

# Fish In a Barrel

By Richard Tornello

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I

2050 CE

By an act of the Imperial Congress and the 4th Constitutional Convention, Presidents of the United States are elected for a single 10-year term. Newly elected President, Rose Katenbach is being briefed by her Chief of Staff, General Gregory Precuneus, prior to her first meeting with Galactic Ambassador Pan.

General Precuneus begins, "Madam President at this briefing we would like to go over some of the more classified programs you will be tasked to understand and make decisions about. This briefing is standard for all incoming administrations. You've heard of Black Programs, the Skunk Works and similar operations. However there is one program that has never been discussed. It is similar to the old Manhattan Project and just as important to our survival. It has no name and is simply called The Program."

He hesitates. "This is never easy, Madam President."

"Go on, please," she says. "All this formality is necessary - but sometimes the military overdoes it. Let's get to it."

"You need to be brought up to date before meeting Galactic Ambassador Pan."

She looks at him. "Galactic what? Ambassador who? Really, do you think I'm falling for some initiation ice breaking joke? General please ..." She looks around at her staff. No one is returning her visual inquiry. They all look to General Precuneus. She turns back toward the General. "Okay, what the hell are you talking about?"

"We go through this with every change of administration. Please bear with me. Much of the data you are about to hear will be totally new and, if I may say from my first introduction, will seem outrageous." The General regains his professional posture. "Please, hear me out. Soon you will understand. That's all I ask."

"Go on."

He begins his memorized presentation. "Madam President, the Black Programs are as follows: Each country has their own Black Programs, while individual countries and federated groups of countries are working together on outer space industrial development and exploration. The Black Programs, as they are called, are designed to extend knowledge in both science and technology."

The President nods. Most of this technical overview is not news.

"Madam President, as you will soon see, these weapons systems are not really designed for the purpose that has been fed to the public. We will be meeting the Galactic Ambassador from an organization that..."

"Are you joking?"

"No Madam President. We would never joke about national defense. This is a real situation that we have been preparing for through many administrations."

"What is the situation exactly?" Her face has lost some of its color.

The General thinks to himself about the distinct change in the political speeches given prior to and after these briefings.

"Madam President, we are not allowed to go into detail until you've officially met the Galactic Ambassador. The Ambassador demands it be done this way - his way."

"Consider this my meeting, damn it." President Katenbach paces about the room.

Being a Washington animal, her next thought is, No leaks, no disclosures in all this time? That's next to impossible in this town. The public knows nothing?

The General's aide can guess what's on her mind and interjects, "Oh, you see it in all the magazines at the food store checkouts. Who really believes that stuff? We let that fly. To answer it would lend credence."

The General now demurs. This next part is dangerous. "For your information, two presidents were about to announce the situation publicly. One was assassinated while the other was seriously wounded. The Earth Military Alliance and Defense League will never allow for full disclosure until the situation goes critical, all systems are in place, and we are forced to mobilize. For this to happen, the infrastructure must be finished - and up and running."

"Give me all the details, every last bit, nothing left out. I need to know. NOW. "

"As I stated, we cannot go into detail until after you meet with Galactic Ambassador Pan."

"Screw that or whatever he happens to be. Tell me NOW! The rest of you, please leave he two of us alone. I have some personal things to say to General Precuneus." The room empties. The door clicks shut. The President waits a bit to collect her thoughts and then nods to General Precuneus.

The General quickly sums up the situation. President Katenbach is a scientist holding a PhD in Quantum Physics from Rutgers University - not a law degree from Harvard - and she is The President. He gestures to her chair. I will give her the whole dump and take my chances. Slowly the President takes her seat.

"No one else may ever know what I'm about to tell you. And Madam President, you can't let on that I have told you. You will be fully informed at the meeting you'll be having next week with Galactic Ambassador Pan. It's our duty to bring you up to speed historically, geopolitically, and technically. Ambassador Pan demands only that he be allowed to go into the details. You will need to play along. "

"All the major players have nuclear weapons and/or advanced research capabilities. We always have problems making sure that some countries understand the severity of this and the way it needs to be coordinated among all participants."

"So all the political propaganda is a cover for this effort about which I am still not completely informed? How long has this been going on?"

"It was officially recognized just after World War II. We know it's been going on far longer."

