

War of the Titans

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It has been over seventy years since the deadly Shivan race left the known universe, defeated by the Galactic Terran Alliance. Peace and prosperity came over the GTA as relief efforts for the once-mighty Vasudian Empire kicked into high gear. For sixty seven years, the GTA and the VE have been bound in friendship, helping each other attain a new level of living for both their people.

Then the Shivans returned. And with them came a whole new breed of warships. Massive vessels outfitted with anti-fighter weaponry made fighter attacks utterly useless. For the GTA and VE Alliance, fighter production took a back seat to the full-scale engineering and manufacturing of bigger, better capital vessels.

It was a brand new era of warfare. Fighters no longer dominated the battlefield. Mighty fleets of Cruisers, Destroyers, and the colossal Dreadnought Destroyers took to the stars to engage the Shivan Naval threat.

This is the War of the Titans.

Admiral Andrew Malstrom stood, hands behind his back, on the bridge of the Sixth Fleet's flagship, the GTDD Dominion. The Dreadnought Destroyer's flag deck was spacious, yet Malstrom felt almost cramped. The Dominion's bridge was swarming with crew members running about, carrying reports to their department superiors. Computer screens and flashing consoles lined the bulkheads of the command deck.

The Sixth Fleet has been on boarder patrol for the past two days, searching for signs of a Shivan advance in this sector. Malstrom knew that this meant GTA Command knew the Shivans would come, or they wouldn't have stationed an entire Battle Fleet like Task Force Six.

Malstrom bent over his command chair and studied the sensor display at the fleet in formation around him. Just slightly to port of the GTDD Dominion sailed the GTD Bastion, commanded by Sixth Fleet's executive officer, Vice Admiral Mark Halloway. Or at least, that was his given human name. His true Vasudian name was almost unpronounceable. The Bastion was a reconditioned war hero from the first Shivan war. Quite an old battle axe, but still proved fully functional at the battle of Porta, in which the Bastion managed to hold off three Lilith-class Cruisers until help arrived.

Malstrom's eyes shifted to the two Light Carrier vessels that cruised behind the Dominion and the Bastion. The Carriers, the GTLC Farragut and Defiance, were Sixth Fleet's only fighter resource after the refitting of all GTA Destroyers to no longer carry fighters in exchange more speed and firepower. Thus the development of the Light Carriers. They carried minimal firepower but housed nine wings of fighters as well as the latest CapShip engine design. Light Carriers were the second-fastest vessels in the fleet, bested only by the escort Cruisers. That made the GTLC's extremely versatile in deploying fighters quickly and efficiently.

Six Nova-class escort Cruisers made a tight circle around the four Capital Ships: The Altair, Wasp, Tori, Hornet, Eagle, and Phoenix. Improved laser turrets, faster engines, and the capability of missile batteries, the Novas put the Fernes-class Cruisers to mothballs in a matter of weeks. Nova-class Cruisers had become the current mainstay of the GTA Fleet, and the backbone for most Fleet operations.

Malstrom reclaimed his seat in the middle of the bridge and calmly watched the activity around

him. Crew members quietly carried on their duties as Sixth Fleet continued its patrol path along the GTA/VE allied systems. He sat back and studied the latest daily reports on his armrest terminal; one of the tedious duties befallen a Fleet Commanding Officer.

He was about to the "C" section of the personnel promotion report when a warning tone sounded from the communications console. "Admiral," the comm officer said, "I'm picking up a distress call! Very faint, sir. I am attempting to re-route the signal and boost its gain."

Malstrom strode over to the communications console and bent alongside the station's occupant. "Identify," he ordered.

"Sensors identify it as the Science Vessel Hermies, Admiral. They claim they are under attack."

Malstrom had a split second to think about this. He knew that moving the entire fleet away from the patrol border would open this sector to a possible attack, should this be a diversion. However, he didn't take a liking to splitting the force up, either. Nevertheless, he knew they must do something.

