

Battlestar *Libra*

Episode 1:

From The Ashes

“Radiological alarm! We’ve got another incoming nuke Commander,” the Officer of the Deck exclaimed excitedly.

The acrid smell of burning electrical components and plastic made Commander Benito Rodrigues’ eyes water. Smoke hung in the air, thick and menacing. Rodrigues turned from the dradis console and raised the phone to his ear. He stayed outwardly calm however inside he was screaming.

“Point defense weapons, track incoming targets. Fire when you have a solution.” Rodrigues turned to the Officer of the Deck. “Mister Hastings what’s our status?”

Hastings, in a flurry of movement, checked numerous readouts and answered quickly. “Sir, we’ve lost our FTL drives. Missile batteries are starting to come back online, estimated three minutes. Technical believes it has isolated the issue with the CNP program and has set up a temporary fix. It’ll hold for now but we need to look into it further to be certain. Seems the information we got from Picon Fleet Headquarters on our way here was accurate.”

Rodrigues listened to the captain while looking over at the marine standing guard by the CIC doors. *This kid looks like he’s no older than seventeen. Hell of a way to spend his youth.* He was shocked back to reality as Hastings yelled.

“Point defense isn’t going to get this one! Missile is inbound!”

“All hands brace for impact!” Rodrigues grabbed the table as alarms sounded. The ship shook violently, throwing everyone in the CIC around. Lights flickered and glass panels broke. Electrical components failed from energy overload, sending showers of sparks in all directions.

Rodrigues picked himself up from the floor and surveyed the damage. Fortunately it was minor. “Damage report Mister Hastings.”

Hastings pulled himself from the deck and sat back in front of his readouts. “Structural damage to engine nacelles three and four. Explosive decompression in causeway eleven, defense batteries fourteen through twenty seven offline.”

Rodrigues shook his head almost imperceptibly. “So what’s the bad news,” he said dryly. He turned to the communications officer. “Get me the *Delphinus*.”

The communications officer, her face streaked with sweat, made several attempts at reaching the *Delphinus*. After what felt like an eternity she looked back at the commander. "Sir, I have Commander Krill on the line."

Rodrigues nodded and picked up the handset. "*Libra* Actual to *Delphinus* Actual, what's your status?"

Battlestar Delphinus

CIC

"We're hurting Ben. We've taken three nukes amidships. Our flight pods are heavily damaged and our catapults are out of commission. This isn't the vacation I had hoped for." Commander Wendy Krill replied. The commander of the *Delphinus* watched silently as the medics carried the body of her XO out of the CIC. He had been killed when a support beam collapsed in the CIC after the last missile impact. "Rainey's dead and I have reports of about 45 percent casualties."

Krill looked about the CIC. Smoke and soot was everywhere, the smell of burning circuitry permeated the air. Crews were running about, their shouts heard clearly through the closed clear doors. Krill saw a spray of what appeared to be blood on the colonial emblem adorned on one of the doors.

The *Delphinus* was a Mercury Class battlestar, like her sister ships *Libra* and *Pegasus*. They were supposed to be top of the line. Their vulnerabilities, however, were showing today.

As she spoke into her handset again Krill could only imagine what was happening aboard the *Libra*. "We're still operational but I don't know for how long. The techs managed to get the CNP patched in time but all the fixes in the world aren't worth a frak when you've got a ton of nukes flying around."

***Libra* CIC**

Rodrigues tightened his grip on the phone. "Get out of here Wendy. We'll cover your withdrawal," he cupped his hand over the mouthpiece and spoke to the XO. "Have the starboard defense turrets alter their trajectory to include the area around the *Delphinus*."

Nodding, Colonel Vansen moved briskly to the weapons console.

The Second Cylon War as it would soon be referred to and the many battles fought during its short span would be talked about for generations to come by all of humanity's survivors. At the onset of the attacks, the colonies were caught with their proverbial pants down. The cylon war machine had appeared suddenly over the colonies and let loose a bombardment of such intensity it was no small wonder how anyone lived.

The Colonial Fleet was mostly out of the space docks and on patrols within the system save for those vessels in the Scorpion, and Picon Fleet Shipyards.

The first engagements between Cylon Baseships and the Colonial Battlestars were an utter slaughter. Apparently, the cylons had developed a new type of weapon, which allowed them to shut down the navigation, and networked components of Colonial vessels. Lessons were learned quickly in the first hours of the second Cylon war. Unfortunately those lessons were too late for ninety-five percent of the colonial fleet.

Battlestar Group (BSG) 26 was enroute to the outer reaches of the Cyrannus system to assume anti pirate patrol duties when the attacks started. Preliminary reports were sketchy but from what Rodrigues was able to best determine the cylons had gained total surprise.

Rodrigues ordered the battle group to return to the inner system and defend the colonies. As preparations were being made for the battle group's return they received orders from Picon Fleet HQ to intercept a new battle fleet entering the sector.

Rodrigues and his staff quickly put a tactical plan together and the battle group proceeded to an intercept point where they hoped they could stop the newest threat. That plan was a simple one, lay in wait and ambush the enemy ships as they dropped out of hyperspace. While enroute to the engagement area Rodrigues received information regarding the weapons used by the cylons and what they appeared to be using to shut down all colonial ships they encountered.

The technical people were learning quickly that the problems were beginning in navigation and spread from there. Further investigation showed the Colonial Navigation Program, which handled all automated navigation plots for the fleet, had a few extra lines of code. This code was a proverbial back door into the otherwise encrypted systems and allowed the cylons to access the network. The *Libra's* Intel and tech personnel had informed Rodrigues they could slow down the spread of the network intrusion with a series of field expedient software patches in the time they were allotted.

BSG 26 jumped into an area of space devoid of any civilian traffic and waited for the cylons to arrive.

It didn't take long for Battlestar Group 26 to see their targets. Five Baseships complete with support ships jumped into the area. It would have been a slaughter had the cylons known about the ambush. Fortunately surprise was on Rodrigues' side and as the Cylons jumped in a salvo of nuclear and nonnuclear missiles was already flying from the three battlestars. One enemy baseship, caught completely off guard, was destroyed within moments. Another was heavily damaged and fell back.

Then the real fireworks started. The Battlestars *Libra*, *Delphinus*, and *Solstice* moved in to close combat, launching full complements of vipers. The tech people had tried desperately to fix the vipers however they couldn't get them all. It was going to be a crapshoot as to who lived and who died. They didn't have the luxury of holding back combat ships when the entire human race was being wiped out.

Lieutenant Rayna "Draco" Darkstone

Battlestar *Libra*, Hangar Deck

Day 00

As soon as Draco heard the CAG's announcement, she ran to the hangar deck wondering what was going on. As she entered she noticed half her squadron, the 113th Black Crows, were already running to their vipers in preparation for launch. Other squadrons were doing the same nearby. *Wow, even the reserve squadron is launching, she thought. This must be bad... Pirates maybe?"* Draco spotted her CO, Captain Janis Dell, and ran over to her. She was discussing something with the CAG.

"Sir," Rayna said firmly, as she saluted the CAG and her CO. The CAG quickly returned the salute, nodded to Cpt. Dell and ran off.

"Draco, glad you're here. We'll divide the squadron into two. I'll take Alpha, you take Bravo. Apparently the Cylons are back, and we've got some raiders to clean up," Captain Dell said grimly.

Rayna seemed puzzled, overwhelmed with the reality of the situation. "But, I'm only the acting XO. I...Shouldn't someone else..."

"I know Rayna. This is..." worry and doubt crept into Dell's voice. "It's a really frakked up situation out there, but we've gotta do this. Listen, if I didn't think you could handle this, I wouldn't have chosen you to fill Aaron's spot."

Rayna felt slightly embarrassed. "Well, I've only been here for about three months..."

Captain Dell gave a warm smile. "I've gotten good recommendations, and you're a good pilot... but besides that, I can just tell." She put a hand on Draco's shoulder. "Good luck and good hunting Lieutenant."

With that, Captain Dell ran to her viper. Draco stood there completely dazed but quickly snapped out of it. Reluctantly, she ran to her Mk VII viper, "Red Dragon". After securing her helmet and activating systems, the knuckledraggers moved her into the launch tube. She waited impatiently for her turn to be shot from the catapult. Soon enough it was her turn.

"Draco, this is Shooter," the launch officer called from his station. "Stand by. Board shows green. Launch in five...four...three...two..."

Suddenly sparks erupted from Draco's front panel and the power she applied to her engines cut out.

"Whaa?"

Red Dragon's systems went cold. They had to pull her viper back out onto the hangar deck. A few minutes later and Chang had found the problem.

"What the frak? This thing is practically brand new. What's wrong with it? How the frak am I supposed to be leading Bravo..." her voice trailed off. Draco felt defeated already.

"Wiring fault sir. Under ideal circumstances, we could probably have it nailed within an hour. But, as it is..."

Draco could tell how nervous Specialist Chang was.

"It's, okay Chang. Shit happens," all she could do was offer him a sincere smile, but it was enough. Chang nodded and focused his attention back on his duties.

"I could have 376 ready for you in a minute. She's a Mark VII but we hadn't been able to install all of the upgrades into her yet."

"Where is she now?"

"On the flight line next to Chief Sutton's office, Eltee. The old man wants every bird that can fly to be ready to go at a moment's notice."

Draco nodded. "Thanks Chang," she said as she ran off.

Moments later, Draco was finally out the tube. It was a mess out there. She read multiple inbound hostiles and erratic Colonial signals. All she could hear was bits and pieces of comm traffic over her wireless, and lots of static. The view was about the same. Some vipers were still flying around attacking raiders. Some were motionless.

"*This is **not** how I thought my first combat engagement would go,*" she thought. Actually, she never thought she'd *have* her first combat engagement.

Battlestar Libra

CIC

"Commander!" the XO shouted, "*Solstice* is going up!"

Rodrigues' eyes shot up to the dradis screen and fixed his gaze on the small digital screen above it. There, he watched a live video feed that had been oriented towards the position where the *Solstice* was located. The *Solstice* crew hadn't gotten the battlestar's systems prepared quickly enough and at the start of the engagement was rendered inoperable after launching its complement of vipers. The remaining ships of the battle group lost contact with the *Solstice* immediately afterwards. One of the baseships began to take a special interest in the *Solstice* and launched salvo after salvo of missiles into her. Her viper screen took as many of the missiles out as possible but they were overwhelmed. Sadly, the rest of the colonial battle group was too busy fighting for its own survival to lend a hand.

The *Solstice*'s ammunition and fuel stores kicked off, blowing huge sections of the ship apart which vented precious oxygen into space. Surprisingly though the vast majority of the *Solstice* stayed intact. *If they remembered their training*, Rodrigues thought, *there was a chance there were survivors.*

Rodrigues said a silent prayer. *Solstice* was an older class battlestar built just after the last cylon war. She was due to be retired in another five years. She had a crew of fifteen hundred souls. "XO," he said calmly to Colonel Vansen. "Get the SAR teams ready. Once this is over, I want

her boarded. We need to see if there are any survivors.”

Vansen nodded. "I hope we get the chance sir."

"So do I Karl, so do I."

A shout of joy erupted from the main Kinetic Energy weapons station. “Baseship number three is breaking apart sir!”

Despite the brief outburst everyone was brought back to reality as the ship shuddered from another missile impact.

A notification alarm sounded and Hastings checked his readouts, looking up quickly at Rodrigues. “Sir, *Delphinus* is on fire. She’s losing hull pressure at a massive rate. I’m reading multiple detonations on her aft engines. The toasters are concentrating on her.”

“Get her on the comm.” Rodrigues spoke as calmly as he could. Within a few moments he was connected with Commander Krill. “*Delphinus* this is *Libra*, you were ordered to fall back.”

The reply was short and sweet. [*Ben, we’re done for. We’ve sustained approximately eighty-five percent casualties and lost all but maneuvering thrust. Say a prayer for us.*] With that the line went dead.

Rodrigues raced to Hastings’ station and watched the screen. “Oh my Gods, NO!”

As the *Delphinus* was hit with several more missiles she continued moving towards the nearest baseship. She picked up speed, firing a full salvo of missiles and flak cannons into the area in between the two capital ships. The missiles found their mark, impacting on the central hub of the baseship. The point defense weapons sent shells into the oncoming raiders, destroying many of them.

Delphinus never slowed. She continued on through the raiders and plowed straight into the baseship. There was a quick flash of light then the darkness turned into daytime. Debris flew in all directions and secondary explosions from live munitions bathed the impact area in an eerie light.

Stranded pilots whose ships were knocked offline from the cylon intrusion watched in horror as

the *Delphinus* made the ultimate sacrifice. Everyone realized at that exact moment they were all now on the losing end of this fight.

Rodrigues closed his eyes briefly. Commander Krill was as close to family as he had; now she was gone. He looked around the CIC. The smoke, the soot, the exhaustion of his crew said it all. It was their last stand. If they didn't take out these enemy capital ships they were all doomed to the same fate as the crew of the *Delphinus*.

"Mister Hastings, inform the CAG he will have to handle the raiders. We will be concentrating on the undamaged enemy baseship." He turned to the communications officer. "Specialist, contact the *Griffyn*. Advise them we will be making a run on the last surviving baseship and require their assistance."

Rodrigues turned then to his XO. "What do we have left XO?"

Vansen regarded his commander with a look of sheer exhaustion. "Three ships still operational sir, including us. *Griffyn* and *Perseus* are both combat capable."

Rodrigues shook his head. *Three ships out of fifteen, this was insane.* "Have *Perseus* hang back in reserve and assist the vipers with fighter suppression. Inform the *Griffyn* we will send a screen of missiles and nukes into the baseship. She is to follow behind the screen and deliver her payload. Let's make it happen."

The *Libra* turned to port and the battlestar moved ahead. Slowly at first but ever increasing in speed the colonial capital ship pointed herself straight at the cylon baseship.

"Steady people," Rodrigues said calmly. He kept his eyes on the readout screen at Captain Hastings' console as well as the overhead dradis monitors. "Mr. Hastings, have the KEW stations ready to fire on my command."

"Aye sir," Hastings reached for the handset at his console.

"Xo," Rodrigues said, "Have DC teams stand by. This has a very real possibility of going horribly wrong."

The distance between the two warships decreased as they both maneuvered for the best position. From the vantage point of the fighter pilots watching the spectacle, it appeared as if the *Libra* was making a suicide run.

The communication's specialist could hear several pilots as they shouted over their ship communications system to the crew of the Libra to stop their approach for fear the Mercury Class battlestar was in the process of making the same sacrifice as her sister ship.

Shells from the KEW weapons were launched in quick succession from the Libra's nose mounted heavy guns. The rounds struck in several areas along the baseship's forward section, rocking the great ship. A spread of missiles launched next, adding to the destruction. Three fourths of the missiles also impacted the baseship and as the explosions began to dissipate, Libra maneuvered out of the way giving Griffyn an opening.

Lieutenant Mark "Bull" Chandler
Viper Pilot - Battlestar *Delphinus*

It was unreal, like a video game. Raiders swarmed all around like angry hornets.

Somewhere baseships and battlestars slugged it out, angry colossuses spewing death and destruction. He could see the flashes of light all around, but it didn't matter.

Nothing mattered any longer but staying alive.

Staying alive meant moving constantly, shooting at the raiders. There was no time to exult in the terrible beauty of targets exploding mid-air.

There had been a moment of almost paralyzing fear when they'd first catapulted out of *Delphinus*. They were under attack! After almost 40 years of peace, the cylons were back, and they had returned with a vengeance.

He was lucky he had been assigned one of the 'old' vipers, somehow the cylons had disabled a lot of the new ones, rendering them sitting ducks, to be blown up at will.

He had seen it in that half-second of immobility when he first shot out of the battlestar – it was a rout, total carnage, hopeless...

And then something snapped.

He flipped the viper around and started shooting.

Outside, raiders buzzed and men and women fought and died.

Outside, battlestars and baseships slugged it out like drunken deckhands on Colonial Day leave.

Outside was chaos, death, and destruction.

Outside, the *Delphinus* rammed into the enemy in a last glorious act of gallantry and desperate bravery.

Outside.

He saw it all through calm, dispassionate eyes, while his body guided the viper through evasive contortions, while his fellow pilots screamed silently in their fiery coffins, while the Colonies disappeared under mushroom clouds, while his world collapsed around him. All the while he kept shooting away against the unending stream of raiders, against overwhelming odds, against all rhyme and reason...

Bull bared his teeth and pushed his stick forward as he dropped in behind another raider that had been unfortunate enough to invade his area of space.

Battlestar *Libra*

“Close it, close it!” a knuckledragger yelled. Private Dan Wolfe put his not-inconsiderable weight behind the hatch, helping the two others already pushing on it. It closed with a *scream* of tortured metal and he spun the wheel, dogging it sealed.

Dan had turned twenty only a month before, had been on the *Libra* only two weeks, and had never imagined a reality like the explosions, smoke-filled passageways and constant ear-piercing alarms. He coughed harshly, not having even been on board long enough to be issued a damage control enviro suit. There had been some for regular sized personnel, but the quartermaster had had to put in a requisition for one to fit Dan’s 6’2”, 225 pound frame.

“You okay?” the knuckledragger asked Dan.

“Yeah,” he replied, easing the weight of the fire bottle strapped to his back. The knuckledragger was a Petty Officer 2nd Class, he noted, seeing the rank on the collar sticking up out of the neck of the bulky firefighting suit. “Where to, sir?” he asked him.

PO2 Landon Alger gave the hatch a critical look; then, assured it would hold, looked at the brawny Marine who was assigned to his Damage Control team just a short time earlier. "What's your name, jarhead?" he asked the marine with a grin. *Glad they gave me a big one or we might never have gotten that hatch closed!*

Taken aback at his smile, Dan replied, "Uh, Wolfe. Private Dan Wolfe, sir."

He slapped him on the arm. "I'm Al, Wolfe. Good to have you on the team." He looked around at the two other team members, knuckledraggers as he was. "You two all right?"

They both nodded. Even with the broadcast of 'brace for impact', they were all thrown around by the impact of the Cylon ordnance.

"Okay, back to causeway ten," Al ordered, retreating along the passageway at a trot. Dan took up the rear, musing, *well; the fire bottle isn't as heavy as a full pack, at least.*

At the junction of the passageway and causeway ten, Al tested the handset on the bulkhead, and finding it working, gave a terse damage report. He listened for a moment, and then hung up.

"Decompression in eleven, it's a good thing we got that hatch closed so quickly," he told the others. "Our post is here now, and let's hope like hell she doesn't take another one like that..."

Silently, Dan agreed.

Destroyer *Griffyn*

"*Griffyn*, the *Solstice* is down, repeat... the Battlestar *Solstice* is..." the crackle and silence of the viper radio said enough.

Colonel Brennan Herald stood in the CIC, shocked at the chaos unfolding before his eyes. He pushed the thoughts from his mind and focused on the here and now. "How are the vipers doing Lieutenant Landry," he asked.

The look on Landry's face said volumes. "They're holding their own for now but we've lost contact with about a fifth of our fighter cover."

Herald looked around the CIC. To some, seeing the multitude of people running about would bring visions of a mad, unorganized dash however, in reality it was a well-practiced drill.

"When the forward missile batteries have a firing solution, order them to salvo fire," he said to the XO. *I can only imagine what's going on behind the porthole shielding*, he thought as he watched his second in command.

They had received orders from the *Libra* to follow her on an end run to destroy the last fully operational baseship. Herald wanted to make certain the *Griffyn* did its part. He watched as the *Libra* punched forward and delivered a slew of deadly ordnance into the enemy ship. Herald smiled as he saw the *Libra* alter its course, leaving an open path for *Griffyn* to prosecute.

It took only a few moments longer for the weapons officer to get the desired readings on his console. "Sir, forward batteries report they have a firing solution," Johnson said.

Herald looked at his XO, waiting for him to give the command to fire. A few seconds passed, which felt like an eternity. The XO stood motionless and was in an obvious state of anxiety. Herald grabbed the handset and placed it to his ear. "Missile batteries commence firing."

The *Griffyn* got closer and closer to its target with flak turrets blazing, her vipers engaging targets of opportunity as they approached the destroyer. Suddenly, the CIC shuddered and a volley of eight missiles barreled towards the Baseship. Within the blink of an eye the Weapons officer's console began registering hits on the enemy capital ship.

"Sir, we have direct hits all over the Baseship," Braddock said to Herald. Outside, missiles from the *Libra*, now moving off on a parallel course, and the *Griffyn* converged on the baseship in the double digits. Detonations from the multiple warheads showed all over the radial arms and the central hub. The Baseship's central axis erupted into flames and debris. The explosions spiraled outwards until the Baseship was engulfed in an ever expanding ball of fire.

The fading blip on the dradis screen confirmed the kill, and Herald gave a small smile. He turned to his XO, leaned in and whispered. "Mr. Braddock, we don't have the luxury of taking our time here. I need you to obey my orders as soon as I give them. Otherwise we'll end up like the crew of the *Solstice*."

Braddock nodded quickly, the embarrassment showing on his face.

Herald smiled and patted his XO on the shoulder. Now wasn't the time to discipline anyone. That could be handled if they made it through this. It wasn't over yet, however. There was still another Baseship and squadron upon squadron of enemy raiders to contend with.

"Incoming ordnance," Braddock said in a panicked tone as he looked up at the dradis.

The ship lurched and lights flickered as a missile impacted the bow portion of the Destroyer's starboard flight pod.

"Damage," Herald asked.

The communications specialist took a moment to confirm the incoming reports from the different areas of the ship. "Starboard flight pod has sustained damage sir. Possible hull breach indicated. All other sections report okay save for a few bumps and bruises."

"XO, get DC teams to the site, and seal off decks that have been breached," Herald said.

Battlestar *Libra*

As the baseship exploded under the barrage of missiles fired by *Libra* and *Griffyn*, the *Libra* turned immediately into the path of the one remaining baseship. It had been heavily damaged at the onset of the battle but was still very dangerous, a point punctuated by a stream of missiles that were fired in the direction of the two colonial warships. The *Libra* took three missiles intended for the *Griffyn*, thus giving Colonel Herald a little breathing room.

Rodrigues spoke into his handset. "Herald this is Rodrigues, we'll take on the last baseship. Keep our aft covered and help with the raiders. If we don't take it out on this pass you are free to engage." He turned to his XO, "Let's get this bastard."

Destroyer *Griffyn*

CIC

Upon hearing Rodrigues' orders Herald nodded. *I hope the old man knows what he's doing.*

Herald grabbed the wireless: "Roger that *Libra*," he said. He looked over at Johnson. "Get me Mad Dog."

Captain Alicia Barker loved flying, especially vipers. There was nothing like dropping in on a nugget in training and watching them panic. Of course the feeling of playing chicken couldn't be matched either.

But this was REAL. There were no more games, no playtime, no nuggets, at least not anymore.

[CAG this is *Griffyn* Actual,] her wireless chirped. She replied instantly. "Actual, this is Mad Dog, go," she replied as another Cylon... and another viper exploded off to her port side.

[Orders from *Libra* are to guard her aft and take out the Raiders as she makes attack run on remaining Baseship]

" Roger that sir," she switched to the squadron channel. "Talons, take the Raiders on *Libra's* port aft. Stallions form up on me to take Raiders on *Libra's* starboard," she yelled into the wireless. The remaining *Griffyn* vipers did just as she said.

Battlestar *Libra*

CIC

Watching the dradis intently Rodrigues counted off the seconds until the *Libra* had moved up alongside the baseship. Missiles from both vessels flashed across the void in between the two warships, each missile impacted their targets in different areas. The *Libra* changed course slightly and set course to a point alongside the baseship. Rodrigues grabbed the handset and looked at the communications specialist. "Give me ship wide," he said.

It took less than a second for the young specialist to make the connection. "Your all set sir."

"All hands, this is the commander. Brace for impact. DC teams to the starboard side of the ship. Be prepared for numerous missile hits." Rodrigues turned to the weapons officer. "All starboard batteries and missile tubes fire on my mark. We're going to give them a broadside."

Libra began to pass the baseship and Rodrigues watched the screen, his eyes unwavering. As the lumbering cylon baseship reached just in front of the *Libra's* flight pods Rodrigues shouted to the weapons officer, "All batteries FIRE!"

The starboard batteries opened up with missile salvos, flak guns, and a large spread of heavy weapons. The effect was instant and devastating. Multiple detonations quickly took their toll on the baseship and it came apart in a fiery mass.

Rodrigues gave a sigh of relief as the enemy capital ship exploded. Now they had to take care of the raiders in the immediate area.

The Day of the Cylon attacks

Before Dawn

Hunt curled his body, rolling away from the kicks. He hung, sort of, with the Daggers, but he hadn't fully initiated into their gang. He'd stolen a car and mugged a mark like they required, but he drew the line at shooting at cops. Not that he especially liked cops, but a long time ago he'd decided that he wouldn't kill anyone unless it was in self-defense. And 'shooting at', from his view, was the same as killing.

So when the Regals jumped him, he didn't expect that any of the Daggers would come to his defense. He could tell that they didn't plan on killing him, or he'd already be dead. No, they just wanted to beat the crap out of him, and he'd had that done to him before.

He kept his wits about him, kept his head tucked in, and avoided the worst of the beating. When he saw the chance, he got to his feet and ran. Hunt ran doubled over, out of breath and in pain, but he still ran. He knew the streets well, but so did the Regals and it took a little while to lose them. Once he lost them, he found a dark corner in a narrow alley and sat with his back against the wall, hugging his knees to his chest.

He rested a few minutes, panting and swearing under his breath, and then he assessed his injuries. He'd been kicked in the jaw, right where it hinged under his left ear, and that hurt the worst, the pain pounding up into his head. Gingerly he opened and closed his jaw and decided it wasn't broken... but chewing would be a problem for awhile.

His ribs on the right were the next down in the pain level. He stretched out his legs and gently probed the ribs, again relieved that nothing was broken. The rest of his injuries were relatively minor: skinned and bruised knuckles on both hands; his right upper arm was scraped and oozing up to the edge of his sleeveless t-shirt; both his legs ached and would likely be bruised;

and he had a knot on the outside of his left forearm from the steel toe of a boot.

Wearily he got to his feet and looked around. In the process of losing the Regals, he'd gotten lost, himself. He was near the edge of the city now, and he headed out of the alley, but then froze, pressing himself up against the wall.

Cops! Not specifically looking for him, just looking to roust drunks and druggies, but Hunt didn't want to be caught up in their patrol. Two of them, with flashlights, and they turned down the alley.

Hunt moved silently back down the alley, keeping his back to the wall, knowing they were looking for scum passed out on the ground, not for anyone mobile. Luckily the alley wasn't a blind one, and he slithered around the corner and kept to the dark edges of the street, loping once he was clear.

The cops seemed to be everywhere, and twice Hunt had to change direction, eventually finding himself up against a fence next to what looked like a large warehouse. He could smell and hear animals of some sort—and he saw another patrol. Not cops, security guards this time. He looked around in the darkness and opted to jump the fence, barbed wire and all. It wouldn't be the first time, and he knew how to get over the wire without getting stuck. He did end up jabbing a barb into his left hand as he grabbed the wire and rolled over it, and the barb gashed it as he let go and fell to the ground. He closed his fist around it and headed for what looked like a good hiding place.

It was a good-sized shuttle, and what drew Hunt was the open cargo hatch. There was some sort of half-gate over the bottom of the hatch opening, and he vaulted over it, landing lightly on his feet inside the cargo area.

His vision was night adapted, and he searched for some place to hide, finding a sort of storage locker that odd, heavy suits were hung in. He closed the door and wormed his way between the suits and sat up against the back. He leaned his right shoulder against the side wall, then jerked away and touched the scrape on his upper arm with his fingertips.

“Motherfrakking Regals,” he muttered without moving his jaw. The storage locker was narrow, and he leaned his left shoulder against the other side wall, closing his eyes. In spite of the aches from his injuries, he was asleep in less than a minute.

Battlestar *Libra*

“Let’s go!” Al snapped, running full out, and again Dan brought up the rear. He’d studied the layout of Mercury class battlestars, but that was far different than actually knowing how to get around.

More fires... electrical fires, the harsh smoke searing, and Dan aimed the nozzle of the fire bottle as the knuckledraggers pulled panels down. The ship shuddered, throwing them off their feet again and again.

Something ruptured, spraying them all with an oily substance. Dan watched in horror as the knuckledragger in front of him caught fire. Immediately and instinctively he turned the nozzle on her, covering her with foam. Concentrating fully on the task of dousing the flames it took a few moments for Dan to finally hear Al yelling, “You’re on fire, on fire!” and Dan realized HE was burning, too.

Al snatched the nozzle from Dan’s hands, spraying him along his left side.

“Thanks!” Dan shouted, his eyes wide, as Al handed the nozzle back to him.

Suddenly Dan felt himself lifted and thrown about as he saw a flash and felt, rather than heard, a tremendous crash and explosion. Despite his relative inexperience Dan knew exactly what had happened. It was the initial jar of a hard impact.

Everything went black.

Battlestar *Libra*

Flight deck

Mac yanked the leads loose and stuffed the hand-held hard drive into her coverall pocket. Swiftly she closed the drive door shut and fastened it closed.

“Okay, this one is a go!” she yelled, climbing out of the cockpit and jumping down off the Mark-VII’s wing. No time for the usual safety, no time for maintenance stands and logs and standard operating procedures. Just get the CNP fix loaded into the ships’ databases and hope that it worked. *I hope it’s a go....*

“Where the frak is the Chief, Dusty?” she asked Specialist Dustin Pickett.

“Dunno, Mac,” Dusty looked as harried as Mac felt. “Port pod DC team I think...”

“We’ve got shot up ships coming in faster than we can get this fix uploaded,” Mac said with frustration.

“Here, lemme take that and you go look at the mangled ones,” Dusty held out his hand. Mac slapped the hard drive into it and headed for a viper as it was being towed in; its left wing looked like metal-eating moths had been at it.

“Frak me!” she exclaimed, putting her fingers clear though the tip of the wing. “How the hell am I supposed to fix this?” But her mind was already at work, and she grabbed one of the specialists, sending him off with a list of things she needed. As soon as he returned, they started the patch job.

One of the pilots came up to them and demanded, “Where’s the Chief?”

Mac looked over her shoulder briefly, turning her eyes back to the repair job. “Damage control, sir,” she said. “What do you need?”

“A ship that flies!” she exclaimed.

Mac nodded. “Here, Li, you finish up, just keep doing like we started,” she told the specialist, then she turned to the pilot. “What’s up with the bird, sir?” she asked.

“Starboard thrusters are all out,” the pilot was clearly angry, but Mac knew it wasn’t directed at her.

“All of ‘em?” Mac asked, stretching her legs to keep up with the taller pilot as they headed for the viper.

Mac listened as the pilot described the problem, opening an electronics panel even as she was still explaining. “Fried,” Mac muttered, pulling out a relay and tossing it over her shoulder. “Fried, fried, fried,” three more followed the first. “Five minutes, sir, give me five minutes,” she ran off to get spare parts, and a short time later, seven minutes, not the five as she’d promised, the viper was being prepped to go out again.

“Nothing like job security,” Mac sighed as she headed for another damaged viper as it was pulled into the repair bay.

Another part of Colonial space

Captain Donald Gibbs, seated on the bridge of the liner *Astral Dawn*, held up the piece of paper for the umpteenth time.

He read it silently.

From : New Astral Lines

To: Captain Donald Gibbs; Astral Dawn.

The following information was received from Colonial Fleet Headquarters.

Attention all Colonial units, Cylon attack is underway. This is no drill.

Assume this is true. Take all necessary precautions. Astral Lines Controller will contact you on wireless with update.

He put the paper down, and turned his head slightly to the side.

“Cylons.” He said to his co-pilot. “It’s been over 40 years, and not a peep from them.”

‘Well, they’re making a grand entrance.’ Phineus Gojisa said somberly.

Astral Dawn was an older liner, recently restored with all new systems. Her interior decorum was of the dark woods and such of her original majesty. From a passenger point of view, she was a remodeled antique of 35 years of age. Her systems, however, were the latest. New Astral Lines, Inc. had purchased two of the old Astral Lines ships: *Dawn* and *Glory*. A third, *Queen*, would likely join her two sisters; negotiations had been underway for a few months.

Astral Dawn was on a twenty-day vacation run around the system, with six-hundred twenty one persons aboard when that memo had come across the communications console.

He hadn’t hesitated.

First, he had all outgoing wireless transmissions stopped, then he changed course, and lowered his running lights. Years earlier, on another liner, he had been pursued by a pirate vessel. The defenseless liner had run silently into an asteroid field to mask itself. He had done the same thing then. Lights were lowered, systems were taken offline, and transmissions terminated. It had worked then. The pirates had lost the liner, assuming it had made a hyper light jump. That liner didn't have a jump system.

And although *Astral Dawn* did have a jump system, the captain had wondered where should he jump to? Where would be a safe place?

Gibbs decided the best thing to do was to sit tight, to let the military handle things. The Colonies were being targeted, so he would keep his ship away from the combat zones.

The captain turned to the communications officer.

"Any chance of cleaning up the wireless, Warren?"

Warren Danson lowered his headphones. "Sorry, Captain, it's all bits and pieces and static. Lots of relays must be down."

"The passengers are getting what we're getting, right?" Gibbs wanted to be assured.

"Yes, Don." Gojisa replied. "All wireless channels are being routed to the public and private receivers."

"Good." Captain Gibbs said. "They can't call home, but they can know as much as we do."

"Dradis contact!" Phineus Gojisa sat upright in his chair. "Two unknowns coming our way!"

"Fire up the engines!" Gibbs commanded, as he was throwing various switches. "We have to assume the worst!" *Cylons*, he thought to himself.

The two unknown contacts turned out to be cylon raiders after all, though a configuration Gibbs didn't recognize. *These must be a new kind*, he thought. *Small, fast, and mean.*

They would overtake the liner in a few minutes.

"Dradis contact!" Gojisa exclaimed. "A third ship... colonial transponder!"

