

“Occasional chauvinistic remarks are unintended but unavoidable and should not be taken seriously.”¹

Empire.

BY CARL CHRISTIAN KJELGAARD MIKKELSEN.

Part III

Interlude.

RIGELLIAN WAR, The First... *following their massive defeat at Rigel II, the forces of the Alliance where forced to withdraw from the border, abandoning their outer worlds as they went. These scarcely populated planets with their inadequate defenses fell victim to the terrible onslaught of the Empire ...*

- *Encyclopedia Galactica.*²

Losira was on board the Alliance flagship “Salvation” in orbit around the planet Vega. The sun was rising above the planet’s surface. The ship’s observation lounge was nearly deserted, only a few crewmen lingered over their drinks. Losira sat by herself at a table right next to one of large windows. A bright nebula dominated her lower field of vision. A few miles away a swarm of shuttle pods and transports were servicing a couple of capital ships. A small courier slid across the window, accelerated and disappeared as it jumped to hyper-space. A few hours ago Losira had arrived on board a similar vessel.

For nearly two months she had been running the day to day operations at the front. Now a conference was to be held to determine the future strategy of the Alliance. The situation was serious, though not yet desperate. Seeking to avoid a major confrontation, one which they would certainly loose, the Alliance had fought a defensive war trading space for time. Losira had launched a series of small attacks against imperial commerce, forcing the enemy to withdraw a large number of frigates and corvettes for convoy duty. A huge part of the enemy fleet had been wallowed up through the necessity of occupying the conquered territory. But the Empire could still muster a terrifying force. How to nullify that advantage .. ?

A soft cough interrupted her thoughts. A young ensign had moved up behind her.

“Excuse me, ma’am. The conference is in 10 minutes. If you would please follow me.”

“Thank you, young man. I think I know my way around.” Losira snapped.

“Oh-yes. Admiral.”

She felt somewhat sorry for him, as she stepped past him and strode towards the door. He really looked kind of cute. Fifteen years ago she might have looked twice, but not now. Besides, how could she possibly apologize to a mere ensign.

The conference-room was long and rectangular. A large table dominated the room. A few guards where standing next to the entrance. Members of the government and high command were already present and engaged in quiet discussion. Over the years Losira had come to know

¹The authors favorite quotation from Knuth’s fine work on the art of computer programming.

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most of them, among those prime minister Belisarius, a lean man in his late seventies, and minister Maurice, the man responsible for the Alliance's shift transition to a war-time economy. Her attention was drawn towards a distant corner, where a large man was standing by himself. He was absorbed in reading some small note, which had just been handed him by a junior officer. He had aged well, he was still as tall and imposing, as he had always been. He didn't look a day over fifty, though he had to be well into his sixties.

Twenty years ago, when Losira entered the academy, he had been in charge of her training. He was an expert on warfare, always emphasizing the need for keeping the initiative and pointing out the lessons that could be learned from past campaigns.

She moved closer until she was standing right next to him. His insignia showed him to be their newly appointed chief of staff.

His worried frown was replaced by a broad smile as he looked up and recognized her.

"It's you. Losira. Now, Admiral, you certainly are a feast for sore eyes. You bring a touch of happiness to an old man's life."

"Sir ! I see you haven't lost your sense for flattery."

"I have yet to lie to you."

"Congratulations, Nogura. I heard of your promotion a month ago. But I thought you had retired."

"Oh, yes. I had. You see, they sort of drafted me. But then again I didn't really think of refusing. But now, I ..."

An ministers aide spoke : "Ladies and gentlemen. Would you please take your seats !"

There was the usual shuffling of feet and chairs while every one found his place. The guards left the room and sealed the doors behind them.

A silence formed around the prime minister : "This meeting is classified, you are absolutely forbidden to discuss any of the proceedings with anyone not present in this room."

"Now, having said this, I would like to thank you all for having made it here. I feel that we are at a dead end, and I would welcome some military options. Perhaps our commander in chief .."

"Please excuse me, sir." Nogura broke in, "I apologize for interrupting, but I have just received information of vital importance to this council."

"I see, Chief. Well, then by all means, please continue."

"A week ago one of our squadrons was attacked near ..."

