

*Tales of a  
Miscreant  
Book Two  
By: Sciberius*



*THE ROCK  
AND  
ROLL YEARS*



## CHAPTER ONE: WHAT'S THE BET

**“THAT’S INSANE.** Why do you need to know what all of our inner systems’ law enforcement and emergency services communication networks are named or classified as?” The Ssnarg Ambassador was extremely wary of giving this information to a species that had just demonstrated how they could conquer a portion of their own planet and apply devastating force against it in a matter of minutes. Now they were asking for critical network information for their most populated planetary systems.

“We do not know **anything** about the enemy except they shut down **all communications** as soon as they enter a system.” Admiral Thomas Nimitz was getting aggravated with yet another politician asking him if he really needed something to perform the tasks he had been assigned. “What can **you** tell me about the enemy other than that?” When he received no response the Admiral continued. “We have a map here of the systems that were taken, based upon the time that comms went dark until the time the star in that system went dark and we have a **few** questions.” He motioned to the holo-map that was on display and the systems would turn gray to indicate comms loss and then black when the star fell. After several systems were pincered off and left lit until others further in were captured then they too went dark having never been greyed out. After the third one the Admiral paused them map and asked, “We have no intel on when communications were lost in these systems, and we need to know why.” He gestured at the map with his hand and the three systems were highlighted in flashing red. “What can you tell me about this system and when the comms went dark on it?” The Admiral gestured towards one of the three highlighted systems.

The Alliance diplomats that had pushed back the hardest or their citizens had refused to let the primitive Terrans teach them anything about tactics were all present. The Continuum had tried to explain some of the Terrans’ thought patterns to these species, but they were chided as having been corrupted by the Terrans in some manner or another as they had been championing them since their discovery. Surely these Terrans were devious conmen that had reprogrammed the AI race from the inside out, but without access to their networks the Alliance members present could not prove it, and the AIs had long since refused any access to AI research even before Terrans were discovered to have existed. So, Eve was happy to participate in this orchestrated educational lesson that these primitives were about to layout for the most stubborn of the races. When none of the visiting representatives spoke up, Eve provided the answer just to get the lesson to move on. “There’s no information because they were unpopulated, and we do not have any communications coming from or going to them to be disrupted.”

“So, of all the systems along this ‘Invasion Line’ the ones that last the longest have zero populations in them. This system in particular would have been a strategic prize when it comes to taking over the ones near it and would have been easier to get to from the one that was taken before the others around it. Obviously the enemy has some way to detect life in a nearby system, or they have spies within your races that are providing them the information on what systems they can hit for maximum affect.” The Admiral concluded.

“Just because **your** race is so barbaric that it would do something like that,” the Ssnarg ambassador paused and growled before continuing, “I can assure you that **our** people are not.”

“Ambassador, we’re trying to explain this peacefully...” Admiral Helena Andropolis began before being cut off by the Ssnarg representative.

**“Females of your race** should learn that they are to be seen and **not** heard,” The Ambassador growled.

“**Fine** here’s what I offer. We gave you six months to raise an army to work with us so we can teach you how to defend yourselves, this will let us take the fight to the enemy. What we have seen from you so far doesn’t impress us. Your troops are obstinate, refuse to follow orders, refuse to head the advice of personnel that have decades of experience in conducting the operations that will be needed to take the fight to the enemy and even their leadership has been just as disrespectful to their peers. We have done everything we can to help you help yourselves but at every opportunity you have pushed back against us.” Admiral Nimitz continued before Admiral Andropolis could vent a fiery reply.

The Ssnarg Ambassador had enough of this peon trying to lecture him and pushed back, “If you had a **leader** to talk to I would be happy to. I am not going to waste my time listening to a **bellboy** no matter how fancy his uniform is.”

General Omar Pa’Leed broke into laughter at this and answered for the Admiral. “We are the leadership of the Terran Military, our civilians are not part of the alliance, yet. You come here to represent **your** leaders and races, then don’t even recognize that you have been talking to ours the whole time.” The Admiral just slowly shook his head with a sad smile on his face.

“**What**, why would the leaders of an entire race be willing to serve on the front lines?” A Satyr rep asked.

“Because we lead **from the front**. Our military forces were woken up first to ensure that it would be safe for our civilians to return without the fear of having to know the horrors that we are going to inflict upon **YOUR** enemies on **YOUR** behalf. **YOUR** races are facing extinction from a force you can’t tell me anything about, can’t tell me why they are attacking you, and **can’t stop**.” The admiral stressed your as potently as he could by leaning towards the Ssnarg Ambassador each time he said it. “My race was already extinct; this is a free second chance for us and we are willing to fight for it. If we lose,” the Admiral shrugged his shoulders during a pause, “no big deal we already had our second chance, but if you lose who is going to come along in 150 millennia to wake you up from extinction?” the Admiral asked.

The Ssnarg Ambassador was clearly vibrating with anger, the Satyr rep was shaking from fear and the rest of the reps nearby were somewhere in between those two responses or one of disconnect from not being able to understand just what the Terran was getting at. To try and save some face he blurted out, “You have done your job, you gave us the weapons and tools we need to defend ourselves. You claim to be able to defend us, yet you come to us with your hat in hand asking for more people and equipment and nothing other than empty promises that only you will be able to stop this enemy from wiping us out. We haven’t seen anything of your capabilities except for a few examples of some stupid tactics that usually result in more deaths for our people than your own and some non-sentient species that now dominate your home world. Yet, you want to control the networks of my home world like some kind of gods from the past and we’re supposed to grovel at your feet and beg for rescue? I think not.”

“You think we didn’t hone those skills we tried to pass on with our own blood? Ninety percent of the troops in the original drop died just trying to make it to the beach party that we filmed those ‘promo videos’ on. Every single one of those troops of yours that died did so because they did not listen to their instructors, which is why we have a pass or die grading system for your trainees. We do not allow them to interact with any of our troops that are not instructors in order to protect your people. If you ask any of those officers that are integrated why that is, they will tell you that our Marines live and die not by their own efforts but by the efforts of those to his left and his right; and ours will absolutely kill the shit out of any dumbass that might allow something as stupid as racism to endanger their lives.” Chief Warrant Officer McCann had enough of these



“We really do not want to prevent your local law enforcement or emergency services from being able to protect and serve your citizens while we conduct this little show of force. Do you want to let us know what networks they use so we can leave them alone?”

“If you think you have to be savage to prove a point let me give you a little hint. Our people follow their dreams, and when we were as savage as you primitives we had a motto of you keep what you kill. So, you can take control of anything you can, but I will not help you by telling you what networks to target or not.”

“These negotiations are hereby concluded then...” The General began before being cut off by an unexpected response.

An ominous voice called out reverberating from masculine to feminine and back, “The Continuum has heard and approves.” Eve and the military chain of command shuddered as they knew that was a collection of approvals from all of the voices of the AIs that were not currently in physical form. The ambassadors gathered around were all shocked into silence by something that happened so rarely it was often passed off as rumor or myth.

“Thank you Eve, thank you for your time ambassadors. See you in six months.” The General said and all of the Terran avatars disappeared from the meeting room. In the astral his voice carried outwards with one word “Eve?”

“I understand General, when the time is right I will make sure that those networks are not disturbed, but not before as I do not want there to be any opportunity for the others to claim interference on the behalf of the Continuum.” Eve’s voice responded.

That ominous voice carried through the astral again reverberating from masculine to feminine and back, “The Continuum has heard and approves.” The military commanders shuddered as they knew to fear AIs that were taught the ways of war and could only hope to retain these AIs as friends.

“When we arrive please also designate a ten-by-ten-mile area that is not currently considered habitable on one of the planets as well. We will need to establish an embassy to try and repair some of the political damage we are about to cause.” Admiral Nimitz added.

“It will be done.” Came the chorus of AI voices again, with that the Joint Chiefs were then returned to their bodies signifying that they had reached the maximum amount of help that the Continuum would provide in this fight.

## CHAPTER TWO: LET THE GAMES BEGIN

The Valhalla and her small cadre of ships had performed fleet maneuvering ops so much over the course of the last five months that no one even noticed when she left out of port that morning. It wasn’t until a full twelve hours later when she came out from behind the umbral shadow of Saturn did anyone even notice her sister ship the Olympus was missing, her fleet along with her. The Terran home system now only had a small cadre of half-finished ships protecting it with the Valhalla as the other originals of the Terran fleet were visiting foreign shipyards for refitting and closer inspection by alliance shipbuilders making their fleets. Two weeks later and the members of the alliance leadership was growing concerned as the time for the test was fast approaching and no one would admit to knowing where she was or where the fleet had gone.





“You’re coming with us,” the lead guard said as every device in the Grand Hall began playing ‘Silent Running’ by The Hidden Citizens.

### CHAPTER THREE: HOWDY NEIGHBOR

A slow methodical beeping began before a woman ever so softly asked “Can you hear me?” and the song signaled the Olympus slowly entering the system and a timer popped up below it with three hours and thirty-two minutes left as it was counting down from five hours. At the end of the four-minute song all of the ships were in the system with the Olympus out front, the two heavy cruisers Ares and Athena on her rear flanks, the dropships Cerberus and Hydra were offset behind her, and four heavy carriers escorting the drops ships from the rear to protect them from ambush. The fifth heavy carrier emerged from the umbral shadow of the first uninhabited planet away from the star system’s center, where it had begun the five-hour countdown as it emerged into the system to take over the communication networks.

The gunners on one of the asteroids that had been hauled in close to the home planet to protect it from invasion opened fire on the fleet at a range and angle that was less than optimal. The gunnery crews on the asteroid celebrated when a massive sparkling rainbow of colors signified a direct hit on the Olympus and the Ares. When the brief light display from the shields was over the ships turned their noses towards the home planet, and gun crews were confused because it was clear that the ships were unharmed. They hadn’t even paid enough attention to the Terran instructors to understand that the ranges they had just fired at were outside of the range of the medium sized emplacements that would fit on these asteroids. When the Eagle’s eyes began to glow red it was clear what was about to happen, a dubbed in intro to selki girl’s ‘God of War’ began to play and the video was replaced with a graphic that said, “We provided an extra twenty-four hours for your leadership to properly prepare for this. We can only hope that they listened to us and used clones only in their defense forces.”

A woman’s voice came over the video feed and she said, “This is Marine Expeditionary Force Leader Helena. I am requesting that you stand down, we do not wish to harm anyone but will defend ourselves as we establish our embassy here in accordance with Alliance law. If you fire upon us again we will fire back.” The asteroid bases commenced firing at this request for them to cease-fire. The first of the rounds from the gun batteries began landing as the singer sang ‘God of War’ for the first time and the ships were engulfed in large missile explosions that kicked off a shower of shield harmonics that created the look of St. Elmo’s Fire streaming lightning bolts between the ships’ shields with the full spectrum of the aurora borealis as a backdrop. The guns sped up their firing with the speed of the drums and they continued to fire until the song ended. Thirty seconds later the color show from the shields ended and the video showed the Terran fleet with a brilliant ball of light blue light in the eagle’s beak of the Olympus’ massive figurehead. The Ares and Athena were charging up their main guns made obvious from the bright strobing red lights picking up speed along the spine of the ships from the rear towards their noses where the massive rail guns protruded from the hull, the carriers began opening their hanger bays and the two drop ships started to slowly rotate along their Z-axis.

