

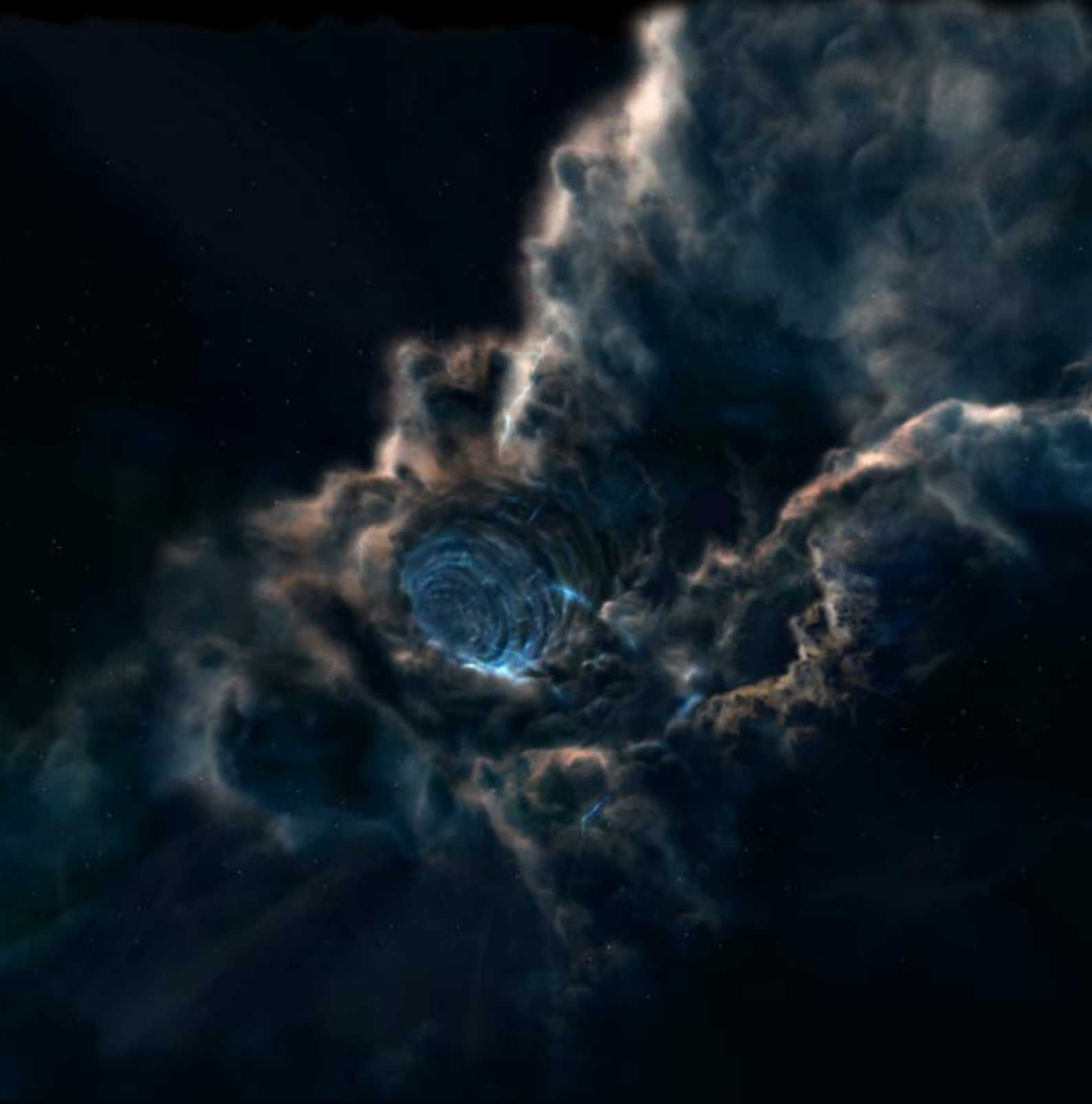
The Chronicles of Firmus Ixion Foundation

Every Empire has a beginning,
and an end.

Until the end arrives, the
whole can not be judged;
within is the record of
Fixian origin.

Judge it how you will.

Firmus Ixion THE FOUNDATION



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FOREWORD

I began the writing of this short story just over two years ago. In that time I left it to sit on many occasions for months on end. With the approach of Firmus Ixion's 3rd year as an IGA, and now being the longest lived alliance within Eve, I wanted to finish what I had begun those many moons ago; especially before my memory of past events fails me completely.

FIX is a greatly changed alliance from it's past. In Eve, those who fail to evolve, will find that they have died well before the final blow lands to put them out of the misery of stale existence.

The deaths of alliances in particular, are often accompanied with a great deal of fanfare. With conflict often comes the virulent propaganda and the public war of words many of us are more than familiar to have witnessed. Your opponents spout off on your pending demise, the power of their forces, their will to see this through to the end.

Firmus Ixion has the distinct and dubious honour to have been pronounced soon to be dead more times than any other entity within Eve. The faces within FIX change; friends and corporations have come and gone, a double fistful are left over from the time of our Foundation.

While so much has changed, there is one thing that has remained the same. The will to live, to fight beyond reasonable hope of victory; this stamina is what has defined FIX in our past, and holds strong in our present. Our best days aren't defined by any sane yardstick, but rather by the level of conflict we have endured at any given time. Our pride, is focused upon our ability to absorb punishment, to overcome the odds, to make our foes eat their hasty words of impending victory.

We discovered long ago that our worst foe, the one we have failed to grapple with repeatedly, is the state of peace. It is with our devout hope that these times are only long enough to replenish our depleted stocks of ships, for the only times FIX is truly at it's best, is when the worst is staring us in the face.

One day, Firmus Ixion will die.

But not today.

Forged in Conflict.
Avernus



PROLOGUE

Sitting in his office, the Intaki had to wonder at the latest developments in the rumor mill. Occasional wafts of pungent smoke drifted across his view and were ignored. An occasional automatic tap to remove ash from the end of his cigarette, accompanied by the chink of his glass of Port were the only sounds in the room apart from the ever present hum of electronics. Dim light in the room kept the monitors in sharp focus, the majority of possible distractions carefully kept outside his line of sight. Usually he wouldn't spend an inordinate amount of time pondering the various pieces of intelligence that crossed his path; some things however, just couldn't be ignored.

Over time, Imperium Technologies, known as IT for short, had succeeded in earning the respect of their peers that is so necessary to operate in their region. Before that respect had ever been earned in Querious, IT had come well armed with contacts, and at this moment those contacts were tentatively cross-confirming some disturbing information. Avernus, the CEO of IT, had a level of access to classified Intel that many would envy, and others would break into a sweat over if they knew what he had at his fingertips. Most would be laughing off this latest gossip as pathetic Curse Alliance propaganda right about now, Avernus was currently wishing he could join them in their amusement.

They can't really think ... surely not?