"Your guess, General?"

"It's not a guess sir. Since the destruction of the Neanderthals, Madam President."

"You've got to be kidding me." This time she is not standing but is taking it all in.

"No, I'm not. And if I may say so, we are, how I should say this, here on this planet as a test, a colony, perhaps as a mistake. Some of us think it's possibly a game. You will need to decide for yourself."

This is the first time she addresses him by his first name, "General Precuneus, Gregory, are you all crazy? A test, a game, a war? And, EVERY president since Truman has known about this?"

"Yes, Madam President, and everyone has responded in pretty much the same manner. Hell Madam, even our own people, with years of training behind them, react with total disbelief when they are indoctrinated into the program, me included. Roosevelt was the first President to be informed and he refused to believe it. He would not meet with Ambassador Pan in 1938. Do you remember Orson Well's War of the Worlds broadcast? It was the Galactic Ambassador attempting to set up a meeting in New Jersey. It failed."

"Gregory, please leave me. I have to digest this. And General, thank you. I appreciate your candor and truthfulness." President Katenbach swivels her chair away from him and he exits. The door clicks shut.

"They never tell you the whole story, even in the intimate meetings with the last one on the way out. Sons of bitches," she says to the empty room. "No wonder they go gray."

II

President Rose Katenbach and her staff are aboard a low orbital Imperial United States military vehicle. They launch from Andrews Air Base-Space Port. Once in orbit, they are met by a Galactic League craft and escorted to a vessel that displays the Ambassador's Flag. The Bow of the giant craft has an insignia that indicates his presence. The President notices the insignia but is unaware of its meaning.

From what President Katenbach can view, she guesses that the ship is at least three times larger than the island of Manhattan in length and width. She does not get a good look at the totality of the vessel. In some manner, as a scientist she is fascinated. "How do they do it, General? How do they transport over these distances? What about the acceleration effects on their bodies? "

The General says in a low voice, "We still haven't figured that out."

They all disembark and are met by The Galactic League Commander and her personal guard.

"I am Galactic Commander Tetri, Ambassador Pan's Military Attaché and Administrator of this quadrant of the galaxy. This is my vessel or ship as you would call it." She is over six foot tall, armed, wearing shielded glasses, and shows no emotion. She is polite but firm. "Please Madam President and General Precuneus follow me. The others, including your S.S. detachment, will be escorted to their suites."

The S.S. people are at a loss. They are not supposed to leave the President's side. The head of the President's guard is about to question Commander Tetri when General Precuneus waves her down. "I will take responsibility from here. Please do as you are instructed. This is an order."

President Katenbach is also about to question the separation of her staff. The idea that someone else is in command of the sovereign space that is Earth's has not quite sunk in. The General, who has been through this before, guesses the president's feelings and deflects a possible political gaffe by saying, "Yes commander. It is an honor to see you again. I notice that Ambassador has his flag on your vessel."

Commander Tetri glances his way, acknowledging the comment, but says nothing. An Officer approaches her. They converge and he breaks away facing the General. He is considerably shorter in stature than the rest of the crew, most being well over six feet tall, but he also wears the Ambassador's Insignia on his lapels.

"Good day General. I am Commander Hewa. I will escort you in from here. Your suite will be adjacent to President Katenbach's." The President and General Precuneus separate. The door opens to his suite. "Ambassador Pan will be making the arrangements from this point on. General, you are familiar with the protocols."

Tetri faces the President, "Madam President, this is your suite. I will have one of my staff assist you in getting settled and addressing any need and concerns. Your personal items have been placed in your quarters." And in a less military manner Commander Tetri says, "Madam President do try and relax. I can be reached should you require anything."

Later, Ambassador Pan is alone with President Katenbach in a private section of the ship.

"Madam President, it is an honor to finally meet you. If you don't mind, I will dispense with the pleasantries and get to the point."

"Yes, Mr. Ambassador, you do that," President Katenbach says in a manner that might be misinterpreted as sarcastic. There is no awe in her demeanor.

The Ambassador notices the remark and her tone. She knows more than she is supposed to. He begins, "Once our deep space sensors observed your planet's use of atomic weapons and atmospheric testing, we knew that the beginning of a new epoch was indicated."

The President makes no remark.

