



The Enigma

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The Enigma

The vessel named Enigma was a small survey ship designed for deep space astrometric analysis. It was the sole asset of the Ko family, a pair of Amarrian Khanids who took up exploration in deep space regions to locate and survey valuable, rare ores and salvage whose locations were then sold to the highest bidder for exploitation of those resources. The career was not a profitable one, as the finds were always spread too thin and time passed too long in between "locates" as they were called in the exploration lexicon. As such the ship was not fitted with the best equipment, but it was always in good condition and had served well even for weeks in deep space.

Virat and Anema had met on Khanid Prime during their yearly pilgrimage to the temple that their families had belonged to for centuries. Immediately they fell in love and were married soon after with the blessing of their parents. In the months after their wedding, they were expected to fulfill their duty to their families, join the Amarr nation and pursue careers in the militaristic regime that their parents had worked so hard for years to build. Neither Virat nor Anema however were traditionally minded, and rejected the Khanid ideals and broke the family traditions that had existed for a long time before they were born. They were both shunned from their families for this, ousted from the temple society that they had known all their lives, and thrust into a solitary livelihood without familial support. All that was left to them was to work their way up from the bottom of off-world society on an Amarr station away from Khanid space. They moved their few possessions with them to Mista on the border of low security space in the Domain region. It was an effort to get on with their lives, together yet so alone.

Virat always had a passion for the unknown, and Anema as well. They wished to do something more than just work in a claustrophobic station office all day. During the next few years, Virat and Anema worked their way up from station personnel jobs to management positions. They attended science, astrometric, and ship command classes at Hedion University. They worked extra hours and saved every little bit of money they had to purchase an exploration ship hull based on the Magnate ship class. They called it the Enigma, because in exploration there are many things about the unknown that are unexplainable and intriguing. The name fit their purpose, as both Virat and Anema were an enigma unto themselves.

Along the way among the stars, it was with much joy that Virat and Anema welcomed two children into their lives. Both Darius and Nalman were born in space on board the Enigma, and had grown into well-mannered and sharp little boys who knew the dark of space better than they knew the feel of solid ground. Virat and Anema loved their two children dearly, as to them it meant that they were no longer alone, but had a family of their own to raise as they saw fit. It was a dangerous life, and a hard one, and they spent weeks outside of any known and well travelled star systems. Somehow though, Virat and Anema always found time to foster learning within their children and ensured that their children knew they were loved and wanted. The children spent their time about the ship, playing in the cargo hold and the cabins and watching their mother and father ply their trade in the unknown reaches of the star systems of New Eden.

The alarm panel blinked furiously as the proximity klaxon resounded through the ship's narrow passageways. Virat and Anema, coming from different areas of the ship, raced onto the bridge. The bridge of the Enigma was small and well-used. Once an opulent vessel, the Enigma had been set aside once the original owners had upgraded to a newer ship, and Virat managed to obtain the Magnate-class ship for much lower than the asking price. There were controls, panels, readouts and large display screens scattered across the cockpit-like bridge. In front was a viewport overlooking a wide expanse of open space. Off in the distance was a small asteroid field which had been the primary focus of the ship's activities this day. Two worn but cushioned seats were bolted to the deck on opposite sides of the main control board. Virat and Anema quickly settled into the seats to respond and assess the cause of the alarm.

Anema studied the proximity alert readout, and switched over to the scanner. It was only a second before two signatures appeared on scan. Anema looked up from her display.

"Two signatures on scan. Class unknown." she spoke in a monotone voice.

Virat stood up and came over to look at the scanner panel. Anema tried once more to get a firm reading on the signatures.

"You sure you recalibrated the scanner from our last survey yesterday?" Virat asked.

"Yes, I did. The recalibration came out just fine; what do you think they are?" Anema replied.

"I don't know. Try the scan again," Virat said thoughtful, yet concerned as his eyebrows furrowed and tightened.

Anema hit the scanner button one more time. This time, the display supplied more information. Anema and Virat looked up at each other in horror as the scanner identified the vessels which matched Minmatar designs: Rifter-class. They would arrive within very soon according to the scan's distance readout and there was no time to spare.

"ETA 30 minutes," Anema said heavily, even though Virat had read the information off the panel as well.