The ship registering a colonial transponder jumped in directly behind the cylon raiders and immediately increased speed towards them. It had a distinctive fuselage that looked more like a warship than a civilian vessel. *Mercurius*, a ship slightly two and a half times the length of a colonial raptor surged forward and dropped in behind the closest raider.

Kalrk, the lone occupant of *Mercurius*, fixed his new prey on the dradis console. They were after what appeared to be a slow moving tanker, or something as cumbersome. Whoever the humans were, they would be in real trouble if he didn't do something fast. Aiming his weapons at the two raiders, he opened fire. The twin guns clipped one, sending it cart-wheeling to the right.

The other one paid him no attention, instead it continued targeting the liner, and fired two missiles.

"Incoming!" Co-Pilot Gojisa yelled unnecessarily.

"Frakkin' hell." Comm Officer Warren Danson muttered.

Gibbs watched as the missiles streaked across the vacuum towards the *Dawn*. "Evasive maneuvers, hard pull to starboard...now!" Grasping the back of the pilot's seat Gibbs kept his eyes glued to the console.

As the ship leaned to starboard the missiles altered their flight and followed.

Mercurius sped up and overtook the missiles, flying in front of them and becoming their new hot objective. Kalrk fired off a swallow and one of the cylon missiles went for it, detonating on contact with the distraction device.

The second missile continued to track *Mercurius* and followed through every twist and turn Kalrk initiated. He released two more swallows in the hopes of evading the missile but it continued to track.

Kalrk decided he had only one option left. In a split-second, he spun *Mercurius* 180 degrees on its x axis, and pressed the trigger. The missile exploded into small fragments, sending the harmless shards in all directions.

"Now where did you frakkers go," Kalrk asked no one. Spotting the nearest cylon ship he began pursuing it, hoping to finish it off quickly. The raider pulled up and attempted to loop back over the small colonial ship but Kalrk had other plans. He pulled back on this flight controls and kept

the toaster in his sights. When it began to change attitude and drop into the final part of the loop Kalrk mashed the trigger. Rounds spewed from the nose-mounted cannon and caught the raider in the area where the cockpit should have been. The raider erupted in a fireball, which quickly dissipated. Without missing a beat Kalrk turned his attention to the other remaining cylon ship.

The injured craft, was righting itself and was again pursuing the colonial ship. A missile fired from *Mercurius* went unerring to the cylon and took it out.

“Pathetic raiders.” Kalrk said, while coming alongside the tanker or whatever it was.

[You saved our asses!] Came through the speakers in his helmet. [This is liner *Astral Dawn*. Who are you, hotshot?]

“I’m Kalrk. And this is my ship *Mercurius*.” He replied calmly and not boastfully.

[Kalrk?] A man on the liner retorted. [Kalrk, As in President of K Industries?]

“That’s right,” Kalrk replied. And you?”

[Captain Donald Gibbs. Thank you, Mr. Kalrk. We wouldn’t have escaped those cylon ships! Where’d you learn to shoot like that? And that was some fancy flying.]

“I have my hobbies, captain. And I like to be prepared for anything.”

[Well, thanks again.] Gibbs repeated. [Where have you been? What have you seen, Mr. Kalrk?]

“Humanity’s children have come home,” was the plainly stated sentence. “But this, this way....” His voice trailed off.

[It’s a nightmare,] Gibbs remarked. [What should we do? Should we go somewhere or...?]

“No!” Kalrk interrupted. Then he took a breath to calm himself. “It isn’t safe to be moving about. You should keep a low profile here.”

[That’s what we were doing, then those two showed up.]

“They were scouts... I think,” Kalrk said. *But what were they scouting*, he thought. “No more should come this way for some hours... I’ve studied the Cylon War and their tactics. You’ll be safe here for a while.”

[We’ll be safe? What about you, Mister Kalrk?]

“Kalrk. My name is Kalrk.” He didn’t like being called mister. “I... I have to check something out. Wait here for me. I won’t be long. You’ll be safe here for hours, trust me.”

[I won’t promise that we’ll be here hours from now, Kalrk . But I sure would like your company.] Don Gibbs was being honest. [*Astral Dawn* owes you big time, hero.]

“I won’t be more than two hours, maybe less. Kalrk, out.” He turned his ship from the side of the liner and at a short distance, *Mercurius* jumped away.

Aerelon

Morning, day of the Cylon attacks

Hunt woke up with a start and gasped. “Frak me,” he growled, putting his hand to the side of his jaw. He realized what had awakened him; animals, big ones from the sounds of it, being loaded onto the shuttle. He breathed in and out, pressed his palm against his bruised ribs, and then gave a mental shrug. *Whatever, he thought. Change of scenery will do me good... just hope nobody looks in here.*

The barbed wire gash on his left hand was throbbing, and he opened and closed his hand experimentally. The closet he was hiding in was almost completely dark and he couldn’t see anything.

After awhile, it sounded like the loading was done, then there were various ship noises and then the shuttle took off.

“Hell,” Hunt muttered, bracing himself. Once the ship was airborne, the flight was smooth and steady, and didn’t last very long—less than an hour.

Then the reverse of before—the shuttle landed, people talking, animals were unloaded, and Hunt listened carefully, trying to figure out where he was. Somewhere else on Aerelon? It didn’t *sound* like it. He didn’t move from the closet for awhile, then cautiously opened the door a crack and peered out, listening. Nothing—that is, no people and no animals. Slowly he eased out of the closet, stiff and sore and alert. No one was in the shuttle, but the hatch was still open. He looked out to see a landing bay with no one in sight. So he was on a larger ship now...

He walked down the shuttle ramp, following the path that the animals had obviously been

herded along, out the landing bay and down a wide passage. He could hear the animals more clearly now, cows he guessed, and he tested each hatch he came to. The first unlocked one was a feed storage locker, so he slid in and looked around. Bales of hay were stacked deck to overhead from the back along one wall. Bales had been taken from the front, the second stack only as high as Hunt was tall, and a single row in front at knee height. Across from the hay, large unopened bags of grain and other lumpy feed, and near the hatch, a big metal bin with a door a few feet off the floor. Hunt opened it, finding loose grain inside.

As good as any other place, he thought, and with reminders of his various injuries he rearranged the hay bales to make a hollow space behind the front stacks. He climbed into his 'nest' and relaxed slightly. He looked at the gash on his left palm. It had bled quite a bit, leaving dry crusted blood over his hand and forearm, but wasn't bleeding any more—now it was very tender, swollen, and red.

Unexpectedly, the hatch opened and someone came in. Hunt froze, not even breathing, until they left. "So far so good," he muttered quietly, then tenderly rubbed his aching jaw.

Destroyer *Griffyn*

The explosion of the last Baseship was spectacular, but the Raiders were so numerous there was no time for celebration. The *Griffyn's* flak turrets were taking out some Raiders, but the heat of the battle was now a matter of air combat maneuvering between single seat fighters.

Mad Dog looked around for a solution, her eyes scanned and thoughts raced. *We have to get them closer to the Griffyn*, she thought. Suddenly a flash off to the right caught her eye. She turned her head to see a missile streaking towards the *Griffyn* she whipped her viper around and poured on the speed in an attempt to destroy it before it hit. She fired at the missile but could not hit it.

"*Griffyn* from Mad Dog you've got an incoming vampire at five o'clock. I can't get it in time. Brace, *Griffyn*, brace!"

Mad Dog yanked back on the stick and pulled away from the *Griffyn* as fast as she could so as not to get caught in either the *Griffyn's* firing solution or in the blast wave from the missile's impact. Just as she looked back over her shoulder the missile struck the *Griffyn's* starboard flight pod.

The resulting detonation blinded her for a few moments and then the blast wave she was desperately trying to avoid hit her.

CPO Paul Luna
Destroyer *Douglas J. Griffyn* Deck Chief
- in the starboard flight pod

The warning of the missile was so sudden... he saw the techs standing there bracing themselves for the impact, and when he could see through the smoke after the explosion... it was what he imagined Hell to be like.

Fire, sparks, smoke, and the noises of groaning metal greeted his senses. He stood up, and saw that a beam had fallen from the upper structure above and the sight was unbearable. Checking their pulses only confirmed his fears. Paul looked around for something, anything to cover them with. He finally found a tarp used to cover vipers. It would have to do.

The DC teams were swarming everywhere, putting out fires and sealing off hatches. Luna found PO2 Gulley, "what's our status?" Only receiving an odd look from Gulley he realized the roaring noise of the fire. "What's our status," he yelled.

"Launch tubes 1-4 are inoperable... too much structural damage," she said. Luna quickly began running through the deck, checking for personnel and checking the other 6 launch tubes.

Everything else checked out... well... checked out as good as can be expected in this chaotic situation. Luna grabbed his necklace, which consisted of a small goddess pendant, kissed it, and said a small prayer.

As he raced to the area where the heaviest damage was being reported, Luna kissed the pendant again. *You can never be too superstitious on a fleet destroyer during a firefight*, he mused.

Battlestar *Libra*
Colonial Recon Marines
Fire Team 1

[All hands brace for impact!]

Alarms blared throughout the ship.

Lance corporal Josette Benoit hardly had time to grab the railing on the bulkhead before the incoming ordnance hit.

The ship shook violently, and she was thrown to the deck. The lights flickered briefly and then went out, enveloping the passageway in Stygian darkness. The sounds were deafening – fire alarms, boots running, metal groaning in protest at the abuse. She screamed above the din “Fire Team! Status!”

“Lafitte here!” The voice was strong and came from somewhere behind her.

“Jones?” Benoit called out to the third member of her team. “Jonesy? Lafitte! Where’s Jones?”

She heard movement behind her as she stood up.

“He’s here!” Lafitte called. “Out cold, but still breathing.”

“Make him comfortable and let’s go. We gotta get to the CIC!”

Their orders were to haul their asses to the CIC and protect the CO at all costs. They rushed through the passageways, now faintly illuminated by emergency LED lighting.

The CIC was a bevy of activity. In its midst, Commander Benito Rodrigues, the Old Man or Badass Benny, as he was sometimes referred to, appeared an island of calm competence. The Old Man was standing, giving orders, seemingly in all places at the same time.

The Old Man would get them out of this. She was sure of it.

“Hell of a way to celebrate your birthday, eh?” Lafitte joked, a crooked smile gracing his too-pretty face.

Josette breathed deeply, “My birthday...”

Earlier that day...

Josette smiled as she took out the carefully wrapped package from her locker.

Her birthday present from Aunt Claire.

Every year since she could remember, Aunt Claire had sent her a present for her birthday. Sometimes the package was a few days early, but it had never been late. The gift itself was simple, its monetary worth determined by the ebbs and flows of Aunt Claire’s often scant finances – a small toy or a coloring book when she was a child; a batch of cookies, a bottle of cologne or some pretty trinket as she grew older... But always with the gift there was a letter, and that was the most special part of Josette’s birthday ritual. For the letter invariably told a

story about Aunt Claire's twin sister, Celine, when she was Josette's age. Celine. Josette's mother. Celine who died when Josette was only two.

She opened the package carefully, setting aside the gaily wrapped box with its paper ribbons and bows. She would open it later. First the letter.

As usual, it was handwritten on pastel colored paper that still bore a soft scent of some unidentifiable flower. Aunt Claire would send other messages throughout the year, electronic messages to Josette's e-account, with pictures and stuff. But her birthday letter was special, meant to be touched and saved and enjoyed for many years.

... .. My dearest niece,

*... .. Happy birthday! May the gods bless you and protect you, and may
... .. your day be filled with joy and beauty.*

*... .. You are now twenty, and such a fine young woman... Celine would
... .. be so proud of you, dear Josette! She met your father when she
... .. was 20, you know. She was in nursing school...*

Josette's eyes misted, and she closed them briefly. She knew this story – it was her favorite when she was growing up. She could hear her father's deep voice as he tucked her to sleep, telling her, for the umpteenth time, how he met her mother. "She was a nursing student, Josie, beautiful as an angel. Her eyes were a clear turquoise blue, like the still waters off the beaches of Korfeaux, her skin like golden honey. And her smile! Her smile would light up a room, Josie, and her sweet voice could soothe away all pain. She was assigned to care for a dumb fireman with more brawn than brains..." He always laughed when he said that, and Josette always blew him a kiss and burrowed deeper into her bed, imagining her beautiful mother and her handsome, brave father, who'd been injured saving someone's life. "I saw her, Josie, and it was like the gods had smiled on me. I fell in love with her right there. And the gods did smile on me then, because she felt the same way..."

*... ..They married a few months later and were gloriously Happy. Twelve years passed, and their
... ..joy was finally complete when Celine delivered a healthy, bouncing baby girl. And they
... ..named her Josette.*

She smiled at Lafitte with gallows humor. "I said I wanted fireworks for my birthday, Frankie. Looks like I got them."

Lance Corporal Psyche (Princess) D'Argent
Colonial Marines - Recon
Fire Team 2

Alarms blared throughout the ship, as an announcement came over the intercom

[All hands brace for impact!]

This sent the majority of people looking for something to hold on to with one small oblivious exception.

"So this is what the end of the world looks like," Psyche muttered under her breath, as she stood watching all the others scurry around her like ants whose home had just been sat on. But considering that their home had pretty much just been sat on, it probably was an appropriate picture.

Some lay dead, others were breaking down into fits of despair while yet others were rising to the occasion, true heroes. And here she was on the outside watching it all, fascinated by it all and yet consumed with only one real thought. Was *he* dead?

Somehow she doubted it. People like him did not die in holocausts or human genocides or other such human trivialities. She just was not that lucky and he was just that resilient. Well the world may be ending but she was Happy to know that the one true thing about herself still seemed to hold true: she really did have one big motherfrakker of a daddy complex.

A frantic passerby gave her an incredulous look at the chuckle that escaped her lips at that thought.

She sighed. More fodder for her rep. Oh well, maybe she would die and if any one survived they could write on her casket "She laughed in the face of death." This thought really didn't upset or scare her as it would most others. Which was something that became clear to her at her first meeting with her father after her joining the marines.

"What in the world makes you think a beauty queen could ever survive in the army" Said the elegant man waspishly

"Marines dad," she corrected him almost unconsciously, ignoring his astounded look at this comment.

"Marines, army, or navy, it does not matter. Other than this place will be the death of you. Mark my words, you cannot survive in a world without me," he said through gnashed teeth.

"If this place is the death of me at least that will prove one thing." The room fell silent but filled

with a tension louder than any voices as the two occupants stared intently at each other, her father's look daring her to continue. "That if I can't survive this place I really am not my father's daughter," Her eyes for the first time ever met his directly and eye to eye she made the statement, "And I can die with that."

At that moment, the ship took a hit and sent her small frame through the air and her mind back into the present. Oh yes the world was ending, and she supposed she should start doing her part to help put a stop to it, as that was the kind of thing they paid her for.

Gemenon **The Home Colonies**

In a flash of light in the blackness of space, the small ship *Mercurius* appeared from a hyperlight jump.

Kalrk had chosen to come here for a specific reason.

For the cylons to attack the humans at Picon made sense, as it was the home of Colonial Fleet Headquarters. For the cylons to attack the humans at Caprica made sense, as it held the political seat.

Gemenon was a rather peaceful world, where the citizens regarded their sacred scrolls with the highest of reverence. This was Kalrk's reason to come here, to see if the cylons were actually attacking the other colonies, when there was no need to. By destroying Fleet Headquarters, the political seat, and the military forces, the Colonies would be theirs. There was no advantage strategically for attacking the other Colonies, including Gemenon.

The sight before Kalrk sickened him.

Gemenon was being pounded by nuclear explosions. There were well over 300 raiders encircling the dying planet. Two baseships in orbit were silent observers.

A flash of light between the two baseships, and a colonial battlestar was there. Had the battlestar *chosen* to appear there? She looked like she had all ready been in battle. The telltale signs of powerful nuclear explosions were on her hull, horrifyingly evident on one of her landing pods. The pod wasn't viable; it was barely still attached to the ship. There was no way it could

fully retract or extend.

In short, the battlestar was a bird with a clipped wing.

Maybe the baseships had been taken by surprise that a battlestar would be so desperate, or so stupid, to attack two of them at point blank range like this. Alternatively, maybe the baseships were astounded at the audacity of such a tactic. Both way, the battlestar was launching her nuclear ordnance at both of the titans, and they were doing nothing.

One baseship exploded and for just a fleeting moment, Kalrk was amazed. Could the battlestar win this?

The surviving baseship however, now burning, fired its salvo at the battlestar. As these giants slugged it out, raiders joined in and fired upon the battlestar, hitting it above, below and behind.

It was no contest. It was a slaughter.

As the second baseship exploded from the onslaught of the nuclear ordnance from the Colonial Battlestar, it too succumbed to the damage inflicted upon it. The battlestar erupted in a tremendous cloud of flame and debris.

Frakkin' hell! Kalrk was dumbfounded by the sheer magnitude. "That was..." he said aloud to no one. "That was the dumbest, most asinine move I think any commander ever made in colonial history. That ship could have survived to fight another day, but instead, the fool..."

It was too much for Kalrk, so much needless bloodshed. Killing to survive, struggling for survival... *that* made sense. But this suicide run by the battlestar, and the sheer disregard for life by the cylons... it was too much. If the humans would be this stupid, he would have to be smarter.

If the cylons would be this heartless, he would have heart.

Tears ran down his checks, as he tapped some buttons on the console of his ship. Soon, Kalrk jumped away from this macabre scene.

Lieutenant Greg Ryans
Viper 211 D288NC Archangels
Launching from *Libra*

[Action Stations Action Stations, set condition one throughout the ship, this is NOT a drill, repeat, this is NOT a drill,] came the call from the CIC earlier.

"What the Frak," Greg had thought. There was no time to wonder, he was in the launch tubes and ready for launch. His MkVII viper had its navigational programs wiped, and could not engage in the battle as the process was still going on. So he had to settle for a Mk II... from word of mouth, the only weapon effective against this Cylon attack.

The second Greg and the Archangels were out the launch tubes, he saw... VIPERS... everywhere, nearly half of them frozen in place, and the rest taking on Raiders that vastly outnumbered them. He looked around and saw more of his squadron mates still pouring out of the *Libra*.

Anger arose inside of him, and he felt it course all the way down to his fingertips. He looked at Baseships: "Just wait until we get past *Libra's* flak barrier."

Looking towards *Libra*, Ryans saw another pair of vipers launch and turned in time to see nine Raiders in front of him, all closing on the *Libra*. Desperate times called for desperate measures.

Greg toggled over to Missile launch, leaving his guns alone for the moment.

For the first time in his life, Greg cursed the viper Mk II. *Only four missiles, better make them count.*

Locking on to the Raiders in front of him, Greg let loose with all four of his ship to ship missiles. He knew, in his heart and his mind, that if more than one of the missiles in flight failed to hit their targets then the *Libra* was going to be in real trouble.

And yet, Greg had more pressing concerns...

Somewhere, out here, in the chaos that was combat, there were dozens of vipers racing around trying to save his ship... his home. His brothers, his fellow viper pilots, were out there, somewhere.

Flight Ops
Battlestar *Libra*
Day 00

"All squadron leaders, this is the CAG. Get your remaining units together and coordinate your efforts with the other squadron CO's. We've got more toasters inbound toward our position. Take 'em out." Major Craig Maur, the *Libra* CAG, hit a switch and pushed the mic on his headset aside. "What the hell is wrong with the comms?"

"Cylons appear to be jamming us. All wireless communications are erratic. Also... reports coming in... .. Sir! Numerous pilots report multiple vipers have been disabled. They say... they say they're being turned off, like somebody flipped a switch!" explained one of the officers. They were in the 'War Room' trying to manage all the vipers. The major leaned against the board looking at all the makeshift models. The number and rate of "friendlies" being pulled off the board was disconcerting at best.

"Frakkin' hell," he said, gritting his teeth. "Get me the chief of the deck." It was evident that despite their best attempts at circumventing the CNP protocols recently installed in the ships there was still more work to be done.

Main Flight Deck
Battlestar *Libra*

"HEY MAC," Checkov yelled over the noise of the deck, waving the handset in the air. "Where's the Chief?"

Mac looked up, her hands still on the viper's fuel regulator valve. "DAMAGE CONTROL, port side last I heard," she shouted back.

"IT'S THE CAG!" the blonde knuckledragger yelled.

"Oh, frak," Mac muttered, wiping her hands on a rag as she trotted over to take the handset. "Thanks, Icy." Into the handset she said, "Petty Officer MacLean here sir."

[Where's the chief?] The voice on the other end of the line was short and terse. Before Mac could answer the CAG continued. [Wait, you never mind that. You tell him we've got a situation here. Our birds out there are being shut down somehow by those frakkin' toasters. You knuckledraggers need to fix that.]

Mac closed her eyes, only opening them when she had herself under control. It was one thing to pop off at a pilot. It was something else to go off on the CAG. She clenched the handset tightly, holding back irritation, and said respectfully, "Sir, I'm aware we have a situation, and I'm sure the Chief is aware, too. We're getting the software fix downloaded into the birds as fast as we can, and we're patching up the ones that are coming in shot up... and half the deck crew is on damage control, keeping the *Libra* together. Begging your pardon sir, but while I'm here talking to you, I'm not on the deck working on the ships."

She took a deep breath, frustrated. *Hold your tongue, Mac, you're talking to the CAG*, she rebuked herself.

Flight Ops **Battlestar *Libra***

The major wasn't really paying much attention to MacLean's response. One of the officers had handed him a note.

"Mm hmm, we'll just keep our birds flying'. CAG out." He switched channels on his headset without taking his eyes off the paper.

"Aww hell." he muttered, after absorbing all the critical information from the latest sitrep. "Tell me we've got a solution to this crap?"

"Yes sir. Technicians are currently rolling back our navcom software. Seems the Cylons have exploited a flaw in our navigational-"

The major cut him off quick. "I don't need the specifics just give me a simple answer." He stared intently at the board and then to the dradis screens. "How many of our p-"

Suddenly the ship rocked with the impact of a nuclear detonation. The CAG gripped the edge of the table and watched the lights flicker. "Sitrep! Was that theirs or one of ours?"

"Theirs sir! Point defense missed another anti ship missile. We've got minor structural damage

ship wide. Engine pods 3 and 4 damaged. FTL is offli..."

"Do I look like the CO, Lieutenant? Give me a Sitrep on our men out there," Maur wiped the sweat off his brow with the back of his hand and unzipped his flight suit a bit. He sighed, feeling exhausted already.

"Reports are coming in sir," the young lieutenant examined his screen carefully. "Ship to ship comms are pretty frakked sir. I think Phoenix squadron reports only minor casualties. Captain Montello of the Archangel's reports half his birds are back in the barn for computer downgrades. Black Crows are unknown. We can't raise them on wireless and dradis is sporadic. Captain Rees reports, I believe only two casualties in his squadron."

"And the other ships?"

The lieutenant called up the information. "The *Solstice* is gone sir. Last clear communication said their launch systems were inoperative. All vipers currently on the board is all they could muster before they went up. *Griffyn* is currently holding up about as well as we are."

Maur leaned against the table and stared at the board in thought. He looked very tense and he didn't realize he'd been clenching his teeth.

"Keep monitoring our people." He looked around grimly. "And may the gods have mercy on us... "

Somewhere in space..

Astral Dawn.

"Ladies and gentlemen, this is the captain speaking," Don Gibbs began the ship-wide public address message. "Two cylon ships, smaller than the raiders of the First Cylon War, were destroyed by the pilot of a colonial vessel that saved us. That vessel is the *Mercurius*. Kalkr, the president of K Industries is the pilot and owner of that ship."

"All souls aboard *Astral Dawn* owe their lives to Captain Kalkr, and his foresight in arming his ship. He has studied the cylon issue as a hobby, which has proven fortuitous for us. The good captain has gone scouting, to ascertain the situation throughout the Colonies. He has assured me, and I concur, that we are better to remain here, than to wander into a combat zone."

"As you have been hearing, our forces are not doing well against the cylons. Please pray for them, for your loved ones... and for us on the *Dawn*."

"I assure you that the bridge crew, I, and all the crew, are prepared for the possibility, hopefully remote, of more cylons entering our area. If this were to happen, we will make a hyperlight jump, not to any Colony, as all are under attack, but to a point outward, near the red line."

"For now, we remain here, anticipating the return of Captain Kalrk, praying to the gods and above all, remaining calm."

Gibbs replaced the handset on the cradle and looked at his chief pilot. "Did I sound convincing?"

The man looked up at him and smiled grimly. "If I didn't know any better I would feel like everything's going to be fine."

Gibbs nodded and returned the smile. "My next magic trick will be to convince myself of those same words."

Destroyer Douglas J. Griffyn

The attack on the baseship had worked beautifully, but now the task was to mop up the remaining raiders. Flak turrets were useless now that the raiders were aiming for the vipers. Missile barrages were too risky since both viper and raider alike were in such close proximity. The recent impact by the antiship missile was a big hit but the destroyer was still in the game.

[*Griffyn*, this is Mad Dog, we need to draw the Raiders closer to you, we're outnumbered out here,] came the CAG's voice over the wireless.

"*Griffyn* Actual Copy that," Herald looked around for a short moment and continued. "Flak turrets and missile barrages stand by for incoming bogies, Mad Dog, bring your people our way, and hit after-burners on my mark."

[Okay Talons, Stallions, form up and head towards *Griffyn*, hit after-burners on *Griffyn*'s mark], Captain Barker's voice could be heard over the combat channel.

Herald saw them turn and head for the *Griffyn's* outer perimeter on the dradis console. As he watched, he saw the raiders turn as well, intent on pursuing the vipers. *Wait... wait... wait...* Herald thought. *Now!* "All vipers hit afterburners," he said into the handheld. To his surprise and horror, only fourteen followed the order. "Jamming... FRAKKING JAMMING," he said in anguish. The four remaining vipers vanished off dradis, while the others accelerated towards the *Griffyn*. The distance between vipers and Raiders began growing. It was time to even out the odds. Looking at the weapons officer Herald waited for the young man to complete his calculations.

"Turrets and Barrages have firing solutions sir!"

"Open fire," Herald said.

The raiders on dradis began flashing and then disappeared one by one. Of the thirty-seven that followed the fleeing vipers, twenty-nine were taken out quickly, the rest fell back and headed towards the *Libra*.

"Increase speed and pursue, when missile barrages have firing solution, you know what to do," Herald said to Braddock. He lifted the handset to his ear. "Mad Dog, assist *Libra* vipers in Raider cleanup," he said.

Battlestar *Libra* Fleet Marine Ops Section

"Hey Princess, you done taking your beauty nap?" yelled Lance Corporal Alma "Zany" Zanutto as she sped past Py. Pushing herself up off the floor where she had just landed, Lance Corporal Psyche D'Argent shook her head to clear the dizziness that had briefly overtaken her after she had been knocked off her feet by the last missile impact. Nodding her head Py quickly got up.

"Yeah. You know when they say brace for impact that generally means grab on to something, not stand there like the village idiot," PFC Hugo Lopez said in mock concern. "Are you all right? You actually flew for a minute and I know you never wanted to be a viper pilot."

Py, getting to her feet, gave Hugo a quick glance and dashed off saying over her shoulder, "now who's the village idiot?"

Py and the rest of her team had orders to boot it to the starboard side hangar deck in case of boarding actions by the enemy. It was the standard drill, one practiced countless times. These weren't normal times though. Somehow she doubted that would be an actually problem however as the cylons seemed intent on blowing them all out of the sky.

Turning the corner she reached the hangar deck and came upon a scene of utter devastation. People were being taken out on stretchers, minor fires had started and deck crews were working hard to extinguish the flames. Pilots could be heard screaming at knuckledraggers for not working fast enough to repair their vipers. Lopez and Zanutto came up behind her and looked upon the chaos in fascination.

“Hugo, you take launch control,” Py began. “Anyone comes down that breezeway that doesn’t have authorization, put them on the floor. Zany and I are going up to the top deck and keep watch over the main area.” She gave the Sniper Rifle slung over her back a pat.

It took only a few minutes for Py and Zany to reach the catwalk overlooking the entire bay. Once in place, Py unstrapped her weapon, placed it on the railing to more easily use the scope, and began scanning the whole deck. Zany sat down next to her and pulled out her binoculars, starting her own watch.

Looking through her scope at the chaos below her was calming, soothing even, to her nerves and she soon found herself back into her comfort zone of numbness that her earlier trip down memory lane had temporarily knocked her out from. She found herself wondering how many would live and how many would die, even started making a death pool in her head based on different people and how they were acting; five minutes for the criers, one minute for the heroes, and thirty seconds for the idiots stupid enough to jump into those death traps called vipers.

“Possible target 10 o'clock,” Zany said bringing her out of her reverie.

Py shifted her weapon to the area Zany indicated in time to see something she thought was a trick of the light. Down on the deck a lone deckhand was leaning over a small pile of equipment. It appeared to Py as if the person she sighted in on was starting a fire!

“Are you seeing what I am,” a bewildered Zany asked. “Should I call this in?”

Py was about to give permission to proceed when all of a sudden a fire extinguisher was thrown to the deckhand. Immediately he started putting out the fire he seemed to have started. Py shook her head to shake the suspicion away. “Negative, we must have been seeing things.”

“Yeah I see that too but I could have sworn that person started the fire,” Zany maintained stubbornly.

“Well that fire is out and unless we see something like that happen again I say leave it alone,”

despite what she saw Py felt something was very odd about that whole situation. She shifted her scope to another area of the deck and resumed sentry duties.

Day 0

AerStar Orbital Trans-shipment Facilities

Loading Dock E245

“Slowly, slowly. Careful with that container! Where did you learn to load, in wrecking school?” Buster McCormack growled the instructions to the hapless loading technician over the wireless. “Godsdamned idiots, the lot of them,” he murmured under his breath as he oversaw the hook-up of that last huge container to the Demeter’s slim body. The cargo shuttle was already back and secured, its cargo unloaded and taken care of. Now if Thorny would get the FTL engine fixed, they could be on their way. Godsdamned waste of money and effort, if they asked him, having functional FTL drives on an inter-colony cargo hauler, but nobody asked for *his* opinion, no siree; the Capt’n and Thorny, they thought they were still in the Fleet, always fitting the old Dem with every sort of high-falutin’ gee-gaws...

“Frakking waste of hard-earned cubits, I say...” he muttered for the millionth time.

Inside the engine room, Thorny wiped the grease off her hands as she described her concerns to Ross Whittaker, one of the engineers at AerStar facility. “It’s like this, Mr. Whittaker, we’ve overhauled the engine twice already, set up a dedicated computer for the calculations, out of network to prevent accidental corruption, and *still* the old girl will be off on the jumps. It’s not that bad on close ones, but on longer ones... Maybe if you would check her out? I have the last round of diagnostics here...” She rummaged through the desk’s drawers and found the thick stack of papers under some circuit boards.

Whittaker took the printouts gingerly. “Well, Ms. Thorne, I’ll do my best. Why don’t you spool the engine as if for a jump so I can check the engine functions?”

“Sure thing. You’ll see she’s a sweet one, but damn if she doesn’t go where she wants instead of where we want her to!”, Thorny joked as she began running the protocols for an FTL jump.

On the bridge, Inga Mueller was giving a quick tour to her old Fleet friend, Xenthias Merconi. “Xen, you really didn’t have to bring Karl and the girls over. I would’ve sent the shuttle to pick them up.”

“Nonsense!” The striking brunette waved her friend’s protests away. “How could I miss this chance to see you? It’s been, what? Five years since we last saw each other? Inga, you have to take some time off, go on a cruise, and spend some time planetside. You know you guys can stay at the beach house any time you want. The gods know there’s enough space there since Owen left.”

Inga could still not quite believe that Owen had left Xen for another woman. Her friend was as slim and beautiful as she’d been more than 25 years ago when they met in flight school. Xen and Owen had made the perfect couple – Owen the tall, virile CAG, blond and beautiful as the god Apollo, and Xenthias the lovely vivacious nugget who captured his heart. It was the stuff of romantic novels.

And now it was over. She kept the beach house and the *Terpischore*; he kept the town house and the company they’d built together.

Inga hugged her friend. “I know, hon. And...”

Whatever she was about to say was cut short by the sound of sirens, followed immediately by an explosion. The ship shook violently, throwing them.

“What the frak?!”

“Inga! Outside! Baseships! Frak it to Hades, we’re under attack!!!”

Inga ran to the captain’s chair, Xenthias close behind her. dradis showed multiple contacts, too many to count.

Another explosion rocked the cargo hauler.

“They are blowing up the docking station! We got to get out of here”

Inga flipped a switch. “Buster! Clive! Shut all hatches. Repeat, shut all hatches. Prepare for immediate departure!”

Another switch. “Thorny! Fire up the engines – we’re bailing out NOW!”

She grabbed the PA mike and switched it on, “Attention all crew. Attention all crew. Prepare for immediate departure. Repeat, prepare for immediate departure and hang the frak on. It’s going to be a bumpy ride!”

Without words, Xenthias assumed co-pilot position, and was checking the various gauges for readiness. “All clear for takeoff, Bluebird.” It was as if 25 years had melted away and they were back in the Fleet...

“Right, Jolly. Let’s get this bird outta here!”

With a rush of air, the Demeter unlocked from the docking station and headed for open space.

The baseship was pounding away at the AerStar Facilities. Some of the ships that had not been able to unlock now lay destroyed, their burning skeletons still attached to the loading docks. The docking station itself was a broken toy, twisting in space.

Then suddenly, as if on cue, the baseship spewed its raiders, to finish the job.

“Frak me! They’re coming after us!”

“Blue, there’s too many! We have to jump! CAN we jump?”

“Yes!” She flicked the switch. “Thorny! Spool up the jump drives. How soon?”

[Engine’s spooled, just tell me where and we’re ready to go.]

“Wherever, Thorny! As far away as she’ll go!” Inga’s voice was sharp.

[You got it! 15 seconds and counting]

14

13

12

Two raiders approached for the kill, flying almost leisurely.

10

9

Inga flipped the Demeter 90 degrees – it wasn't easy; this ship did not have the maneuverability of the raptor she'd flown when she'd pulled those stunts as a matter of course. But flip it did, presenting the cargo holds to the approaching raiders. If they fired before she could jump at least they wouldn't hit anything vital.

