

Kancolle: Exodus Initiative

jusblekyuri

Kantai Collection

In Progress



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Summary

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Description:

Humanity has been betrayed from within. The Fleet Girl Initiative is in the hands of the enemy. The rest of the world has fallen under the rule of the Abyssals and their allies. But there are those who remember what it was like to live free and aren't willing to give in just yet.

Chapter 1

Kancolle: Exodus Initiative

...

Humanity has been betrayed from within. The Fleet Girl Initiative is in the hands of the enemy. The rest of the world has fallen under the rule of the Abyssals and their allies. But there are those who remember what it was like to live free and aren't willing to give in just yet.

...

Chapter 1:

You and I both remember that day very well.

There was nothing to mark this particular day as anything that we weren't already used to. Maybe the protests and demonstrations against the government and military were slightly larger than usual.

When the major Abyssal offensive showed up on our doorstep, we simply stood by our comrades like we've done for a long time.

But this time was different.

...

It was in Sasebo when Japan was first alerted to the traitors in their midst.

We were kindly introduced to the depth of their betrayal when we were fired upon by our own ships and Kanmusu.

Why did it have to be that particular day?

...

“Why are we running?” Murakumo yells. She is angry, we all are.

“You heard the Prime Minister.” Akashi says, “We have to run.”

A lot of the Kanmusu, or ship girls, on this passenger ship are injured. They won't recover from their wounds unless they receive more supplies, supplies we can't spare.

Only a few ship girls managed to escape the country when the various officers declared their allegiance and all hell broke loose.

The captain of this vessel isn't military, but even this passenger ship has seen combat. Ethan Feuriels,

“For Real(s)” or “Fuhrer” depending on your standing with him.

“The crew and I have been listening to the news.” Ethan leads the people left standing to a large spacious area that might have been a dining room to be enjoyed in peacetime, but all the windows have metal sheets over them. But there are still nice wooden dining tables and chairs. He has a large laminated world map that he sets down.

“We are here.” he circles at a space between Taiwan and Japan with a marker, “We need to decide on a destination.”

“Which countries have been taken over?” asks Midway. She had been lucky enough to be on patrol far enough when the attacks happened. Unfortunately, she was far from America, far from home.

“Japan, Korea, Vietnam, United States, India.” Ethan crosses out the countries on the map, “Most of Europe. The Abyssals seem to have hit Europe the hardest. A lot of countries are still fighting.”

“So much confusion.” states Midway.

“I believe that Australia will be the best place to head for now.” Ethan says, “At least they’re

government is still friendly. I just have to call them up and ask if it's alright to take a shipload of Kanmusu into their ports."

"Are we really not fighting?" asks Murakumo.

"Not until we know who is on our side." Ethan says, "Then we can fight with them."

"But Australia is really isolated." Akashi says, "Where could we run from there if the Abyssals come?"

...

The Prime Minister of Japan made that broadcast telling the nation that we were not to help a government run by Abyssal sympathiser and supporters. We haven't heard from him since.

Just how many people have betrayed us to the Abyssals?

Now there is a new provisional government for Japan. Our nations began to crumble from the inside, from the huge riots and panic. Or from the coups that toppled the leaders from power.

What are we meant to do when we were targeted by our own people?

...

“Is that okay with you Stalingrad-san?”

I jerk my head up at the mention of my name.

“Sorry,” I don’t want the responsibility of our survival, “That’s fine.”

“You didn’t hear what we just said.” Midway sighs. Akashi then decides to intervene.

“Were it not for you,” Please don’t compliment me. “none of us would be here. I trust whatever decision you make.”

I didn’t think Murakumo would be nodding as well. I didn’t think she was the type to be grateful for being dragged away from the fight.

“Do we know if we can get through the Philippines and Indonesia without inspection?” I state, “We can take advantage of the confusion and we want as few people to know what is on this ship, especially if those countries might betray us later.”

The captain seems to be agreeing.

“We want as few records of our passage as possible,” he looks at the map again, “We could try

to pass through while everyone is still figuring out what's going on.”

He leaves, probably to head to the bridge and plot our course. The four Kanmusu sit down and contemplate the events that have eclipsed the world.

...

Kanmusu, or ship girls, are ships resurrected from the dead and have returned in human form. And they still possess many of the qualities they had when they were a ship. Some of them have memories from their previous lives as well.

So to resurrect a ship girl takes a serious amount of resources. Someone has to then gather those resources and then complete a summoning ritual.

Ship girls can come from all sorts of nations, but they would prefer to be brought back by their own nation.

Kanmusu wield ship rigging, armaments and equipment that gives them the abilities to float, shoot, sail and all the things they could do in their previous forms.

...

“There she goes again.”

Murakumo doesn't appreciate my daydreaming.

"What do we do when our flagship is incapacitated?" asks Akashi

It seems their conversation has moved on.

"Someone hit her," says Midway.

"Ow," that punch in the shoulder didn't hurt too much, "What do you want?"

"How do you think we can start to reclaim the world?" That question sounds obnoxious for some reason. No offense to Midway.

"Why are you asking me?" People just leave me alone and keep talking.

"Because we respect you, Stalingrad-san," says Akashi.

"Good for you," I say, "Let me go back to my thoughts."

"Not very sociable is she?" says Murakumo.

...

Battlecruisers were not popular for long.

They hit fast, dodge fast and apparently die fast too.

It was only after I had come back and become human that I could research the fates that befell ships of my type.

Historical reading is quite morbid but I liked morbid.

I read all about the deaths battlecruisers suffered. I read all about the world wars. I then looked up and wondered why so many stories in fiction make battlecruisers so famous. Especially fiction including space ships. In reality, battlecruisers did not have a great time.

The Russians never built many modern battleships or battlecruisers. I read about how all my sister ships of the Stalingrad-class were cancelled and broken up for scrap when Stalin suddenly died in 1953.

At least I was laid down and launched. Even if my commissioning ceremony was only after they designated me a target ship.

Now I could read all about my previous life, I realised just how lucky I was to have lived as long as I did. Twelve years. Even if half the time I was

waiting to be completed, and the other half I was being hit over and over, at least I wasn't destroyed before they could finish my hull.

...

When I came back, they discussed my death again.

I was no warship. My crews were never warriors. Only weapon inspectors. I never went to war. The only manoeuvres I remember are trying to stay afloat after they tested weapons on me. I have never rushed for anything. The only schedule I obeyed was the next factory quota of ammunition. I never fought in a situation that garnered praise. Never fought in a situation that needed me to kill or be killed at my navy's convenience.

The weapon tests went on for years. Eventually I realised that I was going to die in this same spot I had been hurt in for years.

I saw very few other warships. I remember the ones that were ordered to tow me to site of the weapons testing and those who shot me for target practice.

When I came back, they were already discussing where best to scrap a ship and which ship breakers

would be most convenient.

It was only a few days before I received the notice.

I suppose in wartime, the higher-ups have committee meetings all the time so the decision was made fast.

There were official reasons. Like how I didn't match the Russian Federation's needs. I was too maintenance-heavy. I was untested in combat. My service history was unremarkable and unfavourable. They couldn't afford to procure my equipment and then deploy me. Convenience, basically.

Having been summoned in Vladivostok, the navy wanted the best return they could get for the resources it cost to summon me. There were plenty of ship breakers in Asia.

While I waited until specialised ship breakers for Kanmusu could be prepared, I was allowed to go around the area for a little bit.

I won't complain about those few glorious days because it was the only high point of both my lives.

The journey to my death is what saved me when the Abyssals attacked and the inter-fighting began.

...

As well as having injured ship girls to repair, we also have their equipment to repair.

We just don't have the supplies right now. If the Abyssals attack this ship, it will literally be just Murakumo defending us and the weapons of the passenger ship.

We've got permission. So let's get to a safe port and wait for the storm to pass.

...

When all the craziness kicked off, I was on board another ship. A ferry just needed to travel down the coast of Eastern Russia.

The only Kanmusu equipment on-board were the ones that had been rejected by the Russians and needed to be more efficiently broken down.

I could only take what I could as the ship went down after being fired upon as we went passed China.

Dear galloping Bolsheviks. I nearly threw away the radio I had because it seemed like every channel had someone needing help.

The only distress call I responded to were the ones that needed a meat shield.

The only things I can remember from my previous life are getting hurt and limping to the target area to test out the range and accuracy of the new missiles we had at the time. Being a target ship is not too far off being a distraction ship.

Some of the Japanese officers were still loyal and they were getting pummelled by those who had been convinced to the Abyssals' side by incentives like power or death.

The Japanese ship girls were probably really surprised to see a Russian battlecruiser all of a sudden.

They were also a little surprised when I just went straight into the opposing Kanmusu and Abyssal fleets and told them to flee.

Getting bombed, shelled and shot at, doesn't hurt after so many years of target practice for the firing squad.

...

I don't recall how I survived.

But the enemy had just used all their weapons on an unarmed and vulnerable battlecruiser and I kept on going.

While the enemy grasped their controls and triggers, I just clutched onto the only things I had.

The most valuable thing I had was a small little campaign medal I had been given.

I don't even know why I was given such a decoration. But in those days that I had to look around, people realised I was a Kanmusu and asked me who I was. 'Stalingrad' I said. 'What a prestigious name' I was told.

And then one veteran came up to me and discussed how he remembered that city. That battle.

We swapped war stories. Well, he shared his stories and I only had what I had read. Then he insisted that I should take something befitting the defender of Russia in this war now.

"Please take this." I didn't earn that! Take that back!

"Don't just give this to me!"

"Well," he looked slightly aggrieved, "My father doesn't need this rusted medal in particular. Well

anymore at least. It wasn't his favourite anyway."

"Your father would be spinning in his grave, comrade."

"You should have something before you go to fight the Abyssals."

I didn't have the heart to refuse.

"I won't be around much longer."

"Why?"

"The navy says I'm too expensive to keep."

"Too expensive? That's what they said all those years ago. Yet Russia is still here today because the price is never too high for the free heroes of the world."

...

"What's that alarm?"

Murakumo, that alarm means we're in danger.

"This is the captain," the speakers on the ship boomed, "Abyssal and Vietnamese aircraft have been sighted on a course that brings them near us. We could use some help."

“I’ll go and distract them again.” I stand up from the table.

No one complains this time. Not anymore. And the enemy won’t be able to ignore a target like an undefended Kanmusu.

What is the point of emotions when they’re going to die with you anyway?

...

The new Prime Minister of Japan savoured the power of his position.

The woman seated across the desk smiled.

“You still have to answer to us, cult preacher,” she said.

“I know how these things work,” he was still going to be the most powerful human in Japan, “I do what you say and get to do as much as you want.”

The woman drops her smile and lets him see the amount of violence she is willing to visit on him if he does the wrong thing.

“I’m glad we’re in agreement,” she murmurs and looks at the military parade going on outside the window.

The parade doesn't look too special, until you realise that all of the soldiers are marching past the bodies of the politicians that refused to cooperate or were not controllable.

"I have no intention of fighting you," he and the new cabinet will look after Japan.

...

I don't want to take too much because the others will need it more than me.

I only need to lead them away and take the hits. I only need enough to move and die.

This time the dying will be faster and easier and cheaper. They'll kill me or I'll scuttle myself if they try to take me.

I won't take anything more. I also left behind the little medal in my room, one of the many cabins the ship has for holidaying passengers. Someone will find it when they check my belongings.

'For the Defence of Stalingrad.'

...

The captain and the crew salute me before I go over the side. Then the captain tells me which way

the enemy is and which radio frequency I should be tuned to.

I reach the decks with my improvised rigging.

I turn around and salute the poorly armed passenger ship that has found itself in a warzone. At least it fights better than me.

I don't see anyone else to farewell so I cast off.

...

"How could they?" Hood shakes her fist at the small British jets mixed in with the equally small Abyssal fliers.

"Run," the destroyer ship girl Hyperion is already up to her waist and sinking further into the water, "You can't take on all of the British navy."

"Run where?" Hood demands, and she regrets for shouting at a dying friend, "Sorry. But where?"

"Get anyone who's on our side and run," Hyperion coughs up blood, "A battlecruiser can run and fight again. You can harass the enemy, but not here."

And Hyperion disappears under the water.

Two flights of Harrier jump jets. Illustrious, that traitor.

“I’ll be back again,” Hood turns away from the British Isles, from home.

...

The woman has left the office of the new Prime Minister.

Her phone has a new alert. The woman pulls the phone out of her blazer and checks it. They were working on finding out who was on the Abyssal side and who hadn’t been accounted for.

A new capital ship has been sighted fleeing with several other Kanmusu near Japan. No one could identify this new capital ship.

Well it was early days yet. They still needed to complete occupying the nations and their governments. Then they would have to look the records of who had moved where.

Some of the Kanmusu not on the Abyssals’ side that hadn’t been killed or captured already were fleeing. They could run, but they would not pose a threat in such numbers.

...

“Oh hell,” said Nimitz.

She was being chased by most of the escorts that she had happily been sailing with just a few moments ago.

Then the Abyssals started showing up on radar.

“Uh, guys,” Nimitz pointed at the distant shapes, “Could we please fight the real enemy?”

There was no way she could outrun her own escort ships, but they had gunned down their own and that was enough to get Nimitz running.

“Sorry,” said Sampson, an Arleigh Burke-class, “Orders.”

They were not fighting the Abyssals? What?

And then Nimitz felt her escorting ships overtaking and surrounding her.

Chapter 2

Chapter Two:

...

I switch the radio to open and unencrypted channel and talk to the attackers.

“Comrades of communism, and... Abyssalism. If you want to test the toughest steel processed in the Gulag labour camps, just look at this ship girl here.”

Now they are heading for me.

I haven't consumed enough ship supplies, or human food either. I'm already injured and I won't be able to run very far.

But I have my knowledge and skills.

And a few medical supplies.

When I first heard of the inter-network back in Vladivostok, I realised I was in a very different time.

All the information that is available if you have the proper interface.

Aren't people afraid that there are even rough schematics and experts talking about the making of atomic bombs on the internet? What if some dictator just decides to look up how they could produce weapons? Chances are, it's available to them. What if the internet arms the wrong people?

Sifting through the vast amount of information on the internet gave me a little more insight into how people and communications have advanced since my time. I remember the Iron Curtain. Information about both sides of the Iron Curtain ended up on the KGB's desks and not in the peoples' minds. A huge pool of unrefined ideas that transcends countries and national borders. What an unthinkable invention.

Granted, giving everyone the chance to access the internet and communicate with each other means that all the people I would have never met before or wanted to meet before could have a say. That includes halfwits and dullards unfortunately.

While browsing the inter-network, I came across a professional demonstrating first-aid.

Exactly what I wanted.

...

The Australian ship girls in Fleet Base East, Sydney, Australia, were watching the television set with numbing shock and horror, when an out of breath Canberra ran into the mess hall.

“There are... (*remind me to exercise more*)... Japanese ship girls coming to Australia and they’re being chased.”

Well the fight wasn’t waiting for them to come to it.

“Who by?” asks HMAS Sydney.

“The Abyssals and the Vietnamese People’s Navy.”

“How many ship girls are being deployed by the Australian navy?” asks HMAS Perth.

“The ones in Darwin.”

“Us?”

“We are to stay put. Orders from Kuttabul base.”

...

The human and Abyssal aircraft happily pound away at battlecruiser armour.

A direct hit dislocates my shoulder. That's easy to fix. Just pop it back in place.

Another hit. An anti-ship missile. An old friend come to say hello again. I feel my leg snap and my engine power is cut down drastically.

Is that my citadel failing? Yes. My ribcage doesn't feel bruised anymore. It's completely broken.

I idly wonder what people would call my personality now that I'm in human form. Murakumo called me a masochist, whatever that means.

"Stalingrad to Liquid Assets," I radio a private channel to the passenger ship, "I'm sustaining heavy damage. You get those Kanmusu to safety. Remember; little thieves are hanged, but great ones escape to praise."

"Liquid Assets to Stalingrad," that's the second-in-command, "We're in Indonesian waters now. We shouldn't be chased for much longer, unless the Vietnamese want to face the consequences. Thank you."

"Stalingrad only asks that you tell everyone that Stalingrad said farewell."

...

“How many Kanmusu are still on our side?” Scharnhorst was surprised at the number of Kanmusu now travelling around Gibraltar.

It seemed as if at least a quarter of the capital ships from Britain and Germany had managed to escape the carnage.

“A fair few,” said Hood, “The Suez Canal is still in friendly hands, but we don’t know how much longer that will last. The rendezvous has been set to Australia. Keep radio chatter down. We don’t want the radio frequency to be compromised.”

“How many friendlies can we expect there?” asks Prinz Eugen.

“Our friends can’t tell us the names of the Kanmusu in case someone else betrays us.” Hood looks over the fleet of loyal ship girls travelling with her, “They mentioned that a lot of them were injured, but we can expect a battlecruiser leading them.”

“Battlecruiser?” that piqued Invincible’s interest.

“Definitely a battlecruiser,” affirmed Hood, “And they didn’t know who she was at first.”

...

“She’s dead isn’t she?” Murakumo asks the chefs at lunch the next day.

“Stalingrad is gone,” said a chef, “Her radio broke and we couldn’t call her.”

Kiyoshimo, the destroyer Kanmusu who always liked battleships, looks thoroughly downcast as she sits at a dining table with barely disturbed food.

“What’s up Kiyoshimo?” asks Murakumo as she sets down her tray as the dining table.

“Kiyoshima just thought of how cool battlecruisers could be,” said Kiyoshimo, “Stalingrad-sama took all those hits the other day and still keep moving.”

“She’s made to do that, Kiyoshima,” says Murakumo as she looks dips her fork into a bit of gravy and suspiciously tests its consistency.

“Stalingrad-sama was so nice to Kiyoshimo. She always had time to talk to Kiyoshimo.”

...

Duct tape can fix hull material, can fix armour, can fix electronics, can fix bodies.

If Soviet Russia had this tape back in the Great Patriotic War, there would have been no way the Soviets could lose as long as they had a steady logistics and rolls and rolls of this stuff.

Stalingrad battlecruiser product's main ingredients: Tape (60%). Warnings: More tape than skin.

'While no one invention won the war, there exists a very small group of developments upon which victory very largely depended'. Bolshevik. This tape could have won wars alone.

I have a sneaking suspicion the enemy has run out of ammunition again. The skies are clear again.

I finished making a splint for my leg. The last one splint I made was obliterated in the attacks.

I can still float on the ocean's surface on my own two feet. The warms blanket of the ocean will have to wait for another time.