Reports from agents were scrolling across the displays in the office. Many of the origins of those sources in question were completely unrelated. In order to even survive in Querious, IT had but little choice when aligning with other corporations in the region. Without friends, a lone corporation in Querious would be unlikely to stave off destruction of its assets for very long; constant attacks by pirates and Curse Alliance raiding fleets had seen to the demise of corporations that chose to 'go it alone' in terrifyingly short order in the past. Mutual protection, or a lonely demise, the choice wasn't a hard one to make.

It was time to start comparing notes with some close allies. Keying a button, Avernus divided his display to show the face of his assistant. <Helena, I need you to get in contact with Nez Perces from JHENR, and Droewa of Dark Centuri, use a secure com link; let them know I need to speak with them.> Dropping the com, he returned his attention to the reports that had arrested his attention. Today had brought him word that the Coalition of the Free Stars was planning action that directly affected the residents of Querious. Nominally, the CFS controlled the region within which he lived; in reality CFS fleets were rarely seen and the local corporations were on their own when it came to protecting their interests.

There were three regions that came under the rule of the CFS, Querious being the closest to the Empire region known as Khanid Kingdom. The other regions, Delve and Period Basis were considerably further from Empire space, and thus were often left undisturbed by raiders; the residents of Querious dealt with them on a daily basis. Querious was distinctive for a number of reasons. For one, the stations in Querious were in the hands of local corporations. Another difference was that there were no corporate alliances in Querious that operated under the umbrella of the CFS. Delve and Period Basis on the other hand, did have corporate alliances operating there, notably the Deep Space Mining Alliance [DSMA] and the Star Alliance [StA]. The majority of the stations in those two regions were under the control of a third party however, the Fountain Alliance. Between the three resident alliances, they had recently formed a group amongst themselves, the UFS.

It was considered to be a politically delicate situation. The CFS and others had been itching to have control of the stations in its space for months now, and the local alliances in the other regions beside Querious were constantly up in arms over the high taxation in those very stations. It had come to exchanges of furious fire on a few isolated occasions, but the considerable military strength of the Fountain Alliance was quick to suppress any insurgencies with their superior numbers and skill. Diplomacy would be the ideal medium to attempt a satisfactory compromise for the parties involved; unfortunately the diplomatic corps of the CFS appeared to have all the diplomatic savvy of a retarded slaver hound. Several agreements had been made between

the parties, all of them greatly favored the Fountain Alliance; leaving the residents of Delve and Period Basis, dependant upon the agreements reached through the CFS, unsatisfied and impatiently waiting for change.

<Sir, the com is open and ready for your meeting.>

<Thank you Helena, hold any other incoming coms for now.> The office displays had reconfigured themselves automatically for the two men now facing Avernus. <Gentlemen, thank you for meeting with me on such short notice, I appreciate it. I'm sure you've both heard the news by now.> There wasn't much of a question as to if they knew to what news he was referring, all three men regularly passed intel between themselves and discussed the issues of the day.

The image of Droewa's face gave way to a wry grin. <Actually we were just going over the news between us when your assistant got in touch. We were reflecting on our earlier discussions with what the CFS president had told us.>

A frown marred Avernus's face for a moment. <That came to mind as well, frankly the whole thing looks like another signature cluster fuck on the part of the CFS. Not too mention the whole UFS idea they keep pushing for us to join... it doesn't make a whole lot of sense. Conrad has given information on good faith, in return we told Conrad about our plans for the QDF. Now I can understand the desire CFS has to control those stations down there, but there is information pointing to an escalation in their plans, we could rather easily get pulled right into the thick of things if we aren't careful. The question is if they are eyeing us up? >

<Look at what happened in H74 only a week ago! DSMA waltzed in and took control of the damn place while we watched; that happened before we knew about the UFS, it's a clear indicator that this whole 'UFS' crap isn't going to pass us by.> Nez Perces appeared agitated in the display. Some might have taken him for being over anxious, but it was simply that Nez was a passionate man when it came to threats towards Querious. It didn't matter if those threats were real or imagined, for until they were vanquished in reality or just from his mind, he would go right on with pouring his energy into defending his brainchild.

Nez Perces was primarily responsible for the creation of the Querious Defense Force [QDF]. It was the military organization that bound the corporations of Querious together in mutual defense, gone were the days of unorganized retaliation against raiders. Through his efforts, Nez Perces had convinced, cajoled, or wheedled the local corporations into integrating their corporate fleets into a centralized entity that would be capable of securing their combined interests. Others had tried to accomplish the same goal in the past, but none had been so effective. The three men talking were the Joint Chiefs of Staff for the QDF. Between them, they would make decisions that changed the face of Querious.

<Avernus, I think Nez has a good point there. Isn't it possible that Conrad just gave us that information to throw us off? He must be as aware as we are, of the sieve that is CFS security. Even Fountain Alliance has heard this information by now, and it's their stations that are supposed to be the target.>

Tapping his fingers on his desk, Avernus mulled over the thoughts in his mind. <Let's look at the information we have in front of us here. Most of the QDF corporations have already heard the rumors, among them is Black Avatar. BA is a Fountain Alliance corporation and they went to some lengths to make sure that we heard this information from their perspective. Whatever CFS is thinking, they need a jolt to bring them back to reality right now. Even the plan that we officially know of, which calls for no violence, this peaceful protest of theirs, is likely to end up having some asshat pilot making a hash of the whole thing. Now I don't think that the CFS is going to target Querious, it's just too stupid to consider, they'd be cutting off their own supply lines to Delve if they back us into a corner. Not too mention, the QDF is more than a match for anything the CFS could conceivably throw at us.>

Avernus paused to gather his thoughts for a moment, his fingers coming to a rest. The two men watching, knowing his habits, gave him his needed time. <Ok, so here are our options as I see them. We can either say

nothing... or we can confront the CFS Council with what we have heard. If we say nothing, then we can expect the CFS to carry through with whatever they have planned, which in my opinion is likely to be a disaster for them either way.> He allowed himself a grin which he shared with his two compatriots. <If we confront them publically, make them aware that their plan is in jeopardy, perhaps they'll gain some sense.>

There was quiet for a few seconds as the men pondered the options before them. Droewa was the first to speak. <I think we should confront them, I don't really see them coming after Querious either... but I don't want to see them getting any bright ideas. If they know we're on edge, that might be enough to dissuade any action towards us.>

A slow smile then crossed over the face of Nez Perces as he raised his eyes from thought to view the two men in his display. <Agreed. If they don't change their plans however, it may yet work towards our benefit. Let's ask Black Avatar to contact CFS on our behalf, only a fool would fail to notice the consequences of being contacted by a corporation that is both in the Fountain Alliance as well as being in the QDF.>

<Not too mention that BA has two of the three stations in Querious. Come to think of it, the three of us will need another meeting with Conrad later on.> Avernus keyed the button to his assistant again.

