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Illustration by Matsumoto Noriyuki

Design by Shindosha

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"Bentenmaru's battle records?"

Misa looked at Marika suspiciously.

"And from the time of the War of Independence?"

"Yeah..."

Marika nodded with a look of uncertainty.

"Where is it?"

"Of course it's in the archives. If I use my captain's authority, I can search through the records of Bentenmaru as much as I want."

Looking around the bridge, Misa added as if she had just remembered.

"Oh, of course the crew's private areas are an exception. What? You want to see that sort of thing? That's not a good hobby."

"No, I'm not."

Marika hurriedly waved her hands.

"I just need the official battle records from the War of Independence against the Stellar Alliance."

"Then it shouldn't be that hard to find."

Misa turned her seat around the observer console and started tapping on it.

"There's the Fleet HQ below your school."

"Huh?"

"If it's the official records from the War of Independence, they're all in the Star System Archives, so there's no need to go into the forbidden war ruins. There's no way there would be any restrictions on the citizens of Sea of the Morningstar looking up battle records from that long ago."

The War of Independence against the Stellar Alliance is an important part of history for all planets that were members of the Federation of Colonial Stars. Battle records from over 100 years ago were declassified long ago, and there are no restrictions on citizens viewing them.

"I'd checked the public archives first."

Marika peered at the display from behind the observer's seat.

"If it's a public record, you can access it from the club room."

"There wasn't one?"

Misa asked, typing on the keyboard.

"Pirate ships that were issued privateer licenses were treated as warships during the War of Independence. Not only battle records, but even logbooks should be made public, right?"

"That's true, isn't it?"

Marika sighed, her face heavy with emotion.

"That's what I thought, but I couldn't find any decent records."

"Eh?"

Misa stopped. Marika continued her explanation.

"All I could find were battle records with only the date and time and the results, or the meal menu. I wondered if they'd been cut by censorship at headquarters or the archives, or if there was some data loss somewhere, and the original Bentenmaru would definitely have battle records."

Electronic records have long since reached the theoretical limit of imprinting information on each atom. A spaceship only needs a small portion of its archive to hold all the records of its long lifespan.

"That's probably..."

Misa began tapping on the control panel.

"It's not a matter of censorship or data loss or anything like that, it's probably just negligence on the part of the captain and crew."

"Huh?"

"Yes, the logbook from the end of the War of Independence."

Misa called up the Bentenmaru logbook, which had been written for many years, on the display.

"Shall I read it here?"

"Transfer it to the captain's seat."

Marika swiftly jumped up to the captain's seat. The document file transferred to the sub-monitor was opened on the main display.

The empty logbook was displayed.

"Oh dear..."

Marika cried out as she saw the logbook, which only had the date and three meal menus.

"What's this? There are many times when the current position is missing!"

"That's what a pirate's logbook is like."

Misa began to close the console on the observer's seat.

"Do you think a half-baked person who can't serve on a warship or a merchant ship would keep a proper logbook?"

"Oh dear."

"Jokes aside."

Misa stood up, laughing at Marika, who was looking at her with a resentful look.

"The truth is, it must have been such hard work that they didn't even have time to write the logbook. Pirate ships, even now, were always short on crew and usually had to work without rest."

"Yeah..."

Marika's hardest job since becoming captain is writing the logbook. Most of the information that needs to be written, such as the current location at each time and the status of the ongoing mission, is templated, but no matter how much I do it, I don't feel like I'm used to it.

"Not only were battle records, but reports of battle results were only given verbally because there was no time to put them in writing, and at the time, three other jobs were already running at the same time, so it was normal."

"Yeah..."

Marika nodded gloomily.

"What will you do? If you have a recorder, you can record everything without cutting corners."

The recorder records the status of the ship in chronological order, whether during battle, sailing, or entering port. Since the theoretical limit was reached and memory capacity became almost no problem, it is normal for spaceships to keep records from the time the system was first lit during construction.

"No."

Marika shook her head in disapproval.

"Did pirate ships during the War of Independence submit unprocessed record data as battle records?"

"I don't think they did that either."

Misa shook her head with a plausible look.

"Because at the very least, if it was submitted, the star system military would have kept a record."

"Yeah..."

Marika nodded while thinking.

"During the busy period at the end of the War of Independence, the headquarters, which was already overwhelmed with the regular military alone, wouldn't have created an easy-to-read report from the battle records of a pirate ship unless it was absolutely necessary."

"What's wrong?"

Misa looked up at Marika, who had sunk into the captain's seat.

"You want to see the battle records from the end of the War of Independence? Did you get a history assignment?"

"Yeah, well, that's about it."

Marika answered vaguely.

"The previous captain of the yacht club asked me to show her the battle records of the Bentenmaru during the War of Independence if I could."

"Huh?"

Misa crossed her arms in interest.

"The previous captain was a brilliant woman who went to Space University, right? That's amazing."

"Well, she's amazing, in many ways."

Marika suddenly realized something and sat up from the backrest, turning to face Misa.

"Hey, can you show me the battle records of other pirate ships?"

"I think they'd have no problem showing me the battle records from the War of Independence."

Misa looked back at Marika testingly.

"But will they find anything more than the battle records in the archives?"

Thinking of the familiar faces of the pirate ship's leaders, including Captain Kenjo Kurihara of the Barbaroussa, Marika sank back into the captain's seat.

"I don't know about the pirate ship crew during the War of Independence, but I guess they're probably in a similar situation to ours."

"Are you ready?"

Cane, who was at the helm, called out to the captain.

"We'll soon be in the airspace you requested. Time to get to work."

"Yes."

Sitting back in the captain's seat, Marika looked around at the display. There were reactions from multiple sensors.

"Is this correct?"

Coorie, who had passed the observation data compiled for easy viewing to the captain's seat, turned around and asked. Marika checked the spatial coordinates displayed on the display.

"It's correct."

Next, she checked the current location of the Bentenmaru.

"There's been no change in the relative position to Tau, and it's far away from Mars Star, so does that mean this spatial disturbance is coming from Tau and its coordinates are linked to Tau's rotational period, not Mars Star's orbital period?"

"You're right."

Coorie tapped the control panel.

"Well, when it comes to spatial disturbances in the inner planetary system, they're usually directly affected by the largest gravitational source in the vicinity."

Marika compared the observation data she'd brought from Odette II with the latest data obtained by the Bentenmaru.

"But it seems the peak of activity has passed. When I looked at it before, the shapes of the constellations on the other side looked distorted, but now I can only confirm it with the sensors."

Coorie quickly switched between the observation results.

"I don't think it's a space anomaly important enough to warrant a pirate ship's observation."

"If it was just a space disturbance, it couldn't have lasted this long."

Luca, in the navigator's seat, said, placing his hand on the crystal ball in front of him.

"Even if the energy that caused the anomaly was concentrated at one point in space for some reason, it would eventually radiate out and disappear. Even though it's weakened, there's no way it could maintain a scale large enough to be discovered so easily."

"That's true, though."

Coorie looked over the data he had gathered.

"Unless it was a really strange space anomaly, there's no way they'd bother to send a request for a reward to investigate through the regular route."

Misa, in the observer seat, slid her finger over the control panel.

"Look, this spatial anomaly's registration number. When Odette II discovered it, it was a temporary number, but before I knew it, it had been given an official number and the number of symbols had increased."

Marika looked over the registration numbers given to spatial anomalies. When Odette II reported to the control station, the registration number should have only been assigned the abbreviation for the year in the Galactic Standard Calendar, the Tau star system where it was discovered, and a serial number from the beginning of the year, but various unfamiliar symbols had been added and deleted.

"That's true."

Marika tried to translate in her head the abbreviations that prefixed the spatial anomaly's registration number, which seemed to have become a familiar sequence.

"...So this spatial anomaly has been registered with the Galactic Empire's route control bureau, not with the planet Tau!?"

"That's why I thought it was a generous job for the control bureau."

Kane, at the helm, looked at the sensor data with a serious look on his face.

"If the sponsor is not a star system government but the Empire, does this spatial anomaly really have something important in mind?"

"It doesn't look like it at the moment."

Coorie rummaged around in the control panel.

"Well, then, as ordered, shall we start a more thorough investigation?"

"All the observation probes are ready to be installed."

Schnitzer announced from the battle commander's seat.

"Understood."

Marika nodded in the captain's seat.

"Well, then, let's go and place the observation probes around the spatial disturbance as planned. Eight in total?"

Marika looked over the investigation plan displayed on the display.

"Wouldn't we be able to gather all the data with at least four? That's a lot."

"The more observation points we have, the higher the accuracy."

Coorie presented a revised plan for the placement of the eight probes based on the latest data.

"Sponsors who pay a lot of money are strict about the quality of work. Kane, make sure you place them accurately."

"Okay!"

Kane tightened his grip on the wheel. Sandaime turned to the captain's seat and gave a thumbs up.

"Bentenmaru is ready to launch!"

"Well then, let's go."

Marika ordered.

"Bentenmaru, launch!"

It is said that the Space University began when the first intelligence born in the universe tried to record the knowledge it had gained.

There is no definite record of whether it was the first life form or the first intelligence born in this universe, how many civilizations had arisen before, and to what stage they had evolved before perishing. What is certain is that the species that wanted to record their knowledge knew how to cross the stars, and they tried every possible way to preserve the records for as long as possible.

The first space university was built on the oldest continent on that planet. The first intelligent beings who had acquired the ability to cross the stars next decided to place a backup in space in order to preserve the records more reliably.

No matter how well protected a structure on a planet is, it cannot escape natural disasters. It was expected that the records stored in interplanetary space would survive much longer than those on a planet, but they were also expected to be lost along with the lifespan of the parent star.

Interstellar space would provide an even more stable environment for a longer period of time.

The most robust interstellar spaceship built with the technology of the time was sent into interstellar space without any FTL technology, for the sole purpose of preserving the records.

As expected by the intelligent beings who created the first space university, the backup spaceship sent out to preserve the records faithfully fulfilled its role. Even when academic institutions such as space universities built on planets were destroyed due to war or other reasons, the record ships in interstellar space helped them to revive.

When a record ship that had survived even the destruction of the intelligence that first created it was discovered, it was not one ship but a fleet of several ships. It was also confirmed that there were several other fleets with the same records flying.

The record fleet was discovered by a community of several types of intelligences, not a single species. The community, which is the oldest loose alliance in confirmed history, the root of many old interstellar nation systems, and the source of the current Galactic Empire, entrusted the handling of the discovered record fleet to a newly integrated academic research institution.

The academic research institution, which was created by integrating the highest educational institutions and think tanks of interstellar civilizations that had arisen in multiple star systems and developed to the point of crossing the stars, was said to have not even been unified in name at first. The institution, which was given a position to ignore the political interests of interstellar civilizations, inherited the name of the organization that created the discovered record fleet, Space University, in honor of the discovered record fleet.

The Space University was established in a star system with a stable G-type star as its mother planet, and three planets in the habitable zone, but no unique civilization had yet developed. Since then, the Space University, which is older than the Empire, has continued to carve out an uninterrupted history as the oldest and greatest academic institution in the Milky Way Galaxy.

The fourth planet in the University system, called Tania[[1]](#footnote-1) after the god who governs language in classical mythology, is the oldest developed planet that still retains its original appearance. Tania has an artificial ring in geostationary orbit and is connected to space by an orbital elevator built at two points on the equator. It is a planet blessed with abundant oceans and nature.

Jenny Dolittle could not have imagined the landscape of a developed planet with a history of tens of thousands of years, despite having never experienced major wars or rises and falls. History is built by the work of intelligent beings over many generations, and the idea of ​​history being created in a controlled and isolated place was beyond her imagination, coming from a pioneering planet.

Tania has four continents and an archipelago. The planet’s axis is not tilted much relative to its mother planet, and its orbit is almost perfectly circular, so the climate is stable. Tania, which has planetary orbital control and climate control to maintain its environment, has many old cities with a long history spanning tens of thousands of years.

New students who enter the Space University are assigned to various locations on the three planets based on their wishes and aptitude. Jenny Dolittle began her university life in Acacia, the oldest city in Tania, which receives the most new students and was built around a huge archive.

Acacia is the oldest planned city in existence, designed with a huge archive in the center and facilities necessary for its maintenance and operation placed around it. There are planets and cities in the universe older than Space University, but all of them were developed and developed due to military and commercial needs. There is no other city that was planned as an information city from the beginning and has been maintained and developed for that purpose.

Facilities necessary for its maintenance and operation were constructed around the archive, a gigantic conical tower that has been called either a great tree or a mountain due to its shape.

The gigantic archive at the center is essentially a gigantic information factory.

When the decision to build the archive was made, there was already a wide variety of formats to be stored. Even characters are not only written on ancient monuments, wooden tablets, plant leaves, animal skins, or paper made from these materials. There are also records expressed by methods of processing materials, such as how to tie string, how to weave cloth, and how to fold paper. There are also records that have been passed down only by memory as oral traditions, and there are countless records that do not involve characters, such as paintings and sculptures.

It is common for a language to have multiple writing systems, and these change over time. It is also common for recording media and standards to change due to technological advances and changes in the environment.

Due to the archive's philosophy of storing all records in the entire universe and maintaining a system for their access, it became an information factory using the latest technology, rather than the library as originally envisioned. In order to accumulate records of various forms and styles and keep them available for viewing at all times, a system must be maintained to constantly translate and output all records in the latest format. The city was built with a large enough area and space to accommodate future development.

However, the tens of thousands of years since it began functioning were enough to eat up that space.

The government housing where professors, engineers, researchers, and others from Space University live was built on the outskirts of the old town. Compared to the central part of Acacia, which is centered around an artificial mountain built on a giant scale, the government housing district, lined with stone government housing that is neither tall nor huge, looks like an old garden city.

Since many of the residents live there for the job of determining student grades and rankings, the government housing district, where many teachers and professors live, was known by the nickname Enma Yokocho. Jenny looked around the area known as Hell's First Street, where many of the professors who have been there for the longest time live.

The two- and three-story antique stone residential buildings are apartment buildings with minimal commonalities, such as the position of their entrances and windows. Depending on the residents' tastes, the walls are painted in eccentric colors that make them stand out from the surroundings, or are sunken with special surface treatments, and each house's garden varies from one that is separated and tended to to another that is left unattended. There are mountains of equipment piled up, and in one house, a dragon with no collar or fence can be seen curled up and sleeping in front of the entrance.

The sidewalks are made of the same wear-resistant stone as the building materials, and the straight roads look like they could be used as runways, where a variety of vehicles, both human-powered and automated, are parked, stranded, or thrown out.

"Well, if you're so ignorant as to commit a crime against the professors of Hell, you probably shouldn't have come all the way here in the first place."

Jenny, walking down Hell's first block with her mobile information terminal in hand, stopped in front of an old government building covered in ivy. There was no need to check the numbers and symbols on the delivery box. Parked in the driveway was the sports-type commuter car she had seen in the professor's parking lot. Compared to the steam locomotives of the past and the flapping planes with internal combustion propulsion and folded wings, the commuter car with wheels looked rather ordinary, even though it was a bright color like a racer.

Jenny saw the door to the government building at the end of the pavement that led to the back of the poorly maintained garden. There was not a single modern electronic device in sight in the entrance area, which was appropriate for an old building.

The front door was decorated with the same old coat of arms as the door to the professor's laboratory. The head of a long-fanged carnivore that is said to have once lived on the same planet as the professor, with a curved sword and a twisted staff stacked one on top of the other underneath. The relief on the old black wood is said to represent the bravery of the carnivore, the power of the curved sword, and the wisdom of the staff, but Jenny hasn't even checked how accurate this explanation was.

Standing in front of the entrance, Jenny looked around once more. She noticed that the mouth of the long-fanged carnivore was holding a heavy metal ring. A bump protruding from the bottom of the metal ring seemed to support the relief of the stacked staff and curved sword, and there were traces of it having been beaten many times.

It took Jenny a while to remember how to use it.

A black and white drawing of a person

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"It's a knocker. Wow, I thought the one on the door of the high school principal's office was the last one."

I grabbed the heavy metal ring that the carnivorous beast had in its mouth and lifted it up. When I hit it against the lump, the metal sound, heavier than I expected, rang out like a bell.

I waited for a while, wondering if I should knock again, when I heard a muffled voice from somewhere.

"*Hello, who's there?*"

Jenny looked around the entrance again. It wouldn't be surprising if there was some kind of security system hidden there, but the voice I heard didn't seem to be mechanically reproduced.

"I'm Jenny Dolittle, a first-year student."

Jenny spoke the lines she had prepared.

"I've come to meet Professor Athena Sakyura."

"*Oh, you.*"

Jenny found the place where the voice was coming from. An old funnel was attached sideways next to the door, and a rust-colored pipe led to somewhere.

"*The lock is open. Come in.*"

It seemed that sending a message in advance to confirm the visit schedule was worth it. Jenny waited for the door to open.

"*Oh, just to be sure, open the door with your own hands. There's a lever in front of you, on the left side of the door. Push it down and it will open.*"

"It's not automatic."

Muttering, Jenny put her hand on the large antique-like lever attached to one corner of the large front door. The door lock was released with the response of moving the old, heavy mechanism.

Jenny opened the heavy, large door. Inside was an antique shop.

"*Come straight in, I'm in the room at the back on the right.*"

A muffled voice came from the funnel at the front door.

"*There are a lot of antiques here, so be careful not to catch anything on anything around you.*"

"Yes."

Jenny answered and stepped into her professor's official residence.

Freshmen admitted to Space University are assigned to various faculties based on their preferences and basic education. They can also choose the field they want to study.

Jenny, who enrolled in the Faculty of Economics, chose the History of Modern Interstellar Warfare as an elective outside of her specialty. She had always been interested in history and enjoyed researching it, so she thought she had the academic ability to acquire basic knowledge.

However, Athena Sakyura, who became Jenny's professor as a first-time student, easily shattered the confidence of this freshman college student, who was the top student at her local high school. Although she understood intellectually that this was a necessary course for the re-education of freshmen who had no other criteria for evaluation than the amount of detailed knowledge, Jenny could not accept it emotionally, so she set her immediate virtual enemy at the university to be her professor, an Imperial nobleman who was rumored to be a long-lived Methuselah.

The condition for victory was to make Professor Athena Sakyura recognize her as an intelligent student. Jenny returned to Sea of the Morningstar with that intention, but returned to Space University with a different intention.

Unlike the laboratory, which was equipped with the latest information technology, Professor Athena's home study was filled with classical interiors like those seen in historical dramas. The lighting equipment attached to the wall also seemed to be gaslight, judging from the bright flames flickering irregularly in the glass lampshades.

"Sorry for the mess."

Old books and antiques were piled up on the huge desk facing the wall. Athena turned her office chair, which looked new, and turned to face Jenny. A funnel connected to a flexible tube dangles against a wall covered with pasted notes, image cards, and printouts.

"My parents' house keeps sending me antiques one after another, hoping to get rid of them. I'm thinking it's about time to get a dealer to take them away."

"Your parents' house..."

If they're a long-lived species, the number of relics they accumulate will increase in proportion to their lifespan. Jenny started to imagine this, but then shook her head.

"Here you go."

Athena stood up from her office chair with automatic supports and pointed to several chairs of various ages and styles placed on the worn carpet. A large stump that looked like a fossil was being used as a table, judging from the lamps, what looked like wine bottles, and a drinking pot that were placed on it. Jenny sat down on a relatively new, low-backed chair decorated with intricate carvings that looked to be about 100 years old. The classic style cushions, which she had only seen on old furniture from the time of the Governor-General's Office at Hakuoh Girls' Academy, sank in softer than they looked and supported Jenny.

"So, what is it?"

The professor asked, his chair facing away from the desk.

"What did you want to ask me that made you come all the way to my house?"

"Time travel?"

The professor's grey eyes shot at Jenny.

"What are you talking about?"

"I mean it literally."

Jenny continued the conversation, using all her memories and prior knowledge of the long-lived species she had met.

"Time travel, which moves you from the present to any time in the past or future."

The professor looked at Jenny's face intently.

"You can't escape the one-way flow of time. Didn't you learn that in the basics of physics?"

"Nuclear fusion and FTL speeds were once thought to be impossible."

Jenny began to develop her prepared argument.

"On my planet, education never denied the possibility, even if it was only a small one."

"That's not a very commendable educational approach."

Athena spoke her honest opinion.

"Even if you teach someone that something is impossible, there will always be people who don't believe it. Sometimes, those people will make something impossible possible, but education isn't about expecting a lucky break like that."

"I understand the professor's educational approach."

You can get some information from any expression or gesture. Jenny doesn't take her eyes off Athena.

"So, can you answer my question?"

"Is time travel possible?"

"No."

Jenny asked, staring into the professor's eyes.

"Is research into time travel being conducted at Space University?"

It is said that Space University, which has an entire star system, three habitable planets, and hundreds of facilities in interplanetary space, including space cities and colonies, currently has billions of ongoing research themes. Not all of them are open to ordinary students, and freshman Jenny Dolittle can only see a list of a few of them.

"How did you come up with that idea?"

Suddenly, the professor's eyes took on a color she had never seen before.

"Could you redo something in the past?"

Since she had never heard that before, it took a moment for Jenny to realize that he was joking.

"Yes, I have enough of the past I would like to redo to make a list and submit it."

I wasn't sure if I was able to make a good expression. Jenny replied, trying to smile.

"But I'll take care of my own life. That's not why I'm asking about time travel."

"Then why?"

"In this universe where FTL speeds have been put into practical use and spaceships and information can be delivered faster than the speed of light, isn't time travel the last remaining topic?"

Jenny asked, staring at the professor's face so as not to miss any small details.

"There's no reason to think that this isn't being studied at the galaxy's top academic institution."

"I'm a historian."

Without taking her eyes off her student, Athena replied.

"Unfortunately, I'm not an expert in spatial physics or quantum time. I think that's a better question to ask the conductor of science."

"Research and development into time travel is not a publicly-disclosed research topic at the Space University."

Jenny replied. "I don't expect that I, a first-time student, will be easily informed of the existence and details of unpublished research topics. I heard at the entrance ceremony that intelligence requires appropriate qualifications."

"So you know your position."

Athena tilted her head slightly and looked at Jenny.

"Officially, the answer to your question is of course no, but before I answer, I'll ask you something. Why did you want to ask a historian about time travel?"

Jenny thought, trying to remember the line of her thoughts. She opened her mouth.

"I thought that the professor was probably the closest to the answer I wanted to find out at Space University."

"Maybe the answer you want to find is in the science lab?"

"I understand that Space University is not an easy place to be taught by a first-year student who has just entered and has not achieved any results, just because he asked about an unpublished research topic."

"Then why are you asking a historian who is not a specialist?"

"Because I thought that if we really consider the practical application of time travel, verification would be necessary."

Jenny continued, carefully watching the professor's expression.

"If research on time travel is being conducted, a thorough feasibility verification should be conducted. And if time travel is to be put into practical use, it would be history that will benefit the most. Even if it is still in the theoretical consideration stage, I thought that participation from history would be required."

"That's a reasonable inference before confirmation."

Athena took off the headset with the interface and placed it on the desk.

"Come in. I'll show you something interesting."

Athena left the study and headed straight to the bathroom. Jenny checked just to be sure.

"What's interesting, the toilet?"

"No. It'll take a while, so I'm preparing for that."

Athena's commuter car was a large sports type. Jenny, who was invited to get into the low wedge-shaped car, looked at the overly ostentatious control panel in front of the driver's seat and the sticks on both sides of the seat, and then looked back at the profile of the professor who was fastening his seat belt with practiced hands.

"It's not just a car, is it?"

"Yes. Do you get motion sickness?"

"No."

As she answered, Jenny carefully fastened the belt of the bucket seat with a body support system, following the professor's example. Athena turned on the main switch and started up the system. Colorful control panel displays appeared around the driver's seat.

"That's good."

The glass roof canopy, which had been opened forward by a flexible arm, closed. Jenny noticed that the windows and body were much thicker than a normal commuter car.

Athena checked the display and placed both hands on the control sticks on either side of the driver's seat on the right side. Jenny braced herself, anticipating the start of acceleration.

Contrary to her expectations, Athena smoothly started the commuter car. They left the residential area, which was also equipped with autodrive, in smooth full manual driving and got onto the highway that connected directly to the old residential area.

Even on the highway, Athena's driving remained safe and secure. Still in manual driving, she took the flowing lane and took a route to the suburbs.

It took willpower not to ask about the destination. Jenny looked not at the view of the ancient city's freeway, which could be seen from the interior of the car, which was completely open up to the ceiling, but at the area around the driver's seat, where a variety of information was displayed that was unimaginable in a normal commuter car.

Many of the 3D displays showed the traffic conditions not only around but also in the sky, the current location, and the operating status of the power system. Jenny realized that this was not a commuter car on the ground, but an airplane.

Without warning, the commuter plane floated up into the air. Jenny struggled to keep her cool.

Perhaps it was the powerful anti-gravity system at work, but there was no weight felt inside the car as it soared. Even after passing several low-lying clouds, the air pressure inside the car did not change, perhaps because it was pressurized. With its axis pointed toward the sky, the commuter plane's speed and altitude increased rapidly.

Generally, vehicles operated within the atmosphere are rarely equipped with inertial control or anti-gravity systems, with the exception of those used for specific purposes.

Jenny stole a peek at the display on the driver's side. The speedometer, which easily exceeded the sound barrier, indicated that the plane was continuing to accelerate. The same blue sky as the one seen from the Sea of the Morningstar, was turning a dull black.

"Are we outside?"

"Yes."

Athena cast a quick glance at Jenny in the passenger seat.

"I guess it's not just for show that he's from a transportation company and was captain of the yacht club in high school. I thought I'd be a bit more surprised."

"I am surprised."

Jenny answered, looking around the inside of the commuter car. It was a four-seater sports car, and the display around the driver's seat was overloaded and the control system was different from a normal commuter car, but the rest of it looked like a commuter car that had been carefully modified.

"I can't believe such a small aircraft can reach orbit."

The professor, who was holding the control stick in the driver's seat, seemed to smile.

"I'm glad that you're a student who's used to being outside. I can skip a lot of explanations."

"I'm surprised."

Jenny said sincerely.

"I can't believe that we can fly into interplanetary space so easily, let alone into orbit."

The professor in the driver's seat was smiling.

"You can't really go faster than the speed of light, can you?"

"I don't know?"

Outside the car window, protected by multiple layers of light-blocking shields, the surface of the Unibar Gs1, the home planet of the Unibar system, was slowly boiling and flowing. The Commuter was approaching Unibar Gs1, even closer to the star than Saison, the first planet in the Unibar system.

Even after passing through Tania's stratosphere and rising to a place that could be called outer space, Athena did not slow down the Commuter's acceleration. Because the acceleration could not be felt thanks to the inertial control system, the only way to read the speed was from the numbers displayed. Not wanting to hide anything, Athena, who was driving, opened the display on the passenger side and displayed the navigation display.

Passing low orbit altitude, Athena accelerated the Commuter even further. Seeing the professor continue to accelerate even after long past orbital speed, Jenny guessed that the destination was not the relay station in Tania orbit, but something further ahead.

Jenny's guess was half right, half wrong. What was right was that the Commuter's destination was even further away than the relay station, and what was wrong was that the destination was directly above a star, passing three inner planet orbits with a single small Commuter.

It was only after passing the second inner planet orbit that Athena, holding the control stick, finally began to slow down the Commuter. Jenny was dizzy thinking about where on the Commuter was the large-capacity inertial control system that could continuously accelerate and decelerate throughout the entire journey.

As they approached the star Unibar Gs1, the car windows became more protectively colored. The stars that were visible disappeared, and the corona on the surface of the star became discernible, but the environment inside the car was the same as when they were on the surface of Tania.

Approaching Unibar Gs1 from the ecliptic plane, Athena set course for the north pole of the star. Directly above the star, so close that it would be licked if a large flare occurred, a glowing golden structure resembling a giant spider was visible.

"That's what I wanted to show you."

In the car, with artificial gravity still in effect, Athena pointed to the golden space structure on her path.

"A high-energy particle research station. A research station that uses the abundant energy of a star close to Unibar Gs1 to repeatedly create and destroy high-energy particles."

"A stellar-scale high-energy research station..."

Jenny repeated the professor's explanation. She knew of the existence of an energy research institute that uses a huge accelerator built in orbit around a giant gas planet, but this was the first time she had seen one on a stellar scale.

"It's gold because it reflects heat the best. It's located so close to the star because it has a lot of energy, but it can't pump out enough energy to affect the star's activity, so it's been moved to a bigger place where it won't affect the surrounding star system even if it gets a little reckless, and there's talk of leaving this one for star control."

"Isn't even the energy of one star enough?"

Jenny muttered in a daze.

"The question was whether research on time travel was being conducted at the Space University."

Athena slowly rotated her commuter while looking down at the station located directly above the north pole of the star Unibar Gs1.

"The answer is, it is being conducted."

Jenny silently stared at the research station directly above the star. "However, the experiment currently being conducted is a very basic one, only capable of sending information to the past."

"Transmitting information to the past, you say?"

Jenny repeated the experiment, which was much more modest than she had imagined.

"That's right. If you use FTL communication, you can send information to the entire universe without any time lag. But you can't send information before the time of transmission. That's common sense, isn't it?"

"Yes."

"FTL navigation is a way to avoid flying at the same spatial distance by passing through a hyperdimensional space, but we can avoid time constraints by using a more advanced trick."

Athena in the driver's seat laughed.

"My professor of hyperdimensional cosmology gave me a more technical explanation, but that's what it was in a nutshell. However, the time constraints are more difficult and delicate than the spatial constraints because they are on a different dimension, so at this stage it's not about making an object travel through time, but sending simple information to the past."

"Really?"

"The goal now is to send a simple signal to the past, five seconds ago."

"Only five seconds? Is that so?"

"That's what I heard too. Can't you send such a simple signal just five seconds ago, whether it's positive or negative? Then they asked me if I could stop time, even for just a moment. Rather than stopping apparent time by traveling at the speed of light, to stop the time that is flowing now for even a moment, it seems that calculations require energy equivalent to the mass of the entire universe."

"...But,"

After thinking for a moment, Jenny answered.

"Even if we could stop time in the entire universe, the time we perceive would also stop, so we wouldn't know."

"It's called the observer's paradox," Athena said.

"As long as we live in three-dimensional space, we can't sense the exact direction of the fourth dimension. That's why we need a trick backed up by hyperdimensional cosmology."

Athena glanced at the student in the passenger seat.

"Can I ask you a question?"

"What is it?"

Jenny unconsciously braced herself.

"Why did you come up with the idea of ​​time travel?"

Jenny looked at Athena's profile as she sat facing forward in the driver's seat.

"I thought that if I was going to do historical research, the best way to do it would be to do a field survey... that's a lie."

Jenny quickly denied it.

"I thought that maybe there have been some instances of time travel or similar phenomena in the past, and that you might know more about them, Professor."

Athena, who was in the driver's seat, turned to face Jenny in the passenger seat. She tilted her head slightly and looked at her for a while, then returned her eyes to the control panel.

"In this universe, time doesn't flow uniformly everywhere. You know that much, right?"

"Yes."

Jenny nodded. Time flows differently in space, depending on speed, gravity, and other factors.

"Before it became common to use high-energy, brute force jumps like we do today, FTL travel was done by searching for and connecting gaps, phase differences, holes, and tears in space. If it's possible to travel beyond the laws of space, there's no reason to conclude that it's impossible to travel in time."

Athena turned the Commuter around. It seemed to have turned its back on the star and started accelerating, but Jenny couldn't feel like she was moving because the inertial control system was still working perfectly.

Looking at the display, the Commuter continued to accelerate quite a bit. It seemed to be on its way back to Tania.

"I'll tell you a special secret."

Jenny looked at the professor's profile in the driver's seat, joking.

"Do you know what Space University was originally?"

"I heard it was a fleet carrying knowledge."

"Before that."

After setting the return trajectory, Athena released both hands from the control stick.

"The Record Fleet that became the basis of Space University wasn't born suddenly between the stars. It was before that, when there was no way to cross the stars, before libraries were built on the planets where they were born."

"There are records from that long ago!?"

Athena continued with a smile.

"The oldest source of Space University was a magic troupe. Astrology, which became the basis of astronomy, alchemy, which became the basis of chemistry, and other techniques that were called magic were recorded and shared so that they wouldn't be lost, but they can't be confirmed, and the oldest records are the ones that were made."

"Magic...?"

Jenny tried to use a word that she hadn't used much in practice. Athena continued.

"The knowledge systems that would later come to be called science were initially called magic or the secret arts, hidden, and strictly restricted in their use. They were organized, explored, and laws were discovered, and developed into science. Meanwhile, the education level of the general public rose, and truths that were only conveyed to a limited number of people of a certain class began to be widely conveyed as education. In most civilizations, it is not until the number of educated individuals, not just the total number, accounts for a certain percentage that they can climb the ladder to interstellar civilization through the industrial and information revolutions."

Jenny was also taught this. Higher education will reach its development limit unless it becomes more universally available to a certain extent, not just to a small portion of the people who make up a civilized society. At the same time, it also relates to whether society has the capacity to provide unproductive education to the majority, and how much waste it can tolerate.

"So, the Space University, which was once a magic troupe, chose the educational institution as the optimal form."

Athena skipped over the detailed process and theory and spoke her conclusion.

"It takes time, money, and power, but in the end, I believed that it was the most reliable method. Education doesn't produce the results you want right away, but you can expect results that go beyond what you want."

"Is the current Space University the result you wanted?"

"The form of the Space University is only a means. Education, records, and research are also means. So think about how to use them well."

"Yes."

"Time travel is not just about finding time entanglements or distorting the time line by force. You can learn about the past by searching for records of the past and investigating and analyzing them."

Jenny looked at the profile of the professor in the driver's seat.

"Is that why you study history?"

"That's just one of the reasons. I'm not studying history because I want to travel in time."

The professor said, facing forward.

"It's based on the War of Independence, right?"

"Yes."

Jenny answered. She had heard many times about the professor's devilish memory.

"Even giving a hint like this might be against the rules, so from now on, I'll just assume that what I say next is a monologue."

"Yes?"

Not understanding what the professor meant, Jenny asked again.

"As with most big projects, it's harder to end a war than it is to start one. Once it starts, it's a continuous battle of direct and indirect action based on the convenience and intentions of the parties involved, so in a political sense, there's not much difference between ancient times before the stars were set out and modern battles that are fought at FTL speeds."

"Ah..."

"But the beginning and end of a war are closely related to the changes of the era and the convenience of the parties involved, and the outcome can change dramatically depending on the changing situation and the abilities and will of the parties involved. If you're going to study war, I think it would be most useful to think about how to end it."

Jenny tried to apply the professor's words to herself. She chose the independence war between the Stellar Alliance and the Federation of Colonial Stars as her theme because it was the history that was closest to her. And Jenny remembered another reason: learning from actual combat would be useful in peacetime work.

"I wonder if the subject of my research is too complicated and mysterious?"

"I understand."

Jenny answered with a smile.

"Thank you for your valuable advice."

"Huh?"

Marika, who had come to the yacht club room to ask her classmate Mami to get her a lunchbox, tilted her head.

"What's wrong?"

In the empty yacht club room during lunch break, Marika tries out some vaguely remembered steps in front of the old-fashioned communication system that takes up half the wall.

"Did I do something wrong?"

Marika slides back to the table with her chair and picks up the mobile device that was lying there. The communication device, which looks like an ordinary mobile device, has been extensively modified by the Bentenmaru's technical staff using military technology, and is capable of communicating directly with spacecraft in orbit without going through a network.

Marika touches the display that is in standby mode and checks the display. There are no new incoming calls or unread messages.

She twists her head further and turns to look at the display of the communication system on the wall.

As the captain, even when she is not on duty aboard, Marika makes regular contact with Bentenmaru twice a day. Twice a day, in the morning and at night. Sometimes she just sends a standard message to say that everything is normal, and sometimes she makes a voice call if she has the time.

