

Empire

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EMPIRE

PART I

BEGINNING OF WAR.

TRANTOR ... *By the end of the fourth millennium the Kingdom of Trantor had become truly imperial in scope. Following a brief period of consolidation, a new wave of conquest was launched during the reign of Aegis, First of the Name ...*

*At the very rim of the explored galaxy there was a loosely knit union of worlds, see map ... Having avoided confrontation for many years, the Alliance now became the focus of the Emperor's attention. They were fortunate indeed to have in their service such able commanders as ...*¹

- *Encyclopedia Galactica.*

Captain Loskene left the auxiliary control-room and moved down the corridor. As captain it was among his duties to welcome their passenger on board. The admiral's transport would be docking any moment now. He was a little uneasy about admiral Losira, she was not known for her patience, and he disliked being out-ranked by a woman. They belonged in subordinate positions, like his new yeomen. A small lecherous smile crossed his face at the thought. Well if all went well, it wouldn't last long and soon Losira would be off his ship.

He swung around the corner and entered the docking area. His first officer and an honorary guard were already present and were lined up at the end of the airlock.

"How long, Mr. Roise?" he asked.

"About another minute, sir! I'm pressurizing the chamber now."

The operation was complete and the door slid open. A woman stepped out followed by two junior officers.

"Present arms!"

Permission to come aboard?" she asked.

"Permission granted." Loskene's eyes swept over her figure. She was in her mid thirties, a potentially beautiful woman, had she only cared. Somehow you got the impression her face was rarely graced by a smile. Her height was emphasized by her slim waist. The firm outline of her breasts were visible beneath her uniform.

"Welcome aboard the "Fearless". I'm Captain Loskene. Allow me to present my first officer, Commander Roise."

"How do you do, Captain. Commander."

"Thank you, ma'am."

"Now Mr. Roise, if you would escort the Admiral and her aides to their quarters..."

"I like a tour of your ship." Losira broke in.

¹ All quotations from the Encyclopedia Galactica here reproduced are taken from the 116th edition published in 1020 F.E by the Encyclopedia Galactica Publishing Co., Terminus, with permission of the publishers.

“Well, I’m sure that can be arranged eventually. Right now we are quite busy.”, Loskene answered.

“I like it now, if you don’t mind, *Captain*.”

There was slight pause. “Of course, Admiral.” Loskene said, “Perhaps you would like to ...” He was interrupted by the intercom, “Captain to the bridge, two Imperial cruisers have just popped out of hyper-space. They are closing in on us fast.

Loskene hit a switch : “This is the Captain. Sound the alert. All decks to battle stations. Raise shields.”

They rushed down the corridor passing running crewmen. Upon entering the bridge Loskene barked, “Status report !”.

“Shields are up, weapons armed and ready. They will be within range in five minutes.”

“Captain. I’m sorry,” Losira said “but as senior officer it is my duty to assume command of this vessel.”

“What ! This is my command, my ship. You have no ...”

“I’m sure there is no need for me to quote regulations. Lieutenant, have they hailed us yet ?”

“No, sir. ”

“Open a channel.”

“Engineering to bridge. We have a serious problem down here.”

“This is Admiral Losira in command. What is the matter ?”

“Admiral, ..? What ! Ah, I understand. We’re having some trouble with one of the main engines. The error is in the interface with the main reactor. I’ll have to shut the reactor down in order to fix it. I’m afraid it might take at least two hours.

“Damn it. Keep the reactor online. We may be needing every ounce of power you can squeeze out of it. Losira out.”

“Captain Loskene. Can we outrun them ?”

“No, Ma’am. I’m afraid not. But we are still more maneuverable.”

“Could we attempt a jump ?”

“No, not yet. In 20 minutes we should have a crude computation ready. But I wouldn’t care to rely on it.”

“Admiral, they are coming within range.” a lieutenant broke in.

“Haven’t they answered yet ?”

“No, ma’am they are ignoring us. What the hell ! They are transmitting our old prefix code !”

“What ! ” Loskene roared “Our old code. Where did they get that from ?”

“I don’t know. Somebody must have sold out. Fortunately High Command changed it just before we left star-base VI.”

Each and every ship in the fleet had its own prefix code which nobody but the high command was supposed to know. In the rare event that a crew went insane or mutinied, loyal vessels could use the prefix code to order the main computer to disabled the shields, leaving the ship defenseless and forcing a surrender.

“Admiral. We are being hailed. ”

“On screen.”

A man’s face appeared on the main viewing screen replacing the star-field and the approaching vessels.

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"I'm Commander Brodrig of the Imperial Battle Cruisers "Vengeance" and "Sovereign". I order you to lower your shields and prepare to be boarded.

