Providence

Chapter 1

Dawson: Do you think it's ready?

Garrett: No

Dawson: Even after Hindenburg?

Garrett: Yes

Dawson: Well...I will start the preparations for the next test.

I am first and foremost a soldier. Out my window, the small puffs of an explosion were visible in the twilight of space. The ships were so far away that they seemed small, and the battle appeared insignificant. The miniature ships looked like toys, like children moving T6 class battleships around. A small twinkle flickered, like someone had turned on a flashlight for only a second, and the hull of the CFS Magnet cruiser split in half, its carcass gently drifting apart in the void of space. The planet of Kaloth hung as a glowing, sapphire backdrop, oblivious and bored of the death of thousands.

In the past, I used to fight. Because of fighting, I lost all my limbs and my lower body. Apparently, some people up top saw my potential and put my excuse for a body into a machine to keep me alive. So now I have a mechanical apparatus that supports the living part of me and also enhances my mental abilities. They didn't want me for my fighting skills. They wanted me for my mastery of the battlefield and my strategic mind. Unfortunately, that meant tying me up in a machine that can't leave the deck of Providence.

There was a new message when I get to my computer. Once I read it, I took one more look out the window and decided on a plan.

Taluss was happy. His fleet has the upper hand against the smaller CFS ships and soon all of the Kaloth would once again be his.

"Cardinal Taluss sir!" a quivering subordinate shouts, "Should we eliminate the rest of the federation ships sir!"

"Disable all cruiser but capture the frigates," Taluss said, his eyes unmoving.

"Capturing all frigates sir!" copied the man, then relaying the message.

Taluss shifting his view away from the window, signaled for a screen. The face of the high lord Khadar was suddenly visible. Taluss bowed with respect and while on his knees, said "Supreme lord, the operation has all gone according to plan. The sent federation militia has been neutralized."

The supreme lord's wrinkled eyes blinked lethargically than in a voice like a rake scraping against a shed, said "Very well cardinal. Have your men prepare the reverse engineering plants".

"As you command", Taluss said as he bowed again. Suddenly, there was an audible boom. Taluss peered out the window but the situation on the battlefield was unchanged. Another boom. The subordinate cried "Cardinal sir! There is an approaching battle cruiser... Providence-class".

Taluss's face turned white and suddenly shouted: "divert all attention, destroy it immediately!"

"Is there a problem cardinal?" The supreme lord's decrepit body moaned out.

"Uh, sir," said the subordinate, "Are you sure you want to…"

"Just do it!" the cardinal snapped. "Why no supreme lord, there is no problem".

The subordinate looked as though to raise something, however, fearfully peered at his screen instead.

There was another boom, except it wasn't planetside. It was much closer. Close enough to noticeably rock the ship the cardinal was in.

"What is happening!" The cardinal demanded.

"The frigates that were in the tractor beam sir were let free when we diverted power towards pulse cannons," said the subordinate, "The frigates are currently shooting our cannons and shields".

"Cardinal stop attacking Providence and eliminate the frigates!" the supreme leader's face noticeably more animated.

"With all do respect the supreme leader, Providence currently poses a much more imminent threat", the cardinal said, dangerously articulate.

"Sir", the subordinate said, "Sir, I must advise you that our pulse cannons are currently out of range of Providence".

"What!" the face of the cardinal was comparable to large tomato. "Divert fire to the frigates!"

"But sir…"

"DO IT!"

Quivering the subordinate carries out the command.

Suddenly Providence was the cardinal's ship, firing with its double dread cannons, ripping the sturdy Kaloth cruisers into grains of sand flailing through space.

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I stood still waiting for my commander to come on. Soon the Delta appeared assuredly on screen.

"Ryker!" Delta Dawson strong voice echoes across my enclosed deck, "Congratulations on your recent victory! However may I ask why you waited and did not attack Taluss directly?"

I took a breath before smoothly saying "Sir I knew that Taluss was a weak commander, so if he were to see me he would instantly yearn for my elimination, ignoring the imminent threat of the frigates. When he finally realized I was out of range and decided to attack the frigates I used Providence's jump driveability to then launch the frontal assault when their attention was to the frigates. If I had gone directly in I would have suffered the fire of their whole fleet. This way I minimized the damage done".

"Well it was fortunate for you that he reacted exactly as you intended", answered Dawson, his voice rumbling across the intercom in waves of static, "As you know in the mission briefing it described Taluss as an unintelligent man, however, our superior forces were neutralised, so he must have been sandbagging himself to defeat our forces. If we were winning, why would we call you in?"

"You called in Providence because you need me", Ryker said. Closing his eyes, he took a breath through his nose. Once he let it out he said "Although it would appear the situation would require a tactical genius, in reality, our ships made foolish moves, attacking with its cruisers first, instead of using the more agile frigates to chip away at the larger ships while avoiding tractor beams, and then, when the frigates have lowered the shields of the enemy strike with the cruisers."

Dawson looked forward thoughtfully, before saying in a righteous voice "Good work Epsilon. We now have a new assignment for you".