"I thought you said your information was new ?"

"Yes, it is. If you would please allow me to explain ..."

"Now as I was about to say, a week ago one of our squadrons, the 23rd, was decimated at Infi. Their foe was but a single imperial battle cruiser. The enemy employed a new kind of weapon. We haven't had time to analyze the technical details yet, but somehow they have found a way to blank out our shields."

Dead silence fell across the table.

"A single ship, the "Hermes" managed escape to through a desperate jump. They ended up in the middle of nowhere and had to effect repairs, before they could transmit a full report."

"I must emphasize that this is the only report of its kind. There is no reason to believe that this weapon is in any widespread use. But following this successful testing the Empire will surely build and install many more."

Losira voiced the general concern : "And render our entire fleet obsolete !"

"Yes. Quite so."

The C-in-C spoke quietly : "Then we must end this conflict as quickly as possible."

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“Obviously, we lack the military potential to defeat the Empire in open battle. However, by creating internal disorder we could force them to withdraw.”

“Well, in that case I believe I have an excellent possibility in mind,” Losira said.

“Yes ?”

“We should launch a full scale attack towards the province of Anacreon. Our fleet would be moving through our old territory, which has yet to be secured by the Empire.

“And what precisely do you intend to obtain by that ?”, the prime minister inquired.

“We would seriously threaten their transports in the entire area, the enemy fleet is especially dependent on regular supply runs. But above all I’m counting on Anacreon trying to obtain independence.”

“You mean rebel against the Empire ?”

“Sure. The Empire is in no position to ignore that, they’ll have to withdraw their fleet to stamp out the rebellion and secure their border.”

“I would like to share your firm conviction, ma’am. But I believe you are overly optimistic,” the prime minister spoke. “Fifty years ago Anacreon rebelled against the Empire. They asked for our help, but we chose to refuse. The rebellion was brutally crushed, the leaders hunted down and exorbitant taxes imposed for several years. The common people have never forgotten what they consider our betrayal. I doubt they’ll ever go to war for our sake. However, if ...

“Ah. I believe your idea could be modified into something which would surely work.”

“When the Empire first conquered the province of Anacreon, they left their own prefect in charge. Following the rebellion they choose to build their power on the remains of the old ruling class. An direct attack on Anacreon would only further infuriate the population, but if the local nobility could possibly gain control of the planet, I doubt if they would hesitate to through out the Empire.

“I therefore propose that we direct our attack, not at the province itself, but at some world, deeper within imperial territory, critical to their control of Anacreon.”

“I believe I how such a world,” the minister of transportation said, “it’s Santanni the Normandic sector. It is the only world in the entire area with sizeable deposits of neutronic fuel. All shipments between the provinces of Anacreon and Loris and the rest of the Empire must pass by this planet. The destruction of the local refineries and fuel depots, would be a devastating blow to the stability of the Empire.”

In the general murmur of agreement, Losira inquired :

“I see your point, but what do we know of their defenses and how can we possibly keep our task force supplied. Santanni is at least five hundred parsecs from our nearest base.”

“According to our latest intelligence,” the C-in-C said checking his pad, “which is but a few week old, their defenses consists largely of long range fighters and some surface based artillery.

“What !?”

“A squadron of the main fleet used to be stationed there, but they have been assigned to the front. We shouldn’t have any trouble with the remains.”

“And as for the distance,” Nogura added. “We still have a couple of long range fuel carriers left. They can keep a task force built around ten capital ships running for about two months. I estimate the operation could be carried out in as little as forty days.”

“Which leave us a pretty wide margin of error ... Very well, I withdraw my objections.”, Losira said.

“Good. And remember, it’s imperative that we act now, while we still have time.

A few other options were discussed, but they were all rejected one by one, as being either too long termed or too costly in men and above all material. By the end the meeting the decision

was made to launch the Santanni operation.

At late afternoon Losira paid a visit to Nogura's office. It was a fine room, offering a nice view to the planets surface. Nogura was sitting at his desk idly watching the star-field, when Losira entered.

"Ah, there you are ! Come on in, Admiral."

"Thank you, sir." Losira said, then adding, "It is good to see you. It has been a long time."