Pain means I'm still alive. I'm reminded that I'm still alive by the headaches I'm having that seem to be evolving into migraines.

I wait to make sure the enemy isn't coming back.

Could I lose the enemy and then follow the allies back to Australia?

...

“Salute.”

The handful of Kanmusu at Pearl Harbour saluted and took a seat in the briefing room.

The room resembles a lecture theatre or amphitheatre. It was meant to seat many, many more Kanmusu and other staff.

“This is us right here.” Commander Cooke indicates the small dot tagged Hawaii with his metallic pointer, “All those still deemed to be fighting for the good guys have been in communications.”

He indicates the dot tagged Sydney.

“We are to move as many people as possible to this position here.” He looks away from the map and projector, “Any questions?”

He rolls up the projector screen and then points to one ship girl.

“How can we be sure the Abyssals won’t hear where we are going?” asks Enterprise.

“We can’t be sure they haven’t heard already,” they had no idea who would betray them and how much the enemy already knew.

“So we’re just going to head for Australia while the enemy could know all about us?” says an incredulous Yorktown.

“We are to gather everyone who didn’t immediately join the Abyssals yesterday,” Cooke looks at the assembled Kanmusu, “But whoever hasn’t revealed themselves yet could feed the enemy information on our movements.”

“What if the enemy attacks us in Australia?” asks Iowa.

“I suspect we will come up with another spot to regroup. And I suspect we will be picking through everyone’s loyalties the whole time.”

...

“Oi, Canberra.”

“What?”

“What if we have a witch hunt on our hands?”

HMAS Adelaide looks back at the Tribal-class destroyer ship girl, Arunta, who is near the back of

the battle group composed of Kanmusu and regular warships.

“That could happen.”

...

Sadly, I ran out of fuel somewhere past the Philippines.

...

Murakumo supported Kiyoshimo as they walked back to the medical section of the ship. It was uncomfortable with all these casts and bandages.

Kiyoshimo had been badly wounded when the Kongou battleship sisters had fired upon her.

It was only a hail of their secondary batteries that struck her first. If it had been their powerful 14 inch guns, she would definitely be dead.

She had been so confused. They had already heard the Prime Minister’s address and the news that people were betraying them. But then those who were left just started fighting each other.

Murakumo had managed to tow her to safety. A brave passenger ship had slowed down nearby and

ran every risk of being destroyed. None of the missiles or torpedoes were aimed the passenger ship.

A ship girl she had never seen before just charged into the fray. She was wearing battlecruiser propulsion and armour that didn't seem to fit her all that well. But the enemy recognised a valuable and unprotected capital ship. Battlecruisers were not well protected enough and all too expensive.

But the Kanmusu girl simply stood there and weathered the storm of firepower directed at her. When the enemy began to back off, she managed to catch up to the passenger ship at a respectable speed.

Kiyoshimo didn't know there had been any more battlecruisers launched after World War Two. But the new ship girl identified herself as a battlecruiser, Stalingrad, launched in 1954.

The new ship girl didn't seem used to having people around her. If someone startled her, she just stared at the person even when someone else was speaking.

Stalingrad explained that she had spent a long time by herself and she was more comfortable alone. She explained that she always expected a surprise to be an unpleasant one. Stalingrad mentioned that the

only shocks she ever received in her previous life were when she was unexpectedly hurt when she was sleeping, or when she had finally died.

Kiyoshimo asked if Stalingrad felt sad for being alone and being a target ship. But the battlecruiser pulled out that hotshot aura that all battlecruisers seem to instinctively have when they return from doing something ridiculously risky and being successful.

“I would not regret my service at all. Because of what I endured, my navy could develop the next generations. I was able to fulfil my duties.”

Kiyoshimo had asked if Stalingrad was okay. The battlecruiser gave her a surprisingly honest, but worrying answer.

“I keep thinking that I am going to die very soon. In my last form, my injuries were only cleaned up a little when there was a danger that I would sink. I got comfortable with the pain. I was scared whenever it went away. Now that I have already died once, I don’t want it to go away. The last time I stopped hurting I was scrapped.”

That is why the battlecruiser didn’t let the doctor on the ship treat her injuries. She pointed out that

even with the medical supplies, Kanmusu can't be repaired very quickly unless they have proper ship supplies. The doctor had looked slightly pensive and some pain relievers. Stalingrad didn't want pain to leave though.

Kiyoshimo wondered what they would do once they had arrived at Australia. Even if they weren't discovered and crushed, how could they even begin to fight against an opponent that had occupied most of the world?

...

A day later, the fighting still hadn't died down.

Where were the rest of the Kanmusu? The group of ships and ship girls had somehow missed the passenger ship they had been sent to look for.

The group made a risky decision to split up and search.

...

I didn't think playing dead would have worked.

The Indonesians are still fighting each other and the Abyssals. I'll just lie here on the water and no one will bother looking at me.

I'm honestly surprised at how well it worked.

While I was floating there I thought back to what all armchair generals were saying about my design.

Why would the Soviet Union operate a battlecruiser when it didn't need or know how to use them?

Why were the battlecruisers so poorly protected and armed?

Well as soon as the main supporter of the whole battlecruiser-building scheme died, we were all cancelled.

I waited and waited. The sky was turning a little darker. I just watched the clouds tumbling by.

Wait. Why can I hear voices?

...

“How could you just pass by a passenger ship, Quickmatch?”

“How come you're Australian but you never operated in Australian waters in your last life, Nestor?”

The two Australian destroyers glided past pieces of wreckage. It appeared as though a major battle had occurred here. Really they should have been looking at their surroundings more.

“Don’t bring that up. It was the British. Wouldn’t let me actually go to Australia back then.”

“We’ll find them.”

“How can you — EEK!”

Suddenly one of the pieces of floating debris in front sat up and waved at them.

“What do we do?”

“Submarines do stuff like this sometimes. Shoot it!”

...

“I don’t think our rounds are getting through.”

“4.7 inch shells can’t beat dank armour schemes, Nestor.”

“Excuse me,” I wave again, “But are you two English?”

“Before I answer, who are you?” says the one called Quickmatch.

“My name is Stalingrad.”

“Never heard of a warship with that name.”

“We are Australian,” says Nestor, “But the British were funny back then. Both of us were commissioned to the Australian Navy, but both of us were owned by the Royal Navy for the action scenes in World War Two though.”

“Could you please help me up?” I ask.

“Oh, yeah su— EEEEEEEEEKKKKKKKKK!”

“Nestor! What happened?” exclaims Quickmatch.

“SHE’S GOT MORE ORGANS HANGING OUT THEN A GODDAMN ANIMAL GIVING BIRTH.”

“Nestor, what hallucinogens did you slip into your coffee? This time.”

“HALF HER BLIDDY FLESH IS JUST GONE! WHAT CREATURE WOULDN’T BE IN AGONY? WHY ARE YOU NOT SCREAMING IN AGONY?!”

“Oh.” Quickmatch is now appraising my wounds with a more clinical gaze, “That’s a lot of tape and

bandages.”

“Can you please calm down,” One of the destroyers is looking at me like I was the secret police, “I don’t mean to offend anyone, but I would be grateful if you could help me.”

“How do we know you are on our side?” says Quickmatch menacingly.

“You two could literally torture me all you want and all you’ll hurt is my opinion of you if you use that tone on me again.”

“I actually don’t doubt that.”

Nestor has given up and her screeches finally degenerate into undecipherable mutterings.

“Since I can’t see any weapons with you, I’ll lend you some humanitarian aid,” Quickmatch grabs under my arms and pulls me up.

“Thanks.”

...

“So you’re a battlecruiser.” Quickmatch and Nestor are towing me back. Two destroyers towing a battlecruiser is possible since I’ve lightened my

displacement by having bits of me blown off and using the majority of my ship supplies.

“Yes.”

“Never knew the Ruskie had battlecruisers,” remarks Nestor, “And you were launched in the 1950’s.”

“Yes.”

“That would make you the last battlecruiser ever launched,” says Quickmatch. Nestor chimes in with a deep voice.

“The Last Battlecruiser; featuring Tom Cruise, as Stalingrad, as Sadako Yamamura.”

“I don’t get those references.”

“They’re all movies.”

“Ah. Is it true that a normal human can watch half a day’s worth of TV shows?”

“Normally? The whole day.”

“I thought that was only an urban legend I read online.”

“You mean a meme,” says Quickmatch.

“There’s a lot more entertainment than I remember people having.”

“Let me show you,” Nestor shows me a little thin rectangular box with curved corners.

“Is that a handheld transceiver?”

“It’s used for communicating but that is not really what it’s best at.”

...

When the group from Darwin saw the bloodied and demolished figure being towed towards them, they assumed the worst had happened. The passenger ship and its Kanmusu passengers had been attacked.

But it wasn’t too late. This was the Kanmusu who had fought a delaying action against the Abyssals and allowed the others to continue unhindered.

The heavy cruiser, Australia, wondered aloud to the ship girls if the others would have arrived in Australian soon after the group from Darwin had left.

All of them were to return back to Darwin and get refreshed. If proceedings continued like this, the theatre of combat might soon include Australia

...

“Can I speak to her now?”

“Of course, mister Feuriels.”

There was a bit of chatter and the phone was handed over to the Kanmusu.

“Stalingrad speaking.” Stalingrad’s usual unruffled tone.

“We are all very glad you made it out alive.” All of the Kanmusu had cheered when they heard that the one that had been given up for dead, had returned.

“I’m still a long ways from a full recovery, but I’ll join you guys soon.”

“One of the girls, Kiyoshimo, was really shaken by your sacrifice. She’s been clutching onto that medal you always wore non-stop since —”

The sounds of shattering objects and startled screams.

“Did she touch the metal with her bare hands?”

“Uh, yes.”

The sounds intensify in volume, but Stalingrad just continues over the noise.

“Tell her that I want that medal in the conditions that I left it or I will Kaputnik her.”

Chapter 3

Chapter Three:

...

HMS Resource had been operating with the Royal Australian Navy when the British Isles had come under attack. She was somewhat disgruntled at the fact that her home was now in the filthy claws of the enemy.

Being a repair ship in her previous incarnation, HMS Resource, with the necessary equipment, medicines and ship supplies, could administer extensive repairs on Kanmusu.

The battlecruiser the Australians had picked up was in no danger of dying. Stalingrad was on-board HMAS Sirius, a replenishment tanker, and couldn't sink. The battlecruiser would not suddenly explode since she had taken off her rigging, and the fuel or ammunition she might have had with it was already used up anyway.

This meant HMS Resource could take the time to look at sketches of the battlecruiser's design and

schematics before putting the battlecruiser through reparative surgery.

The Stalingrad-class battlecruisers had been designed with very different priorities in mind. HMS Resource had been around other battlecruisers and struggled to identify anything in common.

The design of these battlecruisers had been a protracted process. Designed to be the first ambitious modern capital ships for the Soviet Union as they emerged from World War Two, the design decisions had a mix of wartime experience and new expectations adjusting to the new times.

The Soviets had put an emphasis on a battlecruiser whose primary purpose was to fight closer to the homeland and whose intended targets were other cruisers. It could dedicate less internal space to cargo storage. There were more internal machinery and systems that HMS Resource would have to fix.

With the Soviet Union having little experience of building large ships, there had been many arguments over what they wanted to achieve with these ships.

All these small changes and modifications had made the battlecruiser's design very complex and

HMS Resource did not have any experience to fall back on. So HMS Resource had to bury herself in reading over all the technical data.

“You’ve got this,” says HMS Resource to herself as she orders the patient to be prepared for surgery, “Just think of it as an up-scaled heavy cruiser.”

...

“The Mediterranean is still friendly and Abyssal-free,” reports HMS Renown.

“Good,” says Hood, “What is the situation of the fleet?”

“We’ll need to wait at Malta for the slower Kanmusu to catch up.”

The Abyssals and the countries they controlled could still continue their attacks. Those who still resisted them were facing the Abyssals attacking them from the seas and skies and humans from everywhere.

Just being able to take over those governments and then direct their militaries to attack their neighbours shortly afterwards was devastating the countries that still had not caving into their own rebels and the Abyssals.

...

It had taken a few minutes before things went very wrong.

HMS Resource had been cleaning up the Kanmusu's superstructure and had inserted new ribs.

The sedated Kanmusu had violently rejected the improper repairs and HMS Resource was afraid that she may have messed up the injured ship girl even further.

"Oh no," HMS Resource drops the cardiothoracic surgery tools and quickly rushes over to look at the internal scans and then compares them to the plastic schematic sheets taped next to the screens that display how the battlecruiser should be.

"Are you joking me?" she glares at the sheet showing the armour arrangement, "Why do you need different thicknesses and materials for every single bulkhead?"

...

"We will now attempt to break through the enemy's encirclement of Hawaii," Commander Cooke continues his briefing, "The longer we stay, the more assets the enemy can use against us. I want

us out of here by the time they complete their takeover of the United States and redirect more forces to here.”

The assembled Kanmusu still seem sceptical of the plan, especially when the fears of a traitor in their midst still linger.

“And if they follow us to Australia,” asks Iowa, “what do we do then?”

“We try to lose them in the confusion around Asia,” If this plan to regroup actually worked without somehow screwing up, betraying them or attracting the attention of the Abyssals at all, Cooke would shave off the rest of his greying hair.

“Are we going to go loud or stealthy as we break out?” asks Arizona, “I don’t imagine we can escape unnoticed when the enemy has Nimitz on their side as well.”

“We’ll split up our forces,” says Cooke, “I’ll release the details when you need to know.”

Even if the enemy had learned of their plan to regroup or had heard of them trying to escape, they didn’t have to make it easy for the enemy to get them.

“Get ready to leave at any time,” Cooke wouldn’t even tell them the time they were going to escape.

...

Kiyoshimo took the battlecruiser’s threats very seriously.

Kiyoshimo had committed a grave crime by handling one of Stalingrad’s prized possessions.

She had visited Stalingrad’s room when everyone was giving up Stalingrad for dead. She had read the little inscription on the medal. Hibiki should have been around to read the faded Russian words, but Kiyoshimo searched the internet for what the medal was.

The medal was awarded to those who had participated in the battles in Stalingrad. It was nice for the battlecruiser to receive this particular commendation.

Kiyoshimo thought it was very fitting for the battlecruiser to have been named after Stalingrad. She had taken a beating and kept fighting to the very end.

Kiyoshimo had taken and kept the little medal. The battlecruiser wouldn’t need the medal now that

she was gone.

But then the captain had told everyone on-board that Stalingrad had survived. And Stalingrad had been approaching something very close to fury when she had heard Kiyoshimo might have ruined the medal.

So now Kiyoshimo is restoring the medal. She put on a pair of clean gloves and handles the medal with all the care it deserved. She cut the little stitching to remove the ribbon holding the medal and cautiously cleans the ribbon. She flattens the ribbon between two papers moistened with distilled water, and paperweights. She scrubs and rinses metal. She polishes and lacqueres the surface until it shines. Then she puts the medal back together.

The other Kanmusu watched the injured destroyer restore the medal and asked where she got it. Kiyoshimo is too concentrated on her task and only answers the questions enough to make the other leave. Only after the ribbon is crisp and the metal gleams, does Kiyoshimo stop. Far from satisfied, she goes to find something appropriate to house the relic.

The passenger ship has a range of furniture that Kiyoshimo could use. She finds a mahogany table

and asks the crew if she could commandeer it for her own purposes.

...

“The Russians really didn’t spare any expenses,” remarks HMS Resource as she tries to navigate and mend the battlecruiser’s unique propulsion systems.

“This part of the leg goes... here... I think... Probably... Maybe... No it doesn’t... At all...”

This was challenging for the repair ship girl. She hadn’t even known all that many Russian Kanmusu or studied them in particular.

But the British repair ship girl was slowly managing to bring the battlecruiser back to shape.

It was fascinating just how unnecessarily complicated the Russians had made this battlecruiser. The arrangement of the inside was inefficient, but somehow sturdy. Although the battlecruiser had somewhat thin armour protection, the internal machinery could transition to backups should any be damaged.

Although the Soviets had kept their weapons tests secret at the time, HMS Resource had managed to find legitimate records after browsing around.

The bulkheads seemed very strange to HMS Resource. The bottom armoured bulges meant to protect against torpedoes was divided into four sections, two empty and two filled with oil. And some of the bulkheads were placed and shaped in incomprehensible ways.

The armour scheme for the Stalingrad-class was strange indeed.

On several weapons tests, Stalingrad had comfortably taken the then modern generation of missiles and shells. Stalingrad had taken seven anti-ship missiles on one occasion and had most of her compartments breached. But the damage didn't cripple or sink her.

It might work for Stalingrad.

But HMS Resource would have been tearing at her hair if it hadn't been under a surgeon cap.

She turns to look at the sheet concerning Stalingrad's armaments to see if there would be more sense there.

Apparently the Soviets didn't have to obey the laws of physics because Stalingrad's 12 inch/305mm main gun shells had an advertised range of 33 miles

or 53 kilometres. A specially developed long-range shell could fly more than double that distance.

HMS Resource had wondered why Stalingrad hadn't showed up with any weapons when they had found her. Obviously these weapons had not been available. Or logical.

...

I woke up feeling really odd.

Took me a while to realise why it felt wrong.

I had received surgery and full repairs for the first time in both of my lives.

The Kanmusu that I recognised as Resource was sitting next to the bed I was in and was sifting through a stack of papers. She's wearing a doctor's coat now and not medical scrubs anymore.

She looks up.

"How are you feeling, Stalingrad?"

I consider that for a little while.

"It's not painful anymore."

Resource frowns at my wistful tone.

“You’re a masochist, aren’t you?”

“What does that mean?” People keep calling me that.

“A masochist is someone who really enjoys pain.”

“... Why do you ask when you already know the answer?”

Resource looks really stern and shocked. She sets down the papers.

“That is not a healthy obsession at all.”

People have always been concerned with my health. Was I still useful to others? Was I still useful enough to continue testing the latest firepower?

“I’m sorry.”

Resource clears her throat (/harrumphs).

“Do you have a commanding officer I can speak to?”

I was going to be scrapped just after I was summoned. That means I don’t have a commission or superior officer.

“I was discharged from the Russian military.”

Resource stares at me.

“Then whose command did you refer to when you went into battle?”

“I told you I was with those other ship girls that fled from Japan.”

“That’s not what I’m asking.”

“What are you asking then?”

Resource loses her patience and yells at me. It irritates me when people talk to me with an unfriendly tone.

