field laid dormant. From the debris around it I could tell there was battle and we were in its prison. The creature did not notice us nor did it care about our presence. Amongst the debris and corpses of the creatures I could see bits and pieces of Shivan fighters. There was a magnitude of war ship debris as well; I could almost name them; Cains, Ravanas, Demons, and even a few Sathanas pieces floating around. My mind was creating the scenario: the Shivans, as the Guardians of the Universe banished this monster into this prison and killed anything that had subspace abilities to avoid the release of this thing. But as I stared into it I could see it featured many designs as Shivan features. The large serpent sported many sharp points and had the same red and black colour scheme. The fearsome 'face' had its jaw open as if it was killed and blast holes riddled its body. Lines of beams streaking across its body could be seen with the distinctive drilling of stationary ones. But it seems my ship awoke something. The 'eyes' of the creature glowed and turned to stare at us; it knows we are there. My ship suddenly picked up a massive load of enemy signatures and I quickly realized the creatures were exiting its body. In the void of subspace with no shields and with an armada of enemies coming at you is not exactly an easy thing to swallow. I activated the capacitors for my gun reserves and prepared myself for so extreme dog fighting. But the chance would have to wait as my ship exited subspace.

I was once again found myself in the field. The redness was much more threatening than the darkness I was in a few minutes before hand. I pushed my fighter and began going in a straight line through the field. The girl stared into the darkness with me and had not moved much from her spot. She did not smile nor did show any signs of relief. In fact she looked like she was very alert and readied herself for something to come. I watched my radar as well; the interference from the field made it jump like crazy but I knew that among the chaos were enemies waiting to pounce. I tried to use the jump drives again but to my expectation, they were shot. No activity what so ever. To conserve power, I turned off the engines and let the fighter travel on inertia alone but I kept the shields on to protect the hull against the heat of the field. The girl looked around and breathed a sign of relief.

They didn't follow us. I'm glad

"I wonder what they are?"

The Great Destroyers, the true destroyers

I was almost surprised at such an answer; I never knew my mind could create such an elaborate answer. I looked at her again and this time, for the first time since I met her, she spoke.

"They eat stars and ruin nodes and they do this all for their amusement" her voice was the same as it was in my head. Then... It means she was talking to me the whole time.

"Who are you?"

She looked at me with sad eyes but before she could respond our ship was hit but something. The girl screamed loudly then fell and hit herself on the walls of the ship. I secured her to the ground and jumped to the pilot seat to find that the creatures had reached my location. I turned all systems on and began my fight with them. Not taking any chances I switched my weapons into the Kayser cannon and began the gruelling task of engaging them. They were fast and agile but my Erinyes fighter kept up with them and to my shock, my Kayser had no trouble killing them.

"How... How does your kind possess the power of the destroyers?" I could hear her but I could not respond to her.

"Sit tight, I'll have us outta here in no time!"

But she did not; instead she held herself onto my chair and observed the battle. During intervals I took peeks at her and found she was struggling to breathe and her complexion had dropped. She finally gave up and fell onto my lap. I used one arm to pilot the ship and the other to hold her onto me. I would never allow her die alone.

"Stay with me, please!"

Will you listen? Will you see the past? Will you fight the present? Will you aim for the future?

"Yes, yes, yes, and yes!" I yelled.

The fighting stopped; an unknown force pushed the creatures far back and my fighter was pushed further and further into the field. As I traveled through the long corridor I could see images, recollections of things of the past. Yes, I was viewing the history of the Shivans...

