

Flight of the Orion

by Bryan Schuder

Harvos has served along humans for many years now. He was part of an initiative to integrate Humans into Galactic Coalition fleet. It seemed a fool's errand then, but Harvos served aboard the Human cruiser Mintaka. He still tells tales to his fellow Coalition officers and has yet to run out of stories to tell. He witnessed the pure insanity that extended space travel seems to have upon humans and how they cope with it. So, upon taking command of his ship, he made sure the quartermaster added shaving cream, permanent markers, air horns, blow-up dolls, brown paper bags, lighters, and duct tape to the list of "restricted but special request only" items. Harvos also witnessed some of the greatest feats of ingenuity he had ever seen. Human ship cores are unique, as they combine gravity control, antimatter reactor, and warp drive systems into one unit. They are unique, because no other species is that crazy. It took Harvos a long time of studying human culture and comedy to figure out the best way to relate how he felt about being aboard a human ship with a "core" inside of it: "Imagine a munitions plant, fuel refinery, and alcohol distillery crammed haphazardly into one building, staffed entirely by monkeys, built upon a nuclear waste dump that used to be an ancient burial ground. Then, imagine being told you get the bedroom at the top floor." Finally, he saw the sheer determination and bravery humans erupt when in unwinnable situations. The streaking after-image of the badly damaged, fiery battleship Johnston as it semi-warped itself right up into the main channel of the Tzerkz's planet killer's beam weapon, then self-destructed in a brilliant last act of defiance. That will always hold a place in his memory. Harvos and the rest of the Scillia species owe an incalculable debt to the humans for that day. Humans not only saved his and his species's homeworld, destroyed the Tzerkz greatest super weapon, but also drew the ire of the Tzerkz from every other species in the Coalition.

All this is why Harvos looks suspiciously upon the badly damaged super-carrier Orion as his Scillia prime battleship cruises by. "Why is it still here?"

Harvos's assistant commander Malva joins his side. "Sir?"

"The Orion. Why is IT still here? Every other human ship that's capable of leaving has left to regroup."

"From reports, it seems most the useful equipment has been transferred to others ships, and while still able to move... The human fleet commander reports that they believe it will not survive a warp transit."

" Bullshit."

"What did you say, sir?"

"Oh. Sorry. A human saying in their English language. Umm... It's a more explicit way of calling someone's bluff or pointing out falsehoods."

"I see. What's the bluff?"

"That ship is capable of a warp transit. They know how to tweak those damned cores to adjust for any number of states a ship is in. I've seen them literally warp nothing but a pile of scrap

with a core hidden somewhere inside of it.”

“Sir, mass scanning shows that over half the ship is... missing. Our chief engineer has been able to visually confirm the missing components faster than the computer can scan and calculate- They’re waving their arms at us, sir.”

Over in one of the many gaping holes that open the Orion, a collection of vacuum suited humans are standing on what was once a functional runway and hangar bay. Wreckage scatters the area and flits of light sparkle from the arc welders being used on the ship. The gathering of vacuum suited humans take a momentary break to wave at the passing Scillian prime battleship. Harvos through the observation deck window waves back. His assistant, Malva eventually mimics the gesture after some confusion.

“Tell Chief Engineer Vetra to keep a close eye on the Orion.”

“Yes, sir. I will inform her.”

“I want to be informed of anything out of the ordinary. The humans wouldn’t leave this ship unless there’s another plan for it. They know the Tzerkz fleet regrouped and is coming this way.”

“Do you want me to hail the Orion and get in contact with the captain?”

“No.”

“ . . . “

“He’s not going to say anything anyway. I don’t feel like playing twenty question with him. And if they are planning something, we don’t want disrupt their plans.”

“Are you sure, sir?”

“Yes. . . . Yes, I’m sure.”

“Understood.”

“Right now, I think they giving us the courtesy of plausible deniability.”

A few hours pass. The Coalition fleet has formed a blockade in the path of the regrouped Tzerkz fleet. Long distance scanners confirm and they are fast coming into visual range.

Harvos stands with stoic confidence on the command deck, “Visual, yet?”

