

Tom Stevens hides the internal apprehension; he is experiencing. This is a much larger force than expected; and, even with, the additional reinforcement he had under 5MC-15-45-98-4, his operation would be outmatched.

As a precaution, he advises his Theatre Nine Fleet Commanders to employ variation B of the battle plan. They would monitor the exit positions of each of the eight hundred twenty-one vortices. As a ship approaches its terminal event horizon, the force builds. Destabilizing the event threshold when the vessels are exactly four seconds out, assures their destruction. He orders each Fleet Commander to follow the status of the building exits; and, command the attack on them, at precisely the right time. Each Fleet Commander's flagship would automate the process and tap into Stevens sensor reporting. He also instructs his forces to use each ship to target two exit apertures with the support of two fighters, at each one.

The estimated time of arrival comes; and, goes. Nine's forces are in shock, as new orders come in. "Use intense scans of the region beyond the trajectories. The enemy is overshooting our estimated landings!" Stevens orders.

Local communication lines are swamped as Theatre Nine and Twelve Commanders and all the Fleet Commanders fire orders to their subordinates. Thresholds are detected thirty-five hundred kilometers beyond the original estimates. Ships have already started their turns. Target points are still within range. But, many enemy vessels successfully exit; before, Fifth Mobile actually begins to target other jump-exit points.

Bryant orders the two outside portions of Theatre Ten into the fray. The rest of Twelve will still be held as a reserve. But, it will take an hour and a half for this additional pressure to arrive.

Fifth Mobile forces target enemy ships as they begin to turn back to face their foe. Raptors are launched four at a time, from each warship in the armada injecting two hundred and fifty-six weapons platforms into the battle every seven seconds. The enemy reciprocates at a slower rate. Swarms of angry hornets fill the battlefield; encountering each other and attacking the larger ships of their opponents.

Though there is an organization to each little region, the totality looks like absolute mayhem. The continuous smaller flares of fighter class vessels exploding are punctuated by the blinding fusion flare of the larger warships annihilating.

Raptors crisscross just under, or over, the streams of spears and particle charges in an attempt to draw their enemy pursuers into the line of fire. Larger ships are used as a cover for

Raptors to make High-G turns; to return to the battle chasing the fighter that had been hounding them.

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"Brace for impact!" The Midgard's Captain roars across the intercom as screens and enunciation panels flash the message; "Imminent collision. Secure yourselves and all potential projectiles", repeatedly. Earsplitting claxons accompany the warnings.

The Midgard lurches violently. Some are thrown viciously. Others manage to grab onto something; as the ship tilts violently to port and pauses; as if, leaning on its side; then, abruptly rights itself; as hundreds of struggling automatic navigation thrusters grab hold.

Stevens is tossed to the floor across the room from his bar; then hurled back across the office and against the cabinet's side. There is a snap; as he extends his left hand to protect himself.

He scrambles to his feet, as the ship regains its normal attitude, and lurches clumsily toward the data pad, on his desk; but, halts abruptly to examine his throbbing wrist. It is already discolored and swelling. He resumes the trek; tapping the communications icon when he reaches his goal.

"Captain, what the hell happened?" He barks the question.

"Sir, I ordered the destruction of an enemy warship that was attempting to ram us. It was only four hundred meters off the starboard bow; when, we annihilated it. That was the shockwave." It was an excitedly nervous response.

"Many casualties?" The Admiral inquires.

"We're just getting all our reports, sir. Are you okay?"

"Not really. But, I can wait if there are serious injuries. I may have broken my left wrist." Tom advises the Captain.

"I'll send an E-squad from sickbay, sir. Are you in much pain?" There is genuine concern in the voice.

"Make sure they look after serious injuries, first. I'll be okay. If they get to me in a couple of hours, I'm sure I'll be fine. You did a great job." Stevens explains.

"Let me know if it gets any worse, please." The Captain clicks off. He is swamped. Reports from all over the enormous vessel are piling on him.

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After an hour and a half of ferocious engagement, no one, except the Midgard's senior station, notices the formation of two groups of ninety-six churning, lustrous apertures forming above the battle scene. It is expected. Theatre Ten has arrived. Their armaments are aimed and begin spewing misery, as Raptors pour from ships, the instant event horizons are cleared.

The enemy, sensing the overwhelming nature of the battle, attempt to try and escape; constantly triggering their Casimir emitters. But, Fifth Mobile forces direct a portion of their weapons to these expanding maelstroms; extinguishing them before they can blossom into full-fledged vortices.

The battle rages. Stevens senses, from reports, that; losses are about four to one; but Fifth, and particularly Theatre Nine, is suffering extensive casualties as a cost of winning this struggle.

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IGB is more than holding its own in the peripheral sites. But, Astinov is finding it tough slugging with the enemy employing the two-ship strategy. Each Theatre Thirteen warship trades hailstorms with the enemy. Half the deployed Raptors are engaged with enemy fighters; but, the other half seek out all the protected enemy ships and harass them, as much as possible; concentrating on the destruction of their launch bays.

Theatre Eleven is already mopping up; destroying anything disabled but non-functional. I generate new orders to Urquhart.