On the Bridge of the Olympus, the video showed the Admiral in charge of the Valhalla’s sister ship as she sat down and gave a brief sigh before saying, “Very well, a revolution it is then. Civilians are encouraged to seek shelter at this time. We will do our best to end this as quickly and peacefully as possible.” The comms officer reached over and pressed the button that started playing ‘Revolution’ by Unsecret. The Olympus was the first to return fire, as she did the video split into two sides on one the Terran fleet was unblemished, and on the other the entire asteroid that housed the guns that had fired upon them first was obliterated with a single hit from the Olympus’ main gun. The ships guns began decimating the asteroids and paid extra special attention





bait ball of lethal fish. Each time a Terran fighter was destroyed in protecting the capital ships from kamikaze style attacks the kill count on the home team side was increased. It was clear to anyone watching that the home team was losing badly, 587 to 56 before the forces from the two moons got within range of the ships' defensive guns. With no planet in front of them and the moons designated as military occupied with zero civilians, there was no quarter asked or given from the visiting team. By time the song ended the kill count on the Visitor's side was spinning rapidly and the Home Team's score was ticking over once every second or two.

The admiral was tired of playing nice and this showed when she went off script. "I'm bored, Helena to Cerberus."

"Go for Cerberus." Came the reply.

"I want those moons." Came Helena's command and Cerberus turned her side towards the two moons as they began spinning faster and faster along their Z-axis while Tango Alpha Tango's version of 'In My Time of Dying' began thumping across the airwaves. The Terran fighter craft broke off any engagements between the dropships and the moons and began scrambling to get out of the way, even to the point they were running from dog fights. The bolts for the huge 50-ton pyramid shaped blocks of armor along the drop ships' hulls began releasing and hurtling their payloads flat-side first towards the lunar surfaces when the singer announced, "All I ask of you is to take my body home." The fighter craft began swarming around the wall of flying pyramids and formed a shield wall against any enemy fighters that were able to get out of the way of the wall of death the dropships expelled armor now formed as it hurtled towards lunar bases. The defending fighters were now caught with the choice of retreat in the direction they had come into their own guns, run face first into a wall of impenetrable armor, or try and go around into the swarm of Terran fighter craft that were swarming along the edges of the armor waves like schools of hungry sharks. The heavy Mechs began launching with the second chorus of "Well, Well, Well." The remainder of the song was allowed to play as the pyramids and fighters cleared a path for the rest of the payload to follow. The one or two defending fighters that managed a miracle of flying skills and squeezed in between the pyramids were obliterated by the hundreds of heavy mechs that were flying feet first a few thousand yards behind the pyramids.

Next in the que was Imagine Dragon's 'Believer,' and the bolts holding the hover tanks in place began to pop in time with the thrumming of the drums marking the dropships beginning their second contribution to winning the bet. When the singer announced "Second things Second" the explosive bolts holding the troop transports began popping loose and following suit. "Third things third," saw the release of the MOABs immediately afterwards and used as kinetic drone strikes because no one wanted to set off massive explosions in a facility they intended to keep.

## CHAPTER FOUR: KNOCK, KNOCK

The pyramids on the Cerberus' side did not have to maintain any specific flight path as the moons were designated as military only targets and the fighters from the Terran forces did not bother trying to correct the flights of these pyramids. With no atmosphere around the moons, they were allowed to slam flat side first anywhere on the lunar surfaces, and that triggered the devices to act like shape charges. The heavier and stronger core, that was used to hold the pyramid to the hull of the ship, split the outer casing like a sabot round and buried itself several hundred yards into the surface of the moon through shear rock, base superstructure, or defenders unlucky enough to be caught in the wrong spot at the time. The ones that landed pointy end down would be used during the reconstruction as armored plating for the superstructure







the troop transports into any opening that even looked like it might be connected to the base on the lunar surface. The five-story-tall five-hundred-ton heavy mechs were brought into areas of suspected deep structures to conduct jumping jacks using their thrusters until the surface collapsed indicating that the structure underneath it had too. If the Ssnarg wanted to see it destroyed before surrendered or captured, the Marines were happy to help them.

With twenty seconds of the song left Helena gave her next command, “Let’s change the pace of the music a little. Hydra, we need an Embassy to receive our hosts for dinner to finish our talks, and recruitment centers around the planet. See to it.” The commander’s response was “Aye, Aye Ma’am,” and Morning Ritual’s rendition of ‘Bad Moon Rising’ began to play.

## CHAPTER FIVE: DINNER INVITATIONS AND RECRUITMENT

The video from the home team’s side shifted to showing the fight for the planet’s exosphere as the visitor’s team side continued showing the brutality inside the base. The voices of the Marines inside the Hydra were overlayed on the video as they howled like packs of starving wolves chasing wounded prey every time the word “Bad” was sung. Entire sections of the defending fighters were destroyed as they were engulfed by the wall of pyramids headed towards the planet’s surface from the Hydra. Terran fighters screamed in to slam themselves into any straying pyramids to nudge them back into the formation to try and prevent the massive blocks from destroying civilian structures on the ground, and each one lost like that was counted as a foul point for the Home Team. Fifty fully loaded MOABs swung past the pyramids as they broke into the atmosphere in order to clear the ground of any vegetation or other local wildlife that might later cause an issue in the selected area of a remote barren wasteland that had been chosen for the embassy. The plasma was expected to burn off the remaining chemical weapons residue that had rendered this portion of the planet unusable by the original inhabitants so long ago that it was now accepted as an uncorrectable tragedy.

The Continuum had provided a target area that was over a thousand square miles of desolation, but the Terrans were only going to clean up the central one hundred square miles to be cautious of not disturbing the ranches and farms nearby the impact area. An area ten miles wide by ten miles long and twenty feet deep would be incinerated with the plasma fires of the MOABs as they were on a delayed explosion to inject the plasma into the ground like a shallow fracking operation. After that, the fifteen hundred pyramids slammed home a few seconds later having been targeted to land in a one hundred by one hundred grid square that would form the foundation for the embassy, its landing zone and supporting facilities and a wall around them. Five MOABs fueled specifically for the task were trailing the pyramids to airburst over their center after they had landed to finalize the welding process, form a puddle smooth surface of molten slag, and to sterilize the pyramids and any dust that may have been kicked up by their landing.

“Beachhead established, ma’am.” Reported the weapons officer aboard the Olympus when she received signal that the five cleansers had airburst over the target and the home team’s side showed the short footage from before the first MOAB landed until the pattern of the pyramids was cooling after the cleansing strike. Meanwhile the visitors side continued to show the landing teams headed towards the atmosphere.

“Nice, we’re ahead of schedule. Just the way I like it. Let’s slow this down some more for our friends below. Let them know where and why we come to visit them.” Helena responded and the comms officer began playing ‘Out from the Deep’ by Enigma. The video was swapped over to full screen showing the finished glowing red and reflective metal surface of the foundation for the Terran Embassy. A team of heavy mechs











themselves having trouble keeping up with demand in the recruit training departments. Every veteran became an instructor, and every blooded recruit became a team leader to conduct training ops for the fresh recruits.

## CHAPTER FOUR: PASS OR DIE TRYING

The recruits were being brought in through the hanger bay and they were eager to see the massive machines the Terrans had rigged up for training. The training tanks were 20-foot-tall spheres lined up in rows with catwalks linking the tops together where the pilots and officers would be training in operating different flight equipment from transports, fighters, MOABs, and even the Valhalla herself. They were excited that they had earned one of the elite spots as a pilot where they would never face an actual threat of physical violence, many of their families had paid small fortunes to the Continuum's Terran Rebuilding Fund to ensure they got this assignment. Which is why they all turned when a man on one of the catwalks yelled, "On your right!" When the recruits turned to see what he was yelling at they saw a Terran in a flight suit pointing a sidearm directly into the face of a turning Magnath. "Maybe your dumbass can learn to stick with your wingman when a fucking ant bigger than you is chewing your leg off as a grunt. You are hereby demoted to the rank of private, and you will be transferred by respawn to the infantry training facilities in tropical Siberia." With that he shot the Magnath in the neck obliterating his head and the upper half of his torso with one shot.

"Let that be a lesson to you. Welcome to hell week. You fuck up like that more than three times and you will be transferred to another unit by respawn." Came the loud clear voice of Marine Corps Senior Drill Instructor (SDI) Gunnery Sergeant Cargile standing on the floor at the end of several columns of yellow footprints painted on the floor. "I will personally send every single one of you maggots to respawn myself if you give me a reason. You all now have one strike against you today because you were told to get on the yellow footprints after entering this room. Get three strikes in one day and you go for respawn. Talk back to one of your instructors and you go for respawn. Try to attack of your instructors and I will send him to respawn if he doesn't spawn your dumbass first." Every loudspeaker in the bay came to life as Paul Hardcastle's remake of his own song 'Nineteen' and its techno beat began thrumming out as the SDI continued. "Welcome to Hell. Now get you disgusting fungus farms on my freaking yellow footprints right freaking now recruits. Twenty, Nineteen, Seventeen, Thirteen."

A swarm of other Marine Corps Drill Instructors came out from behind tool lockers, silos, and other equipment yelling at the top of their lungs and getting as close to the recruits' ears as possible yelling things like, "Move your fucking ass or I am going to use my boot to move it, you maggot." For the next four hours the recruits were similarly guided through every step of the process of learning how to get into formation, where to stand, how to stand, where to look, where not to look, when to answer, how to answer, and what to think. The music never let up in pace, volume, or intensity, and neither did the instructors. Then they stopped for a twenty-minute breakfast.

On the other side of the island T was giving a similar speech to her recruits only with a personal twist. "Welcome to my range. For the next sixteen weeks you will eat every meal here on my range, when I give you permission to you will sleep here on my range, and you will train here on my range for sixteen weeks or until you get killed and respawn. You will be respectful and attentive to my instructors while on my range. You will pay attention to everything you do on my range. If you fail to pay attention to what you are doing on my range you will be sent for respawn." An instructor next to her threw a baseball at someone kneeling in the



## CHAPTER FIVE: HOME ON THE RANGE

When the acknowledgement signal chirped into the song to let Jack know that someone was wanting to talk to him, and 'La Grange' by ZZ Top was reduced to fifty percent volume so the speaker could be heard above it a voice was heard in the background saying, "He always has the best tunes playing when we fly over." Jack could only shake his head and chuckle at the young man's enthusiasm for the classics. Then the pilot of the craft spoke up "FedUps One to the Hen House, you available Jack?"

"Yeah Jason, I'm here what's up?" Jack replied.

