

Birthright: First Strike
(working title)

by
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ACT ONE

FADE IN:

EXT. BLACK

A black screen, the word "In the year 2592 the human race is at war." are printed clearly in the center.

EXT. HOSPICE RIDGE -- VESTA-PALLAS, NIGHT

A ROCKET is fired from a behind a hill. It streams into the distance leaving a trail of black SMOKE in its wake.

EXT. BLACK

White text on a black screen "With itself."

EXT. HOSPICE RIDGE

The rocket impacts the side of a building EXPLODING in a giant fireball.

Location sub title "Vesta-Pallas colony"

A huge battle. Earth Empire (EE) TROOPS are moving in. Twenty destroyer class (Robotic Omni-terrain Armored Combat Hetzer) R.O.A.C.H.es (described in attached document to save space), are slowly advancing over the hilled terrain towards the weakly defended hospital. These giant robotic legged tanks face off against seven Outer Planet Astrosociological Confederation (OPAC) R.O.A.C.H.es that are defending the position. We get to see one of the few RANDALS that are still in operation. Its machine gun mounts looks like they had been blown off sometime before the battle. Its cannon slides forward and we see its back legs brace and almost buckle under the force of its cannon. The tungsten shell impacts its target, a well aimed shot into the cockpit/head of the approaching destroyers.

The remaining EE R.O.A.C.H.es advance on the hospital.

INT. COCKPIT IVONOVA

IVONOVA is Commander forth echelon ALEXANDER KIRSKOF's R.O.A.C.H. It's a *Destroyer* class, just like the attacking forces. Front viewing surface of the cockpit is a large viewing screen that is displaying the battle outside as if viewed from a window. The screen is also filled with many HUD artifacts such as targeting reticules and damage reports. In the upper left corner of the screen, taped to the only bare spot visible is a PHOTO of a man in front of a farm house wearing a dirty old shirt and work gloves. He doesn't appear to be much older than Alexander is now.

The picture looks very old but well loved. On the bottom of the photo is written in black pen "Never forget".

In the center of the cockpit sits Kirskof, a tall and handsome Russian man in his early thirties. He wears the MILITARY UNIFORM of the OPAC and fights with the two control sticks on his chair as he begins to step his R.O.A.C.H. back.

KIRSKOF

Fall back! We can't hold this position.

INT. RANDAL COCKPIT

The *Randal* cockpit is much more jury-rigged, It has wires hanging from various parts and a much smaller viewing screen. MAXWELL is also a young man, around the same age as Alexander. The resemblance stops there as Maxwell is much shorter, not as fit, and of Asian descent.

MAXWELL

Commander we can take them.

INT. COCKPIT IVONOVA

KIRSKOF

That's an order. Fall back.

EXT. HOSPICE RIDGE

Four of the OPAC R.O.A.C.H.es, one *DESTROYER*, one *RANDAL* and two *LONG-DOG* are falling back to avoid the assault on the hospital.

INT. RANDAL COCKPIT

MAXWELL

It's a hospital. We can't just abandon them. There are sick and elderly inside.

INT. COCKPIT IVONOVA

KIRSKOF

Warrior sixth echelon Maxwell. Fall back, we can't save anyone today.

INT. RANDAL COCKPIT

MAXWELL

Commander?

INT. COCKPIT IVONOVA

KIRSKOF
That's an order, fall back!

INT. RANDAL COCKPIT

MAXWELL
Yes sir, falling..

The cockpit is suddenly jerked off to one side.

EXT. HOSPICE RIDGE

A rocket impacts one of the knees of the Randal blowing it off.

INT. RANDAL COCKPIT

Sparks are now flying out of various spots in the cockpit and a damage light is blinking on the right side of the view screen.

MAXWELL
Change of plans Commander, movement
controls down. Get out of here!

EXT. HOSPICE RIDGE

Alexander turns to look behind himself in his R.O.A.C.H. He fires an ineffective shot into the attackers.

The *RANDAL* rears back and fires another SHOT into the chest of one of the approaching units. It staggers backwards but then continues forward. The *Randal* rears back and places a second SHOT into the shoulder of the same unit, BLOWING OFF its right ARM. The *DESTROYERS* are now in full range of the *Randal* and they open fire. The *Randal* is preparing a third SHOT when a rocket impacts the nose of its cannon. The *Randal* EXPLODES. The rest of the squadron is making a full retreat.

INT. HOSPICE RIDGE HOSPITAL

An old man, by the look on his face it is easy to tell that he knows he's not going to make it. He reaches into his night jacket and withdraws a pipe. He lights it and takes in a single puff then exhales.

In SLOW MOTION as the camera PULLS OUT through the smoke and through the dirty window to the outside of the hospital.

EXT. HOSPICE RIDGE HOSPITAL

We see many FACES in 6th floor window of the hospital, some are afraid, some are bleak. A barrage of ROCKETS streak across the front of the hospital, many impact the 6th floor. Everyone at the window is killed instantly.

EXT. VESTA-PALLAS

The hospital EXPLODES into a giant fireball, as the OPAC R.O.A.C.H.es disappear over the horizon and the EE FORCES take up position in their newly captured territory.

EXT. VESTA-PALLAS LANDING ZONE

A large *Phlegyas* class CARRIER lands on the barren terrain and picks up the retreating OPAC TROOPS. Its name, *CERBERUS*, can be seen on the side as it pierces the Exosphere causing a ripple to fill the sky like a rock dropped in a pond.

