

Lord Alexander Westing III

High Lord of the Crimson Fleet

Lord Alexander Westing the Third—the latest in a long line of captains to raise the black flag over the Crimson Fleets. Through the Long Night these fleets had kept their people in the asteroid archipelagos safe and fed when many other worlds had long burned out or been consumed by the darkness.

His grandfather had managed to lead the fleet with enough skill to earn a peace with the new Imperium that rose from the former ashes of Terra after the Primarch Horus Lupercal realized it was easier to bribe the pirates of the deep void into the Imperium than it was to try and hunt them down in the deep-void asteroid belts they operated from.

In his father's time the Crimson Fleet had mostly lain dormant, being given long-needed repairs and upgrades thanks to the new contacts with the Martian priesthood as they studied the new state of the wider galaxy. What they found was a bloated system full of targets ripe to loot and plunder—but the existence of the Legions made such rich targets too great a risk. So for a generation the Brigade sat idle, with nothing to do but train and master the new weaponry their newly acquired status allowed.

Only occasionally were they allowed to exercise their craft on newly found territories at the edge of the Imperium's control, but time and again the Astartes would arrive to claim command over the worlds they had just seized.

Now, finally, with the fires of war stoked by Horus, the time has again come to raise the Black over the Crimson Fleet. The galaxy is ripe, and Alexander the Third fully intends to have his men harvest its fruits as he wills it.

— End of Transmission —

Council of the Crimson Fleet

A War Council Aboard the Flagship

Alexander sat in his command throne before the table. Around the table sat other thrones, each impressive in their own right but none to match his own. As the High Lord of the Crimson Fleet, it was his right to sit above his subordinates.

“Report, my Captains. Tell me how the war is going.”

Only three of the thrones were occupied in person. Captain Cortez, master of the Ravager Corps, sat studying the displays with quiet attention.

“The Velatarius stand ready to raid and pillage, Lord,” Cortez replied without taking his eyes off the displays. “We have one hundred thousand made men ready to deploy with the fleet, along with maybe five hundred thousand hopefuls who are looking to move up their lot and be able to lay claim to their own share of the spoils.”

Across the table sat a massive brute of a man, covered in muscle that was clearly artificially enhanced, sockets covering his visible arms and chest.

“The Market has made another delivery. As per the deal, one percent have been returned to us, grown to suit our purpose. Once they have been implanted within the armor we will have another five thousand Charonites ready to unleash,” replied Attil, the Butcher Captain. “The Butchers will be ready by the time we make planetfall.”

At the far end of the table a woman sat. Her body was smaller than either Cortez or Attil, but she was no less impressive due to the number of cybernetics that made up her frame.

“R0M-1’EL, tell me—how do my armored corps fare?” Alexander asked as the attention turned to her.

In her robotic voice R0M-1’EL replied in a level, almost disinterested drone: “The fleet can bring down four hundred thirty-five Leman Russ assault tanks armed with demolisher cannons, another five hundred seventeen armed with plasma arms, another—”

“Enough, R0M-1’EL. I do not need to know how many of your tanks are in operation, just that your forces are ready to deploy.”

R0M-1’EL paused for a moment, obviously doing some calculations within its partial silica brain. “My forces stand ready to crush whatever resistance the planet might hold—be it mortal, Astartes, or the automata of the Mechanicus.”

Of the other nine thrones, six were covered in black draping—a tradition for when a captain was sent out on a raid or otherwise unable to be present with the lord of the fleet. One sat empty but had a display screen deployed from the ceiling above the throne, a feature to allow for conference even when they could not leave their post. On the screen, Void Captain Oratio sat upon his own command throne for the warship they all occupied, both guiding the subtle movements of the fleet as they crept into the system and taking precautions to ensure neither loyalist nor Horusite could detect them until they were ready.

“My Lord Captain, the fleet should be in position to strike within the week. There is no sign that they have yet detected us. The witches’ warnings have again proven fruitful. We only need to get the report of the Dagger Captain and we should be ready for your order to strike, Lord Alexander.”

Suddenly the other empty seat activated its own display screen, dropping down. On it a thin man of wiry build appeared. You would assume he was some harmless old beggar by his garb—not one of twelve honored pirate lords—but it was that very assumption that had allowed him to lie, murder, and spy his way onto the council of captains. The message was filled with waves of static and distortion; the distance between them alone did not account for it.

