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The Poseidon was closest to the colonial scrap yard. It made common sense to try and support that battlestar until reinforcements arrived. However, no one would have guessed that the Argus would end up becoming a rescue ship and home for 900 souls. It was a built 2 decades before the first cylon war and then refurbished at the beginning of it. An untrained crew of enlisted mechanics and inexperienced captain had accomplished nothing short of the impossible. The Poseidon was destroyed but the remnants of the colonial fleet survived and with that, hope continued. But their future was grim, the enemy was far superior and they had almost no resources. And as Captain Reeves would say, "Miracles can happen, but sometime you have to push the issue."

Prologue: The Rescue

CIC on the Argus had the odour of burnt dust as old computer circuits and electrical wires became warm again after years of sitting dormant. Reeves nervously clenched his fists and did his best to not second guess his command decisions. Or at the very least, to not let his crew see, that he was just as clueless about what to do, as the men who served under him.

Remembering an old movie he once saw, he tried to bark an order like a real Commander. "Soldier! Is my fraking sky clear?" His voice cracked at the end of his enquiry. It had come as a slight surprise to him that a loud and clear voice responded, "Sir, I see no enemy contacts on the dradius." Somehow, his men weren't second-guessing his command. Again he responded with force and demanded contact be made to enquire what help they could offer. But the response of, "I'm sorry sir, I can't make contact," left him with another problem he had to solve. His apprehensions started to dissolve into anger and frustration.

"Why the hell not?" His face a flushed a shade of red as he strode toward the communications counsel. "How the frak should I know. I'm a wielder not a com officer." Push your men to the breaking point but never break them, advice from his father, stirred in his mind. "Relax," his voice dropped to a softer tone. "You are doing a fine job, I don't really know to much about communications either." Calmly he ordered, "open the shield and lets take a look." As it opened, no one could help but gasp at the spectacle.

The Poseidon was burning, landing bays were destroyed and people were vacating via the airlocks. One of the deck chiefs walked up and stood beside Reeves, "Her fire suppression systems must be destroyed and those fires are near her tylium tanks." Just then communications came online and their conversation was interrupted. "Sir, the viper pilots just started talking again. They are trying to raise us and the Poseidon." This wasn't the time for talk; he had to assume command again. "I'll take it here unless you need me to take it there." The young man at sitting at COM began to stutter his response

and the captain made quick steps to his side. "Don't worry about it." An image of relief crossed the enlisted man's face as Reeves grabbed the headset and cleared his throat.

"This is Capt...." He paused and started again. "This is Reeves, I am taking command of this situation. All vipers are cleared to make an unassisted landing on our port landing bay." The makeshift communications operator interrupted, "Sir, our port bay is filled with scrap." Reeves flashed a perturbed look at the man. "Correction, make that our starboard landing bay. All raptors that are able, are to pick up as many survivors as possible before attempting to land." The array of chatter on the radio confirmed his commands were being obeyed. Handing back the headset, his mind took a fast assessment of his predicament of going from captain of the junk, to battlestar commander and now fleet commander. Under his breath he mumbled, "Athena, I need a to perform miracles not royal frak-ups."

The deck chief came to stand beside him, "Sir?" With a nervous smile, "Nothing. What?" Again the deck chief spoke, "We have 3 scrap haulers in the bay and they should be able to pick up more survivors than any raptor could." The captain was finally starting to go on command-autopilot and he found himself responding his authorization without second thought. "Get them in the sky and if any are filled with scrap, flush it out into space." The chief nodded and turned on his heel. "Max, Scuds and Alana! You heard the Captain's orders get your fraking asses down there and get those haulers off the ground!" A chain of command was now in place aboard the Argus. And for the time there was nothing left to do but wait for the next problem to happen.

During the next few moments, the captain stood next to communications and made the man sitting there nervous in his job. "Sir, hauler two just landed and hauler one is ready to take off again." Reeves didn't answer, instead the chief responded from across the room, "tell them to keep going until they have no damn fuel." But no sooner, said then the problem captain Reeves was waiting for appeared. "Dradius contacts!!! A frak of a lot of them!" Reeves jumped to attention! "Tell hauler one to park it." The chief moved toward Reeves, "are they ours or cylon." Unfortunately the person operating the dradius had no clue, "they all look the same to me, Sir." Reeves, cracked his neck and coldly stated, that they should assume they're cylons. The chief looked at Reeves with a questioning glance to which he was given an assurance that the Captain had no intention of toughing it out for another fight. "I know when not to push my luck, chief. What's the E.T.A. on them and hauler three?" Dradius responded that hauler three should be 3 minutes and cylons about 5. "It's going to cut it close chief, spool up the FTL. We jump the moment the hauler is aboard." At this statement the wielder at COM stood up with a shocked look and the chief responded by crossing the room and relieving him from further duty. "It's a numbers game now, nothing else we can do." And the young man silently slumped in his chair.

Dradius began to count down of the moments to the cylon arrival. "2 minutes and 30 seconds." Chief looked up, "hauler three is in the bay sir." With his arms folded in confidence, Reeves issued the order to jump. However, his problems were far from over, and he found himself with forcing yet another issue.

"What the frak do you mean we can't jump?" His eyes darted and looked out at the vast expanse of space. The silhouettes of ships were now visible and it was obvious they weren't colonial. He could smell the crew's sweat and feel them looking at him in confusion and horror. His patience was running thin. "Sir, we have no coordinates."

Slapping himself in the face with both hands he bellowed, "Just fraking jump and it doesn't matter where." The room became silent as the men at FTL tried to make the jump happen. The count down from Dradius emphasized the situation, "1 minute 30 seconds."

Finally at the 1 minute mark the people at FTL looked up and one of them spoke. "Sorry sir, but the system won't accept random jump coordinates. We think it's an old fail safe and we don't know how to bypass it." The chief looked at his captain and Reeves looked like a defeated man. Exhausted he spoke, "I didn't think we would be flying this thing home. Later I assumed there would be return coordinates in the system." The voice from Dradius echoed their situation, "45 seconds."

Chief was at the FTL command, "check the old computer log files. Maybe there is something we can use." The voice boomed again, "30 seconds!" Reeves could see the raiders clearly now and he yelled, "Shut the frak up!!!" A commotion started at FTL and chief's voice sang out, "We have coordinates!" Before he could turn to face his men, the captain screamed, "DO IT!" And in seconds the entire ship went black.

"Ah Frak sakes!" Captain Reeves had been pushed to his limits and was now losing composure in his command. It was the Chief's voice sounding that relaxed him, "It's ok! It's just the lights! We jumped! Is there anything on dradius?" The comment that there "Wasn't a fraking thing on the scope," was met with loud cheers and hugs in CIC. For the moment it looked like a miracle had happened and they were safe.

After a few moments of indulgence, the captain stood straight, proud and addressed his crew. "Well we aren't out of this yet. So lets save the victory celebration for after the war. I guess now I should ask, where did we jump?" The troubled looks from FTL told more than words. "I think the coordinates we inputted were from the last jump the Argus made after she was decommissioned. That would have been to the junk yard." However, looking out the shield window, it was obvious they were nowhere near any kind of scrap depot. Reeves couldn't help but make an exhausted sneer before he spoke, "The problem is we didn't start the jump from the same place the original coordinates were used. And even if we had, there was no account for stellar drift." There was nothing more anyone could add. So Reeves gave instructions to get the ship's lights fixed, left the Chief in command of C.I.C, and worked his way through the darkness towards the landing bay.

The landing bay was filled with survivors and an older gentleman sat on the floor as he was having his head bandaged. Despite his condition and age, his voice rang out with authority and everyone was following his instructions. Although his space suit hid his uniform and therefore rank, Reeves easily figured it out it was Admiral Hallis. As such

he made his way to the old man, stood before him, and saluted. The Admiral was the first to speak. "What's our tactical situation?" Hallis was a man of few words and business always came first.

"Sir, for the moment we are safe. And welcome aboard the Argus." The Captain found himself once again second-guessing things and he wasn't sure how the Admiral would take the news he was aboard a scrap heap. The experienced soldier was able to read the Captain's feelings. "Considering the alternative, it's an honour to be here. You did good Captain. However, I'm about to piss in your shoe, I'm kind of used to being in charge. I'm certain you understand. Your command was short, but what a command it was." Obvious relief swept Reeve's face as the burden of decision was removed, and despite the direness of the current situation the Admiral was forced to grin.

Formalities finished, Reeves spoke again. "Sir, I've got knuckle-grinders handling C.I.C, we made an emergency jump and I have no clue where we are. I'm sorry Sir." The Admiral forced himself to his feet despite the protests of the doctor and summoned, "Mr. Lapointe, front and centre." A tall dark lanky figure grabbed a piece of scrap for a makeshift crutch and came over. "Mr Lapointe, meet Captain Reeves. I want you to work with him to assess our situation." The doctor interjected that Lapointe's leg needed attention. Hallis dismissed him saying he was moving and he was needed in C.I.C, that the doctor could concern himself with the hundreds of others, assessing who could resume duties. As if to emphasize his point, the light was restored.

With nothing left to say, Lapointe and Reeves started for CIC. But the Admiral called after them, "Captain Reeves, there is one thing I forgot, that I had better do now, in case I don't get the chance later." With this the Captain stopped, turned and faced the Admiral. Again the old man's voice bellowed out, "ATTENTION!!!" Reeves found himself facing the survivors of the Poseidon. They were all saluting him and the emotion of what happened struck him. Looking at the battered men and women, the only emotion he displayed was a single tear that rolled down his cheek. With that, he turned and went back to work.

It was a simple conclusion that no one aboard the Argus wanted to admit. The Poseidon was destroyed by a handful of raiders and all facts concluded that the rest of the fleet had suffered similar. Regardless of what the crew might choose to believe, the war was probably over and the colonial fleet lost. Admiral Hallis addressed the crew; he made it clear that he believed the enemy got lucky and it was just a matter of time before they were back into the fight. But Reeves remained realistic and under his breath mumbled "There is no such thing as luck when you're the one holding all the cards." Only Major Assuras and Chief Forester, whom were standing either side of him, over-heard his comment but neither gave even a whisper of acknowledgement. It was luck that aided the colonials. It resided with them because of courage, daring and unorthodox

thinking. For the new crew of the Argus, death and certain defeat had been turned into a fighting chance. But without food or other resources, finding good fortune would demand everyone push their limits.

Chapter 1: Basics for Survival

"Frak!! Frak!! Frak!! I would give my left arm for repair manuals and a wiring diagram!" Chief Forester vented, as he once again was forced to witness sparks, and smoke rising from the raptor's circuit board, he attempted to repair. After another sigh he wet a finger, touched the tip of his soldering iron and found it wasn't as hot as it should be. Sadly he got up from his chair, went to adjust the crudely fashioned portable heater and thought better of it, "turning up the heat will only use the fuel faster." Instead he resolved himself to changing the battery that powered both the soldering iron and the desk lamp. As he sat back down and waited for the iron to heat up, he heard the footsteps of two figures approaching.

"Hey Chief. Mind if we hide out here for a bit?" Major Lillian Assuras and Major Jim Ford entered the room. Welcoming the opportunity for some companionship the Chief responded that the two could park it anywhere they liked. "Are the majors having a hard time sleeping?" The two officers gave a slight chuckle and Assuras made it clear she thought that boot camp with a 10-day hike in the rain was more comfortable than sleeping on the galley floor. There were two officially heated and powered areas aboard the battlestar, CIC and the galley. The galley, designed for approximately 150 men to comfortably eat in, now served as sleeping quarters for the entire crew. No one would dispute the fact that, for the moment, the Argus was anything but a luxury ship.

After a pause, Ford finally spoke up, "When the hell are you guys going to get power restored to the entire ship?" The chief raised an eyebrow before responding, "Well sir, everything is hooked up. But in order to power the entire ship we need to run the engines and we can't spare the tylium; this old ship isn't exactly fuel-efficient. It was Captain Reeves and Mr. Lapointe who decided to turn them

off." Major Ford shook his head when the Captain's name was mentioned, and he grumbled he was sick of hearing about the legendary Reeves. Chief Forester gave the man an evil glare and Assuras demanded to know what his problem was with the Reeves.

Clearing his throat, Ford gave his response. "I like the man alright, but no offence, he didn't exactly make any incredible command decisions when he rescued us. If you examine what he did, there was nothing special, anyone would have done the same." Forester slapped his knee and pointed a finger at the Major, "Excuse me Sir, but I take offence to your comments." The other major interjected and vocalized her agreement with the chief. Which only resulted in Ford reminding the enlisted man to watch his tone around an officer. Major Assuras looked at the man in contempt and refrained from comment.

Major Ford could have let the issue die but instead he was seeking to exert his dominance. "Look, Reeves is a fine man and I'm sure he did a fine job in the junk yard. But this is war and not a garbage pile." His chair fell over as the chief stood up and demanded permission to speak freely. But as Ford responded with his denial, Major Assuras granted it. "I have served under the Capitan for more than 10 years. He has always been an excellent leader and..." He was interrupted by the words "Blah. Blah. Blah... When you're an officer I'll listen to your drivel, but for now just go back to work." Drawing in a deep breath the enlisted man forced himself to salute and went back to repairing the broken raptor circuit board. As he tried to calm his anger and focus on his task, it was Major Assuras that got the last word of the debate. "Major you've overlooked the most obvious, the most extraordinary of all," she paused to verify she had his attention. "He made THIS scrap heap fly". With a cluck of his tongue and grinding his teeth, Ford hostilely left the room.

As the footstep disappeared down the corridor, it was the chief that spoke and offered his apology for what had just occurred. With a smile and a chuckle the major brushed away the incident saying that Ford has always been a good pilot but he is still a jerk. "His call-sign is Dagget but his squadron likes to call him "Major A-hole." The two shared a snicker and the atmosphere relaxed considerably.

Extending his hand the Chief finally introduced himself,

"I'm Chief Julian Forester; I was kind of second in command of the junk yard." Accepting his hand, the major returned the favour in similar fashion. "Major Lillian Assuras, call-sign Cupcake. I'm the CAG, but you don't have to salute me if there is no one else present." Julian looked up at the ceiling and bit his lip as he dropped the handshake. Lillian just groaned as she observed the man's reaction and told him to go ahead and laugh at her call sign. She had gotten the name when others found out she enjoys baking, sewing and other such womanly domestic things. "And yes, I even wear lace panties instead of fleet issued cottons." With a slight flush of embarrassment the chief returned to his work.

Cupcake was dozing in the corner, when the Chief grabbed two screwdrivers and proceeded to make a short drum roll on the table. The major stirred and sat up noting that it sounded like someone had finished his work. Giving a slight smile to his guest, he began to reconnect the power lead and explain that this was his 5th attempt to repair the main-board of the raptor and that 5 was always a lucky number. Having said that he flipped the switch and watched as the counsel light up without problems. "Fraking A! Who said you can't mix the old and the new." With a proud and satisfied grin he leaned back in his chair and told the major about how he would like to choke the person responsible for all the thumb sized holes in all the fighters' computer panels. It was Cupcake's turn to go red and she sheepishly accepted responsibility for the damage to the aircrafts.

"Things happen fast in combat. There we were floating dead in space, ready for the cylons to finish us off, when the Argus jumps in and clears the sky, buying us a few moments to respond. Nothing inside my viper is working, so I'm thinking maybe I should be outside it. Unfortunately, I can't get my canopy open because whatever the toasters did fraked it up too. For a moment I consider ejecting, but it occurs to me that I'm only going to eject myself half way across the universe. So I grab my side arm and decide to try to shoot out the canopy." Chief `s blank look turned to a smile, "You missed." "The gods were with me; the bullet ricocheted and went straight through my main panel. After a few seconds of me calming down, I noticed that I had access to my manoeuvring thrusters. So I tried to fire up my main engines and they started without a complaint." She continued to explain how lights and hand signals were used to pass information from one plane to the next. And as each

pilot regained control of his fighter, his com-systems were re-enabled, allowing them to contact the Argus and land.

Looking at her strangely for a moment, the chief thought about what she had just told him. He then put his tools away and shut off the heater before commenting. He fathomed that because all military planes have a tertiary back up system that reverts to manual control in the event of complete computer failure, shooting their main-boards was probably the smartest thing they did. But this brought a startling revelation to the major, "That means that they didn't damage our vipers. They just shut them off." And with a nod of his head he simply informed her that she should pass on the information to their superiors. It might not be much, but any information on how the cylons fraked our systems might be helpful. With that said, the pair headed back to the galley for some much needed sleep.

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Captain Reeves was tired, unshaven and appeared to be in a sombre mood. The truth was he had many things to accomplish and found it uncomfortable to be around so many other officers. For most of his military career he was in charge of the scrap yard and the only officer stationed there for the past 12 years. He looked across at Lt. Lapointe, and prepared to speak to him when a loud crash came from the corner. A quick glance over his shoulder showed him Alana and Scuds were trying to clear the CIC of scrap metal and she was having problems lifting the load. Raising his voice he boomed, "Frak sakes, Alana put the stuff down!" He walked towards the pile, signalling the Lieutenant to follow. He locked his eyes in a cold stare with his young subordinate, then he calmly told her she looked green and to go see the doctor. However, she protested and proceeded to attempt to lift the heavy metal again. The expression on the Captains face was anything but amusement.

"This is not the yard; when I give an instruction to a subordinate I expect it obeyed." The woman put her face down and quickly apologized for her behaviour. But Reeves continued to speak to her in a gruff tone. "You can resume your duties if the doctor clears you. And I want him to talk to me personally." With that he reached inside his pants pocket and pulled out a small handkerchief. "And you need this more than I do." Accepting the gift she looked at Reeves smiled and asked if that was all. To which he

responded she was dismissed.

"Lieutenant, grab a couple of those boxes. We can talk and move some of this stuff at the same time." Captain Reeves bent down and picked up the end of the heavy metal that Alana had struggled with. "Now you were saying that I would want to know what happened to the Poseidon. Well, you can correct me if I'm wrong, but I have it on good authority that the toasters blew it up." The crewmen chuckled at Lapointe's expense to let everyone know they thought it was a good joke. And weighted down by their loads, they proceeded into the dark corridor.

The brightness of CIC faded with each step, undaunted by the increasing reliance on Scuds' head mounted lantern, Reeves continued his speech, "Until further notice, everyone works two back to back shifts. There are exactly 926 people on this ship and everyone has to haul his own ass." Scuds grunted his agreement as they rounded a corner. "The Argus was 20 years old going into the last cylon war. She was scheduled to be decommissioned 15 years ago, not 5, and the brass kept her around a bit longer out of respect for her former commander. This ship had its wings clipped the week after the old man died." As the lieutenant listened, the Captain explained that no one aboard has served on a ship of this age. And furthermore, there were no manuals, diagrams or available logs. "We need to know everything about this ship and our best and only resource is the ship itself." With these words they entered a designated storage area and put their loads down.

"We have yet to identify what everything does on this ship, let alone the limitations of the equipment. Save for the FTL's random co-ordinate failsafe, something I want you to rectify." Scuds excused himself and asked if the two officers needed a flashlight to navigate their way back to CIC. Letting the man know they were ok, Reeves continued, "When a ship is decommissioned the first stop is to a shipyard, not the junk yard. They give it one last physical inspection but also wipe the computer systems to make sure there is no sensitive data. Your first priority is to figure out how to resurrect that data. The only thing we have been able to access was the last jump she made, after that wipe, to the junkyard.

As they made their way back to CIC, the problems with medical were made his second priority. Reeves explained that

the doctor had next to nothing. And he expected that Lapointe could work with Chief Forester to set-up equipment. "I noticed you have a laptop. That's good, because until you hook up some sort of computer system for the doctor, you are going to have to share it with him." Beyond that, when he couldn't sleep or found himself with free time, he could go down to the landing bay and figure out what the toasters did to our planes and how to keep it from happening again. In CIC the two stepped around several workers, cleaning up and wielding in a chair. "Look we have enough fuel for 1 jump, almost no food and sleeping accommodations suck. But..." The enlisted men interrupted Reeves as they all spoke in unison, "If your hands are too occupied doing your job. Then they are too busy to get you into trouble." Despite himself the captain laughed and yelled out "Frakoff!" Then shrugged and simply acknowledged that he has made that comment a lot over the years. With nothing more to add he dismissed the Lieutenant and went back to his own job.

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It was humid in the galley; the smell of sweat and stench from the bathroom permeated every molecule of the stuffy air. Another rough and crowded sleep was ending, but at least no one was cold, because with this many people, body heat kept the place warm. This was their fourth morning on the Argus, and as had already become routine, the women lined-up to use the bathroom, while the men started to gather their urine-filled containers. Faced with the daunting task of stumbling over the cluster of the bodies to reach the designated restroom, a few men had started peeing in bottles on the second night. Today, Mr. Lapointe noticed many of the female crew were now opting for this quick release. He shook his head and muttered to himself, "Modesty is disappearing, but it doesn't matter because everyone smells bad."

As he put on his shirt, a commotion in a far corner caught his attention. Two officers had degenerated into yelling and shoving. He watched in disbelief, as Major Assuras, in the middle of voiding her bladder, bellowed out, "Enough!" It was so loud that she, not only gained immediate control over the situation, but the attention of everyone present. Bottomless and with only one foot in her pant legs she pushed past the crowd and crossed the area to stand face to face with those involved. Her assault continued, "What is

the problem here? Did one of you have a bad dream, and now you need a hug? You two are pilots under my command and I won't tolerate this sort of garbage!" She stood glaring at the two men for a moment as if to emphasize her authority.

Finally after about 20 seconds of this tension, one of the men permitted his eyes to look down and allowed himself to smirk and wink at the major. "Good morning, Cupcake." Mr. Lapointe gasped at the audacity; however, if Assuras was shocked it wasn't obvious, "Oh, you like that! Is this the first time you've seen one?! Well take a good look Lieutenant!" Normally the ship's CAG was always calm and difficult to anger, but with sufficient reason or provocation, she could be ferocious. "In fact all of you take a good, long, hard look! Moving quickly to the front of the room her yelling was directed at everyone. "Yes, this ship is old! Yes, there is no fuel! And yes, there is no food! But we are colonial soldiers, as such, if you need to be coddled, you should have never signed the damn papers and agreed to do this job!" Everyone was focused on her and no one, not even superior officers dared interrupt now. "Tough times are in the job description and if you have a problem with them you should have stayed on your mother's breast!" Inhaling a deep breath and letting it out slowly, she finally stopped yelling. "So yea, take a good hard look. We are at war; there is no place for personal desires, comforts, or even dignity. Whatever it takes to get the job done, then that's the way it is going to be." Lapointe nodded and put his head down for a moment before he spoke, loud and clearly proclaiming the biblical "So say we all." To which the crew responded in kind. The major herself finally broke the tension by saying that she was in the middle of something and if there was no more problems she would be in the corner finishing her business

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CIC was a clutter of people trying to get work done when the Admiral and Colonel Bridgeford entered it. Today was the day that a complete assessment of their current situation would be presented and discussed. Admiral Hallis was quiet and appeared tired. In order to preserve a certain amount of what he believed was a necessary separation between himself and his people, he had taken to sleeping in a raptor in a spacesuit. On the other hand the new acting XO, a marine, appeared to be thriving under these conditions. With several saying "good morning sir," he

approached Mr. Lapointe and asked if the conference room was ready. In affirmation Lapointe opened the door and ushered them inside. Already seated was Major Assuras and Captain Lewellyn, the ship's doctor.

"Good morning. Dismiss with formalities and lets get right to business." Hallis sat down at the head of the rectangular table with Bridgeford to his left and the Doctor on his right. Adjusting himself in his seat, the colonel noted that Captain Reeves was notably missing. To which Mr. Lapointe responded, "He should be here shortly sir. He is currently down in the engine room." The door opened and the captain walked in with apologies for his tardiness. With a scowl and a low voice, Admiral Hallis announced his displeasure at the man's actions. He explained that Reeves might have once been the junkyard dog, but as one of his command officers, he should leave the engine room problems in the capable hands of Chief Forester. With an apology and acknowledgement, the captain took his seat. Lapointe pursed his lips at Reeves and sighed.

"Sir if I may?" The Admiral nodded his accent to proceed. "Because of protocols implemented by both myself and Mr. Reeves, the men required command approval before attempting to restart the engines." Colonel Bridgeford furrowed his brow and demanded to know why they would be using the engines and wasting the precious fuel. Standing up, the captain spoke, "We needed to get the oxygen scrubbers working. Three days without clean air and the O2 levels were becoming dangerously low. But I'm happy to say, that, what should have been another 20 hours of work, has been completed. Hopefully with the fresh air, some of the smell will quickly vacate." The Admiral grinned and rescinded his admonishment. But the Colonel clucked and wanted to know how long they have before the engines ran dry and everyone suffocated. Reeves spoke again, "Actually sir, we didn't need to start the engines for electricity. Instead we constructed some crude solar panels and deployed them on the outside of the haul. They appear to be working adequately." Dr. Lewellyn chuckled and stated that if he ever needed heart surgery he wanted the captain in charge. At that the Admiral just smiled and said, "good work."

Without further commentary the meeting began, Mr. Lapointe led the dialog. "It seems appropriate to start with the assessment of our resources." Being handed small booklet of paper from Reeves, he continued. "Ok I'll begin with

personnel. We currently have 926 men aboard the Argus of that there are 110 skilled tradesmen and 16 deck labourers. 100 came from the scrap yard the rest from the Poseidon. This means we are in excellent shape to restore or repair most mechanical functions on this ship." He paused for a moment and looked at the Admiral to see if he had any questions before he continued. "We got lucky and 96% of our raptor and combat pilots made it as well. Including the Colonel's command we have 2 full groups of marine forces. Lastly the doctor, 2 marine med techs, various support services personnel and the command officers." Rubbing his chin the admiral noted it was a good thing that the haulers could hold a lot.

"As everyone knows, the Poseidon was engaged in a transport operation from Ganameade Station to Picon. In addition to picking up the colonel and his men, we received a full squadron of vipers and raptors, along with their pilots. Giving us 3 squadrons- 75 Mach 8's plus 2 squadrons- 50 Raptors. " Hallis put his hand up and signalled Mr. Lapointe to stop for a moment as he looked at Bridgeford. "There is something I have wanted to ask you. What's the story with that civilian you're protecting? After all, the guy must be something special for the brass to send an entire group of marines and it's colonel to keep him safe." Casually stretching and releasing a yawn, the marine almost seemed condescending as he stated that it was a strictly need to know basis; but, he added, the old man at the top didn't think he needed to know much either. Orders were to ensure his safe arrival at Sirius facilities and everything and anyone was considered expendable. The Admiral shook his head, "I have a scary thought. Taking on those extra planes cut Ganameade's fighter defences in half. Makes me wonder if someone up high foresaw this attack." Uneasy glances were exchanged around the table, and then Lapointe cleared his throat to resume.

Continuing with the equipment totals, he noted the 3 haulers responsible for bringing the majority of survivors to the Argus, and chuckled that the battlestar was virtually bursting at the seams with scrap and spare parts enough to fix or build anything. The colonel interjected with a question about the armaments. Major Assuras fielded the question. "Well..." Her voice trailed off and she drew in a breath of air. "Our planes had just launched and none of us got off a shot; they're fully loaded. But as for the Argus, not much." Defence was a major concern to the old marine and he demanded clarification on the comment. Captain Reeves

replied, "Sir, don't forget this ship was sitting in a scrap yard." The Bridgeford struck his fist on the table, "I am painfully aware of that fact! I want to know how much! I certain you know how to think because none of us would be here otherwise. So don't get stupid on me now." As Reeves apologized for his mistake, Hallis looked at the Colonel with a questioning glance.

"We had several pallets and large containers marked ammo and weapons. All decommissioned ships undergo a final inspection at a dockyard before coming to me. What we had was stuff people overlooked. We loaded everything without sorting through it. I believe what we have can equip all the marines with small arms and about half with heavy weapons. Small ammo is plentiful, but stuff for the Argus, I think we need to do an inventory". His voice trailed off and Hallis simply asked for how long could they hang in a firefight. The response was not a pleasant one. "A few seconds at best, we already used most what we had trying to help the Poseidon.

Finished with personnel and inventory, Lapointe addressed the current situation, "Ok, the air problem has been surmounted. We have heat and shelter covered by our current arrangements. Which leaves water and food as our next immediate needs." Lapointe's synopsis was unsettling but expected and he explained that although the crew was on a 200 calorie a day diet, there would be nothing left in 2 days. Because what little they had, was from several cases of old MREs found in the Argus septic system. Obviously, years ago someone dropped them in there as commentary on their taste. With a few grins and chuckles, the doctor took his turn at presenting information.

"We are all going to get a lot thinner. After a few days we can expect crankiness, short tempers, headaches and fainting but for the most part we have some time, the average human takes several weeks to drop off from starvation. The good news is we have been able to create vitamin shots to help offset this problem." Everyone looked surprised when they heard there were vitamins and Assuras voiced the question on their minds, "From where?" With a big toothy grin, the man continued. "Well I'm working with a chemist and some of the things like zinc and iron, I'm able to get from the scrap. But I found a perfectly good source of nutrients. Everyone just has to plug their noses as they get the shot." Silent confusion was broken with Lapointe loudly

proclaiming "Eeewww! I'm not getting that injected into me!" Lewellyn broke into a big laugh and told him it was doctor's orders, further embellishing the moment as he went on to say that humanpoop could do more than just provide methane for the generators and portable heaters.

In spite of themselves the cloistered group could still find humour with their present circumstance. "Ok, all jokes aside, this next problem is serious. We need water because we are going to start dying in 21 days without it." Smiles vanished, and Major Assuras protested, "No one washes and we are collecting every damn drop of urine, either by container or in those 3 measly stalls permitted. I thought we had a recycling system in place." The doctor assured her that they did. But that even if their equipment was state-of-the-art, and not a small makeshift fabrication, they would always get back a little less than was being used. He punctuated his statement adding, " And major that's why I estimate 21 days and because without it we would only have a week."

The Admiral bit his lip and sat in silence. It was Lapointe that finally stirred him to respond, "sir?" Looking at everyone he issued an order, "I understand Chief Forester has repaired 1 raptor. Send it out to look for water and keep it looking around the clock. You're in charge of this Major."

The Doctor turned to the Admiral, "So there is no chance of getting the FTL fixed in the next week or so, and jumping back to the fleet to get the help we need?" Taking a deep breath, the Admiral laid the cards on the table. "It's not the FTL, we're lost." Reeves jumped in the conversation, to shoulder the responsibility he was sure was his fault. "We cut corners in starting the engines to get the Argus into the battle quickly, it seems to have effected her jump range. Hell, if the safeties didn't blow, we may have kept going until we ran out of fuel; as it is we only have enough for one jump."

With confusion still evident on his face, the doctor asked why they didn't just reverse their jump coordinates. "It is not that simple," Reeves endeavoured to explain, "Any point in space is referenced along 3 axis, up-down, left-right, and forward-backward. This equates to six points of reference like the sides of a box. Connect the opposing points with string, and you have your location where those strings intersect. Then to plot a jump you need to use a

seventh point, your point of origin. Since we are lost..." The doctor interrupted and stating that now they needed 6 points of reference to determine their point of origin. This said, the colonel emphasized the matter by proclaiming that they are basically fraked and the captain responded with a demur, "Yes sir, we're fraked."

Hallis looked at Reeves again and opened his hands in a questioning gesture as he spoke, "Back to the water issue. Are the tanks on the ship good to go if by chance we do find it?" The captain nodded his head and assured him that the entire system was in excellent shape, having already had Chief Alana Cain perform a full inspection on them. "Cain?" Bridgeford repeated and assumed there was no relation to Admiral Cain. But the captain responded that actually it was her youngest sister. With a disdainful snort, the marine commented how military genius doesn't appear to run in the family. The admiral focused his attention on the colonel and returned the disdain with a cool response, "She was part of the operation that saved your ass."

The meeting was quickly drawing to a close when the Colonel brought an issue forward before Hallis, "You asked me about my civilian charge, I notice you got one too." The doctor offered some clarification and admitted that this was the chemist he had been working with. But it was the Admiral who gave the most insight, informing everyone that the man was a drug dealer. "He had been sneaking onto military stations and ships for months, selling his crap and stealing stuff. He was arrested aboard Ganameade and because we were going to Picon, I agreed to do the base commander a favour and take out the garbage." Lewellyn was quick to interject that guy was more than a dealer; he was a chemical genius and he couldn't have made the vitamin shots without him. "The man is a regular alchemist, what you and I call crap, no pun intended, he can use to make all kinds of things." Hallis immediately saw the potential asset and told the doctor to have the man come and speak to him. "In a time of war regulations give me a wide range of power." Bridgeford smiled and softly sang, "You're in the army now."

Before calling the meeting adjourned, Hallis noted that both Reeves and Lapointe had a small booklet of paper. Then he went on to say how he had been keeping the ships logs on the back of some recipes found in the galley. So if either had a secret stash of paper somewhere, he would be grateful. The command officers smiled and everyone agreed that the

Admiral deserved his gift. Major Assuras and Lewellyn reached under the table, hauled out a box and pushed it across to Hallis. He pulled from the crate a dusty logbook. "They are the original Argus logs written by her commander Isaac". Examining the journal more closely, the admiral thought what a great asset its contents could turn out to be. Then thumbing through the book he realized the true magnitude of the gift, Commander Isaac had only written on the front side of each page. Gently caressing the old texts Admiral Hallis thanked everyone and commented that for a cold ship he suddenly felt warm, but before there was another water problem, everyone was dismissed.

Chapter 2: Conduct Unbecoming

Down the entire length of the corridor, everyone could hear Alana's crying as she protested her innocence. However Major Ford was ruthless in his verbal assault and secretly enjoyed the feeling of power it gave him. "You're a Food thief! Admit it! No one has eaten a damn thing in 4 fraking days and you're getting to stuff your face!" Presently unable to handle his attack she sought the solace of the wall next to her and slumped to the floor with sweat and tears rolling down her face. "Look at you! You're also a pathetic excuse for a soldier. Unlike your big sister you aren't fit to wear the uniform!" He snorted and further commented about her inability to stand at attention when an officer speaks to her.

In the middle of this verbal assault Col. Bridgeford rounded the corner and with a purposeful stride to stand face to face with the major. Under the glare of the Colonel, Ford began, "I'm glad you're here sir. This pathetic excuse for fleet soldier has been stealing food." Taking a deep breath and slowly letting it out, Bridgeford stated there hadn't been any food to steal for 4 days, then glanced down at the sobbing woman curled up on the floor and calmly told her to get up. Addressing Ford, "You better have a good explanation for chewing out an enlisted man in public." Assured of his righteousness, the look on the major's face was pure shock as he attempted a response, "I...I found a sack of food in her gear."

The old marine calmly folded his arms and fixed his gaze on the younger officer, "Ok, so explain to me why you're doing inspections, and then how you concluded that the food was

stolen." Attempting to regain his composure but finding himself stuttering for an explanation to justify searching a crewmember's personal belongings, he finally blurted out, "look at how much she has!" and he handed the colonel a cloth sack the size of a shoe box. Looking pensive for a moment, Bridgeford examined the bag and finally fixed his gaze back on the Major. "So no explanation for the invasion of privacy." The colonel's eyes glared with contempt as he stared into Ford's pupils and rolled his tongue in his mouth, as if to communicate Ford's actions left a very bad taste in his mouth and it was only his military discipline that kept him from striking the man in front of him. Feeling that he sufficiently made his opinion clear he finally asked about the food. "Ok soldier, explain the food and don't pull that crying crap with me."

Assuming a posture of attention, Chief Cain explained the food had been given to her, which left Bridgeford questioning, why aboard a ship of starving people would anyone sacrifice their last morsels of food. "Because I asked for volunteers!" Interjected the doctor as he and the admiral, who had been sharing a conversation, stepped into the hallway. "She is under doctor's orders to eat. Is there a problem with that?" The colonel had a problem with anything that might negatively impact on the ship and felt a group of people going without food for the benefit of one fell into that jurisdiction. Hallis nodded agreement to Bridgeford's statement and added that regulations make it clear the doctor's authority ended at the safety of everyone else. Brushing off the concerns of both men, the doctor responded, "Unless of course it involves civilians, and then my authority over-rules even the admiral. As such I'm not obliged to explain anything to you." Forever a marine, the colonel began to angrily state that last he checked she was a soldier, when the admiral calmly dismissed captain Dr. Lewellyn and Chief Cain. Accepting the admiral's decision the X.O. turned attention to the major and deciding that what had began as a public spectacle, should end as one, as such he bellowed like a pissed off drill sergeant, "Ok Fly Boy! The next time you feel the need to violate someone's personal space, inspections start with you! And it's going to be a full body cavity search, done by marines with big cold hands! Dismissed!" Ford hastily saluted and retreated down the passageway.

Sneering after the man disappearing from his sight,

Bridgeford mumbled the major's un-official call sign, Major A-hole. Returning to CIC, the admiral looked at his XO and noted that it appeared he enjoyed chewing the man out. "Yes he is a jerk, but a hell of a good pilot." However the colonel didn't care if he was the best pilot in the fleet it didn't give him permission to be a jackass." Most pilots are ego monsters. And the better they are the worse they can be. These aren't marines you're dealing with; you may want to change your tactics." Bridgeford shrugged an acknowledgement but noted Hallis appeared to enjoy seeing the pilot taken down a notch too. With a wry smirk Hallis responded, "He needs it on a frequent basis. He was almost my CAG. At the very last possible moment, I promoted Assuras in his place." Raising an eyebrow the old marine enquired about what happened. "Well, the Poseidon's old CAG was transferred to the Atlantia and Ford was the next senior officer, so it should have been his. But still, I like to think these things over."

Stopping briefly and looking Bridgeford straight in the eye, he went on, that in all his years he has only known 4 exceptional pilots; two of which, he was lucky enough to have under his command. Walking on, the admiral continued, "Four civilian scientists had crashed on a Jovian gas giant with an equatorial gravity 23.12m/s and right in the heart of a permanent storm." Not understanding the science, Bridgeford only commented that it sounded harsh. "Ford and Assuras both went out in separate Raptors to get a look at the situation. After their report, I was going to pull the plug and Cupcake agreed neither of us would have risked it. But Ford argued pilot's discretion and against my judgment, I let him go for it. He not only saved those people, he did it without major damage to the plane. That cinched it for me, I was sure he was the right man for the job. Until..." The colonel grinned and said, "Major A-hole surfaced." Shaking his head Hallis stated, with a capital A. "I figured he earned his day off, that I'll make it informal, just go down to the duty lockers and give him his piece of paper and a handshake."

Bridgeford interrupted saying, "Oh by the Lords of Kobol, that must have been a big mistake." Admiral Hallis snorted, "Was it ever. I get down there to find him already celebrating and he's gone to the trouble of getting a sliver plaque and hanging it on his locker. Still prepared to over-look it all, I state that I'm here to announce the CAG and pull out the piece of paper. Ford looks me in the

face, says thanks Teddy and takes it out my hand." Colonel Bridgeford broke out in a big laugh and Hallis finished. "So, I'm pissed and yell out attention, to get control of the situation. Then I take the paperwork back, walk over to Assuras and promote her to the rank of major, instructing her to report to my office at 08h00 to formalize her new position." The old marine was surprised with his ego that he took things lying down. Hallis responded that he doubted his 3 months of official complaints and paperwork were done in the reclined position. Finally stopping just before entering the Command centre, Bridgeford had to ask who were the other two great pilots. The admiral responded, "I met this one flight instructor called Starbuck and she could really push it." "Never heard of her. Who else?" Smiling wickedly, "Myself of course", Hallis boasted and stepped inside CIC

As usual, on the bridge Lapointe and Reeves were busy analyzing data, situations and devising solutions for their problems. Since the attack and meeting each other, the two had become inseparable. As a team they were piecing the together what would become the owners manual for the Argus and the basis for the procedural systems. Both of them were hard at work analyzing data from Cupcake's last flight making certain that no stone had been left unturned in their quest for water. As usual, upon completion nothing was found. Reeves stood up and shook his head and didn't try to hide the disappointment on his face. Whereas Lapointe began mumbling about the possibility of designing some sort of large scale atmosphere condenser and decided to check the mission data again.

The COM officer interrupted the silent business-like atmosphere of command to inform the admiral that Cupcake was ending her rotation early today due to heating problems with her navigational computer. Hallis looked toward the captain and found his question answered before he was able to ask it. "Chief Forester has second raptor repaired and ready to go, sir." Acknowledging this statement, he started to open his mouth to ask another question, Mr. Lapointe this time responded, before he could speak. "Major Ford is on the flight deck sleeping in a raptor. He had some difficulties; I believe he had some problems getting to sleep and have only been asleep for 3 hours. I recommend resuming rotation at the regular scheduled time." Hallis agreed and turned to look at his X.O., who left him for a third time unable to voice his thoughts. "It was obviously

this morning's incident disturbed him." Annoyed, Admiral Hallis yelled at everyone in CIC, "Ok! The next person that answers me before I get a chance to make a sound is going find himself on waste recovery duty." With everyone's attention focused on him, the oldman laughed and noted that they must be doing a great job if they can make an admiral redundant. Finally able to give a command, he told Reeves to make certain that Cupcake's new data files were analyzed.

The raptor made its approach for the landing bay too fast and had to be waved off. Cupcake cursed herself because she should have just manually landed the plane instead of trying to use the computers. She and her crewman had been getting anomalous readings on all of their computer systems almost the entire flight. Her anger, at wasting more fuel, was punctuated by punching her own chair. "Easy major, the chief has enough problems piecing these planes together with old junk. He doesn't need you ruining the upholstery too," commented her crewman. Her eyes flared with anger but she bit her tongue and did her job, properly this time.

"Major, please calm down." The chief was trying to appease a very angry Cupcake with assurances that he checked the craft before it left the ship. He tried and to explain how he has no official raptor replacement parts, and had to make old circuits do the job of new ones but that he would have it fixed by the next rotation. With hostility she threw her gloves in the plane, ordered the chief to fix it right this time and stormed off to get some sleep. Forester simply saluted and went to retrieve his multi-tester.

"Someone isn't a happy camper today." Chief Cain stated as she handed Chief Forester his multi-tester. "I can't say I blame her. After all, if you had fixed it properly the first time, none of this would have happened." Forester shot her an evil look and asked for his soldering iron to which she responded by stuffing it down her shirt. "Come and get it." He put his hands on his hips and shook his head letting her know that he didn't have time for this. She responded by lifting up her shirt, letting the tool fall out and exposing her breasts, "A girl needs something to take her mind off her problems... And so does a man." With a bashful grin Forester rolled his eyes. "Look, there is no one around. I'm horny and hungry and my odds of getting a lobster dinner aren't good. So..." Her voice trailed off and she flashed a set of doleful eyes at the man. However, the

object of her desire decided to play it tough and saying what he really needed right now were her skills in electrical work. Picking the iron up she then handed it to the chief with one hand and with the other grabbed his crotch. "Ok, but after you're done servicing the plane, you're going to service me." Then forcing her tongue in the man's mouth she planted a hard lusty kiss and sashayed toward the broken raptor. After moments pause, for composure, and to re-adjust his overalls, chief Forester followed the woman into the plane.

Major Ford sat in the cockpit of a raptor trying to sleep. He hated the crowded sleeping quarters, but the cold of the raptor wasn't making sleep anymore easy. He switched on the plane's heating, excusing the waste of power with the all importance of his sleep. After all, the survival of the crew rested upon his capable shoulders. The day's earlier events continued to haunt him, and staring out the window of his craft his eyes bore into chief Cain merrily working along side Forester. His contempt turned to arousal when he was able to witness the flirtations of the woman. He decided to try and ignore the childish antics of enlisted men. His reasoning was that the colonel would most likely accuse him of looking for fault and grunts tend to lie. Besides Cain had fairly large breasts; he might as well enjoy the show because it would mostly likely be awhile before some worthy broad would get to feel his turbo thruster again. As the pair entered the other raptor, he was pleased to discover that if he shifted position he could see into it.

