

ON THE BATTLEFIELD

by
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"I repeat, this is Lieutenant Lucas Weissritter, Gyrfalcon Charlie-Echo-Niner-One-Two, requesting immediate assistance and pickup. Under pursuit from three bogeys, identification type unknown. Coordinates attached to this message."

Flipping off the recorder, Lucas immediately yanked the controls hard to the right, the force of the vernier thrusters jerking the badger in his seat as a plasma bolt shot through the space he had been about to occupy a moment before. With a silent curse, he tapped out the command to attach his location and put the message on repeat, then returned to concentrate on dodging the enemy fire.

It had been such a simple mission. Ride in unpowered, hitchhiking on an asteroid until he could pass within scanning range of the Republic base, grab some low-power scans, then ride the asteroid back out-system. Nice easy in-and-out. When he let that first trickle of power flow through the circuits of his stripped-down Gyrfalcon Frame however, all hell broke loose.

The base was on the outskirts of the Klovo system, not exactly prime strategic material. What little intel the Commonwealth had had suggested a couple of light patrols; maybe 5-6 light class Frames. When he'd peeked over the rock however, sensors had picked up at least 15, and a Vegan ship that he hadn't been able to identify. No doubt it was someone important, which meant he just HAD to get this info into Altairan hands.

Releasing the controls, the beleaguered tapped a quick series of commands into the console in front of him, then gritted his teeth as he felt the randomizer kick in and send the Frame veering off on a brand new vector. His ride home wasn't supposed to be here for another week, so he just had to keep dodging and hope that-

"This is Alpha-Bravo-Nine-Sixer-Two, to Altairan Commonwealth Gyrfalcon. Cut to course One-seven-nine by Three-four-two, maximum thrust. Over."

Yes! Lucas felt the urge to fist-pump, but the widely varying accelerations made any sort of large movement risky. "This is Gyrfalcon Charlie-Echo-Niner-One-Two, acknowledging," he responded as he toggled the comm switch and wrenched the Frame onto the given course. "ETA to contact?"

"How about right now?" echoed a second voice. A moment later, three- no, four- shapes rocketed past Lucas's unit, appearing on his radar as they lit off their IFF(Internal Friend-or-Foe) transmitters and charged in on the suddenly outnumbered Vegan Frames. Baring his teeth in a feral grin, the grim badger pilot tossed his former opponents one last middle finger before angling in towards the carrier in the distance, it's flashing green icon like a sign from heaven.

Lucas found himself mildly impressed as he watched from the pilot deck, his rescuers landing with a precision that quite a few Altairan pilots would have envied. Even though the fine movements were all computer-controlled, the surety with which his rescuers operated their Frames spoke highly of their

piloting skills.

Smiling, he took another swig of mead from the space-safe foil pouch, and swung down, gliding in the free-fall down towards the four humanoid machines. In design, their Lanner medium-weight Frames were similar to his own Gyr Falcon, but a large part of that was due to the necessities and shortcuts that the war had forced upon them.

It had begun a scant few years ago, with a garbled transmission from fabled Terra, the homeworld of the Creators. No one ever knew what had happened to it in the distant past or to the creatures called humanity that had given birth to the multitude of races today, but here was a scrap of information, nearly lost to the void!

Unfortunately, the direction of the signal couldn't be determined, but Altairan and Vegan alike had worked together to decode the fragment. None of the video and most of the audio were beyond recovery, but a few words could be made out... "Fleed," "Dizer" and "Vegan."

Both sides immediately blamed the other- the Vegans claimed innocence and that they had undoubtedly been working to protect the last humans; while all of Altair knew the truth, that the Vegans had been responsible for the loss of Terra.

It takes time to turn tools of peace into weapons of war, and so machines of construction were turned to destruction. Frames that had been used to construct space stations or mighty skyscrapers were armed and sent into battle, and when those were lost, new ones were built. It was easier after all to replace equipment that you have skilled pilots for, than to train brand new pilots on brand new equipment when you're fighting for your lives.

As for the very idea of the Frames themselves, some might question the wisdom of using a humanoid body design at all. When corporations found that said design allowed for the same equipment to be used on the ground or in space, thanks to the partial inertia neutralizers that had just recently been made viable, they chomped at the bit to turn them out. The rest, as they say, was history.

The Lanner model itself resembled in style the old gryphons of Terran legend. The head was shaped similar to a bird's, housing external cameras behind blue lenses that resembled eyes above the dedicated ECM/ECCM module, itself stored within a beak-like structure. The sensor fins rising above to the left and to the right resembled feline ears, completing the resemblance.

The body itself was bulky, as it contained the cockpit, the neutralizer, as well as the fuel cells powering the Frame. The armor was at its thickest there, over the most vital of locations, and had been crafted to resemble a boxy breastplate of a knight of old, complete with pauldrons of sorts that protected the shoulder joints from direct attack.

As he drew closer, Lucas realized these must be the newest model Lanners, as he could spot several panel lines suggesting that the torso could separate. A chest cockpit had always been one of the issues of their design, but he'd heard rumors from a few older pilots that the Commonwealth had found a way to incorporate an ejection system into the newer models.

A pair of what appeared to be folded wings rose over the shoulders of the Frames. On his Gyr Falcon, they were intended to be used for heat dissipation, but these ones looked like they could serve as actual wings. Must be for the ejection system, the badger thought as he touched down lightly before the

grounded Frames.

Steam hissed from several concealed vents as cooling systems in the folded, digitigrade legs kicked in, releasing the rest of the waste heat built up from the fighting minutes before. As it cleared, the cockpit hatches rose and Lucas found himself muzzle-to-muzzle with the pilots that had covered his escape.