“My lord, we were able to make orbit with the concealment of the nightshields. As soon as we made forced connection with the loyalist data stacks we came under attack by malevolent scrap code. We were able to mine the required communication and tactical data from their systems, but the squat datasmiths are currently fighting to quarantine the scrap code from our core systems. The night shields are unaffected by the code due to using Eldar tech, but if the primary generators fail so will our veil. We are currently underway to reunite with the fleet, but I dare not send the data until it has been cleansed. For now we prepare to have all of it transposed onto a physical format so it can be reviewed by my combat logisticians. We should be in contact range with you in three days as long as our systems hold, and within two days if we can regain full system control within the next twelve hours. The datasmiths report that this data corruption is almost organic in its spread, but they assure me we have the generators fully quarantined since they are not standard Imperial tech like most of our control systems.”

As the screen went dark and contact with the Dagger Captain was lost, all eyes in the room returned to Lord Alexander.

“Will we simply follow the contract, my Lord? Without ships it would be easy to strike a crippling blow on several of the loyalist battle cruisers before they knew the danger,” Cortez commented.

Alexander just raised a hand and everyone stopped.

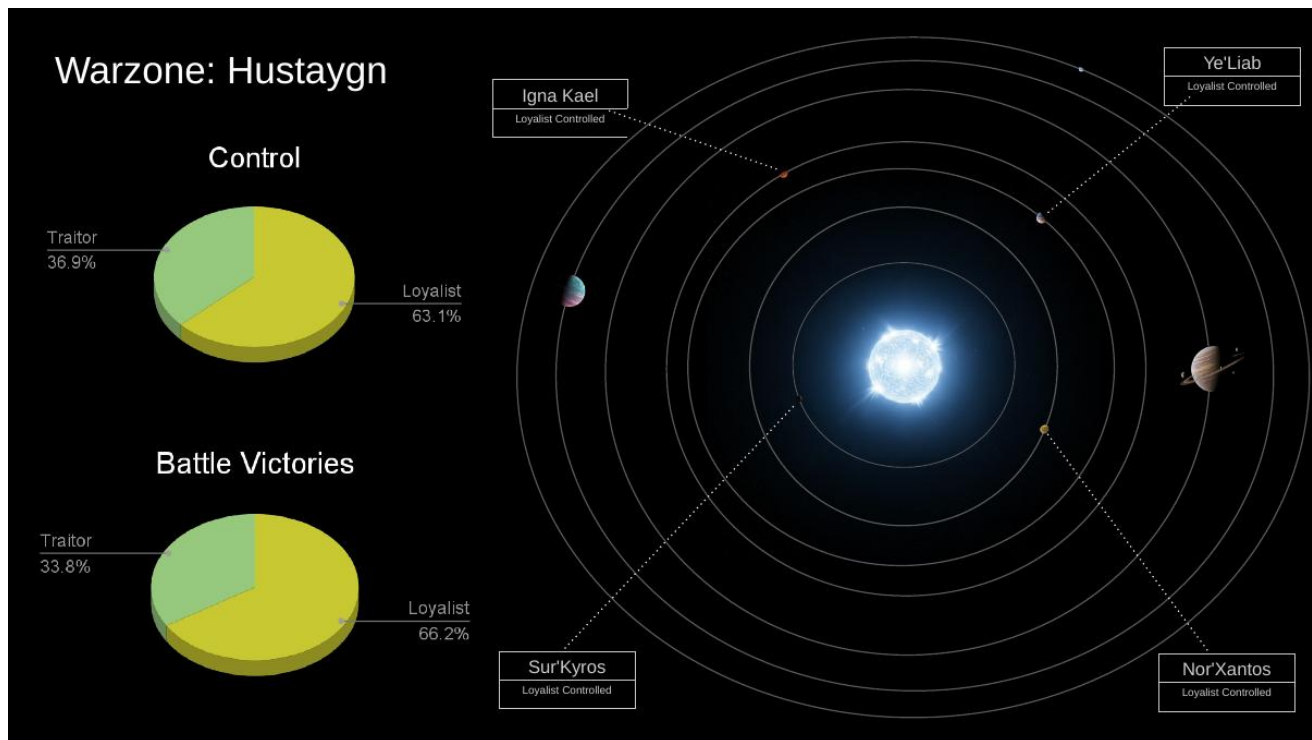
“I would see the data our clever spymaster has obtained with such efforts before I commit much of the fleet to action. Only once I have seen it will I make my call.”