"Helm," he ordered, "Alter course to intercept. Inform Vice Admiral Halloway that the Bastion is the fleet flagship during the Dominion's absence. Recall the Cruisers Wasp, Tori, and Phoenix to our flight path, as well as the Light Carrier Defiance."

"Aye sir. Fleet responding, Admiral. We are underway. Admiral Halloway acknowledges command, sir."

"Very well. Full speed ahead, helm. Best possible speed to target."

"All ahead aye. She's way out there, sr. ETA to target one hour and five minutes. Assigned task force is acknowledging new battle formation."

"Understood," Malstrom said. To him, the time passed slowly. Most of the trip was spent running weapons checks and efficiency tests. Malstrom ran a tight fleet, and he wanted to be ready for anything. This time was certainly no exception.

"Admiral, I've got contact!" Malstrom swiveled his chair to face the tactical console.

"Report."

"The Hermies is floundering to starboard, sir. One Shivan Lilith Mark II-class Cruiser. She's.....wait a minute! Admiral, the Hermies has disappeared!"

"Destroyed?" Malstrom asked, suspicious.

"No sir! No debris detected. She just vanished!"

Damnit! The whole damn thing was a setup! Malstrom knew it was a mistake to split the fleet apart, and now he had to pay for his mistake. He only hoped he caught it in time. His next decisions could mean life or death for everyone involved. He had to act fast.

"Tell the Defiance to launch bombers and instruct the rest of the task force to pull back!"— Malstrom pointed a finger at the navigation officer—"Helm, set course for the rest of the Fleet! Emergency speed!"

"Emergency speed, aye!" Malstrom could detect the urgency in his bridge crew's voices. He didn't realize that he was shouting orders in a room where no sound reached above thirty decibels. "Two wings of Ursa bombers with Ulysses fighter escort on attack vector to Shivan Cruiser, sir. Contact in twenty seconds."

"Acknowledged. Instruct the Phoenix to protect the Defiance until—"

"Sir, the Bastion reports the Fleet is under heavy Shivan attack! They are requesting immediate aid!"

Malstrom saw this coming the minute the Hermies disappeared. The Shivans probably destroyed the science vessel, then used its ECM signature to create a sensor ghost. The rest was easy. It was an age-old tactic, and Malstrom fell for it. He couldn't believe his ignorance.

"Communications, record." Malstrom paused to wait for the recording confirmation tone. "Notify Admiral Halloway that we are making best possible speed to assist. End transmission and send."

"Sent sir." A pause. "Sir, the Lilith has escaped into subspace. The bombers are returning to the Defiance."

"Acknowledged," Malstrom responded. He was beginning to get tired of this. "Helm, estimated time to arrival at emergency speed?"

"Admiral, ETA at...fifty minutes sir."

"Very well. Continue on present course and speed." Malstrom activated his intercom. "Weapons, bridge," he sounded, "Ready all long-range missiles for extreme-range launch."

"Bridge, weapons," the intercom responded, "ready all long range missiles aye." Moments later, the call was returned and missiles were ready.

"Admiral," the sensor officer called, "we are coming into sensor range now sir. The Fleet is engaged with three Lilith-class Cruisers and one Demon-class Destroyer sir. She's an older model, but she's giving quite a wallop to the Bastion. It appears that the Demon knows where the money is, so to speak, Admiral."

"Damage report," Malstrom ordered.

"The Bastion is taking heavy hits, sir, and the Wasp reports damage to weapons subsystems."

The intercom came to life once more. "Bridge, weapons! Within missile range now sir!"

"Ready missiles for launch!"

"Ready sir. Current target is a Lilith. She's at twenty five percent, so this volley should do it!"

"Fire!" Missile batteries rotated to face the damaged enemy Cruiser. A shutter passed through the Dreadnought Destroyer as the Phoenix VII's broke from their salvos and charged towards the target. The Lilith lanced out with anti-missile fire, but only manage to take down a third of the swarm. The missiles detonated against the port side, sending the Cruiser toppling in a new direction. Explosions riddled its hull as it literally broke in two, sending sparking debris into space.