7 ...

6 ...

The raiders accelerated their pace, splitting up as they approached.

5...

4 ...

They opened fire at the same time, and the Demeter shook with the almost simultaneous impact of their missiles.

2

1

JUMP!

Combat Zone
Battlestar *Libra* Airspace

Greg was distracted for a second by a bright light. He looked over his shoulder for merely a second, before returning to his hunt to more Raiders to kill.

Oh, Lord's of Kobol, they're hitting the Libra. These psychotic machines are serious.

Off to his left, he could make out the skeletal remains of the *Delphinus*, as pieces of her superstructure floated lazily amongst the wreckage of the baseship she took down.

A raider, alone, came at him from below. He juked and jinked as hard as his viper would allow, but it was no use this time. A line of bullets slammed through his left stabilizer wing, even as his return blast sheared the wing off the raider and sent it spinning out of control.

He looked over his damage report computer for a moment. Left wing badly damaged. Left Fuel tank punctured, and leaking. Port side airframe controls shorted out.

Well, I'm out of the fight. At least I got a few of those mother frakkers.

Turning as best he could, Greg brought himself back on a fairly steady course for the *Libra*. He opened a channel.

"*Libra, Libra*, this is viper 227D. Be advised, I am damaged beyond battle capacity, but flyable. I am returning to base. Inform Flight Deck Ops that I am coming in hot. My viper is controllable, barely. Landing will be near crash conditions. Please have emergency team ready to respond if I can't control it... Sorry gang, I got a few of the frakkers, but I'm out of the rest of this one."

[227D this is Flight Control. You are cleared for a starboard approach. Crash team is standing by. Good luck Lieutenant.]

"Roger, Flight Control, I have the ball. Nail everything down, I'm coming in hot."

Greg looked up briefly, savoring the site of the Landing Bay. *Almost home boy, just another minute and you'll be safe and snug behind the protection of an entire Battlestar.*

Ryans turned his attention to his controls. In order to compensate for his damaged portside controls he was having to overcook his forward, aft, and starboard maneuvering thrusters. The viper bucked and shifted like an unbroken horse on the first day of saddle training.

Good, good, little above the glide-path but acceptable. Come on Greg, you can do this. Are you a hot pilot, or just another wannabe throttle jock?

Pushing his stick forward, Greg aligned himself more properly with the glide-path into the Landing Bay. He pulled his throttles back as far as he dared. Drifting a little left, he applied

more aft thrust to bring his nose around.

300 Meters, entering inner marker. Deploy retros now... 200 meters... go to full reverse thrust... 50 meters... landing skids down... Let's hope the Doc can put me back together if this doesn't work... and... touchdown...

The fireworks were spectacular. The sparks from the viper's landing gear spread across the entire width of the viper. The light from the engines lit up every inch of the Landing Bay. Skidding across the deck at nearly twice the recommended landing speed, his viper Mk II looked like a rocket straight out of a launcher. The fire from his retro-thrusters blew molten red shafts of pure hell. The few people who were bold enough not to have taken protective shelter within the inner hangers were rewarded with the sight of one of the most insane landings ever in the history of the Battlestar *Libra*, to date.

Less than five meters from the opposite end of the landing bay arrestor net, a mere twenty-five meters from the open space, Greg's viper came to rest, pointed at a 30 degree angle to the correct flight path. It took several minutes for the deck crews to tow his bird to an elevator. He wasn't injured so he rode it out. Once in the safety of the flight deck Greg popped his cockpit. He removed his protective harness, stood up, placed his right hand on the side of his cockpit, and vomited on the deck.

He looked around, and saw the small number of people who had remained in the bay while he executed the landing. Smiling inwardly, he held up his hand.

"Thank you ladies and gents, nothing to see here, just another pilot coming home. You can go about your business."

Greg Ryans, you owe an extra prayer to the Lords of Kobol tonight.

Slightly unsteady but nonetheless intent on getting back out and into the fight Ryans strode off to find another viper to fly.

Demeter

Throughout the day, Hunt heard a variety of things—people in the passageway outside the feed locker, animals, weird ship sounds. Or maybe they weren't so weird—Hunt had never been aboard a ship before. He discovered that the lights in the compartment were motion sensor, coming on when he moved, and turning off a few minutes after he stopped moving.

He explored the feed locker, completing his survey in minutes even though it was a good sized storage room. It was crammed full of hay and other feed for animals. Curious, he ripped open one of the lumpy bags of feed, surprised to find it was filled with apples.

“Shit,” he murmured, touching his jaw. “Figures...” But he pried the apple in two with his fingers and broke off small pieces, chewing gingerly.

The gash on his left hand was still swollen and hot, and he mused, *I should probably wash this out*. Each time he thought the passage had been quiet long enough to risk scouting around, he heard someone out there. *Wait till night*, he decided. *I bet night shift is fewer people, quieter*. He settled back into his nest in the hay and dozed.

The sudden blare of sirens brought him up out of sleep, heart pounding. “Frak!” he looked around, for a moment thinking the cops were after him. He then realized where he was. “Frak,” he muttered again, wondering what to do, but before he could do anything, the ship shook hard, throwing him off the hay bales, tossing the hay and feed bags every which way.

Warning words came over the ship's speakers. “Damn!” Hunt scrambled, pressing his back in the corner by the door, trying to brace himself.

Seconds ticked by with agonizing slowness. Just when he started to relax, the ship moved, more smoothly this time—but then it felt to Hunt as if the entire ship had been flipped over, the hay and feed bags flying through the air. He curled up on the deck in the corner, protecting his head with his arms. *Frak me*, he thought, resigned but not afraid. *Get away from the Regals just so I can get crushed by hay and bags of apples*. He shoved away the hay bale that had landed on his back, gasping at the pain in his left hand. It was slimy with blood, and he realized the gash had opened. He pressed his hand against his chest, wincing.

The ship jolted violently several more times, but it wasn't as bad as when everything had flipped over. In the relative stillness that followed, Hunt breathed, not moving.

And then Hunt felt the strangest sensation... as if he'd been turned inside out for the space of

time between heartbeats. "Oh hell," he gasped, but even as he spoke it was over. The sensation made him nauseous... or maybe it was just all the sudden movements of the ship... or the beating he'd just taken, after having been pounded by the Regals... or maybe it was a combination of all of it.

He lay there on the deck, curled in the corner, waiting for whatever would happen next, partly hidden by the shambles of the hay and feed bags around him. Eventually he relaxed a little, kicking at a hay bale to give himself a little more space.

"Frak," he murmured with gloom. "What the hell have you gotten into now, Hunt?"

Battlestar *Libra*

Klaxons... flashing lights... bitter air. Dan coughed, his throat like sandpaper, and was suddenly aware of his surroundings. He pushed himself to his knees, rubbing his watering eyes with his forearm. "Al," he said, his voice like gravel, turning to the knuckledragger. "Al, wake up." He shook the petty officer, who stirred and started groaning.

"Gods," Al gasped. "Frak..."

Dan stayed on his hands and knees, looking for the other two on his damage control team in the smoky passageway. He found each of them, pausing, then made his way back to Al, who was sitting up.

"Are they..." Al asked hoarsely.

Dan nodded.

Al closed his eyes, running his palm down his face, then he crawled over to the bodies, also checking them; he shook his head and collected their dog tags, shoving them in his pocket.

"C'mon," he said to Dan.

Crouched low, they retreated down the passage to clearer air. Al found a handset and reported in, listened, and nodded. "We need to get to starboard environmental control station seven," he told Dan.

"Lead on, sir," Dan said.

Al looked back the way they had come and asked, "Is the hatch down there still open?"

Dan looked also, shrugged, and gripped the nozzle of the fire bottle. He took a deep breath and loped back down the passage, returning after half a minute. "Closed now," he told Al in a raspy voice.

Al nodded and led on, Dan at his shoulder. *If it's like this in here, I wonder what it's like out there*, the Marine wondered. He rubbed his chest with the palm of his hand, grimaced, and followed Al doggedly.

Destroyer Griffyn
Outside the destroyer's firing solution
Day 00

The viper flipped end over end like a helpless leaf in a fall breeze. Mad Dog fought with the attitude controls, cursing violently as she fired maneuvering thrusters in quick succession. She righted her ship and saw, coming towards her, the same cylon raider that had just knocked her out of control. She yanked the flight stick back and slammed the accelerator to the firewall, looping up and over the raider. She dropped out of the loop into a perfect firing position and snapped off a burst from her cannons. The explosive rounds struck the raider along its tail and top, causing it to explode.

[You ok over there Mad Dog?] Hawkeye, the CO of the Talons, asked her.

"Frakker clipped my wing," Barker said as she zig zagged in an attempt to get a line on another raider. "I'm combat capable and there don't seem to be any more problems," she said. "Less talk and more fireworks Hawkeye, you don't want to lose top ranking on the kill boards do you?" Hawkeye couldn't see the smile she had on her face.

"Not a chance nugget," Hawkeye replied with obvious enthusiasm. The raiders were so numerous, and the *Griffyn's* flak barrier was so far away. Travelling that far would be suicide, so to duke it out with the raiders out here was the only option.

"Mother Frakkers, I'll show you jamming," she said as she pointed in the direction of another raider and accelerated back into the fight.

Demeter
Bridge

The view outside was peaceful; no sign of baseships or raiders, no sign of... anything. Distant stars blinked with merry disregard in the vast velvety expanse of fathomless space.

They were alone.

Inga heaved a sigh of relief. Xenthias checked the dradis and the gauges again, then slumped against the console. "That was close..." She muttered to no one in particular.

"But why?" Inga asked, her voice shaking. "What's going on, Xen?"

Her friend could not answer.

Just then, most of the crew erupted into the bridge. The girls, still in their bathing suits and sarongs, rushed to hug their mother, seeking the comfort of her strong embrace. Everyone was talking at the same time, all asking the same thing, what had happened? Over her daughters' heads, Inga sought Karl, and he understood she needed him close; he moved next to her and wrapped his slight frame around his family. They were together; all would be well.

Helmut "Putz" Schmidt exercised his prerogative as second in command and shushed the noisy throng. "People, shut up! Let the captain speak!"

Inga stepped out of her immediate family's embrace and faced her crew – her extended family. "There's not much I can tell you. Just as we finished loading our cargo the AerStar facility was attacked. Before we launched I heard the flight ops crew of the platform mention Cylons."

Shivers went throughout the room. *Cylons?*

"Xenthias and I," she motioned to her friend, "saw the baseships. We unlocked and headed out of there just in time before they destroyed the docking station. Then the raiders came – new ones, smaller and faster. We..." she choked with delayed terror, "we are unarmed; they would've destroyed us! But praise the gods the FTL engine was spooled for check up. We were able to jump to safety." She closed her eyes briefly. "And here we are," she chuckled mirthlessly. "Wherever *here* is. Putz, maybe you can go to the engine room and ask your wife just *where* we should be? So we can at least have a starting point to find out where we actually are?"

She was back in command now. They were safe, for now. It was time to assess damage and

plan their course of action. “Clive, the explosions at the docking station shook us up a bit, and we took some direct hits on the starboard cargo pods. Check for damage and let me know the what, when and how of the fixes. Ferdie,” she turned to the medic/veterinarian/barber of the ship, “prep the infirmary for cuts, bumps and scrapes. I’m pretty sure you’ll have more than a few of those to take care of. Giada and Ilka can help you. Buster, you and your guys check on the cargo...”

Demeter **Cargo Area**

Hunt stirred restlessly. *It was hot, summer in the streets, and he looked for shade, for someplace cooler. He couldn’t find any place, though, even the ground in the shaded alleys baking.*

“Damn,” he sat up and rubbed his face, looking around the feed compartment. He wiped sweat off his forehead with the back of his arm, and looked at his left palm. “Oh, damn...” The throbbing of his swollen hand outstripped any other aches and pains he had. “Not good, Hunt,” he muttered. “Need to get this fixed.”

He was tired, though, and rested a moment...

The belt came down across his back... no, across his hand... whack! He jumped and gritted his teeth, refusing to make any sound. Jaren, the foster parent he lived with, snarled at him and raised the belt again. Hunt ducked his head, but the belt snapped down across his hand again.

Oh, it hurt.

Colonial Occupied Space **Leonis Planetary Boundary**

A year and a half ago, Kalrk had purchased a piece of virtually worthless desert a few time zones west of Leonis City. It was remote, which was vital for his business, public and private; and that time zone was in sync with Caprica City on far away Caprica.

With the “overnight success” of K Industries, the area around it was suddenly prime real estate for other independent inventive companies, and the collection of corporations springing up in the desert around K industries here came to be collectively called K Town.

Today the planet was a radioactive wasteland.

Why? The president of K Industries wondered. *Why did they have to attack Leonis?*

Aboard *Mercurius*, Kalrk made his way to the world; a baseship was lounging in orbit. His transponder system was deactivated, and his ship would be invisible to Colonial technology. The cylons would be able to detect his ship. Wouldn't they?

He entered orbit and began to scan the surface, K Town and K Industries. From what his readings told him, the entire complex suffered a direct nuclear hit. The complex had been completely obliterated.

One and a half years, Kalrk thought to himself. *They destroyed my business. They killed my employees.*

Everyone that knew him, or thought they knew him, would say he was a rather bland fellow, who had an emotionless hard shell.

Not that he would disagree with them.

Until now.

He felt emotions that he had never known before. Remorse... Sorrow... Guilt... Anger.

Anger.

That was the one emotion that overpowered the others, the anger.

Why did they do this... to me?

He decided he wouldn't set down the *Mercurius*. He could, but he wouldn't; he didn't want to see any more details. He didn't want to see the bodies which would be mangled, ripped apart, melted, mixed with rubble and concrete and gods knew what else.

No. He had seen enough.

His gaze was now on the nearby baseship. He flew towards it with a rising anger that threatened to consume him. He began arming procedures on two missiles that were tucked away in hidden compartments on *Mercurius'* underside. The missiles were nuclear and would cause a considerable amount of damage to the baseship.

Just prior to arming the missiles, and certainly alerting the baseship to his true intentions, Kalrk paused. *No this wasn't the answer*, he thought. *I could hit this thing and cause a lot of damage and maybe even destroy it but that will ultimately cause more problems than it's worth.*

He slowed down *Mercurius* and continued his track towards the baseship, as if to come in for a landing. At the last minute he veered away and the *Mercurius* jumped.

Demeter

It took two hours to pacify the cows enough to be able to tend to the injured ones, and three more to take care of their injuries – mostly, as Inga had predicted, bumps and bruises, although some required stitches.

Six hours later, after a short break for some chow, Buster and his crew finally got to the feed hold.

The place was a mess!

Bales of hay were strewn all across the cavernous space, the grain box had toppled and sacks of feed and spilt grain littered the deck.

“Okay, boys, this is the last one. Let’s pick this up so we can get some rest!”

As he lifted a bale of hay, Buster noticed some movement out of the corner of his eye and he moved further back to investigate. *Probably just a mouse...*

Hunt stirred, hearing voices. His head was pounding and it was hot, but he shivered. Someone was looming over him... *REGALS!* He tried to roll away but he was up against something, trapped. He scrambled to his feet unsteadily... *gods, his left hand hurt...* he clutched his arm to his chest, his right hand in a fist, ready. Sweat ran down the side of his face.

"Whoa boy!" *Where did this kid come from?* He was a mess, dirty and bruised, and had a wild look about him. Buster raised his hands, so as not to scare him. "Calm down, kid. Who are you?"

Hunt didn't see Buster, he saw Jaren, the Regal's leader. "Leave me alone!" Hunt growled. He blinked. *No, it wasn't Jaren.* He didn't know this guy. "Whaa," he focused with an effort, trying to move back, stumbling slightly. He licked his lips. "Where am I?" he asked faintly. It was a trick, it had to be. This *WAS* Jaren, and he was trapped. Hunt had no choice, he had to get away, he charged...

Buster wasn't expecting the boy to charge him and was unprepared when Hunt hit him. "You're on the Deme... *Whuff!*" The boy packed a wallop for all his slight frame, and knocked the wind out of Buster when he charged into the older man's midsection. Buster McCormack, however, was a big man, and one not unfamiliar with dockside brawling. He recovered quickly and grabbed the youngster.

It was like trying to hold on to an eel. A very slippery, very angry eel, and one that was burning with fever.

"Lemme... go..." Hunt struggled. He was so tired... his head was pounding. "Please," he whispered faintly. "Don't hurt me... don't..." *NO* he couldn't plead, never show weakness, they preyed on weakness.

But this man wasn't trying to hurt him, just hold him. Hunt's legs felt like rubber, he twisted, trying to get away out of instinct, but his strength was draining quickly.

"Frak," he panted, sagging. "Frak..." he tried to stay on his feet. This wasn't Jaren, it couldn't be, this man was a lot bigger than Jaren and he didn't have a belt, wasn't trying to hit him. "My hand hurts," he groaned, giving up on trying to get away. He rested his head against the front of the man's shoulder. "I'm frakked..."

Buster was taken aback by the boy's reaction. It was as if the wind had been taken out of his sails; he collapsed like a puppet whose strings are cut off, and Buster had to hold him or he would've fallen to the deck.

He spoke gruffly but softly, "'tis okay, boy. Let's have that hand looked at. Ferdie will have you right on no time. Let's go."

Hunt was too tired and confused to fight any more, and his hand felt like it was on fire. He let the man lead him, mostly carry him actually, as his thoughts wandered. He remembered, *was it really a memory, or a wish?* Gentle hands, quiet voices, when he was very young. He sweated and shivered and let that dream draw him in.

Sometime later

Demeter Infirmary

"He's resting quietly now." Ferdie spoke softly as she caressed the sleeping boy's curly mop of hair. "He's so young, Terence! And he has been abused, for a long time it seems. Some of those bruises are very old... "

Buster nodded. Only Giada and Ferdie called him Terence. In Giada's lips, it was a caress; in Ferdie's it merely sounded vaguely foreign.

"How old can he be? Fourteen? Perhaps fifteen? Definitely not more than sixteen, for sure. I wonder how he got into the ship..." He looked again at the sleeping youngster. His hand was heavily bandaged, his cuts and bruises tended to. Ferdie had given him something for the pain as well as antibiotics for the infection.

"He won't be answering questions any time soon, Terence. With what I gave him, he should sleep for at least 12 hours. Now off with you! Giada must be looking for you."

He smiled at the mention of his wife. "Can't keep Gia waiting can I? Your sister gets grumpy when I'm not around."

"Bah!" Ferdie swatted him good-naturedly "Can't see why she'd want to have a big lump like you around. Now shoo!"

Buster left, and Ferdie resumed setting the infirmary right after the day's busy work, while the unknown youth slept soundly.

Battlestar *Libra* **Flight Deck**

"When beauty queens rebel they get naked pictures taken of themselves, not join the marines," the sound of her father's condescending and yet frustrated voice floated unwanted into her mind.

What is wrong with me? Py thought to herself. *Why are these memories haunting me all of a sudden?* She had barely been bothered by any of this for a good year now, but failing to continue to keep them at bay any longer, her vision blurred as the world around her faded away and the past reclaimed her once more that day.

"It seemed kind of redundant after that very revealing photo shoot you commissioned of me last year," Py replied to her father.

"Hey Py do you think anyone on the Colonies survived?" Zany asked, her words choking with emotion.

Zany's question brought Py out of her reverie. Not wanting to get in to a blow by blow account of whether the Colonies were being attacked for fear of her spotter having some kind of breakdown, she just shrugged not even looking up to see Zany's reaction.

She and Zany had been together from day one of sniper training and Py guessed Zany was the person she was closest in the world to. This really did not mean much as she did not feel all that close to her. She imagined Zany would probably be hurt by this as she seemed to have delusions of sisterhood, yet she could not muster enough feelings to have that actually bother her.

Not much did affect Py - hell the world apparently was ending around her and the only emotion this invoked in her was a hope that her only connection to it would die as well. Not what Zany wanted to hear right now, she was sure, and Py was just not capable of giving anything else.

Py often found herself contemplating just how human she was. Her lack of emotion or ability to attach to anyone or anything would often bring this train of thought and fear to the forefront of her mind. She wanted to be human but also unknowingly ran away from being so. She could never take this fear to anyone for that would mean to reveal her greatest secret, the revelation that finally gave her enough strength to leave her father and his hold on her. Something she had suspected and yet had no real idea of until she got her hands on the documents that told her she was not like everyone else. That the man who called himself her father had created her

in a Petri dish and then implanted her into the brood mare that would bore the name of mother. That he had done things to her DNA that nature would never even think of doing to humans.

On the day she decided to join the marines, Py finally understood what her father meant when he told people that she was his masterpiece, his greatest creation. With that understanding she got up, walked out of her luxurious home, and all the way to the recruiting center and joined the Marines.

From that point Py never looked back. She broke all ties to her father and everyone else even remotely associated with him. She was glad the drill instructors treated her like everyone else, like something one or two levels below pond scum. The fact that she wasn't placed on a pedestal meant more to her than an award, trophy, or contest she had ever won in her life. She felt, for the briefest of moments, like she was actually a real human being.

Astral Dawn

Liza Liala, sat on the edge of her bed, punching for what was somewhere between the third and tenth time at her suddenly useless wireless device. The device screen, unsympathetic as it was, flashed back at her that her transmission had terminated before it could be completed. There was no signal.

Frak, what the hell, she thought. Did someone cut the wireless transmissions?

No one was around to answer her rhetorical question had she actually said it aloud. But she was beginning to suspect that was exactly what someone had done. Whatever their reasons, however, was unknown. She had to make contact, had to report in. After all, it was her job. Unfortunately she couldn't at this point.

Meanwhile, the infernal device continued to pick up transmissions, even as it blocked her outgoing replies. She received frantic calls and calm reports blended together, telling of Cylons, and attacks upon Caprica and the other Colonies, destroyed buildings, dead or unreachable officials, and activations of emergency procedures. No matter what she heard, however, it was what she did not hear that was most unnerving. The transmissions she was receiving on her unit were nearly as garbled as the broadcasts that played on the public wireless unit she had turned on in the corner of the room. Barely half the words, if that, were reaching her. That should not have been the case. They should have been reaching her loud and clear. Unable to reply, unable to assist, unable to even confirm she was not among the dead, she could do no more than sit and listen to the transmissions. That is, what few of them reached her. Five

minutes passed, then ten minutes, then twenty. As time went on, the transmissions became more and more panicked, and fewer and further between. There was more static now, and less data reaching her, it seemed, every moment. Her left hand gripped her wireless unit so tight her knuckles went white, and her right hand automatically tapped at it again, without her even really noticing, trying in vain, once more, to make a transmission of her own. Once again, the effort failed. However, she did not have to dwell on it long, as a voice suddenly blared over the PA system.

[Ladies and gentlemen, this is the captain speaking. Two cylon ships, smaller than the raiders of the Cylon War - the First Cylon War - , were destroyed by Kalkr, the president of K Industries. That was his vessel beside us; *Mercurius*. All souls aboard *Astral Dawn* owe their lives to Captain Kalkr, and his foresight in arming his ship. He has studied the cylon issue as a hobby, which has proven fortuitous for us. The good captain has gone scouting, to ascertain the situation throughout the Colonies. He has assured me, and I concur, that we are better to remain here, than to wander into a combat zone. As you have been hearing, our forces are not doing well against the cylons. Please pray for them, and for your loved ones... and for us on the *Dawn*. I assure you that the bridge crew, and I, and all the crew, are prepared for the possibility, hopefully remote, of more cylons entering our area. If this were to happen, we will make a hyperlight jump, not to any Colony, as all are under attack, but to a point outward, near the red line. For now, we remain here: anticipating the return of Captain Kalkr, praying to the gods, remaining calm.]

Colonial forces had not been faring well against the Cylons, indeed. Some part of her wished she was any other passenger aboard this ship who, with access only to the public wireless transmissions and the Captain's announcement, could still hold out real hope. She knew better, however. She barely heard anything, now, even from her own wireless unit.....and what she did hear made no sense. Conflicting reports. Conflicting orders.

“Lords of Kobol, hear my prayer, give strength to our forces fighting the Cylons, to defeat the enemy. Protect them, and help them to protect and defend your people, on the surface of the Colonies...”

Her prayers were cut off by the next message, blaring out of the wireless unit she had dropped on the bed. It was the first message in quite some time to come through loud and clear....but it gave her no comfort, far from it, in fact.

[This is an official Colonial Government broadcast. All Ministers and officials should now go to Case Orange. Repeat...This is an official Colonial Government broadcast. All Ministers and

officials should now go to Case Orange.]

The message was not one she had to respond to. She wasn't even close to being in the order of succession. But it drove a stake through her heart, nonetheless, and she dropped her head into her hands. They were gone. Maybe all of them, certainly most of them. And if they were gone...Gods only knew, most everyone else probably was as well. And there was nothing she could do. Nothing.

The public areas of the luxury liner were eerily quiet. Most passengers, and crew, were in their rooms, listening to the garbled transmissions, or praying to the lords of Kobol.

Senior Security Officer, Jonathan Willborn, was silently praying as well as he performed his normal duties by walking about. He'd wave at the few people he'd meet in various lounges, walk over if beckoned to explain from his point of view what the *Dawn* should be doing. In short, the passengers needed to see that things were "normal" on the ship.

In the circular observation deck, he walked over to a couple in the 60s.

"Hey.", he whispered so as to get their attention, but not to startle them out of their unfocused gaze at the stars.

The woman knew that voice and as she turned, she was getting up, and she hugged him tightly.

"Oh, Jonathan," she sobbed. "It's so..."

"Yeah mom, I know." he kissed her on the cheek. He didn't want to mention his older sister and her husband and their kids, or his older brother. There wasn't a need to tell his mother whom she had lost.

"What do you think, Jon," his dad asked. "Is sitting here the smart thing, or should we have used that fancy hyperlight jump system and go somewhere?"

Jonathan knew his dad father well. The older Willborn had never been a very patient man. In business, Tristan Willborn was a man of action, and now in the first month of his retirement, the man was still *go go go*.

"Yeah, we're doing the right thing." Jonathan said to his parents. '*Dawn* has more plating than

most new ships, but not near enough to survive the kinds of missiles..." he could picture his twin being destroyed; his siblings and nieces and nephews burning from the unholy inferno.

"We're doing the right thing," he repeated. "There's nothing *Dawn* can do for anyone in the Colonies."

His mother hugged him again, tighter. "What about us? What'll happen to us?"

"We'll be ok," he wanted to believe it himself. "Captain Gibbs is a smart man, he's been up against pirates and terrorists in his years at space. That's why he cut the outgoing communications. If the bad guys don't hear us, they might not come looking for us."

His father shrugged. "Well, we can't stay here forever."

Jonathan knew his dad very well. The elder Willborn was hiding his worries.

Like father, like son.

Stateroom B-4

Lisa Falls looked up from her contemplation of the 19th Phrase of Pythia's Eighth Prophecy. The noise had been going on outside her cabin for several minutes now, and it was becoming a distraction. She rose, straitened her purple robes of office, and sighed.

She strode over to her Stateroom door. *I love vacations, it's always something.*

Lisa opened her door, and was instantly stunned by the large number of people running around the passageway frantically. She tried to stop several people, and was finally successful with a young Porter.

"Young man, what is going on here?" she demanded.

"Uh, Ma'am, where have you been for the last 10 minutes? The Cylons are back, and they are attacking the colonies. Now, please, I have to go." Without another word the young man turned, running off down the corridor.

Oh, Lords, Pythia was right.

Closing her door, Lisa ran back to the huge desk where she had been sitting, and grabbed up the Copy of the scroll she had been reading. She ran her eyes directly to the 19th phrase.

(19) Lo, and you shall know when the Demon Hordes have returned home, and they shall command fire from their hands, and death with their eyes, for the faithful.

(20) And that day will bring great chaos to the descendants of Kobol, and those that survive shall be scattered like crumbs on the ocean.

(21) But some will arise, out of the ashes of defeat, to command the heavens once again.

Now, it was here, the day of the return. The time had come for the chaos that the ways of the evil amongst the Colonists had drawn down upon themselves, and time for the righteous few to survive, and rebuild. Now they would see, they would have to see. If she was one of the survivors, she would *MAKE* them see.

Astral Dawn Bridge

“Anything?” Captain Gibbs asked his co-pilot and the Comm officer. Gibbs didn’t see anything, but he wanted the assurance.

“Nothing, Don, just us.” Phineus Gojisa said while peering into the dradis screen intently.

“It’s clear, captain.” Comm Officer Danson added.

Gibbs let out a deep breath. He could feel some tension leave his body. He was glad he had Danson terminate all outgoing transmissions from the ship’s desk stations. *Better that we keep radio silence.* He picked up the handset and spoke once someone on the other end answered. “Sandra, we could use some coffee up here. Thanks.’ He said into the handset, and then hung up.

“Time for another announcement, I guess.” Gibbs said to the two men with him. He pointed to Danson who flipped a lever on the communication console. Once the channel was open Gibbs spoke into the microphone pickup in his headset. “Ladies and gentlemen, this is the captain,” he began the ship-wide public address. “We are awaiting the return of Captain Kalrk, to hear what news he brings. It is possible, and I say only possible, that we will remain here for some time. If there are no further encounters with the cylons, we might fare best to remain here. Again I remind you that should a hyperlight jump be necessary, we would travel to the safety limit distance of our *new* Hyperlight Jump System, past the red line. Thank you for remaining calm, and thank you for the prayers.”

He cut the connection.

“What say we take turns at the wheel, Phineus? You go relax, while I sit here for a bit? I don’t want us both to be less than our best. You rest now and in... say 2 hours I’ll take a break. How does that sound?”

“Sounds good, Don.” His friend smiled as he began to take off the headset. I won’t go far, just to my cabin.”

“Sure thing.” The captain replied. “Rest your eyes. And in two hours, I’ll- ”

“Dradis contact!” Warren Danson shouted excitedly.

“Frak!” Co-pilot Gojisa said, as he scrambled back to his seat.

“Identify that ship,” Gibbs practically shouted to his bridge crew.

“Colonial signal,” Gojisa was relieved. “It’s a colonial.”

On the dradis screens on the bridge, was the blip of a small spacecraft.

[Colonial vessel. This is Raptor 312 of the Battlestar *Galactica*, Lieutenant Sharon Valerii speaking. Please identify yourself.] The small craft’s pilot could be heard in the *Dawn’s* bridge, over the headsets.

“Hello Raptor 312,” Gibbs spoke into the mini-microphone which was part of his headset.

“This is Captain Donald Gibbs of the cruise liner *Astral Dawn*. Boy, are we glad to see a friendly face! What news do you bring? Transmissions are intermittent at best.”

[Captain, the newly sworn in President of the Twelve Colonies is gathering ships for mutual

support. She's on her ship *Colonial One*.]

"Who is the new President?" Gibbs inquired.

[Laura Roslin.] The female raptor pilot replied. [She's all that's left of the Colonial Cabinet. I'm sending you the jump coordinates.]

"Lieutenant, we need to wait here for a while. Another ship is due to return here, to us, soon. We can't abandon that ship."

[I can't stay with you, Captain.] Valerii's voice echoed from the bridge speakers. [I need to keep searching for other ships.]

"Understood Raptor 312, we'll jump to the coordinates in thirty minutes. But we need to give the other ship time to get back here."

[All right.] Gibbs could tell by her voice she wasn't Happy about leaving the liner alone. [Thirty minutes.]

"Tell the president, we look forward to meeting her." Gibbs said amiably." Gibbs thought for the briefest of moments and keyed the mic again. "Lieutenant... how did you find us?"

[I picked up a faint signal from this area, so I thought I'd take a look and here you are. I have to be going, Captain. See you in thirty minutes, Valerii, out.]

When the raptor jumped away, Gibbs picked up a portable close range handset. He pressed the transmit switch.

"Willborn, come in. This is Gibbs." He let the button up when he had finished speaking.

[Willborn here, Go ahead, captain.]

"Somebody onboard is using a personal transmitter. You need to find it and shut it down."

[Yes sir, I'm on it. Willborn out.]

"Who would be so stupid as to send a signal?" Danson asked aloud.

"Easy, Warren," Gibbs warned the Comm Officer. He then spoke more gently. "Let's hope the

person is stupid, and not a suicidal nut job.”

Co-pilot Gojisa muttered, “Let’s hope that raptor was the only ship to get that signal.”

Stateroom B-4

Lisa Falls dropped yet another scroll to her desk.

It's all here. All of it.

(Scorpanis 9:13) And Lo, the downtrodden creations of Man, the slave multitude, will have their revenge on their overseers.

(Giltthram 10:7) And I say behold... The Children of Kobol will rise up and rule... but their rule will be cut short... The fire of hatred will fall upon them from the sky... and life itself will be deprived them.

(Pythia 12:5) And I looked upon the Holy city, and it burned with a fire as bright as the sun, and was hidden in a blanket of fear.

(Malthiticus 2:8, the book of Life.) And they would come, the lost, the fearful... and among them would rise the saviors... those who would fight past the fear, and battle their way back into the light.

(Scorpanis 15:5) And they will know... the path to rebirth will never be easy... Strife, death, and pain will be the cost... but the reward would be beyond all imagining.

The reward. Could it be? The demons have come. The fire of hatred is upon us. But, out of the fire, it is such a simple word. Dirt, Soil, Filth... Earth. No, I must not speak it. A fable, a myth. First of the Colonies, lost in time. If we survive, I must make sure never to mention the prophecies. It is too faint a hope. Revenge. Revenge against the Demon Hordes. That must be our driving factor.

Lieutenant Rayna "Draco" Darkstone

Battlestar *Libra* Airspace

Day 00

Raiders, lots of them! These, however, weren't the same as the pictures and the simulators. No, these were much more *sinister* looking. Draco had spent the past 10 minutes or so avoiding the raiders as much as she could. There was so much chaos she wasn't too sure what to do. IFF signals were sketchy. Her wireless only picked up bits and pieces. It was mostly static. She was essentially on her own.

Okay Rayna, just...