“What kind of madness is this? You don’t have any orders?”

Well.When I think about it, I’m a warship without a navy.

“I’m a pirate battlecruiser. You satisfied?” you slag.

“Well,” now Resource seems more worked up about something else, “I suppose Britain will declare us all fugitives and criminals anyway.”

...

“We still haven’t been attacked,” says Invincible, “at all.”

“And none of the ship girls have started fighting each other,” says Hood.

But the European nations were falling. They had to get past the Suez Canal or the enemy would find them in the Mediterranean.

“Heads up.”

The heavy cruiser Seydlitz and a few German destroyers had gone ahead of the Kanmusu fleet.

“Turkey just surrendered to the Abyssals,” says Seydlitz.

“Then we need to hurry up,” says Hood.

...

Since I’m the only patient Resource needs to tend to, she continues to sit beside me and turned on the flat-screen television fixed to the wall.

Televisions have advanced beyond their bulky boxes on stilts that I remember.

We watch in full colour the events that are unfolding.

Well, the breaking news is that Turkey has allowed some Abyssal-loving crazies march into their government building.

“Hey, Resource.”

“Yeah?”

“Is this what a hippie looks like?” Apparently I must have missed out seeing these gaudily clothed protesters in my last life.

“Close enough.”

I know I shouldn't let my Soviet background skew my perception on the world but I still might reflect Russian bias from the time.

Being part of a navy that were the sworn enemies of capitalists made for a very big surprise when I was first summoned. Where are all the countries that we communists and socialist fought so damn hard for?

Since I died in the early part of 1962, I could not witness the politics that directly followed. I would have liked to have been there when the Cuban Missile Crisis happened.

It's been a chore to adjust to the new status quo and world now that I'm back. My Cold War

memories and habits are all I have. The inter-network and my colleagues only gave me a glimpse of what has changed in this world.

Turkey. I feel like a terrible person, because the first thought I had was that it was good that their government was gone. I remembered that they were hosting American atomic weapons pointed at my homeland.

I need to change my ways or I'm going to lose my mind if I meet the American military. As I am right now, I'm likely to just gun them down where they stand. It's also likely that I might vent my thoughts at them.

That would be a catastrophic diplomatic failure.

'Arming moderate religious terrorists? There never has been or will be moderate terrorists in the Middle East.' Or 'You should have sent air conditioning. Those units are better than the military units you sent against the Taliban.' Or 'You should have thought more about funding ISIS if they were going to be such a problem.'

I was expecting to be scrapped, so no one bothered to bring me up to speed. Someone needs

bring some serious indoctrination to beat the Soviet propaganda out of me.

No. I can't look act like an American hater in this day and age. That role is for others to take now. Russia is America's friend now. Russia is not Soviet Union now. Russia *is* filthy capitalist —

...

!

HMS Resource became alarmed when the Russian battlecruiser suddenly began slapping herself.

“Are you okay, Stalingrad?”

The Russian battlecruiser did not seem to be able to concentrate very hard on reality. Resource had thought that Stalingrad would not pay much attention to the television and wouldn't mind if Resource watched.

“I'm fine,” the battlecruiser rubs her eyes, “I was just thinking that I haven't adjusted well to this life yet.”

Stalingrad is just as strange as the people who had designed her. She can give you nonsense

answers and really upset someone, and then be disconcertingly honest afterwards.

Being strange was normal for Kanmusu. It was inevitable Stalingrad would want to avoid talking too much to others, because in her previous life, her only interactions with any other warships was getting shot. And those weren't really nice interactions to remember when you don't remember much else.

“We all had to get used to our new lives.”

When ship girls were summoned, they were usually disoriented from being alive again and human all of a sudden.

They had a lot to take in. The horrifying and ugly Abyssals were the impetus needed to gently ease the ship girls away from old grudges and traumatic memories.

At least Stalingrad wasn't really hostile or mean to anyone. HMS Resource remembered HMS Hood's summoning. Many Kanmusu and important people had gathered in the room where they did the summonings when they were bringing back a ship girl.

Summoning a ship back from the dead could be a gamble. The navy could only hope to receive a ship they would want, there was a minimum amount of resources that would allow a ship to fashion itself a human body. Summoning a destroyer generally took a different amount of resources than a battleship, for example. Sometimes the more modern ships needed different materials than the older ships.

They saw the supplies in the summoning circles vanishing and played the music any British ship should know, Heart of Oak.

Then a ship girl pulled herself out of the small pool in the middle of the room and the Kanmusu began cheering when they recognised HMS Hood. When the other people were told who it was, the applause became even more joyous.

The cheering had broken down in confusion as the ship girl screamed in rage. They all stared, except for the guy who accidentally spilt some champagne on the ship girl commission forms and was hurriedly mopping the fluid from the papers.

“HAVE AT YOU GERMANY!” Then Hood yanked the nearest ship girls she recognised and was ready to go to war with the Germans. She had adjusted to being alive and human now, and it took

the battleships HMS Warspite and Nelson to hold back the excited battlecruiser.

Only after having a stiff drink, a welcoming handshake from the Prime Minister, several recordings of the Allied Victory in World War Two and the coronation of the current British monarch, did Hood begin to come to terms with the changing times.

HMS Resource watched the Russian battlecruiser, Stalingrad, looking increasingly more distressed as she pondered something.

“You need help with anything else, Stalingrad?”

“Yeah,” Stalingrad smacks herself on the forehead and closes her eyes, “It’s a problem I’m having with the Americans.”

“Language problem?” asks Resource, “I know their English is hard to understand.”

“I’m afraid that I will react horribly and make them hate me.”

HMS Resource knows the relatively new and masochistic Kanmusu needs to absorb a lot of new things.

“You don’t seem to have a problem with the rest of us.”

“I don’t really hate all the enemies Russia had back then,” Stalingrad massages her temples, “Russia cannot afford to lose any more allies. But I just feel really hyper whenever I think of the United States.”

“I know that Ameri—”

“RED ARMY BRINGS LIBERATION!”

HMS Resource falls out of her chair as the battlecruiser suddenly starts screaming Soviet warcries.

Stalingrad swipes the television remote off Resource’s vacated chair and throws it at the new President of America announcing the new regime changes and curfews on the television.

The television smashes and sparks a little as it dies.

Resource risks raising her head a little as she cowers away from the Russian Kanmusu.

The battlecruiser breathes heavily and then comes back to her senses. Stalingrad wonders what happened to the television.

...

“We’ll work on that, Stalingrad.”

Chapter 4

Chapter Four:

...

The Australian ship girls rotate shifts between being on board a regular ship and being on the water.

Nestor ends her break and casts offs again from HMS Sirius. She hands out ship supplies and thermos flasks to all the Kanmusu still sailing.

Quickmatch chews on a small oil can and opens up her flask.

“What in the blazes, Nestor! There is a place and time for coffee and that is not at tea time.”

“They ran out of proper tea,” apologises Nestor, “The British Kanmusu took what was left.”

“I suppose proper coffee is better than bad tea,” Quickmatch drinks and wishes the coffee tasted as good as it smelled.

“While I was on-board, Stalingrad apparently got really mad when she saw the new American

President.”

“Anyone would get worked up looking at the traitor.”

Especially when that traitor marches into the White House and let protestors loose. The politicians had to get away, and now the new regime has no one to oppose them. Everyone in America was scared to do anything because the Abyssals and their human minions would kill them.

“Not just that. Resource thinks that Stalingrad has a bit of a racial problem.”

“Well, we all had issues when we came back. Maybe even now.”

Quickmatch had seen the end of her war, so she didn't really have any lingering fights she would want to settle. But many other Kanmusu had problems and disputes left unfinished in their previous lives.

...

“Oh hell no.”

These might be American jets but Iowa didn't hesitate to shoot.

The enemy had modern Kanmusu and Abyssal warships. This would be a tough escape.

Iowa had been handed some sealed orders and been told to only open them when it was appropriate.

The orders she had received was for her to lead a group of fast warships to take a long and circuitous route that would lead them all around and through the South-East Asian islands and countries. They would rely on the chaos of the fighting around Vietnam and the rest of the region to lose their pursuers. If the pursuers were determined to chase them, they were to ditch their ship riggings and commandeer an anonymous ship fleeing the warzone and head for Australia.

If the enemy still kept following them, they were to head for Taiwan and wait. Taiwan was still friendly and was actively brawling with the Abyssal warships that had engulfed Asia. They had jailed all the most vocal Abyssal supporters and declared martial law. Hopefully the ship girls could stay there for a short time.

If the enemy caught up with them, then the Kanmusu were to scatter in all directions and fend for themselves. They would try their best to disguise

their appearances as the enemy must know who wasn't on their side.

“How do you reckon they've coerced all these ship girls?” asks Enterprise over their group's communications, “I don't remember this many wanting to work for the Abyssals.”

“Yorktown,” the cruiser Alaska notices the carrier is very agitated, “Your planes will be nothing to Nimitz's F-18 jet fighters. Keep your aircraft tied down and—”

“I know, I know,” says Yorktown, “We're going fast. They're staying with me.”

“Uh oh,” the destroyer Edison points at distant aircraft behind them, “They have Gerald, don't they?”

There had been no point making an escape when it was dark. It would have just handicapped the older Kanmusu.

Gerald R. Ford, had been a brand-new supercarrier when she was sunk operating around Iceland. When she had come back, the navy wanted to keep her out of sight because there had been so many that died with her.

The Abyssals had chosen to focus on coastal areas in their relentless assaults against humanity. There had been a few instances when whole countries had been abandoned because their positions were too isolated and hopeless to maintain. Iceland had been abandoned. The supercarrier had taken on a few of the refugees in addition to her normal crew.

The Abyssals operated from bases in the main oceans, but for some reason, their locations remained secret after so long. Some speculated the bases were actually mobile and moving around.

The Abyssals had turned up and sunk Gerald R. Ford with a colossal loss of life. They didn't stop shooting until the survivors were all dead.

It was always a touchy subject when these important ships were brought back from death. Iowa knew that the navy was always concerned about the image of the Ship Girl Initiative. There were always anti-Kanmusu hate groups or someone criticising why they resurrected a particular ship.

Having Gerald R. Ford as well as Nimitz would only add to the enemy's supercarrier strength though.

“Those are definitely F-35’s,” says Enterprise, “We don’t stop for anyone who slows down.”

...

“Let me see what you made,” Akashi knows that Kiyoshimo has been slowly constructing something as they were transported to Darwin.

Kiyoshimo looks exhausted and she has wood splinters and shavings on her. She holds up a dark mahogany box for inspection.

Akashi remembers that Kiyoshimo took some furniture, a saw, some other tools, and disappeared into what would have been the bar if this passenger ship had been in peacetime.

“I see you prepared a gift for Stalingrad,” Akashi had wanted to make something for Stalingrad. She was a repair ship after all, and had it not been for Stalingrad doing her job, Akashi and many others would have been sunk. Akashi wanted to construct something, but she had been so busy tending to the injured.

“Yes,” Kiyoshimo opens up the box and shows Akashi the magnificent golden medal nestled in clean fabrics.

“You did this for her without any encouragement?” says Akashi, “She will be really grateful.”

“Well,” Kiyoshimo wonders if her efforts will save her, “This is a treasured possession of Stalingrad-sama and Kiyoshimo might have damaged it.”

“She will forgive you when she sees this,” Akashi appraises the professionally-made hinges, “Why is it so big?”

“So that Stalingrad-sama can put all her medals here when she earns them,” Kiyoshimo holds up the pin mount she made so that Stalingrad could wear a row of medals, “Kiyoshimo wasn’t sure if Stalingrad-sama likes her medals to clink against each other like the traditional style, but Kiyoshimo thought Stalingrad would not like her decorations damaged.”

...

HMS/(declared fugitive) Resource fearfully answers Stalingrad’s questions.

It was the longest time that Stalingrad has actually focussed.

Her eyes would have made every dictator installed to lead revolutions and deny capitalism seem like charity workers in comparison.

Resource was aware that she had to give the battlecruiser some essential knowledge. But there were moments that made it physically painful to look and answer the battlecruiser. That part when the Soviet Union was dissolved? Stalingrad appeared ready to dig up false socialists and defile graves.

But Resource had to endure this, otherwise Stalingrad would screw up badly enough to scuttle herself from the humiliation.

“When can I get better before I can move around?”

“You can move around now. But you will feel a lot of pain if you push yourself too hard.”

So Stalingrad obviously gets out of the bed and HMS/(castaway) Resource tries to hold her back.

Stalingrad is much stronger than her thin frame suggests. She continues without any appreciable loss of speed.

“I need my rigging.”

“I haven’t mended it yet. Please go back and recover.”

There were still plenty of materials still left over. Stalingrad had needed a fraction of it for her repairs, and Resource planned to use the rest to make some equipment as they were taken back to Darwin.

“I need,” growls the battlecruiser, “to make some amendments to the Russian Constitution.”

“You can’t,” cries the repair ship holding onto the battlecruiser, “Please don’t do anything dramatic while you’re injured.”

“If I can do it now,” the battlecruiser stumbles down the hallway leading out of the medical bay, “I cannot rest while good men lay in state and bad men occupy their thrones.”

“No,” wails the repair ship.

They bump into the cruiser ship girls having a break. The cruisers are immediately concerned and awed.

Now the battlecruiser was more ship rather than shipwreck, Stalingrad has such purpose and poise that the Australians are completely stunned . Now that her construction has been completed, the

Kanmusu could only gape admire her exotic and elegant appearance and animation.

Even though she is wearing medical robes, the cruisers stare at her tall figure. Those sleek curves and long legs hadn't been hinted at when they had first met her corpse-like form.

Stalingrad was complete. This was the dreams and promise that had culminated in a beautiful and torturous victory.

There was nothing that could have prepared them for her inexorable gracefulness. The doctor trying to restrain her appeals to the heavy cruisers.

“Australia, Shropshire, please stop her.”

The two cousins recover and move to stop the battlecruiser. They were cousins because they belonged to the same class of heavy cruiser, County-class, but Australia belonged to the Kent sub-class, and Shropshire to the London sub-class.

“So this is what a Russian capital Kanmusu looks like,” Shropshire has repossessed her mental faculties. Australia is still dazed as they drag the protesting battlecruiser back to the medical ward.

“No, let me go,” complains Stalingrad, “The motherland needs me. I don’t have time to recover when political dissidents hold power.”

...

Even Abyssals get bored.

According to the military hierarchy of the Abyssals, the most powerful warships and leaders of the Abyssals were demons and princesses.

The Abyssal equivalent of destroyers and cruisers look like animals and rocks had children, but they gradually get more humanoid until you finally get to the top.

Light Cruiser Demon was getting bored of waiting for the others to hurry up. Some of the more humanoid Abyssals had gone on land to finalise agreements with the new government in Vietnam.

So Light Cruiser Demon just watches the nimble Abyssal fliers zipping around the area, looking for trouble.

She has been out here for days.

Abyssals don’t really need to see a port to service them unless they were seriously damaged. Abyssals could be self-sufficient and feed from the fish and

wait for Wa-class transport Abyssals to arrive with other supplies.

Then the Light Cruiser Demon was alerted to a formidable amount of Kanmusu coming towards them.

...

“Well there’s me gone,” says USS Edison as she gets enveloped by the water, “For a second time.”

“Damn it,” the Kanmusu had made it so far, only to get swarmed and caught between the enemy forces.

“Snap out of it Iowa,” orders Enterprise.

“Incoming,” says Yorktown.

The supercarriers have chased them this far.

...

As soon as we reach Darwin, I charge off the ship despite the protests of my attending physician.

I need to go and slay Kiyoshimo where she stands.

It’s really nice weather here. The hot wind is like a blanket that makes me really drowsy. I look around

the port. There are a lot of people scurrying around. The rhythmic clanking noises from the finished coastal fortifications calms and soothes my rage.

“Stalingrad-sama?”

I wipe away some sweat and turn to the destroyer ship girl. There’s only one Kanmusu I could guess who would try to use a reverential tone to escape their punishment.

“Ah,” I stomp towards my target, “Kiyoshimo.”

This time I will be the one serving out the pain.

“This is for you,” Kiyoshimo holds out a box to me.

How long has Kiyoshimo been out here? She’s completely drenched in sweat.

My anger is shunted aside again and I cautiously take the box. Maybe Kiyoshimo will try something dodgy.

I open the lid. These are fine well-oiled hinges.

Then I see the medal.

When I was first donated this medal, the metal had been rusted and grimy, the inscriptions corroded

and illegible, and the ribbon tattered and discoloured.

It looks fresh and I'm stunned by how different it looks. It used to be kind of sad before. Now I half expect this came from an award ceremony.

"To the steel-hearted defender, Stalingrad." Kiyoshimo picks up the medal, "This gift of Kiyoshimo's."

Wait. Why does that sound familiar?

"In token of the homage of the Japanese people." Kiyoshimo pins the medal to the left side of my borrowed Australian naval uniform.

I was only joking about the award ceremony.

"I present this token of honour to Stalingrad," Kiyoshimo takes the box from me and steps away, "Truly you had hearts of steel."

This sounds similar to that time the Allies thanked the Soviets. Why is Kiyoshimo being so serious and grandiose?

I'm so caught off guard my arms are still frozen from when they were holding the box.

“Kiyoshimo,” I recover from the unexpected randomness, “I cherish this nostalgia, but I will never deserve my namesake. I will never approach the deeds of those who struggled and died there. I have not suffered as they have. I have not freed as they have.”

Kiyoshimo is shaking her head. She’s more serious than I’ve ever seen her. I always thought she was a bit dreamy, and that’s coming from me.

“I just want Stalingrad-sama to be adequately praised.”

I am not someone that should be praised. I am not someone that should be praised like those valorous heroes. I’m just a crazy time capsule of Soviet ideals and discomfort.

“I only stood in the way of the enemy. I didn’t kill any of them.”

“Sometimes that’s all that’s needed,” Kiyoshimo makes it sound like what I did was something hard. It’s the only thing I could do and what needed to be done. So it’s what I did.

...

It has been confirmed.

The group of Kanmusu need to be stopped.

Light Cruiser Demon had gotten some of the other warships to take a look. The group of Kanmusu had fired on both the human and Abyssal vessels.

There were so many of them though. Light Cruiser Demon would be foolish to take on so many at once. They were being very well led.

She could run. But running always has the risks of getting caught.

There had to be an alternative that didn't get her killed.

...

“Well that plan broke pretty quickly.”

Iowa and Enterprise make for a conspicuous sight when they are foreigners and completely drenched in sea water for some reason.