The young ensign responds promptly, “Yes, Commander, the Tzerkz fleet is in visual range, putting it on the holo-visualizer.”

“Indeed. Seems like the our friends the humans gave them some serious trouble.”

Malva briefly studies her console, “Reports from our sensor team and other teams in the fleet indicate that the Tzerkz have moved damaged ships to the rear of the fleet. Near their dreadnaught.”

“Well, that’s why the human fleet didn’t wait for backup. Can’t blame them there. We are going to be in for a fight. Inform the fleet, full alert, and all ships to battle configurations.”

“... Um, Commander. ...”

Harvos glances around briefly to find who called him and eventually sees his Chief Engineer looking back at him. “Yes, Chief Engineer Vetra?”

“You might want to look at this.”

Harvos walks calmly and lean in closer to see Vetra’s screen. “What’s going on, Vetra?”

“I’ve been keeping an eye on the Orion. And it’s really strange.”

“I’m guessing not the normal human strange.”

“No. They’ve been making odd modifications to their ship, that I’m not quite familiar with. Without actively scanning, I can’t gain much more information. But-”

“They’re definitely up to something.”

“Yes. Passive sensors don’t indicate anything conclusive. But, there was a strange hyperwave transmission.”

“Did you capture it?”

“Yes. And it wasn’t encrypted, and it was not transmitted to a single target. It was a general broadcast towards the human fleet that left.”

“What’s the transmission?”

“I don’t know. It’s a series documents written in different human languages. Images of drawings with notation of sorts. And what looks to be source code to what I guess is computer that the humans use. And then there’s a huge document that seems like a massive research paper.”

Harvos narrows his eyes at the screen, “What are you all planning...”

“Sir?”

“Coordinate an effort with the fleet’s engineer, science, and intelligence teams.”

“Yes, sir.”

“Let me know if you find anything.”

Harvos stood back up and walked calmly back to his post, next to his assistant. “Has the Orion moved at all?”

“Not at all.”

“ . . . “

“You’re nervous, sir?”

“No. Frustrated.”

“Sir?”

“Part of me would really like to be in on what they are planning.”

“Sir?!”

The Tzerkz fleet had reconfigured itself into a similar battle formation of the Coalition fleet. Both sides were well out of range of each other’s weaponry. It was the usual stand off before the battle. Each side gauging and calculating strength and tactics.

A collection of holographic figures surround the front of Harvos at his post. The various captains of other ships continue to argue and debate about what to and how to do it. Harvos slowly drifts his gaze to the different captains. The stern look on his face slowly leaking out his irritation with this part of a typical Coalition battle. “The key thing is that the dreadnaught doesn’t move further into human territory.”

“But, Commander, there are plenty of other high value targets.”

“Yes, I agree Commander, the dreadnaught is only good for sieging. The battleships and cruisers would be far greater targets.”

“Surely, Commander, you do not want to throw a Coalition fleet towards one ship of little value outside of planetary bombardment. They could be-”

Harvos closes his eyes and for a few moments tries to filter out the chatter. He really can’t blame the other species in the fleet. They didn’t understand what destruction of a planet was like. None of their worlds had been affected by the Tzerkz, yet. The Sctillia were the ones to feel brunt of the wrath of a dreadnaught and almost the wrath of the planet killer. But... the Humans... They understood. Strangely, Harvos theorized, it’s probably because they had destroyed their own worlds many times before.

“COMMANDER! THE ORION-”

Harvos opens his eyes in time to see the super carrier Orion, blaze and buzz through the Coalition fleet’s blockade formation. A cacophony of thrusters torching streaming blue-white jets of plasma thread the massive vessel through the eye of a narrow corridor between all the fleet ships. Crew members aboard the Sctillian ship held onto nearby objects as the Orion lit up the monitors and its passing vibrated everything near it. A few of the holographic images of captains reacted to the sight in their own ways. The eruption of plasma from the main massive sub-light engines of the Orion were like suns going supernova. A visible blue-white plasma trail lingered for seconds behind the ship. After a few moments, audible sounds of debris hitting the hull of Harvos’s prime battleship could be heard. Bits of the Orion were breaking off from the shear forces at work.