Marika attended Hakuo Girls' Academy again today, and during her morning break, she sent her regular message to Bentenmaru, who was supposed to be investigating an abnormal phenomenon in interplanetary space. However, even though she waited until the next break, she didn't receive a confirmation that the message was received immediately. She tried calling directly from her mobile device, but it didn't go through, so as soon as morning classes ended, Marika rushed to the Yacht Club and started up the built-in communications system, which was larger and more powerful than a mobile device.

Betenmaru is a privateer ship officially recognized by Sea of the Morningstar, and is fully equipped with a main contact number and an extension for staff. However, the main contact number is set to voicemail, and the extension doesn't work either.

Since Marika became captain, there have only been two or three times when she was unable to contact Bentenmaru. The first time was when an escaped cat-monkey caused all the crew members except Marika to be quarantined, leaving the Bentenmaru empty.

It wasn't uncommon for Marika to forget to make regular contact or to be late or unable to make contact due to unavoidable circumstances, but it was rare for the Bentenmaru, with so many people on board, to be unable to receive signals. And losing contact with the Bentenmaru could only mean one thing.

"An emergency, huh..."

Marika muttered, thinking back to see if there was anything she'd forgotten or skipped steps.

The Bentenmaru should have continued to observe the spatial disturbances at the locations where the eight observation probes were installed. Marika switched the communication system display to network and checked the celestial forecast.

The planet Tau was stable. There was no record of any abnormality warnings being issued due to the planet Tau.

"Last time, the planet Tau was unstable in many ways, but that's not the case this time. If that's the case..."

She then investigated to see if there were any unusual conditions occurring in the airspace where the Bentenmaru should have been. Even after checking the air traffic control station's route information, the latest military information, and even the news reports, nothing had changed.

"So does that mean Bentenmaru has put a radio silence on us for some reason?"

If Bentenmaru had gone into hiding on purpose, it would be nearly impossible to find it.

"Was there a reason for Bentenmaru to hide without contacting us...?"

As she spoke of the possible scenarios, Marika was puzzled even more. She had no idea what situation Bentenmaru had encountered, or what abnormal situation had occurred in the Tau star system.

The mobile phone suddenly started ringing. Startled, Marika answered the call with her usual quick reflexes.

"Hello, this is Kato Marika... Ririka!?"

She instinctively checked the caller on the display. It was definitely the Shinokuhama Airport Air Traffic Control Station, where her mother, Kato Ririka, worked.

"*There's no need to panic. It's real. This morning's breakfast was some freshly bought rations, fruit juice, and yogurt.*"

After hearing the menu of the last meal they had together, which served as a password, Marika looked at the call display on her display once again. It was via a normal phone line.

"Yes, yes, um, do I need to verify my identity?"

Since entering high school, Ririka has never called Marika's cell phone while she is on campus.

"*We can see that the cell phone you are calling is inside Hakuoh Girls' Academy. This is a message from the Orbital Control Station to Kato Marika, captain of the Bentenmaru. The Bentenmaru has gone missing.*"

Marika looked at the display on her cell phone once again. There was no doubt that it was a call from the Shinokuhama Airport Control Station.

Taking a deep breath, Marika put the cell phone to her ear again. "Well, can you give me all the information we currently have?"

There was a smile on the other end of the phone.

"*The transponder of the Bentenmaru, which was investigating an interplanetary space anomaly at the request of the military, suddenly disappeared. Since the airspace is only visible to the military's unmanned patrol planets, we don't know the details, and the fleet has not taken action as it is deemed that there is no emergency at the moment.*"

"Suddenly disappeared..."

Spaceships traveling are required to transmit transponders for safety. However, it is not uncommon for transponders to be turned off for various reasons.

"*Even when scanning with the patrol planets, the hull of the Bentenmaru cannot be found in the airspace in question. There is no sign of FTL travel.*"

The arrangement of the patrol planets managed by the military is not uniform. It is natural that they are distributed thickly in the inner planetary system and thinly in the outer planetary system, but the airspace around Sea of the Morningstar is the densest, and other airspaces are sparse. The patrol planets revolve around the star on their own orbits, and there are not many around the airspace Bentenmaru was investigating.

If it was normal navigation, it would not be difficult for Bentenmaru, who had turned off the transponder, to blind the patrol planets. However, even if the density is low, it is almost impossible to escape the patrol net and jump faster than light speed.

"*That is why the military is unable to determine whether Bentenmaru encountered some abnormality or whether it has hidden itself of its own volition. After checking, it was found that the captain of Bentenmaru is on Sea of the Morningstar and can be contacted. In that case, the next thing to do is to directly check with the captain.*"

Marika remembered the request Bentenmaru had received from the military via FTL.

"Bentenmaru is continuing to investigate the spatial anomaly in the airspace in question at the request of the military."

Marika answered without a clear outlook for the future.

"The request requires that the survey and observation be carried out with the utmost precision. We cannot deny the possibility that the high-powered main engine or the constantly oscillating transponder could cause an error."

Marika added, thinking about whether she could come up with any other plausible explanation.

"If possible, could we also ask the military to refrain from scanning the airspace in question?"

"*Is the reason why we can't see the Bentenmaru right now because it's part of the planned investigation and observation?*"

"As the captain of the Bentenmaru, I trust my crew."

Marika spoke her motto.

"The Bentenmaru isn't acting as a pirate right now. Just because the captain isn't on board shouldn't limit the investigation and observation."

"*Understood.*"

Ririka backed down much faster than Marika expected.

"*So, the Bentenmaru isn't in any abnormal situation right now, and there's no need to ask the galaxy military for an investigation just because it's gone missing.*"

Marika shook her head, thinking about what would happen if something problematic had happened to the Bentenmaru.

"That's right. If it were possible, I think the investigation would go more smoothly and there wouldn't be any unnecessary trouble if Bentenmaru designated the airspace under investigation as a no-entry, high-alert airspace."

"*High-alert airspace, huh?*"

Ririka on the other end of the phone seemed to laugh.

"*Fortunately, we're far from Sea of the Morningstar at the moment, but if we set up a no-entry, high-alert airspace in the inner planetary system, wouldn't that attract unnecessary scrutiny from all quarters?*"

"Ah..."

"*For now, the airspace in question is moving away from Sea of the Morningstar.*"

It has been confirmed that the spatial disturbance is not moving with Sea of the Morningstar's orbital period, but with the rotation period of its home planet, Tau. Tau's rotation period is about 30 days, and the spatial anomaly moves away from Sea of the Morningstar and approaches it again along with Tau's rotation.

"*As the control station, all we can do is recommend that customers coming to Sea of the Morningstar choose an approach orbit that avoids the spatial anomaly, but is that okay?*”

The control station can only specify the orbit of a spaceship in the vicinity of the Sea of the Morningstar. In interplanetary space, there is no need to specify an orbit in the first place.

A spaceship that enters a solar system chooses its own orbit and flies until it approaches the target star. The orbit control station checks the ship's nationality, proper name, current position and speed using a transponder, and controls it if necessary.

Some spaceships leave the orbit setting up to the control station. For such spaceships, the control station specifies the most suitable safe orbit.

“That's enough.”

Since we don't know the reason why Bentenmaru went missing, we can't deny the possibility that spaceships flying in the surrounding airspace will go missing in the same way. Thinking that this risk has been eliminated to some extent, Marika answered with relief.

“*So, when is Bentenmaru expected to be visible?*”

Naturally, Ririka hit the nail on the head.

"...I don't think it will take a week."

Marika answered calmly.

"I would like to observe slowly, taking about one rotation of the planet Tau, but the contract does not allow for that long."

"*A week?*"

When Ririka asked again, Marika quickly calculated the situation and the reason. It would not be comfortable for the control station if a spaceship that had erased its transponder in the controlled airspace was missing and somewhere.

"I think it will take about three or four days."

Without any estimate, Marika just let it come out of her mouth.

"I think we can get a lot of data if we observe it that precisely."

"*Understood.*"

Ririka answered.

"*Well then, I will inform the military and the control station of the disappearance of the Bentenmaru transponder and the fact that the main body is still missing as part of the observation of spatial anomalies.*"

"Thank you."

"*Is there anything you would like to tell us?*"

Things she wanted to discuss and confirm came pouring out of her like a torrent. After taking a deep breath, Marika answered.

"No. If there is anything you need, I promise to contact the control station as a top priority."

"*I'm counting on you. I plan to be back by dinner today. Sorry for disturbing your studies. Bye.*"

The call was cut off. Marika looked at the display of her mobile device for a while, which showed the name of the Shinokuhama Airport Control Station on the other end of the line.

A knock reached her ears and Marika came back to her senses.

"Sorry, I'll be right back!"

After quickly erasing the communication system's operation records and starting the shutdown procedure, Marika ran to the locked clubroom door.

"Hey, wait!"

Mami was waiting outside the door, carrying lunch boxes for two people.

"What should we do? Shall we borrow this room? Or go somewhere else?"

He said that, Marika looked back inside the clubroom. The display of the communication system, which had completed the shutdown procedure, disappeared.

"Let's go outside. I want to eat while looking at the sky."

"Marika, are you worried again?!"

Marika was shocked and looked back at Mami's face.

"How did you know?!"

"Well, it's not like that since I was little."

Mami was holding the open door and waiting for Marika.

"When you were in the first grade, you fell in love at first sight with your new teacher, but when you found out she was already married, and when you found a kitten on the way to school, you still said you wanted to eat outside."

"Oh, right..."

Marika placed her outstretched index finger and thumb on her forehead.

"You remember something unpleasant."

"Well, it's about Marika. How is it? Is there anything I can help you with this time?"

Marika turned around and confirmed that all the equipment in the room was gone.

"That's a business secret, isn't it?"

"Oh, so it's something about work."

Mami handed Marika her lunchbox as she came out of the clubroom.

"The rooftop? Or would you like to go to the courtyard?"

"Let's go to the courtyard."

Marika took the lunchbox and started walking.

A black rectangular object with white text

Description automatically generated

"Bentenmaru!?"

Chiaki asked Marika the same question for the umpteenth time.

"He's gone missing! Do you know what that means!?"

"I told you I don't know."

Marika repeated the same answer for the umpteenth time.

"That's why I'm asking Barbaroosa to help me investigate the airspace where Bentenmaru was last seen."

"Are these spatial coordinates correct?"

Kenjo Kurihara, who was in the captain's seat, projected a star chart onto the large 3D display in the center of the bridge. The 3D configuration of the inner planets' orbits centered on Tau, with their current position on the opposite side of Tau from Mars Star.

"It's fine."

Marika looked at the 3D diagram on the large display, comparing it with the numbers of the spatial coordinates she remembered. The bridge of the Barbaroosa, which uses a battleship as a pirate ship, is much wider than Bentenmaru's.

"I think we'll soon be able to see the observation probe that Bentenmaru placed."

"This."

Nora, who was in the first officer's seat, superimposed eight bright spots on the orbital diagram on the 3D display.

"The transponder is normal, but we can't tell anything more from here."

The probe that Bentenmaru placed to observe spatial anomalies formed the vertices of a regular hexahedron just like Marika's memory. Artificial objects placed in space through the proper procedures continue to emit transponders according to navigational laws.

"Can I borrow your control code?"

"Yes."

The observation probes and observation buoys under Bentenmaru's control are locked with control codes to prevent them from being used by others. Unless the encrypted control code is woven into the command, the probe or buoy cannot be moved or the desired data obtained.

Marika, standing in front of the 3D display, in her uniform, went up to Nora in the first officer's seat and handed her a small data card.

"Try using it."

"I'll borrow it."

Nora inserted the card into the slot and performed the usual check before reading out the data.

"It's very polite to only put the control code on a brand new data card."

"I was trained on the Bentenmaru."

"It's easy to use, so it's very helpful."

Nora read out the frequency and control code from the data on the card and called the observation probe, which was continuing its observations while maintaining its exact position. The response came back immediately.

"Yes, I got it."

Nora looked up at Marika.

"What should I do?"

"Download the data from the start of the observations up until now."

Marika spoke the procedure she had thought out many times.

"Please put the data on the card I just gave you."

"Anything else?"

"Use the Barbaroosa's sensor system to see through the airspace where our observation probe is located."

Marika looked around the bridge of the Barbaroosa. When they operated together, she had received a basic explanation of what kind of sensor system the Barbaroosa was equipped with, but she couldn't imagine how useful it was as clearly as Bentenmaru.

"That's a simple matter. Is it for real? Or for business purposes?"

Marika laughed at the obvious distinction between the two.

"For actual use, but no active, only passive, please."

"Specify the search range. And why limit sensing to passive?"

"The search range is a 200km radius from the space surrounded by the eight observation probes. The reason is that we don't know what kind of stimuli the spatial anomaly that Bentenmaru was observing will react to, so we want to avoid unnecessary stimuli."

"Bentenmaru, what were you doing?"

Marika looked up at Chiaki's question.

"We were investigating a spatial anomaly that appeared in interplanetary space at the request of the military."

"I told you that."

Chiaki glared at Marika in a quiet voice.

"It's weird for the military to use a pirate ship for a simple spatial anomaly."

"Chiaki, leave it at that."

Kenjo called out from the captain's seat.

"Professional confidentiality is not uncommon in this line of work. How much of the situation I reveal and how much I explain is up to Bentenmaru."

"Spike!"

Boggs, the mechanical cyborg sitting in the sensor seat, reported, comparing the reaction on the display to a thorn.

"There's a weak reaction on the outside of the observation probe, this is..."

Boggs quickly captured the target and zoomed in while continuing his verbal report.

"Metal reaction, with beacon, message capsule."

At the same time as the image, a new reaction was displayed as a bright spot on the 3D display in the center of the bridge.

"Is it moving?"

In the large-scale 3D display, the new reaction was not moving at a high speed that could be seen.

"The relative speed with the observation probe is several tens of meters per second."

Boggs answered while operating the console.

"It's not synchronized with the probe, so it's coming from somewhere else. The problem is that this beacon started transmitting just now, just waiting for us to start observing."

"Really?"

Nora in the first officer's seat checked Boggs' report by time scrolling the data. The beacon emitted by the message capsule is weak, but the signal used for distress calls can be received from a much longer distance.

"No doubt about it," Boggs replied.

"I don't know if it sensed our approach and started transmitting, or if it was a timer, but it was definitely silent until just now. With a message capsule of this size, it would be difficult to find it unless you aimed your radar at it and searched for it."

"Can you retrieve it?"

The message capsule shown on the screen was a communication tube commonly used on the Bentenmaru. It was a cylindrical tube called a cybone, about 40 cm long and 5 cm in diameter, and was made of a special material that was protected against heat and radiation, and was made to be sturdy enough to withstand the long-term space environment.

It was strong enough to not lose its original shape even when entering the atmosphere from orbital speed or colliding with the ground, but it was only equipped with a beacon transmitter to communicate its current location.

"It's easy."

Boggs checked the sensor data of the space around the message capsule. No abnormalities were found.

"Will we be approaching the space surrounded by the observation probe rather than the current situation?"

Marika turned to Kenjo in the captain's seat. He nodded as if asking for his opinion.

Marika answered.

"As long as we're outside the observation probe, I think we'll be fine."

As they got closer, the details of the message capsule became clearer through optical observation.

"This must be the Bentenmaru's communication tube."

Kenjo said as he saw the optically printed identification symbol on the slowly rotating capsule's surface, the ship's name clearly visible to the naked eye, and the pirate mark of Benzaiten holding a biwa (Japanese lute).

"Captain Marika, did you know this was here?"

"No."

Marika shook her head obediently.

"I was hoping there might be some clues left behind."

"I don't think Captain Marika knew the message capsule was here."

Boggs displayed the results of the analysis so far.

"Calculating from the message capsule's orbit, it was released at least 100 years ago."

The message capsule was retrieved by a crew member of the Barbaroosa carrying a mobile unit during an extravehicular operation. After checking that it was not contaminated by harmful radiation, it was brought onto the Barbaroosa bridge.

Marika stared intently at the cylindrical message capsule that was brought onto the bridge along with a wagon carrying a simple analysis system.

The message capsule is a standardized communication tube with a unique identification number. It was determined that the message capsule, made to Galactic Empire standard specifications, had been manufactured about 10 years ago and delivered to the Bentenmaru.

However, a simple analysis showed that the sensor was spitting out an error. The results of the aging measurement of the cosmic rays accumulated on the surface of the hardened heat-resistant cell metal communication tube calculated an impossible figure.

"It's been thrown into space for 120 years, plus or minus three?"

Chiaki read out the information on the display with a look of astonishment.

"The intrinsic clock is also showing a year 120 years into the future according to the standard calendar, so how do you manage it as the captain, Marika?"

"The intrinsic clock is out of sync too!?"

Marika raised her voice and reconsidered the information displayed. The clock built into this type of communication tube does not have an automatic calibration function, and does not receive standard time transmitted by navigation buoys or orbital control stations to adjust the time.

"So the timer deliberately started transmitting to a time in the future?"

"...That's what it would mean."

Chiaki admitted with a puzzled look on her face.

"If you want a message capsule with an incorrect clock inside to start sending at that time, it shouldn't work unless you set the timer to a future time."

Marika did the math in her head. What if the Bentenmaru was in the Tau star system during the War of Independence, the same star system from which Odette II had jumped, and tried to contact the future?

The Bentenmaru's navigation records had accurately recorded the time up until that very moment. There was no doubt that the crew of the Bentenmaru could predict with a fair amount of accuracy how long it would take for Marika to lose her regular contact, sense something was wrong, and get here somehow.

"It's probably the work of one of my crew."

Marika turned to Kenjo in the captain's seat.

"Well, Captain Kenjo, from now on I, Captain Kato Marika of the Bentenmaru, may say some crazy things, some stupid things that don't make sense. Can you please listen without being surprised?"

Kenjo opened his eyes slightly and looked back at Marika.

"Oh? So you're ready to talk?"

"Aren't you curious about what's in this?"

Marika picked up the heavy communication tube. The message capsule, which had been floating in interplanetary space for over 100 years, was completely cold. The screw-in caps on both ends were so tightly screwed in that they couldn't be loosened with bare hands.

"Lend me."

Chiaki, holding a huge wrench in each hand, clamped the message capsule and turned the long grip with all his might.

"I'll help."

"Okay, hold this."

With the help of Chiaki and Marika, the screw-on cap finally turned. After resetting the wrench several times, Marika's hand strength made it easy to turn.

"The spatial anomaly that Bentenmaru was investigating at the request of the military had been known to the control station for some time."

As she turned the lid round and round, Marika began to explain.

"When it was first discovered, it was at Sea of the Morningstar's Lagrange point, not far from the military's anchorage airspace."

After removing the cap containing the built-in clock and transmitter, there was the inner lid. Both the outer and inner lids were made to be airtight using metal packing, but the internal pressure had long since been released from the capsule, which had been in a high vacuum for over 100 years. No matter how tightly it was sealed, atmospheric molecules would leak through the gaps in the metal molecular structure.

Marika handed the cylinder to Chiaki, who was waiting with pliers.

"As you know, spatial anomalies are not something that can be maintained or observed for a long time unless they are extremely unusual. In most cases, they are troublesome when first discovered, but they eventually disperse and disappear."

Chiaki began removing the inner lid with the pliers.

"So this spatial anomaly was expected to disappear naturally, and although there were warnings, no one paid any attention to it. The first person to approach this spatial anomaly was our Odette II."

"Did you approach the spatial anomaly on Hakuoh Girls' Academy's training sailing ship?"

After removing the inner lid, Chiaki looked inside and handed the cylinder to Marika.

"I didn't mean to get close, but I was led there when I was chasing an unidentified ship."

A polymer sheet for cushioning was rolled up and stuffed inside the cylinder. Pinch it with her fingertips and Marika pulled the rolled up sheet out of the cylinder.

"Then, like a sudden explosion, a spatial anomaly expanded right before my eyes, and I was swallowed up."

"Swallowed, you mean Odette II?"

Marika nodded to Chiaki.

"The solar sail wasn't deployed, but there was a whole solar sail ship with a FTL booster."

"And then?"

Chiaki said with a suspicious look on his face.

"Where were you sent flying?"

"It was here."

Marika said shyly as she began to unfold the rolled up cushioning sheet.

"But it wasn't now. I was swallowed up by a spatial anomaly and sent flying to the Tau star system, where the War of Independence was taking place 120 years ago."

A data card fell from the spread sheet onto the floor of the bridge. The bridge of the Barbaroosa began to commotion. Marika pretended not to notice and picked up the case of cards that had been dropped.

"Don't make a fuss!"

Kenjo, who was in the captain's seat, shouted.

"If you've been working in space for many years, it's not that uncommon to miss a jump and end up in an unexpected place. There are tons of stories about spaceships that jump from the past, and plenty of stories about jumping from the future. Well, it's the first time that someone I know, whose face and name I know, has said that they did it."

Kenjo turned a sharp gaze towards Marika.

"Nora, just to be on the safe side, turn off the recorder on the bridge for a while."

"Thank you."

After bowing, Marika looked around the bridge of the Barbaroosa. The veteran bridge crew all pretended to be calm, but Chiaki looked frightening, as if she might snap at any moment.

"So, did you say that the training ship Odette II of Hakuoh Girls' Academy was swallowed up by a spatial anomaly and was sent to a star system where a war of independence was taking place?"

Captain Kenjo summarized, slumped in his captain's seat and with his thick arms folded. Marika nodded vigorously at Kenjo.

"That was a world where the Galactic Positioning System (GPS) we use now didn't reach. There was an old navigational aid system called Loran from the colony era, and since Odette was an old spaceship, we were able to use Loran and confirm the current location and time."

Marika showed Captain Kenjo the data card she had picked up.

"Considering the age of the message capsule, I think this probably contains the logbook of the Bentenmaru, which went about 120 years ago. Would you like to take a look?"

Kenjo looked at Marika intently, showing his sturdy fangs that looked like they might eat you.

"It was the will of our ancestors that said we shouldn't listen to the ghosts of the past."

Marika looked at the data card she had picked up. It was the Bentenmaru's voyage record, only available to Captain Marika Kato, and had today's date written by hand in the Galactic Standard Calendar. Marika couldn't help but take a double look at the handwritten words.

"This character..."

Since the date was today, the timer on the message capsule must have been set to today. Kenjo continued, looking at the data card in Marika's hand.

"When you hear the ghost's words, you are consumed by the past. Sometimes, if you get lost, you can't find your way home. Of course, I'm not uninterested in the contents of the message that has been floating around here for 120 years, but you have to look at it by yourself, Captain Marika."

Kenjo glanced at Chiaki.

"If you need help, let me know. But I don't want to interfere with the past."

After noticing his father's gaze, Chiaki spoke to Marika.

"Even if you went to the Tau star system 120 years ago, how long were you there? I've never heard of Odette II going missing for even a moment."

"Odette II was in the past for about a week. She returned only a few minutes before the jump to the past, so the data from the Orbital Control Station shows no time that she disappeared."

"That makes sense."

Kenjo said with a growling voice.

"But even if the previous Odette II returned to the present before she went missing, it seems that this time, Bentenmaru didn't. We have to listen to the will of our ancestors, but as a pirate ship, not helping them is not an option. What are you going to do, Captain Marika?"

"That's right."

Marika answered with a smile, pretending to be at ease.

"Bentenmaru might suddenly come back tomorrow, or maybe he's already back and has something else to do."

Marika looked at the data card in her hand.

"First, I'll check the contents of this. Then, please give me the observation data from Barbaroosa. If there's anything Bentenmaru wants me to do, I think the crew will make sure it gets through to here."

"Understood. I'll make a copy of the data here. Chiaki, please take Captain Marika to the guest communications booth. There, we can check the contents of the card without anyone seeing."

Kenjo clapped his hands together.

"Nora, resume recording on the bridge."

"Wow, there's a room like this."

Marika was led by Chiaki to a special guest cabin. In one section of the pirate ship, a converted old battleship, a room like a reception room in an old castle was set up with lavish furnishings and the utmost luxury.

"Sometimes guests who like this kind of luxury come on board."

Chiaki looked around the room, decorated with classical sculptures and masterpieces and a glittering chandelier hanging from the high ceiling. On one side of the wall, there was a large window with bars that seemed to project the open space of outer space, but that was a reproduced image on a high-precision display.

"If we had had a room like this when Gruier first came on board the Bentenmaru, it would have been a lot easier for us."

Chiaki shook her head as Marika looked around the room enviously.

"Any real royalty or aristocrat would be used to seeing rooms like this and wouldn't be happy about it."

After making a surprised face, Marika remembered Kakiyuu's time on First Virginia, the blue sister planet of the Serenity star system.

"Now that I think of it..."

"This way."

Chiaki opened a door made of old wood with carvings that were unusual for the interior of a ship. The next room was a small, purposely partitioned communications booth. It was surrounded by walls made of the same polished old wood and had a standard information and communications system installed.

"This is a communications booth for distinguished guests. Many of our customers, such as VIPs from major trading companies and government officials, want to keep their communications secret no matter how much it costs."

Stretching her arm beyond the prepared seat, Chiaki ran her fingers over the console with practiced hands. All of the displays on the information terminal lit up.

"We're also concerned about trust, so this information terminal is independent of the ship's network and has a separate communication line. Is this okay?"

Marika sat down in the chair provided, taking over from Chiaki, who had moved from in front of the information terminal.

"I think it's okay. I mean, if you want to do serious customer service, you have to prepare things like this too."

Marika inserted the data card she had taken out of the case into the console's slot. It was recognized, and the input window for the name and password appeared on the display.

"Okay."

As Chiaki was about to leave the communications booth, Marika said while tapping on the keyboard.

"Are you interested in what's inside the message capsule?"

Marika switched the input window.

"Captain Kenjo had Chiaki show you around, so doesn't that mean you want to take a look?"

"Do you want to see it?"

When Chiaki asked her a question in return, Marika showed her the case in which the card was in.

"Whose handwriting do you think it's?"

Chiaki's eyes were drawn to the handwritten letters on the case label.

"That doesn't look like an adult's handwriting... Could it really be Marika's?"

"Maybe."

Marika opened the data card, thinking about what method she would use if her past self were to send a message to her future self.

A graphic message with the Bentenmaru emblem as the title appeared on the display. Marika glanced at Chiaki.

"I'll go out with you."

Marika played the message. Seeing the person on the screen, Marika and Chiaki cried out at the same time.

"Huh!?"

"*Hello, me and, I think, Chiaki.*"

With a troubled smile, Marika, dressed in a captain's uniform, spoke up in the display.

"*Um, right now, Chiaki and I should be viewing this message in the communications booth in the VIP room of Barbaroosa. If that's not the case, then history must have changed somewhere, so I hope that's not the case.*"

A group of cartoon characters

Description automatically generated

"Marika, what are you talking about!"

Chiaki grabbed Marika's shoulders at the communications desk. Marika shook her head in a panic.

"How could I not know! This is me from 120 years ago, and from the way you talk, it's me from the future!"

The bridge visible behind Marika in her captain's uniform is definitely Bentenmaru's.

"*I think Chiaki is especially confused about a lot of things, but I'll explain it to you. Bentenmaru is currently in the Tau star system from 120 years ago, and is doing various things to clean up the aftermath of the war. Every day feels like a secret story of the War of Independence, but at least it's my second time, so I'm doing my best.*"

"You seem to be pretty overwhelmed."

Chiaki looked back and forth between Marika on the display and Marika in front of her, her mouth hanging open.

"They're both the same... well, when you're directing battles from the captain's seat, that's how it is."

"*I'm going to explain why I sent the message in this kind of underhanded way. I don't know if I can explain it well, but please understand if you don't understand. Otherwise, the future you return to will be different.*"

"I'll have you explain it to me later."

Chiaki whispered in Marika's ear, who was frozen in her chair.

"You said the same thing."

"*Well, I'll tell you the most important thing first. Bring the Silent Whisper to Garnet A.*"

"What!?"

Marika looked at her face on the display again.

"*No matter what I do, I don't have enough pieces. One Silent Whisper is as useful as a dozen patrol planes from the War of Independence, so it's urgent. Oh, no need for weapons, I don't intend to have them participate in frontal combat. So how can I get it delivered?*'

The Bentenmaru crest appeared on the display.

Marika and Chiaki, who were sitting, stared at the crest for a while.

Chiaki spoke first.

"What was that just now..."

"What do you mean..."

Unable to answer, Marika closed the image message. She opened it to see if there was any other data on the card.

"There's no way I could understand that."

"It's your message!"

Chiaki snapped.

"You don't even know what you're saying!?"

"There's no way you could know why your future self is saying that!"

"What do you mean future self? Isn't this a message from the past!?"

"I mean!"

Marika turned her chair towards Chiaki to explain, but was at a loss for words.

"The me who was talking just now is probably me much later than now."

She explains without even realizing it.

"I don't know what will happen from now on, but I think I will probably go to the Tau star system again when the War of Independence is going on. I think that's why they sent the message with a timer to the future me."

"What's that?"

"So, the message is definitely from the past, but the me who sent it is not the me of today, but the me much later, so I don't know yet what it means or what will happen next."

After glaring suspiciously at Marika, Chiaki dropped her head and sighed. Marika asked timidly.

"Did you understand?"

Chiaki nodded with her face down.

"You don't understand either."

"Good, so you understand."

"I don't understand!"

Chiaki bared her fangs. She roughly opened the booth door.

"At that rate, you really haven't heard about the schedule from now on?"

"What are you talking about?"

Chiaki checked the current time on the multi-function watch on her uniform wrist.

"The real reason why Barbaroosa came to this star system. It's about time to arrive at the relay station."

Barbaroosa did not dock at the Sea of the Morningstar relay station. Marika returned to the Sea of the Morningstar relay station in the small boat that Barbaroosa had brought with her for communication.

An unexpected person was waiting for her at the small boat launch port.

"Boss?"

Seeing the unexpected face, Marika quickly corrected herself.

"No, Jenny?"

She looked around. Lynn is nowhere to be seen at the small boat landing port for interplanetary space travel.

"Oh?"

Jenny also looks surprised.

"You were on the Barbaroosa too?"

"You're one of our customers."

"Eh?"

Chiaki, wearing the uniform of Hakuoh Girls' Academy Sea of the Forest Star, carrying a large bag on her shoulder, comes out of the small boat landing port. She slides her finger over the control panel of the boarding bridge and starts to close the airtight door.

"Eh?"

The reservation column on the display changes from a plain registration number indicating a Barbaroosa-equipped boat to a display showing reservations available.

"Chiaki, aren't you going home?"

"I won't stay long."

From the window next to the boarding bridge, I can see the docked shuttle boat leaving.

"I was going to, but after seeing that, I'm not sure I can go back on schedule."

"It's reassuring if you're coming with me and the messenger."

Jenny walked ahead.

"Let's go. If we go now, we can make the next flight to Shin-Okuhama."

After seeing off Chiaki, who followed her as if it was the most natural thing to do, Marika hurriedly chased after her.

"What's wrong, Jenny? I thought you went back to college?"

"I'm back. I've been given a new assignment, and I'm currently researching it."

Jenny stopped and lowered her voice, waiting for Marika to catch up.

"It was a good thing you were here, Marika. I have something I don't want you to hear. Can you introduce me to a Chinese restaurant in the staff dining area at Shin-Okuhama Airport?"

"... Eh!?"

Marika looked at Jenny's face again.

"The airport staff dining area is not open to the public!"

"There's no problem if you're with staff. Ririka, you're on duty today, right?"

The staff dining area at Shin-Okuhama Airport is clearly separated from the general public area. Although there are plausible reasons for it, such as security measures, the old underground dining area is not a place that the general public can enter, unlike the newly built terminal building, and both the airport staff and the dining area staff agree.

Marika arrived at Shin-Okuhama Airport on a shuttle flight from the relay station with Jenny and Chiaki.

Before departing from the relay station, Marika had sent a message to Ririka, who was on air traffic control at Shin-Okuhama Airport.

If her shift had gone according to schedule, Ririka should have finished work by the time Marika's shuttle arrived. However, as Marika got off the boarding bridge, she noticed a call on her mobile device.

"That means it was just about the time she landed."

From the control tower, the shuttle's departure and arrival times were easily visible. Marika opened the message, expecting that Ririka hadn't finished her work.

"What's wrong?"

Jenny asked Marika, who was reading the message on her mobile device as she walked.

"Ririka, are you still at work?"

"Yes."

Marika answered while checking the message.

"Apparently, the cargo convoy from above is delayed and the re-entry corridor is clogged, so they can't let go."

"I see."

Jenny looked at the arrival and departure information on the display as she passed by. There were no delays to passenger flights.

"In that case, I guess we'll wait for Ririka to finish work before having dinner?"

"No problem."

Marika showed Jenny the display of her mobile device.

"Ririka, you've sent me a family ID that's valid only for today. Now you can enter the staff area."

Even at the new terminal at Shin-Okuhama Airport, the general public area and staff area are strictly separated. With just one limited-time family ID, all three of us can't enter the staff area. Marika entered the staff area through a back alley, a refill inspection door next to a refrigerator in an unmanned store lined with vending machines, in a section of the old terminal that houses an old inn that opened when the airport opened.

"Please don't get separated."

Marika led the way down a narrow corridor stacked with ancient food containers and wooden boxes that she had never seen used anywhere else.

"I thought I knew the airport inside and out."

Jenny looked up with interest at the bare light bulbs from the old generation dangling from the dingy ceiling.

"I didn't know there was a place like this."

"The upper part was renovated to become a new terminal, but the basement is still the same as it was before, and apparently there are no accurate maps because it was expanded and renovated haphazardly without a plan. I don't know much about the staff cafeteria."

Marika started down the stairs at the back of a gap in the wall that you would pass by if you didn't know.

"Even if you get lost, I can't come and get you."

"There are places like this everywhere, aren't there?"

Chiaki looked around the underground food court, where old signs were piled up in the cramped underground alley, with amusement. Marika asked in a bit of surprise.

"Are there any other places like this?"

"There's a food court like this in Nakamiyako Port in Umimorihoshi. It's very similar. But that one isn't underground, it's above ground."

"Really?"

As she listened to the story, Marika searched for a hidden door. When she opened the door, which looked like nothing more than a black wall, the lively sound of frying ingredients and the appetizing smell of spices came rushing out.

"Hello!"

Marika yelled as she peered into the kitchen. The kitchen crew, all wearing high chef hats and looking like villains, all turned their gazes towards Marika. Marika forced a smile and bowed.

"This is Kato Marika. Is there a seat available?"

"Come in."

The only one who didn't even turn around answered in a rusty voice.

"Ririka has made a reservation for you."

"Thank you."

Marika was careful to go to the back of the room, not touching the huge pots and stacks of ingredients, when she noticed that no one was following her. She turned around to see Jenny, who had just stepped into the kitchen, with her eyes fixed on a forehead in the back.

"That's..."

Marika followed where Jenny was looking.

The contents of the forehead, coated black with grease and soot over the years, were impossible to read with the naked eye.

While Marika was thinking about whether to go and get her back, Jenny bowed into the kitchen.

"Nice to meet you. I'm Jenny Dolittle, the former captain of the Yacht Club at Hakuoh Girls' Academy."

Jenny came into the kitchen with a smile.

"Thank you, Marika. I wanted to see that."

"What's that?"

Chiaki, who followed behind, asked, looking around the kitchen. If you didn't know, you wouldn't notice the frame hanging high up on the oil-stained wall. With a troubled look on her face, Marika answered in a low voice.

"The surrender document."

"Eh?"

"From the time of the War of Independence. Come in, I don't want to disturb you."

"There's a room like this, too."

Marika had only seen the hall lined with tables of all sizes, and the large private room that was sometimes rented, so she looked around the room with interest. Around a round table the same size as the smallest table in the hall, there were six beautiful chairs, all with intricate carvings and colorfully embroidered cushions on the backs.

"Wow, that's amazing."

Chiaki was the last to enter and closed the door behind her. She flicked the display of the information terminal she had taken out of her skirt pocket.

"All the networks I was connected to up until now have been cut off."

Chiaki continued to scroll through the display, searching for a network that the information terminal could connect to. She couldn't find one.

"I asked for a room where we could have a private conversation."

Marika pulled out two chairs.