INT. CERBERUS DROP BAY

A massive cargo hold. The middle section is clear but the walls are covered in various repair depots. We can see two R.O.A.C.H.es in bays. They look like they are being scrapped for parts. The various R.O.A.C.H.es that survived on the OPAC side of the last battle are headed to various depots for repairs, refuel and to disembark.

From behind *Ivoniva*. A door slides open on the back of the destroyer's head and KIRSKOF, still in his cockpit chair, is elevated through the opening. This is both an entry-exit method and an eject system.

Kirskof unclips himself from his safety restraints and steps out of his chair. He removes his helmet, places it back on the seat then hits a button on the side of the seat. It lowers back into place and the hatch seals. A mechanic attaches a refueling hose to the back of the R.O.A.C.H. Kirskof exits through a door at the rear of the depot.

INT. CERBERUS JACKSON'S OFFICE

A small cramped office. Tactical third echelon LILY JACKSON, an older lady in her mid 60's, sits behind a solid oak desk. She wears the traditional uniform of the OPAC forces. Black pants and a black shirt, with a military jacket thrown over her shoulders. Over the breast of the jacket we can see the OPAC logo, a single point surrounded by a circle that represents each of the nine colonies. On the desk sits pile of papers. The top one is labeled "Casualty reports".

On a ledge beside her sits three pictures. Two young women and a young man in their early twenties to late thirties. They are all dressed in military uniforms and there is a purple heart hanging around each picture. These are Jackson's only children and the only personal items she displays. They are there to remind her what she is fighting for.

Kirskof enters silently through the open door of her office Jackson is lost in her own mind staring down at the papers before her.

KIRSKOF

Tactical.

Jackson closes the file she was reading, slamming her hand down onto her desk.

JACKSON

I'm tired of this.

She reaches into the folder and grabs the top sheet gripping it firmly.

JACKSON

More casualty reports.

KIRSKOF

I heard that the fighting on Ceres had died down and that Europa had stepped down its level of alert and was providing much needed medical aid to survivors.

JACKSON

Is that what we've become, survivors? The empire is winning. I'm old and I probably won't live to see it, but they will win.

She reaches into her desk drawer and grabs a piece of paper. In the desk drawer is a very impressive set of medals under the paper. She closes the drawer and hides the medals.

JACKSON

Have you seen the latest reports from medical research?

KIRSKOF

I heard they were trying a new treatment. Have they found a cure

JACKSON

No, they've abandoned the treatment, due to unforeseen side effects. Birth rate is still less than five percent. They don't have to kill us in the battlefield they just have to wait for us to die.

KIRSKOF

They might still find the cure for Tammuz. They won't just give up looking.

JACKSON

It's been fourteen years Alex, no ones going to find a cure out here. Earth has a cure.

KIRSKOF

How do you know that?

JACKSON

I guess I don't know but I feel it.

KIRSKOF

And what do you expect them to do, just hand it over?

Jackson gets up and walks over to the pictures on the ledge with the pictures. She picks up the picture of the youngest one and looks it over.

JACKSON

No, I've been thinking about this for a long time. A long long time.

KIRSKOF

We can't just walk in there and take it.

JACKSON

Fourteen years is to long with out children. My children would have been old enough to have kids of their own by now. No one settles down any more. We are forgetting the meaning of family. We are losing hope and in our hearts we've already lost this war. I'm disbanding the squadron.

KIRSKOF

Why?

JACKSON

I'm not going to risk any more lives than I have to. There are a lot of fine young men and women that serve on this ship and I won't put their lives in danger.

KIRSKOF

Their lives are in danger everyday.

JACKSON

They are being reassigned to defense positions on Europa.

KIRSKOF

I heard that we were just there temporarily then we would be back on the front line.

JACKSON

Orders change.

KIRSKOF

Yes madam, and what is to become of me?

JACKSON

We are going to Earth.

KIRSKOF

Enemy territory?

JACKSON

I'm old but I'm far from senile. We are going to end this.

KIRSKOF

Yes madam. If those are our orders.

JACKSON

I'm not taking orders any more.

KIRSKOF

The council?

JACKSON

Doesn't know. Our only chance is to go in under the radar and hope a small unit can infiltrate its way to Earth.

KIRSKOF

And you think there's a chance we could make it?

JACKSON

I don't think there is any chance if we don't. I can't make this an order Alex, just a request from an old friend.

KIRSKOF

You've never let me down before.

JACKSON

We won't be completely alone. Can you send up Maxwell, I need to talk to him.

KIRSKOF

Lily.

JACKSON

Yes?

KIRSKOF

Maxwell didn't make it.

JACKSON

(under breath)

They shall grow not old.

KIRSKOF

Pardon?

JACKSON

You are dismissed.

KIRSKOF

Yes Madam.

Kirskof turns to exit but waits and listens in the doorway, just out of view of Lily. Lily Jackson recites a famous quote, by Laurence Binyon, to herself as she works

JACKSON

They shall grow not old, as we that
are left grow old;
Age shall not weary them, nor the
years condemn.
At the going down of the sun and in
the morning.
We will remember them.

Kirskof leaves. Jackson opens up another drawer, removes an empty envelope from it, and takes a purple heart from an almost empty box. Using a pen from her desk she writes on the envelope "Warrior sixth echelon Thomas J. Maxwell." She opens the envelope, places the purple heart inside and seals it firmly by running her finger across the glue seal.

She opens yet another drawer on her desk. These are the things she keeps close to herself. In the drawer we can see a hundred envelopes all with different names. Jackson places the new envelope at the back of the almost full drawer. Each envelope is hand-labeled with the name of a different soldier that had served and died under Jackson's command.

