

Chapter 08//TERROR

<< E.B.S. Grand Gambit, In Orbit around Planet Sauria >>

“Sir, please, we must get you to Medical! You are badly injured!”

Admiral Scales shoved the doctor, actually his Chief Medical Officer, out of his way, nearly limping his way down the corridor as he made his way to the ship’s bridge. The shot of morphine he’d been given in the shuttle was beginning to wear off and the bandages that the field medic applied in the hangar bay were soaked through with blood.

“Doctor, you will facilitate my continued leadership of this fleet, or I will see to it that you are thrown in the brig!” Scales shouted, stopping briefly enough to shoot a glare at the shorter man, who stood his ground.

“If you die, then what happens?” He asked, defiant.

The Admiral sneered, then turned away and continued toward the bridge.

“Bring whatever medical equipment you require to the bridge. You will tend to me there.” He relented and overheard the doctor behind him beginning giving instructions to both the nurses that accompanied him and to the soldiers that had escorted them. Once on the bridge he eased himself into his seat and ignored the concerned looks from the bridge staff.

“Inform the fleet that I have resumed direct command of the 3rd Fleet. I want all ships in the sky!”

“S-Sir, something is happening behind us!”

“If it was an explosion then we were correct to retreat.” Scales replied, narrowing his attention to the shield ahead of them in the distant sky.

“I’ve never seen an explosion like this on radar, Sir.”

Scales sneered, then winced as a shockwave slammed into the ship from behind. The turbulence sent men tumbling to the floor, the entire vessel lurching backwards with their view through the window tilting and moving backwards as if something had grabbed the ship and was hauling it back the way they’d come.

“Are we under attack!” Shouted an officer from Tactical, others pulling themselves back to their stations while the Admiral felt the wind felt leave his lungs as the pain in his side nearly left him vomiting on the floor.

The ship stabilized and fell still once more, his crew all scrambling to assess the cause of the ship's sudden instability.

"Whatever was happening behind us just stopped, Sir, I- I can't explain what it was! We were already twenty miles away from ground zero! Was that nuclear?"

"Nuclear would have knocked us forward!" Another crewman at Tactical countered.

"It doesn't matter!" Scales shut them all down, pulling himself back upright and swallowing down the bile he felt rising in his throat.

"We will rendezvous with the rest of the fleet and assume a phalanx formation!"

The bridge crew all fell into line, their discipline returning under the watchful eye of their leader. As the ship gained altitude the Admiral could see the rest of his fleet beginning to take to the skies from the distant sea, the majority of them having taken refuge under the water's surface the moment they'd reached Sauria.

Those ships in the distance were small now, but in a few minutes, they'd be together again, a fleet as large now as it had been at the start of the War. He wondered what the Cornerians had sent to face him.

Before them all, the shimmering barrier that held them captive on the planet began to ripple, and then quietly faded.

"Sir, my sensors aren't detecting anything overhead, the shield appears to be gone."

"Fire one of our anti air batteries where the shield was, Tactical."

"Aye, aye!"

A moment later and weapons fire erupted from the starboard side of the ship, four laser bolts lancing skyward. Everyone on the bridge waited, but nothing happened. The four bolts continued upwards until they faded from view.

"We will continue our rendezvous! Inform all ships that as soon as we've made formation we will ascend to orbit as one unit!"

The bridge erupted in a triumphant "Aye, Aye!"

Behind him the bridge door opened, and the doctor and his nurses stepped onto the bridge. The team of three approached the Admiral, and he consented to their care by standing and letting the two nurses remove his jacket before cutting away the remains of his shirt. The two men

discarded the torn shirt and began obeying the doctor's instructions on how to remove the soiled bandage and begin to clean the wound.

"Your prognosis, Doctor?" He asked, feigning indifference as he kept his attention forward with the rest of the ship crew focusing on their duties, and noticeably trying to ignore their commander's condition.

"You were struck by an energy weapon, more powerful than a standard blaster. You're only alive because you're muscular. You're missing a lot of flesh and your ribs are broken, and it looks like pieces of bone are missing. There's partial cauterization of the wound from the weapon. Right now, I can't say for certain how bad your internal damage is. That would require an x-ray."