"This is Admiral Losira commanding the Alliance frigate "Fearless". You're in violation of the Treaty of Tau Ceti. Your presence here is an act of war. I give you one hour to leave Alliance space."

"Admiral Losira. Perhaps you haven't noticed, but you are in no position to quote treaty. We out-gun you ten to one. Lower your shields or we will blow you out of the sky !"

Before answering Losira whispered a few quiet orders : "Helm, standby for evasive action at my command. Weapons officer, target their leading cruiser, blasters at maximum, try to take out their shield generators." Then turning to the screen :

"Do you know what Commander ? Go fuck yourself. I'd rather die than surrender."

Loskene roared : "Are you out of your mind ? Those are battle cruisers, not corvettes !"

"Calm yourself, Captain. Helm. Now !"

The bridge crew were pressed into their seats as the ship lurched forward. Two vast energy beams flicked out from cruisers, narrowly missing them, passing through the position they had just occupied.

"Weapons have locked on, sir !"

"Fire at will. Helm, keep maneuvering, try to bring them in each others line of fire. We have got to buy some time"

"Aye, sir."

The ship rocked violently as they were hit fair and square, almost knocking them out of their chairs.

"Damage report ?"

"Some minor damage. No casualties. Number four shield is down 30 percent."

"Divert auxiliary power to shields."

They took a hit, another one and then yet another. Their own fire splashed harmlessly against the enemy's protective screens.

"Admiral, serious damage to number one shield. Number four is buckling."

"Engineering to bridge. The generators are badly over-strained. We can't keep this up for long."

"Admiral, this is suicide." Loskene said, "We have no chance at all."

"I'm sure you'll agree that surrender is no option. You know what the Empire does to its prisoners. How long before we can attempt a jump ?"

"12 minutes, fifty seconds."

Another direct hit shook the frigate.

"All right, let's try something else. Hold your fire. Engineering, lower shields and blank out all systems, but weapons. Shut down life-support too !"

The ship fell silent as the power came off. The emergency lighting flicked on and cast a dim light over their haggard faces.

Surprisingly the cruisers ceased firing.

"I thought so." Losira said slowly, "They wanted us alive all along. Now they are looking us over."

While the "Sovereign" kept her distance, the "Vengeance" approached carefully. Losira watched as the cruiser came to a slow halt at point blank range.

"If I'm right they'll try to board us. They'll have to lower their shields."

“Admiral, should I lock on to it ?”

“No, Lieutenant. They might detect our weapons lock on. Target and fire manually, but only at my command.”

“Admiral, we’re starting to drift. Should I keep her on course ?”

“Negative. Helm.”

Commander Brodrig studied the “Fearless”. Their final hits seemed to have disabled it. His sensor scans indicated that their power production had all but ceased. His strict orders in mind, he decided to risk a boarding party. For a minute or so he would be defenseless, while they launched a small transport. But there was no other way and besides the “Sovereign” would be covering him.

On board the “Fearless” Losira allowed herself a small smile as the cruisers shields came down.

“That’s right. Now hold your fire. Engineering. I’ll be needing all power available in a few seconds. Helm, plot an intercept course for the “Sovereign”. Maximum acceleration when I give the word.”

“Weapons officer, are you ready ?”

“Aye, sir. Standing by.”

“Engineering. Cut in power now ! Shields up. Fire all weapons !”

Rays of deadly energy flashed out from the “Fearless”, cutting through the unprotected hull of the “Vengeance”, vaporizing walls as they went and exploding their shield generators.

The “Sovereign”’s responds came a split second too late, their fire was stopped short of the hull by the frigates shields. Their captain stared in disbelief as his mad attacker turned and bore down on them

“Fire !” he ordered.

While his shields were built to absorb radiation and deflect dust and small meteorites, there was no way by which they could withstand the kinetic energy of the closing frigate.

Desperately he ordered evasive action, but his efforts were all in vain. The “Fearless” being the smaller vessel was also the more maneuverable and could not be dodged.

“25 seconds to impact. 23, 22, ..”

On board the frigate tension was building up. First were being clenched.

“The forward shields are buckling !”

“Emergency power to shields. Divert power from aft shields.”

“15 seconds, 14, 13, 12... ”

“The reactor is overloading !”

“I want more power !”

“You arrogant bitch. You will get us all killed. !”

The “Vengeance” loomed large on main viewing screen. Destruction seemed imminent, when suddenly the image flicked and the cruiser was gone.

It took Losira a moment to realize that the cruiser had jumped away. She had forced the enemy into a position where there was no alternative but death.

There was a general sigh of relief as realization hit the crew.

“Good work, all hands. Reduce reactor output to normal levels.” Losira ordered, “Bring her about and pursue the “Vengeance”. ”

“Admiral,” Loskene asked, “what about her ? Are you going to destroy them ? They are virtually defenseless !”

