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FOUR MONTHS BEFORE

Around 11,000 BC ATLANTA SUNA

Whistling while walking back onto the base, Risor thinks, “*Comfy assignment, beautiful beaches, great food, occasional combat but not too intense, yup, I have it good. Well, as long as this war doesn’t screw it up.*” He heads to the base’s Mission Command building for a brief on their upcoming mission. His squadron, the Falcon Claw, and two others will soon go on a mission to strike a grave blow to the Rama Empire and her allies in this decade-long war.

Entering the general’s office, Risor greets General Varno, the base commander, sitting at his desk with others already seated. Nodding toward the open seat, Varno turns his attention back to the screen on the opposite wall displaying a map of a base.

The intelligence officer waits for Risor to sit before starting his brief. The Aether-powered map projector displays a map of the Rama military base in Taxila.

The officer starts, “My Lady and Lords, our target for this mission. Intelligence states that they are building some type of powerful new weapon there. Your mission will be to capture or destroy this weapon and all its data if you cannot bring it back.”

Risor asks, “Lieutenant, what type of weapon is it?”

“We are not really sure. The evidence provided by the Shigar is pretty scant...”

Lady Jana Kalin, the commander of the Wave Rider squadron, a Shigar party member and commander of the mission, interrupts. “Does it really matter? Just do what you are told.”

Before Risor can respond, she turns to Varno. “General, I request that the Falcon Claw squadron perform the feint mission.”

Turning back to Risor. “No offense, Commander Tarnor, but I want someone who follows orders and doesn’t endanger the mission with frivolous questions watching my back.”

Risor shoots back, his anger getting the best of him. “You mean you want Shigar to get all the glory?”

General Varno interrupts, “Okay, people, we are on the same side.” Taking a deep breath before continuing, “Let’s keep politics out of it, okay? I agree with your request, Commander Kalin.”

Jana and the other squadron commander, Lord Jamal Fera, leader of the Sun Darters, look disdainfully at Risor.

Fingernails digging into palms and jaw clenching, Risor stares daggers back at Jamal when he receives a stern look from Varno. Risor relaxes slightly. He nods, and Varno signals the intelligence officer to continue.

Once the intelligence officer completes his brief, Varno states, “If no further questions, you are dismissed to your squadron briefings. Risor, a word.”

All of the officers stand at attention and salute. Lady Kalin, Lord Fera, and the intelligence officer leave the office. Risor keeps standing at attention, afraid his anger will betray him.

Once the door is closed, Risor spits out. “Sir, I could have supported her just fine.”

“Yes, Commander.”

Risor pauses at the general’s lack of response. Varno continues, “But if things go wrong, she will blame you and Nalos. There are tensions enough between the two parties.”

Not quite ready to give in, Risor responds. “Sir, I would not let our political issues get in the way of my duties.”

Sighing, Varno gets up and walks towards the door. Risor is still standing at attention. “Yes, Commander Tarnor, I believe you, but I have heard of Lady Kalin, and we both know about Jamal. Trust me on this. Dismissed.”

Not entirely satisfied with the general’s answer, but knowing he can’t keep arguing, he performs a parade-ground salute and exits. General Varno does not understand; he is not a Nalos member like Risor.

Walking out of the command center, he feels cheated. Annoyed by the events in the office, he thinks, “*This day started so good.*” But by the time he gets to his barracks, he wonders if that is not bad.



On the base's flight line, many Vailixi, silvery, box-shaped craft powered by Aether, are parked and loading troops. A few Vailixi fly high overhead, providing a defensive patrol for all the craft on the ground. The air over the base shimmers slightly, signifying that the base's shields are active.

Troopers in Aether combat armor stand in line, boarding the Vailixi. The bulky armor covers their entire body with red Skor metal plating. Skor, a gift from Poseidon long ago, is created by armorers and priests, and when infused with Aether, it is difficult to pierce and takes the shape of the body armor. But without Aether, it collapses into a pool of a rubber-like substance that is easy to transport and store. It also provides enhanced visuals and can communicate with other armored teams, Vailixi, or, if in range, bases.