"Got her, sir!" the tactical officer cried excitedly. "New hostiles! The Demon is turning towards, sir!"

"Close to primary range, Lieutenant."

"Aye sir. Closing in five...four...three...two...one...in range!"

"Arm forward turrets one through ten," Malstrom instructed, careful not to raise his voice. Although the heat of battle excited him, he had to make sure that he didn't get carried away. The tone in his voice affected moral seriously, and he had to remain calm. His eased posture had an effect on his bridge crew, as they relaxed slightly.

"Armed, sir."

Malstrom touched his intercom control again. "Weapons, bridge. Target that Demon and fire at will."

"Aye aye!" the intercom sounded. Laser fire projected from both warring capital ships, however the GTDD Dominion held the upper hand and soon the Demon was quick to withdraw. Oh no, Malstrom thought bitterly, you aren't getting away that easily!

"Helm, shift your rudder to left full! Charge the starboard turrets. Bring down the blast bulkheads on all decks starboard and prepare to go broadside."

"Aye aye, Admiral." The giant hulk of the Galactic Terran Dreadnought Destroyer Dominion pulled alongside of the Shivan Demon as her turrets drew an invisible targeting line directly to the enemy Destroyer. Fusion Mortars, Triple Laser Cannons, and Heavy Synaptic Fire ruptured the enemy's hull, exposing its guts to the vacuum of space. Admiral Malstrom ordered missiles to fire as well, sealing the Demon's fiery fate. As the Dominion broke away from its position, the Demon angled away; spewing gasses and other debris into space.

Malstrom knew that an old Demon-class Destroyer was no match for the advanced weaponry of a GTA Dreadnought Destroyer. There had to be a catch. This time, Admiral Malstrom wasn't taking any chances. He was about to find out just how right he was.

"Admiral, I am detecting a jump point opening to starboard!"

Malstrom spun around, taking his gaze away from the battle on the viewscreen. "What? Identify!"

"Two Lucifer-class Super Destroyers!" Malstrom cursed under his breath. Now it got serious.

"Send out a call for reinforcements! Tell the Fleet to pull back and—"

"Admiral, the Bastion is reporting heavy damage. She can't take much more, sir! She's going down!"

"Pull away! Regroup at coordinates...five one five—!" A blinding light forced Malstrom to shield his eyes from the viewscreen. The brilliant explosion of the Bastion was followed by the shock wave caused by the Bastion's power reactor exploding. Malstrom braced himself as the Dominion rode the shock wave. As the jarring came to a close, Malstrom was back on his feet and into action.

"Recall the fighters and put distance between the enemy and us!" Malstrom signaled to the tactical

officer. "Lieutenant, give me a target report!"

"Admiral, I am detecting nothing but those two Super Destroyers. All other targets have been destroyed."

"All right. We can do this," Malstrom said, unsure if he was reassuring his crew or himself. "Bring us about and prepare to fire the Omega missile."

He knew full well what the Omega missile meant. It was the ultimate anti-capital ship weapon, and the absolute last resort in any situation. Not only was the missile extremely expensive to produce, but the radiation effects could last for thousands of years. It also had a tendency to create an awesome explosion that could destroy most Cruisers in the immediate vicinity. Looking at his tactical display, Malstrom noticed that what was left of the Cruisers from Sixth Fleet were attempting to escape the Lucifers' fire.

"Weapons, bridge," he spoke into the intercom, "As soon as the Hornet, Eagle, and Altair are out of range, launch that missile!"

"Aye aye, sir! Estimated time to missile ready...five minutes sir. They should have plenty of time to get out of there."

"Mister," Malstrom responded, "I'm not concerned with what they should have, but what they do have, understand?"

"Yes sir. Aye sir."