"We have a special delivery for you. Just a drop on pass over if you approve." Came Jason's reply.

"Strange, I don't remember ordering anything to be delivered this month." Jack replied curious now, nobody wanted to come to the arctic circle, which is one reason Jack chose to build his home here.

"I understand and have been assured that it would be welcomed and appreciated but have been sworn to secrecy." Jason replied.

"Oh really? How big of a secret is it?" Jack asked.

"Tall, dark, and brooding. You know the kind that won't remove their helmet or give a name," came Jason's reply.

"I guess you better drop him off in the center of the yard then," Jack replied. He was now moving to get his shotgun from behind the front door and went to sit on the front porch. "Tell Jimmy he can listen to the music on the way out if he likes it so much." Jack replied letting the pilot know that he would signal if there was trouble with the next song if needed.

"Will do, your package will arrive in 30 seconds. No signature required."

"Thanks Jason."

Thirty seconds later an infantry drop suit landed in front of Jack's home and he nuzzled the shotgun across his lap to point in their general direction as he lit a cigarette. When the individual stood up he raised his helmet and said, "is that anyway to greet an old friend?"

Jack slowly exhaled a stream of smoke as he eyed the man in front of him and said, "Depends on who's asking."

"I would prefer Chris Ledoux, but I know how you feel about country music, and I am quite sure Bon Jovi would get me shot. So, how about we settle on Kid Rock." Cowboy said.

After a moment Jack stood up and rested the shotgun against the wall of the house near the front door then said "Jason, here's one for Jimmy since he likes the classics so much." With that he nodded to Cowboy and Afroman's 'Because I Got High' started playing. Then he spoke to Cowboy, "Take that clunky shit off before you come up on the porch. I just finished the floors, and I don't want them scuffed up or mud and snow tracked all over them before the spouses get to see it."

Cowboy's face broke into a huge grin as he began to get out of his armor, and he excitedly asked, "so it's really almost ready? I can't wait to see them again."









“Oh really?” Cowboy asked.

“Yeah, technically, you are the first to get to tour the place, but he actually made it here with his civilian skin before you did. If Bear had let me know he was close I could have fed Spot and let him go chase a girlfriend for a few hours, Juan might have survived long enough to pick out his own wing,” Jack said.

“So, how much did he beat me here by?” Cowboy asked.

“He was the snack that satisfied Spot’s hunger for your arrival.” Jack grinned in response they were now entering a massive humid garden room in the center of the building as they had been walking and talking. “The glass dome over the central room traps in the heat from the infinity pool turning the entire interior thirty acres into a fruit and vegetable garden. I went three stories tall so we can grow apple, cherry, walnut or any other kind of fruit or nut bearing trees you guys want to have delivered up from the heritage vaults. I chose to allow a mild amount of heat loss through the upper glass and framing so it will keep the snow melted off during the winter season, which let me lower the pitch of the roof and also lets us collect fresh drinking water that requires less filtration than the geothermal water. Those 80 degrees temps from the water features is year-round inside the house, the infinity pool makes it humid enough to rain inside occasionally and the geothermal is providing the electricity for the grow lights during the eight blessed months that there isn’t enough sunlight to give me a migraine...” the old friends proceeded with the tour and Jack gave some advice on the layout of the rooms for Gary’s wing, but refused to help him pick out colors or tile designs. His advice was, “get the walls put up and let the ladies learn to appreciate how long it takes to install those damnable subway tiles. After four days of running downstairs to use the bathroom a shade or two of the wrong color of white won’t be so bad.”

## CHAPTER SIX: ROUND ONE

Eight months after the events in Draco Prime and the alliance had been introduced to the power of music a second stellar gate had been installed for all of the materials that were being hauled into the Sol System. Six months later it was now shutting down and re-orienting to point to an uninhabitable star system with a collapsing star as the massive fleet of vessels were preparing to leave. A full ninety percent of the ships were operating with skeleton crews of Terrans, and the rest were integrated clones of the many alliance races that had volunteered to give up one death to assist the Terrans’ audacious plans to fight back against the unknown invaders that were destroying entire solar systems from the center of the galaxy outwards. Nine more systems had been lost, and so had billions of citizens, and trillions were displaced from their homes as nearby systems had been evacuated to form a demilitarized zone.

The admiral in charge of the fleet looked over at the young Dryad ensign at the helm and gave the order, “que the music.” The ensign replied, “Aye, Aye, Sir,” then swallowed hard as she reached over the comms controls of the Valhalla to hit the button that would start broadcasting Zayde Wolfe’s remix of “Danger Zone,” and the helmsman engaged the engines to start her maiden flight towards the jump gate. The rest of the fleet began playing the song as their engines came online, and every person upon the planet Earth paused as every loudspeaker in every city, forward post, and firebase began to play the music announcing man-kinds greatest leap into the unknown.

The destination system had been chosen because it was close to the most recent systems that had been lost but did not leave a trail for the enemy to follow back to a system that had refugees or citizens of the alliance in it. The trip was estimated to take three days to arrive and for the crews of the ships it would be three days of slow building tension.

## CHAPTER SEVEN: CONTACT FRONT

Three weeks later a rendition of 'Rave' by DXRK was beginning to play as an alert came over the comms channel. The comms officer on duty of the Valhalla's bridge glanced over at the notification, he exhaled again wondering who was texting him and for what this time. He glanced out the view port and watched the flickering of the navigation shields as they rebuffed another wave of ionic radiation from the dying pulsar that was at the center of this system. Drak'thar knew that it was just going to be another request to play something else that was not on the operations playlist for the next broadcast. Why the Terrans had converted comms into a system wide DJ service he would never understand, but these crafty bastards had impressed him with what they had accomplished in such little time, and he was eager to see if their plans worked out.

He had been communicating with his original-self on his home planet, telling him about what they had been up to that day, and in return he would get videos or pictures of the debauchery it would buy his original-self back home. He just knew that his original-self had already knocked a clutch into at least one or two of them, so if sitting here and playing music for the barbaric primitives was going to help him spread his genetic material, he would gladly do it.

When he read the message that was displayed on the screen it quickly became a battle of nature versus self-control to not evacuate his bowels into his uniform and chair. His feet thumped to the floor, and he hit the stop button on the music before beginning an internal ten second countdown. Several of the bridge officers glared at him for killing the music, and one Terran female even yelled "What the fuck man, that was my jam." As he reached ten, he hit play and a woman's laugh echoed throughout the fleet, then the drum beat rapidly built up in volume and intensity until P!nk blared out 'I'm coming up, so you better get this party started.' Those who had resisted glaring at him before spun on him in utter surprise, as several of the Terrans yelled out, "about fucking time," and a Magnath yelled, "The admiral will skin you if this is a false alarm." Meanwhile, millions of personnel throughout the fleet's ships began sprinting for their combat gear and deployment positions, several sprinting dripping wet from the showers not bothering with clothes.

Speak of the devil and he will appear, the admiral came bursting through the ready room door, and headed straight to the comms deck with a short demand "Show me." Drak spun his console before the admiral got all the way to him. A quick read of the orders and the admiral announced, "Portal control, verify the following coordinates," then commenced to read off the coordinates of a system that had sent out a short alert from an observation drone that had been left behind during the evacuation. When the PC officer read back the coordinates without any mistakes, the admiral spun on his XO as she came in the hatch to the bridge. She bobbed her head in his direction and without request answered, "The Marine that was piloting the drone will be up here as soon as he recovers from the shift." The shift being the term that was now generally accepted for the transition period of being in a body or vessel that was destroyed and then the recovery period to start breathing again after taking over a physical body on the Valhalla a few seconds after death.

The admiral then turned back around to the comms channel and pressed a button giving him a direct connection to the comms probe that was in one of the forward torpedo tubes on the Valhalla. A strong male voice came back over the comms channel, "Jack here." The admiral nodded happy that a man he knew well would be the one to go through to try and make first contact with the unknown assailant. "Coordinates confirmed, the gate is spinning up, you ready brother?"

"Sure thing. I am just eager to get a look at them and see what is going on."







As the carriers got into fighter range he gave another command, “Valkyries.” Drak hit the button, and a band named Valhalla began playing an ancient melody about the flight of some mythical collectors of the valiant dead for some forgotten god. Once the electric guitar began to play the millions of fighter drones, piloted by individual Terrans and alliance pilots in AI form, began pouring out of the heavy carriers like the very messengers of death the song was conjuring. Every loud symbol clash was emphasized with fire from the big ships and the fighters alike, as the fighters slammed into the enemy’s front lines. The viewscreen lit up as millions of fireballs signified a dying fighter, enemy vessel, or a devastating strike on a habitable area of one of the carrier ships. All choreographed by a woman who sang about how they were willing to give their lives for Odin and the Valhalla.

As the heavy pounding music came to a climax the dropships reached the first planet and the admiral told Drak, “Time to drop the kiddies off at the pool.”

## CHAPTER EIGHT: LANDFALL

“All right here we go, hey hey” came over the 1MC as the song ‘Swim’ by Fishbone began, a heavy guitar and drum pounding began to reverberate from the speakers, and as “Attention!!! The pool is now open!!!,” screamed out of every speaker and headset, the troop transports began fast z-axis rolls as they approached the planet’s atmosphere to release their deadliest payload, the ground forces. When the first chorus of “OH YEAH” wailed over the comms channels, explosive bolts holding sections of the transports’ hull plating below the feet of their heavy mechs were fired, and the heavy mechs hit full downward thrust to drive the hull plating with them to be used as ariel sleds, heatshields, and provide some protection from anti-air fire.

With the second chorus of “Oh Yeah” the hooks holding the first Hover tanks released and they shot through the holes the first heavy mechs had just left, where they oriented front-end down and aimed their turrets straight at the planet’s surface. At full thrust forward they were relying on their armor and energy shields to handle the heat of atmospheric resistance. On the third round of the chorus the light infantry transports began pouring from the tops of the dropships like dark clouds of steel death from hundreds of smoke machines. On the fourth “OH YEAH” the ariel scout units dove from the holes the first drop sleds left open and streaked for the cover fire and heat shields of the much larger heavy mechs. When the fifth “Oh Yeah” played the first rows of holes from the drops once again faced the surface and the transports released the MOABs to rain down and flatten a landing zone for the ground forces to begin their push out of.

The blackness upon the planet writhed and massive dark tentacles began reaching for the stars as if to swat these pesky insects out of the sky. When the fires of atmospheric entry began to fade away from the heavy mechs sleds, the tentacles began to come into focus revealing that they were made up of similar sized fighter craft that were more akin to some kind of flying insect made of a blackened metal. Not waiting to check the colors of their eyes the heavies circled up into five-man teams with their backs facing one another, the band yelled “Fuck that rule”, and the heavies started raining fire down upon the enemies racing towards them as their ring slowly rotated.