Risor's second in command, Tilor Togolan, a noble from one of the smaller colonies near Risor's home of Altai, stands with him near the rear of their craft with the troopers for their Vailixi already boarded. They stand watching Lady Kalin and Lord Fera talk a few Vailixi over.

"Happy lot they are. We are better off doing the feint, sir. No backstabbing." Tilor states, then spits on the ground.

Smiling, Risor responds, "Backstabbing? I doubt they would go that far. She writes her ticket in the Shigar if this is successful. She won't screw with her chances."

Shaking his head, Tilor gives Risor a severe look, "Yes, sir, but General Varno is right. If it fails and we are central to it, she would blame you and Nalos for causing the failure. It's better this way."

Nodding in agreement, Risor turns to them again and sighs, "Party politics is such bullshit." Turning back toward the open bay of the craft. "Shall we go?"

Tilor gives one more look toward the other commanders. Grins and states, "Besides, Jamal and his Darters are fuck ups waiting to happen. They would probably screw up the feint and need our assistance to save their asses."

With the rear ramp door closing, he adds, "Definitely better this way."



Overlooking the beachside military base stands a small hut at the edge of a hillside orchard. Four people around a fire watch the Vailixi take off and head toward the northwest. As the last craft recedes into the distance, one of the four turns and enters the dwelling.

One man of the three remaining people stands, shading his eyes, and asks, "How many did you get?"

The sole woman answers, “I counted forty-five. About three squadrons.”

The last man, still squatting near the fire, nods his head at the woman’s pronouncement. The standing man nods and goes into the hut. In a dark corner of the hut sits the man who entered earlier, talking into a mirror-like device glowing with the power of Aether. He turns at the intrusion.

The man entering the hut walks to the other man and says, “Tell them we see three squadrons heading in a northwest direction.”

The woman from outside comes in and asks, “Shall we tell them the rumors we heard from the other villagers?”

Nodding, the standing man states, “Yes, tell them we believe that the target is Taxila.”



ATLANTA RAMA

A dogfight occurs over the targeted military base near Taxila between Vailixi and Vimana. Vailixi are small and fast. Vimana, the flying craft of the Rama Empire, looks like small step pyramids, correspondingly slow but heavily armed.

The Vimana are outnumbered and losing. Their saving grace is the ground-to-air fire support they are getting from the base’s defenses. The base defenses consist of large cannons that throw up clouds of Aether streams to deny an area to the Atlanteans. Below the dogfight, some of the base’s buildings are on fire or smoking from strikes by the Atlanteans.

Vailixi swarm around the base like wasps around a hive. Defending Vimana circle above the base, relying on its defenses to ward off the Vailixi ships coming from various angles. The Vailixi group into three or four craft, concentrating on one Vimana at a time. They try to breach the target’s shields before nearby Vimana can swat them away with overwhelming firepower.



The command bridge of Risor's *Vailixi* has four consoles in the forward section: weapons, two probes that feel and see what is around the vessel, and shields. Behind this console row are three more positions. First is the navigator position, Tilor's seat, followed by Risor's spot as the craft commander. The communications position is to the right of the commander's seat, and on the left is a passageway leading to the lower passenger deck below.

Each console glows a soft blue with Aetheric energy. Aether flows through the conduits connecting to the console dishes, causing them to glow. The navigation console emits a fast pulsing rhythm. The other consoles pulsate, too, but slower.

The communications officer, Dimer, turns to Risor. "Sir, Lady Kalin wishes to speak to you."

Risor swings a smaller dish, connected to his station's chair, into position in front of him. "Pass to my console."

Jana's face appears on the screen, "Commander, break off to commence your mission."

"Yes, my Lady." Risor swings the dish back to the side.

"Tilor, the queen has spoken. Time to head towards Taxila." Tilor grins and turns back to prepare the orders.



Jana's *Vailixi* lands among others in a clearing. The rear ramp opens, and power-armored troopers armed with an Aether spear disembark and start heading into the woods. Each *Vailixi* unloads ten troopers, then takes off and is replaced by another.

