

Captain Jameson sat alone upon the darkened bridge of an Apocalypse class battleship, the myriad of digital readouts and ghostly display screens cast shadows into the corners, where empty glasses, deflated balloons and a profusion of other party paraphernalia could be seen laying haphazardly on hastily erected tables and upon the floor, in roughly equal measure.

The party that had so recently drawn to a close was the aftermath of the naming ceremony for the ship he was currently aboard, a ceremony that had named this vessel "Deadspace Dilemma". She was a sleek and dangerous ship, built at great expense. A set of blueprints were stolen from the Amarr Navy shipyards in Tash-Murkon Prime and had, as these things often do, found their way into the hands of a privateer. Said privateer had offered these plans to the highest bidder, namely one Captain Jameson.

Jameson flipped idly through a plastic binder, which detailed final flight specifications for the ship, it was most impressive. The standard mega beam lasers had been modified to fire a heavy anode particle stream, the mega pulse lasers had a secondary afocal targeting system installed, and the medium beam lasers were heavily modulated. Yes, a very deadly and expensive ship indeed. Her defences were equally spectacular, 1600mm reinforced crystalline carbide plating covered 98.2% of the hull, a variety of armour hardening sub-systems and an automated armour repair module would turn her into a real tank, she would be very hard to kill. Yes she may well have started as a set of blueprints for a standard Amarr Military Apocalypse but Jameson had insisted on a variety of non-standard modifications, and she had cost him every Isk he had available and then some. This was ultimately the reason why he was sitting here alone, upon the sombre bridge of a deadly battleship in the dark, whilst his associates had carried the party elsewhere into the night.

Jameson span around in the ergonomic captains chair and keyed a sequence into his command keypad. The armoured shutters covering the ships forward view port slid open slowly, and he was rewarded by a view across the vast dry dock inside the Impro factory orbiting moon 2 of Ordat VI, in the Ordat system of Tash-Murkon. Some 400 metres away across the expanse of the factory, sat an older Armageddon class battleship, the aged, flaking paint along the side of her hull revealed her name as "Grey Area". Jameson had piloted this ship since his training in battleship handling had been completed many moons ago, and today she was going to die.

As illogical as he knew it was, he could not think of it as anything but a death. The ship had shown a particular character whilst he had been her Captain, often performing far beyond the on-paper specifications, in a manner he had come to envisage as nothing short of loyalty. Today not only was she to die, but he would be her executioner. However, before their long relationship drew to a close, she had one final duty left, the duty which any expensive and insured item has when it out lives its usefulness and is superseded by something newer. The insurance payout for this ship meeting an untimely end would offset a large chunk of the manufacture costs of this shiny new Apocalypse. Just as long as the insurance company never investigated too closely of course, but he knew some people, who knew some people, and he was sure it was all taken care of. He understood the logic of his next actions, but still the act saddened him, the Grey Area had seen him through some very tight spots.

Whilst the Deadspace Dilemma was being constructed, the confusion in the factory bay had been a perfected cover for the de-commissioning of the Grey Area. She had been gutted of all functional systems apart from her warp and impulse drives. All of her on-board data systems had been rigged

to read as if nothing had changed, her digital signature still reported her as a fully equipped ex-Navy battleship, in the hands of a registered free trader with a less than perfect security rating (some people named these types pirates, a tradition dating back to old Earth times). In reality she was a flying husk.

Jameson once again keyed a control sequence, and the navigation lights on the Grey Area winked awake. Her impulse drives began to glow gently on idle and the mechanical decking encapsulating part of her hull was disengaged, and withdrew into the darkness of the docking bay, until she floated weightless inside the huge station. The hangar bay doors began to grumble slowly open and a view of the stars became visible through the ever widening gap. Once the bay doors were open, Jameson rose and walked across to the control chair, the chair had rigged for remote control of the Grey Area, he would fly her to her death from here, silently aware of a nagging guilt that he should be piloting her for real, regardless of the recklessness of such an act.

A deft manipulation of the controls left the Grey Area turning gently around and powering on a perfect parabola towards the hangar doors and space beyond. She disappeared a metre at a time out into cold space, and Jameson relished these final last sights of this dependable old ship. Once she was clear of the station he keyed the autopilot sequence for the Soumi system, back of beyond hell in the heavens, soon to be the final resting place for Grey Area. He could imagine her vast bulk almost gathering itself up, as her impulse engines accelerated up to speed, at which point her warp engines would fire up and propel her towards the Ordat stargate at 3.5 astronomical units per second. His display screen confirmed that this was exactly what was happening; the final voyage of Grey Area was underway.

