

## **Alexandra “Sasha” Zharkova**

Daughter of an esteemed General, Sasha grew up in a family with a strong military tradition. She was always pushed to be the best and fought hard to evade her older brother Yuri's looming shadow. Trained and educated by the best she was seemingly destined for greatness. A natural athlete she took well to combat training, though her ultimate strength was in battlefield strategy. She proved to be a studious and masterful tactician and was inducted into the Russian military space program with the goal of becoming a star ship Captain.

Always the subject of a tremendous amount of pressure, Sasha weathered it gracefully on the outside. On the inside she was also eager for a release, if only for a moment. Still though, life was good for Sasha before the invasion.

After graduating for the Naval Academy Sasha was commissioned as the first officer aboard the new christened cruiser *Vigilance*. Captained by the head strong Ivan Rykov, the ship and its crew had just finished their first shake down outside of Mars when Thalurian's fleet warped in.

## **The War**

After the the destruction of the *The Good Word* the *Vigilance* was summoned back to Earth to fight in its defense. Sasha tried to advise against immediately returning, urging caution and perhaps reconnaissance before engaging an unknown enemy. She tried to make contact with other inbound ships, hoping to create a formation and a plan of attack. This sparked a lengthy argument with Rykov who wanted nothing more than to ride in and rescue his home planet, tactics be damned.

This argument would save the *Vigilance* and her crew as it delayed their arrival long enough to avoid the majority of the conflict. When they were finally in Earth's orbit, there was only the enemy and ocean of debris. Confused it took a handful of frozen human bodies for the crew to come to terms with the horrifying reality.

Thinking quickly Sasha ordered all but the most critical systems to be powered down, hoping to lower their energy signature. And so the *Vigilance* sat adrift, hidden by wreckage of her allies, watching an invading force reap untold amounts of damage on her home.

A straight fight was out of the question, even Rykov knew that. The Thalurian ships were considerably larger and infinitely more powerful than the *Vigilance*. Though she had the element of surprise the

*Vigilance* had little else. Rykov called for an emergency meeting, gathering all of his senior staff for what would be the first and the last time.

With conventional weapons out of the equation Sasha devised a two part plan, The first was to have the *Vigilance* slip into FTL and slam into the nearest enemy ship the *Leviathan*. The kinetic energy from the impact should be enough to penetrate the Thalurian shields and possibly their hull. .

The second part of her plan was to set off a secondary explosion by placing armed nuclear warheads in stasis. As soon as the ship was destroyed from the impact, the stasis field would lose power and the ordinance would detonate inside the unshielded vessel.

Rykov was not thrilled with the idea of destroying a ship he was only recently made captain of, but given their options this was the best course.

Daring as it was the plan would still take coordination. Sasha set about opening communications with Earth, in order to asses the capabilities of the enemy and to create a diversion. She managed to get a response from a hidden defense network in Germany that was willing to help.

While monitoring signals she noticed something strange. There were obvious communications going on throughout the nations of earth and the ships of the enemy, but there was one, isolated stream of data flowing from Earth and to the *Leviathan*, stranger yet, the *Leviathan* was responding...

When she tried to trace the source of origin, she was met with a signal that bounced all over the globe. It would take more power than she was comfortable expending to discover the source. The data stream itself was heavily encrypted, aware of the implications Sasha copied all that she could and saved it to a local drive.

With the distraction in place the rest of the crew would return to the planet through escape pods and secondary vessels and the teleporter would only be used once to port Sasha and the Captain just before impact as its use would alert the *Leviathan* to their presence.

As the crew drifted down to the now war torn Earth, The German Salvo arrived right on time earning the *Leviathan's* attention.

With their authorization codes entered the Sasha and Rykov prepared for teleport, except only Sasha was enveloped in energy. Rykov, grim faced and determined, "I must see this through... I hope one day you understand" and with that a confused Sasha dematerialized from the bridge. Alone staring out into the void Captain Rykov took a moment to glance down at earth and with a smile he punched the engage button, launching the *Vigilance* into its glorious end.

The prow of the *Leviathan* exploded into a shower of splintered metal and fire as the *Vigilance* hit home,. Emergency shields went up a nanosecond later with as deterrent for future attacks. It only served to bring about the vessels doom however as the nuclear warheads in stasis detonated a moment later. Its wrath held within the in the *Leviathan's* shields, the explosion was amplified by the containment.

Sasha's first sensation was that a stale recycled air this was followed by applause, loud ,robust applause. Her vision cleared only reveal a shaken bunker filled with an assembly of civilians and soldiers, all soot covered and bloody. They were on their feet, pointing to video footage of what was left of the *Leviathan*. She felt a smile creep onto her face, knowing that Rykov had not died in vain.

She was greeted by her brother Yuri who escorted her off the teleporter pad and through the crowd. “ I have something I need you to look into” Sasha said reaching for her data drive. “It can wait” Yuri replied solemnly and it was then Sasha realized something was wrong.

“Father?” she guessed, putting two and two together. He nodded, leading her toward the med bay. Sasha's heart sank, she felt her emotions rush to the fore but she forced them down.

The med-bay was a wash with activity as doctors and nurses frantically tried to triage the wounded. She found her father laid out on a gurney, his ruined uniform draped over a nearby chair. His broad shirtless chest was wrapped in blood soaked bandages, while the rest of his body was dotted with cuts, bruises, and abrasions.

“He'll pull through,” the attending nurse suggested, answering the question she dared not ask. With a wave of his blood stained hand the General dismissed all but his daughter. Sasha was at his side, a tumultuous mix of emotions. Concern, anger, hatred, and uncertainty all vied for control of her mind.

Her father tried to speak but was interrupted by a violent series of wet coughs. The motion caused him a great deal of pain, but even in his dire state he would not let his daughter see it. He reached for her hand, “I am proud of you”, he confessed, letting his words hang in the air. It was the first time Sasha had ever heard those words from her father. Glancing at his daughter he began, ”that hatred and rage I see your eyes...savor it, cultivate it, let it grow into a something terrible. You will have need of it soon I fear...”