"Do you know why I'm on this planet?"

The president does not allow herself to indicate she is aware of anything other than what she has been told she is permitted to know. "It's a very secret part of my position," she says. "I know there has been a formal briefing for every president since Truman."

The Ambassador agrees while thinking: If she isn't demanding answers, she must know. They did not follow my orders. However, she is very cool under fire. I will let it slide, for now. Maybe.

The President continues, "This is a meeting between our people and yours, as far as I was informed by my Chief of Staff and Secretary of State. This meeting is to expand upon that."

The Ambassador thinks to himself, a meeting of our peoples, how quaint. "You have then not been informed."

"Informed? Informed of what? What more should I be aware of?"

"We would like to introduce ourselves and our mission. We are from a different section of the galaxy. Our mission is not to invade your planet but to engage in a little give and take. Jousting is the word to describe our mission. You are familiar with the term?"

She nods, not saying anything.

Well, she is a cool one, just like someone I know. He laughs to himself thinking of Commander Tetri.

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"Madam President, allow me to introduce you to what has been presented to all the current world leaders in a private meetings. This also includes former Presidents of the United States, The

Chairman of China, The President of Russia, The Emperor and Prime Minister of Japan and various other Heads of State. Each leader, with his or her military, was briefed independently at first, and then in a sub-Rosa joint session in Roswell, New Mexico, in 1947 and thereafter. I will begin a holographic record of one meeting. This is what I said to your then President Eisenhower. Who, I will admit, I admired. That's why I am recalling this meeting as opposed to any of the others." A holographic image appeared over a circular disc in the middle of the table. It was a view of a group of seated humans with Ambassador Pan standing at the front of the room.

"My name is Ambassador Pan. Ambassador Pan or Mister Ambassador is the manner in which I will be addressed. I am the only being that Earth will have contact with, except for my Military Attaches."

President Eisenhower could be seen looking over to his Chief of Staff, General LeMay. "First let me make sure. General - everyone here is cleared KOSMIK-A, correct?" They both looked around at the small group of people present: the Vice President; the Secretary of Defense; The Secretary of State; Chiefs of Staff; and a few others who were recording the meeting below the White House in a bunker.

'Yes, Mr. President. This meeting is for this group's eyes and ears only," an aide replied.

"Mr. President, it is an honor to finally meet you. You are a great hero among our people. You are a former general, Current Commander in Chief, and the head of a globally successful military action. You are the civilian leader of a great historically warlike nation. You are attempting to piece together the ruins of your planet in a most civilized manner. You, sir, should be proud of that fact.'

President Eisenhower nodded. "Thank you. Please have a seat at the table. We have much to discuss. I am surprised by your visit, but you are here and that's a fact."

"We will not inform your populations of our presence or goals. That is your choice and decision. I can only recommend you do whatever is necessary in order to avoid panic. An educational process should be developed. And yes, it will disrupt a number of entrenched politically powerful entities. That is your problem. You must deal with that reality.' Ambassador Pan turned towards Eisenhower. 'Mr. President, have you ever heard of Roswell?"

The President and the Vice President looked at each other questioningly and shrugged, but General LeMay's eyes enlarged. The President chuckled and said, "I read something about a crashed space saucer." He started to laugh but stopped quite abruptly. "Oh my god." He looked to General LeMay and demanded, "Why wasn't I informed?" before collecting himself. "Please do go on, sir."

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The Ambassador continues to outline the history to President Katenbach. She is silent, shocked even though she was briefed. The actual presentation is unnerving.

President Katenbach admits, "This is history as I never knew it. There was never a hint of anything other than what was written."

Pan continues, "The Russians knew from their early Twentieth Century history that something was unusual. The metal shards recovered from the 1908 explosion that flattened much of the forest in Tunguska were not made from any material on this planet. The fact that the Tsar refused to believe his scientists and ministers helped to end the family rule. The Bolsheviks and others of like mind had planned to present the data to the public. The ensuing wars prevented that until the present era. The officials within the Russian military establishment were less than surprised. Only the U.S. kept most of its military leadership and its citizenry in the dark, as you now know."

Ambassador Pan looks to President Katenbach and says, "That's about the totality of the information you need to know. I can't think of anything else that would matter except to mention since then, leadership in every country has been given a similar introduction to the players as well as full recordings of the initial and follow-up meetings. Nothing has been left out. Shock is always the first reaction."