As he stood up he looked at the final empty throne, covered in a white veil instead of the black ones the others were marked with. After a brief pause he started moving toward the deck reserved for the Lord Captain alone—well, for the past five generations of Lord Captains of the Crimson Fleet, reserved for the Lord Captain... and the Witch.

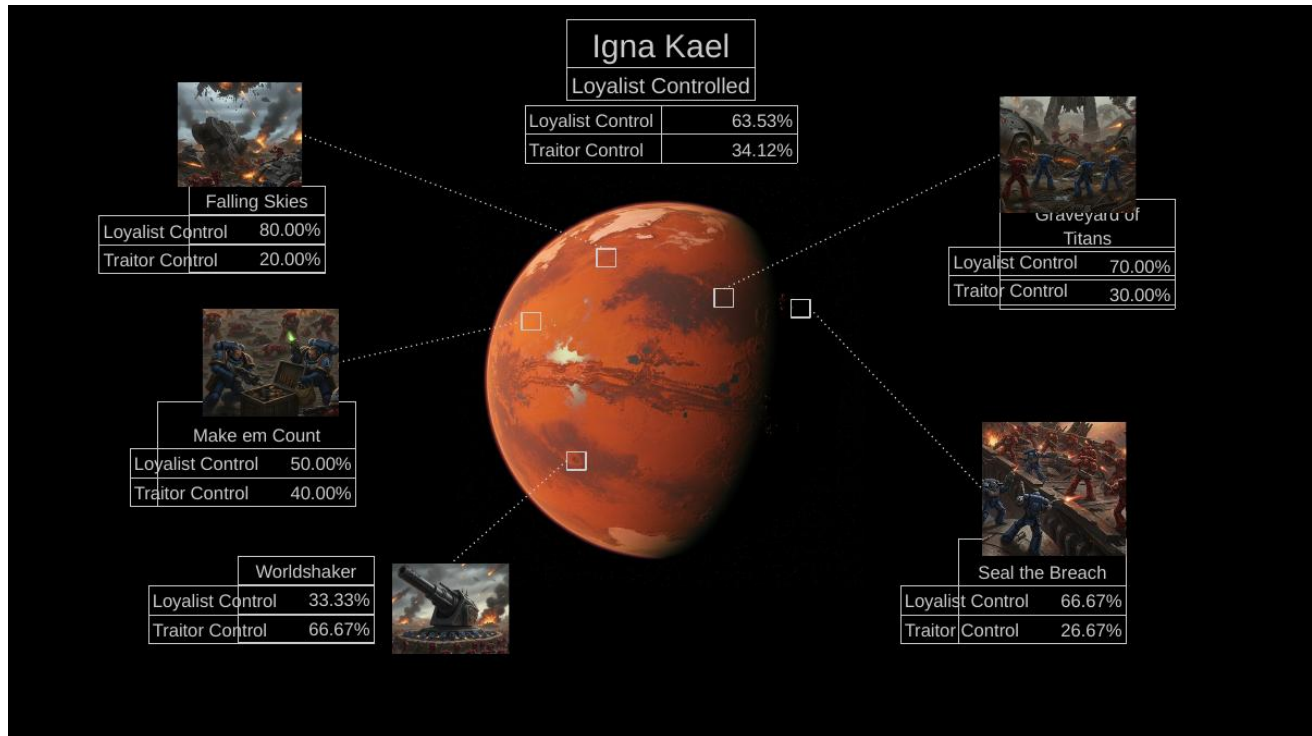
— End of Transmission —

Warzone: Hustaygn — Strategic Maps

Extracted from Warzone 2025 Tracker

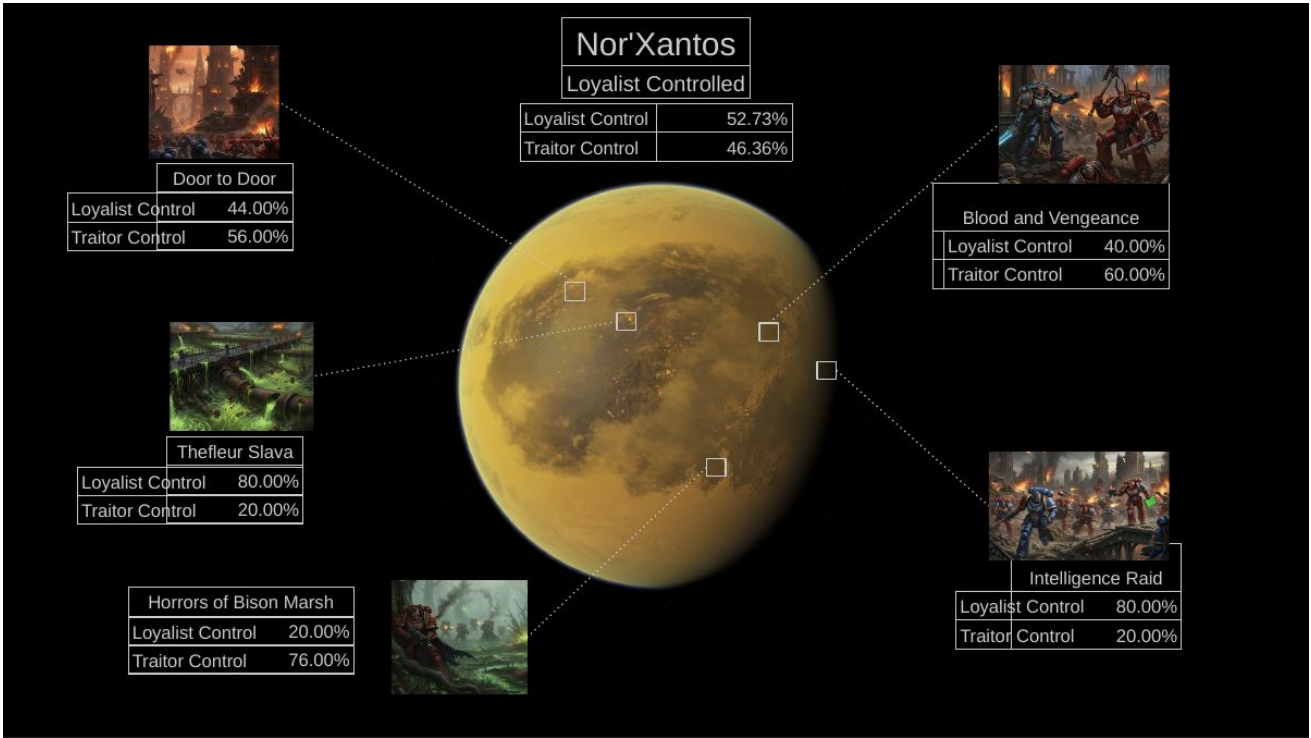


Igna Kael