"Get the children," Virat Ko turned to his wife and hissed, "Get them into the pod now. Comm me when they are secured. Do it as quickly as you can."

With a withered look in her eyes but not losing a second's time, Anema ran down the passageway where the children's room was and swung the door open quickly.

Darius and his little brother, Nalman, were on the floor playing with some spare replacement parts, nuts, and bolts. They had them all spread out on the floor on a soft mat and for all intents seemed like they were playing some organized sort of game. Darius had the dark hair of his father and the stark, piercing, beautiful eyes of his mother. His features were soft, unusual for Khanids, but he was still young with lots of time to grow into his own. He favored his father's looks. Nalman seemed to favor neither parent, with a darker complexion than Virat. Virat and Anema were sure Darius would follow in their footsteps someday into exploration. With Nalman, they just had no ideas. He seemed more interested in building things, and fixing broken toys, even at his young age.

The boys hardly ever fought amongst themselves. Darius looked up from the game they were playing as his mother entered the room.

"Darius, get your brother and come with me. Now."

"But mama, why?" Darius looked up at her with his dark eyes, concerned with his mother's urgent tone.

"There's no time. We must go," Anema said hastily.

"Yes, mama," and stood up.

Darius grabbed his little brother's hand obediently and dragged him to his feet, away from his toys and the game. Nalman, shocked at the unusually rough treatment from his brother, started to cry. He slipped from his brother's grip and fell on the hard metal deck plating. Darius reached down quickly and swung Nalman up onto his back and ran for the door where his mother stood, Nalman's tears wetting the back of his shirt as he went.

Darius followed his mother down the hallway to the lifepod chamber. It was a short way down the corridor, and they passed access panels, other cabins and workrooms on their way. Anema palmed the door panel, a lock clicked, and the hatch hissed open. She stepped into the circular shaped room. It had a large door at the far end of the room, which was heavily constructed and had a small thick porthole looking out into space. In the center of the room was a small egg shaped construction sitting in a cradle on the deck plating. The lifepod.

Lifepods were similar to the pods used by capsuleers to pilot spacecraft, but were designed to be escape ships for crew members of smaller, non-capsuleer piloted vessels like the Enigma. The lifepod could either be fitted with survival gear, food, and water for weeks of life support, or with a stasis envelope. The stasis envelope was a fairly new and expensive technology which allowed crew members to be placed in the pod and put into a state of suspended animation. The lifepod with a stasis envelope could theoretically keep its occupants alive for many months in stasis. They were designed in such a way as to automatically determine its location and then compute the best possible way to return to the ship's designated port of origin. A lifepod had the ability to warp similar to the capsuleer pods did, so they could navigate jump gates through systems to known space. There was always a danger of being caught and destroyed but it was a sacrifice made to ensure the possible survival of crewmembers on smaller ships. The pods did have avoidance systems and scanning capability, so the on-board computer would make a good attempt at circumventing the possibility of capture. The Enigma had only one two-person lifepod aboard. It was all Virat and Anema could afford, but it proved the best chance of survival should something happen to their ship.

Darius halted right next to his mother by the pod, and put Nalman down. Nalman was still sobbing furiously. The pod's door was open wide showing the padded walls and the stasis couches inside. The status lights on the outer panel were blinking slowly, like a heartbeat.

Anema lowered herself to her knees to look Darius in the eyes, and put her hand on his shoulder.

"Darius, you have to look after your brother now. Your father and I love you both very much. Make sure you remember who you are, and make sure your brother does as well. We are proud of you." Anema said, her eyes

welling with tears, and embraced both boys, first Darius, and then Nalman. Nalman tried to cling to Anema, he knew something was very wrong and didn't want to let go. Darius had to help separate Nalman and Nalman clung to Darius as their mother looked at them one final time, appraising them with soft and saddened eyes.

The warning klaxon sounded again. Anema jolted upright and pushed both boys to the couches inside the pod. Nalman was still sobbing, and Darius helped settle him in his seat and strapped him in. Then Darius sat into his couch and buckled himself as well. Anema kissed both boys on the forehead, tears falling from her cheeks. Darius watched his mother recede outside the pod, tears welling in his eyes as he fought the urge to cry as well. Nalman just cried in his restraints, reaching for his mother and repeated "Mama, don't go," over and over again.