She couldn't finish her thought. A raider had suddenly come from overhead, surprising her. It didn't show up on her dradis until it was right on top of her. A missile lock warning sounded and she panicked. She rolled the viper and slammed her feet on the rudder pedals. Her viper reacted instantaneously and turned in an inverted ninety degree turn. She hit the afterburners and shot away. The raider pursued.

Draco swallowed hard. *"Get the frak off me!"*

Draco flipped her ship over in a one hundred eighty degree turn and opened fire. The raider was too quick though. The rounds from her ship's cannon missed it completely. The missile lock sounded again. Draco had seen the swarm missiles from those things, having watched them devastate a whole mess of vipers. All she could do was keep moving, and try to avoid a lock. Looking up she swallowed hard. She was moving into another wing of raiders!

Suddenly a missile streaked by her canopy and impacted a raider. The resulting detonation from the missile impact blew the raider apart in a shower of sparks and... blood? Draco stared in disbelief and relief. A viper formed on her right wing. It was her friend and fellow squad mate Lieutenant Nick "Quickdraw" Baxter.

[Draco! Switch to your emergency short-range wireless.]

She hadn't thought to try that but quickly complied.

"Quickdraw, where the frak's the rest of our squadron? IFF's aren't registering and all I'm getting across the squadron channel is useless static."

[I'm not sure, I lost track just after I launched. We just gotta keep moving quickly. Pick 'em off while we can.]

Draco was silent for a moment, watching the chaos around her. She could see explosions in the

distance from vipers, raiders, and capital ships alike. A strange thought crossed her mind. She suddenly craved *blueberry pie*! She quickly realized she needed to focus. It was too easy for her to get distracted in a situation she didn't want to be in.

[Draco! Draco, you alright?]

"Uh yeah. Yeah, I'm fine Quickdraw," Darkstone lied.

[Alright, I'm going to stay on your wing. We'll work in tandem. We'll have a better chance of surviving if we stick together.]

"Yeah, yeah. Roger *that*," Rayne breathed a sigh of relief. She felt a bit more focused and confident now that she had Quickdraw watching out for her. The two Black Crows headed hand-in-hand into the heart of the battlefield.

Battlestar *Libra* Flight Deck

How long had it been?

Eons? Hours? Seconds?

Time lost all meaning. Space lost all meaning. Chandler was one with the viper, moving with it as they danced an obscene dance of death with the ever willing raiders. He didn't know it, may have even been appalled to realize it, but he was smiling - not a true smile, but a terrifying grimace, harking to the primitive, savage past of his forefathers.

Another raider exploded silently before him, and his viper shook with the impact of the debris. He fired again as he avoided another incoming raider.

He was running short of ammo, and fuel.

Delphinus was gone. He could stay and die, or he could refuel and rearm at the closest Colonial ship and go out again to take out more cylons before he left this life. He chose the latter.

He landed uneventfully on the unfamiliar deck. The viper had not come to a complete stop after being towed to the flight deck before he opened the canopy and stood, taking off his

helmet. A knuckledragger rushed a ladder and he got off the ship. He threw his helmet at the blond woman and uttered, "Rearm and refuel. How long?"

"Sir, I cannot.."

He cut her off by grabbing her upper arm in a savage grip and grounding out slowly his face inches from hers, "Re-arm. And. Re-fuel. NOW!"

Sonia drew in a quick breath, her blue eyes locked on his green ones; his large hand around her arm *hurt*. Godsdamn, who *was* this powerful pilot? A thrill went through her body.

"Yes sir," she said. *As soon as you let go of me...*

She gasped, and he looked at her, *really* looked at her. She was blonde and beautiful with her sharp features and icy blue eyes. But it was her magnificent chest that drew his eyes. Her T-shirt was tight and sweaty and framed her breasts to perfection. His body leaped in appreciation and recognition.

His reaction caught him by surprise, effectively breaking his odd trance-like state.

He was aghast.

The Universe was crashing about him and he was rutting after a piece of tail. His friends and shipmates were *dead!* And yet he had let himself be distracted by...

And he had *hurt her!*

He dropped her arm like it burned him.

"See to it." His voice was raspy and low.

He turned and walked off across the flight deck.

Damage Control Starboard side

Marine Sgt Fordyce was shouting something about cutting tools into a handset when Dan and Al turned the corner. Dan stared, the passageway just beyond where they stood looked like a

cross between an avalanche and a cave-in. Several large structural beams had fallen at random angles, mixing with overhead and bulkhead panels. Twisted pieces of metal nearly blocked the passage. The fire suppression nozzles had sprayed white foam over everything, effectively putting out any electrical fires, but the scene was so alien looking, it took Dan a moment to realize that there were *people* trapped in that chaos.

“Frak!” he exclaimed when he saw someone was lying on his side under the debris. He started ripping the fire bottle straps off his shoulders.

“Wolfe!” Fordyce exclaimed, finished with barking orders into the handset. She helped him get the fire bottle off, saying, “Thank the gods you’re such a Heracles! They’re supposed to be coming with tools, but...” She practically threw the fire bottle at Al; Dan was already on his knees next to the person he’d seen lying on his side.

“I’m fine,” the person told Dan. “But she...” he stopped, then added, “I’m a medic.”

The medic wasn’t trapped at all. Through gaps in the wreckage, Dan could see that he had one hand on the head of a female crewmember.

“Her name is Diane,” the medic told Dan.

Dan could tell that Diane was badly injured. She was very pale, her eyes unfocused and wandering, and there was blood on her lips. She was trapped under panels and one of the beams.

“Can you lift it?” Fordyce asked Dan.

Dan was looking at the beam. *Gods, no way*, he thought, but he got to his feet and positioned himself so he’d have some leverage, then he put his arms around the beam and strained upward. It moved very slightly, but Dan lost his grip and fell backward, the beam slippery from the fire suppression foam.

Again Dan positioned himself, on one knee with his shoulder under the beam, his hands on it. He closed his eyes and pushed up. Again the beam moved slightly, but then it stuck.

A guttural, almost primitive noise escaped from Dan’s throat like a growl as he strained to lift the beam again. Slowly, almost imperceptibly at first the beam began to move.

Fordyce and Al jumped in, also trying to lift the beam. Metal groaned and squealed and the beam moved another inch. Dan grunted with effort and the beam moved more.

“Just a little bit more!” the medic said from underneath, his arms on either side of Diane’s head, his hands gripping her shirt under her shoulders.

All three struggled with almost super human effort to move the beam. Slowly, almost

imperceptibly at first, the piece of structural steel moved.

"That's it, that's it!" the medic scooted backward, pulling Diane out from under the wreckage.

Dan, Al, and Fordyce relaxed, panting, and Dan turned to look.

"It's all right, we have you out now," the medic was telling Diane.

Dan only had the basic first aid and buddy care that all Marines were trained in, but he knew right away that the medic's assurance of 'it's all right' was just words. It was clear that Diane's body had been so badly crushed and mangled, there was no chance she'd survive. Dan didn't want to look, but he couldn't pull his gaze from the horrific sight.

Voices snapped him out of his thrall, and he turned quickly, grabbing at Fordyce's arm. "There's more people in there, Sergeant!" he said, shocked.

She snapped her head around. "Let's go," she ordered. She looked back at the medic. Quietly, she said, "Can you move her further back?"

The medic looked up, his expression grim, and he nodded and again bent over the dying crewmember. Al helped him move her further down the passage.

Dan attacked the pile of bent panels, pulling them down one by one and tossing them behind him in a frenzy.

"Frak me!" Fordyce exclaimed, ducking. She saw that there was no stopping the big Marine, so she dragged the metal pieces further away, clearing room for Dan to work.

Destroyer Douglas J. Griffyn

Flight Deck

"Get me back out there," Mad Dog yelled at a technician as she stood beside her viper, pacing back and forth.

"Just a few more minutes' sir, we're overwhelmed out here," the tech said with teeth chattering.

Mad Dog didn't notice at first, but her hands were shaking. The knuckledragger stared at them, then at her as she stopped pacing. Barker looked down at her hands and noticed they were trembling. "No, not now, I can't... "

A Beautiful house overlooking the famous shoreline on Caprica, flowers everywhere, a child runs in and jumps on her mother and fathers bed to wake them up to the beautiful day- " TRASH, PILLOW TALK, LYING SACK OF... The only thing she could do to refocus her mind and become angry again was to think of him.

Seth Lorenbak... she had met him on shore leave four years ago on Tauron. The first date was perfect, right down to the kiss good night. The thing that surprised her most was that he made no motion to go inside after the date. A true gentleman, so she thought.

The two got closer and closer, and she went to see him on Tauron every time she had leave. She remembered one morning she had awoken to a BEAUTIFUL day, and he was already awake... then began whispering how they would spend every morning like that when she finally resigned.

The last time she saw him was on shore leave two years ago... she snuck up to his apartment, put the key in the door, and walked in, just to surprise him. Unfortunately the surprise was on her. Apparently she was too good at sneaking, and found him in bed asleep... with another woman.

"Mad Dog," CPO Luna said while nudging to get her attention. "Good to go," he said as Barker jumped into her cockpit, and was towed towards the launch tubes.

Libra Flight Deck Port Side

Py and Zany had been up on their perch for twenty minutes now at the most, but it was beginning to feel like hours. They had not said a word since Py had shrugged off Zany's worries about the colonies. That suited Py just fine as she seemed to have her own demons to struggle with and was very busy trying not to have to deal with them.

She found that watching the viper pilots throw hissy fits at the knuckledraggers was actually an excellent way to help battle those demons. Viper pilots apparently were not only bat shit crazy, but several of them turned out to be glorified tantrum throwing babies. The strangest part of it all to her though was how the mechanics just seemed to take it. Sure, a few yelled back and stuff, but still it never came off as very honest. Of course the fact that most of them jumped right in to take care of the pilots at the very same time they were receiving constant abuse didn't help. Whether the knuckledraggers yelled back at the pilots or not was immaterial. It

occurred to Py that the two different dynamics there were the perfect example of an S&M relationship.

A resounding thud, accompanied with a violent shudder brought Py to the here and now. Py's head popped up from her scope at the loud crunching noise and to Zany's scream of "Holy Frak!"

Another explosion, this one much closer sounded in Py's ears bringing with it an even more violent shaking. The only thing to pass her vision was again the image of ants running around screaming. Those ants, however, strangely began to get larger and closer. She felt herself falling but was powerless to control what was happening. As she began to lose consciousness PY was finally free from the dreams of the past, and the demons associated with those dreams.

Those demonic visions, however, gave way to other visions.

She was in an open field, gazing at the clear sky, and covered in dandelions. She could smell summer in the air. The sight was warming and yet she found herself terrified. For some reason she could not remember what brought her here but she knew that it was important that she did. She also knew that it was not the source of her terror.

Shivers ran down her spine a second before she heard his voice.

"I have never been fond of nature but if this is where you need to be to feel safe so be it," the warm and loving voice said.

He crouched down beside her and gently pushed the hair on the side of her face behind her ear. He then studied her intently. She swallowed, leaving her mouth dry, trying desperately to keep herself composed, the mantra of "this is only a dream this is only a dream" running through her head over and over again.

Then finally he spoke again, "Good; you did not injure yourself, I would have been very upset if anything had marred this perfect face."

She did not move a muscle other than to swallow since she knew he was here. He sat down beside her and put his arm around her like any normal loving father would. She found herself wanting to cry. She wanted to cry tears of fear, tears of loss, and tears of frustration. Some part of her wanted to just let him be daddy again. She wanted to curl up in his arms and feel

safe. Something told her though that this was not right. When her father was around he was not always... around.

The bigger part of her wanted to run but she knew, like the old wives' tale, statues did not run in the presence of an immortal for it would attract the immortal's attention and you would become their prey. So she just sat there quietly in the futile hope he would just go away.

He spoke again, as if reading her thoughts. "In a way you are right, this is all just a dream but I warn you there is more reality behind it than most normal dreams."

This caught her attention and in her surprise she responded, "how ... what the frak is that supposed to mean?"

The handsome man looked at her in a cold disdain. "My, what the marines have taught you in two years, fluency in the language of vulgarity." He paused to reach out his hand to her chin, caressed it lightly and then applied pressure forcing her face to turn toward him. She gave no resistance as she knew it would be pointless. Instead she looked at him full on, taking in his blue eyes, his long aquiline nose, and the widow's peak salt and pepper hair. He had aged well, too well.

"You're changing the topic and I'm not slow enough to fall for a bait and switch act," she said.

The look in his eyes betrayed a gleam of pride. The thumb on the hand holding her chin slowly rose up to gently caress her bottom lip. Instinctively she tried to pull away, the horror and fear she was feeling finally reflecting in her eyes. Her attempt failed, though, as his grip tightened painfully on her chin and a slow smile reached his lips. He brought himself in closer so she could feel his breath on her mouth and gave her the one response she dreaded. "Yes truly you are." he licked his lips and she wanted to vomit. "You are mine. I made you cell by cell, I know things about you that you still have no idea." Slowly he inched in closer, "Did you really think that you could do anything to get away? Did you even believe that even the destruction of the human race would keep me from you?" Lightly their lips touched. "We are more connected than any two other beings alive and I can reach you anywhere, any time." He pulled her completely into his arms and firmly placed his lips on hers. She started to scream from the deepest part of her - loud, louder than anything she had ever heard or felt ever; the sound of it filled the field, her mind and soul, and she kept screaming. She screamed until she no longer felt him there beside her, until she no longer smelled summer in the air or felt grass under her. She screamed until she was truly free.

Py regained consciousness to the sound of others screaming with her.

Astral Dawn

Liza sat there, silently, holding back the tears. Time blended together, and she did not know how long it had been since the broadcast. But slowly, finally, she pulled her head out her hands. This was information she alone would have. She had to find some of the *Dawn's* personnel. Tell them. That much was her responsibility. Her duty was to relay that information to the Captain. Clipping the wireless unit to the waist of her pants, she made her way out of her suite, and into the corridor beyond.

She barely got more than one hundred feet before she nearly ran into a man traveling in the opposite direction, walking as quickly as she was. She started to turn, noticing he looked as if he might be ships' personnel, and heard a voice call out to her.

"Excuse me, ma'am! Are you Liza Liala?"

She stopped, and turned the rest of the way, noticing he had also turned, and was facing her.

"Yes."

Puzzled, she nonetheless opened her mouth to tell him the news. But before she could, he spoke, his eyes locked onto her wireless unit, clipped at her hip.

"Hello. I'm Jonathan Willborn, Senior Security Officer. Have you made any transmissions, ma'am?"

"I attempted to. But none of my transmissions went through. Why?"

Why, indeed. Why did he want to know that, and why had he been searching, apparently, for her?

"Captain Gibbs has asked me to find a transmitter device. It may have been yours. Whom were you trying to contact?"

"I was trying to contact my superiors. Report in. But it didn't work. Why did your captain ask you to find such a device?"

"*Dawn* is running silent, all outgoing communications have been halted per the captain's orders. We don't want the cylons to find us."

He paused, and she wondered why he had even been looking for a transmitter. After all, it wasn't as if anything had gone through....How had he known, and why did he and his Captain care?

"Would you please come with me to the bridge, to see Captain Gibbs? We shouldn't speak in a hallway."

Puzzled, she nevertheless nodded. That would give her a chance to take her news directly to the Captain. Excellent, "Yes. I need to speak with your captain, regarding a transmission I received."

"Great." he replied, 'This way, Miss."

He pointed down the hallway.

"We can access a crew lift, and avoid any distractions. We need to get there fast."

It took only a few short minutes and the lift stopped at the bridge level. Once the doors opened Willborn and his charge entered the bridge of *Astral Dawn*.

"Captain," Willborn said respectfully. "This is Liza Liala. It was her transmitter, sir. She was trying to reach her boss."

"Hello, Miss Liala," Gibbs stood, and shook her hand. "I'm Captain Gibbs. Welcome to the bridge."

"Thank you, Captain," She paused for a moment, looking very serious and somewhat sad. "I'm afraid I have some bad news for you, Captain."

"I can't imagine anything worse than we're dealing with right now, but please go ahead."

Liza found it hard to find the words, "I can't think of any easy way to say this, Captain, but... the President is dead, the Vice President is dead, and most or all of the Cabinet is dead."

"Please have a seat," Gibbs offered her the vacant seat behind his command chair. "Yes, we know. A raptor found us and told us that a member of the Cabinet has been sworn in as President, a Laura Roslin." Gibbs became more serious, "How did you know that Adar and the others were dead? What kind of transmitter is that?"

"I received an automated Case Orange message, Captain. This is an official government transmitter."

Gibbs nodded. "Those use relays throughout Colonial Space," he said what she already knew. "The raptor picked up part of a transmission from you. That's how it found us."

Liza looked very surprised...

"One of my transmissions got through? It kept telling me they didn't..."

"Part of one," Gibbs interrupted her. "And we don't want the cylons to find us."

"I won't send again, Captain. I haven't even received anything, since the Case Orange. You said one of the Cabinet members survived, and was sworn in? Where are they?"

"We have the coordinates to their location, but we are waiting for Kalrk to return," he eyed her transmitter. "You'll need to hand that over to Mister Willborn."

She hesitated for a moment, then shrugged and unclipped it. Liza sighed in surrender. After all, she saw no point in keeping it if they were all dead. Handing the transmitter to the security officer, Liza said, "Here you are, Mister Willborn."

"Thank you." Jonathan replied, while holding it. "I'll have this locked up, so no one can mess with it. It'll be returned to you as soon as possible, Miss Liala."

"Thank you." She said to Willborn, and then turned again to Gibbs. "When Mister Kalrk returns, please inform me. I want to prepare before we join the new President."

"Of course," Captain Gibbs was pleasant. "Please don't tell anyone that we're planning the jump. That's my job." he smiled.

"Certainly, Captain. Is there anything else I should know, at this time?"

"I can't think of anything that I haven't told you here, or via public address." he shook her hand.

"Jonathan, if you would kindly escort Miss Liala to the public area of her choice," he turned again to Liza, "Thank you for your kind understanding, Miss Liala. I'll contact you before we make the jump to the new President."

"Thank you, Captain." Liza's head was spinning. *So a governmental body was still in effect.*

"Would you please follow me ma'am," Willborn said.

"Please take me back to my suite. I wish to be in a location where I may easily be contacted, when we make the jump."

"Certainly." he said, but his mind was wandering *Why would this beautiful woman be travelling alone?* "Right this way." He pointed at the open hatch, leading from the bridge.

Battlestar *Libra* Starboard flight pod

Mac pressed the closure on the bag holding the parts she'd come for, and jammed the bag into her pocket. As she turned to leave the supply compartment, she heard a noise—not the sound of any viper or Raptor engine, but something much more harsh and sinister.

And then the howling torment of metal on metal, almost immediately followed by a large explosion.

The whole deck shook and Mac dashed through the hatch, out onto the deck.

She barely noted the chaos on the deck as her eyes searched for the source of the crash. Further down... inboard... *something* had crashed into the bulkhead under the causeway.

The warning klaxons were already blaring, and as Mac ran, she snapped at a stunned knuckledragger, "Get medics down here!"

People were hurt... there was blood and debris everywhere. Without thinking, Mac slowed slightly in her run and scooped a loose wrench up off the deck.

Then—she stopped short.

"What... the... frak?"

She stared.

Alexandra MacLean had been a Colonial Navy knuckledragger for over four years. She'd seen every type of ordnance the Navy had in its inventory.

This was not anything she'd ever seen before.

Lying within a pile of mangled and torn metal was a long cylindrical object, perhaps six feet long and eighteen inches in diameter... this was a cylon missile!

And thank the Gods, it hadn't detonated!

"Oh, dammit all to hell!" Mac swore.

Looking quickly around she noticed the two Marines, both unconscious on the deck. "Must have been up on the causeway," Mac muttered, checking the first one. She shook her head. Alive, but with injuries Mac had no idea how to treat. At that moment medics rushed onto the flight deck, relieving Mac of her patients.

The other Marine, a striking redhead that Mac had seen around before, was also unconscious, but Mac couldn't see any obvious injuries from where she stood.

She looked at the missile again, then turned to another knuckledragger who'd just run up and was staring in utter disbelief at the chaos on the deck.

"Clear the deck, Stoker," Mac ordered the specialist. "And I mean everybody... pilots, too. This thing hasn't gone off yet and gods only knows if it's going to. Help the medics get the injured off, too."

Even as she was speaking, she was running for the handset on the bulkhead. She picked it up and placed the receiver to her ear, relieved to find it still worked.

"CIC... Petty Officer MacLean here, starboard flight deck. We're evacuating the deck, uh, sir, we have an unexploded cylon missile here and I need," *frak*, what *did* she need? "I need someone to defuse it!"

***Libra* CIC**

Hastings listened in utter disbelief as MacLean relayed the report. He had it on the speakers per Rodrigues' orders.

Rodrigues picked up the phone and spoke quickly. "This is the commander. Mac, keep everyone out of there until I get an Ordnance Disposal team there. Captain Riley will assume command once he's down there. Until then you are my direct representative. Rodrigues out." he then turned to the comms officer. "Get me Captain Riley on the double."

It took only a few seconds for the connection to be made and Riley's voice came up on the other end of the line.

[Riley here sir.]

"Eric," Rodrigues began. "We've got some unexploded enemy ordnance on the upper starboard flight deck. It looks like a cylon anti ship missile broke through the hull and hit the deck. The area's sealed off and the deck crews are clearing the flight line. Get your EOD team in there right away."

[Understood sir, we're on our way.]

Starboard Flight Pod

Within fifteen minutes the entire flight deck had been cleared and the EOD teams were racing to the location where the anti ship missile was located. When Lafitte and Benoit got there, the two were already halfway into their protective gear - the heavily padded suits and helmets that were supposed to shield them if the missile exploded prematurely. They both knew that, at best, the gear would only be good enough to enable the cleanup crew to pick up enough pieces for a positive ID, but procedures were procedures, and they had long given up on trying to make sense of them all.

By all intents and purposes it was a major miracle the entire flight deck hadn't been turned into a vacuum once the missile had breached the hull. Somehow, however, debris from the impact had clogged the entry point of the missile, thus effectively sealing the entry point. Almost as it happened, a damage control team was moving to repair the entry point.

The deck had been cleared of all personnel except the small knuckledragger who had called in the alarm, Py, who was just coming around from being knocked unconscious, Hugo, and a pair of medics who refused to go while there were still wounded on the flight deck.

"MacLean, Py, and you three," Benoit said. "You should leave. We don't know if Frankie will be able to defuse this thing, and if it goes off, we're all done for. MacLean, you need to be fixing

vipers, not babysitting us. We know what we gotta do, let us do our job," Jo tried to reason with them, in an attempt to get them to go to safety.

Meanwhile, Lafitte walked around the foreign piece of unexploded ordnance, searching his mind for everything he had ever learned, in and out of the service, about cylons and explosives. Satisfied with his inspection, he knelt next to the missile, close to the tail end where a panel cover was located; he opened his instrument case and took out a tiny screwdriver. He hadn't even begun to work and he was already sweating. *Well, Francois, mon ami, today is the day you'll find out if there really are gods out there. Because they'll either help you, or meet you on your way to Hades...*

After all that had happened in such a short period of time, Mac didn't feel at all afraid. *At least if it blows up, I'll never know what happened.*

She'd heard the same reports that everyone else had; the Colonies under attack... all of them? She didn't want to believe it, but knew it had to be true. She pushed away thoughts of her parents and brothers on Aerelon. *I wonder where Ross is.* She thought about her oldest brother, a viper pilot on the Destroyer *Jason Gray*. Would he have had a better chance of survival than the rest of her family?

With a resolute shake of her head, Mac dismissed those musings. She looked up and down the deck. *Frak, this is going to be a real mess to clean up,* she sighed. *I wonder where the hell Chief Sutton is?*

"Sure sir. We'll wait, out." Benoit hung up the wired receiver and turned to her teammate. "Hold off, Frankie. They want us to wait for Captain Riley before we start working on this thing," she received a quick wink from her partner who was still in the process of surveying the outside of the missile casing.

Riley entered the flight deck just as Lafitte finished his preliminary survey of the missile. He looked up at Riley and nodded slowly. It didn't take more than that for Riley to know exactly what they were up against. He turned, looking at Py who was slowly getting up after having to force the medics to stop fussing over her.

The medics had slapped a quick bandage on her and, after determining she was relatively ok, left the flight bay.

Py had moved a distance away from the missile she had landed on. She took up a position guarding the doorway to the docking bay to keep all unauthorized personnel out. Hugo stood

beside her as Zany was sent to the med bay for some serious injuries from her fall. Py's only complaint was a searing headache, a sore back, and some split knuckles, all of which came from her fall. Zany now lay near death.

One min Py had been in the dream with her father and the next in a free fall for the deck below.

"Out Py and Hugo, now," Riley motioned to the nearest hatchway. "You too Mac."

Py opened her mouth in protest but Riley cut her off with an icy stare. "Don't even think about it. Out or you're going to be pulling guard duty in the head for the next year and a half. I want you to report to the med unit right away. That's an order."

Grumbling, Py nodded and turned towards the hatch. She stepped through and slowly headed off to the medical unit. She knew better than to try and make Captain Riley back down. He wasn't the type of officer who gave a marine too many chances to frak up.

Without missing a step Mac moved back to a safer vantage point, just outside the hatchway. She watched with a fair amount of curiosity as the marines went to work.

Riley allowed his people to continue their examination of the missile. These two were amongst the best EOD techs he had. He felt fortunate they were here now.

Libra Airspace

It wasn't supposed to be like this.

One month. Not even a full month, actually. One month, her first posting. She was barely more than a trainee for frak's sake, barely a pilot at all.

But the Cylons didn't care about that. The Cylons didn't care either way, she knew, as she had watched those with ten, a hundred times, more experience stop, helpless against their own software, and explode, targeted by the Cylons. The only thing that mattered here was whether or not you had a working viper—if you did, you had a chance. And ironically, it was the older ships, or those that were, like hers, newer but in need of software upgrade or repair, that were fairing best.

Lieutenant JG Eliana Kareen "Lace" Lawrence fought the urge to panic. Cylons! They were attacking the Colonies! Her family was there! They were attacking her ship! They were killing her shipmates!

The raiders, focus on the Raiders. This is just another exercise, just another day. She had but one goal. Nothing else existed. One goal, take out the frakking toasters.

She wanted to be able to follow someone's lead, be someone's wingman. Shoot down the Raiders, nothing more, nothing less. But she couldn't, anymore. He had fallen victim early on, to his own shiny new viper. There wasn't anyone left for her to follow. She had to do this on her own.

And to think she had been miffed, to be stuck today with a ship that, in her words at the time, "barely flew". It was going to keep her alive, now.

Alive, long enough to make the toasters pay. That was all that mattered, anymore.

Battlestar *Libra*

"Wolfe!" Fordyce shouted, then louder, "WOLFE!"

Dan paused in his furious efforts, standing on a pile of bent panels and other debris as it shifted under his feet. He scrambled to keep his balance.

"Use your brain!" Fordyce yelled, clearly angry. "See? All that stuff is going to come crashing down, and none of us are big enough to drag your hulking carcass out of there if you get hurt!" As if to punctuate her words, the pile shifted again.

"Uhhh..." Dan looked at the twisted piece of metal in his hands. "Sorry, Sarge..."

"Yeah, you're sorry all right," she agreed. "What the first rule of rescue ops?"

His expression was blank a moment, then he nodded grudgingly. "Don't do anything stupid and add yourself to those who need to be rescued," he sighed.

"Exactly," she said sharply. "Okay, what you need to do is step back there," she pointed, "and get that top one before it slides down and cuts your empty head off."

Following the sergeant's direction, Dan, assisted now by Al, cleared a safe path through the wreckage to the three crewmembers trapped on the other side.

The medic was right at Dan's shoulder as he levered the last length of crushed conduit aside, pushing past Dan to check on one crewmember that was propped against the bulkhead. The other two were on their feet. A quick check and reassurances from the injured person, and the medic turned his head, speaking to Dan, "Private, I need you to help Rogers."

The medic's diagnosis was a broken leg, and after a brief consultation, Dan just picked Rogers up like a child and carried him through the narrow cleared path.

"Over here," once they were through, the medic took Dan's elbow, leading him around the corner. "Put him down here."

Dan did as the medic ordered, carefully lowering Rogers to the deck. "Thanks," the injured crewman told Dan in spite of his pain.

Dan looked over his shoulder and then retraced his steps to where Diane lay on the deck, going to one knee next to her. She was dead, and although there was nothing to cover her body with, the medic had closed her eyes and wiped the blood from her lips.

"Oh, frak," Dan whispered.

Fordyce had followed him, and she put her hand on his shoulder. He stood suddenly and turned, towering over her. With anger, he said, "I should have gotten that beam off her faster."

She shook her head. "She was too badly hurt from the moment it crushed her," the sergeant said gently.

Dan shook his head, his jaw muscles bunching.

Sgt Fordyce could see that she wasn't going to be able to reason with him at that moment. "If you're going to use that anger you have building up inside of you then put it to something constructive Dan," she said. "Come on, Kimmel needs help."

With a last glance at Diane's body, Dan let Fordyce pull him away.

Libra Airspace

Draco had to cover her eyes for a moment, as she witnessed a series of explosions that lit up the vacuum. The distraction was short lived, however, as a storm of raiders swirled around her. Cannon shells and missiles flew everywhere, but there were no reliable dradis contacts to lock in on. It was a wonder she was still alive.

Quickdraw stayed close to her and took down a lot of the incoming raiders. He had noticed a lot of vipers had been shut down somehow every time the raiders got close. So he figured if he kept moving, kept his distance from the raiders, and shot them down as quickly as possible, they couldn't disable him. Thus far it had worked for him, but his fuel and ammo was starting to run low.

Draco followed a couple of raiders, keeping a safe distance as she tried to line up a shot. Suddenly, a dradis contact registered on her screen. It approached fast from behind. The IFF signal wasn't resolving. Draco flipped around quickly and was about to open fire when her radio came alive.

[Don't shoot!] Lieutenant Mira "Divot" Koldeski's voice screamed over Draco's emergency wireless. Draco allowed her thumb to slide off the gun switch as she recognized a colonial viper in front of her.

"Divot, is that you?"

"Yeah," Koldeski replied, the fear in her voice was apparent. "Ahh, yeah roger."

"Hey Divot, glad you could find the time to join us," Quickdraw chimed in. He finished off the last of the raiders in the immediate area and looped around behind Draco to verify the lack of targets. "We left a few raiders for you if you would be so kind as to join us here." His words were punctuated by the explosion of a raider that made the mistake of entering Quickdraw's gun sight.

"Nice shooting Quickdraw," Koldeski countered. She was much more at ease now that she had found other members of her squadron. "It's good to see you too! It's a frakking mess out here... It's only by the luck of the gods we're still alive. ... So where's the rest of the squadron anyway? Where's Captain Dell? I didn't even see any of our squadron after the recall."

"Wait... what recall," Draco asked, a sinking feeling welling in her stomach.

"You mean, you guys didn't get the transmission? All pilots with the new Navcom upgrades were ordered to return for a system downgrade as soon as the baseships were taken down. The Cylons frakked up the navcom systems in the newer vipers it seems. It shut them off like flipping a light switch."

Draco thought about how her viper had shorted out before launch. How it was new and had the navcom program installed. And had she actually launched in Red Dragon...

[So what are your orders, sir?] Divot's voice brought Draco out of her thoughts

"Who, me?"

[Well, yeah Draco. Captain Dell made *you* the temp XO. And since we don't know where she is right now...]

Draco regretted accepting the position. Had she *known* something like this would happen she would have flat out refused. She gave a heavy sigh. "Alright, I guess the three of us stick together... and uh, shoot the Cylons?"

Quickdraw chuckled a bit, which was surprising considering the situation they were in.

"Sounds about right to me!"

[I suppose we'll find out what happened with everyone else in debriefing. I bet we hear some good stories!] Draco heard Divot's reply

Yeah... if we survive that is, Draco thought.

The three fighters formed into a wedge and they thrust themselves directly into the raiders.

Douglas J Griffyn
Starboard Hangar Deck

"Lords of Kobol, go with your children lost this day, and guide them along their path. Be with

those still fighting our enemy, and help us to survive this catastrophe victorious, so say we all," Captain Marcus Strauss said in the monotone voice he just discovered he possessed. He looked around the makeshift morgue at the rear of *Douglas J. Griffyn's* Starboard hangar deck. Row upon row of the dead lay motionless as medics continued to bring body bags in.

He had recited that prayer at least a dozen times to fearful crew members, and had it memorized by now. The last part of the prayer came about on a whim... he knew the scrolls, and the exodus, and the apocalypse the Lords of Kobol spoke of, but he had to instill faith into the fearful.

Strauss thought of his daughter the most throughout the entire time... she lived on Picon with her husband, and Marcus' grand-daughter. The news of Picon being the first to go sent Strauss to the floor in anguish but he had to recover quickly. There would be time to mourn later... what would the crew do without anyone to give them a glimmer... maybe a small one, of hope?

He had to continue his job, he had to at least get hold of the gods for his daughter's sake.

"Sir...," a young marine with tears streaming down her cheeks said to Strauss. He had seen that look many times by now. "Sure," he said and they clasped hands and bowed their heads.

CIC

Watching the dradis screen intently Herald witnessed the numbers of raiders continue to drop. The problem was, however, the background noise was fouling up all of the sensors.

[*Griffyn* Actual this is Mad Dog, we're running out of targets out here, repeat, we are running out of targets, can you confirm,] Barker's voice sounded over the overhead speakers.

Herald picked up the handset: "Mad Dog, dradis is a crap shoot right now, are you certain that the numbers of raiders are diminishing," Herald asked.

[We have them outnumbered sir,] she replied.

Outside, the dog fights between the last group of raiders could be seen clearly by the Talons and Stallions. Barker pulled back on her stick and sent her viper into a vertical climb, giving her

a perfect view of the rest of her squadrons. "Requesting orders," she repeated.

"Orders are to aid *Libra* and remaining *Solstice* and *Delphinus* vipers in cleanup, and when done return home," Herald said, while looking over the faces of all the CIC Personnel. He saw something he had never seen before in any of them, true terror. Their families were gone, everything they cared about has been obliterated.