Turns out that a serious amount Abyssal and enemy firepower has just arrived in the Philippines. The people still fighting them fled before the dozens of modern human warships and Abyssal vessels.

They had completely botched the plan to make it to Australia in the confusion.

The enemy knew where to search for them.

Enterprise collapses as soon as she steps onto Taiwan. A fire spontaneously erupts from her rigging.

Like how ships were resurrected in the form of humans, their crews also took human form.

The crew members are very small, they could fit in a human's palm. They have disproportionately large heads and small bodies. They are known as 'fairies' because of their size.

Now, a team of fairies jump out of some openings in the ship rigging and begin fighting the fire.

“What do we do about them?” asks Iowa.

“You hold them,” says the damaged Enterprise.

Air strikes from modern jet aircraft gave the vintage carrier some nasty wounds. Passer-bys stare at the smoking form of Enterprise and the wrecked equipment she has on her.

“We need to get disguised,” suggests Iowa, “We’re too obvious about being ship girls.”

Iowa removes Enterprise's equipment and scoops up the surviving crew. The author would describe where she put them but that's highly classified information.

She then hauls the carrier to a standing position.

"You're heartless, Iowa."

"Is the 'Grey Ghost' complaining that the enemy hit her too hard?"

"Don't be a know-it-all, Iowa."

"No one likes a priss, Enterprise."

Wait in Taiwan until someone came to get them. Iowa was sure someone had given the enemy the radio frequencies and codes they had been using. She needed a different way to communicate with friendlies.

Iowa wondered who would have betrayed them. It seemed many of the Kanmusu going over to the other side were unwilling as they had to obey what their direct superiors ordered them to do.

Any Kanmusu in their midst could be a traitor.

"There's a souvenir shop over there, Iowa."

“Then let’s go get some disguises.”

...

Resource caught up to the battlecruiser and begs her to just lie down and recover.

There was a destroyer ship girl Resource hadn’t recognised, but assumed had arrived with the other fleeing Japanese Kanmusu.

“Oh, hello, my name is Resource and I’m healing your colleague over here.”

“I’m Kiyoshimo, is Stalingrad-sama going to be okay?”

Resource frowned because the Japanese ship girl still used Japanese even as she spoke English.

“Stalingrad will need two weeks rest before she should do anything strenuous.”

“I wish to complain,” said Stalingrad, “I feel fine.”

“You should still be in pain.”

“I am.”

Resource just buried her face in her hands. She gave up and wandered away. The patient knows

best.

Stalingrad is feeling distinctly hungry as she gazes at the wood shavings mixed with water on Kiyoshimo.

When there wasn't enough food to scrape by, or not enough glue and paint to scrape off, a bit of mystery soup was next on the menu. A bit of wood pulp and hot water was excellent to cure a food production quota problem.

“Where is everyone else?” asks Stalingrad.

“They are all in the military base,” Kiyoshimo tucks the box under an arm and guides the battlecruiser.

Chapter 5

Chapter Five:

...

“Okaerinasai!”

“Welcome back!”

I would have preferred to be welcomed back in my mother tongue, but I appreciate that all the crew and Japanese Kanmusu have organised a party for me.

I really haven't spoken much Russian at all since I left Vladivostok. I can converse in Japanese and English so I've just used that instead. The smattering of English was essential learning. I probably picked up Japanese unintentionally from what I heard back in my previous life, but it's been useful.

A warship tends to pick up the mannerisms and memories of their crews. It's also why ships reflect actions that they had done as a result of their crews. Some Kanmusu remember their commanding officers with fondness. I don't really... Actually they did have some really nice skills.

That damn fine manoeuvring to recover after being hit and getting back to the target area has been passed on to me. And the obvious collection of languages from my Soviet comrades. But where did I pick up Japanese?

I think it was the crew getting their hands on some illegal intellectual contraband. They all learnt Japanese so they could read these comics that were just beginning to rise in popularity.

My memory recall isn't perfect, but it's enough language to get by.

The Commissariat and the inter-network would condemn them. But I could use a quiet place and something to read right now.

Everyone crowds around me as soon as I enter. The room is really big. There is a mammoth Australian flag and a podium above the raised section on one end, and all the plastic chairs on the lower part of the room has been stacked and left on the side. Maybe they hold events and functions here.

“Is this for us?” says Quickmatch.

“We didn't do anything, my very special snowflake,” Nestor snatches a few snacks from the tables set up.

The food vanishes pretty quickly and all the injured Kanmusu that have all been healed come over to thank me.

I try to fix an approximation of a smile upon my face to hide my inner terror.

“Was all this really necessary?” I ask mister Feuriels after the initial deluge of people thanked me was past.

“These girls would have found any opportunity to celebrate,” says Feuriels, “But it will only distract them.”

These Kanmusu have lost their home. A lot of people here have just lost their homes. I haven't really mentioned how Russia is in the control of the Abyssals after a human army of their minions ransacked Moscow.

“Where is Midway?” I ask. I only saw the American carrier at the beginning of the celebrations.

“She sprained her ankle when she went to get refills of food.” That would be the equivalent of damaging your propulsion turbines if you're not sure what it feels like.

...

“You laggards get through the canal,” says Invincible over the radio, “Hurry up. We’re not waiting any longer.”

The battlecruiser turns to look at the jet bombers heading towards them.

There was no way they could defeat dozens of modern aircraft. Invincible could only slow them down.

“Please don’t do this,” Hood doesn’t want to leave this venerable warrior behind, “What would your sisters say?”

“I don’t give thruppence what they think,” says Invincible, “They would do the same if they weren’t conspiring with the enemy.”

Hood has witnessed many of her friends and those she respected all die. The toll of the war was beginning to impact the battlecruiser’s determination.

“Then let me join you.”

“Nonsense. You need to lead us to victory, ‘Mighty Hood’.”

Hood clamps down on her emotions. She has learnt that you had to spend every last moment talking or she would regret it forever.

So while Hood and the other ship girls escape, Hood had her last conversation with a living Invincible.

Over the sounds of gunfire and combat, they laugh their final jokes and reminisced about memories they share. Invincible and Hood kept talking even as one of them sank.

Around the time the last Kanmusu in the fleet was clear of the Arabian Peninsula, Hood lost all contact with Invincible.

“Are you okay?” asks Prinz Eugen.

“No.” Hood can’t help but get a little teary.

Where would they have to go to pay for all the injustice they had suffered? How many of their own people would they have to kill? When could they finally stop?

Hood confirms their next destination. Vengeance has no need for any doubts.

...

Some pains are more painful to endure.

Profound grief and abject agony are good examples. I know I cannot appreciate all pains.

This hammering headache is so bad I'm back in bed. It's annoying that I can't think straight and enjoy it.

"Just how many drinking games were you in?" asks Resource as she notes the pungent odour of alcohol.

"The real question is why the destroyers were joining us," I was either drunk or hungover. I don't recall when the party ended for me.

Some of the girls drinking did not look like they were at this country's legal drinking age. If they were Russians, it wouldn't matter. But there might be an inquiry since we're in Australia. Maybe.

"I'll just administer some painkillers for you." Resource slips some drips into me, hangs up some sloshing plastic packets and flicks them. I feel numbness spreading through my bloodstream.

Then I comprehend what she just said.

Pain. Killers.

“You can’t do this to me,” I whine, “You can’t punish me for over-exceeding the alcohol quota, comrade.”

“How is she?” Akashi bustles into the room. There are other doctors on base, but a repair ship girl is the preferred choice to maintain Kanmusu.

“She’s fine,” says Resource.

“Dear Shinto deities,” Akashi goes over and examines the packets more closely, “What are you injecting her with?”

“There’s no chance she’ll get addicted to something that she hates,” explains Resource, “She looks like she wants to murder me right now.”

“Is this how you want to play it?” My words are still slurred but my intentions are that universal language, “You can’t motivate me with pain and the fear of it, so you’re doing this now?”

“A healthy patient and healthy lifestyle need to go together,” that smug little smile, “You’ll get used to it.”

“I see you know what you’re doing,” Akashi leaves the room, “What did I just witness?”

“I don’t want to get used to it,” I screech, “You Bourgeois cannot hope to oppress the lower-class forever. One day you’ll regret taking my constitutional rights.”

“Ra, Ra, Rasputin, just be quiet down and enjoy it like normal people do.”

She just dropped the microphone and let the lyrics of the song finish me off. That is just. Pure. Unadulterated. Imperialism. What did I expect from American, British, Australian and Japanese allies?

I would have preferred the slow decline of my human rights with tyrannical democracy. This is just complete Bolshevik.

It’s too much for me. It’s uncomfortable without anything to suffer through. I already felt quite dizzy before and now I can’t keep concentrated without discomfort. But going over to strangle the doctor is not feasible.

If Resource insists that I need to change my ways, I’ll take this opportunity to express myself like the hip and trendy do these days.

DX

RIP RIP: #Really irritating people removing interesting pain.

I'm too tired to think.

Little did I know what the doctor would do to me or what was going to happen to me.

...

The battlecruiser had come in downcast and drunk. She left sugar-high and sober.

Resource watches the battlecruiser stagger out of the medical building onto the sidewalk that leads back to the main part of the base. With an armful of candy. Since this is Australia and they're our hosts, let us play along and call them footpaths.

It was text-book. To dislodge an addiction, you need a less harmful alternative.

After the battlecruiser had rested for a bit, Resource, took a few samples of her blood. Stalingrad didn't have any internal plumbing problems.

Resource has discovered that the battlecruiser had a craving for cute and sweet things.

So the good doctor had introduced the inexperienced, hungover and exhausted ship girl to mass-produced sugar.

The battlecruiser's reconstructed body parts still needed to sort out their identity crisis of how they had gotten there. The battlecruiser's only lengthy naps were passing out from wounds. She was only just beginning to recover from surgery. The battlecruiser had experienced getting completely drunk for herself for the first time.

None of her crew's memories could have prepared her for this.

Resource's main concern was that the battlecruiser might have just had a cardiac arrest or stroke right there and then from the shock. She was willing to run the risk of diabetes. That was more treatable than masochism.

Hopefully Resource had given the battlecruiser enough 'medication' that she didn't relapse into her old ways. Hopefully it would last a few days.

More research is required.

...

I woke up again after passing out. Again.

The headache has improved.

“Have a marshmallow.”

Okay. Thanks, Resource?

Wait, this is all just a tactic to lure me into forgetting who I am.

The cake is a lie. It’s a trap!

And I stopped caring fifty marshmallows ago.

...

Murakumo had helped Kiyoshimo walk down the footpath as the two headed for the medical building.

The British and Australian ship girls had introduced them to a method called “Brits-krieg”. It was used when someone wanted to recover from getting hungover.

It involved drinking brandy, whisky, boiling tea and cold water and repeating until something happened.

Frighteningly, Murakumo actually felt better. Kiyoshimo had just decorated the floor with her dinner.

Murakumo was heading back to the main building when she saw a certain battlecruiser.

The battlecruiser's eyes are usually either darkly intense or vacant. However this time, they were gleaming bright.

As Murakumo watched, the battlecruiser swayed and then sank into a kneeling position.

“Stalingrad, are you okay?”

This is the most energetic the battlecruiser has ever appeared to Murakumo. She smiles. It's was a light-hearted smile as well. What is going on here?

“Hey, Murakumo,” her Japanese has suddenly turned flawless, “Let us go around and share these with everyone.”

“Geez,” Murakumo takes a portion of sweets from the battlecruiser's huge armful, “You need to quit looking out for us.”

The battlecruiser laughs. And it wasn't bitter or gloomy at all. What is going on here?

Usually Stalingrad just tends to fade from the conversation unless you directly talk to her.

But the battlecruiser was really excited for some reason. She actually agreed to play video games with them. She complained before that she did not have the reflexes to react to the weird and wonderful flickers on the television screen, but suddenly she had no objections.

Murakumo and the rest of the Kanmusu just gamed, talked and ate sweets. They needed to save the world, but not when everyone is completely demolished from last night's party.

...

Now it was time for the last group to leave.

Commander Cooke, the human staff, and the injured or just dead-slow ship girls were ready to take-off.

“You ready for the last hoorah, 'Reaper One'?”

In Cooke's opinion, sometimes the best equipment is the old ones. Some may want America's latest superiority jet fighter, the F-35 Lightning, but most would want an F-22 Raptor on their side.

The many areas these older aircraft excelled at they were completely number one in. Nothing could

approach the F-22's capabilities as a jet fighter, not even the bulkier, slower and newer F-35.

Fortunately, there side still had the fight pilots left.

“The plan is to break through the encirclement and meet up with the Chinese loyalist's air replenishment 'Mughal' unit.”

Commander Cooke wondered how many ship girls that he had sent overwater would survive.

Now how many would die with these transport helicopters as well?

...

At lunch, we held a barbecue party.

My crew weren't all that familiar with Western cuisine, so by extension, neither am I.

It involves cooking raw or marinated meat on an oiled hotplate and grill. The only thing that wasn't meat was the sauce and the fruit afterwards. The Russian in me appreciates steaks for appetiser, steaks and vodka for main, and wine and watermelon for dessert.

Then we had a tea party.

The good doctor gave me substances I cannot remember. I can change between feeling tired and hyperactive without any conceivable reason.

Everything seems like a good idea all of a sudden. I'm really talkative as well.

I ask if the cassette tape is broken. The Australian soldier I was talking to explained that this was radio music.

“Is the recording corrupted or something?”

“No. This is what we call 'Heavy Metal' music.”

“Do people like the sounds of screaming singers and dying instruments?”

The radio then changed to something I almost recognised. I asked again.

“This is 'Rock and Roll' music.”

I see. I remember that genre was around my time. The KGB would say damning words about what contraband my weeaboo crew had somehow smuggled through the Iron Curtain.

But that brings me onto another point.

I have no doubt that the military professionals here are disciplined and trained, but their infantry 'Spray and Pray' firearms seem lacking.

What happened to those monuments of rapid and reliable firepower that were the cutting-edge *assault* rifles? You could use their bayonets and stocks to cook your meals and use the magazines for industrial renovations. They were *offensive* weapons and *blatantly* obvious about it. I do not approve of these new plastic and flimsy toys that seem to not want to offend you with their dainty frame.

It's like comparing sledgehammers to scalpels. Don't modern soldiers still need to be able to fix bayonets to beat up bushes and bodies as well?

And what happened to those weapons that you had to jam at half-cycle to stop them firing because they had no safeties? Where is the thrill in these new generations of weapons with all these safety features?

Warships are designed to go into and make a hazardous working environment while crammed with explosive and flammable equipment. Warships have to get used to sailing into battle and hoping that their armoured bubble-wrap held long enough for them to hit something that goes boom.

It's a race of assisted suicides to see who breaks first.

So I gave the Australian soldiers a piece of my mind and they actually seemed really interested in what I had to say.

I like this country. I'm going to dedicate some literature to it.

A lot of people were surprised at my literary talent. Apparently it could be called 'a fair shake of the sauce bottle.'

...

THE LIQUIDATED FARMER — By Comrade Stalingrad

Prologue:

Living off the land were the unsung heroes of Australia.

Working the dry topsoils and beating natural disasters, these independent veteran farmers do not wait for handouts.

Sometimes you could do everything right. You could have obeyed the seasons. You could have used

the right equipment and crops. You could have tended to the land as best as you could.

But unless Mother Nature agrees to come to the party, these efforts could all be for naught.

A drought had persisted for many years in this hot and dry continent. Many farmers lost their livelihoods.

There was one farmer though, that became very rich in these harsh years.

He was so rich that he could influence the state government and had set up farmer subsidies.

Every time the harvesting season came around, his land was always untended to. He could claim that it was the nature destroying his crops. The more land he had, the bigger the payments.

So he got more money. And he bought more land. And he got lazier. And got even more money.

One day, the drought that had to be endured for years were suddenly was broken up rain. The government happily withdrew the farmer subsidies, but many farmers could now take advantage for this most anticipated rain.

They had kept their farms and equipment in the best conditions, waiting and hoping for this moment that had finally arrived.

There was one farmer though, that became very poor in these bountiful years.

His fields were in terrible condition. His crops were starved by neglect and choked by weeds. His machinery hadn't seen service in years.

Working the dry topsoils and beating natural disasters, this dependent lazy farmer waited for handouts that never came.

When it rains, it pours.

This is the story of a foolish farmer. And Australia's welfare system.

...

Kiyoshimo watched the Soviet battlecruiser writing a Nobel Prize-worthy novel at the back of the recreation room.

Usually the battlecruiser detested Western culture and literature, but now she is writing a slew of poems and stories with an authentic Australian touch.

Chapter 6

Chapter Six:

...

“Who will you appoint to be the commanding officer of the arrived ship girls?” asked Ethan Feuriels.

Now that he has delivered the Kanmusu to Australia, the commander of the armed passenger ship, Liquid Assets still has plenty to do.

More foreign Kanmusu were going to arrive in Australia and the hosts were going to have an enormous workload.

He speaks to the commandant that was the ranking officer controlling the ship girl facilities in Darwin. The city’s location to the frontlines had made it the priority to receive things from the Shpi Girl Initiative.

“We cannot have Australian officers leading the newly arrived ship girls,” says the commandant, “We’re still expecting traitors right here to reveal themselves. I don’t want to open the floodgates for

the Australian traitors to lord over these homeless Kanmusu.”

Kanmusu had to absolutely follow the orders of their direct superiors. All the Japanese Kanmusu here had lost their commanding officers. The Prime Minister refused to give into the new Japanese government and died with the final orders being to resist the new government.

So that meant these Kanmusu had received those last orders from the very top. Unless the Japanese Emperor caved into the enemy’s demands, they could follow the Prime Minister’s orders. Even if the Abyssals changed the hierarchy, those orders were to not see the new Japanese government as legitimate. Thanks to him, the Kanmusu had some options.

The chain of command had been extremely messy to sort out. Commander Cooke was someone that was trustworthy, but he was a very junior officer to be left with most of Pearl Harbour’s Kanmusu.

When Feuriels had contacted the Australian government, the commandant had reached out to the Kanmusu that could possibly still be out of the enemy’s hands. The enemy was busy occupying countries and administering to them. The Australians concentrated on finding out the positions

and status of the Kanmusu. But secret communications meant nothing when there was still people leaking information to the enemy.

Now a large force of Abyssals and their supporters were tying up loose ends in the Asian region. Commander Cooke's Kanmusu had run into this huge enemy presence and were now scattered all over the region.