<Yes sir?>

<Helena, open a secure com link to Black Avatar please. Give them my regards, and ask if we could arrange for the use of their diplomatic services.>

CHAPTER 1

DELIVERY

Standing at a port view window, Heavyg regarded the station he would soon be docking at. Normally he would be enveloped in his pod, controlling his own ship, and leading other pod pilots from the QDF. Today he was tasked with a different sort of mission. Like many pod pilots, heavyg was known by his callsign. There were in fact very few pod pilots that were known by their true names. Pod pilots were a powerful economic force within the universe, and with no signs of their power diminishing, there was considerable envy from various factions, and dangers to those families who numbered a pod pilot among them. There had been incidents in the past. As such, identities were best kept under tight security, and the standard use of callsigns became common practice.

Today he was a passenger on the diplomatic courier ship *Witch's Tit*, his destination, which was visible to the naked eye now, was Gehi IX, Moon 4, Royal Khanid Navy Assembly Plant, headquarters for the Council of the Coalition of the Free Stars. With the golden station growing larger in the background, he studied the appearance of his reflection in the window; a hard face with a stony countenance returned his regard, confident in his abilities. That confidence was well placed, and hard earned. He had begun his career with his graduation from the Caldari Science and Trade Institute, if they hadn't prepared him for his coming challenges, his Civire heritage did. The uniform he wore was one that saw infrequent personal use, saved for formal occasions, a deep blue with gold trim, the wings of his rank and ribbons of campaigns he had fought in were clustered on his chest. It was the dress uniform of a Black Avatar officer.

Months after his graduation, he had joined up with the Coalition Navy. The CFS was a fledgling alliance at that time, new to its power, purposeful in its desire to achieve great things. Unfortunately, there were far too many member corporations in the rapidly expanding Coalition that only paid lip service to the spirit in which it had been founded. The Navy had been terminally under-funded, undermanned, and over worked; it had

been a thankless task, but on reflection, a valuable experience. The original vision for the CFS was continuously becoming diluted as more and more of the founding corporations bailed out on what they considered to be a failed effort. In time, the Coalition Navy was disbanded, and Heavyg found himself eventually joining, and settling into, Black Avatar.

Tractors guided the ship into the docking bays of the Gehi station, in short order the ship was locked in place and the port doors opened to access Terminal Three. Waiting at the entryway was a small, pale young man, a pad in hand that projected the image of the person he was waiting for. Spotting Heavyg he hurried over to introduce himself, <Hello Sir, I'm here to escort your personage to the Council Chambers?>

Heavyg had to wonder if the young man was a bit daft, he certainly seemed out of sorts in the least; declining to speak, he gave a short nod of assent to his escort and let the Page lead him to the lifts that would deliver him to the Council. The Page was chatting to Heavyg unceasingly, apparently without a point to make, and he just ended up tuning him out. Terminal Three was restricted in its usage too ambassadors, diplomats, and those of sufficiently high enough rank or prestige. Glancing around, he couldn't help but notice that besides the security contingent, there were more people than he would have expected. In evidence were representatives of DSMA and StA, along with a slew of diplomats from young corporations that he didn't recognize.

Then he saw a diplomat passing by that he most certainly did recognize, Lallante of Shinra Corporation, a member of the Curse Alliance; following in her wake was the usual gaggle of sycophants that aided her in the propaganda conquests she was well known for. His escort was babbling on with various inconsequential comments and failed to notice the look of hard distaste in Heavyg's eyes as he glanced in the direction of the CA party. Entering the one of the lifts, an attendant brought the lift into movement to begin its short route to the Council Chambers. Something his escort said managed to break through his inattention, <Stop a moment, what did you just say?>

The young mans jaw ceased its endless movement as he realized, quite unexpectedly, that this particular person had actually taken note of something he said, and asked him a question. <Urm, I remarked Sir, that the Council was unable to accommodate your request for a private audience, and that your petition before them is currently scheduled to be made during general assembly.> The toadie took a deep breath and then slowly continued, paying close attention to the expressionless face of the rather large man he was escorting, and wishing he could be elsewhere. <I'm very sorry for any inconvenience this causes Sir, the abruptness of your request took us by surprise, there was no time to arrange anything further.> He tried to add some moisture to his mouth as he regarded his charge, noticing the slight tightening around the eyes, which themselves had taken on an ominous glint.

<Very well, so be it.>

Remarkably, and with a sudden insight of wisdom, the escort managed to keep his mouth closed for the rest of the ride in the lift. Once out of the lift, it was a short walk through to the Council Chamber entrance, delayed only by the necessary security scans. The Page lead Heavyg to the double doors that opened automatically, swinging outwards; just inside the entrance was a station manned by a bored looking officer, holding out his hand to the Page waiting to receive the pad in his possession. Pad in hand, he inserted it into a slot, hearing an affirmative beep, he removed it and passed his thumb over the pads scanner before handing it back to the escort.

Throughout the chamber, a soft female voice introduced the most recent arrival. <For the consideration of the esteemed members for the Council, Heavyg, Officer of Black Avatar Corporation and authorized representative of the Independent Corporations of the Querious Region.> The chamber was something of a wonder for acoustics, and the soft voice was clearly heard by all who cared enough to pay attention to it. A few present nodded their heads in the direction of the BA officer in greetings; many others simply filed his presence away in their subconscious and devoted their attention to matters at hand. General Assembly was underway and various senators, CEOs, and representatives of all stripes were making their way to and fro

between the numerous huddled groups; petitioners and the petitioned, traders and buyers, lawmakers and those who carried out justice, the voices were many and they all had their ears open for any juicy tidbit to pass their way. Few had any business in hearing what Heavyg had come here for.

Scanning the groups, Heavyg attempted to pick out a likely group for where he could carry out his purpose. <Ah, they should do just fine.> Shifting into motion, he bore down upon a group that held several distinguished persons of the CFS government, mixed with some persons of celebrity. A few security types lingered on the outskirts. Among them were an Admiral of the CFS, and the President of the CFS himself; the assembled people hardly had time to adjust before Heavyg was among them, his presence cutting their previous dialogue short.

Murmured greetings were offered to him, some with a note of warmth in them, but for the most part they were cool, his interruption was likely poorly timed. They were likely going to view his timing with considerably less warmth once they actually heard what he was here for. Alexander Rahl, Admiral of the CFS, nodded with professional courtesy towards the BA officer, <Hello there Heavy, haven't seen you inside these particular walls in some time.> The opening was there for Heavyg to step into, and he didn't disappoint.

<Alex, nice to see you again, you're right that this isn't a courtesy call. I've come to lay some rumors to rest.> He looked at the people arrayed around him and quickly surveyed the area to see who else might be listening. Fat chance anything stays secret in this room for long. <It's a somewhat sensitive topic, but being rather insensitive myself, I'll just be blunt. I hear on the grape vine; CFS, StA, and DSMA are planning an attack on Querious, and FA, is this the case?> He had delivered the question with a completely neutral tone, his pitch lowered so his voice wouldn't carry, and people had been leaning in too better hear what was said. It was like loosing the fox in the hen house. Eye brows shot upward and mouths dropped open, for several seconds there was such a complete silence from the resulting shock of the question, that it functioned much like a shout. The curiosity of other groups nearby was apparently piqued, many of them drawing closer to the President's entourage, and be damned with etiquette.