He looked over the faces, and then remembered his family on Scorpia... Eunice and his little girl Sharla...

He snapped out of the trance and began assigning tasks. "Braddock, see what can be done to clear up dradis, work through as much of the jamming as possible, Landry, start monitoring viper wireless chatter, I want to know how many of our people we lost, and how many are stranded out there." He pointed to the communications specialist seated across the room. "Get me Commander Rodrigues. The *Libra's* going to need assistance," Herald said as he strode over to Major Johnson to coordinate the DC Teams.

Cylon occupied Colonial Space

The *Mercurius* rested at the bottom of a crater on an asteroid. The lower hatch, which led to the cargo bay, was open.

Kalrk, dressed in EVA gear, exited a small cavern dug into the side of a cliff face and paused. He looked around, at his ship and the surrounding area. *No sign of anybody*, he thought. *They're busy at the colonies and looking for individual ships, not looking at uninhabitable asteroids.*

Glancing at the timepiece on his suit he frowned. *Sixty-six minutes. I've been away from Astral Dawn sixty-six minutes.*

He stepped back inside the cavern, picked up a large crate, an eight foot cube, and began the low gravity hop to the ship's waiting hatch. Taking it into the cargo bay, he placed it to the far back with the other two, and began securing it with straps. *Can't have these bouncing around down here*, he mused. Once he was satisfied with the securing job he tapped a few buttons on an obscure control panel, and watched as the cargo hatch closed. Turning, he walked to a certain spot in the cargo bay, looked up and saw that he was under the opening to the area his flight crew knew to be his "suite". He jumped upward and through the opening, landing

effortlessly on the deck plating above. *Funny thing about zero G, he thought, anyone can look like a super being.*

Moving forward, to the cockpit, Kalrk hit a few switches and buttons, the ship began to fill with atmosphere, heat, and gravity. He sat in the pilot's seat, and with a few more controls manipulated on the console, the engines came online. *One more stop, and then I'll see how Astral Dawn is doing.*

Battlestar *Libra* **Upper Starboard Flight Deck**

Mac watched the marines thoughtfully, putting names to faces. *PFC Lopez... Lance Corporal D'Argent, the redhead who had moved to one of the entrances doorways... Lance Corporal Benoit, the tall dark-haired girl... and PFC Lafitte. I wish I'd paid closer attention to our marines before. Especially Lafitte... geez, he's a good looking guy!* She sighed. *Yeah, well, if you'd listen to Chief Sutton and get off the deck once in awhile, you might actually meet someone other than knuckledraggers.*

She looked around the deck from her vantage point outside the hatchway and murmured to herself, "Like there's going to be any off-duty time with all this..."

She looked again at the group of marines and focused on one, the name escaping her. It was Captain *Riley*, Mac realized. He was all business, his eyes on the missile as he conferred with Lafitte and Benoit. *I wonder if it's a rule, that all Marines have to be good looking,* Mac thought. Chuckling softly she realized, *Frak, girl, so it takes a near death experience to get you to notice guys?* She shook her head with amusement. *If Gordie knew, he'd give me hell!* She thought of her younger brother fondly. She knew what was happening on the colonies and resolutely turned her mind back to the scene before her.

She looked at Lafitte's tools, the compact instrument case he'd opened on the deck. She was suddenly aware of the weight of the wrench in the lower leg pocket of her coveralls. Curious, she wanted to move closer, to watch but stayed out of the way per Captain Riley's orders.

Astral Dawn

Mercurius appeared in a flash of light near the stationary vessel.

"*Astral Dawn*, come in. This is Kalrk on *Mercurius*," he said into the microphone on the inside of his flight helmet. Immediately he received a reply.

{Kalrk! Welcome back,} the voice of Captain Gibbs was unmistakable. "A colonial raptor found us and gave us coordinates to the President... the newly-sworn in President of the Twelve Colonies. She's gathering ships.]

"How did a raptor find you," Kalrk was puzzled. *Was it just dumb luck?*

He heard Gibbs chuckle on the other end of the connection, [A government employee is onboard and she used her official communications device to answer the Code Orange Alert. The raptor picked up part of her transmission.]

FRAK! Kalrk cursed inside his skull. He attempted to sound calm when he responded to Captain Gibbs. "This is bad, Captain, *very* bad. The cylons know where you are. Trust me, they know."

[If they know all ready, why haven't they attacked us? And if they tried it, we'd jump out of here in a heartbeat.]

"I request permission to come aboard," Kalrk replied straightforward. "I'll be able to enter through one of your airlocks, near the shuttle bay entrance on your starboard side. Meet me there, Gibbs, and have that government employee and their toy there as well, Kalrk out."

Astral Dawn **Living Quarters**

Liza Liala was sitting at the desk in her suite, staring off into nothingness. She was in over her head. Had no idea what was next, for her, for any of them. Would there even be a next? There had to be. On the other side of their next jump, the new President of the Twelve Colonies would be waiting... to tell her what was next. That was as close to comfort as she was going to get at this time. Her thoughts were interrupted by a knock on the door. She walked over and opened it, to find the security officer from earlier standing in the corridor.

"Mister Willborn. Is it time?"

He shook his head no. "Would you please accompany me to the shuttle bay, to meet with Captain Gibbs and Captain Kalrk?"

"Captain Kalrk has returned? Shouldn't we be making the jump, then? Why do they want to see me," Liza asked. Fear began trickling into her chest.

He looked uncomfortable, or more likely, she thought, studying his face, *puzzled*. He volunteered no information and she began to suspect he might have none to give.

"Will you accompany me?"

She didn't see she had much choice. Going with him seemed to be the only way she was going to get any answers.

"Yes, by all means Mister Willborn. Please lead the way."

He stepped aside, making room for her to exit her suite and enter the corridor alongside him, following him as they walked to the shuttle bay. Once they entered the lift, he held out a hand to her.

"Here, ma'am, you can have this back now."

She took the transmitter from him and, out of sheer habit, clipped it at her side once more, puzzled as to why he had suddenly returned it to her, and equally puzzled as to what possible use it could ever have, again. At any rate, she supposed, it was at least good to have it back... After all that had happened, if nothing else, at least no one could accuse her of losing government property.

They rode the lift to the correct deck, and walked the rest of the way in silence, including the walk across the shuttle bay to where Captain Gibbs stood.

"Miss Liala. Thank you for coming, Gibbs said.

He held out his hand, and she extended hers in return, all the while wondering what exactly this was all about. What was the delay in the jump that they had planned for (or so it had sounded at the time) the moment Kalrk returned.

"Miss Liala," Gibbs began. "On the other side of this airlock is Kalrk's ship *Mercurius*; we can open this in a moment." He pointed at the control panel which had a red light, indicating that the hookup was not complete.

"I told him about your transmission piece that got the attention of that raptor, and about the new President. He was insistent that we meet him."

Liza was puzzled, "Do you have any idea why, Captain? I was under the impression we would be making our jump as soon as Mister Kalrk returned."

"He says the cylons know where we are," Gibbs was confused as well. "He's studied the Cylon War. I guess he sees a pattern between now and then perhaps? At any rate he asked for us to meet him prior to our jump."

Liza looked even more concerned now. "Captain... If the Cylons know where we are, isn't that all the more reason to jump away as soon as possible?"

Gibbs paused for the briefest of moments. He had the same thought when he spoke with Kalrk earlier. "I'm not sure." Gibbs answered. "Why wouldn't the cylons jump *here* and destroy us, if they know where we are?"

The control panel light changed from red to green, and there was a low volume beep. Gibbs turned to the panel and tapped a sequence of numbers. The airlock opened with a hiss.

From within the accordion-like tube, a figure walked toward them from the open hatch of *Mercurius*. Gibbs saw what looked like a black cylon centurion. Don Gibbs gasped as a reflex, and took a step backward, into Liza Liala.

The figure's two hands were near its throat, and with another slight hiss, the helmet detached from the rest of the suit, revealing the face of Kalrk underneath.

"Captain Gibbs, nice to meet you," Kalrk said as he extended his right hand.

"You scared the hell out of me, man!" Gibbs said, his heart still pounding.

Willborn stood defensively beside Liala.

Liza Liala extended her hand to the new arrival.

"Mister Kalrk, I presume."

"Yes." He replied as he shook her hand. "And you are...?" He thought she must be a member of the *Astral Dawn's* crew.

"Liza Liala. I'm an analyst with the Colonial Bureau of Investigations."

His smile almost disappeared, almost. "So you're the passenger with the governmental transmitter?"

"Yes, that's correct."

"Ok. I'll be brief," He looked from her to Gibbs and at Willborn. "We don't have a lot of time. The cylons likely are able to track that transmitter. Its frequency is from the First War."

Liala looked down at her the transmitter, unclipped it, and held it out in her hand to Kalrk.

"Then I give you permission to destroy it. It's not as if it's going to be of much use to me in the future."

He took it from her graciously. "Thank you. But we shouldn't destroy it. We can use it to our advantage." Kalrk dropped it inside his helmet and with his free hand, opened a pocket in his pants leg, and took out a standard eight-sided computer disc. "This has coordinates to a safe place, near an asteroid that I've used in the past. I was just there, and there are no signs of the cylons. I urge you, Captain, jump there before the cylons show up. You'll be safe there."

"We should go meet the president," Gibbs began.

"No!" Kalrk said forcibly. He lowered his voice. "Forgive me. No, you mustn't go there. Not now. It isn't safe." He nodded towards Liza, "*She* has sent a message too, remember?"

Liza's stare sent icy daggers at Kalrk. "What exactly do you suggest, then, Mister Kalrk? That we jump to those coordinates you have just provided, and hide indefinitely? No. We have to meet her, and the ships she is gathering. Hiding at the asteroid may protect us today, tomorrow, the next day. But in the long run we'll stand no chance alone."

"You're right, we stand no chance alone and we can't hide out indefinitely." Kalrk was rather

pleasant actually. The human thing to do is to gather together. The problem with that is the cylons know this. Soon, they will strike. Trust me on this."

Liala admired his tact.

Kalrk turned to Gibbs. "Captain, I implore you. Do not go to the President now. I believe with every fiber of my being that the cylons know where the president is and will attack them soon as well."

Liza analyzed the facts presented by Kalrk, finally asking, "If you suggest we wait, Mister Kalrk, how do you propose we keep the Cylons away from us while we do?"

"They're tracking this transmitter, so we let them track it." He looked intently into her eyes. "And I ask you, to trust me, Miss. While the *Dawn* jumps to that asteroid area... you accompany me on *Mercurius*. Once the *Dawn's* jump has been completed, you make another call on it."

She looked at him, shocked. *Had he gone nuts?* "You're kidding, Mister Kalrk... Aren't you?"

"This is life and death," He said coldly. "For this to work to our advantage, I need this device *and* you," he lowered his voice. "And you need to get off this ship, as they want to kill you maybe more than any other person here." He stared at her and at Gibbs, waiting for someone to respond.

Liala matched Kalrk's gaze in a way that meant to make it clear that no one looks at her that way. She held the gaze for a few moments and replied, "Very well, Mister Kalrk. However, I disagree with the second part of your assessment. While it is likely they would indeed wish to kill someone who would carry such a device, I see no way for them to know which passenger was in possession of it. After all, it isn't as if the Cylons were walking among us the last few years, taking notes on who's who."

He held his tongue for a moment, choosing his response carefully. "Thank you."

Turning to Gibbs he asked, "Will you trust me and not jump to the President's location yet?"

"You're the cylon expert here, Kalrk," Gibbs said. "If you think that they're following us, following that transmitter..."

"Captain, pardon me," Willborn interrupted. "You would let her go with him out there and risk

her life? And you would listen to him about going to some asteroid?"

"He saved us from those two cylon attack ships Jonathan," Gibbs reminded the Security Officer. "We'll go to the asteroid. And if there is any trouble there, we'll go to the President."

"And as for Miss Liala," Willborn looked at her with great concern. "Are you sure you want to do this?"

"No, Mister Willborn, I am far from sure," Liza answered honestly. "However, in situations such as the one we now find ourselves in, there is little to be certain of. One thing I may be certain of is that Mister Kalrk is not about to head off on his own with my transmitter. It was issued to me. I cannot simply hand it off to anyone who comes by." She took a deep breath, and continued. "If something should... occur... while Mister Kalrk and I are attempting to carry out this plan, and you meet the new President... without us... Please deliver to her the possessions within my suite, especially my briefcase, its contents, and my ID badge."

A short time later

"I hope that enviro-suit is comfortable enough," Kalrk said to the woman in the back of the deck. "And again, welcome aboard *Mercurius*. You can sit up here if you'd like."

She could hear him clearly through the helmet's communications system. And while the suit was not stylish, it was practical. If the ship lost atmosphere, she wouldn't die, not immediately any way.

Liza went up front and took the offered seat, folding herself into it as gracefully as possible, under the circumstances. Somehow, she had the feeling Kalrk was the type of man who liked to play with his ship. Sitting would likely be the wisest course of action.

As she sat, Kalrk spoke once more... and though she could not see his face, she could, from his voice, get almost a crystal-clear clear picture of his likely expression as he spoke his next words. "C.B.I. Analyst, huh?" he said, with a smirk in his voice. *Does she really think I believed that cover story?* He thought. His tone made it clear he did not believe her.

Liza suspected her companion hoped to bait her into confirming or denying his suspicions, if not through words, than at least through actions and tone. As such, with a silent a mental sigh, she responded, keeping her own tone of voice almost totally devoid of inflection. Let him think what he would... and give him no answers, nor anything that could be used to formulate any answers... in either direction. "Yes, Mister Kalrk."

"Please... call me Kalrk." She seemed quite defensive, and he didn't want to intimidate her, if that were even possible. There was no reason to make her uncomfortable. "And if you'd be so kind, now that the *Dawn* has jumped away, please send a message that we now have 20 ships present and will be Jumping away in five minutes."

"And buckle up."

Battlestar *Libra* Flight Deck

"Be that as it may Corporal Benoit, we need to assume the missile's ready to detonate. That's the reason Lafitte is going to handle the disarming procedure, with your assistance." Riley looked at both Jo and Francois. It was a tough call, Frankie had more experience, but Jo's hands were smaller, which would help if the space inside was cramped.

Nodding, the two marines knelt by the missile. Lafitte took out the tiny screwdriver and ever so carefully, began to remove the cover.

The screws gave easily, and soon were on the deck. Jo then lifted the metal cover, handling it gingerly. Soon it, too, lay on the deck. Inside, the missile glowed with an odd reddish light.

Lafitte took a device from the instruments box. The device was a smallish, handheld device that housed a magnifying glass and some electronic sensors. He examined inside the missile, searching for the control panel. Sweat ran down his face and he swore softly in his native dialect. Jo looked in, mesmerized. One of the sensors blinked, and he went back to make sure. Yes, there was no doubt. *If* the sensor was right, and *if* the cylons had merely refined Colonial detonation technology, instead of devising something totally new, he knew how to disarm this thing. But it would be tricky.

"Josette, cherie, lift the black panel *very carefully*. Underneath there should be two wires, maybe three, connected to the panel. Move the panel as far away as you can, to give me some space, *but do not break or disconnect the wires*. Understood?"

"Oui."

Mac watched and listened, transfixed. She couldn't see into the small compartment that Lafitte and Benoit were working in, but she recognized the tension in their voices and bodies.

Jo did as Lafitte had instructed, pulling the control panel back enough so he could better work. Sighing he went in, the small pliers looking out of place in his big hands. He paused for a quick prayer, and cut, wincing for the explosion.

It never came.

The missile's interior went dark. It was disarmed.

The assembled marines breathed a sigh of relief and smiled. Josette spoke to the Captain, "It's done, sir."

Francois bowed his head and thanked gods he didn't believe in anymore...

Riley nodded, smiling. "I wouldn't have expected anything less from my best EOD techs. Great work you two."

Mac recognized the release of their tension when the missile was disarmed. She moved in slowly, respectful of the fact there was still a large chunk of enemy explosives sitting on her deck. Once she got closer she was able to see the compartment they were working in. Whistling softly she asked, "Could you show me what you did?"

Lafitte took off his helmet and bowed with a flourish to the cute knuckledragger, "Mas oui, of course!" He was smiling widely, his blue eyes crinkling with humor and appreciation, "Come closer and I will show you!"

Jo chuckled, "Careful, MacLean. Don't get *too* close, or he may show you more than you expected!"

He grabbed his heart in mock despair, "You wound me, Lance Corporal Benoit!" But he ruined the effect by bursting into laughter.

Surprised by his humor, Mac also laughed. "Well, I sure didn't expect a cylon missile to show up here!" she replied. She looked at Lafitte's tools, then at him. *Damn, a guy this good looking has got to have more girlfriends than he knows what to do with...* She gave herself a mental shake, and went to one knee, looking into the missile's open compartment.

Carefully she moved the inside panel, studying the electronics underneath. "Humph, it doesn't look too much different than our missiles," she said with surprise. "It must be impact detonated, and somehow flew in here without hitting anything hard enough." She looked toward the nose of the missile. "Or else it malfunctioned somehow." She looked at Lafitte questioningly.

Lafitte squatted next to her and smiled his devastating grin, "Beautiful and bright! I am smitten!" He looked at the name tag on her jumpsuit. "Ma petite Miss MacLean, I am Francois Lafitte, but you can call me lover. Or sweetie. Or whatever you want. But Frankie will also do." His face very close to hers, he pointed to the control panel with the severed wire. "See there? Bad soldering, therefore bad contact. That's why it didn't explode..."

Riley, watching the exchange between his people and Mac, shook his head, smiling. He moved to the nearest phone and picked it up. "CIC this is Captain Riley. Advise the commander the enemy ordnance is neutralized."

[Understood Captain, we'll advise him right away.]

Riley hung up the receiver and looked over at two marines standing watch over the entrance. Motioning them over he pointed to the missile. "You two get that missile secured. I don't want some idiot accidentally setting it off."

The marine nodded to the captain and walked up to the three hovering over the missile. She could not help but roll her eyes over the banter they were throwing at each other.

"Miss Maclean, Jo and ... she paused for effect while looking over to give him a derisive look.. Lafitte, Captain Riley gave me and Brinkman orders to get this missile locked up ASAP. So if we can all stop playing Happy hour and you give us a hand moving it onto the cart I would be very grateful.

Jo was the first to react. "Sure Kelly, as soon as Brinkman gets here we'll prop this baby on the cart so you can take it to the armory."

Lafitte laughed PFC Kelly's obviously dismissive look away. "Ah Kelly, as lovely and warm as ever! Had I not fallen madly in love with Miss MacLean here, I would try to melt your icy heart,

but alas, I am now taken," he said as he put his arm around Mac's shoulders and hugged her to his side.

Kelly looked at Lafitte with disdain, silently admitting to herself he ruffled her feathers a bit with that ice heart comment, but she was not one to let a pretty boy get the best of her. "It would take warmth to melt my heart Lafitte, not fluff." She could hear footsteps coming up behind her as Brinkman approached with the large trolley. "Ahh here is our ride, why don't you use those pretty boy looks and those muscles and give me a hand lifting this oversized bullet onto the missile cart," Kelly knelt down and grabbed one end of the missile waiting for Lafitte to give her a hand.

Lafitte turned to MacLean, still smiling, but a keen observer would notice the edge to his good humor. "Don't pay her any attention, cherie. Our beloved PFC Kelly is convinced that beauty and brains cannot coexist, but you and Josette prove otherwise, no?"

Mac chuckled and said, "Yeah, I bet you say that to all the girls... but Kelly is right. I've got to get the deck opened up and running again." She sighed quietly. *I wonder what his arm around me would feel like if he wasn't wearing that frakking bomb suit... not that I'd ever have a chance to find out.* "Frankie, my first name is Alexandra, but everyone calls me Mac."

He picked the other end of the missile and nodded to Jo, who smiled and stepped back. He asked, "Ready?", and almost immediately got up gracefully, like a cat, lifting his end of the missile effortlessly.

Kelly looked up at Lafitte and gave him a smirk that said *I know something you don't*. She proceeded to lift her end of the missile with just as much ease and looked over at the trolley which stood a foot away from them. She looked back at Lafitte and smiled a devilish grin, "Voules vous danse? Mon Cherie." she challenged him.

He smiled again, "Merci beaucoup mais non, il fait trop froid. Now let's get this missile to the armory, shall we?"

Once the missile was on the trolley and before they rolled it out, Lafitte turned his attention to MacLean once again. "Alexandra." He tried the name out loud, his slight accent making it sound exotic and regal at the same time. "It is a beautiful name, cherie. Why would anyone call you anything else?"

Hearing Lafitte go through the motions of a man of adventure Josette rolled her eyes.

Ignoring her, Lafitte continued. "But now, I must go. I'll see you later... Alexandra." He winked.

Mac watched with appreciation, following them as they wheeled the missile out the hatch. The wide passageway was crammed with the people who'd been evacuated from the deck. Upon seeing the missile, however they quickly cleared a path.

"Dusty," Mac said, seeing one of her fellow knuckledraggers in the crowd, "Could you call and get a DC team in here?" More loudly, she said, "Deck's open, back to work everyone!" Her thoughts on the job ahead, she said, "It's a frakking mess... has anyone heard anything from Chief Sutton?" Without waiting for an answer, she turned and headed back onto the deck.

Riley watched as the marines rolled the deactivated missile off to one of the armories on the far side of the flight line. He exhaled slowly and wiped his forehead, drawing away a sopping wet sleeve. *I'm getting too frakking old for this*, he mused silently.

Aboard *Mercurius*

Liza pulled out the transmitter she had attached to her belt. The helmet of her flight suit prevented her from using it with voice, so she poked at the keypad, preparing to send a text transmission. The bulky fingers of the suit were impossible to use in such a manner, so she used the tiny stylus instead. The minutes dragged on as she painstakingly entered the text, several times almost dropping the stylus from her slippery, suit-clad fingers. Finally, she completed the message, and sent it. Turning slightly and spoke into the mic in her suit. "The transmission is sent."

"Well, you could have sent an audio message through the helmet, you know," Kalrk replied. There was an obvious hint of amusement in his voice.

He sounded almost pleased with himself and she aimed to put a quick end to that with her next words. "And interface with a system I know nothing about? No thank you, I know nothing about this particular suit, Mister Kalrk. In addition I also know almost nothing about you or your ship, no offense intended."

"No offense taken. And the name is Kalrk. Are you secured to that seat?"

"Yes."

"Good. Because I imagine we'll have company in about four minutes. So, where are you from?"

"Caprica, not that I suppose that matters anymore," Liza could barely imagine what kind of hell everyone in the colonies could be going through right now. The thought made her blood run cold.

"It matters." he said sadly. "It all matters. Where we're from, where we're going... it all matters. I'm from Sagittaron, but I've lived on several colonies. I lived on Leonis for the last year and a half at K industries. He turned his grotesque helmet towards her. What was your name again?"

He either had the world's worst memory, or he was toying with her. Either way, in this case, she saw no reason not to repeat it for him.

"Liza Liala."

"Well, Liza Liala, have you ever been on any wild up and down topsy turvy rides before?"

"I suppose it depends on your definition of wild, Mist... Err, Kalrk."

He smiled inside his helmet, but wasn't going to say anything about her finally dropping that annoying "Mister".

"What I mean is...Do you get space sickness easily, Liza Liala? We may need to take some evasive maneuvers shortly."

What a bizarre question, she thought. Whether she did or not mattered little at this point—It was not as if they could sit around and let the cylons shoot them down just to avoid space sickness. "No. I do not. And even if I did, I would respectfully point out that evading the Cylons and saving our necks is of much greater importance than avoiding such things."

His hands had been on the controls the whole time that they had been speaking. His eyes, likewise, were constantly scanning the various instrument displays on the console. "That's good to know."

His voice sounded—barely, but it did sound to her—as if there was more to his last words than met the eye. As if he thought not only was it good to know....But it was interesting to know.

He fired up the turbos, sending them both back into their seats from the sudden g's.

"Cylon raiders on dradis, I have two targets. Hang on Liza Liala!"

Mercurius was closing in on them. The raiders, as opposed to *Mercurius*, seemed to be strolling through the area.

"They're confused," Kalrk said to his passenger. "They're wondering if our ships jumped before they got here."

He tapped a button on the side of the control stick and two missiles were launched from launchers near the forward cargo bay, under *Mercurius*' nose. Liza saw them clearly as they bolted for their intended targets. The raiders, however, were more agile than anything seen in forty years, and had not only dodged, but were able to destroy the incoming missiles.

"Perfect." Kalrk said, as he did a roll, a turn, and an upsweep, firing his cannons. One of the Cylons exploded in front of the *Merc*'s path, sparks 'splashing' on the windshield. Kalrk suddenly slammed on the reverse thrusters, and *Mercurius* lurched in a 180 degree flip maneuver. While not textbook it was effective and he hit the turbos again. The other raider made an abrupt turn and attempted to evade Kalrk's ship. Kalrk mashed the trigger on the flight stick and in seconds the second raider exploded from the gunfire. Kalrk slowed his ship down.

"They're so predictable."

She stopped to catch her breath after that last maneuver. "Predi... Predictable in what way"

"That they came here when our 20 ships were about to jump. 'About to jump' means any vipers on CAP would need to have returned to their ships, leaving our *little fleet* practically defenseless during that one minute. That's why I asked you to mention we would jump in five minutes," Kalrk flipped several switches on the overhead console.

Liza was amazed. Kalrk knew more about the Cylons than anyone she had ever met, or even heard of, even more than most Cylon experts she had met. This entire time, this entire trip, he had been pushing her, testing her, baiting her. Now, it was time to turn the tables at last. "You certainly know a great deal about the Cylons. Tell me, how did you learn it all"

"Reading mostly, and watching old war documentaries. Ready to jump?"

"Yes."

"Is your heart rate ok?"

Another stupid question Liala thought. It was elevated slightly, of course, like anyone's would have been. But if it hadn't been fine, could she have been speaking to him? Was he as dumb as he seemed? No, he couldn't be....he had proven that, in other instances. He must be baiting her again. But at the moment, she couldn't care less. More raiders might show at any moment. "I'm fine, Kalrk. By all means, let's get the frak out of here before more raiders show."

"No more will show up here, not for a while at least. They'll wait while the two raiders tear up our 20 ships."

A Cylon expert indeed, though eerily so. He must have spent his whole life studying them, but why? Liza was becoming uneasy at the lack of any real information being presented to her.

Kalrk turned his head and faced her, the centurion style helmet almost unnerving. "That's why we're jumping... to meet more raiders."

With that, he turned back to the controls, tapped some buttons, made a few adjustments to several instruments, and *Mercurius* jumped away.

...

A flash of light in the darkness of space and *Mercurius* appeared in another place.

"Let me explain, the cylons traced your signal, and sent two raiders to destroy you and your twenty gathered ships. So we took them out, before they could signal back to wherever they came from, that you aren't twenty ships." He flipped a set of switches on the control board and a star map of the area they were in flashed on the screen. "And now, if you would be so kind, Liza Liala, send a message that your twenty ships will remain here for," he looked at the timepiece on his wrist. "for an hour. Also add that any ships picking up your signal should meet you here. Don't mention the two ships we destroyed. As far as the cylons will know, we left before they showed up, so let them try to figure what happened to their scouts. In your message say, that after the hour, any assembled vessels will be jumping further away from Colonial space and never to return. The cylons will come, of course, to destroy you before that

jump. But, they'll wait until others have joined you, see? And after you send that, if you'd like, you can join me for a bite to eat."

Kalrk walked to the hatch between the cockpit area and the larger space which was his living quarters, where she had first boarded the ship. As she knew, that big space was an open deck with nothing in it., just the bulkheads, the ceiling and the deck. "Or if you prefer to stay up here, that's fine," he began. "Just don't mess with the controls and blow us up."

With that, he left.

Liza should have expected it, she supposed. Like many of his wealth and position, he seemed to have an attitude.

Liza removed her flight helmet and sat for a few minutes in her seat, silently contemplating the situation the entire human race had suddenly found itself in. Here she was, a CBI special agent, in an unknown sector of space trying to lure an enemy to her. This enemy had already proven its ruthlessness by laying waste to all twelve colonies. And what seemed worse was she was here with a person that in other circumstances would be getting her attention, albeit, in a less friendly manner.

Showing no reaction his comments, she spoke into her transmitter, this time sending a voice transmission, detailing, as Kalrk had requested, the ships she had "gathered" here, the coordinates, and that they would wait an hour for other Colonial vessels who wished to join them, before jumping away. As she did so, she glanced around the cockpit, careful to move only her eyes, not her head, so as to not alert him if he was watching as to what she was doing. To her slight surprise, she could not see anything that was not, to her knowledge, or would not have been, standard in the cockpit of such a ship. Returning the transmitter to its place at her hip, she got up, and made her way into the back, wondering how he was going to eat back there. By sitting on the floor? The curiosity of what he thought he was up to was just too much to pass up.

Much to her surprise, when she finally made it back there, the space was no longer barren. Instead, a table was there, having seemingly folded right out of the wall, along with a bench... appliances now revealed dotted the wall nearby. Instant kitchen! Nearby, but sufficiently spaced from the rest, a couch, Gods only knew how, had also somehow materialized from the wall. Part of her was fascinated with all these gadgets and part of her felt disdain, as this man now reminded her, in this way at least, of her mother, who's attitude in life had been "What good is money if you can't show it off?".

Whether for the purpose to show off or the simple fascination with technology, it was, undeniably, his ship. As such, she stood there patiently, waiting for him to formally offer her food, and invite her to sit and join him, either at the table, or on the couch...

He pulled a tray out of a doorway in the wall. It was an energy oven.

"How did the message go?" He asked, while placing the tray on the table. He looked at her, just standing there. "Is something wrong," he asked, trying to understand why she was just standing there. Pointing to the food on his tray he motioned for her to sit. "It's not poisoned, honest. If you're hungry, come and eat. If you're thirsty, come and drink. But don't just stand there, Liza Liala. Try to make yourself comfortable. Mi barco es su barco."

Pilot's Ready Room Battlestar *Libra*

Chandler found the head and got into the farthest stall, shutting the metal half door with a bang. He closed his eyes, breathing in and out, deeply and regularly, in order to regain control of his emotions. *Think, Mark. THINK!* He breathed slowly, in and out, in and out. A few moments later his heartbeat slowed and reason ruled again.

The CAG. He must report to the *Libra* CAG. The CAG would know if anyone from the *Delphinus* had survived, the CAG would know what was going on. The CAG would give him his orders, and he would go back out and execute them.

He splashed water on his face and righted his flight suit.

Satisfied, he left in search of the *Libra* CAG.

Port Topside Launch bay Battlestar *Libra*

Lieutenant Geroges "Nomen" Brangle ran through his final checks. Combat radio set to short range UHF to lessen the jamming.

Feldergarb eating Cylons. Come on...check check... would have been in the air already if it weren't for that Nav system update... come on... one more... Yes!

"Nomen to Flight control, flight of three ready to launch."

[Nomen this is Shooter. You're in the green, prepare for launch. Good hunting.]

Even as the order was given, the last three members of viper Squadron Seventeen hit their catapult controls, and were tossed into space like ragdolls.

As soon as the launch forces abated Brangle hit his Comm.

"This is viper Five-Five-Seven leading flight of three, to any viper Commander in range, requesting orders."

He waited the standard ten seconds. Receiving no reply, he transmitted once again. After again receiving no response on the comm channel he switched to the intersquad channel.

"OK, looks like we're on our own for the moment. Honey, you take left. Wisecrack you take right. I'll take center. Let's go find us some pigeons to fleece."

The three ship flight took up standard triangular formation, lead in forward center, left in rear high, and right in rear low, in full turbo. Scanning his dradis, 'Nomen' picked a likely group of targets, and aimed his viper at them. Again he switched to the main tactical channel and keyed his mic. "This is viper Five-Five-Seven, to any viper Commander in range, requesting orders," Still no reply. He recorded the same message, and set it to broadcast every 30 seconds, until shut down.

There they were, six raiders in tight formation, heading straight in to the *Libra*, slightly below and to the left of their flight path.

Knowing that his wingmen would be taking all flight cues from his actions, he aimed his nose up and right just slightly, working out a battle plan as he went.

When the Cylon formation was aligned correctly, he shut down his turbos, and pulled his viper around hard to the left and down. His flight group was now aimed directly at the formation of Cylons, coming in on their left side. Relighting his turbos, he glanced down at his dradis to make sure his wingmen were with him. Satisfied that they were in position he accelerated forward.

The flight of raiders appeared to be too intent on the *Libra* to have even noticed his group, as they made no attempt at all to maneuver. Cannons blazing, the three vipers shot up to the formation, and within seconds five of six raiders were transformed into glowing balls of debris.

Unable to resist, Second Lieutenant Paul "Wisecrack" Thorson yelled over the wireless. "Ha, have some jam with your toaster, suckers!"

The sixth raider swung around to face the newest threat. Even as the flight of vipers made their turn to finish the job the raider managed to get off one burst of cannon fire before being blasted apart.

Almost as if it were destiny, the single burst of cannon fire, a mere five rounds, landed squarely in the cockpit section of Wisecrack's viper, shredding the canopy, instantly killing Thorson.

The remaining two vipers turned, and Nomen's cockpit vibrated with his scream of rage.

Specialist Sonia Checkov
Port Flight Pod
Battlestar *Libra*

Sonia thought about Lieutenant Chandler as she took care of the viper, D933NC. *This bird is in good shape, she mused. Like he is...* She smiled slightly to herself. *I didn't expect to get that sort of reaction from anyone today... I'll have to see if I can get assigned as his crew chief...*

She turned her concentration to the ship. Whatever else anyone thought of her, she was obsessive in her attention to her vipers.