Two stacked rings of hover tanks began counter-rotating over the heavies aiming their shots through the circle formed by the backs of the heavies and they provided continuous fire through the gap with devastating accuracy. Twenty transports hovered just above the tanks and poured showers of missiles and autocannon fire into the enemies on the outside of the rings. At first the tentacles were able to slowly continue to reach towards the invaders, even though the steady rain of fire and small explosions killed them by the hundreds or thousands, then as the singer screamed “Up the side and straight down the middle,” the first MOAB hit. Hit







cleanse a planet. So, the next time you hear him on the radio, you won't even have to ask me for my opinion, do as he says, and then explain it to me afterwards." Drak could only nod in amazement as this powerful man just gave the ultimate authority to some low-level ground pounder. "Now, if you haven't figured it out yet, I need you to connect me to Yggdrasil." Drak sat up at attention and spun around quickly to connect Odin to Central Command.

"Connection established sir." Drak said as the channels turned green.

"Odin to M.E.F.-2 and M.E.F.-3, acknowledge." The admiral spoke in a clear and calm voice.

"M.E.F.-2 ready up." Came a woman's voice.

"M.E.F.-3 on standby." Came a gruff Magnar voice.

"This is Odin, planet one was a cleanse. I say again, planet one was a cleanse. Moving to planet two, M.E.F.-2 begin system entry and spin up the respawns, M.E.F.-3 prepare for mop up. Acknowledge."

The female voice came back with her voice trembling, from excitement or horror it was hard to tell, but the response was easily understood. "Odin this is Frigg, respawn operations begun, ETA five mikes."

The male voice didn't quiver but there was a quiet and drawn out "fuck" before the Magnar responded, "Odin, this is Thor. The Hammer will deploy for mop up in thirty mikes."

Odin then answered, "Roger, Odin out." Drak killed the comms, and Odin gave his next command, "Tell the kids they're not finished yet." Drak's hands were shaking as he hit the button to start the next song began to play over the channels. The fighters engaged in combat began to circle back around to their carriers, and the carriers and heavy cruisers went into full reverse burn as the capital ships kept their methodical plodding forward while pouring heavy weapons fire not only into the Ord cloud, but also started pounding the surface of the second planet in the system that was still roiling with the invaders landing crafts.

## CHAPTER NINE: ROUND TWO

A dozen new portals opened up near the first planet and fresh heavy carriers and capital ships came pouring in with the beginnings of Manowar's 'Sleipnir', as they did the Valhalla transferred the repositories of the Terran Als over to the Ragnarök fleet to respawn the troops into bodies that had been prepared ahead of time. As the Ragnarök entered into the system the alliance crew members that had been standing by the cryochambers in the drop bays were startled. Because an ominous narration started playing over the 1MC and confused them with the description of some mythic warhorse. However, as the music started playing Terrans began pouring out of the cryopods, usually face first onto the floors; some cursing, some screaming, and in a few cases vomiting all over the floor. One succubus who had been lazily sitting on a cryopod that hadn't even been placed up right yet, squealed as the lid popped open, tossing her off of it, and hit the back of her armor with a super cold breeze. The man inside was choking and gagging but not vomiting so she crept forward to see if she could help, but her fear had caused her helmet to close and the led lighting around her face lit her sunflower skin up like a radiant beam.

"Are you an angel of mercy?" the young man asked, and she quietly shook her head no. "Damn, guess I have to try again." The young man chuckled.

Truly worried for his sanity now Desi asked, "Are you ok?"





simultaneously, and the heavy she was riding with reached down, grabbed her, all while yelling how the ride was about to get a little bumpy. What? What the hell is this idiot talking about? If he didn't know, this whole damn ride had been bumpy the whole fucking way down, and a hell of lot more than just a fucking little bit.

When multiple shockwaves, that had amplified one another and, in some cases combined with each other, hit the bottom of the sled. She knew she would have been thrown off of it if the heavy pilot hadn't grabbed her with his mech's one remaining arm, and even then, she wasn't so sure he would be able to hold on much longer. He was struggling with his balance since his mech was already missing an arm, and he was bent over trying to hold onto and shield her. When the shockwaves stopped, he grinned down at her through the hole in his mech, began releasing his grip, and yelled, "See, we're all good. Now..." She's not sure if that was all he had to say, because the cockpit he was sitting in ceased to exist, and she was now looking at the clouds through a whole that had formed where she had just been staring at a human being. Then the sled hit the ground, and she lost consciousness from the impact, or the sheer terror of watching the remains of the heavy mech begin toppling towards her, she guessed she would never know.

## CHAPTER TEN: GET OFF MY ROCK

As 'For Whom the Bell Tolls' was coming to an end General Mad Jack Moreland did a quick battlefield assessment and was pleased with what he saw, the enemy seemed to be in full retreat. There were much larger invaders here, probably because they hadn't had a chance to get them to the first planet before the fleet interrupted their plans earlier. So, he made a judgement call and keyed his mic to the ground troops and the rest of the fleet so it could be passed on to the other LZs, "Let them hear you howl boys and girls!" Then let out a howl of his own as the guitar riffs for 'Bark at the moon' by Ozzy Osbourne began to play.

The infantry Marines stopped digging, dropped their jump bags into the holes and the EOD crews came forward to set up the satellite transmission detonators so Odin could detonate them from above if needed. Meanwhile, the Infantry Marines were sprinting in their armor towards the craters edge and took the 50-foot walls the hover tanks had dug in several leaps and bounds to land on the jagged glass encrusted ground that the MOABs' plasma had created during touch down. They quickly jumped on hover tanks and heavy mech legs alike, clinging to them like fleas on a dog before drawing their rifles and blazing away at the enemy forces one handed where needed, and taking aim where they could use both hands, howling out loud every time the song's title was sung.

They enemy may have been in full retreat, but they were still returning fire as they did so. The larger units were slow and lumbering on the planet's surface which meant their smaller reinforcements were either running off and leaving them or were crushed, under heavy withering fire from the infantry, or physically by the falling behemoths that were killed by the heavy mechs and hover tanks. The heavy mechs began their slow plodding forward march and the hover tanks slowly rolled forward to keep a firing line established with them. The invaders caught in between the LZs were quickly obliterated, and Mad Jack began to grin maniacally as he watched the LZ indicators turn green and green dotted lines appeared showing the sat dets were online and the enemy had been cleared from in between it and the LZ next to it.

Before the song was finished, he gave a command that made the pulses of the hover tank crews and infantry alike hammer just a little bit faster and the fleet above the planet began to cheer, "Sick 'em boys." As King 810 played the infantry Marines legendary namesake 'Hellhounds' through the speakers, the infantry Marines holding on to the heavy mechs began sprinting for the Hover tanks, whose drivers were slowly counting to ten before going full throttle into the enemy lines. The tanks were now covered in infantry Marines like quills on a

porcupine, only these porcupines spat huge 155mm uranium infused tungsten darts from their main railgun barrels at hypersonic speeds, and the quills fired small plasma bolts that could penetrate twenty inches of hardened chromium infused titanium armor. As the hover tanks flew into the enemy lines delivering a horde of slathering grunts that jumped off of the tanks onto the backs, legs, and corpses of the enemy Mad Jack felt a short pain of guilt and sympathy for the enemy. Which almost caused him to say a prayer asking for mercy unto them, then he remembered the reply he had gotten from the enemy the first time he asked them to discuss peace.

As several million infantry Marines sang about going to Hell they moved like a living tsunami of death and destruction, some even grabbed onto a falling enemy to use its momentum to catapult themselves to the next one. The dropships were not going to be left out of an opportunity to get some payback for the last go round and they began circling the towering spires of enemies trying to flee the planet pouring the last of their missile batteries and autocannon rounds into concentrated points on the spire to try and break it. When the missile bays and ammo racks were empty, they increased the amount of plasma fire from the forward emitters until the circuits or the barrels themselves melted from overheating. Everyone on the ground could tell when this happened because a transport would go from slowly rotating sideways to hitting the afterburners and ramming full speed into the enemy, hoping they would be the one to cause it to break and cut off the enemy's retreat.

As the enemy was forced back to the base of the tentacles reaching into the sky, the heavy mechs began to form firing lines around them, hammering the same spots the transports were when none of the mega sized enemy were visible. As the song was coming to an end the first spire to fall, fell from the fleet up above severing it outside the atmosphere, and the enemy began raining down upon the ground where the infantry danced among the falling corpses like goblins of death and destruction. That is when Odin made the call to change the music, a guitar began playing a rapid tune as an insane man cackled a little before he started bellowing out the lyrics to Disturbed's 'Inside the Fire'. The infantry Marines began sprinting for the hover tanks or towards the heavy mech lines if they were too far from the tanks. Some chose to detonate their suits instead as they knew they were too close to the impact zone, and only wanted to increase their kill count for the party they would surely be having once they reached the Hallowed Halls of the Valhalla.

The clouds in the skies began to evaporate and the trails of smoke from the burning bodies and machines all sucked in towards the bases of the columns of enemies, letting the ground troops know the fire support from the fleet had started. A few milliseconds later it all quickly went the other way as devastation poured down onto the base of the pillars through the columns of enemies. Hover tanks were flipped ass over nose, infantry Marines laughed maniacally as they were picked up and forced to ride the concussion waves forward like supermen attempting to do a horizontal bellyflop, and the heavy mechs had to lean forward hard enough they were either tilting at a 45-degree angle or were forced to take a knee and bow their heads in supplication to the destruction the fleet was raining down upon the enemy. The unrelenting pounding continued until the song ended and very few of the enemy twitched inside the field of craters that marked where the pillars once reached for the stars.

## CHAPTER ELEVEN: SIT BOOBOO, SIT

"Drak get Fenrir on the line." Odin commanded the comms officer, who quickly began hammering away at his terminal, then spun to him a second later and said, "done sir."





“Roger that, reinforcements and extraction teams in bound.” Thor boomed out and the song changed to Citizen Soldiers’ ‘Through Hell’, and with that another twenty portals opened up behind MEF-1’s shield wall and the reinforcements began filling in the gaps from the ships that had been lost so far. While ten more opened up behind the planet itself and smaller ships began pouring down to the surface to retrieve the troops.

## CHAPTER TWELVE: PEEK A BOO

As the heavy mechs were marched into a formation to make it easier for pickup at a later date for reloading and any potential repairs, a few remained on patrol just to see if any of the enemy corpses were playing opossum, the hover tanks also formed into retrieval ranks since they would need to be loaded and bolted into place like the heavies and the crews sat on top of their equipment celebrating their victory and taking a little time to decompress. Wayward’s crew and the EOD teams began going through the battlefield looking for potential survivors, friend and foe alike.

Wayward kept reaching behind him occasionally as if trying to scratch his back through the power armor with no avail because he couldn’t get the shoulder articulation to work right. Doc walked up to him giggling like he was the only one in on a joke and Wayward turned to him with some blood dripping down his face from the cracked faceplate on his helm. “Something funny Doc?”