Admiral Rahl was the first to recover his senses from what he had just heard, his face conveyed an appropriate mix of belligerence and wonder, <That's just... insane! Querious is CFS space, how could we even attack our own space, that makes no sense whatsoever.> A ripple quickly traveled outward from the group as the statement was passed from group to group. Stepping forward from nearby, Andrew Redburn had quickly sorted out what was occurring.

His face was flushed crimson as he entered into the conversation, <I can assure you, as the highest diplomatic officer for Star Alliance, I am in constant contact with both the CFS and with DSMA.> Raising his voice further he continued on, <I've heard this dirty rumor before as well, and I'll say this right now, neither CFS, StA, nor DSMA, are involved in any sort of a plan to attack Fountain Alliance interests. As for attacking Querious, that makes even less sense! As Admiral Rahl said, Querious is CFS space after all!>

Into the resulting quiet that blanketed the Council Chamber, came a laugh of disbelief. Turning to the source of the outburst revealed Conrad, President of the CFS, with a look of sheer amusement plain on his face. When he spoke his voice carried to all corners of the Chamber, <Good Lord, but that is a juicy rumor isn't it! I must say though, it's about time we had one like that. After all, I've heard rumors about Stain Alliance attacking Fountain; Curse Alliance in bed with the Phoenix Alliance, rumors about just about everyone, surely it was our turn sooner or later? I was beginning to feel quite left out actually.> A smile was creasing his face as he said this, and the tension that had started to grow in the Chamber noticeably faded.

Ambassador Redburn wasn't completely finished though, <You do realize that its rumors like this that create incidents don't you? FA will likely end up reacting to this, we can likely expect to see an increase of their fleet strength as a direct result in Delve! That serves no one's interests, and the only result can be an increase in tensions.> He glared at the BA officer as if in challenge to argue the point further.

Heavyg looked at the people surrounding him, and made his apologies, <Please understand that it wasn't

my desire to create a situation out of this, all I wanted to do was to clear the air and put this rumor to rest before it really did cause some problems. You've done that for me, and I thank you for it. I never believed it to be true, but the question had to be asked.> That having been said, he turned his back on them and departed from the Chamber. Duty satisfied, he made his way back to the *Witch's Tit*, from there he could send out his report to the waiting corporations in Querious, as well as to FA's High Command.

Conrad watched Heavyg exit the Chamber, his eyes were carefully guarded, and his mouth bent in a slight smile. With a light touch to Ambassador Redburns shoulder, he spoke softly enough that it wouldn't be heard by others, <Set up a secure com for later, we need to discuss things.> With those words, the President of the CFS moved onto another group of representatives that had been patiently waiting to talk with him.

CHAPTER 2

GATHERING OF MINDS

The *Witch's Tit* had an uneventful trip having departed Gehi, managing to navigate through the Pipe into the deeper reaches of Querious without encountering any of the usual hostiles that normally plagued the entrance to CFS space. CFS space was unique in the universe, it had the distinction of being the only place an individual or corporation could go and take advantage of the resources to be found there without having to be a member of the alliance that claimed the area.

That area was truly vast, encompassing three separate regions, each with bountiful quantities of precious ores containing some of the rarest and most sought after minerals in existence. It was a free for all, in every sense of the term. Anyone and everyone could come there to make their mark, prove their worth, and amass their fortune. Many did, and many others tried. There were of course problems to be had however.

While it was accessible to all who were lawful of nature, there was no accountability impressed upon those who sought to take advantage of what was offered. Nothing that forced people to help provide assets against those unlawful elements that would encroach upon these regions in search of easy prey. The predators had been numerous for a long time until the Querious Defense Force had come into existence.

Several corporations had pooled their resources, and created a common line of defense against those who would seek to take advantage of them. In short time, the pilots involved, who had already been hardened by the region itself, learned to rely upon one another, and their efficiency in the art of the kill grew alongside their camaraderie. They based themselves out of the Imperium Technologies station in 9CG, the first station in the line of fire.

Witch's Tit was docking at the Imperium Technologies Frigate Waxing Emporium now, the place having been named in a fit of humor upon the part of the hosting corporation's pilots. As always, the docks were a bustle of activity. Heavyg glanced around with a critical eye, looking to ships and crews who he knew would later be flying under his command. Every type of frigate, cruiser and battleship known to man was to be found in this station, and there was a constant stream of ships going about their daily business, or setting up the next patrol for their area of influence in this region.

Heavyg had little time to spend in the docks today; an appointment had been made with the Joint Chiefs of Staff. They'd want to hear first hand what he had to say. Striding down familiar corridors, feeling very much at home, he proceeded to the meeting. No guards were found in these corridors, he knew every face he came across. Arriving at the lounge that had been set apart for the meeting, he proceeded in.

Arrayed before him, sitting comfortably, were three people he had come to know very well. The three men who currently made up the Joint Chiefs were the direct voice and representatives for the admiralty, seeing to

their needs, and for the most part, keeping the business of war, and the business of politics, separated in the interests of their fleets. Several others were present as well; well worn faces, confident, full of pride, the admirals were men not to be trifled with.

Comfortable in the company of his peers, Heavyg took an available seat while responding to the welcomes that greeted his arrival. <Thank you, it's certainly good to be back, the Council Chambers in Gehi don't hold much for me anymore these days it seems.>

Droewa was eager to get things started. <So Heavy, what is your gut feeling? What is the CFS up to?>

<Honestly, I think they are going to make a move on the stations in Delve and Period Basis. While they looked surprised by my question into the matter, it was the wrong sort of surprise if you follow my meaning.>

<As in, 'you caught onto our act', as opposed to 'what the hell are you talking about', sort of surprise?> The bass voiced query came from Corporal Hicks, a notable figure amongst the group present.

<Exactly Hicks, though I do have to say, they seemed sincere enough concerning Querious and our stations here... I don't think they want to tangle with us. In fact, I think they'd like to see us stay well clear of any situation that may arise from their actions.>

One of the other Admirals in the room, Cougar One, spoke up <Well you know Fountain isn't going to like anyone sitting on the sidelines, and Black Avatar is going to have to take action no matter what is decided here since BA is a part of that Alliance.>

Nez Perces piped in at that point, <Well of course BA has to do what they have to do, and I can appreciate that, but the question of the moment is what do we do? The CFS Fleet is going to have to come down the pipe after all, there simply aren't enough of them out here for them to form up in our area of space, they'll have to come from Empire.>

<That makes for an interesting situation doesn't it?> remarked Avernus.