FADE TO BLACK:

ACT TWO

CUT TO:

EXT. EUROPA -- MINOS, EVENING

Europa was once an ice moon, but after its terraforming the excessive amount of water created vast oceans. It is the only place in the solar system where you will find non-human life. However, because of the artificial rise in temperature, most of it has died off and all that remains are sea creatures that live deep beneath the ocean surface.

There is not much land on Europa. Most of the settlements are built on metallic stilts in the shallower parts of the ocean surrounding the few islands. Europa's primary export is its water which it exports to the outer colonies.

The *Cerberus* touches down on one of the smaller island platforms as a WATER TANKER takes off from another landing platform. There isn't much of a town to speak of here, just a bunch of old looking, rusted metallic structures.

EXT. EUROPA -- MINOS, EVENING

A water tanker fills up from a pump that we see running into the ocean, there is a small whirlpool where the water is being drained.

WATER TRANSPORT CAPTAIN

(As heard over a radio)

Water Transport Whisky Tango eighty
niner requesting permission to
disembark for IO.

AIR TRAFFIC CONTROL

(voice over radio)

Persimmon granted, good travels.

WATER TRANSPORT CAPTAIN

(over radio)

Over and out see you in a few
months.

The water transport takes off and punches through the Exosphere making the usual ripple in the sky.

INT. THE WET RAT BAR AND GRILL

A musky old structure, that doubles as the town hall and the local tavern. It's not so much that they didn't want a town hall but every time they held a meeting everyone was at the tavern.

Eventually they just hung the old town hall sign over the bar. On the other wall of the tavern hangs the taxidermied remains of an alien sea creature resembling a large fish.

The bar is full of water and ore MINERS looking to drink anything but water. At a table sits BRICK, a stout woman that you wouldn't want to get into a bar brawl with, and CHAPLIN, a heavy duty mechanic, with the grease still on his hands.

BRICK

I heard a rumor down in the shaft today.

CHAPLIN

What? Finally find out how four finger Mcharly ended up with four fingers?

BRICK

No, worse than that.

CHAPLIN

Worse? I think that's a matter of opinion that you might want to leave up to Mcharly.

BRICK

Serious, the demolition guys have been talking.

CHAPLIN

And they voted you queen of the underground.

BRICK

What does it take for you to be serious?

CHAPLIN

I don't know I haven't figured that one out, maybe another few beers.

BRICK

No, I've seen you with another few beers and you don't get any more useful just a lot less conscious.

CHAPLIN

Ah, you think I'm useful, how sweet.

BRICK

I think you're irritating, now shut up and listen.

They reduced our shipments last week and rumor has it that they're planning on shutting us down. The colonies are spitting close to being self-sustaining.

CHAPLIN

(laughs)

BRICK

What? You think it's funny being out of a job?

CHAPLIN

No, I think it's funny that it took you this long to clue in.

BRICK

You know I'd slug you.

CHAPLIN

But you know I'd hit you back, and I'd win.

KIRSKOF (O.S.)

Technician fifth echelon
Christopher Montgomery Chaplin,
didn't anyone ever teach you its
not polite to strike a lady?

Kirskof stands behind Chaplin who didn't hear Kirskof coming. He was the last person he expected to see or hear. Chaplin looks very surprised to see him.

BRICK

Who's this army rat calling a lady?

CHAPLIN

Brick I'd like to introduce the luckiest son of a space dog you'll ever meet. My old Commanding officer, commander fifth echelon Alexander 'Sputnick' Kirskof

BRICK

Russian.

KIRSKOF

Titan born and raised.

BRICK

Just as bad.

CHAPLIN

What brings you to this back of the planet watering hole. Finally decided to give up on that war of yours and come join your old drinkin' buddy?

KIRSKOF

First off all it's commander fourth echelon and it's your war too.

CHAPLIN

Well congratulations for outliving your superiors, but it stopped being my war years ago.

KIRSKOF

So what are you going to do just spend the rest of your life rusting away here like these walls?

CHAPLIN

Better than throwing my life away for a war that can't be won. Now pull up a seat or leave 'cause you're giving me a sore neck.

Kirskof pulls up an empty chair from a near by table that another MINER was sitting at. The miner gives him an evil look.

KIRSKOF

And what if I said we could win it?

BRICK

He'd tell you were crazy. I fought in that war too. I've seen Earth's forces and I know when to give up fighting.

CHAPLIN

I guess I should introduce you two. This here is Brick. You can call her Brittany. She'll love you for it.

BRICK

I'll hit you for it.

CHAPLIN

She works demolition down in the shaft.

BRICK

I worked munitions back in the army. You know someone has to keep those guns loaded, or do you Russians not think that far ahead?

KIRSKOF

Chris, I'm here to ask you a favor. Can we talk privately?

CHAPLIN

About what? You're crazy if you think we can win this war, and you are even crazier if you think I'm going to help.

KIRSKOF

You are the best R.O.A.C.H. mechanic I know and more than that, you're the one man in the solar system I know I can trust.

CHAPLIN

I'm retired. Does this look like a military uniform?

KIRSKOF

I'm not here on behalf of the military. This isn't their idea.

CHAPLIN

Okay, I'm liking the sound of this already.

KIRSKOF

Let's get out of here.

Chaplin finishes his beer in a single slam, Brick had already finished hers.

CHAPLIN

My place or yours?

Chaplin gets up from his chair and almost topples over. Brick and Kirskof catch him.

KIRSKOF

Easy there big boy.

