The Weapon
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He fingered the controls of the Weapon. It was nearly time. His partner gave him a reassuring thumbs-up gesture, as if that would ease his mind. Just being in this area was a risk enough, but being on one of the three ships with this particular Weapon raised the stakes by nearly seven-thousand-fold. The two of them were suited up, ready to evacuate the corvette once they were ready to fire, once the rest of the crew was off the vessel. The risks were enormous, but after all, they were at war.

They had long ago forgotten what each side stood for, even what they had been called in the beginning; they just knew that they had been *right* and the other side horribly wrong. The conflict had gone on for centuries. It wasn't as if the conflict was very significant for the rest of humanity. Everyone knew that the war was going on, and everyone avoided that star system. Its official name became forgotten to organic minds, only lingering as an afterthought in various computer banks and outdated star charts. Most simply referred to it as the System of War. Many didn't refer to it at all. Weapons research was critical in the war, so the two sides focused on it entirely, abandoning all other areas of study. All knowledge was used solely to cause as much destruction to the other side as possible. After all, what was the point of knowing anything, if not to use it to your advantage?

The Weapon had been created twelve years ago, by the *good* side of course. Had it been the other way around those savages would have demolished his side at any cost. The Weapon unleashed an enormous amount of energy, more than should have been possible. No one cared how it worked, only that it did. Testing had gone very badly. Nearly every time one of the Weapon was fired it tore itself, and anything within five-thousand kilometers of itself, apart, not stopping until even the individual quarks of the device were shredded. The development team had reduced the error margin to fifty percent. Half of the time it worked, half of the time it ended very, very poorly. The only way around that was to get everyone off the ship before it fired the Weapon, launching it on a runaway course for annihilation, one way or the other.

The other side had gotten their hold on one of the Weapon, and used it successfully on the home moon-base of his side. One shot was all it needed. This was now the final fleet. Three of the Weapon, alongside a few dozen other ships, against the entire planet of the enemy. One Weapon would take out the entire enemy planet and fleet. One Weapon would give his side a victory after all these centuries. One Weapon. And they had three.

The enemy was ruthless, though. They took out the vanguard and only lost eight ships. As they made their way closer and closer to the Weapons at the center it became more difficult for the enemy to gain headway. The two fleets, much like matter and antimatter, tore each other to pieces in a storm of mutual-annihilation.

And then they took a hit. Their engines were down, they were adrift. Then another shot rocked the chassis, sending them into a spin of confusion. Unsecured crewmembers fell out of their stations and drifted quickly into walls. Many impacts resulted in swift death. He managed to hold on, but his partner wasn't so lucky. She lost her grip and tumbled away from the controls. He looked away as she collided with the bulkhead. He couldn't go to check if she was alive, and it would be impossible to get back to his station. He had a duty to perform. A Weapon to fire.

He realized then that many of the other ships had taken similar hits. Most of them had lost integrity and breached, killing everyone inside and leaving the vessels as nothing more than obstacles. As he surveyed the area he noticed that there were four ships left surrounding his, none Weapon-carrying. Life-support was still online, the engines could be fixed and the computer core was still functional. So was the Weapon. He could still fire it. Without his partner he would have no way to lock in the sequence, he would have to stay on the ship and hope that the Weapon would fire on the enemy, not fail, and destroy himself along with his few remaining comrades.

He aimed.

He steeled himself, preparing for either the best or the worst.

He put his hand over the firing controller and got ready to press it.

He was ready.

He could do this.

He knew it was the right time.

He wasn't ready.

He should rethink this.

What if it didn't work? His was the last Weapon-ship. There were only four other ships around him, probably totalling twenty-five people left. He would wipe out his side forever, and the the other side would win.

But what if it did work? The Weapon was powerful enough to take out the whole planet and the enemy fleet. The war would be won. Finally. His side may have suffered heavy losses, but the opposition would be gone

But the risk was too great. He couldn't do it. He had to find another way out. He had to-And then he realized he had hit the button with his elbow absentmindedly. He had a fraction of a second to recognize what had just happened, and then in a brilliant flash of light, the war was over.