As the flight leader tossed the neural web 'met back into the cockpit, shaking her hair loose, Lucas pursed his lips in a soft involuntary whistle. Rather than the thick muscular build that badgers like himself sported, the pilot was a sleek (and damn sexy in his opinion) sharkgirl. Her head was all sharp, angular curves, reminiscent of the predator that her ancient ancestors had spliced into themselves. Her golden hair drifting almost like a halo in the null gravity of the hangar before practiced hands reached back to tie it off.

Her pilot suit hugged her body like a second skin, emphasizing her natural, more feminine curves. The way it hugged the curve of her chest and the swell of her hips was almost hypnotizing, but anyone who had piloted for several years was used to such sights by now. Of course, Lucas corrected himself with a mental grin, just because you're used to the scenery doesn't mean you can't appreciate it!

As she stepped out, her finned tail swung free, and with practiced ease she used its momentum to send her down to the hangar floor. There was a leashed ferocity there, underlaid with grace, and Lucas found himself not sure whether to drool or crap himself. Deciding to do neither, he took another swig of his drink, then offered his free hand to the shark gal. "Thanks for the save. Lt Lucas Weissritter, callsign Stripetease, formerly of the 3rd Colovian Guard."

The pilot took his hand in a clasp, giving it a firm squeeze that almost made him wince. "Lt Commander Melissa Alteisan, callsign Skybyte. 26th Selgar Lancers." Flashing the badger a smile full of teeth, she openly looked him over and raised an eyeridge. "Stripetease, eh?"

"Lost a bet," Lucas answered with a grin and a shrug, trying to resist the urge to shake his hand as she released it. "Thought I was a goner, 'til you all showed up."

"You can thank Gusher for that," The blue-clad and brown-skinned shark thumbed over at the pilot of the third Lanner, bouncing her way across the hangar deck towards them. "She's handy with a scanner, even if she doesn't know when to shut up."

"I heard that!" Nearly tripping over an anchor, 'Gusher' landed firmly, if not gracefully, next to the two pilots. "Just because I happen to like talking about what I enjoy—"

"Skip it," Melissa said, giving the female pilot a more friendly smile than she'd given the appreciative badger. "I was just filling in our flyboy here about your skills with the sensors, not your skills in bed."

Lucas tried not to snicker, turning it into an aborted snerk as he got a better look at the flight's EW officer. Like her superior, she was of aquatic descent as well, though far less predatory. At a guess, perhaps of dolphin descent. Where the Lt Cmdr was all sharp angles and curves, 'Gusher' was nothing but curves; thick of thigh and breast. With her short-cut hair, no doubt many would find her attractive.

"Lt. Layla Calloway, callsign Gusher," the 'phin said as she shook hands with Lucas. "Maybe sometime you can show me how you got your callsign, and I'll show you mine," she finished with a wink, her

voice dropping almost into a purr on the last part. Lucas just gave her a smile and a nod; a romp with her might be fun, but he was still far more interested in her superior.

"Who was it that-burrrrrrrp- got the first kill though?" The third pilot introduced himself with a deep belch. While his head and tail gave away his skunk heritage, in shape he was far more akin to Lucas himself. Where Lucas's stockiness was attributed to muscle though, this unnamed musteline obviously had dunk far too much for far too long, judging by the size of his gut. "Sgt. Ike O'Shannasy, callsign Gaskunk. Pleasure to meecha."

"Likewise," the badger said as his smile became far more forced. He didn't have to ask where this fellow had gotten his callsign from; his breath made it far too obvious. Noticing only three bodies on the floor now, Lucas looked back to Melissa, who had unzipped the first few inches of her flightsuit, enough to get more comfortable, and more pleasingly from Lucas's point of view, enough to show a fair amount of dark brown cleavage. "Where's your fourth?"

The sharkgirl looked around, then let an exasperated sigh. "That's Gildor, our scout. He hates being around here when they start working on our Frames." She thumbed over her shoulder at the techs starting to swarm over the kneeling metal forms behind them. "Sensitive hearing, you know."

"Rabbit?" Lucas hazarded a guess, but Melissa shook her head.

"Bat."

"So," Ike interjected, the skunk slapping both Lucas and Melissa on the back, "Let's head on down to the Dive and you can fill us in on what we're gonna be going up against next."

"What makes you say-"

"We're not stupid," Layla cut Lucas off mid-question. "Our relief isn't due here for another three days, and from the way you were throwing that distress signal, you weren't expecting help either. So looks like whatever you found is gonna be our dish."

"Fair 'nough," the badger conceded as the group made it's way towards the transit tube. "Well it was originally supposed to be a basic recon mission..."

As space patrols tend to last weeks at a time before making port, most ships include a lounge of some fashion or other, typically well stocked in whatever cooks or pours. Despite serving the same function, each ship tended to develop their own nicknames for such a place, such as Down Below or Space Waste. On the Amaterasu, it was known simply as "The Dive."

The lights were dim at the moment, as the ship had apparently been in the middle of its "night" cycle when they'd picked up the running battle on sensors. Now that the commotion had ended temporarily, most of the crew had gone back to bed, leaving the lounge to the four pilots.

Ike let out a low whistle before pausing to chug down another few gulps of some concoction he'd put together behind the empty bar. Wiping the foam off his muzzle with a sleeve, he shook his head at the

badger who was taking a long drink of his own. "You don't do anything by halves, do you?"

Lucas's tongue darted out to clean any foam from his lips before replying, as the two aquatics watched on in amusement. "Well, if it had been up to me that base would have been long abandoned. I still don't see-"

"And that's why you're a Lieutenant," Melissa interjected with a toothy smile. "I know you think you've heard this before, but space is big. Really big."

"Bigger than that horse's-"

Melissa's tail shot out like brown lightning, the fins slapping across Layla's mouth and silencing the 'phin with a loud smack. As the chastised dolphin rubbed her cheek, Melissa continued as if she hadn't been interrupted. "Anyways, if someone wanted to bad enough, they could amass a huge fleet and head straight for your home system, knock the hell out of it, then come back and clean up. There's no blockades, no stopping a determined ship from going anywhere, except one thing: supplies."