"Very well." Malstrom closed the intercom channel. The intensity was beginning to get to him. "Helm, keep a distance of ten thousand units from the Lucifers at all times."

"Aye sir!"

"Weapons, bridge! The missile is ready, sir!"

Malstrom turned towards the viewscreen again. "Are those Cruisers out of range yet?"

There was a pause that seemed to end time. Finally, tactical spoke. "Admiral, the Hornet has suffered major drive damage. She's disabled, sir. Repairs are underway and should be mobile again in...three minutes."

"Sir!" The call came from the sensor officer. "One of the Lucifers is powering up her engines! If she moves, we'll lose our shot to take them both out at the same time!"

Malstrom gritted his teeth. This was a decision he hoped he didn't have to make. "Is the Hornet out yet?"

"Negative sir. ETA one minute, twenty seconds and counting."

Malstrom squared his shoulders. "Get me Captain Auron," he ordered.

"Aye sir." Within seconds, a static-ruptured face of Captain Valerie Auron appeared on the viewscreen. Her face was bleeding from her brow as repair crews could be seen madly rushing around the bridge. Sparks and small explosions distracted Malstrom as he addressed the captain of

the Hornet.

"Captain Auron, we need you out of the blast area now!"

Auron almost looked like she was about to commit insubordination, but stopped herself. "Negative, admiral," she said, as calmly as possible. "Drive damage is substantial. We are almost complete..."

A protest from tactical. "Sir, if we don't fire now, we'll lose the shot!"

A long silence dominated the Dominion's bridge; broken only by the occasional static and regular sounds of computer consoles.

"Sir..." the tactical officer tried again, but stopped short. Malstrom's eyes were leveled on the viewscreen to Captain Auron's pleading eyes. He looked away suddenly and glanced at his tactical display, then back to his tactical officer, then back up to Auron. Finally, after what seemed like hours, he spoke. Softly and almost gingerly; like his words were glass to be shattered.

"Captain," he said, almost a whisper, "God be with you..."

"Malstrom, you son of a bi—!" The transmission was terminated by Malstrom's signal of his thumb cutting across his throat. The viewscreen went blank for a moment before redisplaying the scene before them. The entire transaction only took twenty two seconds, but to Admiral Malstrom it seemed like an eternity.

"Missile control ready?" Malstrom asked, solemnly; not taking his gaze away from the viewscreen. The screen displayed the two Lucifers, dominating the picture. The GTC Hornet was about five hundred units to port of one of the Shivan vessels, sparking and tilted slightly on its X axis.

"Yes sir," came the response. Malstrom almost forgot what he was asking as he looked one last time at the crippled Hornet and her dictating attackers.

Malstrom squared his shoulders and stood up straight. "Look sharp," he muttered, under his breath. "Fire," he commanded. The Dominion shuttered violently as the massive Omega missile broke from its harbor and fired its first afterburner. As it cleared the Dominion, it activated its full engines and afterburners, racing for its target.

The Omega smashed into the first Lucifer with an effulgent explosion, sending it colliding with her sister ship. Both vessels tumbled into each other like a bad pair of dancers. One of the Lucifers took all the damage it could and burst into a dazzling display of fireworks. The other Lucifer, caught in the explosion, detonated as well. The shock wave generated took the Hornet with violent force, sending it spinning furiously before igniting in a burst of fire to which the vacuum of space quickly smothered.

The Dominion trembled under the last of the shock wave, even at its extreme range. When the entire fiasco was finished, nothing remained of the enemy fleet but debris. The remains of the Hornet lay to waste among the stars.

Admiral Andrew Malstrom stood soberly on the bridge of the GTDD Dominion. They had lost three Cruisers and the Bastion. What a horrible loss. "Inform GTA Command," he said at last. "Explain our recent battle and request instructions." Malstrom sat down in his command chair and gazed at the viewscreen again before turning his attention to the post-battle reports flooding his armrest console.

-= The End =-