"Come on in. Let's have some tea."

With practiced hands, she poured tea from the ceramic teapot on the table into a handleless teacup.

"Unfortunately, we don't have chocolate parfait here, but the almond tofu is delicious."

After glaring at Marika, Chiaki waited for Jenny to arrive at the table and pulled out a chair herself to sit down.

"I think this will be easier to talk about, so can I go first?"

Marika nodded. Jenny turned to Chiaki.

"Please."

"I've received this from the captain and the others."

Chiaki took out a stack of data cards from the bag she had brought with her and arranged them on the table.

"These are battle records and logbooks from the War of Independence of active pirate ships, copies of the original records of each ship."

"Thanks. That's very helpful."

"But I don't think the contents of the records are that different from what you can get at the Federation of Colonial Stars archives."

"I wonder?"

Jenny smiled enigmatically.

"Even the records of Odette II that I have at hand have some inconsistencies, but I'm sure the records from the pirate ships that are still in operation today are full of interesting data."

Jenny picked up the cards on the table in a pile like a dealer. Marika remembered and put her hand in the pocket of her uniform.

"Here's the data you asked for, too."

She took out a few data cards and chose one carefully to avoid making a mistake.

"These are the logbooks and battle records of the Bentenmaru up until the end of the war. Um."

Marika glanced at Chiaki.

"I don't think ours will be of much use either."

"It's enough to confirm where we were and what we were doing. Now, if we combine this with the records from the Stellar Alliance, we should be able to figure out where everyone was doing what during the War of Independence."

Chiaki looked back at Jenny, who had put the cards in her clutch bag.

"Jenny, are you tracking all the spaceships from the War of Independence!?"

"No way, who would do something that would make you dizzy just thinking about the effort involved?"

Jenny laughed.

"It was only for a short period of time, from when the expeditionary fleet approached the system until the Galactic Empire intervened and the war ended. There were only a limited number of warships from the Stellar Alliance that were not organized into the expeditionary fleet, and we can track where most of the spaceships from the Federation of Colonial Stars and the pirates were and what they were doing, so we just want to confirm them all at once."

"Even if you say only for a short period of time, that's all the spaceships in the many star systems on both sides in the full-scale war, right?"

Chiaki said with a difficult look on her face.

"It's not just in the hundreds, is it?"

"1,921 ships."

Marika and Chiaki looked back at Jenny as she spoke. Jenny continued.

"Not including ships that were in dock, ships that went missing during the war and still haven't been found, ships that were unable to move, and ships that are missing, there were a total of 1,921 ships operating at the end of the War of Independence, including the Stellar Alliance and the Federation of Colonial Stars."

"You counted them!?"

"That's something you can easily find if you compile the data."

Jenny shrugged.

"The frontline forces of the expeditionary fleet are 400 ships, the auxiliary and supply ships that are either operating together or separately total 500, and the total forces that the Federation of Colonial Stars has in its system to intercept them is 370 ships in total, including pirate ships, and transports and liaison ships that can't go faster than light, which aren't counted as combat ships by the Stellar Alliance's standards. The rest are merchant ships that didn't participate in the battle, and I think that there are some Stellar Alliance disguised ships and the Federation of Colonial Stars's intelligence gathering ships mixed in, but I haven't been able to wash them all out."

"Does that include the Stellar Alliance fleet that conducted Operation Stellar Slayer at Garnet A and the pirate fleet that went to deal with it?"

Jenny nodded at Marika's question.

"In the official records of the Stellar Alliance, the Stellar Slayer fleet doesn't appear, and all the pirate ships are said to have been called in for an interception operation on the planet Tau, but yes, it's included in my calculations."

"Do you think we have enough power to just intercept them?"

"No way, we're just trying to make it look like we're on equal footing by adding up the numbers."

Jenny shook her head.

"I told you, the power we were able to gather. When it became clear that the destination of the expeditionary fleet was the Tau system, the Federation of Colonial Stars in the Tau system had only 70 ships that could be used as a fighting force, including pirate ships and disguised merchant ships, and the number of warships that could be used to organize a regular fleet was less than double digits, even if they gathered up the ships that were in dock and under repair."

Marika and Chiaki looked at each other. Marika turned her face back to Jenny.

"No matter how you look at it, it's not a ratio of forces that can wage a fair war."

"From the beginning of the War of Independence, the military strength of the Stellar Alliance and the colony planets was never equal. If you compared it in total, it would be a game that was more than double or triple. However, while the Stellar Alliance had to split its military strength among multiple colony planets, the colony planets concentrated their meager military strength in one place and moved it from one battle to the next to make it look like they were fighting properly."

"I'm glad I wasn't a soldier back then."

Marika sighed.

"Just thinking about it makes me depressed."

"The only thing that was fortunate for the colonists was that the expeditionary fleet, which was likely to be the decisive force for the Stellar Alliance, was a fleet so large that it couldn't move as quickly as previous mobile fleets. Thanks to this, they had the leeway to gather forces from all the colonial star systems, and they were able to slow down the expeditionary fleet's movements by attacking the long supply lines from the Stellar Alliance. But even if the full force of the Colonial Confederation had gathered in perfect condition in the system as planned, it would have been one-third the number of ships, and less than one-tenth of its strength. I really think that the general headquarters of the Colonial Confederation at that time... I think it's good that he wasn't there. No matter how you look at it, it's an impossible game."

"Impossible game?"

"Of course, we gathered forces for a decisive battle, but even if everything miraculously went according to plan, the best we could do would be to repel the expeditionary fleet, and if we fought honestly, all our forces would be destroyed and we would have to surrender unconditionally. That's why the political side was using all available channels to negotiate with the Stellar Alliance so that we wouldn't have to surrender unconditionally in the worst case scenario. Do you know about this?"

Marika looked at Chiaki as if asking. Chiaki said to Jenny.

"I only know what's in the textbooks. Negotiations to end the War of Independence were ongoing, but the Galactic Empire's intervention was scrapped due to the emergency situation that could have resulted in the loss of both the Stellar Alliance and the colonies, so I don't think there are any meaningful records left."

"There are records, at least. The Stellar Alliance and the colonies were declassified more than half a century ago because of the statute of limitations. However, the changes that followed the annexation of the Empire were so big that no one had studied it until now unless they were really curious about it."

"Well, that's because history literally changed."

"But the people of the Colonial Union, who are in the midst of an expeditionary fleet attack, don't know that something like that would change history is coming, and they can't count on it. So, We took various measures to avoid the worst case scenario. There are some measures that you can only take if you are in a certain position. For example, even if an ambassador from a colony planet and the Stellar Alliance negotiates, there are things he can and cannot do depending on his authority."

"Well, it's not that easy to contact the Colony Alliance from a Stellar Alliance."

"The Colony Alliance's Fleet HQ on Sea of the Morningstar was where representatives from all the colony planets gathered, so they were expected to not only command the battles but also guide the course of the war. Of course, each battle is a separate situation, but if you forget why you're fighting, you can't continue the war. So the Fleet HQ not only commanded the battles, but also worked on ending the war with the Stellar Alliance."

Jenny looked around at Chiaki and Marika.

"We knew that even if we intercepted the expeditionary fleet and repelled it as expected, that would be the end of the Federation of Colonial Stars's military power. If the expeditionary fleet held its ground and attacked again, there would probably be no military power left in the system to defend against it. In the worst case scenario, we could imagine that strategic weapons would return Mare Star to its pre-reclamation state."

"Pre-reclamation..."

"That would be before colonization, before Mare Star had a name. It would be even worse if it were all burned down."

Even during the War of Independence, there were giant bombs that could easily burn down an entire planet. Although there is no record of them being used in combat, there is a record that the expeditionary fleet was equipped with them.

"One of the trump cards to avoid the worst case scenario was the signing of a surrender document, where the Federation of Colonial Stars would admit defeat to their master planet. If the Federation of Colonial Stars surrendered, the war could be stopped even if the worst case scenario occurred, such as the expeditionary fleet destroying the interception forces and orbitally bombarding the Sea of the Morningstar."

Jenny reached for her tea.

"For better or worse, the Federation of Colonial Stars never had to hand over the surrender document to the colonial power. Since it was a valid surrender document under interstellar law at the time, I thought it would have been treated with utmost care afterwards, destroyed to prevent it from being misused, or even if it wasn't thrown away, stuffed into a restricted area of ​​the public archives and forgotten about, but that doesn't mean you have the actual document."

"...Did you hear that from president Lynn?"

"Of course. If you hear something like that, you definitely want to see the actual document. I heard it was here, so I asked Marika to bring it over. This is a story I don't want anyone else to hear. I'm really grateful for today."

"Jenny..."

Marika looked at Jenny with a suspicious look on her face.

"Are you really satisfied with just looking at the frame, coated in such black that you can't see what's inside?"

"That's another matter."

Jenny shook her head lightly, with a straight face.

"Of course, I'd like to open it up and take a good look at the actual surrender document, but I can't ask a chef I've never met before at a restaurant I've never been to before to do that. So, that's something for another time. Anyway."

Jenny looked around at Marika and Chiaki, who were sitting on either side of her.

"What do we need to talk about now?"

Marika closed her eyes, took a deep breath, and then turned to face Jenny.

"Bentenmaru has gone missing."

"Huh?"

"I know where he is. Today I received a message capsule from the missing Bentenmaru. It says that Bentenmaru's current location, or rather the current time, is the Tau star system at the end of the War of Independence 120 years ago. So, what comes next is something we should do now."

Marika said, still staring at Jenny's face.

"It looks like we'll have to go back 120 years, probably with Odette II."

"Hmm..."

Jenny groaned with interest. She looked around at Chiaki.

"Do you know that Chiaki wasn't surprised by what you just said?"

"I just heard it."

Chiaki shook her head coldly.

"I don't know the details. But Marika isn't the type to tell such obvious lies, and there is circumstantial evidence."

"I like girls who can figure things out quickly."

Jenny turned her eyes back to Marika.

"Can you tell me why you decided that we had to go back 120 years in time again?"

"The Bentenmaru, which jumped 120 years ago, left a message capsule near the spatial disturbance that was being investigated today."

"The Bentenmaru was investigating that spatial disturbance?"

Jenny looked at Marika again.

"At the request of the military."

Marika nodded.

"Of course, we didn't report to the control station or the military that there were two Odette IIs at once, or that they had been there in the past. Requests to investigate spatial disturbances are not uncommon, but an order for a detailed investigation with eight probes is rare, so when Misa checked, it seemed that the request wasn't from the star system military, but from higher up."

Jenny frowned.

"Up where?"

Marika lowered her voice.

"It's the Imperial fleet."

After a short silence, Jenny shook her head lightly.

"If that's true, it's strange. The Imperial Fleet could have just sent their own research vessel."

"I thought they didn't want to draw attention."

"What kind of letter was in the bottle that Bentenmaru sent after 120 years?"

"I did."

Marika said with some difficulty.

"I recorded the message on the bridge of the Bentenmaru."

Jenny looked at Marika's face for a moment.

"Marika? Marika's message came out of a capsule from 120 years ago? Who arranged that cast?"

"Probably the bridge crew of the Bentenmaru gathered around."

"I'm jealous that you have such a talented pirate ship."

"Thank you."

"And so, Marika doesn't remember recording such a message now."

Looking at Marika, Jenny muttered as if to confirm. Marika nodded.

"So, we're going to jump to the past in the near future and record the message there."

"That's right."

Marika nodded with a look of not really understanding.

"Um, do you know what's going on?"

"I understand that there's something I don't really understand that hasn't ended yet."

Jenny said with a plausible face.

"Um, what's going to happen to us?"

Jenny tapped Marika on the shoulder, who looked worried.

"It's going to happen as it will. Time travel and time slips are areas where modern science has yet to establish theories or applications, so it's pointless to worry about what's going to happen without thinking about it, unless you think about the reasoning. Instead, think about what you should do."

"Well, how can you think about what to do when you don't know what's going to happen?"

"Compared to the last time, when we were suddenly thrown into a jump, this time is much better than a warning from a family member."

Jenny said nonchalantly.

"Well, it's already been decided that Odette II and Silent Whisper will go back in time and meet Bentenmaru, right? That's easy."

"Is that so?"

"That's how it is, or so the professor of hypothetical history said."

"Study hypothetical history?"

Chiaki and Marika asked in unison.

"Yes, hypothetical history. There are no what-ifs in history, as the famous line goes, but it's a study of simulating history with a hypothetical model that adds various assumptions. You'd expect from Space University, they even have a research lab for that."

"A space university, of all places, is doing that sort of thing!?"

"They do everything there, from strict mathematical theory to black magic. Hypothetical history was originally a simulation that started from economic mathematics, and it seems to have started from simulating not only monetary accounts, but various historical models, quantifying them, simulating them, examining how far they deviate from reality, and how reliable the equations and constants used are."

"Really?"

"Hey, do you know what Maxwell's demon is?"

Jenny looked around at Chiaki and Marika.

"If there was a demon that could split the air molecules in a room, with the ones with high heat content here and the ones with low heat content there, the temperature in the room would be higher in some parts and lower in others. But in reality, that doesn't happen, and the temperature in the room will eventually become uniform according to the law of increasing entropy. In the same way, the flow of time and history will only flow in one direction unless there is a demon that can control each molecule. The historical simulations used in hypothetical history don't produce very different results just by adding one or two variables."

Marika and Chiaki looked at each other suspiciously.

"So, history has a certain degree of convergence, and even if a stone floating in a river is pushed out of the flow by some force, it will eventually return. The idea is that even if you do something at the time travel destination, history won't change as much as you expect."

Marika turned her eyes back to Jenny.

"Are you sure about that?"

Jenny smiled mischievously.

"Unfortunately, a simulation is just a simulation, and a calculation is just a calculation. There is some theory on how many variables should be incorporated into a historical model to determine whether the future will change or not, but the biggest weakness is that it cannot be actually verified."

Jenny looked around at Marika and Chiaki with amusement.

"Do you know why it can't be verified?"

Marika and Chiaki looked at each other.

"Because if history changes, everything after that will change too. You can't compare the changed history to the original history, whether it was interference from the future or not."

"Eh?"

The two of them spoke in unison, confused. Jenny nodded yes.

"In other words, history is created with a certain inevitability, so even if the people there do something a little reckless, it won't make much difference. So, what will happen in the future is planned to a certain extent, and what happened in the past doesn't change that much. To put it more simply."

Jenny looked at Chiaki and Marika's faces like a teacher in front of her students.

"Even if time slip doesn't know if it will happen, it will be the past from the future. If you have to go to the past again with Odette II, there's probably something you still have to do."

"I don't think the flow of time cares about the inevitability of history, do you?"

Jenny nodded at Chiaki.

"But if you know that time slip will happen again, don't you think there's no harm in preparing it in a way that suits you?"

"Is that okay? At worst, history will be changed."

"Probably even if history is changed, we won't be able to recognize it."

Jenny shook her head lightly.

"I don't know how serious you are or how feasible it is, but it's not uncommon for any clever think tank or advanced research institute to at least consider time travel. If it can be put into practical use, it would be incredibly useful, so no matter how much money and manpower you put into it, it'll be worth it."

"Jenny,"

Marika said, looking at Jenny's face.

"You still think you have something to do, don't you?"

"Yes. I'm not sure if time is going to help me with my history report, or if it's something else."

"Even time is on your side?"

Chiaki gave a wry smile.

"I can't do it."

"It's a matter of mood. Whether it's the past, the present, or the future, do what you can. There's a limit to what an individual can do, and no matter how much you worry, you can't be sure of the right answer."

"Is worrying a waste of time?"

"At least, that's not the captain's job. The captain's job is to make decisions, and if you worry, you won't be able to do your job."

Marika looked away from Jenny.

"But..."

"Bentenmaru is missing, and you yourself have requested support. You've already decided that you will return to the past once more, so isn't it your job to prepare and do what you need to do to make the most of the given situation?"

"Um..."

Marika pulled out her seat and stood up from the table. She motioned to Jenny and Chiaki to keep talking, and walked slowly to the door.

"If we have to send the Odette II out again, I think it's the captain's job to prepare as much as possible now."

Jenny followed Marika's movements with her eyes as she continued to speak. Marika put her hand on the knob and slammed the door open.

"Oh?"

Ririka was leaning against the outside wall with her arms folded, talking to her father in a chef's coat holding a large plate, when she saw Marika's face peeking through the open door.

"Are you done with your secret?"

"... I thought you were listening?"

"You've got a private room at your father's restaurant, there's no way anyone can hear what's going on inside."

Ririka knocked on the thick door.

"If you're not done yet, I'll wait."

Marika turned back to the inside of the room.

"It's okay, sorry to have kept you waiting."

Marika bowed to her father.

"May I serve dinner?"

The next morning, the flight plan for the next training voyage was delivered to all members of the yacht club under the name of Kato Marika.

The training sailboat Odette II of the Hakuo Girls' Academy Yacht Club must change its registration category to maintain its FTL booster. In order to change its Category II sublight spaceship to Category I FTL spaceship, it must be inspected by an inspector from the Bureau of Shipping, which manages the registration and inspection of spaceships, along with its FTL engine.

Inspection as a sublight spaceship could be done even while moored in the dock. If the format was correct, the inspection could be done over the network, and a certificate of approval would be sent. It is not uncommon for Category I FTL spacecraft to be unable to undergo inspections during long voyages, so inspection procedures are established via network, and the presence of an inspector is not necessarily required.

However, if a category change were to involve the addition of a FTL engine, an inspector would need to be present to inspect the ship. If the ship was shown the actual ship, they would not be required to perform a FTL jump. However, it goes without saying that the inspector would need to see the actual ship with the FTL engine attached.

The Odette II's dedicated dock at the Sea of the Morningstar Relay Station is not large enough to dock with the bulky FTL engine connected.

Therefore, in order to change the category, the Odette II needs to be shown to the inspector outside the dock with the FTL booster attached.

The Yacht Club had scheduled a short training voyage over the long weekend that included the Sea of the Morningstar Harvest Festival. After the first inspection of the ship with an inspector from the Shipping Bureau on board for the category change, the team would use the FTL booster to make a round trip flight to a nearby star system.

After school on the day that the flight plan for the training voyage was received, the Yacht Club canceled all of their training plans. Not only all the members, but even the previous club president, Jenny Dolittle, who is now a student at Space University, attended the briefing, which took place in a locked club room with the highest level of counterintelligence measures.

Marika explained the training voyage to the entire crew, including all the members, former club president Jenny, who was attending as an observer, and Chiaki, who was on loan from the Hakuoh Girls' Academy Sea Forest Star Yacht Club.

According to Jenny's predictions, there is a possibility that the voyage will be different from what was planned, and Marika explained all the information she currently knows to the club members.

"So, for this training voyage, we will allow you to disembark after the ship inspection is completed."

Marika looked around at the faces of the club members who were listening to the explanation here and there because the center table in the club room was not enough.

"The hull inspection to change the category to a FTL spaceship involves complicated operations such as docking with a FTL booster, so I would like everyone to participate. However, I think that the training voyage after that will not go as planned due to the circumstances I just explained. In the worst case scenario, we may not be able to return as planned."

The members laughed at Marika's calm way of speaking. Marika responded with a polite smile and continued.

"After the inspection, the inspector gets off the Odette II, and then we will send out a shuttle boat to the relay station. We will not make an announcement on the ship, so those who wish to disembark should gather secretly on the ship's deck."

Marika looked around at all the members' faces once again.

"Well, if you have any questions, I will answer as much as I can."

"Yes."

Sasha, holding a memo pad in one hand, raised her hand. Marika prepared herself.

"Yes."

"The preserved food used up until the last voyage has already arrived at the dock."

"Huh?"

"This time, I think it would be easier to respond to an emergency if we added some fresh food and luxury items just in case, so, um, I've listed a lot of things like this, but can I order them?"

"What!?"

Marika's eyes widened at the list Sasha had transferred from the memo pad she had in hand to the display on the main table. There were far more items than in a normal food supply.

"Actually, I have something to tell you."

Lynn, the president of the yacht club, was sitting next to Marika at the table, and she pointed the open notebook display at Marika.

"Now that we've started running the Odette II, which had been docked for a long time, we're running out of spare parts. If we can't expect supplies on the go, we'd feel a lot more at ease if we had at least this much, and even the parts on this list if possible."

"What!?"

Marika couldn't keep up with the list that was scrolling by at high speed.

"But, where in the world do you think that budget is?"

"Don't worry."

Lynn gave a thumbs up.

"We were told that the school would set aside a contingency budget for the costs of changing categories. Our club members did all the paperwork and applications, which would normally be outsourced to a company, so it ended up costing a lot less than the original budget. It would be a problem if we were to use the freed-up budget for personal purposes, but as long as we're using it for Odette II, it's okay, and Black Granny knows about it too."

"Not Black Granny, but even the vice principal!?"

"There's something I should tell you."

Jenny, who was attending as an observer, raised her hand and spoke.

"Today, I asked the relay station to carry out regular maintenance and updates for Silent Whisper, and also to replenish repair parts. I asked for it to be done super fast, so it should all be finished by the time Odette II leaves port."

"Just how much does it cost to maintain and update an electronic reconnaissance boat!?"

"It's fine, it's still under warranty. All replacement parts will be handed over to them as operational data, but even if we have the special parts that need replacing, there's no use for them, right?"

"Eh, you don't have any replacement parts left over here?"

Lynn interrupted, sounding dissatisfied.

"I was thinking about powering up Odette II, or parts to modify your HAL-Bou."

"There are a lot of specialized parts that don't skimp on the budget for development or operation, so it would be a pain if we had to use them. For now, I'm consulting with Lyseon Zircone about extending the warranty period by sending the operational data, but once that expires, it will only cost money to keep them, so I'm thinking of selling them to some eccentric private army."

"Um, I think you should prepare some other things like this." "Are there any restrictions on what you can bring in?" "If you don't know what's going to happen, you should bring in as much as you can, right?"

A barrage of questions bombarded Marika. Her mouth agape, Marika looked at president Lynn for help.

"Marika, who has the qualifications, will be the captain for this training voyage."

Lynn waved her hand with a refreshing look on her face as if it was none of her business.

"The preparations before departure are also the captain's job, right? Now, do your job."

After turning a pathetic face to Lynn, Marika began to answer the mountain of questions from the club members one by one.

"Chiaki, you're also going on this voyage, aren't you?"

Gruier called out to Chiaki, who was watching Marika from a tea table away from the main table, who was dealing with the barrage of questions from the club members one by one.

"Well, if that wasn't your intention, I wouldn't have come all the way here with you."

Chiaki looked at Gruier.

"You're also going to go on board no matter what I say now, aren't you?"

"Yes."

Gruier answered as if it was obvious.

"If space pirates didn't exist in this universe, Serenity wouldn't exist in its current form."

"Jenny said earlier that even if there were no space pirates from the Federation of Colonial Stars, someone else would help out, right?"

"You can't rely on hypotheticals."

Gruier said with a straight face.

"It's my duty to protect Serenity in its current form. I'll do whatever I have to do to achieve that."

Gruier looked at Marika, who was frantically being swarmed by the club members, with a loving gaze.

"It seems like your desire takes precedence over your sense of duty, doesn't it?"

"Yes?"

"No, nothing."

Chiaki also looked at Marika, who was surrounded by the club members.

"You've grown up so well, huh."

A cartoon of a child

Description automatically generated

A black and white sign with white text

Description automatically generated

"*It'll take a while to load the containers!*"

On the bridge of the Odette II, which was not fully staffed before departure, Marika, who was in the captain's seat, heard Sasha's report from the pier through her headset.

"You know what? We can organize the warehouse later!"

While simultaneously running several procedures such as a pre-departure hull check and a final check of the flight plan, Marika spoke into the microphone of her headset.

"As long as the hatches are closed so that there is no air leakage, it doesn't matter if it's in the passageway or on the ship's deck, just get all the luggage on board!"

"*Roger! The captain just changed the policy. We can put the organization off until later, so just get the luggage on board first!*"

Thinking that it would be a lot of work to clean up, Marika returned to the task at hand. The majority of the manpower had been diverted to loading supplies, including food and spare parts, that had arrived at the pier, so the current bridge crew was far below its usual number.

"Is that okay?"

Chiaki asked, between checking the operation of the navigation electronics and updating the data.

"If we load the deck with cargo, there won't be room for Silent Whisper."

"We'll be glad you're not here."

Marika answered, checking the flight plan for any holes that the controller could poke.

"Silent Whisper will wait until the ship is cleared before landing. It'll be fine as long as it's there before the jump."

Silent Whisper, which would normally be on board the Odette II's deck, had left the ship for inspection and maintenance. Either it had just arrived at the Sea of the Morningstar relay station at the right time, or Jenny had specially called it there for that purpose, as it was currently landing on Lyseon Zircone's patrol service ship.

Jenny, who was operating Silent Whisper alone, had contacted her and said that even if they took the express course and omitted the acceptance test, the maintenance would not be completed in time for the Odette II's departure.

After leaving the relay station, the Odette II first flew to a military anchorage airspace, connected its FTL booster, and then underwent a hull inspection by an inspector from the Bureau of Shipping to change its category, known as a ship inspection for short.

According to the plan, by the time of departure, all supplies including food should have been loaded, and the maintenance and updates of the Silent Whisper on board should have been completed. However, the usual schedule of loading supplies and carrying out maintenance on the ship at the same time as preparing for departure quickly fell apart.

The transporter who was supposed to deliver the supplies to the ship's warehouse simply secured the container to the weightless pier and headed off to the next task. Meanwhile, the Odette II, facing the important task of changing its category, had to undergo more thorough checks than usual before departing.

With the help of the Hakuoh Girls' Academy secretary, the only documents that needed to be submitted to the Ship Bureau inspector were prepared while still on the ground. However, since it was a category change rather than a normal hull inspection, the number of check items in front of the hull increased like a curse.

"I've been to space many times with the Odette II, and I've used the boosters many times and have a proven track record, so why do I have to check all these things now!?"

The number of automatic check items alone was three times that of a normal ship inspection, and an order of magnitude higher than the usual pre-departure check, causing Marika to scream in the captain's seat.

"Besides, the checker is running automatically and giving the OK, so why do I have to go out and check it out!?"

Even though it's a delicate solar sailing ship, the Odette II is only 200 meters long, so if you want to look around inside and out, you'll have to travel a long distance and it will take time.

"That's how bureaucratic work is, it can't be helped."

Lynn answered while typing in a continuous sound.

"If you don't actually move your body and check it with your own eyes, it won't feel like you've done your job."

"If you want to work, you can do it with your own body!"

Marika banged on the console angrily.

"Anyway, the results of the checks are more reliable with a computer, so why do we have to go out and check parts that are well-maintained and working properly!!"

"Well, normally, there are specialized companies that do the tedious work of ship inspections and category changes, but when it comes to our own training sailboat, we can't just leave it to the companies."

Lynn took her fingers off the control panel and took a breath.

"The teacher said that the necessary expenses will be covered as long as the club members do it themselves, and anyway, there's no company within a radius of 50 light years that can take care of a solar sailboat full of antique electronic weapons like this."

"Ahhhh."

Marika let out a despairing cry and buried her face in the control panel of the captain's seat.

"Now that I think about it, when we wanted to replace parts that couldn't be repaired, we had to deal with contractors who didn't even speak Galactic Standard language to get the parts we needed."

"Well, let's split up and do the visual check."

Lynn tapped the control panel and floated up from her seat.

"Chiaki, are you sure I can leave this to you?"

Chiaki glanced up.

"I can't even look after the electronic weapons system, you know?"

"Don't worry, I've set it up so that it will do everything from installation checks to inspections and updates automatically if you leave it alone."

Lynn tapped the seat of the electronics battleship.

"If anyone starts complaining, let me know. Captain, I'll do it inside, can you look outside?"

A captain must check the status of the spaceship with his own eyes before departing. Pre-flight checks are not required by law, and all the necessary data can be obtained from the bridge.

If Lynn does the pre-flight check inside the ship, Marika calculated that it would cut the time and effort required before departure in half, and looked around the bridge. Chiaki was in the navigator's seat, Lynn was in the electronics battleship, and Yayoi was screaming in the engineer's seat while checking the engine. There were only four crew members on the bridge, including Marika.

"No, I'll do it myself."

Marika shook her head to drive away the devil's temptation to take the easy way out.

"We would like to skip the pre-flight check if possible, but if you and the chief work together, it will take half the time, but if you are going to be the captain, you need to see the condition of the spaceship with your own eyes, otherwise you will regret it later."

Marika forced a smile at Lynn, who was floating in the electronic battleship seat, and Chiaki, who looked up at the captain's seat in surprise.

"President Lynn, please act as the acting captain on the bridge while I'm away."

The Odette II is currently in port, but there is no telling when or where a message will come from.

Laughing softly, Lynn, who was floating, grabbed the backrest and returned to the electronic battleship seat.

"Understood. I've accepted the role of acting captain on the bridge."

She moved to the electronic battleship seat next to her and started tapping on the control panel.

"If there are any messages that we can't handle here, I'll contact you, so don't forget to take your walkie-talkie."

"We don't have time," Chiaki said with a happy look on her face.

"Hurry!"

"Roger!"

Replying in a cheerful voice, Marika sent the flight plan, which had been checked and was final, to the control station. The scheduled departure time was still a while away, and the clearance should have been returned by the time she returned to the bridge.

"Okay, leave the rest to me!"

Make sure to grab her walkie-talkie and jump out of the bridge. She went out into the center shaft that ran through the center of the ship, synchronizing the headset she had been wearing with the walkie-talkie as she moved.

In the center shaft, there were several bags and sacks floating about that were the personal belongings of the club members, who had apparently not even had time to enter their rooms.

"It's going to be a mess even after we leave port, this thing."

Looking down the center shaft, all the way to the ship's deck, she could see containers overflowing from the wide-open loading doors, which seemed to have been forcibly crammed in.

"I wonder if we can secure it before we leave port."

Equipped with an inertial control device, the Odette II is designed for weightless navigation, but there's no telling what will happen when it goes into space. If the cargo is not secured and the ship roughly changes position, it could drift around the ship and destroy the equipment and hull structure. Marika kicked the wall with both hands and feet and jumped onto the ship's deck like a pinball.

"This is..."

The center shaft was buried under containers, cases, bags, trunks, shopping bags, drink cases, and stuffed animals that had overflowed from the ship's deck. It would be possible to get out by digging, but considering the risk of being buried alive along the way, Marika jumped into the side hatch of the center shaft. She went outside the ship through a simple inspection airlock at the base of the mizzen mast.

A drawing of a person lying down

Description automatically generated

In the dedicated pier C68, the Odette II, with its nine masts folded, is moored with its port side against the pier as per theory. The left deck alone is not enough, so the right deck is also open and the loading work is still continuing.

"It will take a while."

As she floated away from the hull, Marika looked around the pier where the containers were lined up, only temporarily fixed.

"I know."

"*If it's just loading, I don't think it will take that long.*"

Marika was startled when Sasha's voice came through her headset and she looked for the person she was communicating with. On the starboard deck, a blonde was waving her hand as she bucket-brigade a floating container from the port side.

"I found you!"

Marika waved to Sasha as a sign that she had confirmed who she was talking to. "Sorry, I'm not here to help with the pre-flight check."

"*Understood. We should be done loading by the time we leave port.*"

Sasha answered, pushing the small container she received to the second-years waiting on the deck.

"*But just thinking about sorting it out after that is exhausting.*"

"Well, you can meet up with Jenny after the ship inspection at worst, so can you clear the deck for Silent Whisper to get in by then?"

"*It'll be fine, I think.*"

Sasha said, relaying the next container floating by to the deck.

"*The center shaft will probably be full of stuff though.*"

"It'll be fine as long as we finish sorting it out by the time we get back."

Marika had a complicated look on her face as she looked at the bags, packages, cases, and pouches that looked like personal belongings floating among the supplies. Although they had announced that they would allow anyone who wanted to disembark after the ship inspection, it seemed like all the members had brought large luggage with them for a long-term training voyage.

"*I think the biggest job will be organizing the ship for a while after we leave port.*"

Sasha replied in between loading instructions.

"*There was a game like that, right? I never thought it would actually happen in real life. Well, I'll leave it to you to do your job.*"

"Thank you."

Waving her hand, Marika jumped into the space inside the pier to the port side of the Odette II. The pre-flight check starts from the port side of the spaceship, facing horizontally towards the bow, and basically goes around in one circle.

The Odette II's appearance inside the pier, with its three masts folded in three directions, was far from its normal sailing posture. Compared to the last time, there were no major renovations or maintenance that would change the exterior, so Marika moved slowly, paying close attention to whether there were any visible abnormalities with the exterior of the Odette II.

As she rounded the bow sprit that jutted out from the bow, the walkie-talkie started ringing.

"Yes, this is Kato Marika."

Marika flicked her headset and immediately answered the call. The display showed a call from the bridge.

"*Bridge, it's Lynn.*"

Lynn's voice, coming from the wireless headset earpiece, sounded a little confused.

"*Are you okay now?*"

"We're visually checking the bow."

Marika answered as she drifted around the starboard side of the Odette II's hull.

"What is it?"

"*The control station is calling the captain by name. I said she’s on duty now, but it's an urgent matter that can be resolved quickly.*"

"Please connect me."

Marika said, wondering if there was something she had forgotten to write in the flight plan she had already submitted.

"If it can be resolved quickly, I think it's okay to do the preflight check."

"*Be careful.*"

Lynn said in a low voice.

"*You're not communicating with the relay station control station. You're communicating with Shin-Okuhama Airport.*"

"Eh?"

Without even confirming, the communication was switched.

"*This is Kato Ririka from the Shin-Okuhama Airport Control Station.*"

"Ririka!?"

Still floating, Marika instinctively straightened her back.

"*I know you're probably busy right before departure, but can I talk to you for a moment?*”

Lynn said that the caller was from Shin-Okuhama Airport, and Ririka stated her affiliation before her name. This meant that this was not a call from a mother to her daughter, but rather an inquiry from the control station to the captain. Thinking that far, Marika continued.

“Yes, we are currently conducting a pre-flight check at the relay station pier, but we can talk.”

“*Sorry to interrupt you while you are working. It's just that I need to confirm a few things.*”

If the control officer had called the captain as part of his duties, this communication would have been recorded. Feeling a pain in her stomach, Marika answered into the headset.

“It's fine. Please go ahead.”

“*Odette II is scheduled to depart for a ship inspection to change category, is that correct?*"

"Yes."

"*You're scheduled to depart at 12:00, so let's hurry.*"

"I'd like to take it a little longer, but we need to go outside and dock with the booster before we can meet the inspector from the Marine Bureau."

"*Is it true that the captain of Odette II is Kato Marika?*"

"I'm the only one in the yacht club who is qualified to be a captain."

"*Bentenmaru hasn't returned yet.*"

Ririka cut straight to the point.

"*And according to the latest flight plan we have here, the captain of Bentenmaru is still you, Kato Marika. A captain is needed to operate a ship, and since there is only one captain, there can only be one spaceship.*"

"Bentenmaru is currently engaged in a different mission."

That was a problem that Gruier had pointed out when creating the flight plan for Odette II. Gruier had also proposed a solution at the same time.

"A pirate ship only needs a captain with a privateer's license when it is engaged in acts of piracy. The current missions of the Bentenmaru do not involve piracy, and there are many crew members on board who are qualified as captains."

Because Marika insisted on balancing her studies with her job, there have been many times when she has not been on board the Bentenmaru since she was appointed captain. Not only the bridge crew, but the pirate ship is so rich in talent that you can throw a stone and hit someone qualified as a captain, so there is no shortage of acting captains.

"*Who is the acting captain of the Bentenmaru now?*"

"Umm..."

Marika tried to imagine the situation of the Bentenmaru now. Currently, the Bentenmaru is investigating a spatial anomaly.

"Hyakume and Coorie should be taking turns."

"*Well, those guys are not a cause for concern.*"

Ririka's voice on the other end of the radio contained a smile.

"*And, the situation of Bentenmaru cannot be disclosed due to confidentiality agreements.*"

"Let's just leave it at that."

Marika agrees.