She paused to take a drink herself of something bright purple that smelled vaguely of seaweed, then continued. "I doubt you've checked the maps, but this base is right on the edge of a miniature rift that leads straight to Altair. No one cared about it before because most of the fighting is over near Helix IV, but it looks like someone on the other side decided to finally roll the dice."

"Just fuckin' great," Lucas murmured before taking another deep draught of mead. "So we're all that stands between an enemy strike force and home. Just fuckin' great."

"You got it in one," Melissa shot him a small smile, this one with a bit less in the way of visible teeth. "It's too small for a true invasion, but infrastructure like orbital yards are nice fat juicy targets," she paused to tear off a chunk of some cooked bird in demonstration, making sure to make her chewing as loud as possible before finishing her sentence. "And all it would take is a few asteroids accelerated to fractional cee velocities from the outer system to cripple that for years."

"They wouldn't dare!" This time it was the sergeant who spoke up, the skunk's beady eyes narrowing. "Kinetic strikes have been outlawed since the Accord of-"

"So what?" Layla drowned him out with a sigh, twirling a lock of her hair in one finger. "Don't you think High Command would have done it if they thought they could get away with it?"

"You... have a point," Ike responded grudgingly. "But why not do it with a single ship then? Why this much force?"

Lucas rubbed the bridge of his muzzle in thought. The pieces were all there, but they didn't make sense. Not that it was his job to make sense of it, but it beat sitting around swapping dirty jokes like half his last tour of duty had been. Of course the other half of it being swapping beds hadn't hurt, he mentally added with a quick glance at the shapely shark across the table.

A shark whose mind was as sharp as her body, he revised as she spoke again. "Then we'd just rebuild. I bet if we had access to the records of that ship and those Frames, they would all be marked as disposed or AWOL. The reason it's only that size is it was as large as they could get and still be able to disavow it if their plan fails. Which of course it will." Her smile this time was full of those sharp teeth

and cold as space itself.

"Damn straight!" Ike raised a mug in salute, then let out a resounding belch. "To the Commonwealth!"

"To the Commonwealth!" 3 voices echoed back, and 4 mugs clanked together in accord.

Eventually, Lucas had excused himself after catching himself eyeing the Lt Cmdr for probably the thousandth time, imagining what he'd like to do to her. No one else had seemed to notice, thanks to the steady flow of alcohol, but from the buzz in the back of his head he had a feeling that if he'd drunken any more he might have tried to go further than looking.

Would that have been such a bad thing? He couldn't help turning that thought over in his head as he lay on the bed in his temporary quarters, clad only in boxers and sporting a bit of a bulge still at the images floating in the back of his mind.

It wasn't that he was considered bad-looking by most, as that dolphin's reaction has shown. Only about 5' tall, as opposed to the nearly 6' shark or five-and-a-half of the 'phin, he could only have been described as stocky. Every bit of it was muscle however, and for a moment he recalled how one particular past bedpartner had loved to trace along the muscles underneath his dark-colored fur, finding the scars here and there from his years of combat experience.

She'd spoken of an ancient legend from pre-Diaspora Terra too, of other races of humans that may have existed, much the way all the different races of fur and skin existed alongside one another. She had spoken of elves and gnomes, but she had been sure that somehow Lucas must have descended from the stock of a race called dwarves. If they had existed(which the few documents that still survived seemed to contradict) they were a fairly strong match, apart from the lack of something called a beard. When she lent him a copy of the stories she'd read, he'd found himself admiring their work ethic and methods of recreation, though he'd preferred bedding as much as drinking, and there's been no mention-

BZZT!

The buzzer on his door shook the badger out of his thoughts. As it buzzed a second time, he sat up and called out, "Enter," though he had no idea who'd bother to be stopping by on this boat.

The door swished open silently, and to his surprise Lt Calloway stepped through. The slightly chubby phin had left her flight suit behind apparently, as she was barely clad in a halter top a size too small for her bounteous breasts and a pair of dark navy panties that hugged her wide hips. The flight suit hadn't hid much before, but now he could see almost every curve of shiny grey skin, catching the room's light and reflecting it slightly as the door closed behind her.

Layla licked her lips, but the badger couldn't tell from here if it was nervousness, or.. something else. "I... couldn't sleep, so I thought I'd come see if you wouldn't mind some company," she said in her whistling, slightly musical voice.

"I never mind company," Lucas responded tentatively as he adjusted his position on the bed, making room for her to sit there if she'd like. "After all, out here you never know what's going to come next."

Flashing him a smile, the 'phin crossed the small-ish quarters and took a seat beside him, placing her hand atop his. At the touch of her skin, Lucas found himself hyper-aware of the chub he was still sporting within his boxers. Had she noticed? Or did he care if she did, he found himself thinking as she leaned a bit closer, coincidentally giving him a nice view of her cleavage, straight down into her stretched halter.

"I... couldn't help but notice that you seemed pretty... interested in the commander," she whispered, her careful choice of words turning gears in the aroused badger's mind and answering several questions for him. "I'm not her, but you seem very... interesting... to me," As she murmured the word interesting, she turned slightly, her large breasts squishing against his shoulder as her other hand brushed over the cloth-covered hump in his boxers, stroking her fingertips over the already growing length hidden under it.

Lucas hesitated for a brief moment, but once he felt her touch through the thin cloth, he felt what little inhibitions he had drain away like the amber liquid he'd been downing less than an hour before. "I'm always up for a little recreation," he rumbled as he seized her wrist and forced her hand down against his hidden erection, letting her feel the firm shape underneath. His other hand darted from underneath hers as she let out a surprised mewl, pressing firmly against her back as he leaned up and forced a firm kiss against her rounded nose and muzzle.