CHAPLIN

Shut up and take me home.

BRICK

I think he says that to all the girls.

KIRSKOF

No wonder he's still single.

Brick does not look amused as the two of them drag a very drunk Chaplin home.

EXT. EUROPA -- CRETE (CAPITAL CITY)

Crete is a very different place than Minos, it is lush and green. Clean class futuristic looking buildings cover the meticulously landscaped terrain. Here and there people wander the path ways as if strolling through a park in the summer. They are all well dressed in casual summer clothing.

In the distance the *Cerberus* lands, in an almost out of sight space port. The wealthy of Europa enjoy conducting there business outside in the weather controlled utopia.

One of these elite is PETER RADCLIFF, personal attaché to Mr. Itsuma. Peter is well paid for his services but has no sense of fashion. He is dressed in a cheap grey suit and his blond hair is parted to one side in completely the wrong way to look anything but dorky.

EXT. EUROPA -- CRETE (CAPITAL CITY)

Later in the day Lily Jackson walks across the green fields and enters one of the large central buildings.

INT. EUROPA MILITARY RESEARCH HALLWAY

Lily walks down the hall and knocks on a door labeled "Rachael Hunter Proton Research". RACHAEL HUNTER, answers. She is a young woman around the age of twenty five. She stands short of Lily and many pounds slimmer, her well shaped figure is covered by work shirt with various electrical tools and gadgets in the eight different pockets. Her pants look similarly weighed down with voltmeters and electromagnetic measuring equipment.

HUNTER

Lily?

Lily nods and Rachael lets her in.

INT. RACHAEL HUNTER'S OFFICE

In the center of Rachael's office is a holographic projection table.

It is currently projecting a partially disassembled proton cannon. As Lily and Rachael enter the office rachael presses a button on the console and the weapon disappears to be replaced by a potted plant off to the side and a closed book.

HUNTER

What brings you back here, I haven't seen you sense the funeral.

JACKSON

I'm surprised you remember me. It's been ten years.

HUNTER

My father spoke of you and your daughter often. Old wise lady Jackson, that's what he would call you. Did you ever speak to him after Amanda's funeral?

JACKSON

I kept putting it off until it was too late. Did you get the letter I wrote after his death?

HUNTER

I did, thank you, but after all these years you didn't just drop by to catch up on old times.

Rachael begins to gather up some odds and ends from around the office. She scopes what appears to be a collection of L.E.Ds and wires into a backpack.

JACKSON

I need your help, but I don't want to talk here.

HUNTER

You brought the Cerberus?

Jackson looks surprised that Hunter knew of the command.

HUNTER

It gets really boring in here. I've kept an eye open for any news I could get about the war or about you. I thought you where still stationed on Vesta-Pallas.

JACKSON

That changed as all things.

HUNTER

Then may they change for the better.

JACKSON

I've got some people I'd like you to meet.

HUNTER

Anything you say grams but I have something I think I should pick up first. Just a little something I've been working on in my spare time.

Rachael puts on her backpack and they leave, just as they do Rachael pushes a button on her watch and turns off the plant and then the lights.

INT. CERBERUS BRIEFING ROOM

The new crew of the Cerberus all sit at grey metal tables. Each table seats two people. Most of the tables are empty. This room doubles as the officer's mess. With limited manpower sometimes a warrior would only have enough time to eat before heading out again. It was very important to make sure the army was well fed and well informed.

At one of the front desks sits Kirskof. Chaplin, still a little hung over, and Brick sit off to the side. Brick wants to stay as far away from Kirskof as she can.

In the second row sits the stunning MELISSA PENDER. At the age of twenty-seven she is part of the new crop of young pilots that is filling the positions of fallen, more senior officers. She is a good pilot and she knows it, so does the rest of the crew, but most importantly she has to prove it. She believes that signing on to this mission will help her prove herself.

Third row sits Rachel HUNTER, the young attractive recon officer. Her desk is scattered with bits of something that she seems very intent on fixing. She pokes at it with a screwdriver with the curiosity of a child.

Jackson enters the briefing room and approaches the podium.

JACKSON

Attention!

Kirskof, Hunter, and Pender all stand up and salute.

JACKSON
Technicians Samsung and Chaplin, a senior officer is on the deck.

CHAPLIN
Retired Madam, I haven't signed on to anything yet.

JACKSON
And when do you plan on committing yourself to a cause?

BRICK
I think he has to be sober first.

CHAPLIN
I'm plenty fine and sober, just a little bit woozy. I'll start saluting when I figure out which of the two of you is real.

Jackson turns to Kirskof.

JACKSON
Is this the best you could find?

KIRSKOF
He's the best there is. The other one I can't speak for.

CHAPLIN
But I can. We might not be the straight-arrow yes-men that you might be used to, but we get the job done.

RADCLIFF (O.S.)
And what exactly would that job be?

Peter Radcliff, standing at the back door to the briefing room. In his cheap grey suit and tie.

JACKSON
Mr. Radcliff, I presume.

RADCLIFF
You can address me as Mr. Radcliff.

JACKSON
I was not expecting you until tomorrow.

RADCLIFF

And I was told that your crew was on temporarily assignment and that your ship was ready.

JACKSON

They are and it is.

Jackson directs her attention once again to the crew.

JACKSON

You are all dismissed. Melissa, would you head up to control and make sure everything is in order.

PENDER

Yes, madam.

The crew exits. Hunter is carrying a box containing the bits of wire and LEDs that she grabbed from her office earlier.