Chapter 2

Dawson "I'm not sure if it will be able to complete the assignment".

Garret "If the asset can't do it then we will eliminate it"

Dawson "Why would we eliminate Providence, Ryker, the asset, whatever. It would still have immense value".

Garret "But it would pose too much of a threat".

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Imagine you are a large turtle, trying to get to the other side while cars speed down the highway. Now imagine that even if you did make it to the other side ravenous rabbits with spears were there to attack you. Now imagine that if you didn't move in minutes a bulldozer would come to where you were sitting and push you on to the road. Now imagine what you would do. Only the cars were an asteroids belt engulfing the planet Saylox. Only rabbits were Tamarian forces harbouring the deadly planet. Only the bulldozer were the reinforcements coming to aid the Tamarian ships, and only five minutes was five days. Only it was all real.

Ryker had a gesture with his hand and a screen appeared with Old Boy on it. "Old Boy", Ryker said, "We are currently in an impossible situation".

Old Boy turned his head in an exasperated fashion around Ryker's empty deck, then said "What? Nobody else to talk to there?"

"Ha ha", Ryker said while simultaneously pulling up a screen Old Boy's vitals, "But seriously, the guys up top really decided to give it us this time".

"What are Deltas for?" Old Boy's handsome smile glinted across the screen, "Come down with me to the practice range".

Ryker watched Old Boy descend down one corridor and reappear on one of his on another one of his surveillance monitors. *The great control,* thought Ryker, *was one advantage of being Epsilon of providence.*

Old Boy's strong frame casually walked down the screens, waving at people as he passes, saluting to Theta's, then eventually making it down to the training room. Two Billion credit worth of elite battle cruiser, yet there was still room for a training room.

Old Boy picked up a simulation band and pulled it over his head, then strapped himself into the simulation apparatus. Ryker meanwhile pulled up a new holo-screen with what Old Boy was seeing now. Old Boy was currently seeing a the fields of Kaloth, the sound of gunfire audible and the decaying buildings crumbling down.

Old Boys picks up a rifle and starts running into battle. However in reality, Old Boy is in a giant baby walker running around in the empty training room. "So explain to me your predicament" Old Boy said as he raced down the battlefield.

"Well the Tamarians knew we were coming. So with their two week head start, bunkered themselves into the planet Saylox. It took them a long time to go into the asteroid field with their smaller and more nimble ships, and would make it impossible for our larger cruisers to go in after them. They are also better supplied, meaning they can afford to hunker down, leaving us to starve".

Old Boy ran down the alley, ducking behind a slab of shattered concrete, then peeking out to fire a few shots at the training bots. "So basically if you attack your fracked, and if you wait your fracked". Old Boy was very observant sometimes.

I, controlling the training bots he was fighting, turned the spawned more in on the eastern side of the map, then placed a barrier in front and to the right of Old Boy. "Yeah", I said leaning back into the grasp of my CPE, "Pretty convenient for them there was an asteroid orbit around that planet".

"Not for you" Old Boy said, his frame a blur on the screen as he sprints down the road. "You just", spotting an enemy he kneels down, takes aim, and fires, "Have to find a way to turn this into your advantage. Like you always do, they wouldn't put any random weedbag in for the Epsilon of their most valuable ship". The training bot crumpled from his hiding space. Headshot.

"That's not very useful", I said, then turning a dial to change the difficulty of the bot.

Sitting there I thought. Watching Old Boy run around the complex, ducking behind rocks and shooting with deadly accuracy. I thought, *how do I turn an army of cruisers into an advantage. The only advantage I have with cruisers is on the battlefield, but I can't get to them.* I thought, and then, it came to me.

Ruvator drank a glass of wine. He could finally relax. The federation dogs were finally off his back and the fleet stationed outside of Saylox couldn't touch him. He laughed out loud and allowed his servants to feed amuse him. After months of dealing with a harsh Epsilon, finding this new jovial Ruvator was a shock to some servants, but they soon adjusted.

"Ha!" Ruvator roared, slapping a servant heartedly on the back. The servant squirmed back, expecting to be executed soon for performing a deed not to his masters satisfaction. "Pour me another glass!" Ruvator's cherry face bright and lively.

"Sir…" another servant said hesitantly. "The federation fleet has mobilized for a siege."

"HA!" Ruvator erupted in laughter, the servant wincing backward, "Those fools dare siege us! Pay no attention to them servant, we have the superior numbers and are better supplied and they know it! Now we wait and rejoice because soon the federation will be defeated, and the Gauls will once again be ours".

"What!" the technician said "You want our ships to take decommission their shields!"

I sighed and said "No, not decommission the shields, rearrange them. I want you to take off…"

"What!"

"Wait!" I said, face perfectly placid "I want you take off the shield generator on ⅘ of the ships and place them on to the last 20%. Then I want you to make them face in one direction, projecting only out".