As his tongue lapped against her smooth lips, she parted them and her tongue darted out to play. Giving his bulge a gentle squeeze, she shifted her grip to shuck him of that single cloth barrier, breathing through her nose as she toyed with his tongue. Or was it the other way around now?

As his bare badgercock rose, freed from captivity, Lucas released one claw and dragged it down her back from neck to dorsal, causing the horny phin to yelp slightly as it parted cloth and left a small red line in her clear grey skin, her plump tits pushing free of the fabric, no longer able to contain their curves.

She only had time to give that throbbing, vital maleness a few strokes, before he took her by the arms and practically threw her onto the bed, the mattress bouncing slightly as he climbed over top of her, throwing away the now-useless halter as those ripe tits spread on her chest, her stiff pink nipples poking up like buttons on a console of pleasure. She lifted her hands to stroke over the fur of his bank, panting as she gazed up at the male badger, his body like a god of war, that wonderfully thick cock hanging between his legs making her quiver slightly in anticipation.

Not noticing or caring about her reactions, Lucas slid down a bit, grasping at her left tit with one clawed hand, squeezing it hard as he lowered his muzzle to the other. Layla yelped softly in mingled pain and pleasure as she felt his claws and teeth poking her shiny skin, digging a little into that soft titflesh as he gave those ripe breasts a firm suck and teased the nipple in his mouth with a tonguetip.

Giving that full, swollen breast a few firm sucks, he turned his attention to the matter of that navy-colored cloth barring the way to his true destination. Letting the rolling titflesh fall from his mouth, he brought his claws down and sliced through the straps on the sides of her panties, another soft clicking yelp escaping as he drew two more red lines in her soft, feminine flesh. Rising up on his knees to peel off the final barrier, he gave her another good look at that throbbing, jutting badgercock, from veined shaft to swollen head as that dampened cloth was thrown aside.

The horny 'phin could only stare at that deliciously thick piece of wonderful male equipment as Lucas angled himself between her legs, guiding the tip up against those pursed netherlips and letting them barely kiss it. A soft mewl slipped from her rounded muzzle at the feel of that heated touch, but as soon as he had it lined up, Lucas let his hips fall and fed her hungry pussy every last inch on one hard, quick thrust that made the bed creak and her large breasts quiver, their smooth curves dotted with spots of red as well.

There was nor foreplay in this; no sense of gentleness. Letting her head fall back, Layla closed her eyes, panting and mewling as she felt that wonderfully thick badger shaft stretching her surprisingly tight dolphin cunt, her huge tits shaking with the bed as he slammed that length into her like a stallion breeding his prize mare. Her hands left his scarred, furred back as he grabbed her upper arms and forced them down against her side, taking full control over the submissive aquatic underneath him as that rigid maleness drove again and again between those thick soft-grey thighs, her finned tail slapping the end of the bed with each deep thrust.

Her mind a haze, Layla lost herself in a world of pure sensation. That huge cock filling every corner of her slick little pussy. Those sharp claws digging into her biceps. The heavy breath of the badger dominating her blowing against her own heated skin. The pinpricks of pain from where he had left his mark on those bouncing tits. The squishing sounds of her soaking pussy being filled with each slap of their hips. Every moment and movement pushing her closer to what she wanted, what she needed. What she craved.

She was not the first, however, and almost simultaneously she felt that sudden explosion of warm goo deep inside her body and sharp badger teeth clamping onto her shoulder. She let out a mewling, clicking cry as she felt that thick badger cream being pumped into her hungry womb, Lucas's body tense above her as he growled his pleasure into her shoulder, clamped in his jaws. As that flood of warmth filled her, she found her own release as well, quivering and mewling her moans under the climaxing badger as her convulsing cunny clenched at the thick meat filling it, her own juices squirting out around the pulsing shaft, revealing the source of her nickname.

After a nameless period of time somewhere between too soon and infinity, the thick shots of warm creamy badgercum slowed and stopped, pointed teeth relaxing their grasp of soft grey flesh. The river of honeyed 'phin juice trailed to nothingness, and worn muscles relaxed around the thick intruder they had been milking. For minutes afterwards, the two lay there, badger atop dolphin, neither speaking as they recovered from the sudden bout of passionate sex that had struck with the suddenness of a well-planned ambush.

A well-planned... The final pieces fell into place, and carefully, Lucas nudged his worn-out bedpartner's cheek with his nosepad. "You were planning on this, weren't you?" he murmured softly, the answer already half-expected.

"Mmhmm," Layla responded in a self-satisfied tone, giving her tailfins an idle flip. "Since I saw you in the hangar I wanted you on me and in me, and from how you were looking at 'lissa, I figured this was my only shot." She nuzzled into his shoulder a little, wincing as the stinging of the various scratches was starting to cut through the gentle haze her mind was still floating in. "You know, you're almost as rough as she is..."

If there was one thing Lucas hated, it was being manipulated, but he just couldn't quite find it in him to be angry at the girl whose body had yielded so wonderfully to his own. Carefully, he withdrew his

shrinking maleness from her warm confines, a gooey string of their mingled essence connecting them for a moment as she let out a soft mewl of half-hearted protest. Once out however, he lay back against her, his sticky shaft smearing their juices across her belly as a little leftover dribbled out onto her thighs and the bed.

With the same serene acceptance that she'd taken that powerful, primal mating, she snuggled her thick curves up against the badger's stout, musclebound form, stroking her fingers along hidden scars as she listened to him breathing. Gradually, the rhythm gave way to the regular pattern of well-deserved sleep, and not long after she allowed herself to fall under its gentle waves as well.

Everyone else was already in the briefing room by the time the door slid open to admit Lucas. After helping bandage Layla's shoulder, he'd loaned her a bathrobe that barely fit (and barely covered her) to get back to her own quarters. As soon as she'd left, he'd taken a nice long shower, and almost forgot what time it was until his chronometer beeped a 15-minute warning to the briefing. It'd been a quick scramble to dry out his fur and get into at least a T-shirt and shorts, but as he glanced at the time display in the room, he felt some slight relief that he'd at least made it on time.