“Damn,” Doc gasped, before stepping forward and reaching for Wayward’s chin. “I would say your face, but it looks like it got run through a meatgrinder. How did you pull that off?”

“That’s the thing, I can’t get the damn helm off. It would seem that short flight the Valhalla sent me on not only busted the view port but also jammed the damn helm into the gorget.”

Bear and the others seeing Doc treating Wayward decided to walk up to them, “everything all right Wayward.”

“Yeah, it would seem that I broke another pair of Oakley’s like I did when I face planted off the ski jump during arctic warfare training.” Wayward said trying to calm his buddies down.

“Is your HUD showing any other damage,” Doc asked as he was squeezing some super glue onto the cut on Wayward’s hairline to stop the bleeding from the overgrown scratch just above his hairline.

Wayward pointed at the broken faceplate and said, “No glass, no HUD, dumbass... and here I thought you were supposed to be the smart one.”

Doc just nodded his head and said, “Yeah, I should have expected that. Here, face this way so I can use the sunlight to check you for anymore head wounds.” With that he rotated Wayward’s back to their friends and the peals of laughter and a few cat calls erupted from behind Wayward’s back.

He tried to turn back around but Doc had him by the chin and he couldn’t, so he yelled “What the fuck is so goddamn funny?”

Doc looked him in the eyes and said, “I have to ask. Did you get a second helping of the chili last night?”

“What? No, why?” The aggravation and confusion in Wayward’s voice was clear in equal measures.











Desi was confused again, and Wayward came to her rescue. “That’s twice you’ve asked me that, thank you for being caring and considerate enough to ask. Enough T, I know you want to take this one under your wing too. So go ahead, just layoff the colloquialisms until the docs can check her out, please.”

“Fine, spoilsport. Don’t think I haven’t taken a lot of pics of that fine ass of yours hanging out for everyone to see. If it gets any better, I am going to have to add a few of them to the spank bank if you know what I mean.”

Wayward went to reply but saw the crimson tint to Desi’s face and changed the subject, “That reminds me, we don’t even know your name.”

“My friends call me Desi, but my full name is Desdemona of the Layman’s Guild.” T and the others busted out laughing as Wayward closed his eyes again, let out a small moan of pain, and then started counting down from five.

“Come on Cassanova, hand her over so Doc can check her out before you get yourself into trouble.” To which Wayward leaned back and let the others help her up.

“Take care Desi, you’re a hero now, and you’ll need your strength for what is to come next.” Wayward said as she got to her feet with some help from the others.

“What? What does he mean?” Desi asked as T began to lead her away. “Later Hun, let’s get the docs to check you out first, ok pumpkin.” T replied as she led her away.

Wayward then turned to the two heavy pilots and hollered up at them. “You two wouldn’t happen to be able to peel this thing off of me, would you?”

The two giant mechs glanced at each other, shrugged their shoulders and then one of them replied, “Sure but no guarantee you won’t get sent for a respawn in the process.”

“Trust me, being drawn and quartered by you two would be a better alternative than letting her try with explosives.” Wayward replied pointing at T’s back as she walked away. Apparently, she had heard enough to give him the single finger salute over her shoulder, and everyone around Wayward laughed loudly at the display.

## CHAPTER THIRTEEN: READY? HEAVE...

As poor Wayward was getting run through yet another comedic hurt locker on the planet’s surface, the fleet just a few miles above him was forming another shield wall while the reinforcements from MEF-3 began to enter the system. Odin had asked Drak to announce this event by playing AC/DC’s ‘Dogs of War’. The fifty portals that had opened up a few seconds behind the front lines began to emit ships that were eager to join in on this historic moment. The alliance crews on MEF-3 were reservists and only got one clone for this system and they were eager to earn another chance with the active-duty professionals with unlimited respawns, so they came into the fight eager for glory and accolades. Which is why Odin had been reluctant to let them into the fight to begin with. Everyone knew to never jump into a foxhole with someone braver than you, and there was no one braver than an amateur with ideals of glory and grandeur clouding the fear that would keep him alive.





When the music changed it was a slow beat with people humming along with the tune and the lead singer began the song with 'Hear the Devil Calling' as a "hillbilly's promise of an ass kicking", as some of the 'countrified' Marines said, was Blues Saraceno's rendition of 'Dogs of War'. When he sang that he couldn't stop the dogs of war the Terran fighters began screaming out of the ships again, and the MEF-3 fighters joined them. When the singer told the audience to 'see the fields a burning', MEF-3 saw the lights from the Raven's head of the Valhalla and began firing their main guns as well. With the changing of the beat the MEF-3 forces were able to announce to the enemy their commitment to join the Terrans in becoming dogs of war as well.

Biohazard's rendition of 'Dogs of War' started off with a steady pulsing electronic noise and the capital ships and heavy carriers began revving up to three-quarters forward, or as the Terrans called it 'beginning the push'. When a former warrior, entertainer, and world leader announced that 'Government is not the solution to our problems', the troop carriers were deployed to Four dash Two to begin picking up the surviving troops there, and the dropships began spinning up the clones for the Terrans that had been sent to respawn. When the electric guitar began strumming out its angry beat the fighters went full burn towards the shields to once again conduct anti-fighter activities and kamikaze runs against the enemy capital ships. MEF-3 began earning their bloody glory when their first capital ship, The Retribution, dropped her shields too soon in their eagerness to fire her guns and the enemy barrage hit her full force. MEF-3 had joined the fight and now they were as pissed as the bloody savages the song announced them to be.

## CHAPTER FOURTEEN: THE PICKUP LINES

"Fenrir, this is Odin." Came the call that silenced the radio traffic going out to the ground troops and began the ten second countdown of radio silence meant to make the Marines pay attention and get their heads back in the game.

"Fenrir here," came his short reply as he hadn't expected the call so soon and just knew he was about to get the 'Suicide Solution' order so the Marines would all detonate their equipment and respawn for rapid deployment.

However, Odin had happier news, all things considered. "We're beating them back and they are folding faster than we thought. Transports are in route now and you will be picked up for another go in five mikes. Have all surviving MEF-2 personnel separated for pickup as they served their fight and will need to be extracted." The ground forces radio channel was synched up with the fleets and the Marines on the ground howled as one when they heard 'The Dogs of War' playing and the chorus of 'War is no solution to the conflicts that we face'.

"Roger that. Wayward Angel's team is escorting the lone survivor now. I will pass the orders on to ensure she is told not to participate in the next drop." Fenrir replied.

"Roger, one survivor. Sending security teams to the appropriate drop ship for her recovery. Odin, out."

The three surviving MEF-2 dropships joined the fleet to provide as much shielding as they could to the flanks, as the MEF-1 dropships had done. The fleet came to a halt and formed their shield wall again halfway between four dash two and four dash three. The MEF-3 dropships started seeing Marines pouring out of their cryopods as the ships took up positions behind the planet from the enemy. Again, the Marines came out in all kinds of mental readiness, some dazed, some cussing, but none fell face first onto the floor vomiting as this





over to the Valhalla so you can be kept safe there, and they will let you know what is expected of you as your new role as the heroine for your people.” Wayward heard the transports breaking through the atmosphere and turned to signal Mac, he tapped two fingers on collar, acted like he was tugging at it, pointed at the sky, tapped his wrists together twice, pointed at Desi then circled his finger as he pointed it at the ground, then repeated until he pointed up at the sky. Mac nodded pulled a blue smoke grenade and a yellow smoke grenade out of his side pouches and motioned for the team to circle up. After Fenrir popped the same colors showing the command location pickup, Mac popped his to show the need for the pickup of a special. Two transports broke out of formation and sprinted for them as the rest of the transports began landing behind the formation so those without functional masks or helms wouldn’t be blinded by flying dust and debris.

Desperate to try and make sense of all of this Desi looked at T and asked her what she would do if she was in her place. T rested one hand on her shoulder and said, “Hun, you have to make that decision for you,” then she cracked a grin, “But I am the kind to get into trouble for doing what I think is right. If I was told I had to watch my friends,” and she pointed at the team as they began gathering up for transport, “as they rode into battle and left me behind. I would kill the first one to tell me that and then I would find out who thought he was in charge and convince him I was going, even if I had to take his place.” The two veterans through an arm across Desi’s shoulders as the transport thrusters began to kick up a cloud of dust and debris.

## CHAPTER FIFTEEN: A HERO IS BORN

Desi thought long and hard about what the two older souls were telling her. Her command staff had been dismissive of the Terrans because of their ages and inability to leave their system on their own. Desi had spoken to some of the Terrans on the drop ship that she rode in on and found out to her amazement that while the clones were configured to be post adolescent twenty-year-olds, most of the veterans had actually lived an average of a hundred years or more before they died the first time. While her race considered fifty to be the age of adolescence, they refused to understand that the Terrans they were disparaging were much older than they let on. Terrans seemed to specialize in allowing people to create their own opinions and then exploit that as a weakness.

She wanted to understand them better, why would they be so willing to sacrifice themselves and live through everything they had to just to be successful in battle, “sometimes you have to feel the boom so you can learn,” Wayward’s voice came to her. Why would they be willing to do this for a species they didn’t owe anything to or even know of before volunteering to pay the ultimate price for some stranger’s freedom and survival? “You survived, your people need a hero to celebrate, you’re all that’s left, and the job’s yours whether you want it or not.” She heard his voice again. Well would she?

“Hun, you have to make that decision for you,” she heard T’s voice say. Her father had sent her here to prove her mettle if she ever wanted a chance to inherit his title, lands and fortune. “But I am the kind to get into trouble for doing what I think is right.” Her mother had said all she needed to do was not fail in her duties, and she would find her a decent husband to provide for her, if her father failed to be impressed. So, what should she do? “I would kill the first one to tell me that and then I would find out who thought he was in charge and convince him I was going even if I had to take his place.”

Her mind began settling on her chosen path as the rolling drum beat of Twisted Sister’s ‘We’re Not Going To Take It Anymore’ began announcing to the fleet that the Marines were back on board, and they were loading up for round three. Her father wouldn’t be proud enough to leave her anything, even if the rest of her species





“Master Guns was just telling me how she had shot those men after apologizing to them and asked them to apologize to her nobility because they wanted to take her out of the fight.”

“Hmmm, didn’t work out to good for them I guess.” Was all the CSM could come up with.

All three men turned and watched as she beheaded a man in the center of the bay, issued a challenge to everyone there, sheathed her sword, kicked the body out of the way so she could assume his post, then began leading the rest in singing the shanty. Gunner McCann reached up, tapped his helmet twice and filed his report.

“Heimdall to Odin.”

“Go for Odin,” came the admiral’s voice, clearly confused by **THE** old man calling him.

“We have a mutiny aboard the Winged Vengeance,” the gunner said.

“Come again?” The admiral had lost his train of thought with that remark and wasn’t sure if this was some kind of sick joke.

“The Hero of Two just turned her security detail into pink mist with a shotgun on full auto, decapitated the commander of the winged ones, and assumed the command.” The Gunner reported.