"Control my pain and keep the wound bandaged. When the battle is resolved I will follow you to Medical, Doctor."

When there didn't come an immediate reply, he turned to stare the doctor down, the ape's aged features looked grim. After a moment the older man nodded and began to personally assist in helping tend to the Admiral's wounds and began requesting dosages of medication to mitigate the damage that had been done.

As they worked on him, the Grand Gambit continued its course and within minutes it had reunited with the rest of the fleet, its escorts leaving their posts to assume their position within the phalanx as the fleet, now united, rose ever skyward. Once Tactical confirmed that the formation had been completed, the Admiral issued the command for all ships to ascend into orbit around Sauria.

"The Cornerian fleet is 442 kilometers to our starboard side, Admiral, at 2 o'clock." His helmsman informed him.

He winced as the doctor began to apply a spray adhesive to his wound, the medical sealant burning like alcohol as it bonded to his flesh to create an airtight seal to protect him from further infection.

"Have the phalanx turn 60 degrees, inform all ships to ready their main guns." He commanded.

"We're being hailed, Admiral."

"Give me Engineering, now. I want a status report from Dr. Boone!" He ignored the Cornerians, and instead focused his attention elsewhere. Moments later a voice came to life over the bridge loudspeakers from Engineering.

"Yes, Admiral! I'm here."

"Can our main gun be fired? Is it ready?"

“No, Sir, I need another... we’re mounting the first battery and moving soon to the second. Once mounted we’ll need to run diagnostics and calibrations. Fifteen minutes, maybe twenty. These are minimum estimates, Sir. With the power potential we’re working with, everything must be done correctly.”

Fifteen minutes or more without the main gun... But he would trust the Doctor.

“Carry on, Doctor Boone. I expect the main gun to be ready to fire in fifteen, no less!” He shot back.

“Admiral, I’ll inform you the instant it’s ready.”

He lifted his hand and waved it, his Comms officer killing the link to Engineering.

“Status report.”

“Sir, all ships are signaling that they are ready to fire on your orders.”

“Are the Cornerian’s still hailing us?”

“Yes, Admiral.”

He nodded, gesturing his hand to Comms, who then turned back to his console. Scales instructed one of the nurses to help him with his jacket, the Admiral pulling his good arm through the sleeve while letting the other side of the jacket hang loosely over his injured arm and side to hide them from view.

A hologram flickered to life in front of the Admiral and his crew, and they were greeted by a middle aged man in a sharp grey Cornerian uniform. The slender canine reached up to adjust his cap.

“I’m requesting an audience with the commander of your fleet.”

“You have him.” Scales replied, taking a step closer to the hologram. The dog in the hologram narrowed his gaze, and Scales eyed him hard, trying to assess his opponent. The canine’s posture was stiff, arms clasped behind his back, showing discipline without revealing any sign of alarm or concern in his expression.

“The war is over. This does not need to escalate any further than it already has. I would like to negotiate the release of the hostages you have taken.” His unknown rival said.

“And who are you to be doing these negotiations?” Scales asked in return, buying more time for Engineering. Fifteen minutes wasn’t too long of a wait for a battle that had yet to start.

“I am Admiral Lyle Dachshund of the Cornerian 5th Fleet, and you are?”

“Admiral Rex Tyrannous Scales, of the Imperial 3rd Fleet.”

“I believe you were conspicuously absent when we descended on Venom in the final days.” His rival replied, the corners of his mouth curling up in a smile. That barb did not go unnoticed.

“And I believe your competence was conspicuously absent when we laid siege to Katina, Admiral Dachshund.”

His rival remained silent; a barb traded for a barb. The 5th Fleet had been responsible for Katina’s defense during the war, and was no doubt led by this man. The “Iron Shield” of Katina did in fact put up a great resistance, thwarted only due to being outnumbered 2 to 1. He reached back to his chair and thumbed the button that would mute the bridge to prevent the Cornerians from hearing.

“How many in their fleet?”

“49, Admiral.”