### III

A week had passed since President Katenbach's initial meeting with Galactic Ambassador Pan. She had now invited General Precuneus and the Ambassador to her ranch in Western Virginia. They were away from the terminal insanity that was the Capital. Rose Katenbach, was a former Olympic shooter. She was glad they had been able to "sneak out" to her ranch to relax and enjoy some different activities. This setting would give her an opportunity to observe the Ambassador up close.

"Gentlemen," she said, "I have a collection of trap shotguns. One of them should fit each of you. Why don't we go out to my range and enjoy a little practice?" She turned to the Secret Service people guarding her. "Why don't you leave us and enjoy the local scenery. I don't feel you have to worry about these two," she ordered.

"We'll be close, Madam President," the head of her team answered. She was not leaving the President alone, especially not with That One - The Ambassador.

"Madam President, this is quite different from anything I have experienced," said the Ambassador. "Considering all that has come before, I never expected any activity or invitation such as this."

"No need to be so formal," she answered. "Please, let's forget the business of state for a few hours and blow off some steam and some clay pigeons."

The Ambassador liked this one. I hope they do well, he thought to himself.

The General kept his mouth shut. He thought Colonel Wan would have had a field day with all this. But Colonel Wan was not invited for reasons he could only guess. Wan was a difficult one to contain sometimes. He had been informed that this was merely a pleasure outing. Looking over at the Ambassador he thought, I'm sure the President has her reasons.

The General engrossed himself looking over, picking up, and mounting what he felt was a priceless collection of shooting instruments. The balance on each was perfect. The wood and engravings were flawless. He had never before seen anything like this. Finally he exclaimed, "Do you really want us to use these pieces of art? I mean look at them."

The President laughed, "Most of these were tools of my old trade. Of course, use them. General, here, take the Kreigoff. I think you'll like it. Mr. Ambassador, you have your pick of any of the others since you are my honored guest."

The Ambassador looked over the weapons and settled on a semi-automatic Beretta that had been specially built for a large being. He shouldered it, checked the balance, sites, and the metal finish and smiled. "Yes, this will do just fine. I haven't used anything like it in ages. Amazing level of quality for so ancient a technology."

"Wait until you see the accuracy Mr. Ambassador. The recoil will take some getting used to. I have shooting jackets for both of you. Gentlemen, please follow me."

The Ambassador knew precisely that the President was trying to size him up. He had conducted this scenario, minus the shooting, throughout the planet with new leaders for decades. The opening questions were always the same and never rehearsed. The Ambassador liked the complete spontaneity. It gave him a gauge so he could get a true reaction. Still, this would be different with guns in hand.

"Madam President, do you hunt?"

"Yes, of course, why?"

"I'd like to know more of your thoughts on that subject. Hunting is one of our favorite sports too." The Ambassador was obviously intrigued.

The President stated most emphatically, "I can't speak for those that hunt for survival. That's a totally different issue. For me, and others like me, it's a release. I feel like I am closer to nature out here. Hunting serves a purpose as well. It is a sport, but it also helps keep the animal population in check. With the planet populations the size they are, there is less room for animal migration. With that in mind, hunting keeps the wild animal population in a balance so there is less starvation."

"Animal husbandry is an interesting way to view hunting. Madam President, you do have other reasons besides survival or husbandry?" asked the Ambassador.

"Hunting is a way to get back to our primal roots."

"Primal roots. Yes, we understand that concept too. How very similar we are. You've shown great gifts in this area, hunting that is. Why don't you hunt each other as sport? You do undergo a form of ritual hunting in your wars?"

"War is only used for self-defense. Hunting another human being, that would be an abomination. One does not hunt other human beings!" The President is guarded by the statement and the follow-up question.

"But war is allowed, correct?"

"Yes, as I mentioned, it is self-defense."

Now the Ambassador started to drill through the argument. "Hunting animals that have no recourse to counter your technology, is that fair or sporting?"

"It's hunter and prey, my good sir," said the President, not sure where this line of discussion was going. "It's the way of the universe."