"Yes, it has. In fact it has seemed twice as long."

He laughed gently, as she turned to hide her blush. She reached out and fingered the leaves of a large gum tree standing right next to his desk.

"Please. Have a seat, Admiral." The suddenly, "How come you never married ?"

"What ! I don't know ..., I guess I never had the time."

"Nonsense. Losira. You can't spend the rest your life like this, well you'll end up like me."

"I don't know ..."

"I remember once at the academy. Some freshman made a pass at you. Poor fellow, he had to spend a couple of hours at the infirmary. I had to scold your severely."

"Sir, please."

"Yes, I know. I could probably go on all night, but I didn't send for you to talk about old days. I'm concerned about this new weapon. I wonder how you would counteract it ? I suppose, by now you have read the full report."

"Yes, I have. The device appears to have limited range. When the imperial cruiser first appeared, our squadron swarmed in for an easy kill, and only then did they activate the field depressor. I think the only reason the "Hermes" managed to get away, was because it was the most distant vessel."

"I tend to agree with your analysis. Unfortunately their range seems to be slightly larger those of our weapons."

"Yes. Now, obviously we can't defeat a fleet or even a single ship thus equipped by conventional means. But I have an idea, which might work once or even twice. You see, we'll have to sacrifice a couple of old transports ...

It took Losira a little less than five minutes to explain her plan to Nogura. He cross questioned her for a few more, then sank back into his chair with a satisfied smile,

"I see you have eared your rank well, Admiral. I'm proud of you.

I'm absolutely sure that it's going to work.

"Do you know what ? I would like you to be in charge of Santanni operation. I believe you are just the right officer for the job."

"Why, thank you, sir."

"By the way, are you familiar with an officer named Loskene ?"

"Well, yes. I once assumed command of his vessel, the "Fearless". I don't think he's to happy about me."

"No, I'd imagine not. Anyhow, I would like him to be your second in command, he's quite capable. He has recently been made a commodore."

"Well, is that so. Now. I suppose, I should be on my way as soon as possible. When will the necessary fuel carriers and transports be available ?"

"In no more than three days. Most of them are already here, but a few are undergoing repairs down at Vega. I have prepared a detailed summary of all the warships available to your operation.

"I thought you might like to browse through it."

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“Thank, you.”

“Oh, and Admiral ...”

“Yes ?”

“All my hopes.”

Part IV

End of War.

SANTANNI, Battle of ... *fought on 154th day of the seventh year of reign of Emperor Aegis I, between the forces of the Alliance and those of the Empire.*

It was the last battle of consequence during the First Rigellian War. Considering the circumstances, the outcome was quite surprising ..

- *Encyclopedia Galactica.*

They made the final transition through hyper-space and emerged in the shadow of Santanni's forest moon, Endor. Their journey had been almost free of incidents, only once did they come across a small convoy, which they promptly reduced to dust. For a moment Losira feared that their secrecy had been compromised, but the enemy hadn't had the time to transmit a single message.

Now the fleet was speeding towards the planet, the capital ships spread out in a sphere protected by screen a of frigates. A couple of cruisers and corvettes formed the rear-guard along with about a dozen odd-looking transports.

Losira sat in the command chair of her flagship, the “Callisto”. Loskene was making a tour of the bridge, inspecting the various stations.

“What's our ETA ?”, Losira asked.

“Three hours, seventeen minutes, Admiral.”, the helmsman responded.”

“Losira to all ships. Accelerate to maximum speed.”

“Admiral, enemy subspace communications have increased dramatically, they must have detected us by now.”

“Enemy fighters have left the stratosphere,” Loskene reported. “They intercept us in twenty five minutes.”

“Acknowledged. Signal the rear-guard and tell them to fall back, we'll handle those fighters.”

The attack was fierce, but hopelessly inadequate. A few fighters were brought down by long range torpedo, but most of them fell victim to the rapidly firing blasters of the frigates. One unfortunate pilot lost control of his craft and collided violently with an escort, triggering a chain reaction which blew both vessels to bits. Then quite suddenly the survivors broke off their attack and retreated out of range.

“Admiral ! An large number of imperial vessels have just appeared above Santanni.”