“But I will repeat myself, Admiral Scales. This does not need to escalate. We are willing to negotiate the release of your hostages.” The canine interrupted them. Scales eyed the man, considering. He wasn’t quite outnumbered two to one yet, but in ten or so minutes he would be. As for the hostages, they were still on Sauria, alive, but left to rot in their cages. They weren’t of any use to the Empire now.

He thumbed the switch on his chair again, knowing he could now speak to the Cornerian.

“I’m afraid you’re not in the position to bargain, Admiral. We’ll speak again when you’re ready to surrender. End transmission.”

The hologram immediately shut off, and Scales raised his hand and pointed at the sparkling lights far off in the distant space, the Cornerian fleet giving itself away with their blue shields and caution lights.

“Broadcast to all ships in the fleet,” he announced, his Comms officer quickly working the console controls before turning to him and nodding. “All ships, open fire!”

Then, all at once, the entirety of the Imperial 3rd Fleet fired its main guns, each with an effective range of 500 kilometers. The cascade of weapons fire was breathtaking. Hundreds of laser bolts lanced across the stars and seemed to vanish as they reached their intended targets. A great violence erupted as each bolt collided with the enemy’s shields, explosions spreading like fire across the wall of Cornerian defenses.

“Estimating 90% of our shots landed, Sir! Incoming return fire!”

“Brace for impact!” Scales shouted to his fleet as flash of blue light echoed in the distance, growing in brightness as the enemy weapons fire lanced at them through space, colliding with the Grand Gambit’s shields and shattering across their surface, the bridge’s forward window adjusting for the brightness to prevent the crew from being blinded. A moment passed before another cascade of blue light flashed in the distance as the Cornerians were firing a second volley.

“All units close ranks and advance, and fire when ready! Deploy all fighter squadrons!” He shouted, the adrenaline surging through his system shoving the pain back as he clenched his fist in front of him. The second volley hit, shattering again across the Grand Gambit’s shield, the bridge again adjusting for the brilliance flashes of light. He thrust his hand forward, aiming a finger at the Cornerians, a wicked smile on his lips.

“Let the slaughter begin!” He cried as his fleet launched their own second volley.

<< C.A.S. Eternal, In Orbit around Planet Sauria >>

“Damage report!” Admiral Dachshund shouted from his seat on the bridge. The Imperial fleet had yet to pause their laser barrage, and the Eternal’s forward shields were holding.

“Negligible damage, sir! All ships are holding, but I’m getting multiple reports of fighter squadrons being sighted just out of range of our anti-air defenses.” His chief tactical officer shouted in reply.

Stepping towards Tactical he surveyed the layout of the enemy on the battle grid, and quickly understood their formation.

“Signal to the fleet that I want an immediate shift to a Star formation. I want four cruisers on every battleship, protect those flanks and throw power to the forward shields!”

“Roger!” Came a shout from his communication staff. The bridge was alive with activity as his orders, both spoken and silent, flowed from him and to his fleet. He was outnumbered and outgunned, but he’d held out at Katina for three days before finally being crippled, and he didn’t need to wait three days for reinforcements this time. The cavalry would soon come, and when it did they’d crush the Empire together for a second time.

“Sir! Affirmations incoming, the fleet is now in position, we’re getting requests for fighter support.”

The admiral nodded, and lifted his hand and shook the officer a gesture to 'go ahead'. Within the next five minutes he'd have over a hundred fighters in the air. He didn't know how many fighters the enemy had, but with that many battleships in their fleet it wouldn't be a shock to Dachshund if they had more than he did.

It wouldn't matter in the end. The "Iron Shield" would hold the line. When he lost Katina he had an entire planet to worry about with a fleet in orbit stretched so thin it was like tissue paper, but here on Sauria there was no need to protect the planet, and he suspected the enemy had no reason to flee, thus making this a direct conflict with no surprises. All Dachshund needed to do was hold the line with a tight formation, his Iron Shield.

"Admiral, we're getting a request from The Great Fox."

"Which is?"

"Fox McCloud has escaped the planet, but they are requesting support to help reach him. Apparently his Arwing is damaged." The officer replied. The Admiral frowned, and paced his over to Communications, extending his hand to the officer at the console. He was handed the headset and lifted it to his ear.

"This is Admiral Dachshund." He said.