"*Let's get back to the Odette II. After the ship inspection, we plan to make a training voyage to Garnet A. Is that correct?*"

The control station shares all submitted flight plans. It is not surprising that a spaceship that flies through the stars could appear anywhere at any time, and we do not know what situation it will find itself in. Marika submitted the flight plan for Odette II at the Sea of the Morningstar relay station, but it would not be surprising if the control station at Shinokuhama Airport checked it.

"Yes."

Marika wondered why Ririka had bothered to ask for confirmation of the flight plan. If it was just a training voyage for the girls' school yacht club, there was no way that a ground controller would contact her. If there was a possible reason, it would be that the captain of the currently missing Bentenmaru would be aboard as the captain of another spaceship.

"*You're scheduled to return to Sea of the Morningstar in three days, with one backup day. Are you okay?*"

Marika finally understood the role she was expected to play after Ririka's seemingly innocent final words.

"There's no problem. The red giant Garnet A is stable for now, and we haven't scheduled any difficult training programs. One backup day is more of an excuse to the parents of the club members, so don't worry too much about it."

"*The scheduled investigation period for Bentenmaru will end in four days.*"

Marika braced herself for Ririka's unchanged tone, thinking that the main topic had come up.

"*You're fully aware of the situation, aren't you?*"

"It's up to our crew to do that."

Marika said, trying to sound as innocent as possible.

"Maybe the job would be done better without a high school girl captain on board."

Ririka's mocking response came back.

"*Oh?*"

"They're all veterans who are proud of themselves, so we can leave them alone for routine work. I'm sure the Star System and Imperial Fleets think the same."

Ririka burst out laughing at Marika's self-deprecating words on the other end of the radio.

"*Understood. I'll pass that on to the relevant parties. Is there anything you'd like us to do?*"

"Don't worry about anything."

Marika said that from the bottom of her heart.

"We'll all come back safely."

"*Don't make us worry too much.*"

Ririka replied simply.

"*I pray for a safe voyage for the Odette II and the Bentenmaru. This concludes our communication.*”

“Thank you.”

Marika looked at the transceiver display. The communication from Shinokuhama Airport, which was relayed by the bridge, was cut off. Instead, the bridge called Marika.

“*This is the bridge, Chiaki. What was that communication? Why did the Shinokuhama control station contact us about our space flight plan?*”

“…Probably.”

Marika answered in one sentence, summarizing the situation around her.

“Lots of places were worried about us, and I think Ririka took it all in.”

Anyone can listen to the conversation on the transceiver if they want to. There was a pause, as if to take a breath, and Chiaki answered.

“*…I see. It's a good thing that you have a persuasive family member on the ground.*”

“Really.”

Marika nodded over the line.

"Now, I'll do my job properly so you don't have to worry."

Loading of supplies and luggage onto the Odette II was completed 30 minutes before the requested departure time. However, the containers that had been temporarily secured to the pier, the cargo planned to be brought on board, and luggage were simply brought into the pressurized area inside the ship, and the front and rear of the center shaft, which is the center of the ship's deck, are currently blocked off.

All hatches on the Odette II were closed and checked for airtightness, and at the same time, preparations for opening pier C68 began.

Pier C68, which is also a closed dock, is normally filled with air at one atmosphere. As an old-fashioned closed dock, pier C68 is not equipped with a high-quality air shield that allows air to pass through the hull without leaking pressurized air. If the air pressure inside the dock is not lowered sufficiently before the dock is opened for departure, the atmosphere inside will explode into the vacuum of space as soon as the main gate is opened, causing a violent storm that will damage the dock and upset the attitude of the relay station.

To prevent accidents and make efficient use of atmospheric resources, the atmosphere inside must be vented before the pier is opened. It's not easy to vent the air in a closed pier that can fit an entire spacecraft, unlike a small space like an airlock for a spacewalk. Also, it can't be opened unless both the spacecraft and the pier are sealed.

Normally, before opening a closed system, the air is vented after the spacecraft's airtightness is confirmed. When the Odette II departed this time, the usual procedure was ignored, and the pier's air was vented at the same time as the hatch on the spacecraft's side was closed. It would be troublesome if there was an air leak on the Odette II's side or if the hatch had been left open, but the automatic repair system is fully equipped in case the airtightness is broken. If this system is activated, a rapid-hardening polymer foam is sprayed into the leaking area to ensure airtightness. The rest of the process is troublesome in many ways.

The automatic repair system for maintaining pressurization was activated, and the airtightness check of the hull was conducted in a race, and fortunately, Odette II won. And even at this point, the captain, who was still checking the inside of the ship, had not yet returned to the bridge.

Departure preparations continued on the bridge, with even less than the minimum number of people present, communicating by walkie-talkie.

Marika, who had completed the pre-flight checks that are usually performed before departure, as well as the checks required for the ship's inspection for a category change, returned to the bridge five minutes before the scheduled departure time.

"You’re late!"

Marika, who was in the navigator's seat, slid into the captain's seat out of breath, and the display in front of her showed the departure permission from the control station.

"I thought we were going to leave without the captain."

"Because the center shaft was closed."

Marika literally flew back from the engine room at the very rear of the ship and checked the departure trajectory shown on the display.

"There are no ships that could be an obstacle on the route, and no urgent spaceships that might cut in line."

"Are we on schedule?"

Chiaki confirmed, rapidly switching between displays on the navigator's seat.

"We can still postpone departure."

"As scheduled!"

Marika declared, skimming over the status displayed on the captain's seat display.

"If there are no problems with the navigation, engines, and sensors, and we're ready to depart, there's no need to bother postponing it. Has the air been properly removed from the pier?"

"The current pressure is eight percent."

Lynn, who had moved from the electronic warfare seat to the radar/sensor seat, answered.

"Because the pump is old, it gets hard to evacuate if it's turned down to 10%. At this rate, we won't be able to create a vacuum in time for departure."

"We need to start opening the gate one minute before the scheduled departure time, otherwise we won't be able to leave on time."

The departure time of a spaceship is the time when contact with the port is lost, either by the docking arm field lock or by a single cable. Although it is slender, the main gate of pier C68, which houses the 200-meter-class solar sail ship Odette II, is driven by an old mechanical device, so it takes time to open and close.

"Four more minutes."

Lynn looked at the display that was counting down the scheduled departure time.

"At three minutes and twenty seconds, I think we can get it under five percent at best. What should we do? We can postpone the departure by ten minutes, and there are no scheduled departures or arrivals that we can cut in on, you know?"

"If the pressure is down to five percent, the port authority won't get angry."

Marika glanced at the numbers for the outside air pressure, which was slowly decreasing. Closed wharves vary in size and the performance of the air pumps they are equipped with, so as long as the pressure is reduced from the normal pressure standard of one atmosphere to five percent, there will be no operational problems even if we open it.

"If the pressure is down to five percent one minute before the scheduled time, we can open the gate and depart as scheduled. Is the engine OK?"

While switching the display on the control panel, Marika checked with Yayoi in the engineer's seat.

"It's fine. The inside of the ship is still a mess, so I've set it up so that inertial control and antigravity systems take priority, and normal engines are kept to a minimum."

"What about the navigation system?"

"All systems, no abnormalities."

Chiaki answered as if that were the norm.

"The update was completed without any problems and the calibration was done. You can see your current position no matter where you go."

"How about the radar/sensor system?"

"The navigation radar is normal, and the passive sensor system is also working normally. We can't leave the combat radar and active sensors in the harbor, but we don't plan on using them on the way there, so it should be fine."

"Communication system?"

The radio operator's seat was left vacant. Marika checked the status of the communication system, which she had set to prioritize the captain's seat. There were no emergency notifications from the control station, and no calls from outside. There were no abnormalities in the communication situation around the relay station.

"Normal communication, FTL communication, and data communication are all fine. How's the control system?"

"It's fine."

Ai, who was at the helm, answered from the helmsman's seat.

"The previous test showed the numbers as specified. We can depart, fly to the anchorage airspace, and dock with the booster."

"Thanks."

Marika looked around the bridge. There were only two people in charge of the engine, navigation, and radar/sensor systems, and the captain and captain were in charge of the radio operator's seat. The bridge crew was not even half full.

"Are there only five people to operate this ship?"

Only the minimum number of crew members were in the engine room, and the loaded luggage was being cleared away inside the ship. Marika looked around the empty bridge and muttered to herself.

"Well, in the worst case scenario, we can operate it unmanned, so it's not a problem."

Marika looked around the displays around the captain's seat. We're not fully prepared, but there are no warnings that would cause problems when we start moving. We checked the outside air pressure, and it was decreasing steadily.

Marika switched the channel on the headset she had been wearing to the ship's announcements. She cleared her throat.

"*This is the bridge, Captain Kato Marika.*"

Marika's voice echoed throughout the ship.

"*Odette II is currently preparing to depart, and the scheduled departure time remains unchanged at 1200. We plan to prioritize the use of antigravity engines for the flight, and keep normal propulsion to a minimum, but please be aware that emergencies can occur at any time.*"

Marika closed her eyes and listened carefully to the sounds she could hear. The sound of the air conditioning, the rhythm of Lynn typing on the keyboard, and the vibrations from the engine room were only faintly transmitted. Marika opened her eyes, feeling that it was the same as usual.

"*After departing the relay station, the ship will head to the Star System Military's anchorage airspace to dock with the FTL booster.*"

Marika looked at the schedule, which was drawn up with a lot of wishful thinking.

"*After docking, we will rendezvous with the Ship Bureau's communication boat outside the anchorage airspace, and undergo a category change inspection by an inspector. The deadline for tidying up the ship is when the inspector boards. We will keep you updated from the bridge, but if you can't make it in time, please at least tidy up so that it's not too unsightly.*"

Laughter could be heard from the open door.

"*After the inspector finishes inspecting the hull, we plan to depart for the training voyage after accommodating Jenny's Silent Whisper.*"

Marika checked the external pressure on the display. The pump at the pier seemed to be struggling, but the external pressure had finally dropped below five percent. One minute and thirty seconds before the scheduled departure time.

"*The gate will open in 30 seconds. We will move Odette II after confirming that the atmosphere has been released.*"

Marika called up the command to open the gate on the control panel. She glanced at the countdown board.

"*Odette II, prepare to depart, gate open, 20 seconds left.*"

"Antigravity engine, starting."

Yayoi in the engineer's seat started to start up the antigravity engine. Marika looked around the display again to see if there were any problems with the engine or control systems. The display, which should have been given priority if an alarm was issued, was simply showing the system status.

"*Five, four, three, two, one, zero!*"

After confirming that the external air pressure had dropped to the four percent range, Marika flicked the touch panel to command the gate to open. In a vacuum, it would be enough to open only the direction of travel, but in the current situation where there is a small amount of atmosphere remaining, it is necessary to open both the front and rear gates at the same time. Releasing the pressurized air from only one side would cause an unnecessary recoil to the station, but if the front and back are opened at the same time, the recoil is offset.

The two gates at the front and back of Pier C68 slowly began to open left and right. As the airtight pads opened, the air remaining in the pier was released with explosive force, and a small amount of water vapor filled the dock with a pure white mist due to adiabatic expansion, which was then sucked out from the front and back gates.

The outside air pressure dropped to zero in an instant. However, they couldn't move until the gates were completely open.

"*Gantry lock, release.*"

Marika said, still connected to the onboard PA system. Using control from Odette II, the gantry lock that was securing the hull to the pier was released. A dull sound could be heard as the gantry arm extended from the pier to the hull, releasing Odette II.

Marika confirmed that the air pump at the pier had automatically stopped due to a drop in air pressure. There was no one at the pier, so they had to set up the post-departure process.

"*Purge cables.*"

Power had already been switched to the inside of the ship, but the emergency power and information cables were disconnected. Ai, who was in the helm, moved the wheel slightly to move the Odette II away from the pier.

"*Pier, gantry arms retract.*"

The gantry arm that secures the hull to the pier retracts so that it is aligned with the wall of the dock.

"Proximity sensor system, all normal."

Lynn activated the optical laser sensor, which is essential when moving in a narrow space like inside a dock, and displayed a precise diagram of the surrounding gaps on the display.

"Gate open confirmed."

"*Departure.*"

With the ship's internal broadcasting system still open, Marika said.

"Forward slow! Odette II, let's go."

The latest spaceships have become more labor-saving, so it's not uncommon for a commercial spaceship to be operated by a very small number of people. However, it's not that easy when it comes to a solar sail ship that is over 200 years old.

Without deploying the solar sail, Odette II flew at a slow speed from the relay station to the star system military's anchorage airspace. Since the flight was in a state where the bridge, engine room, and radar/sensor systems could not meet the crew quota, they flew obediently with the aim of avoiding accidents and violations.

After leaving the relay station's control zone and heading toward the military's anchorage airspace, Gruier returned to the bridge. According to the report, most of the supplies on the ship's deck have been moved to the shaft in front of the warehouse, and are currently being organized.

"Since the organization of the incoming supplies is nearing completion, Sasha has instructed the radio operator to return to the bridge."

"Thank you, then, take your seat."

The flight plan for docking with the FTL booster in the military's anchorage airspace had already been submitted and approval had been obtained. After receiving confirmation of an automatic response from the satellite controlling the anchorage airspace, Odette II entered the anchorage airspace.

The docking of the FTL booster alone could be done from the bridge, but confirmation after docking and the connection of the control system required manpower. Although the ship's deck had finally been cleared, the arrangement of supplies had not yet been completed, so the bridge crew and the staff in charge of the engineering ward were sent out to carry out the extravehicular work in space suits.

Yayoi, the only one left, was in an unusual situation where she had to not only give instructions for the work but also supervise the entire extravehicular work, but with Marika, the captain, on-site, the connection of the FTL booster was completed only slightly later than the optimistic schedule that had been in place.

As soon as Marika returned to the bridge, she received a call from the ship bureau's communication boat carrying an inspector. Marika replied that she would accept the inspector on board as scheduled.

When the Odette II accepted the Ship Bureau's communication boat onto the deck, some of the crew members' personal belongings were still floating in the center shaft.

The hull inspection for the category change was completed so easily that the crew members, who were not used to bureaucratic work and were prepared for it, were surprised. Since all the documents had been submitted in advance, the inspector who came on board the Odette II only pointed out a few defects that could be corrected on site, and after walking around the inside and outside of the ship, he declared the inspection complete.

"*Odette II from Silent Whisper, this is Jenny Dolittle.*"

On the communication monitor, Jenny looked around at the tired faces of the bridge crew with a strange look on her face.

"*We will rendezvous with you soon. What's wrong? You look like you've been in a fight.*'

'Odette II to Silent Whisper, this is Gruier on the bridge.'

Gruier was the only one to answer the call with a straight face.

'The inspector from the Maritime Bureau just finished inspecting the ship and has returned. It seems that all procedures for changing the category of the Odette II have now been completed.'

'*Thank you for your hard work.*'

Jenny, who was the only one at the controls of the Silent Whisper, chuckled.

'*So now the Odette II can fly freely through the galaxy as a Category I FTL spaceship.*'

'Wow, this was more nerve-wracking than a battle.'

The communication line was switched to the radar/sensor seat, and Lynn took over the call.

"I finally understand why the seniors didn't change the category of Odette II. It was too much trouble."

"*Oh, so that's a nice souvenir for your juniors. Is the ship cleaned up?*"

"There's enough space on the ship's deck for Silent Whisper."

Gruier said.

"I think we'll finish sorting the warehouse by the end of the day. Odette II is mostly operating normally."

"*That's the best thing.*"

Jenny, who was alone on the Silent Whisper, glanced at the food packs filling the other seats.

"*At this rate, you probably won't even have to prepare dinner for tonight. I bought out all the Koenig Katze delicatessen from the relay station, so please keep the dining hall open.*"

The bridge erupted in cheers when Jenny mentioned the name of the top-class grocery store in the relay station.

"Thank you. We'll prepare the best seat for you."

"*Bridge from the ship's deck.*"

Sasha, who was working on containing Silent Whisper, contacted the bridge.

"*Silent Whisper has been docked and is currently being secured.*"

"Thank you."

Marika responded to the report from the deck.

"Um..."

"*One more thing to report.*"

As if she had forgotten, Sasha added.

"*At this time, not a single person has come to the deck wanting to disembark. Jenny not only bought out the Koenig Katze deli, but also Uiro Moon's sweets.*"

"Eh..."

Uiro Moon is a popular sweets store at the relay station.

"*If everyone saw that mountain of sweets, they'd probably stay even if they were at risk of repeating the year.*"

"As expected..."

Marika thought she could see Jenny's smug face.

"Understood. Odette II will depart as soon as securing the Silent Whisper is completed."

At the Shinokuhama Airport Control Station, Kato Ririka received a report that Odette II had made a FTL jump from the planetary orbit within the solar system.

"Destination, Garnet A?"

Looking at the short report displayed on the sub-monitor in the chief controller's seat, Ririka muttered. As per the submitted flight plan, Odette II made contact with the ship bureau's communication boat near the solar system's anchorage airspace, retrieved a small boat that had departed from the relay station, and then made a FTL jump.

"I wonder where they really went."

Unless a dedicated patrol boat is attached, it is impossible to track the destination of a spaceship that has made a jump from its wake. While checking the lineup of transport planes in the re-entry corridor, Ririka displayed the latest status of Bentenmaru on the sub-monitor.

If the transponder is emitted within the control zone, the current location of the spaceship is displayed no matter where it is in the galaxy. However, the Bentenmaru's transponder was last heard four days ago within the Tau star system.

Ririka muttered nostalgically.

"I wonder who she takes after in that she's a reckless assassin."

"We're touching down."

Sasha announced, finally returning to her usual position in the navigator's seat just before the FTL jump. As soon as Odette II returned to normal space, the navigation and radar/sensor systems observed the current location and confirmed the situation.

"No ships in the surrounding airspace!"

"Positioning completed by the Galactic Positioning System (GPS)."

The results of the positioning observation were displayed on the display in the captain's seat. Garnet A's outer planetary system is closer to interstellar space than it is within the star system.

"No abnormalities at this time."

Looking at the galactic standard time displayed by GPS, Chiaki, who had moved from the navigator's seat to the radar/sensor seat, made an additional report.

"Looks like we're not time traveling yet. This is the current galaxy."

Chiaki switched the display in front of him to the actual view from optical observation. The same starry sky as seen with the naked eye was displayed.

"Well, there were no abnormalities during the jump."

Marika, who was in the captain's seat, was checking the additional observation results of the current position from various sensors.

"Since we jumped smoothly and landed smoothly, it would be more troublesome if we ended up somewhere else at some other time."

"Where are we?"

All we could see in the surrounding airspace was interstellar matter. The navigation radar also only showed distant dark clouds and tiny planets.

"Garnet A."

Marika answered.

"Garnet A? Isn't it not even in the outer planetary system, but even further outside the remaining Oort Cloud?"

"This is fine."

After checking the GPS coordinates, Marika raised her head and looked around the bridge.

"One hundred and twenty years ago, the pirate fleet of the Federation of Colonial Stars fought the final fleet battle of the War of Independence here against the Stellar Alliance fleet, which was trying to make Garnet A supernova. The message in the Bentenmaru's communication tube said to bring Odette II here. So there must be something here."

"It's here!"

Chiaki called out.

"Beacon confirmed!"

Chiaki had seen the same reaction from the bridge of the Barbaroussa.

"Bentenmaru's communication tube!"

"Bring the ship closer and prepare for recovery."

Marika ordered.

The communication tube was retrieved by a pair of first-year students who had been waiting in the airlock in space suits since before the jump. The communication tube's inherent clock was off by about 120 years from the current time, just as it was when it was recovered by the Barbaroosa. From the orbital elements, Lynn deduced that the communication tube had been released from outside the solar system 120 years ago.

When the communication tube was opened on the bridge of Odette II, a data card with Marika's handwriting written on the label was removed. All that was recorded inside was the space coordinate symbols and numbers.

Marika read that these were not galactic absolute coordinates, but star system coordinates based at Garnet A, and pointed Odette II towards the indicated point.

"It's a communication tube that hasn't even sent out a beacon, just orbiting a red giant star with no ports, so I don't think there's much chance of it being found."

Marika explained on Odette II as they headed towards the desired coordinates.

"Since it's been left alone for 120 years, I think it's possible that someone else might pick it up. It's not information that would be a problem if it was taken, but I wanted to make sure that no one other than the person involved knows about it."

"I see it!"

Chiaki announced.

"It's small scale, but it's a space disturbance! It's far enough away from the home planet and there are no weak gravity sources in the vicinity. If you don't specify the coordinates, you won't find it even if you search."

"You're right."

Marika confirmed the data on the space disturbance, which was first confirmed by optical observation and then by the gravity sensor, which was narrowed down. Compared to the space disturbance that was swallowed up by the Tau star system, the effective radius is one order of magnitude smaller.

"But the distortion is large."

The space disturbance itself cannot be detected by optical observation. However, the distortion of the starry sky in the background is clearly visible in the space captured at the maximum telephoto lens.

"So that was 120 years ago..."

Jenny was in the observer's seat, watching the data obtained by all of the observation equipment on the Odette II.

"If I bring my professors here, I think that alone will ensure my graduation."

"Would you like to do that?"

Marika, who was in the captain's seat, asked Jenny.

"If we send the coordinates of this place to the Space University along with the investigation request with the senior's name on it, I'm sure they'll be able to investigate it more precisely and accurately than Bentenmaru or Odette II could."

"That's an attractive proposal."

Jenny scrolled through the data that was obtained.

"Even though we only observed the spatial disturbance we just found for such a short time, the fluctuations in size are quite drastic, aren’t they?"

"That's right."

Marika looked down at the observation data. Space disturbances themselves are a phenomenon that are discovered occasionally, but it's rare to see their size change from moment to moment right before your eyes.

"If the escape route to the other side disappears while we're leisurely surveying, that would be the trigger for history to change right before our eyes. According to the plan, or rather the message from the past, Odette II was here 120 years ago, right?"

"That should be it."

Marika looked at the coordinates recorded on the card in the communication tube with a lack of confidence.

"I'm not sure though."

"Everyone over there is probably anxiously waiting for reinforcements to arrive. I think we should hurry."

Seeing Jenny's smiling face, Marika let out a heavy sigh. She looked around at the bridge crew.

The bridge crew of the Odette II, all positioned opposite each other, looked at the captain with expectant smiles.

Closing her eyes, Marika nodded.

"I understand. Let's go. Maintain current speed, maintain engine power, keep mast fully retracted, radar/sensor systems passive only, maintain current observation posture. Target: spatial disturbance at Garnet A. The Odette II will now begin the actual training voyage."

This was the third time that the Odette II had taken a trajectory that would have put it directly into a spatial disturbance. Compared to the previous two times, the ship's hull shaking caused by passing through the spatial disturbance this time was barely noticeable.

"Did we miss?"

Marika, who had switched the display to the external view monitor, quickly looked around the control panel.

"No."

Sasha in the navigator's seat answered.

"The galactic positioning system is down. There's no reception from Loran. There was no navigation support system in Antares Constellation during the War of Independence."

"Check the star chart!"

Lynn called out after checking the star arrangement with the sensor system.

"Not now. It matches the arrangement from 120 years ago! It looks like we've come to that side."

"Scan the whole sky!"

Marika ordered, standing up straight.

"Confirm current location, then scan the surrounding airspace, all passive, don't emit radio waves from here!!"

"Spatial disturbance confirmed behind."

Lynn reported.

"That's the one we just left. Now, did it cause any reaction like touchdown by coming out of there?"

If it's a FTL jump, it will have various effects on the target coordinates and the surrounding space before touchdown. The last time Odette II returned from 120 years ago, the prejump phenomenon was observed. This time too, it cannot be denied that a similar phenomenon occurred in the surrounding airspace.

In outer space, where there are no modern navigational support systems, Odette II observed the surrounding airspace according to the prescribed procedure.

"Current position, outer planet system of Garnet A."

Sasha reported from the navigator's seat.

"The position based at Garnet A has shifted quite a bit, but the distance hasn't changed much."

"There are some suspicious reactions."

Lynn immediately sent some of the reactions she had found to the display in the captain's seat.

"There is probably a reaction from a spaceship on the other side of Garnet A."

"I wonder if it's the Stellar Slayer fleet from the Stellar Alliance."

"No reaction in nearby space."

There were no signs of spaceships or similar reactions within close range that would likely be attacked. Marika gave the following instructions.

"Mast, fully deployed. Radar/sensor system, continue to observe the surrounding space with passive observation. Please measure the current time as accurately as possible with all-sky observation."

In outer space, where there is no navigational support, the only clock is the chronometer equipped on the spaceship. However, at present, it is only useful for knowing the spaceship's specific time.

The stars in the universe are constantly moving. The movements of the stars in the Orion Arm, including the Cetus Constellation and the Antares Constellation, from stars to planets and planets, are all precisely measured, and all positions from the past to the future can be calculated.

If we can accurately observe the current positions of the planets orbiting Garnet A and the positions of the stars visible in the sky, we can know the current time. Marika looked at Jenny in the observer seat.

"Senior, do you have any records of the Stellar Slayer fleet?"

"The Stellar Slayer fleet?"

I asked again, and Jenny waved her hand with a difficult look on her face.

"Well, isn't it a violation of the rules of even the Stellar Alliance to try to artificially create a supernova, making it the ultimate weapon? I've looked hard for it, but it seems there are no records left, and I heard that when it was annexed by the Galactic Empire, all the inconvenient records were thrown away, so it's probably among them."

"Do you have any records of the Stellar Slayer fleet?"

Marika thought deeply.

"It would be a lot easier if we knew the current time and the relative positions of the Stellar Slayer fleet."

Having an idea, Marika looked up.

"Then what about the pirate fleet? The pirate fleet that flew to Garnet A to intercept the Stellar Slayer still has all of their logs, so we know where they are and what they're doing, right?"

"You can't rely on them."

"Eh?"

"Marika, the captain of the Bentenmaru, would probably understand, but when you're really busy, you have to do one thing after another without having time to keep records. On a pirate ship where chaos is a constant, some records seem to have been made to add up after the fact, and the automatic records sometimes disappear or are clearly contradictory, or they just copy and paste previous records."

Jenny opened the file she had taken out and ran her finger over the pages.

"I'll try to organize it so it's easy to read. Don't rely on it too much."

"Thanks."

Perhaps the careful maintenance for the ship inspection was a success, but the deployment of the mast and yard of the Odette II was completed without any problems. Most of the antennas are mounted on the mast, and the sensor systems are also equipped on the mast and yard to operate multiple sensors at the same time with as little distance between them as possible. Just by deploying the mast, the detection ability increases.

"December 21, 129, new calendar year, huh..."

Leaving the processing of the enormously increased observational data to the radar/sensor system, where Lynn and all the other seats were filled, Marika looked at the current time calculated from the positions of the constellations and planets.

"It's about six months since we last came here," said Gruier in the radio operator's seat.

"Shall we try calling someone?"

"What do you mean, call someone!?"

"The Bentenmaru."

Gruier tapped the control panel.

"They should be nearby, right?"

"They should be."

In the message that was in the communication tube, Marika said that Bentenmaru was in the Antares constellation.

"But at this time at Garnet A, the Stellar Slayer fleet is preparing to make the red giant supernova. Have the Federation of Colonial Stars pirate ships come this far yet?"

Marika tried to remember the movements of the pirate ships at the end of the War of Independence. From what she could vaguely remember, the Tau star system was desperately trying to deal with the approach of the Stellar Alliance's large expeditionary fleet at the end of the war. Meanwhile, the pirate fleet was facing off against the Stellar Slayer fleet, which was carrying out the supernova plan that was being carried out at Garnet A in Antares.

Marika only knew the outline of what kind of battle would unfold at Garnet A. The supernova bomb that the Stellar Alliance was planning to use was a final weapon that would scorch a planet with a radius of several dozen light years and destroy the ecosystems of habitable planets within a radius of several dozen light years. Its use is strictly prohibited by treaty, both in the Galactic Empire and in the anti-Empire frontier.

Although it was not officially the activity of a regular army, the fact that the Stellar Alliance tried to use a supernova bomb against the colony planets at the end of the War of Independence was carefully concealed when it was annexed by the Galactic Empire. As a result, almost no official records of the battles at Garnet A remain. The few battle records are on the pirate ship, but Marika knows that they are poorly organized and difficult to use.

"No communication!"

Thinking that far, Marika shook her head.

"But there should be two Bentenmarus around here! The one from the War of Independence and the one that came from the same future as us. What if we try to summon the wrong one and end up summoning the wrong one!"

"Huh?"

Lynn exaggerated.

"So what does that mean? Does that mean there are two Bentenmarus here, the old one and the current one?"

"There's more than just the Bentenmaru."

Jenny in the observer's seat answered while tapping on the control panel.

"There should also be two White Swans. One of them is called Odette II."

"Eh?"

The bridge crew's voices, who didn't seem to understand the situation very well, harmonized.

"But the current Bentenmaru doesn't know that Odette II has come here yet, right?"

Gruier said, confirming each word.

"Marika left a message on the communication tube from the Bentenmaru after coming here and making contact with the Bentenmaru, right?"

Chiaki looked at Marika in the captain's seat while analyzing.

"Marika, how did you get in contact with Bentenmaru?"

"There's no way I'd know!"

Marika blurted out.

"What should I do? I don't think I'll get a proper response if I accidentally call them by normal communication, and anyway, this place will soon become a battlefield if history is correct!"

"At least, it seems like that's what the people here intend."

Lynn unfolded the mast and displayed a list of reactions that had been confirmed in the Garnet A star system early on.

"It's only passive observation, so the reactions on the other side of the star are from a few hours ago. The reactions related to FTL travel are from about half a day ago in the outer planetary system. They're probably supply ships or something."

"...There are a lot of them directly above the star."

Garnet A has become a red giant and has expanded to the point where it is enough to swallow up the former third planet. There are many reactions around the red giant, which has grown to a diameter of 1.12 astronomical units, about one-third the size of the inner planetary system of the solar system.

"The strong reactions at both poles are the control station for extracting energy from the red giant, and the one on the equator is the work ship for controlling the star itself."

Marika muttered, remembering the last time she came here. Even though it was the past for her, she shook her head, realizing that it was 120 years in the future.

"The reactions at both poles and the equator are not spaceships from the Stellar Alliance, but rather work ships of the Stellar Slayer fleet, so they shouldn't be of any use. The same type of ship as the one on the equator should also be a work ship equipped with a powerful gravity control engine, so as long as we can confirm its current location, there's no need to track it any further. There are probably other ships that can be of use..."

"Oh, there are many in the outer planetary system."

Lynn listed the reactions that could be detected at the moment on the display.

"They're emitting strong radio waves without caring about people's eyes, so they stand out like lighthouses. Judging from the reactions and output, I think these are probably the escort fleet of the Stellar Slayer fleet."

Marika looked at the reactions displayed as a list on the display. The computer checked the database and displayed the types and ship types that matched with a high probability for some of them.

"Eight cruisers, sixteen destroyers..."

Marika spoke as calmly as possible, in the face of a much greater force than she had expected.

"They're sending an expeditionary fleet to the Tau system, and yet they're able to bring this much force to a place like this."

Jenny muttered in admiration.

"I wonder if it's on the list. Wait a moment, I'll check to see if I can confirm it."

"Thank you."

"So, what should we do?"

Lynn said, rechecking the reactions that were automatically determined not to be spaceships in the first scan to make sure there were no missed ones.

"It seems we came out without a prejump phenomenon, so they haven't noticed us yet. But we're well within their scanning range. If we stay still, it'll only be a matter of time before we're found."

The spaceships around Garnet A are on guard, firing their radars for patrol. The radars race through space at the speed of light, revealing Odette II. Marika confirmed that a spaceship was near Odette II. If they stay still, Odette II will be visible on their radar in an hour.

"Any reaction other than the Stellar Alliance?"

"Your friend/foe identification system is working fine."

Lynn lined up the automatically identified enemy marks on the display.

"Right now, I can only see enemies in this airspace. No friendly or unidentified ones. When will the pirate ship arrive here?"

Marika looked at Jenny, who was tapping away at her keyboard while investigating. It didn't look like she'd get an answer for a while.

"I think they'll be arriving soon."

The communication system rang with an unexpectedly sharp ringtone.

"Incoming call!"

Gruier opened the communication channel. Marika's eyes widened as she saw the data displayed on the communication monitor.

"Bentenmaru!?"

"Directional communication, with identification signal."

Gruier announced, picking out only the necessary data.

"The other party's identification signal is Bentenmaru, but it's not Odette II that's being called. It's the White Swan."

"Did the old protocol trigger a reaction?"

"I think so."

Gruier answered, tapping on the control panel with quick fingers that were unusual for an amateur.

"This ship is now Odette II, but it used to be the White Swan. This encryption code is also from a long time ago, so please wait, I'll match the code now."

"So the other party is the old Bentenmaru!?"

Marika spoke up, and Gruier nodded.

"I think so. Do you want to take it?"

Marika only thought for a moment.

"Connect."

"I'm opening a line with Bentenmaru. Audio only."

"*This is Bentenmaru, Captain Bunzaemon.*"

An unfamiliar voice came out. At that moment, Marika realized that the crew of the Bentenmaru during the War of Independence was completely different from the crew of today.

"How are you, White Swan? I didn't realize how you got here, but Captain Shiratori[[2]](#footnote-2), you're still pretty brave, leisurely observing without camouflage."

"The current captain of the Bentenmaru is Kato Chirusonian Bunzaemon."

Jenny passed the data to the captain's seat.

"The captain of the White Swan is Shiratori Kent, 52 years old, male."

"What!?"

The voice modulation device (equalizer) that Lynn had made in case of something like this was not going to be up to date in time.

"His daughter is the first officer on board."

Jenny sent new data to the captain's seat.

"Shiratori Suzuka, 17 years old, female."

"This is the White Swan, Shiratori Suzuka."

Marika read the name on the display and answered the call.

"*Is it her? What about the separate force that the Karyoubinga’s Count mentioned, which is at the end of a different supply line from the main force?*'

Marika looked at Jenny, looking for some information.

'At this time, the pirate ship's job was to attack the supply line of the expeditionary fleet to the Tau star system.'

Jenny spoke quickly, tapping on the control panel at high speed.

'There was also information that the Stellar Alliance was preparing a final weapon separate from the expeditionary fleet.'

'I don't know if it was the final weapon that was in the information, though.'

Marika checked today's date. She didn't know who she could tell her about it or how much she could tell them.

"*It's definitely preparations for war.*"

Captain Bunzaemon said with a smile.

"*Otherwise, why would the Stellar Alliance have such valuable forces around a red giant that has no strategic value? It seems they have four easy-to-use cruisers and a destroyer as well.*"

"According to our observations, we have confirmed eight cruisers and sixteen destroyers."

"*As expected of the White Swan.*"

Bunzaemon's voice contained a smile.

"*The rumor that they have Clairvoyants on guard duty is not just for show. Can you tell me where they are?*"

"Of course. Well..."

Marika looked around the bridge.

"Wait a minute!"

Lynn shouted while tapping on the control panel.

"They won't be able to decipher the data if we give it to them as is! We're currently looking up the standard code for this era!"

"This is it!"

Gruier, in the radio operator's seat, sent a file to the radar/sensor system.

"28-year quad code, with conversion code for the current date!"

Wartime encrypted communications changed their encryption codes depending on the date.

"Thank goodness! I'm impressed you found something like this."

"Odette II automatically handled it."

Gruier answered while touching the communications panel.

"You found the communication standard and the encryption code for pirate communication. Otherwise, I wouldn't have been able to respond to a sudden call without any preparation."

"You seniors, you've really kept this setting alive that you're probably never going to use again."

"It would just take so much time to send all of our data."

Marika continued the conversation with Bentenmaru.

"I'll send you a list of the enemy ships and the current locations of the spaceships that are apparently working around Garnet A."

"I'm grateful. Please give my thanks to Captain Shiratori, Suzuka-chan."

Marika was a moment late in responding to the friendly call. She met Chiaki's eyes, who was looking at the captain's seat with a worried look.

Her mouth moved naturally.