Eliana Kareen (EK) "Lace" Lawrence
Viper Pilot, Battlestar *Libra*
***Libra* Airspace**

The Raiders had seemed to be thinning out, inasmuch as such analogies could apply, for quite some time now. At first, it had seemed as if there were at least three raiders on her tail at any given time. Now, she was finding, she was having to seek *them* out. It was, she admitted, a nice change, and one she allowed herself to acknowledge with the first words she had spoken since her scream of fear and frustration an unknown amount of time before, when her lead had died in a stream of Cylon fire. "Frakking toasters, how's it feel to be on the other side of the equation," she muttered

A few quick maneuvers and shots dispatched yet another raider. She had no idea how many she had killed, being too busy trying to stay alive, on her own, to bother keeping count. There

was only one count that mattered today, and it wasn't how many raiders she killed. It was whether she could still count one certain heart beating in her chest at the end of this day...

... and how many of her comrades could say the same.

As she turned into yet another raider and pressed the trigger on her flight stick, she saw, in the distance, the still burning hulk of the *Solstice*. The once mighty battlestar sat motionless, listing in relation to the other ships in the fleet.

Rage began to overtake fear and her face set into a snarl. *These bastards are going to pay so help be. As the Gods are my witness I WILL avenge their sacrifices.*

Lace flipped her viper over and began pursuing another enemy contact with a renewed sense of confidence.

Destroyer *Douglas J. Griffyn*

Herald grabbed the handset, "*Griffyn Actual to Libra Actual, be advised all enemy combatants in our airspace have been neutralized. We are diverting our fighter cover to you in order to assist you.*

The reply took a lot less time than he expected. [*Libra Actual to Griffyn Actual, we Copy. Hold at least one squadron for emergency contingencies. You've done a great job today Bren.*]

Herald nodded slightly, looking around at the faces of his weary crew. "Thank you sir, you have our deepest gratitude for taking those missiles for us. Otherwise it might have gotten a bit ugly. *Griffyn Actual out,*" he replaced the handset on the cradle.

With the help of the *Griffyn's* Raptor ECOs the CIC crew managed to clear up dradis, and now an accurate count on enemy contacts was displayed. The real task, however, was to begin now. That was clearing up the wireless.

The communications section, exhausted but still alert, kept close tabs on the voice traffic in the battle area. There was lots of chatter from viper pilots and stranded ones, but it was beginning to diminish. Wireless communication could have been even more of a crapshoot than dradis had been were it not for the tenacity of his bridge crew.

Herald looked over at his XO, and gave him a wry look. "Alright XO, let's start getting an accurate count of what we need to fix on this tub."

"Aye sir," Braddock turned and walked over to one of the communications stations.

Herald let out an audible sigh. *I need a drink after this is over*, he thought.

PO2 Alexandra MacLean
Battlestar *Libra*
Flight Deck

After Lafitte and the other Marines had gone off with the missile, Mac called the CIC, giving a quick status report to Captain Hastings. At the end she added "Sir, I know Chief Sutton is on Damage Control somewhere, but we could really use him here... the starboard landing deck is a mess." She paused and added slowly, "I know some of our mechanics were killed, possibly even some pilots also. We, ah, we had to evacuate so quickly I haven't found out yet. I'll report in as soon as I can."

The injured had been evacuated along with the uninjured, but those who'd been killed were still on the deck. Specialist Andrea Benedict, Andy, and Dusty had taken on the job of moving the five bodies to one side, mostly out of view, and had covered them. Now Mac went and looked at the unmoving forms.

"Chief Sutton should be doing this," she whispered to herself, but he wasn't here. She was in line for promotion to Petty Officer First Class, and she'd been his dayshift assistant. He wasn't here, so this duty fell to her.

She uncovered each of the bodies and took their dog tags. Four knuckledraggers, one pilot. She steeled herself, putting away her grief and anger. She clenched the dog tag chains tightly in her hand. *Now what do I do*, she wondered.

"I'll be back in a minute," she told Andy.

Andy took one look at Mac's face, and at the dangling dog tags, and nodded wordlessly.

Libra CIC
Minutes later

Mac stood in the entrance to the CIC, not certain what to do now that she was there. The Marine on guard duty reminded her of Lafitte... the memory of his quick grin and his wink at her made her suddenly grateful that *she* was still alive; and the thought brought guilt along with it.

She suddenly felt very small.

Hastings saw Mac standing in the outer area and motioned her to enter the center room of the CIC. The doors opened with a hiss of air as she approached. He walked over to her and led her in. The doors closed behind them.

Mac saw the commander at the map table watching the battle wind down. She was about to pass the dog tags to Hastings and leave however Rodrigues stopped her.

“What’s on your mind Mac?” Rodrigues said. Despite everything happening he wanted to know what was bringing her to the CIC.

Mac stepped forward slowly. “Sir, I wanted to bring these to you. I wasn’t quite sure what else I should do” she held the tags out.

Rodrigues wasn’t quite sure how to respond. All at once he had the sudden urge to take the young knuckledragger into his arms and comfort her as one would a tearful child. Instead he slowly took the ID chains, pausing to hold her hand briefly. Doing so, he hoped, would give her confidence in the times ahead. “Thank you Mac. You’re doing one hell of a job. I’m indebted to you.”

Almost at once other matters required his attention. He received another communication from the *Griffyn*.

Rodrigues replied. “Begin mop up operations Bren. As soon as we get the toasters taken care of we need to start a combined search and rescue mission. We’ve got a lot of people out there to pick up. I need you to concentrate on the pilots and ships out there. We’ll handle the *Solstice*. I’ll contact you when we’re ready. *Libra* out,” Rodrigues turned his attention back to the situation at hand. “Let’s get ready for a search and rescue mission to the *Solstice*. Also have all of the DC teams keep it up. We’re almost through this.”

Lance Corporal Psyche (Princess) D'Argent
Med Bay

Py slowly, reluctantly, approached the bed in sick bay. There were machines and tubes of all kinds hooked up to its occupant. Py felt herself start to shake as her mouth went dry and she took the last step bringing her to the edge of the bed.

Alma was covered in bruises from head to toe

"You are mine I made you cell by cell, I know things about you that you still have no idea," echoed in the back of her mind

She forced herself to keep looking at her spotter and the woman who called her sister as she touched the bump on the back of her own head; apparently the worst of her own injuries and yet not even a concussion.

"If she makes it through the night she might just make it altogether," said the medic who came over to check Alma's vitals. "So there is hope even though it looks bad."

Hope, Py thought. *What a trap that is*, and yet she could not help falling into it because she had just discovered something. She actually wanted Alma to survive.

The medic, who had finished writing her findings on Alma's chart, looked up at the woman who stood at the edge of her patient's bed. She saw a tired and yet stunning redhead who looked like she was about to fall down where she stood. Fearing having to add another patient to her already oversized list, she shoed Py from sick bay.

"You do her or yourself no favors if you collapse from exhaustion. The gods know we don't have the medical staff to look after you at the moment, so off you go."

Py just looked at her, all of her previous vulnerability disappearing in to a void of detachment. She walked away from Alma's bed not looking back, not allowing herself to. What was wrong with her today, she wondered not for the first time in the course of events. It was not like it was her world that had just ended, not like she had just lost a single thing. So why am I experiencing all the emotional upheaval?

Py muttered to herself "Just drop it Py, or you will end up driving yourself crazy. Ignore it and

it will all just go away, like it always has before. Feel nothing and suffer nothing. Live by that die by that" but part of Py cried out in anguish at this, that she wanted to feel something, to live and not just exist. Py just squashed that part of herself as she always had; not noticing that this time a whimper was left alive.

CPO Paul Luna
Destroyer Douglas J. Griffyn
Starboard Flight Pod

"Okay, we got birds coming in, we need this deck cleared of all debris and, " he stopped himself short. *Bodies, was he really about to say that?*

Eight bodies total, the three techs from earlier, and five members of a DC team sent to the starboard pod just before the missile hit. From the *Libra* vipers that had landed on *Griffyn* to refuel, and the word they had passed on, the *Libra* had sustained much more damage than the *Griffyn*.

Paul looked around, and really took in the sight. There were at least a dozen of his knuckledraggers, what he considered to be his family, injured. Scaffolding lay everywhere, and parts of varying types lay scattered across the deck. Tears began to well up, and he grabbed a greasy towel from his coveralls and wiped them away. The grease on his face didn't matter. Nothing mattered at this point but getting vipers in and out.

Then he remembered his *real* family. His mother and father had died years before in a car wreck on Leonis, and he was an only child. But his wife, or ex-wife rather, was still on Leonis, along with his son Tommy. They had begun to patch the wounds of the divorce about a month ago and the outlook of them getting back together was promising.

Now, he was not sure of anything, all he wanted to see was Tommy, and his son's beautiful mother Joanne. Oh if he could see her face once more. He didn't mean to say the things he said, he wanted to make things better, truly better, and to forget the past as well as his frakking mistakes.

"Chief, CIC on the horn," a specialist said.

He grabbed the handset: "CIC this is Luna."

[How is everything down there Chief, any more damage from the impact,] the voice of the XO was unmistakable.

"No sir, but everyone is shaken up, we've made the aft section of the hangar into a make-shift morgue for now, and I hear that the port flight pod sustained minimal damage," Luna replied, trying to seem optimistic.

[Excellent, well, as much as can be expected anyhow, keep up the work. Keep bringing our birds in, and refueling any others, prepare the deck for stranded viper and for Raptor launches,] Braddock told Luna.

"Roger that sir, Luna out," and with that he hung up the handset and ran over to assist in securing one of the *Delphinus*' remaining active vipers.

Battlestar *Libra*

Mac left the CIC, looking blindly straight ahead, trying to keep her composure. When the Marine stepped in front of her, she nearly ran into him, and when she looked up, she saw with a jolt that it was Lafitte, Frankie.

"Oh, oh, sorry," she said blankly.

"I'm not," he said with a grin.

She breathed in and out slowly. "Look, I, ah, I—" she blinked back tears and swallowed hard, looking down. *Gods, Mac, don't cry in front of him...*

She didn't trust herself to speak and just shook her head and tried to step around him.

"Ah, cherie, don't cry! It's not that bad, is it, to bump into me?" He searched her face. "Pretty Alexandra, you've had a rough day, no? It *has* been a rough day and I'm a brute to hold you so. But smile for me and I will let you go, okay?"

She drew in a long shaky breath and tried to give him a smile. *Don't cry, don't cry, don't cry...* but one tear escaped, running down her cheek.

He brushed it away tenderly with his thumb and hugged her. "It's okay, ma petite." He held her there, close to his heart. "I'm afraid we will all cry today." He kissed the top of her head softly.

She rested her palms and forehead against his chest, her breathing uneven. "It wouldn't have got to me, but he was so *nice*." She sniffed. "The Commander, I mean, when I gave him the dog tags." She breathed out slowly, relaxing. *Oh gods I wish he would just hold me forever.*

She moved back a little and Lafitte released her. "Thanks, Frankie," she gave him a small smile. "I've got work to do."

"Any time, Alexandra." He said it softly, and he meant it. Then the brief moment passed, like it had never been, and his jaunty grin was back in place, "Holding pretty girls is a specialty of mine, Cherie!"

She chuckled; shaking her head, then strode down the passageway, thinking of vipers to be fixed.

Mercurius

"They're consistent. They shouldn't get here until the hour is almost up," Kalrk said as he looked at his timepiece. "In about twenty three minutes." He kept his eyes glued to the dradis.

"Great. At least there's one thing to be said for a consistent enemy. Then again, what the hell else can you expect from a robot, anyway," Liza replied sarcastically

"The cylons are not robots." he said, suppressing anger. "Man created them... created life... and then they pretended to have no responsibility. Man treats animals more humanely than he ever did his own children."

"I know all about how humans treat their children, Mister Kalrk. Trust me."

She had reverted to calling him "Mister", reverted to her first instincts, when touched in a particularly vulnerable emotional spot. Kalrk caught the 'Mister' and realized why she had said it.

“So do I, so do I.” He said with more sadness than anger. There was hurt in his answer.

The dradis alarm sounded. Something had arrived.

"I thought you said the Cylons were predictable?" Liala exclaimed.

“They are... and that’s not a cylon,” He was staring intently at the screen. He saw something more than the blip that she was seeing. “It’s a Colonial vessel!”

[This is Colonial Heavy Nine Four One,] a male voice came over the speakers in *Mercurius’* cockpit. [Is anybody here?]

"A Colonial vessel! Oh, frak!!! They must've picked up the transmission! Look, we've got to get them out of here, before the Cylons show..."

“Let me talk to them first. Play along.” Kalrk said, throwing a few switches.

“Nine Four One, this is ... Colonial Cruiser *Ophiuchus*. Welcome. Director Liza Liala is here with me.”

He pointed at her, as to cue her.

She looked at him as if he were insane, He wanted her to impersonate the director. On the other hand, she supposed, the Director wasn't alive anymore to find out about it, and the odds that whoever was in that ship would remember the name of the actual director were incredibly slim. Finally, with a last glare, she shrugged, and spoke.

"Colonial Vessel, please identify yourself, and have your Captain get on the wireless."

There was a pause from the starliner.

[Umm.. this IS the Captain,] the same voice said. [What is...]

Kalrk threw some more switches and the transmission stopped.

“Try again, Director Liala, *this* time tell him he’s breaking up and to go to frequency 8386 immediately.”

8386 was perhaps the worst frequency of all. It had a piss poor range, and was only one step

higher than talking through cups attached by a string.

"Do it. 8386." He repeated the number, so she would know he hadn't made a mistake. He turned the ship's transmitter back on.

"Colonial Vessel, your transmission is breaking up. Please switch immediately to frequency 8386."

[Say again? It sounded like you said 8386... ?]

"You heard the Director. Do it now Nine Four One," Kalrk was stern, and he turned off the transmitter again. "Okay, we're on 8386. Tell him the truth now."

She looked at him quizzically.

"The *whole* truth, including the parts about your ship not being what you said it was, and me not being the Director? Or do I just tell the truth about using ourselves as Cylon bait?"

He chuckled. "The truth about us not being twenty ships here... that our ships are gathering in Colonial space by a deserted asteroid... *Director*."

Liala rolled her eyes, and then nodded for him to flip the transmitter back on. He did so, and gestured to her.

"Colonial vessel, I assume by now you have noticed that there are not twenty ships gathered here. I apologize, but you have wandered into the middle of an official operation. We are attempting to lure the Cylons to this location with our transmission. Surviving Colonial vessels are actually assembling at the following coordinates near a deserted asteroid. I recommend you go there immediately, as we expect the Cylons to arrive at our location momentarily."

"And, you are to remain on frequency 8386." Kalrk added. "Tell Captain Gibbs that Director Liala and Captain Kalrk sent you."

[You don't have to tell me again, Director, Captain. If you say the cylons are coming here, then we're leaving. We'll remain on 8386 and report to Captain Gibbs. Nine Four One out.]

Liala turned to Kalrk, and he turned off the transmitter. She had a sort of dry tone to her voice that showed exactly how she felt.

"Great. Then we'll have two ships that think I'm the Director, instead of just one."

There was a bit of a smirk on her face this time and she continued, ""You certainly are something, Kalrk. I'll give you that much."

"Thank you, Director."

Time passed and ultimately so did the destruction of several cylon raiders. As the time passed the constant combat and strain on the occupants of *Mercurius* grew more and more palpable.

Kalrk shook Liala slightly, by the arm. "Liza? You ok?" he asked.

That last raider had been better than the others he had encountered today. It had almost beaten him.

He had had no choice but to use all his talents at the controls, which had put the ship through some maneuvers that were near the threshold of human endurance.

Liala had blacked out, or had been close to it.

She groaned, and he took a deep breath, relieved.

"You... are... insane," she managed.

"We're alive." he said plainly. *So much for a thank you*, he mused silently

"Yes, we are. However, I really fail to see the need for us to bait the Cylons *twice*. You, on the other hand, chose to, and, in the process, encountered what was clearly some kind of godsdamned cylon prodigy. You decided to get out of said situation, which you had gotten yourself into, by engaging in maneuvers that would black out even some viper pilots, most likely. And so I say again, you are insane."

She was ok. She was bitching.

And without thinking about it, without planning it, he began to bitch too.

"You're welcome. You send that signal to the government which put the entire *Astral Dawn* at risk, and *I* get said ship away from your transmitter. And *I* take you, a cylon target aboard *my* armed ship, to protect you, and *I* come up with the plan to fool the cylons, to draw them away

from the *Astral Dawn*, and then *I* get that Colonial Heavy safely away from us. So, Yes, I'm insane... for putting up with you... you... spoiled brat. You... bitch. And what do I get? I get nothing but lip. I'll gladly put you back on *Astral Dawn*. Where you can sit there and do nothing, while *I* fend off the cylons from those two ships."

He sat back in his chair, overcome with emotions he had *never* felt before. It was overwhelming to him.

"Lip, Mister Kalrk? I sent my signal, yes. I did my *duty*. Sent along what was, to my knowledge, a *secure* channel. And yes, you took me! You practically ordered me! You *demand*ed that I and the Captain meet you, and gave no reasons why. You demanded I accompany you aboard, even before it became clear I did not wish to part with the transmitter, you seemed to want me on this flight, for no reasons I can discern! And you have continually and at every turn been annoying, arrogant, and self-centered. You then seemed puzzled in those instances in which I attempted to show you the deference often accorded to the Captain of a vessel! You have been a show off, an emotionally immature thrill seeker, and a man who has clearly let his own opinion of himself, his skills, and his so-called money and power go to his head. You take risks that are not required, tell lies that are not required, go for complex or duplicitous solutions when the simple or straightforward would do, and seem disdainful of others when they would have suggested or asked for a different approach. You unilaterally take actions and expect others to follow on your cue, as if you were the ruler of all. And I have news for you Mister Kalrk, news that perhaps no one in your life has ever been bold or bothered enough to tell you, you are not the ruler you think you are."

He had sat there staring ahead blankly, but hearing every word she uttered, absorbing it all, memorizing them perhaps. He took a deep breath and spoke as calmly as he could.

"Your knowledge? Don't make me laugh. You and the Colonial Government know nothing. You decommission your military ships, downsize, even as the cylons have vanished from your scope. And you assume they won't return with a vengeance? And you keep the same protocols in place as during the War, the Case Orange, for example. You rely on machines to do everything for you again, machines that are turned off, and you stumble in the dark. And now, you say that I am self-centered when I have not run for my life, but have put myself at risk to save the *Dawn* and you and that Colonial Heavy. And as for the simple solutions you so crave.. I shall give you a simple solution. I'm returning you to the *Dawn*, where you can bitch about my thrill seeking while you sip a cocktail at the pool, and while I fend off cylons in my thrill seeking and self-centered way," Kalrk's anger increased and he spat venom with every word he uttered. "And I know I am not a ruler of *any* kind. I am a pawn in this mixed up existence called life. If

anything, I am life's jester. Life itself is laughing at me, mocking me. So you're in good company there. So I am setting the coordinates to the asteroid to drop you off at your suite, Director."

A beep sounded in their helmets' speakers.

"Dradis!" Kalrk was fully alert.

She had been going to continue this fight. *Cocktails at the pool? Totally reliant on machines? His actions being the only ones that saved anyone, when he had, less than two hours before, told her how critical she was to the plan? And the final nail in the coffin, calling her Director... again.* Liza resisted the urge to swear under her breath; it was clear he did not believe her. Or perhaps he did again, now that she had lost her cool with him. But whatever response she would have made was swallowed up by the beeping of the Dradis.

Whatever else he was, he was, at the moment, the one keeping them alive. No sense in distracting him and plenty of sense in not doing so.

[This is *Pan Galactic Flight 76*. Is anyone here?] A voice came through the wireless system, and into their helmets.

"Frak me." Kalrk managed to say; his mind a jumble of thoughts. "Tell them whatever you want."

One of her eyebrows rose slightly, but she reached over just the same, and flipped on the transmitter. As he had seemed to think that the frequency was important, she made her first action to repeat that part of things.

"Yes, *Pan Galactic Flight 76*. Please switch immediately to frequency 8386 for further information and instruction."

Kalrk reached for the switches and changed the frequency to 8386. "This is," Kalrk began, but stopped, and started over. "Welcome, Pan Galactic 76. Liza Liala of the CBI is aboard my ship."

"*Pan Galactic Flight 76*, this is Liza Liala, CBI. Surviving Colonial vessels are now assembling at the following coordinates, near a deserted asteroid. I recommend you go there with all possible speed."

"One moment Flight 76," Kalrk said and turned off the transmitter. He turned his head and

looked directly into Liza's eyes. "You don't need to be here anymore." He said softly. "I can stay here for a while and direct any other colonials to you. You should go with 76."

She had to admit, it was tempting. Nearly anything, at this moment, that got her off this ship and away from this man sounded tempting. Not to mention putting her one step closer to reporting in to the new President. However, something was just not quite right. The tone of his voice had changed. It wasn't a lot but to a trained governmental agent it was definitely noticeable. Although in a rarity for her she could not quite read it. And that perhaps intrigued her most of all. There was also the matter of the other vessels that might come here. They had been lured here by her message, by her transmission. They would arrive confused, seeing none of the ships they had expected to find. And the Cylons, she suspected, had used more than a little confusion of various types, today. They might not trust this unknown ship, and its unknown Captain. They would trust her, the voice on the wireless, and the voice of the transmission.

No. It was clear. No matter how much she might wish to get off this ship, and no matter how much he might wish her off it, she had to stay. "Thank you, Kalrk. But I believe I should remain. My voice, my name, is the one in the transmission. I need to be here, in case any more arrive and are... uncertain." She did not bother to elaborate. Either he would figure it out, or he would not. And if he did not, either he would ask her to clarify, or he would not. No sense in wasting the words, and potentially reigniting the argument, if she could avoid it.

He breathed in deeply and exhaled. "It's dangerous to remain on this ship.' He was still speaking softly. "*Mercurius*, is now a cylon target. You should leave that," Kalrk stopped. Remembering what she had said about how she felt about leaving her governmental transmitter with any unauthorized persons he changed what he said. "you should destroy that transmitter and go with 76," his voice was a whisper now. "I don't know if I can keep this up indefinitely. The cylons are getting better," he looked in her eyes, the visor of his helmet preventing Liza from seeing his face.

She considered it all, for a moment. This time, it was more than clear to her that he was truly concerned, not simply wanting her off his ship.

"Fine, do you have a weapon aboard, Kalrk?"

"I have weapons, yes."

"Anything suitable for destroying the transmitter?"

"I can strap an explosive to the transmitter, set a timer, and eject it."

"That will work. Please do so now, and eject it before I depart this vessel. In the meantime, I wish to record a message, if possible, for you to transmit to any ships that arrive here and should fail to believe you, or ask to speak to me. If you could please set it so that I may do so."

He leaned forward in his seat, and tapped a few buttons on the console. "The recorder is ready when you are. It's set for your helmet's microphone only, right now." She heard his voice through her helmet's speakers.

"Thank you." She said to him.

"Colonial vessels, if you are receiving this transmission, it is because you asked to speak to me, or asked Captain Kalrk for proof that this was the vessel which sent the transmission. I assure you, it is. I have now left the area on one of the ships that arrived earlier. Please follow Captain Kalrk's instructions to the letter, and I will be waiting at a new set of coordinates, when you arrive. Thank you for your cooperation. Liza Liala, out."

"Got it." He said, and he once again turned on his ship's transmitter.

"Flight 76, we are sorry for the delay. Liza Liala will be boarding your vessel in a moment. Please stand by," he switched off the transmitter

Kalrk stood up, to walk to the living area. "I have some explosives in there... and some tape."

Nodding in approval Liza uttered only one word, "Excellent." She stood as well, to follow him, holding the transmitter. Together, they walked into the back, and she stood, patiently, waiting.

It didn't take long. In a cabinet which was blended perfectly into a wall, he took out a small box which contained the items they needed. "Here it is." He said in a more normal tone. "You want to strap it, or shall I?"

Wonderful, she thought to herself. There he went, again. He just couldn't give it up, testing her story. Testing her cover, which she knew by now he suspected was just that, a cover. He probably never would give it up. And that meant she would have to always be careful around him... *always*. "Please, be my guest."

Kalrk fastened the explosive to the transmitter, took off his timepiece and attached it as well, and set the timepiece's controls. "That'll do it." He handed it all to her. "Push the chronometer

button and flush it down the disposal." He tapped a button on the wall, and a panel slid open.

She took the transmitter back from him, and stepped close to the open panel. She reached out a finger, pushed the button, and dropped it in. The disposal panel closed, and with the sound of air being released, the contents were sucked out of the ship. Two minutes later, in the vacuum, the explosive went off, destroying the government transmitter.

Satisfied with the destruction of the transmitter Kalrk turned to his passenger. "Ready for your ride," he asked.

"Yes. I assume you want the suit back, by the way," she replied, reaching up with one gloved hand, ready to disconnect the helmet.

"Keep it, please," he replied, almost touching her arm.

"Thank you, Mi... Kalrk. I'll see you at the rendezvous coordinates."

Ten minutes later, she was aboard *Pan Galactic Flight 76*... and he was alone on *Mercurius*.

"Lords of Kobol protect you, *Flight 76*.' He said to that captain on the weak frequency.

The starliner jumped, and once again Kalrk was alone.

Psyche (Princess) D'Argent
Marine shower facilities
Battlestar *Libra*

D'Argent entered the co-ed shower area, having already gone back to her bunk to get a change of clothes and towel as well as her shower bag. The room was cold, as no one was using nor had been for at least a few hours. She could still see some towels on the floor and other cosmetics like soap and shampoo laying around haphazardly, probably left behind when the

alarms started to go off.

Happy that no one was here and reveling in her solitude she dragged herself to the closest bench and dropped herself on it. The other marines would not be back for a bit as they had been sent out on SAR ops. Py frowned at being left out of the mission however in addition to being shooed away from the medical bay they took a quick look at her and as a result she was confined to the ship so her injuries had a chance to heal. As upset as she was about being left out she was also relieved in a way. The constant thoughts of her father had been distracting enough for her to question whether she was still effective enough to do her job.

A painful groan softly whooshed from her mouth as she bent over to untie and pull off her boots. *That was the easy part Py*, she thought as she braced herself to remove her top which had in some places been sticking to her back. Trying to not dwell on the pain too much she ripped her undershirt from her body and over her head. Tears of pain escaped her eyes, her heartbeat and breathing increased. "Frak Me," hissed from her gritted teeth. Instead of stopping she continued to remove the rest of her clothes as quickly and efficiently as the pain would allow.

Py stood, rather unsteadily, and walked to the large mirrors over the sinks to try and survey just how bad this was. Facing her back to the mirrors Py turned her head a bit and got a good glimpse of the damage. And with tears streaming down her face she found herself chuckling almost wildly at the sight before her. Her back was a combination of reds, blacks, and purples from the bruising she had received from her fall. Her skin had cracked open in places and blood once again oozed out of those cuts, the wounds having been reopened by her removing her shirt. The back of her head had a large knot on it, slightly above the medulla. Her hair, matted together from the blood that had coated it, appeared to be a darker shade of red. She looked and could tell it was only going to get worse before it got better. She found she could not tear her eyes away. She had never hurt herself before, not so much as a paper cut. In fact, she had never even been sick for most her life. So seeing the condition of her backside gave her a sense of relief. *I may be human after all*, she thought.

Finally pulling herself away from the mirror she turned to the shower with reluctance. She took another good look at her back and immediately knew there would be no enjoyment taken from this shower. It was going to be all pain.

Colonial Space Hidden in a small asteroid field

Captain Gibbs, on the bridge of the *Astral Dawn*, looked at the timepiece on the console. He hadn't seen *Mercurius* in over an hour and a half.

"Frak." He said aloud to no one. "What is taking them so long?"

"Sir?" Communications Officer Danson asked, thinking the captain had been addressing him.

"Hmm? Oh. Sorry, Warren. I was just wondering how long Kalrk and Miss Liala are going to keep us waiting. We have a new president to meet."

"They did send that Colonial Heavy. Maybe they're waiting if any more ships show up?"

"*Cylon* ships, from what Captain Didimour said." He exhaled. "I don't like it, Warren. They should get back here, so we can go meet the president and her ships. I wonder how many there are?"

Gibbs' question was immediately forgotten as the ship's alarms sounded.

Dradis contact!" Gibbs exclaimed, as he sat upright in his seat now. Had the cylons found them? If so, *Astral Dawn* and *Colonial Heavy 941* would jump to the President... and *Mercurius* might never find them.

"Colonial signature," the navigator announced. "Its transponder shows it to be a civilian vessel."

"Verify that!"

"Sir," the communications officer said. "We're receiving a transmission on the preset channel."

[*Pan Galactic Flight 76* to Captain Gibbs, come in please.] The signal was weak, accompanied with a lot of static.

At the same time, the navigator nodded to Gibbs indicating the transponder signal was authentic.

"This is Donald Gibbs on the luxury liner *Astral Dawn*. Good to see you, Pan Galactic." He replied. The trepidation he felt began to subside.

[Captain Heather Bevfhah speaking, Captain Gibbs. It's nice to hear friendly voices... even on this channel. I have Miss Liala aboard, she requests transfer to your ship.]

"On your ship? What about Kalrk," *had the Mercurius fallen to the cylons? Was the man dead?*

[He stayed behind, in case any more colonials show up.]

"*Dawn* is sending a shuttle over, for Miss Liala. Thank the lords of Kobol you are all safe."

[The lords of Kobol and this fine young lady here Captain Gibbs. Had it not been for the signal she sent out we more than likely would have been destroyed. Have you any news of the colonies?]

Gibbs looked at the floor. "None, Captain. We have only received snippets of transmissions since the attack started. After Miss Liala received and notified us of the Case Orange we haven't heard anything further."

[Understood. We'll be standing by to receive your shuttle, Captain. I look forward to meeting you.]

"And I you, Captain. Astral Dawn out," Gibbs replaced

Pvt. Dan Wolfe

Sick Bay

Dan helped get Rogers to medical bay, seeing the insanity of the place as he entered. It looked like a grenade had gone off in the room with so many injured persons lying around. A medic quickly assessed Roger's condition, telling him with apology that he'd had to wait, then he surveyed Dan.

"Are you all right?" he asked the big Marine.

The question took Dan by surprise. "Oh, ah, fine," he said.

"You don't *look* fine," the medic said critically. "Were you in a fire?"

Dan looked down at himself. His uniform was filthy, especially along his left side where it had been on fire, and the fire-retardant fabric was black and appeared as if it had melted in several places. The fire-smothering foam had only served to make him look worse. He rubbed his hand down his left side and shrugged. "Just slightly overcooked," he said cheerfully. "Still pretty rare though."

The medic narrowed his eyes and used his penlight to look into Dan's eyes. "Were you knocked

unconscious?" he asked suspiciously.

Dan started to shake his head then remembered. "Only for a couple seconds," he admitted.

The medic circled around to Dan's back and probed his skull, finding the lump on the back of his head right away. Dan winced. The medic came back around to regard Dan and snorted. "Hard headed jarhead, go take a shower and get that soot and foam residue off your skin. If you have any blisters from the fire, come back and I'll give you some salve for it. Get something to eat and a couple hours sleep."

Dan nodded but didn't move.

"That's an order, Marine," the medic said sharply.

"Yes sir," Dan nodded again.

"Just report in to your squad leader after," the medic finished and turned his attention to another patient leaving the young marine to his thoughts.

When Dan went to take a shower, only one other person was there, already standing in one of the stalls. He hung a towel on the hook, stripped off his ruined uniform and stepped under the warm water. By the look of the water that ran down the drain, the exposed parts of his body had been very grimy. No wonder the medic had been concerned.

D'Argent turned on the shower as hot as she could stand and stepped into it back first. All the air left her in one big whoosh as the pain hit her full force. The pain was far worse than she had imagined and she found herself gritting her teeth. She turned around to give her back a break and let the water hit her in the chest instead, letting out a sigh of relief. She looked down and saw the water was mixed with her blood, reminding her that she was going to have to wash her hair. She reached over to her shampoo bottle, squeezed some in to her hands, and proceeded to wash the bulk of blood from her hair. The pain coursed through her body as she scrubbed the soap through the bloody tendrils of hair. It took a few moments for her to regain her composure and she stopped to rinse the shampoo out. When she was done she glanced over at the conditioner bottle, sitting on the shelf. "Screw that," she said and turned off the water.

Py stepped out of the shower and grabbed her towel, wrapping it loosely around her. She decided to take another look at her injuries and noticed for the first time she was not alone. "Damn," she whispered as she grabbed the antibiotic salve the medic had given her for her back. *Better get this done quickly before I get to have an audience to watch me struggle with it,*

she mused, removing the cap from the tube of salve.

She started to apply some to her shoulders. *Hmm this is not so bad*, D'Argent thought. *It's a little uncomfortable but I can do this no problem.* She pushed her arm lower and tried hefting her back up to meet her hand in order to put the cream on the injuries there. Waves of extreme pain slammed through her as she tried to reach a particularly nasty bruise. A cry of agony passed her lips despite her best intentions of remaining quiet. Unfortunately as she cried out the running water in the other stall stopped.

Dan turned off the water and ran his hand gingerly over the left side of his chest. His skin all the way down his hip and upper thigh was tender and red, but there weren't any blisters. *Looks like a sunburn*, he shrugged, and wrapped his towel around his waist; just as he did, he heard someone—a noise, like a soft cry of pain. Going out to the common area, he saw Lance Corporal D'Argent; at least, the back of her.

“Holy frak!” he exclaimed. “Lance Corporal, geez, your back!” It was obvious that she was trying to put some salve on her back, and he asked, “Do you need some help?”

Trying to hide her pain, Py pulled on all her beauty queen training to compose herself before she turned around to face the man behind her. After a few seconds she was pleased with her results and, smile on her face, she slowly languidly moved to look at Dan only to get an eye full of naked chest. Quickly pulling her eyes up to his face she responded politely. “No thank you. I'm fine, really.”

Dan was accustomed to the co-ed showers, and he'd seen plenty of girls naked in the shower rooms. He'd never quite seen one like Lance Corporal D'Argent, though, and seeing the front of her, it was easy to forget the livid bruising on the back of her... he swallowed hard and hoped he'd tied his towel securely enough around his waist.

He could tell she was in pain, and saw her sway as she tried to put the salve on her back.