Normally shields are generated from a shield generator and wrap around the entirety of the ship. The energy created forms hard light and absorbs kinetic energy, thus enabling cruisers to take large amount of ballistic damage.

"To make a shield, well into an actual knight's shield, and facing outwardly instead of wrapping all around is possible, and will protect more area where the shield is facing, but the rear will be totally exposed!" The technician complained "A ship with no shield can succumb to just two pulse cannon hits! And you want me to move the shields entirely off of ⅘ of the fleet! Are you crazy!?"

"Make it happen", I said with no changes to my facial expression. Then before the technician could go on a rant I closed the call he was on with me. One advantage of being stuck

in the control room, was I got to control the conference calls. I turn around in my CPE, the mechanical machine stuck in my body swivels around noiselessly, fueling me with the gel that enhances my cognitive ability. From the deck I can control the ship with my mind. Of course the sacrifice is that my there is a wire heading from the ships into my brain, immobilizing me. Yet having control is superior to being a technician.

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Two days later, the technician called back, telling me that I was crazy, a lunatic, a gilt-son and that the job was done. Just the type of respect I demand from my subordinates.

"Good", I said. Then canceled the call again just as the technician opened his mouth again. I swiped another screen and pulled up Old Boy on the phone. "Old Boy" I said "Begin phase one".

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Ruvator, still enjoying the luxury of the lounge in his finest ship, receives two messages back to back. One was from his cousin, telling him that he is coming to Saylox with a fleet three times that of the federation one laying siege on Ruvator, and the other a message that the federation ships made a wall.

"Excuse me?" Ruvator said incredulously "How can they have made a wall, one that not only circumferences the entire planet, but in a system where there are no materials to build it out of and their only help are light years away".

The subordinate, realising that it probably wasn't the best job to deliver bad news to the Epsilon, said "They used their shields sir. They repurposed their shields so that they face outwards, then had all their ships surround Saylox, creating a shield wall protecting the entire planet. A great defensive position".

Ruvator sat, thinking. A fleet of 100 could get to the federation ships in an hour, but they would be easily spotted, and shot down before they got to the federation ships. His best course of action was to sit tight and wait for his cousin to come.

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I sat, stone faced, considering. The thought gnawing at me. I had to get a second opinion, so I called up Old Boy. "Old Boy, I need your advice. As you know, most of the $\frac{1}{6}$ of the fleet have all the shield and protect the rest, however the $\frac{5}{6}$ of the fleet without shields are dangerously vulnerable. So of course the obvious option is to move people into the ships with the shield, have a skeleton crew running the non-shielded ships, to minimize casualties. I can simple write programs on the ship, but ultimately it will need a crew, and they will be sacrificed.

Old Boy's face more solemn than usual (I guess I'm rubbing off onto him), says "I think the solution is obvious. Make it voluntary. Then tell the few who sign up there will be a reward if they survive".

"Yes" I said, then pause, "Old Boy, you know you are the best Zeta I have. I know this is asking a lot, but…"

Old Boy held up a hand to the camera and said "No need to plead, I was planning on being the first person in the volunteer line".

"Thank you, old friend", I said. I closed my screen and slumped back into my chair. For 1.4 seconds I contemplated condemning my best friend to the gallows. Then I raised my head and pulled up a new screen. I had work to do.

Four days later, the Tamarian backup fleet arrived, led by Ruvator's cousin, Adral. Adral's fleet was massive. Consisting of mostly smaller cruisers that were what he could scrap up for an army from the other Tamarian clans, but nevertheless, fearsome and formidable. The massive swarm of ships of all hues and volumes looked like a locust swarm, humming through the horizon. Rumbling in in the thousands, the fleet would have made even the Capital City unseasy. Adral's fleet easily outnumbered Ryker's 3:1.

I looked, as always out the window. The fleet did not scare me, then again, not much did. I signaled the alarm and my people got into position.

Chapter 3

Dawson "It did good"
Garrett "It did it out of convenience"
Dawson "What do you mean"
Garrett "The asset knew that if he sacrificed his own soldiers with no remorse there would be mutiny. If there was no chance of uprise he would gladly lay down men for the cause"

They attacked at night, or what was night for the people on Saylox. Good thing I never sleep though. Being attached to a machine that pumps caffeine and chemicals into my body keeps me lucid for battle anytime. Anytime was 2600 (on Saylox) Adral's fleet mobilized around the south corner of the shield wall.

Adral's fleet circled around the shield wall, like a pack of wolves, thirsty for a kill. Staying in Saylox's orbit, the fleet looked terrifying. I don't know how, but they blinded me for 12 seconds. 37 seconds for a supercomputer, that thinks 100x times faster than humans of adequate intelligence, is a sizable period of absence. My guess is that they put out an EMP, or used some unknown technology. But whatever the case was, all the orbiting ships, in that 37 seconds, suddenly lept into formation, spiralling to a single point on the shield wall. At the same time, Ruvator's fleet inside the planet lept up as well, with hundreds of ships coming out of the asteroid belt for attack. Their plan was obvious, simple and deadly. Have a planned spot on the shield wall to focus all fire then enter the wall and destroy all the unprotected ships. It was a coordinated disaster for us.