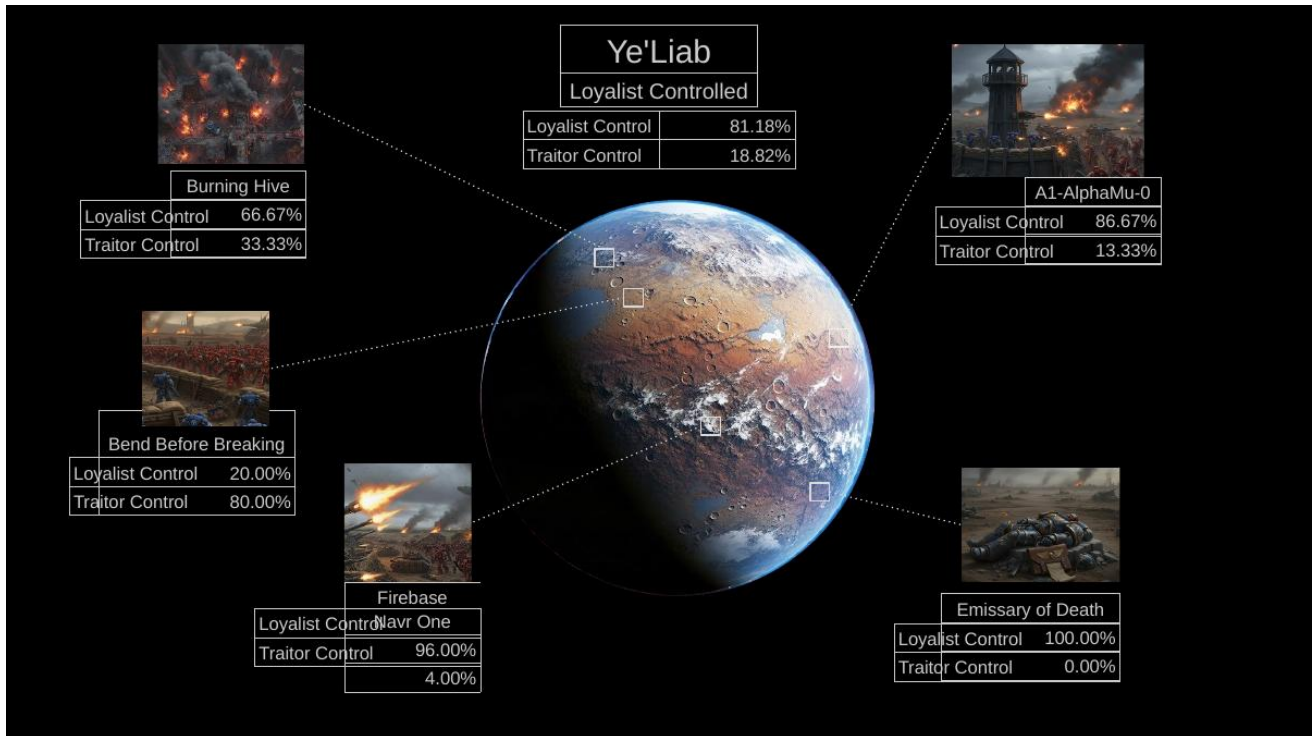
Igna Kael — Loyalist Controlled (63.53% Loyalist / 34.12% Traitor)

Nor'Xantos



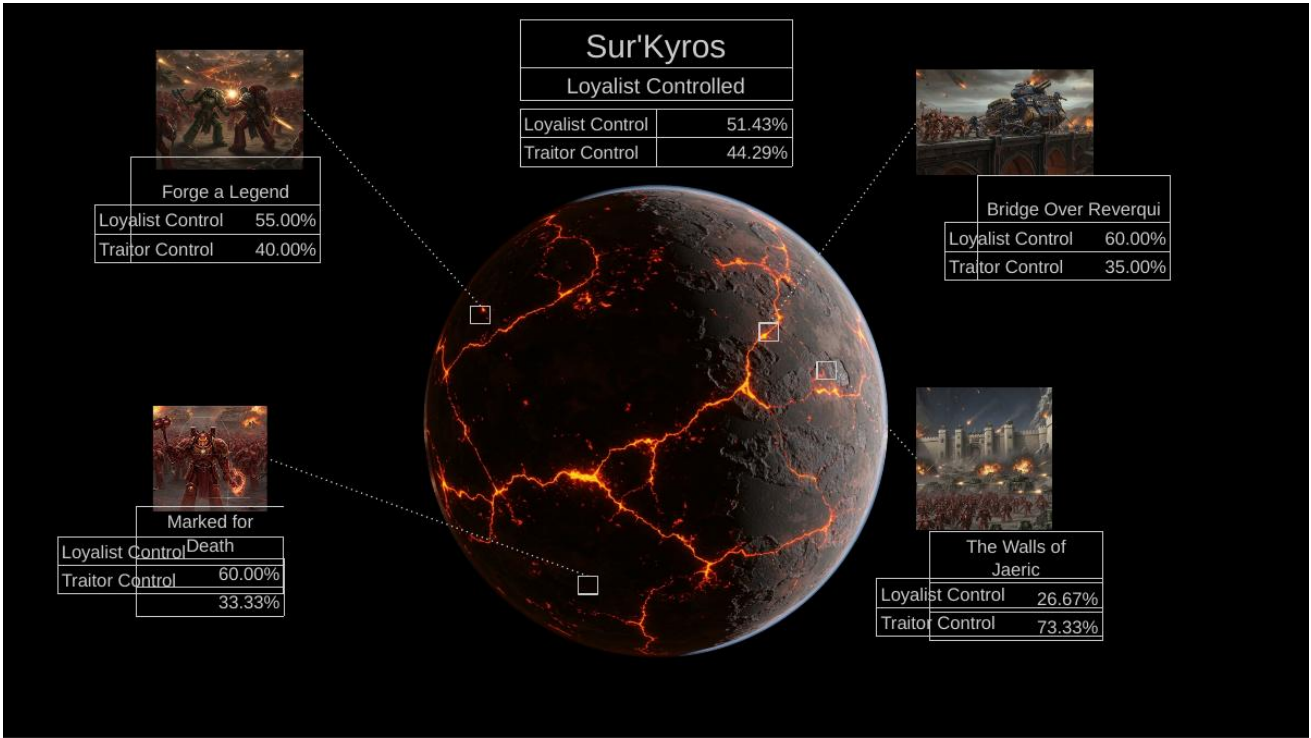
Nor'Xantos — Loyalist Controlled (52.73% Loyalist / 46.36% Traitor) • Key focus of Alexander's initial plan

