

A few miles off the west coast of Africa, maybe closest to Senegal at this point in time, the prototype craft currently being referred to as The Comet tore through the water in the direction of its assigned coordinates. With its two experimental engines firing away at its stern, along with the two boosters at its sides and the specialised coating on its hull, The Comet was managing speeds of around seventy knots, having to constantly work against the counteractive forces present at these depths. Those inside, the team designated Variance Response: Halo (VR:Ha), could only be grateful for the rushed upgrades made while at Pico Island. Lights illuminated patches of the underwater environment ahead meanwhile the sonar system searched the seabed for anything that might have been missed.

The Comet was just big enough to house the essential equipment, the crew and a little excess space to move around in. As it was, only two of the four crewmembers were in the control room, steering themselves through the murky blue. On the one hand they weren't near the depth that would render them blind beyond the reinforced viewports, on the other it was far from crystal at even a couple of metres away. Every so often they got to glimpse a fish.

A series of beeps from the transponder had Maseo Yune turning his attention away from the controls so that he could read the latest transmission, "We've had a course correction. Alter our bearing by fifty-three degrees to starboard. They're moving to deeper waters."

"It'll be a big ship," his co-pilot, Azita Pirzad, rationalised, "they probably want to be sure of their secrecy. Making the corrections now."

The Comet gradually pitched to the right as they turned further away from the continent. This did nothing for what they could see.

"The transmitter's still functioning then," Azita continued to remark by means of maintaining the conversation.

"As clear here as it was up there. And if this is important enough to have the boss want a direct link, it'd better hold..."

The end of his sentence was lost to the sudden jolt that rattled the small craft.

"It's fine. The ship's responding to how fast we're diving," Azita called out into the cabin behind them as well as simply informing Maseo. "Is everything alright back there?"

She received two knocks of a knuckle against a metal wall in response.

"Good."

"Are you not going to check in with Amanda?" Maseo joked as he set about managing their speed.

"It's Amanda."

"You know I don't think she needs to be assessing the fuel injectors this close to the drop point."

“It’s what she’s chosen to do. Plus do you want to be responsible for the boss’ new toy breaking down?”

Another set of beeps from the transponder saved Maseo from the need to reply. In the pause that followed Azita quickly sensed that something was wrong.

She was the one to turn from her controls this time, “What is it?”

He didn’t answer, motionless in his staring at the readout.

“Seriously, do I have to remind you of the importance of communication?”

It wasn’t necessary for her to go that far, “There’s something going on at the surface.”

“Care to elaborate?”

“This is something everyone should hear.”

Having pulled Amanda Watson away from the fuel injectors, bringing in Carter Hentschel from the cabin in the process, Maseo had brought the news to the crew’s attention. No-one was quite sure what to make of it. Carter signed his request for clarification.

“That’s what he said,” Amanda agreed.

“We can be grateful they thought to tell us,” Azita pointed out.

Maseo leaned over and deactivated the readout screen, “Listen, now that we know what’s happening up there, the only thing we can do differently is continue with that knowledge in our heads. Yes this is a surprise turn of events to say the least, but it hasn’t negated the job we’re here to do. I’ve no doubt that someone working for the TresCorp Foundry will come up with a solution, if not the big man himself, as busy as he’s meant to be clearing up that scene near Kalispell. What we should do is focus.”

Carter gestured that while they would stick to the task at hand, it would probably be a good idea to keep the readout screen on. Maseo obliged, not needing the undivided attention anymore.

“We *will* be able to sustain a constant comms link to the surface, right?”

Carter nodded.

“Well it doesn’t matter now,” Azita informed them. “We’re here.”

Moving closer to a porthole Amanda was the next to fully know what she meant. Coming into sharper view from being a vague shape through the water as they bore down upon it, they could finally see the HMCS Wanderer. The brainchild of some Canadian ‘visionary’ for his project Heroniac Shore, it was one of many such vessels currently roaming the seas deploying remote nuclear reactors off various coasts to be part of a grand energy grid, the eventual connections between which still being something of an enigma. This class of submarine was unique in design, having a long thin midsection around which could be attached a good number of the compact reactors for deployment, meanwhile the prow and stern were relatively enlarged for

control and propulsion respectively. Judging by how barren the midsection was the Wanderer had already succeeded in planting much of its cargo.

“I told you it’d be big,” Azita recalled. “Now we just have to find their command centre.”

Maseo went on to say what each of them knew from their briefing, “With the Comet’s stealth components they shouldn’t have detected our approach, yet we cannot take for granted that they won’t be aware of our presence.”

“I’m bringing us in,” Azita spoke up again. “You three go gear up. And yes, Carter, I’ll keep an eye on the transponder.”

With a thud and a hiss they heard The Comet clamp onto the side of the Wanderer. Beneath the hatch at the trio’s feet the plasma cutters were slicing away at the foreign hull meaning it was without much delay that they were stepping through the seal and onto a metal walkway. Amanda went first followed by Carter and Maseo. Each was equipped with a Canadian naval uniform, a stunner and a radio operating on a private frequency.

What they were faced with were pipes. They were lucky not to have ruptured one in their entry. They were also fortunate that this stretch of corridor appeared to be empty. Spreading out to either side to afford each other some room, the three of them looked around. From this angle it could have been any other submarine.