After almost 1 hour of watching Forester and Cain repair a circuit board and install an extra cooling fan, Ford was finally starting to fall asleep. Secretly he was angry that their early playful actions didn't continue. But his eyes suddenly shot open as he noticed Alana completely remove her shirt to expose her breasts and Forester affectionately lean into her. Ford's mind began to race and he started to quietly talk to himself, "Oh yea a little mile high action at last." While watching he noticed that it was quite warm in the plane, turned off the heating and continued whispering his appreciation of the spectacle he was witnessing. "Umm that's right little girl, kneel before your master. Worship at his pleasure altar." Finally loosing himself in moment, the major unbuttoned his pants for greater comfort and became a distant participant in their affections.

The major's eyes rolled back into his head, his hand shook in a repetitive motion and a husky moan spilled out past his lips. Rolling his head to one side so he could further indulge his act of intrusion, he began to mumble obscenities to degrade and objectify the female he was fixated upon. Thereby heightening his own twisted arousal and bringing him within a breath of satisfaction. When his situational awareness pilot training alerted him to the footsteps of another person approaching. "Frak!" He cursed and sank silently into his seat. It was captain Reeves approaching to copy the data from Cupcakes last flight. But then it occurred to him that the captain was about to walk in on the two grunts fraking. With a sadistic grin, Ford admitted to himself he enjoyed a good fireworks display more than a live porno.

Reeves entered the raptor and saw the two chiefs in their moment of affection. He quickly turned and shielding his eye with his hand, exited the plane. "Ahh bloody hell! Julian put your tool away! I don't need to see that." A slight whine was evident in his voice as he finished the comment. But from inside the craft Alana giggled like a schoolgirl and yelled out that it was now 4 times he had walked in on them in a compromising moment. She also told him that if he didn't like watching, he might try knocking before entering a room and the captain responded saying it's a plane not a room. With yet another feminine chuckle she apologized, "Sorry Scott. I promise it will certainly happen again... and again... and again." In the meantime major Ford sat up in his chair waiting for the pyrotechnics to begin.

With apologies, chief Forester was the first to emerge from the spacecraft. Reeves was not overly interested in excuses, but he also wasn't angry when he spoke. "Sheesh Jules... This isn't like the yard anymore. I'm no longer the only officer, and in case you haven't noticed there is an admiral. And I don't even want to mention what that colonel Bridgeford would do if he caught you." A bare breasted Alana emerged and stepped between the two men enquiring if Scotty was going to turn them in. Putting his head down and looking at the floor the captain spoke again. "Of course I'm not going to turn you in. Just next time if you're going to frak, find a better place than the landing bay. And in the meantime put your damn shirt on." With a snort, she replaced her clothing and stated it wasn't like everyone aboard the ship hasn't already fondled each other in

massive galley-bedroom or watched each other pee. It was slowly becoming obvious to Major Ford that Reeves wasn't going to do his job and nail them to the wall. Biting his finger, his anger began to grow.

Being assured that the raptor was good to go, Cain explained, "The older circuits, soldered in for the repair, tend to run hotter. We just had to install an extra cooling fan." Relieved that it wasn't serious, Reeves entered to make a copy of the latest sensor files for a second analysis. Cain stuck her head in the plane for a moment to enquire about the status of using the comet as a source of water. The captain looked at her not understanding what she was talking about. She responded in a matter of fact tone, "The one that was passed 2 day ago. Is it too dangerous to retrieve?" Stunned and with a weird look on his face the captain was convinced this was another Alana prank when she marched back into the aircraft. "Look it's right here in the navigation computer. I noticed it when I backed up the data before we started repair work." Quickly joined by Forester, Reeves ran to the pilot's counsel and began searching the flight logs demanding why wasn't this information noted in the pilot's report. "This information wouldn't be in the sensor sweep data. It's a navigational system and the airman's job to bring this to our attention." Chief Cain pushed a few buttons on the counsel and brought up the display to show that the plane had to alter course to avoid the celestial body and noted it occurred on Major Ford's rotation. Blood flowed freely into Reeve's eyes and he clenched his fists trying to restrain his anger and finally loosing the battle yelled, "Major Asshole!!!!!"

Ford sat in the cockpit of the other raptor as contempt for the legendary Mr. Reeves dripped from the sweat of his eyebrows. Determined to make all the other times he found fault with the captain's work appear to be as tame as a walk in the park, he bolted from his chair and headed toward the trio as he heard the scream of anger from the captain. Pausing for a brief second, the major promised himself that he was going to sit over the captain's shoulder every spare moment he had and teach him what a true colonial officer was. As the group exited the plane he yelled at them, "So Mr. Reeves! Is it in junkyard regulations to let people frak around wherever they like? Or is that a policy you dreamed up on your own?"

Shooting the man a hostile glance Reeves attempted to avoid

Ford's verbal abuse. But sure that he finally had the junkyard dog where he wanted him he pushed the issue. The captain, having suffered several days of being belittled and ridiculed, finally gave into his basic instincts and retaliated. "I have had enough of your fraking crap! Let's get a few things straight, 1) I'm doing my job. 2) You're a frak up and 3) Next time zip up your damn pants after you finish masturbating. I already know your personality is a joke, I don't need to see proof." Looking down in shock the Ford quickly covered his shame with one hand and reached out to grab the shoulder of the captain with the other. But in a response to this un-welcome touch, Reeves struck his fist hard into the man's mouth with sufficient force to knock him down. Then seizing the moment and he bore down on him. It took both of the chiefs to pull him off the man. Forester brought him back to reality with hard reminders about the water. Spitting in the major's direction Reeves marched toward the admiral's office. As Ford picked himself up and walked after the captain, Cain calmly chided, "I hope you enjoyed the show sir." Exhausted Forester only mumbled, "We're completely screwed now."

Chapter 3: Operation Icicle

Captain Reeves stormed into C.I.C and barked, "Where the frak is the Admiral?!" Normally a calm person, his vocal assertiveness came as a shock to those present. The colonel responded that he was sleeping in his office and demanded to know what the captain's problem was. A veteran, Bridgeford was not a man easily surprised. However, Reeves response, "I'll deal with you later" as he marched past, momentarily left the man confused. He was not accustomed to this type of treatment.

Throwing open the door to the admiral's new office and quarters, the captain continued his insolence. "Admiral, get-up now! We need to talk!" Thinking they might be under attack, the old man of the ship jumped out of the cot, he had been sleeping on and demanded to know what was the situation. Compounding his confusion, was not the response for which his groggy mind searched, but the colonel entering and screaming, "Who the hell do you think you are?!" With a look that could kill, Reeves stared into marine's eyes and coldly said, "I'm talking with the admiral about the water we found." Curling a fist, Bridgeford was almost shaking at having to restrain himself, from literally throwing Reeves out the door. However, the Admiral locked onto the precious word, "Water?" his voice perked.

Just then, Ford entered the quickly crowding quarters, shouting and pointing a finger at the captain. "He is letting enlisted men have sex!" The colonel got his third surprise as he turned to see the major. "What the frak happened to your face?!" Singularly focused despite the chaos, the Admiral tried again, "Did we find water?" But the captain

drowned his question, "I belted the idiot!!" The colonel turned to regard Reeves, "You struck a superior?!" Hallis shook the sleep from his head, "What is this about water?" The major shouted over the admiral's voice, "He hit me because I caught him permitting the flight deck to be used for an enlisted orgy!" Bridgeford's surprise at the recent turn of events was suddenly replaced by confusion, "Orgy??" Hallis once again tried to be heard, his patience wearing thin, "Tell me about the water!" Unfortunately, no one was paying attention and Reeves snapped at Ford, "I hit you because you were masturbating on the flight deck while watching enlisted personal frak!" The colonel was taken back and stumbling to find words. Having been ignored too many times Hallis yelled in a command voice to gain control, "Did we find fraking water!!" A momentary silence finally came across those in the room. The admiral, at last, had control.

Having taken several moments to listen to the captain's explanation, Hallis appeared to be introspective before commenting. "So, a few day's ago major Ford found water and didn't say anything. And you didn't catch his mistake because it was the pilot's responsibility to inform you of any navigational occurrences." He rubbed his chin, sighed stared down his nose at Reeves, "I'll deal with your discipline later. Right now get on top of this." He then dismissed the captain, who quickly saluted and returned to CIC. Bridgeford offered to handle the discipline the lovebirds. But Hallis refused, "Part of the problem is we have two crews aboard this ship. We don't need two commanders as well. I'll handle it personally." Having stated that he exited the room, leaving Major Ford and Colonel Bridgeford alone.

The major looked at the marine and started to say he wanted to file formal charges but found himself being interrupted. "Do you want to know what I think?" Bridgeford didn't wait for response before continuing. "You're a hotshot! And you have been riding that man's ass because you're jealous. Well tonight he kicked your ass. Unlike you, normally he is a good officer, and he is very well liked and respected by this crew. He left this room the man that found water and therefore hope. You, on the other hand, are the stupid astronaut that enjoys battlestar porno and kept this crew drinking piss for 2 extra days because he couldn't figure out that a comet is a dirty snowball. And as you get hell out of my site, you might want to re-think your next actions! Major A-hole you are grounded and dismissed!" Without a further word, Ford saluted and left the room.

XOXOX

Major Assuras was passed out from exhaustion in a corner of the galley. A combination of both the physical demands of long hours flying, lack of nutrition and the mental stress was taking its toll on her. Lapointe approached, tapped her on the shoulder and apologized for disturbing her. She rolled over mumbling that it better be an attack. Again Lapointe gently nudged her saying they found water and she slowly rolled over to look at him with one eye. Calmly and briefly he explained that it was a comet and they needed a pilot's expertise and someone to get sensor data. Rolling away she smiled, "That's wonderful news and Dagget can handle it." Forever trying to be professional, lieutenant Lapointe found himself suppressing a grin, "There was an altercation. The major has been grounded." Groaning and reaching for a hand to help her up made it clear that she

wasn't fit to fly. "You're only needed in CIC for now. The admiral said you could use his office to catch up on your sleep. As for the major, captain Reeves beat him for masturbating publicly on the landing bay." With her mouth hanging open, Assuras could barely say the words, "Oh frak sakes." The two, then walked toward command.

"Given its current trajectory, the comet is going to pass relatively close to us. But it's huge and we can't land on it. I don't have any ideas on how to make this happen." Cupcake was busy rubbing her eyes and wishing she had a coffee. Chief Cain approached and the colonel wanted to know why she was present. Patiently Reeves responded that her knowledge might help, as she was his best hauler operator. Hallis quickly corrected the captain by saying she was HIS best hauler pilot and he welcomed the chief to the meeting. She took her seat and began listening to the dialog.

At one point during the discussion Hallis and Assuras started to form a plan where the Haulers would fly into the upper part of the comet's tail and try to catch some ice particles. Alana's eyes widened and she put her head in her hands as she heard the plan. Noticing her reaction Bridgeford spoke, "Chief, if you have something to say. Spit it out." Alana cleared her voice and softly said she thought it was a bad plan. Everyone in the room focused their attention on her. "I'll do my duty but I'm not comfortable trying to fly through a comet's trail or use my craft to play catch with giant high-speed icebergs." The room was silent for moment and Assuras said she would fly the hauler. Nodding his head the admiral resumed talking about the plan. One again chief Cain spoke up, "Major is there enough time for me to train you?" The room went momentarily silent and Cupcake let everyone know she could fly any plane ever made. "Yes major, a hauler is a plane but it is also heavy equipment. You have to be able to do more than fly." The admiral agreed to her point stating the major should stick to her viper.

"Basically you're saying these big boats can easily push or pull something the size of a battlestar or larger but it has to be stationary." Alana began to explain that the machines had a lot of strength but were never designed for fancy aerial manoeuvres. "They are equipped with magnetic locks and cables for pulling anything. And I'm sure we could construct some sort of grapple cannon. The trick would be to find a slow enough moving piece or break off a piece to tow it back." Cupcake's eyes brightened and a wry grin came across her face. It was apparent to everyone that she had an idea and as she looked at the chief, the same conclusion came to her as well. "Use the vipers!" said Alana. Assuras confirmed, "Exactly and go after the snowball itself. Blast a few chunks off!" Lapointe chimed in that they needed a raptor to get some readings to choose the strike location. With a smug look the admiral dramatically put his hands behind his head and leaned back in his chair commenting how much he loves this crew. Then he ordered a raptor in the air, scheduled a briefing for when it returned and commanded Major Assuras to go to bed. "You're leading operation icicle in the morning."

Despite the lack of food, adequate water and heating, each day that passed the crew cleaned scrap out of rooms and implemented daily procedures. Slowly the Argus not only began to look like a battlestar, it started to function like one. The news of operation

icicle spread fast and once again the crew was talking about captain Reeves, or the Junkyard dog, as he had become known. Passing through the corridors, Reeves found it uncomfortable receiving the random compliments from his fellow crewmen, and he did his best to explain it was chief Cain that found water. But nothing could really dampen his good spirits. The possibility of water made him happy, but his current enthusiasm was held in the two cups he carefully carried in front of him. Triumphant arriving at the admirals briefing room, his precious gifts in hand, he marched into the room and smiled at the recipients. "Alana, this is for you and Cupcake this is for you." He handed them the cups. Alana looked inside it and was surprised to find milk, while Assuras blurted in her shock "Coffee!?" Mr. Lapointe and the doctor, who were also present, were the first to question where was the secret cache of milk and coffee. "Unfortunately, there isn't one. I couldn't sleep so I ended up cleaning out Haulers. The milk is from instant creamer packets and the coffee was some instant I found in a small baggie under a seat. Major, I hope you like your coffee black because I gave Alana all the cream." Assuras responded saying she loved black coffee and anything tasted better than piss water.

Colonel Bridgeford walked into the room and immediately noticed the doctor. "Is there something of a medical nature to this comet?" Doctor Lewellyn responded that his alchemist was interested in its chemical composition and had decided to invite himself to the meeting. To avoid conflict, the doctor decided to come along in order to baby-sit the man. "So where is the dope pusher?" asked Bridgeford. Sensing the conversation was about him, Freddy let out an exaggerated moan and crawled out from under the table. "Was someone talking about me?" Emerging from his hiding spot was a late 20s – early 30s male with cherry red hair wearing military fatigues rolled to the knee and tied at the waist with a pink silk like scarf. The colonel's eyes narrowed and he took his seat mumbling about disgracing the uniform. Cracking an evil smile the newly drafted drug dealer walked over to the marine and said, "Well that's because I didn't have a big strong soldier boy like you to help me get dressed today." Bridgeford abruptly stood up and the doctor quickly interceded and removed his charge from the immediate area.

"Was my cot comfortable for you, Cupcake?" Hallis entered the room and took his seat and Assuras thanked him for the use of his bed. "What's the deal?" Captain Reeves stood up and happily informed his admiral that operation icicle looked promising. He and lieutenant Lapointe examined the raptor's data, there were 4 possible places to strike the comet and any of them will supply enough water to fill the tanks. As Reeves recommended one place, he referred to as zone 1, that should create multiple large fragments, a voice from the end of the table spoke. "Sweetie, before you do that. Do you have some kind of chemical analysis of the different strike areas I can look at?" It was the ship's newest recruit, the former dope pusher, speaking." As the captain passed down the makeshift portable data display the colonel stated that the private might find his service life easier if he learned how to properly talk to an officer. The man responded by blowing a kiss at the marine and then examining the data. The room grew uncomfortably silent waiting for the man to speak.

"Go for your number 3 strike position." Everyone looked at him and waited for further information and when it became obvious none was coming the admiral spoke the

question everyone wanted to know. “Ok private, why?” Rolling his eyes the response came, “Well honey, I mean Mr. Admiral, sir.” Flashing a condescending grin at the colonel. “You need all kinds of other stuff and there are crucial elements in zone 3 but not zone 1.” Bridgeford retorted with an equal act of condescension and asked for further explanation from private scumbag. Hallis shot his XO a dirty look but said nothing. “I changed my last name to Parts several years ago. So you can use that now Mr. Colonel, sir. The ships need fuel and there are trace amounts of tylium, as well as methane of a sufficient quality and quantity that I should be able to make something with enough kick that perhaps you can use it as a substitute for your regular aviation fuel. Or at least make this ship a warmer place to live.” He played with his hair and let his voice trail off saying perhaps even make some drugs. Everyone gave the private a hard stare and the doctor quickly defused the situation by saying it would be only used for legitimate medical purposes.

At the comet’s current speed and trajectory, by the time the mission would be ready to start, it would take the haulers 37 hours to rendezvous with the celestial body. They weren’t FTL capable and redesigning them wasn’t feasible. Zone 3 was estimated 85% likely to break into 3 large chunks, or else provide 2 even larger pieces. A raptor and viper would accompany the heavy equipment and to conserve fuel they would shut down their engines and coast. Using fighter missiles instead of demolitions is guess work and sloppy at best. Additionally factoring pilot fatigue, the possible size and speed of each fragment meant that this mission was extremely dangerous. Normally the admiral would have asked for volunteers but given their current circumstances he felt it was purely a command decision that rested solely upon his shoulders. “Chief Cain, the haulers just became a working squadron and you’re in command of it. Assemble your pilots and brief them. Cupcake, you’re on the viper. Grab a raptor crew and sit in on the meeting. And I want you to give the chief any support she needs on this mission. It’s her expertise and therefore her game calls. Those are my orders, dismissed.” As everyone left the office, Hallis began to immediately write in the logbooks. It was apparent on his face he was just doing his job and not taking any pleasure in it.

The deck crews made certain that planes carried extra battery power for their suits and oxygen. Colonel Bridgeford made an announcement in the galley that if anyone was holding out or had saved a few morsels of food, to consider donating it now. Doctor Lewellyn gave all those involved a vitamin shot and the biggest surprise came from one of the raptor squadrons. They had given call signs to each of the hauler operators and painted them on the sides of the ships along with a squad name. They were now being called Squadron 001, “The Ass Haulers.” Hallis believed that military pomp was sometimes necessary because it was good to boost moral and therefore performance. With the Argus crew facing possible death from dehydration, he not only indulged this behaviour, he added to it by giving everyone a military send off. Standing on the flight decks all available command officers and personal saluted the Ass Haulers as they took off. Operation Icicle was underway.

XOXOX

“This is Hell’s Honey, all pilots form up on raptor 236 and prepare for shutdown. And if anyone wants to dump his pee bottle out the window try not to get it on anyone behind you. Running the wipers requires turning on the engine and this is strictly a downhill coast in neutral.” Obeying her orders Cupcake and Clubber the raptor pilot chuckled as they listened to Alana’s attempt at the lingo. “Roger that Hell, taking formation with raptor 236 and preparing to shut down on your mark.” After all the planes took position Alana gave the shut down order and one by one, each plane checked in. The chatter of their voices over the radio was the only sound heard in the silence of space.

XOXOX

The colonel’s authoritative voice boomed and could easily be heard outside the Admiral’s office in CIC. He was making it clear that striking a superior officer was wrong and that if it had been anyone but Reeves, he would be in the brig. Standing at attention and looking straight ahead the captain responded loudly, “Sir, this captain was in error and accepts full responsibility for his actions! I ask to be put in the brig! Sir!” This approach to the charges levied before the captain appeared to appease colonel Bridgeford. But the admiral wasn’t buying into it. He leaned back and considered the man before him. Mentally trying to sum up the famous Junkyard Dog, he was careful of how he would choose his words. Removing the rank insignia from his uniform he began, “Drop the protocol for 10 minutes gentlemen; this is between men and off the record.” Raising an eyebrow but deciding to follow along the colonel removed his bars and put them on the table. The admiral thanked him and proceeded with his enquiry.

“Aboard the Poseidon I knew every officer under my command. Checked their personal records myself. But you, I don’t know crap about. You’re the infamous Captain Reeves who resurrected an old dead battlestar in under an hour, saved the Poseidon’s crew, found water, has a crew of men that adore him and can handle himself in a fight. I’m not sure if you were a complete jack-ass, the fleet’s secret weapon or it’s biggest frak up!” Hallis leaned forward, folded his hands and put them on the table, never taking his eyes off of Reeves. “Men that can do great things can also cause large problems. So tell me why you were stuck in charge of a garbage dump.”

Reeves’ scrunched this face, commenting that he never gave his reasons much thought. He was in the yard by choice and he really didn’t want to be anywhere else. Having dedicated their lives to climbing the military ladder, both his superiors were dumbfounded that anyone would choose a dead-end assignment. The colonel voiced his wish for ambrosia. With sigh and resolving himself that he would have to discuss his private life, the captain began. “I joined the Colonial fleet because it just simplified things. My adopted parents are priests of Athena and they were in charge of a street kitchen and opened their house to troubled and abandoned homeless children.” The man standing in front of Hallis began to take form but to the colonel he thought this environment should make a man a seriously motivated for success. As far as he was concerned, Reeves must have had sex with some admiral’s daughter.

However, admiral Hallis voiced how it made sense. By joining the military the captain was part of something similar to what he knew. At the same time he cut down on life's chaos and always knew what was expected. "Yes sir and it gives me a feeling of being wanted. When I was 8, my mother took me to the kitchen, sat me down and got me something to eat. Until then I lived most of my life in a squat. Well... she then went into the bathroom and killed herself." Finally Bridgeford understood and saw that Reeves had learned to get his job done, not bring attention to himself and how to take care of his own problems.

Satisfied that he knew enough, admiral Hallis replaced his rank markings on his uniform and formally address his officer. "Thank you captain. I appreciate the information. However, for striking a superior officer and failure to adequately discipline the lower ranks.... During operation icicle, unless I need you, you're in the brig." The XO raised an eyebrow when he heard "brig." Hallis looked at him and made it clear you don't become an admiral by failing in one's duty. As a gesture of respect to Reeves, the marine said he would escort the man himself but the admiral cut him off. "Colonel that won't be necessary. I'm certain the captain knows the way. And I would prefer you take command of Major Ford. Case closed and you two can leave."

XOXOX

It was a long and rough flight for everyone involved. But slowly their objective appeared before them. Clubber had been the official radio DJ on this mission and made the long silence bearable. "Ladies and Gentlemen if you care to look out your forward window. You will see ahead of us a great big intergalactic snowball." The raptor crew could have waited on the Argus and easily jumped ahead to meet the assembled mission players. But the argument that less fuel would be consumed was correct. However, secretly it was more a case of this group of people wanting to be part of something from the start. At first admiral Hallis was resistant to the idea, but after a few seconds of thought, he noted that Lt. Clubber and Dancer were always a couple of joking clowns in the officer's lounge. When he looked at the lieutenant his only question was if the man could sing and an immediate off-key screech was the response given. Inwardly smirking, he noted that 36 hours could be a very long flight.

"Cupcake to Clubber, I need my steady position and strike coordinates for zone 3." The raptor pilot affirmed her request and began make close passes on the comet to get as much surface information as possible. 30 minutes passed before he was ready to upload them to Assuras. Each of the next few moments of this operation was vital and the major found herself sweating in her suit. "Frak. I would hope the deck chief did a good job fixing my computer. Switching from manual to computer controls. And...Mark!" The flyby-wire technology and targeting system lights came on, fluttered for a second and went out. Cupcake was not amused, "Double Frak!! Hell's Honey, next time make your boyfriend fix the computer before you give him a piece of tail. Ok, trying this again. On...3, 2, 1, Mark!" Again the computer systems fluttered with life, began to fade but then held steady. "Fraking A! Cupcake to Clubber, I'm ready for that data." The raptor then transmitted the information without further incident.

The fighter plane took its position and waited for the necessary flyby and rotation of the comet to occur. Her breathing became heavy and she was worried. Fighting for mental control she began to verbally whisper, "Calm, calm, weapons are hot and it's like hitting the side of a barn. Nothing to worry about." Slowly the stellar iceberg moved into position and her thumb hovered over the firing button. At 10 seconds Clubber started to radio a countdown and was quickly told to shut up by the major. Although the airwaves were now silent, everyone was mentally keeping count. And just as they reached 0, the flame of a missile being launched was observed. Everyone held his breath as it made its way to the target. In what felt like an eternity, it scored a direct hit and ice fragments scattered from the surface into space. This left only one question on all minds, "was it enough?"

5 seconds after the strike panic started. The airwaves started crackle with everyone asking did it work and Clubber screaming he could do some more data sweeps for another run. But as the comet continued its rotation, the missile's heat and the weakness in the ice it found began to give way. The fissure opened up further and velocity of the main body tore free 2 large pieces. They were sent far enough away from the comet that the haulers could grapple for them. Panic of failure became yells of joy erupting over the airwaves.

"Nice fraking shooting major!" Alana was eyeballing the two hunks of ice and considering their course of action. Although both pieces were enormous in size, one was significantly and visibly larger than the other. The preferred scenario was a fracture of 3 smaller objects and taking one of them back. Any of which would have been more than sufficient for their needs. "I'm thinking the big boy. Honey to Dancer, give..." Scuds saying she was out of her fraking mind and he planned to form up on the small one, interrupted Alana. Chief Cain snapped at the man, "Stand down and you will form up on which one I say to. Ok, Dancer..." Again the man in hauler 2 interrupted telling her it was too big. "Scuds, shut up and that's an order!" Unfortunately Honey's peer wasn't about to relent and pointed out that she couldn't order him because they were the same rank. Major Assuras immediately interceded, "In that case I'm ordering you to shut the frak up!" The airwaves went silent and finally the major told the chief to proceed. "Thank you Major. Honey to Dancer, can you give me a course and trajectory on the little guy."

The raptor crew did some calculations and with a laugh cheered across the radio. "Yea! Hell's Honey, you rule! Cupcake that was one hell of a shot we made." Alana started to smirk and said she thought so. "Well Honey, if you're so smart. How about you tell us by how much." Clubber and Dancer were now starting to sing a re-worded love ballad to Chief Cain. The chief wet her lips and calmly said that she guessed about 4,000km out. Dancer's voice boomed out, "That's a hell of a guess, calculations put it at 3,530km." Like everyone else Cupcake was annoyed and wanted to know what they were talking about. At last Clubber responded with the information, "Major at the current trajectory and speed that little iceberg is going to break away from the pull of the comet and pass within 3,530km of the Argus." Dancer broke in demanding how in Hades did Cain

know. “It’s my job to know. I’ve got a lot of experience shoving around big objects.” Once again everyone was ecstatic.

Scuds disobediently started to voice his disapproval of the Chief’s decision. “Scuds, it’s my call and I didn’t fly all this way out here for nothing. We are taking the big boy home too.” He argued it was too big to move, and that they would require at least 8 haulers to tow it. “We cycle the engines in 5 second full throttle bursts to slow it down. I promise it will slow.” The other two hauler operators were adamant in their objections and pointed out they wouldn’t even have fuel to land. “If we get this big thing, the admiral himself will come out with a jerry can and top us up.” Still the protests continued and once again the major was required to assert command authority. Her only concern was if chief Cain was certain she could haul it. “Major, I know my job. Trust me.” Assuras simply stated that she was in charge and they better do as she says or else.

Alana immediately gave the officers pause to worry when she did her own pass over the ice fragment and disregarded most of the recommendations from the raptor. She barked her orders and unlike previous times, there was no descent from her fellow operators. One by one, beginning with Alana, each of the heavy machines took a position and fired the make shift grapple cannon in to the ice. Information from raptor scan confirmed that each one was locked deep into hard areas of the ice. On Cain’s mark they powered up their engines and slowly began to increase their thrust to full. “Ok folks we do this and drinks are on me. Full throttle in 5, 4, 3, 2, 1, Go!” The raptor crew and Assuras suddenly could see the massive power of the industrial machines as the towlines became extremely taught. Unfortunately, they had minimal effect on their tow. The squadron powered down and awaited the chief’s command to proceed again.

“Ok fellas, that was less than impressive. I want you to manually open the torque valves as far as they go and we do a 5 second burn followed by a 5 second over burn.” Again her squadron voiced their concerns and stated that a 5 second over burn could destroy the engines. But Alana didn’t flinch, “Noted and I accept full responsibility. We will begin again in 30 seconds.” The major broke in on the airwave saying this wasn’t necessary. Alana Cain retorted with, “My call, you said so yourself. We begin burn in 20 seconds.” Major Assuras bit her lip and contemplated over-turning her authority but then decided she would wait a few more moments. Chief Cain’s voice came the airwaves again, “Burn on my mark in 5, 4, 3, 2, 1... Go!” The engines burned brightly and the raptor registered an increase in ambient temperature as they kicked in for maximal thrust. The block of ice started to slow to and come to a stationary position.

Demanding everyone give their status, the other two operators checked in. Scuds was having problems, “Engines are ok but all my electrical systems are severely over-heating. It smells like crap in here.” Cain grunted her dissatisfaction and Cupcake said it was over. However, Hell’s Honey wasn’t ready to quit and enquired about her peer’s suit condition and confirmed it was in operating without a problem. “You have to be in your suit anyway. If worse comes to worse, you just keep your helmet on and you should be fine. We are going to coast back anyway. Besides if there is a serious problem, you’re just a short walk to the raptor.” The Major didn’t like the sound of this but the chief

reminded her there was now more than water at stake and haulers were easy to repair compared to vipers and raptors. Once again Assuras relented and the procedure began again. “5, 4, 3, 2, 1... Go!” The ice began to move in the desired direction but Scud’s plane flamed out at the end.

Calls for him to verify status were unanswered. The raptor did a flyby with a signal light. Scuds used a handheld and flashed back that he was ok but needed a tow truck. Being appeased of her crewman’s condition although one less hauler, Alana ordered another burn but full throttle only, no over burn. Their tow slowly came up to speed. Dancer eventually broke in on the radio, “You’re in the corridor, 5 by 5. I guess drinks are on you. Nice job chief.” Thanking Dancer for the compliment, Cain disengaged the grapple and flew over to Hauler 2 attaching a magnetic lock. “I guess I’m the designated driver”. She noted that although Scuds would be missed, he wasn’t a big radio star anyway.

Chapter 4: Changes in the Chain of Command

*“Scuttlebutt heard on Argus...
Why Ford’s working out with us...
Following his misplaced lust...
Had himself a nut to bust...
Sound off 1, 2...Sound off 3, 4..
1, 2, 3, 4.... 1-2, 3-4!!*

*Caught some crewmen watched ‘em frak...
Took his viper from its rack...
Junkyard hit him in disgust...
And his viper lost it’s thrust...
Sound off...”*

The marines were singing the derogatory chant in order to keep the workout rhythm. Colonel Bridgeford had taken command of Ford and was now making him jog laps with his marines on the flight deck. The little workout ditty caused great embarrassment to the major. The laughter from the enlisted men present along with the colonel’s constant yells of, “Hey flyboy, I can’t hear you!” only made the egotistical pilot want to find a place to hide. “Flyboy in the marines we exercise! Get the lead out!” It was already 4 days of this torture and he wasn’t sure how long his punishment would be. Secretly he wished he had been put in the brig instead of Reeves.

The admiral surreptitiously walked onto the flight deck and stood beside the colonel. “I’ve got people singing this in CIC so I had to check it out myself.” Bridgeford said it was good for morale and took the major’s ego down a notch too. The admiral looked at his X.O. and thanked the Lords of Kobol that he was the ship’s commanding officer. “I would hate to piss you off; there is a mean streak in you.” Colonel Bridgeford thanked his superior for noticing and calmly said there was a reason he became a marine and not a pilot. Noting that when it absolutely and positively requires execution with extreme prejudice, it’s the Colonial Marines to the rescue. With a smirk, Hallis told him to not to

over do it. After all, they still didn't have food and water was rationed. Bridgeford laughed and said not to worry because the doctor has already said that he now has facilities for harvesting and freezing organs and blood if the Major drops dead.

The admiral rolled his eyes and spoke again. "I want you to assign him to be the liaison officer with the lower ranks. We have a problem with Reeves operating one crew and me another and it should help Ford get over his superiority complex." With a smile Bridgeford saluted the admiral who in turn told him to carry on.

Shortly after the training exercises the major grabbed a sack and walked down one of the corridors. Ford was convinced that the colonel and his marines were insane. No food, limited water and these guys were doing kamikaze workouts, he repeated muttered to himself. Slowly he walked up to the ship's alchemist door and he knocked on it. A very whimsically dramatic voice responded, "Cooooome innnnn whoever you are." The major pushed open the door and saw a man wearing a lab coat of his own creation, which hung open revealing a sliver g-string. Noting that it was warm in the room, Ford was surprised when the private walked over, threw his arms around him and kissed his cheek. "Oh a man! What can I do for you soldier boy?" Major Ford turned red faced and was very uncomfortable. But nevertheless, he managed to state that he had heard he could get something for the hunger pains and boast his performance levels.

"Well what you go to trade?" Ford opened the bag and showed him 2 bottles of water. "Hmmm you know there might be water on it's way so I'm not accepting that as payment. Have you got anything else? Perhaps you have something more personal to offer?", Freddy cooed these words at the attractive pilot looking him up and down before letting his eyes rest below his belt. The major stuttered the word no and the other man folded his arms with a sarcastic but disdainful look on his face. Major Ford opened his jacket and pulled out 2 nutrition bars and the chemist squealed like a schoolgirl. "Soldier boy, food is big bucks these days. This and a kiss will buy some herbal and none of that chemical crap I'm currently making." He walked over to the desk and pulled out a small baggie. "Ok, soldier boy, where is my kiss?" Feeling slightly nauseated from the earlier exercise Ford decided to close his eyes and give the man the required peck on the cheek. Handing over the drugs the alchemist commented, "Now that wasn't so bad?...was it?" Ford just turned and walked out the door as his host laughed. "See you soon."

XOXOX

Reeves lay on the mattress-less bunk of the brig, when he heard the whistling and footsteps of someone approaching. Admiral Hallis' good mood was evident as he walked into the unlocked cell, carrying a portable receiver. "Was it cold enough for you captain?" Moving to sit up on the bed captain Reeves decided to ignore the question. Although he was wearing a spacesuit, without power it only made the chill bearable. Instead he enquired if it was his equipment that the Admiral had. "I hope you don't mind. The communications on this ship are limited by today's standards, and I wasn't going to try to rip one out of a raptor. Besides yours appears to have even better range. Not standard issue is it?" With a shake of his head, the captain explained it was a gift

from his adopted father and the squawk box they used to locate the Poseidon. Turning it on, Hallis said it was a hell of a radio.

As the receiver came to life, Cupcake's voice crackled on it. "Oh! Oh! Dancer you remember private Decker on Halcyon base?" Dancer and Clubber uniformly groaned and said how he was the worse cook in the fleet. Cupcake laughing hard broke into an impersonation, "Errr... Ummm... You mean I got to peel the potatoes before I mash them?" After a round of chuckles, Hell's Honey suggested that if they were going to surprise the ship, they had better switch to radio silence for the next little while. After all long-range communications should be close. Cupcake responded, "I bet we won't surprise the Admiral. That old bird probably hasn't slept since we left and has most likely wielded a giant antenna on the Argus' hull." With that statement, Hallis grinned and mumbled about how his crew knows him too well and then turned off the radio. He then looked at Reeves and informed him he needed him in CIC now. Thankful for his freedom, the captain was happy to accompany the admiral to command.

CIC was a clutter of people singularly focused on their jobs. Concentrating on a task helped keep the mind off empty stomachs. To this effect, only Lieutenant Lapointe welcomed the return of the captain. But his joy in seeing his frequent working partner was replaced with anticipation when petty officer Richards announced that he was successful in creating a radio link with one of the raptors on the flight deck. "Sir, we now have acceptable long range communication ability." The admiral nodded and told him to put it on the box for everyone to hear. The man complied with Hallis' demand and the room filled with the sounds of stellar static for 15 minutes.

"Argus this is Dancer, do you read me? Over." Raising an eyebrow in the direction of captain Reeves, Hallis spoke informing Dancer he was talking to Actual and enquired about the mission status. "Well sir, chief Cain ignored data and did her own thing. Scuds' hauler flamed out and is being towed back..." Colonel Bridgeford interrupted demanding a mission report, not a play by play. "Yes sir! And my apology for airman Dancer." Cupcake took over the dialog with Argus. "Sir, this major will report that as long as we get our hot showers first. Mission Accomplished!" CIC broke out into loud applause and cheers. "Hell's Honey harpooned a big one sir. And we have its little brother trailing us about 2 days behind." The admiral looked at Reeves, smiled and slapped the man on the shoulder in congratulations.

A few days past, Doctor Lewellyn had said he believed that the Argus was a lucky ship. Annoyed by the comment, the admiral protested that the Poseidon was a great battlestar too. The doctor calmly responded that it was lucky until it blew up. "Dave, this bird kicked ass in the first war. And then came back to do it in the second. The Poseidon didn't even last 10 fraking minutes. Yea, it was a great ship, but it wasn't very lucky." Considering that certain death had again turned into a fighting chance, his sentiment was now being shared and echoed by the rest of the crew. As Hallis stepped on to the flight deck to be present for the landings, he over-heard the lucky comments from many of his people. Silently he acknowledged, he would have to get used to the bruising, his former vessel's destruction had left on his ego.

The giant fragment of the comet was parked alongside the ship and all the planes had landed. Admiral Hallis barely got the opportunity to shake chief Cain's hand when jovial chaos erupted. As if to emphasize that an abundance of water was at hand, the admiral and the chief were doused in the precious liquid. Permitting the insubordination, the old man simply said, "By Zeus that's a big rock. You're one hell of a pilot. See me at 09h00." Wet and walking away, he spotted Cupcake and gave her an approving salute as some of the deck hands lifted her on their shoulders. Everyone began to yell comments about how tomorrow they are going to find food. The party continued for almost an hour before the tired heroes complained they wanted to sleep.

XOXOX

With a bounce in her step, it didn't matter to Alana Cain that the shower was cold or the legs of her pants were damp. Considering the recent events, it just felt good to be clean again. Coming to the Admiral's door she straightened her shirt before knocking on it. "Enter." Hallis responded. As she entered in the room she noticed chief Forester was already present and standing at attention. Judging by both the looks on their faces Cain concluded this was going to be more than a congratulatory meeting. "09h00... You're punctual, I can give you that. You can stand at attention beside chief Forester." Chief Cain had hoped that the chewing out that she and Forester received on the flight deck would be the conclusion of their amorous incident. Suddenly she noticed how the wetness of her pants made the ship's chill less bearable. Straighten at Forester's side she did her best to hide her discomfort are braced for what was to come.

Twice walking around and eye balling the two soldiers, the admiral considered his words carefully and finally stood behind them. "Lost in space. No food. Damn cold and substandard living conditions." He paused for a moment and licked his lips before continuing with his speech. "I can appreciate that the captain allowed and perhaps even indulged your relationship in the junk yard. But you're now soldiers serving aboard a battlestar under my command." The old man paused again and walked around to the front of the two chiefs in order to look at their faces. Alana Cain began to interject, in an attempt to accept full responsibility for the incident but the admiral's prior calm authoritative voice became a bellow. "Did I give you permission to speak?!!" Chief Cain quickly shut up and stared at the wall ahead of her. Dropping his voice, Hallis continued. "You two get this in your heads. The only thing that's keeping us together is discipline. The last thing we need is a breakdown in structure. And I'll be damned before I permit two horny adults to cause me problems." Admiral Hallis cracked his knuckles then spoke through clenched teeth. "No matter how much blood is flowing in your crotches, you keep your fraking pants pulled up."

Feeling that he sufficiently made his point, Hallis sat down behind his table. "Chief Forester as punishment for your actions, you have waste recovery duty for two weeks in addition to any electronics repairs on my planes." Looking up at Cain he noted that he had a special problem with her. He couldn't outright punish one of the heroes of operation icicle; it would be bad for moral. On the other hand, he thought to himself, "no

deed should go un-rewarded.” “The haulers have proven their value and are now an official squadron on this ship. It might be acceptable to have enlisted personal pilot the haulers but an officer has to command a squad. Therefore, chief Alana Cain, I am promoting you to lieutenant. And regulations prohibit the fraternization of officers and enlisted men. So your relationship is now terminated.” The old man stood up again and took the rank insignia out from his jacket pocket and pinned it on Alana. “I personally know Admiral Cain, and your older sister would be proud of what you’ve accomplished.” He then stood back, saluted lieutenant Cain told her to report to the CAG for assignments. And without further drama, he dismissed them.

Some distance down the corridor, Chief Forester stopped, smiled widely and gave the new lieutenant a congratulatory hug. However, Alana wasn’t very receptive. “Yea great, now I can’t even touch my own husband.” The chief began to laugh and suggested a nice crawl space above one of the ships engines. Rubbing her forehead she didn’t share her spouse’s humour or his optimism. Together they considered if perhaps they should have informed Hallis about their marriage but decided against it noting that captain Reeves had already spent time in the brig. “By Athena, can you imagine what would happen if he found out Scotty married us without going through the proper procedures? I’m sure he would have a crap and execute him.” Forester’s comments made clear he was worried for their friend. With a sigh his wife told him to just do his job and everything should be ok. The chief stepped back, saluted and walked away in the opposite direction.

XOXOX

Cupcake was present only to observe new lieutenant’s performance and offer advice or help if required. However she noted that Ford, who was part of this mission, sat in the pilot briefing room with a look of disdain on his face as he watched Hell’s Honey lead the mission briefing. In his mind he was furious that she could get away with causing problems. But mostly he was annoyed that he had to run humiliating laps with the marines and as liaison officer was forced to interface with enlisted personal; people, obviously far beneath him, while she was patted on the back and promoted. Honey’s voice thudded in his ears with each syllable. “Ok, as you know we are going after the smaller fragment today. Once again Clubber and Dancer are going to pilot the raptor in case we need data to help us find anchor points. Dagget, Major Ford, will be in the launch tube on alert in case we need him to break up the snowball into smaller pieces. Because fuel is still a problem at this point in time, he won’t be accompanying us unless we need him. Any questions?”

Scuds began to snicker and wanted to know if that meant Major A-hole was going to be watching Alana’s behind again. Cupcake stood up and was about to yell at the man for his comments but lieutenant Cain quickly stepped in front of the insubordinate pilot and took control. “On your feet!” Scuds rolled his eyes and stood up but Cain wasn’t going to flinch from his lack of respect and was prepared to make him an example. “In case you didn’t notice both major Ford and myself are officers. That means we are not you beer drinking buddies! You will refer to us as sir or by our ranks. For the record when you talk to an officer you do it with respect! And if you don’t, I’ll personally bust your

ass into next week.” Standing in his personal space and with her face inches from his, she enquired if he understood. His half hearted response prompted her to bark out, “Understood Sir!” This time chief Scuds responded with appropriate enthusiasm. Satisfied the matter was sufficiently handled, she wished good hunting to all. As everyone departed Cupcake came to her and congratulated her on the way she handled the problem. But cautioned her that these men would require some time to adjust to her new position.

Chapter 5: The Neighbours

As the ass haulers approached the fragment, Dancer radioed Honey and let her know that everything looked as before. But he left the decision on making a surface pass up to her. “No lets try to save a wee bit of fuel. Everything looks the same. I’ll call you if I need you.” Observing the trajectory, shape and speed, Cain ordered Max to anchor from behind the snowball and prepare to slow it down first. Chief Maxime, acknowledged the order and proceeded to circle behind. As he rounded the rear of the ice chunk, he suddenly reversed direction, fired his engines on maximum and screamed over the radio. “Cylons!!! It’s a Fraking Cylon raider” Lieutenant Cain barked orders to her squad to break and run while Dancer signalled the Argus for support.