Jameson dozed for a time, the effects of the alcohol from the previous hours of partying, and was awakened by a pre-programmed alarm emanating from the navigation console. The Grey Area was decelerating out of warp and fast approaching the Soumi stargate. He flicked on the remote camera mounted on the nose of the Grey Area and watched space peel past her hull on the monitor, as she decelerated down to impulse speed and began to slowly approach the stargate. It took the ship almost two minutes to drift into the gate array, which automatically triggered when it sensed the big ship draw close and catapulted it into the next system, Soumi.

Soumi, in the Kor-Azor region of the Panoumid Constellation, was home to many of the more aggressive types of businessmen who ply the space lanes for their trade. The type of businessman who tends to negotiate whilst he has your ship target locked and ECM jammed, the type of businessman who cares all about your cargo and nothing about you. The kind of businessman that Jameson had been in his younger days and he knew the type well, they would see the appearance of a fully armed (well at least it looked like it was) battleship as nothing but a threat with a possible profit attached. In short they would assess the threat, find it acceptable in a profit to risk ratio kind of way, and then close for the kill. All he had to do was make sure they woke up and took notice.

He keyed a final command into his navigation console and the old battleship lined itself up on a point in space identified as Soumi I asteroid belt IV, which he new for sure was nothing but a selection of hollow, mined out asteroids, just the kind of asteroids that could be worked into a functioning space station, once you managed to seal all the cracks and establish an atmosphere. All together the perfect pirate base and he knew this one was inhabited. The ship once again accelerated up to high impulse speed to facilitate the priming of the warp engines, before it threw

itself forward into its last warp hop. At reaching the asteroid field it decelerated down to a perfect stop and switched its impulse engines to idle. Its on-board systems were programmed to give out the tell tale signatures of a battleship scanning the immediate area for possible threat and assimilating the returned data. It looked and sounded (in a digital sense) like it meant business.

Some few moments passed before a response could be perceived, a faint shimmering around one of the larger asteroids confirmed his suspicions, as he recognized a passive shield being powered up that engulfed the entire rock. This was swiftly followed by the launch of several interceptor class frigates, all closing upon the Grey Area in the perfect safety that travelling at speeds of 2000 metres per second can afford your average interceptor pilot, when confronting a battleship, too fast for large guns to track, too small to lock as a missile target, they could quite literally peck you to death with their tiny neutron blasters. The only real defence would be a smart bomb, igniting the whole of space in a 5km radius of the ship with a huge dose of plasma fire. The Grey Area had no such device installed and the pirates would know this. Jameson watched as the interceptors entered into a steady orbit of the old ship at a range of 7.5km and began to barrage it with small neutron blasts.

Jameson viewed the escalating situation with a mixture of pride and sadness, as the old ships shields valiantly deflected the small blasters for several minutes. Inevitably the shields gave out and the armour began to slowly erode. Several minutes later the armour was gone and the structure was being severely damaged. Small fires had erupted all along the hull of the Grey Area, reflecting off the grey/gold structure plating in a rose coloured glow. The old ship gently rocked from side to side as its atmosphere vented from several fractures in the hull, a most laconic death dance from a majestic ship, elegant even as it died. And then finally, super nova, an explosion that scorched the sky in its ferocity, metals and polymers heated to such an extent that the gases they turned into when vaporized reacted and re-exploded in ever increasing crescendos.

Jameson knew the exact moment the ship had died, it was signalled by the flashing of the alarm on his Neocron unit, an alarm that was informing him that the sum of 65.7 million Isk had been paid into his account by his insurance company, due to the unfortunate loss of one Armageddon class battleship that he had owned. The claim had been triggered the moment the digital signature of the ship had ceased to be received by any sub-space transponders, and was not listed as being scrapped. Ruthlessly efficient as all major financial institutions generally were.

Jameson rose from his chair and picked up a half empty bottle of champagne from the floor, he walked from the deck of the Deadspace Dilemma, a slight smile playing on his lips, it was after all only a ship and 65.7 million Isk can buy an awful lot of new memories.