While still forcing her smile she yet again tried to put the salve on the same place as before. This time the results were even more disastrous. The world around her started to go black with stars and for a second she thought someone must have thrown her out an air lock as she started to crash to the floor on her knees.

“Whoa!” Wolfe exclaimed, and stepped forward to catch her as her knees buckled. *Oh frak me, what the hell do I do now*, he thought. He held her gently against his chest, trying not to touch her injured back. “I, ah, I don't think you're...” he began to say. *OH FRAK how do I get out of*

this? I CAN'T say she's not fine... oh frak frak frak... Finally he blurted, "I think you need to sit down and let me help you!"

Grudgingly Py whimpered, "I think you may be right"

Carefully he lowered her to sit on the bench, and he picked up her towel and handed it to her. He knew his face was red.

Looking up, Py noticed his blush and found herself amused at his modesty, her annoyance at herself and him melting away. She took the towel he offered graciously. "Thanks." She paused "Umm, I guess you are right, I'm gonna need help with this." She handed him the cream. "If you don't mind... that is?"

Relieved that she wasn't angry at him, he took the tube and sat behind her. "Of course I don't mind. I offered to help, didn't I?" He squeezed salve onto his fingertips and gently started applying it to her back. "Let me know if I hurt you," he said anxiously.

Py had never pictured her first human contact outside of hand-to-hand combat training would end up quite so painful. Of course she had never actually pictured it at all. Dan had told her to tell him when he hurt her, but she made the executive decision to not ruin her vocal cords with the amount of times she would have to inform him of her pain. Until he hit a really sore spot and a small squeak escaped her lips.

Dan jerked his hand away. "Sorry," he said. "I, ah... frak, Lance Corporal, what happened anyway? Your back must hurt like hell." He rested his left hand on her shoulder to steady her, and even more carefully resumed smoothing the salve on her back.

"Py, call me Py. And I'll survive," she stated steadily. "You're doing great, really." She lied, as she once again had to restrain herself from instinctively hitting him for unintentionally causing her pain. "I owe you one really."

He could tell that she wasn't being entirely truthful, and he tried to be gentler. "Sorry," he said again in a low voice. "I could never be a medic. You don't owe me anything, unless it's maybe a pop in the nose for being too rough."

To Py's surprise she found herself laughing at his comment. "I already put a knuckledragger in sick bay for trying to help me, so I'm not sure making that kind of offer would be wise," she said with a small smile on her face, temporarily forgetting her pain.

"Oh, I'm pretty tough," he said with a grin. "I get in fights all the time. You're tough, too, but I think I have the advantage of size."

She turned her head to look at him full on, a smile from ear to ear turning her face from beautiful to breathtaking. "Yeah, you're big, but trust me I would surprise you, and that is why I would kick your ass, no one expects me coming!" she challenged.

He laughed, using his flat palm to spread the salve over her lower back. "Well, you have *that* right, Py," he agreed. "I'm sure you could surprise me!"

Benoit was dead tired. Not so much from the work, this had been light, but the tension... and the uncertainty.

Captain Riley had given them thirty minutes to grab some chow, but she wasn't hungry, so she headed to the shower room to brush her teeth and wash her face.

She was not prepared for the scene that greeted her.

Py was sitting on a bench, a big, BIG marine sitting behind her, both of them laughing as he caressed her lower back.

By now, Jo was used to naked marines, male and female, but there was something so... intimate about the sight. She blushed a deep red and stammered, "Oh, I'm... s... sorry."

Dan looked up at her, raising his eyebrows questioningly. "Sorry? Oh, ah..." It suddenly occurred to him how he and Py must have looked, sitting there. He got red again. "I'm just, ah, helping Py, Lance Corporal D'Argent, she, they, the medic told her she needed salve on her back," he stammered. *Frak, another Lance Corporal! Gods, and she's as beautiful as Py!*

Even in her embarrassment, Josette could not help but take an appreciative look at the big Marine. He and Py made a striking couple - she small, pale and doll-like, he tall, wide and olive skinned. For some reason she thought of a dark Apollo and a lissome muse...

"No, no, that's okay, I just thought... Wait, salve? Py, you're hurt? What happened?"

She'd never been close to Py, but for some reason Jo was upset that the redheaded Marine was hurt, maybe because so many had died this day. And worrying about Py took her mind of the

nearly naked hulk of a man sitting there, looking bashfully at her with kind brown eyes the shade of rich dark chocolate...

Py watched the exchange between the two bashful marines with great amusement. Hmm, she must have missed the memo on being shy as a requirement for being a marine. It took a second for Jo's question to penetrate her consciousness. "I fell on that frakkin cylon missile that you and Lafitte disarmed. The catwalk I was on collapsed when it hit. No biggie, not even a concussion," Py responded as she stood up dropping her towel, turning to let JO see her back, "Just one big ass bruise." She then turned back to look at Jo inquiringly as she walked up to her, "Have you met Dan? Jo?" She asked curiously.

"Sacre bleu, girl, that's one bad wound!" Jo could not believe Py had been able to stand on the flight pod all that time while so hurt. Then again, Py had surprised her before - the diminutive Marine was a lot stronger than she looked, and quite without modesty. She was naked as a jaybird and yet was introducing her boyfriend like she was dressed in designer silks in one of her beauty queen soirees.

Jo blushed again. "No, I have not met Dan." She extended her hand, like it was the most normal thing in the world to meet the nearly naked boyfriend of a naked comrade in a Marine shower room while humankind died at the hands of cylons. "I am Josette Benoit, enchante."

Dan stood and grabbed at his towel, holding it in front of him. He *knew* his face was red as Jo's as he held up his towel with one hand while he shook Josette Benoit's hand. *Enchante? Holy frakking hell, I think I died and went to heaven...*

"I'm Dan Wolfe... nice to meet you," he replied. The humor of the situation hit him... and he was probably over-tired, also... and he burst out laughing. "Frak, I joined 'cause I figured the uniform would attract girls, but the Marine recruiter never told me about times like *this!*"

Jo joined his mirth, "No, I don't suppose he did. He didn't tell *me!*"

Just then, Lafitte walked in, looking for Josette. "Josette, cherie, I was worried about you, and here you are cavorting with" he glanced over Dan and looked appreciatively at Py, "naked men and naughty nymphs. He stood next to Josette and extended his hand too, "Francois Lafitte, mon ami. And you are?"

"Dan Wolfe," Dan shook Lafitte's hand. *Ok, so I guess Benoit and Lafitte are an item... figures...*

As her laughter died down Py started to feel the cold as goose bumps started to pop up on her skin. She glanced at her towel on the floor but figured it would not be very affective as it was

quite damp at this point. "Well I'm starting to get chilled so I guess I should dress myself," she smirked. "Gods know I need some sleep so I will leave you two to it." She looked at the two suggestively as she quickly grabbed her clothes and got dressed.

Lafitte watched lazily, almost insultingly, while Py dressed; her snubs didn't even sting any more, they were almost amusing.

Before leaving, though, she walked over to Dan, got very close and whispered in his ear "Thank you for making that as painless as possible, really," she said with double meaning then gave a nod to Jo before walking out of the room.

"Oh, sure," he replied, smiling, unable to keep himself from looking up the length of her body. *Oh, damn... is she really interested in me?*

He gave Lafitte a grin. "I think we're in the best place to appreciate beautiful women, hmm?"

Lafitte called after Py "And I love you too, Cherie, you know where to find me if you get too cold at night!" He then turned to Dan and grinned, "That we are, mon ami... that we are."

Josette harrumphed loudly. "If you guys are through shooting the shit, we have work to do. Frankie?" She turned again to Dan, "See you around, Dan." She then turned and left.

Lafitte smiled at Dan and, after an exaggerated shrug, followed her out the room.

Astral Dawn

The shuttle ride, over, thankfully, had been uneventful and quiet. The moment the shuttle had landed, however, she had been met—both by the *Dawn's* deck chief and by Mister Willborn, and whisked up to the bridge. She couldn't be sure, but seemed, in a way, some of the crew were holding themselves a bit more...rigidly...than they had that first time she entered the bridge, earlier that day.

"Miss Liala, welcome back. What happened, out there? Where have you and Kalrk been?"

"Baiting Cylons. As you can see, we caught a few Colonials, as well...."

"Fine work, Miss Liala." Gibbs congratulated her. "Why isn't Kalrk back too?"

"He stayed behind, Captain... in case more Colonial vessels respond to the message."

"How much longer will that be? We have to go see the President, the new one."

"He didn't specify, Captain. He simply told me he would stay there for... awhile. He sounded," she hesitated for a moment, then continued. "He sounded somewhat dejected." It wasn't like she had much to conceal anymore, to protect by not revealing things such as her ability to "read" someone. Her cover was blown, frakked to hell, and served up as a five-course dinner. She would have a hard enough time convincing them of the truth now that she was not the Director. She would never, likely, be able to convince anyone ever again that she was "just" an analyst. "He spoke of himself and his ship as Cylons' targets. Admitted he was doubtful he could best the Raiders in combat, the next time. Captain I am not certain he believes that he will return."

"That's insane. He should have jumped back here."

"I agree, he should have. However he, unfortunately, did not agree. And as the *Mercurius* is his ship, I found myself with little say in the decision."

"Did the plan work? Did you see any Cylons?"

"Yes. At the first coordinates, we were attacked by two raiders which Mi... Kalrk dispatched fairly easily. At the second set of coordinates, however, the coordinates where we also met the two Colonial vessels, we were attacked by a second set of raiders, both of which seemed to be much more skilled than the first. Mister Kalrk had a definite opinion though, and though I have no idea how this would be possible I am inclined to trust him, as he is the Cylon expert. He believed the raiders were getting better. He truly seemed to think as if he could likely not defeat the next set as if each set would be better than the one which preceded it."

"Do you think any more Colonial ships will show up where he is? Did you argue with him, order him, to get back here?" Gibbs was becoming increasingly frustrated. He wanted to leave, to join the rest of the fleet being assembled by the newly sworn president. He also, however, wanted to wait for Kalrk's return. Despite having only met this person a few hours earlier he felt as if Kalrk was a long lost compatriot, a kindred of sorts.

"Given that two Colonial vessels did indeed respond to the message, yes, I believe it is likely more, perhaps one, or two, might indeed respond to the message," Liza continued. "As such, no, I did not order him to return. I wished to stay as well, in fact. We sent the message. We promised a fleet assembling, on the other side. However, Mister Kalrk urged me to return here,

with Flight 76. I offered again to stay but he was rather insistent in the matter," Liala looked at Gibbs, expectantly.

Gibbs thought it over for a second. "Yes, I agree. You're needed here. Your professional opinion and advice will be greatly relied upon." Suddenly his head jerked up and he stared into Liza's eyes, "Your transmitter Kalrk said the Cylons could track it!" He didn't want the cylons to be able to continue following them and he was certain he did not want to join the fleet only to have the toasters pop in moments later armed with nukes.

"Yes," Liala replied. "Which is why we destroyed it, before I left with Flight 76."

"Smart thinking." Gibbs replied, relieved. "And switching to the low frequency was a smart move too, Director."

"That was Mister Kalrk's idea, actually, Captain. He really is quite the Cylon expert," she paused for the briefest of moments. "One thing we should set straight at this very moment, Captain. I am not, nor was I ever, the Director of the CBI. That was also Mister Kalrk's idea I suspect he thought it would lend more weight to our orders for incoming Colonial vessels to immediately vacate the area and jump to this location."

"Well, that little white lie sure convinced the Colonial Heavy and that Pan Galactic."

"Do you know the total number of passengers aboard each vessel?"

"Yes. Captain Didimour on the Colonial Heavy and I have been conversing and I was able to speak with Captain Bevfhah of the *Pan Galactic* while you were shuttling back here. Captain Bevfhah told me she's carrying nine-hundred-eight souls. Didimour's ship has one-hundred-thirty-six. Add to that the six-hundred-twenty-one here on *Dawn*."

That was more than a thousand people more, in addition to the *Dawn*, to take with them now, to the new President, and into whatever future, if any, lay ahead for the human race. More than one thousand lives saved, all due to Kalrk's plan. She whispered, in her head, a silent apology to him, for calling him insane, and a silent prayer to the Gods for his protection.

"Excellent, Captain. While you were in conference with the other Captains what, if any, consensus has been reached as to how long to remain here before attempting to join the new President?"

"Well, we didn't get into that topic yet. Mostly, we've been sharing how our day has been. We've waited for you. And as much as I want to meet the new president, I am worried. Kalrk

mentioned that she would have sent a message too, right? As a member of the cabinet that is?"

"She would have had to have sent a message, Captain. Her code, back on the same frequency as the Case Orange transmission. The system would have responded itself, again, afterwards, informing her of her new...duties."

"And the Cylons would have picked up that signal, if Kalrk is right."

Liza saw where Gibbs' line of thinking was going. It was something she had thought of herself as well. "He likely is. He has, so far, been right about everything else, concerning the Cylons."

"Ok, let's get the other two captains on the line and share what we know, and what our concerns are. Then we can decide on our next move, sound good to you?"

"Certainly. By all means, let's get them on the line."

"Right, and after the call you can move to your new quarters. The Corporate Suite here on Bridge Deck will be your new home. That'll save you a lot of walking from quarters to the bridge. It's down the hall four doors from here."

"Thank you, Captain, but that won't be necessary..." or maybe it would. If nothing else, it would, as he hinted, accord her easier and speedier access to the bridge and to him. It was also, she hoped, a more secure suite. She stopped in mid-sentence, and nodded, instead. "I accept."

"Great." he said. "Let's call Bevfah and Didimour."

After the customary round of introductions, during which neither she nor Gibbs bothered to attempt at that moment to clear up the fact that was not the CBI Director, the early consensus had been in favor of jumping as soon as possible to the coordinates where they were to meet the new President. However, upon being told of the Cylon ability to trace transmissions and reminded of the hopeful forthcoming return of Kalrk, the *Mercurius*, and any other Colonial vessels he might bring with him, Gibbs finally seemed to have Bevfah and Didimour at least halfway convinced to wait. He looked over at Liza, and nodded to her.

"Captain Bevfah and Captain Didimour," she said into the pickup. "Given the situation, both as concerns the *Mercurius*, and as concerns the possible threats faced by the fleet the President is assembling, I would recommend we remain here for at least a half-hour more. It is likely that

more vessels may have heard my transmission, as each of you did, and may join Mister Kalrk at the coordinates. We should wait for such ships, and for the *Mercurius*, as long as possible."

Demeter

Six hours later

Damage assessment was complete and repairs made; Demeter was a tough old bird, and the raiders' missiles had hit two cargo pods, not the actual ship. The pods had held up surprisingly well, and only three containers had been ruined: smashed tomatoes, brussel sprouts and cauliflower must now be floating somewhere in orbit above Aerelon.

Inga, Putz, Thorny and Xenthias stood on the bridge, discussing their next steps.

"We can't stay here. We have to go back, check the other Colonies, and find out what the frak happened," Xenthias repeated.

"And risk destruction? No. I say we stay put. We have supplies, we can survive alone." Putz was just as adamant.

Thorny took her husband's hand, "For how long, Helmut? How long will it be before they find us? Xen's right, we have to find out what happened. What if the cylons were defeated? Maybe the battlestars arrived just after we left and routed them."

"Ha! Fat chance of *that* happening! Adar and his idiots dismantled the armed forces, remember?" Putz would not be persuaded.

Inga listened, and made her decision. "Xen, your ship can make short jumps, right?"

Three faces turned as one, puzzled. "Very short ones, yes, but why," she smiled, suddenly understanding what Inga was suggesting. "I'll scout for you."

"Only if you want to Xenthias, it'll be dangerous... "

There was a feral glint in Xenthias's eyes. "*Terpsichore* is not as," she paused, searching for the right word, "innocuous as she seems."

Trust Jolly to have some surprises up her sleeve, Inga thought amused. "How long between jumps?"

"45 to 60 seconds."

"We will stay two jumps behind, then. If the coast is clear, you'll let us know." Inga did not voice what would happen if it was not.

But Xenthias did, "Either way you'll know. If I'm not back in 5 minutes, get the Hades out of Hodge. "

Starboard Flight Bay **Battlestar *Libra***

It had been a grueling several hours since the last of the cylon raiders had been dealt with.

Riley surveyed the damage caused by the engagement with the cylon baseships. The flight deck was in utter chaos. Scores of techs and pilots scurried about readying their ships for possible combat. Combat he hoped would never come.

He stood in a makeshift morgue, one of several which had been set up in different areas of the ship. Reports were still sketchy however he knew they had paid a dear price this day. No less than a hundred dead from this ship alone. Gods knew how many had lost their lives throughout the fleet. Riley watched, in a fog, as medics, marines, and deck crew brought in the body bags. They were placed gently on the floor in neat rows. Their information and dog tags placed on the outside of the bags to be retrieved by the graves registration NCO.

Riley walked over to the phone hanging on the nearby wall. "This is Captain Riley," he said to the person on the other end. "Start consolidating all of the casualties onto the starboard flight deck. Let's make the medics' job a little easier."

As he hung up the phone he was approached by a young lieutenant from the CIC. "Captain, the commander wants you to get the SAR team ready and fly over to the *Solstice*. He hopes there are some survivors there."

Riley nodded and waved the lieutenant off without saying a word. He then motioned his First Sergeant over. "Top, get the SAR team ready to fly in five minutes. We're going over to the *Solstice*."

"Aye sir," the First Sergeant replied. In a flash he was gone.

There could still be a chance survivors are out there, Riley thought. I just hope we don't get jumped while we're out there picking them up.

Astral Dawn

Antonia Seda sat in the chair next to Thaddeus Wernick and calmly smoothed her fingers down the sleeve of her silk shirt, then gracefully crossed her legs, resting one hand on her thigh, the other on the arm of the chair. She looked around the elegantly appointed sitting room casually, not many other *Astral Dawn* passengers were there.

Wernick usually introduced her as his assistant, but any astute observer could see that she didn't do much "assisting". That astute observer would probably guess she was actually Wernick's mistress, which deeply amused her. Of anyone she might choose to frak, the dry, lean, precise CFO of D'Argent Inc. would be among the last.

Her true role was one that very few would guess. Tall, blonde, and as elegant looking as the room they were currently sitting in, Toni was Wernick's bodyguard. Not that there was much need for a bodyguard here on the *Astral Dawn*—her skills would have been most needed at the destination of their journey. In light of the cylon attacks, when and how her skills would be needed was *anyone's* guess.

She had worked for D'Argent Inc., specifically for its president, Kin-Gus Rex D'Argent, for three years now, as a corporate bodyguard, industrial spy, and all around facilitator of dirty little secrets. It never ceased to amaze her how men would willingly give up corporate secrets to impress a woman they'd failed to impress in bed. It was so easy and D'Argent paid her very well, far better than she'd been paid in her past life for allowing men to frak her. Far, far better.

She appeared outwardly calm, sitting there in her tailored silk shirt and trousers, while next to her Wernick fidgeted, frowned, and glared at the laptop computer on the table in front of him. Toni suspected that the purpose of this trip was some sort of illegal financial transaction, but she didn't care much about the corporate dealings. Wernick was worried about his personal finances in the face of the cylon attacks, and also about the corporation's finances.

Toni was an excellent actress, and even if she was consumed by inner turmoil, she could still appear outwardly calm. In this case, though, she was as calm inwardly as she appeared outwardly. She liked the security of her corporate salary, but the money she was paid was just another form of barter. Her true wealth lay in her body and her skills, and she could trade those for anything she needed.

For now, she just waited. She'd seen the cylon raiders out the window of her posh stateroom that adjoined Wernick's. She'd seen the ship that Captain Gibbs had identified as the *Mercurius*, an armed yacht owned by Kalrk, CEO of K Industries. She'd heard the garbled transmissions and Captain Gibb's updates on their situation.

Now the *Astral Dawn* waited, as Toni herself waited, for whatever would happen next. The luxury liner was 'hiding' by an asteroid, devoid of anything even resembling an atmosphere, and had just recently been joined by two other Colonial ships.

"I need more information," Wernick muttered.

Toni glanced at him, but otherwise ignored him. Captain Gibbs had shut down all wireless transmissions; everyone was as in the dark as Wernick. Although perhaps not *everyone* was completely in the dark. Toni had seen a young, dark-haired woman escorted several times by the ship's security officer and by the captain himself. The woman's last name was Liala, and Toni had pegged her as some sort of spook the first time she'd seen her. At first Toni had thought corporate spook; and then perhaps as an undercover cop for the ship, but she had revised her guesses, and most recently speculated that Liala was a Colonial spook. She idly wondered if Wernick, and D'Argent Inc. might have been the target of Liala's scrutiny, but the cylon attacks changed everything. Even if D'Argent Inc. had been under government investigation, by all accounts, there wasn't much left of the corporation to investigate or much left of the government to care about the results of any such investigation.

Toni turned her thoughts to the other passengers, and the crew. Who would be most useful to her? What did she need now, and what would she need in the future? She sat in the chair with her legs crossed, her elegantly-clad foot bobbing gently, a slight smile on her lips, and plotted.

Port Flight Pod

Destroyer Douglas J Griffyn

Captain Alicia "Mad Dog" Barker's landing, among the others, was anything but routine. Usually after training ops they'd come home and have some drinks with their friends, friends that were not going to join them this time. This was no training op, countless vipers were still stranded in space, and body bags were being carried to the starboard pod.

She looked around and saw before her the fruits of this Apocalypse. Damaged vipers and

operational ones from the *Delphinus* and *Griffyn* were strewn all over the deck. *Griffyn* was only designed for twenty vipers, ten per flight pod, but now they were taking on about twice that many.

As she looked around the deck she saw Lieutenant Hammonds as he sat next to his viper, a blank stare on his face. He had taken Lieutenant Ekondia's place while she was on maternity leave, and two weeks ago barely knew anything about a viper. Mad Dog had been hard on him a few days ago during a training exercise. *It was a good thing, she thought. He's lucky to be alive, we're all lucky to be alive.*

Barker walked over to where he sat. "Good job nugget, you brought yourself home," she patted him on the back and walked off. The emotionless look in his eyes broke for a second as he watched her move to the far wall.

Barker walked over to the handset on the wall, and picked it up to dial CIC. "CIC this is Mad Dog, requesting to speak to Actual," she said.

[Copy that Mad Dog,] Landry's voice could be heard on the other end of the line.

Within a matter of seconds Barker heard Herald's voice as he picked up a receiver. [Herald here, good to hear your voice Mad Dog. Nice job bringing our people home.]

"Thank you sir, but we've lost five of our vipers in combat," she said, mentally reviewing the faces of those lost.

[It could have been much, much worse Alicia; at least we still have the ship, and extra vipers from the *Delphinus*.]

"Yeah... sir, I believe it wise to set up a CAP flight around the *Libra* and what's left of the battle group, we don't know how many more toasters could jump in on top of us," she said.

[That's already in the works. *Libra* contacted us just a few minutes ago and advised they would pull the first CAP. We'll relieve them in a few hours. Get your people some chow and some rest. We'll be back at it again soon I'm afraid, Actual out.]

As she replaced the handset on the cradle Barker turned again to see Hammonds still seated on the deck next to his ship. The complete lack of emotion concerned her. He couldn't lose it now, none of them could. If they did then it would be all over... for everyone.

PO2 Alexandra MacLean
Starboard flight pod
Battlestar *Libra*

Mac looked at the list of vipers and raptors on the whiteboard outside Chief Sutton's office with an incredible sense of weariness. The maintenance status' column had far too many red X's on it. Far too many completely crossed off the list... she didn't even want to think about the pilots of those birds.

She turned and leaned against the bulkhead, looking up and down the deck. It looked like a tornado had torn through the place. Scrap from the collapsed causeway was pushed up against the bulkhead under where it had once stood, the pile having grown as warped and shredded pieces of ships had been added to it. Non-mission capable birds had just been towed and pushed out of the way.

Mac saw Andy sitting on the edge of a maintenance stand, a tech manual across her knees, but she was staring sightlessly into space. Mac pushed herself off the bulkhead and walked over. "Andy," she said.

The knuckledragger looked at her without comprehension.

"Andy," Mac repeated.

Andy blinked. "Yeah," she said. "Sorry... yeah, Mac, what do you need?"

Mac shook her head. "It looks like about all of our birds are back in," she said. "Go get some sleep."

Andy blinked again, then nodded, and climbed down off the stand.

"Here, let me take that," Mac took the tech manual from her, and jerked her head. "Get!"

Andy sighed. "Thanks, Mac," she said, and headed off the deck.

Mac walked down the deck, checking in with each of the mechanics, sending the dayshift ones off to get some rest. As soon as the attacks had started, the nightshift people had also come on duty, but they'd had most of the day to sleep.

Mac paused next to a viper and put her hand on it. "The Chief is going to have to do up a new duty roster," she told the bird. She looked at it more closely. "Hmm, where did you come from?" She glanced up at the tail number. "Oh... from the *Delphinus*," she paused. *Didn't I hear that the Delphinus deliberately crashed into a cylon baseship?*

She shook her head, too numb to feel grief, and continued her walk down the deck. *What frakking time is it, anyway*, she wondered rubbing her gritty eyes with the sleeve of her coveralls. *Where the frak is the Chief?*

She sighed. She was walking the rounds, as Chief Sutton did several times a day, checking the status of the knuckledraggers and the ships. Mac automatically sorted out which birds could be repaired most easily, putting the on-duty mechanics to work, assigning priorities.

Then she got her tools and went to work herself.

CPO Paul Luna
Deck Chief
Destroyer *Douglas J. Griffyn*
Port Flight Pod

The difference between starboard and port, right and left... the difference between the two flight pods, night and day.

The starboard flight pod had scaffolding and support beams down in the bow section. Debris from parts pulled from damaged vipers littered the deck like fall leaves.

The port flight pod, on the other hand, had suffered minimal damage and was full of both vipers left over from the *Delphinus*, and vipers from the *Griffyn*.

Luna looked over just in time to see a viper pilot from the *Libra* trotting in his direction. The young pilot walked alongside the Chief. "Has there been any word from the *Libra* about the Cylon Missile in the starboard flight pod?"

Luna looked puzzled and said, "There's a lot of chatter going on in the airwaves right now, word from *Libra* has been limited, but I can assure you she's still in the air."

"Is there anything I can do to help out here Chief," the pilot asked.

"We need help in the starboard flight pod moving debris out of the way and getting the deck completely operational again," he said. The pilot gave him a nod and walked off into the corridor towards the starboard flight pod.

Luna walked over to a *Delphinus* viper, "Jennie, what have we got here," he asked a technician lying underneath the viper.

"Landing gear is stuck in place and there's a lot of undercarriage damage," she said.

Luna looked around. *There are so many ships here it'll be a bitch to tell them apart. We need to separate their vipers from ours,* he thought.

Astral Dawn

Liza Liala methodically re-packed her suitcases, as she would have at the end of a journey. And, she supposed, as she placed the last item inside the last bag and zipped it up, that this was. It appeared that this was the end of the journey, or rather the end of the world.

She hooked her briefcase over one shoulder, her carry-on over the other, and pulled the two larger bags behind her, making her way through the corridors and lifts to the new suite that Captain Gibbs had suggested she move to. She keyed open the door, entered... and stopped.

The suite before her made her previous quarters look like a cramped one-star motel room, and that was saying something.

She made a quick pass through all the rooms, inspecting the area... and when she was satisfied, set about unpacking her things. In a way, it seemed ridiculous, to be moving suites and unpacking clothing while they waited. *While they waited, after the end of the world, for a man who might or might not return,* she thought solemnly. *While they waited, before joining the new leader of whatever was left.* Ridiculous yes, but necessary to do this at some point. And it had become necessary now, to occupy herself with something. The task fit the need... nothing more, nothing less.

Eliana Kareen (EK) "Lace" Lawrence
Battlestar *Libra*

She was shaking, as she stripped out of her gear. Somehow she had survived. Somehow... she had brought back a viper without a scratch upon it. But now that it was over, she started to think. About what the odds had been against her, the odds she had just beat. She thought about what had happened to others who had not had such luck, about what had likely happened to her family. About what had happened to everyone, and everything, she had ever known. *It wasn't supposed to be like this*, EK thought. She had only recently graduated from training, and had only been aboard the *Libra*, her first assignment, for less than a month. She was barely a pilot at all, the nugget of nuggets, aboard the *Libra*. She had lost her lead less than ten minutes into the battle. She had been alone. How could she have made it back? How did she make it back?

She made her way to the showers, and let her hair down. It tumbled down her back in a cascade of tangled, sweat-drenched curls, as she turned on the water. The water was warm, as was the room but she could see that her body, even under the warmth of the water, was still shaking as if it were encased in ice.

After a few moments under the water her body began to warm. With the warmth her body began to relax a bit, and then the tears came.

Causeway C **Battlestar *Libra***

Lieutenant Greg Ryans was walking through the corridors of hanging wiring and broken lights. *How could this happen, how could they do this to us*, he kept thinking.

He reached the hatch to the officer's head and opened it, stepping inside. He walked in, dropped his towel, quickly undressed and went towards an open shower. He heard the water running, and expected it to be another one of the Archangels in there... nothing unusual.

A hot shower would relax him... or at least, they always did in the past.

He rounded the corner and saw a most interesting sight.

The new nugget... was in the shower! She had made it back home! *Thank the gods, there's some hope for our trainers*, he thought.

He looked her up and down... and saw that she was shaking, even with the obvious warm water and steam.

" Ummm... are you okay?"

He had to repeat it three times, before he got a response. When she spoke, her voice was barely more than a whisper, and a traumatized one, at that.

"Apparently, my frakking viper didn't have a scratch! I don't get it... I... I lost my lead! He died less than ten minutes out, when the godsdamned toasters pulled their stunt! I fought that battle alone! Others ten times better died, others ten times more experienced and with their wingman at their side still came back with damaged ships! I shouldn't BE here! I keep analyzing it, over and over... trying to figure out why. I'm trying to figure out how. All the odds were stacked against me, in every possible way! So why then? Why am I still here? And what did I do to somehow beat those odds," the tears continued to stream down her face.

He stood there, astonished at the questions she was asking. He could see that standing up was not helping her shaking problem, so he walked over, grabbed both of her shoulders, and helped her over to the nearest bench.

"Why? I never ask myself that anymore. This was no accident. The Cylons don't know who among us is more experienced or not, they only see targets. Many *very* skilled pilots died out there, but because of their own stupidity. We weren't prepared for something of this magnitude," watching her Greg continued. "I used to ask myself the same questions when I first started out. Of course... they didn't deal with death... but other personal reasons. I found it helped to not question, to just accept things as the way they are."

Her voice got even quieter, now... barely audible at all. "The way things are? Who could accept this? What is there left now, for any of us? They destroyed it all. They killed everyone. Those walking chrome plated bastards killed my mother, my father, my sisters, my friends. My apartment was destroyed, our fleet and the entire Twelve Colonies of Kobol. Twelve planets, billions of people... everything, everyone, gone in less than a day! How could anyone accept this? There is no "this"... there is nothing. Nothing left at all... "

Suddenly, the thought of his family rushed into Greg's mind. The family that he had left and claimed he never wanted to see again. The family that showed up at his graduation from Fleet Academy, the ones he blew off after graduation.

"Okay... I'm sorry, it's just... all of this is happening around us, and it's as if I can't feel a thing. I

know the Colonies are gone, I *know* that we've lost everything, I *know* I'll never see my family, but I can't feel any of it. None of this has impacted me yet," his lip began to quiver. "It's like a callous over my heart, I feel numb to all of it. I'm in no condition to give advice, I'm sorry for misleading you."

Eliana drew back away from Greg just a little. But he expected that to happen after he vented like he just did.

"How can you not feel it dammit, how can any of you *not* feel it! The toasters took away everything from us! Godsdamnit I'm surrounded by people who act like it's another damn day at the frakking park! What point is there in anything anymore then? If there's nothing left to live for exactly what point is there to all this! If the human race is all but over, and what remains cannot survive long it's clear the point isn't even to have each other, anymore is it! If you're all so frakking unfeeling that there's nothing left to have there for us then why the hell are we even here," Eliana was practically screaming.

Greg withdrew in his mind, and said the only thing he had left. "You think we don't feel it, but have you talked to anyone about the attacks? I guarantee every person on the ship can't help but think of one thing at the moment, who they've lost! The problem is nugget, if we let that get in our way, then the cylons could just jump back in and blow us away, just like they did our families."

Eliana looked at him with a confused face. "We said we would protect them, you know. Not just our families, but the Colonies as a whole. The thing is we failed. I just... Dammit, I wish I could be like the rest of you. I really do. I just... can't. How do you do it? ... How can I learn?" she asked Greg. She wiped the tears angrily from her eyes.

"Time, that's the only way to learn. We've been in this for years; you've been in it for a month. Don't expect to be fully integrated into the military mindset just yet. There is nothing wrong with you, just give it time, and *don't* blame yourself." Greg replied, his voice more calm with every word. He watched as Lawrence slowly shook her head, the tears streaming down her face.

CPO Paul Luna
Destroyer *Douglas J. Griffyn*
Causeway F

The causeway was lined with blinking lights as well as those that were already out. People moved about in chaotic order, heading to their next assignment. This small ship was his home, and they were his family, what family he had left. The crew had become a tightly-knit family, and the loss of any life on the ship was catastrophic.

"The starboard flight pod had to be operational before the SAR mission. The port flight pod was full of vipers, about thirty-eight altogether, which was fifteen more than the pod was designed to handle with any elbow room. The main problem with the starboard flight pod was the debris.

Luna entered the deck to see people everywhere, not just the usual knuckledraggers, but pilots and marines as well. The forklifts were busy moving the fallen scaffolding and support beams. Everyone helping was either grabbing debris and picking it up, or moving light debris with push brooms.

"Chief, where do you need this," one of the marines asked holding up a piece of a small turbine.

Luna pointed to a chest in the corner: "Over there."

At this rate, the hangar would be able to house any oncoming birds, but was crippled when it came to launching them. The area of the hangar housing the four damaged launch tubes had been marked by yellow tape, and the only ones allowed in were the DC teams.