"That's a very good argument. You established a rationale for hunting and if it's the hunting of humans, it is self defense. Still - even though you argue from a food-chain perspective - it still appears to me, to us, that hunting is a one sided activity. Or at least the odds are certainly stacked in your favor. A duck doesn't shoot back."

"Ducks are food. Humans are not!"

The Ambassador lightened things up with the next question. "Well, maybe so," he chuckled, "but what if the sides were even. How would you feel then?"

"I'm not sure. I never thought of it in that manner. I never considered a duck shooting back that is. How would that work?" She laughed at the very idea. "Bears, ducks, and deer would somehow need to develop ways to meet our threat in a manner equal to us and yet within their capacity."

"Please, Madam President, allow me to ask a few more questions. Would you feel it was sporting, shooting fish in a barrel?"

"Of course not! It wouldn't be fair or sporting at all! I fish in a river or on a boat in the ocean. In a barrel, really now." She gave the Ambassador a look.

"A sporting chance. That's a good point and you have brought that up a number of times. I like that." Ambassador Pan liked this president.

The Ambassador continued, "Let me go over some past history that I haven't mentioned previously and has brought me to present myself to you and others of your rank throughout your planet. On your calendar, August 6th and 9th 1945 your country changed the rules of the game for everyone."

"Game?"

"Yes, game. Previous to this specific technological era your planet was in many respects, primitive. This is not an insult, only an observation. You had the makings of a great planet. Through your use of atomic bombs and the paths your planet took since then - self defense notwithstanding - things have been altered, so we've moved the..."

"They were the enemy," interrupted The President.

"No, they were people. That action got our attention. Two years later, the rules really changed when you shot down one of our unarmed observation craft. We know your military, and we have no idea how you got that lucky shot off at one of our craft. It crashed in Roswell, in your July 1947." The ambassador looked tense, and then he sighed. "I suggest we break this line of conversation and get on with our shooting. We can resume in a week. I know you're newly elected. We go through this every few years with your nation. It does get tedious."

He continued, "I am inviting the Ambassador of Russia, China, India and some of the other countries to meet with me and my military attaches. The location will be transmitted to you via secure channels."

The President maintained her composure. "Let's go shoot." She looked at General Precuneus. He nodded that he was ready.

The General had been through these initial meetings several times previously. He kept his distance as they spoke. He thought to himself, I'll get my chance to give her the complete technical run down on The Program soon enough. Here we go again. She's lucky to have this unplanned shooting party with Pan. She must have something about her that he likes and respects. He's never done anything like this with the others.

IV  
2050 CE

Colonel Wan Shi-kai was general Precuneus' technical aid interface with the Chinese, Japanese and the rest of the Asian community. Colonel Wan was a senior member of the Peoples Liberation Army Space Command and a trusted member of the Earth Defense Force. He had a

PhD in particle physics from Beijing University. He was a bit of a hot shot and a loose cannon at times.

General Precuneus knew the type. They are great to have at your back but can be trouble when certain levels of advanced diplomacy are required. Colonel Wan had risen through his ranks by dint of brains and guts, not to mention family connections. Handing him to General Precuneus solved a couple of issues. First, he would become their eyes and ears to the thinking of the general in command. And secondly, Colonel Wan would now be the general's problem. Protocol demanded that each senior representative be accepted, short of a major crime. Colonel Wan was the best choice.

General Precuneus could guess why Wan's superiors had sent him, but his technological experience would be a boon to the total effort. The General overlooked the other personal and intelligence issues.

Colonel Wan had come up with the concept of turning the energy-focusing and production facilities orbiting the sun into weapons to be used in the eventual upcoming war games. At first everyone thought he had gone off the deep end. But once he described his plans in full technical detail, the staff wondered why they had not thought of it. There the answer was in full view and no one even noticed it. Colonel Wan had learned early on to have both political and technical back-up when presenting a novel concept. He had stated his case in this way: "The solar arrays we have in place are located in orbit around the sun at 1,000,000 km as per Crane and Westmorland's seminal work on Black Hole Starships Propulsion in 2009. In that book, they mentioned that a Small Black Hole could be artificially created by firing a huge number of gamma rays from converging lasers. We have such lasers today, which actually work with our present energy programs. The Black Hole Weapon System, that I have named The Program, will consist of power pulses."