A large group of European ship girls had successfully escaped the blood bath of the European and African continents. But they were being pursued and attacked relentlessly as they travelled in the vague direction of Australia.

The Australian's own ship girls were spread too thinly to effectively defend if the Abyssals attacked Australia in large numbers. And some higher-up officer might go over to the other side and take the Kanmusu they commanded with them.

This situation was far from ideal.

The only reason why the regrouping situation had even gotten this far was because the good guys had a wildcard that the enemy would never expect. A battlecruiser they wouldn't expect to be brought back.

Most Kanmusu had much more time and better conditions. But the commandant believed that she was going to have to break the battlecruiser as soon as possible to get back into the fight.

Stalingrad had been a member of the Soviet Navy.

Every single citizen of every socialist and communist country in history was brainwashed to believe that all capitalists were bad and the cause of all their country's failure. They were taught to believe that they should die at the convenience of their government.

Every one of these countries convince their citizens that only when every morsel of capitalism is raped, bombed and removed from existence, that the world will be peaceful and prosperous.

And the military was the tool of the politicians. Every soldier wanted to take at least one capitalist with them to the afterlife. They were conveniently lost and conveniently replaced.

And when the people become unhappy, it's the military that has to not let any doubts or imagination or blasphemy affect them when they enforced the government's will. And the Soviet Union was very

militarised, its sailors would have been subjected to strenuous conditioning to protect them against any possible political, moral or ethical confusion.

And of course, the bastions of capitalism, North America and Europe, are what causes there people to suffer all the time, right? Oh no, not own government, look at those wasteful and greedy capitalists over there causing our economy to be mishandled.

Everyone that was part of Stalingrad's crew and her history would have socialist background. That meant the propaganda and hate would be extremely difficult to remove.

“Feuriels, where is Stalingrad right now?”

“She just got treated by a repair Kanmusu and is now in the recreational room.

“Gather the repair ship girls in my office. And I need to get our novice battlecruiser trained up.”

...

The others came up with nicknames for me as we whiled away the afternoon in the living room.

There were a lot of suggestions.

I feel that Murakumo's nicknames are insightful and would very well suit me. 'Stallin'-grad', 'Killingrad' and 'Maso-cruiser' sound quite good.

Midway's suggestion was inspired by that controversial book, 1984. 'Floating Fortress', but apparently that awesome name has been taken by a warship type Abyssals. Damn thieves.

Many of the nicknames were riddled with references to games, novels, movies and entertainment I haven't gotten around to seeing. Apparently people are already calling me the 'Red Line', 'Barrier Troop' and 'Ash Heap' amongst other things for the stunts I pulled in getting the Kanmusu to safety.

If nicknames show how the others view me, there seems to be a fair amount of respect from the Japanese Kanmusu.

I have been running on the remnants of what were once fumes of what was once fuel.

Just now my recently reconstructed systems are realising they have been fooled and sold down the river to the secret police. The substances that have kept me going are wearing off.

So when the commandant came around and saw me completely wasted, she was really irritated because she was supposed to be instructing me now.

Sorry for exceeding the Party quota, comrades.

...

“I’ll be going now. Just watch anything you want.”

The commandant has been giving Stalingrad a more complete collection of perspectives concerning the time around the Cold War and afterwards.

Stalingrad is receiving a cultural education. Her notebook is filled with quotes and sketches from a range of movies from Captain Phillips to Titanic, from Matrix to Black Hawk Down.

’Tell them about the dream, Martin.’

Well let me improvise this next part.

And the commandant leaves the battlecruiser during a documentary about a fiery and passionate orator.

The next movies the battlecruiser pick are the modern takes on the battles of Stalingrad. Most of them are garbage.

She remembers her crew members had watched a two-part film that completely excluded Zhukov and some others that were critical to the battles. Maybe because the films were too busy showing Stalin as a superhuman military genius. Or the officers fell out of favour.

The second part shows the Russians begin that huge counter-attack. Operation Uranus. Germany better prepare their anus for demolition. Oh yeah we completely *rectum* false socialists.

Then she watched Top Gun.

Before she was designated as a target ship, the more faithful ship workers had believed that Russia would build powerful battlegroups with aircraft carriers and battlecruisers cooperating with the other.

In truth the industrial and economic cost to build these large ships was completely delusional. But when she was being constructed, Stalingrad remembers that some engineers hoping they would see the Soviet Navy contain such powerful behemoths.

So Stalingrad had been a little excited to see what an aircraft carrier was really like. But she did not

really have many civilised interactions with other warships and had never met a true aircraft carrier.

She watches Tom Cruise as he duels with Russian MiG jet propulsion aircraft.

Stalingrad wonders if she'll ever see Midway in action. Someone must be working on replacing the carrier's lost aircraft.

She also wonders what she should feel when seeing the 'Stars and Stripes' instead of the 'Hammer and Sickle'.

After finishing that movie, Stalingrad decides to take a break and walk around the place.

This building holds the theory and tactics classes for Kanmusu. There was also a healthy video library for history lessons.

The kitchen is all out of tea and coffee and won't be restocked until morning probably, so Stalingrad tries that chocolate beverage that the Australians seem to enjoy. She wonders what different it makes, when sometimes some of them drink it with cold milk, others prefer microwaved, and some have boiling water.

Too confusing. Stalingrad mixes the drink with cold milk and wanders around.

It is way past sleeping time. Stalingrad doesn't mind if the cultural education takes until morning. Just marathon the movies.

Stalingrad notices that only four rooms in the building still have unlocked doors. The one she's been sitting in. The kitchen. Bathroom.

The last room has a 'Staff Only' door but Stalingrad is tired. Normally she wouldn't let her curiosity get the better of her. It would have prevented the disaster that happened.

The room had so many shelves, but there were only two cardboard boxes. One of them was marked 'Gender Education'.

The other was marked 'Do not let Stalingrad watch what is in this.' In multiple languages.

So she opens it. Instead of having movie illustrated covers, the cases have covers with just text. There are two cases packaged together with the text 'Confronting.' and since Stalingrad fondly remembers two-part movies, she decides to watch it anyway.

It started off tamely enough. It was documentary style. There were some interviews and some drawings that explain how a particular battle went down. Then there is real footage and recordings.

This must have been before the Ship Girl Initiative. The Japanese had been trying to track the movements of the enemy and guess they are gathering enough forces to storm the Japanese archipelago. The Abyssal warships number in the hundreds. The Abyssal fliers number in the thousands.

It takes two minutes before my perception of the world is obliterated.

Things go bad rapidly. The Abyssals break the human's formations of warships and as the fighting turns into a brawl, they inflict heavy casualties.

People think Soviet commanders can just throw ridiculous amounts of men to die at a problem. But the losses here are staggering. Even if the Soviet officers had been ordered to win at all costs, they would have been relieved from their positions. The people who decided to keep the fleet in the battle would have been publicly executed.

It is clear that the Americans assign considerable importance on their carriers. Every time one looks like it's in trouble, something else is sent to die in their place.

But that didn't stop the Abyssals sinking their best warships and sailors. At this point the fleet's dignity should have been shattered and the surviving military assets should have fled.

But they keep fighting. Their commanders must not care about the safety of their jobs. How could they have matched the enemy with rising ferocity when the pride of their fleet should be gone? The Soviet navy would never have kept fighting with these colossal losses.

Stalingrad watches with her hands over her mouth when the battleships Iowa and Missouri stonewall the Abyssals attack on the last supercarrier left, Gerald R. Ford which would die in another battle.

The Iowa-class battleships cut down the Abyssals with all the martial pride and ferocity of the finest and freest. They go down and so do thousands of their crews. The Abyssals don't stop shooting until most of those have died.

The Americans keep fighting until the Abyssals run. They had kept fighting their enemy to the bitter and bloody conclusion, when the Soviet navy would have long given up.

What should have been their sworn political enemies come to pick up their survivors. Despite this, despite what victory cost them, despite the language barrier, the battered Chinese sailors who should never have fought alongside and for these people, sing along with the Japanese and Americans as they pull them out of the water.

The Abyssals do not get to invade Japan. Too many had died for that.

If Stalingrad was shaken by the visceral footage of this battle, at least that battle was a win for the humans. The next battle did not end in victory for the humans.

The Abyssals are going for an offensive on the Arabian Peninsula. The sheer number of those who went to their aid shocks Stalingrad.

To the Soviets, those people they could not control were worthless. Those people were barely humans in the Soviets' eyes. Stalingrad had that same bias until she watched.

How could she maintain this view when she saw the huge combined display of human cooperation? Militaries of different cultures, traditions, religions and politics fought side by side, comrades facing the huge Abyssal force. People with ugly histories and grudges with each other, fought with their old rivals and allies.

But this was not a victory. Stalingrad hears the last audio recordings from the doomed warships, surrounded by Abyssals on all sides. The comrades were thanking each other, blessing each other. An Egyptian officer requests that they do not die slowly. The British grant this wish and a nuclear missile ends the battle. The fallout forces some cities to be evacuated.

The first DVD ends and Stalingrad promptly plays the second DVD.

...

Resource and Akashi are looking at the battlecruiser's design.

Due to protocol and procedure, the American, British and Japanese ship girls technically have no navy to answer to. They are all criminals in the eyes

of their home countries. They are going against their governments and gone absolutely rogue.

Akashi believes that Stalingrad just needs a simple equipment refit. The battlecruiser's planned weapons and systems were never fully developed and tested. Replace those with tried and reliable weapons and systems.

Resource suggests the battlecruiser needs to be completely redesigned and remodelled. Her Soviet design is so complicated and complex. The battlecruiser's equipment could be simplified. Maybe it could be changed to suit the more standard armament of the British battlecruisers and battleships.

The repair ships and engineers were now adjusting the Australian ship girl facilities to accommodate the newly arrived Kanmusu. And they could expect more to arrive.

With most of the Ship Girl Initiative in enemy hands, the Australians were going to be outgunned and outnumbered by foes that held the majority of the ship girls.

Akashi and Resource need to cater to the Kanmusu in Darwin, who all have vastly differing

equipment and designs. More repair ship girls were heading to Darwin to help.

Unless they were destroyed in transit, they could expect the European ship girls to arrive at Australia approximately a week.

And the American ship girls would arrive at Australia whenever they could slip through the enemy's grasp.

In particular, the battlecruiser's weapons were still hypothetical when funding for research and development could be finished for the Stalingrad-class.

The Soviets had planned for 9 new and unfinished 12 inch/305 mm weapon to be used for the battlecruisers' main guns. This could be swapped for different weaponry of equivalent dimensions.

Unfortunately, they had no commanding officer and only vague instructions telling them what to do. So the British and Japanese repair ships spent the rest of the night and most of the morning discussing and researching. They have to modify and manufacture equipment for a lot of Kanmusu.

...

Some pains are unavoidable.

I was used to the pains that are inflicted by others.

But this is mental agony I am experiencing as I attempt to cross the gulf between the old world and the new.

I'm sitting with my knees drawn to my chest on the beach, as I wait for sunrise.

That little voice that should have been suppressed speaks to me.

When did it all change? What happened after the Soviets defeated the false socialist Germans?

I have the memories, duty and beliefs from decades ago urging me to shut this treasonous voice out.

When did it become about the Soviets finding a way to go to war in peacetime? When did the Soviets stop paying the cost of freedom? When did we start fighting through others? What happened to the hot-blooded defence of the homeland? When did the Soviets stop fighting for their own?

Without any conscious thought, my hand has slipped into my borrowed coat pocket and grips the

medal that Kiyoshimo has made pristine.

Show the world. The Russian military does not stand for those politicians any more. Show them all that the Russian military has and always will suffer for freedom .

I'm going against everything that I was taught to believe in by the Soviet Union.

Show the world Stalingrad remembers. Remind the world what living in freedom costs.

Then the voice sounded amused.

Which nickname are they going to pick for you?

Chapter 7

Chapter Seven:

...

Light Cruiser Demon has been heavily injured after getting into that fight with rogue American ship girls.

So now she accompanies the Abyssal delegation into Russia. The highest-ranked officer of the Russian Navy, the grand admiral, had been on their side. That meant every Russian Kanmusu in commission had to kneel to their authority. They were on the Abyssals' side.

Light Cruiser Demon looks at the list of commissioned Russian Kanmusu. There is no mention of the unidentified Kanmusu that had appeared a few days ago and fled.

Light Cruiser Demon sighs. Who was this mystery Kanmusu?

She walks out of Vladivostok naval base. She can't help but feel vulnerable. Similar to the humans' Kanmusu, Abyssal warships need to have

their equipment and be on the water to have their full abilities.

The Abyssals have been hunting down the Kanmusu that are not under their control. Some were killed. The others were captured. For the ones they captured, the Kanmusu need to accept a new commission and commanding officer to be under the Abyssals' control.

...

The commandant walks into the teaching building for Kanmusu. Stalingrad must have already left.

She goes to the movie room and puts back all the boxes of DVD's. The battlecruiser Kanmusu was courteous enough to put all the DVD's back into their cases and boxes.

The commandant notices the last box. So she looks at what the battlecruiser has been watching.

Oh no.

...

Kiyoshimo wakes up and is going to clean up part of the beach in the morning.

She finds the battlecruiser asleep on the beachfront.

It is not healthy for a beached Kanmusu to be exposed to the elements for long. She gets help to move the battlecruiser back to bed.

Akashi took the battlecruiser's temperature. It was far beyond the safe limits of the Kanmusu's boiler systems. Akashi declares that Stalingrad was to be confined to bed for the next few days. If you don't know what that feels like, it's similar to when you get mothballed and put into reserve until you are needed.

Resource is annoyed when she was told that Stalingrad was to be laid up in ordinary for the next few days. She has read through dozens of the reference books in search of suitable weapons for the battlecruiser. Resource had been planning a major remodel for the battlecruiser.

However the battlecruiser is not in working order. It wasn't all that bad considering Resource would be able to use that time to work on more of her ideas.

Resource had initially wanted to completely overhaul the battlecruiser. This would be a considerable undertaking to restructure the entire

layout and machinery of Stalingrad. Akashi had discouraged this. Akashi wanted to fully judge the potential of the design of the battlecruiser before they did anything drastic.

So Resource had to downscale some of her ideas. She had produced a faithful interpretation of the battlecruiser's ship rigging, true to the Soviet design. But it was missing things that had never been fully completed by the Soviets.

As much as Resource wanted to, Akashi told her that they could not install larger-caliber naval guns on Stalingrad. Yet. Resource was itching to replace those 12 inch/305mm Soviet main guns with something else.

...

The two disguised Kanmusu, Iowa and Enterprise, were planning for a way to get to rendezvous point in Australia.

Both Kanmusu are well-known to the public, so they have had to change their appearance dramatically. They wear coloured eye contacts, wigs and have acquired a spray tan. If one were to search their pockets or their bags, they would find their tiny 'fairy' crews.

They are sitting at an internet café. The two Kanmusu sit at the computers. They are trying to be stealthy as some of these small fairies jump on the keys of the keyboard.

The technician fairies are trying to secretly communicate to Cooke and the Australians. They want to let them know what they will try to do.

The Kanmusu will try and acquire fake identities so they can travel to Australia. The technician fairies will handle their backgrounds and there are plenty of fake document makers.

The café is one of those massive ones that probably host huge LAN gaming parties and tournaments. So the Kanmusu do not note the new arrival weaving their way towards them until almost too late.

The two Kanmusu panic and try to hide their fairy crews until they recognise who it is.

“Is that you, Arizona?” asks Enterprise.

“Yep.” Where did her red hair go?

“I thought you were with Commander Cooke?” says Iowa.

“Our plane got fragged,” says Arizona, “The pilots of our F-22 escorts were all with the enemy. Cooke and the others are hiding in this motel.”

Arizona gives them the map with the location circled on it.

“He’s got a plan as well.”

...

Light Cruiser Demon comes back to Vladivostok naval base after a nice walk.

Then she gets back to sorting through the records again.

Vladivostok naval base had processed a scrapping form sent by the Russian Ship Girl Initiative committee in Moscow. The Kanmusu, a Stalingrad-class battlecruiser, could have been the mystery Kanmusu.

But the Kanmusu wouldn’t have had her ship rigging. That was the primary reason for her scrapping. Miniaturising the systems of the warship and turning it into ship rigging was inefficient and complex. The Russian navy was reluctant to spend more resources on a warship that had incomplete

and untested systems. They wouldn't spend more time trying to optimise those systems.

The transport ship the Kanmusu had been on had some Kanmusu equipment, so the Kanmusu might have cobbled together some improvised rigging for herself. But that would be a poor substitute for rigging that was specifically designed for the Kanmusu.

The mystery capital ship that had appeared near Japan and then Indonesia had taken enough hits to deplete the ammunition of its attackers. That would have required serious armour and protection that surely couldn't have come for some second-hand defective equipment.

Light Cruiser Demon is ready to dismiss the idea that this ill-equipped battlecruiser could be the powerful capital ship. Before she does, she takes a look at the technical data of the Stalingrad-class that was available.

The idea was actually plausible.

Theoretically, the Stalingrad-class did not have good external armour. It was the internal bulk of the battlecruiser that could take extreme damage. That made it possible that the Kanmusu could have gone

without that external armour of dedicated ship rigging. The Kanmusu might have survived combat.

So Light Cruiser Demon looks at the convoluted design and details of the Stalingrad-class.

The documents seem confused as to what the battlecruiser should be. Light Cruiser Demon can see why the Russian navy had not bothered trying to navigate the confusing puzzle of the design.

Could the battlecruiser achieve even a fraction of the expectations of the Soviet designers?

Ridiculous accuracy and range with its main guns. Manoeuvrability that could overtake destroyers. This was a very different monster than most battlecruiser Kanmusu that the Abyssals had seen.

And that's what worried Light Cruiser Demon. The humans had not fully developed these battlecruisers. Neither had the humans used the battlecruiser in combat. No one knew the full potential of the design. Only a few tests had given some hints. This battlecruiser would be unpredictable and dangerous.

...

“That is what everyone is calling me now?”

No. I had hoped I would get nicknames as cool as the battleship New Jersey’s ‘Black Dragon’ or something.

I manipulate one of these ‘tablet computers’ until it shows a list of warship nicknames and shove that in front of Kiyoshimo.

“You have all these nicknames to inspire you guys,” I say. D:

“Well the Australians are calling you ‘Pavlova’,” says Nestor, “After the dessert.”

I’m currently my room. Not much decoration. The room is not that large. The window faces the door. Desk and bed are on the other sides.

A bunch of destroyers have come to see me. For whatever reason, they really look up to capital ship girls. They take up positions on my bed and Kiyoshimo takes my chair.