Yet, at two seconds Old Boy saw what was happening, immediately called for $\frac{5}{6}$ of the ships on the far side of the shield wall, the side not being focused on, to rush over to defend the single point of concentration. At the same time he ordered every ships they got to fire at Adral's ships, and at every 20 second period, $\frac{1}{6}$ of the ships should turn around and fire at the invaders from planet side.

When I came to, the battle was in full swing and old boy acting as the interim commander, frantically ordered ships about. But this was my job. I had the cognitive ability to micromanage the entire fleet, telling them exactly where to strike, myself leading the charge. Providence flying across the blasting enemy ships in one shot, then, faster then any ship the size of Providence should rightly be able to, zips away. The secret was the jumps. Providence's ability to jump up to 1.6 miles away in less than 2 seconds was a major contributing factor to legends of Providence's ability to be everywhere at once, attacking from all sides.

Now that I could see, I tell each ship exactly where to go and when to attack. It was rough. The swirling armada of ships would smash the shield wall, then retreat. Each time the thunderous *boom* was heard, Old Boy's heart rate increased by 1.3 bpm for about five minutes.

In my secluded deck I watched with patience. My heart rate indistinguishable from one second to the next. There I can see that the average strength of the shields are at 60% and falling. Each bash of the fleet takes away a sizeable amount of durability. This would not last much longer.

Yet, with each bash of the shield wall, swaths of Adral's fleet had to venture death by flying so near the line of fire, my cruisers pumping cannon blasts through our shields, taking a sizable amount of ships.

So it was, that at 0300, Adral's fleet retreated back into orbit. They were losing too many and not getting the results they hoped for. Meanwhile my fleet went to bed, exhausted. Surprised to be alive, yet not enough to stay awake.

Chapter 4

Dawson "What a hell of a night"
Garret "It very nearly failed"
Dawson "But it held on"
Garrett "Epsilons shouldn't rely on reactive subordinates to save them. Serendipity happens once, maybe twice"

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Ruvator, no longer on vacation mode, was furious. How, the small outnumbered federation fleet, fighting a battle on two sides, be so dogged as to not move. Ruvator banged a wall, cursing his misfortune.

"Adral!" he screamed at his brother in a face not too unlike that of a bear that lost it's cub, "How could you be so stupid as to a fleet one third your size!"

Adral, not nearly as timid as most servant, yet still weary said "They had a ringer sir, Providence".

Ruvator stopped, stunned. The federation sending it's best ship it's changer of wars, it's deus ex machina. Ruvator cursed again. "Still!" he cried "4500 of you should be able to take down one Providence! You dullard gilt! Tell the tribe leader of the Gauls to send in more troops. They know as well as we do that if the federation beat us in this area, then the federation will be upon the Central next.

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Once again I was at my usual spot on the deck, peering out the window. Adral's fleet back to circling the planet, drifting in orbit, patiently waiting for the perfect kill. This battle was close. Soldier's morale were low, but winning the impossible night was solace. Still we needed to win this quickly. They played their hand. The EMP was their extra assurance of victory, but now we could defend against it.

The sound of war was getting louder. The screen of the battlefield that I was looking at blinked green, shields regenerated and at 100%, then, simultaneously, they all blinked orange, they were getting attacked.

My guess was that they divided their army into 12. 12 legions to simultaneously attack 12 different suadrations of the shield wall. Pulling up another screen, I quickly spoke, loud and confidently. "Gentlemen, hold your ground and look fierce".

Jones rushed down the corridor, pushing away other people that were also frantically scrambling around. Nearing the reactor room, he donned the protective hazmat suit, legs shaking as he aims one through the leg hole of the suit and missing. "Frack!" he yelled. Luckily nobody was around to witness his inaptitude of dressing himself.

Wrestling his way into the suit, he barreled his shoulder into the room hatch, pushing with all his might, and fear. As soon as he opened the door, Jones instantly experienced being a live potato stuck in an oven. But this potato was on a mission. Sweating, Jones fumbled through room when another *boom* went off, tilting the whole ship, swaying Jones to the point where he falls down on his butt. "FRACK!"

Finally getting to the reactor, as suspected, one of the five the radiator was broken, causing the large amount of rads leaking through the ship. Wiping the sweat from his forehead with his hand (then remembering that his head was behind a hazmat mask), Jones ripped out a sonic gazer and saw that the coolant had burst out. Jones guess was that it being in such close proximity to other large amounts of radiation, the coolant was strained and burst through it's tank. The ship was never meant to hold four extra shield generators.

"Um, HQ, a radiator is broken and all the coolant has escaped. We don't have a reserve coolant box anywhere so I can't fix it". Jones tumbled as another shell smacking the ship.

"Well fix the fracking thing!" Jones could hear Lee coughing through the comlink, "Radiation is getting bad up here".