I could see the destruction of the Colossus, then the destruction of the first Sathanas. I saw the destruction of the Sol jump node and I saw the destruction of the Galatea. I saw their entry into GTA space. I saw their meaningless wanderings in space. Here, I witness the destruction of the Ancient's home world, their meaningless fight against the Shivans and how they ruled their empire with grief and pain. I saw many things. The bloody history of the Shivans was plagued with the blood of countless races. I saw much destruction, from home worlds to super weapons created to kill the Shivans, but they all failed and they all died. But in all, never before had a race survived two encounters with them. I can see why they saw the Terrans and Vasudans in a different light. Never before had an alliance been formed, never before had enemies become friends. Just as the Ancients said: They were no ordinary enemy; we were special, our insignificant existence was different; different from all those others that seek the oppression of others; we did not follow the pattern. I looked to my right and saw why the Shivans were so bent on killing all subspace faring beings. My theory was correct; they fought a force ages before even the creation of earth. They fought hard with much blood shed and suffering. They lost many but continued. I watched as the dark serpents consume a star; I watched a dark entity violating a jump node; I watched their forces consume all life; and I watched the Shivans desperately fight them back; fighting with inferior weapons, with inferior armour, and inferior numbers. But they fought. The Shivans then did not resemble the ones we knew and examined. They were not as harsh and mechanical, they were not armed, and they were not evil. To fight these entities, they changed themselves. They threw away everything that hindered their battle performance. They killed the Destroyers to take their place; to guard the tomb of the old and allow pathetic life to survive. But I saw, they were not so quick to develop this idea. It was the first species that drove them to turn. They wanted power and fought the Destroyers, only to be crushed. The Shivans, who had already murdered and killed, felt no remorse but felt devastated. They tried again with another, but met with the same result. They were ugly; they were

hideous; they were monsters. No one would accept them anymore; no one would communicate with them anymore. And so, to preserve the lives of the weak, they set out to crush any life that could travel through subspace, in fear that they may release the first Destroyers and seal the fate of the Universe. I understand now... I must die because I have seen too much. I have seen more than any other living being has. From the creation of the Universe until now; I have witnessed them all. The images faded and the Destroyers charged.

I could know remember the beginning of my long and horrendous journey. Formally stationed on the GTD Aquinas, I was transferred to the GTD Echo after the former was destroyed by Shivans. With the whole GTVA armada retreating from Capella, they found a strange hole. Putting most of the crew to sleep with a special drug to make them lose their memories they set out into the hole to explore. I know now, the hole closed. It closed when the Shivans departed and returned home. Yes, this is the Shivan's home world. This unforgiving field and doom and despair, with danger lurking at every corner, the Shivans call this place home. I saw it in the images. Their home planet destroyed by the destroyers. They became nomads and fought to push them back. Now all that remains of their world is a divided red field and a friary node in the middle. Here, they must engage in an endless battle with the first destroyers to ensure the survival of others. They have made the ultimate sacrifice for the happiness and survival of others; a noble action, done only by a race with a strong conviction such as theirs. I looked at the girl whom I held closely.

"It's me they want... Just give me to them, they'll leave you be"

I heard her weak voice. She was struggling to keep her eyes open.

"No"

"If you kill me now... They'll leave... They have no business with you. They want revenge only"

"No"

"Please... I don't want to see you hurt..."

"No!"

"Why?"

I could not answer that question myself either. Her voice was soft and slow. I kept up my fighting of the now countless enemies that came. I never imagined myself to be such a pilot but my years of flying gave me a great edge. I was not the wing leader of Delta wing for nothing.

"I won't let you die, not here, not now!" I yelled.

"Why... Why would you do something like that?"

"Because... Because I like- I love you okay!" the blood rushed to my face.

"Love?"

"I don't care if I have to fight an army to protect you, I'll fight" for her, I was willing to continue my useless campaign.

"You're special to me! I want to meet my mother and father! I want you to meet my friends! I want

you see Earth with me! It may not be the perfect blue planet like in the book; it has many bad people, many horrible people, and horrible things. But! But it has its charms. I want you to see her limitless skies, her vast seas, her colourful forests, her proud cities; I want you to see them! And I want to see them with you"

Her breathing was more laboured and she was getting weaker and weaker.

"Stay with me... Please!"

I noticed another red sun; I did not care if led me back to the darkness again. I made a dash for it. If I could get there, I can save her. I gripped her tightly. No matter how hard I tried, the thickness of the creatures blocked my path. I did not advance.

Will you die with her?

I pushed my fighter to the brink of collapse. My kill score reached forty-three and I showed no signs of stopping. I looked at her one more time. She saved me from my despair and she became my other when I had no one else to see. In my thirty-two years of life, she was the only thing worth working hard for. I never worked hard for anything, not for flight school, not for a job, not for anything. But here, and now, I placed all my effort in protecting her. This is my choice. I will not abandon her.

Will you die with her?

I looked at her.

In a confident and firm voice:

"Yes"