In CIC petty officer Richards had been monitoring communications and alerted Command to the situation and the admiral immediately ordered Dagget into the air and he was patched in on the ship’s speaker. “This is Admiral Hallis, we are at condition 2. This is not a drill.” He then looked at Bridgeford and simply noted that although they might be lost but it appeared the enemy had found them.

As major Ford came into view, lieutenant Cain took a position alongside the raptor. Scuds and Max were returning to the Argus. Something about this situation didn’t feel right, as if there was something that should be happening but wasn’t. She broke radio silence, “Dancer something isn’t right about this.” There was no response and major Ford was now heading directly toward the comet fragment. It was obvious that he intended to surprise the raider and take it out before it could spot him. Again Honey broke silence, “Honey to Dagget. Stand down, there is more going on here.” Ford, didn’t respond and was now angry that this glorified truck driver was jeopardizing their safety by not shutting up.

Desperately the lieutenant tried the Argus. “Hell’s Honey here, give me Actual. It’s fraking important.” She watched and held her breath because in the next few moments the major would begin his attack run. Several more heartbeats passed when the radio finally signalled a response from Actual. And the admiral made it clear it had better be good. “Sir something is wrong with how that raider is behaving. We cannot see it at all without going behind the ice; it is practically riding the fragment. And despite being seen, it hasn’t moved away from the ice. Please just tell Dagget to make a pass first.” Hallis’ breathing could be heard and it was obvious he was considering the decision. Finally after several intense seconds he ordered major Ford to break off his attack. Hell’s Honey breathed a sigh of relief.

Ford circled wide and made a pass for a visual on the raider. “Dagget to Argus, it’s a raider alright, but it doesn’t look like the ones that attacked us. It looks like the pictures in the history books.” The raptor moved closer to acquire data readings on the craft. Several minutes passed finally Dancer stated that it appeared to be a derelict caught in the fragment’s gravitational pull. With surprise the major commented that considering the gravity from this chunk was so minor it must have passed within millimetres of the ship to ensnare it. He then contacted the Argus again for further advisement.

Despite the apparent lack of threat, Hallis wanted the enemy annihilated. Lieutenant Cain was on the radio calmly asking the admiral to reconsider his decision to destroy the enemy bird. But it was finally captain Reeves and colonel Bridgeford, in CIC, that convinced the old man to change his mind. The captain argued that the raider might contain navigational information to help them figure out where they were. And the old marine overcame Hallis’ fear of a trap by reminding him that if it were, it would mean the enemy already knew where they were. And as such they were already screwed. Pure logic ruled and he ordered the ship brought back with the snowball.

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Save for the marines, the landing bay was cleared of all personnel. The colonel coordinated with his men using wireless communications. Once they secured the area and surrounded the raider, chief Forester and another aviation mechanic were quickly brought into to disable the weapons and power systems of the craft. After they completed their tasks the two men were quickly rushed out of the bay and an armed man prepared to enter the plane. The next few moments aboard the Argus everyone was silent and holding his breath.

The hatch opened and a soldier cautiously entered. Several heavy eternal seconds passed before a response was given. “I have 3 centurions, they don’t appear to be alive. Please advise.” Bridgeford ordered to attempt to remove any weapons they might have and then they would remove the robots. One by one, they came out and were placed on the flight deck floor. Sufficiently satisfied the cylons were not a threat, the old marine pronounced the area secure. Although the atmosphere was intense, there was optimism that this discovery might turn out to be another lucky break.

However, as Hallis approached the area, the look in his eyes appeared more bloodthirsty than hopeful or apprehensive. It was obvious to anyone looking at him that he was thinking about the people he had lost and the civilians that died from the surprise attack. Standing directly before the enemy bodies he uttered his only orders. “There’s general meeting at 07h00. Colonel, you tell captain Reeves to get his butt down here and get to work.” He then spat on one of the toasters and left landing bay.

XOXOX

Carrying a small box, Lewellyn strolled toward the admiral's office talking to the alchemist. He was calmly asking him not to antagonize the colonel. "Just tuck your shirt in and try and be more professional." The unwilling recruit winked and smiled in response and the doctor knew he was asking a leopard to change his spots. The door to the office was open and they entered without knocking. Both Hallis and Bridgeford were already present and engaged in conversation. Stopping their dialog, they looked at the two men who entered and colonel Bridgeford ask them to close the door. The private did so with dramatic flair and the old marine bit his lip. Dr. Lewellyn put the box on the table and smiled as he asked everyone to guess what his present was. The two commanding officers just looked at the man without a comment.

The ship's medical officer shrugged off the cold stares. "Well, I brought us breakfast." He then opened the box and produced several glasses and a container of brownish orange coloured liquid. Admiral Hallis and colonel Bridgeford suspiciously regarded the liquid substance without touching the container. The doctor laughed at their apprehension and let them know it was made from the comet. He then explained that the comet contained microorganisms which they had successfully cultured and from which they could easily extrapolate all 8 essential amino acids. As he finished, "there is tons of the stuff, so drink-up"; Cain, Reeves, Lapointe and major Ford entered the room. Lapointe immediately noticed the worried faces and the oddly coloured liquid and spoke without consideration, "Wonderful poop juice." To which Private Parts burst out laughing.

The meeting started and the medical report was first. Immediately the ship's doctor began to chew out the colonel for his marine workout program. Ford sat with arms crossed and a condescending look on his face. "I indulged you're exercise program only because it kept people busy during operation icicle. I agreed with the admiral that busy and tired soldiers were better than hungry and desperate ones. But the workouts and the double duties have got to stop. I have already treated 5 people for extreme fatigue and hunger. We are human! Not toasters!" The man punctuated his final comment by slamming his fist on the table. Admiral Hallis nodded and agreed that all double duties would immediately cease. "Good! Now our odds of not dying from hunger have increased significantly because we have some supplements." Having won the argument the Doc stood up and delivered his report.

Captain Lewellyn explained that the reason for the liquid concoction was to try to keep the digestive system functioning. Amino acids in a pure crystallized form are immediately taken up into the bloodstream. But a diet of nothing but amino acids is damaging on the kidneys. The crew would need to drink at least 4 glasses a day, but should have a 2.5 to 1 water intake with it. "So until we get a crops growing or synthesize livestock, get used to the taste". The solution to the digestive problems was to create the slurry; its special additive is fatty-lipids. Reaching over and patting the colourful chemist on the shoulder he told everyone how the private found a method to hydrolyse human hair for the last ingredient.

Private Parts, as he claimed was his name, stood up and took a bow and then looked at the colonel and appeared to address him directly. "And I need more of it. So hair cuts

for everyone. And that can include beards, body hair and even a big brave marine's curly pubes."

Bridgeford's eyes narrowed and it was obvious he was clenching his fists under the table. Admiral Hallis gave the marine colonel a hard stare, and the doctor quickly returned to making his report. "Now the drink does not contain all eight essentials. Triptophane is a natural sedative so I will be distributing it in pure form to be taken before bed. This should both help the crew sleep and keep its effects from interfering with duties. And there are no excuses or exceptions."

The colonel stood up to brief everyone about the recovered raider and as he did so the drafted drug dealer whistled commenting about how nice Bridgeford's package looked in his pants. Colonel Bridgeford turned 3 different shades of red, sat back down, handed captain Reeves his written analysis and then spoke directly to the private. "Next time you talk to me like that or disgrace that uniform I'll put a bullet in your head. You fraking homo." Admiral Hallis immediately barked, "Stand down! And that's an order colonel!" He then looked at the doctor and his charge, "If there is nothing else for you to add, both of you are dismissed." The two men got up and walked out of the room without further incident. As Hallis looked back at the marine, Reeves tried to defuse the situation asking if he could proceed. The Admiral hesitated for a moment then gave him the go ahead.

"At the admiral's request I assembled a team last night to study the cylon fighter and I asked the colonel to be part of it. Our preliminary findings and speculations are a mix of good and possible bad news. Starting with colonel Bridgeford's situational analysis..." The captain explained that based on the fact that the raider was old, best estimates place it at the end or shortly after the first conflict. It doesn't have long range or FTL capability. "Therefore it is safe to assume the possibility of a basestar nearby." The admiral's face showed no expression whereas major Ford glowered and folded his arms.

As everyone looked at him for the moment he realized his faux pas and quickly explained he was eager to kick some toaster ass and Hallis agreed. "The good news is it has been in space a long time. We haven't found any damage yet and it has almost a full tank of fuel. We believe the plane's flight systems may have protocol that automatically shuts down everything, perhaps to await further orders, in order to preserve power. So if there is a basestar..." Admiral Hallis interrupted Reeves and completed the sentence saying that it might have similarly shut down. He then cracked his neck and asked where they guessed the ship could be. Captain Reeves responded by gesturing for lieutenant Cain to take the floor.

As Alana stood up, Ford decided to hide his contempt for the woman by pretending to make notes. As far as he was concerned anything she said was a waste of time and would only have to be verified by those who were better trained. "Thank you captain and my apologies if I'm a little rough around the edges. I'm kind of new at this officer stuff." The admiral assured her it would be fine and to continue. She then quickly added that based on her recent activities everyone believes she is a trajectory genius. Taking a deep breath she started, "Ok, the smaller fragment followed a wider but similar path toward the

Argus. Since we could see the piece for the first 8 hours of our return trip, it is unlikely it encountered the raider along that portion of its path. Mapping its trajectory, I further narrowed the field based on the raptor logs of the water searches.” She then inadvertently looked at the major and commented provided those flight reports were complete; this left one area that was never searched. “It puts it about 15,000 km out from us.” The lieutenant sat back down and despite his annoyance for Cain’s subtle jab at his mistake, major Ford decided to not ask any questions. Admiral Hallis looked at the colonel and ordered him to personally oversee this situation and coordinate a recon mission with the CAG. He then looked at lieutenant Lapointe and the major letting them know they were next.

Putting his arms on the table and leaning forward, Ford abruptly began stating there was a problem. “We just got the scrap cleaned out of the starboard flight deck and the lieutenant and the grunts want to fill it up again. As it is, this ship has an inferior number of launch tubes and if the cylons attack, we’re screwed.” Mr. Lapointe attempted to explain that to fully exploit the resources of the comet fragments required large floor area to construct equipment, melt pieces they break off and easy access to space to get those pieces. The major folded his arms and huffed in disgust and made it clear that he believed the enlisted personal weren’t trying hard enough to find better solutions. However Bridgeford wasn’t being tolerant of the holier-than-thou attitude and bluntly told lieutenant Lapointe that the men could have whatever they needed and the admiral gave his authority by agreeing. “There is water, heating fuel and even some nutrition in that ice. We need that stuff now and we can deal with the enemy later. Is there anything else bothering you?”

Much to everyone’s surprise, major Ford continued. “Yes sir there is a discipline problem in the lower ranks. No one has outright disobeyed my orders but they certainly aren’t performing to the best of their abilities.” Hallis dropped his head and then rubbed his face with his hands asking the colonel to take over. “You know flyboy there is a saying in the marine guard that war brings out the true nature of a man. I don’t know what you were like prior to these problems, but you have been a damn arrogant ass. It’s high time you learn that the enlisted men are every bit as valuable as anyone else on this ship.” But Ford interrupted saying he just believed that captain Reeves was better able to handle the men and should be placed in charge of them again. Admiral Hallis slammed his fist on the table; “I’ll consider your advice and implement the change when the war is over! If there is nothing else, I’m closing this meeting.” The admiral then got up, walked out the door and into CIC.

XOXOX

Although the comet contained trace amounts of tylium, extracting it was not going to be easy. But methane was plentiful, easy to get at and could be used to power virtually every small engine or machine on the Argus. So as pieces of the fragment were processed, the Argus started to become fully operational again. The objective was that two large generators would handle all of the ship’s electrical requirements. Construction of the first began during operation icicle and was now completed. It restored full electrical to

everything from lighting to dradius. The portable generators were now being used for their designed function, to power tools and construction equipment. The second generator was larger and was still being built. It would power the entire environmental systems and needless to say everyone aboard looked forward to being able to effectively heat the old battlestar. Despite the main heating still being offline, less crew were now sleeping communicably on the galley floor as better quarters became available due to makeshift electric and methane space heaters.

Colonel Bridgeford had chuckled in CIC when he overheard a crewmen complain about the lack of available mattresses. Mentally noting that it was only a few days prior they were processing their own body waste for nutrients and fuel and facing certain death due to dehydration. He couldn't help but marvel at how far they had come in such a short period of time. This could have easily degenerated into anarchy and cannibalism but despite a few incidents, everyone had held tight and rose to the challenge. He believed that the recent events were the greatest moments in his life-long career. This was going to be the year they retired him to a desk, but the fight wasn't out of him yet. And as he dressed each morning it occurred to him, never before was he as proud as he was now, to put his uniform on and do his duty.

“Cylons Suck! Strife – 126 kills!” Ford read the words scratched on the bottom of the rack above him. Admittedly the Argus was a ship with a lot history, but it was also old and obsolete. It certainly wasn't the Poseidon, which by contrast was organized and disciplined. This boat was literally a garbage barge in comparison. As he lay in his rack awake and waiting for his obligatory duty babysitting the enlisted, his mind wandered. He saw the current situation as inconvenient, chaotic and Reeves was completely to blame for it. The captain had been intentionally deceptive concerning his rank when he reached the Poseidon. He had completely overstepped command structure assuming duties that were not his responsibility. A junkyard dog is supposed to be guarding a refuse pile and not assuming command of a battlestar. Their planes were functioning, but he took them out of the fight, and he got everyone lost in space. Had he been better trained he would have known to just pick up the survivors of the Poseidon and wait for the fleet to send proper help. And now their best hope for getting home was finding the enemy's basestar. Just then his wristwatch alarm went off and rubbing his eyes, he got out of bed.

XOXOX

Ford walked out of the pilot's duty locker and into a nearby bathroom. He was happy that all the toilets were now functioning and he didn't have to publicly urinate in a bottle. Never again would he take being able to use the head alone for granted. Inwardly he was excited that there should be hot water in the next 48-72hrs and he could have a long shower. If they could figure out how to make some soap, toothpaste and towels, it would be perfect. But on the Reeves luxury cruise, such things cost extra. The major rubbed his baldhead as he looked in the mirror. He felt smug because he was the first man on the ship to donate his hair for the cause of manufacturing the new food replacements. But still as he gazed in the mirror he dreaded having to do yet another night as grunt supervisor.

Technically there was no day or night aboard the Argus but according to the time kept, he was performing the nightshift. At least that meant less of the enlisted men he would have to watch over. He knew they didn't like him and they laughed behind his back. There was nothing he could do to change that. Sighing, he reached into his pocket and pulled out some of the herbal substance he got from the alchemist. "Just a little to take the edge off", he convinced himself was all he needed, as he rolled it in a piece of paper between his fingers. Grinning mischievously, he then walked into a stall, closed the door, knelt down on the floor and smoked it, exhaling into toilet to hide the smell. After finishing it he walked out with a smile to the starboard flight pod. Today was going to be the day everyone would like him.

The starboard flight pod was a buzz with men constructing various processors and chemical separators. The cylon raider and the 3 centurions had been moved here as well and lay in a corner on the floor. Ford entered singing a song and patting a few men on the back. He walked past lieutenant Cain and Chief Forester, who were tinkering with one of the engines from a hauler. Each of the big industrial machines had 5 engines and they had removed one and mounted it for experimentation. "Hey chief, lieutenant. What are you two up to?" Forester explained that he couldn't sleep and decided to figure out if he could make the engine run on methane. He had asked lieutenant Cain for a bit of help. The major responded, "No problem. Do your best and if you two need a break alone..." He smiled a big toothy grin that instead of appearing friendly actually made a chill run up their spines. He continued, "I promise not to watch. In fact I promise to run interference for you two." He then clicked his heels like a child and walked away toward a small observation room in the corner of the landing bay. Cain and Forester looked at each other nervously and finally the Chief commented saying he must have fraked the alchemist.

Time had passed and the various work proceeded smoothly on the flight floor. The major made several trips to the bathroom and was able to maintain his positive attitude. After several hours a work stoppage occurred and Ford stuck his head out of his room to enquire why. When one of the men yelled back, "Hey Major it's our lunch." Ford walked out and started to laugh about his stupidity. Everyone expecting some sort of chew out or speech about disloyalty to the uniform found this a refreshing change. "So let me guess what's for lunch today? Hmm... I bet it's brown sludge." Nervous laughs ensued. Not because what was said was particularly funny but because no one was certain what to make of the major's behaviour.

Not undaunted by the lack of guffaws he wanted, major Ford decided to push his comedy act further. He walked over to one of the centurions and proceeded to introduce his friend. Doing a very effective ventriloquist act, Ford told several jokes. Alana Cain observed his behaviour and felt that not only were his actions inappropriate but potentially dangerous. She complained to chief that someone should say something before he went too far. Chief shrugged and pointed out that Alana was the next highest-ranking personnel in the room.

“You know the toasters think they are tough! But can they dance?” Major Ford picked up the inanimate robot and attempted a waltz with it and laughed at how it needed to go on a diet. “See ladies and gentlemen, there is nothing to be afraid of. It is a well known fact that those that can’t dance can’t win a war.” He dropped the machine on the floor and then pulled down his pants to display his rear end at the toaster. At last he got the laughter he wanted. At which point Cain walked up to the major and demanded to talk. But Ford responded, “Chill out lieutenant! It’s just a dead toaster. Besides this is good for the moral of the troops. And you would know that if you attended officer school. Now mommy, go back to the chief and suckle someone who wants it.” Needless to say this was a hit with the enlisted men watching the show and Cain walked away.

Lieutenant Cain was becoming angry over major Ford’s actions. Not only had he publicly humiliated her, but also his callous disregard for the enemy was sure to get someone hurt. When he propped the cylon up in a chair, put his sidearm in its hand and proceeded to pantomime being shot, she had had enough. “Major! I know you are superior officer, but what you are doing is dangerous.” The major turned around to dismiss the new lieutenant’s concerns by explaining the machine was dead. However, unnoticed to anyone, the cylon’s eye began to move back and forth. It noticed the gun in its hand, aimed at the quarrelling duo and fired. Blood poured from a wound in Alana’s chest and she looked stunned at major Ford for a second and fell to the floor. Surprised, he turned around to see where the shot had come from and two rounds were placed in his abdomen.

The colonel had decided to periodically check in on Ford to ensure things flowed smoothly. He was just rounding the corner to the bay when he heard lieutenant Cain yell at the major and then the gunshots. Drawing his gun he ran to the flight deck to witness the chaos. The robot was fully erect and everyone was scrambling for cover. The old marine moved quickly into the room and took partial cover behind some of the processing equipment. He then returned fire, capturing the machine’s attention. It quickly degenerated into a shooting match that only ended because the centurion ran out of ammo. The old marine was finally able to kill the cylon by placing several shots into its head. Quickly reloading and running to its side, he yelled for someone to contact medical because they had several people wounded. Chief Forester ran to his wife’s side and began to howl as she reached up to touch his face.

Chapter 6: Losing Control

Heat was being restored to the ship, quarters were becoming available, but there were still crewmen sleeping on the galley floor, albeit substantially less. Captain Reeves was curled up in his usual place in a corner of the room when Lieutenant Lapointe ran into the room, roughly shook the slumbering captain and informed him about the accident. “Sir, Cain has been shot, and you got to get up now before the Colonel shoots Forester.” Groggy and confused, Reeves stood up, attempting to make sense of what he was hearing, while Lapointe dragged him by the arm towards medical. With a stumble the captain followed and together the two ran down the hallway.

The passageway to medical revealed their intended destination; Colonel Bridgeford and two marines filled the doorway weapons drawn. Their attentions were on the commotion inside the room and as the two out-of-breath officers approached they could hear yelling from inside. "You're lying! You won't even look at her!" The voice was obviously a distressed chief Forester. The colonel was responding in a commanding tone trying to gain control over the situation, "Son put the gun down! I know what you're going through!" Reeves finally arrived and stood beside the old marine. Looking into the room he could see the chief had a gun pointed at the doctor's head and demanding he treat Alana Cain. "You want to save Ford and not her!"

As Reeves observed the scene, perplexed about what he should say or do, Admiral Hallis arrived and demanded to know why the colonel had not rectified the situation. "My marines; my call," was the old warrior's response and Hallis' eyes glowed with anger, but he refrained from further speaking. Silent until this moment, the doctor finally spoke. "Ford is a frak up! But I can't treat her because she's already dead. Shoot me or let me help the others!" Chief Forester started to gasp and pointed the gun first at himself, then back at Lewellyn. With options disappearing, Bridgeford seized the opportunity. And as he gave the command to "take him down", Reeves pushed past the marines and into the line of fire, calling out his friend's name, "Julian! Julian!" The sound of his companion's voice broke through and the chief looked in the direction of its source. "Jules, it's me Scott. Please put the gun down." Registering his friend's face, the emotional man, crumpled into him, let the weapon fall from his hand to the floor and sobbed like a child. "She was my wife. He murdered my wife..." Reeves wrapped his arms around the man and gently lead him out of the room. The Admiral stared coldly at the captain and spat the words out to take the man to the brig.

XOXOX

"I'm not interested in felter carb. What's the body count?" The admiral's face conveyed no emotion as he sat behind his desk with his hands folded and looking up at the colonel. "1 dead, 4 wounded and Ford was the worst. They are all expected to live." Hallis breathed in deeply and slowly let it out as he looked at the marine commander and spoke slowly, "Your marines, your call and my ship!" Bridgeford was equally cold in his response pointing out that although they were at his disposal, they were from different branches of the military and any ability to command them was conveyed through him. The admiral cracked his neck and spoke again, "Fair enough, but I have a problem integrating 2 crews on this ship and I don't need a third to really frak things up. Next time a man pulls a gun on another crewmen, you immediately take him down. Understood?" As the colonel acknowledged his understanding of the command, there was a knock at the door. Ignoring the interruption, the two men stared hard at each other. Until a second tapping at the door was followed by Hallis and Captain Reeves walked into the room.

"You told me the cylons were deactivated." The old man's mood was evidently foul and he wasn't relenting in regaining order over his ship. Reeves attempted to stand straighter and cleared his throat as he spoke, "Sir, chief Forester and I personally removed anything

that remotely looked like a power cell in the centurions. I have since had them dismembered.”

The admiral thumbed his rank insignia and contemplated removing it for a moment but decided that it wouldn't further anything at this time. Instead he asked one question, “wife?” Sweat poured down Reeves' cheek and his voice cracked as he attempted to explain. “Yes sir, umm...” He attempted to continue. “5 years ago, I performed the ceremony. We didn't go through the regulatory procedures because that might have meant one of them would be reassigned. I'm sorry sir, but everything was different in the yard.” Hallis bared his teeth and yelled that this was no longer the junk pile and he has a dead officer as proof.

Another knock occurred and admiral Hallis finished his statement telling whoever it was to enter. Mr. Lapointe opened the door and informed everyone that the doctor was now available to talk. Without a word, Hallis and Bridgeford got up and walked out toward the operating room. The captain attempted to follow but was stopped by the X.O. and Reeves softly pleaded, “Sir, she was like family. I knew her for almost 10 years.” As the admiral continued to walk ahead, the colonel gave his consent by removing the side arm of captain Reeves, ushering him to walk ahead and demanding an end to the drama.

An exhausted doctor stood in his medical office, still wearing the blood stained clothing from the operations he had recently performed. The smell of ether and a crude disinfectant permeated the air. “If you are thinking of smoking, don't do it. The anaesthetic was distilled out of lord knows what and I'm certain it could blow us all to hell. I had to operate with bodies half awake and twitching. Not to mention, pocket knives would have been better scalpels.” No one responded to Lewellyn's comments and just kept looking at him waiting useful information. “Oookaay...” “Of the 4 wounded, 3 were minor with shots to the legs and arms. Only major Ford was critical, he took two shots in the gut, lost both kidneys and a lot of blood. Fortunately the deceased lieutenant was a close enough match that I transplanted hers.”

Colonel Bridgeford snorted in disgust at the thought that Ford caused Cain's death and she still saved his. “There is one thing you need to know. I found dope in the major's pocket, several buds of a herbal substance.” The admiral closed and pursed his lips as the full extent of major Ford's crime set in his mind. He unbuckled the clasp on his holster and ordered captain Lewellyn to wake the man but the doctor quickly began yelling and stood in front of admiral Hallis. “Hey! I just spent 17 hours saving a man's life!” The old man looked at the medical officer without emotion and the doctor placed his hand on the admiral's chest. “Dave, you know regulations prohibit you executing a man while he is under my care.” Nodding slightly, Hallis handed his side arm to the colonel, restated his order to wake Ford and walked into the recovery room.

Entering the room the 4 men observed the instigator of the problems sleeping peacefully. It left a distinct taste of disgust in the mouths of all but the doctor. The admiral was the only one to talk, “Get him up, now!” Lewellyn began to protest that giving him stimulants could be dangerous but Hallis growled at him, “Give the addict some fraking

crap and wake him now.” With a sigh and consent the doctor prepared a syringe and administrated the concoction. The major’s eyes began to open and he slowly became aware of his surroundings. As Ford acknowledged the presence of his commanding officer, admiral Hallis began his verbal assault. “You put the gun in the enemy’s hand and caused the death of another officer. As far as I am concerned you’re a murderer, just as if you pulled the trigger yourself, captain.” Groggily, the recovering man attempted to correct the error in his rank.

As the admiral clenched his fists, the colonel held forward a gun and commented that he wasn’t worth keeping alive. After a pause for reflection Admiral Hallis continued, “Sorry, Lieutenant. During a time of war my power is damn near absolute and it is only out of respect for the doctor that I don’t execute you. But when we get back to colonial space, I will make certain you rot in the worst prison I can find.” Although still clouded by sleep, Lieutenant Ford had the reality of the situation setting into his mind and as a tear streamed down his face, he was given his interim punishment. “You’re duties will be limited to supervising the enlisted men. Everyday you are going to have to deal with those that know you killed one of their own and then when you are done you will return to the brig. And you are to avoid chief Forester at all costs, I don’t care if you need to crawl under a pile of scrap, don’t let him see you, hear you or even smell your presence.”

The recently demoted officer attempted to mutter his acknowledgement but was unable to create the sounds, instead the only thing anyone heard was the heavy breathing of the ship’s old man as he stared ruthlessly at what he considered was human garbage. Colonel Bridgeford touched him on the shoulder to get him to leave but he wasn’t finished. “For your information, lieutenant Alana Cain and chief Julian Forester had every right to frak. You didn’t just cause the death of a fellow soldier; you killed a man’s wife.” With nothing more to say he turned on his heel and walked toward the door followed by Bridgeford and the doctor.

Reeves, however, remained looking at the man in the bed. His two superiors stopped, looked back and the old marine did a double check to make certain he had the captain’s weapon. With complete contempt, Captain Reeves spoke, “I’ve known Julian for over 10 years and you better pray that he never finds out that Alana was pregnant. Because nothing will stop him.” Admiral Hallis looked at Lewellyn, shook his head and slowly repeated a statement the doctor had once said to him, “Unless of course it involves civilians and then your authority over-rules even mine.” Doctor Lewellyn nodded his head and mumbled she was ordered to eat to prevent a miscarriage. And Bridgeford likewise commented that explained why others were sneaking her food. As these revelations were made, the captain joined them and the three commanding officers left medical.

The men walked some distance, in silence, down the corridor away from sickbay. The admiral was quietly fuming, grinding his teeth together as they proceeded, until

suddenly he abruptly halted. Reeves and Bridgeford did the same and both men waited for Hallis to say something. Without losing the cold and angry stare that he had worn on his face since this incident occurred, admiral Hallis removed his rank from his uniform and handed it to the colonel. "For the next 2 minutes you have total command of this ship." Having done so, he unexpectedly turned, and drove his fist into the face of captain Reeves with such ferocity that it sent the man spinning, first into the bulkhead and second to the ground. His voice bellowed with his rage as he verbally assaulted the captain. "Are there any other fraking secrets I need to know!!" Blood pouring from his nose and lips, captain Reeves assured him there wasn't. "Ford won't be the only man I execute if there is." Hallis punctuated his position with the last statement, and he turned to the old marine to retrieve his insignias.

However, the colonel hesitated, looked down at the bleeding officer and enquired if he wanted to pursue charges. The captain produced a piece of cloth from his pocket and brought it to his face nurse his wound. He spoke through it, "No sir." Bridgeford looked once again making certain this was the man's decision and received this response. "It's been an emotional day. Sir, I guess I just wasn't watching my step." The marine handed back the admiral's property and leaving the captain sitting on the floor, the pair continued toward CIC.

Chapter 7: Precautionary Measures

Because of recent events, Clubber and Dancer found themselves pulling more than their fair share of raptor flights to search for the enemy basestar. Normally a simple task made complicated because extreme caution was being exercised. Each quadrant of space was examined by shutting down the plane while still beyond the ability of long-range scans. The spacecraft would then be allowed to coast into the area and the computer systems would be activated in order to gather the necessary data. It was a slow process but under the current conditions, it was decided to be an absolutely necessary procedure. Converting methane into aviation fuel was proving to be extremely difficult and save for locating a supply depot, there was no possible solution for the battlestar's ammo shortage. Until fortune blessed the Argus again, the crew's only hope would be to not attract cylon attention.

To this effect, all communications outside the Argus were done by signal light and even wireless aboard the ship was now brought to an end.

Since there was now a possibility of encountering the enemy, Cupcake, as the C.A.G., was remaining aboard the Argus. Keeping her pilots ready for combat was full time job. It too was made exceptionally difficult because of the fuel shortage, no flight simulators, and until someone could discover how the toasters shut down their computers, if engaged, despite any repairs, all planes would be forced to use their failsafe manual control systems. This meant that the fly-by-wire technology that made the viper mark VII's such a highly dynamic fighter would be unavailable. An otherwise easy machine to fly, without the aid of the hundreds of seamless computer corrections, no one felt comfortable taking them into combat. Despite daily discussions, theory was no substitute for practice.

Reeves' broken nose, hadn't escaped the attention of major Assuras, and despite his insistence that he had tripped, she didn't believe him. Instead she went to the admiral to discuss the impact of recent events upon the crew. Hallis was cajoling, almost to the point of condescension. And when it became obvious that the major wasn't going to relent, Admiral Hallis finally told her to make her point and get out of his office. Cupcake responded by taking off her rank. "I believe you're famous for doing this." The ship's old man remained quiet and waited for the next move to be made. "When Reeves struck Ford, it was insubordination. But when you belted the captain that was a breakdown in the chain of command. We lost a lot of senior officers from the Poseidon, and although the colonel is the acting X.O, he is a marine. Technically that makes me second in command and captain Reeves third.

The ship's commanding officer grew impatient, cracked his neck and attempted to stare down his CAG. Assuras didn't flinch, but rather leaned across the desk drawing herself closer to the Admiral, "The last thing I want to do is take command of a ship that you frak up because of your temper. Yea, there is a war, but there are still some limits on your authority and I know the regulations too. So don't think for a second I won't lock you in the brig if it happens again." Replacing her rank insignia, she felt her point was sufficiently made and they could therefore skip the customary punch in the mouth. With that said, she left the room.

XOXOX

The starboard landing bay was a mess with equipment and manufacturing processes. Because of this, the port flight deck wasn't much better. What had become jokingly known as the airplane dance occurred every time someone had to take off or land. According to the official designation, the Argus is a destroyer with attached flight areas.

These additions, suggested by engineers during its construction, were intended to accommodate the then newly developed Viper (mark 1). The brass working within budget constraints, agreed to the addition of two pods, one for each side, giving it limited abilities as a carrier. Because the Poseidon was engaged in transport operations, the Argus, constructed to accommodate 2 squadrons of vipers and 1 squadron of shuttlecrafts was now overburdened with fighter craft. Therefore, what designed to comfortably carry a total of 75 planes, in two sections, was now housing 125 plus the 3 massive haulers in a single area. Even during its prime, the Argus with only a total of 8 launch tubes was considered inferior. The dance, made a fast engagement of the enemy impossible, because for take-offs and returns deck personnel had to literally push spacecraft from one area to another to make room.

Clubber and Dancer were returning from their search and as per the new landing procedure, the raptor had to first fly in front of the shield window on CIC. From there, the landing bay would be phoned to announce the arrival. Signal lights on the haul of the ship would convey communications from the deck officer to the pilot. It was an inefficient and clumsy form of communications. However, it did ensure that a nearby cylon patrol wouldn't pick up any wayward radio signals. Skill, intuition and procedure had become valuable assets and everyone was trying to find ways to improve in the performance of their jobs. The words "Safety is everyone's concern" took on a new meaning for the crew.

Cupcake made it a point of personally being present for the reports as the planes came in. As such she was the first person to receive the news from Clubber and Dancer as they disembarked their craft. "We found it Major. It's an old one and it looks like it's been shut down for a long time." Assuras raised an eyebrow and said that was what everyone thought about the toaster that killed Hell's Honey. Still feeling the grief over their dead comrade, everyone paused for a few seconds, nodding agreement with the validity of the comment. It was a pointless death, but if there was anything to be learned, it was that even dead, the enemy could be dangerous. Granting the two airmen leave for some rack-time, the major personally compiled their flight data and logs. Then she brought the records to Bridgeford and Lapointe for analysis and op planning.

Chapter 8: Say a Prayer

News about having located the cylons spread to everyone on the ship. The next morning when Assuras walked into CIC, everyone became exceptionally quiet. Each person present was wondering what was going to happen next and how the decisions in the command meeting would affect him. Bridgeford acknowledged the major's presence, placed Reeves in control of CIC and escorted her into the admiral's office. As those present stood at their posts staring momentarily at the door, the captain rolled his eyes and barked an order for everyone to get back to work. Anyone with a need to know would find out soon enough.

"Had lieutenant Cain not been killed by a deactivated toaster, I would have just recommended we do a couple of flybys with a raptor and grab some more scans. And

then maybe send in a boarding party of marines.’ So said Hallis. “However, I don’t need to tell you that things have changed.” The colonel was next to speak and he underlined the problem was the lack of available data on the enemy. Making it clear that no one aboard the ship was old enough to have fought in the first war. Major Assuras sighed and began to volunteer a possible plan.

Having spent several hours last night with captain Reeves, they took the colonel’s analysis of the tactical problems and devised a work around. “I hope I wasn’t out of line asking for help from Mr. Reeves, I couldn’t sleep and was just spinning my wheels.” Hallis just looked at his C.A.G. waiting for her to continue and Bridgeford commented that the captain needed to get his mind off his friend. Assuras continued, “We use the raider to go aboard the basestar. If we take a hauler and tow the craft back to where it was picked up by the ice fragment, we can fly it back to it’s mother ship without leaving a flight record of where it came from.” The admiral enquired if this wouldn’t be better as a recon mission. “No sir. The one thing Cain’s death has shown us is that the toasters can reactivate given the right circumstances. If we go with a full group aboard that craft, we run a greater risk of turning them on.” Colonel Bridgeford agreed that a smaller unit stood a better chance of getting in and out with intell.

They would take a team of 4 people in the cylon fighter. Even though the raider was originally designed to carry only three centurions, the robots are slightly larger people, so although it might be a cramped ride, it should easily accommodate everyone. This left the decision about whom the crew should be and immediately the old marine volunteered 2 men under his command. But the major had specific personnel in mind and dismissed the idea. “As for pilots I would use a top gun for this. Normally I would recommend Ford. But the doctor won’t release him and I doubt you will give him his wings back. So I’m going to personally take command of it. For the other pilot I’m checking out the raptor airmen. Captain Reeves recommended filling the next two seats with technical and this is where it’s the admiral’s choice.”

Hallis looked at Assuras and enquired about what his choices were. “Well the first is a toss up between Lapointe and Reeves. Technically both of them are trained systems analysts. However, they have different experiences and specializations. The lieutenant is more of a programmer and network engineer, whereas, the captain is more of a hardware expert and electrical engineer. There is a lot of overlap in their skills, so it’s a tough choice.” The admiral looked at the colonel and asked for an opinion. “I recommend you send Mr. Lapointe. The toasters are all computer networks. And Frak, this ship is apparently all hardware with no network. Besides Mr. Reeves is a senior officer with command experience.” Admiral Hallis thought the argument made sense and agreed.

Moving on to the final person proved to be controversial and Cupcake had to clear her throat before she spoke. She proceeded to explain she wanted chief Forester. Both Bridgeford and Hallis sat wide-eyed looking at her for a moment and wondered if she had been sniffing aviation fuel. Pointing out that he is the best man for the job because he is an electrician has over 5,000 hours of space walk experience and hull repairs and that he can handle cutting torches. Shaking his head the admiral’s initial words were, “Frak

me!” The major calmly asserted that to the best of both her and Reeves’ knowledge there was no close second available. But the old man remained resolute, “No fraking way am I going to put a man who just watched his wife get killed on a mission.” The colonel finally swayed the old man, saying that due to circumstances beyond his control, the chief is sitting in the brig and that perhaps work might be something he needed. They should at least ask him. With a growl in his throat, the admiral gave consent. “I don’t like it, but I suppose if someone has to cut through the hull, it sounds like he’s the person to do it. Send the captain down to talk to him.”

XOXOX

Forester sat quietly with his knees up to his chest when the colonel and Reeves entered the jail. Immediately the X.O. started yelling as he noticed that someone had locked the gate on the chief’s cell. It was obvious his sympathies were with the grieving husband and he saw it as morally wrong to treat him like a criminal. When the guard in charge quoted that it was standard procedure, Bridgeford snapped and rewarded him with 3 weeks duty on waste recovery. The chief chuckled about having been incarcerated for the past 5 days for because Ford murdered his wife. The marine brushed aside the comment and personally unlocked the door.

“So I guess since the piece of crap was high it exempts him from being charged? Or is it because major A-hole is such a great pilot he gets to kill anyone he doesn’t like?” Bridgeford decided to not engage chief Forester in conversation and simply apologized then stood behind Reeves. The captain calmly explained the current situation and told him they required him on the mission, but Julian hostilely interrupted. “Go frak yourself Scott!! Alana’s body has been sitting on ice and you won’t even say the words. Some fraking friend.” The colonel became confused and his expression conveyed this fact. “She prayed to Athena every day of her life. There is no priest here and you know the damn words.”

Captain Reeves shook his head and began to protest that he was an atheist and Forester flew into a rage grabbing his friend by the shirt. “You’re a liar! I heard you ask the goddess for help when we rescued the Poseidon’s crew! Without a priest, you are all she has!” Tears welled up in Reeves’ eyes; his bottom lip began to tremble and he shook his head to say no. “Scotty please, I’m begging you. Let me close her eyes and put a coin in her hand so that she may pay the ferryman for passage into the underworld. Help me bury my wife and I’ll do your fraking mission.” Having heard enough, the marine snapped in his silent composure, stating that he would make easy for the captain to rectify his religious issues. He ordered him to perform the service and promised the grieving husband he would do all in his ability to help, saying he understood. Then turning abruptly, he hastened out of the room forcing down his own emotions as he went.

XOXOX

Lapointe read over the mission profile with Clubber in CIC, as the funeral service for Lieutenant Alana Cain proceeded on the starboard flight deck. He couldn't get over the fact that captain Reeves had to be ordered to do the religious service. The captain knew Cain for almost 10 years and Forester for more than that. So close to them, that he performed a non-authorized civil marriage ceremony to join the two. He couldn't understand what possible problem a man could have with the gods, so as to turn his back on his friend, particularly in a time of need. Finally he spoke up, "What is up Reeves butt lately?" The lieutenant calmly commented, "The man has issues. Don't dwell on it too much or you will end up with issues too." But Mr. Lapointe continued in his bewilderment, "Fine, the man say's he is an atheist but frak; Alana Cain was like family to him. And weren't his parents Athenian clergy?" Clubber looked the man in the eyes, shrugged and said that perhaps that was the problem. But he preferred they drop the conversation because he wanted to finish quickly so he could pay his respects to the chief. Lieutenant Lapointe simply agreed and the pair returned to their work without further dialog on the subject.

Meanwhile the starboard pod had been temporarily cleared of all manufacturing equipment and over 150 enlisted men plus officers were in attendance. As the ritual proceeded, many people, mostly of the former scrap yard, wept openly. If it hadn't been evident before, it was now obvious to those from the Poseidon that Alana was well liked and her death would deeply affect them. Prior to the war, their world was less structured than other military establishments. There was only 1 officer to report to and everyone spent long periods of time with each other in close contact.

Looking around and observing the faces of the men and women that served under captain Reeves, the admiral began to understand that these people were more like a family than soldiers serving side by side. Hallis smirked because as he looked at Reeves, he saw a man that was a soldier first and foremost. Other men in his former position might have forgotten their sworn duties and refused to engage. But when the war began, he didn't and he reminded everyone that they still wore the uniform. The survivors of the Poseidon were living proof, that he was willing to take any risk when called upon. And as such it didn't matter what the command was; the captain would obey it. Hallis further studied the man who's personal issues with the gods ran so deeply that despite the close bond he had with the deceased, he would have preferred to see her corpse sit in the morgue instead of performing this rite. Captain Scott Reeves used to have his admiration for what he accomplished with the Argus. But today, he earned the admiral's respect.

Finishing the final anointing of the body to prepare it for its journey into the underworld, emotion finally overcame Reeves as he spoke a few final words. "As we say goodbye to our departed sister..." He stopped momentarily and wiped tears from his eyes. "I want everyone to remember how great Alana was. I think about the day she first showed up and reported to me for duty. Her face was green and she looked like she was going to be sick. She had eaten some 30-year-old rations while on the transport to the yard and being admiral Cain's younger sister she was trying to be strong. And as I filled out her paperwork, she passed gas and sighed in obvious relief. I'm not certain why but I was honestly surprised that she did that. But she just laughed and said she was just trying to

be one of the guys.” There were smirks; a couple of quiet chuckles and several people nodded their heads remembering the woman. “She always worked hard, cursed when things didn’t go right, and organized pyramid games. Then there was the day that her and the much older chief Julian Forester got together. Using my office and desk, apparently she accidentally kicked on the squawk system. As if wasn’t bad enough you could hear her through a closed door, she had made certain the entire yard knew.” Forester’s legs gave out and the colonel grabbed him preventing his fall. He sobbed openly at the memory. “Doing my job, I demanded an explanation. Her response was she always had a problem being loud and in the future would always use a pillow to preserve the peace. No matter how much discipline I gave out, she and Julian weren’t going to be separated. Finally I gave up, married them and never regretted it, because they suddenly became discreet.” The captain walked over to the body, pulled back the cover and gently bent down to kiss the cheek of the dead woman and looked out to everyone one last time. “She was a best friend to some, sister to others, mother to a few and a lover to one. Remember her life and not the meaningless way she died.”

The room grew silent for a moment as everyone bowed their heads for a personal prayer and waited for Reeves to speak the customary words of, “so say we all.” But as the minute passed he continued to stare at the floor. It was finally Cupcake’s voice that was heard as she stated lieutenant Cain’s death wasn’t pointless. It taught them to never drop their guard around the enemy. The admiral picked his head up and saw the depression and sorrow on the faces of many. He spoke loudly and authoritative, “That’s right! Her death was stupid, unnecessary and preventable. But it wasn’t without meaning!!”