"It's not 'chan'!"

Chiaki's eyes widened.

"Okay, done!"

Lynn tapped the control panel.

"The digest version of the observation results is complete, I'll send it to you, Gruier!"

"Received. Can be sent out anytime."

"Sending our observation results."

Marika lowered her eyes to the communication display. The only thing connecting Odette II and Bentenmaru was the currently connected communication line.

"Is it okay to send it over this line?"

"*Yeah, go ahead. I'll decrypt it and check it right away.*"

"Please send it."

Under Marika's instructions, Gruier sent the observation results data to Bentenmaru.

"*Received.*"

Although it was data for dozens of spaceships, it was stripped down to just the type, current position, and speed direction, so it didn't take up much space.

"*Wait a minute, I'm having my guys check it now...hohohoho, this is amazing.*"

Bunzaemon exclaimed in admiration.

“*Not only can you see subtle reactions that we couldn't judge, but you can even see things that we didn't even notice. What kind of magic are you using?*”

“...It's a trade secret.”

After finally answering, Marika added as if she had just thought of something.

“My crew is excellent.”

A hearty laugh was heard from the other end of the line. Marika couldn't laugh.

“*Thank you, White Swan. Until our forces are ready, Bentenmaru will temporarily retreat to the usual meeting point. What do you want to do?*”

“I've confirmed what I wanted to confirm, so we'll also temporarily withdraw.”

Marika spoke up one of the options she had been considering.

“We'll keep sailing and leave the patrol zone.”

After saying that, she added hastily.

“That's what Captain Shiratori said.”

“*Understood. See you later, Suzuka-chan.*”

After taking a breath, Marika responded.

'Not Chan! Good luck, Captain Bunzaemon.'

Marika confirmed on the communications display that the line had been cut. Just to be sure, she looked at Gruier, who nodded to the captain's seat.

'Communication ended. Thank you for your hard work.'

'Whoaaaa.'

Feeling a sudden wave of fatigue, Marika wiped her forehead. The sweat that hadn't flowed in the weightless state stuck to the back of her hands.

'Why? Where was Bentenmaru? It was just normal communication, right? There was barely any time lag, so that means the other party was within 100,000 kilometers, right?'

'If we get found, we'll both be in trouble.'

Lynn rechecked the sensor data from close range.

"Warships on patrol use radars loudly, so it's not that difficult to find them passively if they're nearby. If you know where they are, it's common to wait for an opportunity to sneak in, or to run away if you're about to be found."

Lynn checked the observation data, estimating the blind spots from the positions of the two nearest cruisers.

"The asteroid in the catalog is a perfect match, but I wonder if it's hiding in this thing?"

"I wonder if it's using stealth or something."

Thinking about the current equipment on the Bentenmaru, Marika shook her head.

"No, I don't have time to think about other spaceships. They should be more familiar with the situation than us, so let's leave it to them. Deploy the sun sail and head from the ecliptic to the north pole."

"We'll take an orbit of Garnet A from the ecliptic to the north pole."

Helmsman Ai repeated. Jenny asked.

"Why that way?"

"I just chose the direction where the patrol network was the thinnest. I don't know the assembly coordinates. I wonder if I can find them in the old records."

"Thanks for your hard work. How was it? How did it feel to talk to your great-grandfather?"

Marika looked at Jenny again.

"What? Your great-grandfather?"

"Kato Chirusonian Bunzaemon was the first captain of the pirate ship Bentenmaru. And pirate licenses are only given to direct descendants."

Looking down at the display, Jenny confirmed the name of the former captain of Bentenmaru.

"The man I just spoke to is Kato Bunzaemon, Marika Kato's great-grandfather."

A few "ahhh"s were heard across the bridge, the loudest of which was Marika's.

A black rectangular object with white border

Description automatically generated

"I'll explain the situation."

Saying through the microphone, Marika looked around at the faces of the members gathered on the bridge of the Odette II. The watchmen were in charge of the radar/sensor system and the engine room, but everyone else was crammed into the bridge, which wasn't exactly spacious.

Some of the members who couldn't fit in were crowded around the open door to the center shaft. Marika's voice was also being carried throughout the entire ship.

"We've been able to determine the current situation from the voyage and communication records that remained on the Odette II. I'll explain the current situation as far as we know it."

Marika looked down at the display, which showed a list of the current status.

"First, the current time. It's December 21, 129, new calendar year, and it's almost midnight, so it's the 22nd. The time is the standard time used on the spaceships of the Federation of Colonial Stars, the same time as Shin-Okuhama City, where the fleet headquarters is located. It's not the galactic standard calendar, but the standard is the same time as Shin-Okuhama City now."

"At the very least, that means we're operating on the same time zone as Hakuoh Girls' Academy, right?"

Jenny, who was in the observer seat, called out.

"You don't need to worry about being confused by being suddenly thrown into a different time, do you?"

"That's how it is."

Marika looked around at the faces of the club members, who didn't quite get it. The clock on board the Odette II switched to display the confirmed current time.

"However, the date is 120 years ago. It was at the end of the War of Independence."

Anyone who grew up on a former colony planet knows the anniversary of the start and end of the War of Independence. The War of Independence ended on December 31, 129th year of the Gregorian calendar.

"As you all know, the war will end in about 10 days. The main force of the expeditionary fleet of the Stellar Alliance is approaching the Tau system, and the Federation of Colonial Stars is overwhelmed with dealing with it."

Compared to the last time they came to the Tau system during the War of Independence, the club members' prior knowledge has increased significantly. Not only did the girls learn about the communication protocols and navigation support systems of the War of Independence, the command structure and layout of the Federation of Colonial Stars fleet, which they would never have a chance to use in their daily lives, but they also learned about their respective equipment and achievements, the radar performance of the Stellar Alliance fleet, and the practical performance of the shipboard weapons, and they were becoming such experts that they would run away barefoot from their jobs.

"Many people probably know about the Stellar Slayer Project, which the Stellar Alliance carried out while on a fleet expedition to the colony planets, because I've been involved in it a lot recently. The question is, what was happening here, at Garnet A in the Antares constellation, with only 10 days left until the end of the war?"

Marika projected a star chart centered on the red giant star Garnet A in the space in the center of the bridge that she had been given free.

"Jenny brought me the records of Karyoubinga, so I have a rough idea of ​​the situation. I'll infer the situation from the records of the pirate ships we have now and from my earlier communication with Captain Bunzaemon of the Bentenmaru, and update it as appropriate if there are any mistakes."

The positions of the spaceships discovered through observation were overlaid on the star chart.

"This is the current arrangement of the Stellar Slayer fleet. We are currently preparing to set up control stations at both poles of Garnet A, and work ships equipped with powerful antigravity engines lined up around the equator."

Apart from the large control stations at both poles, the arrangement of work ships at the equator is not yet uniform. There is a large floating dock in orbit around Garnet A that seems to take care of the work ships, and many work ships are waiting for their turn for maintenance or resupply.

"It seems that Stellar Slayer did not originally intend to make a red giant star a supernova. In the original plan, they were thinking of something like an energy network that would extract energy from a star and send it via hyperspace to space cities in interstellar space or space ships traveling in deep space."

Marika looked at Jenny to make sure that she was explaining things correctly. Jenny nodded slightly and took over the explanation. She turned on the microphone on her headset and started talking.

"It's easy to extract energy from a star. But you can tell just by listening that the idea of ​​sending only energy through hyperspace is full of absurdities. Even now, the golden rule for FTL travel is to travel as far away from the source of gravity as possible, but they're trying to send the energy from right next to a red giant star, even if it's fading."

Jenny, holding the remote control, fired a beam for the point. She adjusted the length and pointed to the red sphere of the red giant star displayed in 3D.

"These are the control stations installed at both poles. The system absorbs energy from antennas that spread in all directions and sends it into hyperspace. Of course, as an energy network, it's still incomplete at this point. The first attempt at Stellar Slayer was to turn this into an offensive weapon."

Jenny looked around at her juniors.

"It would be difficult to deliver energy through hyperspace to a spaceship moving at high speed, but if it was aimed at a colony planet, it could be a powerful destructive weapon. The problem is the error of the jump through hyperspace, but even when the error margin was set to planetary scale, the experiment was unsuccessful. We're lucky, because if it had been successful, the Stellar Alliance wouldn't have had to send a fleet to launch energy bombardments wherever it wanted."

The bridge was buzzing. Jenny continued.

"It must be terrible for the people being bombed. There are no battleships in orbit, and in fact there are no enemy ships in the system, but whether it's a military base on high alert or a peaceful urban area, explosions just happen. The only way to detect it in advance would be if the prejump phenomenon was observed on the ground, but there's no time to escape. On the other hand, for the attacking side, there's no weapon as easy and simple as this. As long as you know the coordinates of the target point, you can attack whenever you want, on any scale you want. Of course, development was expected to be extremely difficult, but the results were great, so a huge budget, equipment, and personnel were invested. But in the end, development as an energy network was not going to be enough to prepare for this war, so it must have been lowered in priority."

Jenny pointed to each of the work ships stationed around the star with her beam pointer.

"Research into extracting energy from stars has also greatly advanced our knowledge of stars themselves. At some point, I think they developed the theory and technical procedures for artificially making red giants supernovae. So they probably tried to use Garnet A as a final weapon against the colonies."

Jenny circled the beam pointer around the red, which indicates the enemy forces.

"Then how did the Federation of Colonial Stars, which doesn't even have its own observation base, notice your secret weapon? I'm sure the fleet headquarters was informed that the Stellar Alliance's secret weapon was being prepared, but of course the regular fleet doesn't have the capacity to deal with it. That's where the familiar pirate ship comes in."

Using the remote control, Jenny made Garnet A, which had only a red glow indicating the Stellar Alliance's side, appear with a blue glow indicating an ally.

"The role of the pirate ships when the expeditionary fleet is heading to the star system is to cut off the expeditionary fleet's supply lines, which extend as far as they can from the Stellar Alliance. It's still the same today, but the only ones that can move around for long periods of time and even engage in battle without supplies are the Imperial regular fleets, which have three times as many transports and auxiliary vessels as combat ships. If you want to keep a large fleet in good working order, daily supplies and training and maintenance are essential. Isn't that right, Lynn?"

"But in games and simulations with easy settings, there are heaps of things like that."

Lynn, who was in the electronic warfare seat, answered.

"Even a completely closed-loop intergenerational spaceship would not miss an opportunity to resupply. Especially a large fleet from 120 years ago. If the supply ships on the designated routes did not transport the fleet every day, the fleet's fighting power would drop by several percent per day."

"Thanks for the easy-to-understand explanation. In other words, targeting supply ships one by one is an important job that will gradually reduce the fighting power of the main expeditionary fleet. If that's the case, it's natural that a tactical target that can be expected to have a greater effect than targeting the supply ships would be the supply bases where supplies are stored, rather than the supply ships themselves. If it succeeds, the damage to the expeditionary fleet will be great, and since supplies cannot be stopped even if the supply base is gone, the burden on the Stellar Alliance's supply ships will also be great. That's why the pirates were working hard to cut off the supply lines, but while targeting the supply ships, they noticed that there was another supply line in addition to the expeditionary fleet. I think that the separate force that Karyoubinga noticed was probably following the other supply line and noticing Garnet A's Stellar Slayer fleet."

Jenny used the beam pointer to trace the outline of the red giant star.

"From here on, there will be some guesswork. I think the fleet headquarters on Sea of the Morningstar probably has reliable information, but we're not supposed to be here, so we can't just casually call them or ask anyone for confirmation. I've pieced together the information that will be researched over the next 120 years, picking out only the parts that suit me, so if I were to tell someone today what I'm saying, they'd probably laugh and say it's full of mistakes, but since it's connected to future history, I believe there can't be any major mistakes."

Jenny switched the display on her hand.

"The information about Garnet A's separate force that the pirate ship noticed from the supply line must have been passed on to Fleet Command. They were free to do whatever they wanted wherever they wanted, but they had to report who was doing what and where, and what the results were, and ask for Fleet Command's instructions if necessary. That was one of the conditions for maintaining a pirate license. And Fleet Command also knew that the Stellar Alliance was preparing a final weapon in addition to the expeditionary fleet. Although the records of battles in space are famous, the Federation of Colonial Stars knew that they could not compete with the Stellar Alliance in terms of frontal strength or economic scale, so they put more effort into information warfare. So they told the pirates that a supernova bomb was being prepared at Garnet A and ordered them to stop it. In response, the pirates are abandoning their original job of supply and commerce warfare and gathering at Garnet A. That's the current situation."

Jenny pointed with the beam pointer to the current location of Odette II, who was moving away from Garnet A.

Clearing her throat, Marika took over the explanation.

"The pirate ships are gathering at the specified coordinates. If they get too close, they'll be spotted by the cruisers and destroyers on high alert, so they're gathering at a distance."

Operating the control panel, Marika switched the 3D display, which had been a close-up of Garnet A, to a star map of the surrounding star system.

"Fleet HQ sent a request for Garnet A to be dispatched to the pirate ships, and their goal was to disrupt the activities of the Stellar Slayer fleet. We were able to confirm the initial gathering coordinates because a message with that exact meaning was found in the communications records from when Odette II was still the White Swan. From communications before and after, we know where the White Swan is and what it's doing."

A murmur-like yell spread across the bridge.

"According to that, the current location of the White Swan is Luiting, which has the nearest supply base on the Stellar Alliance's side. According to the logbook, it will arrive here at Garnet A in two days."

An even louder murmur rose from the club members.

Clapping her hands, Jenny drew the attention of the club members on the bridge to her.

"We pretty much know what's going to happen here from now on. But we don't know what we should do. So I'll explain what we know now. What I want to explain is the Stellar Alliance's war policy."

Jenny threw the beam pointer at the red giant star at the center of the 3D display.

"Thanks to the pirate ships that were in charge of cutting off the supply lines, the expeditionary fleet will soon arrive at Sea of the Morningstar without having to worry about supplies. So why did the Stellar Alliance try to use a weapon that could win without allocating extra forces as a supernova bomb at a time when the expeditionary fleet had reached the star system where the Federation of Colonial Stars's fleet headquarters was located and they were winning as planned?"

Jenny turned off the beam pointer in a dramatic tone and looked around at the faces of the members peering in from all sides on the weightless bridge.

"It's because the Stellar Alliance was thinking of going to war with the Galactic Empire after the War of Independence."

An unannounced alarm cut through the silent bridge. Marika reflexively checked the display around the captain's seat.

"Unconfirmed reaction!"

Chiaki, who was sitting in the radar/sensor seat, called out.

"It's faint, but there's no doubt about it!"

"Unconfirmed?"

Marika confirmed, trying to keep her voice as calm as possible.

"So it's not the colony alliance or the Stellar Alliance?"

"I can't confirm either of the identification signals."

Leaving confirmation by other observation methods to the members of the same radar/sensor seat, Chiaki reported only the conclusion.

"In that case, it can't be the Stellar Alliance."

Marika quickly concluded.

"Garnet A is on high alert, and this is within the Stellar Alliance's airspace. If they're not sending out an identification signal there, then they're definitely the side that doesn't want their identity to be known."

"So, pirates?"

Marika didn't nod.

"Do you want to check it out?"

Lynn, who was in the electronic warfare seat, called out casually.

"Fortunately, the unidentified reaction is farther away from Garnet A than we are. If it's directed outward, it won't be easily noticed even if we fire a radar."

Right now, Odette II is facing away from Garnet A and heading toward the northern sky. There are no warships from the Stellar Alliance in the direction of travel, so there is no need to worry about our presence or position being revealed by receiving the radar even if we fire it. Strictly speaking, there is a possibility that the radar reflected by the target will return to the vicinity of Garnet A and be received, but the possibility and risk are sufficiently low.

"Let's check," Marika said.

"Keep the radar output as low as possible to avoid any complications. Well, from the reaction we've got now, you can't tell the type of enemy, right?"

"The thermal radiation is low and the energy reaction is undetectable, there's no visible wake, and it's probably using optical stealth."

Chiaki projected the image from the maximum optical telephoto lens onto the center of the bridge. Only a single blurred dot of the starry sky in the background was visible.

"There's definitely something out there that doesn't want to be revealed."

Chiaki gave a digest of the information she had.

"With this much information, the scope is too broad to narrow down the type of ship, but it's natural to think that it's a high-powered ship with military specifications."

"Okay. Ready for battle!"

Marika ordered.

"Everyone, return to your posts. We'll continue this discussion after we find out the true identity of the spaceship in front of us."

The members who had been crowding the bridge started to scatter to their posts, raising their voices.

"Shall we use Silent Whisper?"

Jenny in the observer seat asked.

"No."

Marika shook her head.

"We still don't know if it's friend or foe, or what it is. I'd like to keep our secret weapon hidden for now."

The bright spot displayed in the northern sky of Garnet A, which was displayed in 3D in the center of the bridge, remained white, indicating that it was unidentified.

"Even as it is now, Odette II's detection ability is better than the White Swan thanks to the updates. We can win even without Silent Whisper."

"However, I don't think that an enemy that is stealthy will be illuminated easily."

Lynn jumped from her usual electronic warfare seat to the radar/sensor seat and took her seat with the twin-tailed first-year.

"Fortunately, even with only passive, we can roughly determine the enemy's location. Let's narrow the range and focus the beam to roast them all at once."

Quickly preparing the radar firing procedure.

"Not in pulse mode."

Marika instructed after seeing the beam mode of the radar that was transferred to her.

"Let's go with continuous beam."

"Eh?"

Lynn looked up at the captain's seat.

"After the first shot, I was thinking of pulsating it every three seconds to see what would happen."

"Firing a radar with such a low power output is like picking a fight."

The output is not set to maximum, and the radar being prepared for firing is not a high-frequency radar for fire control. However, the output of the radar equipped on the Odette II far exceeds the standard for civilian ships, and is still stronger than that of warships.

"When the radar hits them, they will know that we have noticed them. In that case, it makes no difference whether we turn off the radar or not. What's more frightening is that while the radar is turned off, we will be hit with a counterattack that we can't predict."

"Understood."

Lynn easily changed the firing mode.

"Preparation for firing is complete. We can go anytime."

"Please wait."

Marika looked around the main bridge, where the crew was gathered, and then looked down at the display around the captain's seat.

"As of now, everyone hasn't been deployed yet. Since we've come this far, let's go after we're all ready."

"Well, then, I'll go too."

Lynn swapped seats with the twin-tailed first-year and returned to the electronic warfare seat.

"For now, let's get everything ready and warm up the machine so we can take on the enemy."

"Please keep it moderate."

Marika called out to the electronic warfare seat.

"We don't know what's going to happen here in the future. Don't go all out with your trump card right from the start, okay?"

"I know, I know."

Lynn replied, switching between several settings.

"Unless the enemy has a particularly elaborate reaction, it'll be fine, but if we keep this moving too, we can get more data than just the radar/sensor system. If there's too much data, we won't have time to analyze it."

All of the Odette II ships reported that they were ready. Marika gave the command.

"Let's begin radar illumination."

"Illumination."

Chiaki said briefly.

"We should get a response in 20 seconds..."

Radars fired at the speed of light take a certain amount of time to hit a distant target, reflect, and return. As soon as illumination began, a timer began counting down from 20 seconds.

"It's arrived."

As soon as the countdown reached the 10th second mark, Chiaki muttered.

"Now we just have to wait for it to return... It's here!"

In the exact time that was calculated, the radar lit up the target 3 million kilometers away.

"It's on! Huh?!"

Chiaki, who was about to start analyzing the returning signal, let out a sudden cry.

"It's gone!?"

The target was only visible on the radar for a split second. The signal swelled up as noise immediately after it was detected, then faded and disappeared.

"No, it's stealth."

Lynn said, tapping on the control panel of the electronic warfare seat.

"You've disabled our radar with active stealth!"

"Sensors, continue to focus on observing the airspace in question!"

Marika ordered emergency measures.

"Radar wave, shift to upper position and re-emit!"

"Change frequency and re-emit."

As Chiaki repeated, she switched the radar frequency to a finer one.

"Just to be sure, double the range! Even if it's illuminated, it won't look like the target is still!"

Marika checked the sensor's reaction. No spatial anomaly like a FTL jump could be observed. The countdown timer, which had been reset to zero, decreased in time with the radar's re-emission after changing frequency.

"Change frequency again in 10 seconds."

Without waiting for a reaction, Marika gave her next move.

"From now on, change the frequency every 10 seconds and illuminate the area around the first target. Have you analyzed the first reaction?"

Even if the reaction is only for a moment, if it's recorded, it can be analyzed in any way. However, the twin-tailed girl in the sensor seat shook her head and passed the analysis results to the captain's seat.

"According to the search results, there are no ships on either the Stellar Alliance or the colony planets that match the response."

"Then we'll check all other ships of the Galactic Empire."

The search itself is done by computer.

"That would be so much."

The display that had no search results was now overflowing with data and began scrolling at high speed.

"What!?"

"That's useless."

Seeing the same results from the observer seat, Jenny sighed.

"We got it!"

Chiaki called out.

"It got away so quickly!?"

This time, the computer's response was instantaneous. The bridge crew all shouted out in unison as the ship's name was displayed simultaneously in several places on the bridge.

"Bentenmaru!?"

"Bentenmaru, y'all."

Chiaki repeated, as if to confirm.

"The previous Bentenmaru doesn't have reliable data, but this Bentenmaru matches the data Odette II has."

Marika checked the data that had been passed around to the captain's seat.

Even after becoming a pirate ship, the Bentenmaru has undergone numerous modifications. The ship's form, based on the prototype of a mobile cruiser that was already a second-rate class even during the War of Independence, has not changed, but its appearance has steadily changed due to repairs due to damage and remodeling due to updates.

The Bentenmaru's response matched the latest data from 120 years in the future that Odette II had.

"Gruier!"

Marika called out to Gruier in the radio operator's seat.

"Directional communication, at lowest power, call Bentenmaru under the name of Odette II, Kato Marika!"

"I'm ready."

I don't know how long he'd been preparing it, but Gruier opened a communication channel.

"Directional communication, Captain Kato Marika of the Odette II, calling the Bentenmaru."

Instead of a response, a short message came back. The message, which came back in the name of Misa Grandwood, acting captain of the Bentenmaru, asked the Odette II to illuminate several specified coordinates in rapid succession on the radar.

"Combat in progress."

Judging from the speed of the response and the content of the instructions, Marika immediately ordered Bentenmaru to irradiate the radar in the space specified by the radar. The radar frequency for the target was sent back to Bentenmaru.

"Irradiation will commence," Chiaki announced.

"The radar will irradiate nine blocks of the irradiation area, centered on the first airspace, while changing the frequency every ten seconds."

"First time."

Marika nodded.

"I've told you our frequency and launch timing, so Bentenmaru can catch and analyze the reaction of Odette II's radar."

Normally, a radar emits its own signal and receives the reflected signal. However, if the exact launch timing, position, and frequency are known, the radar waves emitted by other spacecraft can be received by the ship's antenna.

"The angle between Odette II's current position and Bentenmaru's is quite different, but we should be able to get useful data against a stealth enemy."

"Begin irradiation!"

Odette II illuminated the space ahead of it with its radar as soon as it was ready for the first irradiation. After 10 seconds of irradiation, it changed the frequency and illuminated the next set range.

"Who is the enemy?"

While waiting for a response to the first irradiation, Gruier said.

"Is it not the Stellar Alliance?"

"There is currently no notable movement in the Stellar Alliance fleet around Garnet A."

Chiaki, who had gotten there first, reported.

"If our spaceship was being chased by a pirate ship from the Federation of Colonial Stars, there would have been some more movement, but there is nothing."

"But if Bentenmaru is chasing us, then they're not our allies."

Marika saw the message sent under Misa's name. "With this quick response and the mission instructions given without explanation, I'm sure it's our pirate ship."

"It's the Bentenmaru we know. I'm sure."

Marika looked at Gruier who made the assertion.

"What is the basis for saying that you're so sure?"

"There are various communication standards and so on, but the decisive factor is the timestamp in the message from Bentenmaru."

Gruier pointed to the display with a smile. Hearing that, Marika looked again at the time of the message sent under Misa's name.

The time of sending is written into the message. In normal communication, it's not uncommon for there to be a time lag of several seconds to several minutes, and sometimes a completely attenuated communication is received several months or years later.

The time of sending the message sent from Bentenmaru was written in Galactic Standard Time, and the date and time differed from that of Odette II by only a few days.

"Well, if Bentenmaru hasn't reset the galactic standard time, then that means our crew is spending a few extra days here."

Marika looked up in surprise.

"Wait a second, then what about the previous communication with Bentenmaru?"

"Don't worry."

Gruier calmly called up the communication record.

"As you can see, your timestamp is set to the time observed after we arrived here. There is a difference of a few seconds between the timestamp and theirs, but that's not that unusual in our world 120 years from now, so we ignored it."

"As expected..."

After looking back at Gruier, Marika shifted her eyes to the radar response on the display. Four shots had already been fired, but there was no response within the range of the third shot.

"Don't just keep your eyes on the front, keep your eyes on other directions too."

Noticing that everyone on the bridge was paying attention to the radar response, Marika warned them.

"If an attack comes from a direction you're not looking at, you'll be killed instantly."

Hurriedly, the twin-tailed and short-haired girls on either side of Chiaki each began searching in a different direction.

After completing the nine-block irradiation centered on the first airspace, and the time for the last radar response to return, Odette II had not gotten any new responses. Even when the search was expanded in all directions, including Garnet A behind, there were no noticeable responses.

"There are mountains of responses if you remove the filter," Chiaki said while examining the results of the radar irradiation.

"But there aren't enough promising responses to make us want to re-irradiate. What should we do? Should we expand the range a little more, or should we just try illuminating the entire direction of travel?"

"Not yet."

Marika, who was in the captain's seat, shook her head.

"Bentenmaru might have picked up something. Are there any signs of electronic warfare?"

"There's a patrol radar and other things flying around from behind, that is, Garnet A, but I can't see anything in front, including around Bentenmaru. There's a cruiser fleet on patrol nearby, so it's true that they can't accidentally send anything out, but Bentenmaru is probably in passive observation mode, just like us."

If you accidentally ignite normal propulsion near a patrol, they might detect an infrared response. If the source of the spreading infrared light can be traced to the current position of the spaceship.

"Don't move, since Bentenmaru hasn't said anything."

Marika ordered.

"When it comes to combat, they have more experts over there, so if we do anything unnecessary here, we'll just get in the way."

A call sounded on the bridge. Marika swiped her eyes over the communications monitor.

"There's a message from Bentenmaru. This time it comes with a picture."

"Connect."

"Can I take a look?"

"Of course!"

Marika stared at the communication monitor. The noise took the shape of a person. Marika wondered what she would do if someone she didn't know appeared on the monitor.

"*Yes, this is Bentenmaru, Acting Captain Misa Grandwood.*"

Misa appeared on the communication monitor and saluted with a nostalgic look on her face.

"*It's been 120 years, Odette II.*"

"This is Odette II, Captain Kato Marika."

Marika let out a sigh of relief and waved to the other side of the monitor.

"Sorry I'm late. Is everyone safe over there?"

"*Late?*"

Misa looked back at Marika with a slightly surprised look on her face.

"*So, you, not just you, all of you, came here on purpose!?*"

"Yes."

Marika nodded with a smile.

"I've also brought a secret weapon. Um..."

Marika looked around the bridge of Odette II.

"As the captain of Bentenmaru, I'd like to hear from you. First, what's the current situation?"

"*Bentenmaru is tracking an unidentified ship.*"

Misa answered smoothly on the communications monitor.

"*Ah, don't worry, we haven't had any contact with this ship or command. I was worried that we might do something careless and change history, but the fact that you've come here means that at least for now the future hasn't been altered that much.*"

"We came here four days after Bentenmaru went missing from the Tau system."

Marika said, thinking that explaining all that was a pain.

"At least up until that point, I don't think the future has changed much, but, um, the unidentified ship? Wait, what was that thing that disappeared so quickly?"

"*That's it.*"

Misa nodded with a difficult look on her face.

"*An unidentified ship that doesn't seem to be from the Federation of Colonial Stars or the Stellar Alliance. It's not normal that Bentenmaru is chasing it in earnest and doesn't even let her get a hold of its tail.*"

As if realizing something, Misa looked at Marika again.

"*What secret weapon did you bring? Odette II?*"

It can't compare to Bentenmaru in terms of electronic warfare power, but the Odette II, which can use its huge mast as an antenna, has high detection and communication capabilities.

"No, it's even more useful."

Marika cleared her throat, sounding pretentious.

"It's Silent Whisper."

The two ships made contact at a sufficient distance from the pirate ship's gathering coordinates, which were confirmed from the communication records of Garnet A and Odette II's time as the White Swan.

Before making contact, Bentenmaru and Odette II exchanged various information via communication.

Just as Marika had imagined, Bentenmaru was completely swallowed up by the space disturbance that rapidly expanded during the approach investigation, and jumped back in time. Although their current position was confirmed to be in the same star system, the time was completely different.

"If I had known it would turn out like this, I should have listened to the details more thoroughly."

Between the explanations of the facts, Misa said over the communication line.

"Because I never thought that the time travel we were aiming for would happen two or three times."

Marika made excuses apologetically.

"It's not like you'd believe me if I told you."

"Even if I had, I wouldn't have believed you if I hadn't known the situation."

The bridge crew, who had guessed from Marika's words and actions that Odette II had jumped back in time, demonstrated their fearsome emergency response capabilities. The present time is the end of the War of Independence, and the Tau star system is in a state of panic as the expeditionary fleet from the Stellar Alliance is about to arrive, so Bentenmaru, who still has the data and equipment from that time, has no trouble moving around.

When Marika is not around, the command of Bentenmaru is rotated among the bridge crew depending on the situation. When it was determined that the current location was the Tau star system at the end of the War of Independence, the acting captain was transferred from Hyakume to Misa.

"Why Misa?"

"Because it's the most boring time during an emergency."

Misa answered nonchalantly.

"As long as no one gets hurt or falls, it's not a big problem if you don't work. After that, it's about tenure... I guess."

"Tenure?"

Marika looked at Misa suspiciously. Misa quickly changed the topic.

"Unfortunately, none of our crew members have experience with time travel."

"Really?"

"I'm not sure because I don't know everyone's backgrounds, but I've never heard of it. So we all met face to face and discussed what we should do."

"So, what happened?"

"There aren't many options for what to do. First of all, should we take action against the situation in front of us, or just wait and see?"

That was a problem Marika and the members of the yacht club had also struggled with. Misa asked Marika.

"If you've experienced it, I'd like to ask about time paradoxes. How did you decide on that?"

"I thought about how not to deviate from the history that exists now," Marika answered.

"If we do something careless and the Federation of Colonial Stars disappears, or the pirates disappear, we'll be in trouble."

"That's basically the same conclusion as ours. Yes, we know how the War of Independence goes. We don't want to change the outcome. So we decided to wait and see as much as possible. Luckily, our star system is at war, so even if there is a ship that is a little inconsistent, we don't have to worry about being chased as long as we don't take any hostile action that stands out, and we still have the old records. We all agreed that that's why the captain was so concerned about the old records."

"That's why it's so hard to translate the records into something useful."

"So, we agreed to wait and see for the time being, but we're not a pirate ship either. We kept our distance from the Sea of the Morningstar so as not to attract attention, and continued to search the entire sky in case it might be useful. Then we noticed an unidentified ship that wasn't in the records."

Misa stopped explaining there.

"We'll just have to make contact. I've chased them so far and they still haven't let me get a hold of their tail, so I don't want to talk to them on regular communication because I don't know where they might be eavesdropping."

Misa looked back at Marika from the communication monitor.

"I've got something I'd like to ask you."

"What is it?"

"How did you know Bentenmaru was here?"

"Because I left a note."

Marika pointed the Bentenmaru's communication tube, which she had fixed at the foot of the captain's seat since she had nowhere to put it, at the camera.

"And there are two of them. One for the Tau system and one for Antares constellation."

Misa looked at the communication tube held in Marika's hand with a very strange look on her face.

"A communication tube? Is that Bentenmaru's (our) communication tube (Psyborn)?"

Marika nodded exaggeratedly.

"Bentenmaru sent a letter in a bottle to be delivered to the future, and I received it 120 years later."

"...At least since we came here, we haven't released a communication tube, you know?"

Marika nodded again.

"Bentenmaru will release a communication tube in the future. If we forget, the future will change."

Odette II came alongside Bentenmaru.

With the sun sails spread, there is a limit to how close Odette II and Bentenmaru can get. Bentenmaru's reconnaissance ability depends largely on the size of its spread antenna, so it is important to keep the antenna deployed even while it is alongside. For that reason, Odette II and Bentenmaru came alongside each other by docking their extended boarding bridges at the midpoint.

Marika boarded Bentenmaru accompanied by Jenny, Gruier, and Chiaki. Meanwhile, Coorie had boarded the Odette II with his electronic warfare staff and maintenance crew to check on the status of Silent Whisper and other matters.

"Welcome back."

Misa raised her hand as Marika entered the bridge and got off the captain's seat. The entire bridge crew was there, except for Coorie, who had greeted her on the ship's deck.

Marika looked around and saw familiar faces in familiar places, and breathed a sigh of relief.

"I'm glad you're safe."

"It must be tough being the captain of two ships."

Marika shook her head when Gruier said that.

"Stop it, it's impossible to command two ships at the same time!"

"But at the moment, Marika is the captain of Odette II."

"Well, as long as Bentenmaru is operating as a pirate ship, we need Marika to stay."

Marika glared at Misa.

"Misa will continue to be the acting captain of Bentenmaru!"

"Well, that's lonely, won't you stay here?"

"No matter how you look at it, the unarmed solar sail ship is more dangerous! I don't think the current Stellar Alliance army will distinguish between the training ship Odette II and the pirate ship White Swan, and the captain of Odette II wrote it on the flight plan, so I'll be the captain of Odette II until we return!!"

"Yes, yes."

Misa backed down easily.

"It's certainly dangerous to be unarmed on this battlefield. What should we do? Should we put our marines on board in case of emergency?"

In fleet battles, Schnitzer's marines are in charge of shipboard weapons, and are also a powerful force in hand-to-hand combat.

"Oh, that might be good."

Marika looked at Schnitzer in his reserved seat. She didn't want to pull Schnitzer, who was in charge of battle command, from the bridge of the Bentenmaru, but if the Bentenmaru's marines were heavily armed and on board the Odette II, it would be easier to respond to various emergencies, including combat situations.

"If we can get them on board with heavy mobile warfare weapons, we can at least take care of anti-aircraft combat."

Marika shook her head in a panic, imagining marines in powered suits and armored space suits holding anti-aircraft missiles and large-caliber rifles on the Odette II.

"No, no! As the captain, I would never allow our fully armed Marines to board and stay on a girls' school training sailing ship!"

"Really? Our Marines would do a good job."

"Well, you'd better not work at a girls' school."

Kane, who was at the helm, interjected.

"That's worse than retreating from a losing battle."

"Really?!"

"Yes, yes, we won't scare Kane either!"

Marika glanced around at the bridge display.

"The Bentenmaru doesn't seem to be a problem."

Marika turned her eyes back to Misa.

"What is this information about the unidentified ship that you don't want to talk about in regular communication?"

"So, since we ended up in the Tau star system at the end of the War of Independence, we decided to wait and see what was going on as far away as possible from the patrol network that was centered around Sea of the Morningstar."

Misa displayed a star chart of the Tau star system on the main screen.

"Even though we decided to wait and see the situation, that was only the policy in front of us. If we just watched silently, something might happen that we had to do. I was planning to run away if things got bad, but there's no guarantee that we could escape, even if the people we were up against were our ancestors from 120 years ago. I won't know until I'm actually in that situation, but if we need to sink the enemy to survive, that's what I intended to do as the acting captain."

"Isn't Bentenmaru okay?"

When Chiaki asked, Misa shook her head with a smile.

"Fortunately, the Bentenmaru from this era is not in any other star system, but we are still fakes in this era. I don't know if we can get away with it if they ask us for an accurate answer, and we can't go and prove our identity to Fleet HQ. There is not a single crew member from the Bentenmaru from this era on this ship, and there is also another thing: we don't have any records of a fake Bentenmaru being found and investigated or tracked."