Jana walks down the ramp with powered armor on and her helmet off, talking to her second, Nailos Dentam. He is in a standard flight suit and remains on the ramp.

"Keep half the squadron here and send the others to assist Jamal."

He nods and looks like he wants to say something. She motions for him to talk. "Yes, my Lady. Could I not go with you? I would feel better," he pleads.

Jana grips his shoulder with her armored hand and tightens her grip until Nailos winces in pain. With a cold voice, she says, "As I said before, I don't need your protection, Nailos. I could cut you down in seconds."

Lines crease his forehead, and his lips pull back into a grimace of pain. He hurriedly responds, "Forgive me, my Lady. I do not mean offense. I just... well... us..."

Releasing his shoulder, she takes a deep breath, "I know what you meant, but

just do what I say.”

Putting on her helm, she turns and, with her escorts, bounds off into the forest after the other troopers. He watches until she disappears in the woods. Massaging his shoulder, he retreats up the ramp as it closes. The craft lifts and speeds away.



Hours before, the meadow was tranquil, and a dirt road traversed through the woodlands to the base's gate. Now, troopers in power armor have taken up positions within the trees, exchanging fire with Rama soldiers who have barricaded themselves among the base's buildings.

The meadow separates the forest from a wooden and stone fence, scattered with now burning watch towers. The Rama troops are equipped with leather breastplates, helmets, and greaves; they cling tightly to their Aether bows. Made from metal and armed with a glowing string, these weapons can shoot out a bolt of Aether when pulled back and released. It is similar to the Aether spear wielded by Atlanteans, which emits a discharge of Aether when its trigger is pressed.

Jana reaches the tree line and assesses the situation. The enemy seems to be heavily outnumbered. Without hesitation, she issues the order to advance. The troopers emerge from the trees in a skirmish line. Jana remains behind them, orchestrating their movements.

At her command, a handful of troopers dart forward using their power armor's enhanced speed. Shrugging off enemy fire, they perform a power-assisted leap over the wall and ditch to the other side. With weapons blazing, they charge toward the closest buildings to create a bridgehead along the base's perimeter. Enemy fire concentrates on the advanced team, desperately trying to collapse the position before reinforcements arrive from the forest line. The enemy's efforts to dislodge the bridgehead play into Jana's plans. Their concentration allows the rest of the troopers a chance to move forward under weak fire.

Jana, in mid-jump, targets a group of defenders behind a nearby barricade. She hits two of them with successive shots. Discipline fails, and they scatter, abandoning the barricade to her forces. Landing gracefully, Jana takes in the chaos around her - seeing a nearby trooper hit by multiple blasts. His body flung back into the ditch. Others are hit while landing and another falls, but most charge forward successfully. The battle rages on intensely, each trooper fighting for survival and victory against a determined enemy selling each building dearly.



Jamal and his Sun Darters try suppressing the ground fire while battling the remaining Vimana over the base. Three of his squadron complete a dive into the base to strafe some buildings where a large concentration of defenders are massing. They start walking their fire down a row of buildings, successfully breaking up the enemy formations.

The three Vailixi start pulling up and away when a few buildings fall apart to reveal Aether cannons. Two of the three Vailixi are right in the path of the cannons and disintegrate under fire. The last one is able to pull up and away but is leaving a trail of smoke. It will survive to fight another day but is already returning to base at a much-reduced speed.

Jamal's communication officer breaks his concentration, viewing the demise of his squadron members. "Commander, scouts are reporting a large number of Vimana inbound from the south."

He swings his Aether dish into position and sees the reported inbound targets.

"Get me, Lady Kalin. Order the squadron to break off. We will strike these new Vimana. Tell the Wave Riders to continue to support the ground forces." His staff gets to work on passing his messages.

The front viewer shows the open sky as the craft ascends to combat altitude. Other Vailixi form up on his craft.

"Commander, Lady Kalin."

Sitting up straight, Jamal lowers the privacy shield over his seat. This will keep their conversation private while allowing him to see the rest of the command deck.