Walking to where the captain stood, he took charge of the event. “She was a soldier and in war, soldiers die. And it isn’t always a glorious death. We lost many people from the Poseidon, left them floating in space for the enemy to peg them off. There was nothing noble or great about how they died. Like Cain they forfeited their lives because we dropped our guard. We let it down because after over 40 years of nothing from the cylons, we forgot they were out there. Peace exists because those that wear the uniform are forever vigilant and forever standing guard. When we frak up, people die!” Abruptly he went over to Alana’s body and passed his hand over it. “Remember lieutenant Alana Cain and the crew of the Poseidon. Give their sacrifices meaning by never letting this happen again!” Hallis then fixed his gaze on the chief and in a matter of fact like tone directed his comments to him directly. “Because of recent events I haven’t given the mission an official designation. Chief Forester, this one is for your wife.” He then barked out again at those assembled, “It’s time we take the fight to toasters. Operation Cain begins at 10h00 tomorrow. So Say We All!!” Everyone responded in kind, but to Bridgeford, who held onto Forester, they sounded like children. Picking up his head, he bellowed he couldn’t hear them. This time the crewmen shouted back, “SO SAY WE ALL!!!” And the body was launched into space ending the service.

XOXOX

It had been a long night and the day began early for captain Reeves. He had an unexpected morning meeting with admiral Hallis. The two men saw each other’s

perspective and both agreed there were currently more important matters than what might have occurred during the captain's command prior to the war. As such, it was now 08h00 and he was on his way to talk to Scuds and Max. Hell's Honey was gone but the Ass Haulers were still a squadron and someone had to take command of them. Arriving at the duty lockers he noticed there were 5 men present and demanded they all come to attention as he entered.

"I'll make this brief. Max, report to the ready room at 09h00 and Cupcake will brief you. Scuds, you're off the mission." As chief Maxime gave a nod that the command was understood. The other hauler operator looked at the captain and demanded to know what was the fraking problem; Reeves responded that they could talk privately later. "You're going to start training chief Price to fly our equipment." Unfortunately chief Samuel Cudrows was accustomed to pushing his weight around and he wasn't prepared to drop the issue. As far as he was concerned, after Cain, he was the senior driver. Plus Price was a member of the Poseidon crew and he didn't like that at all. Corporal Doug Lexley was a member of the scrap yard gang and was being trained to fly when the war started. He would be a better choice in his opinion.

The captain glared at him and he licked his teeth before he spoke. "Yea, he can learn to handle the equipment but the last I checked, Lexley wasn't a chief and no one below that rank operates a hauler. And Price has operated similar machines. But since you decided to question my orders, I'm going to lay it on the line for you." Captain Reeves took a couple of steps forward and stood in chief Cudrows' personal space. "Max is going to start officer training because you're a mouth, a pain in the ass, and you need to learn you're place on this ship. People like you get other's killed, so you will get with the program or I will lock you in the brig for the entire war." The others in the room were surprised but not shocked. Like it or not, they were no longer the Perseus and Poseidon crews. They were now the men and women of the Argus, or at least until assigned elsewhere.

Cupcake heard the captain discipline chief Cudrows and intercepted him as he went down the hallway. She had two unofficial concerns to discuss before the mission briefing. The first was the last minute change of Max instead of Scuds and assured him that she could handle the insubordinate man. Reeves responded that chief Cudrows might be the better operator but that his big mouth is ultimately because he was a coward. The role of the hauler pilot might be minor but since they were dealing with the enemy, there was no way he was going to use a man that couldn't be trusted to watch her back. A little shocked at the frankness of captain Reeves comments, she made mental note of the information dropped the issue.

Her second reason for the conversation was more a request. The last time she engaged the toasters, they had gotten their butts kicked and since the captain was the closest thing to a priest, she hoped he could perform a blessing on the crew before they left. Without stopping his stride, he responded to her request by saying that he had no intention of spending this war chanting prayers and casting superstitious spells. "Unless it's an order, I'm sure you can make your own destiny." He then saluted her and proceeded down a

different corridor. Major Assuras stood momentarily with her mouth open watching him disappear in the distance, noticing she had arrived at the ready room; she opened the door and walked in.

The lieutenants, Lapointe and Turin, (aka. Clubber), as well as chief Maxime and Forester were already present and seated. Saying that it was good to be working with Max again, the major dismissed formalities and proceeded with the breakdown of the operation. "I'm certain you have all read the profile and know your roles. Hauler 3 will be replacing hauler 2. It's going to tow us in the enemy craft into the theatre. We have a pretty good idea were it was originally captured by the iceberg's gravitational pull. At which point Clubber and myself will start the engines and fly it to the basestar. The bird has been stripped of its centre seat and the mission equipment has been loaded on." Looking at Mr. Lapointe and chief Forester she told them to do a double check before departure. After all, we can't go back for anything forgotten. "Try and get comfortable because it's going to be a cramped ride.

All data says that the enemy's home is shut down, but as we know, that doesn't mean the toasters won't reactivate. With luck they stay off and we won't have a problem entering. But if for some reason we do have a problem, the chief will exit the raider and hopefully create a solution. Explosives will not be an option for fear they might re-enable the toasters."

At this point in the briefing lieutenant Lapointe took over. He explained that once inside they had one primary objective and 2 possible secondary ones. In all matters, due to lack of Intel, they had complete discretionary power on how to proceed. Primarily, they are to locate the computer systems, access and acquire a copy of the navigational records. This was the only objective they were expected to complete at all costs. Secondary orders were to find sensitive places to plant explosive charges to disable the ship's flight systems and communications. The colonel's men have instructed Forester and Turin on how to do this. Finally, find any information on enemy locations or involvements. You'll have 7 hours from drop off to rendezvous with hauler 3.

Cupcake spoke up again and drew the meeting to a close. "We leave at 10h00. 7 and 1/2 hours after dropping us Hauler 3 is to assume we failed and return to Argus. Cylons aren't good hosts, so lets not frak around and just focus on the job. Now if there are no questions; suit up!" Only Turin had anything to say and that was to ask if Cupcake spoke to captain Reeves about saying a prayer to which chief Forester snorted that it was a fat chance unless he was ordered to. Assuras sighed and just walked away.

XOXOX

Despite the raptor data, the planning and the simulations, no one really knew much about the enemy. It was an old basestar that had most likely been in the last war. As such had they been back at the colonies it would have been a simple process of walking into a library and checking out a history book. Everything from floor plans to wiring schematics and how many centurions aboard would have been available. All of which could have made their tasks a lot easier, but given the current situation, they were facing

a potential suicide mission. Therefore, unlike operation icicle, this mission was void of the any military pomp. Whereas the previous was a struggle for the survival of everyone aboard the ship, this one only directly affected those involved in the operation. Only 4 people came to the flight deck to give their best wishes. Everyone else that might have been working close by made a point of keeping themselves occupied with their tasks instead of acknowledging what was about to begin. To them the combatants were known in un-official terms as dead men walking.

Standing outside of the raider, in addition to the five people undertaking the task, there were another group of four men, Hallis, Bridgeford, Reeves and the strange civilian that the colonel was charged with protecting. No one thought anything of the presence of the commanding officers, but everyone found the protected person's attendance very strange or uncomfortable. He never complained, pulled his own weight and never caused any problems. But he had a very unsettling way of being in a room when someone thought they were alone and appeared to always be watching or studying everyone around him. When they factored in that he rarely spoke and no one knew his name, it made him appear to be downright creepy. Why he was present was anyone's guess.

“This one is for your wife chief, but that doesn't mean you have permission for any unnecessary heroics. Keep it simple and get what you're going there for.” The admiral dropping his normally stern demeanour was almost parental in his concern for his men. He made it clear that he didn't believe in luck, so he wished them good hunting instead. The colonel echoed similar sympathies as the unknown civilian stepped forward and presented major Assuras a small plastic black box. Cupcake accepted the gift and wondered if it was a day timer or music player for the trip. The stranger smirked, “Need to know basis. All you need to know is keep it with you at all times. The flashing led light means it's on and if you suddenly find yourself surrounded by raiders, you might want to considering holding your fire and see what they do first. Push hard on the bottom of it and the unit will self-destruct within 3 seconds. And don't worry I have another so whatever happens, do NOT let the enemy get their hands on it.” Without even a handshake or further word he just turned and walked away, leaving everyone bewildered.

After a last check to make certain that everything was loaded everyone prepared to enter the plane. The major wasn't without one last comment, it was directed at Reeves in a rather sarcastic tone. She enquired if he was going to bless their mission for good luck and in a monotone voice the captain responded, “Athena, these people need to perform miracles and not royal frak ups.” Chief Forester looked at his friend and responded with, “So say we all.” Although there was no doubt that in anyone's mind that the prayer was without sincerity, it was quickly echoed by all. And Forester walked over and embraced his old companion. “Scott, it doesn't matter if you lost your faith in the gods. They still have faith in you. There is an after world and Alana is there, waiting for us.” Reeves responded by holding back his words and emotions. Then stepping back and saluting as everyone entered the enemy bird. And without further incident the ship was towed out into space.

Chapter 9: Operation Cain

As the hauler approached its destination, chief Maxime initiated wireless contact. "Cupcake, Max. I'm close to dropping you off. Let me get clear before you light your candles." The ship was placed into position and the tow craft moved off to and took a safe position directly above it. Afterwards, the major radioed back, "Thanks for the lift. Hopefully we will see at 18h00, if not sooner." Feeling the need to give them something to look forward to the heavy equipment pilot got the last word in. "Hey major. I've been playing with some comet organisms and a few other tasty things. When you guys get back I've got some fermented sludge home brew to celebrate with. And I promise that after 4 drinks you hardly notice the taste." Everyone on the raider cracked up and Clubber voiced their feelings wondering if that was supposed to make them happy or want to botch the mission.

The cylon fighter flew toward its destination and after several minutes the basestar came into view. Apprehension and the scent of fear hung in the atmosphere of the cramped plane. But most of all, as they approached and the enemy base grew larger, everyone just wanted to get it over with. Lieutenant Turin found himself commenting that he was actually looking forward to trying that sludge brewski. They eventually flew up to what looked like the landing port on the top saucer section and it was obviously closed.

The major broke the silent awe they were all experiencing, "Ok chief, you're on. Where do you want me to park?" "About half a meter above the centre of the bay doors." was his reply. Double-checking his suit seals, Forester prepared to exit the craft. Several years ago he had been part of the crew that did hull repairs on the Atlantia after it had been battered in a meteor shower. He then remembered the Argus and wondered what kinds of alloys were used in its construction. His thoughts were both from curiosity and of hope that this would be possible to cut through with the equipment he had. The rear hatch to the ship opened and he stepped out on to the surface of the cylon warship.

It looked pretty normal and in fact to the chief it seemed substandard. Especially compared to the hull of the Argus. He walked around for a moment or two searching for an access panel. The first thing he noted was that there were no markings on the basestar to denote anything. On human space crafts there were all kinds of labels saying everything from compression valve 132 to fuel line B - caution 900 P.S.I. But then he thought to himself that machines wouldn't require such things. They would automatically be programmed with all this stuff or could directly access some sort of database. He, like the rest of his species, required maps, repair manuals and some sort of sign that gave him a clue he was in the right area. Sighing, he figured that cutting hole big enough for raider in the landing bay doors wasn't an option. They only had enough room for 1 oxy-acetylene tank on the cylon fighter. Somewhere in this area were the hydraulics that operated the door; it was just a question of cutting open the right area to find them. He would have to just make his best guess and perhaps several of them.

"Chief you have been at it almost an hour and that's the 5th hole you cut open." The major was growing impatient. They had a time limit and they still didn't know what to expect once they got inside the ship. "Well if you don't want to wait for me you can just fire up that raider's weapons and try and blow a hole in the hull. It might wake up all the

toasters but I'll completely understand." He was working as fast as he could and he didn't think Assuras' complaints were going to help things. He got through another section of the hull and saw 3 lines. If he built the ship it wasn't where he would have put them but it still made a certain amount of logical sense that they would be in this area. So as far as he was concerned it was a definite possibility they were what he was looking for. He put down his torch and took out his pipe cutters and began to splice into one of the lines. Hydraulic fluid spurting out on the incision. "Hey guys I think you can start warming up the engines in 5 minutes." As he vented the fluid pressure into space, the massive doors began to open.

After Forester re-entered the plane, Cupcake and Clubber landed the craft in the bay. It was official; they were now aboard the cylon base. After the engines had been shut down they each took a moment to check their weapons. "Guns are hot gentlemen, so make certain you know where everyone is. We don't need any accidents." Preparing to open the hatch again lieutenant Turin spoke in panicked voice. "Frak! We already have company." They could see through the front window of the raider a centurion had begun walking toward them.

Everyone drew his or her firearm and the lieutenant spoke again, "It's got to open the hatch and when it does we blast it." However, the robot didn't approach the rear but instead simply proceeded to look into the cockpit. Its ominous single red eye stopped moving back and forth and then it shut down again. Everyone but Lapointe appeared confused wondering what just happened. He noted that the light on the black box came on as the toaster approached. The major spoke quickly, "The guy did say wait to see what they do. I think I'm just going to keep this with us." There were several nervous smiles and the chief exited out onto the flight deck. The others then quickly followed and Mr. Lapointe noted that Forester appeared to enjoy being first.

There were numerous old raiders and scattered about were several centurions. All echoed clubber's comments that it was creepy. After a few moments of wondering around on the landing bay, everyone turned his/her attention to lieutenant Lapointe. He returned their gazes by snapping at them, "Like I have a frakin' clue!" Cupcake responded by saying that he was the computer expert and pointed out that he somehow had a laptop. Mr. Lapointe chuckled and said, "Watch a lot of movies major?" He shook his head remembering some films he had seen on Caprica. "Ok, alright, if I was going to install a network in this ship I would make the hub and tech centre as central as possible. We should try getting down to where the two saucer sections join. He then pointed into the direction of one corridor and said it looked as good as any place to start. No one disagreed and they followed.

As they walked through the corridors the relative austere and darkness of their surroundings impressed them. Colonial ships weren't known for being colourful but compared to this basestar they would be considered palaces. The floor was the natural black pigment of a polymer compound, most likely used to insulate against electro magnetic interference and possible discharge. Lapointe explained that the centurions, ship, etc are all machines and if one of them had a problem and sent an electrical arc, it

could have cascading catastrophic effects on everything. Not to mention that must be a hell of a lot of EMI in a room filled with robots. With almost no contrast to the plastic under their feet, the walls were unpainted metal. Any rooms they encountered were solely utilitarian, each one looked alike and only their contents offered any distinctions. This made the search not only monotonous but also confusing because there were no points of reference. The chief complained twice saying that a couple of signs would have been too much to hope for.

Finally after 45 minutes of what felt like moving around in circles, they came upon a room that had two large computer banks facing each other. They walked in and the young tech pulled out his portable and spilled a backpack filled with network cables, screwdrivers, a soldering iron and various other tools. He looked at the chief and told him to take the front panel off one of the mainframes. Cupcake decided she felt safer with the room's door closed and quickly shut it. "I'm going to need to first build some sort of interface then I've got to figure out how to talk to this thing. You can either wait until I call up a floor plan or construction schematic or attempt a blind hunt for places to put the explosives for our secondary objectives." The major decided they should wait and Turin stated he wasn't looking forward to trying to deploy the colonel's cannibalized missile-part demolitions. Making it clear that he felt a 2 hour discussion with the old marine wasn't sufficient training.

As the minutes passed the narrow room became humid and musky. Chief Forester figured there weren't any real environmental systems aboard the ship, because after all, robots didn't have to breath. Just as lieutenant Lapointe figured out how to patch into the main computer and was attaching the cables, movement could be heard from the corridor outside the room. Approximately 20 seconds lapsed and it became obvious that multiple footsteps were heading toward them. Cupcake looked around and sarcastically asked if anyone actually believed it was just mice. The lieutenant was now clicking away on the keyboard of his machine and broke the tension. "Frak, I think we might have set off a security system. Cover me!" The three soldiers took positions up at the door preparing for a possible fight. The centurions could now be heard a few meters away and approaching.

"Frak maybe!" The sound of the approaching cylons suddenly stopped. All eyes were on Lapointe and Cupcake demanded clarification about what maybe was. He replied, "I'm not sure, I think we set off some sort of humidity detector in this room. Perhaps the toasters were only coming to check it out." The major looked at him and wanted to know if they were still on their way in or had they been dealt with. She didn't appreciate the shrugging response and ordered him to extrapolate further. "Sir, it's not like I'm able to speak to it like a person. I have to figure out what everything does and there are literally thousands of processes. All I did was delete a suddenly active thread. The only reason I think its humidity detector is because I saw something similar once." Looking back at his computer, he remarked it was like flying blind without a control operator for help.

As time passed, Clubber started to tell jokes and do Bridgeford impersonations. Although no one laughed, it helped to clear the tension. But major Assuras was growing impatient and she wanted to put as much distance between herself and this ship as soon as possible. "Lieutenant, I want to know how long." Looking up from his work he told her 3 perhaps 4 hours and even longer if she kept interrupting him. "That's too long soldier, is there anything we can do to help?" Cupcake had decided it was time to push the man a little bit. So with an exasperated breath, Lapointe responded. "Ok, I think I've got a good grip on the system but like I said I have tons of stuff to search through. And it doesn't help me that same humidity thread reappears every 5 minutes and I have to deal with it." Lieutenant Turin tried to be funny saying that he could have been a techno-geek but failed the I.Q. test.

Chapter 10: Communicating with the Enemy

"This is really starting to piss me off!" Mr. Lapointe continued, "I might be able to deal with that fraking process I could just watch what happens when the toasters come on." The chief enquired if it had to be all the robots or would one of them do? "One should suffice. If I can find what it is that happens when they interface with the ship I should be able to disrupt it indefinitely. Chief Forester asked for a coin because he had an idea and Assuras threw him one. "Lieutenant, are you ready and watching that computer of yours?" Lapointe assured him he was and Forester opened the door to the room and ran toward what was one the two centurions that had been previously approaching. As he came to stand directly in front of it, he yelled. "Elysian Fields or bust!" Then he grabbed the cylon's arm, quickly stuck his gun in its hand. Confused the major had ran after him, only to dive to the floor for cover as the red eye of the machine suddenly activated for a moment and then faded out again. Shaken and pissed off she grabbed the man and snarled at him. "Bust is right! We get out of this alive and I'm going to bust your ass." She let go of the man. Exiting the corridor, she looked over her shoulder back at him. "Oh yea, nice touch with the coin. I'm not from Geminon or a priestess, so you might be able to pay for your passage across the river. But I'm pretty sure if you kill yourself, you won't go to the same underworld as your wife."

Entering back into the server room it was easy to see that Mr. Lapointe was grinning from ear to ear, as his fingers furiously danced across his keyboard. "Major I don't want to encourage the chief, but that pointed me in so many right directions, I could kiss him." Everyone was silent for a few moments to allow the tech head to work. He at last picked his head up and spoke. "Ok, the toasters can't interface with the ship and vice versa. Also I think I can give you some info on them. The main servers can activate them, they periodically come on to check for orders and human proximity or possible hostile action can activate them too. But some of them have been off for a very long time and their circuits might have problems reinitiating. So just because one doesn't move when you touch it now doesn't mean it won't later."

Lieutenant Turin looked at him puzzled and asked if he suddenly had access to a manual on them. With a smug look on his face Lapointe explained, "Nope. I saw exactly how they access their network and each other. Once I was able to do it the same way. It was

easy for me to deduce everything according to its function. And I must admit that the cylon systems are old because the processing power of the laptop gives me a big advantage. However, some program documentation would have been nice.” The major holstered her side arm and told the man to stop the gloating and to just get the navigational files. She was then assured that he should have them in 5 minutes and they could then move on to secondary objectives.

XOXOX

“Do you have the navigational files or not!” The lieutenant was annoying the major with his argument to consider a new course of action. “Our mission was to find out where we are, plant some explosives, gather any possible Intel and bug out! Do you require a further explanation?” Clubber interrupted the argument to say that it was Cupcake’s decision, but he agreed with the suggestion Lapointe was making. Assuras folded her arms and shot an angry glance at her co-pilot for a moment and then told Mr. Lapointe, who was sitting on the floor, to tell her what he wanted to do again.

“Sir I’ve got an entire inventory list. This basestar has fuel, ammo and weapons. Enough supplies here to fill the tanks and re-arm the Argus. You have discretionary power and I’m not asking you to change the operation’s parameters, just extend them. We know where we are now. I have a ship schematic so we can still take out the communications and if you come back with a team, we can get tons of information by tearing this thing apart. But you will have to leave me here with the laptop.”

It was this final point that she had a problem with. Not only would she have to leave a man behind, but apparently because the cylon systems re-initialized every 90 minutes she would have to leave the computer too. And they didn’t have any available medium to save the data on. She could lose them both as far as she was concerned; she was being asked to place a lot of faith in just one man. Turin spoke again and finally swayed her decision saying he could just copy down the coordinates. He then took out his knife, picked up the panel used to cover the large computer system and started to scratch the data into it, noting they might have to bend it in half to fit it into the plane.

Pissed off and against what she felt was her better judgment, Cupcake began the pre-flight sequence on the raider. “This is fraking stupid! Stupid! Stupid! Stupid!” She was angrily flipping switches and no one wanted to talk to her considering the mood she was in. As the engines engaged the major punched her seat and asked the Lords of Kobol to look after the man they were leaving alone. She hoped that the interface device would protect Lapointe, because there were just too many unpredictable variables aboard the toaster base.

The plane lifted off, exited the ship and everyone began to feel some relief. “Clubber spoke, “Ok let’s take out those communications the pilot way.” The crew felt safer not trying to use demolitions to disable the basestar’s means of communications and since they now knew the ship layout, it was easier, safer and faster to just destroy the main dishes on the hull. However, this too required faith in the lieutenant they had left behind,

because if he hadn't disabled the ship to robot interface, they might find themselves quickly swarmed by raiders.

They moved to the top saucer section and Cupcake handled the firing while Clubber stabilized the plane. "Target one acquired, weapons free and fire in 3... 2... 1..." The fighter's weapons strafed the enemy base and within milliseconds, the main dish exploded. They moved on to the secondary dish amidst a few loudly verbalized hot damn comments. The procedure was the same as they came up on the bottom section of the warship. The major once again did the count down and in seconds the other transmission array erupted in an explosion. "Fraking yea! That's what I like to see!" Her apprehension about changing the mission momentarily disappeared as she observed the fireball and she eloquently said that she really liked big booms. "Ok they aren't the new toasters. But after what they did to the Poseidon and us, any toaster will do, and that felt so fraking good! Let's go get the cavalry." High fives all around, they sped toward the rendezvous.

Chapter 11: Send in the Marines

The link up with hauler 3 commenced without a problem and the two pilots were happy to let someone else drive for a little bit. It gave them some time to relax and figure out how they were going to explain everything to the admiral. Max had commented they were early, and assumed that meant the mission was a success. He didn't know how to comprehend the major's statement that the mission parameters have changed and were therefore being extended. However, he shrugged it off because it wasn't his problem.

The admiral and colonel were present as the ship came into the landing bay. Their faces were perplexed as Forester asked for help getting the piece of computer panel out of the raider. Being told it was the navigational information left Bridgeford saying that this was going to be one interesting report. Cupcake then emerged and Hallis immediately noted they were 1 man short. "Yes sir, Lapointe remained aboard the enemy ship. The parameters have changed and I've extended the mission. I left him behind and in control of the enemy base." In unison the two men folded their arms and waited for her to continue. This accidental synchronized act had an unsettling effect on Assuras. "We more or less accomplished our objectives. We know where we are, destroyed the communications, Mr. Lapointe has control of the basestar's flight systems and we can gather enemy data by taking apart the base." The two command officers looked at her wide-eyed and everyone was motioned toward the admiral's office for debriefing.

"Sir, discretionary power was given to us. I made a command decision because it made sense. Once we had a copy the navigational data, I could no longer argue the logic." No one was arguing with major Assuras, but she was still unsettled because her two mission companions were extremely silent. "Sir, the cylons have fuel, ammo and a ton of other things we need. After the marines do some house cleaning, the ship is ours." Hallis sat at his desk and shook his head to say no, but responded that it was a great idea. Assuras was suddenly relieved as the admiral told her and Bridgeford they had 2 hours to work

out a profile. “Even if the toasters are off, I wouldn’t want to be left alone and surrounded by them.”

It was hard to keep anything on the Argus compartmentalized. Although it was relatively easy to keep exact details secret, preventing everyone from knowing when and what was going to happen was impossible. The moment the computer panel with the flight data was handed to Reeves in CIC Everyone suspected they would be returning to the basestar. After all, it was a piece of scratched tin and not a laptop computer. Consequently when Assuras and Bridgeford left the debriefing, the captain found himself again having to remind everyone. “Need to know basis people!”

The major and the colonel sat at table trying to work out the details for the second stage of Operation Cain. “Counting what was already on the Poseidon, I have two groups of marines and I want all of them for the mission.” Assuras looked at him noting that it was more than a raptor could hold. “Back in my day we had shuttles and a couple of those would have done the trick.” The major looked at him and said that she didn’t feel comfortable putting that many of our advanced technical planes in an enemy strong hold, not to mention the large amount of fuel that many would require. “I would rather just use one or two. Set up a command centre from the first and maybe have the second in the air jamming all signals.” Although extremely slow in comparison, a single hauler could carry everyone with equipment and have lots of room to spare. But the rear of a hauler wasn’t pressurized and suits would run out of air long before arriving at the destination and there probably weren’t enough oxygen bottles aboard to make it feasible. Bridgeford pondered for a moment and then asked Assuras to grab them some sludge-gumbo, that he would be back in 20 minutes. He was heading down to the port flight deck to discuss the problem with knuckle grinder to two.

The noise from the processing of the ice fragments and various other mechanical endeavours was deafening and the colonel had to yell in order to be heard. He stood talking to two, a machinist and female welder. “So you want to use a hauler as a troop carrier?” The woman had asked and wondered why they couldn’t just use raptors or suits if they really had their heart set on using heavy equipment. Bridgeford rubbed his face hoping this wasn’t going to be a difficult conversation. The male looked at his co-worker then commented, “Got too many men to carry and too far to go, huh colonel? Not a problem. It’s just a question of a few welds, some seals and an O2 scrubber. However, it won’t be heated. But you can still use suits just to keep warm. We could run a couple of power couplings from the engine into the back everyone can plug into.” The machinist further explained that there were no vital manufacturing operations currently underway, so he could pull some men from their jobs and get it done in about 15 hours. The old marine smugly smirked; this was the kind of answer he was hoping for.

Assuras and Bridgeford had their plan of action and met with the admiral again. It was relatively simple in design. A squadron of vipers, two raptors and a modified hauler would be dispatched to the basestar. One raptor would remain outside of base in order to jam all and any signals. The second would enter; land and a small group of marines would vacate and secure the landing bay. This would give the other marines time to

remove their suits and file out after the hauler landed. They would then proceed directly toward Lapointe, securing the pathway as they went. Upon arrival, one group of marines works the upper saucer and the second group goes downstairs. Hallis interrupted and wanted confirmation of what he already knew, “The vipers are to destroy the base in case something goes wrong?” The major responded, “Yes sir, if for whatever reason Mr. Lapointe failed to hold down the fort, we blow the thing to hell. Our fighters are faster and better armed. So it shouldn’t be a problem. Back to the plan, once we have confirmation the ship is secured, I land my plane, the colonel takes command of the ship, and I fly it back here.”

The old marine then added that there are 2 other procedure particulars. The marines had ample small arms but relatively few assault rifles. While the centurions appear to have heavy arms as standard issue. The men would take them as they went. Second, after a toaster is shot, cutting saws would be used to dismember it. Making it clear there is no reason to take any chances. The Argus’ old man wrapped up the meeting by looking at the time breakdown. “Let’s see here what we are looking at for a turn around. It took you 2 hours to cook up this scheme. 15 hours for modifications to the heavy equipment. 2 hours to fly to the objective. Finally add in the time to come here plus 1.5. So it’s going to be 24.5 hours the lieutenant is going to be sleeping alone with the enemy. Factor in another 10 to 12 for the time he was awake getting ready for the original mission. He has got to be feeling the pressure. So get to work”

When the trio walked out of the office and captain Reeves announced the admiral was on deck, Hallis noticed that although the people in CIC were working, there were sideways glances and it was clear to the old man that curiosity was particularly high. He paused and thought for a moment about everything this crew had experienced. First it was a surprise attack that almost destroyed them, then getting lost in space, without heating or fuel, under the threat of death from dehydration and now reduced to eating sludge-gumbo for their very survival. Looking around at the hollowed faces of his people, their weight loss evidenced by the scraps of rope or cloth holding their ever loosening pants in place. They were defying the odds and surviving. As Reeves walked over to return command to admiral Hallis, the old man made a judgment call.

The men and women of the Argus deserved a break or at least a pat on back. Therefore he asked to be put on the ship’s address. “Attention all personnel, this is Admiral Hallis. So far Operation Cain has been successful and we are now preparing to launch its second phase. Major Assuras, colonel Bridgeford and marine forces will be returning to the basestar. They will take control of the enemy vessel and return here with it. It will be used to refuel and re-arm us. Having completed that, we already have procured flight logs that have provided us the location of a known planet. It is my plan to go there, calculate a jump, grab some take out food and head home. I’m sure everyone wishes the operatives of this mission good hunting.”

No sooner did he abruptly end with, “that is all”, when the ship erupted in clapping, cheers, hugs and some tears. It was a gutsy move on the admiral’s part. But he figured that even if the toaster base ended up being destroyed, they still knew where to get food.

According to the navigational data they were close to a planet. Once everyone in command returned to normal, the captain joked, "I told you if you needed to know he would tell you." With their spirits newly lifted, everyone laughed readily in response.

XOXOX

There were icicles forming from the breath of the men in the rear of the hauler. The general attitude of the marines was one of welcome relief to be involved in doing something other than chaperoning mechanics and flyboys. And the mission briefing affirmed that if everything went like clockwork, this could be just a coffee run, yet despite their eagerness, tension was high. As it is prone to happen amongst hand-to-hand combatants, the humour was a mixture of subtle harassment about each other's bravery to morbid commentary about what each person was going to do to the enemy. One man said he was going to return with a collection of robot heads and put on a puppet show for the entire ship. Needless to say there were many people willing to help him with his endeavour.

The vipers led the approach to draw any fire should the enemy be ready for engagement. Although the communication antenna was destroyed, no one wanted to take unnecessary chances and the raptors made sure all possible electronic signals were jammed. Colonel Bridgeford assumed a position of command in one of the raptors and gave the order to go in.

As according to plan, a small group of marines aboard one of the raptors went in first to secure the landing bay. Upon landing, 4 centurions immediately awoke and approached the unknown plane. The moment the soldiers opened the door a firefight commenced and a stray shot ricocheted into the cockpit wounding the pilot in the neck. However, as quickly as the combat began, it finished, and the sound of a cutting saw dismembering the fallen robots was soon heard. The navigator of the plane immediately radioed in the situation while one of the soldiers performed immediate triage. "Command, Sasha. One man down and it's Bear." A shrill gurgle of pain came from Bear and the field medic responded to it, saying that's a good sign. Noting that the bullet had passed cleanly through the left and out the right side of the neck, severing only the windpipe, the medic added that the lieutenant's singing career was over, but that he would live. And Sasha continued her transmission with the information. "He is expected to live, but we can't lift off without another pilot."

"Chief Max that's your queue. It's time to unwrap the gifts." Bridgeford fumed slightly about the loss of one pilot but in war things like this happened. The important thing was the first part of the plan was now finished, and in the absence of enemy fire, it appeared that Lapointe had done his job. The marine commented to himself, "Apparently the lieutenant had to reset some sort of computer beep every 90 minutes. I hope everything goes smoothly because he has got to be exhausted."

The massive hauler roared toward the enemy ship and the chief complained that it was a tight squeeze fitting in the door. As he passed through, he scraped the side of the plane and laughed about needing a new paint job. Everyone sitting in the back was jostled and

one of the soldiers took it as a signal to make a speech. “You bunch of mother-fraking bad asses! When you go in there don’t forget these toasters killed thousands of our people and murdered lieutenant Cain. I’m going to stuff their tin heads up their metal butts! Now who is with me?” The men shouted back that they all were, to which he responded that he couldn’t hear them. The spirit lifting revelry continued, response and challenge, with each increasing in volume until the words could no longer be understood. Then finally the man laughed, “Yea! Now prove it by getting me cylon ashtray.”

The industrial machine landed, the men filed out of the craft, broke up into units and quickly commenced to secure the foreign territory. Working as team the marines advanced. A pair would take the lead and identify the proximity of robots. Then several shooters would take position and gun down the things at the best range possible. This sneak attack approach worked to annihilate many centurions in their dormant state, however there were still sporadic gunfights. Once the machine was taken down, a man with an industrial saw would quickly remove the head and limbs of it and then the creature’s weapons would be confiscated for use. The marines worked quickly and after 55 minutes, the colonel was signalled that they felt reasonably assured the ship was under their control. As the colonel’s raptor was brought aboard, gave his final command to the viper squadron. “Cupcake, Bridgeford. If you have to destroy the thing, do it and don’t worry about us.” The order was acknowledged.

A troop command centre was being established in the landing bay when the colonel’s plane came in. As he exited onto the flight deck the sergeant in command came up to verbally relay a preliminary report. Three soldiers to the far left were being boisterously loud. “Sir, all vital areas are secured. It’s mainly just the hack and slash left.” The two men ignored the ruckus, despite its increasing volume and participants. It was Clubber, the raptor pilot, poking his head out to inquire if there was a drunken party going on, that finally garnered a response. The marine sergeant yelled for the others to keep it down and Bridgeford enquired about the score.

Lieutenant Turin looked perplexed and the two marines laughed, explaining that they were playing a game. “With marine ground-pounders, it’s common practice to take large, easily rolled objects that once belonged to the enemy, set up a few in a formation and try and knock them down for points.” In this case it was cylon heads. The lieutenant went from being confused to slightly shocked and the colonel laughed harder. “After crawling on your belling in mud, 12 hour marches carrying full gear in the rain and eating bugs; the marines always have the best souvenir shop in the colonial forces.”

No sooner was the word given that all toasters had been dismembered, and Bridgeford’s handheld wireless crackled to life. One of the soldiers alerted him they had found lieutenant Lapointe. “He’s not injured, but he is in rough shape, I think you need to come look for yourself.” The old marine acknowledged and squinted his left eye trying to figure out what could possibly be the problem. Glancing toward Turin he shrugged and proceeded down the hallway.

Chapter 12: Wired!

Two men guarded a room that was near the computer centre. In it was a large chair where some sort of master A.I. robot must have sat in, interfaced with the entire ship and issued commands. Currently sitting in the seat was lieutenant Lapointe, nude and happily gibbering away to himself, apparently with no concern to those present. Entering the room, the colonel's mouth gaped at the absurd sight for which he was ill prepared. "What the frak?! Lieutenant!" If the vision of misconduct caught the colonel off guard, the computer tech's response practically knocked him on this ass. "Oh hey Bridgie. I've been field promoted to imperious cylon leader. How's it hanging with you?" Bridgeford shook his head, slapped the side of his own face and decided. "The man has cracked from the pressure."

The young marine that radioed the colonel walked over to colonel Bridgeford and handed him a set of clothes. Bridgeford noted the foul smell and figured he had a partial explanation for the man's nudity. The junior soldier then asked the two guards to wait outside the room before he spoke again to his commanding officer. Drawing his attention to the left front pocket of the pants. The colonel scrunched his nose, because of their wetness, but still reached in. He pulled from the pocket a small packet of what were obviously narcotics. "What the frak! Is everyone on dope these days?" Lapointe jumped down from the chair and ran up to the old marine waving his arms. "Hey, that's my bravery medicine! Just a little and I have the strength of 10 ordinary men. Now (snatching the package away from the colonel) get your own because I'm not sharing." He then folded his arms and looked condescendingly at his new company.

Deciding to ignore the raving naked man for the moment, all attention focused on returning with the captured ship to the Argus. "Radio Turin and tell him to clear our vipers to land. Let's get some of the fly boys piloting this bucket home." Just then a loud alarm went off in the computer room and everyone looked about with expressions of confusion and impending horror. But the nude lieutenant jumped up proclaiming that it was his 90-minute reminder to dance with an A.I.

Sitting on the floor, laptop propped up on his knees, oblivious to the on looking colonel and several marines, the tech-head opened his pouch of drugs, pinched a little bit between his thumb and forefinger and proceeded to snort it up his nose. "Oh baby that's what I like. Now you fraking bitch, lets see if I taught you anything." His fingers began typing rapidly across the keyboard and his excitement was difficult to contain. "Yea! yea! Hooga! Hooga! Hooga! I rule!" The colonel didn't know if he should strike the man, be impressed by his abilities or just walk away. Finally he decided that he now had a big ship to command, and his efforts would be best suited doing something other than babysitting a drug addict. "Got you again you old mechanical piece of crap. Hey, did you guys know there isn't a place to go potty on this boat?" Colonel Bridgeford exited leaving a marine guard in charge of chaperoning.

XOXOX

“If the toasters are all cut up, and outgoing communication capabilities are destroyed, what is he resetting and can we trust him to keep doing it?” Major Assuras was now aboard and trying to make sense out of the current situation. She had known lieutenant Lapointe for a long time and the idea that he was using drugs was difficult to fathom. The colonel cleared his throat, “It’s like trying to get a stoned person to explain how the universe works. Apparently the computer that controls this ship is an AI too. It could still self-destruct or jump to another basestar. That’s why I need you guys to fly this thing home, then we can blow the computer.” The major nodded and headed down to what everyone believed was a control room.

Interfaces between the robots and ship ran everything. However, the cylons did factor in a set of manual controls. Given the age of the ship it was relatively easy to figure out the systems. The only problem was there were no displays or counsels to get readings from. Obviously the toasters didn’t need them because they would just interface directly with the ship. The raptors would have to be used as air traffic controllers and be the eyes for return trip. Cupcake couldn’t help notice the difference between the two species. Because one of the first things any human would have done was look for good places to put in windows.

Because the basestar was in more of a standby mode than completely shutdown, the engines were modestly warm and the restart sequence would be short. Perhaps more than 40 years had passed with various systems still drawing power, but whatever their source, the fuel consumption was negligible, leaving the tylium tanks modestly full. The design of ship might be simplistic and nothing to look at. But if nothing else good could be said about it; its power systems were efficient.

As engine thrust was tested the hull creaked and echoed. It was unsettling and had a haunting effect on those piloting the craft. However Bridgeford appeared un-phased as he walked into the room holding a cylon head. “Take a look at this major, one of my men gave me a gift. He hallowed out a toaster skull and put a flashlight in it. Too bad I don’t have grand children, I bet kids would love something like this.” Cupcake momentarily glanced at the colonel, rolled her eyes and decided that marines were very strange.

“Just to keep you in the know, I’ve dispatched a raptor to jump to the Argus and fetch Reeves. They took Bear too; your pilot is going to need surgery. Although, Lapointe is now clothed, he’s still snorting and keyboarding; I’ll rest easier after he is relieved. One of my medics said if we took the crap away he might just pass out and we would be really screwed.” Major Assuras didn’t like the sound of that and issued an order to get the pre-flight done as quickly as possible. The moment the captain showed up she wanted to be leaving. In hindsight, she wished she had originally taken him. He would have stayed awake by slapping himself in the face all night.

Because the raptor was free to use it’s jump abilities Captain Reeves came aboard within 2 hours and immediately relieved the drugged crewman. This was plenty of time for the motivated Assuras to get her crew ready for flight. So, as soon as the captain was

prepared, the ship headed for the Argus. As the vessel approached the battlestar and registered on dradius, the colonel initiated communications. The old man of the ship had it pushed through on the speakers. "Argus this is colonel Bridgeford. Mission accomplished." C.N.C. clapped and cheered with the good news. "For a supply ship this thing is damn cold and ugly but we got lots of toaster-ashtrays for everyone. Even if you don't smoke." The admiral had been slightly worried when Reeves had to be dispatched. But the colonel and the major were good capable soldiers. Although he hid it well, he couldn't help his mother-hen emotions. Congratulating Bridgeford he told him to pull up alongside and then report to his office.

Chapter 13: Re-Supplying

The movement of men and equipment occurred quickly. Assuras and the colonel reported to the admiral and captain Reeves assumed temporary command of what was now being called Toaster one. In the meantime, the doctor took charge of lieutenant Lapointe. His condition was kept quiet. Another drugged officer, especially one that was stoned during a vital mission would frak with crew mentalities and moral.

Hallis noted the disturbing trend of a drug problem aboard his ship and he found it no coincidence that there was a known dealer within his crew. In the case of Ford, the Alchemist had managed to argue his way out of trouble by noting that the former major had a herbal substance and he had nothing natural available to him. He had been strip searched multiple times before being put in the Poseidon brig and again after the rescue by the Argus. Given the fact that a large part of their survival depended on the man, the admiral accepted the explanation.

However the private was becoming less of a vital role as resources were replenished, and he could hardly argue that this chemical concoction was not of his design. And knowing the officer that served under his command, Hallis felt reasonably certain that unlike the former major, this lieutenant would have no problems telling him everything. He made a mental note that after the customary morning meeting; he was going to finish what started with Cain's death, by hauling the dope pusher in for questioning. Strangely, the old warrior found himself looking forward to tackling this problem. He hated scumbags and as far as he was concerned tomorrow would be a good day to start garbage collection.

Tonight his plans included visiting his inebriated crewmen for confirmation of what he already knew and launching a triple raptor recon mission that he like to call, "Operation Breakfast." Since there was now a surplus of aviation fuel available and they were near a planet called Gomorrah, they could start to gather the what they really needed, food.

Gomorrah was once a colony lost to the cylons, who made it a base. Later, during the last war, 2 battlestars, one of them being the Galactica, destroyed the facility. Although the star charts needed to be updated with actual readings, the admiral estimated that it would have taken the Poseidon 3 jumps to cover the distance from the last location. When Reeves said they had to circumnavigate many systems to get the ship quickly into

the fight, they must have accidentally created instability in the FTL engines. Luckily the first jump got them where they needed to be and more again that they didn't disintegrate in the second. Because an unstable drive rarely results in an extended range. Instead what happens is the entire ship has its molecules scattered across the solar system. Smirking to himself, he ended up agreeing with the doctor. The Argus is a lucky ship.

After having wished the participants of the breakfast mission good hunting, the old man rounded the corner and walked into sickbay. Dr. Lewellyn greeted him at the door and informed him that lieutenant Lapointe was now conscious and lucid. Hallis scrunched up his face and walked toward his officer. He wasn't quite certain what he was going to say to the man because his career record had been exemplary until now. Looking down at the man, he paused before he finally spoke. "You want to tell me about how it happened?"

The lieutenant stuttered for a moment, took a deep breath and finally spoke. "It started back when I was in university. I used to use various stimulants and drugs to help me get through exams and other difficult periods. Sometimes a little nose candy can really help a person calm their nerves and focus. I guess I did a little too much this time." The admiral was expecting to hear that it was the lack of food and hunger pains that drove him to it. Not that he was a closet junkie. He said nothing for the moment permitted the man to continue. "I didn't know it, but the basestar's computer was an AI. Each time I reset the security systems it learned from me until it became like a game of chess. Finally at one point, when I had to go to the bathroom, I left the room because I didn't want to do it in the same room I was in. But I forgot the box our spy gave me. My guess is I was still in within its range because one of the centurions walked up behind me when I was in the middle of reliving myself and told me it was by my command. I froze, waited for half an hour, just standing there, before it simply shut down. By then it was time to reset the system and I did a little bit to steady myself. And I guess you can figure out the rest sir."

Admiral Hallis shook his head in understanding but only said one word. "Where?" Lapointe responded, "The alchemist."