RADCLIFF

At least you appear to run a tight ship. What's with the R.O.A.C.H.es in the hanger?

JACKSON

Just a few of my crew sticking around making sure this ship is ready for Mr. Itsuma.

RADCLIFF

If you wouldn't mind. I'd like to see the ship.

INT. CERBERUS DROP BAY CORRIDOR

A dirty passage that runs beside the drop bay, along the hallway are numbered steel doors that lead to the access decks for the R.O.A.C.H.es. Radcliff and Jackson walk.

RADCLIFF

Satisfactory, just don't forget that Mr. Itsuma is a very influential person and that this vacation of his to Tethys is very important to him.

JACKSON

Will it be just him or will his wife be joining him?

RADCLIFF

Mr. Itsuma's personal relations is none of your business. It's your job to get him there. This may not be one of your glorious front line defeats, but the council has decided that he should have a military escort.

JACKSON

Permission to speak frankly?

RADCLIFF

I'm not your commanding officer you can say whatever you want.

JACKSON

Then let me warn you that if you ever say anything bad about the people that are dying every day on the front lines for your right to live I will personally throw you out the drop bay doors from high orbit and we can find out what kills you first, the freezing, the suffocating or if the impact simply shatters every bone in your body.

RADCLIFF

Noted. It's not that I have any disrespect for the military. It's just that I believe that we can find a peaceful resolution to this scuffle.

JACKSON

Is that what this war is to you? A scuffle? A schoolyard fight? Are you really that separated from the front line? Is the council really that ignorant?

RADCLIFF

We are not ignorant. We just have a different point of view. Let's say that we have a more refined perspective. It is the council's hope that an assignment like this will give you time to think about what this battle really is about.

JACKSON

It is about our future, and if you want to have a future you have five minutes to get off my ship.

RADCLIFF

This ship is the property of the OPAC military under the guidance of the council.

Jackson is visibly mad by this point.

JACKSON

Make that four minutes, and if I ever see your face again I'll have it shot off.

RADCLIFF

I'm sorry if you took offence to the truth I have presented here.

JACKSON

You are not welcome here, Mr. Radcliff. There is an exit elevator at the end of the corridor.

Jackson knows that if she has to spend any more time with Radcliff she will do something she would regret.

Radcliff makes his way to the elevator at the end of the corridor. Jackson stops at the end of the corridor until she hears the sound of the elevator doors closing.

FADE OUT:

ACT THREE

FADE IN:

INT. CERBERUS COMMAND

Pender is in the pilot's chair, doing a pre-flight check. Jackson enters, still mad from her argument with Radcliff.

JACKSON

Are we ready to take off?

PENDER

Just about.

JACKSON

The sooner the better. We may have company soon.

PENDER

Yes, Madam.

INT. CERBERUS BRIEFING ROOM

Kirskof and Chaplin are playing a poker game.

KIRSKOF

So what's with you and Brittany?

CHAPLIN

Brick? She's a friend. I don't know. We've spent a lot of time together under the rock. I guess she grows on you.

KIRSKOF

Ya, like a strange fungus. I fold.

CHAPLIN

You never could tell when I was bluffing. Pair of threes and I still win.

Chaplin sweeps the table of all the assorted chips and cash.

KIRSKOF

Maybe I'm just taking it easy on you old chap.

CHAPLIN

Shut up and deal Kid.

They continue to play as they talk.

CHAPLIN

It's been what eleven years since you signed up and thought you had what it takes to fight along side the best?

KIRSKOF

Twelve long years of dragging your sorry ass out of one too many tight situation.

CHAPLIN

And you're sure you want me tagging along and making more trouble?

KIRSKOF

Who else is going to fix Ivoniva when I get her smashed up?

CHAPLIN

You've never told me why you call your R.O.A.C.H. that?

KIRSKOF

When we win this war, we'll have lots of time to sit on the back porch drinking and telling old tales about young women.

CHAPLIN

Well that settles it, I'll never hear the story. Two pair.

KIRSKOF

If Lily says so, then we'll win this war. Three of a kind.

Kirskof goes to sweep the large pile of winnings from the table when the entire ship jumps two feet to the right and then back again.

KIRSKOF

Command.

INT. CERBERUS COMMAND

The crew of the Cerberus: Kirskof, Chaplin, Brick, and Hunter all come running into the room where Jackson and Pender are seated.

HUNTER

What's happening?

JACKSON

We're leaving.

BRICK

I thought we were not set to launch until sunset. We don't even have all the supplies onboard.

JACKSON

That rat Radcliff will go to the council and they will ground us. I will not have some second-guessing pacifist politicians losing us this war. We are leaving early and setting course back to Vesta-Pallas. We can find what we need there.

CHAPLIN

The OPAC forces are losing there. Where do you expect to find these spare resources?

JACKSON

An enemy encampment has been set up at Hospice Ridge. It is new and will not be heavily defended. They will not be expecting a rear drop and surgical strike.

BRICK

This is suicide.

KIRSKOF

This is the mission.

BRICK

Just like a ruskie to stand up for every crazy idea he hears. A bloody momma's boy on top of it all.

Chaplin has to physically restrain Kirskof from knocking Brick out. Radcliff enters.

RADCLIFF

At least one of you crazies is still somewhat sane. Lily Jackson, by the power given to me by the council I hereby relieve...

Jackson pushes her way through rest of the crew and gives Radcliff a strong right hook to the side of the face. He drops like a rock and the room goes temporarily silent.

BRICK

And what do you plan to do about him?

JACKSON

Tie him up, somewhere, away from here.