“ALL SHIPS HOLD POSITIONS! Someone get me a vector on the Orion and tell me where it’s going and HOW THE HELL IT IS MOVING THAT FAST!”

Harvos rushed straight to Vetra, “What happened?!”

“It- It... Massive energy readings throughout the ship, everything went live. Everything! There’s new things on the ship that aren’t in the plans even!”

“What?!”

“It seems like they scraped a bunch of fighters and just welded on the jets where every they could fit, they must have used the fighter mini-cores and somehow-”

“Reconfigured them for pure power production and some of them to become the plasma ejectors. I’ve seen them do it. Thankfully the small ones aren’t antimatter based. Just ONLY gravity field fusion based. Not that’s any real comfort.”

“Uh- Yes. That sounds right. Oh creator... All their weapon systems are armed! And more!!”

Malva yells, “Visual confirmation, sir! Every bay, pod, turret, and whatever else is open, armed, and charging.”

The young ensign calls, “Vector confirmed, they are going straight for the Tzerkz fleet and going at least five times the rated speed of the Orion. Acceleration will put them faster than our scout ships in a minute.”

Harvos stood up straight and gazed towards the trail of light behind the Orion, screens tracking its movement and maintaining a visual. As the captains of the fleet argued and bickered, with the only agreement that the humans had gone suicidal... Harvos continued to study the scene before him. There was a purpose behind this. It may have been insane odds and a crazy basis, but there’s a plan behind this.

“Commander, they are about in Tzerkz weapons range-”

In this moment... The Orion filled up the empty void of space between the two forces. It filled it with everything it could muster. Missiles launched from every tube in every bay in a constant barrage scattering out in chaotic random paths towards the Tzerkz fleet. Flares blasted out from every direction surrounding the Orion. Chaff belched out. Electromagnetic Thermal Optic particulate clouds spewed forth, jetting kilometers and spreading. Torpedos accelerate out from the massive launch tubes, breaching through the chaotic cloud surrounding the Orion. Then, the nuclear cruise bombs... Many species staunchly believe that these must be standard equipment on all human ships. The nuclear cruise bombs fired their first stages away from the Orion before locking onto some unknown, random target. The railgun turrets arced away, sending charged glowing slugs towards the Tzerkz fleet. Gauss accelerators launched seemingly random junk off towards the enemy fleet. Finally, as if to cap off the show, fighters launched from the hangars, the runway, and even the new holes in the ship. They then chaotically launched their payloads while flying straight towards the Tzerkz fleet.

With an abrupt shudder that shook more bits of the ship, the Orion fires another set of thrusters and violently starts to pull away off it’s original course.

“Commander, the... Orion is pulling away?!”

Harvos studies the displays showing the chaos from multiple angles, while most are too dumbstruck to say anything. He watches as the Orion miraculously pulls away from the weapons range of the Tzerkz fleet and continues to pull away, just moments before the Tzerkz fleet begin firing counter-measures at the various missiles, projectiles, fighters, flare, and the chaotic mess before them.

Harvos eyes narrow at the many screens showing the Tzerkz shooting down missiles and torpedos, "Where's the secondary explosions? ... Chief Engineer?"

"Uh- Yes, Commander!"

"Did passive radiation sensors pick up any signature of human nuclear warheads on the Orion in the past few hours?"

"... .. No."

"Do we have a good visual on a torpedo or cruise bomb?"

"... Yes! Bringing it up."

"... .. Those aren't warheads at all."

"I think those are waste recycling tanks?"

"Malva! Sensor reports! Life signs?!"

"Only the Orion in one section. The main command bridge. And in a localized gravity dampening field. I wish I had more but the debris, particulate cloud, flares, chaff, and other activity is making it hard to scan anything."

"Wait. A localized gravity dampening field?"

"Yes."

"They used thrusters and sub-light engines..."

"Yes...."

"On a super carrier with one of the largest of their ship cores in existence-"

The Vetra shouts, "Commander! The transmission by the humans before, one of the engineers from another ship figured out what some of it was."