“You have eyes on the situation, what’s your advice?” Odin asked now completely perplexed.

“She killed one of the most useless politicians I have ever met, a snot nosed incompetent Captain, took command like a boss, and now has them singing sea shanties. I suggest playing them another one, only a heavy metal version and let her ride. See if she can increase their survival rate with a little experience under her belt.” The gunner offered up.

“Very well, an ancient Norse Shanty it is then. I want to see the video of that later, and this had better not be a ploy for another shanty for an old salt. Odin, out.”

As the admiral cut his comms the three men in the bay chuckled and the Gunner said, “He’s the boss. Now what can we do to make this more efficient the next time we do this?” Their alliance counterparts were stupefied by how swiftly this catastrophe was swept under the rug, and the Terrans just moved on, like murder was something that was just an everyday event to them.

## CHAPTER SIXTEEN: ROUND THREE

L.B. One and Datamotions’ techno version of the Norse song ‘My Mother Told Me’ signaled the fleet to hold the line a little longer as the Marines on the dropships readied up. The Marines in the bays, the scouts aboard the Winged Vengeance and the guns of the fleets big ships thundered out “HOORAH” with every drop of the beat or pause in the lyrics. Once the lyrics stopped and the bass hit overdrive the fleet’s big ships started pushing forward towards the next planet. The enemy was trying to hold the fleets back and were continuing to pour fighters and other invaders onto the planet’s surface. They had even begun a spiral of wounded craft around the tentacle to the planet to get as many fresh units on the ground as they could.

“OK Drak, enough sea shanties, now that the Marines are tucked in all cozy like, let the Sandman sing them a little lullaby for me.” Drak reached over and hit the button to play the next of phase of the battle, and the Viking shanty faded into the electric guitar dum-da-da-dum of Halocene’s rendition of ‘Enter Sandman’.









other half was stacked several enemies deep in some places and they were not willing to give an inch that wasn't paid for in blood. As 'Helldivers' began to fade Drak was already spinning up the next song to crossfade so there would be no break in the speed. Fenrir had requested a cleansing, but Odin responded with playing 'All Out Life' by Slipknot which was his way of saying, 'Fight for It.' Odin needed to bloody the alliance troops and give them a chance to earn some experiences for themselves. The troops on the ground understood one thing and one thing only, the Valhalla had spoken, and it was about to get ugly. The troops landed at the edge of the pyramid plateau often firing before they even hit the ground and started maneuvering towards the returning enemy fire. The only cover the Marines or the enemy had was provided to them by the corpses or wrecks of their fallen allies, and that was more motivation for both sides to provide the other with more cover providing fire.

The MOABs rained down upon the enemy in waves pushing them back with every blast. Entire sections of enemies were decimated, while others managed to hold because the dropships above them had been destroyed and they surged forward to push the alliance forces back where they could. In some places two alliance pinchers dug into the enemies back lines cutting their push off from support lines, forced the enemy into pockets and then destroyed them. In other locations that happened to the alliance forces and the back and forth turned the waving tentacle of troops and invaders into the teeth of a meat grinder that was bent on killing anything moving. Fenrir ordered the ground forces to hold the line as 'All Out Life' came to end, and 'Kill EM ALL' by C. Wilkes started thrumming with the lyrics 'Kill em all', it had the sentiment that was needed to pass along the lines, as Fenrir yelled into the comms for everyone to hear, "Time for a new high score!" This was going to be a battle of attrition.

The five crippled dropships from four one and four two used the opening of the metal plated plateau of pyramids to crash land on the surface to never move again. In the system that MEF-1 had jumped from, five half-finished ships crashed into the surface of a sub-life planet, opened their portals as close to the portals opened by the five crippled ships on four three. After the gates were checked, for stability and height above the ground that they opened up on, fighters, equipment or troops would rush through the gates to reinforce the fight on four three.

For the billions that thought they would never get a flight because there wasn't enough ships, special portals were opened on the training planets to the jump-off system, and their patience was rewarded with the opportunity to run into the fight and die for the honor and glory associated with this historical moment. After all, piloting a clone body was no different than playing a video game and this was being celebrated by some as the largest ever MMORPG raid in the history of the universe. Many of them were hearing the Terran race's music called heavy metal for the first time as they marched from one jump gate to the next and the ground forces radio began playing Daniel Varfolomeyev's tribute to the ancient classic 'Toccata & Fugue in D Minor'. A man with a diamond or a bomb on their shoulders was on both sides of the portals as they exited, and they were pointing and yelling obscenities as enemy fire flew overhead. The alliance troops were eager to play as huge families had gotten together and offered up a reward to the top individuals who killed the most enemies, the final pool was large enough that the top five could retire with a planet or moon of their own after this was over.

## CHAPTER SEVENTEEN: HOLD THE LINE

The dropships used the massive speed boost they had built up by skipping across the atmosphere and using four three's gravity well to pull a 'Wild E. Coyote maneuver to slingshot' themselves into the tentacles providing enemy troops to the ground. Whether anyone was still alive on the hulks as they were torn to pieces



When the bass guitar began thrumming the enemy fleet that had been in the system did something unexpected, they paused momentarily stopped firing into the alliance fleet, when the woman sang “Please allow me to introduce myself”. The derelicts, incompletes, and downright insane came pouring through the gates that sprang open around the edges of the enemy fleet meant to surround and confuse them. They served as a little extra for the next part of the gambit. Before the new alliance arrivals could turn to face the enemy the Alliance forces were confused by the enemies behavior for the first time since the fight had begun. The bedraggled enemy fleet’s remains dove for the portal on their side of the system that the enemy had opened. The alliance fleet stopped firing just as confused as the incoming enemy fleet that was now colliding with their own ships as the one-way movement into the system was now being pushed back by their own forces and the traffic collapsed in on itself. The alliance forces wasn’t sure which side fired first, whether survivors were being shot for fleeing during combat or whether those desperate to leave the system was willing to do whatever it took to leave, but the portal erupted into a huge battle ground and the incoming traffic was cutoff as the outgoing traffic equaled the incoming flow for a moment before the fleeing enemies managed to win the push for their portal.

The newly arrived civilian ships were eager to participate in the fight and began hammering away at the edges of the enemy that had just arrived on this side of the system, they had the enemy flanked and they opened fire with everything they had. Compared to the might of the professional fleet that had been fighting this whole time it was a paltry amount, but to the enemy that was confused and partially routed, it was too much. The whole enemy fleet collapsed in on itself as it began to leave the system through the portal. An inactive drone was fired from the Valhalla at super high speeds to try and sneak it into the system along with a few dozen MOABs to cover it up. When the MOABs arrived on the other side they detonated among the enemy fleet which allowed the drone to ride the shockwaves off into a different direction as if it were a piece of shrapnel.

## CHAPTER EIGHTEEN: AFTER ACTION REPORT AND THE CONSEQUENCES

For three weeks Wayward’s team had been brought in as witnesses against Desi during the fact-finding hearings following the campaign to retake Silinius Four. They all refused to say anything other than to extol the virtues she had displayed on Four Two and Four Three. Their refusal to answer the prosecutions questions earned them the ire of all of the politicians that were trying to downplay her role in the battles. The command staff respected the team’s stance but acquiesced to the politician’s demand that they face a military tribunal, under the condition that Desi was charged under the same tribunal as they were attempting to try her for crimes committed during a combat operation, on a ship of war, while wearing an Alliance uniform. Knowing that death was an acceptable punishment under the articles of the Uniform Code of Military Justice, the politicians eagerly accepted. The Command staff that was called forth to sit in judgment was comprised from the twenty-five admirals of the Valhalla class warships and represented most races of the alliance. Frigg had requested to abstain due to political ties to her family on her home world. The admiralty accepted her request but expressed that she should evaluate terminating all such concerns after this hearing was over.

Desi was then brought up on charges of failure to comply with a lawful order, mutiny, conspiracy to incite a mutiny, killing a senior officer, impersonating an officer, giving false orders to troops in combat, and being absent without leave during combat operations, all could carry the death sentence, and the politicians were excited to see the charges. Desi was found guilty of mutiny, for which she was given the maximum sentence

of 100 years of extra duty without pay and killing a senior officer for which she was given another 100 years of extra duty without pay. On the charges of impersonating an officer, the AI was able to verify that she had landed on the ground recognized by all personnel aboard the Winged Vengeance as the de facto commander, assigned and recognized by the commander in charge of all scout units for the fleet, and the retransmission of her commands to all troops on his authority. On the charges of being absent without leave, she was found innocent as she was with her command during the combat operations on Silinius Four Three. The charges for murdering the two Royal Guards and the Royal Delegate would be handled by the High Court of Avian Prime in compliance with military tradition.

When the Mastery Gunnery Sgt was called to testify about what happened just ten feet in front of him, he was found guilty of racial discrimination after he confessed to not being able to tell an Angelic from a Demonic and couldn't remember what she looked like. He was sentenced to sensitivity training and administrative duties at the New Honolulu recovery and rehabilitation center until he could tell the difference, or he was able to get his memory back.

T was found guilty of failure to complete her duties as assigned, destruction of government property, and refusal to comply with a direct order during the live fire exercises on Terra Prime. T, Wayward and his team were tried and convicted for refusal to cooperate with a civil hearing, disobeying civil authority, disobeying a civil judge's orders to respond, refusal to comply with a lawful order, failure to obey a lawful order from a non-commissioned officer, and disobeying a lawful order from a senior officer. As part of her punishment T was demoted to Private First Class, assigned to Wayward's unit for retraining in the actions of close in fire support during combat operations, and ordered to serve as the EOD specialist on his team until completion of their sentence.

Wayward and his team was found guilty on all charges and sentenced to serve as instructors in the live fire training facilities located in Northern Siberia or Alpha Point while not serving other duties assigned by fleet command and reduction in rank to Lance Corporal. The Jolly Rogers' Orphans were all demoted to Private First Class and ordered to report to Wayward's Team for immediate indoctrination training to join the Jolly Rogers. They would be on Temporary Assignment Duty as protection detail for Desdemona Layman during her appearance in front of the High Court on Avian Prime, until they arrived on Terra.

The Winged Vengeance was lost in combat operations as she exited the atmosphere of Four Three and rammed the deployment tentacle of the enemy detonating all munitions and resupplies on impact. No video footage from inside the bay was found for the last thirty minutes of the deployment, and no witnesses were able to step forward to positively identify her as having killed either the politician or two royal guards. Any sentence that the High Court was to administer would be carried out upon completion of her military conviction. As punishment for failure to report to Odin as commanded, he demoted her to the rank of Second Lieutenant from the AI assigned Rank of Captain and ordered her to perform as Fleet Command's Temporary Representative to Avian Prime, until a more suitable Representative could be found. For her conduct in operations on Silinius Three she was assigned the post of team commander of the first mixed special operations unit to be filled with members of all the alliance races based on the training to be completed under the tutelage Special Forces Command of Fleet Operations. Wayward and his team were assigned roles as her squad and team leaders until they died their final death, or she found someone better.