Kirskof and Chaplin drag the unconscious body out of the room and into the briefing room.

INT. CERBERUS BRIEFING ROOM

Kirskof and Chaplin drag Radcliff into the kitchen just off the side of the briefing room and secure him using some rope that is normally used to secure boxes of food during rough maneuvers.

CHAPLIN

You still think this is a good idea?

KIRSKOF

Many good people like me and you gave their lives at Hospice Ridge. Maxwell was one of them.

CHAPLIN

Maxwell was my friend too. I trained him remember? But what will be served by adding to the dead?

KIRSKOF

There are a lot of good people down there still. If we can capture some of their supplies we can at least slow down their advance, give the other forces a fighting chance.

CHAPLIN

We'll see this through but we're even then and I won't commit to anything past Vesta-Pallas.

KIRSKOF

And Brick?

CHAPLIN

She does what she wants but under it all she's a fighter and she won't give up as long as there is a fight to win.

KIRSKOF

I'm just not sure whose side she is on.

Chaplin and Kirskof leave the still unconscious Radcliff tied in the kitchen.

INT. CERBERUS JACKSON'S OFFICE

Kirskof and Chaplin are walking through the drop bay taking stock of the situation. They stop in front of IVONIVA.

CHAPLIN

Why do you still pilot this Empire built piece of trash?

KIRSKOF

Ivoniva has served me well.

CHAPLIN

I still think Destroyer class R.O.A.C.H.es are more show than substance.

KIRSKOF

And that must be your trash heap down at the end.

A modified Randal sits down at the end of the drop bay. Its lower legs have treads that run from the knee to the ankle.

CHAPLIN

Ya, isn't she a bute?

KIRSKOF

She's a pile of rust.

CHAPLIN

Okay, so she could use a little shine, but she's the fastest R.O.A.C.H. ever made. I've added tracks for fast movement over smooth ground and I've added new stabilizers. She can pump three rounds for every two the original model could.

KIRSKOF

We'll see tomorrow.

A loud bang is heard from the other side of the drop bay. Turning around we see Rachael HUNTER working atop a bloodhound class R.O.A.C.H. the bloodhound is more jet fighter than R.O.A.C.H.

HUNTER
Sorry, I dropped my wrench.

KIRSKOF
What are you doing up there?

HUNTER
I'm just adjusting the long range sensors and making sure the multiplexor array is properly aligned.

Chaplin turns to Kirskof

CHAPLIN
Did you understand any of that?

KIRSKOF
Not a word.

Yelling back to Hunter.

CHAPLIN
Just try not to break anything little girl and watch where you're throwing your tools.

HUNTER
I know what I'm doing. Unlike some techs here and if I was throwing a tool I wouldn't have missed.

CHAPLIN
Oh, a girl with spirit.

Chaplin winks at Kirskof.

CHAPLIN
Anything you say toots.

Chaplin turns to continue down the drop bay. Rachael throws an empty bottle of oil at Chaplin. It nails him in the center of his back. He turns around and glares up at Rachael who now has a huge smile on her face.

HUNTER
Sorry. It slipped.

Chaplin gives her two fingers, the pointer and middle. This is what has become a customary replacement for the middle finger.

KIRSKOF

The lot of you are going to kill
each other before the enemy does.

INT. CERBERUS BRIEFING ROOM

Radcliff gets a bucket of water thrown in his face.

RADCLIFF

Was that totally necessary? There
are better ways of waking a guy up.

Jackson is standing over Radcliff. Alexander is standing behind

JACKSON

What are you doing on my ship?

RADCLIFF

It's not your ship. It's the
property of the OPAC council.

JACKSON

It's my ship and you were told to
get off it. I figure we should
still let you leave but we're
currently a day away from our
destination and the rest of the
crew has decided against throwing
you out here.

RADCLIFF

You wouldn't dare.

Jackson says nothing just looks him directly in the eyes and
grins.

RADCLIFF

What do you want?

JACKSON

What are you doing on my ship?

RADCLIFF

It's not your ship. We've gone over
this.

JACKSON

Alex, help me untie him.

Alexander comes over and starts untying Peter.

RADCLIFF

Changed your mind and decided to
turn yourself in?

JACKSON

Changed my mind and decided to
throw you out the airlock anyway I
can deal with my crews concerns
later.

Radcliff is now using his free hands to prevent Kirskof from
untieing his feet.

RADCLIFF

Okay. Okay! I stayed onboard. I
didn't think everything was on the
level. So I stayed on board after I
got on the elevator. I went down to
check out the engine room and I
came up when I felt the ship move.

JACKSON

And what were you doing in the
engine room? Trying to sabotage the
ship?

RADCLIFF

Of course not. Mr. Itsuma was
supposed to be coming on board.

JACKSON

His trip is postponed due to more
pressing matters of a war. Tie him
up again.

Jackson turns to leave. Alex goes to rebind his hands.

RADCLIFF

Are you just going to leave me
here?

Jackson stops and looks back.

JACKSON

Can you give me a reason not too?

RADCLIFF

I have up to date intelligence on
the conditions at the front.

Jackson stops for a moment and turns back to Radcliff.

JACKSON

You could not lie to save your own skin.

Jackson goes to leave again.

RADCLIFF

I know about the battle at Hospice Ridge. I know you lost that battle and I know you blame yourself. It was a hospital full of innocent people and you let them die. You were in command and you let them die.

JACKSON

You aren't making me like you any more and I'm not going to be hurt by your attempts to bring me down.