"Goodbye my children. I love you both, and God look favorably upon you as you grow. Father and I will be watching." she smiled gently as the pod door sealed around the hatch and hissed shut. Through a small viewport, Anema could see the stasis cycle beginning as both boys closed their eyes and drifted off to the nothingness of dreamless stasis within the pod.

Anema rushed out of the pod's chamber and quickly shut the hatch to the room. She tapped the commlink on the panel just outside the hatch, and shouted, "Virat, the pod is sealed. Eject them NOW."

The outer pod bay door opened and the air rushed from the chamber. The pod's outer lights blinked in succession, first red, then green. The pod then ejected itself from the bay door and began moving away silently from the ship. Anema, watching from the porthole in the hatch door, knew that once the pod was clear it would begin calculations to autopilot its way back to known space.

Sighing heavily, sobs beginning to wrack her frame, she turned and sprinted toward the bridge.

She made it with little time to spare. Virat was furiously working the panels, attempting without success to maneuver the ship away from the approaching vessels. He moved the controls and the ship lumbered and shuddered forward.

"Two Rifter-class frigates, not responding to hails." he said quickly.

"I'll get to the comm panel and try to send out distress signals and message drones," Anema said in reply.

Anema jumped into the cushioned task chair and accessed the comm panel, brushing tears from face. She spoke quickly into the comm-mic on the control board.

"Survey Ship Enigma, designation K-56AGG-1, reporting distress in deep space region location K88X-J. We are under attack, two Minmatar ships, class Rifter, will not respond to hails. Please send assistance, " she spoke clearly, and then repeated the message again. Then she reached over, punched a button on the board and ejected message drones.

The message drones normally were configured to include complete system and ship logs from the entire historical voyage of the ship as well as any and all communication from the ship. The drones were programmed to maneuver themselves automatically back to the ship's registered port of origin similar to lifepods so that data and information could be recovered in the event of the loss of the ship.

She rocked heavily back in the padded chair. She looked at Virat, still bent over his panel working. Almost as if he could feel her eyes on him, he looked up and over to Anema. She mouthed "I love you" and smiled as the first volley of autocannon fire from the twin Rifters hit the outer shielding.

Virat looked back at his panel. He just stared at the indicators on the board as the shields buckled almost instantly. The next volley removed what little armor the ship had in place, and they only had moments.

Virat cleared his throat, stepped away from his chair, and over to his wife. He embraced her fiercely and whispered in her ear, "I love you as well."

The ship exploded in a brilliant flash of pure light sending hull fragments scattering into the vacuum of space. A quickly cooling, tangled mass of metal and ship components was all that remained where the ship was a few seconds ago. The Rifters cut their engines for a moment and scanned the wreckage, but nothing of value was left to them in the shattered wreck of the Enigma.

Darius had been waiting for the last shuttle out to take him back to Amarr Prime as he passed by the window displaying the open expanse of space. He looked out of the station's viewport window overlooking the second moon of Sebmy VIII. Alone in his thoughts for the time being, he wondered what it could have been like if his parents were still alive. Were his parents yet watching over him like they promised? Had he done the right things, and made the right choices? Now more than ever he wanted to know what his parents thought and whether all the things he had fought for in the last few years were worth it in the end. Nalman had just been accepted to Hedion University to study ship design and engineering. Darius had already said his goodbyes to Nalman. Embarking on a six year study program at the well-renown school, Nalman had high hopes to someday be able to design and manufacture starships.

Nalman had been sad for his older brother. For the last eighteen years of his life, Darius had taken care of Nalman. He had given up everything so that his little brother would grow up with everything he needed. It was a struggle for Darius, and Nalman could never express the deep gratitude he felt knowing that his brother had sacrificed so much for him. He too had said his goodbyes to Darius, and left toward the University's entrance and admittance hall to be welcomed to his chosen path of study.

Seeing the wide vista at the viewport open to him gave him pangs of longing for a ship to travel into the emptiness, just as his parents had done. He wished for the oblivion of space, as alone as he felt. Above all, he wanted to find something in the vast dark that meant something to him, like it meant something to his parents. He didn't know what that mysterious unknown was, but he would find it someday. Just like his parents.

Just as Virat and Anema knew that he would.