The idea was to demonstrate the ability to harness the energy in such a manner as to create small, 15 to 30 solar mass black holes that would flash in and out of existence. However, they would, as their bigger and more massive brothers and sisters do, spew out jets of energy moving at 99% of the speed of light. No being or automated system would be able to react quickly enough to avoid the jet of energy that would vaporize anything in its path. There would be no defense against this.

General Precuneus politely interrupted, "If I may say, we have one chance, just one sporting chance. We're a bit better off than sitting ducks or fish in a barrel as the Ambassador likes to remind me. Some sport."

Wan continued, "We know that there is an outside chance the system could run away with itself, destroying everyone in the process, but we have decided it is worth the risk."

Colonel Wan took to the project with all his might, giving every ounce of energy to it. His enthusiasm was infectious. Scientists, engineers, military staff and civilian personnel who were indoctrinated into the project requested assignment to his groups.

"We are saving the planet. This is the final battle. Losing is not an option." Those were his words written in all major languages placed over his desk. He tolerated no slackers and no substandard work.

V  
2050 CE

A month following her first set of meetings with the Ambassador, President Katenbach - together with other leaders - met again with Ambassador Pan, this time at Roswell. Each leader had his or her military staff along.

The Ambassador reintroduced the Commander of the ship he currently occupied. He repeated his opening statement given to the Americans when they originally boarded her craft. "This is my Senior Military Attaché, Commander of this quadrant of the galaxy. If I am not available, she has complete authority to conduct whatever she deems necessary." She nodded in acknowledgment.

"Please, let us begin. As most of you know, we initially seeded the planet with what you call Neanderthals hoping they would evolve to what you are basically today. They were, as a whole, rather satisfied with their lot and refused to move much further.

"As President Katenbach mentioned earlier, shooting fish in a barrel would be unsportsmanlike behavior. We too like to hunt and we like to groom and breed planets and beings for games and competition. In order to accomplish that goal we have to assist in the development and evolution of said planets, unless we stumble across one at our current level or close to it."

"In the case of Earth we bred and groomed. However, you far out exceeded our goals, especially with the use of atomic and nuclear weapons. We didn't expect their use at all, although I don't know why, considering your history. That moved the time-table up."

President Katenbach was outraged. "I'm not someone's experiment, someone's fighting dog. I can't believe what I'm hearing."

The Ambassador continued after a bit, "In truth, we didn't want you to obliterate yourselves before we had a chance to play. Your destruction of one of our unarmed crafts in 1947 forced our hand. We started assisting your planet in moving forward technically. All your black programs are actually coordinated. Each country is developing systems that will assist in our eventual game of life or death.

"Now you are close to the point at which we want the games to begin. You have ten years to coordinate, integrate, and organize your planet for the games. It will be a fair fight, unlike your shooting at unarmed ducks, or fish in a barrel. Commander Tetri will go over the rules of engagement, and the rules for a tie and a win. Since you do not have interstellar flight capabilities this action will take place within your solar system."

Commander Tetri interrupted. "Sir, if I may. Our technical members will be giving you an assist up to a point. It will be a point that we will decide upon. Roswell is where we will meet your people. It is a spot hallowed for our fallen unarmed comrades." She looks around at the assembled room for emphasis. She would rather displace this bunch of monkeys with a new breed and start the process all over.

The Ambassador gives the President an ever so slight nod. If she notices or is affected by this she does not show it. She doesn't flinch.

VI  
2060 CE

Within the Space Command Combat Center the screens indicate the positions of the alien and Earth battle fleets.

"General you must fire!" Colonel Wan Shi-kai demands in a controlled but emphatic manner. Colonel Wan can't fathom the General's hesitation. The target fleet is there in plain view and in range. The starting rules are like a chess game, Earth gets to go first. What is he thinking? They have been planning this for years. The surprise will guarantee our freedom. Order the exchange. That will be the end. The alien fleet will pull back.

"Calm, be calm. This is it one way or the other. We will make our move. However, something is very wrong with this picture," he says to Colonel Wan in a low voice. He does not want to embarrass the Colonel and he does not want to be distracted from his calculations and evaluations.