Nez looked at Avernus, <What situation are you speaking of.>

Boldyn jumped to the conclusion first though, <They are based in Empire... they don't really have any real stockpiles of ships and equipment down here do they... >, a glint entered his eye, and the room could see the beginnings of a smile forming on his lips. With quick comprehension dawning on the rest of the rooms' occupants, Boldyn continued. <Look, if we do have to end up fighting them, it's a simple matter for us, all we have to do is prevent them from getting through the pipe, and those who are fighting down here to begin with will have no reinforcements.>

<They've screwed up their logistics before they've even got started>, said Hicks, <Block the pipe and shut them down there, and their forces within CFS space will be rolled up inside a week or two!>

Droewa looked at those present. <Are we going to fight them then?>

<Well we'll have to if they come after our stations of course, but what if they don't come after our stations, do we fight them then, or do we let them be?> Nez began to pick up speed as he juggled with thoughts as they came to him. <We don't owe any favors to Fountain. We don't know if the CFS and their friends are coming for our stations or not, but we have to be ready when they make their move, no matter which way they jump.>

<If we present a large enough force to them, they'll likely bypass us anyways and just head straight for Delve. What I have to wonder is this; if they actually succeed in taking the stations in Delve and Period Basis, how long is it before they turn their eyes upon the stations here in Querious? We've already seen DSMA, the

partners of CFS, hit our station in H74, and then try to pass it off as a misunderstanding. Isn't it more likely just a sign of things to come?> Quiet held for a bit as Avernus finished.

Boldyn laid into the discussion again, <We can take the CFS, and the rest of the UFS if need be, I guarantee you that, they aren't even a close match for us. I'm not going to worry about maybes down the road. I say keep a close eye on Gehi for build ups for now. When they begin their operation, we pull together our own fleet, and we let the situation play itself out. If they move on us, fine, we'll waste their ships and pod them back to their clone stations in Empire. After that, we'll close down the pipe.>

There were gentle nods of ascent around the room as agreement was reached.

Avernus spoke into the room as people began to stand, <That's it then, we'll take a wait and see approach. Gentlemen, thanks for your thoughts, as always, they are most appreciated. Let's see what tomorrow brings up. In the meantime, talk to your corps, and let's get our guys ready to move on short notice.>

The meeting broke up, as people filed towards the doors, smatterings of talk could be heard between officers as they discussed tactics, and possible strategies.

As Avernus moved towards the doors himself, he felt a light touch upon his arm. Turning to see, Nez gestured to him to wait a moment, Droewa stood at his side. The last of the officers left the room and Droewa spoke.

<Av, we noticed that you didn't bring up the discussions we've had between us with Conrad. The last one in particular.>

<Some things are best left for another time. Conrad asked us to keep our discussion strictly confidential. For the time being, we have some goals that need to be reached first.>

Nez peered at Avernus very closely. <Do you think he meant for us to keep it from the Admirals as well?>

In a voice with a hint of fatigue, Avernus replied to the weighted question. <I doubt it.>

All three paused at that point. Silent agreement was met between them. The lights dimmed and the doors breathed quietly to a close behind them as they too left the meeting, each feeling the burdens of responsibility, and the thrill of possibility.

CHAPTER 3

SOUNDING OF THE DRUMS

Sheppard wandered the docks. He loved the smell of them, the energy from all the activity. As he made each turn of a corner, he was greeted by the sights and sounds of ships and their crews as preparations were made; a constant bustle enveloped the area as ship commanders made final adjustments, and tested various setups, trying to get every last ounce of efficiency available, turning their vessels into highly tuned deliverers of ruin and despair.

Tension and expectation were thick in the dockyard air, and confidence. During the course of this last day, anticipations had increased, everyone sensed something was about to happen. Mining operations had come to a halt; patrols against the fanatical Blood Raider faction within the region had been brought to a sudden end as the Admirals recalled all the pilots of the Querious Defense Force. The fleet was forming.

Coming alongside another ships bay area, Sheppard looked in to see Afecks of Obsidian Asylum, being paced by a number of his crewmen as he walked underneath a Raven battleship. Jabbering away into his headset, Afecks was clearly audible to Sheppard from his perch above. <How is the feedback now? Is it clear yet... any jitters?>

Sheppard smiled as he shouted down, <Afecks, what are you up to now? Don't tell me you still haven't figured out how to get that thing ready for a fight.>

A grin on his face, Afecks looked up to see the source of the heckling. <Don't tell me you still haven't figured out that history is about to occur! I'm setting up some surveillance equipment on my baby; I'm going to record every last thing that happens, as it happens. No sitting around the table telling my grandkids how it was back in my day, I'm going to give them the high definition version of the events, big screen and surround sound! None of this storytelling crap!>

Chuckling to himself, Sheppard called out, <In that case, just be sure fly on my right, it's my better side.> With a wave of farewell, he pulled back from the edge of the bay area, and continued on his way. A distance away from him he could see one of the Admirals talking with an officer.

As he began to approach them, the voice of Heavyg rose abruptly. <What do you mean you can't contact any of them!> Sheppard's walk slowed off and he came to a halt, attention fixed ahead of him. The officer talking with Heavyg replied with something Sheppard couldn't quite pickup. <Not one of the three! Are you kidding me?>

Spying Sheppard, Heavyg called over to him, <Shep, get to your ship, NOW!> Sheppard's stomach gave a bit of a lurch. Not needing to be told twice, he turned on his heel and began to dash back down the path he had come. Thirty seconds into his run, he heard the station intercom cut in.

<ALL PILOTS AND CREWS TO YOUR SHIPS, THIS IS A FULL ALERT. ALL PILOTS AND CREWS TO YOUR SHIPS.....>

The docks turning into a seemingly chaotic scene as hundreds flooded the dockyards as they made way to their ships; engines of ships coming to life added their earsplitting addition to the cacophony of the scene that was unfolding. Dodging through knots of humanity, Sheppard neared his own goal before him, a Megathron battleship, the *Crooked Shaft*.

Going up the ramp as fast as he could manage, he ducked in as the ship sealed itself to the outside. Within a few turns, he came upon his destination; climbing into his pod, he plugged himself in. The pod closed in around him, and fluids began to fill up the interior, within seconds he was firmly ensconced inside.

There was nothing to see, no sound, no sensory input at all... and he was at perfect peace. A pinpoint of light appeared in front of him and grew in size as his senses rushed to embrace the awaiting world. With a great suddenness, that world expanded and his vision had extended to encompass the outside of Crooked Shaft, looking around he could see those ships of his friends and corpmates springing to life. Sheppard's senses blossomed, and all the terrible power of his ship came into his complete command. Multiple channels of communication opened to him and awaited his participation. He paused a moment, and repeated a single thought to himself that he had repeated many times before.

I am not my ship.

He focused upon the channels.

A flow of information circulated through him, and was filtered by priority settings based upon his needs. The command channel was quiet, where he had expected a constant flow of information telling those just

plugging in what needed to be done. He shifted his focus towards the lines of communication that would put him in touch with his corpmates.

[Guys, speak to me here, what's going on, command channel is quiet]

[Fishweasel here, I've managed to pick up a bit of it, looks like the CFS are finally on the move, only there seems to be a hitch in the plan]

[And that is?]

[From what I gather, we were going to be playing it by ear when the time came, only problem being that the guys who are supposed to be here to make the big moral decisions are nowhere to be found.]

[The JCoS are missing!?!]

[Yep, and their corporations are going slightly mental about it. The Admirals still need to get this show on the road though, and are consulting with each other now on closed channels.]

This can't be good...

Other channels began to vie for his attention, and then a single one flared before him, demanding concentration, the Command channel.