"What the frack do you think I'm doing!" Jones shouted into the comlink, "You'd think if there was a fracking room full of fracking coolant, I would've fixed the fracking problem by now! But no! There is no sparer pile of…" Spare pile of coolant, but there was a spare pile of hazmat suits.

Jones sprinted back the way he came, each step awkward from the bulky hazmat suits. These were top of the line suits, could protect against insane amounts of radiation. If Jones could cover the radiator in a blanket of hazmat suits, he might be able to stop radiation, just until they could get help.

Jones carrying the pile of hazmat suits in his comically large suit hands, he rushed over to the reactor and layered all the suits onto the leaking reactor, then fixing them in with adhesive gel. Soon Jones could feel the temperature drop, and he let out a sigh of relief, not before

another jolting of the ship. Jones took out his comlink and smoothly said "HQ the problem has been fixed. You can shut up now Lee". There was silence on the other end. "Lee?" Jones questioned into the comlink. Jones looked at his comlink; all the heat from the reactor must have melted some wiring. Anyway, Jones needed to get back up to HQ for further instructions. Realising it would take longer to take off the suit then to just wear it, Jones departed the reactor room, and sprinted back to the bridge to tell Lee.

On his journey Jones didn't think it was odd that he didn't see or hear anybody else through his trip to the bridge.

"Lee! I fixed it, Lee!" Jones said as he opened the door to the bridge, jubilant, then terrified. Every man on the deck was dead. Lying on face down or face up. Jones crumbled to his knees, face weary and shocked. He hadn't fixed the radiator in time. Lee and everybody else was dead because of him.

From his vantage point, Jones had a clear view outside the window of the bridge, the swarm of of enemy cruisers, staring back at him, firing unrelentlessly, then, shooting a synchronized missiles that rock the ship.

Jones sat in despair as the shield strength plummeted. Every blast of the weakend the shield visibly enough, that with his naked eyes, Jones could see the spider web cracks in the shield, the calling of death.

Jones dipped his head, ready to join his crewmates in the land of the dead when the universal comlink on the ship went off. "Gentlemen!" the epsilon, Ryker's voice flooded through the ship, overcoming the roar of gunfire. "Gentlemen! You are being attacked with impossible odds, fighting just barely to survive, yet you have! The very fact that you are still here means that you are strong, and for all those who have died you must be doubly so for them! Do not let their passing be in vain, do not concede just because the odds are overwhelming! We will bow our heads to lady death without a fight! Fight for your federation! Fight for all that is holy! Fight for your fallen and future comrades!"

Tears streaming down his cheek, Jones leaped up and rushed to the control panel, pressing down hard on the firing button, aiming with his impaired vision through the suit at the cloud of enemy cruisers. "For the federation!' he cried as the shield integrity approached 5%, slamming his fist on the pulse missile button, releasing all them at once. Closing his eyes, Jones prayed, prayed for Lee's and his own soul, and for all that you'd join him. Yet he was not dying. When he opened his eyes a bright green shipped had suddenly popped on to the field, flanking the enemy ships, ripping their hulls like a bear ripping apart cardboard. Providence was here.

Jones shouted into the empty deck, cheering, waving his hands ecstatically before remembering to press the fire buttons. Providence agilely moved about the horde of enemies, delicately avoiding enemy attack while hammering enemies with it's double dread cannons.

Providence distracted enemy fire so he could target them, without onslaught, slowly regaining shield integrity.

Then, Providence winked away, jumping to another squadron to help somewhere else. But the damage was done. The enemies were dismayed, briefly caught off guard as they tried wildly to turn around and shoot Providence, exposing their backs to us. Then, when Providence left, maneuvering again to fight at the shield wall. Losing their tempo, we were now the ones laying down the onslaught.

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Chapter 5

Dawson "You gotta admit, it did good"

Garrett "..."

Dawson "I mean if I were put in that position I would surrender, save lives that would be lost in a suicide attempt"

Garrett "You're not the asset"

Dawson "Sure, but the enemy did everything the enemy was suppose to do. It capitalized on its superior numbers by spreading the enemy thin. Yet it still beat them"

Garrett "It would have only taken a breach in one area"

Dawson "Oh come on. Rallying its troops to fight, then personally attacking at the helm of Providence to the places that were about to fall?"

Garrett "It still hasn't passed the test yet"

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Once again, through the star light, the stage was set. It felt like a well rehearsed performance now. I would stand and watch through my window, the actors circling around the stage, then rush on with a new plan each time.

Impassively the same scene passed out my window. Soon the show would start.

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Old Boy, was much older than his looks might suggest. Even with his nickname, people constantly underestimated his true date of origin.

"So what's it like being friends with the epsilon?", Fields asked. After spending 36 hours with Old Boy, Fields finally warmed up to the question. Everyone else at the table secretly tried to conceal their curiosity in the question too, not too well though.