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“Yes, I know. But we lack the capacity to take the crew prisoners. It is obvious that the Empire is about to declare war on us. We can not allow a cruiser to escape.”

“But we’re talking about hundreds of lives !”

“Captain, don’t you ever question my commands again or I’ll have you relieved of duty. The Empire was never been merciful.”

“Admiral, we’re coming within range.” a young lieutenant said sickingly.

“Lock on. Fire all weapons !”

“Admiral, we’re being hailed. I think they wish to surrender !”

“No reply.”

“But, Admi..”

“I made myself clear, didn’t I ? Maintain fire !”

Their blasters cut through the hull of “Vengeance” like knives through a melting cheese. Finally the main reactor took a hit and ship blew with a colossal explosion.

“Yes ! So die the foolish !”

“Cease firing. Effect repairs immediately. We’ll be leaving for Sirius as soon as possible. I’ll be in my quarters. Captain. You have the con.”

And Losira left the bridge leaving Loskene to stare at the smoldering wreckage of what had once been an proud Imperial Cruiser.

PART II TREASON.

“FEARLESS” INCIDENT, THE. ... *Emperor Aegis I used the loss of an Imperial cruiser at Betelgeuse as an excuse for launching his long planned offensive against the Alliance ...*

Within a few days an Alliance task force was caught unprepared near Sherman’s planet and was nearly wiped out, see map below. Today it remains a mystery just how the Imperials learned of their whereabouts, but it has been speculated that ...

- *Encyclopedia Galactica.*

Losira had hardly slept during the night. She couldn’t rid herself of the memories that kept returning. Twenty years ago she had lived with her parents at a small research outpost on a desert planet. One day an Imperial scout came across the outpost. Deciding to give his men a day off, the captain attacked the station. The men had been shot, she could still feel her fathers blood across her face, while the troops had ..., she was never able to complete the thought.

It had felt good to destroy the cruiser. Oh, to watch the beams cut it to pieces. She imagined how the men had screamed for help while searching for cover that didn’t exist. But now ...

The Imperials left the women to die among the ruins. Her mother went insane with sorrow and died within a few days. By some miracle Losira and few others survived and were picked up by a supply ship arriving by the end of the week.

Her intercom beeped, “Bridge to Admiral Losira”. She flicked a switch and answered angrily “Yes, what is it ?”.

“Captain Loskene here, Admiral. We’re receiving a coded message from high command. Should I relay it to your quarters ?”

“No. I’ll be joining you on the bridge in a minute.”

As usual the message was pointed and brief. “We are pleased to hear of your escape. As expected the Empire has declared war. Enemy ships have crossed the border, fighting has occurred. We are assembling a task force at Rigel II. You are to proceed there at once and assume command. Further instructions will follow. High Command out.”

“Acknowledge the message. How long to Rigel, Captain ?”

“Three jumps. About a week, if we hurry.”

“I want to be there in no more than five days. Start your computations at once.”

“Aye, Admiral.” and for himself he added, “And may fortune favor the foolish !”

The jump was and would probably remain forever the only practical way of traveling between the stars. In ordinary space no vessel could move faster than the speed of light, a fact which had been known since antiquity, but using the hyper-drive one could leave the relativistic universe and travel between any two points in an instant of observed time.

The journey through hyper-space was governed by an elegant set of mathematical equations in an infinite number of unknowns. The exact solution did exist but in practice it could never be found, however the equations could always be solved numerically to any desired degree of accuracy.

The main problem of hyper-spatial travel was one of navigation. How to determine your position in interstellar space ? Within your own solar system the problem was easy, like the ancient sailors you could follow the stars, but jump ten parsecs and the constellations that you knew so well had been distorted beyond recognition. The answer was spectral analysis. Each star shone with its own unique spectrum, and once you had identified a few equally spaced stars a straight forward computation gave you an estimate of the ships position and orientation.

Unfortunately the problem was not that simple. The stars in the galaxy were numbered in the billions and only a small fraction had been charted and catalogized. In addition interstellar dust reflected and scattered the light making orientation more of an art and less of a science.

There was always an element of risk involved, it could be minimized but never eliminated. The inaccuracy in the ship’s position made the jump that much less certain. The error increased with the length of jump and for this reason most ships kept their jumps fairly short, about a fifty parsecs or so.

The presence of gravitational fields complicated the entry into hyper-space, in an extreme emergency you might risk a jump while just above a planetary surface, but most likely you would end up far from your destination or in the immediate vicinity of a flaming star. One preferred to speed away from mass for a couple of days before attempting the first jump.