As he strode over to take a seat, his eyes quickly scanned the room. The ship's captain, a smallish canine of cocker spaniel descent, had already taken the podium, and was watching him with mixed annoyance and resignation. Evidently she was used to the pilot shenanigans which were common among the deep space patrols. Next to her on stage was the primary flight officer, a male wolf who almost seemed to tower over his captain in his naval blues and greys.

The first row held a couple more naval personnel, likely the pilots for whatever scheme the captain and her staff had cooked up. The only others here in fact were the other Frame pilots, and he nodded to them as he slid into a seat on the third row.

Ike returned the nod, the skunk wearing a rumpled flight uniform that had obviously seen better days. The two aquatics were a little further down, both of them wearing loose-fitting T-shirts, though only Melissa was wearing pants with them. Layla merely smiled, but the glare that the sharkgirl gave him made his stomach dip slightly. There was something going on there, and briefly he wondered how much the 'phin had shared with the other aquatic.

The fourth pilot of the flight had finally put in an appearance as well, giving Lucas his first look at 'Gildor.' Immaculately dressed in the official pilot's uniform, he was of a size with the badger, but for the slim frame compared to Lucas's stout build. The bars of a Lieutenant flashed on the bat's collar as he returned the nod to the badger sliding into one of the many empty seats.

"Now that we're all here," the spaniel's high pitched voice rang out, "I'll start with an update on the situation. At 2200 hours yesterday, our guest pilot discovered that the Vegans had been massing a small strike force at their Klovo base. Up until now this base has been relatively unimportant in the scheme of things, but with the reverses they've suffered in the McCarthy and Gorlam systems, we believe they are going to go for a deep strike on Altair itself."

One of the helmsmen up front let out a low whistle, but shut up as the captain's gaze turned on him. "Once they leave, we have no way of tracking them, so we have to disrupt this operation now, before

they get any farther. They did detect our scout so they are likely going to move up their timetable. TacOps gives us two days on the outside for them to launch, and I expect them to leave well before then."

The lupine flight officer's fingers danced across the display before him, and the holotank behind the stage came to life. Floating in it was a representation of Klovo's asteroid belt and the Vegan base hidden near it. Red lights flickered to life across it as the captain spoke.

"From the recon data, they've augmented their patrols with three more flights of light Frames. There were no medium or heavier frames reported, but I would expect at least one flight of them as well." Additional lights flickered to life in the orange of an unconfirmed sighting. "The ship docked with the base has been identified as a Metron class light cruiser."

Lucas found his eyes flicking towards Melissa a moment before going back to the tank. So far, it matched up with what the Lt Cmdr had guessed at the bar last night. But just how were they going to deal with an enemy that outnumbered them this much, even if his side had the weight advantage?

"Now since we have their base currently zeroed in thanks to our scout, we are going to take a page from their book of what they were undoubtedly planning to do to us. The Tiger's Breath will deploy Frames, then travel above the ecliptic on baffled thrust. Once there, we will launch missiles with laser warheads also on baffled thrust. They should reach main drive burnout here," she indicated a marker that sprung up in blue as she spoke. "At this point they will be purely ballistic until they reach striking distance here." She indicated another blue marker there.

"At this point their sensors may detect the missiles, which is where your team comes in." Five green lights flashed to life, near the edge of the asteroids. "Lt Tylor will remain in a low power state, while Lt Cmdr Alteisan will lead the remainder of the flight on what would appear to be a normal strike mission. The Vegans know we operate in units of four, so this should look like a desperate last minute attempt to stop them. You four will "be surprised" by the amount of enemy resistance, and start to retreat this way." She indicated a curving path in purple, leading away from the base in a direction almost exactly opposite the vector of the missiles.

"While they're busy looking at the noise you make, Lt Tylor will monitor the missiles. Once he believes they are close enough, he will bring up their maneuvering drives and guide them in for the kill." Green triangles flared to life just past the asteroids, and curved in on the base. A moment later, they vanished, as did the icons of the ship, base, and any nearby enemy Frames. "At this point, we will move back in for cleanup. Any questions?"

The captain looked around, but no one raised a hand. "Very well. Operation will begin at 1900 hours. Lt Weissritter, I'd like you to stay a moment. The rest of you are dismissed."

As the others shuffled out, Lucas made his way over to the two superiors waiting on the stage. "Yes sir?" he asked, coming to attention.

The flight office was the one to respond this time. "I'm afraid we don't have much in the way of Gyrfalcon parts on board, but we need your Frame to maintain the illusion that the Frame assault is all of our units. I'd like you to sit down with our head tech and work out what armaments we can mount on your Frame. Just don't forget that you won't have the armor of the others, and don't overload it."

"I never do, sir." Lucas acknowledged.

"Dismissed."

As the two officers turned to discuss some finer point of the coming battle, Lucas strode out the door and was promptly grabbed and forced up against the wall with a surprised yelp.

From inches away, hard yellow eyes bored into his own, framed in an angled, brown-skinned face that he had seen but moments before. "Layla told me about last night," Melissa stated in a cold, matter-of-fact voice. "I don't mind others playing with my toys, but I do not like it when they damage them."

Clenching down on any fear he may have had, Lucas returned the glare eye-to-eye. "She seemed to like it to me." Something changed in her expression at his defiant response, but the badger could not quite put a finger on it.

"Well, well," she responded, a tinge of venomous honey entering her voice. "It's not often I find someone with the balls to speak back." Lucas fought the urge to shiver as he felt her own claws trail down his belly through the cloth, before reaching around to cup his crotch in her palm, her left arm keeping him braced against the metal wall. "Maybe I ought to do something about that."

"You'll never know what you missed out on then," Lucas replied in a voice much calmer than he felt. "If you can really take what I can give."