“Somehow I'm not surprised,” Losira muttered to herself.

Then turning to Loskene, she snapped : “How come we didn't detect them earlier on ?”

“I really can't say, ma'am, ” Loskene replied stiffly, “they could have been hiding behind the planet or they might just have come out of hyper-space. In either case may I suggest ... ”

“... that we bring up the rear-guard, an excellent notion.”

“They'll be within firing range in 20 minutes, fifteen seconds.”

“Mr. Loskene. Deploy the fleet, pattern Nogura five. I'll be in my ready-room. I want our chief engineer to report to me immediately.”

“Ma’am, this is highly irregular, you shouldn’t ...”

“I’m quite aware of that. Carry on your orders.”

Losira sat down behind her desk and tried desperately to unknit the tension in her stomach, everything would be decided within the hour ...

The chief engineer entered running. He panted slightly : “Sorry, admiral. I really don’t have much time. I need to get back to my engines.”

Losira cut him short : “Have you had any more unauthorized accesses to the main computer core ?”

“No, and I haven’t been able to trace it, nor do I have any clue to what they were looking for !”

“That’s just to bad. But I can make a fair guess. Now, what about those devices we discussed lately.”

“They are all in place, I did it myself, nobody else knows.”

“Excellent. We might still triumph.”

Losira reentered the bridge, “Status report, please !”

“Intercept in 17 minutes, 3 seconds. The rear-guard will catch up with us well before then.”

“Slow to one quarter speed.”

“Losira to all ships, commence calculations for one micro-jump. Coordinates phi : 183, theta : 56, and a mere 10.000 kilometers.”

“183, 56 and 10.000. Message received and acknowledged by all ships, ma’am.” the communications officer reported.

Turning against the view-screen Losira muttered, “Come on, you bastard, take the bait.”

On board the “Executioner”, flagship of the Empire, Grand Admiral Chi’nan smiled confidentially. The enemy was seriously outnumbered and now thanks to one critical piece of information nothing could deprive him of victory.

He hated traitors, filthy scum, but he had to admit that they could be quite usefull.

The gab between the opposing forces was closing rapidly. Soon they would be within firing range.

“Losira to all ships, maximum acceleration now !”

The entire fleet lurched forward. The imperial response came a split second later, their shields flicked on and deadly rays of energy leaped out towards their mad attackers.

“Concentrate fire at their capital ships. Fire at will.” Losira barked.

“Stand-by on the hyper-drive.”

“Engineering, initialize auto-control systems on freighters.”

“Aye. Admiral.”

“Range : 30 kilometers and closing rapidly. 27, 26 ...”

On their left wing a battle-cruiser blew up, the flames reached out and engulfed a nearby frigate.

“Shields at 70 percent and dropping.”

“Losira, to all units. Cease fire. Divert maximum power to shields.”

“... 15, 14, 13.”

“All ships, hyper-jump now !”

And as if somebody had waved a magic wand all Alliance warships were yanked away, leaving but a few lumping cargo carriers behind. With their automated guidance system in place they

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continued down towards the imperials.

“And detonate ...”

Expectantly Losira swung towards the view-screen as the helmsman struggled to restore the image of the imperial fleet.

Nothing happened.

Loskene broke the silence, “Ironie, isn’t it. Is so easy to jamm a known frequency. Oh, no. Admiral, please don’t try anything foolish, I have you all covered ...”

Losira turned towards Loskene, “That may be so, however ...”

As she spoke a blinding white light flashed across the screen. A flaming flower originating from the very center of the enemy fleet, grew rapidly until it had completely swallowed the imperials.

“... it is equally easy to install a proximity detector. Poor devils, they’ll never survive those 5000 MT warheads.”

“... No, no. ”, Loskene whispered. “You cunning bitch ... You’ll never get me alive.”

He turned his blaster on himself and pulled the trigger.

“Get this corpse of my bridge,” Losira said grimly, “We have a battle to finish.”

“... following their decisive victory of Santanni the Alliance enjoyed a century of peace ...

But eventually they succumbed due to the constant political and economic pressure exerted by more patient emperors.”

- Encyclopedia Galactica.

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