“Are you alright in there?” Azita hissed to them over their radios.

“Affirmative,” Maseo replied. “We should probably cease contact until it is necessary.”

“Agreed. But before I let you go, I thought you should know I’m going to be attempting to access their computers from here. Hopefully it’ll give us some definite evidence of something.”

With that the radios went silent and the trio turned their attentions on themselves. No-one expressed the thought that this would have been easier if their boss had actually told them what specifically they should be looking for.

Amanda took charge, “Right, I’m going to find one of the remaining reactors, see if I can gauge anything from it. Maseo, you go up to the higher decks. Try to find their transmitter. They might have been in contact with someone. Carter, you get into the command centre. There may be officers in there but it’s our best bet for finding intel. Any questions?”

“And remember, most of these people are probably just doing their job, like we are,” Maseo added. “Try to minimise confrontations as much as possible.”

Not wasting any time, it was only with a point to confirm his direction that Carter was jogging away. Taking that prompt to do so, the other two went their separate ways as well.

Carter kept moving in the same general direction. He had to get there eventually, plus Azita had landed them in the vicinity of where she predicted the desired room might be. He slowed to a nonchalant walk upon finding himself approaching actual naval crewmembers, but overall he seemed to go unnoticed. No-one tried to talk to him, there were no awkward moments of trying to pass people in any cramped thoroughfares and it was with ease that he managed to keep his cool throughout. A confident man, it was with no more difficulty than a couple of retracing of steps that he came to where he was meant to be.

Squaring himself up in front of the door to the command centre, Carter knocked. The chatter of officers he could just about make out coming from inside faded away.

“Who is it?”

Carter checked that this part of the passageway was indeed vacant except for him, then prepared himself for the next few seconds. An exasperated officer was coming to the door. He opened it. Carter smiled and punched him across the side of the head, knocking the man out cold. Stepping over the collapsing officer, Carter whipped out his stunner to incapacitate the rest before they could seriously react. With that the command centre was his.

He continued to grin as he shook the residual force of the punch out of his hand. He was by no means a violent man, he was simply glad to have taken advantage of the exhilarating opportunity. No lasting harm should have been done. But that was all in the past. He wasn't done here. The first points of interest were the papers many of the unconscious officers had themselves been examining. Scanning the lines of text, he knew he didn't need to look any further. Grasping a hold of his radio Carter flipped a specialised switch back and forth such that the subtle intermittent buzzes hence relayed were in the pattern of Morse code.

Once sure that Carter's message was complete Maseo whispered back, “I'll be able to confirm that in a minute. I'm almost there.”

The radio went silent for a few moments, leaving Carter waiting for it to burst into life again. In this time he realised he should really shut the door; he didn't need anyone looking in and seeing the disarray. When the response did come, Maseo sounded the tiniest bit more exhausted.

“I'm at the transmitter. I had to stun a group of them, but they'll be fine. These new gadgets do the trick, huh. As I was saying though, this sub has indeed been in contact with people, and it seems for the reasons you just suggested.”

At this point Amanda came onto the line, “Would you care to explain?”

“The reactors may be able to provide power to these places, yet they can as easily cause a nuclear explosion in turn. While I don't know what the effect of these detonations happening underwater would be, we are nonetheless near the mainland and threats have been made. It seems certain government officials have been warned

about this fact, with the understanding that this disaster can only be avoided through complete compliance.”

Building on the end of that explanation, Carter coded in that these reactors would also detonate should there be any resistance at all, even if not from the government, to the oncoming...somethings.

“Well I’m looking at one of them right now and I wouldn’t be surprised if it was capable of that, even if I don’t know exactly how it works,” Amanda considered. “I managed to convince them I was meant to be running maintenance on this thing. This tech definitely isn’t normal. Someone’s been helping these people out. Who has stuff like this?”

“You mean other than our boss?” Maseo mused.

“Yes, other than Hewlett. There’s definitely knowledge behind this that could be used on the surface which instead they’ve chosen to hide in these depths.”

“And if they’re not careful they could have the whole Earth sinking with it.”

“They also must have had a hand in getting themselves immune from any legal or official action against this.”

“Sorry to interrupt,” Azita cut across their conversation, “there’s something else you might need to know about. Carter, you’re in the command centre, right? There should be some monitors around you somewhere.”

So taken up had he been by the discovery of the papers, Carter had failed to examine the rest of the room. There were indeed monitors arranged along a counter showing video feeds of the interiors and exteriors of submarines.

“Those are a selection of the other ships in their fleet,” Azita contextualised the images for him. “They have encrypted surveillance broadcasting between each other. The left-most one should be an exterior view. Do you see what’s happening?”

Seating himself in front of the specified monitor, Carter’s eyes raked the screen. Beyond what could be seen of the hull was the seabed, as well as something upon it. A series of undersea cables had been set up to run across the sand. A light was running down them, illuminating the water as it flowed out into the ocean.

“To clarify, this is from a sub off the west of mainland Europe,” Azita went on to say. “From what I’ve been able to ascertain, as well as establishing this reactor-based con the operation was also being used to cover the construction of these cables. Whatever they’re for, they’re coming online.”