"My Lady, a large Vimana force is coming from the south. We will engage and leave your Vailixi to support you."

He sees Jana think that over. "Fair enough. We are starting to breach the perimeter. Any word on what the Falcon Claw is encountering?"

"No word yet, my Lady. I will check."



An earth-shattering explosion fills the air, and Jana tightens her grip on her weapon. Buildings around them have been razed to their foundations. Dead

defenders, with the occasional Atlantean power suit, litter the streets while many of the buildings burn.

The defenders are making the Atlanteans fight for each building by firing from windows, roofs, or the sides of buildings. The fires burn out of control - fueled by the highly charged Aether energy released by both sides.

Jana is under no illusion that they can hold this ground. She has a short window to get to the research buildings and take this discovery or at least destroy it. They are only a block or two away from the target buildings.



The air is thick with the smells of smoke, blood, ash, and the metallic tang of Aetheric energy released in the raging battle. Indrajit, a tall, powerfully built young man, stands near the corner of a building a few blocks from Jana's location. He has an Aether bow strapped to his back and a large blade in his hand. There are another thirty Rama soldiers around him.

Peering around the corner with a small mirror, Indrajit sees a few Rama soldiers down the road falling back ahead of the enemy's power-armored troopers. Aether streams whiz back and forth between the two forces. Most of those defenders will probably not return to the protection of the building where Indrajit waits.

He turns to his friend, Zhenjin. "Zhen, when they get closer, I will charge out. Signal the strike at the same time."

With a worried look, "Are you sure about this, my Lord? You are quick, but I think Aether is faster."

Indrajit gives Zhen a quick grin and a pat on the shoulder, "Aether, maybe, but not those troopers."

He peers around the corner and notices that most retreating soldiers are past him or down. The enemy is almost even with the corner, maybe three meters away, and paying attention to the last of the defenders trying to get around the corner of the building on the opposite side of the street.

Zhen shakes his head and puts his horn to his mouth, watching his lord and friend. Indrajit cocks his head to listen for the coming footsteps, then takes a deep breath.

Jumping out from behind the corner of the building, Indrajit lands with his blade, igniting into Aether flames. He swings at the first Atlantean trooper's head. The God-crafted blade easily slices through the enemy's armor, and the helmeted head smacks the wall a meter away.

Before the body hits the ground, Indrajit is driving his sword into the chest of

the next trooper. Grabbing the dying soldier's Aether spear and aiming it back toward the oncoming troopers, he shoots the next trooper.

Zhen blows the horn and, with the rest of his men, starts to run around the corner to fight the oncoming Atlanteans. Being a God-blessed hero with superhuman speed, Indrajit is already attacking the next trooper about two meters from the corner. Before the Atlanteans could concentrate their fire on Indrajit, Zhen and the other Rama soldiers filed into the street, firing.



Jana and her team quickly move through the cluttered office, rifling through drawers and flipping through stacks of paper scrolls. The two large desks dominate the room, each covered in piles of papers and writing implements. Along two walls stood floor-to-ceiling shelves overflowing with more scrolls and parchment. Unlike the more advanced Atlantean society, the Rama empire relies heavily on written records. Scrolls of aged paper are treasured here, symbolizing tradition and history. Though the Atlanteans had long ago abandoned paper in favor of Aether-powered tablets, the Ramans clung to tradition. However, they also adapted to technological advancements. Like their Atlantean counterparts, they utilize Aether tablets for more complex matters. This decision reduces the workload for their priests and requires less Aether power to maintain compared to the extravagant systems of Atlantis.

A trooper shoves a stack of captured tablets into a bag. At the same time, Jana and the others concentrate on reading scrolls to reduce the load they must take.

Explosions continue to shake dust from the rafters over those rummaging in the office. Occasionally, Jana blows dust from the screen of her Aether tablet, which she holds over a scroll she is translating. Unlike those around her, she uses the tablet's translation capabilities because she cannot read Rama's script.