"So we can't let ourselves be found out by accident."

"We all agreed that it would be easier and more convenient. But we don't know what would happen if we actually had a battle, and what if the war unfolding before our eyes was different from the one we know. Fortunately, that hasn't happened yet, but we haven't come to any conclusions."

"What if the war was different..."

Misa looked at Jenny as she muttered.

"In the history we know, the expeditionary fleet of the Stellar Alliance that reached the Tau system never attacked the Sea of the Morningstar directly. But if that were to happen, would you just watch silently, or would you fight alongside the Federation of Colonial Stars? It's a difficult question."

"Yes."

Jenny nodded.

"It's an incredibly difficult question."

"No one was worried about returning to the future because there were plenty of options, like cryosleep or a slightly longer detour to travel at the speed of light, but that's why Bentenmaru was assigned to a patrol mission as a volunteer with no reporting obligation. Then, we noticed a spaceship that wasn't on record."

"Is it a spaceship from the Stellar Alliance?"

Jenny asked. Around this time, when the expeditionary fleet was about to reach the Tau system, the Stellar Alliance had sent out several scout ships.

"Then it's simple. If the expeditionary fleet can't get accurate information and prolongs the attack, that's the same as the history we know. But the unidentified ship we noticed had completely different behavior patterns and reactions from the reconnaissance ship of the Stellar Alliance. The Bentenmaru also has a minimum of archived records, and even if we compare them, they don't match the Stellar Alliance's separate unit or forced reconnaissance unit."

"So a spaceship that wasn't from a colony planet or the Stellar Alliance came to the Tau star system?"

Misa nodded when Gruier asked.

"Moreover, there are no records of that spaceship in the Bentenmaru records. Maybe we could find something if we went back to the future and looked into it, but of course that's impossible. But we can speculate on the possibility, right?"

Misa looked around at the faces of Marika, Chiaki, Jenny, and Gruier on the bridge, one by one.

"The development of colonies began before the practical application of FTL engines. Since then, our civilization has had contact with other civilizations many times. The airspace that includes the Stellar Alliance and the colony planet was in the Orion Arm, particularly in the countryside, so it wasn't very frequent, but even so, once the FTL engines became available, the opportunities for contact rapidly expanded, and trade with galactic civilizations began. For example, isn't it true that the FTL engine of Odette II was not made by a colony planet or Stellar Alliance, but by a manufacturer in the Galactic Empire?"

"The manufacturer that made the converter reactor no longer exists, but I have checked the records."

Marika said, looking at the application documents for the change in category of Odette II.

"I don't know how it came to be in that form, and why it is still in use today."

"So what?"

Misa asked, encouraging her to think further. Marika answered as she was told.

"You mean, it wasn't from the Stellar Alliance or the Federation of Colonial Stars, but from the Empire or the frontier?"

"During the War of Independence, the Federation of Colonial Stars shouldn't have had any contact with the Galactic Empire," Jenny said.

"However, I've heard that the Stellar Alliance had some contact with the Empire and had obtained a lot of information."

"Even without contact, it's possible to scout, right?"

Misa spoke in a teacher-like tone.

"The Empire has a policy of non-interference in civil wars, and if it's a civilization that hasn't officially made contact, they probably won't intervene. But if a civilization that can travel faster than light has made contact, even if only partially, it would be possible to gather various information, and even if the Imperial fleet is not directly involved because they put so much effort into intelligence, I don't think they'd ignore a war in the countryside."

Misa looked around at the students' faces again.

"Don't you think we need to confirm?"

"Confirm whether the other party is the Galactic Empire or not..."

Gruier muttered to confirm.

"Yes. If it's the Empire, then there's not much to worry about. But if some criminal organization or pirate is taking advantage of the situation, then that's not the case. At least, in the history we know, there shouldn't be any cases of such lawless people getting involved."

"So, did you track the unidentified ship here to confirm?"

Gruier said to Misa.

"Yes. From the circumstantial evidence, a scout ship with such training and equipment could only be a top-tier Imperial fleet, but we haven't been able to confirm it yet. But if Odette II and Silent Whisper come, we should be able to track the unidentified ship much more efficiently than chasing it with just the Bentenmaru."

"...No."

"Eh?"

"That sounds pretty bad."

Marika looked at Gruier's face as he spoke.

"Why? The Galactic Empire is not an enemy, so why is it bad?"

"If the expeditionary fleet of the Stellar Alliance and the Federation of Colonial Stars only clash in the Tau system, I don't think the Imperial fleet will interfere. But what if the Empire notices that one of the forces is trying to use a supernova bomb here in the Antares constellation?"

Schnitzer groaned.

"What would happen..."

"Supernova bombs are strategic weapons that the opposing Empire and the Periphery have banned even by treaty."

Schnitzer turned around in his seat and spoke in a low voice.

"If a new civilization that is not part of the Rebels or the Empire tries to use it, the Empire will eliminate it by force."

"Oh, so!"

Jenny spoke up.

"So the Galactic Empire will intervene in the War of Independence!"

"No, I don't think that's the case."

Schnitzer's answer was unexpected.

"The problem for the Empire is not the War of Independence, which is classified as a civil war, but the use of supernova bombs, which will burn the surrounding environment to the ground, whether it is a habitable planet or not. If it is a strategic weapon that violates the treaty, the fleet should act quickly and eliminate the threat without waiting for the judgment of the Imperial higher-ups."

"In that case, isn't there a problem?"

Chiaki said nonchalantly.

"If the Empire can eliminate the danger of the supernova bomb, wouldn't that be great?"

"That's not the history we know."

Chiaki gasped at Schnitzer's answer.

"Besides, if a fleet that is non-interventionist in principle intervenes, I don't think the matter will end with just removing the supernova bomb."

"What do you mean?"

Jenny asked Schnitzer. Schnitzer answered calmly.

"The fleet's mission is not just to keep the empire safe. It is also an important mission of the fleet to eliminate dangers to the universe. Would they judge a civilization that tries to use a supernova bomb as one that can coexist with them?"

"In other words..."

Jenny frowned and spoke the predictable conclusion.

"You mean the Stellar Alliance will be taken by the Galactic Empire?"

"I don't think the Galactic Empire would distinguish between the Stellar Alliance and colonies."

Schnitzer said without changing his tone.

"Even if we are fighting a war of independence, from the perspective of the empire, we are the same civilization. Would they take into consideration internal circumstances such as a war of independence between a Stellar Alliance and the colony planets? And would they go easy on a civilization that they judge would not be able to coexist as a result?"

"If we use a supernova bomb, we'll all be wiped out!?"

Schnitzer quietly nodded at Jenny's conclusion, which sounded almost like a scream.

"Even if the supernova bomb wasn't used, the fact that it was attempted may be enough for the Empire."

"And in the history we know, the supernova bomb wasn't used, and the Empire didn't intervene to crush our civilization by force."

Marika looked up, folding her arms and speaking thoughtfully.

"So, is that what we have to do here?"

"What we have to do?"

Chiaki asked again. Marika nodded.

"In the history we know, the Galactic Empire didn't intervene in the battle between the Stellar Slayer fleet and the pirate ships at Garnet A. The pirate ships didn't allow the supernova bomb to be used by the Stellar Alliance."

Marika said, confirming the situation one by one.

"And now, there are spaceships that are not recorded at Garnet A. Just in front of us are two ships, Bentenmaru and Odette II from the future, and three if you include Silent Whisper, and one unidentified ship whose identity is unknown."

Marika looked around at the faces of the bridge crew.

"If something unrecorded and unknown to us occurs, isn't it our job here to make sure it doesn't have an unnecessary impact on the history we know?"

"Eh..."

Looking at Marika's face, and the satisfied faces of the Bentenmaru's bridge crew, Chiaki turned his eyes back to Marika.

"I understand what you're saying, but aren't the victory conditions too complicated? How can we win in this situation?"

"Um..."

After thinking for a bit, Marika spoke.

"First of all, we should avoid interfering in the battles at Garnet A if possible."

"I think it will be difficult."

Marika asked, as Gruier pointed this out with a grim look on her face.

"Why?"

"First of all, emotionally we are on the side of the pirates. Also, we have already made contact with Bentenmaru and provided them with information."

Misa, upon hearing Bentenmaru, gave Marika a strange look. With a look of regret, Marika covered her mouth with both hands.

"No, not this Bentenmaru."

"Not this Bentenmaru, you mean."

Misa realized right away.

"With this Bentenmaru?"

While still covering her mouth with both hands, Marika nodded slightly.

"With the current Bentenmaru, who is on a pirate ship in the War of Independence?!"

Marika nodded again.

"What did you mean by contact? Did you meet the old crew of Bentenmaru?"

"Just a little bit of voice communication."

Marika tried to make excuses in a small voice.

"And then, the data of the Stellar Slayer fleet around Garnet A observed by Odette II."

Staring at Marika's face, who looked away, Misa shook her head.

"Well, what's done can't be helped now. Let's pray that the results don't affect history."

"It should be okay, if it's only that much."

Hyakume, who was tapping on the control panel, said leisurely.

"If the records of communication between us and Odette II around Garnet A during the War of Independence are still in the archives from long ago, doesn't that mean that history wasn't affected?"

Misa gave Hyakume a suspicious look.

"Really?"

"Communication records for two or three days can disappear all at once, or be rewritten later, so I don't think there's anything to be so nervous about, but, um, it's the communication records of Bentenmaru from a little while ago."

"It shouldn't have been a communication with Odette II."

Gruier adds.

"We used the White Swan's ID properly."

"As expected. It must be this guy. A communication record of 129-12-22-0224. The observation data from White Swan is also saved along with it. Don't worry, Captain, the results of the communication are properly recorded on Bentenmaru. That means, at least, it doesn't seem like this communication caused any changes to the future."

"That's good..."

Marika breathed a sigh of relief. Misa turned back to Marika.

"So, you spoke with the crew of the Bentenmaru now?"

"Yes."

Marika nodded.

"The captain of the Bentenmaru when it became a pirate ship, Kato Bunzaemon. He's my great-great-grandfather."

A strange silence filled the bridge.

"Anyway, we must avoid any careless contact with pirates or the Stellar Slayer fleet as much as possible!"

Jenny said.

"If we make contact that's not recorded, we don't know what will happen."

"I think that's a good policy on your side, but the problem is with the unidentified ship."

Misa turned her eyes back to Marika.

"At the moment, we don't know who it is, let alone who it belongs to. Based on circumstantial evidence, we've determined that it's either an Imperial fleet or a spaceship with similar training and equipment, but we can't be sure."

"You have no choice but to not let them intervene and not give them any information, right?"

Marika said.

"It would be a problem if Garnet A went supernova right in front of us, but even if it becomes known that the fleet is trying to make a red giant supernova, there is a possibility that the Galactic Empire will intervene in a way that has never been done before. In that case, what we should do is not only to prevent the Empire from intervening, but also to intercept the unidentified ship so that we can't get any information."

"Are you planning to take on the Empire?"

Marika laughed when Gruier asked to confirm.

"Not at all. The only time you should pick a fight is when you can win against someone you can beat, and only if you're happy about winning. In the current situation, all we can do is to confirm the identity of the unidentified ship, and to prevent it from finding out what is happening here. So, first of all, I think we should intercept them so they can't even carry out reconnaissance missions."

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"I see, so that's the plan."

Coorie, who was in the middle of maintenance and adjustment of Silent Whisper with his crew, answered after hearing Marika's explanation when he returned to the deck.

"I don't mind if you make a decisive shot, but please think of a backup plan in case you miss."

"What if you miss?"

Marika looked at Coorie again.

"Does that mean the ship we're chasing now might not be an Imperial ship?"

"I think it's probably an Imperial ship."

Coorie nodded vaguely with a complicated look on his face.

"I don't think it's possible for an unidentified ship to be pursued from the Tau system to Garnet A without being identified, whether it's the Federation of Colonial Stars or the Stellar Alliance. But we don't know much about the current galaxy. Even in electronic warfare, we only feel like we can win because the Stellar Alliance of this era is the opponent, but if it were an Imperial fleet or a rebel army, we don't know if we could fight it properly, whether it would be easy or difficult, or even if it would even be a fight at all."

"That's..."

Marika blinked at the point that came from a direction she hadn't thought of.

It is said that space combat began the day after spaceships began flying. There is endless debate about which species was the first to fly in space in the galaxy, and about the situation in the universe as a whole, but there is no doubt that combat has a history and accumulation that is as old as space flight.

In the future, 120 years from now, both Bentenmaru and Odette II have a fair amount of electronic warfare capabilities. However, this was the result of constant updates and contact with the former colony extraterrestrial forces after it was annexed by the Galactic Empire. Marika does not know whether their military power, including electronic warfare, was comparable to the Galactic Empire's standards when it was first annexed by the Galactic Empire, or whether they were completely uncompetitive.

"...Coorie, can you check it out?"

Marika blurted out her sudden idea.

"What do you mean?"

Coorie looked at Marika again.

"You want me to check the current Galactic Empire's electronic warfare standards? How?"

"Connect to the Galactic Empire's network."

Marika spoke her ideas one after another.

"The Galactic Empire still uses a FTL network, right? If we can get into the Galactic Network, we can get reliable information about the Empire, right?"

"Well, yeah."

Coorie scratched her messy blonde hair, which she had casually tied up.

"If there was an access point nearby it would be easy to connect, but in this day and age they wouldn't even listen to Bentenmaru's protocol."

"What?"

Marika frowned.

"What do you mean?"

"I wondered if there was anything I could do when I came here, so I gave it a try."

Coorie turned away from Marika for a moment.

"Imperial fleet bases come and go, but I thought that if it was as big as Port Seruna, it would definitely be open for business, so I thought I could connect to the galactic network using FTL communication. But it didn't work. The authentication and everything was completely different 120 years ago, and I couldn't even see the nameplate on the front door."

"You couldn't get into the network?"

"That's what I meant. I was able to confirm that the fleet base in Port Seruna is now under the jurisdiction of the Seventh Fleet, and is a frontline base fighting against the border, and is doing well."

In the world 120 years from now, Port Seruna is the base of the Imperial Fifth Fleet. In 120 years from now, the territory of the Galactic Empire has expanded even further, and the front line of the rebel army, which is in charge of the Seventh Fleet, has moved even further to the border.

"I see, so you need current knowledge not only for electronic warfare, but also to get into the network..."

Marika was deep in thought.

"What do I need to get in?"

"This is still a remote area that is not part of the Galactic Empire, and it will be some time before we are registered with the Galactic Empire and recognized as a spaceship. We are still in the position of savages. It would be easy if we had a valid Imperial bank account."

"An Imperial bank account, huh..."

Marika thought deeply. In 120 years' time, there will be transactions with organizations and companies within the Empire, including the Imperial Fleet and Insurance Association, so there will also be an account under Bentenmaru's name. Marika, who had only known Sea of the Morningstar's local credit union until then, also opened an account at the Central Bank because it was necessary for work.

"There's no way I can use Bentenmaru's account."

"What are you expecting from an account that hasn't even been opened yet? Besides, there's not even a single credit in it."

"What are you talking about?"

Returning to the ship's deck from the boarding bridge where he had been connected, Gruier called out to Marika and Coorie, who were chatting beside the Silent Whispers that were open here and there.

"No, I'm just saying that it would be easier to access the information network of the Galactic Empire if we had a bank account."

"A bank account?"

Gruier tilted his head slightly.

"Yes, we do."

Marika and Coorie exchanged glances.

"Well, a well-established United Kingdom would have at least an account."

"The royal family can freely use a large amount of money at any time in case of an emergency. They have a special account for that purpose at the Imperial Bank."

"Imperial Bank?!"

It was Coorie who exclaimed in abruptly.

"You have an account at an unbranded Imperial Bank that doesn't have a name like First Imperial Bank or Central Imperial Bank or anything like that in it!?"

"We've been doing business with a lot of different places for a long time."

Gruier nodded nonchalantly.

"The Serenity United Kingdom opened an account at the Imperial Bank when it was founded. A special account for the royal family was also opened at that time, and it has been useful countless times since then."

Marika looked back and forth between Coorie, who was gaping at the mouth, and the usual Gruier.

"Is it really that amazing to have an account at the Imperial Bank?"

"The Imperial Bank, the Imperial Bank!"

Coorie waved his hands around frantically, foaming at the corners of his mouth.

"Even though the Galactic Empire is vast, there is only one Imperial Bank with no name and no brand, and it is the Imperial Bank, which is on the same level as an Imperial ministry! The value of the Imperial currency is guaranteed, and the economy of not only the Empire but the entire galaxy, including the borders, is running because the Imperial Bank is doing its job properly! It is impossible to open an account at the Imperial Bank unless you are a nation, so it is crazy to have an account at such a place that you can use freely at your own discretion!"

"Well, it is like a nation."

Gruier gave an ambiguous smile.

"Would you like to use it?"

"Can you use it?"

Marika looked at Gruier's confident face again.

"Um, so in other words, can Gruier use the money in the account now?"

"Of course."

Gruier nodded.

"Since we don't know what kind of emergency situation will occur or what the circumstances are, there are no troublesome restrictions on the use of the dedicated account."

"But, it's a dedicated account for the Serenity royal family, isn't it okay to use it freely?"

"It would be a problem if a third party used it for their own personal gain, but as long as it is used by the royal family at their discretion, there is no problem."

"But, if it is investigated later, various problems will arise."

"No one will investigate."

Gruier's face clouded over slightly.

"Well, that's why we can't say there won't be various problems, and even our royal family's safe is not an inexhaustible source of funds. Is the amount required a large amount?"

"Ah, it's not a big deal at all."

Coorie waved his hands rapidly.

"All you have to do is sign a contract with a suitable provider and open the gate to the information network, so it should cost about the same as a cup of tea."

"In that case, please use it."

Gruier said with a bright smile. Marika and Coorie exchanged glances. Coorie dropped his head, let out an exaggerated sigh, and put one hand on Marika's shoulder.

"Captain, today is the first time I've ever felt that even hell depends on money."

"Um, well..."

"I thought that if I jumped back 120 years, I wouldn't have anything useful to offer, but if I'm the princess of the prestigious United Kingdom, I won't be short of money even if I travel back in time. What in the world is happening on this planet?"

"Really, the security of a strong nation is designed to make do with minor historical constraints."

Marika patted Coorie back on the shoulder.

"It's a blessing that Gruier is on our side. Thank you Gruier, I'm not in a position to be picky about my methods, so I'll use whatever I can."

"Yes, please make use of me."

Gruier pulled back one leg and greeted the princess as she lowered her hips slightly.

"Coorie, keep a record of how much you spent on what. I'll pay you back later."

"Whether it's the Imperial Bank or the royal family, it's best not to promise to pay back the money you borrow."

Coorie spoke in his usual tone.

"If we say 120 years from now, how much will the interest have ballooned to?"

"In that case, let's pay back the money we spent to Gruier right away."

Marika smiled.

"Is that okay?"

"No one will complain if the money spent from the account is returned to our pockets."

Gruier nodded.

"Shall I go first? Or should I wait until I finish my work?"

Coorie looked back and forth between Gruier and Marika. The answer came immediately.

"Let's go first. The sooner we get the information, the better."

Coorie came to the bridge of Odette II with Marika and the others, and sat down with Gruier in the radio operator's seat and began preparing to connect to the information network.

The Galactic Empire has built a powerful information network throughout its territory as a public facility. The network was first developed as an academic network, then for military use, and after FTL communication became practical, it has been maintained and operated as an information network connecting the entire galaxy.

It is said that the network that can share information simultaneously throughout the entire galaxy has changed the galaxy more than FTL navigation itself. FTL theory made it possible for information to travel faster than light along with people and goods. The information network connecting the entire Galactic Empire made it possible to share the latest information anywhere in the universe without the trouble of maintaining and operating FTL spaceships.

Due to the nature of sending information through hyperspace, FTL communication requires much more energy and specialized equipment than normal communication. FTL communication is affected by spatial conditions, just like FTL navigation, so constant connections are limited to relay stations, space cities, and large ships with ample power output.

If the star systems that had undergone the War of Independence were annexed by the Galactic Empire 120 years later, there would be many access points that were constantly connected to the network via hyperspace communication. However, now at the end of the War of Independence, the Orion Arm, which includes Cetacean and Antares, is not part of the Galactic Empire, and of course there are no access points that are constantly connected to the network.

Coorie had guessed that a relatively close node that was always connected to the network was Port Seruna, which was maintained and operated as an Imperial fleet base. Unfortunately, however, he was unable to set up FTL communication to Port Seruna using the phone book from 120 years in the future that Bentenmaru had.

With the help of Gruier, the princess of the Serenity United Kingdom who has an account at the Imperial Bank, Coorie first tried to set up a FTL line to the bank branch that should be in Port Seruna.

"As expected, moneylenders have a low barrier to entry even for communication facilities."

Unlike the last time when he knew the exact coordinates of Port Seruna but couldn't even set up an internet connection, the communication settings for the Imperial Bank branch were completed so easily that Coorie was sometimes puzzled.

"Even Bentenmaru had a communication system and standard that had been used since it was annexed by the Empire, so I tried it, but it didn't connect properly. When you're in the customer service business, you can handle anything even if it doesn't match the standard a little. I wonder if it will even receive and respond to ancient analog signals."

"Can you use such antique signals for FTL communication!?"

Lynn, who had come to the radio operator's seat to help, spoke up.

"When it comes to FTL communication, you can't know where it will affect you until you actually try it, so I thought it was common sense that it would be at least digital."

"I'm surprised too. If they can handle analog FTL communication, not only do they have a very flexible system, but they can automatically analyze and do something about unregistered, unknown standards."

"Wow..."

Lynn shook her head.

"That's some incredible technology. I don't want to go to war with a place that has that sort of setup at just a reception desk."

"I'm not going to start a war this time."

Coorie banged away on the keyboard of the control panel, then looked up.

"Connected. Can you authenticate me, Gruier?"

"Yes."

Gruier took the place of Coorie who had just left the room, and sat down in the radio operator's seat. He smoothly typed in a long random number into the standard authentication screen.

The screen changed. "Good."

Gruier muttered to herself.

"That's a question I can answer."

Marika, who had been looking away from Gruier during the authentication, couldn't help but ask.

"Eh?"

"To use a special account, you need not only a PIN number, but also questions to confirm that you are a member of the royal family."

Gruier ran her fingers over the keyboard.

"The full name of the first prince of the United Royal Family, without any abbreviations. He is Grand Duke Shimsiel, my grandfather."

Gruier typed out the long name with a bit of joy.

"Obviously, he's not Grand Duke now, so I have to be careful not to get the title wrong."

Gruier quickly tapped the authentication key. The string of characters that had hopped the FTL line was restored and authenticated by the mainframe of a bank branch at a space base far, far away.

"Yes, we're connected."

Gruier looked up with a grin.

"What do we do now?"

"Connecting to the galactic network?!"

Hyakume spoke up after hearing about the wired connection of Odette II from the bridge of Bentenmaru.

"That's quite a sneaky trick you've come up with. But can we really connect to the galactic net with the equipment we have now?"

"We got Gruier's help and used a lot of sneaky tricks."

On the communications monitor, Marika stuck out her tongue. Hyakume nodded in understanding.

"Well, with that princess there, most tricks would work. So, did it connect?"

"Right now, Coorie is setting up Odette II to connect to the network. Ah, it's connected."

Coorie in the radio operator's seat continued setting up the information network while explaining to Lynn and Gruier. Marika looked down at the settings screen displayed on the captain's seat.

"The access point is currently Port Seruna, the Seventh Fleet's frontline base."

"I know it's an old base, but I see, that's how things are now."

Hyakume muttered with deep emotion.

"But after 120 years, military companies have come here and economic activity has been brisk, so can we really connect to the galactic net so easily through a frontline base?"

"You'll probably complain a lot when you get back there, Coorie, so just listen to me. It seems that Port Seruna's size as a military port hasn't changed much, so there are a lot of companies just trying to maintain it. There are also providers that provide networks with counterintelligence guarantees in complete secrecy for these private sector bigwigs."

"Even in ancient times, the snake knows the snake's way."

Hyakume shook his head in amazement.

"But with such a high-end provider, the contract fees and usage fees seem like something you don't want to think about..."

"That's where the Serenity United Kingdom's Royal Family account at the Imperial Bank comes in handy."

"An Imperial Bank account, huh?"

Hyakume opened his mouth like an idiot.

"What kind of thing do you have? But can the future Seventh Princess use it in a place like this?"

"Yes, you can."

Marika nodded as if convincing herself.

"It's an account reserved for the royal family, and for emergencies, so as long as you can confirm that it's a royal account, you don't need to verify your identity. Having a private account at the Imperial Bank is pretty powerful, isn't it? As soon as they confirmed it, a live operator came out as a concierge and prepared all the necessary arrangements according to our requests."

"Seriously?"

Hyakume put his hand to his head in exasperation.

"Captain, are you aware that you're dealing with something outrageous?"

"I really do think that I'm lucky that they're not our enemy. So, if we borrowed the necessary expenses from the United Kingdom and tried to settle the debt in 120 years, the interest alone would bankrupt Bentenmaru."

"Yeah, that would be a lifelong commitment."

"To prevent that from happening, I'm thinking of paying back the money I spent to Gruier right away. I think Coorie will bring back the exact amount, so please prepare it in Bentenmaru's safe."

Not just pirate ships, but spaceships that don't know what kind of situation they might encounter anywhere in the galaxy keep cash in their safes that can be used immediately.

"Okay, I'll leave the safe open."

Hyakume answered while scratching his cheek.

"I hope the bill is something our coffers can handle."

"I appreciate the Imperial Fleet's tradition of open information."

Although it is quite different from the familiar 120-year-later design, searching the Seventh Fleet's website, which is displayed in standard language, is not confusing. Coorie easily found the information he was looking for.

"Now I can easily find out where the ships of the Seventh Fleet, which is responsible for the borders, are doing and what they are doing."

One of the reasons for the existence of the Imperial Fleet is the long-standing tradition of gunboat diplomacy. The First to Sixth Numbers Fleets, which are responsible for the Empire's territory, publish all of their main forces and where they are doing.

The Seventh Fleet, which is essentially at war with the rebel forces on the borders that do not submit to the Empire, is no exception. With the exception of cases where the purpose of their operations must be kept secret, most of the ships in the fleet are published, including where they are in the galaxy and why.

"It's probably not detailed enough to be useful if you were planning to deploy an interceptor fleet in an actual war with the Imperial Fleet, and it probably isn't accurate enough."

Coorie downloaded data on the latest status of the Imperial Seventh Fleet, which was stored in several parts on the information server at Port Seruna, to Odette II.

"Is that all just data!?"

Lynn's eyes widen at the amount of data sent over the FTL line.

"Even so, this is limited to ships belonging to the Seventh Fleet."

The Imperial Fleet classifies and manages spaceships by size, from smallest to largest: spacecraft, spaceship, spaceship, and spaceship. Spaceships are frontal combat forces, and everything else is spaceships. "We don't know where the unidentified ship was before the star system it was in, or where it's going after Antares, but we can at least tell that it's a spaceship large enough to travel long distances without resupply. Unless it's a special service ship on a top-secret mission that's not on the list, it should be among them."

Coorie quickly began to analyze the downloaded data.

Marika timidly called out to Coorie.

"Um, just for reference, I'd like to ask, how many spaceships does the Seventh Fleet have in total?"

"Probably several million."

Marika looked back at Coorie who had casually spoken out that ridiculous figure.

"What!?"

"Unlike other Numbers Fleets, the Imperial Seventh Fleet covers the entire frontier as its airspace. That means it has to cover an airspace one or two orders of magnitude larger than the others, and the number of ships it has is one or two orders of magnitude larger."

"A fleet of several million ships...how do you command it?"

"It's not like you're sending all of your fleets at one target. Also, it's limited to the Seventh Fleet's ships that can travel faster than light, so it's only in the order of several million, but if you include aircraft carriers and communication boats, the total number should probably be two orders of magnitude higher."

"Haa..."

Marika sighed.

"Space is so vast."

"We can manage if we don't try to deal with everything at once. There's no need to check the destinations of millions of ships. We can just check the Seventh Fleet ships that are currently in the Antares constellation."

After confirming that Odette II's download mainframe had absorbed all the data, Coorie began a conditional search. What Imperial ships are currently operating in the Antares constellation?

"Huh?"

Unexpectedly, Coorie looked at the display again. The latest data on the Imperial Seventh Fleet published by Port Seruna showed that there were no ships from the Seventh Fleet currently operating in the Antares constellation.

"Maybe they don't at least report their current location regularly."

Muttering to himself, Coorie relaxed the search criteria. He expanded the date and time setting from today to three days ago.

No search results.

"Huh?"

I tried specifying a star system from more than four days ago. No search results.

"Huh? Is something really wrong?"

Thinking that I might have set it wrong, Coorie tried specifying a star system near Port Seruna. Fountainbrow training airspace.

A list of ship names from about two fleets appeared on the display.

"Is it not my fault...?"

Coorie changed the search conditions back.

Even after changing the search conditions in various ways, I could not find any ships belonging to the Imperial Fleet currently operating in the Antares constellation.

I expanded the search conditions to the entire Orion Arm and the time period to about a week, and finally several ships came up in the search results. Coorie checked the current location of each spaceship one by one and shook his head.

"Captain Marika."

Coorie reported while tapping on the control panel at high speed.

"I will report the results of the search, tentatively. Based on the published data on the Seventh Fleet, there is no ship that fits the description. In other words, the unidentified ship we are currently pursuing may not be a vessel of the Imperial Seventh Fleet."

The bridge was silent. All that could be heard was the constant clicking of Coorie's keys.

After reviewing the results of Coorie's search once more, Marika looked up.

"You're saying it's not an Imperial warship?"

"The data we're checking now is from the Seventh Fleet, which has been made public. We haven't ruled out all possibilities yet, so we can't say for sure, but at the very least, the Seventh Fleet has not deployed a powerful fleet to the Orion Arm, including the Antares constellatioc."

"Is it possible that it's a warship other than the Seventh Fleet?"

"I won't deny it, but it's unlikely. Unless there's some special reason, the Imperial Numbers Fleet never leaves its airspace. And as far as the military's official website is concerned, there has been no publicity indicating that the Numbers Fleet, whose airspace is within the Empire, has left the Empire."

Coorie pulls up information one after another from the network.

"I've only looked at the official site, so it's possible that a special ship that hasn't been made public is conducting a top-secret mission, but I think that possibility is low enough to be ignored."

"If you don't mind, could you tell me why you think so?"

"Because, in the past and now, the Orion Arm is an airspace that has no significant strategic or resource value to the Empire."

Coorie answered bluntly while tapping on the control panel.

"If this was a strategic point on the route or had special mineral resources, interstellar civilizations would contact us even if we didn't say anything. Neither the Stellar Alliance nor the colonized planets have been invaded by significant alien civilizations, and even now, while we are fighting the War of Independence, our relationship with them is limited to economic activities, because in our countryside, there isn't much that would be a problem if taken, and there isn't much that would be a joy to take."

"I know that."

Marika sank into the captain's seat with an unpleasant look on her face.

"There's no need to say that so clearly."

"An accurate understanding is necessary for an analytical evaluation."

Coorie answered in an expressionless voice.

"The Orion Arm has never been an important place to the Empire, and never was. No, not now, but after we join the Empire, they might consider us an important part of the Empire, but now that we're fighting the War of Independence, I don't think the Empire would care about us unless there's some special reason."

"If they're investigating whether a remote interstellar nation that's not under the Empire's influence might use a supernova bomb."

"In that case, the Imperial fleet has no reason to keep it a secret."

Coorie said without lowering the pitch of his tapping on the control panel.

"At the moment, neither the Stellar Alliance nor the colony planets have much contact with the Empire. Even if the Seventh Fleet sent a research vessel to unexplored airspace to gather information, there's nothing to be gained by treating it as classified. In fact, there are plenty of research vessels and fleets sent to remote areas outside the Orion Arm."

Coorie displayed the results of a search with only a few changes to the conditions. The number of results sky rocketed.

"The Seventh Fleet has published information on how many research ships are dispatched to which airspace. There should be no reason to conceal the dispatch status of research ships to the Orion Arm."

Marika stared at the search results on the display. She couldn't think of a valid counterargument.

"If the ship we're chasing isn't the Seventh Fleet, then where is it and what is it?"

"I'll look into that now."

Coorie didn't drop his tempo as he tapped on the control panel.

"Flight plans are published by the control station, now and always. I'll use the flight plans submitted to the control station at Port Seruna to identify any Imperial spaceships currently in this area."

"Please."

Marika thought for a moment and asked.

"Is it possible that the unidentified ship is not an Imperial ship but a spaceship from the frontier?"

"I won't deny it, but I think it's unlikely."

A flight plan was sent over from the control station.

"The data we've obtained so far on the unidentified ship is limited, but the pattern of the FTL jump and the few reactions match those of the Imperial spaceship Bentenmaru has. There are of course many examples of spaceships on the frontier that use engines and hulls from Imperial companies, but I can't think of any reason why they would go out of their way to investigate this area, which has little strategic value."

"Well, there's probably a reason over there, so I won't go into that too much here."

Marika looked around the displays around the captain's seat. She checked their current location.

"Um, isn't the unidentified ship an Imperial fleet? What should we do?"

"Think about it."

Coorie said coldly.

"The reason we were chasing the unidentified ship with the Bentenmaru is because it's something that doesn't appear in the history we know. Even now, when we can connect to the Empire's net and get information, the situation hasn't changed. If we knew who it was, we'd decide how to deal with it, but the fact that there's an enemy there that we have to deal with hasn't changed."

Spaceships navigating the Empire submit flight plans to the control station. Flight plans are shared among all control stations and are used to ensure the safety of spaceships and their routes.

The orbital control situation in the Empire wasn't much different from what Marika and the others knew 120 years later. The flight plan standards had changed slightly, and the data for flights into airspace without designated airspace lanes was quite rough. But it should still be enough to know which spaceships were where and why.

Port Seruna, the base, was also the control station in charge of the largest airspace in the surrounding airspace. The central part of the Orion Arm, which is outside the Empire's territory, is also set as part of its airspace.

When an Imperial spaceship makes an interstellar flight, it is required to submit a flight plan to the control station. A spaceship flying in the Orion Arm has its flight plan submitted to the Port Seruna control station, and this flight plan is supposed to be shared with other control stations.

However, the data released by the Port Seruna control station did not reveal any spaceships that should currently be in the Orion Arm.

Coorie further utilized the network to find out the latest status of the Imperial fleet deployed in the border airspace centered on the Orion Arm, the independent star defense forces and star system armies, invasion companies, military companies, transport companies, and spaceships registered for private or personal use.

"No ships?"

Marika stared at the display, feeling as if she was being deceived by the information from the network that should have been the most reliable.

"I don't know if the unidentified ship is intentionally concealing its identity or if our investigation is just off the mark, but that's how it is."

Coorie stopped tapping on the control panel almost nonstop and looked at Marika in the captain's seat.

"That's dangerous."

"That's right..."

At first, Marika just nodded at the sign she heard, but then she realized what it meant and nodded again.

"I never thought there would be a spaceship here whose identity we couldn't figure out after going this far. This means that we don't just have to intercept the unidentified ship, we have to clearly identify its identity."

"I agree."

Coorie floated up from the radio operator's seat.

"Honestly, I didn't feel like we were chasing such a dangerous spaceship. It was the end of the War of Independence, but I thought it was strange that we couldn't even get a hold of it, even though we were chasing it with the Bentenmaru, which should have had much more advanced equipment than we do now."

Marika thought for a moment and asked.

"Didn't you think it was a dangerous spaceship?"

Pirate ships deal with a variety of spaceships. It's not uncommon for them to be asked to do business with luxury cruise ships, conduct exercises with the Imperial fleet or the star system army, or investigate unidentified spaceships.

Because a pirate ship deals with a variety of spaceships, the crew's experience accumulates at a pace that would be unthinkable for fleet, military, or liner service. The crew's feel and senses are also sharpened by various cases.