[This is Cougar One. All ships undock from the station and form up.]

Sheppard spoke to his corpmates then.

[Right guys this is it! Let's get our butts in gear and do as the man says!]

With a chorus of ribald remarks and general laughter being fed back to him, The Council began the process of undocking their ships. Millions of kilograms of war machine surged forward, passing through atmospheric shielding into the vacuum of space; massive port doors opened as streams of Battleships poured forth from the station, a nest disgorging its hornets. Flitting in and around the Battleships were a swarm of supporting Cruisers and Frigates, each with a role to play in what was to come this day.

The lumbering host began to form up 30km from the station; pilots aligned their ships towards the PZM stargate as the order came down from the Admirals. Ships were still coming out of the station, flying to get into formation. Following their usual practice, a smaller host undocked all at once together in a tight formation, as Imperium Technologies maneuvered themselves to add their strength to the growing armada.

Within five short minutes, the Querious Defense Force had brought all its might together. Stretching out over 50km they flew parallel to each other, many of them in wonderment as they gazed upon what they had wrought. Never in any of their memories had the QDF brought this level of power into such an assemblage.

A voice came onto the channel, strong with confidence and pride.

[All ships set destination for 7CGD, prepare for gang warp protocols.]

Setting his warp control settings into slave mode, Sheppard pulled back his vision to get a view of the ships flying alongside.

Man oh man... We're loaded up for electronic warfare in a big way, just look at all those Scorpions and Blackbirds. We could tangle with a fleet twice our size like this.

[Gang Warp Commencing in 3... 2... 1... WARP]

Crooked Shaft gave a slight shudder as her warp drive kicked in, and then she was accelerating forwards at

an exponential rate, the station behind them quickly turning into a small dot and then simply a navigational marker on the overlay. Planets and moons fled past his view as their flight progressed, shadows dancing across ships as the sun itself moved to the tune they played.

Nothing in the universe is as fearsome as a fleet on the move with singular purpose, with perhaps a single possible exception; a fleet where none know of its intent. The QDF fleet went forth, and perhaps even the universe itself took notice.

CHAPTER 4

CHOICES

[Is it always like this?]

[Is what always like this?]

[The waiting... we're here, they are here, what is everyone waiting for?]

[Yeah... it's always like this.]

Only hours earlier, forces from DSMA and StA attacked the stations throughout Delve and Period Basis. Alongside them were elements of the CFS. Now the bulk of the CFS forces were en route from Khanid Kingdom, steadily progressing down the pipe to where the QDF were hurrying to position themselves in wait. Reports were already coming in that FA had been prepared for the strike, and their own forces were pressing hard on the counterattack. Public anxiety was quickly growing, conflicting information on Galnet channels was making it hard for people to make any sense of what was really happening.

The path to Delve through Querious flowed through a single system, designated 7CGD-P. A backwater system, named by some forgotten astronomer from another era. It is in this system that the QDF was now arraying its fleet in a defensive posture, sitting a short distance from the outbound gate that would allow further direct travel into Delve.

For the last thirty minutes a group of several CFS interceptors had been observing the QDF fleet from 200km out, just outside the maximum effective range of its weaponry. All the while, further CFS forces were pouring into system, bolstering their numbers; the local system communication channel was dead silent, not a word had been said by a single pilot of either fleet.

The QDF admirals were in continuous communication with each other; going over tactics one final time should the CFS fleet decide to warp in on them. It was general knowledge at this point, that were that to happen, no questions would be asked, nor would there be any hesitation; the QDF would consider it a sign of aggression, and reply with the full fury of the terrible firepower available to them.

Snapshot AQM, a pilot from the Ars Quantus Militis Corporation had his Scorpion positioned 20km from the stargate, under a kilometer away from him was his friend and corpmate, Havoc AQM, in a twin of his own ship. Looking around his immediate surroundings was every last ship that the Querious Defense Force could possibly muster; in his own estimation, the turn out was most impressive.

[Havoc, you there bud?]

[Yep, I'm here. What's on your mind?]

[Hey man... I know you have a bit more information than I do, I'm trying to figure something out. This is a triangle system right? ... Well the CFS pilots, if they want to go an extra jump through the other gate here, they can get back on the route to Delve without coming through us. We're not guarding the other gate either, why not?]

[Well, I don't have the definitive answer to that, but I think I know what's going on. The thing is, the Admirals want the CFS to make the first move and show their intentions, so we leave them a way around us.]

[Don't we already know their intentions? I mean look at their interceptors, they've been scouting our strength here for a good half hour already, and they continue to reinforce their fleet. There is going to be a fight, no doubt about it.]

[Yeah that's true, but I guess the Admirals have to think about things on a larger scale.]

[Larger scale?]

[For sure! Think about how this is going to look on the Galactic newlines. I mean, this is the CFS we're talking about here... defenders of free space, last bastion of hope for the common pilot, blah blah blah.]

[But that's bullshit, CFS does squat to defend this space, we do all the heavy lifting!]

[You don't need to tell me that, but the rest of the Galaxy doesn't exactly have our point of view, before today most of them never knew we existed.]

[Ok then, so what do we do if they do end up going around? Are we supposed to be chasing them, or do we... Hey! Look at your overview, those interceptors!]

Havoc turned his senses upon them to see that the interceptors had grouped up into a somewhat tighter formation. Just at that moment the interceptors displayed the amazing agility that they are known for, and sharply veered towards the gate and the QDF fleet.

[Snapshot, they're pouring on the speed, this is it; their fleet is coming. Be ready.]

The Command Channel flared to life.

[This is Cougar One, all pilots go weapons hot, I will be the primary target caller, followed by Boldyn, then Marko. Target the five closest Battleship class vessels when they come in. If you do not have an immediate primary or secondary target called for you, you will fire upon the closest hostile to you. Interceptors and cruisers, target and scramble our primaries, I don't want them getting out once they are here. Sort targets by distance.]

Snapshot could feel his heart rate begin to pick up speed rapidly. He was still keeping his eyes on the rapidly approaching hostile interceptors; just as they reached the 150km marker the guns on a nearby Megathron belched fire as it unloaded a salvo of its long range ammo. Following in rapid succession by a Tempest firing its own barrage, and then several more Battleships opened up to quickly for him to track exactly who was firing.

The interceptors had been coming straight at them; their transversal velocity must have been minimal, and the effects were horrifying. Faster than their pilots could react to the mistake they had made, their ships were torn asunder as long range rounds hit home with vicious impact. Munitions that had been designed for engaging craft many times greater in size than their current targets, penetrated through the flimsy shields and thin armor of the interceptors. Internal explosions blossomed and expanded outwards past the hulls, incinerating crew and equipment in equal measure, until there was nothing recognizable left of the ships that had been coming at them.

Snapshot felt vaguely ill at the sudden loss of life he had just witnessed.
Think of them as targets, they're just like targets in simulation.

That wasn't helping.
Fuck it! Better them than me!

That actually helped some.