“Why?” :C

“It’s referring to Pavlov’s House,” says Quickmatch, “You know that famous siege in Stalingr —”

“I know,” I interrupted, “What gave them that idea?”

“One of the soldiers was looking something up Stalingrad and saw the Soviet wedding cake-style architecture.”

It has become some sort of event to find me a nickname. All of the naval base is talking about it. Despite the utmost need for secrecy, the rest of Darwin is probably trying to find a nickname for a battlecruiser. The enemy does not even need an intelligence department to find me. They can just follow the requests posted in the local newspapers.

The details of the Kanmusu in Darwin should have been secret. But our plan of hiding in Australia is completely obliterated. It's only a matter of time before the Abyssals finish blockading and occupying the Asian region. Then they will come for us.

“What are other people calling me?”

“The Japanese call you 'White Death', 'Winter Warrior', and —” begins Kiyoshimo.

These nicknames are so bad and lame I would execute them out of pity.

I turn to Arunta.

“‘Red ghost on the North Coast’ —”

Nope.

I turn to Murakumo.

“‘Koba—” she begins.

I give up.

...

“How are you, Pavlova?”

“Terrible, and don’t call me that!”

Resource can see just how sick Stalingrad is. She looks like she needs to sleep for two days straight and could.

Despite her inactivity, and not being fitted out with all her systems, the battlecruiser has technically been put into full service. Her crew has been summoned.

All ships go through a certain process. Resource believes that procedures are all that stand between an armed rabble and an army. She disapproves when procedures are disturbed.

Generally the process is: ordering, keel-laying, launching, naming and blessing, outfitting, trials,

and then commissioning.

It is analogous to disrupting birth and childhood if you mess with this process.

The summoning for 'fairy' crews was not as prestigious as the summoning for Kanmusu. Resource had been the only one who had put out the resources into the summoning circles and watched the summoning. The little sailors had pulled themselves out of the summoning pool and Resource had put them on a little tray to take to the battlecruiser's room.

Initially the Soviets had attempted to eliminate religion in Russia. The government had harassed and destroyed the religions and followers. Later Stalin revived and treated many religions much better. After his death, the Soviets went straight back to oppressing the religions.

The 'fairy' crew of the battlecruiser have pastors and priests of the Eastern Orthodox faith. Resource has to go and get holy water and other things for them.

The crew are holding the ceremony on the battlecruiser's bed, next to her waist.

Resource watches them baptise the battlecruiser. The tiny religious practitioners of the 'fairy' crew squeaks speeches about the battlecruiser's recent actions. These were the first 'baptism by fire' and proper shakedown cruise/maiden voyage of the battlecruiser in this life. Then the band starts playing and someone smashes a miniscule bottle of fine champagne across the battlecruiser. The assembled sailors cheer and break out the rest of the alcohol.

A 'fairy' with an impressive dress uniform says a few words before they all drink.

Having a 'fairy' crew vastly improves the conditions of a Kanmusu's rigging and abilities in combat. They can also monitor and maintain the ship girl outside of combat. If the battlecruiser's sickness got any worse, they could alert the repair ship girls to the problem.

Resource's own crew have been invited to the ceremony. The battlecruiser crew is grateful.

Kanmusu crews inherit an inferior amount of memories from the past life of the battlecruiser. They hold no memories from the battlecruiser after she was resurrected. But they understand that Resource has been keeping the battlecruiser healthy.

Stalingrad seems really pleased to see her crew. She's careful not to move too much of the bed blankets since that would disturb the ceremony. Even though she's got some champagne and holy water on her.

Resource notes that three of the crew are off to one side of the ceremony. One of them is the well-dressed 'fairy' and is the equivalent of the captain. One of them is the senior engineering chief. The last is the chief steward.

The argument is happening near the battlecruiser's head. The chief engineer is berating and scolding the battlecruiser for going into battles so recklessly.

Stalingrad explains to her what the situation was. All crew are female. For some reason.

The chief engineer doesn't look happy with the explanation. The captain is trying to calm her down. The steward is here because she wants to discuss supplies with the battlecruiser.

After the others return to the ceremony, the steward speaks to the battlecruiser. Resource listens closely, because it quickly becomes very obvious

that this steward knows how to keep this complicated battlecruiser in best shape.

The steward lists off what the diet of the battlecruiser should be. Dozens of different things to keep her internals in good shape.

Lots of different cleaning materials for the diverse range of materials that compose the internal structure. Oil and lubricants of different types and qualities for the machinery.

The battlecruiser crew will need to maintain any combat equipment she gets as well.

As the steward keeps going, Resource is slightly aggrieved by the amount and variety of supplies the ship girl needs. Stalingrad is a capital ship girl after all, and needs those supplies. But the inefficient internal system and structure requires her to eat and drink a diverse and huge diet.

The steward then pulls out some papers. The 'fairy' actually admits that the design could be improved. The steward apologises to the battlecruiser for complaining. It was poor conduct for the Soviet sailors to criticise the equipment they received.

Even when they knew it is not the best, the Soviet navy inspected their ships and would blame the sailors if the ship was unpresentable. It was Soviet Russia. It was common for government inspections to blame the user of the equipment and not the equipment itself.

Finishing with the advice to keep up with the diet she has outlined, the steward turns to Resource. She'll need to see whatever rigging will be made for the battlecruiser.

“We haven't been sure what to do about the incomplete nature of the ship rigging,” says Resource.

The 'fairy' shrugs. Since the crew insisted on a ceremony as soon as they were summoned, they do not know the urgency and details of the whole situation.

Resource clears her throat and gets the attention of the celebrating 'fairies'.

She then explains how the world has changed and what they are up against.

She sees the battlecruiser crew become shocked. The world is very different. They have new allies

and enemies. Also the odds that are stacked against them are substantial.

Resource takes the tablet computer and shows the battlecruiser and 'fairies'.

The desperate battles the humans have fought. The merciless and terrifying Abyssals. The battlecruiser crew make signs warding off demonic influence.

The occupation of much of the humans' countries and militaries. The battlecruiser crews get particularly upset about the Kanmusu fighting and killing each other.

...

It was only after I received my crew that I realised how hungry I was.

I realise now what it was. It was always feeling that I was waiting to die. It always felt like my next meal was my last meal and I never wanted to take too much.

My steward is checking to see I receive the correct quantity and quality of dinner. Kiyoshimo volunteered to bring me food from the canteen.

The steward knows exactly what food I like as well. I absolutely love this chicken rice dish. If you are wondering, I have had thirty-six dishes and nineteen bottles for my dinner so far.

This latest table-sized pizza is being carefully inspected. The tiny 'fairy' prods a piece of pepperoni sausage. She is not satisfied and turns to Kiyoshimo. There needs to be four times more toppings than there is pizza base. Most of that will need to be meat.

While we wait, the steward urges me to finish my drink. A bottle of the finest imported black vodka in Darwin.

I feel like an excessive and indulgent upper-class glutton. But the steward insists this high-quality meal should be constantly sustained.

The 'fairy' was furious when she saw the evidence of malnutrition. Apparently I also had low blood pressure and my body had really suffered when I slept outside. My body temperature indicated a deeper sickness. If you don't know what that means, the rising plumbing pressure in my weakened boilers was the first symptom.

So the whole crew has been trying to get me back to fighting shape. The engineers had been told what medicines were available. They requested the medicines and tried to understand the labels written in English.

The steward states that I will actually need to increase the amount of food I receive when I recover.

“How much?” I’m almost afraid to ask.

More than triple what I have had so far.

I devour the pizza that Kiyoshimo brings back. Oh my goodness. Was there really so much tasty food in the world?

After two more hours, the steward is content I have eaten my healthy diet. She goes across the bridge to the bedside table where the rest of the crew has set up their tents. The bridge is a ruler taped into place between the table and bed. The hand-sized crew is going to sleep.

The steward remembers something. She rushes back over the ruler and says that I need to speed up my eating. I need to breathe in whatever is put in front of me. Then she goes back and grabs napkins and toothpicks to make her tent.

Kiyoshimo sits down beside me.

“Do you feel better, Stalingrad-sama?”

“Yes. I don’t feel like I’m dying anymore.” It’s the truth.

I have been quite sad ever since I was brought back from death. All the stress of believing I was going to die as soon as I suspected I would be scrapped. The large amount of people who want to fight and kill me. There is a lot I have to adjust to in this new world. This world is suffering.

Seeing the crew make so much of a fuss about me... That really cheers me up. They came over to ask how I was doing. They were really horrified about my mental state. They have been comforting and humouring me non-stop. The crew want me to recover.

“Kiyoshimo is happy you feel like you won’t die,” says Kiyoshimo. Oh no, are those tears, was she upset? “Otherwise Kiyoshimo would not have Stalingrad-sama to look up to.”

“Kiyoshimo,” I say, “You should not let me become that important to you. Battlecruisers die easily. No one should ever hinge their happiness on me.”

“No!” yells Kiyoshimo, “Don’t speak like that Stalingrad-sama!”

Kiyoshimo. It is imperative that you are to never get close to me.

“Look at history,” I say, “Battlecruisers had so much firepower packed into large and weak hulls. We died so easily. How easy it is to hit a battlecruiser. How easy is it to hit something critical.”

“Please stop this,” Kiyoshimo is crying, “You can’t think those negative thoughts. Do you feel like you are in danger all the time?”

“Kiyoshimo,” I sit up and embrace her, “Please understand this. This is what I am. I belong to the group of risk-takers with low expectations of survival. The moment I can fight, I will die.”

I met Kiyoshimo and took that damage to save the fleeing Kanmusu. I do not want to form these attachments with my comrades that will only hurt them when I leave. In all my happiness, I let all of them to depend too much on me.

I thought my personality would isolate them as I went did what I had to do. But everyone is

respecting me and being helpful. They act like I will be around for a long time.

I let them recover and depend on me because they had lost their homes. They had lost people they loved and cherished. They had seen their friends attack and slaughter themselves. The enemy has the position of strength.

That needs to change. Friendliness has lost its usefulness. I will now have to make them want me to die.

I then shove Kiyoshimo off me and slap her.

“Stay away from me. You disgusting little Japanese girl.”

After Kiyoshimo runs away, I turn to the ‘fairy’ that was watching us. The captain leans back on the eraser she sits on. She toasts me with her wineglass. She understands. Her only question is how many people will believe my new act.

“As many as damn possible.”

The captain sips her wineglass. Then she nods. She says that if I can make them hate me enough, I can make them want me to die, but also to believe I won’t.

We both salute each other. Then we go to sleep.

Chapter 8

Chapter Eight:

...

The new Prime Minister of Japan looks over the invasion plans for Australia.

It is amusing, really. He chuckles as he pictures the Kanmusu getting smacked by anti-ship missiles bigger than themselves.

The Kanmusu forces defending Australia are laughably weak. Because other neighbouring countries could be expected to defend them, the Australian navy had sent their better or modern Kanmusu to other places far from home. There is probably no more than thirty native and foreign Kanmusu altogether in Australia.

The remaining native Kanmusu were to be sufficient for light policing, escort and defensive combat roles. They have hardly seen combat. Instead they participate in joint training exercises with conventional warships to give the Australian navy experience.

Also, the facilities available to the Kanmusu are already being strained maintaining the foreign Kanmusu. Most of the Kanmusu are injured, ill-equipped or in poor condition.

The invasion will feature Abyssal sympathisers attacking Australian Government and military buildings. The Abyssal and their allies will send warships to destroy the Australian navy and guests.

Unfortunately, there are not many Abyssal sympathisers in the Australian's higher-ranks. It wasn't deemed a high priority to infiltrate the Australian Kanmusu fleet. But it doesn't really matter too much.

The occupation of so many human territory means the Abyssals have to budget which Kanmusu they want to keep on their side. It takes a lot of resources to occupy new territories. It has been deemed that the Kanmusu currently in Australia are not worth keeping. So kill them all.

The Abyssals and their supporters won't need to deploy many forces. The Kongou-class fast battleship ship girls. The supercarrier ship girl, Nimitz. And dozens of Kanmusu and conventional ship escorts.

There is no chance of failure.

...

“I know what you’re trying to do,” says the commandant, “And you should stop it. Everyone needs you. The fleet depends on you.”

I was woken up to a blissful and hot Australian morning. It was the commandant who un-blissfully woke me up, though.

“This is better for Kiyoshimo and the others,” I yawn.

“If you are afraid about what they will think when you die,” the commandant says, “There is a better way to help them.”

“What is it? I do not want to hinder them when I die.”

“If you believe you will die so much,” the commandant sighs, “Make your death meaningful to them. Make them avenge you.”

“I will be one of the first ship girls to fall in battle. Vengeance will blind them.”

“Stalingrad,” the commandant smiles wryly, “If you are like any of the battlecruisers I have heard of,

you will want to go down in a blaze of glory. The first ship girls to fall in battle? Battlecruisers make the first martyrs. Battlecruiser ship girls lead their navies. They lead their nations beyond their deaths. Look at the battlecruisers that inspired their nations to avenge them.”

It is true. The navies always want to avenge their battlecruisers. There must be something really appealing about battlecruisers. Maybe the risks of having battleship firepower in cruiser-armoured hulls. We are the first capital ships to charge the enemy. And everyone else upholds our example and deaths.

“How should I apologise to them?” I ask, “I don’t think people hold racial insults in high regard.”

“Explain what made you do it. Explain how you felt. Everyone believes you are recovering from all that you have been through. All that you have been through to save them as well.”

“I won’t be so important to them when all the other Kanmusu start arriving in Australia. Why is everyone relying on me so much, anyway?”

“Stalingrad,” the commandant looks at me incredulously, “If you wanted to avoid people

respecting you, you could have done things differently. You were a freaking ghost ship, a Flying Dutchman, a ship that did not exist. You just appeared and protected those fleeing to Australia by absorbing damage that would cripple entire fleets. You turned the tide of the battle without firing a shot. You led a fleet to safety. The enemy is struggling to comprehend you. No one can just look in the history books and guess what you might do. Despite our best efforts, the average Barry off the street has heard of your exploits.”

“Dancing Trotsky! What sort of operation are you running here? Did no one even try to deny those rumours?”

“Meh.” She shrugs.

“Pardon me, but did you just shrug off our gaping information leaks?”

“It exercises everyone’s imagination. The enemy and us.”

And that is when the base alarms starts sounding.

The high-pitched alarms clearly are meant to instantly get everyone to be lively. I already know the sirens will traumatise my dreams.

“This is not a drill. Prepare all units for imminent enemy contact. The outer defense line has been crossed by hostile aircraft. The base perimeter has been breached. This is not a drill. I repeat. This is not a drill.”

...

“Are. You. Insane?”

“Thanks for the vote of confidence, Enterprise.”

“Sir,” the carrier looked at Cooke, “You want us to take the fight to the enemy?”

“They won’t expect it.”

“This isn’t like the movies! The enemy is trained to react to surprises.”

“Ok. Before we continue. Does anyone else have any objections?”

The rest of the Kanmusu gathered in the small motel room shake their heads.

“I like it,” says Iowa.

“Iowa! This plan is too stupid.”

“Dangerous,” corrects Cooke, “Stupidly dangerous, not dangerously stupid.”

Arizona and her sister, Pennsylvania, come back from the errand.

“Here it is,” Pennsylvania sets down a map on the bed.

The Taiwanese are still refusing to surrender to the Abyssal forces. The Kanmusu cannot leave the island quietly when everything that leaves gets shot down.

So Cooke wants them to attempt another breakout manoeuvre. Now with even less friendly forces.

The word has gotten out that the Abyssals are mustering a substantial force to invade Australia. The map that the Pennsylvania sisters retrieved was sent over by the Australians. It includes all that the Australians know and predictions as well.

“As you can see,” he points at the Philippines, “Amphibious assault and landing forces for the occupation of Australia are being mustered here.”

He indicates Malaysia.

“It says here that the Abyssals have gathered a large defensive fleet here.”

He takes a pen from Alaska and then leans over the map. He draws on it for a few minutes.

“And this is the route we are taking.”

It leads directly to Malaysia.

Enterprise facepalms.

“I’m in a dream.”

“Hood and her European ship girls will be there as well.”

...

Stalingrad’s ship rigging is complete.

At Akashi’s insistence, Resource has kept it purely Russian. The unfinished systems and weapons have been replaced with older ones that the Russians did finish developing.

It’s not like the Soviets had terrible equipment. It’s just that Resource was more familiar with crafting British armaments. But this ship rigging will help evaluate the battlecruiser’s design. There is a lot of technical experience to get from this.

Resource had dug up the messy documents concerning the Stalingrad-class. The final design

was missing some things, but those could be filled in by the older design documents.

Ship rigging is a miniaturised version of a ship girl's old external hull. It is heavy. So Resource took a utility truck — Australians call them 'utes' — to load the miniature ammunition, fuel, and ship supplies. Then she enlisted the of a heavy mover vehicle to take the ship rigging to the shore.

Once everything was at the shoreline, Resource tried to get Kiyoshimo to set up some target buoys in the water. But the destroyer refused when Resource explained it was for Stalingrad. Weird. Usually Kiyoshimo enjoys helping the battlecruiser.

So Resource did the setting up by herself. Then she needed something that could hold the rigging when it's deployed on the water. Since they are Kanmusu weapons, they are really slow to move overland.

The battlecruiser is still sick, so Resource can't just get her to test the rigging. A shame.

So Resource removes one of the miniaturised 12inch/305mm gun barrels and manages to build a raft for it to sit on.

The gun is not the Soviet wonder weapon with ridiculous range and accuracy. No, Resource had used the older Imperial Russian 12 inch gun. Completed in 1907, it had been excellent for its age and calibre.

It isn't too shabby. Resource looks forward to when the battlecruiser can actually shoot back at her enemies.

The testing took a long time, but the ship rigging worked. With that problem solved, Resource went to bed.

She slept in late, which was why she was awoken by the screams of alarms and aircraft.

...

"If that is what the enemy has," the commandant is on the radio as she runs back to the administration building, "Get everyone out, right now."

"We cannot do that," the person on the other end sounds flustered, "There are Abyssal supporters right outside our gates and on the roads. They are trapping us here."

"How about helicopters?"

"The enemy has jet fighters, ma'am."

“Damn, damn, damn.” She clicks off the radio and leaves the Kanmusu accommodation building.

The commandant is running across the sidewalk — sorry, footpath — when the guided missiles smack into the administration building. The commandant shields herself from the fragments that fly everywhere over the lawn.