XOXOX

It was always the same people for the morning command meeting, Bridgeford, Assuras, Lewellyn and Reeves. But today, he intercepted them, one at a time as they passed through C.I.C and instructed each to wait a few moments. It was close to duty shift change and he wanted to make certain when that occurred that they were all present. As Cupcake entered the area, he once again asked to be put through on ship's address. "Attention all personnel, this is admiral Hallis. Some of you are waking up and some of you are going to sleep. Everyone is ordered to immediately proceed to the ship's galley. Because depending on your perspective breakfast or dinner is now being served. Now..." Hallis suddenly found himself being drowned out by the chaos of the noise. The commotion as it grew was reflected on the individual scale in the face of Assuras. The major's eyes suddenly flared wide, she started to turn round to leave and then back again towards her commander, uncertain if she should wait a moment or run down to the

kitchen and get in line. The old man found himself yelling as people in the command centre were suddenly abandoning their posts. "Wait! Not you guys!" He walked over to his office and opened the door and 3 men with several trays of fruits walked out. "You people still have to fly the ship. But enjoy your meal." He then returned to the loudspeaker. "Ok, don't make yourselves sick and don't kill each other, there is enough for everyone. Hallis out."

Assuring his senior officers there was more fruit in his office. The admiral ushered them in. As she stuffed what looked like a white apple in her mouth, the major began with the first sentiments about believing that any kind of food was at best another 72 hours away. Hallis grinned, "All of you have gone hungry long enough and we are now have a surplus of aviation fuel. I wasn't going to make anyone wait longer without a good reason. My apologies because it's not much more than some fruit for now." Cramming their mouths full, Reeves and Bridgeford opted for hand gestures of appreciation. Whereas the doctor took a moment between bites to say how their systems have been without real food for some time. Everyone would have to ease into eating again. Then quickly added that the damn weird apple tasted like the nectar of the gods. Admiral Hallis grabbed another one for himself and asked if they could start the morning meeting now.

"Toaster one is old, but I still took no chances with the AI mainframe. Anything that even remotely looked like an interface to the ship systems I cut. As a further safety precaution, I had the computer physically removed from the basestar and it currently is in pieces on the floor of a storage room." Figuring the captain was being a bit over cautious Lewellyn shook his head. "The last cylon we thought was deactivated still managed to kill." Reeves' facial expression was cold and icy when he made the comment but he dropped the issue quickly and continued his report. "The basestar is old but still newer and slightly larger than this ship. Its tanks will fill both of ours and still leave hers about a 1/5 full. We have to build a transfer pump and pipe. It won't be pretty or efficient but it will get the job done. Best guess is 96 hours to completion." The admiral appeared pleased but wondered about why they were keeping the computer parts. "I intend to construct a stand alone computer for medical." The doctor looked up and said that was a very thoughtful thing to do.

The colonel stood up with apologies that he wasn't a battlestar expert but for lack of anyone better suited for the job; he had assumed responsibility for re-arming of the ship. "Well the enemy vessel was packing some serious heat. Those fraking tin cans certainly like their explosives." He paused for a moment as a thought entered his mind and then commented that the Argus didn't have any dishes and cylon heads might make good bowls. Assuras rolled her eyes and looked at him strangely but he continued. "Hey, it was just a thought." He shrugged. "Ok, when the captain rescued us it was with an element of surprise. And after talking with those involved, I found out they basically pointed their guns in the general direction and pulled the triggers. There are auto feeders, but the gunnery crews are more hands on than most is used to. So a few of my men are on the job learning and developing a training procedure." As Bridgeford sat back down, Hallis looked at him and said he agreed that they are going to need some more dinnerware. "A few old MRE trays won't cut it. Find a couple of men that aren't busy

and have them hollow out the heads, perhaps even stamp out some cutlery and cups. And scavenge the cylon body parts for materials because that'll be good for moral too."

The admiral then looked at his last two command officers and said that he didn't believe they have too much to add at this particular meeting. But he still asked if they had anything to say. Cupcake was the first to speak and saying that even though the Argus was heavy with planes. There are a lot of cylon raiders in perfectly good shape and she was investigating options with them.

The doctor grunted that there might be some diarrhoea and vomiting amongst various members of the crew as solid food returns to their diets. Hallis then leaned forward at his desk. "Reeves you're free to return to Toaster one. Keep me updated on the fuelling progress because as soon as possible I want to be in orbit of Gomorrah. Next, Bridgeford and I have some work to do. So major I want you to take CIC this morning. And colonel, go get the Alchemist and bring him back here. There are a few matters we need to discuss with our private." Admiral Hallis then grabbed another apple and simply dismissed everyone.

Chapter 14: Cruel and Unusual

Colonel Bridgeford was extremely happy to personally be escorting the drug dealer to the Admiral's office. As he stood beside the man he wondered what kind of punishment Hallis was going to give him. Despite the fact that the Admiral had frequently demonstrated an ability to be ruthless, the colonel felt that regardless of how severe, anything would most likely be a slap on the wrists. But as the commanding officer of the Argus walked out from behind his desk and stood face to face with the Alchemist, a sudden chill and fear ran down the marine's spine. Admiral Hallis then un-holstered his gun and pointed it at the head of the private. Without saying a word he pulled the trigger and the man who was the catalyst to lieutenant Cain's death, fell to the floor. The gun was unloaded, but a point was effectively made.

Sitting back down at his desk, Hallis opened a drawer and replaced the bullets. "Next time you decide to push crap on my ship, the gun will be loaded. I don't frak around. Don't ever forget it." The private stood up with terror and sweat running across his face. He struggled to control his breathing and his mind searched for some sort of angle he could play to gain a measure of influence in this struggle. "We have food, fuel and water. Your importance is pretty much over. Only reason I don't execute you right now is due to your aid and the doctor's insistence that your skills are still useful in replenishing the medicinal supplies."

The colonel focused on the admiral and found himself with mixed emotions about the man. He knew admiral Hallis could have a temper but what he had just done could be considered cruel and un-usual punishment. Glancing at the Alchemist, he saw a familiar darting of his eyes. Something he had long since learned the man did when he was trying to figure a way to weasel out of a situation. It became clear to him the bastard, had

learned nothing from this brush with death, and would deal again given the chance. Angrily he thought, perhaps he should have been shot and put out his misery.

“You gave Ford the weed, helped cause the death of young woman and ruined a man’s career.” Private Parts mind suddenly felt it had found a card to play and he blurted with defiance about reasonable doubt. The admiral slammed his fist on the desk. “During a time of war my orders are, when in doubt... Kill! You gave more of your dope to my lieutenant and put at risk the lives of many. And it won’t happen again.” Looking at the old marine he made his orders clear. “Shave his damn tye-dyed red hair off and make him wear that uniform properly. Then I want a guard on him 24-7. He will eat his meals, bathe and sleep underguard; he is to interface with no one. If he goes to the head, someone is in there with him. In the morning and each night he and his quarters will be searched and choose someone who doesn’t make it enjoyable for him.” Looking at his side arm again, he removed one bullet and tossed it to the Alchemist. “If even an aspirin is found in your possession. I’m going to personally put that in your head.” Looking at the colonel, too angry to continue talking, he made a motion of dismissal with his hand. Bridgeford took the man and exited the room, then CIC and slowly disappeared down the hall.

As the two walked down a corridor the red haired pusher began to sing, wave his arms about and skip. The colonel mumbled to himself again that the right thing to do would have been to execute him because there was no saving grace in this kid. “Oh what’s the matter soldier boy? Did the Admiral’s big pointy weapon scare you?”

Despite power being fully restored to the ship, there were still some areas in that were not always well lit. In one such area, in the distance and at a juncture in the hallway, stood three waiting men. Lurking in the shadows were two marines and the civilian, believed to be some sort of secret agent, nick named by the crew Mr. Creepy. As Bridgeford and the Alchemist approached, a shiver ran through the private and it became obvious that they were there for him “Frak, ok Mr. big tough marine colonel sir. Get it over with and beat me up.” The creepy civilian folded his arms, smiling and telling his protectors that he would be fine under the colonel’s care and they could return in about 10 minutes or so. The two men turned and walked down the corridor.

“My official designation is...” The civilian paused for a moment in order to smirk. “Well I really don’t have anything official. Let’s just say I’m the kind of guy that gets to do things most can’t or won’t.” The Alchemist was now confused about what was going on. In the past he had dealt with pimps, other drug dealers and even a rapist. But this individual was something different and he had to shrug off the feeling that he might have been better off taking his chances with the admiral.

With a hand gesture from Mr. Creepy, chief Forester emerged from the adjacent hallway and stood amidst the 3 men. Bridgeford nodded his head and said, “Show him.” The man who everyone was certain was a spy, produced a small hand held media player from his pants pocket and turned it on. The screen flickered to life and on it was a video recording of the drug deal made with the former major Ford. The transaction that

eventually led to the death of the chief's wife. Forester's eyes and nostrils flared with intense anger and he moved to strike the dealer but the colonel caught him. "You hit him and it's problems." Then looking at the spooky man he made it clear that if he hits him and there was nothing anyone could do.

The chief attempted to argue that they needed to take this video to the admiral. But Mr. Creepy looked at Bridgeford and enquired if he was certain this is what he wanted. No sooner had the colonel replied yes then the spy quickly struck the Alchemist with a clenched fist in the throat and kicked him in the crotch. As the man buckled over he grabbed him, turned him around, twisted his arm behind his back and grabbed a handful of his hair. Then he ran with him several meters down the intersecting corridor, which terminated at an airlock. With an equally swift motion he opened the door, threw him in and sealed it shut.

He hit the intercom and in a calm matter of fact voice spoke. "This is similar to the type of locks they use on some freighters. It takes them about 3.5 minutes to decompress." Having said that he began to turn the valve on the door and the hissing sound of air escaping could be heard. "Scumbags are some of my best friends. So I assure you it's nothing personal. Ok, don't worry too much about the 3.5 minutes thing. Because, around the 60 second mark your eyes, ears, nose and mouth will start to bleed blue-ish blood. Lack of oxygen to make it red, you know. At about 110 seconds your guts will start to heave out of your chest and after 125 your pretty much dead. Which means you have about 105 seconds left."

The private was already banging on the door demanding to be let out. "The colonel, he felt it was important you confessed your crimes to the admiral. He figured it might help give Julian some closure. Also there is a remote chance it will help with your personality flaws. I like the old marine and the man is kind of noble in that sort of thing." Inside the gasping man slammed his fist on the window and a streak of blood smeared it. "Neat, it's already coming out of your pours. Now, I could show Hallis the tape but that means he would know I've bugged the entire ship. It's a bad habit of mine and perhaps I should see a therapist for it.

Almost forgot if you're going to give in, you should do it soon because sound doesn't travel in a vacuum. Oh and 70 seconds remaining." Pressing his lips against the glass for a kiss the spy commented he was a sucker for a blue face. "My, what a strong boy you are! Look at those pretty bulging eyes." At last the bright red haired private screamed he would do it. At that point his assailant simply walked away from the area saying it was the chief's decision.

Strangely enough Julian Forester didn't immediately re-compress the airlock. Instead in morbid curiosity he permitted it to continue for a few more seconds before finally deciding his wife wouldn't have wanted him to do this. As much as it bothered him, he began to reach out to turn the valves. But the colonel shoved him out of the way saying the chief made his decision but he hadn't yet. Forester began to freak demanding to know what Bridgeford was doing and when he lunged for the marine commander, he found the

spy pointing a gun in his face. “You’re one of the good guys. You have your closure now just walk away.” The chief glared into his eyes. “I know you miss your wife. But she would want you to keep living. At the very least not die meaninglessly like her.” Chief Forester hesitated as the argument set in and then quickly left.

The spy chuckled, “I’m sure he will have a good cry over this. Ok, there are about 20 seconds left” Colonel Bridgeford shook with anger, walked away from the door as the man on inside of the airlock collapsed to the ground in a pool of blue un-oxygenated blood. Finally gritting his teeth he returned and began re-pressurizing the lock. Cussing at himself for making this choice. “Don’t worry, just give me a moment to drag his body into the open. Those two nice helpful marines will return and take him to medical.” This being done, the two men left the area walking together.

Bridgeford felt sickened about what they had just done and about 100 meters from the scene he finally spoke wanting to know the reason why the spy agreed to help him. It certainly had nothing to do with friendship or admiration. “The man was fraking with my mission. Like the admiral, I tolerated him because he kept us alive. But now drug addicted soldiers on an obsolete battlestar put me at risk.” The colonel nodded his understanding. “And I’ve done a lot of things in my life. I figured it had been a long time since I saw something interesting.”

Despite himself colonel Bridgeford said, in disgust, that flushing a man out an airlock wasn’t what he considered interesting. “Oh no you misunderstood me. I’ve flushed a few people into space. It’s especially fun to see if you don’t decompress first and get to watch them twitching and floating away against the dark backdrop. What I thought was interesting was that I’ve never seen a father wrestle with the decision of doing it to his son before.” The colonel stopped dead in his tracks, with his eyes and a facial expression that could only be described as a deer in the headlight look. “Don’t worry, you taught your little boy a lesson. And I won’t say anything. After all, keeping secrets is what I do. Even if they are only little family ones.” As the old marine stood in the hallway sobbing in shame and sorrow, the spy began to sing the same song the private had moments ago as he sauntered back to his quarters.

Chapter 15: Something to Talk About

It always began with questions or commentary from a pilot. And then, from the moment Reeves landed aboard the Argus, he would be bombarded, as various crewmembers would pester him for information or with suggestions. He was temporarily in command of Toaster One because he was the only man that could tear down the enemy ship and maximize its usage. He was also the only man the snipes completely trusted and would give 110% of their efforts, both the wrecking yard and Poseidon crews. Despite his quiet understated nature he understood the workingmen and was able maintain the paradoxical position of “one of the gang” while giving commands. But as the admiral had once pointed out to the colonel, the captain is like that with everyone. “He knows how to get real close to you but at the same time keep an extreme distance.”

And today, Clubber was the first to approach captain Reeves. Unlike everyone else, he had two questions instead of a single one as was customary. He was wondering why they don't just use a raptor to get the FTL coordinates and jump the Argus from here. His second was why were they attaching such a thin towline between Toaster One and the Argus. He noted that it would snap the moment they tried to pull the ship. Reeves responded, "First, we have our reasons for not jumping from this location. And second, the rope isn't for towing. It's so I can space walk over here for my morning meetings and avoid being asked the same fraking stupid question I get from all the raptor pilots." A little surprised at the response the lieutenant stood blinking, wondering if a mattress would help the man's demeanour.

Rounding the corner of the flight deck and proceeding down the hall he was intercepted by a marine grunt that had to ask why they didn't use a hauler to get food instead raptors. The captain snarled that high tech planes looked prettier and kept walking. Next, it was Max; he wanted to know about installing a cylon FTL drive into the battlestar and he received a sniped comment about having to talk to Forester. This continued twice more and Reeves thought to himself that he preferred it when they were fighting to survive hunger, because he was left alone. He missed the yard and wished he could return to it and it's simplicity.

Major Assuras rounded the corner. With pigtails in her auburn hair and eating what appeared to be a homemade granola bar, she was her usual happy-go-lucky self and stopped to greet the captain. "Morning Scotty! I was thinking about you last night and wondered..." Reeves suddenly cut her off in mid sentence and barked, "The answer is I don't know, the admiral will tell you if you need to know, because the doctor ordered us to take the shot, there are no replacement boots and frankly I am not the source of all wisdom!!!" Cupcake politely smiled saying she was only going to ask if he wanted to join her for lunch, because they would be serving meat today in the galley. Apologetically captain Reeves turned down the offer and tried to explain his current problem. Assuras just snickered commenting that adversity was easier for command officers to handle than downtime. As she turned, walked down the hallway and was joined by Sasha, Reeves disappeared into CIC.

"How is Bear doing?" The major enquired. Sasha looked at her and shook her head. The man wasn't handling his injury very well and walked around the ship with nothing to do and in an angry mood because he couldn't talk. "That's got to be hard." Assuras noted. The lieutenant also pointed out that although they now had food aboard the ship, the raptor pilot was forced to have his poured into his stomach via a tube. "Frak! I never even thought about that. How are you handling it?" Lieutenant Gains chuckled and noted they weren't really close, but that she felt bad for the man. The two officers continued their walk, in silence for a moment, toward the galley to get something to eat.

Sasha and Lillian stopped when they saw the line up and the conversation resumed. "Where did you get the granola bar? And is getting up early a prerequisite for extra goodies?" Assuras pointed out that chief Maxime made it for her. He had become the un-

official chef aboard the ship, even venturing out with the marines on food runs, to hand select ingredients.

“Well hopefully those bars are high in energy like the ones we used to have. I noticed you had a hard time going to sleep last night. And showering after you this morning, I regretted not adjusting the temperature as I got blasted with cold water. Is everything ok?” The major responded, “Well, a mattress would make rack time a bit easier. I just couldn’t get comfortable.” Sasha cracked a wry mischievous grin. “I bet it would be a lot more comfortable if Captain Reeves was in it with you. Cupcake’s face flushed 3 shades of red and she stuttered an attempt to say that she didn’t have feelings for the captain. “Oh please, my bunk is under yours, I heard you whispering his name.” Major Assuras went silent and the confident viper pilot became embarrassed about showing a side of herself, people rarely saw. Her friend gently revelled in her discomfort.

A smell came from the galley and then there was a uniform gasp and applause from everyone present. Chief Maxime proudly stood upon a chair and proclaimed that they now had both a fully functional oven and refrigerator. Before he stepped down, he confirmed that the wonderful abrupt sizzle and odour was some sort of lake trout baking. The lieutenant, deciding to make the conversation less awkward for her friend, offered a suggestion, “You know what we need? A night of just us girls having a good conversation.” Assuras quickly recovered and thought it was a great idea. She noted that the galley was pretty empty at night. They could get some of Max’s home made white apple cider concoction and she was certain that the chief had ground up some more flour. “Yummy, some fresh baked bread. You know, we should just invite Maxime.”

Just then another female co-worker, waiting in line behind them, chimed in, wondering if she could join them, or if it was only open to officers. Whereas the doctor, who was standing off to the side, over heard the words “fresh baked bread.” And decided that he wanted to attend too. The major intercepted. “Sorry captain.” She placed an emphasis in her voice on the man’s rank. “This moral meeting is for female crew only and yes, corporal you are welcome to attend.” Lewellyn appeared slightly perturbed and noted that chief Max was not female at all. “True enough,” intercepted Sasha. “But he is just like one of the girls.” To which the doctor matter-of-factly stated that he didn’t know the man was same-gender oriented. The 3 women laughed and their new companion calmly said that the chief was not a homosexual. The lieutenant shook her head and without thinking blurted, “I know for a fact he is not gay”.

It was the major’s turn to make her friend uncomfortable. “Oh really... Is there something you care to share?” The raptor navigator blushed and said no. However, the major pushed the issue saying that fraternization between enlisted men and officers was against regulations. “Well then, it’s a good thing he is in officer training.” Considering that this might be a taste of what a girl’s night was like, the doctor bowed out by asking that they save him a piece of bread and walked away.

As Lewellyn, took his plate and walked back toward CIC. He noticed the admiral in the distance and yelled to him to wait up. Pausing a moment Hallis noted a disturbing trend in his officers about brining food into morning meetings. "I tolerated it for a few days because it was just over month without solid food. But I want today to be the last of it." The doctor apologized and agreed that a certain amount of professionalism was needed. Then quickly added that Assuras was baking bread tonight in the company of a couple of girls wanting to talk about their love affairs of chief Maxime.

Admiral Hallis softly laughed, "Translation is some of the female crew are going be gathering in the galley tonight to bake bread and talk. I also bet that the chief is the only invited male member of the crew." Captain Lewellyn looked up at him with a certain amount of surprise wondering how he knew that information. "Max is just like one of the girls and half the women on here have a crush on him. Oh and for the record, the only woman he is actually fraking is Lieutenant Gains." The doctor was amazed at the ease the ship's old man was able to deduce that. "I was the only boy of 6 children, married for 25 years and raised 2 daughters of my own. I can speak girl-talk.

As for the fraking... Well, you don't get my rank without knowing what is happening around you. And I'm indulging it for the time being." The two men entered C.I.C and walked into the ready room where Reeves was waiting for everyone to arrive.

Chapter 16: Own Personal Hell

Mr. Creepy sat in his quarters, facing the door, with his back against the wall. Two marine guards kept watch outside of the room. He wasn't paranoid or fearful in the least; it was a simple matter of fact that this was the way he slept. The idea of lying down in a bed was something he had long forgotten. And truth be known, he didn't care anymore. Giving a slight yawn and stretch, he shrugged off his stupor and glanced at a clock. With displeasure he noted the time and wondered why his appointment had not yet arrived. Sometimes things happen and he decided to wait an extra 10 minutes.

The time passed and he wondered to himself if his rendezvous had suddenly developed a case of shyness. It hadn't made any difference before, but then again, a lot had happened in the past few days. Indulging his hunch, the spy decided to chase away his chaperones and opened the door to his room. Looking at the big tall man to his left he greeted him with a big toothy smile and then spoke softly. "Good morning private. You know I had a dream last night. It was about a silver bicycle, kind of like the one your father gave you when you were 13." The large soldier began to slightly swagger in his stance and tears rolled across his cheeks. As he looked to the second man he continued in the same mannerism. "Dreams are sometimes scary things. Remember how you used to mock your little sister when she cried to you about her scary dreams." The result was similar and now both men were fighting an internal conflict to control their emotions. "Oh shucks. Look what a terrible person I am for making the both of you cry. Why don't you two go freshen up, and take your time, say, one hour". And as if they had been given a direct order, the two guards disappeared.

Not even a minute transpired after their departure and his appointment arrived; the spy smiled to himself because of his correct assumption. He opened the door and ushered in lieutenant Lapointe. Nervous and shaky the lieutenant entered the room amidst abundant apologies for being late. Mr. Creepy reached up and touched his cheek with a loving caress. "It's ok. I understand and forgive you." Lapointe smiled nervously; slightly relieved he sat down saying that he was ready for another session. "Of course you are ready and I'm so proud of you for everything you have done these past few days. Let's talk a little bit and then I'll have a reward for you."

20 minutes into the session of what appeared to be meaningless conversation about Mr. Lapointe's family and past was somehow started to take an emotional toll on him. "It's like a shadow when I think about my father and mother. I can see them in my mind but I can't remember what it was like to hold them. And my younger brother died when I was 15 but I can't see what his face used to look like." He finally broke and began openly sobbing and his antagonist began to push the issue intensifying his discomfort. "That's right they are all disappearing. All your memories are going away and the only thing left will be the pain and horror of what a monster you are."

The lieutenant began to beg and plead asking to be allowed to keep his family in his heart. "There is nothing I can do to help you. They have to vanish so you can become a monster, that's what you secretly desire." Lieutenant Lapointe screamed out saying that only wanted to serve on a battlestar and not hurt his parents. Finally he threw himself to the ground and protested that he wants the evil in him to disappear. Mr. Creepy simply stood over him and watched the display in disgust.

"Well lieutenant you know what you have to do if you want your family to re-enter your heart and thoughts. You need to take your medicine and heal your soul." The emotional scene occurring on the floor of his quarters was becoming boring and the spy didn't think he needed to continue much further today. Instead he walked over to a small box in the corner of the room and produced a small plastic bag of white powdery narcotics. With a razor blade and a hand sized mirror he sectioned the drug into 3 rows and called over Lapointe to take his medicine.

The lieutenant jumped up, began to blow his runny nose and wipe the tears from his eyes. He then descended upon the narcotics and snorted all 3 lines in quick succession. The spy then wrapped his arms around him and softly mothered him. "Good boy. I know taking your medicine is hard because it defies all logic. But see, there is your brother's face and I bet you can now remember your mommy's last hug." He then helped the man sit down in a chair and folded his arms. "Ok, now we are ready to begin. Let's start with what you know about the admiral and this planet we are going to be visiting for food." He paused for a moment to activate a small media player from his pocket and record the information. "Oh, and if Hallis asks you again, you can tell him you found out my name is Leoben Conoy."

XOXOX

“Good morning captain, is there a particular reason why you appear tired and smug at the same time?” Hallis asked the question as he and the doctor pushed past Reeves into the ready room. Saying they would find out momentarily, he continued to hold the door open for Cupcake and Bridgeford. The admiral took his seat and prepared to hear the synopsis of the recent events and undertakings, but the captain stood behind the old man waiting for a chance to speak. It was quickly given to him, as the admiral disliked having someone over his shoulder and just wanted the report as fast as possible, so he could go back to looking the man in the face. “We have nukes, they are loaded and ready to go.” Everyone sitting at the table looked up in shock. The colonel protested that in an early meeting, it had been determined that the ship wouldn’t be able to accommodate the cylon warheads without the use of a fully equipped weapons plant to adapt the launchers.

“Give the men a little food and you will get a lot.”

Admiral Hallis thought this was somehow too good to be true and pressed Reeves to explain. “We didn’t refit the ship, we refitted the bombs themselves. It required concentration and steady hands, which under a normal diet is much easier to attain. The bombs were simple to strip of their casings and we simply built them new ones. We are just waiting for the refuel process to finish. The Argus is fully armed and ready to go.” As the captain went to take a seat next to major Assuras, her face cracked a smile and without thinking, she jumped up and threw her arms around Reeves. Kissing the man, she squealed, “Scotty did anyone tell you you’re my hero?” As she let him go, her face flushed red, and what could have been brushed aside as a simple comment, was now known to be truth by her telltale reaction. The doctor chuckled with unabashed joy at the viper jockey.

As both officers sat down with reddened faces, the colonel snorted about the crew behaving like teenagers in love. Behind Hallis’ eyes was a certain amount of bemusement but nevertheless he demanded a return to professionalism and for the doctor’s daily report. Straightening his uniform captain Lewellyn began. “I’ve got 2 fraking problems and I want solutions, because these fall outside of my job description.” The admiral made a hand gesture for the man to proceed and as he did so, the doctor stood up to emphasize his points. “I’ve got to release lieutenant Ford. He isn’t well enough to fly, but I’ve got him pushing a broom in medical. I’m not a babysitting service and the lieutenant is on his feet.”

Reeves looked at Bridgeford and in a soft growl spat out that he could use someone for airlock maintenance. Admiral Hallis looked quickly at the captain, but before being able to say a word, doctor Lewellyn slammed his fist on the table. “Hey! I don’t save people just to have them executed or murdered.” The hush that momentarily fell over the room was broken when colonel Bridgeford decided to take the man once again under his care. “He will have to be kept away from Forester and I can put him to work, but otherwise he will be confined to the brig”.

The medical report continued with information about the health of Private Parts. He was expected to live and make a full recovery. But having personally checked the airlock, the

doctor argued the man was lying about his condition arriving by accident. Admiral Hallis looked at colonel Bridgeford with a cold and impassionate stare enquiring about the results of his investigation. The colonel cleared his throat “It wasn’t an accident. But it involves our resident spy. He isn’t answering questions and because he is outside of our jurisdiction, we can’t touch him.” The admiral nodded, looked at Reeves and noted that although the captain was a busy man, he wondered if he had managed any investigation of this matter.

Bridgeford’s eyes appeared shocked and he stuttered something about why a 2nd investigation was occurring. Reeves spoke up, “I haven’t really dug into it. But I concur, it’s between the spy and Alchemist. However, there is more involved.” The captain focused his eyes on the old marine and paused. It was obvious to everyone in the room he was making a silent statement. “Admiral, I assume the matter is finished. But if there is anything you need to know I’ll make certain you are told before there is an incident.” Hallis studied his XO, as he pushed the meeting ahead. Never lifting his gaze off the colonel, he asked the major what she was doing with the newly procured raiders.

“Chief Forester and I are looking into options. The planes are old, but they are still war birds and tests show they can hold their own. We are toying with two options, the possibility of making them single pilot controlled or equipping them with raptor equipment. Then perhaps, we can push them behind enemy lines for surveillance. But at the very least, they are full of spare parts.”

The doctor started scratching his head, noted that they certainly seemed well equipped for battle and enquired if they were intending to re-commission the Argus when they jumped back into colonial space? The response was that the battlestar and crew had to be prepared for anything. “FTL isn’t up to snuff; we did in 1 jump what would have been 3 for the Poseidon. We have mechanics not jump drive engineers aboard the ship. These repairs are a best-guess-scenario and that’s why I’m not using raptors to plot the jump; I want exact numbers. We could end up lost again. And to be blunt, when we left the war, we were getting our butts kicked. The Argus might just find itself back on the active duty list.” It made sense to Lewellyn and now understood why there were going to tow the captured enemy basestar back. However Hallis grinned, “The tow line is so the captain can space walk over here instead of dealing with questions from the raptor pilots.” The meeting then quickly closed after a couple of questions about lieutenant Lapointe.

XOXOX

Ford was escorted down to the brig by two marines of the former Poseidon. The one was a tall, black muscular man with a black goatee. As they approached the cell he was bluntly hostile toward the former major. “Well now... Let’s see.... The hotshot pilot isn’t so hot out of the cockpit. No more orders huh major? Oops... sorry, I meant to say lieutenant. Perhaps you should have confined your fun to a viper instead of playing in the Alchemist’s cockpit?” Lieutenant Ford looked at him with hatred but remained silent. “Go ahead you drugged out murderer. Start something! I fracking dare you!” The disgraced officer put his head down and shuffled into his prison. “Yea, you’re still my

superior officer but in here, I call the shots. Don't you ever forget it." The second guard, a woman, tapped her companion on the shoulder and the two of them sat down and began discussing the prisoner in the 3rd person.

"I hear he's got organs and blood of the woman he murdered in his body." It was a statement of concern from the woman. The black man responded, "Yup, that dumb-ass doctor will save anyone's life at any cost. I would have just gutted the man and iced his parts for people that needed them more." The lieutenant rolled over in his bed and faced the wall. Every night, since the incident he found himself crying about what he did. Regret was a new emotion to him and he too wished he had died. Sadly, it wasn't so much that he wanted to undo what happened to Cain, but to rid himself of this emotional pain.

"He bitched me out a couple of times on the Poseidon and over stupid crap. One day, I had done the buttons up wrong and I got a 10 minute speech about not disgracing the uniform." The male marine laughed at the woman's statement and quickly added that the former major most likely just wanted to look at her boobs. "I don't doubt that for a second. You know, he is the reason why the Persius crew thinks we are a bunch of jerks. I mean they save our butts and major A-hole repays them by making them drink piss water instead telling them about the comet. Then he turns around, gets stoned and kills the one who found his mistake." Her companion sat there nodding his head in agreement.

Lieutenant Ford dozed in small spurts. With the emotional turmoil, the pain in his body and the comments of his guards, it was anything but a comfortable rest. A knock occurred at the door and the dark marine answered it. A tray of food was delivered to the prisoner. Accepting the tray the guard looked down and spat in the cup of water and smiled at the person who delivered it. Much to his pleasure he received a congratulatory thumb up. The woman stood up and banged on the cell door with the butt of her rifle. "Hey fly boy! Wakey, wakey. It's time to get up and feed lieutenant Cain's stomach."

Ford rolled over and said that he only had the deceased's kidneys, nothing else. Much to his surprise his captor became crudely hostile. She blew her nose into what was a reasonable facsimile of mashed potatoes. "Those things don't taste all that great. So I hope you don't mind, I added a little spice. I understand that Alana didn't like hot food, but since it's your gut I thought I might help with the flavour." She then took the tray and slid it into the cell. "Doctor said we had to make sure you eat. Don't make me spoon feed you like a baby."

XOXOX

Unlike the captain and his space walks, the admiral decided to use a raptor to visit Toaster One. He had already toured the enemy ship and didn't feel any compulsion to spend any length of time on it. As far as he was concerned, it was the enemy's garbage and if it weren't for the fact they needed stuff from it, he would have preferred to destroy it. His business today was with captain Reeves and he wanted some reasonable assurance of privacy and confidentiality. Checking on the state of the affairs aboard the basestar

provided a plausible reason for the meeting and kept the scuttlebutt down onboard the Argus.

The captain met Hallis on the flight deck and the two made relative small talk toward a room Reeves had set up for briefings and meetings. As the admiral was sitting down and about to speak, captain Reeves discreetly put a hand on the man's shoulder and gave it a firm squeeze to signal him to remain silent for a moment. He then took a seat himself and folded his arms inside his uniform. After a few seconds he unfolded them and withdrew a small handheld remote. "I've looped the bugs in this room with some edited footage from our last meeting. We have just under a minute to talk." Admiral Hallis simply said to make it fast and tell him what he needed to know. "The Alchemist is Bridgeford's son. And the spy has been busy building surveillance devices and installing them all over the Argus and here. I had Lapointe hack into his system and construct a media player. You don't have time to look at the footage today. There is something else you need to know...."

Captain Reeves took a deep breath, and spoke as he let it out. "Recently I have been finding bombs installed all over the Argus. And that's the real reason I've installed the rope for space walks. Not to get away from the questions." The admiral quickly enquired if he had time for an explanation, the captain glanced at his watch and quickly continued. "Clubber and Dancer make a daily trips here in a raptor. I believe I can trust them and I gave them some forged orders from you to make this a classified operation. Sorry, was no way around it sir. In short, Dancer and I change clothes, he does the space walk if needed and I sneak aboard Argus." The captain folded his arms again and then switched conversation to discuss the enemy's FTL system. The admiral got up and asked for a tour of the engine room.

Partially continuing with the charade the admiral made what he thought were reasonable enquires about installing this ship's FTL aboard the Argus. Reeves responded, "We can strip it to the barebones and pretty much have. But we need jump drive engineers to do anything more. We will just destroy ourselves with anything we attempt." The snipes in the engine department continued their work in silence. It was obvious that some of the younger men were uncomfortable with the idea of Hallis looking over their shoulders. But the older crewmen didn't flinch and busied themselves with their tasks. "I would like to spend a couple of extra days or so before we jettison this junk. I think I can get some of her haul plating stripped and heat exchangers too." Admiral Hallis thought about the request for a moment told the captain he planned to leave for Gomorrah in the next 48 hours. "Well, after re-fuelling the battlestar this won't be empty, if I fly it along to the planet, I'll have five more days to go over everything while the Argus is fully stockpiled". Hallis concurred the idea might be wise.

Having finished the tour of the engines and making several comments about constructing some stand-alone computer systems on the Argus. The two men re-entered the flight deck. Hallis turned his conversation to Mr. Lapointe. "The lieutenant has always been a good officer and I have no doubt he won't abuse drugs again. Nevertheless, he is an addict and you can't trust him. Use him if you must, but don't trust him fraking more

than you need to.” The captain agreed and noted that he wouldn’t use him at all, if it weren’t for his technical skills. “I may want to tour this rubbish again before we go to pick up food. My only concern is the colonial ships, so if there are any emergency problems, you have my permission to ignore the normal change of command and do what you deem necessary. I don’t want anything happening that might make Toaster- One our new home.” Exchanging a salute, admiral Hallis then entered the raptor and left the basestar.

XOXOX

“So I hear that you kissed Scotty today.” Sasha had consumed a couple of glasses of the volatile cider drink and was every bit the antagonist in the conversations. Cupcake on the other hand was adeptly playing the role of the victim. “I know, I can’t believe I did that. The colonel is right, I’m a teenager in love! I go to bed at night thinking about him and I get up thinking about him. Frak! I even drew a heart and wrote the words Mrs. Lillian Reeves in it.” Max walked over and topped up her glass, commenting that alcohol made all the problems disappear. Ladies’ night was popular and 8 more off duty female crewmen had showed up. Sobbing Lillian put her head down, “What am I going to do?”

One female crewmember patted Assuras on the back and told her things would only get better after she fraked him. “He will do what all men do. Enjoy the hell out of you a couple of times and then get bored and dump you. Then you will think he is a jerk and never talk to him again.” Maxime became insulted and attempted to defend not only his friend but also the male gender. Sasha supported him noting that not all men are the same. And that some could cook, clean, sew and take care of babies. She then gave her lover a small pat on the behind with a mischievous grin. “Sure some men are different, but they are also gay. Let’s face it, men and women aren’t supposed to get along.” The chief shook his head, noted the woman’s rank was below his, and took her drink away. The corporal protested but Max only responded that since this was 24hr old home brew, they had to be careful drinking it or they could get sick.

“Lillian, I’ve known Scott for several years. Never once have I see him in a relationship and I’ve never seen him pursue one. I’m pretty certain he isn’t gay because some of the guys used to borrow his magazines. I think he is just shy.” Sasha looked up at Max and almost choked on her drink wondering how the man could possibly be shy. “Yea I know he looks like he is always in control. But I can’t help but think he is a virgin.” Cupcake blinked twice, put her drink down and wondered if he was serious. “Yup, I am. Maybe he is saving himself for marriage. He can be pretty old fashioned about such things.” Lillian put her head down on the table and began to gently thud it against the hard surface. “Not only is he an older man, but an old fashioned virgin. He is never going to want a tramp like me.” She began to cry gently and several others tried to console her.

Sasha staggered toward the kitchen saying it was time to bake some bread. Following her, Assuras noted it was time she lived up to her call sign, “Cupcake the baker.” and dropping her voice, “hopefully virgin breaker.” Her friend began searching for something to use as a mixing bowl, found a stick for stirring and started to slur about Reeves again. “Lill.. I’ve seen the man in a towel and trust me, you are going to have a

whole lot of virgin to break in.” The major quickly retorted, “I don’t care about that. Scotty is just like no man I have ever met and I can’t figure out what it is.”

Max entered the kitchen and immediately found the bowl to make bread. “Major, if you don’t mind my saying, I think I know what it is. You’re the CAG, it’s your responsibility to go out and risk your life to save others. And everyone needs you. The captain is not only the first person to not need you, but probably the first one to rescue you.” Lillian started to sob and slumped to the floor with her drink still in her hand, “You are right... Not only is he my hero. But he is noble, kind, and can take care of himself and others. “And”, her sob became more of a squeak, “He also looks good in a towel! By the gods I’m in love with a gay man”. The chief reached down and took the glass away from Assuras and several others protested that he was allowed to attend ladies night because he was like one of the girls. But that he wasn’t permitted to chaperone.

Chapter 17: With a Little Discretion

Hallis paced back and forth in CIC. Despite his years of experience, as the ship prepared to head toward Gomorrah, he couldn’t hide his nervousness. It was obvious to everyone present, that something only he knew about was troubling him, and it had an unsettling effect on the crew. Nevertheless, he gave the final order to engage the engines and proceed to their destination. As the battlestar eased forward, he held his breath, and beads of perspiration escaped from his temples. Colonel Bridgeford shot a glance at him, “It’s been a while has it?” The question was more rhetorical and the XO made the comment for the benefit of easing the minds of the crewmen. It wasn’t good for them to see their commanding officer in such a manner. The colonel walked over and stood beside the admiral. “Anything I should know?” Hallis looked at him without saying a word and just then Mr. Lapointe’s voice sang out, “Sir, all departments report no problems. We are underway.” Admiral Hallis inhaled sharply and then let out a long a sigh of relief, motioning to the colonel to follow him to his office.

As the two men entered the room, Bridgeford noticed captain Reeves quietly sitting in a dark corner and Hallis gave the old marine a glance that warned him to remain silent. The door was then secured and the admiral spoke, “what is said here, remains here.” The colonel interjected he had thought Reeves was aboard toaster one and the captain responded by saying that officially he still was. “The captain woke me last night. He found this explosive device in one of our tylium tanks. It was set to blow for when we got underway.” The colonel couldn’t believe his ears, “who” he wondered, “would want to destroy them?”

“I went on a gut feeling last night, things were just too quiet for the past couple of days. So I walked over here, did some snooping and discovered that. I can’t comment on the explosives, but I can tell you that the electronics in that detonator are really advanced. That leaves me with 2 suspects, your spy and Lapointe.” The old marine and the ship’s old man were confused. “Oh, it’s simple math, there are only 3 people aboard this ship

that can accomplish the construction of this detonator. Myself, Lapointe and I believe, Mr. Creepy.” The admiral refused to believe that it was Lapointe and Bridgeford offered, “I don’t like Mr. Conoy either. He makes my skin crawl; it always feels like he is trying to get inside of my head. But I know for a fact his mission is to get back to Picon, and I don’t think he can do that with a destroyed battlestar.”

The admiral rubbed his chin and contemplated what to do. He had no answers or ideas, save for telling Reeves to keep him informed of his investigations. The morning command meeting was scheduled in an hour and the captain could just blend in at it. Pausing a moment before returning to the bridge the old man addressed the colonel, “The alchemist is a resourceful criminal. And the airlock incident gives him motive, do you think he might be capable of this?” The marine looked at him and responded, “Trust me when I say he isn’t.” Hallis nodded and left the room.

XOXOX

The morning meeting was pretty standard and concluded with a little bit of controversy. Captain Reeves was going to take command of lieutenant Ford, at least for a little while. It came as no surprise when the captain politely asked the admiral to make this an order, because the mere idea of contact with Ford made him want to hurl. Hallis made a funny face, issued the command and entered it in his duty logs, as everyone left the room.

Within a few moments the door to his office opened and Mr. Creepy walked in. “Hello Dave, I’m sure you don’t mind me calling you that, do you?” Hallis looked up with a hostile but curious stare. “What is it I can do for you Mr. Conoy?” The man pulled up a chair and sat down in front of him. “I wanted to discuss Gomorrah with you. As you know there are both ruins from a former settlement and a cylon depot there.” The admiral shook his head in agreement. “In the north-east quarter of the old depot, I was wondering if you could do some exploring for me. I would do it myself, but staying safe, and going to visit an unsecured planet are mutually exclusive.” The admiral cracked his neck and enquired if there was something in particular that they would be looking for. “Why Dave, I’m looking for intelligence and anything else we can use in the war against the toasters. Just tell your men to keep their eyes open and I’m sure they will be able to discover anything worth finding.”

Mr. Conoy figured the conversation was over and proceeded to get up but the Hallis grabbed his hand to keep him from leaving. “You want to tell me why you were trying to flush the alchemist out my airlock?” The spy smirked and calmly removed his hand from the admiral’s grip. “Not really, it’s a need to know basis.” Admiral Hallis coldly stated that he needed to know because it was his ship.

“In the grand scheme, he was becoming a potential liability to the safe return of this ship to colonial space. And for the record, this isn’t your ship, it belongs to captain Scott Reeves.” The admiral looked the man in the eyes and then grabbed the collar of his uniform and shook his rank insignia at the spy. “Yes, I see you’re an admiral but you forget this ship was decommissioned and placed in the care of the captain. Since this ship

has never been reinstated, that means he is still the caretaker. You're just the highest ranked officer on board." Mr. Conoy turned once more towards the door, and added, for no other reason than to play devil's advocate, "You know admiral, it's customary that when you loose a battlestar that your ability to command is suspended pending an enquiry. But I suppose that wouldn't mean too much, because this is a time of war. Oh wait, you never really received that official declaration either, did you?" With a shrug he exited the room sighing about little details.

Fighting a feeling of wanting to take a bath, the admiral walked out to CIC and summoned Mr. Lapointe into the room. "I want you to work with Cupcake on a recon mission. She is qualified to fly a raptor. I want some flybys scans and a ground recon of the northeast quarter of the old cylon outpost. Tell her to select a navigator and a couple of marines. Lapointe wanted to know if this was a classified operation and Hallis paused for thought, "No, there is too much scuttlebutt on this ship and a classified operation, regardless of how minor, will just agitate the crew. Work up a rest and relaxation schedule that puts you both in that area, but keep things really quiet." With his orders, the lieutenant exited the room.

XOXOX

Finally knowing and understanding the character of captain Reeves, the admiral had come to trust and depend on the man in ways he never trusted anyone else. Reeves is intelligent, highly skilled, understated and because of his childhood, could be very cunning. To this effect, his impromptu arrival on the Argus was only acknowledged by major Assuras' comment she missed passing him in the hallway that morning. No one had noticed he had been sneaking around the battlestar for several hours prior.

Nothing special had been discussed during the command meeting, save for the captain taking command of lieutenant Ford and flying Toaster one to Gomorrah. Toaster one was following the Argus and because most of the ship was stripped, the battlestar would arrive in 4 days while the basestar would need 7. Reeves avoided small talk with Assuras and quickly proceeded to the brig to retrieve his newest crewman.