General Precuneus is known for quick and decisive action. This hesitation is most contrary. The Colonel and almost everyone in the command center are beginning to sweat, and it isn't because of the temperature. The General is quite aware of the tension and turns to Colonel Wan. "Colonel, they've waited this long, a bit longer won't make that much a difference. We'll make our move. Trust me, we will." He says this in a voice meant to inspire confidence.

"The atomic bombing of Japan in the 1940's, the shooting down of an alien space craft during the same decade, and above ground nuclear testing were the beacons that brought us here." General Precuneus is reviewing all that came before. These were always the same clues given by the Ambassador. These words have to do with today's combat, but he has yet to decipher their deeper meaning. He needs a just bit more time. He thinks he is close. He views the positions of the alien fleet and Earth's battle fleet once more on the monitors.

"General Precuneus, Sir? We're waiting for your command, SIR!" Colonel Wan says smartly, saluting.

"Colonel Wan, do not fire until I give the command."

"Yes General, sir, but the battle fleets are in position and ready. It's our move. The commanders have been briefed on our initiating plan of attack. As per the rules of engagement, we open in this one. The Program weapon systems are ready on your command." Colonel Wan reiterates all this in an even more emphatic voice. He gives a nod to begin the repositioning and the target attack sequence.

General Gregory Precuneus says nothing. He only stares at the huge monitors.

General Precuneus begins to outline the situation for all in a language that they can understand. "Let the first moves be made on my count. There are a limited number of possible shots due in part to the energy demanded. The Gamma ray beams will be concentrating more energy onto one point in space-time than they have ever had to do for energy generation." He continues, "The re-application of the technology has the potential to take out the whole solar system if it ever gets out of control, but the simulations suggest it will work.

"One chance, just one sporting chance. That's all we really have here. We're a bit better off than fish in a barrel as the Ambassador would have it... We do have the other beams for close in combat, should that become necessary." He concludes looking around at the assembled officers, scientists and technicians. There is not a sound. Some get it, a few have a clue and the rest are still favoring a blast to the fleet.

Colonel Wan's assistant, a Sergeant Major, takes it upon himself and walks towards the override system that is imbedded into the system. As he lunges for the control center's override, he is tackled by Ambassador Pan's designate who, up until this time, has remained in the shadows. He too was wondering if the General had lost his nerve.

The alien observer-designate hands the soldier to the guards and resumes his position. No words are spoken. The Sergeant Major has been quickly subdued. There is no time to remove him. The planet is at stake. They tie him to a support beam with duct tape and zip ties. The General hears the commotion but is busy with his calculations. An analog clock, an anachronism from the past, with arms moving, is like the command center waiting for the order, and is silent.

"General Precuneus, sir, the dishes are turned and ready to fire. I don't think the opposition has any idea what we've done or can do." A smile crosses his face.

The General looks up, and gets right on point. "No, I don't think they are ready for this. This is a surprise that we developed outside their assistance. This time we kept it hidden as a civilian enterprise." The General is confident of the technology and the element of surprise. He has a smile on his face for the first time in a very long time.

"Sir, your orders?" asks Colonel Wan. This is his life.

"Colonel, concentrate one battery off to the north and one south of the invading fleets that are parked. Make two shots each at the following coordinates. DO NOT aim at the fleet."

"SIR, are we intentionally not shooting at them?" The Colonel is in shock.

"Affirmative, we are not. History teaches and we must learn," commands the General in a tone that backs the Colonel down. "Colonel Wan I understand your concern. As you designed, part of the demonstration was to show the aliens that the Earth based scientists can steer the jets by setting up the black hole at right angles to the beam and thereby control the attacking angle of energy. The temporary event horizons would suck anything in that was not in direct line of the jets.

"If we must shoot to kill, the activity when initiated will to be conducted simultaneously with the back-up mirrors. There will be no need to recalibrate. I didn't want to say anything," nodding in the direction of the Ambassador's agent. "Destruction or crippling of 45% of the fleet was a tie, 50% or better was a win by the rules of engagement. I set this up myself."

The Colonel is impressed but unconvinced.

Black Hole Weaponry has never been attempted. The theory is based upon energy generation work that has been developed to feed the energy requirements of the planet. So far all black holes developed for energy are at most one million metric tons in mass and containable. The experiment before them now is an experiment of last resort.