The enemy has complete air superiority. The people can only leave through the gates, but they will get harassed by the Abyssal supporters. Leaving by sea is not an option since that is where the enemy warships are and what everyone needs to run from.

They knew an attack would happen. But now that it had actually happened, the preparations were useless. The Australian air defense units and aircraft had torn apart by like so many layers of tissue paper.

From here, the commandant can see the harbour is burning. The warships stationed at Darwin had warning, but there was too many for them to handle. Already, a large portion of the base’s defenses lie in ruins.

A blizzard of missiles rains down on the base.

The commandant is pushed to the ground and Stalingrad shields her.

Then the Abyssals sent in their fliers. These miniature Abyssal fliers rained gunfire and bombs on the military facilities and defenders.

Everything is burning.

“We need time,” Stalingrad says softly, “Don’t we?”

“You are not heading out there,” the commandant wipes splatters of Stalingrad’s blood off her face, “That’s an order.”

“You forgot,” Stalingrad frowns, “that I have no commanding officer. I’m a pirate ship as well.”

The commandant reaches for the Kanmusu. But she can’t stop her.

...

I threw on my coat and my crew climbed into the pockets. Then I ran after the commandant and made sure she didn’t get herself killed. Then I looked for the repair ship girls.

Resource and Akashi have slept in the medical building since they tend to the injured Kanmusu. The two repair ship girls are loading them into motor vehicles. Resource looks like she has just

woken up and she still wears duck-patterned pyjamas.

“Stalingrad,” Resource waves me over, “We need some help over here.”

It looks like Midway was badly hit. She is capsized on the lawn, cradling her bleeding side.

I hook my arms under Midway’s shoulders and drag her to a grey van.

“We need time to clear a path through all of the crowds outside the gates,” shouts Akashi.

“We all need some time,” I turn to Resource.

She pales when she realises what I want to do.

“Out of the question.”

“Give me my ship rigging.”

“You don’t even realise how long and hard I worked on it.”

“I will repay you now.”

“No.”

“What if I add please?”

“Take your manners and stow it down your throat.”

I don't have time for this. It's hard to argue my point when she can just flatly deny my request.

“Resource. I want to protect everyone. I won't let anyone die because I was refused to do something to save them when I could have.”

“How about no,” says Resource. She crosses her arms.

“You can't,” Akashi takes my shoulders and shakes me, “Think of what everyone would think.”

“You didn't stop me last time.”

“We didn't have a choice last time.”

“...” I close my eyes.

There is something I can do to convince them.

I could let them see what I hide behind my detached personality.

I open my eyes and look at them. The repair ship girls can see the smallest glimpse of my emotions.

I look distracted and gloomy most of the time. The repair ship girls instinctively scramble away and

put their hands up.

“Give. Me. My. Ship. Rigging... now.” My voice is barely a whisper.

Resource screams and flees. Akashi is wavering.

“Do you want to see more?” I lower the mask even further. Akashi flinches and redirects her gaze somewhere safer.

“No.”

I slowly walk up to the repair ship girl, until I stand right in front of her. Then I force her to look at me.

Akashi wonders why it suddenly got very cold and quiet. Even when the warm morning is made hotter by the flames. Even though the sirens and screams are still sounding. It feels like she is underwater.

She tells me where I can find the ship rigging. Resource kept the equipment by the shore in a shed.

Eventually, Akashi recovers and wonders what just happened.

...

“Kongou-nee, I picked up one warship signature near the shoreline,” says Hiei.

The four Kongou-class battleship sisters keep cruising and turn to look twenty kilometres away where the battlecruiser is stepping onto the water. Their detection equipment indicates it the powerful Kanmusu has just put on her equipment.

“That can’t be right,” Kirishima lifts her glasses, cute villain-like, “Is that supposed to be the battlecruiser?”

The Stalingrad-class battlecruiser starts accelerating towards them. Even from a few kilometres away, they could clearly see the huge volume of water being thrown up behind her. She looks like she has a speed of over 30 knots.

Most of Stalingrad’s first shots from her 12 inch main guns miss.

One of them slaps straight into Kongou’s face.

“Shit!”

“Kongou-sama!” Haruna dashes to the eldest sister’s side.

“Admiral was right,” Kongou wipes her face, “I cannot let you live. FIRE! BURNING LOVE!”

Unlike Stalingrad, the Kongou-class sisters and their crews have years of experience fighting, in both their previous and current incarnations.

Eight 14 inch/356mm shells fired from the angry Kanmusu hit Stalingrad.

“Good shots,” Haruna praises her sister.

“Okay. FOLLOW ME!” Kongou gathers her sisters into positions where they can unleash full broadsides.

Battleships with 'super-firing' turrets can shoot all of their main guns at once. Usually, the battleship must have their targets relative to their side. Firing all guns on one side of the ship is known as a 'broad-side'. If you don't know how it is like to get hit by battleship guns, imagine lots of people punching you one after the other, but missing. Then imagine a lot of people punching you at the same time and hitting.

The battlecruiser clutches the gaping hole in her right leg.

Several small Abyssal fliers dive and drop bombs. To the dismay of the Kongou sisters, none of them have done damage.

Nimitz's miniature jet bombers fire anti-ship missiles into the battlecruiser. These missiles are the Kanmusu version of the Maverick F tactical missiles with 300 pounds or 136 kilograms of shaped explosives. The battlecruiser is knocked around by the detonations and starts to list to her right side.

But the battlecruiser is still going. The Stalingrad-class features an oil and water exchange system for its outer compartments. Whenever these compartments are breached, oil is piped into them. The oil is less dense than water. This will slow down the rate which heavier water comes into the ship and the rate the ship sinks.

Then the Abyssal fliers drop torpedoes on the battlecruiser. Stalingrad has slowed because some of her propulsion was been taken out. They impact. Flames and metal flies everywhere. Huge columns of water are thrown up and obscure the Kanmusu from view.

The battlecruiser emerges, bleeding, slightly lower in the water, yet still capable of moving.

Stalingrad feels a surge of adrenaline as her backup propulsion comes online. The backups are much slower than if all her engines still worked.

The Kanmusu are now close enough to each other for their secondary armament to fire. The Kongou-class sisters' have 4 turrets mounting two artillery barrels of 14 inch/356 mm main armament. Their secondary artillery armament is sixteen 6 inch/152 mm artillery cannons. They also feature twelve 5 inch/127 mm dual-purpose guns that can engage surface and air targets. They also have at least 108 anti-aircraft weapons of 0.98 inch/25 mm.

This configuration is based on the modifications done to the Kongou-class late in World War Two. Originally the Kongou-class were battlecruisers, but they were reconstructed as 'fast' battleships.

In particular, this was the final configuration of Haruna before she was sunk.

They were extensively changed through their years and only their 14 inch remains from their original configuration. The huge number of anti-aircraft guns was introduced late in that war.

In comparison, the Stalingrad-class battlecruisers had weaker offensive armament. Resource kept the configuration as close to the final design as possible. Nine 12 inch/305 mm artillery guns mounted in three triple-barrelled turrets. No secondary artillery armament. Six pairs of 5.1 inch/130

mm dual-purpose guns. Six sets of quadruple-mounted 1.8inch/45 mm anti-aircraft weapons. And ten sets of quad-mounted 0.98 inch/25 mm machine guns.

So Stalingrad did not need to be outnumbered 4 against 1 to be outgunned.

She is already slower than she should be. Kongou-class battleships stab holes into every surface of the battlecruiser and her ship rigging. One of Stalingrad's ammunition storage holding her main artillery shells is ignited. The explosion completely blows one of her main turrets off and another one is destroyed.

The battlecruiser shields her face as Kirishima aims for her command centre. The 14 inch shells tears off both her arms and most of her face. The battlecruiser directs her remaining weapons at Kirishima, but the weapons do not deal enough damage, even if they could hit. Her last 12 inch turret can only fire from two barrels since the middle one is melted. She misses one, but the other manages to hit Kirishima. The shot simply glances off the armoured deck of the battleship's rigging.

The aircraft come back. After their attacks, the battlecruiser falls onto her front.

The battlecruiser tries to crawl. She needs to keep moving, keep dodging.

She can feel the water trying to take her.

There is nowhere she can go to survive. So she heads straight for the moving battleships.

A well placed torpedo cracks the battlecruiser's keel. Stalingrad feels the pain her in back.

She keeps moving. The battleships destroy the last of her turrets.

Just because their equipment is lost, does not mean the fight is over. Stalingrad's crew jump onto the battlecruiser's rigging and back shooting rocket launchers.

The battlecruiser twitches and stops crawling towards the battleships. She coughs up blood and passes out.

However the momentum of the battlecruiser carries her towards the battleships.

The crews of the Kongou-class sisters cower as the Soviet crew fire miniature automatic weapons. When the battlecruiser is close enough, they leap onto Hiei.

“Hie!” Hiei tries to shake off the hand-sized fairies. The rest of the Kongou-class sisters watch in horror as the fairies climb up to Hiei’s rigging.

It’s no use. Within minutes, the battlecruiser’s fairies are knocking out Hiei’s crew. One of Hiei’s imperial Japanese sailors raises a sword in its short arms, yells and charges. One of the Soviet crew draws out a cutlass and a shotgun.

Unfortunately the tiny Imperial sailor is blown backwards by the non-lethal rubber rounds from the shotgun. Then the Soviet sailor clubs the sailor over the head. The Imperial sailor does not get back up.

When the last of her crew is knocked unconscious, Hiei stops dancing about and stiffens. Then she turns to the Kongou sisters.

“Hey?” Kongou has noticed her sister is looking very dazed, “Are you okay?”

...

“So what happened?”

Two Kongou-class ‘fast’ battleships have climbed aboard the flagship when there should have been four sisters returning.

“We got beaten by the battlecruiser,” says Kirishima when it becomes obvious Kongou is too shocked to speaking.

“Eh, where did your sisters go?” asks Vice Admiral Oshiro, the Japanese officer who is in charge of attacking the northern Australian city, Darwin.

“The battlecruiser’s fairies boarded Hiei and took over,” says Kirishima, taking off and cleaning her scratched glasses, “Then they controlled Hiei and took over Haruna as well.”

“And you abandoned them?”

“We tried to get them back, but our crews weren’t enough. They ran.”

“And the city?”

“Under our control.”

“Then we succeeded.”

...

“Shit.”

Kongou and Kirishima are having tea. Being on-board a warship, the JMSDF Hyuga, means there are

not many nicely decorated rooms for them to sit in and enjoy tea. They wouldn't have enjoyed it anyway.

Their sisters had been taken over and were now with the 'enemy'.

Which was strange to think about because the sisters were now on the 'good side'.

“Kongou-san, we will get them back.”

“But the Admiral said no.”

The Kongou-class sisters did not like fighting for the Abyssals. They had been brought back to fight the Abyssals and protect the innocent. Yet now they had to fight. They had no choice. And the Abyssals were offering incentives for the Kanmusu to support them more. Threatening to hurt people if you did not follow instructions. Scrapping annoying Kanmusu. Offering awards if you proved your loyalty to the new regime.

The new government in Japan were nice when compared to what was happening in North America and Europe. The fighting in the United States had gotten really crazy. To get people back to their jobs, the Abyssals controlled the food supply. If you were late or absent, you got no food for a week. Since the

Abyssals control the oceans, they control maritime trade as well. The new governments are setting up a punishing new economic environment.

There is nearly no one left to fight the Abyssals.

...

“Haruna, are you awake?”

Kongou-class 'fast' battleship, Haruna opened her eyes.

Hiei sits back and smiles at her sister.

“What happened?”

“You're with me,” says an unfamiliar voice.

Haruna turns and groans. It was the Kanmusu they had been fighting.

It seems they are in the middle of nowhere. There is only red desert and clay to see around them.

“Where are we?”

“We headed west,” says the Kanmusu, “I think we left the Northern Territory oblast and are somewhere in Western Australia.”

Haruna frowns at the strange word. It is obviously not a Japanese word 'oblast'.

Also, speaking of strange, the Kanmusu looks fine with most of her flesh and limbs gone. The Kanmusu has been wrapped up with bandages and tape.

“Hey! You missed.”

“Sorry.” Looks like Hiei is trying to stitch the gaping holes in the Kanmusu.

“Hiei,” Haruna stands up, “Why are you helping her?”

“Oh,” Haruna claps her hands together, “She’s nice.”

“But aren’t we supposed to be enemies?”

“Not anymore. Do you remember?”

Oh. That’s right. Hiei had grabbed her and several somethings had jumped at her.

“So,” Haruna looks at the large amount of medical supplies the Kanmusu had packed, “We don’t belong to the Japanese navy anymore?”

“No,” Hiei says, “Stalingrad here says we are no longer part of the Ship Girl Initiative.”

“Stalingrad-san. I remember being told to fight you. I apologise.’ The Kanmusu just shrugs.

“She’s an easy-going girl,” says Hiei. She’s managed to lessen the bleeding out of the Kanmusu’s arm stump.

“So,” Haruna wipes her face. It is really hot weather here. “Who do we belong to now?”

“Well,” says Stalingrad, “You belong to the Exodus Initiative, of course.”

Chapter 9

Chapter Nine:

...

“Excuse me, could you help us?” asks Hiei in English.

The Australian farmer frowns at the strange accent. He stops loading his pickup truck and looks to the source of the voice.

He stares. Then he looks away. Then he looks back.

There were three young women. One of them looked like she had swum in a pool of blood. And she smelt like something that had died.

The other two were wearing some strange robes and gold-coloured headbands.

With the news saying that foreign soldiers were occupying the larger Australian cities and the Australian coastline now in danger, the farmer is suspicious and scared.

Was that something moving in their pockets? It looked like a very small head.

“What do you want?” He reaches down into the truck and reaches for his 16 gauge shotgun.

Hiei looks to Stalingrad.

“Good comrade,” says the bloodied woman, “We were caught up in the fighting and need to get away from the coast.”

Well, that is actually a legitimate reason.

His pickup truck has enough seats to sit all of them. But he does not want the dead-smelling woman in the car.

“She has to ride on the back though,” he points to the armless woman.

...

The Australian navy and air force had been overwhelmed.

Now, soldiers from territories occupied by the Abyssals were entering Australia’s largest towns and cities.

The Australian soldiers had been at war with the Abyssal for years. The Australian people had seen the stiff resistance other countries around the world had offered. They were not going to let the invaders walks through the front door without a fight.

The soldiers hid amongst the civilians and ambushed the invaders with grenades, rockets and machine guns. Military and improvised explosives scattered and disorganised the invaders. Snipers crawled along the rooftops and high buildings raining death upon their targets. Buildings were toppled onto the invaders.

The vast majority of Australia's population inhabit coastal areas. The foreign warships and aircraft brought the artefacts and monuments of the Australian people crashing down on them. The fight was too much in the Abyssals' favour. Already the Abyssals were planning Australia's new politics and economy. They would reward those who cooperated with them and punish anyone who refused to follow the new regime.

...

“Nothing?”

“Nothing on radar, Kongou-san.”

The warships and Kanmusu had pursued the battleship and battlecruiser ship girls until they had disappeared off their radar. Most probably they had gone on land and taken off their ship rigging.

Kongou sighs. She was sighing a lot more these days. It used to only be when the Admiral rejected her love confessions and advances. That was before the Abyssals took over Japan and her sisters went missing.

When she gets her hands on that battlecruiser who abducted her sisters. Kongou, who is a proper lady brought up in England, imagines herself becoming uncommonly violent.

Hm. Someone was trying to contact Kongou on the radio. Kongou has her ship rigging on. All she has to do is cover her ears to listen.

“What is it Amatsukaze?” Amatsukaze is one of their escorts, a destroyer ship girl.

“Admiral has an urgent message.”

...

The ships of the Malaysian navy were still waiting.

The influential and powerful people that did not agree to follow the Abyssals' orders, had been removed. As a result, the navy had many new people holding jobs they had no idea how to do.

The captain of the Malaysian frigate Jebat, was supposed to be commanding bulk cargo ships. He had attended the meetings and protests organised by the Abyssal sympathisers just to make sure his wife and sons did not get hurt. There were times when the Malaysian police and army had arrived to break up those gatherings. Those times had been very dangerous and scary.

And now he is in command of a powerful naval vessel because he is trusted by the new government and military that was now filled with Abyssal supporters from all background. He had personally known a few of them, and they thanked him like this...

He has little idea what he is doing. But he has to look like he is in control.

“Tell the unidentified vessels they are to immediately identify themselves or leave Malaysian territorial waters.”

“This is Her Majesty’s Ship, Hood, and these are my friends.”

The Malaysian navy still needs repairs and supplies. There had been fighting when the Malaysian government was overthrown and then the navy was being reorganised. Fighting was still going on in some parts of Malaysia, and people were new to their jobs. This means the Malaysian military was not prepared for another major fight.

“State your purpose for entering Malaysian territorial waters.”

“We are passing through Malaysia. Very violently.”

“Sir,” that was one of the officers that used to work for an advertising company. And now operated the detection gear of a warship, “there are more contacts. Another set of warships attacked our fleet near Johor Bahru!”

That city was near them. Too close to Kuala Lumpur city.

“Shouldn’t they have been someone else’s problem?” mumbles the captain.

“Enemy aircraft inbound,” the officer tries to understand the detection screens, “Velocity is 434 kilometres an hour (270 miles/hour) from the direction of John Bahru.”

“The vessels with Hood have not changed their course and are heading towards us.” Another officer must have been in the Malaysian military before because he told the captain all the information the captain could need to respond to the situation.

“Eh, fire missiles.”

“How many and at which target?” asked the professional-seeming officer.

“... Some for... each... um, ship.”

...

The miniature TBF Avenger bombers drop bombs and torpedoes at the sixteen Malaysian warships.

The TBF Avenger could carry 2000 pounds/907 kilograms of torpedoes or aerial bombs. The smaller Kanmusu version of the TBF Avenger may have smaller bombs and torpedoes, but they still deal the same amount of damage as their regular cousins.

The tiny aircraft dropping very tiny bombs and torpedoes completely demolished the Malaysian warships stationed near Kuala Lumpur.

The warships were not well protected against the torpedoes. They are meant to be floating platforms that shoot long-range missiles. They were not designed to survive thousands of tons of well-meaning explosives. Maybe other ships had inches of steel and metres of space to protect them, but these warships did not.

“It’s a shame we had to kill them,” says Hood.

“*Hey.*”

The European ship girls meet the American ship girls. Commander Cooke is on the top of a luxury yacht with three decks.