I looked down at my hand. I had no good cards to play, but hell, if they wanted to hear a story, maybe they would would let an old man win. I raised 10 units, then layed back into my chair as everybody made a small whistle. "Being friends with the epsilon is like being friends with an intelligent rock" Old Boy knew Ryker was listening, but like a rock, Ryker didn't care how he was described. "However the epsilon is the most intelligent rock you have ever met. And if you screw with him, he'll maul you".

Around the table, people were quiet with contemplation, everyone had already folded. The mood was getting unintentionally dark fast. So Old Boy jolted up, yelling I won at the top of his lungs. Everyone at the table jumped up to, fear in their eyes, then laughing as Old Boy scooped up all the units that he won.

Old Boy was still laughing with his crew of 12, when the shrill shriek of the alarm went off. The jovial twinkle in the men's eyes disappeared, replaced with a hardened look that would have made Ryker proud. The men rushed to their posts, Old Boy, cracking his neck, strolled to the zeta seat.

"Talk to me, what are they up to this time" Old Boy gestured outside the window.

Rodriquez, staring at his screen, said "Their back to their old games sir. Attacking a single point on the shield wall, but um, this type time their in some type of a formation sir.

"Formation?"

"Yes" Rodriquez said, "It almost looks like a wave sir".

"Send me the visual" Old Boy said. Rodriquez, looking down, pressed a button that shows a map of the battle in the center of the room. Old Boy saw what Rodriquez was talking about now. The enemies, instead of attacking in a cone formation, sending everybody into a single point, they were now shaped like a band. The whole fleet of enemy ships were lined in a band. As one side of the band dipped down to attack, the other side would retreat. This was to play around providence. As soon as providence arrives in one area, the fleet would retreat, forcing providence to move to the next spot of enemy fire, only for the fleet to touch back down in Providence's absence.

Old Boy saw what was happening. But there was nothing he could do. Then, the swarm of enemy fighters descended upon the wall. Raining down fire upon the shields. Old Boy, being on the ship inside the shield wall, watched as the hail of lasers got absorbed into the shield, the wall blossoming bright red, then trembling from all the kinetic energy.

Old Boy felt small, small inside his tiny ship of 12, firing into the ocean of enemies. He watched sadly as his own small ship along with other fired hopelessly into enemies that would only be replaced by three more. All his ship could do was wait. Wait behind the divine protection of the shield, praying for it not to crack, yet inevitably watching it's demise. Old Boy knew defeat when he saw it, yet he sat steadfast in his chair, yelling commands and encouragement to his crew, crew that were still breathing, yet not knowing they were already dead.

Ruvator had finally won. He watched as the federation scum put up a hopeless defense against his rallied men. The first fight, under Adral's poor leadership they believed they could win without so much as lifting a finger with their superior numbers. They made sloppy mistakes, overconfident.

The second skirmish was in the federation's advantage as Providence was massively effective at taking out large amounts of enemies congealed in one area. Splitting his army up to conquered by Providence was his mistake. But no more. There is a limit, however, to the amount a superweapon can sway a battle.

So it was only fitting that they put their most dangerous weapon onto Providence. The most cunning, resourceful, and fearsome tactician the federation was able scrounge up from the hellholes they call home. The man who feels no emotion. Who is calm in defeat, only to turn the tables the instant you aren't looking. Who is cold in victory.

But no more. His brilliance took him this far, building a shield wall, commanding his troops through devastatingly large numbers, but brilliance can only get you so far.

As Ruvator watched on from below, the cracks in the wall began to form.

"Fall in. Make the shield wall smaller" Ryker's voice fell upon them all. Old Boy barred his teeth, telling his frantic men to keep fighting. The enemies were close now. Shield integrity was

at 15% and falling. This time they would not retreat because of loss of numbers. They knew that as long as they breached a hole in the wall, just a single hole, they flood the inside, killing all the un-shielded ships. Taking out the bulk of the federation's army, and rescuing Ruvator, the leader of the Gauls.

"Turn around!" Old Boy shouted. The ship he was in did a 360 to fire at the enemies coming through the asteroid belt, from the planet, a constant threat at the rear. Getting attacked from both sides was not fun.

"Turn around!" Old Boy said again after 30 seconds. At the same time $\frac{1}{5}$ of the non-shielded fleet rotated the opposite direction of Old Boy to fire at Ruvator's planetside. The fleet didn't have enough ships to spare to have a designated planetside crew. So instead they had to flip flop. Fortunately, Ruvator could only send so many ships at a time through the asteroid belt. They were slow, and easy targets to hit. "Unfortunately the fleet still had to divert valuable fire away from the threat outside the wall.

"Turn around!"

The enemies, knowing that the we wouldn't dare send raiders to attack their fleet, slept at an opposite schedule than ours. So when we alertly watched for danger, they hugged their teddybears. But when we were weary, they struck with a vicious lucidness. Fortunately, Old Boy's crew hadn't been able to fall to sleep, and were playing cards. But four hours in, the crew rubbed their eyes, made shaky decisions, went to the control just a little bit slower.

"Turn around!"

It was Old Boy's job to yell, to wake them up, to make sure we won, so they didn't go to sleep, and sleep when they returned to their families. It was his duty.