Four out of Ten launch tubes disabled, not horrible but it will set back our launch capabilities. Hopefully we won't need them again in the immediate future, Luna thought.

He watched through the main observation window as DC Teams worked feverously on the landing portion of the flight pod inspecting for any structural weaknesses that might hinder landings. Wearing protective equipment and EVA suits the DC teams looked like insects scurrying about after the lights had come on. So far, it seemed the *Griffyn* had taken the licks the toasters threw at her, and kept on going.

Luna wondered if the *Libra* had suffered more damage, and would need assistance. As of yet he hadn't heard anything and he hoped they were alright. He looked through the window and past the fore end of the landing pod. Approximately two kilometers away and in front of the *Griffyn*, the *Libra* sat. Outwardly she looked as if she was in good shape. The real test would be inside though. Luna watched as the *Libra's* movement took it out of sight. *If they need the help we'll be there,* Luna said silently to himself. *But for now, Griffyn needed tending to.*

He walked over to Simons, one of his PO2's, and got the clipboard from him. On it was the list of vipers in the starboard bay. *Only seven of them.* "Okay, we need to compact all the space in here possible," he said as he walked off. He quickly ran to his office, and grabbed the list for the *Griffyn's* four raptors.

The raptors were fueled and ready to go at a moment's notice. They had been moved from the port pod to the starboard one in order to conserve space. Pointing to Simons, Luna regarded the raptors. "Herald wants them off the deck as soon as word comes from *Libra*, better go ahead and put them on the lifts," Luna turned and ran back to the deck to cleanup.

Astral Dawn **Cylon Occupied Space**

Three hundred feet from *Astral Dawn's* starboard, there was nothing. Suddenly a blinding flash of light, and a four thousand foot-long space park appeared. Proximity alarms sounded on *Astral Dawn's* bridge, and the crew there instinctively looked at the dradis screen and the readout displays.

"Frakkin' hell," co-pilot Phineus Gojisa shouted. "He almost landed in our laps!"

"Shut off the alarms," Captain Gibbs ordered. Turning, he regarded his Comm Officer, "Get that captain on the line."

[Captain Gibbs, come in!] A voice came over the weak wireless frequency. [This is Captain Gabriel Keramidas on The *Grandeur*. Sorry about that, our FTL system has been acting up all day.]

Gibbs shook his head and then spoke into the little microphone attached to his headset.

"Welcome, Captain. I presume Kalrk sent you, since you know my name."

[Frak yeah he sent us! He stayed with us through all kinds of hell back there. I thought we were goners!]

"Why didn't he escort you here? We have someplace else to be."

[I'll tell you all about it, Gibbs, but I need to tell Liza Liala of the CBI as well. Which ship is she on?]

"She's here on the *Dawn*. She transferred over as soon as she got here."

[Understood, would it be possible to get her? That way we can get everything taken care of right away.]

"Wait one and I'll get her. Stand by," Gibbs turned to his security chief. Mr. Willborn. Please find Miss Liala and ask her to return to the bridge, for a conference call."

Astral Dawn VIP Stateroom

Shortly after she finished unpacking, there was a knock at the door. She made her way over, and opened the door, to find Mister Willborn standing outside.

"Miss Liala. Please accompany me to the bridge. Another Colonial vessel has arrived, and her captain wishes to speak with you."

As she followed him to the bridge, Liza noted that Gibbs had indeed had foresight in moving her to her new quarters. It was a very short walk to the bridge, from her new suite. As she entered, she could see Gibbs, who appeared to already be in conference with the aforementioned captain. He looked up as she approached, flicked off the pickup for the transmitter, and spoke.

"Miss Liala, excellent. I have Captain Keramidas of the *Grandeur* on the line. He says he has news of Mister Kalrk."

He reached over then, and flipped the switch back on, and spoke into the microphone then, to the other Captain.

"Captain Keramidas. Miss Liala is present."

Liza took the cue and spoke into the pickup. "Glad to see you here, Captain. What is the news of Mister Kalrk you wished to share with me?"

[It's been a nightmare thirty minutes for *Grandeur*, Miss Liala, Captain Gibbs,] the voice of Gabriel Keramidas began. [*Grandeur* arrived where Captain Kalrk is, about ten minutes after you left on the Pan Galactic. After switching to this frequency, Captain Kalrk gave us these coordinates, and said how we had just missed you. He urged us to make an immediate jump to here, and I was happy to oblige. He said he'd be a few minutes behind us, that he had to set an

auto transmission beacon first. But our FTL didn't work. It took us over thirty minutes to fix it... and Captain Kalrk wouldn't leave us. He said the cylons would be showing up any minute, so he stayed while we underwent diagnostic checks on our hyperlight systems. Maybe five or six minutes into that, two cylon ships showed up. Captain Kalrk kept taking out their missile fire, but he had a hard time killing one of those little ships. My gods, they are *fast*! I never saw anything like them! He took one out finally and the other one jumped away. Captain Kalrk wasn't happy about that... told us to speed up our repairs on our jump drive, that the one cylon had probably gone to get friends.]

Liala looked at Gibbs, the look of concern was unmistakable.

[So, we were trying to figure out what was wrong with our hyperlight systems, and we found it. Miss Liala, it was sabotage. Someone aboard my ship deliberately sabotaged our jump system. He or she did it right after we appeared where Captain Kalrk is. What kind of death wish would such a person have, to leave us as a sitting duck for the cylons? We repaired the damaged equipment, and as we were counting down our jump, six more of those raiders showed up! I think he took out four of them, I was watching the dradis with one eye and the jump clock with the other! I thought we might not make it, but he kept them occupied while we made the jump! As much as I'm worried about Captain Kalrk, I'm more worried about a nut job loose on my ship!]

Demeter

Another part of Cylon Occupied Space

It took another hour to get everything ready. They would jump as close as possible to Aerilon while still outside Colonial space. In two more jumps, *Terpischore* would be close enough to check conditions. And if more than ten minutes elapsed without contact from Terp... *Demeter* would return to deep space.

Xenthias waited inside *Terpischore* for *Demeter* to make the jump.

On the bridge, Inga and Putz checked the gauges, saying a silent prayer.

"Thorny, ready to jump?"

"Yes sir!"

"On my mark. Three, two, one, MARK!"

A short time later and they had arrived at their destination.

"All clear. No dradis contacts." Putz was relieved.

"Praise the gods." Inga switched to Jolly's frequency. "Ready?"

[Ready to roll, Bluebird.]

"Good hunting, Jolly. Over."

Terpischore left the landing bay with the sound of air being sucked out into the vacuum. Once outside, Xenthias circled the Demeter once and jumped.

"The gods be with you, my friend."

Two jumps later Xenthias sat, in utter shock and amazement, at what lay before her. The AerStar docking facilities were the home to hundreds of ships, and a daily travel stop for hundreds more. It was a mess, only debris marked where once hundreds of ships docked at once. Pieces of freighter here, destroyer there, all intermixed with the flash frozen corpses of human beings unlucky enough to be caught in the crossfire. It was mind numbing, the extent of the destruction. *Okay Jolly, she thought, let's see how bad it is planetside.*

She flew closer to the planet. The surface was pockmarked, evidence of the brutality of the orbital bombardment. Two baseships sat in low orbit, dropping nuclear ordnance on a constant basis. As she looked toward the planetary horizon to see no less than ten forming mushroom clouds, which bathed the troposphere in an eerie orange and red glow.

Few could have survived.

She thought of landing, but decided against it. She had ten minutes to get back, actually eight, as two had already elapsed. She wanted to see if it was only Aerelon, or if other planets had fared the same.

Three more jumps and she was close to Canceron.

The scene was the same.

And then she picked a signal. Faint and interrupted by static, but definitely Colonial.

"Attention Colonials, Attention Colonials, vessels... This is Lia Williams, C.B. Following the attack on the colonies, we have assembled our ships to survive the initial attacks. Even though the situation, I have made the decision that it is not safe to remain in, or return to, Colonial space. ... , we are making jump for safety, beyond Colonial space, exact, one hop."

Others had survived! And they were trying to make contact!

Xen recorded the message, including the coordinates, and began the series of "hops" that would take her back to the Demeter.

What was left of humanity was coming together.

Aboard the Demeter Several Hours Later

"Or it could be a trap."

Inga nodded somberly at Helmut's words, "Could be. But what if it's not?"

Xenthias paced impatiently. "Simple. I'll go, check it out and come back if the coast is clear. Five minutes. It'll take longer than that for Thorny to make the ship ready to jump."

Inga recognized that tone of voice "Xen, be careful. No crazy antics."

Xenthias laughed, but the humor never reached her eyes. "Inga, honey, I'm 47. I'm too old for crazy."

As she left the bridge, Xen could've sworn she heard Inga say, "That's what I'm afraid of... "

Within minutes Xenthias had boarded and launched, heading for the coordinates she collected in the transmission.

Xenthias didn't know *what* she expected once she got there, but whatever it was, it was not the scene that greeted her. Instead of a collection of colonial ships she saw two raiders attacking a single ship, debris all around them.

The ship was holding its own against its aggressors, but there were two of them, and they were gaining the upper hand.

She didn't blink. With the flick of a switch she opened the compartment that hid *Terpischore's* two small cannons. They were small caliber, not much better than pea-shooters, actually, against the superior firepower of the raiders, but she had surprise on her side.

"Yeeehah!" The old war whoop came easy to her lips, and she sped to the fray.

The raiders were small and nimble, but they were distracted by the larger ship so they didn't notice her until she was almost upon them.

She shot a salvo, more to get their attention than to do any damage.

It worked.

One of the raiders turned to her and fired.

Terpischore shook with the impact, but held up. Say what they may, but McCleary-Cutlass knew how to build armored ships!

Her only hope was firing very close to do real damage, or a lucky shot into the raider's glowing red "eye."

She positioned her ship to meet the raider head on and accelerated. It was a game of chicken, and she had nothing to lose. Just at the last moment, she made a hard turn starboard and fired.

The raider did not explode, nothing quite that dramatic, but it was done for. It kept going with the momentum, spinning wildly as it cart wheeled away from the fight.

The unknown Colonial had taken advantage of the situation and it, too, destroyed the remaining raider.

Mercurius had found the damaged raider, and made short work of it after firing an anti ship missile. Seconds later, the raider exploded from the impact.

Breathing heavily with the exultation of the kill, Xenthias transmitted a message to the unknown Colonial over the "standard" frequency for civilians. "Greetings, Merconi of *Terpsichore* here. Are we expecting more company? I have some friends and I don't want to bring them to a trap."

[Thank you for the assist, *Colonel*. They almost had us that time.] A male voice came through her wireless. [Please switch to frequency 8386, I repeat, 8386.]

On frequency 8386, Kalrk gave the spiel.

[Thanks again for saving my butt. That last raider might have been able to transmit, so I made you a Colonel. My name's Kalrk and this is my ship *Mercurius*. This area is no longer safe, as you can tell. A group of civilian vessels has gathered at another point, and are remaining wireless silent, except for 8386.]

I don't recognize her voice. But that can be altered electronically. Kalrk was being very careful of his last-minute savior. *That sweet little ship arrived just in time to save me, and now I can give the coordinates to my asteroid.*

[We have to get out of here. Take me to your friends and we can get with the others.]

She laughed, the throaty sound strange even to her. "Glad to be of assist, Mr. Kalrk! It's a skip and a hop to my friends'." She transmitted the first set of coordinates. "Confirm?"

She made ready to jump. "I'll send the next set when we're there."

And she was gone.

Terpsichore sounds legit, but be careful, Kalrk. He reminded himself.

He quickly switched his wireless to the official Colonial Government frequency, and also to the emergency channel.

He played a recorded message, one that he had spliced together from the two messages of Liala. The first had been intended to bait the cylons, and had also called civilian ships. The second was intended to convince colonial ships that Kalrk was telling the truth about Liala and the civilian ships, even though the actual numbers were less than the twenty he had broadcast before.

And this spliced together message had its purpose: to keep Colonials away.

“Attention Colonial vessels, Attention Colonial vessels. This is Liza Liala with the C.B.I. It is not safe to remain in, or return to, Colonial space ... Any Colonial vessels receiving this message should jump to safety, far beyond Colonial space... Liza Liala, out.”

He launched an automated communications drone, which would appear to be just another piece of wreckage.

Switching his wireless back to 8386, he jumped to the coordinates that the pilot of the Terpischore had given him.

Tommy T Templeton
3 days prior to the cylon attacks.

.....and you are hereby released, as of this day back into society”. The warden looked at Tommy T, “Good luck Tommy.” They shook hands.

Two security guards escorted Tommy to a shuttle craft. Part of the integration process for him was a trip aboard a luxury liner, for a tour of the colonies. At the end of the trip Tommy would be expected to choose a planet to live on, a nice little perk after serving 10 years in prison.

The shuttle craft neared the Liner and docked. When he boarded the liner a gentleman approached him. “Welcome aboard the Astral Dawn.” They shook hands. “My name is Jeff Cunnings.”

“Tommy Templeton, thank you.”

“Well let me show you to your seat, later I will show you your cabin. We're about to take off.”

The government official led the way.

They sat down in seats close to the center aisle. Tommy's gaze seemed to be fixed on all the women, which one might expect a male to do when he has been in prison for 10 years.

Tommy looked at the official: "This is going to be a nice trip."

**Antonia Seda,
Passenger On the *Astral Dawn*
Passenger Lounge**

Toni thought of another of the passengers she'd seen. He was a big guy, nearly nine inches taller than her 5'8". He had a certain look about him she recognized; 'don't mess with me'. The way he moved and how his clothes slid over his skin spoke of hard muscle underneath. On top of it, he was a good-looking guy; even in normal circumstances, Toni would have considered casually frakking him.

Circumstances now were far from normal. Toni was tough and could take care of herself, but she knew the value of safety in numbers. A guy like this would be good to have as an ally. *A big guy, with that look in his eye... I bet he's done some things on the wrong side of the law.* She smiled again.

**Tommy T. Templeton
On board the *Astral Dawn*.**

.....not to stray more than 80 feet from me." Jeff said.

"So it's okay to get a drink."

"Just one."

And with that Tommy headed for the lounge. It was nice to get away from that man. All the rules he must follow. Blah Blah Blah is pretty much what Tommy heard.

The lounge was luxurious. Chandeliers, each worth at least a hundred times more than the cash he carried, hung from the ceiling. And booze everywhere. Tommy had not had a drink in ages, his palette was drooling. He went up to the Bartender, "I'll have one bottle of ambrosia."

Heck he said one drink didn't he, Tommy said to himself.

He scanned the people in the lounge. His eyes stopped when he hit a blonde with the most piercing eyes he ever saw. Now he was drooling again.

"Sir, your bottle." The bartender handed him one glass and a bottle of Ambrosia.

"Thanks," Tommy replied, taking the offered bottle and glass. He tried to take his gaze off the woman but couldn't.

As if in answer to Antonia's thoughts, the very person she was thinking about came into the lounge. She saw him case the room, as she always did, watching him from under her eyelashes. He got a bottle and sat on a stool with his back to the bar, and she knew the exact instant he saw her.

Without saying anything to Wernick, she gracefully rose from the chair and walked over to him. She stopped in front of him with a slight smile curving her lips, and held out her hand.

"I'm Antonia Seda," she said to him. "My friends call me Toni."

He took her hand and graciously kissed the top of it. "You have a new friend Toni. My name's Tommy T, but my friends call me Tom." Those eyes of hers were making him melt. She could ask anything from him, and he knew he would not deny her.

Oh, yes, this will be enjoyable, she thought, slowly looking up and down the length of his body. *Very enjoyable.* "Tom," she acknowledged, and sat on the stool next to him. "Would you share your bottle with a lady?" *Not that I am one, but I know how to act the part!* She crossed her legs and wished she'd worn a skirt instead of trousers.

"Yeah I like to share."

He held up his hand at the bartender "Another glass please." The bartender handed him one. He poured her a glass and gave it to her. "And the fellow over there?"

"Thank you," she held her glass up to him, then sipped. "I am Mr. Wernick's assistant," she said calmly. Then she smiled again, adding, "It is purely a business relationship, he's an accountant, quite boring, unfortunately." She sipped again, giving him a look through her lashes. "You don't appear to be the boring type..." she raised one eyebrow, inviting him to talk.

"Boring... not in my life." He held his glass towards the windows looking out into space. Things didn't appear to be boring out there either. "Do you know what's going on?"

She shook her head slowly, and told him what she'd heard. It wasn't any different from what he knew.

Wernick stood and closed his laptop with a snap. With a slight sigh, Toni stood and put her glass on the bar. She leaned close to Tommy, putting her hand on his upper arm, and said, "We can talk again later... I'll look forward to it."

She followed Wernick out of the lounge, feeling Tom's eyes on her the whole time. Right before she left, she looked over her shoulder and winked at him.

Lieutenant Rayna "Draco" Darkstone

Location Unknown

Time Unknown

As Rayna opened her eyes, she became aware of a few things, a blur of commotion around her, yelling, and a stabbing pain on the right side of her head. Once her eyes regained focus, she could distinctly make out Quickdraw and a couple medics standing around her.

"Wait... whaa? How did..." She was slow to process everything, but she knew something bad had happened.

"Rayna! Oh my gods," said Quickdraw. He leaned down to her level. She was lying on the deck while the medics brought over a stretcher.

Looking over, she could see Divot pacing back and forth behind Quickdraw. She looked nervous and kept looking off in the distance.

Draco felt something wet on the side of her face. She wiped it off and looked at her hand. It was red with blood.

It all came back to her in one big rush. The raiders, there were so many of them. But she and her wingmen had cleaned a lot of them up except for one in particular. It had been hard for

her to elude and just as it acquired missile-lock, Draco banked hard to evade. As luck would have it when she broke the missile lock she flew directly into the path of another raider just to have it shoot her! The bullet had breached her cockpit, instantly depressurizing it. Draco was thrown around from the explosive force of the breach and her helmet hit some debris, cracking it. The force of the impact knocked her out. She had no idea what happened next.

"Had she stayed in there any longer, the lack of oxygen would've," said one of the medics to Quickdraw; his expression stern.

Quickdraw nodded, cutting the medic off and looked back to Draco.

"Rayna, you awake?" he said quietly. "Stay with me..."

It took a moment, but she nodded. Quickdraw looked relieved.

Her voice was weak. Quiet. He could hardly hear her over all the chaos on the hangar deck. "W-what happened?"

Quickdraw crouched down and leaned in close. "You..." He tried not to sound so serious. He smiled trying to comfort her while keeping himself together. "You, had a little slip up there sir," he said with a forced light humor.

"Sir... ugh. I hate that," she said weakly. She suddenly tried to sit up, but a medic pushed her back down as he applied a bandage to her head.

"Not a chance sir," the medic said. "We need to check you out before moving you again."

"I need to report to Captain Dell."

Quickdraw's expression turned grim and he slowly shook his head. "I, Draco, Captain Dell died in the attack."

He hesitated for a moment.

"Not all the SAR teams have reported back yet but it appears you, me, and Divot were the only survivors from our squadron..."

Draco looked at him in disbelief. It was too much to comprehend. Her mind started to wander as her brain tried to assimilate the information. She looked to the side and watched various crewmembers scramble around the deck. It all looked so surreal, almost like it was in slow-

motion. There was an awkward heavy silence for a moment.

"I, I guess this means we report to you now Draco."

Draco's head felt very heavy and she lay back down and closed her eyes.

Battlestar *Libra* **CIC**

Rodrigues watched intently as the dradis remained clear of any enemy vessels. Little by little the raiders had been destroyed and he waited to be absolutely certain they weren't coming back any time soon. He turned to the XO. "Get the SAR teams moving."

It took only a scant few minutes for the raptors to launch from the *Libra*. Their first priority was to board any support ships still intact enough to hold atmosphere. Of twenty-nine ships in the *Libra* battle group only three were under their own power. Of the remaining twenty-seven only five were even capable of being boarded. That included the *Solstice*.

Be it the will of the Gods or something else, when the *Solstice* was hit she did not shatter like many of the other ships in the battle group. Largely intact her familiar profile glowed with the many fires that still raged in her superstructure. The one good thing about the fires, if it could be looked upon as a good thing, was that where there's fire, there's oxygen.

As a three ship flight from the *Libra* approached *Solstice* the lead pilot, Lieutenant Jennie Winters, saw the devastation rendered on the *Libra's* sister ship. A gaping hole was visible in her forward area, which appeared to have been the result of a nuclear detonation. The raptors from *Libra* closed in and Winters spotted several raptors sitting on the deck. Closer inspection revealed they were loaded with crew. Something had disabled the flight controls and trapped them there. She smiled at the realization that some had survived and activated her mic. "*Libra*, this is SAR one, be advised we have found survivors aboard *Solstice*. I repeat, we have found survivors aboard *Solstice*. We're going to need as many raptors and shuttles as you can spare.

Inside *Libra's* CIC a cheer went up at the good news. Rodrigues looked at his XO and smiled. "Karl, have the shuttle crews get moving. I want that ship cleared as soon as possible."

"Aye sir," Vansen beamed. "I'll crawl up their butts if I have to."

Upon landing on the port flight pod the teams inside immediately began moving to their

stations. As they moved inside the airlock they discovered that life support in some areas had been knocked out and several decks had sustained catastrophic decompression. It became painfully evident the *Solstice* could never be repaired. All of the SAR crews immediately began looking for survivors. The mechanics moved to the flight deck to check the status of any ships that remained. They discovered vipers everywhere, still in their launch tubes, on the refueling and rearming line, in the repair bays. Raptors were all snug on the flight deck, ready to take to the void. The impact of several nuke strikes overloaded the *Solstice's* systems, effectively entombing the pilots and the crew. It was only by the grace of the Gods the battlestar wasn't finished off by the cylons. There was little doubt, however, had they won the battle there would have been no human survivors.

The search for survivors was methodical and carried out with practiced precision. A contingent of marines moved up to secure the CIC and Auxiliary Control. From there they would secure any classified materials and set charges to prevent the enemy from getting any of the data. Medical personnel with marine escort moved from compartment to compartment, grabbing whoever they could. Those that could not move on their own were triaged onsite and their locations were radioed to the CIC. The marines in the CIC relayed to the medics on the flight deck as well as Command and Control aboard the *Libra*. As it was, the rescue operation was moderately successful. Most of the personnel in areas that had life support failures had the presence of mind to get into their protective suits and use emergency oxygen. The cylon "backdoor" to the CNP had taken the *Solstice* completely. Numerous systems from propulsion to life support was offline in various areas of the ship.

In the CIC the marine team identified the body of the commander and his senior staff. All had died at their stations.

Looking around the CIC at all the dead crewmembers, Sergeant Grenner said a silent prayer to the gods. He collected the commander's weapon key and codebook and motioned his men to move out. "*Libra* this is SAR One," he said. "Command staff has been located and identified. They're all gone. Were clearing the CIC at this time. All Alpha Priority items have been secured."

[Copy that SAR One,] Hastings' voice came over the net. [Set your charges and move back to the flight deck. Continue with rescue and recovery efforts.]

“Understood *Libra*, SAR One out,” Grenner removed his backpack and opened it. Inside sat a remote communication device. He flipped several switches and the device armed. He went to a service panel and, using the *Solstice*’s commander’s key he unlocked and opened it. He attached a set of leads to the remote device and plugged the other end into the wall panel. Upon entering a code into the panel he watched as the LED readout changed from safe to armed. Riley secured the panel and placed the key into the cargo pocket of his combat uniform. He then retrieved a remote device, turned it on, and verified it was functioning. Satisfied everything was in order Grenner went to join his team.

It took hours but the SAR teams were able to secure almost seven hundred survivors. Many were severely injured and would require major medical attention.

The raptors worked in a convoy fashion, shuttling the survivors back to the *Libra* as fast as they could. Deck Mechanics and Ship Mechanics were also transferred to the ships in order to salvage as much as possible. Vipers and raptors were secured and either flown or towed across the void to the *Libra*. Any raptors able to be repaired on site were immediately pressed into service picking up the survivors.

In addition to the survivors crews were able to secure ammo and other stores, which were going to be vital in the days ahead.

Aboard the *Libra* the reports continued to come in from the SAR teams. Rodrigues’ features began to set harder and harder. His resolve and demeanor became more rigid. The old man was getting ready for a fight.

“Hastings. Once the SAR teams have gotten all personnel and material onboard please let me know. I’ll be on the starboard flight deck. XO, you have the con.”

Raptor 127 "Bloodhounds"
Assigned to Destroyer *Douglas J. Griffyn*

Conducting SAR mission on downed pilots

The scene was horrific. If dodging debris of Raiders and vipers was not enough, dodging debris from the Baseships was even worse. They say good things come through hard work... for all the work the Bloodhounds put forth into SAR missions, 16 vipers were recovered from the field of battle.

Only 10 living pilots were recovered still seated in their vipers. The rest they found had either been killed in a crossfire or lack of oxygen. But the difference between vipers and pilots was made up through pilots that had been fortunate enough to eject. Seven ejected pilots were found, a number most would find depressing, but at the current moment, any survivors were a gift from the Gods themselves.

The SAR mission was truly a sobering experience, one in which Captain Miranda "Mongoose" Broccolo, the CO of the Bloodhounds, was not ready for. She knew the protocols to bring the birds home, but had no idea how many times she would have to see floating bodies, and the procedures they would go through to bring in the dead.

Seeing them floating in space was eerie to say the least, and reminded Mongoose of how helpless the stranded pilots had been. The *Griffyn* didn't launch her assault raptor compliment, due to the heavy loss just one being destroyed would be. "I haven't seen any action compared to what they saw," Mongoose said as she and her ECO dropped off five bodies and a survivor in the hangar.

[Raptor N534ER, this is Raptor N522ER, come in Mongoose,] the wireless came alive.

"Copy you Short, what's the problem," Mongoose asked. Natalie Short was one of Mongoose's most reliable pilots, and also one of Mongoose's closest friends.

[Our sector is clear sir, requesting orders,] Short asked.

Mongoose looked around for a second then took a look at the dradis. "Make one more sweep near where the *Delphinus* went down, and bring yourselves home."

The vipers were brought to the *Griffyn's* starboard hangar deck, which by the end of the recovery operation, was completely full. The only room left in the hangar was for *Griffyn's* four

raptors... and that was it. Launching ANYTHING would be torture; hopefully Luna was on the case, and trying to utilize every centimeter of the deck.

Colonel Brennan Herald
Destroyer *Douglas J. Griffyn* Actual
Aft section of starboard flight pod

Bodies... everywhere, at least twenty of them carpeted the secured aft chamber of the starboard flight pod. Just a short while ago they were teeming with life, and had not a care in the world except their duties. But the world had changed in these few hours... giving them this, a landscape of corpses.

“Excuse us sir,” Lance Corporal David Barrett and a group of marines were carrying more bodies in... eight of them. Barrett, after laying the bodies down, saluted the Colonel

“Sir, I’ve never done anything like this, but I believe we give these to you,” tears streaming down her face Barrett handed Herald a handful of dog tags, which Herald immediately stuck in his pocket.

“If you’ll excuse me Lance Corporal, I need some time alone, keep the work up,” he told the distraught marine. He watched as the marines left the room to go get more bodies... hopefully there were no more, but Herald knew it was a false hope.

He knelt down, the weight of all this was too much to bear standing. He touched one of the body bags, hoping it would ease the pain. The realization quickly came, however, that the pain only increased. Tears began to well up. He began looking at the bodies of his crew, PFC Gene Horton, Private Dennis Byrd, he moved over each body and read every single name.

On the next row he saw a few more names he recognized. They were pilots from one of the strike wings. Most of the viper pilots lost this day would more than likely not be recovered, and if so only in pieces. He wished he knew them all on a personal level, but that was one of the curses of commanding a ship.

There would be no letters going home, no meeting with broken-hearted mothers and fathers to tell of their child’s heroism. The parents were gone... everything was gone. The only hope now

was to prolong the living's survival, and preserve humanity at all costs.

Herald didn't even want to contemplate his own loved ones he had lost on the colonies; there was still a lot to do. He needed to get the ship ready to fight again, recover any stranded pilots, and assist in search and rescue operations with the *Libra*. The list in Herald's mind was extensive. He turned to walk out of the bay, and as he reached the door he turned, "Don't worry, your deaths will not be in vain."

He walked out just as another group of marines brought in two more bodies.

The SAR missions would only add to this landscape.

Starboard Flight Deck

Battlestar *Libra*

As the *Griffyn's* CO walked among the dead the same scene was being played out on the *Libra*. One hundred seventy five souls from the *Libra* were dead, their bodies were lying on the deck in neat orderly rows.

In the midst of the sea of body bags Commander Rodrigues and Captain Riley stood. In Rodrigues' hands were the dog tags of those souls who had perished this day. He looked over at the ship's chaplain who was giving last rites to the deceased. Suddenly he felt very small. He turned to his marine commander.

"Good job today Eric, your teams are to be commended for a job very well done. The survivors your teams rescued and the equipment you liberated will help us tremendously in the days to come."

Riley nodded slightly. "I assume sir, that we'll be joining the rest of the fleet soon?"

Rodrigues looked out again over the bodies. "Picon Fleet Headquarters is gone Eric, as are the rest of the colonies. We received a transmission a short time ago that Admiral Nagala's flagship has been destroyed as well. Commander Adama of the *Galactica* has assumed command of the fleet."

Riley looked at the floor in utter shock. "The colonies? Admiral Nagala? This is insane sir. How did they achieve such total surprise? Why didn't our defense mainframe catch it?"

Rodrigues looked at his marine commander. “Those are questions we all want answers to. Unfortunately I don’t think there are too many people left to tell us what went wrong. The fact of the matter is we are now on the losing side of a shooting war. If we don’t get a big handle on things quickly we’re going to get wiped out.”

“What were Commander Adama’s orders sir?” Riley asked expectantly.

“I’m waiting on that now. Unfortunately all we can do is wait. Our deep space transmitter was knocked out during the battle so all we can do for now is receive. As soon as we receive new orders we’ll be underway. Give your troops some rack time Eric. They need it. Keep a contingent available for DC duties and rotate them to make sure everyone gets some down time. When we receive further orders from *Galactica* I’ll call a meeting.”

“Aye aye, sir,” Riley said and slowly walked away towards the Graves Registration NCO. He wanted to get a list of names of his marines together. He would have to write several letters to families of the fallen... if there were any left.

Rodrigues continued to walk amongst the dead. Tears welled up in his eyes at the loss of life. These were his people, his family. Everyone was now locked in a struggle to survive. The slightest pause could doom them all.

Rodrigues turned and watched as the medics brought in yet another body bag. They gently lowered it to the deck, came to attention, and saluted. Rodrigues walked over to the medics as they retrieved the dog tags. A young medic, no more than eighteen, turned and handed him the tags. As he looked at the name on them he spoke, “Where did you find him?”

“Port side, near causeway four. A collapse got five of them...I’m sorry sir.”

Rodrigues gave a half reassuring smile and nodded. “Thanks Specialist. I’ll take care of the notification.”

As he began walking out of the flight deck a tone sounded on the intercom. “Commander Rodrigues to the CIC immediately. Commander Rodrigues to CIC immediately.” Walking over to the nearest handset Rodrigues picked up the phone, “Rodrigues here.”

“Vansen here sir. We’ve just received word from the *Galactica*. They’re advising all ships to set course to the Ragnar Anchorage immediately.”

“Have we been able to get our transmitter repaired yet? Also what’s the status on our FTL

drives?”

“Both are still offline. The transmitter has to be rebuilt sir. There’s no way around that. As for the FTL drives we’re looking at a minimum of eight hours before we can attempt a jump.”

“Understood. Set course for Ragnar. Contact Herald and Itari and have them stay with us. Also Have a raptor launched and place several nukes in the debris field here. I want to leave the toasters a little present. I can guarantee they’ll come looking for those baseships they lost. I’m on my way back up.”

As Rodrigues reached the CIC he was met by the ranking men on the *Libra*. Present were Colonel Vansen, Captain Riley, and Captain Hastings. Also present were several members of the crew whose roles were vital to the *Libra’s* survival. All of them looked at their commander expectantly. As command staff they knew the details of the cylon attacks. Beyond that though, everything was speculation.

He took a few moments to compose himself and he signaled the communications officer to open a channel to all ships. He was given a nod when the channel was clear.

“This is the commander. Today our home worlds came under attack by the cylons. Latest reports detail all twelve of the colonies were subjected to massive nuclear bombardment from baseships in orbit. It is currently unknown if there are any survivors and we must realistically assume the colonies are gone.

In addition the colonial fleet has been all but destroyed. Admiral Nagala was killed along with the destruction of the colonial fleet.” He paused for a few moments but was greeted with only silence. Rodrigues took a deep breath and continued. “After forty years we believed the cylons had gone their own way, leaving us in peace. Why they have returned, why they have committed themselves to mass genocide is unimportant now.

What is important is our survival. If we are to stay alive we must band together. We must trust each other. We must never give up hope. We will never surrender I promise you.

I have received word Commander Adama on the *Galactica* has assumed command of the fleet. We will be getting underway to meet the *Galactica* and any other colonial ships at the Ragnar Anchorage. From there we will repair, rearm, and get back into the fight.

You are all here because you are the best the fleet has to offer. I am truly proud to have each and every one of you as my crew and I will work tirelessly to keep your trust. I ask that you

mourn the dead later. We have a job to do. Again, trust in your officers and each other. We will get through this.

And when the time comes...we will avenge our dead.”

Rodrigues looked at his XO and the rest of the people in the CIC. He received silent nods from them all.

All around the *Libra* and her escort ships the crews were motionless, listening to their battle group commander, listening to the man who would lead them to safety, to victory.

“Stand to your duties. You are the finest men and women the colonial military has ever trained and you will prove that every time you meet the enemy.

All ships set your coordinates to Ragnar. Make way on my mark...Mark.”

The CIC was as silent as a tomb as Rodrigues hung up the phone. As he looked at the group they all snapped to attention and rendered a swift and precise salute. He was taken aback by their conduct and was immediately humbled. He smiled and returned the salute.

“Let’s go meet the *Galactica*.” He said.