RADCLIFF

You're all crazy. I know about the forces on Vesta-Pallas. As security for Mr. Itsuma I had higher clearance. I can help you. The forces guarding Hospice Ridge are preparing to move out.

KIRSKOF

You know he may be useful.

JACKSON

When?

RADCLIFF

Intelligence suggest that they will be making a move to reinforce the front line just after sunset and that they will be moving west.

JACKSON

Did the OPAC have any offensive planned?

RADCLIFF

The council has moved the forces elsewhere.

JACKSON

Why?

RADCLIFF

I don't know.

JACKSON

You better be right or it will be just me, you and Melissa and I won't turn tail and run home with you in tow.

RADCLIFF

Yes, madam.

JACKSON

Now get him out of here.

KIRSKOF

Yes, sir. Paul, please come with me.

RADCLIFF

It's Peter.

Kirskof doesn't seem to care. As he directs Peter using his sidearm down and out of the room.

INT. CERBERUS CREW CORRIDOR

Kirskof directs Radcliff into an officer's quarters and locks the door from the outside.

RADCLIFF

Wait, don't I get something to eat or drink?

His words fall on deaf ears.

INT. CERBERUS BRIEFING ROOM

The drop crew of the Cerberus, Kirskof, Chaplin, Brick, and Hunter, now gather much closer to the front in the briefing room. The smiles have faded from their faces and are replaced with mute expression and uneasy anticipation for what lies ahead.

Jackson stands at the front addressing the room. This is something she is very familiar with. As she speaks large screens behind her lay out the various moves and locations.

JACKSON

We are not here to be heros. We have a job to do. The objective is here.

Jackson motions to a picture of the hospital that was destroyed earlier.

JACKSON

Hospice Ridge. The enemy has set up a base camp here and our intelligence suggests that it will be vulnerable tonight.

BRICK

Where did you get this intelligence?

JACKSON

Rachael Hunter will be deployed from space drop. Her bloodhound class R.O.A.C.H. will be able to give us better surveillance. She will have three minutes to do an aerial sweep of the target. Once she has confirmed our intelligence the rest of the team will be deployed one kilometer from the target.

BRICK

I asked, where did you get this intelligence?

JACKSON

Technician fifth echelon Brittany Samsung. You have not been given permission to address a superior officer.

BRICK

And you haven't given us all of the information. Don't you think that if we are going to risk our lives on the words of a worthless political gopher we should at least know? I doubt he's even seen battle.

JACKSON

That is enough technician. Where I get my information from is none of your business.

Brick gets up and leaves.

CHAPLIN

She's a little hotheaded.

JACKSON

She's a liability.

CHAPLIN

She'll come through in the end. She always does.

JACKSON

The team will meet up with Rachael here. Once you get in it is your mission to destroy or disable any forces that you find there and return with as many of the supplies as you can locate from the manifest.

HUNTER

And if we find any survivors from the original invasion?

KIRSKOF

The Empire doesn't leave any survivors.

PENDER (OVER LOUDSPEAKER)

Target in 30 minutes.

JACKSON

You heard her, suit up.

Everyone gets up to leave, and just as they are about to leave.

JACKSON (O.S.)

Good luck.

INT. CERBERUS CREW QUARTERS

The crew quarters are rather sparse, six bunk beds fill the small room, two shower rooms at the far end, and two doors. On the wall you can see layers of grey dirt with some light patches where pictures once hung. On the far wall there is a row of eight pictures of men and woman in uniform, some are more faded than others. The last one is of Maxwell. BRICK is lying on the top center bunk when CHAPLIN walks in and knocks on the open door frame.

BRICK

If you've come to change my mind it's not going to work.

Chaplin doesn't say anything he just walks towards the back wall.

BRICK

What no begging me to tag along? No telling me how it's the right thing to do?

Chaplin sees the pictures on the wall and reaches out to touch them.

BRICK

Are you even listening to me?

CHAPLIN

Do you know what these pictures are?

BRICK

I don't know. Kill board? Latrine duty? Why should I care?

CHAPLIN

A reminder. I don't know if I ever told you much about my time in the war.

BRICK

I figured you hit your head and forgot it or just spent your days drunk or passed out.

CHAPLIN

My last tour of duty, was here on the Cerberus, under the command of Lily Jackson. At the time there was still fighting on Io. The council had decided that we where to retake Mount Marius. Lily was a strong opposer of the idea and said there was no tactical advantage but she had her orders and I had mine. Lily made sure we could get out and even brought the Cerberus into enemy range to pick us up. I was lucky.

She rescued ten souls that day but the council's arrogance had cost many more. After that, those that survived started hanging the pictures of those that died above their old bunks and eventually when some bunks became to full they moved the photos to the back wall. A reminder of those that came before.

BRICK

And this is supposed to convince me
to come how?

CHAPLIN

I'm not here to convince you of
anything. You can do that on your
own. It's just something to think
of when you are here and we are out
there fighting for what we believe
in.

Chaplin leaves. Brick sits there getting more and more
frustrated with herself for a few moments till she gives up
and throws her pillow, the only thing she could grab, at one
of the side walls. She hops down from her bunk and follows
Chaplin out.

INT. CERBERUS DROP BAY CORRIDOR

Kirskof and Chaplin walk through the doors to their
R.O.A.C.H.es

Brick runs down the corridor and to her R.O.A.C.H.

INT. CERBERUS DROP BAY

Kirskof, Chaplin, Brick and Hunter get lowered into their
R.O.A.C.H.es. We can see each R.O.A.C.H. as they do this in
order to establish who will be piloting each one.

