

A shrill chime pierces through the relative tranquility of the captain's quarters. The captain's eyes jolt open with a start, he drags himself up on his left elbow, while his right hand pads around the control panel mounted in the ceiling of his bunk searching for the acknowledge button to shut off the alarm. His fingers brush across a familiar plastic rectangle polished by use. He smashes the button with a certain satisfaction. The peace creeps back into the birth. To call it quiet would be disingenuous. There is the low whoosh of the air-recycling system, the click of ancient relays, the thrum of the warp drive that causes the decks on all floors to vibrate, there's also the annoyed groans that the ship.

The captain turns on the lights for his quarters. The light flickers briefly and bathes the walls in a soft white light. The soft and still somehow angular carmine accent lines stand out in proud defiance to the sea of cold gray and white of the rest of the room.

Out of habit, he punches up the current date and time on the screen of his control panel.

[0530Z 198 2952]

The time day and year strobe in a laconic rhythm. Slowly he slides his legs off the bed, his feet thud lightly on the deck. He groggily sits up chasing the last remnants of sleep out of his eyes. Cap pushes himself off the bunk and makes his way to his private head where he begins his morning ritual. After his shower, he gets dressed in a gray cotton duty uniform. He pauses at the mirror, giving himself a once over. He scratches at the salt and pepper stubble that adorns his chin. In a move of unbridled anachronism, he waxes his mustache into points.

Before heading out to get some food he sits at his terminal to check reports. Nothing interesting in the news.

" Well, no news is good news..." he grumbles to himself. After checking the terminal, he leaves his quarters and glides through his adjoining office to make his way out onto the habitation deck.

Cap stomps down the hall heading aft, the hallway lighting was warm and relatively comfortable. The clean white ceiling and walls of the hab deck glowed in the amber light. The walls were angled slightly outward giving the illusion of having more space. He enters the galley where he sees his First Mate Gabriel Alvarez already nursing a hot black cup of coffee.

" Gabe, I dunno how you drink this shit straight. "

" Hey Cap, it's not so bad once you get used to it. You just have to drink it so much that it kills off your tastebuds."

"Do you have any training or upkeep scheduled for today, Gabe?"

"Was planning on running some room clearing and repelling boarders drills, Captain Travers."

"Good stuff, carry on Alvarez."

Gabe was an earther from a region that was once called Texas almost a thousand years ago. He towered over the captain when he stood up. Cap knew that Gabe was a member of the Space Force spec ops division when he served, but the particulars of his service remained a mystery. What the

Captain did know was that Gabe was more than qualified to act as the head of security and First Mate aboard the Tireless Nomad.

Cap grabbed a protein bar and headed aft then called the lift to head up to the technical deck. Once on the more utilitarian and foreboding technical deck, Travers hung a left and headed even further aft. Passing by the runabout hangar he continues deeper into the aft of the ship, navigating through several bulkheads. He arrived at the Engineering "office," really it was more of an enclosure with a couple of diagnostic monitors in it. The monitors could give Chief Engineer Talan Gul a brief overview of the general state of the guts of the Nomad.

Talan Gul was a New Terra native, who grew up in one of the giant corp-towers that were densely packed in the planetary capitol city of New Bransford. He got his start working for Sauroter, one of the largest military shipbuilders. He worked his way through several production lines devouring information as he came across it for any starship. Before long he started dreaming of doing more than just building ships. He wanted to see the universe in some of the ships he helped build. Even though Talan was green by spacer standards, Travers knew that he was a solid investment and that his intricate knowledge of ship systems and familiarity with Sauroter's design structure would be invaluable to the Tireless Nomad.

"Hey Chief, how are things looking back here? Any concerns I should be aware of?" inquired Travers directly.

"Oh, Cap. Systems are running within specs for the most part. We are coming up on the 300k AU diagnostic check of the warp drives. I'll forward you a list of required parts and materials." Stated Talan matter-of-factly.

"Noted Chief. I'll see what I can do to get you those parts. Before I forget, there's a drone in the mechanical shop that has had some sensor issues, need you to take a look at that when you can." With that said Travers takes another draw from his still steaming mug and then heads forward towards the bridge.