Lieutenant Ford was asleep in his cell when he heard Reeves voice, "Get him up." Ford had recently gotten used to such disturbances, so he arose quickly fearing retribution from the marines charged with guarding him. "By order of admiral Dave Hallis, effectively immediately lieutenant James Ford is hereby transferred to Toaster one, under the command of captain Scott Reeves." The captain made a hand gesture to one of the guards and a man-sized metal box was pushed into the room. He then spat out the words "put him in it."

Horror was in Ford's eyes as he looked at the container, "what are you going to do to me?" A marine guard entered the cell and grabbed the man by the shirt with one hand, slapped him with the other and told him that the captain was going to give him what he deserved. Witnessing this incident Reeves responded in a fierce command voice, "Private! Enough!" The soldier let go of the lieutenant, but in protest, "Shut the frak up

and consider yourself on report! I'm well aware of lieutenant Ford's crimes but he is still wearing the uniform. If you have a problem with him, you take it to a superior. Now put him in that damn box!"

As Ford exited the prison cell, he continued to look at Reeves with questioning horror. The captain responded, "Chief Forester works on the flight deck and I'll be fraked if I'm going to allow him to see your face again." The lieutenant proceeded to crawl into the box without making a further sound. Reeves spoke again before the lid was closed, "The only reason you're not pushing a broom during your duty hours is I need someone to help fly the basestar. But get this in your head, this is a time of war and Toaster One is under my command, aboard it, my authority is similar to the admiral's. Frak up on a salute and I will personally execute you." As if to punctuate the dreadful reality that was closing in around Ford, the lid was shut on his metal encasement and he was transported to Toaster one.

XOXOX

"Baby, don't think I haven't tried. But what they say about prisons and extended tours of duty, just doesn't hold true with Cupcake." Sasha was speaking as she rested her head on Max's chest, smoking a cigarette. The couple was nude and snuggling underneath a collection of clothing. "She has it real bad for Reeves and absolutely nothing is going to be a substitute for him." Max took a drag from her cigarette and chuckled, "The cap is a hell of a man, if a woman can catch him." The little woman re-adjusted herself and momentarily played with Max's new lieutenant bars before continuing. "At least he is more of a man than Lapointe. She used to have a crush on him. I guess the woman has a thing for technical nerds."

The former chief smiled noting that Reeves might be technical but he was far from a nerd. He then smirked and playfully grabbed his rank markings saying that since he was now an officer, Sasha couldn't order him to do things anymore. She laughed, pulled back the coverings, and shifted her position to lay flat on her back, saying, with a devilish smile that there are a few things she could order her man to do. Max grinned, saluted and was about to carry out his orders, when interrupted by a banging on the duty locker's door. "Gains and Maxime, open the fraking door!" It was major Assuras. Instead of waiting, she shoved, hard, and the bar that was holding the door shut, fell out. The door swung wide, and the major walked in. The two nude officers bolted upright, speechless.

"At ease, I'm not going to bust you two. Max, go hit the showers, I need to talk to Gains." Lieutenant Maxime grabbed his shirt and promptly left the room, closing the door behind him. "I'm sorry major, you know how it is." As such was the relaxed atmosphere in the pilot's off duty area, Gains didn't make an attempt to get dressed as she offered her apologies for her actions. "Yea I know and that's the reason I'm not busting you. We all need to release a bit of tension from time to time. The lords only know I'm jealous right now." The atmosphere became more informal and Sasha wanted to know what was so important that the major busted into the room.

“We got work. It’s not officially classified, but it is on a need to know basis. I want you as my navigator on raptor 484.” She detailed the plan on how they were all going to take some needed R & R together. “According to the admiral, this request came from Mr. Creepy and neither of us trust that twitchy, theological-psychoanalyzing bastard. He knows something is there or he wouldn’t have made the request.” Gains agreed but promptly sighed that she wasn’t going to get to spend time with Max. “If we finish our job quickly, you should be able to get some time alone with the new lieutenant. Just be more discreet about it than today.”

Chapter 18: Different Perspective

Clubber landed the raptor aboard Toaster One with a hard thud. Two deck hands came over, removed the box from the plane and moved it into the captain’s office. Once there, the container was opened and Ford stepped out. Reeves began another speech.

Ford straightened up and looked directly at the wall ahead of him. The one man he hated the most was now the officer he took orders from. His mind raced with the possibilities of what this might mean, everything from accidental death to belligerent orders being barked at him constantly. With a deep breath he focused his thoughts to resolve himself that what would happen, would happen and there was nothing he could do about his fate. Despite any of his previous accomplishments and awarded medals, he was now seen as a complete frak up. If they got back to colonial space, best he could hope for would be a 5-10 year prison term followed by a dishonourable discharge.

Reeves spoke, “Ok, so you’re not a murderer, the death was an accident. But it was made because of stupidity. Somehow, I think I could stomach a cold-blooded killer better than your arrogant, moronic behaviours. And Alana wasn’t just the wife of my closest friend; she was part of the family I always wanted.” Lieutenant Ford made an attempt to open his mouth to speak, but the captain noticing his efforts, spun ‘round to stand barely an inch away and glared into his face. The sound of the Reeves side arm holster being unlatched was the only thing to break the sudden silence of the room. Both men breathed heavily for a moment and once again the captain spoke. “Don’t worry, I’ll obey my orders.” He refastened the latch over his weapon.

“I have a special room for you, it’s the closest to CIC. It’s the only chamber off a corridor between command and an airlock. When you aren’t working, you will be in your quarters and a guard will be posted at the end of the hallway near command. This way you can leave your place anytime you want, but the only place you can go is the airlock. Please feel free to use it anytime you’re feeling sorry for yourself.” Having set the tone of their situation, Reeves added that he still expected the lieutenant to act like an officer in all regards. Save for the fact that he could only issue an order when faced with an emergency situation.

The two men walked to Toaster One’s command centre. As they entered the room, 3 crewmen who were hard at work, suddenly stopped and stood up. In silent defiance, they stared at the walls. Captain Reeves boomed in an authoritative voice, “You’re opinions are

noted! But in the next 5 seconds you can either resume your duties or I find a brig to put you in.” Two men bit their lips and returned to their posts whereas the third, saluted the captain and then presented himself to a marine guard. “Take him to his quarters and keep him there. I don’t have time for this frak.” This was a side of Reeves that Ford didn’t know existed. He never imagined the man could be this strict. Not wanting to cause further problems, the lieutenant commenced with his duties.

XOXOX

The Argus was underway and Toaster One was slowly following behind. As the admiral sat in his office contemplating Leoben Conoy’s comments, he had a very uneasy feeling about returning to colonial space. In 6 days it would be exactly 2 months since the war started. Those few hours that he was directly involved in the war didn’t leave him with positive image of what might have happened since. The wireless signals said it all, a large number of the fleet ships destroyed and as such he feared that there might not be a need re-commission the Argus, because there might be no one left. Perhaps the best thing he could do is stock up on food, supplies and turn this ship toward un-known regions of space. Maybe there is a suitable planet where people like lieutenant Gains and lieutenant Maxime could settle down and start families. He closed his eyes and began to pray to the gods for guidance.

The gods failed to answer. Instead lieutenant Lapointe knocked on the door and Hallis checked himself to make sure he maintained composure. “Enter!” He called out and the lieutenant opened the door. “Sir, colonel Bridgeford wants you to come down to the Alchemist’s quarters, something about Bear and his religious rights.” The ship’s old man stood up and sighed under his breath that Zeus was too busy to even let him finish his prayers. Lapointe overheard part of the quiet comments and asked for the admiral to repeat himself. “Nothing, you need to worry about” was his response as he left the room.

Private Parts was in a corner of his room refusing to come out as long as Bridgeford stood at the door. On the other hand lieutenant Bear was calmly trying to have a conversation with the colonel. He gave no appearance of a man that was temporarily under arrest pending a decision from the admiral. “What’s the problem?” Hallis asked in a matter of fact tone. Bridgeford responded, “The lieutenant has been getting narcotics from the alchemist. Claims he needs them to have a conversation with ghost grandparents.”

Bear chuckled and because of the throat wound he received aboard Toaster One, the sound was guttural and unpleasant. “Admiral, I am here because my grandfather visited me in a dream. He told me my spirit guides have something to show me before we go to Gomorrah.” Admiral Hallis believed in the gods and prayed regularly, but he wasn’t a priest and this was not something he wanted to deal with. “My rules are simple. No unnecessary drug use.” Lieutenant Bear interjected again, “Sir, while my throat healed, I accepted nothing for the pain. I bore the burden alone and in silence.” This was a statement of fact that no one would dispute. Doctor Lewellyn had mentioned in the

command meetings several times that the effort of simple speech and swallowing must have been hell.

The ship's old man paused and scowled for a few moments. He hated all the drug dealer issues that recently became present aboard his ship. "Do your religious rights under the supervision of the doctor. And I want every last narcotic accounted for." Both Bridgeford and the lieutenant nodded their understanding. "Thank you sir." Bear responded in obvious gratefulness. "Sir, if I may say one more thing while I have your ear." Hallis looked at him and said he could proceed. "An old woman, who called herself Dyanara, came with my grandfather. She told me to tell you that in this war you must choose between two enemies. She said for me to sing this song so you would know it was truly her." The lieutenant broke into verse but since his once finely tuned vocal cords were either scarred or shredded beyond healing, he savaged the notes. Still the admiral's face paled as he recognized the song. "Enough lieutenant!" He shook his head and looked at the floor. "Thank you for that information and tell the good doctor to talk to me if he has any problems." Bear saluted and left the area.

Bridgeford joined Hallis and Lapointe on the return to CIC "What was that all mumbo-jumbo about? You went white as ghost when he started to sing." The colonel's annoyance with the mystical stuff was evident in his tone. Hallis paused and swallowed. He decided to deal with this straight on, instead of leaving it to scuttlebutt. "Dyanara was my grandmother's name. She died when I was 4 years old and the only memory I have of her is her tucking me in bed one night and signing that song." As the old marine shook his head in disbelief, lieutenant Lapointe was profoundly affected by this revelation. "That doesn't make any kind of logical sense. If you don't mind my saying so, I think you should forbid his actions, until you get more information." The admiral stopped and looked at the lieutenant, "That's a very good idea, lieutenant. I'll have you and captain Reeves conduct a full investigation into the spirit world. You can submit me a report in 2-weeks." Colonel Bridgeford broke into a laugh, "Yea, I'm sure the captain will love that and his report will be real informative; all 3 words, "go frak yourself."

XOXOX

"Chief, do you have a clue about what you're doing?" Cupcake was on the flight deck talking to Forester. The chief looked at her, shrugged and stated not knowing had never stopped him before. And that he sure as hell, didn't have a clue when he got ice-cold battlestar engines to start. Major Assuras smirked and couldn't resist saying she was always wondering about that. "Well major, it was actually pretty easy. Normally it takes 3 days to heat the engines before you can start a tylium fusion reaction. The captain noted that a solium grenade detonates within 8 degrees of what is needed for the engine start." Assuras' curiosity overcame her disbelief and she motioned him to continue his story. "Well, we drilled out half the fuel injectors and installed valves we could open and close by hand. Then we rigged a cluster of grenades and hung them dead-centre of the combustion chamber." The chief smirked as he noticed a former Poseidon deck hand had stopped to listen too. "We just had to time the detonation with the introduction of fuel and turn the engines on at the same time. It took 2 tries." Cupcake's comment of "Frak

me” was echoed by the deckhand who immediately wondered how they timed it without a computer. Forester smirked, “I counted backwards from 3.”

“Ok, this is what I’m trying to do, install a raptor nav-console in a raider.” Assuras went back to that questioning look and wanted to know why he would do that. “I got to thinking, Max and Gains said that the raiders that attacked the Poseidon were cockpitless. And when we were aboard the basestar and I harassed the sleeping toaster, Lapointe said it triggered some sort of network reaction. I’m just wondering if...” The major intercepted his comments saying she could see where this was going. Forester put a hopeful smile on, “Exactly, I’m willing to bet there must be some sort of master navigational access thingy or something.” The major paused and considered everything, “Proceed on my authority but stop short of making any final connections. I want Reeves or Lapointe to make sure there is nothing that can come back to bite us in the ass. Watch there be a fraking locator beacon on those birds. ”

The chief raised his hand and gave the thumbs up sign and 2 men walked over to the raptor and began the removal of the console. This little action appeared to lift the spirits of the knuckle-grinders present. Obviously this was a project several of them had been looking forward to doing. Forester then asked Assuras to come into his office for a moment; he wanted to have an off-the-record conversation. “Cupcake, Scott isn’t gay. He isn’t a virgin. And I can honestly say he thinks about you, a lot.” The major wasn’t expecting this conversation but she wasn’t going to pass up an opportunity to find out more. “How do you know? Because he certainly doesn’t show it.” Forester calmly explained that he has known the captain for a long time and that he wants something more for his friend. “Although he isn’t sad, I’ve never known him to be happy. The man is like a dog that has been beaten too much. Just stick with him and he will eventually come around.” The major sighed and let it be known that she felt her actions were like those of a teenager and not his superior officer. “Not at all sir, the heart doesn’t care about rank. Besides, you still get your job done and that’s all that counts.”

“So how are you handling being alone?” Cupcake felt better about her unrequited love and wanted to return the favour. “Every morning when I get up I expect to see Alana there, smiling at me. You never know just how much someone was part of you, until they are gone.” The major reached over and took his hand into hers to comfort him, as a tear rolled down the man’s face. “I cry myself asleep. I cry when I expect to see her and she doesn’t show up. And every fraking night, in my dreams, I’m cursed to relive her death.” He began to openly weep and she embraced him, gently coaxing him to let it all out. “I just want to find some dark hole in the ground and curl up and die.” There was nothing she could say; instead she just continued to hold the man as he grieved.

Chapter 19: Divine Intervention

The Argus slowly came upon the planet Gomorrah and excitement grew amongst the ship’s crew. Everyone was getting at least one good meal a day, and taking an orbit around the planet not only offered a chance to fully stock the ship with food. But there were the remains of both an old human settlement and a cylon outpost to explore. This

offered the chance of finding other needed items, like fabric to repair uniforms or make bedding materials. It also meant a little R&R for many of the crewmen. Regardless of whether the battlestar's FTL drive would get them home or not, they would at least be able to confront future adversity prepared. Less captain Reeves, the daily command meeting began.

"I thought oceans and stuff were supposed to be blue." Colonel Bridgeford was a soldier and not a scientist. Seeing purple bodies of water truly disturbed him. Mr. Lapointe answered his concerns, "Normally yes, and there are normal bodies of water located elsewhere on the planet. But these are filled with a small purple plankton type creature. The good news is the water is drinkable and the purple guys are an exploitable resource. I imagine they were the reason the colony choose this area for settlement." The admiral wanted to hear more and asked for a more detailed report.

"The creatures multiply very easily and give off large amounts of high quality methane gas. They resemble plankton but really aren't at all. In fact they are slightly larger and are extremely high in protean. We could construct a 10,000 litre tank and use it to augment our current methane fuel operations. Thereby ensuring that our ship's engines are used solely for the purpose of flight. Not to mention the additional nutrition supplement." Since two-methane powered generators had been built in order to exploit the comet's resources, this was just one more thing that would help ensure their survival. Hallis just calmly said to make it happen.

Doctor Lewellyn was impressed with the idea of being able to raise purple fish on board the ship for food. "That has got to be the best thing I have ever heard. Perhaps we could clear out a space someplace, put down some dirt and raise some crops too." Everyone looked at the man like he was nuts and the doctor decided to drop the subject. "Ok, not much to report. Lieutenant Bear has re-decorated sickbay and turned it into some sort of ritual centre." He shook his head chuckling with reference to the religious symbols that now covered almost every spare inch of wall space in his workplace, "Dave I understand you don't want to interfere with religious freedoms, but why did you choose me to handle it?" The response came from Bridgeford and it was a simple statement of fact. "Bear's religious pursuits involve narcotics and you're the doctor." That ended the conversation, and switched onus to major Assuras.

"I've got 3 issues, the colonel was busy and I spoke to Reeves on the wireless. He is having some minor problems with his crew working with Ford, but assures me he has it under control." Hallis listened quietly and the colonel retorted that he hoped Reeves took his suggestion about giving him the room near the airlock. The major ignored the comment and continued, "I gave chief Forester permission to cannibalize a raptor and install components in one of the captured birds. He has some theories about being able to access cylon databases or something. He is under orders to not make the final connections until captain Reeves sets up some safety protocols."

Lapointe wanted to know why the major didn't assign him. "Thank you Mr. Lapointe but that leads me to my final issue. I'm worried about the chief." The doctor became

concerned and asked for clarification. "I let his action slide on the basestar because it was just after Alana's death. But he recently sobbed in my arms and told me he wanted to die. We need a therapist but until we get one, I thought putting him and Reeves together might help him." Lewellyn immediately agreed and ordered the major to make it happen at the first opportunity. Everyone looked in a slight stunned disbelief at the ship's doctor. "What?! A potentially suicidal crewmen is medical concern and henceforth my department. I'm within my jurisdiction to issue that order." The admiral smirked, agreed and closed the meeting.

XOXOX

The ship's doctor admitted to himself that despite having his medical office turned into a ritual center, he, as well as several other shipmates, found what lieutenant Bear was doing fascinating. The lieutenant wasn't a priest or even formally trained by anything remotely religiously orthodox. Instead he practiced the things he learned from his family and others that were part of his community when he was growing up. It was still the Lords of Kobol that they worshiped but they did so in a very different way. Lewellyn quickly figured out that the names of the gods were only place markers. Something assigned to denote the elements and spheres of influence. Regardless of how they were worshiped, human beings needed something greater than themselves to place faith in. And whereas captain Scott Reeves was failing to be a religious conduit for the Argus, lieutenant Bear, without conscious effort, was beginning to fulfill that role. As re-supply operations were beginning, 15 people found the time to be part of Bear's drum ritual.

Lieutenant Bear had fashioned a drum from a metal container and painted his face, as well as the walls, with sacred symbols. He then sat in the centre of the room mixing a small amount of the narcotics, given to him by the doctor; with some herbs he had asked lieutenant Maxime to procure for him on his last trip to the planet. The man softly chanted as he worked and others began to sit down on the floor, holding hands and forming a circle around him. Once the concoction was complete, he produced a stone-axe and made a small cut on the palm of his left hand. The axe was something his grandfather had made and given to him when he was a child, and he carried it everywhere. The doctor was surprised at the bloodletting, but remained silent and made mental observations. The lights were turned off, the drumming began and the lieutenant's once beautiful voice started a raspy rhythmic chant.

The ritual continued throughout the night and save for the striking of the drum with the sound of his chant, Bear never moved a muscle. Scientific curiosities had brought the doctor to sit within the sphere of the spectacle, intent on gathering observational data. But despite his extensive training, the scent of the burning herbs and never changing rhythm of the sounds ensnared him and drew him in. He found his mind struggling to break free of his body and reason slowly slipping away from him. His final rational thoughts, as he surrendered to a night of dreams that involved everything and nothing, were that the narcotics must be making the lieutenant's experience something even greater.

It was at that moment he opened his eyes and found himself sitting on a windswept plane. A strange peace and serenity overcame him and he decided to lie down and watch the

clouds. He gazed at them like a child noticing how some looked like animals and other things. Unaware of the passage of time, the doctor was abruptly awoken by Bear. The lieutenant stood over him offering a glass of water. He spoke, "Welcome back to the land of the living. You were unconscious the longest. Perhaps next time you should not become fixated on the clouds." Lewellyn's mouth gaped open in a silent response and Bear continued. "Please drink doctor. The admiral will be here in a moment, and I need you to help me convince him of a few things."

The doctor could barely stutter the question about how Bear knew about the clouds, when the Admiral walked into the room. "You will forgive me for the surprise inspection, but I wanted to check in on things because of the drug use." At which point Lewellyn looked at Bear and dropped his glass of water in complete amazement. The lieutenant spoke calmly, "Sir, there was no narcotics in the incense, I was only the only person that used the drugs. It was 2 grams exactly and here is the rest for your inspection." He handed him a small pouch. Hallis nodded, took the sachet and handed it to the doctor saying he wanted it weighed and tested to make certain it was all there. But that he also wanted every person that partook in this ritual tested for drugs. The ship's old man was militant about putting an end to dope deals on his battlestar. Lieutenant Bear smiled and then informed Hallis that he and the doctor needed to discuss several urgent matters.

Chapter 20: Taking Control of the Situation

Reeves was awakened by a marine corporal with information that he needed to go to the flight deck. This usually meant that there was a private call from the admiral and that it was being put through a raptor's communications system. Not only did the aircraft offer a much more secure line but given the nature working conditions aboard the basestar, it gave some needed privacy. The captain thought to himself that it must be truly important if the admiral felt the need to wake him. The old man was normally very respectful of such things and wouldn't trouble a man during his off-duty hours without absolute urgency.

There were very few people on the flight deck, and no one thought twice about Reeves entering the raptor to take a call from the Argus. It had become common practice and the captain did so sometimes several times in a day. And since command officers were never really off duty, no one even considered the hour odd.

The call came in from petty officer Richards, "Captain this is a priority message please stand by for Argus actual." Reeves grunted his acknowledgement; the sleep was still in his eyes. A few seconds passed and the admiral came on the line. "This is Argus actual are you there Toaster Actual?" Captain Reeves responded that he was present and the line was secured. "Captain I have a problem and it's serious. One of our nukes is missing." There was a long pause on com prompting Hallis to enquire if Reeves was still there, to which he once again acknowledged his presence. "I'm sure I don't have to tell you what this means. As such I'm going to put as many people on the planet surface as possible. Most of Toaster One's FTL is still intact. In a worst-case scenario I want you to get these people home. Those are my orders." There wasn't much else that could be

said to the old man except to say that his commands were understood. It was now obvious to both men that Mr. Creepy wasn't some sort of agent being returned to colonial space, he was at the very least, a cylon sympathizer.

He left the raptor and headed back to CIC. Since sleep was no longer possible for him, he decided to pour himself into his work. The tension in command centre was so thick that it could be cut with a knife. Various crewmen were once again reacting harshly and even insubordinately to the presence of lieutenant Ford. Never amused by this behaviour, the Captain, in lieu of the information just given to him, found his tolerance exhausted.

Captain Reeves paced back and forth on the bridge, but his presence did nothing to abate the situation. Raising his voice to reiterate his commands was to no avail. Instead one insubordinate spoke out, "I'm not doing squat with that fraking scum ball. And if you were half the man you made us believe you were, you would execute the filth on the spot!" Slightly shocked, Reeves held his breath and pondered how his superiors would handle this situation. As he considered it, he continued to pace in front of everyone and 2 long silent minutes passed.

Reeves gave an order to one of the marines. "Sergeant, take lieutenant Ford to the airlock. Then put him in it and wait for my command." Several people smirked and shook their heads in agreement. Ford's face lost all colour, but he stood up without a sound and presented himself to the guard. The two men then walked down the hall and shortly the sound of the airlock opening and closing was heard. Now Reeves turned his attention to vocal crewman, who with cocky arrogance over his little victory voiced his approval.

Stepping within the personal space of the soldier, the captain glared at him cold and hard. He then took out his firearm and pointed it at the head of the insubordinate crewman. "Insubordination is not tolerated during a time of war." The man smirked that the captain wouldn't shoot him over issues with major A-Hole. To which captain Reeves responded by firing a bullet through the man's leg. As he fell to the floor howling in pain, Reeves countered, "OH No, I WILL shoot you over it. I just need a better reason kill you." No one spoke or dared breath a word, including the wounded man on the floor. Looking from face to face in a challenge to everyone, the problem was ended once and for all. It was obvious that captain Reeves was no longer the reluctant bridge officer. He had made the transition to war commander, and the Junk Yard Dog had not only just bit a man, he had marked his territory.

Folding his arms across his chest his voice dropped 2 octaves and he issued several orders. "Someone let Ford out of the airlock and see to the wounded crewman. Everyone else, get back to work."

XOXOX

The morning command meeting was delayed aboard the Argus. The alarming news from lieutenant Bear that a nuke was missing left the admiral and colonel scrambling with ways to try and keep this from being known. It had been verified true and the fear was that whoever stole the weapon might panic and detonate it before they could find out who

it was. Both Hallis and Bridgeford grunted under their breaths wishing that Reeves was there to conduct the investigation. In addition to his being methodical, he appeared to have a special knack for being discreet. They even wrestled with the possibility of sending Assuras to take command of Toaster one, but decided a change like that would only arouse questions. Instead Bridgeford was going to investigate the matter and do it under the guise of cleaning up the drug problems. In a weird twist of luck, the ship's dealer was controlled but not out of business. Despite the serious consequences, there were a couple of crewman that were exchanging sexual favours for some mild pharmaceuticals.

The two men walked into the ready room. Assuras, Lapointe and Lewellyn were already present. Hallis apologized to his officers and then looked at Lewellyn with cold eyes. "I've launched a full investigation to find out who stole the narcotics that were in lieutenant Bear's possession." He then made it clear that he was low on patience today and demanded lieutenant Lapointe's re-supply report.

As was his custom, the lieutenant stood up to deliver his information. "As you know haulers can't enter an atmosphere, so we have them in orbit around Gomorrah. A couple of atmosphere jumpers would have been nice, but the raptors are doing an acceptable job. This procedure saves on fuel and it's amazing how much the heavy equipment can carry. Food supplies will be replenished in no time." The admiral interrupted and said he wanted to make a last minute change to the shore leave schedules. "I'm granting the doctor's request to put Forester and Bear together. The chief keeps my planes in the air and the lieutenant is the closest thing we have to a chaplain. Send them down within the next 6 hours and put them next to that purple lake. I understand chief Forester fishes."

Attention switched to Lewellyn and the major. The doctor went first saying he had nothing further to add because he had already told the old man everything earlier. Assuras was equally short in her response. "Nothing of note sir. I have raptor 484 fuelled and ready to take me, Gains and Lapointe to the planet in 6 hours. We are going to try and make some marshmallows out of whatever we can find. And then who knows, perhaps run naked through the grass." The doctor snickered and told her to make sure she doesn't report back for duty out of uniform. Hallis half-heartedly smirked, stood up, opened the door and ushered everyone out of the room. However, Bridgeford remained.

"So if I'm to get this straight, Bear and Forester are going to be down on the planet surface together on some sort of sacred ritual. And this ceremony will tell them how to handle some sort of problem we don't know about?" Hallis admitted that it sounded insane but quickly noted that Bear did know about the missing nuke. The colonel continued. "Well that could be construed that he is the one that stole it and throwing us off the trail." The admiral became coldly irate and made it clear that despite the lieutenant's strangeness he would not steal a warhead and he was not an enemy collaborator.

There was a pause and the old marine relented saying he understood what it meant to know your men so completely that their character was beyond reproach. But still he

made it clear that his investigations would include the lieutenant. “There is a warhead missing and it threatens everyone. I’m going to do everything I need too and no one is exempt, including you.” Admiral Hallis nodded and said he wouldn’t have it any other way. He personally didn’t give any credence to this religious babble, but he couldn’t debate facts, so having the colonel become militant in his investigation wouldn’t hurt.

Chapter 21: Creepy Tails

A hauler had landed; food, as well as salvage from the old settlement, was unloaded onto the flight deck. Lieutenant Bear and colonel Bridgeford had a conversation in a nearby corner as the work progressed. “Say what you will about the scrap yard gang, but one thing you can’t say is they aren’t efficient about getting their salvage.” The colonel was making small talk as he attempted to question Bear. “Yes, they are and no colonel, I had nothing to do with the theft of the war head. You may not believe this, but Admiral Jacob told me about it. He said the cylons are in possession of it.” The old marine didn’t like the lieutenant’s quasi-psychic responses, also hated the new sound of his voice and decided to drop the issue. Instead he pointed toward chief Forester and the waiting raptor to let him know that it was almost time for him to leave. Bear saluted and walked toward his plane.

As the hauler was unloaded the lieutenant stopped to look at the various food items and objects from the old settlement. One of the crewmen on the deck laughed saying that the toasters didn’t even bother with the remains of the old colony when they took it over. But then he suddenly stopped and became sullen as it occurred to him that Gomorrah was once a group of people trying to form a new establishment that had been wiped out of existence. “I’m sorry sir, I guess their misfortune is our gain.” Bear grunted and stopped for a moment.

He noticed a large fireman’s axe and picked it up. He then looked at the deckhand and eased his feelings saying that he was certain the spirits of the past are happy that their sacrifices will help them with their future. “They have no need of these things, but our use of them, will help the spirits rest in peace.” Bear then held the large steel axe above his head and shouted back at the colonel. “Sir! Guns and bombs are coward’s tools. This is how I hunt!” With that he entered the raptor and began the pre-flight procedure as Forester sat in the rear wondering why he was ordered to spend time with the lieutenant by the doctor.

The colonel snorted to himself and mumbling under his breath that the lieutenant should have been a marine. He then watched the plane lift off and was shortly joined by the admiral and the crew of raptor 484. Hallis, without formalities, proceeded with business. He was short in his conversations telling his C.A.G. to not get too curious about anything and just take a casual look around. “I can’t put my finger on it, but Mr. Conoy is something more than a spy-guy. Do only what you have to.” Gains overhearing the commentary laughed and made it clear that for her shore-leave, she intended to finish her job as quickly as possible because she wanted to get out of uniform as quickly as

possible. Her intonation made it clear what she was talking about but everyone choose to ignore it.

Just like the previous raptor, Lapointe, Gains, and Assuras entered the plane and promptly took off. Hallis and Bridgeford walked away from the flight deck, both men commenting how they disliked all this unknown variable felter-carb. The old marine summed it up best, “woogie-boogie intelligence reports. Spies that can’t give a straight answer and a missing nuke. Things are nicely F.U.B.A.R” The admiral rolled his eyes noting that he missed the good old days with the food and water crisis. “At least back then, Gains was too hungry and tired to worry about frakin.”

Aboard raptor 484, the major was the first one to speak. “Ok people, I want to use as little as possible of our shore leave. So let’s just scout out the area and get the frak out of there.” No one disagreed but everyone appeared apprehensive. Noticing their uneasiness, Assuras asked Lapointe to brief them with any information he had on the area. The lieutenant responded, “It’s the old cylon base. During the first war, Galactica and another battlestar blew it up. Since then no one has ever returned to it. After the war the colonies focused on things closer to home. Gomorrah is far and remote with little strategic value. None of the re-supply crews have explored this area because the admiral is scared there might be some old toasters waiting to start up again.”

Major Assuras paused momentarily as she flew the aircraft into the atmosphere. She then spoke a warning. “You hear that people. Keep your focus because it isn’t happy-fun time yet. We may find ourselves going head to head with the enemy.” With foreboding silence the plane landed.

XOXOX

Over the next 24 hours periodic reports had come in from major Assuras on their progress. Nothing special was noted, mostly ruins and the possibility of some salvage and as far as the admiral was concerned, no news was good news. On the other hand things were starting to heat up aboard the Argus. The colonel was in the middle of conducting a search of the entire ship, looking for Mr. Conoy. Needless to say, that both the admiral and colonel were not amused and they were beginning to believe that the man they thought must be a spy was not one at all. Their greatest fear was that he was an enemy collaborator. He must have somehow gotten possession of the warhead and intended to use it to destroy the ship. The worry was that if he wasn’t on the ship; it would already be too late.

Bridgeford was in the admiral’s office yelling at some of his men, demanding to know how guards posted outside a room with no other exits couldn’t see a man leave. Hallis was present and after a few minutes he cut him off, ordered the men to remain silent and dismissed everyone. “It won’t do any good yelling at them. The man probably walked right past them and they didn’t notice or chose not to.” The colonel didn’t like the sound of this and bit his lip to resist verbally exploding at his superior. The admiral continued, “Let’s just reason this out. He must still be on the ship or we wouldn’t be here. Still it won’t hurt to look into it.” Colonel Bridgeford stood stoic and remained silent. “The only

aircraft landing on the planet surface have been raptors. Therefore I'm going down to the flight deck and see if there is anything I can find there. Because he couldn't have stepped onto a plane without being noticed."

The assurance of the admiral had a surprisingly calming effect on the colonel and he was finally able to combat his frustration enough to respond. "The entire ship is already talking, so I'm going to make a public address about looking for the man. It might help." He then began to wonder about how long it would be until Toaster one's arrival and was told that since they were here for just over 40 hours, so they could expect the captain in just over a day. Both men paused for a moment wondering, if Mr. Creepy did blow up the ship, how he planned to get home. Perhaps if he was a cylon sympathizer, there was something aboard the basestar he could use. After all, these problems had started shortly after they found the vessel. Having said all they could say, the two men walked out of the room and began their investigations.

Feeling like he was fumbling in the dark, the old marine entered C.I.C and took the public address system to make his statements about looking for Mr. Conoy. It was short and pointed, simply that they now had reason to believe that the man might be working with the enemy. Nothing was said about the missing nuclear bomb. Not only could this produce panic in some of the crew, but the wild card they were sure had the explosive, might panic himself and prematurely detonate the bomb, if he knew they were aware of its absence. Only petty officer Richards made a comment and that was to say she knew the man was slime. The colonel shot her a dirty look but sat down at a terminal and demanded someone make the old thing display the weapons inventories.

In the meantime, Hallis was questioning people on the flight deck trying to make certain he was correct in his assumption that no one could have gotten off the ship unnoticed. The lieutenant made it clear that it was impossible because apart from the haulers, there were only 2 raptors that had taken off since the disappearance, Cupcake's and Bear's. The admiral shook his head feeling slightly secure that Mr. Conoy couldn't get off his ship, when he noticed small metal containers being loaded into the back of a hauler.

"What are those?" He demanded. The young lieutenant smiled and calmly explained that chief Forester came up the idea before he left. "Instead of having raptors make multiple landings on the planet surface, these empty boxes are loaded on them when they bring supplies to the heavy equipment. They are then dropped from the air to teams gathering supplies on the surface. It saves a lot of fuel!" The ship's old man just closed his eyes when he heard the information. And in disbelief the young man spoke again, "Sir that would be insane! There is almost no room and he couldn't fit extra air. Plus these boxes are bolted shut and dropped without parachutes. It would be like putting a mouse in a soup can and throwing it at a wall." Admiral Hallis just groaned because no matter how dangerous it might be, there was a way off the ship.

It was about that same moment word came from bridge that the communications had been lost with Cupcake. And the colonel had something important to ask, "Admiral, did you order Cupcake's raptor armed with a nuke? Because according to the records you

ordered Lapointe to have it armed 20 minutes before it took off.” Hallis groaned again because as things became clearer, they got muddier.

XOXOX

Mr. Conoy’s mind faded in and out of consciousness due to lack of oxygen. The fall to the planet’s surface was hell and he was fighting the feeling of just letting go of this life. A dull ache was in his legs and he wondered if they were broken. If they were, there would be no reason to continue and perhaps suffocation would be an option. His previous mission was now officially botched and he couldn’t see the value of worrying further about the decrepit Argus. He began to surrender to the darkness affirming to himself that everything would soon be better. But something deep inside his psyche stirred and his hands reached up and removed his helmet. As the air pierced his lungs, he painfully gasped. In a dim haze, he checked his legs and noted that they were sore but not broken. He wasn’t finished with this life yet and he had a new mission to complete.

By cylon or human standards what he had done just done was insane. Leoben had stolen a pilot’s flight gear and stowed away inside a titanium box in the back of a hauler. He had to dangerously lean out his oxygen supply and use a small explosive charge to in order to get out of it before it hit the ground. Not an easy task because they were made small and strong. The construction minimized the possibility they would be damaged when they hit the ground.

Regardless if it was suit design, skill in the deployment of the explosive charge that he used to blow the open box, during it’s freefall, or just plain luck that kept him from being killed; he managed to make it to the planet surface without being noticed. Grinning, he decided that a divine power loved him and it assured him of the righteousness of his mission. Still, death would have been so much easier, even if it wasn’t very entertaining. Sitting up he spoke to himself, “Anyone can die, so you might as well make it an interesting experience.”

He got up and took off his suit and due to curiosity he examined it. With more grinning he noted that there really wasn’t anything useable from it, and although the suit maintained oxygen integrity it was now basically garbage. His parachute wasn’t much better. So he quickly hid what was left of them and preceded to get his bearings. He had managed to convince someone to smuggle his nuke onto the planet. But he wasn’t on Mr. Conoy’s team in this war and he didn’t want to run the risk of him suddenly coming to his senses and ruining all his plans. Instead of just smiling this time, he clapped and laughed about his date with destiny; he was certain he would keep his rendezvous with the warhead. He just had to make sure to deploy it where it would do the most good. Softly he chided himself, “As we stand in the river of time, what has happened before will happen again. Good bye Gomorrah.” He then began to whistle and walk off the pain in his leg.

XOXOX

Major Assuras and her recon party spent the majority of the time walking around the old ruins of the former cylon outpost. It would appear that the destruction of the base was thorough because the highpoints of their mission were the periodic check-ins with the Argus. "Man, the Galactica really blew this place to pieces. There isn't anything worth finding here." Gains was bored and had her mind on being some place else. The major chimed in saying that she just wanted to check the tree line close to the area and then was going to call it quits. She noted that if re-supplying was going according to schedule, the party would begin in a few hours and she had no intention of missing it.

They ventured several hundred meters into the tree line. The forest was wild and unspoiled. Sasha suddenly stopped and motioned to everyone to take cover. The major waited readying her side arm. "What is it lieutenant?" She took out her binoculars started to scan the area. "The birds suddenly stopped making noise." Lapointe looked at her curiously, and without stopping her scan of the area, she softly spoke again, "Lieutenant, that means something nastier than us has scared them off." She pointed in a direction and handed the binoculars to major Assuras. She looked and then cursed that the party was being crashed before it began, as she saw a cylon centurion walk into a clearing about another 500 meters away from them.

"Nothing too much to worry about, it's just like we got rid of on Toaster one." Aircraft engines broke the silence and a heavy raider came into view as it landed in the clearing. They quietly backed off several more meters for more advantageous concealment. The major continued to watch and give the play by play of what she saw. A woman walked out of the plane, she was tall, blonde and proceeded to talk to the centurion. "Frak I hate traitors!" A moment later her jaw dropped open as 2 more identical women emerged from the aircraft. "What the frak is this frak? Triplets?!" She passed the binoculars to lieutenant Gains who quickly added that there were triplets plus a set of twins and the twins were Mr. Conoy's brothers. Assuras gritted her teeth gave the order to quietly bug out of the area. She didn't like the idea that the toasters had somehow created some sort humanlike android.

They began moving back when a hail of bullets came from the direction they were heading. Assuras was momentarily stunned as she regarded the stature of two new centurions that were quickly advancing. Gains knocked her to the ground with a sudden foot sweep. As her face met the grass, she scrambled away on her stomach. Meanwhile Gains and Lapointe dove for cover and in moments found themselves surrounded by the enemy.

The shooting stopped as the 3 blonde triplets and Mr. Conoy look-alikes approached. One of the blonde women spoke, "Ahhh god must love us! You know you should just put your arms up because otherwise we'll have to throw some really big grenades at you." Mr. Lapointe glanced momentarily at Sasha and then slowly stood up with his hands in the air. Again the blonde woman spoke, "Well geez, how did I know lieutenant Lapointe would be the first to stand up?" Sasha Gains was disgusted with her companion and for a moment considered her options. Alone her choices were limited, so she decided to follow suit and hope for opportunities later.

Under the hail of bullets, the major managed to scurry several meters away before getting her feet once again beneath her. She ran blindly through the forest, this was life or death and there was no time to think of her companions. Gunfire ricocheted all around her and she tried to react as they had taught her in basic training. Her lungs burned and her legs ached. The centurions seemed to be everywhere and she panicked wondering how long before she ran directly into one. In the distance she saw what might be remains of the old human outpost and she headed towards it. The sound of the heavy raider above her became evident and in seconds even more intense gunfire erupted. She began a zigzag pattern of running trying to avoid being hit.

Adrenalin filled every muscle of her body as everything dissolved into a nonsensical haze. A metal door on a concrete bunker came into her view and she instinctively headed toward it. And as she approached within 50 meters of her destination, a fair sized tree suddenly fell besides her, having been cut down by bullets. But this was the last, because suddenly the gunfire stopped and she was freely allowed to reach her destination. Assuras pulled open the door, slammed it shut behind her and collapsed on the floor gasping. As she caught her breath, she looked up and saw what appeared to be numerous frozen bodies. “What in the frak is this frak?” was her comment.

Chapter 22: Mission Madness

Forester helped Bear build a shelter and gather wood for a fire. He felt awkward around the raptor pilot was fed up at receiving one-word responses to his numerous attempts at small talk. He blurted. “L.T. what’s the fraking agenda? Get naked and chant by the fire?” He received a hearty laugh from the lieutenant and was told to call him by his first name, Rising-moon. The chief looked at him thinking that was a mouthful and asked if he could just call him Moon. The response was that as long as he didn’t salute, he could call him anything he liked and he was free to take off his clothes if it made him comfortable.

The majority of the late afternoon was spent fishing in relative silence. Moon caught the most but regardless of size, threw them back. As far as he was concerned there were other things available to eat and he didn’t see the justification of sacrificing a creature without reason. On the other hand, Julian caught two small fish and kept them both. He was of the opinion that it might be a long time before he could enjoy fresh catches again. The night approached, Bear started the fire by hand and helped cook the fish. As they ate their meals, the stars grew brighter in the sky and the atmosphere slowly took on an ominous tone.

Wearing only a simple loincloth, with the small stone axe slung at his side, Moon drew symbols on the ground with salt. Julian watched in bewilderment and he found himself slowly being pulled into the moment, despite it not having officially begun. He spotted a bowl of facial paints that Bear made from various plants and started to copy one of the symbols on the ground. Moon finished the last symbol and looked at the chief and pointed to his forehead. “That one means love. See, Aphrodite guides your hand.” He

sat down and threw some herbs on the fire to generate the necessary sacred smoke. Momentarily as everything started to become surreal, Rising-moon began to drum and chant. Forester closed his eyes, breathed deeply and tried to relax. When he opened them, the lieutenant was gone and the forest was silent.

The chief stood up, looked around and called out for the lieutenant. A soft female voice responded from inside the crude fashioned shelter he and Bear had made. "You always panicked so easily." Julian turned abruptly and the woman from inside pushed back the door covering, stepping out. He fell to the ground as he stared at her; it was Alana his wife. "It's good to see that even in death I can still make you fall for me." In a mixture of confusion, fear and emotional pain, tears erupted from his eyes and like hurt animal; he let out a primal scream. Alana just stood and patiently watched.

"Yea... I was kind of warned that dead people have this effect on the living." On his knees Julien continued to sob believing this to be some sort of insane drug hallucination, but then he began to feel an intense burning sensation on his forehead. In a strange way it called him back to normalcy and he finally spoke to his deceased wife. "You're dead!" Alana sarcastically responded, "Well you were there when it happened." She smiled at the man and they shared an uneasy laugh. "I don't think this will last forever, so are you going to come over here and kiss me or what?" The chief took a hesitant step and then quickly crossed the distance. He threw his arms around her and hungrily kissed her hard. Cradling her head in his hands, he once again experienced the sweetness of her mouth and the softness of her body. It wasn't until this moment that even he could fathom how much he had missed her. His heart ached and he decided that he didn't care about living anymore, if he couldn't be with her.