She clenches her fists and tosses the scroll with a loud thud. Looking up, she sees a chaotic scene of discarded scrolls strewn around the room. Piles upon piles of delicate parchment lay scattered on the floor, while a towering mountain of unexamined texts is precariously balanced on the tables. Grinding her teeth, she breathes loudly through her nose and dives back into the task.

"My Lady, Lord Dentam advises that Lord Fera is on the line."

She pulls back from the table, raises her arm, and then taps a device on her wrist. A 3D image of Jamal appears. "What is your status, Jamal?"

The floating head responds, "My Lady, we are getting beaten back. There are too many. We can hold them here, but not much longer."

"Did you hear from Commander Tarnor?"

He nods, "Yes, he is encountering stiffening resistance. More Vimana are joining the battle all the time."

Frowning, "Losses?"

"He reports near full strength. I am down to almost half."

"I have lost a few here. I will send you some."

A new trooper rushes into the office. Everyone looks at the intruder. "My Lady, they have a hero and are counter-attacking with a massive force."

Jana stares at the new trooper briefly, then sees her communicator flashing. She touches another button on her armor. Another 3D image of Dentam appears.

He bows, "My Lady, we have a large force of Vimana coming from the north. I need your support craft to join me."

Turning slightly red and visibly trying to keep control, she turns to one of her team still reviewing scrolls. "Tell me you have found something of value?"

The man looks a little frightened. "I'm sorry, my Lady. It's mostly inventory reports, and they're not even interesting."

Fighting the anger, she growls, "You said this was the base research administrative office."

Swallowing, "That is what Intel said. And the sign near the door says it, too." Others in the room nod their heads in agreement.

She is ready to send some fighters to Dentam when another trooper enters the room. This one has a deep gash in his arm. Blood dripped onto the floor. The trooper quickly exclaims, "My Lady, they are getting closer. We can not stop this cursed hero."

Everyone is watching and awaiting her orders. She turns back to the images. "Dentam, patch me through to Commander Tarnor."

She looks at Jamal, "Commander, fall back to our position as fast as you can."

He nods and then blinks out. In seconds, Risor replaces Dentam as well.

"Commander, fall back to our position. I fear we have sprung a trap, and I will make them pay."

Looking a little surprised, he said, "Yes, my Lady." He looked away from her for a second, "If it's a trap, should we not retreat? There seems to be much more than we can handle coming into range."

"Do as I say."

He nods and disappears. Her anger flares since he broke the connection with a senior. Dentam's image returns, looking worried.

"He broke the connection, my Lady."

"I know what he did." She snaps and turns to the people in the office. "Prepare to fall back to the perimeter."

Everyone starts moving. The image of Dentam disappears.



The Atlanteans have been pushed out of the base. A firing line is forming at the forest's edge, with most troopers already in the forest.

The Rama defenders take up positions within the buildings near the perimeter fence. Shots are traded between the two groups as an overhead dogfight heats up. More Vailixi arrive to overwhelm the few Vimana that remain.

Jana sighs in disgust. She is back to where she was just a few hours before. Through her suit, she calls a floating image of Jamal.

"Commander, how are we doing?"

"My Lady, we are beating them back. But we don't have much strength left."

Jana calls up another image of Risor. He acknowledges her. "Commander, where are you now?"

"We are about five minutes out. The enemy is about six minutes behind us."

Jamal asks, "Risor, how strong of a force do you have?"

He looks away momentarily, "We have ten effective craft, and about twenty enemies are chasing us."

Jamal is about to say something but looks away. When he looks back, he looks worried. "My Lady, the enemy has another force coming from the south. About 20, from what we see. Plus those here and those following Risor, about four to one."

Jana quips, "We are better." Looking at Risor, "Commander, when you get here, land your craft and have each ship deploy three crew to assist in the ground assault. I want to make them pay."

Risor looks at her for a few seconds without acknowledging the order. Then he slowly starts, "My Lady, I.. will .. not. We are outnumbered in the air, and it seems the enemy kicked you out of the base. You will have us destroyed."

Jamal shouts, "Commander, remember your place. Lady Kalin leads this mission."