ACT FOUR

EXT. SPACE ABOVE VESTA-PALLAS

Hunter, in her bloodhound class R.O.A.C.H., exits the back of the Cerberus and heads towards the planet.

EXT. VESTA-PALLAS -- NIGHT

A small ripple in the corner of the sky as Hunter breaks through the ExoSphere.

EXT. HOSPICE RIDGE

Hunter makes a low pass over the target zone. There isn't much left, just a small camp guarded by two destroyer class R.O.A.C.H.es.

INT. COCKPIT OF HUNTER'S R.O.A.C.H.

HUNTER

Resistance is light. I spot two enemy units and light stationary defenses.

INT. CERBERUS COMMAND

PENDER is piloting the ship and JACKSON is on the radio.

JACKSON

Are you sure?

INT. COCKPIT OF HUNTER'S R.O.A.C.H.

HUNTER

Hold on. I'm getting something from inside the ruins of the hospital.

INT. CERBERUS COMMAND

JACKSON

What is it?

INT. COCKPIT OF HUNTER'S R.O.A.C.H.

The cockpit looks much like that of a futuristic fighter plain with a lot of the advanced controls that the destroyer had and a lot more instruments and dials for surveillance.

HUNTER

I'm not sure.

INT. COCKPIT IVONOVA

KIRSKOF
Are we a go?

INT. CERBERUS COMMAND

JACKSON
Too late to back down now.

INT. RANDAL COCKPIT

CHAPLIN
You heard the lady. Let's go.

EXT. SPACE ABOVE VESTA-PALLAS

The Cerberus dives towards the planet.

EXT. VESTA-PALLAS

A much larger ripple in the sky as the Cerberus punches through the ExoSphere

INT. CERBERUS DROP BAY

The three remaining R.O.A.C.H.es run and jump out of the back of the ship.

EXT. NEAR HOSPICE RIDGE (1)

The three R.O.A.C.H.es fire their plasma ejectors. They impact the ground and expand into a clear gelatinous substance that, like jumping into water, cushions the free fall of the R.O.A.C.H.es. Each R.O.A.C.H. sinks to the ground as the substance evaporates.

Chaplin converts his R.O.A.C.H. to tank mode and they all head west to there target position.

EXT. NEAR HOSPICE RIDGE (2)

Hunter lands and joins the ground approach.

EXT. HOSPICE RIDGE

The four R.O.A.C.H.es come over the same ridge that the Earth Empire did in the first battle. Chaplin is now in walker mode.

INT. COCKPIT IVONOVA

KIRSKOF

Hunter and Brick, you take out the
turrets. Chaplin and I have the
destroyers.

EXT. HOSPICE RIDGE

The two females units veer off to take on the turrets. A small battles ensues. The two destroyer class units approach. Chaplin lets off a shot and hits the hip joint of one of the destroyers. It begins to limp. Kirskof jumps for cover as he fires a volley of rockets into the enemy. They all miss. Kirskof continues to return fire from his hiding spot behind some rubble, but the rubble is quickly being blasted away.

Chaplin converts back into tank mode and is now low enough to sneak around the side of the building that he was hiding behind. Kirskof, runs from his position of cover to another one to his left while Chaplin circles to the right. As he does this one of the Destroyers opens up with his machine gun, cutting a stream of bullets straight across the chest of Kirskof's R.O.A.C.H.

INT. RANDAL COCKPIT

Chaplin sees Kirskof get hit.

CHAPLIN

Alex?

INT. COCKPIT IVONOVA

Kirskof is looking rather jostled as he is jerked around in his seat.

KIRSKOF

I'll be better after this is over.

EXT. HOSPICE RIDGE

The two women get in range and seek cover as they do battle with a turret each.

Chaplin steps around the back of the building and comes out behind the two destroys who are now almost on top of Kirskof. Chaplin leans back and fires a shot clean into the weak armor at the back of the unsuspecting destroyer. As it topples forward an escape pod is ejected from the top of its head. It falls face first into the mud with smoke coming from the hole in its back.

The remaining destroyer rotates at its torso to confront its attacker. Kirskof jumps from cover and lands a fist in the back of the head of the destroyer, crushing the back of its cockpit and killing the pilot. It falls face first into the mud.

Final shots fired from Hunter and Brick finish off the turrets.

INT. COCKPIT OF HUNTER'S R.O.A.C.H.

Looking at her control panel.

HUNTER

I'm still picking up something moving in the basement of the hospital.

INT. COCKPIT IVONOVA

Kirskof double checks his readings.

KIRSKOF

I'm not seeing anything.

INT. COCKPIT OF HUNTER'S R.O.A.C.H.

HUNTER

Then neither would they.

INT. COCKPIT OF BRICK'S R.O.A.C.H.

BRICK

The question is did they know it was there?

INT. RANDAL COCKPIT

CHAPLIN

They probably put it there.

INT. COCKPIT IVONOVA

KIRSKOF

Only one way to know for sure.

EXT. HOSPICE RIDGE HOSPITAL

Kirskof makes his way towards the ruins of the hospital.

INT. COCKPIT OF HUNTER'S R.O.A.C.H.

HUNTER

What ever it is it's small. It's in
the northwest corner.

EXT. HOSPICE RIDGE HOSPITAL

Kirskof knocks down the wall hiding what ever it us and we see what is inside. It is a miniature version of a destroyer class R.O.A.C.H. called the Infiltrator. It's pointing it's gun up at Kirskof and Kirskof is pointing his machine gun down at it.

To Be Continued...