"What is it!?"

"A firmware update for their ship core."

"And?"

"They've tried to input it into a simulator they have."

"And?!"

"The result crashed their simulation computer."

Without a word, Vetra, Harvos, and Malva exchanged information by mere sight, much to the nervous gazes of crew, and holographic fleet captains. The Vetra quickly brought up a visual of the Orion. It had stabilized a vector going directly away from the Tzerkz fleet. The main engines had long since gone out and only a dim glow was seen from the melted thruster cones as specs of molten slag broke off into the cosmos. It was free drifting now.

The entire crew on the deck and captains via the holo conference examined the holo of the Orion. Only three people knew what to look for, but the situation had gotten everyone else's attention.

Harvos eyes widened, “Where is that ship’s fuckin’ core?!”

Malva traced the original flight path of the Orion and compare it to the current escape vector. She noticed a strange shudder in the flight path before the Orion broke off and how sharp the Orion broke off. “They launched it.”

“Vetra?!”

“Normally, they wouldn’t be able to do that since they bury those cores deep within the ship. But, missing half the ship, it made it pretty easy to get it out.”

Malva shouts, “I have a visual of something, it’s floating deep within Tzerkz fleet.”

Harvos cranes his head to examine, “I don’t- Oh gods, they launched the entire core bay. I recognize the writing on the bulkhead door there!”

Vetra blinks her eyes, “There’s more writing that’s been spray painted onto the outside.”

“Give me a close up.”

Everyone studied the writing “To the Tzerkz with love from-”

Malva taps on her console, “That’s the Captain’s name-”

Harvos’s eye widen.

Vetra quirks her head to the side, “The rest of the names are on in the title of the research paper.”

“What’s the title of the research paper.”

“Umm, I’m not familiar with human English that well...”

“Just pronounce it.”

“Hyper. Space. Tunnel-ing? Using grav-it-ta-tion-al waves to cause int-er-di-men-sion-al-”

Malva rears her head back, “Weak transmission coming from the Orion, audio only...”

“I want to hear it...”

Through a scratchy, distorted, echo, “Yo! Harvos! Long time! We all just on a whim looked up who was commanding that big battleship and saw it was you! Just wanted to let you know, by our calculations you should be safe, but if ya’ll want to back up a bit... I can’t blame ya! Oh, the cap’n’, Hans, Saitama, and Igor say hi!”

Malva looks at Harvos who has been frozen since the audio started playing, “What was that?”

With a toothy grin on his face, Harvos raises his head, “THE chief engineer of the Mintaka and now the Orion. And it sounds like the Captain, Science Officer, Munition Officer, and Master Pilot are there, too.”

Vetra cries out, “Massive energy reading from the-”

Crew stumbles about as the ship strangely pitches. Many are not used to the ship moving so suddenly and a few fall on the deck floor. Harvos catches Malva as he unconsciously shifts

his weight and adjusts his stance to keep a firm solid footing.

“Ummm... Thank you, Commander.”

“Something you get used to on human ships. Vetra, what was that?”

Another spasm from the ship. A few captains on the holos fall out of view. Monitors displayed fleet ships rocking and moving.

“Gravity waves, Commander. ... Wait! Gravity waves!?”

“ALL SHIPS! ALL POWER TO SHIELDS AND DAMPENERS! FULL EMERGENCY REVERSE! BRACE FOR ANYTHING! And to my crew! Take your seats and HOLD ON!”

Harvos rushes to his chair, dragging Malva and practically throwing her into her chair. He quickly takes off his jacket, throws it behind his chair, while holding onto the sleeves.

“Commander!? What is the meaning of this?! And what ARE you doing!?”

“Malva, if we live through this I would like to file a request for design change for all Scillian ship chairs in my fleet.”

Malva watches the commander and tries to mimic what he’s doing, “And WHAT design change would THAT be?!”

Harvos pulls the sleeves of his jacket in front of his waist and ties them in a knot, “Fucking seatbelts!”