The General's Chinese and Indian counterparts were not aware of his thoughts on the method of demonstration. Most of the staff on the other hand wanted to just blast the fleet in big demonstration and call it a win. If it didn't work, then it would be ship to ship combat. They guessed the outcome. Surrender was not an option.

In a quiet voice the General orders, "Colonel, we will now fire as I mentioned in two stages. Make the other batteries ready to fire on targets at will. Let's show them what we have and see what comes of it. This should be quick. Your key, NOW."

He turns his key with the Colonel's key. The systems are activated. All mirrors move as per their tracking programs.

The solar arrays orbiting the sun reflect the energy to the dishes. They are now aimed into the space firing four quick shots of concentrated energy. They streak into the darkness of space concentrating on each point with so much energy that they create a black hole. One instantly swallows a small artificial moon of a mass equal to that of Phobos. And then the black hole disappears into its own collapse, the energy necessary for its growth and stability turned off. Another creates a black hole that for a second becomes dangerously alive but collapses with an energy implosion never before witnessed by humans.

The Ambassador has appointed a military representative as per the rules. The General knows him as Commander Hewa. He must not communicate to the fleet, just observe. Hewa is amazed at the possibility of what he sees. This is a surprise. Very good, he thinks. Nice move but now what?

The alien invasion fleet doesn't move.

"You would think they figured this out," someone says in the background.

The aliens move their ships into a different formation. The ships in the far end of the solar system swarm to new combat positions surrounding the inner four planets and the Earth's fleet... And then they move away, with no combat being initiated.

General Precuneus looks at the formation on the screens. It is unusual for a battle commander to put his forces this close together. They saw the display of power that we brought to bear. Are they calling our bluff, do they want ship to ship combat? Was I incorrect in my assessment?

A communication jamming pulse overrides all out-going terrestrial and Earth-space-based communications as a voice communication comes across from the alien side.

"General Precuneus. That was your opening move?"

General Precuneus turns slowly and with confidence, "Yes Ambassador, that was our opening move. I see your ships are in combat position. It's your move and we will of course respond in our self-defense as per the rules of engagement."

"How the hell are we going to defend against all of them?" Shouts Colonel Wan. "You're out of your mind and have just enslaved us. You should be shot!"

"General, please subdue your Colonel." cautions the Ambassador and continues. "Well, that is a far different move than we expected. This is rather unique given the majesty of the technology you re-harnessed without our knowledge. You put on quite a display. But now it's our move. Fleet into positions," the Ambassador orders again. The space-battle fleet instantly reorganizes again into a multi-layered and tiered defense.

This is odd thinks the General. I thought one thing, and then it looked like a free-for-all combat situation, and now I'm not sure. It looks like a parade?

The Colonel is shaking in rage. He thinks: This coward. This general is a coward and he will enslave us all! This is not how the Chinese military would act! "Sir, we are in danger of total destruction. It's their move! They will obliterate our fleet and they win. We will be enslaved." He hisses to the General, "You, SIR, are a coward. I cannot let this occur."

The control center is silent. Armed guards are of two minds, shoot the Colonel, or shoot the General and let the Colonel save the planet. Neither happens.

The Galactic League observer is ready. He has override orders from Commander Tetri. He unlocks the firing mechanisms on the weapons that are embedded in his uniform.

A message is relayed to all Earth's military and political centers from the Ambassador's ship. "This is the correct move. We are always hunting for more civilizations with whom to

interconnect. Welcome to the Galaxy League. We will be setting up the process as soon as we can make the proper arrangements."

Everyone in the command centers across the planet stops in their tracks.

"You did evolve into worthy adversaries. But war is not acceptable. Your demonstration of your technology was impressive and, in this case, unexpected. The non-use of lethal power as a demonstration of your technology and might was restrained and awe inspiring." The Ambassador continues directly to the general. "Nice move, General. You should be commended for your thought and bravery in the face of possible annihilation. One of your staff will need some assistance. If you would, please tend to him before he becomes a danger to all of us."

Everyone has been facing the screens, listening and viewing the Ambassador. He is not on Commander Tetri's bridge but on his own ship further out in deep space with his entourage. From what can be gleaned, the vessel is huge by any standards.

The Sergeant Major has freed himself. The group that held him was too busy looking at the screen and the Ambassador. He heads for the weapons override again, but the soldier never makes two more steps.

The End

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