After thinking for a moment, Coorie answered.

"It is a threat in terms of performance. However, at least since we started tracking it, I haven't sensed any hostility from the unidentified ship that would try to sink us. It seems to prioritize not being detected, and then gathering information."

"Information gathering, huh..."

Sinking deep into the captain's seat, Marika muttered.

"It's not a Stellar Alliance or Federation of Colonial Stars, it's an information gathering ship."

"And it's a pretty capable spaceship, too."

Staying suspended in the air of the bridge, Coorie stared intently at Marika and said.

"I didn't sense any hostility or intent to attack, but I did sense the military power to do so. It may not be an Imperial fleet, but I believe they are equipped with sufficient military power."

"Is it an armed intelligence gathering ship...?"

"It's dangerous."

"I agree."

Marika nodded.

"As soon as we can use Silent Whisper, we will continue to track the unidentified ship."

Marika looked around the bridge.

"And so, the next job has been decided. Odette II will work with Bentenmaru to track the unidentified ship and confirm its identity. Uh..."

Marika turned her eyes back to Coorie.

"The plan is the same as what we discussed back at Bentenmaru, is that okay?"

"I think it'll be fine."

Coorie started moving towards the center shaft.

"We'll deploy the highly maneuverable Bentenmaru and Silent Whisper with Odette II at the center, spread the patrol net widely, and wait for the next unidentified ship to be caught, right?"

"That's it."

Marika touched the control panel.

"It seems preparations for Silent Whisper are finished, so is it okay to leave it to them?"

"I'll take care of it."

As she drifted out into the center shaft, Coorie turned to the bridge.

"Is it okay if someone from Odette II doesn't board Silent Whisper?"

"Stop it!"

Marika replied almost screaming.

"This spaceship is already in trouble because we don't have enough people. There's no crew to assign even one or two to Silent Whisper."

"Okay. Leave the center to us then."

Waving her hand, Coorie kicked the wall as she returned to the ship's deck.

"Marika?"

When Jenny called out to her, Marika turned to the observer's seat.

"What is it?"

"Can I get the data from the Port Seruna control station?"

"Sure."

Marika tilted her head. The information currently available should be accessible even in space 120 years from now.

"What are you going to do?"

"There's something I'm curious about."

Jenny started tapping on the control panel.

"I've looked into the movements of spaceships from the Stellar Alliance and colony planets at the end of the War of Independence, but I'm also looking for data on spaceships from the Galactic Empire that we haven't made contact with yet. All the spaceships that should be in this area. I thought that if we added data from outside, we might be able to see things that we haven't seen before, like who is where and what they're doing."

"Please."

Marika nodded slightly.

"It's not that I don't trust Coorie's analysis, but please let me know if you notice anything new."

"Of course."

After undocking with Bentenmaru, Silent Whisper departed from Odette II.

Silent Whisper was accompanied by one pilot from Bentenmaru so that Coorie could focus on operating the electronics.

A small fleet of two ships and one boat deployed a patrol network in search of an unidentified ship that must be somewhere around Garnet A.

Silent Whisper and Bentenmaru were deployed around Odette II, which has excellent exploration and communication capabilities but is not maneuverable and has no onboard weapons. If there is an opportunity for direct contact, Bentenmaru, which has excellent maneuverability and is the only one capable of frontal combat, will take the lead.

Search efforts will be focused on the northern sky, with Garnet A at the center. The last reaction that seemed to be from an unidentified ship was in the northern sky, and even after that, no spatial anomalies such as energy radiation or gravity quakes associated with a FTL jump have been observed. Therefore, the Bentenmaru side predicted that the unidentified ship was still cruising in the northern direction of Garnet A and would appear again.

"*It would be a different story if the unidentified ship could jump and disappear without prejump phenomena or gravity quakes.*"

While checking the lines to ensure smooth data transmission, Hyakume told Marika via image communication.

"*If we're up against such an incredible spaceship, then it was a mistake to have taken on them in the first place. I don't mean to underestimate them, but I've assumed the enemy's capabilities to be within the limits of what we can handle.*"

"I see..."

Marika pondered, her expression troubled.

"If the enemy is unidentified, that means there's a chance that it's a terrible enemy that we can't have anticipated."

"*It's not like it's an unexplored universe full of out-of-place artifacts and the occult, and so far we haven't had a chance to figure out what the enemy is doing, so I think it's okay.*"

"But if even Bentenmaru can barely chase them, they might be able to easily escape if they feel like it."

"*It's true that it's more advantageous to flee than to chase, but thanks to the reinforcements, our forces have tripled. If possible, I'd like to use this force to send pirate reinforcements to the Stellar Slayer fleet.*"

Hyakume glanced outside the communications monitor.

"*If we did that, history would change, so we can't do it openly.*"

The patrol network deployed by Bentenmaru and Silent Whisper, centered on Odette II, also covers the star system centered at Garnet A.

The positions of the Stellar Alliance, centered on the Stellar Slayer fleet, and the status of the gathering pirate fleet are displayed on the display with an accuracy that was not possible for either party to know at the time of the War of Independence.

"With this data, we will do different things..."

After thinking for a moment, Marika turned her eyes back to the communication monitor.

"Misa, are you there?"

"*What is it?*"

Misa appeared on the communication monitor.

"Um, I asked Coorie, but what kind of enemy do you think the Bentenmaru crew thinks the unidentified ship they're chasing is?"

"*What kind of enemy?*"

Misa tilted her head. Marika continued her explanation.

"*They're the ones fleeing without leaving any traces that make it hard to guess their true identity, even though they're serious about Bentenmaru. We've only seen a glimpse of their radar reaction, but Bentenmaru has made contact several times. Surely our crew can at least get a feel for what kind of opponent they are?*"

Marika stared at Misa's face through the communication monitor.

"Even without fighting, Coorie thought that the enemy had fighting power. He doesn't intend to use it at the moment, but he has that power. Do you share Misa's opinion? I wonder if Schnitzer feels the same way."

"*I want to hear those impressions.*"

Misa answered with a look of understanding.

"*I don't know how much combat power the unidentified ship has because I haven't actually fought it, but I agree that it would have at least enough power to take on the Bentenmaru.*"

After thinking for a moment, Misa continued.

"*What I felt from that ship wasn't power or hostility, but confidence. They had a clear purpose, and they knew what they had to do to achieve it, and they were carrying out their mission. It's weird because I don't know anything about their mission or purpose, but I was confident that they had the ability and intelligence to do it.*"

"Have you ever had a similar impression before?"

"*Yes.*"

Misa answered simply.

"*I get that impression from the flagship class Imperial fleets that we practice with. And I sometimes get that impression from cruisers that have a lot of combat experience and are well trained. But who are we facing this time?*"

After thinking for a bit, Misa said.

"*If you ask me what their unshakable self-confidence resembles, I'd say it's more like a bureaucratic organization than the military.*"

"Bureaucratic organization?"

Marika repeated what she hadn't expected.

"*Right. That feeling is similar to a government office or a ministry, a public organization that has been constructed as firmly as possible using all its cunning.*'

Misa stuck out her tongue.

'*I think I'm probably the only one on the Bentenmaru who gets that impression. What are you going to do? Are you going to ask the crew for feedback and profile the enemy?*'

'Profiling is one thing, but I think we should probably think about how to find out the enemy's true identity.'

Marika answered with a lack of confidence.

'Since our forces have increased, I think we can corner the unidentified ship as it is. But I feel like if we don't think about how to expose its true identity after cornering it, it might escape while we're thinking of how to respond.'

Surprisingly, Schnitzer's impression of the unidentified ship was that it was 'not hostile.' He felt like it was avoiding combat situations more than it was trying to find out its true identity. At the same time, they would have a certain fighting force to achieve their objectives, but that doesn't seem to be a problem for the person in charge of battle command.

Hyakume saw the unidentified ship as a veteran with many battles under his belt. He said that they were particularly good at running away.

"*The fact that it kept creeping up despite knowing it was being watched means that it was confident in its ability to escape. Somehow, this behavior pattern doesn't seem like that of a warship.*"

Luca had determined that the unidentified ship was an Imperial research vessel.

"That's why there's no ship that fits the description in either the Seventh Fleet information from Port Seruna or the data from the control bureau."

"*The Orion Arm is currently outside the Empire's territory, and we're not required to submit flight plans to the control bureau. No one will complain if we fly without submitting a flight plan.*'

'There's no way a fleet ship would fly without orders or plans.'

'*Then it's probably not a fleet ship.*'

Sighing, Marika asked.

'So what do you think that ship is here for, Luca?'

'*It's just looking at us for fun.*'

'Eh?'

Marika couldn't help but ask again.

'That's all?'

'*That's all.*'

The patrol network deployed on the northern side of Garnet A brought in a huge amount of data as soon as it was fully operational after completing its adjustments. The most powerful information processing device is Silent Whisper, which is equipped with the latest, ultra-fast, large-capacity computer. The data observed at the three locations of Bentenmaru, Odette II, and Silent Whisper is first collected and processed by Silent Whisper via a set, always-on data line, and then sent to Odette II and Bentenmaru.

The patrol network deployed on the northern sky side of Garnet A is a scaled-down and improved version of the one that a pirate fleet including Bentenmaru and Odette II had once set up on the frontier. Unlike the last time, when many spaceships were on the move searching for enemies, this time the scan was in a fixed airspace, so the accuracy of the observations was high.

There are many ways to detect artificial flying objects, such as spaceships, in the vastness of space. If it is propulsion, the infrared reaction from the jet flame leaves a long tail, and if it communicates or uses radar, electromagnetic waves are emitted. Activity generates heat, and if it jumps faster than the speed of light, space also distorts.

If the patrol airspace was filled with radar, the accuracy of the observations would increase, but Odette II had reasons for not being able to take an active exploration stance.

If we fired radar from our side, it would be detected not only by unidentified ships but also by the pirate fleet that was gathering on the northern sky side. Since there are no records of reinforcements from the future in the battle records of Garnet A, the pirates must not be made aware of the presence of Bentenmaru, Odette II, or Silent Whisper from the future.

The deployed patrol network not only showed the movements of Garnet A's Stellar Slayer fleet, but also the movements of the gathering pirate fleet in detail.

Despite the designated assembly point, the pirate ships moved on their own. According to the records, the first to arrive at the Antares constellation was Captain Kato Bunzaemon's Bentenmaru, followed by Count Destro's Karyoubinga.

"Pirate ships aren't busy either," Jenny said as she looked at the pirate ships around Garnet A, which were not even fully prepared, let alone ready, despite the first fleet battle with the Stellar Slayer fleet being held tomorrow.

"I mean, right now, when the final battle against the expeditionary fleet in the Tau system is drawing to a close, there's not a single ship in the Federation of Colonial Stars that's idle. Even without onboard weapons, there's still plenty that can be done if you can fly, so all the ships that can go are heading to the Tau system, and the pirate ships that have been called to gather at Garnet A are all on missions, so they're in the middle of finishing the work in front of them as a bonus on the way. Even Bentenmaru is busy scouting the power of the Stellar Slayer fleet, even though Odette II gave them the location data for the Stellar Slayer fleet."

"The Stellar Slayer fleet is also in the middle of construction work directly above the red giant to build a system for the supernova bomb."

Lynn answered.

"People in the old days were really hardworking."

Laughter rippled through the bridge of Odette II. Gruier, who didn't laugh, said.

"The fate of the planet depends on it."

As a result of the interceptions since arriving at Garnet A, the Stellar Slayer fleet's communications can now be received with a high degree of accuracy. However, it was only a replay of what was recorded.

"I think the Stellar Alliance's spaceship and the Federation of Colonial Stars 's pirate ship are aware of this and are doing their job accordingly."

"We have to protect both the Stellar Alliance and the Federation of Colonial Stars, so it's tough."

The information they have obtained is not just the location information of the Stellar Slayer fleet and the pirate ships. They have also succeeded in intercepting communications that are encrypted and directional to prevent eavesdropping, and are mostly written to reduce communication time.

Even 120 years ago, encrypted communications are not something that can be easily deciphered. Both the Bentenmaru and Odette II have records of communications between the Federation of Colonial Stars and pirate ships from that time, and the decryption keys were also recorded at the same time, so they can intercept with the same accuracy as their allies.

"And what's more, he's told not to reveal his true identity. I can really understand the feelings of the hero of justice in the story."

Marika glanced over the list of intercepted communication records.

"Same as usual."

Gruier updated the communication records displayed on the captain's seat.

"Captain, you shouldn't read the text. If you see the faces of those pirates now, your judgement will definitely be impaired."

"Yes, yes."

Leaving the confirmation of communications to Gruier, Marika scrolled through the communication list, which only had a plain title and the sending and receiving ships. At the moment, only the Bentenmaru, the Karyoubinga, and a few others had arrived at Garnet A, and although she knew that more and more pirate ships were arriving, there weren't many familiar names.

During the War of Independence, the planet Tau issued privateer licenses to civilian ships to increase its military strength, and the total number of privateer licenses reached several hundred across the entire Federation of Colonial Stars. Although not all of them continued to operate from the start of the War of Independence until its end, at its peak, the number of pirate ships participating reached three digits. The pirate ships gathering at Garnet A, the final battlefield, are survivors of the War of Independence.

"There will only be a handful of these pirate ships left in 120 years."

Marika looked at the names of the pirate ships scheduled to gather on the list. There were many names she didn't know. Marika didn't know how many of them gave up their privateer licenses after the war, how many chose to live as pirates, and how many changed jobs or went out of business over the years.

"There is a prejump phenomenon on the northern sky side."

Chiaki from the radar/sensor seat announced.

"Allies. The Black Swan, a pirate ship."

Marika stared at the name of the pirate ship at the top of the updated list. Among pirate ships that operate independently, the Black Swan excels in command and communication, and has achieved remarkable results in trade wars by attacking the expeditionary fleet's supply lines.

The Black Swan's name is a counterpoint to the sun-sailed White Swan, but its original form is a highly maneuverable cruiser. It was one of the seven pirate ships that were first issued privateering licenses by the Federation of Colonial Stars, and is highly trusted by its fellow pirates.

According to information from the Starry Sky Fleet Command, it was certain at this point that the Stellar Slayer fleet's goal was to set off a supernova bomb. The Stellar Slayer fleet itself, which is mainly made up of work ships, is not a significant fighting force, but the cruiser fleet that serves as escort has sufficient numbers and strength. For this reason, it was expected that the pirate ships would have to move as a fleet, and a command system for fleet operation had been established through prior meetings using FTL lines.

The reason why the Black Swan was chosen as the command ship for this battle, which would be the pirate fleet's first fleet battle, was simple. It was one of the few purely military ships in the pirate fleet, which was dominated by civilian ships, and it had the thickest armor of all the pirate ships participating in this battle.

Thick armor means it has the highest chance of surviving a battle to the end. And the battle command ship is expected to lead to the end, regardless of the outcome.

"I wonder if not keeping to time is a pirate tradition."

Marika muttered as she looked at the data for the Black Swan, which had arrived much later than the originally designated assembly time. Because there were not enough pirate ships to attack the Stellar Slayer fleet, the assembly time and the scheduled start time of the attack that was supposed to take place afterwards were frequently changed.

Upon arriving at Garnet A, the Black Swan began active communication with the surrounding pirate ships without waiting for the spatial anomaly caused by the FTL jump to subside.

"They don't seem to be trying to hide their arrival either."

Gruier was monitoring the amount of communication that had suddenly increased as soon as the Black Swan appeared.

Even though they were quite far away from Garnet A, there was no hiding the spatial disturbance caused by the FTL jump. The cruiser fleet escorting the Stellar Slayer fleet had not yet shown any signs of attacking the pirate fleet, but they should have known that pirate ships were gathering in the surrounding airspace due to the observation of the prejump phenomenon.

"Well, both friend and foe should know that the battle will start soon."

Marika looked at the display showing the arrangement of spaceships around Garnet A. The pirate fleet would be the ones attacking the fleet that was continuing to work around Garnet A and the cruiser fleet that was escorting it.

And Marika knew what the outcome would be.

"What about the unidentified ship we're targeting?"

Marika asked Chiaki. Chiaki updated the observation data to the latest status.

"No response. Incidentally, neither the pirate ship nor the cruiser fleet should have noticed us. Well, the pirate ships' search targets are concentrated around Garnet A, and the cruiser fleet is intent on preparing for an interception, so they're not making any aggressive advances."

After hearing the report, Marika nodded.

"Shall we get started on our side, too?"

Looking around the bridge, Marika said to Gruier.

"Call Bentenmaru. The Bentenmaru we know. Encrypt it carefully, reduce the output as much as possible, and make sure it can't be heard even if you strain your ears."

"I understand."

Gruier set up a communication line with Bentenmaru as instructed.

Marika's eyes fell on the tracking record of the unidentified ship sent by Bentenmaru.

Misa was still acting as captain of Bentenmaru. Marika appointed Hyakume, who was in the radar/sensor seat, as the person to communicate with, and then instructed the bridge crew to listen to the call.

“*Hyakume here.*”

The communications monitor switched on, and Marika scrolled through the neatly organized data about Bentenmaru on the display in front of her.

“I saw the tracking record, and it's a troublesome opponent.”

“*Right?*”

Hyakume on the other side of the communications monitor nodded, satisfied with what she had said.

“*Now, if they were willing to attack over there, there would still be a way to do it, but as soon as they get a glimpse of it, they run away. If they just disappeared like that, there would be no hard feelings, but if you're careful, they'll come back soon and you'll start seeing them again. It seems they don't want to fight, so that's a relief, but it's really annoying.*'

'Assuming they can see our situation as well as we can...'

Marika said, pondering.

'I thought that now would be the time to attack since our forces have increased, but when the Odette II's radar was illuminated, they must have realized that there was another ship in addition to the Bentenmaru. If that's the case, our only hidden weapon is Silent Whisper. They haven't scattered unmanned probes either, have they?'

It's an old trick to place unmanned probes in advance in airspace where combat is expected.

'*They may be doing it, but at least we haven't found them.*'

Hyakume answered while checking the recent combat data.

'*If we could pick up even one probe, it would be a clue to identify the enemy, but there are no signs of that. I'm not sure how well it knows our situation, but it probably has the same detection capabilities as an electronic battleship.*'

'Until now, Bentenmaru is the only one chasing unidentified ships?'

'*For now, Bentenmaru is the only one intensively tracking unidentified ships. Someone from the Federation of Colonial Stars spaceship has caught a glimpse of it, but they think it's not a high threat or urgency, so I think we're the only ones chasing it continuously.*'

'Do you think the unidentified ships are looking at the Stellar Alliance, the Federation of Colonial Stars, and us separately?'

'Us?'

Hyakume looked up on the communications monitor.

'*So by us, you mean, is this Bentenmaru differentiated from the other?*"

"That's true, but I wonder if they can distinguish between the regular forces of the Federation of Colonial Stars and pirate ships that are not under their command. I think it depends on the situation, but if the Bentenmaru, which is supposed to be on the side of the Federation of Colonial Stars, were to chase an unidentified ship while leaving the Stellar Alliance that they should be dealing with, I was thinking that they might deal with us differently."

"*You can see from the outside that the two forces, the Stellar Alliance and the Federation of Colonial Stars, are messing around with each other. But I think it's unlikely that they're looking at this Bentenmaru as a separate force from other pirate ships. At least since we started chasing unidentified ships with the Bentenmaru, we've been lucky enough not to encounter a situation where a spaceship from the Stellar Alliance appeared in front of us and we got into a bang or anything like that.*"

Hyakume asks with a happy look on her face.

"*What's wrong? Have you come up with any clever ideas?*"

"I know from Bentenmaru's tracking records that they're not an easy opponent."

Marika says, still thinking about something.

"Even if we increase our numbers and our resources, if we do the same thing, they'll end up escaping in the same way. And if they don't come back, we'll be left with an uncertainty that may be important for the future."

"*What are the uncertainties about the future?*"

"Whether the Empire was monitoring Garnet A's supernova bomb, or whether they didn't know about it. So it's not good to let them escape without knowing what information they have, and it's not good to give them any more information. In that case, I think the only thing we can do is lure them into a situation where they can't escape and capture them."

"*That sounds like a good idea, but what exactly are you planning to use as bait to lure out the unidentified ship?*"

"Battle."

Marika spoke without even knowing if her decision was right or wrong.

"The pirate fleet will launch its first attack on the Stellar Slayer fleet soon. So we'll use that as bait to capture the unidentified ship that comes out."

Marika displayed a memo she had compiled of Bentenmaru's tracking records on the display.

"Unidentified ships appear when there's some big movement in the expeditionary fleet or the Federation of Colonial Stars, and they seem to run away when they're spotted by Bentenmaru. And there haven't been any large-scale battles in front of unidentified ships since Bentenmaru came here."

Marika looked up at Hyakume, still feeling uneasy.

"Like Luca said, if the unidentified ship is just watching us with amusement, I think it will come out of curiosity when the battle begins. If they think we are the pirate side of the Federation of Colonial Stars, then if they see us participating in the battle with the Stellar Alliance, the surveillance ship will think they have to keep their hands busy and will move boldly."

"*I see, we have no intention of participating in the battle outnumbered from the start. Well, if we both act with the reactions of Bentenmaru and the White Swan, it may be useful as a diversion against the Stellar Slayer fleet, but if we get directly involved in the battle, there is a possibility that history will change.*"

Hyakume checked the positions of the Stellar Slayer fleet and the pirate fleet on the display in his hand.

"*And then, if the unidentified ship comes out to watch the battle and pretends not to notice it, and when it gets too involved, we will immediately switch to intercepting it.*"

"What do you think, Hyakume?"

"*It's the perfect bait to draw out the unidentified ship. The pattern of them appearing when there is some big movement matches our records. But Captain, there is one major problem for this operation to succeed.*'

Hyakume stared at Marika from the communication monitor.

'*We know how the battle will go. But to pull out the unidentified ship and capture it, we have to leave our situation and go after the unidentified ship no matter what it is. And the result of the first fleet battle between the Stellar Slayer fleet and the pirate fleet was a complete defeat for the pirates.*'

Marika nodded. Although there were no sunken ships, the pirate fleet that launched a surprise attack on the Stellar Slayer fleet was unexpectedly intercepted by a strong escort fleet and was thrown away.

'*Even if they were our ancestors from 120 years ago, would you be able to desert your fellow pirates knowing that they were going to lose the battle?*'

Marika closed her eyes and took a deep breath. He opens his eyes.

"We leave the affairs of this era to the people here. We will do our own work."

A black and white sign with white text

Description automatically generated

"I've never had a chance to see someone else's fleet battle."

The bridge's gaze was focused on the spaceship layout diagram with Garnet A at the center of the 3D display in the center.

"Even though I knew what was going to happen, I didn't think it would be this exciting."

Glancing sideways at the progress chart of the first fleet battle against the Stellar Slayer fleet in the battle record, Jenny spoke her honest thoughts on the bridge, which was filled with tension.

"I think I'm probably feeling like I'm watching a play."

Gruier said.

"I think it's similar to waiting for a play to begin, performed by a close acquaintance."

"A play by an acquaintance..."

Jenny looked at the progress chart that she had arranged in her own way to make the battle record easier to read.

"If it were just a play it would be much easier, but what's about to happen is a real battle."

"I'll say it again."

Marika, who was in the captain's seat, said as politely as possible.

"We will not intervene in any battles at Garnet A. If we, who shouldn't be here, get involved in the upcoming battles, it could change the future of history."

"Is there any covering fire to give the pirates an advantage?"

Lynn, who was in the electronic warfare seat, asked to confirm.

"No."

Marika answered immediately.

"Helping the pirates means attacking the Stellar Slayer fleet and the escort fleet. Of course, it's emotionally tempting to support the pirates, but that means attacking the escort fleet, whether directly or indirectly. If, as a result, people who shouldn't die here die, or ships that should survive sink, history will change."

Marika looked around at the faces of the crew on the bridge, trying to remain as calm as possible.

"We're not here to help the pirate fleet. We're here to protect history so that the world won't change in 120 years. So no intervention!"

"Just in case."

Lynn raised her hand to ask for a response.

"What is it?"

"What if the battle doesn't go the way we know it will?"

Marika looked at Lynn's face. Lynn continued.

"What if the pirate ships are wiped out in the upcoming battle, or if we miraculously defeat the cruiser fleet and annihilate the entire fleet, or if the fleet gets desperate and sets off a supernova bomb, what will we do?"

"...It's the same."

It took courage to make such a clear statement.

"Jenny had been collecting pirate records for me, so I've looked at them all together, but I don't know how much of them I can trust. As for the battle at Garnet A, the pirate battle records are sloppy, and in the chaos after the war, the records on the Stellar Alliance were erased. So, even if the events unfold differently from what we know, we can't accurately determine whether that's a false history or a correct history. So, no matter how the battle unfolds, neither Odette II nor Bentenmaru will intervene."

Marika looked at the star chart with Garnet A at its center.

"We won't attack the cruiser fleet of the Stellar Alliance, nor will we support the pirates. Rather, our job is to deal with beings that are not recorded in history."

"That's tough, isn't it..."

In the silent bridge, Lynn spoke leisurely.

"Well, we're trying to protect the future that our ancestors are supposed to protect, so I know it's not easy, but it's hard to just wait and see until the other side makes a move."

Lynn raised one hand.

"Can I ask you one more question?"

"Go ahead."

"We'll just watch the battle in silence, but if the unidentified ship doesn't get caught in our net, what will we do?"

It's been almost 24 hours since we started observing the entire sky, building a patrol net with Bentenmaru and Silent Whisper, with Odette II at the center. They've been able to track all the spaceships around Garnet A, from the Stellar Alliance's Stellar Slayer fleet to their allied pirate ships, almost perfectly, but they've yet to get a definite response from the unidentified ship.

"They'll come out," Marika said confidently.

"We've gotten similar responses from Silent Whisper and Bentenmaru twice, and from Odette II once. The reason we haven't been able to spot the unidentified ship so far is because we haven't been actively pursuing it, and have been letting our prey go free. But what if the unidentified ship doesn't even make an appearance in the upcoming battle..."

After thinking for a bit, Marika said.

"Let's fight here until the end, then go back to the planet Tau and see the end of the War of Independence. I think we can think about how to get back to the future after that."

There are plenty of ways to travel from the past to the future, such as the Urashima effect of light-speed travel or cold sleep.

"The war is over, huh?"

Jenny looked at the chronometer that displayed the current time.

"The War of Independence will be over in a week... I wonder if it's really over."

"It's not over?"

Lynn asked nonchalantly.

"You've come this far, and you've come up with another uncertain factor?"

"Not at all."

Jenny laughed, trying to avoid the question.

"The battle records for Garnet A are full of inaccuracies, but there are plenty of official and unofficial records of the War of Independence. If something different from the records occurs a week before the end of the war, that means history has already started to change."

Jenny looked down at the display.

"Then I don't know what to do."

"The pirate ships Dark Star and Love Machine will soon enter the defense zone set by the fleet."

Chiaki reported the latest observation information from Silent Whisper.

"If we're not careful, we'll end up fighting the cruiser fleet. Isn't it too early?"

"*The start time of the battle will ultimately be decided by headquarters based on reports from the parties involved, and will be recorded in the report created after the battle.*"

Schnitzer, who was pulled out to act as an explainer, explained to the bridge of Odette II from the communication monitor.

"*However, this battle was mainly fought by pirates, whose battle records were often incomplete or not even submitted. After the battle at Garnet A, the headquarters of both the Stellar Alliance and the colony planet were busy with the Empire's invasion, the end of the war, and the annexation, so there are no official reports from either side regarding this battle.*'

'That's a completely careless story, isn't it?'

Jenny, who has done a lot of research, grumbles.

'Well, it's understandable when you actually see the scene.'

'*The battle records of Garnet A, which are considered to be the accepted theory in the Tau system 120 years later, are a compilation of records that were later made accessible and have been parsed together to make the story as consistent as possible. Many parts have been omitted, and there are no records from the spaceships that did not return from Garnet A.*'

'A sunken pirate ship, huh...'

Lynn's mutterings were unexpectedly loud and audible on the bridge.

"*In other words, just because the battle records we have don't match the progress of the upcoming battle doesn't mean history has already begun to change.*"

Schnitzer continued to explain.

"*Currently, Dark Star and Love Machine are on the front lines and will likely engage in combat with the three interceptor destroyers.*"

"That's your prediction as the battle commander of Bentenmaru, right?"

In response to Marika's confirmation, Schnitzer answered.

"*That's right. And Bentenmaru and the Black Swan are moving to pursue the two ships that are ahead of them. The Black Swan probably wants to wait until there are more pirate ships before starting the battle, but they're probably planning to support the pirate ships that have already gone ahead and reduce the enemy's strength as much as possible now.*"

"Well, the battle will start soon."

Marika already knew the result of the initial battle.

No ships were sunk in either the pirate fleet or the Stellar Slayer fleet. However, against a fleet of pirate ships for the first time, the experienced cruiser fleet engaged in effective maneuvering combat. Using a basic tactic of always forming a team of two or more ships to take on one at a time, they easily defeated the pirate ships that were trying to make a hit-and-run move.

As a result of the battle, most of the pirate ships suffered considerable damage. The Black Swan, which fought on the front line until the very end, was moderately damaged, while the White Swan, which had focused its electronic warfare on the destroyer fleet to cover the retreat, became the target of the cruiser fleet's long-range precision fire.

As a result, three of the nine masts were broken, but the damage to the hull was minor. However, a crew member who was performing an extravehicular activity to provide first aid was hit by a near miss.

According to records left on the Odette II, three men were killed, four were seriously injured, and two were slightly injured.

It is not recorded how many of the seriously injured survived the battle and recovered, or died despite medical treatment. Among the seriously injured was Shiratori Kent, who was the captain of the White Swan at the time.

Right now, she was in the same place aboard the same spaceship as the White Swan. Marika was suddenly struck by a sense of unreality, as if everything in front of her was happening in a dream.

"The battle record is now being recorded in its entirety."

Shaking her head, Marika looked around the display in front of her.

"Has any unidentified ships appeared anywhere?"

"I can't see them yet."

Chiaki reported.

"There are a few that seem to be it, but even at this late date, there are still pirate ships jumping in, so I think we'll just have to hang on a little longer and wait for a definite reaction."

"Hey, Marika."

"No."

Marika immediately responded to Lynn who called out to her.

"I haven't said anything yet!"

"You're trying to warn pirate ships that the Stellar Slayer fleet's escort fleet will always attack them in groups of two or more, since they're primarily independent ships, so you're warning them to be careful, but that's no good."

Marika stared at the display without looking up.

"But hey, Marika, advice from a fellow pirate ship is enough."

"It's no use. No matter how much they say it's information from the command ship, we can't respond to something like that once we're in combat. Even if we warn the Black Swan, we can't rearrange our positions now, and there's no way the pirates who've survived up until now are going to listen to us."

"Hmm?"

Marika answered smoothly, and Lynn gave her a strange look.

"So, Marika, did you at least think about it?"

"I did."

Marika answered without looking up.

"I tried to think of ways to minimize the damage without changing the outcome of the battle. But it didn't work. If this were a regular army, I could make them follow my orders according to the chain of command, but with a pirate ship, it's impossible to get them to change their tactics just because I gave them advice."

Marika looked up with a forced smile.

"Well, they're pirates after all. The only way to be smart is to learn by getting hurt."

"Dark Star and Love Machine will soon be in contact with the enemy vanguard."

Chiaki reported calmly.

"They're probably pirates with a light trigger, so they'll probably fire first... I shot!"

The Dark Star, which was ahead of the others, fired the first shot at the very end of its main gun's effective range.

The pirate fleet had already identified the fleet escorting the Stellar Slayer fleet thanks to their reconnaissance activities so far. Destroyers have excellent maneuverability, but their design prioritizes versatility, so the caliber of their main guns is not that large. In contrast, the two pirate ships, Dark Star and Love Machine, are larger than destroyers and are equipped with powerful cannons comparable to those of cruisers. They can only fire a limited number of guns at once, but they have a longer range than destroyers.

"I understand that you want to settle this before the enemy's main guns can reach you, but isn't that too far away?"

Lynn is looking at the distance between the pirate ship and the destroyer.

"No, the first shot is just a test shot for observation purposes."

Chiaki guesses the purpose of the pirate ship's gunfire from the energy reaction he's getting.

"Neither Dark Star nor Love Machine use radar before firing. This is partly because the destroyers are using strong electronic jamming, which makes it difficult to pinpoint their exact positions, but they know that optical observation alone is not enough to ensure the accuracy of their hits."

After hearing that, Lynn looked at the data from the two pirate ships' salvos observed by Silent Whisper.

"It's not fully charged, and the focusing rate is also loose?"

"It's not fully charged so that the next shot can be fired immediately. The focusing rate is loose because if the target hits, it will be burned and observation will be easier, so the destructive power will be reduced."

The destructive power of an energy beam is determined by the energy that is slammed into the target. If you focus the fully charged energy as small as possible and slam it into the target, the penetration power will increase. If you don't focus the beam near the destination, the cross-sectional area of ​​the beam will expand, and the accuracy will increase.

Unfocused beams do not have much destructive power. A beam that spreads to over ten times the target area greatly increases the hit rate, but greatly reduces the destructive power.

However, even if it cannot penetrate armor or destroy armaments, the ship's hull heats up when hit by the energy beam. In space, the high infrared reaction stands out like a light, making it easier and more reliable to aim the next shot.

"I see, that's the tactic they use."

Lynn clapped her hands.

"In that case, we can attack the enemy from an out-of-range distance, even from the very limit of their range. That should work, right?"

"If there are two pirate ships and one destroyer, maybe."

Chiaki became silent.

"But the enemy destroyers are a formation of four, and they're not civilian ships that will sit back and wait for the next shot even if they're shot. We'll approach while making evasive maneuvers, and once we're within their range, they'll start firing wildly from their main guns."

The pirate ship fired another salvo. Dark Star and Love Machine seem to be firing their gunfire in their own way, and the timing is all different.

"And from the perspective of the target, the source of the energy beam is a bright observation target. The destroyer can check the enemy's current location as much as it likes before it gets within range of the destroyer's radar."

Lynn thought for a moment.

"...So, if the pirate ship can't be hit before it gets within range of the destroyer..."

"It'll be a brawl relying on the frontal armor. Of course, there are plenty of things we can do, like electronic jamming and disruptive curtains, but if the pirate ship gets within range of the destroyer and starts a brawl, we'll probably lose."

"Doesn't the pirate ship have a more powerful cannon?"

"If we compare the power of each gun, the pirate ship's main gun is more powerful."

Chiaki's voice was dull.

"Plus, pirates are good at non-standard operations, so I think they make all sorts of crazy modifications to their main guns, knowing that it will shorten their lifespan. I fired, I'm serious this time!"

After a pause in the pirate ship's firing, Dark Star fired a fully charged naval gun. It seems they've increased the concentration rate as much as they can, and the energy response of the data sent from Silent Whisper is orders of magnitude stronger.

"A hit!"

A cheer went up on the bridge of Odette II. A strong energy response came from one corner of the four-ship destroyer fleet.

"...But only one shot. If it was from the side, it would be fine, but if it was from the front, I don't know if even a destroyer could stop it..."

Love Machine also began firing its main guns at full force. A beam cannon with a strong energy response was fired, but no hits were made.

Marika closed her eyes. In order to give the next command, she forcibly turned off the display on the battle situation display.

"What's the reaction of the unidentified ship? The battle has really begun. Do you see anything?"

"Coorie is tracking some notable reactions."

Chiaki showed the points reported by Silent Whisper on the bridge's 3D display.

"One is the main one. The other one is that it's a pirate ship heading this way."

"Continue observation."

Marika gave the command as originally planned.

"If we're not being tracked, the unidentified ship will be as bold as it wants, so Bentenmaru and Odette II will continue to pretend to be distracted by the battle. We'll only start moving once the unidentified ship is firmly caught in our net."

The two ships that started the battle, Dark Star and Love Machine, continued firing at the destroyer fleet while slowing down. However, there was a gap between shots due to the energy recharge, and the destroyer was making active evasive maneuvers, so no effective hits were made.