The crack in the wall was growing bigger, Old Boy's men more fatigued. "Hold the wall and shoot the fracking enemies!" Old Boy yelled, forcing himself to keep his eyes open, "You are the finest men in the federation. Fine men don't give up! Sleep is for the dead boys! Now shoot those fracking…"

The ship rocked as a single bullet hit them. If a bullet hit them, that meant that there was a hole in the wall.

Ruvator laughed as the hole in the wall got bigger, and his fleet under the provisional guidance of his idiot cousin stormed in, massacring all the un-shielded ships. He relished in the idea of all federation scum being slaughtered. It did sadden him a little to find that Providence was nowhere in sight. "Gilts! Running away!" he shouted to the surprise (and fear) of his subordinates.

I looked on a felt even though all these men were now sitting ducks, I had made the right call to get them on to the ships. I was not sure now, of many would collect their rewards. But still I watched from afar as the swarm slowly entered the shield wall.

"Fly in a circular movement. Protect the ships with the shields!" Old Boy barked, now sitting on the edge of his seat. The enemies now had a choice. Either shoot the unguarded ships, or shoot the exposed underbelly of the shield wall. They could shoot the underbelly, making a larger hole, but suffer federation barrage from close distance. Or they could shoot the un-shielded cruisers hiding behind the shield wall, runts without armour. They chose the latter, ignoring the shields, streaming in from the one point that they had conquered.

There was a beep, indicating a private message. It was from Ryker himself. "Old Boy, move your ship to the other side of the shield wall. There is a breach there too and if we allow it to continue they will flank us and have us on both sides" Ryker said in a solemn voice as ever.

"Gottch ya" Old Boy said. "Rozen, turn the ship around to the other side of the wall".

Rozen turned to his panel and pushed a few buttons. The ship then turned around and flew away.

"Sir" Rodriguez said. "There is something funny here".

"What do you mean" Old Boy asked quizzically.

"Well sir, there are enemies on the radar, but I brought my own radar that I built myself on board, and on here it says that there is nothing on that side".

Normally Old Boy would never put the advice of a subordinate over Ryker's, but there was a lot at stake. If Ryker sent even 1% of his army away on a wild goose chase, then the enemies could easily fire at their escaping flanks. "Reload your map" Old Boy commanded. The screen turned up blank. "They hacked our systems" Old Boy breathed. "Full speed back towards the battle Rozen! Greenfeld, get me Ryker on the com, we need to tell him this".

"Ryker our systems have been hacked, divert all the troops that you have sent that way to turn back! Do you hear me!" Old Boy shouted at the placid image of the epsilon's face.

"Old Boy" Rykers said looking almost somber, "You are my best friend. I hacked your ship's systems, I want you to live, I already marked your forms 'died in combat'. You won't be sentenced for desertion. Please for my sake, I order you to run".

Old Boy stared, shocked. Ryker's face disappeared and Old Boy leaned back in his chair, eyes wide, rubbing the scar the wrapped from his face to his chin.

Rozen, clicking a few buttons said "Running away sir".

Old Boy looked onwards and solemnly nodded his head.

"Sir" Rodriguez said "I really appreciate all that you do for your government, and I, well I would be willing to die for you".

Old Boy looked up, and saw the rest of his crew nodding in agreement. "Let's have a vote boys. All of you, close your eyes. Now who is in favor of returning to glory". The decision was unanimous. Everyone raised their hands and smiled under their breath. Old Boy smirked, then laughed outright.

"Rozen! Turn around, were disobeying orders!"

I watched, but still everything was going to according to plan. A beep went off in one of my screens. Old Boy's ship was turning around. I watched in horror as my friend flew to his doom. But no, I had calculated everything. Even with the hiccup of his subordinate discovering the ruse, Old Boy's need to follow orders was stronger than his lust for glory. The only other

possibility was that a subordinate had voiced their opinion which had inspired Old Boy, but that had a 2.36% chance of happening. Still 2.36% didn't mean never.

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      "Old Boy! I command you to turn aro…" Greenfeld cut the communications at Old Boy's command. "Onwards" Old Boy said with a detachment to match Ryker's.

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      I stared. Old Boy would never just hang up. I quickly pulled up his personal comlink and everyone on the ships. All blocked. I instantly started to write a override script, but the federation didn't get their security wall yesterday. I desperately worked, but it was too late.

-

      Old Boy's ship was now leading the charge against the breach in the wall. His ship at the top of the line. Avoiding fire somehow and shooting at enemies with a renewed adrenaline pumping high throughout his crew.

-

      I finally got into the his comlink and screamed "Get out of there! I will make sure you are punished for disobeying orders!"
      Old Boy's handsome voice flowed into my room "Like to see you try when I'm dead".

-

      Old Boy's ship swerved to avoid a shell but ran into another one by accident. The whole ship shook, as old Old Boy gripped the arm of his chair.