"Admiral!" An older voice replied. "We'd appreciate it if you could lend us a hand, Fox is almost on the other side of the enemy fleet!"

He sneered, but not at The Star Fox Team. He bore no ill will to the savior's of Katina. They'd come to the planet's rescue after all when the Iron Shield was left broken in orbit.

"I will not sacrifice the integrity of my fleet, but if The Great Fox is willing to fall in with the 5th Fleet's formation, I will detach our Husky Squadron to render aid."

"Of course, Admiral. Wherever you need the Great Fox we'll get her there." The voice replied, and the Admiral nodded.

"Very good. Send word to Fox McCloud that help is soon coming. Dachshund, Out." He replied, then handed the headset back to the communications officer. "Give this order to the Husky Squadron, that they are to detach from the 5th and form up as escort to Fox McCloud. Make sure he makes it back to us in one piece."

"Roger!" The officer replied, putting his headset back on and relaying the order.

"Admiral, we've got fighters coming within range!" A shout to him from tactical.

“Then let’s not be rude, gentlemen! Answer them!” He shouted, now resuming his post at his seat, flicking out his hand and issuing the command for the Eternal to launch its next volley of weapons fire, every cannon on the ship belching out a lance of molten light towards the flickering lights that were their enemy.

<< Arwing 01, In Orbit around Sauria >>

Fox was dangerously close to falling back into the Saurian atmosphere. When he’d come up into orbit, he had a swarm of battle cruisers coming up with him, and there weren’t many places for him to go that was safe! On his radar he had fifteen signals pursuing him from behind. Probably enemy fighters that had launched right after their mothership had made it into orbit.

“Fox, the Cornerians are sending a squadron to help, but they want The Great Fox to stay with the fleet.” Peppy was telling him over the radio. A laser zipped past him, but it missed by a dozen or so meters. If those fighters kept gaining ground on him then those lasers were about to get a lot more accurate.

“Well, I guess that’s good news given the circumstances!” He replied.

“Sorry, Fox. How bad is your Arwing?”

“Banged up still, engines giving me maybe 90% of its max output. These Imperial fighters are actually faster than me right now, and my G-Diffuser is still shot.” Fox said grimly.

“You can still shoot, right?”

“Yep. But I got an injured party here in the cockpit with me. What are the chances I can get her to a ship?”

There was a pause with Fox adjusting his flight path to avoid another laser by several meters. It felt like the distant fighters weren’t out to kill him yet, just probing. Waiting for him to get within deadly range before they’d all open fire.

“If you can link up with that fighter squadron, then they can help you limp back to the 5th.” The hare told him. According to his radar the 5th fleet was an awfully long way away.

“Roger, that. And where are you guys?”

“We’ve departed The Great Fox and are trying to link up with the Husky Squadron. We’re gonna be there to help get you back, Fox.”

“No! As much as I like the idea, everything I’ve seen over the last couple of hours has me thinking you should stay with the fleet. Just got a feeling it’ll be a good idea to have the three of you there just in case something happens.” Fox told him, not really sure himself as to why. It was just a feeling of unease resting in his gut that told him he should resist the urge to regroup. Having Peppy and the others near the Great Fox was the right idea even if he couldn’t put his finger on why.

“Alright, that’s what we’ll do.” Peppy replied, but the reluctance was clear in his voice.

“I’ll be in good hands, Pep. The Husky Squadron showing up will make it feel just like the Academy, except with more gunfire.”

The hare replied with a laugh.

“Yeah, I guess that’d be true.”

“Fox.” The girl whispered up from his lap. Since launching she’d curled up in his lap, making it difficult for him to use both his arms to pilot his ship. He glanced down at her, noticing the grey bags that had formed under her eyes. She looked so weak, favoring what looked to be a side injury. He thought to ask her how she was holding up.

“I’m ok. My ribs are broken.” She told him, her voice nearly hoarse. He swallowed uneasily, both at her being that badly injured but also that she’d been answering his questions before he’d get the chance to ask them himself.

“I can hear you think.” She replied to that thought with a dry voice. A cold sensation fell over him, like ice water. He then recalled standing there with her in his arms, the armed men standing ahead of them with their guns right before they all began to double over and collapse. The girl started to sniff, her crying again.