By the end of the nightwatch Loskene retired to his quarters, leaving the bridge in the hands of his first officer. He poured himself a drink, sat down in his favorite chair and allowed himself to relax. He felt tired having spent the last few hours supervising the computer. If only she had given him more time. “Murdering bastard !” he thought. “To kill off the entire crew.” It wasn’t war but straight murder, it should never have been allowed to happen. He had to admit though that she had handled the battle well, in fact a little too well ... His thought were interrupted by a soft knock at his door. He smiled a small expectant smile as he stood up.

“Enter.”

“Yeoman Anderson reporting as ordered, sir !”

“Come on in, Yeoman. I would like to talk to you. I understand that your brother has been arrested.” A shadow slid across her pretty face. Obviously she had not been sleeping for the

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last few days, in a small voice she replied :

“Yes, he has. He was smuggling goods for Tau Ceti. I never knew he had gone this far. Oh, Captain.” she cried “I’m so worried for him. Do you think they’ll execute him ?”

“They might, ” Loskene answered, “by now the Alliance is under martial law and law enforcement is going to be rather severe.”

He put a protective arm around her small shoulders,

“But I have few friends at headquarters and they might be able to get him off with a short prison term.”

“You think so ?” she said hopefully.

“Sure, I’m positive. ” He touched her face removing a tear and caressed her hair. “But in return I’ll require certain small favors.”

Horror dawned upon her, desperately she tried to break free of his grip, but he pinned her arms behind her back and his hand clamped down on her mouth. She struggled helplessly.

“Oh no, pretty. You really don’t have any choice. You either submit willingly, or your brother dies. That’s for sure. You might as well relax and get the most of it. But of course there is always your younger sister. She’s such a sweet little creature. You wouldn’t want anything to happen to her, would you ?”.

And he began to tear off her uniform.

Losira was in her quarters studying her computer. The screen held a three dimensional map of the border. The Imperial systems were colored red, while the Alliance shone with a blue light. Rigel II occupied a key strategic position, threatening Imperial commerce across the entire border zone. It was quite obvious what her future orders would be.

She flicked off the screen and leaned back in her chair. Earlier that day she had paid a short visit to engineering. She had inquired about their trouble back at Betelgeuse. The chief engineer had been quite uneasy, looking nervously around as he spoke,

“Oh, no ma’am. It was really quite easy to fix. Yes, we have been experiencing some troubles lately. As a matter of fact we were scheduled for dry dock, but then we received orders to pick you up. Still it puzzles me, it really couldn’t have happened, you know, not all by it-self.”

“Are you suggesting that somebody sabotaged the engine ?”

“Well no, ma’am. I wouldn’t say so. But perhaps someone was a little careless.”

It was to much of a coincidence Losira told herself. Commander Brodrig must have known their exact coordinates, his initial jump had called for pinpoint accuracy. With only partial power the “Fearless” could never outrun the cruisers and in addition she was heavily out-gunned. It had been the perfect trap and the frigate would certainly have fallen into Imperial hands, if she hadn’t won her desperate gamble. There had to be a traitor on board, but who ? It needn’t be one of the command crew, it could be anyone with some access to engineering and communications.

She suddenly felt very small and alone as she realized that she could trust no one but herself. She would have to watch her back. It was far into the night before she finally fell asleep.

The “Fearless” had completed its final jump. It was now speeding towards Rigel II for its rendezvous with the fleet.

Loskene was on duty when Losira entered the bridge. He seemed in high spirits as he spoke, “Well, Admiral. We have made the trip, and in a little less than 5 days !”

“Very good, Captain.”, Losira answered and turning to the communications officer. “Have you had any contact with the fleet yet ?”

“No, ma’am. I have been hailing them for 10 minutes now. No reply.”

“That’s odd. Could it be solar static ?”

“No, not at this distance.” then adding “I know this sounds crazy, Admiral. But in my opinion there is no one out there. The fleet must have gone somewhere else.”

“I am afraid it’s even worse, Admiral.” Loskene in a grave voice, turning his head from a scanner.

“Yes ?”

“I’m picking off readings of massive radiation and scattering debris. There has been a major battle. The fleet has been destroyed.”

“What ! You can’t be serious ?”

“See for yourself, Admiral.”

As they approached the planet they were met by a gruesome sight. Spread out in random orbits around Rigel’s moon were the remnants of the seventh fleet. A few lifeless hulks drifted aimlessly about, flames licking their torn sides. One had been caught in the gravitational well of the star and was spiraling down towards its funeral pyre.

“Holy mother of god, say it ain’t true.” somebody whispered.

“Lieutenant, are you scanning for enemy vessels.” Loskene snapped.

“Aye, Captain. There is no one around, no one at all.”

Losira shut her eyes from the sight. She had to steady herself against a panel before finding the strength to speak,

“Signal through to High Command, tell them that we are fin..., Inform them that the seventh fleet is no more.”

“There is nothing good about war, except its ending.”

“Yes. And may heaven help us all.”

To be continued ...

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