"Oh, I take what I want," The shark's voice had taken on a slight purr, reminiscent of a hunting tiger who had found her prey, and she gave his hidden maleness a firm rub through the fabric with her thumb. "And I'm thinking I may take you up on that offer."

A swishing sound cut through the rising tension, and the two quickly separated, straightening their uniforms as the captain and flight officer stepped out. The spaniel looked at the two and raised an eyeridge. "Something going on?"

Lucas was the first to respond. "The Lt Cmdr was just filling me in on her normal tactics, sir."

She turned and looked up at the towering shark, hands behind her back. "Is this true, commander?"

"Yes sir," Melissa responded without hesitation. "I was just letting him know how we work around here so he can be prepared. Sir."

"Very well, carry on," she told them with a hint of resignation before heading down the corridor and out of sight.

As soon as the two officers were gone, Lucas was reminded that it was still just him and this lovely, dangerous shark. Lifting his head he looked her in the eye once again, as if daring her to continue.

Placing hands on hips, Melissa flashed him a smile full of sharp, pointy teeth. "It would be a shame, wouldn't it, to let that go to waste. Meet me in my quarters at 0300 hours, and we'll see what you have to offer."

Lucas tilted his head slightly as he parsed the time on that. "But that's after the mission-"

"Exactly. Consider it additional motivation to survive." Giving him another pointy grin, she turned and strode off with a sway in her hips, finned tail swinging like a pendulum behind her as Lucas watched her go. While she turned the corner, he found himself recalling that ancient phrase, 'Be careful what you wish for...'

Performing a few last checks on the controls, Lucas nodded in satisfaction. All systems were green, including the additional weapons that the tech crew had managed to finagle on. The Gyr Falcon had the same basic design of the Lanners, albeit an older and lighter weight version, so thankfully there'd been a few spare weapons that could be mounted on the Frame's frame.

After a little thought, he'd decided to keep it simple. To the shoulder mount he'd added a 6-pack missile launcher. Of course, like the missiles the ship would be using, these also used bomb-pumped lasers for the warhead, as explosions lose most of their force on any targets with even partial neutralization of inertia. They also provided a much better stand-out range than the traditional tacnukes that they had replaced, providing for a better chance of a soft kill.

For direct armaments, the left forearm now mounted a medium-strength cutting laser. It may be a workhorse weapon among the Commonwealth forces, but that's because it was among the most efficient weapons, despite what it lacked in effective range.

To offset that, the Frame's right hand now held another fairly recent development, a light anti-cannon. Since traditional explosives had become less than effective and laser-based weaponry still had the issue of diffusion, Commonwealth engineers had been looking for years for a solution, and had eventually hit upon the idea of harnessing antimatter projectiles. For safety reasons, they had limited it to external mounts such as the Frame-sized rifle he was now carrying, that way in case containment failed it would not hurt the machine or pilot before it could be tossed away. It had been due to be deployed at his old unit next year, but it seemed the Tiger's Breath had managed to acquire a case of the rifles, for 'testing' purposes.

Completing the ensemble, though he hoped not to have to use it, was the plasma saber generator attached to his Frame's right hip. Patterned after the ancient Terran legends that spoke of blades made of light from an ordinary cylinder, it was designed to patch into his Frame's internal power system once drawn and generate a blade of plasma contained by a very thin field of force. When struck, containment would fail at that spot and the plasma would eat away at whatever it hit. He hoped never to use it, but similar weapons had saved his life against the heat-sink-turned-axe of many a Vegan unit in past skirmishes.

Giving the thumb's up to the crew below, he sat back and waited for the click of the gantry connecting to the launch systems. In an emergency, they could have just re-launched from the landing deck, but the ship's linear catapult allowed for a much larger initial velocity.

Finally, it was time, and a rough male voice echoed through their comlinks. "Mission start. Extending linear catapult. Course is all clear. Skybyte, you have control."

"I have control," the Lt Cmdr's voice replied. "Melissa Alteisan, Lanner Command, launching."

Even in the shelter of his cockpit Lucas heard the deep hum of the electromagnets and felt the slight shock of the launch system sending so much metal down its length and out into empty space.

"Linear catapult recharging. Course is all clear. Gusher, you have control."

"Got it," Layla responded lightly over the radio. "Layla Calloway, Lanner EW, taking off!"

Another shock, and Lucas's gantry began to move, slotting into the back of the launch queue. The badger checked his harness, making sure it was secure as flight control transferred command to the next pilot.

"Ike O'Shannasy, Lanner Assault." A loud belch echoed across the comlink just before the catapult kicked in. "Let's do this!"

Another click, another handoff, and true to what Lucas had seen thus far, Gildor remained reserved in his acknowledgement. "Roger. Samuel Wrynn, Lanner Scout, going."

Finally, it was Lucas's turn, and he felt the lightning tingle of adrenaline pumping through his veins. If there was ever a time when he was looking towards impending combat as calmly as that bat had, it would be because he knew it was his time to die.

"Course all clear. Stripetease, you have control."

"I have control. Lucas Weissritter, Gyrfalcon Custom, moving out!"

As the catapult kicked in, magnetic fields reached out and grabbed the Frame's body, dragging it through what was essentially an over-sized, down-powered railgun, the G-forces pressed Lucas back into his seat. He always hated this part, but it only lasted a couple seconds as the machine rocketed out into space. As the acceleration ended, he felt the familiar feelings of null-G take over.

A few taps on the controls spread the heatsink-wings and fired small bursts of the verniers to bring him into formation with the rest of the squadron. A few more adjustments, and the radio crackled to life as invisible comm-lasers found their targets.

"Let's keep it high and tight, Dawn Flight." Melissa- no, Skybyte's voice was all business. "Once we pass the hour mark, no thrust bursts over one second. Gildor will break off the thirty minute mark to take his position. At the five minute mark, go weapons-free. One minute, Gusher lets them have an earful. And remember, I expect every one of you to come back alive, including our 'guest.'"