“I’m sorry.” She whimpered. His thoughts weren’t his anymore, were they?

“We’re going to get you somewhere safe, ok?” He said it as soon as he thought it, not giving her time to reply to him first.

“I can,” she started, then stopped to catch her breath, her body flinching in pain for a moment before relaxing again. “I can hear so many people talking. All their voices.”

She gasped in pain, Fox feeling her shift in his lap until she’d found a new position that favored her ribs better.

What are they saying, Fox thought to himself, testing her on purpose this time.

“There’s too many of them. I- I can see your ship from the outside.”

See it from the outside? Must be all those fighters tailing them. His radar was showing them gaining, his engines just weren't up to the challenge of outrunning these guys even if their fighters were inferior. At least his engine wasn't overheating, so he could throttle it up without fear.

"Faster." She said.

"This is the best we can do." He replied.

A cascade of laser fire erupted above him. Every shot missed, but he cautiously angled his trajectory down, bringing him a little closer to Sauria and its atmosphere. Skimming the surface of the planet's atmosphere had helped maximize the distance between him and the Empire, but he was going to have to turn his nose up eventually if he wanted to make his way to the Cornerians.

"No." she whimpered, adding. "Have to fly up."

"Why?" There was a wall of laser fire still lancing overhead, there was no way he could fly up through that without his G-Diffuser.

"Trap!" She winced.

Feeling alarmed he tried nudging the nose of his Arwing up, bringing him closer to the wall of laser fire. A fresh volley of weapons fire joined, and he ducked back low, the threat of those lasers was too great! Then to his left and right he saw more laser fire. Looking back up overhead, then at his radar he saw the fighters behind him were spreading out behind him.

They were boxing him in, so he had nowhere to go but down, but he didn't think his Arwing could survive another trip through reentry though he doubted the enemy knew that. If he was their squad leader, he'd be doing this to make a target easy pickings. You naturally slowed down as you burned through the atmosphere, becoming an easier target to hit.

"You can hear what they are planning?" He asked, letting his eyes dart across space searching for any avenue of escape. He tried to imagine himself flying through a corridor with walls to his every side, searching for a gap through which to slip through.

"I- I don't know. They're all thinking the same thing, trying to keep you still."

He could feel the noose tightening, the laser fire not even trying to target him now, just a steady volley as fast as the fighters could pump them out, keeping him locked in place. His eyes were alert, but when he felt the girl's reach out to touch his hand and the flight stick, he was distracted.

Before he could tell her to stop, she shoved the flight stick hard to the left, his anger shooting through the roof as his Arwing spun hard to the side. Red light illuminated the right side of his ship as a massive energy beam lanced through the laser fire and right where they'd been just moments before.

"Shit!" He pulled control of the Arwing back from the girl and yanked back on the stick, seeing the laser fire had stopped when the energy cannon had taken its shot. The lasers erupted at him again, trying to envelop him in another web of light, but failed to catch him this time.

How did she know to do that? She figured out what they were planning?

"I can, I can understand the noise if they all think the same thing." She gasped, the girl pulling her hand back to cradle it against her chest next to the retracted staff she still carried.

"There are thousands of people in orbit around Sauria! You can hear every voice?" He asked.

"Yes! It's all noise, too many of them." She whimpered again.

Fox was frustrated. He had an asset sitting in his lap that could read the enemy's mind, but there were so damn many of them that the only way she'd know what they were thinking is if they were all thinking the same thing. How often were they going to be that lucky on the battlefield, he thought?

With the chaos of weapons fire echoing around him he wasn't going to hold his breath.

<< E.B.S. Grand Gambit, In Orbit around Planet Sauria >>

Dr. Boone stood at the edge of the catwalk overlooking the work being done overhead. From the ape's vantage point he could see all of Engineering, the Grand Gambit's internal organs making for an incredible sight to behold. This ship wasn't just his life's work, but a tribute to the Emperor. Without Lord Andross' genius Dr Boone's team would never have been able to realize this feat.