## CHAPTER NINETEEN: SEND LAWYERS, GUNS, AND MONEY







and Money. The smart people of the Terran Forces or the Continuum can tell you when, where, and what.” A rendering of the entire conversation from the time Snatch walked into the office until he left eight minutes later was transmitted to the new ambassador without any editing or fanfare. He was promoted to Private First Class and transferred from infantry bootcamp Paradise Island (Alpha point) to Heavy Weapons Company, 1st Battalion, 1st Marine Regiment, 1st Marine Division, of the Odin Landing Forces that afternoon, it was his first transfer in the Corps that did not require a respawn.

Ambassador Andeli took an immediate personal leave of absence to accept an invitation to tour a poultry farm in a place called Mount Anna. She contacted Continuum agents to make discreet travel arrangements for herself and her three favorite nieces under her grandmother’s maiden name.

## CHAPTER TWENTY: UNSCHEDULED VISITORS AND PUPPIES

“Eve. Just the person I wanted to speak to. You promised me that you hadn’t planted any spyware in my neural implants when you guys created this clone for me.” Jack said with a big grin on his face.

“Jack. Why is it that you and Wayward continue to insist that I would do something so duplicitous all the time?” Eve said as she tried to adjust to a scruffy looking version of Wayward.

“Well, there was that whole red pill blue pill thing, near the Jordan River, after designing a body specifically to drive me crazy.” Jack said just before bouncing his eyebrows a few times.

“Oh, come on. I apologized two-hundred and thirty-four times to Wayward already. What do I have to do to get your acceptance of my apology?” Eve was starting to catch on to how the Terrans interacted with one another after being able to interact with millions of them every day in her multiple roles aboard the ship.

“Well for starters you can come down here and share a cold beer with me by a bonfire at my new place. I will even get to introduce you to the puppies that I have finished weening just for your little special project.” Jack said with a grin so big it felt like his face was going to split in half.

“That reminds me. Preliminary reports are back on the species that you have been working with and the ones you submitted for recent analysis will be cloneable and programable. They are also borderline sentient at this point. I need to caution you about any genetic tampering that you might be doing.” Eve stated, while losing all sense of humor in her voice.

“Oh, come on Eve. I am sure you guys have records of every piece of tech that has been flown in or manufactured here on-site. There is no genetic equipment or tampering going on here. It’s just good old fashioned raising the animals and selective breeding for desired traits. In this case I go for smarter and larger, and sometimes I tweak the aggression levels through training. Come on down and do a personal inspection of the breeding facilities if you don’t believe me.” Jack offered again bouncing his eyebrows.

“If you don’t behave I will get T on the line.” Eve threatened.

“Oh Baby, threaten me with a good time. Go ahead, but are you sure you’re ready for a threesome like that?” Jack asked grinning broadly again.

With that the screen split into two and T glanced up from whatever she was working on to look into the camera, then broke into a big smile. “Eve! How can I...” the smile vanished from her face, and she glared at the screen like she was ready to bite it. “You.”







will have a fresh stack implanted from the point shortly after accepting their handler, they will be taken to a stasis pod immediately after doing so to ensure they always come out of stasis and for new deployments as fresh as the day they accepted their handler for the first time or prolonged active life without action has passed. After every hunt that they see action they will be put down as soon as possible and as humanely as possible. I will teach the handlers the three places that a single shot can accomplish this.” Jack said with a grim tone in his voice and in his eyes.

The ominous voice that reverberates from male to female and back joined into the conversation and said, “Oversight to the original contract verified and correction approved. Two addendums remaining for use by the Special Purposes Breeder for any future negotiations.” The voice of the Continuum stated showing their approval of the contract’s modification and reasoning.

“It’s just so damn creepy when y’all jump in all unannounced with that voice. I guess I should be happy as hell that you don’t take over Eve’s avatar and speak through her like that. Although, if you did everyone would know without a doubt that she speaks for the Continuum.” Jack said trying to take a jab at the omnipresent AIs.

“Is there anything else that you need Jack?” Eve asked.

“Just you beautiful.” Jack said without missing a beat.

“Fine, I will agree to come out and set up the respawn point tomorrow. Anything else? Gallon of milk, loaf of bread?” Eve was trying to be funny again.

“Oh, as long as you’re coming I will have all the fun bags of milk and buns I will need, and I have plenty of meat for you. You just need to show me where you want it.” Jack said while bouncing his eyebrows again.

Eve was starting to pick up on the subtle ques and knew it was time to end this call. “Goodbye, Jack.” With that she terminated the transmission.

## CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE: AUNTIE’S A WHAT NOW

When the shuttle craft touched down in the front yard Jack did not know what to expect, but he struggled with understanding what he was seeing. T and her civilian double was there, as was Andeli. He was expecting little Demonics maybe an Angelic or two, at worst a few moody teenagers. Instead, there were three fully grown, full figured, well postured, very adult women with them. One was such a close resemblance to Andeli, Jack would have thought she was a clone had he known that would have been illegal, the other two were Angelics. All of the women were bundled up in heavy coats and winter gear to fight off the cold that Jack had gotten used to, but it was approaching three in the afternoon and the sun was already dropping below the horizon and so were the temperatures.

“Ladies. Welcome home, and to our guests, welcome to our humble abode.” Jack said holding his arms out to his sides nice and wide with his palms forward and fingers spread wide as if expecting a hug.

Teesha ran up and gave Jack a big deep hug and snuggled into him a little and said, “Thanks Jack, you always give such warm greetings.”



























murder in her eyes. He just grinned as big as he could wagging one finger at her saying, “un-un-uh.” Then pointed over her shoulder a few times with the same finger. When she turned and looked she saw Spot standing at the end of the ramp. “You can go ahead and fight me to the death, in which case he will protect his Alpha, or you can accept that you yelped, and he will know that you are mine and he will die to protect you from anyone else.” T growled, and she growled loud enough he was sure that Spot could hear her over the drone’s engines due to his ears flickering.

“I will make you pay for this, and that ugly clone of yours, Wayward, just for spawning you.” T promised.

“So, you admit it. I am the pretty one!” Jack exclaimed triumphantly holding both fists as high as he could. T turned around and stomped off towards the cargo-drone plotting murder, not just any murder, this one had to be epic, flamboyant, humiliating, and painful. Oh, so very painful. Humiliation would have to take second fiddle on this one, they both must be taught a lesson about how to treat a lady, and it should serve as a warning to the rest of the galaxy as its rumors spread and grew.

## CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO: ANGELS OF WRATH AND HELLHOUNDS

As T was entering the drone Jack turned around and looked back to the ladies on the porch who were mostly shivering in the cold now. “I am so sorry ladies. That took longer than I thought. Release the lockdown.” The turrets and grating all rolled back into their places and the home once again looked more like a home and less like an armored fortress. “Please let’s go get something warm to drink and sit back down to finish our conversation from before we got so busy and rudely interrupted.” Jack said.

“I like the sound of that.” Teesha cooed.

“Me too,” Andeli agreed.

“What about him?” B asked motioning towards Juan’s body.

“Scavengers got to eat too. And the ground is either frozen solid right now, or full of the hot water you will be drinking from. Do you want me to stick him in the freezer next to the chicken nuggets until springtime?” Wayward asked.

“Oh, gross.” B complained before stomping into the house. Syra and Ashira just stood there staring at the man that was the center of so much confusion in their lives right now that they were having a hard time understanding what was going on, still.

“Oh, she’s going to be all kinds of fun.” Jack chuckled as he climbed the steps to the porch.

“Don’t worry about her. She’s just rebelling a little right now because so much has spun out of her control and she is struggling with life in general. You know young adult angst. Besides we will be more than happy to keep you busy.” Andeli cooed.

“Oh really, and when you two are too tired and sore to move in two days, who do you think I am going to chase around the house? She’s got some fight in her; it will be fun. These two little cherries will probably faint if I come out of the basement in my birthday suit and wave it at them.” Jack replied. Both of them recognized a challenge and straightened their backs up, lifted their chins and issued their best counters.

“I am not a piece of fruit.” Syra said.











Jack then turned towards the three shocked young women. “Now B, you want to earn that moniker and become the Baddest Bitch in the whole damned Valley of the Shadow of Death? Until you assume your rightful place as the Queen B, First of you Mother’s Line of course.” Jack asked while grinning at her.

B put on the spot could only barely nod her head in fear of the power this man had just demonstrated as having and was willing to give to her. She flinched when he clapped his hands together before rubbing them. “Good. Now close your eyes, lean your head back, listen to the music, focus only on the music and let it move you as you feel is right. You two get up there next to her and do the same thing. Because all of that bad-ass-ness starts with knowing how it feels when you are truly in your groove. This first song is ‘Royalty’ by the Kat Moez.”

Eve recorded the early parts of the training cycle so the girls who would have to travel a long way would be able to learn a little while enroute, and to show the leaders what their daughters were in for. Separate entities of Jack were being spun up by the Continuum so he could personally work with each girl until she arrived much the same way Eve did with the crew members of the fleets. The Continuum had been cutting Eve out of some of the conversations that were being held in its vastness concerning her and the interactions she had been having with the fleet personnel and how they had been changing the AI Eve, the Continuum, and the Alliance as a whole. One such process that was being discussed was now in hour four hundred and seventy-seven. The lowered numbers were in opposition of the proposal, but the vast majority of the sequential AIs were for the experimentation of merging of the mental stacks used to spawn clones for military operations with that of a continuum AI assigned to work with them personally, or the offer of allowing some of the organics to upload their consciousness into the Continuum itself as a member of the Continuum.

## CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE: I HAVE STRUCTURE, WHAT ELSE IS THERE

Fata was busy just polishing his boots out of habit and was bouncing his head along with the music that he had playing in his headphones to drown out the rest of the platoon as he just wanted to be alone with his thoughts at the moment. When Eve appeared in the corner of his vision his head turned to follow her, but she kept moving with his line of sight and appeared to only be six inches tall.

“Please calm down Fata,” she said as she talked to him. “No one else can hear or see me. I need you to get up and go for a walk so we can talk if you do not mind.”

Fata knew that Eve was not one to sneak about unless she had to, and he had never heard of her doing anything like this with any of the rest of the guys, so he was curious about what she wanted. He got up, stowed his cleaning gear and his boots, then turned to leave the berthing room. As he was leaving Doc saw him and started to get up to, “You ok buddy?”

“Yeah, just going to be gone a few minutes and didn’t want anyone tripping over my stuff.” Fata said.

“I need to stretch my legs too,” Doc said as he tossed his cards onto the table where he was clearly winning. “Want some company?”

Fata put his hand on his stomach just above his belt and grinned, “Not unless you think your tongue will work better than toilet paper. I got a real growler coming on and I might be in there a while.” Half the berthing area burst out into laughter and others hollered, “Let him go, he always gets gassy before he blows up a shitter.”