The two pirate ships were slowing down in order to delay even a little before they came within the destroyer's effective firing range. In response, the destroyer fleet continued to accelerate in order to get the target pirate ship within range as soon as possible.

While continuing to decelerate strongly, the pirate ships continued their gunfire at the destroyer fleet. Observing the battle from Silent Whisper, the destroyer fleet moved into full retreat as soon as it got the pirate ship within its range.

Even though the pirate ship was within range, the destroyer fleet did not begin firing. The destroyers had better acceleration performance than the pirate ship currently in front, and it seemed they planned to begin firing once they had approached close enough to gain sufficient firing accuracy.

"Even if the enemy doesn't shoot, if you just run away without showing unnecessary charm, the wounds will be less serious..."

Chiaki grumbles as the pirate ship continues to retreat while firing.

"If Bentenmaru and the Black Swan don't get there in time, you'll be seriously injured."

The battle airspace is far from Odette II, but close to Silent Whisper, which is positioned at a distance. It's a distance that allows effective electronic attacks against the destroyer. Marika realizes that she is hoping that Coorie aboard Silent Whisper will send a rescue ship to the pirate ship.

"There won't be one," she tells herself.

"If you interfere with history, history might change."

"Bentenmaru will enter the battle airspace soon," Chiaki announces. The airspace where the four destroyers and two pirate ships are engaged is moving at high speed.

"Just to be safe, Bentenmaru of this era."

"I know."

Marika thought about the strategy Bentenmaru would use. Since the time of the War of Independence, Bentenmaru has been modified to specialize in electronic warfare. Although it is not as powerful as the current Bentenmaru, its electronic warfare power should be powerful enough against the escort fleet.

The destroyer fleet, which should be well within effective range, has not yet begun firing. Bentenmaru is probably launching a powerful electronic attack to disrupt the destroyer fleet's gunfire. The Black Swan, which has more powerful firepower, is heading to the battle area to cover the retreat of the two sister ships.

At the same time, the three cruisers that are the main force of the escort fleet rushed to the battle area to cover the destroyer fleet. The remaining majority of the main force of the cruiser fleet does not leave the area around Garnet A to escort the Stellar Slayer fleet.

Bentenmaru and the Black Swan were not the only pirate ships heading for the battlefield. Behind them, in addition to the Karyoubinga, several other pirate ships were preparing for battle, and from the ecliptic, the White Swan, which seemed to be on a reconnaissance mission, was approaching.

Marika predicted what would happen next from the steadily changing battle situation display. She didn't have much experience fighting in actual fleet battles, but she had participated in many exercises against Imperial fleets and star systems.

If the Bentenmaru and the Black Swan joined the Dark Star and Love Machine, the destroyer fleet, which was currently in a favorable position, would be at a disadvantage. However, if the three cruisers currently rushing to the scene joined the fleet battle, the situation would once again turn in favor of the Stellar Alliance.

"It's no good..."

Marika muttered. Although there are differences in training and equipment, the outcome of a battle is almost always determined by the number of forces firing at the front. Even if you have a lot of forces, if you don't put them into the fight, it's easy to lose.

And so, most of the pirates currently in this airspace are joining the ongoing battle. In contrast, the Stellar Slayer fleet, working directly above Garnet A, is not taking part in the battle, and the majority of its escort fleet is waiting, watching the progress of the battle.

"I think there were probably some pirates among them who were impatiently watching the battle situation like this."

Chiaki called out to Marika, who was glaring at the battle situation display with a frown on her face.

"Even pirates have been fighting for years, so they probably remember a lot of different methods, but this is their first fleet battle with so many people involved, so they need time to learn that their old methods are completely useless."

"It takes time, and there will be casualties..."

Marika muttered.

"Why are there so many things we don't need to do?"

"Maybe because they suffered a major defeat in the first battle, they managed to do something in the next battle."

Chiaki said, looking at the same battle situation display.

"Pirates aren't stupid, so if they get hurt, they'll think about it a little. On the other hand, the escort fleet was able to crush the pirates without much trouble, so I think they underestimated their strength. Otherwise, I don't think a pirate fleet with such a messy, random battle and no proper chain of command could become a decent fleet force."

"...What about unidentified ships?"

Marika changed the topic.

"Since we're providing so much service, have any come out?"

"Predicting the favorite has become the top priority."

Chiaki gave a brief update on the situation.

"It's definitely an unidentified ship, so the other reactions are just monitors and they're concentrating on searching us. Bentenmaru and Odette II are pretending not to see, but how will they judge us when we're not in the battle? The question is how much they'll lean in since this is their chance to show off."

Before Dark Star, Love Machine, Bentenmaru, and the Black Swan joined up, the destroyer fleet began to retreat without being able to land a hit. The pirates, who now had the advantage in overall strength, now began to pursue. The destroyer fleet tried to drag the pirate fleet in, hoping for cover from the cruiser fleet approaching from behind, while the pirate ships tried to reduce their strength as much as possible before the cruiser fleet and destroyer fleet joined up.

The battle had also begun outside the battle zone. In the battle zone moving vertically toward the northern sky, the White Swan, approaching from the horizontal ecliptic plane, began long-range electronic jamming from its wide-open antennas to both the destroyer fleet and the cruiser fleet approaching for cover.

For a moment, the battle situation seemed to be in favor of the pirates. However, Marika knew what was going to happen next.

The White Swan, which was conducting electronic jamming from a long distance, deployed an uncommonly large antenna suitable for a solar sailing ship. The antenna was large enough to be a target. The cruiser fleet, which was jammed by electronic jamming, attempted long-range precision fire on the White Swan. As a result, the White Swan suffered considerable damage.

The cruiser fleet's long-range precision fire began. Before the results were announced, Odette II received a report from Silent Whisper.

"*It came out!*"

The report echoed on Odette II's bridge via direct communication from Coorie.

"*Garnet A, heading toward the north, A4 at coordinates 0023! The response is tiny, it's definitely not a spaceship from this era.*"

Marika looked at the response data processed by Silent Whisper. Although they were not directly observing the enemy with their radar, the reaction was still very weak.

"What is this..."

Marika looked again at the small reaction that she would have missed if she had not been certain of the enemy's existence.

"They're not directly fighting it yet, right? If so, they're not that far away, so how can they suppress the reaction so small?"

"*I think they're doing some kind of active stealth on all the ships in this airspace.*"

Coorie answered.

"*In any case, to avoid drawing attention, they're turning off conventional propulsion, and barely using antigravity because it would cause a gravitational reaction, and they're moving the spaceship with inertial control alone. In that case, they can keep energy and infrared radiation to a minimum.*"

"Can you make optical observations?"

"*Impossible.*"

She answered immediately.

"*It's probably passive, but it's optically camouflaged. I can see its current position from the deviation from the background stars, but I still can't figure out the shape of the spaceship.*"

Coorie's voice became heated.

"*But that guy is definitely approaching the battle zone. He's so engrossed in watching the battle in front of him that he doesn't think there's a spaceship laying a net waiting for him.*"

She adds happily.

"*We caught him.*"

"We need to get him close enough to close the trap."

Marika glanced around the displays around the captain's seat. There was no change in the visible data. However, with the observation capabilities of the unidentified ship predicted from the tracking data of Bentenmaru, Odette II should also be observed at the current time. In other words, both Odette II and Bentenmaru are being seen by the unidentified ship.

Marika confirmed the positions of Silent Whisper, Odette II, Bentenmaru, and the unidentified ship. At the moment, the unidentified ship was roughly equidistant from Silent Whisper and Odette II, and was approaching Garnet A.

"I caught them here too!"

Chiaki called out. The sensors in passive observation mode, which doesn't show the enemy's sensors our observation status, picked up a small shadow-like reaction in the airspace that Silent Whisper had found.

"You're right... If I hadn't been told it was a spaceship, I would have definitely missed this reaction."

"Our battle is about to begin."

Marika stared at the still distant reaction on the display.

"Measure the enemy's position accurately. Is the engine output OK?"

"It's fine."

Yayoi answered from the engineer's seat.

"Normal engines are fine, and the main engine output of the FTL booster is also fully increased."

Changes in energy reactions are more noticeable than their size. Both Odette II and Bentenmaru increased their engine output in time with the start of the battle with the pirate ship. They can move to full speed at any time.

"Steering, are you OK?"

"Currently controlling attitude using only the solar sails."

Ai answered while carefully turning the wheel.

In the corner of her vision, part of the display flickered.

"The cruiser fleet has caught the White Swan."

Chiaki announced.

"A direct hit... I think the mast was probably damaged."

"Don't look."

Marika said, trying not to think about the fate of the pirates she had yet to see.

"That's not our battlefield. The one we have to deal with right now is an unidentified ship that's trying to sneak into the battlefield."

Even if the unidentified ship is interested in Garnet A's battle, it is unclear how good its observation capabilities are. The closer it gets, the clearer the observation results will be, but it is unclear how close it will get, or whether it will remain at a distance.

The small reaction picked up by the cross observation using Silent Whisper, Odette II, and Bentenmaru definitely indicated that it was approaching Garnet A.

Dark Star and Love Machine continue their gun battle with the destroyer fleet, protected by electronic warfare from Bentenmaru. Dark Star should have better armor than the destroyers, but it is a target for the concentrated fire of the destroyer fleet, which has superior rapid firing, and its situation is not good.

From a distance, the Black Swan begins a diversionary fire on the cruiser fleet behind it. The destroyer fleet was soon being approached by a reinforcement cruiser fleet, and from behind the Bentenmaru and Black Swan, pirate ships including the Karyoubinga were heading for the battle airspace.

"*Let's go.*"

Orders came from Coorie.

"*We'll corner the unidentified ship. Odette II, Bentenmaru, as soon as you're ready, illuminate the enemy!*"

"Odette II, posture change complete."

Ai replied. Then came a communication from Misa.

"*This is Bentenmaru, ready to go anytime.*"

"*Silent Whisper, we're now approaching the target unidentified ship.*"

Coorie's voice echoed on the bridge.

"Commence illumination!"

Odette II and Bentenmaru pointed their bows straight at the unidentified ship, and began illuminating the airspace where the unidentified ship had been confirmed with their radar at full power. At the same time, Silent Whisper, which had retracted its deployed antennas and sensors and shifted into a highly mobile configuration, began to accelerate toward the unidentified ship.

"Start accelerating!"

Marika ordered.

"Target, unidentified ship!"

Odette II accelerated to the same target point as Silent Whisper, using full inertial control. Bentenmaru also began accelerating, turning its back on the battlefield between the destroyer fleet and the pirate ship.

Odette II's radar reached the unidentified ship ten seconds after irradiation began, and Bentenmaru's radar fifteen seconds later.

"I thought so!"

Chiaki cried out when she heard the response ten more seconds later.

"As soon as our radar reached it, it switched to active stealth! But this reaction is still an automatic response. If you can blind the radar of two ships this far apart, go ahead and blind them!!"

After a few seconds, the radar from Bentenmaru that was aimed at the unidentified ship returned to Odette II.

"I can see it!"

Chiaki immediately displayed the obtained data on the display in the center of the bridge.

"It's big, a battleship class!!"

Active stealth is a technology that sends back a false response to radar illumination from one direction, deceiving one's existence. It's not so difficult if it's illuminated from a narrow angle, but it's difficult to respond if it's illuminated from a faraway direction at the same time.

The radar illumination from Odette II and Bentenmaru showed the silhouette of an unidentified ship whose class was unknown until now.

"Can you identify it?"

"I'm doing it now."

Based on the obtained data, the computer began a matching process to see if there were any registered ships with the same type. Lynn read out the results.

"The closest is the Imperial fleet's Glassius class battlecruiser."

"Imperial battleship?"

Marika saw the same data on the display. She checked the movements of the Glassius class currently in operation. No active ships.

"But this one..."

"Oh come on!"

The last Glassius class was an old spaceship that was commissioned over 150 years ago. It would not be surprising if there were no active ships if she searched for them as they are now, 120 years later. Marika searched again for the operational status of the Glassius class 120 years ago using the Galactic Standard Calendar.

"Even if you expand your search to the Seventh Fleet, there is no Glassius class that was in active service during the War of Independence."

"Eh?"

It seems that Lynn had set it up to search for the present from the beginning. Marika looked at the display that showed the same results.

The Imperial fleet, blessed with an abundant budget, also updates its spaceships at a fast pace. Thirty years have passed since the last ship of the same type was commissioned, so it would not be surprising if it had been retired from the Imperial fleet.

"If it's a battleship sold off by the Empire, is it operated by a military company or a private organization...?"

"Unidentified ship, increased energy reaction!"

Chiaki announced.

"As expected, your reaction and decision are quick. Now that you know you're here, you're going to jump and escape."

That was all according to plan.

"Are you going to let me get away that easily?"

Marika was thinking about the jumping performance of the Empire's battleship-class ships. A combat spaceship has high jumping performance to escape. I don't know if the main engine's energy was increased so that it could escape quickly before it approached here, but there was no strong reaction when the unidentified ship was first spotted.

If it was going to jump long distances, it would need to be charged with a large amount of energy. However, if all that was needed was to jump far enough to become invisible to blind the enemy, it wouldn't take long to begin the jump.

Not even taking the time to use normal propulsion to escape from the approaching Odette II and Bentenmaru, the unidentified ship jumped to a position not much different from when it was discovered. After a rapidly increasing energy reaction, the unidentified ship disappeared, leaving a wake of flashy spatial anomalies and gravity quakes typical of a large ship.

"*Yes, let's go.*"

A communication came from Coorie, who had already closed the distance to the unidentified ship.

"*The jump data is as follows!*"

"*Okay, we'll go ahead.*"

Misa, the acting captain of Bentenmaru, said after quickly receiving the observation data from Silent Whisper. Bentenmaru, who had already finished preparing for the jump, calculated the destination of the unidentified ship from the observation data of Silent Whisper and jumped exactly to the same point.

"It would be easier if Bentenmaru could catch it."

Marika looked down at the observation data sent from Silent Whisper.

"Where do we jump to?"

"Around the border between Cetus and Ingalunga, in the empty interstellar space."

Lynn pointed to the corner of the star chart, which showed the destination of the unidentified ship calculated from the observation data.

"Do you know what ship that Glassius class is?"

"I don't know."

Lynn displayed a list of several candidates that she had chosen based on her own intuition rather than the results of the computer search.

"There are no more Glassius class battlecruisers still in active service in the Imperial Fleet. Although they are called battlecruisers, they are half-baked spaceships like combat aircraft carriers with a lot of aircraft on board, so they were left unused in the center or on the outskirts and were not used for very long. However, since the ship's structure has a lot of room, some of them have been sold to invading companies or star system militaries and are still around for a long time. A rare example is one that is used by space universities as research vessels."

"Space universities!?"

Jenny spoke up, jumping from the observer seat to Lynn's electronic warfare seat.

"Space University, um, Space University!?"

"Even now, in the past, there is only one Space University in the galaxy."

Lynn showed Jenny a display showing the data of the Glassius-class research ship belonging to Space University.

"It's obviously old, so it's currently being overhauled in the University system, or rather, it will be for the next 120 years. This is the only Glassius-class still in service, but the refurbishment will take the rest of next year, so it doesn't come up when I search for active ships."

"You can't be..."

Jenny put her thumb to her mouth and muttered with a grim expression.

"FTL communication from Bentenmaru!"

Gruier announced from the radio operator's seat.

"It seems that the second jump was made right in front of Bentenmaru, who was tracking an unidentified ship. We have received the observation data."

The observation data sent over the FTL line showed the next jump destination of the unidentified ship.

"They ran away after all."

Marika nodded. She looked at Yayoi in the engineer's seat.

"Can we go?"

"I was prepared for that, so everything's set!"

Yayoi quickly entered the settings into the control panel and completed the final check. Marika nodded.

"Odette II, let's go. Jump now!"

Bentenmaru touched down. Immediately, Misa, the acting captain, contacted her.

"*Bentenmaru, Odette II, this is Misa. Unidentified ship, how are you?*"

"As you can see, there's no sign of movement at the moment."

Gruier in the radio operator's seat told Bentenmaru the latest situation. The unidentified ship made a second jump right in front of Bentenmaru, and Odette II tracked it. They made contact in the blank space between the Orion Arm and the Perseus Arm. After two consecutive jumps, the unidentified ship had used up all its energy to escape, and showed no signs of moving any further.

If it continued to jump, the plan was to use Odette II to analyze the jump data of the unidentified ship and transmit the results to Silent Whisper to continue the pursuit.

"Captain Marika is currently calling for communication, but there is no response."

"*Then just keep quiet and watch.*"

Misa replied.

"*The Bentenmaru will remain on standby for now, and we'll prepare to deal with any situation that arises.*"

"This is the Hakuoh Girls' Academy training sailing ship, Odette II, out of Sea of the Morningstar in the Tau star system."

Marika called out again, using the Imperial communication standard, not the Federation of Colonial Stars communication standard.

"Your ship has violated several navigational regulations under the standard. Please state your affiliation and ship name."

Marika looked around the displays around the captain's seat. The transponder of the Odette II, which was based on the standard regulations of 120 years ago, was transmitting. However, there was no spaceship in this universe that matched the transmitting ID.

"This is the Odette II, a training sailing ship from Sea of the Morningstar in the Tau system."

Marika repeated once more.

"This is a remote area outside the Galactic Empire, so there are no penalties for not following the standard regulations. However, your ship has violated the Tau system, which is our airspace. We have no intention of attacking you. We simply wish to request an explanation of the situation."

Our communication, along with Marika's image, should have been sent to the other side in the format specified in the standard regulations. With her fingertips on the headset microphone, Marika looked at Gruier in the radio operator's seat.

"How is it?"

"There's no response."

Gruier replied while carefully checking the communications monitor.

"But there's no doubt they can hear me. I think they're probably discussing how to respond."

Just 1000km away, in front of Odette II, the unidentified ship was cruising. It seems that it had used up all its energy after two FTL jumps, so its energy response was low. It seemed to still be under radio silence, and not even a single radar wave was emitted.

"Where are you?"

Marika looked up at Chiaki, who was in the radar/sensor seat.

"Can you tell?"

"The active stealth is gone, but the optical camouflage is still on."

1000km in space is a close distance. However, even with all the optical sensors of Odette II, they could not get any good information from the optically camouflaged ship. From the shape of the ship, it was determined to be a Glassius-class battlecruiser, but beyond that, the characteristics and identification signs of the individual ships were completely unclear.

"What should we do?"

Gruier asked.

"Should we just go ahead and yell it into the other person's ear with a pirate-style forced communication?"

"I don't want to use such rough tactics."

Marika looked at the unidentified ship in optical camouflage on the display.

"It's just a spaceship that we don't have in our records, it's not hostile or aiding the enemy. It's just that there's a suspicious thing hiding its true identity lurking around, and if we can confirm its true identity, we don't want to make things any more awful."

In front of Gruier, the communication system rang a gentle chime.

"We got a reply!"

"Turn up the screen."

Marika ordered everyone on the bridge to show it.

A woman with short, dark blue hair, who seemed to be a long-lived Methuselah, was displayed on the communication monitors at each seat.

"*This is Space University research vessel Curiosity, researcher Sakyura.*"

"Whaaat!?"

Jenny shouted without hesitation. Athena on the other side of the communication monitor looked at Marika, who was wearing a headset, with a puzzled look on her face.

"*You're the captain? Really?*"

"I’m Kato Marika, Captain of the Odette II."

Marika bowed to the communication monitor.

"Nice to meet you. Thank you for responding to our communication. The Federation of Colonial Stars, including the star system Marina, has not yet made official contact with the Galactic Empire, but since this is a Space University research vessel, does that mean that this action is for research purposes?"

After widening her eyes at Marika's response, Athena on the communication monitor turned to the other direction and sighed deeply.

"*What a big blunder.*"

Athena shook her head.

"*When it comes to university research, the principle is no contact, and non-interference so as not to give unnecessary preconceptions or restrict actions, but we got chased and captured by an alien civilization we haven't even made contact with yet? What excuse will I make to my boss?*"

"We just want to confirm your affiliation and purpose."

Marika repeated over the line.

"We're not interested in the Galactic Empire's code of conduct, and we have no intention of interfering with the research vessel's purpose, whatever it may be. As long as we can confirm your affiliation and purpose, we have no intention of restricting your actions after that. If you don't intervene in the battle at Garnet A, Curiosity is free to return to that airspace as a Space University research vessel and continue observing the battle."

After thinking for a moment, Marika added.

"Of course, we have no intention of reporting the principle of non-contact for research vessels anywhere. We are in a star system that has not yet made contact with the Empire. As of now, we have no vested interests with the Empire."

"*For a star system that has not yet made contact, you know quite a lot about the situation.*"

Athena looked at Marika with interest from the communication monitor.

"*How can a civilization that has not made contact with the Empire be able to call accurately in accordance with our communication standards?*"

"Our crew members are excellent."

Marika smiled and gave her usual answer.

"If you wish, we are prepared to answer your questions. Could you help us confirm your affiliation and purpose?"

Athena raised one eyebrow and responded.

"*I understand your intentions. Could you please wait a moment, I'll go and convince our top brass.*'

'Okay.'

Marika nodded.

'How long should we wait?'

'*Oh, just keep the line connected. I don't intend to take that long.*'

Athena stood up from the radio operator's seat without even switching to the standby screen and disappeared from the monitor.

'Looks like it's going to work.'

Gruier called out.

'At the very least, I don't sense any improper intent or lies in what the operator just said.'

'I don't know about the ship, but the person on the other end of the line is definitely a Space University employee.'

Jenny said so that everyone on the bridge could hear. Marika looked at Jenny's face.

'Do you know this person?'

'Yes, it's annoying.'

Jenny looked down at the communications monitor, which was just showing an empty radio operator's seat.

"They say that long-lived species don't change much in appearance, but I never thought the day would come when I'd see it with my own eyes."

Jenny raised her head and looked around at the faces of the bridge crew.

"She’s a professor of history at Space University 120 years from now. Athena Sakyura is my current professor at Space University."

After a moment of silence, a loud voice came from the bridge.

"However!"

Jenny raised her voice emphatically.

"The professor from 120 years ago obviously didn't know my face, and my name is not on the current Space University register. Even if we know them, they don't know us now."

"...It's hard to explain."

Gruier said with a thoughtful look on his face. Jenny shook her head.

"I'm not going to explain it. It's a waste of time to explain such a complicated and impossible situation. There's a much bigger problem than that."

"What is it?"

Marika asked Jenny, who looked serious.

"If that ship is really a university research vessel and has nothing to do with the Empire's intentions or the fleet's research, then all the preconditions are broken. It would mean that everything we thought of was just our own expectations."

"...What's the problem?"

Marika tilted her head even further and asked.

"It's a problem."

Jenny grumbled.

"It's a big problem that could change history."

"Prejump phenomenon confirmed."

Chiaki reported the latest situation as shown on the display.

"Silent Whisper will arrive at current location shortly."

Soon, the Space University's Gracius-class research vessel Curiosity deactivated its optical camouflage. Its pure white hull shone brightly in the pitch black of space, revealing every detail to Odette II, Bentenmaru, and the arriving Silent Whisper.

The other party returned to the communication monitor.

"*I'm Athena Sakyura, a researcher at the Space University Department of Frontier Folklore and History.*"

Athena introduced herself again.

"*Yes, as you guessed, I was watching your activities as part of my research into civilizations uncontacted by the Empire. I have no ill will or ill intent, and although I'm not sure if you'll trust me, I have no intention of aggression. I'll probably write a report about it later. I'll probably have to submit a bunch of written reports first, though.*"

"So it's really just for research purposes!?"

Jenny screamed. Athena nodded with a puzzled look on her face.

"*The Empire has a policy of non-interference when it comes to uncontacted civilizations. Your civilization is not even under the Empire's surveillance yet, so I thought it would be a good example of a civilization that spread to colonies without much contact with the outside world. Is there a problem?*"

"It's a problem, a big problem!"

Jenny yelled, shaking her hair wildly.

"The fact that the Empire, who we thought were watching us, don't know anything about us is a big problem!"

Marika looked at Jenny with a puzzled look on her face. Gruier gasped.

"I thought it was strange when I saw the Imperial fleet's movements right now. They should be intervening in the War of Independence in a week, but I didn't sense even the slightest sign of that in the Seventh Fleet. If they were going to intervene in an interstellar war, they should have sent a large fleet to several places at the same time, and that's what we know from history!!"

Jenny looked around at the faces of the bridge members. She took a deep breath, steadied herself, and started talking.

"Okay? The spaceship we thought was a scout ship for the Imperial fleet was actually a university research ship, and the Empire doesn't know about us, so that means!"

"So that means?"

Lynn repeated with a puzzled look on her face, and Jenny said with a look on her face that looked like she was about to snap.

"If things continue like this, the Empire won't intervene in the War of Independence!"

**Afterword (Asahi Novels version)**

So, what should I do after this?

Well, "Miniskirt Space Pirates" has entered its eleventh volume. As usual, I'm just going with the flow, without thinking about long-term structure, just following the characters' directions and letting my pen flow as the spaceship moves. As always, I follow my ephemeral hedonism and steer the story in an interesting direction without thinking about the consequences, but I can just think about how to develop it by the time the next book is released, so I'll leave the problem solving to my future self.

This time, Marika and the others are running around, following on from the last time, in a setting set in the past, around the time of the War of Independence. I started out thinking that if I just set the story and broke the setting, I could write a pretty good story, but it's been a lot of work. I don't even know every corner of the galaxy in the normal world, but 120 years ago the situation and the balance of power have completely changed. "What's going on over there?" "Is it right?" I have to go around asking all sorts of questions.

More than the time spent actually writing the manuscript, the part of the job that takes the most time and effort is the act of entering the world of the work.

The author lives in the same real world as you do. But even in a work set in modern Japan, the characters aren't in front of you, and the situation is far removed from the author in the workplace. An author can't enter the world of the work unless he or she goes next to the characters and looks around at the same world, the same situation. Unless he or she gets that far, he or she can't see how the story will develop.

When I was younger, I thought that maybe this would get easier if I became a veteran. Of course, there are probably such geniuses in the past and present, but I'm still a long way from being able to sit in front of a piece of manuscript paper and smoothly come up with the character's feelings and development in just a blink of an eye. When I see my predecessors' workplaces, I can recall the hardships they faced, but at the same time, I can also imagine how veteran warriors were able to do such arduous work as a daily routine, which is quite chilling.

At the same time, I feel relieved that my predecessors had such a hard time and that I'm not the only one who had to work so hard.

If you go into the world of the work every day, it won't be so difficult to trip out from the workplace. If you leave it for too long, you'll forget not only how to get into the world of the work, but also how to write a novel, which is no good.

If you are under pressure to meet a deadline, you will inevitably go into the world of the work every day. Near the end of the story, you will be rushing at a pace that is incomparable to the leisurely first half, and I feel my physical strength steadily declining. How are you all doing these days?

Once the deadline is over, you won't be under pressure to meet it anymore. Of course, the next deadline is set, but it's not tomorrow, a week from now, or a month from now. If I can beat the deadline, I have to finish the movies and videos I've been putting off, I want to read books, go on trips, and do interviews.

Because of all this, I gradually become more distant from the world of my work, which I was up to my neck in before the deadline, and when the next deadline comes and I have a terrible experience, I'm learning, but it's not of any use. Makoto's intelligence is fleeting. It's okay, if I continue to live like I did before the deadline, I'll die.

Time doesn't flow quickly, but it seems that I'm good at surprise attacks, and the series "Miniskirt Space Pirates" that began in 2008 is entering its seventh year. The anime version of "Bodacious Space Pirates", which began airing in 2012, will be released in theaters on February 22, 2014, after this book was released. The movie version of "Bodacious Space Pirates: ABYSS OF HYPERSPACE - The Abyss of Subspace" marks the 25th anniversary of director Sato Tatsuo's debut as an anime director.

And Sasamoto, who made his debut in 1984 with Asahi Sonorama Bunko, will celebrate his 30th anniversary in 2014.

When I was younger, I dreamed that if I could build up a career and become a veteran, I would be able to work a little more slowly and leisurely.

After doing it for so many years, I've come to understand that this was just an illusion. In the end, only what you write becomes a manuscript, and if you don't write it, no one will read it.

So, please continue to support me for the next 30 years or so, along with my next work.

If I add the date, I'll get yelled at by all the people who haven't put the time machine into practical use, so I'm deleting it.

Yuichi Sasamoto

**Afterword (KADOKAWA version)**

The fifth year of Bodacious Time Pirates

The fifth year, huh? It's already been five years since the movie came out.

Five years ago, when I was writing Bodacious Time Pirates, the production of the movie version of Bodacious Space Pirates: ABYSS OF HYPERSPACE, which was released in February 2014, was in the final stages. However, as with the TV series, I knew very well that it would be easier for me and the staff if I left everything to director Tatsuo Sato, the original author, and didn't interfere or check anything, so I continued to leave it to him. I didn't check the script that was sent to me at first, and when I went to Tokyo for another matter, Masahisa Suzuki, who helped with the setting for the movie version, advised me, "You might be able to help us strengthen the setting, so why not read it?", so I just had a quick look.

Even though Sasamoto has never done a good job as an original author, he has provided original works many times.

The thing I fear most as an original author is not that a not-so-good media adaptation will be completed.

The biggest fear when entrusting your work to someone who makes a living from the same creative work, such as manga or anime, even if the media is different, is that the resulting media adaptation will be obviously more interesting and better than your original work.

There is no difference in the attitude to create a good work between an original author and a writer who uses that original work to work on other media. As a result, what if the media adaptation turns out to be more interesting than the original?

In other words, that means that the original author loses to the media writer in the serious battle of creation. The original author thinks that this is the most interesting thing to do and thinks about it, but if the media adaptation turns out better than that, then the original author loses because he was unable to come up with a more appropriate and interesting expression, structure, or narrative style. I see, that's how it goes, there was a way to do it. Oh dear.

And at the same time, it's also a victory for the original author as a reader. It's nice to be able to read or see an interesting story. And this serious challenge can be repeated, not just once, but as many times as you like. I won't lose next time, just watch.

If the qualities and style of the writer entrusted to the author are too far removed from the original author's, the original author can laugh about whatever comes out, saying that it's a completely different field. After all, if they draw a cute heroine or a cool mechanical depiction, there's no way to win. Our business is to write down fantasy that can't even be drawn. And the secret to victory is to fight in your field of expertise.

That's why it's scary to even think about suffering an unexpected defeat in your own field where you think you can win, but at the same time, it means you can show a new hand in a field that you've put so much thought into. As a writer, it's a disappointing loss, but as a customer, it's a happy victory.

As for the movie version of Mopai (abbreviated below), I wasn't worried about the outcome, since the director and staff I had already entrusted with the TV version were the same as the original version. The original author, who had skimmed through the script but hadn't even opened the storyboards, only saw a movie version close to the finished product three weeks before the release. When I met the director when he came to Tokyo, he said, "Tomorrow is the dubbing work," and the sound adjustment work, so I asked if I could go and watch it.

This isn't limited to movies, but the shape of a work in the middle of being made is really interesting. It's a rare opportunity to see the production process that can't be seen in the finished product, and the various things that happen along the way that can only be predicted. Being the original author, my request was smoothly accepted, and I ended up watching the penultimate dubbing process at the Azabu-Juban studio.

The three separate films were previewed just before completion, with the director giving instructions on what could be fixed on the spot, and those parts previewed again, with those parts that would take time being previewed at a later date. This was the process that Sasamoto followed, and it was his first time seeing a film close to the finished product.

As it was part of the production process, he couldn't laugh out loud, and as the original author he could just grin irresponsibly, but after watching all three films he noticed how short the total running time was. I added up the numbers on the counter, which I vaguely remembered, and the main feature alone was just over 90 minutes?

When I checked, the running time including the ending credits was 95 minutes. The director said he tried to create a story that wouldn't expand the scale unnecessarily, but I had no idea he'd structured it so tightly.

The film is still unfinished, but I noticed that even though it was the same cut as the trailer, new effects were clearly layered on top.

I knew that the work process had changed significantly since animation began to be created by computers, but seeing it with my own eyes was striking. That shot from the trailer has been processed and tweaked in various ways.

A manga artist friend of mine had told me about the pros and cons of digitizing illustrations. With a paper manuscript, it's finished once the inking and coloring processes are complete, but with a computer, you can try and error as much as you want and layer as many colors as you want, so you can probably work forever.

With anime, too, you can now add as many effects and corrections as you want, so it's probably the situation where you just do everything you can and need! When a certain process becomes more efficient and the work progresses faster, you start spending more time on other things - that's been the case for a long time.

And so, three weeks before the preview screening, which was about to be released, emergency messages were flying around on the day itself, saying, "The afternoon screening has been postponed!" and "The evening screening has also been canceled." With so little time left until the scheduled release date, I can only say to the staff, as the original author, "Okay, I get it, do your best and don't worry about us."

We gathered for the preview screening, but it was canceled, so I went to a Chinese restaurant in the neighborhood to have dinner with an old acquaintance and an editor who had joined us, and while listening to the situation of other theatrical anime, I finally felt like I was a party to the project. The original author's job here is to be relaxed and let the staff work with peace of mind. Even though it's almost finished, I have seen the dubbing process and know the general result, so I don't have to worry about that.

At the end of the dinner that day, I was told, "The package is complete." The preview screening took place the day after the schedule was shifted by one day. It's a theater dedicated to preview screenings, so they can handle it even if the schedule is shifted. I don't feel anxious even if someone involved suddenly asks, "Excuse me, could you please say hello as the original author before the screening?" The director greeted the audience by saying, "Thanks to the hard work of the staff, we were able to make something that's not just like a movie, but a movie."

After the preview, the director and I went to a local bar and celebrated until the morning. No matter how many years you've been a writer or director, it's hard to know how your new work will turn out. Don't worry, this is one of the top five anime movies I've ever seen, and one that the original author would be happy with and satisfied with.

At an event after the film's release, director Sato Tatsuo said, "The works I made for myself are Muryou, Nekojiru-kusa, and Mopai." The original author couldn't help but pump his fist in his heart. Works you make for yourself are valuable because you can't lie to yourself. Good job for me for taking advantage of the opportunity to have such a work made. Now, I wonder if there will be a rematch.

April 17, 2019

Yuichi Sasamoto

This book is a new edition of "Miniskirt Space Pirates 11: Bodacious Time Pirates" published by Asahi Novel in February 2014, with additional content and corrections and a new cover.



Sasamoto Yuichi

1963: Born in Tokyo.

1974: Becomes hooked on "Space Battleship Yamato" from the original broadcast.

1979: Watches "Mobile Suit Gundam" from the original broadcast.

1982: Reads "Galactic Beggars’ Army" and learns how to use airplane pilot manuals as reference books.

1984: Published "Operation Fairy"

1992: Published "Come and See the Stars Dance"

1992: Begins researching rockets from the first H-II rocket to write a space opera.

2008: "Miniskirt space pirate" battle begins!

2012: "Moretsu Space Pirates" televised.

2014: "Moretsu Space Pirates" theatrical animation was released.

2018: "Miniskirt Space Pirates" second battle begins!

Matsumoto Noriyuki

Worked for a game company for about 10 years. After that, he became a freelance illustrator, working on illustrations for light novels. Currently, his main activity is manga. His representative works include "Rin - Noriyuki Matsumoto Art Collection" (Enterbrain), "Tsubame Yodamari Shoujo Kiko" (Tokuma Shoten), and "Minami Kamakura High School Girls Bicycle Club" (Mac Garden).

A cover of a comic book

Description automatically generated

1. TL Note: I have no idea who this is. The closest I can find is Tinia, the sky god and highest god in Etruscan mythology. Hermes is associated with language, or possibly Mnemosyne. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. TL note: I’ve been using the English translation for the name of the ship. “White Swan” in Japanese is Shiratori. Now, I’ve just found out that the ship is named after its captain. Sorry, but I’m going to keep using “White Swan” for the ship and Shiratori for the captain and first officer. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)