To design a warship around a main gun of this magnitude was unheard of, nay, impossible! The power draw was too high, and no reactor in Lylat could provide enough power to fire a weapon like this at full charge. 20% output was the best they could achieve with the Gambit's twin reactors, but even then, the ship had to go into standby and let the reactors replenish the ship's power.

Being forced to wait an hour between discharges would have rendered the Grand Gambit a pitiful main battle weapon, but now... Now that was not so!

“Doctor! Kinetic Battery A has been installed!” One of his technicians shouted from the crane that held the man aloft. The massive dual reactor was beneath them, one of the largest to be built by Venomian scientists, but floating overhead was the delicate rack Lord Andross had designed, and that Boone had brought to life with the skill of his own hand.

The mechanical structure connected itself to the reactor like a spider crouching over its prey, an apparatus designed to house the Kinetic Batteries and serve as a conduit through which power could flow. Nestled within the rack, existed two sockets where each Battery was to be mounted, and now half their job was done. The second Battery they’d recovered was being mounted now.

As soon as they were finished, they could run their first operations test. If power from the reactor could be successfully routed to the Kinetic Batteries, then they would activate, beginning their rotation and power production. The arms of the spider could then route that power back to the ship’s power grid, feeding energy into the Grand Gambit at an accelerated rate far beyond the dual reactor’s capabilities!

The only question is just how much power could be drawn from the Kinetic Batteries?

Several minutes later a second technician shouted that the second Battery had been successfully mounted within the structure, and both men were now pulling their cranes away from the mounts and back towards the walls.

Boone jogged his way down the catwalk to rejoin the rest of his team at the main reactor’s control center located in the fore of Engineering. Still overlooking the reactor, the control center was an open-air platform that afforded the team a clear view of everything occurring within Engineering, and the Doctor could now see the reactor from the front, and the web of mechanic ‘legs’ now tethered to it. The white crystal prisms floating within the structure appeared to him almost like eyes staring back at him.

“Run operation test alpha, point one percent power.” He announced, a fellow scientist to his left began to work the controls on the console while three others monitored a dozen other panels and information screens. The doctor had only eyes for the Batteries.

“Point one percent power active. Routing now.”

The tech’s hand touched a dial, adjusting the power from the reactor to the Batteries, and in an instant the two prisms began to spin. Slowly at first, like the minute hand of an analog clock, but there it was. Success.

“Feedback?” He asked, looking down at the console for the first time, the ape’s eyes dancing across every screen to personally check each and every readout.

“Nothing unexpected, Doctor. Everything’s staying in the green.”

The feedback from the Batteries was nominal. The power was being routed to the Batteries, provoking them to generate power of their own, and then that power was now being fed back to the reactor to be shunted off by the lance circuits and into the Grand Gambit's power grid.

"A slow turn, three seconds per whole percent. Let's increase the power." He announced. The technician at his side carefully fingered the dial and began to very gently turn it. Every three seconds the dial ramped up the power by a single percentage point, and the Doctor watched as the Batteries spun ever faster.

"Everything remains green, Doctor." A technician to his right advised him.

A broad smile was growing across the ape's crimson face. All their work, after all these years, was finally bearing the fruit the Emperor had so rightly predicted would grow!

"Let me." The doctor said, stepped over to his colleague, taking control of the dial for himself. His hand was shaking, but he calmed it, and began to gently turn the dial more, and more, and more again. With each added percent of power the Batteries spun faster and faster until they no longer appeared as prisms, having long lost their geometric edges through their rotation, appearing now only as pure white ovals throbbing with power. His team stood in silence as they all monitored the console, checking and double checking each piece of feedback they received from both the reactor and the Batteries.

The dial could be turned no further.

"100%." He whispered.

"All systems are green, Doctor." A colleague whispered just as quietly. They all stood in awe before the twin white eyes of the spider as it fed the Grand Gambit with more power than could ever be truly calculated.

"Tell the Admiral that the Grand Gambit is complete." Dr Boone said to his team, one of them quickly excusing themselves and hurrying to send his message to the ship's bridge.

Dr Boone lifted his hands skyward, catching the two Batteries in his hands, holding them tight in his mind's eye.

"Truly magnificent!" He said, then began to laugh.