Snapshot's overview lit up... hostile warp signatures incoming! Three Battleships came out of warp, only 50km away from him, quickly followed by a fourth, then a fifth. Training took over and he started locking them all quickly as the Command Channel called out the primary and secondary targets for the fleet to fire upon in order. Selecting the secondary target Snapshot engaged his launchers and watched as four torpedoes violently emerged from within his Scorpion set on a course to the secondary target. He could see an additional four sprouting from Havoc's ship, quickly picking up speed and traveling towards the primary target. Selecting the remaining three ships, he started to cycle his jammers among them, breaking the target locks they were trying to achieve so that they could return fire.

Two more hostile battleships warped in just as the primary target exploded in a gout of flame as over 200 turrets from the assembled fleet all focused as one. Snapshot was entirely too busy to feel any emotion for the crew of the forsaken ship. His torpedoes arrived at what had been the secondary target and splashed across its shielding, just before the fleet's guns turned themselves upon it. Havoc's own torpedoes were now drifting outwards in a lazy path, never having reached their intended target. His launchers were ready again, and Snapshot toggled another four torpedoes off towards a target that was set to be third in line for special attention by the fleet. He noticed that Havoc's own salvo was traveling towards the same target this time.

QDF Interceptors had closed the range quickly and were among the enemy vessels, disrupting their warp drives with specialized electronic warfare modules, keeping their targets from fleeing the battle. Some support craft had followed the CFS Battleships into battle and were being pummeled by the smaller craft in the QDF fleet. An abundance of Heavy missiles were crisscrossing space as they sought to close with their intended prey. Cruise missiles and Torpedoes were crossing the span between the two fleets flaring bright lights as they went, promising sure punishment.

Several more CFS Battleships warped in.

[What the fuck is this?! Why do they keep coming in piecemeal?!]
[No idea, but hope they keep it up!]

Just then Snapshot's Scorpion was raked by a salvo of lasers by an Ammar-built Apocalypse-Class Battleship. His shields buckled and almost collapsed completely. Shocked at the display of the firepower he had been hit with, Snapshot diverted precious energy from his ship's capacitor to his shield generator.

[Havoc! That Apoc just ripped the shit out of my shields, jam his ass!]
[Targeting him now.]

Heart racing wildly, Snapshot waited for his Scorpion to finish acquiring a solution on his aggressor.
[Snap, make sure your ship is aligned to warp out.... Just in case.]

3 seconds.. 2..
Another salvo emitted from the Apocalypse at Snapshot.

Eight lasers sliced right through the Scorpion's shields like they weren't even there. The entire ship shuddered and groaned as the intense power from the lasers raked across his ship. Armor buckled and melted away in

an orgy of superheated fragments flaked off his ship, the tremendous streams of energy burning wide gashes across the hull his once immaculate exterior.

[Sonofvabitch!]

After an eternity in waiting, Snapshot finally got his lock. Directing all of his considerable and sophisticated electronic warfare abilities, Snapshot proceeded to rapidly wrap the Apocalypse up in a haze of static, noise and sensor ghosts to baffle its computers. Launching four more torpedoes at his new target, he finished bringing his ship up to speed; pointing himself towards a planet that his sensors informed him was orbited by many moons. If he had to warp out he wanted a clean escape.

Several more Battleships had warped in; three among them began to target him. Snapshot watched the flight of his torpedoes. The Apocalypse had begun to align itself for a distant planet, its pilot obviously deciding it was a good time to be elsewhere.

Come on, come on... tag this bitch.

Three QDF interceptors converged on the Apocalypse, sensing blood. The torpedoes hit home with a tremendous shockwave, knocking the target slightly off its intending course. It was just enough time for the interceptors to get in position and hold him in place.

[Snapshot, warp out.]

Snapshot willed the ship to go into warp. Rapidly accelerating towards full warp, he had a moment to take the whole battle into perspective as he and his crew left behind the ongoing carnage. Behind him, untold violence was being unleashed, the number of burnt out husks of once proud ships rapidly increased. Out of immediate danger, Snapshot looked more closely at the external view of his Scorpion.

Well crap, that left a mark.

CHAPTER 5

FORGED IN CONFLICT

[You do realize that what we've done isn't going to be considered a very popular move by the general populace out there?]

[Oh for sure... I know that the general galactic populace has taken a rather dim view of our tearing the CFS a new asshole.]

[What's cropped up on the Galnet channels so far?]

[Pretty much what you'd expect. Widespread denunciation of us, lamentation for the death of Free Space, some people trying to wax eloquent upon the end of an era. On the other side of the picture, there are some rather reasonably positive comments that have been made that could be construed to be in our favor.]

[Oh? Like what?]

[That if they weren't strong enough to hold it, then they didn't really deserve to keep it.]

[... nuff said I suppose.]

[Yep, I suppose so.]

Conrad, the last President of the Coalition of the Free Stars, waited patiently for his Com to connect to his intended recipient. He had a great deal of practice with the art of patience, leading the CFS had taught him many lessons in that area.

While the wait continued, Conrad let his eyes flow over the continuing reports coming to his attention on the progress of the war in Querious and elsewhere. Things continued to look to be going from bad to worse, something slightly short of a miracle was going to have to occur to turn the metal tide that was mercilessly pushing the CFS straight out from its own home.

News from DSMA and StA provided no relief nor hope for the future. In both Delve and Period Basis the Fountain Alliance had brought all their power to bear, swiftly retaking their stations and removing all access from the would be owners.

As combat casualties mounted there, pilots, finding themselves in fresh clones, often traumatized by their experiences, also found themselves in Empire space, far from the combat front, and a return path that lead directly through space now held in an iron grip by... what was it they were calling themselves now... ah yes, FIX.

Conrad still couldn't help but think of them still as the QDF, he suspected that many of their own pilots were still having difficulty adjusting to the name change as well. But it wasn't just a change of name, not really, this wasn't just a defense agreement between independent corporations anymore, they had truly thrown in their lot together.

Several fleets had been sent south in an attempt to break through the FIX blockade, all of them had been shattered. The casualties had been staggeringly high, many pod pilots having been cloned repeatedly, along with untold loss of life among crew compliments; but even worse was the lack of results to show for those sacrifices.

At current rates, every FIX ship brought down accounted for 20 CFS ships in return. The alliance was in a near state of despair. His head cradled in his fingers, Conrad became aware of a soft beeping that signified his connection was ready.

Straightening his posture and taking hold of his emotions, he keyed the Com to open.

<Hello Avernus.>

<Hello old friend.>

<It has been quite a week hasn't it.>

<That is has been. I honestly do apologize for the state of affairs Conrad, as you well know, I would have done anything to avoid the situation we now find ourselves in.>

<What is to happen then? Are we to see it through to conclusion? You know that's insane Avernus, the CFS has never been a threat to the QDF... you and I, we've discussed this...>

<Conrad, I know how you're feeling. If I could change things, I'd do it in a heartbeat, but our hands are truly tied here.>

<Why?! Why are they tied? Were FIX to join us now we could push back FA in the space of a week, they'd never stand a chance of holding onto Delve and Period Basis were that to happen.>

<I'm sorry Conrad, but it's far too late, we've given our word on this.>

<Your word? Then help me understand Avernus, we've known each other too long, worked together too hard to let the CFS die.>

On the other end of the screen, Conrad's rapt attention was focused on the face of Avernus, and he now watched this man he had first met as a fellow Senator of the CFS, taking a moment to visibly brace himself before answering.