-

      I had no more games to play, "Old Boy, get out of there, please" I watched on my screen as his very ship rushed into the thick of Adral's fleet, miraculously avoiding every shot. My only guess was that the enemy was expecting a dejected federation fleet, not the federation flying right in with the zealous attitude of a leaming. But surprise would not last for long.

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      The ship lurched again as another shell hit us. Loud, blaring beeps sounded to alert us that the engine had been damaged, and by Old Boy's guess, so had the heat protector. Yet he shouted to his men "We are fine men! We do not desert our brothers to be slaughtered, we thrust our heads in their place! For glory! For honor! For…" Another shell hit the ship.

-

      I screamed, smashing my fist against the window that bounded me. I watched, breath heavy as the cruiser carrying my best friend erupted into a ball of fire smashing into another enemy ship, before resting to be picked off by enemies.

Yet I could still hear a hoarse breath on the other end of my comlink. I watched on my screen as the enemies ravaged Old Boy's ship. The breath was ragged, then it coughed a painful hack. "Good bye. Old friend" the voice said as the ships on my screen tore Old Boy's ship in half. I could hear the fire on Old Boy's comlink, then static.

A droplet of water fell onto the comlink. I sniffled to realise I was crying. I had never felt emotion before, never felt attached to soldiers, never cried. But the tears fell all the same and the shivering in my body continued. Then I roared. Yelled, swinging my hands at the glass window which I forced to pear through.

Frack waiting. Enough have died. Time to go in.

Smiling, Ruvator watched as his fleet flooded the wall. The wall suddenly turned around, so that the shield were facing the planet as opposed to facing outwards towards space and the invaders. *Funny* thought Ruvator. Then there was a flash. A blink, as Providence revealed it's hiding position and went into the fray. Except Providence was behind Adral's fleet, it had somehow sneaked around and was now flanking. Then Ruvator gasped as a flash of light appeared. Providence was dropping nukes.

Adral's fleet was trapped now between the shields, planets asteroid belt and providence. Providence was laying waste to flank. Usually nukes and other AOE devices are useless, unless you can congeal the enemy in one tight block to destroy in. Ruvator had played right into Ryker, creating the only situation where Ryker could win. Ruvator looked on with disbelief as Providence single handedly neutralized swaths of Adral's fleet.

At the same time, the turned around shield wall was now advancing towards the planet. They were pushing Adral's fleet into the planet.

Ruvator now realised that if he continued attack Providence, his fleet would be pushed into the asteroid field by the federation shield. However if he attack the shield wall and tried to escape, then Providence would continue to massacre his fleet.

Victory was so easily attainable, yet it somehow eluded his grasp. He watched as ¾ of his fleet got destroyed by Ryker's brilliance.

When it was all over. Ruvator told his subordinate to send a message. A message of surrender.

Chapter 6

Dawson "Well it succeeded"
Garrett "That it did"
Dawson "Who should give it the good news"
Garrett "You do the honors Dawson"
Dawson "Ok"

I still shook at nights. The memory of Old Boy forever burned into my memory. It had been two weeks but still I shook. But I stood tall for the delta, put on the placid face everybody was use to, that everybody knew except for Old Boy and his 12 crewmates.

Dawson appeared on screen saluting me. I saluted back.

"Congratulations epsilon. You turned a near certain defeat into a victory" Dawson said with a giant smile smeared on his square face.

It didn't feel like a victory, but all I said was "Thank you delta".

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Dawson "Should we tell it the truth"

Garrett "No. I believe it would function better if we didn't tell it what it really is"

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"Well Ryker. People up top have been grading you, and I would just like to tell you that you have passed the test! You, as of now, have been promoted to alpha of the army. Your now my boss" the delta said still smiling.

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Dawson "Well I guess we should tell Harwell to get away from the eliminate button"

Garrett "That we should"

Dawson "Harwell! Hey, it passed the test, no need to destroy it anymore!"

Harwell "What! Sir I believe you are making a big mistake. Sir it's dangerous!"

-

I looked at Dawson with disbelief. Me? Alpha of the whole army. Promoting a lowly epsilon to the alpha?

"Thank you sir" I stammered out "Thank you".

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Garrett "Are you disobeying orders Harwell?"

Harwell "Uh, no sir but it's an AI, it's just a computer…"

Garrett "Stand down Harwell. It passed the test"

-

Dawson looked through the screen at the computer known as Ryker. The secret that nobody else got to see. While most saw a face stuck in an apparatus, Dawson saw an apparatus, humming away, thinking man thoughts.

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Harwell "But sir, maybe it was just faking it, you never know…"

Dawson "Harwell, you saw the results, the swell of emotion. We couldn't even fabricate that. Ryker genuinely felt sad that Old Boy died, he felt emotion. He passed the test"

Harwell "But what if he turns? There is nothing to stop him!"

Dawson "He has the ability of compassion now. It was shown, he cared for Old Boy"
Harwell "But…"
Garrett "Are you disobeying orders son?"
Harwell "..."
Garrett "Stand down. He is one of us now"