"Admiral!" a shout came from Tactical.

"Report."

“Engineering reports that the Kinetic Batteries have been successfully mounted and that Dr Boone says the Grand Gambit is ‘complete’, Sir.” Replied the officer.

“Sir! I’m registering a huge spike in available power from the reactor. Admiral, I’ve never seen it this high even when we fire the main gun!” Another officer next to him replied. Scales began to smile, standing up from his seat and stepping over to Tactical to see the display for himself.

“Here, Sir, available power is maxed out at 100%, but the numerical reading is locked at 999,999. I have no idea how much power we actually have available to us.” The same officer told him.

“As Lord Andross intended. Unlock the forward shield array.” Scales commanded, then left Tactical to their duties, returning his seat. His Chief Medical Officer still resided on the bridge with an assistant at his side, but they each kept their respectful distance as the Admiral walked off his injuries, the pain ever present but being pushed back by the occasional administration of painkillers both oral and local.

“Deploy the array!” An officer shouted.

Outside the ship the set of four massive shield emitters unlocked themselves from the Grand Gambit’s hull. Each emitter was its own independent shield array, fully capable of projecting an energy barrier in front of the Grand Gambit that was large enough to protect the ship from any attack. The four emitters were designed to overlap their shields, weaving a grid not unlike kevlar, thus producing a force field so durable that nothing short of a nosedive into a star could penetrate it.

Normally, powering the four arrays at once would be impossible with the Grand Gambit’s dual reactor alone, but with the Kinetic Batteries anything was now possible. The arrays locked into place, their triangular reflective plates aimed dead ahead and towards the distant Cornerians.

The plates began to flicker, the power from the reactor funneling through the web network of direct filaments, the sudden heat of which cooked off the protective layer of lacquer that had been applied to the array when they’d first been constructed in dry dock. As the wispy dust floated through space in front of the ship, the four shields activated for the first time, the Gambit’s primary defensive shield shutting off in response as designed. With a fleet of allied battleships flanking the Grand Gambit the ship had no need for shields except from the front.

A glowing green disc appeared in front of the Grand Gambit, and with that in place there was nothing the Cornerians could shoot at them that could ever hope to damage the fleet’s flagship vessel.

“Ready the main gun. I want maximum output.” He ordered.

“Aye, Aye! Shunting power to the main gun.”

“Barrel temperature rising, but within tolerances, prepping heat vents now.”

As his men dutifully prepared the weapon to fire, he felt himself growing restless, a tingling sensation dancing across his skin as the moment grew closer. He turned to Communications and ordered them to signal the fleet that the Grand Gambit was about to fire the main gun. Feeling his ego swell in his chest he ordered all his ships in the fleet to cease their fire and to signal all fighter squadrons to abort their sorties and return to allied flanks. He wanted the Cornerians to pay close attention to what was about to kill them.

“Admiral, the main gun is ready to fire!” shouted an officer from Tactical.

“Helm, aim for the center of their formation.” He commanded, his helmsman immediately taking control of the vessel and adjusting the ship’s orientation.

Scales stood again, approaching Tactical, and with him already familiar with the console and its controls he gestured for his men to move. The officers stepped aside as he reached his hand out to grab the firing lever. He didn’t feel anything as he held the leather wrapped steel in his hand, sweat beading up on his brow as he felt a terrible excitement welling up within him. So much power was hiding behind a single pull of a lever that it was almost impossible to believe!

He didn’t know what would happen when he fired the main gun, no one could. Before this moment the full power of this ship existed only in the realm of theory.

The Admiral pulled the lever to fire, and it offered him no resistance, almost as if the Grand Gambit was just as excited as he was to find out just how much destructive power it could unleash.

In front of them the four massive shield arrays went offline, and their mechanical arms rotated the arrays out of the ship’s line of fire to protect them. With the firing path now clear, the ship activated its firing sequence.

The whole ship began to vibrate, each man on the bridge feeling it through his boots and up to his teeth, every pair of eyes glued to the view ahead of them, of the Cornerian fleet. They all heard a boom, like an object breaching the sound barrier, and the ship’s crimson bow was suddenly enveloped in the brightest of white light. The bridge’s windows struggled to mitigate the light, to stop it from flooding the bridge with its brilliance and blinding its occupants, but failing, being forced to shut off the window, protecting the crew, but leaving them blind to the results of their weapon’s fire. It would take several moments for the cameras to reset themselves and restore the windows back to operation.