"Skybyte, off." And with that, Lucas settled in for the long wait to bring them into range.

Red-orange light illuminated the cockpit as plasma blade met heat-axe, and Lucas bit off another long string of profanity. Everything was mostly going according to plan, but dammit, it was rough out here!

As his Gyrfalcon held the first Vegan Frame at bay, he squeezed off a few shots from the antimatter

rifle at the second Frame chasing him, and allowed himself a grim smile as the machine momentarily became a ball of plasma. That still left the one before him, and-

Alarms rang out as a piercing beam of green light tore through the left leg of his Frame, touching off a small explosion as one of the servos gave out that sent it rocketing away from the axe-wielding opponent. "SHIT," he cursed between clenched teeth as he brought the tumbling frame under control and sought out the signature of the third Frame.

As his machine's head turned left and right, mirroring his searching for the enemy, he hoped the others were doing better. They'd been forced to split up to avoid any chances of the Vegans massing fire on a single target from that many sources, but it meant each pilot was on his own, at least until-

There! It was only a momentary flash, another green beam ripping through the space he had been but a moment ago, but it was enough. Flipping up the thumbguard, the beleaguered Altairan badger launched the three remaining laser-headed missiles he'd been saving, and seconds later that space was filled with stars of lasers as they shot out in every direction, tearing the Vegan sniper to pieces as they crossed through metal like a mass driver through cotton.

He didn't even have time to gloat however as the final survivor of his opponents came charging back in, swinging the heat-axe like a scythe. Firing his shoulder verniers, Lucas's Gyrfalcon ducked below the blade. Reacting almost as quickly, that ponderous, heated metal changed direction, biting heavily into the Frame's right wing and shoulder with a shower of sparks as it melted through the armor.

Alarms sounded again as the right arm holding the rifle went dead. Undeterred, Lucas brought up the machine's bird-like legs and fired the foot-thrusters directly into the midsection of the enemy unit, tearing the axe free of its grip as he pulled away. His maneuver must have caught the enemy by surprise as he hung there a moment too long, and with a quick snap of the left wrist the badger pilot sent his plasma sabre spinning, slicing through the machine's midsection moments before the residual power in it cut out.

For a split second, Lucas could see the engine within the Vegan Frame, burning like the heart of a star that it emulated. The moment passed, and another fireball bloomed, eating the remains of the machine that had contained it before winking out into nothingness.

Wary, he scanned immediate space and saw no other immediate opponents, although there were distant flashes from his comrades' own battles. Reaching up with the now-empty left-hand, he pulled the abandoned heat-axe free and spent a few moments to connect power receptacles that had never meant to be connected. The arm-laser wouldn't cut it on its own, but now he stood somewhat of a chance if any more found him.

Quickly he glanced at the mission clock, and smiled another of those grim smiles. Looked like it wouldn't matter anyways, as the missiles should be arriving in 3, 2, 1...

In that moment, as bomb-pumped lasers shot out like the rays of a star, a new sun took form where moments before had been a Vegan base and ship. It far put to shame the display of Lucas's own missiles moments before, the beams beyond any raver's dream as they ripped and stabbed through plate after plate of duranium and battle-steel, seeking the fusion reactor at the heart of each structure and setting them free to be the solar furnace each one had been denied being from birth. Lucas's external monitors dimmed, then dimmed again, as they tried to filter that amazingly destructive force, until finally, it

faded out to darkness once more.

And that, as they say, was that.

Making his way through the dimly lit corridors, Lucas tried once more to nail down what it was he was feeling, and found himself still just as unable to. Yet, he knew he wasn't going to give up on that challenge the sharkgirl had thrown at him.

The mop-up after the battle had been easily enough handled, and thankfully not a single person had been lost. Truth to tell, the euphoric high from winning an outmatched battle like that (despite the damaged limbs and the pitted and scarred armor) had made him forget all about the post-briefing "discussion." That was, until Melissa had, oh-so-casually, reminded him about his "personal debriefing" at 0300.

He had to admit he still wanted that body with those firm, round breasts, and sharp, almost severe curves; to take it and make it his. He was in her territory now though, and one doesn't easily challenge a huntress like her on her own turf. He wasn't about to back down now though, and taking a deep, fortifying breath, the badger rang the buzzer on her door.

"Come."

Stepping through, Lucas felt a surge of blood head southward, so-to-speak at what he found within. Lounging almost lazily on the couch was the lieutenant commander, but she was wearing less than nothing, if it could be called that. Most of her smooth brownish skin was bare to his gaze, her firm, rounded breasts emphasized by the black leather straps wrapping around her chest and under those gorgeous mounds. The dark leather met between those tempting orbs, leading into a strap that led down over a firm tummy before separating into two more straps that joined cuffs around her upper thighs. A few inches below that thigh-high leather boots covered the remainder of her legs, the material creaking slightly as one leg shifted position. And then, adding the spice to all the sugar, she flashed him another sharp-tooth-filled smile, eyeing him appraisingly.

"Well, well, what do we have here," she murmured, her voice cool and measured. "I do believe my new toy has arrived."

Mentally, the badger male slapped himself. He'd just come out of a life-threatening fight against 3-1 odds without a spec of fear, and a damn sexy shark was making him feel nervous? Stripping off his jacket and shirt, he tossed them without looking, the garments smacking into and sliding down the closing door as he strode forward. "We'll see who leaves who quivering, when this is done," he growled out, letting his desires leak into his tone.

"Oooh, a feisty one. I LIKE that," she almost cooed, rising to her feet in one smooth motion. Dark leather creaked as she swaggered up to the stripping badger, legs spread just enough to give him a glimpse at already moist nethers before closing the distance. "But it'll take a REAL male to satisfy me..."

Letting the belt go flying into a wall as he yanked it free, Lucas flashed her a tooth-filled grin that was

no less primal for the size of it. "Is that a challenge?"