As he made his way towards the bridge Travers heard a noise that made his blood run cold. The warp bubble collapsed; they had been interdicted. Only pirates and authorities used warp interdiction, and there weren't any authorities this far outside the major systems. Then the alarm klaxon blared. The coffee fell forgotten to the deck as the captain sprinted towards the bridge stopping only to quickly don his flight suit and helmet. He pounded down the deck bursting into the top floor of the bridge. As he fired up the tactical display in the center of the upper bridge, he called out to the pilot who was on the lower bridge.

"Tank, sitrep!" Travers barked

"Got pulled out of warp and a load of unidentified contacts on the scanner. One of them is huge." Fired back, Tank.

Travers plugged through various scan modes and radar patterns to try and get a resolution on the bogeys. As the images resolved Travers did not like what he saw.

“All hands man battle stations!” he ordered over the Nomad’s PA system.

Calling back to Engineering on the intercom “Talan, give me everything you got to engines and shields. We’re going to need it...”

Talan leaped into action making adjustments and shutting down as many auxiliary systems so he could route as much power to the systems the captain required. The lights across the ship powered down into the emergency lighting scheme, and lights in non-critical locations shut off, while in critical locations they are bathed in red light. The only exception is in the med-bay which still uses white lighting to not hinder Doc in her work should the worst happen.

Gabe burst onto the bridge clad in heavy armor and already toting a submachine gun. He saw Travers already flitting through the various tactical displays at the command section of the bridge. Gabe beelined straight for the captain.

“Hey Cap, what’s the sitrep?” he asked curtly.

“We got interdicted, Gabe. From what I can gather from the scopes it looks like a pirate crew. One Orb Weaver heavy carrier; that means they also must have a Lockjaw to have pulled us out of our warp jump. No idea yet what the disposition of the rest of their forces is. Fair bet they have a couple of raiding parties, and some fighters though. Our priority is getting rid of that Lockjaw so we can get back underway, after that we need to try and make sure we keep the boarding parties off us.” Travers rattled off, with an air of experienced calm even in the face of extreme danger.

Travers moved forward to the command station, his heels locking into the deck plating anchoring him in the spot. From here he has an unencumbered view out of the massive almost beak-like forward windows, as well as control of the strategic readouts. Travers handed over tactical planning to Gabe, letting him focus on the bigger picture and help give heading information to Tank. Gabe then plonked down into the remote gunner’s seat on the right side of the upper deck of the bridge. Using his suit intercom, he called out to the other gunners to make sure they were already in position. Daren, Clyde, and Isoulie all responded that they were in position. Gabe then gave them the cliff notes version of the sitrep. “Keep your eyes peeled for a Lockjaw while searching your sectors, that’s our highest priority for now. If there are any changes, I’ll keep you in the loop.” The other gunners all acknowledged and began sweeping their sectors. The massive side turrets panning around like a chameleon’s eyes. Each of the 4 turrets was mounted with two very large energy repeaters.

In the command section, Travers started using the sensors to shoot out pings searching the inky depths of space for any more information about the enemy forces. He noted wryly that they hadn’t been hailed yet, which did not bode well for them. It told Travers that they were either going to get spaced because the pirates wanted the ship, blown up. After all, the pirates wanted to cover an operation or be torn to pieces for salvage. All roads lead to death in this case. He pushed the thoughts aside for the moment. They weren’t doing anyone any good. Just then he started to get return pings, he started going through them. “Ah! Right there ten o’clock low about two kilometers ahead of the Weaver is the Lockjaw.” Travers shouted out to Gabe, who then relayed the information to his gunners.

On his tactical display, he could see the turrets of the Tireless Nomad all swing in the general vicinity of the offending Lockjaw. They were still about 3 kilometers out of range of the Lockjaw, but they at least had eyes on him for now. "Tank, swing us left new heading tree wun fife." Tank echoed back "Roger new heading 315." Travers noted that two Cutter haulers, which were lightly armored and armed ships often used by pirates to deploy raiding parties, leaped off the deck of the Orb Weaver and started to streak toward them. On their own they weren't much of a threat, but combined with the firepower of the heavy carrier, it would be a dangerous fight. They were seriously outgunned.

"Talan, reinforce the forward and left shield facings" Travers barked into his comm. He hailed the rest of the crew to ensure that everyone was in their EVA suits. Everyone responded affirmatively. "Also, vent the atmosphere on all decks and shut down life support." That way if there were a hull breach it wouldn't turn into an "explosive" decompression, also that way fires wouldn't have any oxygen to gobble up.