Alana broke off the embrace and pushed him back. Like a scornful mother she pointed a finger at him. "Oh no you don't! I heard that!" Julian looked at her in shock and tried to explain that he just wanted them to be together again. "You will eventually get here on your own. Besides the toasters really did a number on us and there are line-ups in the underworld right now." She sat down on the ground and made it known she would be more comfortable if she could put her head in husband's lap. The chief happily complied and she continued to speak. "You're not going to like hearing this, but the war is over and we lost. There are some survivors but for the most part, the colonies are gone. Not much left but nuclear waste lands."

"Tell Scott I said thanks for the funeral and that I understand now why it was so hard for him to do." The chief leaned down and kissed her lips, finding them just as warm as he remembered. Once again reading his thoughts she retorted, "You're not kissing my corpse, so it doesn't work like that." The deceased woman smirked and shook her head as she looked into her husband's eyes. "Down to business before I fade out." She reached up and held his face with one hand. "Being a ghost doesn't give you the ability to see the future. But I can tell you things you can't see, like what's going on around you. For example, you're inside enemy territory and they are just waiting for a real basestar to show up. Not like that old hunk of junk you cannibalized." Julian smirked and played

with Alana's hair to which she responded by pinching his cheeks and giving a stern scolding look.

"This is a very remote cylon outpost and there is something called a resurrection facility on this planet. There really isn't anything else here and nearest I can figure, Toaster one was sent over a decade ago to be a kind of caretaker of this area." She swallowed hard, "which leads to a new problem. The toasters are new, improved and you got to get Max and take out an airfield." The chief stopped being playful for a moment and looked at her with serious eyes and confusion. "There are not many humans left and you're all going to die if you don't do something. Max is about 2km up the lake from you and you'll find the airfield in about 5km in the same direction."

Alana began to relate details of a plan in which there was a heavy cylon raider that routinely landed at a fuelling depot on the far side of the airstrip. "There are 3 centurions. Two of the new kind, 1 of the old and you're pop guns won't do much against the new guys, so blow the fuel station. Don't worry, the raider can take it. After that, you and Max bomb the squadron on the ground and bug out." The chief shook his head and informed her that the flaw to her plan was that neither lieutenant Maxime nor himself were fighter pilots. So perhaps it would best be left to Bear.

"Bear is needed someplace else. And there is no one else to do the job. Taking off isn't that different from using an atmosphere jumper. As for the bombing, all I can say is try dropping a lot of them in a straight line." Forester began to shake his head again and was prevented from speaking with a finger placed on his lips. "I out rank you so consider this an order. And there is nothing against regulations that say a dead lieutenant can't order a chief." She cracked a wry smile, Julian saluted and both of them laughed. "Listen, whatever you do, don't try and save Lapointe. I'm sorry I can't tell you more, so suck face with me because I'm already fading out." The man passionately embraced his wife and in moments she was gone.

Bear stood over the chief offering him a glass of water. "My apologies for the intrusion but we have work to do." Forester took the glass of water and looked around in confusion. "Tell the lieutenant that it will be a vertical take off like the atmosphere jumpers. But set the stabilizers first and keep his thrust up. Also there is a brain box in the back of the ship. You can't miss it and before you fly, rip it out." He then picked up the old fireman's axe and made a small cut on either side of his cheeks. "Your friend is that way." He pointed in a direction up the lake. "I have to go rescue Cupcake and Gains." The man then began to run off in the opposite direction and the chief yelled back that the centurions were new and improved. "I know! What do you think the axe is for?" was the response he received as the man disappeared out of sight.

XOXOX

Things were going accord to plan for Mr. Creepy. He had made contact with the cylons, told them he would share his recent memories later and told them where to find Assuras and her group. As he sat inside the heavy raider, excitement raced in his veins wondering

who was going to die first. He just had to make certain Lapointe didn't get killed. If he died, it could ruin all his plans for the future.

The plane landed and everyone filed out. One of the blonde women spoke, "Their heat signatures are just over there. You know it would just be easier to kill Lapointe." Leoben laughed, referred to the woman as number 6 and told her that it would save time to just keep him alive. The female just shrugged gave the go ahead to proceed with the attack.

The combat was one sided as to be expected. But somehow Cupcake managed to escape. He watched her run in a zigzag pattern to avoid the gunfire. "Looks like the major is going to make it inside the facility. That's going to complicate things a bit." Another Leoben rolled his eyes and sighed about this all having happened before. One of the six's shrugged her shoulders stated the obvious. "Well it certainly means we can't just drop a bomb in there. Things would be so much easier if none of the humans were part of god's plan." The close proximity fire ceased and she turned her attention toward the other two that had dropped for cover.

"Ahhh god must love us! You know you should just put your arms up because otherwise we'll have to throw some really big grenades at you." A few seconds later lieutenant Lapointe stood up and surrendered. She spoke again, "Well geez, how did I know lieutenant Lapointe would be the first to stand up?" Grudgingly, Sasha also stood up and surrendered.

"So what are we going to do with them?" A different six was talking and responded to by another. "Well Lapointe we sit down and have a nice little chit chat with. As for lieutenant Gains, I say we interrogate her and wait until the basestar arrives, then send her to a reproduction centre." The old centurion, that major Assuras had spotted earlier walked up to the group and spoke in his mechanical voice, "By your command." He was given the ok to proceed from one of the Conoys, not Mr. Creepy. "The human has entered the resurrection facility. We can not remove it without damaging or destroying the download receptors or the biologicals." It was a statement of the obvious but the old models were known for doing that.

Gains was restrained and Lapointe wasn't. Instead he was seated beside Mr. Creepy inside the heavy raider "As you can see a lot has changed since being together on the Argus. Don't be scared, we are all here to help you." The plane lifted off and Sasha spat at her comrade, calling him a filthy traitor. One of the sixes coldly stared at her and informed her that she was going to let a number 3 model interrogate her. She then chuckled further adding that those cylons aren't known for being gentle or affectionate. The lieutenant through gritted teeth challenged her captors that androids couldn't be affectionate. "Not androids, a little more than that. We are just as flesh and blood as you are." Mr. Creepy had responded with a smug look on his face.

The aircraft landed and everyone disembarked. There was a small camouflaged building further into the forest and they headed toward it. Lieutenant Lapointe was in complete

confusion as to why he wasn't restrained. As if almost reading his thoughts Mr. Creepy put his arm around him and began to console him. Telling him how he had everything he would need to make him feel better. Lapointe began to sweat and his mouth went dry at the thought. He was a mix of emotions that ranged from a fading sense of loyalty to the fleet to a desire that if he released control, the cylons would take care of him. But most of all, his mind remained steadfast on Mr. Creepy. In some metaphorical way, he had fallen in love with him. And although he looked just like the other Conoys, the lieutenant could somehow tell the difference. It was almost a spiritual connection and that was strengthened by the medicinal white powder he supplied him. Reaching out toward each other, the two men held hands as they walked into the building.

The building extended slightly underground and was comprised of a long corridor with 6 rooms that branched off of it. Sasha was taken down to the end of the hallway and put in one of the rooms. Moments later 2 different statuesque blonde women entered the building. One laughed saying that someone called for a pair of 3s. A Conoy pointed to the room at the end of the hall and said that the human's name was Sash Gains. Together the two women walked to the door and opened it. Bound and sitting, lieutenant Gains looked at the identical women and involuntarily gasped with fear. One of the threes grinned and commented that she was an exceptionally cute human and they were going to have fun. Simultaneously cracking their knuckles, they walked in and closed the door behind them. A few seconds later Gains could be heard cussing, and then screaming in pain.

"They take such joy in the simple things." It was Mr. Creepy speaking. "So what are we going to do about getting the major out of the resurrection facility?" One of the 6's paused for a moment. She then touched Lapointe's cheek with her hand and he found himself gently snuggling his face into it. It was confirmation to him that he made the right choice, the cylons were going to take care of him and make his suffering end. "It's good to see it will be easy with him. Normally there are a lot of problems." She repositioned herself and then gently cradled the man's head against her waist. "We better get Assuras out before she damages something. I say we send in a face she recognizes. And I'm sure if anyone can talk her into surrendering, it will be lieutenant Lapointe. She did love him once." All those present nodded their heads in agreement.

XOXOX

The admiral had assembled, in the ship's galley, the entire deck crew and the master at arms for questioning. He had to ascertain that the nuke was indeed off the ship and on the planet's surface. With anger and frustration close to the surface, he began his interrogation the moment the guards closed the doors to the public. Through clenched teeth he berated sergeant Dole. "You look after the weapons. It never once occurred to you to ask lieutenant Lapointe what he needed a nuke for?" Looking his commander in the eye, as only a well-trained marine could, he calmly informed him that his job was small weapons and warheads were anything but small. Furthermore nothing on the Argus ever follows standard operating procedure. Hallis closed his eyes and slowly exhaled

before speaking again. “But you watched him take the bomb, put it on a weapon transport and wheel it out to the raptor.” The sergeant voiced quickly that he had.

Sweat made the ship’s old man clammy and he continued to consciously control his own breathing in order to keep from losing his temper. “And the rest of you helped him arm Major Assuras’ raptor.” All those present agreed that it was indeed loaded on the aircraft. Hallis was amazed at what he was hearing and secretly found himself wondering if Ford was right about enlisted personnel. They were essentially stupid because when S.O.P. wasn’t standard, they couldn’t figure out a logical course of action, which in this case was to call C.I.C to get a verbal confirmation on the order. True enough their current situation was anything but typical, but this was unacceptable. “Stores say that it was a 40 megaton bomb. Can anyone confirm that?” Uniformly everyone nodded that it was correct.

Chewing on a splinter of wood for a toothpick, the colonel sat in a chair watching the admiral’s investigation unfold. Removing the pick from his mouth he spoke to Hallis offering a suggestion. “Sir, might I suggest that we relieve these men of duty and sequester them to vacant area of the ship. Keep a lid on this until we have more information.” Admiral Hallis agreed with the suggestion and quickly gave the marine a set of orders to immediately carry out.

“Cancel all leave, bring the ship to condition 1. Screw fuel preservation and get a c.a.p. in the air, and start recalling everyone from the planet: vacation is officially over.” The colonel blinked twice at the mention of condition 1 and Hallis was quick to respond. “Mr. Conoy is either the enemy, a collaborator, or in the remote chance he is a spy, going after them. The only certainty is the enemy; and we must be ready.” He grunted and spat out his final words, “I lost the Poseidon and I’m not getting my ass served to me a second time.” Bridgeford called in his guards and proceeded to execute the commands.

XOXOX

Captain Reeves sat in his office contemplating his options. He wasn’t aboard the Argus, so there wasn’t anything he could do to help. Even if he was, he wasn’t certain what he could do. As he contemplated his next course of action, he found himself wishing he had a more experienced officer to bounce ideas off of. Alone, he decided that command really sucked. Then the grave realization of whom he had to turn to struck him. Scowling he made his way to CIC to retrieve the only experienced combat officer he had access to; relieving the soldier of his immediate duties, he ushered Ford into his office.

The ex-viper jock stood at attention, not wanting to warrant the volatile wrath of his commander. The captain slightly broke the tension by telling him to relax before he went into dialog. “We have a problem and I need some advice.” Shocked Ford volunteered to help anyway he could. “A nuke has been stolen from the Argus and it is believed to be on the planet. Mr. Creepy is suspect and missing as well; he may be working for the enemy. Additionally we have lost contact with Cupcake and Bear on the surface. We are 18 hours from rendezvous, given the situation, what is a feasible course of action?”

The lieutenant was stunned that a man who probably dreamed of killing him would dare to ask him for advice. Reeves picked up on the look and made it clear that although he didn't like Ford, he had a job to do, and he couldn't and wouldn't deny the man's superior command and combat experience. His first duty was to the fleet and he wasn't going to be negligent in that duty. Therefore, flushing Ford out of an airlock would have to wait.

Lieutenant Ford wanted to smirk because Reeves needed him, but his smugness was quickly beaten back by shame, as the remorse of his past mistakes surfaced and suppressed it. He enquired about the combat and mechanical status of Toaster one. The response was they had no combat abilities. The haul plating had been stripped to the bare bones leaving some sections exposed to space; there was next to nothing left of the ship. Ford paused a moment, to think before speaking, "Argus is at extreme geo-synchronises orbit around Gomorrah. Manoeuvre the ship at mid point between the two. That way we can act like a shield to anything that might come from the surface. How is our FTL?" "The answer was that it was disabled but the core engines were still intact. Some of the computer systems would have to be put back and range would be very limited.

"Priority should be to the FTL and to calculate out the next nearest resource planet. If Argus is destroyed we might have to take the survivors out of here and Gomorrah won't be safe." Finished Ford simply stared at Reeves. The captain finally broke the silence saying he would draw the admiral's attention to his help. "Sir, no matter what Mr. Creepy's involvement is with the toasters, the enemy is most likely on the planet's surface and a basestar on its way. Consider setting condition 1 aboard the ship."

Another long pause occurred between the two men and the captain enquired if there was anything else that needed to be said. "Yes sir, there is one thing. I know my mistake, I forgot about the job and made things all about me. But it's not all about the job either; it's about the people. You're a hell of a lot tougher than I ever imagined, but every so often everyone needs a pat on the back; push your men as hard as you push yourself and they will break. Most likely when you need them the most."

Like his nickname, the junkyard dog bared his teeth and was about to growl at lieutenant Ford but reconsidered it. He spoke through clenched teeth, "You were the hottest stick on the Poseidon, what the frak happened to you?" Ford cleared his throat, "I broke... Let's just say there was someone I wished had given me a pat on the back." He then saluted and without asking permission left the room. Reeves indulged the minor indiscretion. He didn't like the man anymore than before, but he didn't see any reason to break him further. Especially considering there was still work to do.

XOXOX

Lieutenant Maxime was lounging quietly on his back with a blade of grass in his mouth. He was daydreaming about Sasha showing up and all the wonderful naked things they would do together. He loved everything there was about women especially making love

to them. And he smirked to himself, because it appeared that he found his female equivalent. The feisty red head loved making love just as much as he did.

The tranquility broke. Chief Forester came bursting into the clearing beside the lake. “Max, we got toasters!!” The lieutenant rolled over and darted for his rifle. He looked to the area behind the chief but saw no one. Out of breath, Forester bounded into him. “This planet is a cylon outpost!” He gasped as he heaved the next words, “we got to take out an airfield.” Maxime was confused, questions darted through his mind and he stumbled to voice them and only got out the word “How?” Forester responded saying that Argus was an old ship and it’s obsolete systems couldn’t find a dagget in a pound. “The air field is most likely camouflaged; we have to steal a heavy raider to bomb it.” He then grabbed the man by his jacket and pulled him in the direction he was told to go.

The two men ran and the chief endeavoured to explain further. “There will be 3 toasters but not like we are used to seeing. And that cylon riffle won’t do crap against the new centurions.” Max stopped abruptly as he regained his ability to think and vocally objected that he didn’t know how to fly real planes. “It’s a vertical take off, just like an atmosphere jumper. Set your stabilizers first and keep the thrust up.” He then grabbed the man by the jacket again and started running once more. But this time it was Forester that stopped suddenly remembering that he couldn’t recall seeing the former chief ever use an atmosphere craft. Maxime wheezed his response; “I have twice.” paused and swallowed, “once in a simulator.” At that comment both men just looked at each other for a moment’s disbelief.

“You were with Bear. Where the hell is he?” The response was worse than he had hoped, the raptor pilot was not only occupied, he busy rescuing the major and Sasha. Visibly disturbed at the mention of his lover’s name, lieutenant Maxime pulled rank and demanded all the details before further running off again half-crazed. “Start talking,” was his command.

Forester was struggling to find a non-crazy explanation. Somehow dialog about the dead coming back and so forth just didn’t cut it in his mind. He sighed and offered, “Bear did that weird crap that he does and got some intel. Don’t ask me how because I don’t believe it either. But these are our orders and the plan we are to follow.” Despite his urge to run off to save Sasha, Max listened and decided to trust his long-time friend. And since he was told that lieutenant Bear, a more experienced soldier, backed them, he would follow his orders.

The two men continued the 3 km run toward the fuelling depot. The new centurions looked big and tough, it was obvious they didn’t have the firepower to destroy all 3 of them. The question was how were they going to blow up the fuel depot. “It would have been nice if Bear had cast a spell for explosives.” The lieutenant shook his head because he couldn’t see any way to blow something up with only an old cylon riffle. “We are human sir. Let’s just use our imaginations.” Forester wasn’t kidding in that comment, but Maxime couldn’t resist wanting to believe this was all a bad dream. He closed his eyes, “I’m imagining it exploding.” When he opened them again to see nothing had

changed, he grumbled, “Great plan chief.” The two then sat down in the wooded area that faced the clearing and made notes in the dirt.

Emptying their pockets, Forester produced a knife, a large ball of home-made fishing line and the last letter his wife had written him, whereas Max put on the ground 3 condoms, Sasha’s panties, matches and granola bars. The chief looked at the undergarments and rolled his eyes. “Fraksakes Max, you’re banging the girl. Do you really need those?” The lieutenant eyed the man and bluntly noted that he was certain the chief wasn’t above keeping souvenirs. The two men smirked at each other and continued to examine their options.

“Fuel will explode if it gets hot enough. So we need fire.” Maxime was doing his best to sound like an officer and come up with a plan. Forester shook his head, “Sir, you need at least a small explosion to blow up the fuel. Otherwise it will just burn and the toasters might put it out.” The two men looked at each other in confusion. Finally Max smiled, “I got it!” He picked the knife and started to cut open bullet casings. “My last 3 condoms.” He continued, “I stuff one rubber really tightly with gunpowder and use your letter for a fuse. Then I make a slingshot with the other two.” The chief groaned at the ludicrous idea, and mockingly added, “Why don’t you mold the sticky granola bars around the homemade bomb to give it projectile abilities like a grenade”. “Now you’re talking chief!” The man smiled really goofy like and just continued with his idea. “Next you tie the panties to the end of your fishing line and circle wide along the tree line to the other side of the clearing. When you get there, pull on the line and drag the underwear across the ground in front of the toasters.”

Forester’s objections were silenced when he couldn’t offer another plan of action. So somehow he would weave the fishing line around the trees and other obstacles until he got to the far side of the clearing. Once there, he would begin pulling the panties across and the cylons would spot them and be distracted. At which point Maxime would shoot his last bullet through a fuel barrel stacked next to the heavy raider. He would then use his condom slingshot and catapult the homemade grenade into the spill. Max further argued that he had made the granola bars out of honey and animal fats. So he expected it would burn really nicely. “You never have seen a sugar fire, have you chief? It’s hot and sticky and when it explodes flaming pieces cling to everything.”

Chapter 23: Engaging the Enemy

The major collapsed under her own weight as she looked at the various bodies that literally lined the walls, placed in cubicles for storage. The pain of the physical exertions and the adrenalin of her fear took their toll and she vomited several times before her heart began to slow down. Wiping her mouth with the back of her hand her eyes then darted about in confusion.

She forced herself to stand and drew her side arm. With effort of will she took her steps toward the bodies. It became obvious that these weren’t actual humans in some sort of frozen stasis, but models of cylon beings. She started to walk towards the rear of the

place but then suddenly stopped at one group. The fear that shook her body was quickly surpassed by revulsion and she fought the feeling to vomit again. This particular model group was of an old man, perhaps in his 60s but it was a familiar face. He was one of her classroom flight instructors and had taught her air command psychology. Hostilely, she hit the glass wall encasing the body, but her hand bounced off leaving no damage. She now understood how the toasters had so easily defeated them.

She crumpled to the floor in her despair. The enemy was right under their noses the entire time. Quietly the rough and tough viper jock pulled her knees to her chest and curled into a foetal position. If they were this far out and could make robots this advanced, how could humans prevail? Feeling that she had not only failed her parents, but her entire species, she mumbled, and finally began to suck her thumb. A habit she continued into adulthood under extreme conditions.

Lillian finally passed out from exhaustion and lost track of time. It was loud rapping on the metal door that stirred her to consciousness. Commanding voices from outside beckoned, "Major Assuras! Open the door and you can live. We don't have any reason to hurt you." There were 5 cylons and one of the two 6s was being cajoling in her approach and it infuriated the 3s. She endeavoured to explain with a sigh, "I don't need to tell you there is a battlestar in orbit and even though it's old, it's more than a match for what we currently have on the planet. They destroy the resurrection facility and we can't download. Reinforcements are on their way, we just need to delay her." Uniformly both of the 3s rolled their eyes and then acknowledged that the major had a good set of ovaries. One of them pushed Lapointe to the door and urged him to talk.

He knocked gently and spoke softly, "Major, it's me, Sydney. Let me in." Again one of the 3s was quick to note that she wouldn't open the door and the same cajoling 6 responded that it was according to plan. "Lillian, they will let us survive as a species if we stand down." Dead silence came from the other side of the door. Lapointe looked at the women and enquired what was next and one of them called for a centurion to come.

It was obvious the one 6 was in charge of this as she did all the speaking. "Thumb sucking and all, she is operating according to her profile. But if for some reason she decides to retreat further into the facility, she will see all the models and that will ruin everything." The two 3s stood quietly and listened. They gave every appearance of somehow sadistically enjoying the fact that humans were so predictable. The blonde 3 continued, "The actual resurrection bed is located directly across the hall from her. If the centurion begins to knock down the door she will run to it and lock herself in. That should subdue the threat of her seeing more than she should." The modern heavy robot walked up and began to hammer forcibly on the door. Not sufficient to immediately break it, but enough to show that it would bust open in several. Inside the major's eyes went wide and she responded by jumping up and quickly spotting the adjacent room. She ran to it and slammed the door shut just as the centurion broke through. The 3s softly clapped their hands in appreciation and noted that took care of one problem.

Lapointe was brought again to the next door and he spoke once more. "Major they don't want to hurt you and they want me to come in and talk to you." Assuras retreated to the rear of the chamber and took cover on the far side of the resurrection bed. Despite the situation, she found the smell discomforting. She trained her gun on the door and watched as it gently opened and the big centurion pushed the lieutenant in the room and then closed it again.

"Traitor!!!" Assuras fired and the bullet whizzed past Lapointe's head into the doorframe behind him.

XOXOX

Bear was barefoot, running through the wooded area at a steady and moderate pace. He had torn off most of clothes and covered himself in mud and various other natural pigments. His mind was singularly focused and his movements were like that of animal intent on catching it's prey. Abruptly he stopped for a moment, crouched low and whispered in such a way that it would appear that he was having a conversation with someone. "Up there you say." There was a pause and he stilled his breathing. "Back of the neck and back of knee joints are the weak spots. But I will have to make strikes to the neck from the front or above and down. It will be difficult to get in-between the metal shroud and the head." He proceeded to make sure his gun was secured to his body then lovingly caressed the blade of the old fire axe and softly muttered a prayer asking it's strength to hold strong. Sticking close to the ground, the lieutenant began to stalk up like a wolf-dagget closing in on its victims.

Around the other side of some brush was a modern centurion standing watch. It's back was to Bear and it appeared to not notice the man sneaking up on it. The lieutenant's face was ferial and as he got within 3 meters of his goal, every muscle in his body tensed. Pursing his lips together, he made a sound like a wild bird. His whistle aroused hundreds of birds from their perches, momentarily darkening the sky. The large robot careened his head upward to evaluate the commotion and the young man seized the moment and pounced on the machine.

His first strike rang true and struck at the front of the neck sending the head flying off in random direction. The cylon's body then lifted its arm, guns firing, but the warrior dropped low and simultaneously managed to strike the back of one the knee joints knocking the robot to the ground. Then with a fluidic motion he brought the pick of the axe into the back of the machine, causing sparks and debris to shoot off in all directions. With a calm look he smiled to himself as he enjoyed the view of the destroyed mechanism.

Bear finished hiding the remains and continued to talk quietly to the person only he appeared to hear. "Yes granddad, I know you would have killed it in one blow but I needed 3." He wasn't sure how the cylons would react to a missing centurion or if their network registered the missing machine. But he figured a chopped up toaster told more than a missing one. And secretly he hoped that since he took the head off first, it had no

way or knowing what had attacked it. After all, the last sound it registered was a disturbance of birds who might have been frightened by, well, anything. And while in the woods, the lieutenant had noticed extremely large droppings of some sort of wild animal.

He spotted a well-concealed building on the far side of the brush and clearing. Running his thumb across the axe blade he confirmed that there were only nicks in the metal. He cracked a toothy smile and the crouched low to the ground once more. First he had to rescue Sasha, because he needed her to help get Cupcake. After that, he had no clue what to expect or do; he chuckled to himself, long-term strategies weren't a family trait.

XOXOX

Forester did everything he could to keep his opinions about the new lieutenant and his strategy for stealing the heavy raider to himself. He really gave it absolutely no chance for success, but he was going to give it his all, so that when he died, he could look his wife in the eye and say it was her bright idea that got him there. In a strange way, the chief looked at this entire situation as a no-lose scenario. If they succeeded he would have helped in the war effort and Alana would be watching him with pride. If they failed, as he believed, he would get to hold her again. He smiled politely at Max as he thought to himself how wonderful it was to find out that there was indeed an afterlife.

Max laid out that plan one last time. Undaunted by the possibility that the centurions would not share his interest in undergarments, Max couldn't see the fatal flaw in his plan. How do you weave fishing line around rocks, trees and other obstacles without being seen and then expect it to pull cleanly. Unwilling to argue, Forester took his orders like a soldier. But first he said to his friend, "Max... Sir, you know if Scuds wasn't a drunk and a coward, you would never have been made an officer." Lieutenant Maxime smiled at him and said something about how keeping his nose clean and doing only as he was told paid off in the end. But Forester just shook his head because the man was best suited to playing with girls and baking cakes. After all this time he still couldn't properly park a hauler without scraping the hull. With a last minute hug between the two men, the chief snuck off into the forest line.

20 minutes had passed and Forester was barely 40 meters into the woods. At the rate he was preceding it would be next week before he got to the other side. He paused and thought about his wife, she would call him a bigger fool than Max for going along completely with this strategy. Making a funny face he abandoned the entire "saved by ladies underwear scheme". Instead he just made his way to the opposite side of the clearing. He could now see very clearly one the reasons becoming an officer could be so hard. You had to prove to everyone that you had a brain before they gave you the authority to order men into danger.

He reached the far side and took a deep breath. With a force of willpower alone he ran out into the open clearing, started waving his arms and screaming. "Hey Toast-heads! Look at me! I'm a human!" The centurions turned around and opened fire on the man. The chief dove for the ground as dirt and debris ricocheted around him. His only cover

was behind a rock that was only big enough to sit on. And it was quickly disappearing as the bullets chipped away at it.

Max was momentarily stunned to see the chief doing something different from his plan, but he quickly recovered. Taking aim with the rifle it suddenly occurred to him that perhaps he should have listened to the chief and save more than 1 bullet, in case he missed. He had cut all of them open for the gunpowder save for one. It was too late to regret his past decision so he fired and nicked the side of one of the drums, fuel spilled out onto the ground. He quickly lit the paper wick and was surprised at how fast it burned. Again he cursed because he now realized that the cotton panties would have been better used. His concern for giving his friend every opportunity to stay alive really clouded his judgement. However, luck was on his side. The fat from the granola casing was ignited and burning well enough that he decided to throw it anyway.

Like a fireball it proceeded to fall apart in the air. Burning granola, fell like spit splatters across the field and the gunpowder finally burst with a feeble explosion in the air further raining down on the ground. Fortunately one part of the plan worked well, the aviation fuel on the ground made contact with some of the burning matter and its flame quickly spread to the other fuel drums. The centurions had turned their attention and began raining their assault in the direction of the lieutenant. As their firing drew closer, the tanks grew hotter and finally a handful of seconds after the burning began, they exploded. The fires burned hot and force of the eruption destroyed all that was nearby including the advancing robots, but save for the heavy raider.

As the fires died down the two men slowly got up from their hiding spots and looked at each other. Bewilderment slowly turned to laughter as they began to run toward each other. As the two men met, the chief threw himself to the ground and began to roll around in the grass like a child, kicking his legs in the air. This continued for several moments and finally they began to settle, breathing heavy from exhaustion. Max was the first to speak, "I can't fraking believe that worked. What did you do with Sasha's panties?" The chief stifled a laugh as he focused on the job at hand. "We must find and remove something in the plane called a brain-box." He then made his way to the craft.

XOXOX

"So you're cooperating with the fraking cylons!" Cupcake had a gun pointed at Lapointe and she wasn't going to lower it. He quickly retorted that it wasn't like that. That being an enemy sympathizer was the last thing in the world that he wanted to do but he had to face the cold realities of the situation. "Lillian, the war is over and we lost. Every single battlestar and ship in the fleet has been wiped out, the colonies are destroyed." The major ran up to him and stood in his face screaming that in war the enemy always lies to get what it wants. The lieutenant just stood with a remorseful face.

After much screaming and yelling the major finally slumped to the floor again and pulled her knees up to her chest. She thudded the butt of her side arm against her forehead trying to figure out what she was going to do next. But there were no ideas coming forth.

Lapointe once again ventured the chance to speak and she cut him off. “Sydney, shut your fraking mouth!” The lieutenant sighed and tried again as he pulled a small media device out of his pocket. “Lillian, they showed me this. It’s president Aidar giving an unconditional surrender. The war is over and we are out of jobs.” She just shook her head trying desperately to figure a way out of her current predicament and ignore what Sydney was saying.

“Major I’m not trying to hurt you. But the colonies are gone too. We are the only survivors and they will let us live if we don’t fight them.” She rolled her eyes at the man as he said the words. He walked over and sat down beside her but refrained from touching her. “Lillian, we are the last humans. They will let us settle this planet if we stand down.”

The major rubbed her temples and thought about captain Reeves. She started to hope that he would do another crazy manoeuvre, like when he rescued the crew of the Poseidon, and save her from this mess. As she thought of the man she found herself asking a strange question. “They will let us settle this planet?” The idea of pursuing a relationship with Reeves was now close to the surface of her thoughts. Lapointe looked at her and acknowledged that yes they could settle the planet. Major Assuras smirked and grimaced at the same time. The insanity of it all made her pause and consider her current state. Giant metal robots with big guns were outside the door, she knew that all her family was dead and that humanity was on the edge of extinction. But her mind pushed past this grave reality and wondered what it would be like to play house with the captain. She put the gun down and asked if Lapointe was certain they weren’t lying to him.

“Lil’ there is something else you need to know.” He paused for a moment and finally touched her cheek in a gentle stroke with the back of his hand. “Admiral Hallis has been taken prisoner and Toaster one was destroyed.” She looked at him in shock and he continued to answer the question her mind was scared to voice. “There were no survivors, Reeves wouldn’t stand down. Not even after the admiral ordered him to.” This had happened too fast and it didn’t make sense to her, but Lapointe rationalized it by reminding her how fast the Poseidon and the fleet had been destroyed.

Her mouth opened to scream but not a single sound came forward as her entire body tensed and then dropped into a spasm. She reached up like an infant searching for help and found the lieutenants arms slip around her body to hold her. Without realization to what was happening around her or why, Lapointe kissed her mouth hard and momentarily the pain she felt subsided. He pressed against her a second time and found even less resistance. The major was spent and couldn’t resist and couldn’t make sense of her surroundings. Like a drug-induced haze, everything around her became surreal and he sexually took advantage of her. Overwhelmed, her thoughts remained with the captain and the idea of what might have been.

Chapter 24: Back-up Plans

Toaster one was slowly coming up on the Argus. Reeves was in a space suit, on the remains of the hull, re-working the network connections to the FTL systems on the basestar. He quietly fumed because they could spool up the engines fairly quickly but the computer systems were going to be sluggish. He would have to do several tests but couldn't think of any way to improve performance. Lieutenant Ford had noted he did too well of a job stripping the ship for parts. As it now stood, several sections of the craft were exposed to space.

The captain could see the battlestar in the distance as he made a few final connections, then worked his way back to the airlock. He radioed the raptor on the flight deck and asked to be patched through to the Argus. He wanted a hauler sent over to pick up the last remains of their work. But he also wanted some food and basic necessities sent over. It was a prudent idea considering the possibility of Toaster one becoming their ride home.

Actual responded directly and the captain spoke in short sentences, "We should be in orbit within a few hours. Anyway you can send over a hauler of human needs?" There was a pause for a moment and an agreement that this was a good idea. The admiral responded, "I'll send over 2 haulers, load the one up, send it to me and unload the other and park it on your deck."

Reeves continued, "I've stripped this boat as much as possible. To do anything more will require a wrecking yard." Hallis thought about it for a moment and wondered if given their current situation they might reconsider sending goods the opposite way, but the question was shrugged off, as it wouldn't make much of a difference in a worst-case scenario. Admiral Hallis concluded the conversation and walked away. More or less the Argus was restocked and even had a surplus of food supplies. Most of the feature comforts were still missing aboard ship but at least he wasn't worried about slow painful starvation or freezing to death. Bridgeford intercepted the admiral on the way to engine room. He was enquiring about Toaster one's status and how the captain was holding up during his command.

"The man is like a machine in his efficiency and needless to say he is getting the job done. I expected nothing less from him." The colonel was inclined to agree; he would never forget how Reeve had to be ordered to perform the funeral service for someone who was like family to him. "There is one other thing too. He made Ford his acting XO." Bridgeford stopped in his tracks and looked at the man in dead awe. He could immediately understand why Ford would be the practical choice for an XO given the circumstances. But he never expected that Reeves could remove personal feelings so completely from a decision, or if he himself could have made the same judgment call, regardless of how much sense it appeared to make. Catching the look on the marine's face, the admiral commented that captain Reeves' ability to make tough calls was one of the reasons he turned command of Toaster one over to him and not his XO. The colonel simply snorted in response and asked what was the proposed plan.

"He's got the FTL drive operational again. I'm sending over two haulers, one to pick up the last of the parts and stuff. The other is to remain there in case it is needed. Zeus only

knows that those machines have saved our butts a couple of times.” In the end it all made sense to the two men and it warranted no further discussion.

XOXOX

The man-like cylons were inside the building, talking as Bear snuck around the perimeter. Bear was surprised at how much they appeared to be human and kept wondering what he would find inside one when he sliced it open. He was sure the opportunity would make itself present soon enough. Stealthily he moved closer to the building. The place was of advanced build and made to look like old bombed wreckage from the original outpost. If someone didn't examine the place up close, they would easily overlook it. Two of the 6s and Mr. Conoy were inside talking. Bear avoided detection by two centurions and crawled under a window ledge to listen.

“Oh, she is a screamer!” commented one of the 6s. Lieutenant Gains was in the distance yelling in pain. Bear wondered to himself what information could she yield that they didn't already know. With an outpost and an airbase they must know the location of the Argus and apart from that, what else could they want to know? But he, at the very least, needed an idea of where in the building Sasha was being kept. He kept his head below the window and strained to hear. Perhaps something in their dialog would yield an answer.

A 3 came in and approached Mr. Creepy, taking a seat beside him. “When are you going to share your memories?” She was curious to find out how exactly Leoben got onboard the Argus. Mr. Creepy groaned and responded. “I hate sharing memories because it takes away from the human experience.” Everyone present nodded in agreement, but the 3 talking pushed for further information.

“If you must know I was on the Pegasus trying to help a 6 make certain it was destroyed.” There was a sound of delightful acknowledgement because they suddenly realized who he was. “We had identified Cain as being one of those humans that are a serious threat. A 6 and I were dispatched to make sure things went according to plan. The ship had its networks taken offline in preparation for a 3-month overhaul. They should have been back online by the time of the attack, but unfortunately for me there were serious problems with their networks and I did everything to try and get them back online.” He paused for a moment, and Bear could make out the sound of him sipping what he believed to be coffee or tea. “It became obvious that someone was purposely sabotaging the system, keeping it offline. Sadly 96 hours before the attack, someone framed me for the problems and admiral Cain took me into custody. With it being that close to the war, I played along to avoid detection.” He slurped his drink again and asked how 6 was doing.

The 3 who was doing the questioning raised her eyebrows and pursed her lips. “Sounds like you were dealing with a shadow.” She paused and poured herself something to drink. “This coffee stuff is very addictive, I can understand why humans consume so

much of it.” Taking a sip herself she continued, “The Pegasus got away and we were wondering why neither you nor 6 downloaded. Still I would like you to share those memories. We could all learn from your experiences. Especially if you have anything that will help against the shadows.”

Leoben quickly agreed to share, after he had another coffee and a piece of pie. He appeared surprised to find out that the Pegasus escaped and 6 didn't download. He was then informed that there were other vessels surviving, under the protection of an obsolete battlestar, the Galactica. She had taken a group of refugee ships and headed out into deep space, under the pretence of going to earth.

The room grew silent for a moment and Mr. Conoy broke that silence by enquiring about lieutenant Gains. “Are you certain that the north-east room is secure enough? I mean, no one can climb down through that vent on the roof and rescue her?” One of the 6s responded, “I've got 2 centurions patrolling the perimeter of the building. I'm certain nothing will get past them.” This was the tidbit of information the lieutenant was hoping to receive. He knew about the patrol and with the stealth that one uses to hunt animals and good timing, he had slipped in between them without notice. He looked up, noting that now the challenge was to scale a wall in equal measure.

He closed his eyes and used his other senses to see. The voice of his grandfather was once again heard in his mind. “There is a strong breeze today and when the machines walk you can hear it blow through them.” His surroundings became silent and harmonious at the same time. The beat of his heart pounded in his own ears so loudly that he thought for a moment he would die of a heart attack. But slowly he heard the inaudible soft sound of wind against the metal parts of the centurions. Without opening his eyes, he felt for a place to hold the building, away from the view of the window, and began to scale the wall. His fireman's axe tied tightly to his waist.

His hand reached the ledge of the top of the building and he softly pulled himself over. Crouching low he surveyed the area and satisfied there was no immediate threat he made his way to the ventilation shaft. Upon examination of it, he discovered that front grill would need to be pried off and with a whispered cuss he set about using the axe to gain access. The panel screeched at one point and he paused waiting to see if it had alerted anyone. The centurions below stopped momentarily but continued on. Bear grinned to himself because with the slight wind today the sound could appear to come from multiple directions. Obviously it was good enough to fool machine ears as well as human. He crawled into the shaft and began his decent.

Several times the lieutenant had to close his eyes in order to refrain from sneezing within the dusty metal tunnel, that otherwise was quite easy to traverse. When he reached the room, he sat back in the shadows of the ventilation shaft and peered through the grill covering it. He could see two identical women torturing Sasha. She was tied to a wall and the women were giggling at her like little girls because she had soiled her pants. In addition to their physical attacks, there was loud repetitive noise (that Bear could feel

almost disrupting the natural rhythm of his heart), and a voice that blared at her, “You’re Sub-human...Sub-human.. Sub-human!” over and over again.

A skilled hunter, Bear resisted the urge to move from his hiding spot and attempt an attack. He wouldn’t be able to exit the shaft fast enough, and one never enters a lion’s den while the lion is feasting, one waits until it sleeps with a full belly. Sinking his teeth into his lower lip he watched in disgust the cruelty of the women. Finally, Sasha passed out from pain and her torturers decided to let her sit with her wounds for a little while. Then they figured they would have one more go at her before hosing her down as prep for shipment to a harvest farm. They exited the room and one yelled out that someone had better have saved her a piece of pie.

The lieutenant shoved his fingers into the grate and took firm hold of it. Again he used the axe and started to pry the covering open. Fortunately this time there was no real sound from it and once free he hooked it on to the pike end and lowered it to the floor. He then pulled himself out and went immediately to the room’s door locking it. Reaching Sasha’s side, he attempted to wake her. “Sasha,” he shook her slightly. “I can’t carry you through an air vent.” She rolled her head and spat in his face. “Sasha, it is me Bear. I’m here to rescue you.” Her one eye was swollen shut but with the other she looked at him and gurgled a chuckle. “I’m chained to a wall.” Lieutenant Bear looked at her and smiled, a fireman’s axe was light, but it was made to chop through obstructions quickly. It was proving to be an ideal hand-to-hand weapon against the toasters. But hacking at the restraints would bring attention of the enemy upon them. He examined the wall and laughed because it was the weak point. He could use the pike end and rip the restraints quietly out. It would only be a simple matter of making sure the chains were muffled as they crawled back out the shaft. Bear went about his work and only commented that they both needed to bathe after this.

Lieutenant Gains fell to the floor with a thud. Her body ached and once again Bear repeated that he couldn’t carry her in a ventilation shaft. She forced herself to stand and began moving to the vent. Bear then pushed her up into it and she forced herself to crawl down it into the darkness. The coolness of the metal surface helped soothe the pain somewhat and with each movement the blood re-circulated back into her limbs and her movements became sturdier.

They exited back onto the roof and Bear paused for a moment. He gritted his teeth as he looked at his companion. “You can’t climb, you can’t sneak and you can’t fight in your condition.” He then walked to the edge of the building and noted that the two toasters were circling the building in counter directions. These new centurions were not slow like the old ones. He could wait until they were directly opposite of each other but he doubted if he would have enough time to destroy one and then turn to face the other. Seeing no other way he jumped the 7 meters to the ground with his axe at the ready, attempting to embed his weapon in the skull of the robot.

His aim was off slightly and it glanced off the machine’s head and bit hard into its shoulder. The landing was hard and Bear blindly jumped back up to loosen his axe from

the centurion's body. It spun wildly and as Bear grabbed onto the handle of his weapon it knocked him and it to the ground. The wind was knocked out of the man and he struggled to take a fighting position. Bullets began to hail around him from his immediate opponent and the colonial warrior was forced to retreat slightly, abandoning an attempt at a face-to-face assault. Sub-consciously aware that he didn't have the luxury of time and that he stood no chance of defeating the cylon from a distance. He threw his blade and screamed a battle cry as he did so.

The weapon flew true and the pike of it embedded into the optic center of the robot's moving red eye. It lost direction and sprayed gunfire wildly. Out of reaction alone Bear ran and leaped at it. The force of his body colliding with it knocked it to the ground; he retrieved his axe and swung it hard down on the metal skull, cleaving it in half and leaving it's metal body twitching.

Unfortunately, the combat took too long and the other centurion was now upon him, firing a barrage from its arms as it rounded the corner. The lieutenant dove for the ground and attempted to keep rolling in either direction from the volley of bullets. In the back of his mind he could feel his family waiting for him on the Elusian fields. Dirt flew into his eyes as a shot grazed his nose and landed in the ground. Suddenly the gunfire ceased coming in his direction and for a stunned moment, he looked up in the direction of his enemy. Her voice broke through, screaming at him. "Kill it!" Lieutenant Gains had also jumped off the building landing on the centurion's back. She was holding on with all her strength as the machine twisted about attempting to throw her off.

Bear jumped to his feet and grabbed his axe once again. He ran directly at the centurion only to have it momentarily ignore the woman on his back and direct gunfire at the man. Gains wrapped one arm around its optic area, momentarily distracting it and giving her friend the opportunity to close the distance. The lieutenant finally arrived just as the centurion was able to reach behind him and hurl Sasha by the hair to the ground. But Bear seized the chance and dove low for the knee joints on the robot and hacked through one in two blows, causing the machine to fall forward. With the metal enemy down at his level the lieutenant brought the blade down again, directly cutting its head off. The two toaster guards were now destroyed and the two colonial officers paused for a brief second to catch their breaths.

The sound of aircraft engines in the distance brought them back to the reality of the situation. Looking back at the building, they had just escaped; they could see movement quickly coming around the corner. Without a further reflection the two ran off into the nearby tree line and didn't stop until they could no longer keep running.

XOXOX

It had been 10 minutes and neither Forester nor Max was able to figure out how to start the plane, forget about getting it off the ground. The lieutenant was fretting that the fleshy brain thing was some how needed to make this aircraft start. Needless to say that the two men were exchanging heated words and at one point Maxime ended up

complaining his fist was sore from banging it against the hull. “Fraking toast-heads, you think if they went to all the trouble of acting human they would carry it one step further and put a label on something.” He resisted the urge to slug the plane again.