The Coalition fleet moves expediently backwards from the Tzerkz fleet. Occasionally rocking and pitching, as if ships caught in a rough sea. A small flash erupts from a point within the center of the Tzerkz fleet. Strangely, the Tzerkz fleet is not moving.

“The core bay has blown away, the core is exposed and- By the creator! WHAT IS THAT?!”

Chief Engineer Vetra points to the main monitor focused on a visual of the Orion’s liberated ship core. A reddish glow pulses from the area around the core. Space seemed to be... twisting... turning... winding up around the core. The intensity such that Tzerkz ships seem to be caught in the warp and visually distorted. The Tzerkz fleet was panicking. Tzerkz ships desperately fire docking thrusters to move, big ships drive main engines to breaking points, and some ships try to shoot at the Orion ship core.

Malva holding onto her chair’s console, occasionally tapping in new input to the screen, “Commander, they are unsuccessfully trying to the shoot the core. But, either shots are going wide, getting warped around it, or even going through it?!”

“Through? Like it’s not there?”

“Or here.”

The space around the Orion ship core opens. The black void of space violently backs away from the ship core, revealing a growing bubble of luminescent red. The inside the red bubble another space exists. Star like specs, distant energy streaks, and a soft red glow fill this

space. The bubble expands and engulfs Tzerkz ships. The ships twist and bend into this new space, then aimlessly drift into the red ether. The smaller ships fail to mount an escape and drop in droves into the bubble. Only the biggest ships in the Tzerkz fleet stand a chance. Using every propulsion means they have, many manage to only be partially consumed by the bubble. But at best, the dreadnaught only manages to become half consumed by the bubble.

The bubble stops growing. At a rate even faster than its growth, it deflates. Ships partially inside the bubble get violently pulled by the parts submerged. Many ships rip into pieces as bits disappear into the red space. As the bubble collapses, ships collide into each other. Some bounce back into the regular space, some fall the rest of the way into red space and drift out of view. The bubble closes around the dreadnaught. The closing bubble presses ships still caught halfway into the dreadnaught, eventually crushing and tearing them into pieces. Eventually, the bubble abruptly disappears... along with half the dreadnaught and greater portions of other ships.

Space remains still for minutes. As the remains of ships drift and float, the Orion ship core sits perfectly untouched by all that had transpired.

The Coalition fleet remains at standby.

“Commander?”

“Yes, Malva.”

“We’ve received a message from the Tzerkz fleet.”

“And?”

“Unconditional surrender.”

A timid and horrified tone comes from the young ensign, “Commander. That’s not all.”

“Yes?”

“I’m getting other transmissions from... from... the hyperwave radio... But, I can’t pinpoint where they are coming from. It’s like the transmissions are coming in as background noise from the hyperwave itself.”

“What are they of?”

“Tzerkz. Panic, requests for aid, screams, begging, and surrender broadcasts... Prayers?”

Chief Engineer Vetra had been absolutely silent for minutes after witnessing the phenomena. Finally she blinks her eyes, “No... They didn’t... They just didn’t do it! They couldn’t have!!!”

Harvos turns to his chief engineer, “Vetra... Are you okay-”

“CREATORS FUCKING DAMN THEM!!!”

“Vetra?”

“Don’t you see what they’ve done!”

The collected crew turn their attention towards Vetra.

“The mystery of hyperspace! The realm which we’ve barely tapped using hyperwave radio. They- They- Those damned humans figured out how to breach it! Not only did they figure out how to breach it... The very first thing they do with... T-T-THE BIGGEST DISCOVERY.... IS TO MAKE A BOMB OUT OF IT!!”

Vetra slams her fist into her console, causing it sputter to not functioning. She rests her head onto the broken console and covers her head with her arms. She continues to grumble in absolute spite and frustration.

Harvos only has a knowing smirk on his face. Despite the events that have rocked and rattled the rest of the crew, he remains strangely calm. He undoes the jacket sleeves tied to his waist and stands up. With a calm stride, he arrives at the side of Vetra and pats her on the shoulder.

Vetra raises her head from the console and turns to glance at her Commander.

“This must be your first time serving alongside humans.”