Stepping up nose-to-muzzle with the dark-furred badger, she trailed claw-tipped fingers through his chestfur, her other sliding down into sagging pants to trail fingers over an already stiff badger shaft. "When isn't it?" she murred softly, her hand sliding down further to curl her fingers over his furred sack and press firmly against the underside of his heated fleshy rod. "Rather impressive cannon you're packing."

Smirking, Lucas let the pants fall and grabbed her toned rear with both hands. Giving the smooth globes a firm squeeze, he could feel the muscles flex with each twitch of her finned tail. Why don't you try it on for size then?"

Melissa gave a mock pout that never reached her eyes, her growing hunger visible in the dim light as she wrapped her lower hand around his thick badgercock. "Because that would be too easy," she whispered, curling her fingers to scratch thin lines in the skin underneath the thick fur of the badger's chest. Slowly, she gave that stiff shaft a few pumps as she started to lower herself onto her knees, licking her lips. "I think an appetizer is in order."

As she lowered herself however, Lucas took the initiative and pushed on her shoulders, leaning into it to send them both down onto the carpet, him straddling her midsection as she let out an oof, letting go of his malehood in surprise. "Nuh-uh, not with those teeth," he softly growled back as he scooted up, guiding that swollen meat between her rounded sharktits. "If you want a taste, this snack goes best with milk."

Her initial angry glare turned to something else as she felt that rounded shape slide between her firm, jutting breasts, and the pinpicks of his claws as he squished their soft flesh around his thick dick. "And what makes you think that's what I want," she growled softly in return as he began to hump against her bare breasts, the swollen tip peeking out from between her cleavage on each slide forward. Almost despite herself, she flicked her tongue out, tasting his flesh and the beginnings of his growing pleasure.

"Admit it, this is one cannon you can't wait to see fired," he murr-growled back, thrusting firmly against the shapely globes of warm shark titflesh. "You look good now, but a little white is just what you need."

"Perhaps," she conceded after a moments pause, her claws trailing through the fur of his legs as he rocked against the warm curves of her bust, his thick shaft sliding nicely between her smooth tits as his dribbling pre lubricated them, making them glisten in the room's dim light. "But not the way you think..."

Before he could protest. she lifted her legs and wrapped them around his neck, flipping him off her before continuing into a roll that left her resting on his legs, that drooling badger spire still firm and jutting from between his legs as if asking to be mounted. Without a moment hesitation, she rose up and impaled herself onto that thick badger dick with a satisfied moan.

On Lucas's part, the sudden strike took him by surprise, and before he could react, he found himself underneath the gorgeous hunter as she took every inch of his fat badgercock deep into her heated body. Sitting up, he reached for her shoulders again, but she seized both his arms and flashed him a hungry, feral grin.

"ah, ah, ah! We'll have none of that, shall we?" she murr-growled, tensing her legs and starting to rise and fall on that buried piece of firm badgermeat, massaging it with her strong, sweet pussymuscles that felt like they wanted to suck it right off him.

Returning the growl, he tried to yank his arms free, but her grip was like the bite of her ancestor species, and apart from a few useless scratches he couldn't break free. Baring his teeth, he tried to hump back up into that tight, slick grip that felt like heaven around his buried cock, but Melissa would have none of it. Each time he tried to meet her downward stroke into that wonderfully hot and wet sharkcunt, she would pause, or go down faster, or change the angle. He could feel that familiar boiling sensation as his pleasure grew, despite, or perhaps he admitted with a twinge of self-honesty, because of her control over the situation.

Panting heavily, he licked his lips, involuntary murr-rumbling as her squeezing passage and swift, irregular motions worked his swollen shaft with all the art of a master at her craft. From the pointed moans of his rider, he could tell that the enjoyment was mutual, and he found himself surrendering to the flowing motions of that curved body riding his badgercock so wonderfully, her eyes following her bouncing breasts as she hung before him. It wasn't going to be long now...

His climax came as a surprise to them both in its strength, and the horny shark let out an involuntary yelp as she felt his hot goo shoot straight into her unguarded womb, thick bursts of pearly male cream filling her with that familiar warmth she seldom felt. She could feel herself on the edge as she ground down against his crotch, her body drinking up every drop. She just needed a bit more... just a bit more...

As his climax trailed off, she finally hit hers, grinding firmly against his waist as her squeezing, grasping sharkcunt tried to drain his empty balls of even more of that thick male juice, her mouth hanging open as she mewled and moaned in pleasure above the worn-out, scratched badger.

Then that too, ended and Melissa found herself catching her breath, giving a few more strokes on that spent maleness with her slippery inner walls as she released his arms and rested her palms on his chest. Lucas barely noticed, head leaned back and arms laying loosely on the carpet as his own breathing slowly returned to normal.

he was the first to break the momentary silence as well. "Satisfied?" he murmured, suppressing a shiver as her heated flesh caressed still-sensitive skin.

"Not even," she responded after licking her lips, brushing some loose hair from her face. "You?"

"Bring it on," he replied, lifting himself up onto his elbows under her. "If you're not done, I'm not done."

Flashing him what must have been the first genuine pleasant smile he'd seen from her, she slid off the well-coated shaft, taking it in hand and giving it a few strokes. "You've got tenacity. I like that in my officers."

"As opposed to your toys?" he asked with a raised eyeridge, before biting his lip at the touches along that slippery shaft.

"I could use a fifth pilot on these long voyages," Melissa murmured, giving the warm flesh a gentle but firm squeeze. "If he were to prove himself worthy..."

Lucas let a soft mewlp slip out as she squeezed his spent maleness, but made himself look her directly in the eye. "In the bed or in the battlefield?"

Returning the stare moment-for-moment, the female shark slowly smiled. It was a smile colder than space, but her eyes glowed with a heat like that of the distant suns themselves. "Who says there's a difference?"