"Roger reinforcing For'd and Left facings, venting atmo and killing life support, Cap." After his response, there was a click that was more felt through the deck than heard and it was followed by an audible hiss as atmosphere was being pumped into containment bottles that the crew could hook their EVA suits into while at their stations so their reserves would stay untouched until they were up and moving.

They were one kilometer out of range from the Lockjaw, the Cutters were only a few hundred meters out from. "Gabe, Cutters at our two o'clock. We're still about 30 seconds out from the Lockjaw at current speed. Have the boys take care of them for us, would you?"

"On it, Cap." Replied Gabriel in his terse manner. He relayed the info down to the gunners. "Daren and Isoulie I want you to engage the haulers when they are in range." Two quick affirms were all the responses needed. Less than ten seconds later two of the turrets burst into life as they poured twin streams of energy bolts towards the interdicting Cutters. This forced them to take evasive action which kept them from their primary job of landing on the Nomad. The gunners were barking information back and forth to each other to keep a steady bead on the enemy ships. Isoulie hollered out in triumph as he blew up one of the Cutters. But before the spirit of the crew could be lifted by this victory the shields of the Nomad started to take heavy punishment from the main guns of the carrier.

The shields were holding for now. Travers called out "Tank, start evasive maneuvers but try to keep us on the intercept with that Lockjaw as much as possible!"

"Roger, Cap! Beginning evasive maneuvers!" Tank responded. As Tank began the maneuvers the ship started to groan as it was being wrenched around turning on all axes trying to make it harder for the pirate gunners to chew through the shields. The bullets from the carrier's main guns were streaking past the windows on the bridge.

500 meters from the Lockjaw now. "Gabe, what's the sitch with those Cutters? We're 15 seconds out from the Lockjaw."

"One down Cap, we're working on the last now. I am tracking the Lockjaw, the second we're in range we'll handle it." Gabe shouted back. The captain wished he could wipe his forehead as the sweat was

starting to sting his eyes. Travers then noticed that the weakened right shield was starting to take damage, probably from the last hauler. In its current state, it wouldn't hold out very long against the damage. He couldn't take any power from the other facings though they were still being hammered by the massive guns of the Orb Weaver. "Talan, are there any other places you can get power for the shields from?"

"Negative, we are running at max efficiency, Cap."

"I was afraid of that." Grumbled the captain as the right shield collapsed. The mixed armament of the Cutter began to rake the now unprotected hull of the Nomad. Bullets and bolts thudded off the right side of the bridge's window. "Gabe, handle that fucking ship ...now!" Travers' tactical displays started to flash with a growing list of battle-damaged systems. The deck under his feet was shuddering violently with the constant impacts of rounds. He could just picture the hauler chewing through the hull piece by piece. Talan was going to be a busy man if they made it through this, he mused.

"Clyde's been wounded Cap our right turret is down." Shouted Alvarez to Travers.

"Shit, I'll get Doc moving. Tank, roll us 180 degrees, and get our left turret on that hauler! Talan, reinforce the right shield, now!" The Nomad began to roll, he could see the right shield starting to come back up.

Gabe was sweating profusely. A quarter of their weapons were offline. No telling what kind of damage they'd incurred. Sparks started to shower down out of one of the panels above him. The Lockjaw was in range, he swung his turret around to face the Lockjaw. With precision he started to tear into the Lockjaw, Daren joined in while Isoulie was engaging the Cutter. The Lockjaw quickly buckled under the withering fire of both turrets.

Travers immediately initiated an emergency warp spool it still took time to calculate the headings. The Nomad's shields were almost entirely gone, if the heavy carrier was able to get their guns to bear on the Nomad, that would be the end of her. Seconds ticked by like decades as Travers watched the status of the jump drive. The shields failed, and the first few rounds from the Orb Weaver started to tear into the hull. Though there wasn't any air to carry the sound, Travers swore he could hear the scream of torn metal.

[Spooling Complete]

He hammered the engage button perhaps a bit too hard, but the Tireless Nomad leaped to nearly half the speed of light almost instantly. After a few seconds, he quickly dropped out of Warp and had Tank put in a new course towards the nearest friendly station. That way if the pirates followed their last heading, they would be well off track. He re-engaged the drive and a huge wave of relief washed over him as they were able to escape.