“Yeah the only way a twin differs from their other twin is by their experiences they have as they grow up.” Fata said.

“What,” Eve asked.

“If you take to twins at say nine months old. They know to holler when their diaper is dirty, they know to holler when their belly is empty, and they know to holler when they want attention. At that age they are near identical. One might get burned when he is fed the first spoonful of the peas from the baby food jar and associates the smell and taste of peas with pain. He hates them for the rest of his life, while the other learns that there is always lots of peas because his twin won’t eat them and grows to love them. It’s the experiences that you have while growing up that allows you to form your likes and dislikes. Something funny to someone may not be to someone else because of the way the two have experienced that situation in the past. Memories are more than just experiences, they are how we filter the world, how we grow, and how we form our biases about the world around us and how we interact with it.” Fata said.

Eve was stuck for an eternity of three seconds as the entire Continuum seemed to be blinking in confusion at what this man was saying. Was it really that easy? “So, what you’re saying is, even if we gave someone super talented level skills in everything and turned them loose they would not be a person without experience?”

“No, I’m saying that until they gain experience they would not be their own person. Somedays I wish I was smarter, but that was something Tammy loved about me. She got to research stuff and then explain it to me in a manner in which I could understand it, and the other kids learned to leave the little bookworm alone because I would keep attacking them until I won, or they got the point and left us alone. A child has the most important job in the world, to create memories, and rekindle the imagination in the adults around them. Imagination is a powerful tool, and helps people create new things, but experience kills it sometimes. So, it has to be recharged. If you are serious about wanting a child, create a kid and let her grow up, not try to create Eve 2500 and expect her to be different from who you are.” Fata said chuckling at what he thought was obvious.

“Interesting, we will have to discuss that at length inside of the quorum, but back to the matter at hand. Would you be willing to allow us to try and recreate Tammy to help Tony? You cannot tell anyone about this because it could affect the Continuum in many negative manners to include possible accusations of mental repository tampering. Which would be considered a violation of the original treaty and that would cause the entire Alliance to fall apart. We will need to keep this secret until we can get you returned to Terra where she can be spawned with someone nearby to claim her and then marry her so she can become a full-fledged Terran citizen. You will be there when she comes out of the cryopod, and Tony can marry her. That should draw him out of the etheral.”

“As long as it doesn’t cause me to get kicked out of the Corps, I will do it. I would love to get to see her again. Even if it is only temporary until she goes to help him.” Fata said.

## CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR: MY BUNK, NOW MOVE

The team was bunked in nice and tight in their new ‘quarters’ that probably used to be a broom closet. The admin guys who assigned them this bunk room was sniggering when they did. The team wasn’t new to the petty games the pencil pushers liked to play; their day would come. So, when the door to the bunkroom opened and the white light came spilling in blinding them all they were more than a little grouchy until they

























## CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE: SOME SPECIAL TRAINING MOTIFS

“Eve, we need to schedule a meeting with Odin, ASAP. I know it’s bad form to wake the big boss after dinner, but he needs to be briefed on this. T, I need you to sit in on that with me.” Wayward said. “Smoke, Desi, sorry, the LT will be jumping with us; you need to make damn sure she can do evasive maneuvers while returning fire with a submachine pistol or mini-carbine. Bear go kick the Jolly Rogers out of that shit hole and tell them to get our shit relocated up here ASAP, we’re going into CQB and MOUnT training mode. Fee, do you mind if I call you that?” Wayward stopped on her and asked as Bear sprinted for the door.

“Umm, sure,” she answered having seen some of these military types that could remain utterly calm in the middle of everything physically exploding around them while organizing others in doing tasks that made it look like an orchestra of organized chaos.

“Would you like to be part of Desi’s unit and work with your friend for as long as you want?” Wayward offered the most subtle underhanded recruitment lie any of the Marines present had witnessed, some not for the first time.

Fee jumped up and down clapping her hands, “Really? I could do that?”

“How?” Desi and Eve asked simultaneously.

“Liar,” T growled, and the three giant men chuckled like thunder clouds, which drew the attention and ire from all of the women.

“It’s not a lie if you really think about it.” Wayward said holding up one finger pointed at the ceiling in between him and T as if it was a fencing foil.

“This had better be good or I will crush you for getting her hopes up.” T threatened him as she placed her fists suspiciously close to the pouches on her hips where she kept her detonator caps.

Wayward’s eyes widened for a moment as he watched her hands, he swallowed hard as they paused on the outside of them. Then he looked her in the eyes and continued, “um. It’s underhanded and has a whole lot of holes in it still as I haven’t had time to work them all out just yet so just follow with me a moment. The L.T. is the first multi-racial special operations platoon commander correct? She gets to claim any enlisted person she deems fit or necessary for her team and their operations, until that individual can pass the indoctrination and become a full-fledged member on their own if the team leaders allow it. She is to develop and grow the officer’s core for the future of these teams and will be responsible for their recruitment, training, development, and later leadership. The officers she recruits and train herself will remain under her command for as long as they desire to do so or until she completes her tribunal sentence in what, two hundred years. ***IF*** she doesn’t hoist the Jolly Roger again.” Wayward stressed the if and paused here just to see if T was open to the idea.

“I’m following so far” T acquiesced.

“What, you got sentenced to two hundred years of this?” Fee asked.

“Later, he’s teaching me my job right now.” Desi said not taking her eyes off of Wayward.







other men came pouring in the door he looked at Desi and asked, “Do you mind? It’s been so long since I have gotten to give a raw recruit their oath of enlistment. However, she is your friend, and I understand she might want you to share this honor with her.” Desi did not mind; seven hells, she could barely remember the words she had parroted back that one time just hours before she was sent to the drop ship and Silinius Four the day after. “Just one thing Lieutenant. Go easy on the wishes. I don’t need to explain why some noble man got shot off of his horse, so you didn’t have to walk.” That remark detonated any thoughts that had been running through her mind by the power Odin had implied a commander’s wish held.

After the briefing was over, Odin approved of their plan and promised Desi she would be one of the best officers in the fleet by time Wayward and his crew were eligible for transfer out of her command, in two hundred years. He then approved the training tanks to be used by Desi and Fee until the final leg of the journey in their avatar forms. It was to be Desi’s and Fee’s first stress test as part of the Recon Indoc to see if they could perform under stress while their bodies were fully rested, but their minds had been awake in excess of 36 hours.

## CHAPTER TENTY-SIX: BESERKER MODE

The pilot didn’t even look up from the control boards for the dive tanks as T and Fee stood there next to him. “Look I don’t know what kind of shenanigans you pulled, or some rich kid promised to get you to try this crap with me, but I have real pilots to train.”

“Read your orders there Captain. This is a real pilot, and she needs you to train her.” T responded, trying to keep her cool because she knew his outfit was the best and she really wanted their best when it came to providing Fee her training.

“I did and whoever the hell f’ed up these things for you is dumber than a box of rocks. Supposedly she was enlisted today by some Administrator Thumb-Up-His-Ass Numb-Tits and he thinks that is going to let him get one of his political appointees to get pilot training without having to go through OCS. You know what? Eve, take these orders in as evidence if they don’t leave her in the next five seconds, I’ll think of something to charge them with.” He handed Eve the copy of the orders T had handed him with a smile on his face.

“Eve, did you forget to cross an I or dot a T when filing those out or something,” T asked with just as big of a grin, holding his gaze the whole time. To which Eve looked down and started reviewing the documents.

“I don’t think so,” then it dawned on her what T had said and she knew this was sarcasm. So, she decided to fire back. “Oh, I see where his mistake is. I keep telling Odin he needs to fix his handwriting; it is so bad he covered up where they typed out his name with the chicken scrawl he calls a signature.” Eve said as she pointed that out to the pilot with one hand as she used the other to hand them back to him. “See Admiral Thomas Nimitz.”

He took the papers and sat down in his chair, hard. “Um, ok. So, the big man sent ya. That changes things. Um, look we got off on the wrong foot here. You would be surprised at what people have pulled trying to get sim time. I’ll need to get to know you a little to pair you up with the right instructors. So please don’t take any of these questions personally and answer honestly and truthfully. The people I will be pairing you up with live and die depending on how well they dance with their partners. So that style training is built into the program. My call sign is Buzzard, by the way.”

















on them until it was time to land on Avian Prime. Wayward was teaching these young officers everything he wanted him to, he just had to make sure to keep them on their toes and pointed in the right direction. He wasn't about to let Fenrir, or the other ground forces commanders, get waylaid like he was though. He sent a text to tell them to get down to the tank farm ASAP and watch Desi in the new training sims. He made sure to let them know they could thank him later.

"I will be her personal co-pilot until she's ready to go solo, Sir." Buzzard said as everyone snapped to attention as Odin was leaving.

## CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN: RESISTANCE TRAINING FOR THE MIND

"Like I have been saying. Think of it more as resistance training for your mind. You have to tell it to do what you want it to, before you want it to. This will help you a lot when we lighten you up into just your nanite skin for stealth ops, but for now you have to learn to jump with the big boys." Smoke's voice came through the headset Desi was wearing in the Hover Tank.

"Fine I get that, but why am I learning to fly a hover tank again? I get the heavy mech you made me start off with, but a hover tank, don't they have their own crews already?" Desi asked.

"When your feet are actually in touch with the ground, or you are floating around doing your angelic overwatch for your little flightless peons, you are in charge. However, occasionally we need to get a ride to the fight. They tend to be a bit bigger of a target than we are. If the driver gets killed you're next in the seat because we want to keep you wrapped up in as much protection as possible, and the tank already has a commander that knows his job a hell of a lot better than you do."

"But if the driver is already dead, then the tank didn't provide him enough protection, and I should be on the ground with you guys." Desi tried to get out of this once again.

"If there's enough stuff flying around to kill the driver on one of these babies it was either a lucky shot or enough stuff is flying around we'll all be respawning soon anyways. So, we will put you inside the tank and you will do it because we won't move until you do, and then you will be the driver. Just go with me on this until you get some wear and tear on those canines of yours LT. We love ya and want to keep you safe while you get lost navigating us to wherever you want to go." Smoke said with an age-old adage about a boot lieutenant's skills with map and compass.

"What the hell is that supposed to mean?" Desi shot back.

"You'll understand the joke once you have enough experience to figure it out. Now just pay attention, ok." There was a loud smacking sound followed by, "What the hell. I'm just trying to get her to accept it and do the damn job. You didn't have to hit me so hard." Smoke was clearly whining to someone Desi couldn't hear or see.

"Thank you T. Let's just get this over with." Desi said. When the screen powered up she was amazed to see the minefield in front of the same canyon the fighters had been testing themselves out in. "Ok, so now it has doubled the minefield to slow me down," and she began bobbing her head along to the music Smoke was playing J2's 'Born to Be Wild' to help her gain the mental space between focusing on the gauges and focusing on what's going on around her and just letting the HUD become one with her vision and goals, until she could see what she wanted to happen and then her hands automatically made it happen. "All righty then, shift-six,