<I wish it were simple Conrad, In a way it actually is simple. When the initial battle between our fleets kicked off, our Admirals were in touch with FA, exchanging intelligence and keeping each other apprised of the evolving situation. They had setup the fleet to be in a position that the CFS fleet would be able to bypass them. In their own minds, it was almost like a test for the CFS. To be direct Conrad, the CFS failed the test when they attacked. At that moment, our Admirals made a binding agreement with FA. We agreed to ally ourselves with one another for the duration of this conflict, and see it through to the end.>

<Conrad, you know how we are down here, you know how we choose to live, and that we prize our honour above all else. In the wording of the agreement, our Admirals... who of course aren't the best of diplomats, left themselves no loop hole from which we could disengage ourselves from this predicament.>

<But Avernus... surely your Admirals knew we were no threat to Querious, surely you told them?! We were going to give you complete control of the region under the CFS name, you're own laws would have held sway here! Our own Admirals made an obvious mistake in attacking, but they felt threatened by leaving your fleet at their backs if they progressed further.>

Conrad leaned in, his whole body exhumed intense focus.

<Av, it was in that meeting with you, Droewa, and Nez, that you told me to take the stations!>

<Pardon? Conrad, I think you've lost me...>

<Then it's my turn to be direct. I asked the QDF to join the CFS along with the others and become part of the UFS. You said that the QDF was the only one of the group that had proven itself, that in order for you to take the UFS seriously you needed proof that the UFS was worthy of QDF's membership. I agreed with that! Amongst the various things you pointed out, you said that the UFS needed to own it's own stations!>

<Conrad... I was comparing the UFS to the QDF, and what I'd want to see proven to me that you'd be a group we'd want to be a part of. I talked about leadership, participation by your members, increased combat ability and aggression, and of course I pointed out that the UFS didn't own it's own stations. I wasn't telling you to take the FA stations, I was detailing the differences between our two groups.>

Conrad shook his head, his own eyes downcast, not noticing the eyes of Avernus still upon him, sharp, judging the moment.

<Conrad, I well know the plans you had, for you gave them to me in great detail yourself. I know beyond any doubt that the CFS posed no threat to the QDF or our own plans here in Querious. Had I been there that fateful day this all began, history would be writing a different chapter than the one we find ourselves living through now. But... I didn't know the exact date your plans were to come to fruition. I wasn't there to stop things, I was away with the other two Joint Chiefs and out of communication. Conrad, as much as this pains me, and it does so greatly... when you revealed your plans to me, and we shared our hopes for the future, you swore me to secrecy. You know me Conrad, I hold true to the word I give. Only two others were ever informed of what was to occur in the near future, and they were both with me on that sad day. The Admirals knew nothing, they only had the information immediately at hand by which to judge their actions, and the information they did have committed them to act in defense of our homes.>

Conrad's head bent further downward, his shoulders drooped as if under a tremendous weight and a glint that had been in his eye but moments ago faded to a vacant stare that saw nothing in front of him. Had he still been watching the view screen before him, he'd have seen the lips of his old friend grow tighter together, and his brow furrow as they pinched together.

With no small difficulty, Avernus addressed his friend a final time, his voice strained.

<Conrad, forgive me. Our paths have been set for us by no choice of our own making. I cannot deflect the future.>

The beginnings of a smile almost creased the face of Conrad as he regained some of his posture, looking at Avernus directly.

<At least some good will come from all this. I've always liked your guys, you know that to be true. Unlike some others I've never mistaked who really kept CFS space safe for all this time, you know I wanted to award the QDF for that at some point. By the way... I've been wondering, but what the hell does FIX stand for anyways, or is that the whole name?>

<Well, we couldn't go on GalNet introducing ourselves as the Independant Corporations of Querious, because if there is one thing we aren't anymore, it's independant. We needed to identify ourselves with something in the very least; considering most of our corporations have been here since the region was known only as JK-FIX, I chose to use that. It took a fair bit of thought, but I believe we've settled upon a full name finally. Firmus Ixion.>

<That name sounds like I should almost know it... what's its meaning?>

<Firmus, for well founded. Ixion, from mythology for the first man to ever spill the blood of kin. Eternal damnation was his reward.>

<Well founded damnation?>

<I wouldn't put it quite like that, but we'll remember where we came from, and how we came into existance.>

There was a pause as Conrad reflected thoughts within, his face quite unreadable.

<Avernus, it's time for me to go. As always, I wish you well, and I hope that FIX becomes everything it has the potential to be.>

<Thank you my friend, and goodbye.>

The Com flickered and the connection closed on the other end. Avernus found himself still regarding the blank screen, unaware of anything else for the immediate moment. Coming to himself, he turned away to face his Co-CEO, Silinary.

<So... Av. Did you know when the CFS was going to make their move?>

A pause before he answered.

<Yep.>

<Could you have stopped it?>

<Yep.>

<Your absence on that day...?>

<By design.>

<Why didn't you stop it from happening?>

<We needed the space... we needed to be unhindered... we needed a proper foundation upon which to grow. Also, for FIX to truly live, the CFS had to die.>

<You know I don't like alliances right, that I like us being independant?>

<I know, I certainly haven't forgotten our experiences in the CFS.>

<So what makes you think this will be any different?>

<An alliance was going to happen down here with or without us; the time was ripe, people were ready, and we have the right people this time. We have a strong reputation and the respect of our peers, what happens now will happen with our input from the beginning of what will grow from this.>

<How soon before CFS and friends are going to fold?>

<Give it a week, they're past the point of no return.>

<You going to let on to people what you did once that happens?>

<Nope... I can't, emotions are too raw, all this is too fresh in peoples hearts and minds. We have to calm things down, and get public opinion on our side, or at least more towards our side.>

<So when will you spill the beans?>

<Dunno... if FIX is still alive in a few years, perhaps then... maybe.>

<A few years???!>

Avernus smiled.

<Wouldn't want to show my hand too early.>

Dedicated to all those members, past and present, that have contributed to the history of Firmus Ixion, may many more chapters be written in the years to come. Thanks goes to all those we've played with over the years, friends and enemies alike; and of course, a huge thanks to CCP for the playground they provide us. A special thanks goes to all those people who followed along on the old FIX forums as this got its start and to S3VYN who provided the initial idea and a base to build upon.

Finally, apologies to Conrad. The dream had to live.



The Founding 12:

- | | |
|-------------------------|-----------------------|
| ASUYA Inc. | Legionari |
| Band of Builders | J.H.E.N.R |
| Carbide Industries | Imperium Technologies |
| Dark Centuri | Obsidian Asylum |
| Elite Storm Enterprises | The Council |
| Genx Corp | Zone 5 |