The chief was tired of arguing, he liked his companion but secretly wished he never faced an emergency situation with the man again. He took out a knife and started to remove one of the panels and spoke calmly to himself as he did so. “Ok girl, not sure what your systems look like but I’m sure you will kick over for us if I stroke the right circuit.” Engines began to warm up as soon as he finished his comments.

“What did you touch?” Max was excited. “Nothing yet! I only got the cover off.” The two men looked at each other in a state of confusion and it was finally lieutenant Maxime that just sat down in the pilot’s seat. He then called the plane a “Fraking whore” and struck the control panel. At which point everything shut off again. Forester just shook his head, “Good going sir.”

Another 5 minutes had passed with various intervals of the aircraft starting up and powering down. Finally it was Maxime that noted it was more temperamental than Sasha when she has PMS. He stopped being angry and decided to try his hunch. He ran his hand along the surface in front of his chair and cooed with a gentle soothing voice. “Baby I’m sorry we fought. Can you please forgive me because I promise it won’t happen again.” The engines started to warm up again and he continued talking sweetly. “You’re my sexy girl. I need you baby. I need you real bad.” The chief walked to the opposite wall inside the aircraft and gently thudded his forehead against it as he listened to his friend. “I knew the day I laid my eyes on you that no other toaster plane could satisfy me like you. Come on baby, give daddy some sugar.” All of the aircraft’s systems came on and Max sat down in the pilot’s seat again preparing for take off. “Just like any woman, you got to know how to talk to them.”

Lieutenant Maxime played with the controls for several minutes before finally saying it was time to lift off. The chief decided to lay flat on the floor because he figured if they fell hard, he might have a chance of surviving the impact better. The heavy raider didn’t exactly come equipped with a lot of restraints or safety features.

Max mumbled to himself about making sure the stabilizers were set and keeping the thrust up. He counted down from 3 and commenced to lift off with an enormous amount of speed. Both men were pushed down by the corresponding g-force. The plane almost left the atmosphere before it’s pilot was able to power down and regain control over it. “Keep your thrust up, huh?” It was more of a rhetorical comment than a question.

“Now where is this airfield?” Both men looked out the forward window and were able to see it. It was so obvious to spot that both men were left scratching their heads trying to figure out why know one had see it before. The chief finally spoke up saying that it was time they did the job because they spent a lot of time getting this plane airborne and the cylons had to be moving in on them soon. Maxime then did a mid-level altitude pass on

the airfield in order to practice his attack run and to get a better look at what they are up against.

But as they swung the ship around having just passed the hangars, they suddenly weren't there, or at least disappeared completely within the layout of the land. Having flown the entire length, Maxime turned the craft around again to reveal the bunkers clear as day. He shook his head in understanding saying that only those coming from the direction of refuel depot would be able to spot it. He then drew Forester's attention to the way the fins were laid out on the buildings. Chief Forester sat there in stunned disbelief, "By Zeus, that not only really camouflages them but it's like a battlestar's haul. And looking at how those building are angled a nuke wouldn't hurt them unless the blast came from the exact same direction we are flying from." This suddenly made both men wonder if the weapons aboard the heavy raider had any chance of taking out the airfield.

"L.T., we're going to try! Those hangers are virtually impenetrable to standard air assault, if they could even be seen. Maybe if we come in low, we can fire our weapons directly into them." Max looked at him with a perplexed look and made it clear that he wasn't able to flyby that low and still couldn't see how bombs would get inside the hangers. The chief shrugged, saying not to do a flyby, but to hover, and that he didn't recall seeing actual bombs but missiles on their plane. Maxime just looked at him and repeated the word "hover" several times.

The plausibility argument that ensued was won by Forester who noted that the longer they debated what they could and couldn't make the craft do, the more likely they would lose their opportunity of attack and find themselves in a defensive situation. Silenced Max focused on slowing the forward thrust of the aircraft down and to make it hover in one spot. But it spun and moved all over the place and neither argued the fact that hauler operators should not be raider pilots.

Gaining a measure of control, the slow descent into the airfield began. The plane periodically continued to spin or tilt this way or that as Maxime struggled to maintain control. He grunted that a gauge for an altimeter would have been nice because he had no idea how exactly close the ground was. They were eyeballing the situation from the window when they saw the open half of one the hangers. "Looks like we are level with it." Forester went to the rear of the craft and attempted to fire one of the missiles, but nothing happened. Cusses came from both men and Max made it clear that he was fighting to keep the plane in the air this close to the ground. The chief complained he was certain this was the control panel for the warheads.

The raider began to spin counter clockwise wildly and Forester yelled because he couldn't focus on his work. Max tried to correct the problem but only managed to make it spin in the opposite direction just as fast. Finally the chief stripped the casing off of two wires and yelled he thought he could fire the weapons. "I've only got to touch these two lines together and it should launch the warheads." Both men then looked out the window and saw that centurions were now walking toward the low flying plane. The two

men figured that since the mechanical warriors weren't running at them, they were confused by their erratically spinning fighter craft.

“Max just slow the fraking spin down so I can shoot” Once again the hauler driver began to move the thrusters in the opposite direction and this time instead of spinning, the entire aircraft lurched horizontally to the left. Despite the approaching robots, the comedy of the situation wasn't lost on the two men. Max laughed that this was insane and as the chief continued to look out the window waiting to touch his two wires together. “Insane?” He diversely retorted, “So blowing up a fuel depot with granola bars or trying to make cylons chase women's panties isn't insane?” Maxime broke a smile and noted that this was perhaps the sanest part of the mission. He then told the chief that whatever happens, it was good serving with him. At which Forester spotted an open hanger and connected the lines. The missiles launched and flew inside the building. It blew up in a massive explosion.

The centurions began running toward the raider and opening fire on it. Lieutenant Max managed to make the craft do a slow rotation 3 meters above the ground and the chief fired wildly into anything he could see. In less than a minute their warhead supply was empty and the entire airfield was exploding around them.

They would have cheered but the flames and explosions threatened to destroy them. With a comment that this part was easy, Max reset his stabilizers and powered up the thrust. Once again, the raider shot up vertically into the sky at a high rate of acceleration. Well clear of the danger, the plane levelled and the two shook hands, and Forester wowed, “Frak me, we did it.” The lieutenant agreed but sheepishly punctuated the end of their mission by admitting he had no idea of how to land. “I only flew an atmosphere jumper once and I crashed on the landing.”

Chapter 25: Cupcake's Rescue

Sasha had removed her pants and was at the edge of the lake rinsing them out. She fretted several times about what she wanted to do to the next toaster she laid eyes. But secretly she felt ashamed having been captured and reduced to such a humiliating condition. She finally cursed out loud and asked Bear to never tell anyone what happened. The man chuckled and said he would never tell anyone that she wet her pants in the face of the enemy. She looked at him to see if he was teasing her or just making light of the situation. He looked back at her with seriousness and told her to hurry up, because they still had to rescue the major.

“Whatever happens, we can not rescue lieutenant Lapointe.” Sasha enquired why and Bear had to admit that he had no idea why. It was just something he was told not to do by his guides. This was all bizarre to both of them, the idea that cylons now looked so human that they could pass themselves off as human. Neither of them had an answer to this new development. And the spirited woman was especially angry that Mr. Creepy was a toaster and no one expected anything aboard the Argus. Her commentary was that the cylons knew how to play everyone for a fool.

Lieutenant Gains finally walked out of the water and started to put her wet clothing back on. A look of determination was on her face and she enquired if her companion had another axe. After all, it appeared to work really well against the new improved centurions. Again cussing aloud that she hated upgrades, wistfully adding that fighting the old ones was so much better. They shot less often, moved slower and fell down easier was her opinion. Bear waited patiently for his turn to speak and then took a stick and started drawing in the sand.

“I do not have complete knowledge on this. All I know is there is an entrance here and one from the rear on the left side.” Sasha shook her head and said that she didn’t like the weird psychic intel and preferred cold hard facts. But Bear was quick to point out that his weirdness was enough to lead him to her and affect a rescue. She readily agreed and remained silent, waiting for the man to finish telling her what he knew. But unfortunately the only other thing he could add was that their raptor had been moved to within 250 meters of the facility.

The plan was relatively simple. Because Bear could move faster and quieter, he would sneak up find out more information and relay it back to Gains. To see if they could further develop the strategy, otherwise, he would enter from the rear of the building and try to get Cupcake out while Sasha assaulted or drew everyone’s attention at the front door. If they were lucky, they would get the major and leave via the raptor. It sounded lack lustre to say the least, but so far luck has been a vital part of this adventure so both hoped it would continue to favour them.

Together they walked toward the resurrection facility and Gains wondered if Bear’s spirit guides, grandfather or any other ghost he knew could be counted on to help with the fight. “Artemis is watching us.” His response puzzled Sasha how or why was the goddess amongst the dead? But she only voiced her quandary if the deity would remain a casual observer. “Your people have always assumed my people were primitives in our ways. We are just as sophisticated in our beliefs and it is the same as your worship. The way we view the Lords of Kobol is different as is our relationship. And it is very hard for those of the other realm to interact with this one. Even my grandfather’s voice is fading and I may not hear him again in my life.” The young lieutenant sighed and thought to herself that her friend was incapable of just saying yes or no.

There was a mechanical sound just off to the right of them and they took cover in some brush. A centurion came into view; it was obviously looking for them. The robot lumbered meticulously searching every possible area to hide. Suddenly, it paused for reasons unknown and turned north with its back to them. It was receiving new orders and Bear ceased the moment by attacking. He leaped high and cleaved downward into the base of the skull. It remained attached to the body but the joining control was severed.

The man’s body twitched and he spat, he was getting tired of hand-to-hand combat with the toasters and his axe was really starting to look beat up. As he completed removing

the head and the legs of the centurion, he complained that soon his weapon's strength would fail. Sasha enquired to what he was doing and he calmly explained that their guns have little effect on them. She needed a weapon and he didn't see any reason why they couldn't use what the centurion had. It was a few moments of tinkering but they figured out how to fire the guns and ended up tying the part of the torso to lieutenant Gains back. It was an odd sight and the two laughed.

Gains was wondering what the new orders were that had stopped the centurion in its search. Bear's response was to point to North and draw her attention to a lot of black smoke in the distance. It was in the direction of the airfield and as soon as she was told that the Chief and Max had gone to blow it up, her disbelief in their fortune was bewildering. With the current string of good luck they were having, if this were back in the colonies, she would have purchased a lottery ticket by now.

They started off at a brisk jog in the direction of the major Assuras. The Toasters appeared, for the moment, to be neglecting the search for them. The destruction of the airfield was taking precedence for the moment. There was no way of knowing how well it was hit, but if the rising smokes billows were any indication, it had gone off really well.

They ran and rested in intervals for close to 2 hours. Every step of the way, Gains complained that her short legs and cylon-torso backpack kept her from keeping up with the large axe-wielding warrior. Finally they were able to see movement in the distance. Both of them were amazed at how well the cylons were able to camouflage their structures. The machines had advanced technologically beyond their current abilities. It left them both with a feeling of slight despair but as they were taught in officer's school, allowing oneself to succumb to such feelings was only a strategy for defeat.

Gains and Bear crouched low and assessed the situation. There were three toaster models at the entrance. One Mr. Creepy, one of the blonde torturers and a centurion. If there were this few, perhaps they could assault the front door directly. But they refrained from doing so. With the successful escape and the bombing of the airfield, the cylons were bound to have their defences up. They could attack and suddenly find hordes of robots coming out of the building.

Sasha kept an eye on the door and Bear did his recon, returning quickly. He explained what he saw, all the different bodies, skin cylons, waiting to be activated and it left him visibly disturbed, wondering if there was a possibility that they had something other than circuits and wires inside them. The chamber had a different blonde female in it. He said that she was referred to as "6" by the woman outside the building. Who in return was called, "3."

The 6 stood outside a small room tapping her foot with impatience and watching a handheld monitor. It was difficult to make out, due to the small size of the device, but he was certain that he could see the major on the screen. There was someone else in there with her. His access to the building wasn't so much an entrance as it was a large glass window. He did his recon by peering through it because he couldn't open it. So they

would synchronize their timing and he would smash through it and kill woman inside before freeing the major and possibly killing whoever was in the room with her.

Bear retraced his steps again to the rear of the building. He didn't argue with Gains about being lucky. But deep inside he wanted to believe this was more of a destiny thing. They were succeeding because they were supposed to prevail. However, sometimes the forces and will of those that govern this universe can be cruel. It wouldn't be the first time that a man was allowed to taste victory only to have it pulled from his lips at the last minute. So he hoped that it wasn't ordained that they would fail in this final rescue attempt.

He reached his destination and examined his axe. The blade was severely damaged and he doubted that he could cut through another centurion head. He would have to use the pike end and perhaps it would still handle the knee joints. But regardless how accurate his aim was in landing his blows between the shroud and neck, his weapon wasn't up to the job. He hoped that Sasha's new cylon weapons would rip the robot apart and he wouldn't have to face it one on one. He continued his mental countdown prepared to smash the glass when the giant metal toaster entered the building. Bear cursed under his breath, he had hoped that the centurion would wait outside. Outnumbered, out-gunned and out of ideas, he decided to return to Sasha and wait for a better opportunity later.

Bear was about to scurry back when he heard multiple gunshots. Not only was the centurion still inside but it appeared that Sasha started ahead of schedule. He turned quickly, charged the glass wall and swung the axe hard. As it shattered, he leapt through it, crashed to the floor and quickly rolled to his feet. The large robot turned immediately and began to fire at the lieutenant. A voice screamed in his head, "The eye!" Bear didn't hesitate and hurled his weapon with all his strength at the centurion and its pike end embedded itself into the machine's red eye. It spun wildly out of control and momentarily continued to fire, hitting the female 6 that stood beside it.

XOXOX

Cupcake woke up confused and disoriented over the events that had passed. She did remember something from basic training about shock resulting from sufficient emotional upheaval, that it didn't always need an actual physical injury. She looked at Lapointe and shook her head. "I dumped you before because you were just a boy. You're still a poor excuse for a man. Only this time, in addition to your stunted development towards responsibility, you are also an addict and coward; it's no wonder the toasters got to you." She then began to put her clothes on.

"Sorry I can't be more like captain Reeves." Lieutenant Lapointe was smirking as he half-heartedly tried to defend himself. "But then again, I could be dead like him too." Assuras finished getting dressed and picked up her gun. "At least he died a man. It was Mr. Creepy that supplied you, wasn't it?" It was more as a statement than a question. "Scum, you sold out your race for a bag of snort." Cupcake walked to the door of the room and put her ear to it.

“If I don’t say it’s all clear, they will kill you.” The major looked at the dark skinned man and made a half smirk. She then nonchalantly walked over to the man and gently kissed his lips, agreeing that he was nothing like Reeves. Not only was the Captain brave but that he looked better in a towel too. “In viper training, they teach you to think of yourself as already dead. And like Scott, I’m going to do my job.” She grabbed the door handle and began to open it when she heard gunfire.

At this momentary distraction, Lapointe lunged for her. Unfortunately for him, she was now in full control of her senses and she grabbed the man throwing him into the doorframe. As his head rattled, she threw open the door just in time for a large crash and several stray bullets to find their way into the room. Fortunately for her the doorway was still blocked by Lapointe and the very short burst of fire struck him before she could dive past. Falling to the floor she spotted the blonde woman and the centurion with an axe embedded in its skull. The major attempted to return fire and use the door for cover but unfortunately her former friend was blocking it.

XOXOX

Sasha was closely watching the time for when to start her assault, her eyes never lifting from the three foes between her and the building’s entrance. When Mr. Creepy ordered the centurion into the building, she fumed to herself and figured that Bear would be heading back to wait for a better opportunity. But the guised Argus crewman was unyielding in his treachery; reaching into the back of his pants he produced a weapon. Then the Leoben pointed it at the head of female and in rapid succession emptied the gun into her skull and body. Stunned momentarily, at what she had witnessed, the young female lieutenant did not budge until the shatter of glass shook her from her stupor. Obviously Bear had mistaken the gunfire for a signal to commence the attack, so she ran as fast as possible to his aid. While Mr. Creepy, unaware of her presence, tore off in the direction of the raptor.

Skipping past the body at the entrance to the building, she burst into it and spotted the centurion wildly shooting in all directions. Having a clear shot, she opened fire on the robot and within seconds it fell to the ground and ceased moving. On a vengeful high she scanned the area for other threats before calling out to Bear. The man slowly stood up and began touching himself all over. “Am I shot?” The major too rose to her feet and moving into the area her companions occupied. She was just as stunned, like the large Raptor pilot, she was amazed to discover she had escaped injury, especially when at her feet lie a tall blond woman, shot dead in the face. Sasha however, had burned her hands from the heat generated by firing the cylon guns, thankfully though that was all.

Chapter 26: The Get-Away

Lapointe groaned in the doorway of the adjacent room. He had been shot several times, in the limbs at least. Both Gains and Assuras were about to comment when the sound of raptor engines starting was heard. Sasha screamed and ran outside. “That’s our plane!” The major then looked at Bear and told him to lift the traitor. “No major we can’t take

him! My grandfather said..." She wasn't in the mood to listen about anyone's grandparents and cut him off. "That's a fraking order lieutenant!" The large man grumbled under his breath, did as he was ordered, and burdened by the load; he did his best to keep up with Cupcake as she ran out of the building for the raptor.

Lieutenant Gains made it to the plane just as the doors started to close. She threw herself inside before they shut and scrambled to face the person in the pilot's seat. "Land this plane now!" Mr. Creepy continued his lift off and Sasha moved closer pointing the guns at him. "I'm sure the Major won't have problems flying a raptor coated in toaster guts." With an exasperated sigh of discontent, he lowered the plane, re-opening the doors and protested, "Hurry Lieutenant, we need to get the hell off this planet fast!"

Major Assuras and lieutenant Bear arrived moments later. They boarded the plane and Bear threw Lapointe to the floor as Cupcake began the take off again. "Cover them both. The lieutenant's going to face charges of cowardice in the face of the enemy and I think the Colonel will have fun dismantling the new skin-bot." Mr. Creepy ignored the snide attack; he had one remaining objective, "Now or never, let's get out of here!"

As they began to climb a figure came running out into the clearing. The major's attention was consumed by the raptor's controls, so it was lieutenant Bear that recognized the figure. "Frak me... It's another Lapointe." They hovered for a second and all stared in disbelief. The man in the field was waving for them to land and 3 centurions were chasing him. Mr. Creepy loudly voiced the reality they were awestruck by, "Yes, the lieutenant is a fraking toaster. And with a tone of unmistakable urgency, "But we have got to go NOW! I set up a big nuke that will blow this entire area. So, please take me back to Argus, because I would rather take my chances being dismantled, than get fried by a FRAKIN NUCLEAR EXPLOSION!"

Amid a barrage of cussing, the major piloted skyward.

XOXOX

Chief Forester and lieutenant Maxime shook their heads trying to figure out what their next course of action should be. The debate they had was how they were going to land. Forester was of the opinion that since Max was able to make the aircraft hover really close to the ground they could just cut the engines and drop the last few meters. The aircraft had proven to be fairly tough and should survive without difficulty. The lieutenant was reluctant to try that; he figured that the area would be crawling with centurions, old and new. He thought Nike, the goddess of victory, had smiled down on them once and he didn't want to push their luck. In the meantime they just kind of flew around without a particular direction.

It was finally the chief that realized they were in a space plane and if they couldn't land, they could just head back to the Argus and in a worst-case situation they could be towed onto the flight deck. His mind taxed by the stress of combat sought solace... They "would be heroes, having destroyed an enemy airfield and captured an enemy plane".

Max looked over his shoulder and was about to point out the flaws to that plan, when he noticed his friend looking upwards softly speaking to himself. "I hope I made you proud. I'm a hero now, just like you." The lieutenant couldn't think of anything witty to say and wasn't too certain if wit would be appropriate commentary for when man talks to his deceased wife. Instead he just quietly responded with, "So say we all."

After the brief pause Max pointed out there were two major flaws. The first was that unless the chief could figure out the communications systems, they were likely to get shot down by their own people. And second was lieutenant Maxime never actually took a jumper out of the atmosphere. Therefore, he had no clue how to leave the planet. Forester cursed hard wondering how in hades could a short-order cook becomes a heavy equipment operator. "OK then, let's fly in the same direction Bear headed toward; maybe we can get help. In the meantime, I'll see if I can find the communications circuits."

After some further debate about which direction they were supposed to go, the chief proceeded to open more panels inside the plane. But within 5 minutes he had decided that he was better off trying to unravel a spider's web. Figuring out the firing mechanism made sense because it was similar to what he seen on colonial planes. Although he understood electrical wiring and basic electronics, without a diagram, the communications systems were too complex to understand.

Seating himself beside his comrade, he enquired if he had anymore of his girlfriend's underwear because he was sure that friendlies would respond better to his signal of choice than toasters. He could wave them in the window at any vipers that might come by. "You just aren't going to let me live that down are you?" Forester laughed and made it clear that he was going to make sure his friend got a new call sign if they survived. He then pointed to the horizon and asked if the plane in the distance looked like a raptor.

"Heads up boys and girls! We got a bogie on our tail!" Cupcake was less than impressed because raptor was hardly the kind of aircraft she wanted to face the enemy in. She called out to Bear, letting him know that this was his field of specialty and she would accept any advice he offered. She then decided to bank hard, to the left, and increase thrust. As Sasha maintained guard on the prisoners the axe-wielding pilot took over all the navigator's duties. "Don't use instruments to control your stall, Major. Go by your sense of feel, it works better." Assuras took a deep breath, stopped glancing at the panel and focused her attention out the cockpit window. Her hand gently modulated thruster control as she sensed what the plane needed to stay in the air.

They got behind the heavy raider and locked their weapons in it preparing to fire. But lieutenant Bear noticed and shouted out that the cylon plane wasn't attempting any manoeuvres. Major Assuras ignored the statement and proceeded to launch their few weapons. The lieutenant lunged pulling her hand off the stick just before she could push the button. She screamed wanting to know what the problem was. "A raptor is a piss poor fighter and we have an easy target!" Her navigator and co-pilot retorted back that it might be chief Forester and lieutenant Max in the raider. Cupcake stumbled for words.

Sasha voiced loudly, “Is that how you got those two to blow up the airfield? Made them steal a raider?” She scrunched up her eyes and in exasperation said, “Max is a big idiot; there is no way he can fly a plane.” Cupcake enquired if they could raise the chief on wireless and Bear informed her that he couldn’t. “This better be them or we are screwed. I’m going to fly alongside the raider and take a look.” Mr. Creepy chimed in from the back and re-iterated his comments about nuclear explosion about to occur.

The raptor flew beside the heavy raider and both the major and lieutenant Bear began to laugh. Chief Forester had his face pressed up against the glass and was frantically slapping it with his hands. “By the gods, he is flying like he has never been to flight school. Use a signal light and flash him to follow and try to copy our manoeuvres.” Mr. Creepy laughed at the absurdity and looking to his fellow prisoner, he mocked him. “Simon, you know it really bothered me that my bomb wouldn’t destroy your planes. That’s a hell of a design on the camouflage and amour protection. Unfortunately you forgot to make it idiot proof.” Sasha yelled at them to shut up and quickly stomped on the crotches of both men.

The chief relayed the signal light message to Max. The lieutenant grumbled under his breath because he would have preferred just trying to land and letting real pilots fly them home. The raptor pulled in front of them and he proceeded to follow the plane’s rapid ascent. All things appeared to be going normally when they started to break atmosphere and a huge explosion occurred on the planet’s surface. The ensuing electro magnetic pulse wave from the blast temporarily disabled all of the raiders controls and they flew into orbit erratically. The chief was flung to the rear of the craft smashing his face against the hull. Those aboard the raptor, which had cleared the planet seconds prior, watched the event in horror. The plane was spinning off into space out of control.

Chapter 27: Enemy Vessel

A sense of bewilderment ensued aboard both the Argus and Toaster One. Given the fact that there was a missing nuke, the explosion wasn’t surprising. However to the admiral, colonel and captain it appeared to be detonated uselessly. Hallis was just about to contact Reeves when petty officer Richards reported a distress call was coming in from Cupcake.

“This is Cupcake, I am declaring a state of emergency! We have an out of control enemy bird manned by friendlies. I repeat the enemy bird is under fleet control. Do not destroy!” She was frantic because there was nothing else they could do to help.

Toaster one was the closest to render aid the captain responded by ordering their hauler into the air. It was designed to grapple moving spacecrafts and tow them. However, lieutenant Ford personally delivered the news that the hauler operator, chief Cudrows was passed out drunk and he had relieved him of duty. Reeves groaned noting that they had already sent the other hauler back to Argus. He then looked at Ford and noted he was a pilot. “It’s heavy equipment but if you can fly it, I’ve got someone that can handle the grappling and towing controls.” The lieutenant quickly saluted and ran toward the flight deck. The captain ordered another crewman to accompany him.

Ford scraped the hauler against the haul of the flight deck. The machine was big and didn't respond to controls as quickly as he was used to. His partner laughed that he was being trained to operate the equipment and the last time he tried a take off, all he did was scrape the bottom all over the flight deck. Laughing with him, the lieutenant enquired if there would be a problem grabbing the raider. The young man assured him that he was already cleared to do such things.

They came upon the spinning raider and he shook his head. He was certain that anyone inside would not only be sick to their stomachs but might have had their brains turned into milk shakes. His co-worker spoke, "keep pace with the centre of the spin. I'm going to launch a magnetic grapple on it, once it locks on, you must pull up hard on it. That will slow or stop the spin and bring it under our control." Ford paused for a second to enquire about how this sudden jerking might affect the occupants and was told there was no other procedure to control spinning debris in space.

The magnetic grapple was fired and it hit the target. Ford powered up the thrust but was reluctant to push too hard on the throttle. The hauler's haul groaned and the cable vibrated causing the machine to begin lurching out of control. His companion quickly dove over the lieutenant's lap and shoved thrust control almost to maximum. The problems that were starting suddenly cleared up as they were violently jerked inside the cabin. Lieutenant Ford looked at the man next to him in stunned amazement wondering how in Hades could a single operator pilot this craft and do stuff like they just did. The young man apologized for his actions, "Sorry sir, I've just seen the procedure done several times and was told what could happen if there wasn't enough thrust."

"Toaster one, lieutenant Ford. We have the bird and requesting priority clearance." As they towed the raider onto the flight deck, the lieutenant gained new respect for the people that flew these crafts; their jobs could be just as dangerous as a fighter pilot's. Cupcake contacted the hauler and ordered Ford to remain on board until she cleared him. When Reeves asked for clarification she responded that she would explain later.

XOXOX

"We got lucky and only lost 5 people on that planet. Cupcake say's both Lapointe and Mr. Creepy are toasters. And that it was a cylon outpost." Hallis looked tired and although he wasn't too happy about loosing any men. He was relieved to see that the nuke was, at the very least, no longer a concern. The colonel asked the obvious question, "Why would a toaster blow up his own base?" Neither of them had an immediate answer but at least they took comfort in knowing that Forester and Maxime were fine. Albeit, they were slightly sick to their stomachs and the chief had a broken nose.

Petty officer Richards yelled out, "Dradus contact!" CIC went quiet for several seconds and all eyes were focused on her. "It's a cylon basestar! Oh Frak me! Brace for impact!"

A nuclear warhead hit the starboard-landing pod, leaving everyone scrambling aboard the Argus trying to deal with the sudden emergency. Hallis barked out orders, "Launch all planes and return fire! Damage report!" The combat patrol was moving to intercept the volley of incoming missiles. Unfortunately they were being easily overwhelmed. The cavalry of additional vipers were astonishingly slow to join them. As another warhead struck the same pod and damage reports started to come in., the Admiral ordered, "I don't care how inferior the launch tubes are, I want more of my planes in the air!"

After several minutes and several hits on the starboard flight pod, 2 squadrons of vipers were finally in the air. Only then did the basestar bother to launch raiders. The cylon baseship had delivered a staggering nuclear assault but unlike its modern counter parts, the haul of the Argus was much thicker and heavier. What would have easily have destroyed a more modern battlestar was only beginning to impact its super structure. Although a benefit, 8 minutes into the combat other problems for the old ship were mounting. Its best long-range weapons were only mid-range by modern standards; they couldn't reach the enemy and the toasters appeared to have knowledge of this fact.

The admiral and colonel were frantic trying to develop a quick strategy. Bridgeford noticing that the enemy was faster, more manoeuvrable and was easily keeping them at a distance ordered an FTL jump to close the range. Unfortunately he was quickly told that jump engines were down. He fumed repeatedly demanded to know how they could have gotten on them so fast. "Old dradius system and Mr. Creepy relayed our exact position. They knew exactly where to be to get us."

"Gold squadron pull it tight to the Argus and keep those nukes off her ass! Blue squad hit the raiders. Razzle and dazzle and confuse them so the rest of our planes can launch." As the raiders encountered the vipers they didn't immediately open fire with conventional weapons. Instead they attempted to shut down the planes in the same manner they did in the attack on the colonies. Only this time, it didn't work. All of the colonial aircrafts had their main boards bypassed and under direct pilot control. Someone screamed "Not so easy this time frakheads" over the wireless.

The starboard flight pod took several more hits and it quickly became obvious that the bulk of their attack was focused on that section of the ship. The admiral screamed over the com, at engineering for more speed. Despite the colonel's protests to retreat he was intent on trying to get as close to the basestar as possible. "They're too fast! The result will be the same except that they blow us up running instead of fighting!" Another nuke struck the hull of the Argus and smoke started to fill CIC.

Chapter 28: Abandon Ship

Lapointe and Mr. Creepy were hogtied on the floor of the flight deck. Sasha, Assuras and Reeves were present and interrogating them. "And here I thought you survived on that baseship because you were a computer genius. Only you're just a fraking computer too!" The captain was obviously agitated, his belligerent demeanour caused by the memory of having worked so many hours alongside the enemy. But none of his peers

were complaining. In fact, Lieutenant Gains was openly hostile and revelled in each opportunity to strike and degrade the prisoners.

“He’s a Simon model. A little younger and normally masquerades as a doctor but any technical field will do.” Just as Leoben finished speaking, Gains stomped on his crotch again and told him to shut up unless spoken to. “I’m not a fraking cylon!” he was wincing in pain and struggled against his bonds trying to curl up in a foetal position. “I’m what the toasters call a shadow. A human spy altered to look like them.” Sasha smiled sadistically, kicking him once more. Then turned toward Lapointe and did the same. She chuckled as she looked at her superiors told them she didn’t want Lapointe to feel left out.

The conditions aboard Toaster One were sparse at best, but nevertheless a marine paramedic was tending to their injuries of Forester and Max. “I hear the admiral has given the order to bug out. If you don’t mind my saying so, I think you two are fraking heros. Destroying an enemy airbase with captured raider you didn’t know how to fly. Scuttlebutt is that even the plane is in good shape.” The chief winced as his nose was set and asked if it was true that Ford piloted the hauler that saved them. “Don’t know anything about that. But I do know the captain put the man in a room next to the airlock and told him he could use it anytime he felt sorry for himself.” Chief Forester smiled at the thought of major a-hole being flushed into space. Chaos then ensued in CIC causing everyone to scramble to his or her posts.

Still tightly bound, Mr. Creepy and the Simon cylon were stuffed into body bags and thrown in back of the raptor. The captain had every intention of dissecting the robots and analyzing their internal systems for potential weaknesses. Having passed the chief in a hallway, lieutenant Ford raced down to the flight deck to personally deliver the message to the captain. “Argus is under attack and you’re needed in CIC.”

Crewmen were screaming frantically as reports of hits against the battlestar occurred. It was painfully obvious that they were in no situation to render any help. Major Assuras started barking orders to ascertain more information when Reeves cut her off with a bellow for silence. He walked into the centre of CIC, and began to pace in silence. The major observed him for several seconds and resumed taking command.

The captain cut her off once again and barked an order. “Ford I need you to spool up the FTL...” Assuras crossed the floor and stood in the man’s personal space, snarling at him, “We aren’t abandoning the Argus...captain!” She placed great emphasis on his rank in order to dominate him and take control of the situation. But like his nickname, the junkyard dog wasn’t going to let someone take over his territory and he quickly bared his teeth at the woman, “This is my ship! And until the admiral says otherwise, I’m in command here and that means you take orders from me!” Looking her in the eyes with a cold stare, he undid the clasp of his side arm’s holster. “I’m not fraking running away... I’m jumping into that basestar and you’re going to get everyone out of here before I do it!” Cupcake looked at him dumbfounded, because her first thoughts were that he was going to die. As such, she failed to quickly react as the weight of his words set in. The

captain bellowed, snapping her back to reality, “That’s an order! Now haul your ass soldier!” She turned quickly and proceeded to carry out the command.

As Cupcake led the exodus from CIC, the captain continued to bellow commands, “Contact Argus and tell them to stop chasing the enemy”; he needed the basestar to hold still. “Major, you have less than 15 minutes to evacuate everyone”. As personnel began to quickly vacate CIC, Ford noted they had a problem. The FTL computer that Reeves had re-installed was offline again. He could still spool up the engines manually but without computer they had no way of inputting the coordinates. A vacating crewman momentarily paused and relayed the information that several of the newly laid network cables in section 3 had been accidentally cut by a wielding crew.

Just like when he took command of the old battlestar in the scrap yard, captain Reeves found himself being a problem solver again. With his eyes closed he snarled, “Great fraking time to tell me!” He ran towards the nearby airlock to get a space suit. The crewman looked at lieutenant Ford and tried to explain that no one thought it was important because the admiral said they were going to bug out in a few hours. The lieutenant dismissed her with a wave of his hand because he knew this meant he wouldn’t be abandoning ship with everyone else.

Because large sections of the haul had been stripped away, section 3 was now exposed to space. As the captain rushed to get his suit and gear on, he talked to Ford, “For what it is worth, you’re probably far better at handling the injector flows than I am. So do that and crunch the numbers while I re-establish the network. We jump the moment everyone is off and we have a green board.” With this he put his helmet on and headed to do the repair work.

In a weird sort of ordered chaos everyone was evacuating the ship. Major Assuras was giving orders on the flight deck making sure that not only did everyone get safely off but that any last minute jobs were done. Otherwise someone could get hurt, Reeves plan could fail or people could get left behind. Since two men were about to sacrifice their lives she didn’t want to frak things up. Even more so because the captain was someone she really wanted to explore a relationship with. “Sasha, get on communications and contact the admiral. Tell him to stop chasing the enemy and that request comes under my authority. Enemy is most likely monitoring communications so don’t say why.”

Lieutenant Bear delivered the news of two more problems. The rear of the hauler hadn’t been emptied. It was estimated to take 10 minutes or a crew to clear it and chief Cudrows, the man who flew the craft to the ship, was passed out drunk. Cupcake put two fingers in her mouth and let out a hard loud whistle. “People!! I want every available hand throwing crap out that machine and don’t be polite about it! I want it emptied in 3 minutes and everyone suited up in 5! Bear, you’re flying one of the raptors and throw Scuds in it too. Max, you’ve got the hauler and I’ll take the raider. If there is still a pilot for the communications raptor, tell him to haul ass!”

Boxes were tossed to one side of the hauler and everyone that would be riding in the back suited up. And inside of 10 minutes the planes began to leave the flight deck. Although the raider was packed with personnel, as Cupcake worked the controls, she began to tear up. "Hera, I'm begging you. Look after Scott and Ford as they cross over into the underworld. And please don't let their sacrifices be in vain." Several of the passengers heard her whisper the prayer and responded with a sombre, "So say we all."

XOXOX

Reeves was just finished patching the computer lines as he saw the hauler pull away from the ship. His thoughts were of his wrecking yard crewmen, how far he had come in his life and of his only real friend, Julian Forester. In hindsight it wasn't much of a life, but it was what he chose. He just couldn't believe it was going to end soon. With a sigh, he proceeded to re-enter the pressurized section of the ship. At least it would be over quickly, and if nothing else, people should remember his death.

He took off his helmet and Ford handed him the coordinates while relaying the status information that the ship appeared to be clear, the base star stopped moving and the engines were hot. "After I input the data it should take about 3 or 4 minutes to upload to the jump systems. My repairs weren't very polite, so the system is going to be slow." His fingers danced on the keyboard for several seconds, hit enter and began watching the information packets stream on the monitor. "That's it and now once the number reaches zero remaining, we will get a green board and one of us has to manually trigger the jump." Ford nodded and stepped behind the captain.

"Is there anything else that needs the two of us?" Lieutenant Ford enquired. Reeves said no. "Good, I thought so! Remember when I was your superior and you belted me?" The captain started to turn his head, wondering if the last moments of his life were going to be arguing with Major A-hole. But he never got turned around, as the lieutenant swung a workman's wrench, hard, striking Reeves in the head, knocking him unconscious. He then grabbed the man's helmet and re-attached it to the spacesuit. "I want to die with you about as much as you want to die with me."

Dragging the captain's limp body toward the nearby airlock, Ford sarcastically chided, "Yes sir, I know the way to the airlock. See my quarters are right beside it!" He suppressed a chuckle as he hit the controls, opened the port and tossed Reeves in, stopping momentarily to turn on the suit's locator signal. He smirked at the poetic irony, closing the door. "No need to depressurize first. I'm just going to flush you!" He hit the controls, and watched the rear of the airlock open and captain Reeves' body get sucked into space. "By the gods I can't tell you how many times I dreamed of doing that." He then bolted back to CIC.

Looking at the monitor he noticed that about 25% of the data remained to be uploaded. As he watched the packet flow, he quietly reflected, "Dad, it wouldn't have hurt to for you pat me on the back once in awhile. When I scored 98% on a test you wanted the other 2%." He looked at the monitor and realized that everything around him was taking

on a surreal quality. "I joined the military to get the hell away from you. But still you haunted me and because of it I fraked up. I caused the death of a good person." He then smiled to himself, the counter was almost to zero. "Well, this is it, when I see you on the other side, you can hug me or tell me to frak off!" The upload completed and the monitor flashed green. Lieutenant Jim Ford's hand hesitated momentarily over the switch to begin the jump. Addressing his father one last time, "I don't care because I'm free of you at last", Ford sealed his fate and flipped the switch. Toaster one's engines whined for a long second and then the jump occurred. Outside the ship to everyone looking, it simply disappeared and instantaneously the enemy basestar exploded. The Argus although damaged, would fight another day.

XOXOX

CIC aboard the battlestar was in chaos. Smoke and personnel were running everywhere when petty officer Richards yelled that the basestar had disappeared off of Dradius. Sasha's voice screamed louder than anyone's over wireless. "Whoooo! They fraking did it!!" Assuras nodded her head as tears streamed down her face, "You saved us again." And the admiral ordered that his pilots clean up the remaining raiders.

As damage reports started to come in, Bridgeford stood beside the ship's old man. "It's amazing what you can find in a junkyard." Hallis choked back his emotions simply thanked the gods for their reprieve. Richards then yelled for moment's silence and the colonel proceeded to say they could do that after they got the hell out of there. "No sir! I need silence; telemetry is offline. But I think there is someone out there in a suit and I need hear to sound verify the signal."

A burst of laughter came from the com officer. "All pilots accounted for and given the location, it had to be someone from Toaster one." The admiral quickly yelled out to order a raptor to investigate and for several minutes all work in CIC was done in silence. And finally she spoke, "It's Reeves sir and he is alive!" As cheers erupted in CIC, Richards relayed his current condition and cleared them for a priority medical landing. Hallis left Bridgeford in charge and went down to the landing bay.

Reeves was conscious and having his head bandaged when the admiral arrived. The planes were starting to land and their engines could be heard in the background. Hallis walked over to the captain and shook his hand. "Your commands seem to always end with both a rescue and the destruction of a ship. I'm just glad that this time it was the enemy and not us." The captain said nothing; since he was alive, he couldn't be the hero.

Cupcake approached with a spring in her step, "The gods must be smiling on you." She bent down to hug the man but he remained stoke, slightly emotionless. He finally looked at her and spoke, "It was Ford. He knocked me out and flushed me out of the airlock. Completed the jump on his own." Neither the major nor the admiral shared the stunned looks of other nearby crew. This action was reminiscent of the soldier they both remembered.

The admiral was paged to contact CIC and relayed information about their current condition. He scrunched his face and walked back to where the doctor was preparing to move Reeves to sickbay. "Captain, I'm being told they need 4 hours to get FTL back online. I hate to do this to you but I don't want to push our luck and stick around. You know how to get more out of the men down there." Reeves stood up, amidst the doctor's protests. "Doctor, he is moving and needed in engineering. And I'm certain there are others to tend to."

As he walked toward engineering, the admiral called out to him once more, "Mr. Reeves, before I forget." The captain turned around and Hallis yelled, "ATTENTION!" For the second time in his career he found himself being saluted by an admiral and his peers. Abruptly returning the gesture, he continued on toward engineering.

Chapter 29: Too Little Too Late

A second cylon basestar had jumped into orbit. Its occupants appeared to be less than impressed over the events that had transpired here. Several bio-cylons poured over data and discussed what must have happened. A 3 spoke up, "Let me get this straight. An obsolete battlestar not only manages to re-constitute itself, but it destroys an outpost and one of our basestars. Someone want to tell me what makes this group of people so damn special?"

A 6 model approached her, "I'm sure it's all part of god's plan." And one of the Leoben's laughed saying that perhaps there were some humans aboard the Argus that had destinies yet to fulfill. The 6 gave him a look of disdain and made it clear that god didn't bless anyone aboard the Poseidon or in the Persuis scrap yard with a destiny. "This is just part of a story that gets told over and over again. And every story has an interesting subplot. We will get them eventually."

Just then an 8 walked into the area holding several folders with a perturbed look on her face. The 3 enquired what was the problem. "I'm not so certain that none of them have a part in this story." They all looked at her quizzically. "The ship is called the Argus, aka Argo, named after the ship used in the myth of the search for the Golden Fleece." The 3 laughed; she felt certain that god didn't have master plan for old battlestars.

"I just finished looking at captain Reeves personnel file and found something interesting." A Leoben cocked his head as the 3 asked for the 8 to proceed. "Well Scott is his middle name. His given first name is Jason." The 6 groaned saying that the pagan myths weren't anymore real than their gods and the vocal 3 quickly added that she wasn't prepared to take it this seriously.

Undaunted the 8 continued, "He never knew who his father was and lost his mother at an early age. His adopted father's name was Heron. He and his wife were clergy dedicated to Athena and operated a homeless shelter. Before joining the colonial fleet he

completed clerical studies and was about to dedicate his life to the service of Hera. But for reasons unknown, he refused to take his final vows and re-entered university, under a military bill, and obtained a graduate degree majoring in computer programming and engineering.”

Leoben quickly drew the final conclusions, pointing out that in the myth, the god Poseidon was Jason’s real father. He then roared with laughter because the Poseidon was the Battlestar, from which Captain Reeve rescued the crew. Debate about pagan gods aside, as far as he was concerned this was sufficient proof that something they hadn’t factored in was occurring, and it too was part of the never-ending story.

Pursing her lips the 3 turned her attention back to the immediate and enquired how long ago did the Argus jump, and if there were any survivors. One of the cylons models that looked like lieutenant Lapointe, but was addressed as Simon by Mr. Creepy, spoke up. “The highbred estimates they got away within an hour of destroying the baseship; perhaps about 15 minutes ago. Due to the destruction of the resurrection facility on the surface, and us with our resurrection ship being was out of range, there are no survivors. And any signals remaining would probably be contaminated by the nuclear blast. Trying to save anyone would only be cruel.”

Then 6 folded her arms muttering, “Jason and the Argonauts... How wonderful. So what’s the Golden Fleece?”