

Exodus of the Ularis

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A stream of plasma flashed by Joekam's canopy. He slammed his foot onto the left yaw-pedal, swinging the nose of his sherkath around to face the Herian brakith close on his tail. Inertia kept his fighter moving in it's original direction as he slipped his claw into the firing slot, sending a stream of projectiles from the craft's twin rail guns.

The first burst disintegrated harmlessly against the brakith's shield, illuminating the leaf-shaped craft in white light. Still, the enemy pilot flinched, swerving his craft out of the kill zone, just as Joekam hoped. He adjusted his yaw, keeping the brakith in his sights. His second rail gun burst broke through the shielding and ripped a ragged hole through the

enemy craft.

A fire flared briefly before the vacuum of the void snuffed it out. The Herian fighter rolled to the left before a final surge from its engine sent it tumbling toward the asteroid belt that orbited Sauria below. Joekam fired a third burst into the ship, blasting through the engine casing. He turned his ship away from the blooming explosion and slapped his tail against the boost panel.

The surge of speed tugged him back into his restraints. He snarled as he gazed at the entrancing swarm of sparkles and fire that swarmed around a massive black ship. This duel had pulled him too far away. His frustration lessened as he focused on the chatter coming over his com. The prophet Hoklar had spoken the truth. The Herian and Karn forces were turning on each other, their tenuous truce shattered in the heat of battle.

Even if they were to refocus their attack, it would be too late. The Ularis would soon be gone from this world of exile, finally on the way back to their rightful home. The unbelievers would remain, squabbling in futility over their prison.

The battle chatter ceased, and the voice of the prophet spoke.

"Brave warriors of the Ularis, your valiant sacrifice has ensured our first step on our pilgrimage to our once home, Shenkai."

A glint caught Joekam's eye. He slapped off the boost and pulled back on the throttle. On the port side, a Jerkrenak ship slipped through the void, its torpedo ports sliding open. Joekam roared at the sight of the blood enemies of the Ularis. The Herians and Karn sought only to steal the technology of the Ularis' pilgrimage ship. The Jerkrenak sought the utter destruction of all Ularis.

The prophet's voice continued to fill the cockpit. "Though your defense of our exodus means that you will never see Shenkai in this life, Surka will guide your spirits home."

Joekam rolled in behind the Jerkrenak torpedo ship and loosed a stream from his rail guns. He knew Surka smiled upon him when the projectiles hit no shields. The enemy ship's engines exploded brilliantly, leaving a broken hulk floating in the void. Joekam's triumphant cheer faded when his sensors picked up a torpedo speeding toward the pilgrimage ship.

"Our triumph is now imminent," Hoklar's voice rose to a crescendo. "The Ularis, children of the promise, pilgrims of hope, will no longer be slaves of exile. Our pilgrimage to our rightful home begins!"

The pilgrimage ship began to shimmer as its displacement engines took hold. Joekam slammed his throttle forward as he slapped on the boost one more. If the torpedo hit now it could damage the engines and doom the ship to be in a permanent flux.

A roar ripped from his throat as Joekam pressed his claw into the firing slot, sending a constant flow of metal after the torpedo. The silver stream slipped across the warhead's path and it exploded in a brilliant flash.

Joekam blinked away the spots, stunned. Yet some part of his mind registered the final ripple as the pilgrimage ship displaced. The Ularis exodus had finally begun. With Surka's blessing, his children would hatch on their true home.

A shockwave slammed into his fighter. His control board exploded in a shower of sparks, and the vibration of his engine ceased. Joekam gazed at the cloud of disabled fighters that marked the empty space where the Ularis vessel had been. The swarm slowly dispersed as the helpless ships coasted at the mercy of their inertia.

Joekam smiled as he released his restraints and reached for his canopy control. "Surka, guide me home."