The bridge crew, and the Admiral, waited with bated breath.

<< Arwing 01, In Orbit around Sauria >>

Something was happening! She could feel it, could hear it in the distance as so many voices all began to flow in the same direction. The pain of her injuries was making it difficult to concentrate on what they were all saying, but she could just barely make out the hundreds upon hundreds of voices all filled with a terrible excitement and curiosity.

“What the hell?” Fox said, her catching him pivot his head around the cockpit and out into space. “They’ve all stopped shooting?”

She didn’t understand what was going on, but something horrible was coming! All the excitement she felt, the curiosity pulling over a thousand minds into a trance, was hiding something so dark that she couldn’t wrap her head around it. They were all thinking the same thing, that something was ‘complete’, that something was ready!

“Th-they’re going to do something!” She told Fox, not knowing what else to say, her helplessness gnawing at her bones as she continued in vain to single out a voice in the distance that could reveal what was going to happen.

“You’ve got that right, the fighters on our tail all just peeled off!” He replied, Krystal hearing a lot more than that in his head, a man trying to recount his every encounter, his every battle, assessing and reviewing his own tactics, all so that he could predict what the enemy was planning to do, but coming up empty.

A bright light filled the cockpit, blinding both of them. The thousands of voices around her were suddenly fixated on the light. She felt their confusion, their excitement, the sudden panic, their terror. Hundreds of voices vanished, like a hole had simply appeared in the orchestra of souls, shattering the harmony of its music. As Fox blinked away the light, his confusion and anxiety palpable, she could only scream.

He pulled her close, she could hear him asking her what was wrong as tears fell down her cheeks, the voices of hundreds were suddenly gone from her mind like they’d never existed. Every single voice gone, all of them, they were dead! They were all dead, she knew they were dead, how could she know they were all dead!

“What? Wait, no, I’m fine, Slippy, what’s that?” Fox was talking to someone now, his thoughts distracted, being pulled in multiple directions. He tried to caress her, hoping to silence her, his hand moving over her mouth as she wept, her scream muffled by his hand.

“What the hell was that light!” He shouted into his radio.

“What do you mean that was a weapon!” He shouted again.

<< C.A.S. Eternal, In Orbit around Planet Sauria >>

Admiral Dachshund was on the bridge of his flagship, having only just stood up from his seat, his hands still gripped tight to the armrests as he blinked his vision clear. His bridge crew were in a panic, his helmsman was requesting orders for what to do, for where to go. Tactical was coordinating weapons fire, Communications was in a frenzy.

“Admiral, we lost contact with the Duchess!” An officer shouted from Comms.

“What’s their status, report?” He asked, prying his hands off the seat, and stepped forward, pointing to his helmsman to hold position. Dachshund couldn’t risk a maneuver right now when he didn’t fully understand what the enemy had just done. That white light had preceded some kind of weapons fire!

“S-Sir, they’re gone.” Comms replied.

“Gone? I want a report!” He shouted back.

“Wait, the Sheridan has just reported they’ve lost visual contact with the Sinclair and her escorts.” The officer replied, the dog’s voice beginning to tremble.

“I’ve lost another,” the officer next to him replied, his hand pressed to his headset, knuckles going white under his fur. “No one can make visual contact with the Duchess or her escorts. The entire formation is gone!”

“Hail them!” the Admiral demanded.

“They’re gone, Admiral! They aren’t there anymore!” was the strained reply, the officer’s voice wavering with notes of fear. “It’s like they just vanished!”

Two battleships and their cruisers gone, like that? That was ten vessels, a whole fifth of his fleet! How could they just be... Gone! What kind of weapon could do that?

Fear then gripped him, as soon as it hit him that he’d ordered his entire fleet to assume a tight defensive formation...

“We- We must split our forces! Order the fleet to spread out! Now! Do it now, dammit!” The Admiral shouted. The Iron Shield had been broken.