Ye'Liab



Ye'Liab — Loyalist Controlled (81.18% Loyalist / 18.82% Traitor)

Sur'Kyros



Sur'Kyros — Loyalist Controlled (51.43% Loyalist / 44.29% Traitor)

The Decision

Lord Alexander Westing III — Crimson Fleet

Alexander looked through the data again. He could hardly believe what he was seeing. The Horusites had squandered the element of surprise so thoroughly that it was miraculous they still had any foothold in the system at all. Only on the planet Nor’Xantos was there even a sizable traitor element—comprised mostly of the Word Bearers Legion, who seemed to have completely abandoned engaging the enemy in order to herd non-combatants into specific sites on the planet’s surface.

Meanwhile the local forces of the Night Lords appeared busy engaging in ritual suicide as they flung themselves into the enemy from orbit again and again. Most recently the Dark Angels had taken little time in destroying them before turning their attention to using their control of the orbital defence weapons to fire on any traitor forces engaged on the planet, without care for possible friendly forces being present. And all these reports listed at least four different Primarchs battling across this small sector, several of them “confirmed” dead multiple times only to be reported in action again within the week. The whole warzone was a complete mess, and it was clear that the Traitors were on the losing end.

“I have made up my mind. The commander we made our deal with is listed as dead more than fifteen planetary cycles ago. Since his whole ship was shot out of orbit it is unlikely anyone else here knows that we are. We will side with the Loyalists, take what we want where there is no organized resistance, and prepare to be out of this system before the traitor reinforcements can arrive. All ships, set your nightshields to maximum output. Set course for Nor’Xantos—it has the least forces from either faction, and the cities are empty and ripe for plunder before they can stop us.”

“NOOO!”

The objection was not so much a word as it was a thought screamed into his head from someone else. The feeling was alien to his human mind, but the deeper parts of his emotions were clear. The Witch. It had gotten another vision. To go to Nor’Xantos meant death for either it or the Lord Captain. Something happening on Nor’Xantos was clearly not as it seemed.

“Belay that order.” He paused as he examined the map again. Anywhere else he might land his fleet would force an engagement with one faction or the other, and as long as he was an unknown force he would be attacked by both.

“My raiders of the Crimson Fleet, let us introduce ourselves to our new friends and enemies. And let us make it an introduction to remember. Move into a strike position on the Iron Warriors battle barge engaging with the forces of the First and Seventh Legions. I want decapitation shots only!”

From his command throne the two dozen screens connecting him to the other ships in the fleet all responded in unison. His men were good. A lifetime of training and generations of piracy had selected for only those with a proper mix of obedience and initiative to survive within the realm the Crimson Fleet called home.

“Open an all-frequency hailing call. Greetings, mighty Astartes. I am Lord Alexander Westing, Rogue Trader, Master of the Crimson Fleet, and Pirate Lord of the Deep Void. To those who are siding with the Master of Mankind I offer my services—my men, ships, and tanks—to assist with your campaign against the forces of the Warmaster. To those who fight under the banner of Horus Lupercal I offer now the choice to surrender to my forces and turn over all your materials. If you should deny our offer, then I offer you only one thing—”

As the message paused, all twenty-six ships of the fleet disabled whatever archaic, ancient, or xenos-based systems had allowed them to approach within veritable knifefight range of the void battle at once, all of them waiting for the cue they knew was coming. The Iron Warriors battlecruiser had been placing all the power of its void shields toward the front of its own ship as it engaged the Loyalist forces; its own sides and rear were practically naked and now faced with two dozen targets on its exposed flank. Before it could even begin to right its shields the command came:

“Death.”

— *End of Transmission* —