With resolve stiffening, he said, "I believe Lady Kalin does not see the full picture and is in error. As the commander with the largest remaining force, I am taking command and ordering a retreat."

Slightly shocked at his statement, but before she can respond, Jana sees a person carrying a fiery sword speed into the woods further down the line.

To Risor, "I am in charge here."

She is again interrupted when a ground officer breaks into her communications on the emergency channel.

"My Lady, I apologize for interrupting, but the enemy is advancing into the woods. Their hero is already amongst us, and we can not hold much longer."

She looks down the line at the enemy in the meadow before the forest. Her troopers are vastly outnumbered.

“Order the retreat back to the landing zone. Commander Fera, pick up my force. Commander Tarnor, provide air cover.”

Both subordinate commanders nod and disappear. She and the remaining troopers start to disengage in an orderly manner. She knows that today is not only a military loss but also a political one.



GLOSSARY

- Aether is a power based on drawing energy from everything and directing it as the user wishes. The gods taught humans this power.
- Alta - Continents of America.
- Alta Cieto - South America.
- Alta Falta - Region around the Gulf of Mexico and the Caribbean.
- Atlanta - The continents of Europe, Asia, and Africa are grouped together.
- Atlanta Coda - Africa below the savannahs of the Sahara
- Atlanta Luxa - North Africa above the savannahs of the Sahara and Middle East.
- Atlanta Meito - Western Europe
- Atlanta Nado - Eastern Europe
- Atlanta Rama - Indus River area, home of the Raman Empire.
- Atlanta Sangam - Southern India and Sri Lanka, home of the Sangam Empire.
- Atlanta Suna is the ice age landmass of Sundaland, which is now

Southeast Asia. This large landmass includes the island nations of Malaysia and Indonesia.

- Atlanta Questo - Northern Asia above the Himalayan Mountains.
- Blessing of Poseidon – A mystical event that occurs at sundown on clear days in Atlantis. As the light last touches the capstone, it flashes brilliantly in all directions, becoming a dazzling spectacle. The image of the God Poseidon smiling directly at the viewer, in the viewer's mind, occurs to all that look up at that moment.
- Gift of Poseidon—The average lifespan for those of ancient Atlantean bloodlines was 150 years. They remained hale until the last 20 or so years of their lives. The average non-Atlantean lived around 30-60 years.
- Mantrik – Aether adept of the Rama Empire.
- Mother Stone—A large jewel shaped by Aether. It is used by priests to concentrate Aether power and channel it into tools that use Aether. Depending on the type of tool, adepts or normal people can use it.
- Nalos – Political party of Atlantis that believes that Atlantis should be a friend to all and not try to rule the world. For the first 20,000+ years of the city-turned-empire's existence, they came as teachers and friends to the other people of the world.
- Piilo – Military unit of around 100 soldiers and part of a company.
- Poseidon's Well – The inner sanctum of Poseidon's temples where the Mother Stone is kept.
- Shigar – Political party of Atlantis that believes that Atlantis is superior to all others and all should pay tribute to Atlantis. Over the first 20,000+ years of Atlantis, there were those who reveled in the power and glory of Atlantis. They thought that Atlantis should rule the world to guide the less fortunate to civilized society.
- Shilot - A master of aether, science or medicine that is not part of the military.
- Shuma – Priest.
- Skor - Aether made metal of Atlantis, harder than today's titanium.
- Somena – Healer of Aceso.

- Tia - river
- Tia Yolán - Mississippi River
- Tes - Large bodies of water like a Sea, Gulf, or Ocean.
- Tes Atlan - Atlantic Ocean
- Tes Falta - Gulf of Mexico
- Tes Falon - Middle Caribbean Sea
- Tes Fatlan - Southern Caribbean Sea
- Tes Naldo - A large sea covering large parts of the Eastern European/Asia landmass caused by the northern ice shelf blocking northern flowing rivers.
- Tes Rama - Indian Ocean
- Tes Tira - Pacific Ocean
- Tes Zeita - Mediterranean Sea