“We thought you would arrive. Took you long enough,” says Hood.

“What are you talking about? We just happened to be here,” says Cooke. He tips his naval cap over his face.

“If those ships shot any missiles, we would have been totally screwed. Thanks.”

“So now that we are all here, we can go sort out the serious problem.”

“You mean in Australia?” asks Hood.

“I mean right behind us,” Cooke points in the direction of Taiwan.

“You brought guests for us?” Hood indicates the direction of Europe, “And we have guests over there as well.”

“Wait,” Cooke scratches his head, “Both of us were being chased?”

“Obviously I thought you had a plan.”

The ship girl and the commander stare at each other.

...

New Mexico and Pensacola were sad Kanmusu.

The battleship and heavy cruiser had to deal with their new commanding officer. Their previous commanding officer, a greying Vice Admiral, had been promoted to a three-star billet at the beginning of the war. Well, since the war was publically declared. The government tried to keep the Abyssals a secret.

But anyway, the old man had looked after the ship girls of the United States Third Fleet since they were first introduced. Whenever a ship girl got into trouble outside of the base, he was efficiently able to fight off the waves of news reporters and public criticism.

There was that time when the politicians thought it would be a great idea to change the ship prefix for American ship girls. Instead of USS, it would be USSG — United States Ship Girl. Like it mattered and needed to get voted on. The old man had made it clear that the ship girls enjoyed their traditional naming schemes.

But anyway, the new commanding officer was definitely not as competent as the old man. Because he could not be bothered remembering all of them by their proper names, he remembers them by something else.

Now Pensacola is 'Pepsi-Cola' and New Mexico is 'Tex Mex'.

It makes them very sad Kanmusu. They have their own nicknames.

But most of the new naval officers are just as bad or even worse. They got rid of the ship girl's old

officers and there is nothing the ship girls can do to complain. They have to follow all the orders handed down by the navy until they are retired or dead.

Most of the people being appointed to powerful positions are chosen because they are loyal to the Abyssals, and not because they are well-suited. Some of the officers were just pissed off with the old system, some just wanted power, others had believed that the Abyssals could not be beaten in the war. Among these Abyssal supporters, probably less than a tenth knew how to operate the United States navy.

“It’s not that bad you guys,” says the destroyer ship girl, McClusky as they sit down at a table by the shore. Because of the constant fighting, the officers want them ready, and their equipment is close at hand. None of them have had much time to relax because the new officers are scared and nervous.

“Oh cheer up,” says the battleship ship girl Nevada, “You can change his mind later.”

“Easy for you to say,” says New Mexico, “He did not give you completely shitty names.”

“I beg to differ,” says McClusky, “He calls me ‘McCluster-fuck’.”

“Okay,” laughs Pensacola, “That is the worst I’ve heard.”

“But he calls Nevada ‘cheer-up ship girl’ because she’s lucky enough to have been called that in the past.”

“Come on guys, chee —” begins Nevada.

“Shut up,” grumbles New Mexico.

New Mexico yawns and then pulls out a newspaper. The front page declares ‘Victory in Victoria: Australian state capital city of Melbourne surrenders to the Alliance.’

The Alliance is now just a name for the countries the Abyssals believe they control. It does not mean that all the Abyssal-occupied countries are co-operating with each other. It’s probably going to change.

New Mexico turns to the relevant pages and reads.

By now, the invasion forces are entering some of Australia’s largest cities. Australia is a large island and has a long coastline, but the takeover of Australia will end in Alliance victory. The Alliance also wants to use some of its forces in the region to

occupy New Zealand as well. Very optimistic of them to just split their forces.

The photos in the newspapers do not have confronting images. There are pictures of the Alliance soldiers helping the Australians citizens. There are never pictures that show too much of the death and destruction.

There are mentions of other battles in other cities which the newspaper covers, so New Mexico looks at those.

It is one of the smaller articles that catch her attention.

...

'Criminal Kanmusu in Darwin disappear.'

Yesterday, at 8:30 am in Darwin, the Alliance made a daring and courageous manoeuvre on the city of Darwin. While the city is now in the capable hands of the Alliance, the foreign Kanmusu fugitives being harboured by the illegitimate Australian government managed to escape. Attempts to seize the Kanmusu were stalled by an unexpected obstacle. The foreign Kanmusu have been dishonourably discharged by their respective navies

and have been accused of committing grievous war crimes.

Along with these Kanmusu, a substantial amount of military personnel managed to evacuate before the Alliance could capture the city.

The official information is that the aforementioned unexpected obstacle was a 'battlecruiser' Kanmusu. The Kanmusu managed to hold the attentions of the Alliance forces before escaping with two Alliance Kanmusu as hostages.

The Alliance is acting with the assumption that this particular Kanmusu is the Stalingrad, the lead ship of the unfinished Stalingrad-class.

This Kanmusu has been a disruption to Alliance operations in the Asian region on numerous occasions. The Kanmusu smuggled the fugitive Kanmusu illegally through Philippine and Indonesian waters.

As the name suggests, the Stalingrad-class were Soviet ships. Had they been finished, they would have been the last battlecruisers with large-calibre artillery in the Soviet navy. They would have been some of the last 'gunslinger' ships of the Soviet Union.

The Russian government has announced that the Kanmusu presumed to be Stalingrad was to be scrapped for unsatisfactory performance. If this is the case, the Alliance may have to review the changes it wants to make to their inventory of Kanmusu.

The Kanmusu engaged Alliance warships for almost an hour before it took its hostages and retreated. It was pursued, and contact was lost when the Kanmusu escaped onto land today. The 'unsatisfactory' performance of the Kanmusu proved to be a major annoyance to Alliance efforts to peacefully occupy Darwin city.

The hunt for the fugitive Kanmusu is still ongoing.

Pictures below:

...

“Anything interesting in there, Mexico?” asks Nevada, the blonde girl has notices New Mexico has frozen.

“Not really,” says New Mexico. She shows them the article, “Look at this woman.”

The other three ship girls look at the pictures.

One of the pictures is the plan views of a battlecruiser, side and top.

The next picture is an artistic impression of the battlecruiser.

Not a bad-looking ship.

Then there are photos of the ship girl.

They have been around North Carolina, and she's called the 'Showboat' for a reason. The American Kanmusu thought they were immune to many of the ship girls being beautiful.

The serious-looking woman in the photo is very pretty. This photo must have been taken before she became a criminal. She has the legs and thin frame of a cruiser, but not the muscled arms of a battleship. It kind of reminds the American ship girls of the German heavy cruiser ship girls.

The next photo has her smiling. Woah.

It looks like the woman tried a small smile for the first time and got excited when she did it.

What is striking about that smile is that it seems to hold the emotions of bittersweet happiness, regret, exhilaration, fear, and sadness at the same time. The smile is like a snapshot of all the feelings the woman

is having in that moment, a glimpse behind those pretty eyes and face.

But these conflicting emotions all seem natural for the woman's face. It's... breathtaking in a subdued way. Elegant.

"Did you guys finish reading?" asks New Mexico.

"... I was too caught up looking at those photos," says Penascola.

"Yeah. She's stunning," McClusker agrees.

"Never mind."

...

Kiyoshimo cries herself to sleep.

The Kanmusu have ridden in the back of a Bushmaster armoured personal carrier for more than half a day with barely any stops. Murakumo looks at the pocket watch Quickmatch takes out. The time is almost 11:00 pm.

They have to get from the northern city of Darwin to the southern side of the country.

The distance the invaders have to travel to get to all the cities is huge. The majority of the invading forces went to the eastern coast of Australia, where most of the other Australian cities are close together.

All the major cities hug the Australian coastline because it gives them access by sea to the rest of the world. Now Kanmusu, human and Abyssal warships were travelling along the long coastlines and putting hostile troops onto the land.

Darwin was gone, but it would take a while for the whole country to be occupied.

The planned destination is the southern city Adelaide. The Stuart Highway is a major road that does not mess around. It will take them straight from Darwin to Adelaide.

The highway is shared between the Northern Territory and South Australia state. A few years ago, the government set a maximum speed limit for the Highway at 68 miles/hour or 110 km/hour.

But the convoy of military and emergency vehicles coming from Darwin go traditional. They have removed the speed governors from their vehicles. Speed governors limit the top speed of a

vehicle. There may be reasons for this. That did not matter now.

As the convoy zips across the Australian interior, the drivers — there are more than one because you can't stop a vehicle on the Highway because you're tired — turn up the volume of the radio. It's depressing to hear the news reports. This area has been bombed, please get away and stay away. There is fighting in this town and unknown amounts of casualties. This military unit has been destroyed.

“Okay girls,” the driver sounds like he's taking his daughters to the football. The football that you wear gear so you can run into people, “We arrived in Alice Springs. That means we are halfway there.”

Alice Springs sits in the middle of Australia. It's a large and comfortable town to stay in if you want to explore the desert.

“Thank you,” Murakumo is eager to get out because she's been in the vehicle for so long.

“Here,” that driver hands the ship girls some brightly-coloured notes and coins, “Find somewhere to stay and be back to the vehicles by tomorrow evening. After the sun starts setting, so 7:00 pm.”

The sun starts setting at 7:00 pm? That must be tough to live around here.

“When does the sun start rising here?”

“5:30 am.”

Murakumo shakes Kiyoshimo awake. Then the two destroyers set off.

...

The Australian town is twitchy and nervous.

There is little chance they will be attacked this far into the country. Hopefully.

But suddenly these girls had entered the town looking like foreigners and wearing strange clothes.

Nestor and Quickmatch easily sooths their suspicions. They enter a fine dining establishment.

“Can we have a menu here, mate.”

The word, mate, is used differently in the Australian context. It’s like their version of bro, boyo or lad in Australia.

So Nestor and Quickmatch settle down into a nice clothed table and chairs and enjoy pork belly with potatoes.

Murakumo looks at the weird and wonderful shapes and colours of Australian money. Because the Kanmusu had, unsurprisingly, more experience with the Japanese currency (Yen), the amounts seemed too small. What could this 10 dollar note get you?

Murakumo and Kiyoshimo were not very familiar to the foreign customs and culture. They very quickly head towards disaster.

“And who are you supposed to be?”

It appears that they have stepped into a tavern or pub. All the people here have some form of liquor.

Murakumo instantly puts all engines into reverse and backs away towards the door.

“Argh!”

One of the drunken men has grabbed Murakumo arm.

“I asked you a question!”

...

Stalingrad generously hands over to the farmer a blue note that proudly displays \$10. Well, more

accurately, Haruna took the notes out of Stalingrad's pockets and handed them over.

“Many thanks comrade,” says Stalingrad.

The sun has gone down. She thought she was getting cooked on the back of that truck. The back of a pickup truck is conveniently known as tray. How... appropriate.

The Kanmusu almost stopped in the middle of nowhere. But now, like an oasis in the desert, a large and busy town seemed to have sprung up from the endless sands and shrubs of the Australian desert.

Of course, people noticed the strange sight of three women covered in blood and dressed strangely. And were their pockets moving? They obviously did not know they were Kanmusu.

“What,” says that voice which Stalingrad instantly recognises.

Stalingrad turns and beams at the repair ship girl.

Resource has been recovering from the traumatic moment when she had glanced into Stalingrad's soul. It had been terrifying. It seemed that as she looked into the abyss, the abyss looked into her. It

had inspired terror and other random emotions that Stalingrad had been feeling.

Resource thought she had been able to recover. After all, it had been a long time since then.

Then she realises that the corpse she was staring at was...

“We have a battlecruiser named Invincible,” said Resource, “But what the actual —”

Then she remembers that the battlecruiser looks like a corpse.

“I had to leave the rigging behind,” says the battlecruiser ship girl cheerfully, “Too heavy to move on land. Worked like a charm though.”

“... You better come with me.”

“My good doctor, is there somewhere that my comrades can stay?”

Then Resource notices two Kanmusu she has never seen before. But they seem familiar...

“Hello,” one of them bows, “My name is Haruna.”

“And I am Hiei,” the other bows.

Resource looks between the Kanmusu.

“You have quite a story to tell.”

...

In many places, a tavern is part of a bigger establishment. On many occasions, the tavern shares the building or premises with accommodations.

Resource leads us to one of these excellent establishments.

“Been here least time,” she goes to open the door, “Great service and —”

Then she stops and stares at the door because that sounded like a girl screaming.

Is that Murakumo?

Haruna turns to face Stalingrad and asks what they should do.

“Open that door.”

Resource opens the door and I take a moment to judge the situation. Judging the situation before I get too —

I can see Murakumo getting harassed.

I know as a Kanmusu we are not meant to fight the people we are supposed to be protecting. Our ship rigging gives us most of our strength and abilities, but we are still quite strong. We could probably fight a professional boxer.

But that does not matter.

I'm quite tall so I might have to crouch a bit to head-butt them.

...

Dear Great Comrade.

This must be what it feels like when the capital ships get swarmed to death by the littler ships.

All around me are these cute little destroyers and even some light cruisers coddling me. I can't move. Please. Help.

Resource and Akashi looked into my missing arms. They said they would have to rebuild my arms. Actually, first Resource scolded me for frowning. She has gotten so used to me smiling when it gets painful that it really distracts her when I don't.

I've been on the back of a pickup truck getting cooked at 130 degrees Fahrenheit/(like, 54 degrees

Celsius?) for all the time the sun has been up. I'm not joking when I say it was up in the sky for more than twelve hours. The pain got boring. A wine connoisseur gets bored if they taste the same blends or variety of wines.

I don't really get to use my extensive lexicon or vocabulary that stores all the offensive language my crew and I remember. But it makes me *this* close to swearing like a sailor. You could not see how close it was could you? Oh yeah, that's because I have no f*c*i*g arms.

S*i*. I can't start ***** swear now. Not with all these adorable little ship girls all around me.

They were really excited because I somehow came back. Again. The Japanese Kanmusu and Midway—

(I forget we had an American with us. I forget so I don't go around and ask her to fight me)

Thanks for wiping off the sweat Hiei.

I try very hard not to gunboat diplomacy Midway.

—Anyway, the Kanmusu are getting used to seeing me come back alive from heavy damage.

We will get to Adelaide, but what we do there is something that will have to be answered when we get there. Or earlier if they give me back my arms.

Chapter 10

Chapter Ten:

...

Well the commandant thought she had gotten quite the promotion.

It is official. The Commander of the Australian Fleet has been missing ever since the initial attacks on Japan. The Rear Admiral had been leading a Kanmusu exchange programme with the Japanese. The Australian Navy has lost one of our finest strategic planners and its best ship girls.

The Australian Navy has taken a beating. The Australians have lost a significant military port and fleet officers when Darwin was lost. The command structure is being adjusted.

Before the attacks, the commandant's rank would be the equivalent of a lieutenant commander. She had been in charge of the Kanmusu facilities in Darwin.

A large portion of the military personnel in Darwin escaped. They had managed to evacuate

Kanmusu and other personnel before the city was occupied.

But this means the commandant has become the most senior officer in this group. So to reflect her status, Australian Fleet Command has given her a temporary position. She has been promoted to Acting Captain.

She is with navy personnel and Kanmusu in the middle of the desert. The ocean is thousands of miles away.

This is a worrying sign.

When they fled Darwin, the group lost most of its military assets. Hopefully the base in Adelaide can bring them back up to fighting strength.

There are two huge hostile forces now sailing down the eastern and western coasts of Australia. These forces are destroying and occupying the important coastline. The coast is where most of Australia's population and their homes are.

The Australian navy is massing warships and ship girls for counter-attacks. But the navy is weakened. There will be only a dozen patrol boats and destroyer escorts (frigates) for the counter-attack on the hostile eastern forces.

Australian Kanmusu on the eastern coast includes; the Majestic-class light carrier, Melbourne, the Colossus-class light carrier, Vengeance, and perhaps a dozen cruiser, destroyer and destroyer escort Kanmusu.

The Alliance eastern forces have at least two dozen powerful conventional ships. They have dozens of Kanmusu. They have modern supercarrier ship girls.

That is why the commandant has chosen to take this group to the southern city, Adelaide. It will probably be the last city the enemy will arrive at.

Their only hope is that they get more time.

The enemy forces chasing Hood and Cooke were fought off and returned to their countries. Those forces had to chase them across entire oceans.

The Kanmusu with Hood and Cooke have linked up. The plan is for them to smash through the enemy forces on Australia's western coast. There is only one major city along the west of Australia. The enemy forces will be much weaker on the western coast.

If all goes to plan, all these Kanmusu will meet at Adelaide.

The last plan had us meeting at Darwin. Hopefully the new plan works this time. There is nowhere for them to flee if Australia falls.

...

With something like the internet, news spreads fast.

It was everywhere. One battlecruiser ship girl standing against the ferocious strength of the Darwin surprise attack and stopping the advance. The Kanmusu had walked into an opposing fleet, survived, and walked out with two Kanmusu as prize ship girls.

People who were still resisting the Alliance used this as an example of a victory among the recent defeats.

However the internet is being monitored. The people who openly criticise the new Alliance are tracked to their locations and disappear. People find ways to express their dissatisfaction by supporting this Kanmusu.

'For us, there is no land behind Australia.'

The videos of the fight between the battlecruiser ship girl and four battleship ship girls are taken

down.

But everyone is reminded again. Reminded of that name, Stalingrad.

...

Sadly the captain of Liquid Assets, Ethan Feuriels could not come with them. Hopefully he managed to survive.

Akashi is looking into something to replace Stalingrad's missing arms. Until they get the proper facilities and supplies, they cannot reconstruct her whole arm.

Akashi can make Stalingrad some prosthetic arms though until they can get her arms reconstructed.

Resource has more urgent problems to deal with.

Stalingrad's overall health is in trouble. She had to cope with extreme damage without immediate medical assistance. She waited on the back of a vehicle with the desert temperatures and heat. Resource moves her to the largest hospital in Alice Springs.

Stalingrad's crew go for some well-deserved shore leave.

She goes to get Midway. Midway's crew has a look at the battlecruiser ship girl. Even American damage control hesitates. Stalingrad is more scrap metal than battlecruiser.

Stalingrad was never in the best health to begin with. When she got into that battle at Darwin, she was still recovering from pervious combat damage.

The battlecruiser ship girl is sedated. Midway's engineering teams go through the gaping wounds and explore her insides.

When they get out, the chief engineer asks to speak to Resource privately.

It seems Stalingrad's construction has problems. The post-war economy and industry of the Soviet Union after World War Two had to find places to cut expenses. The battlecruisers were never finished. They were not checked for flaws before they were cancelled and Stalingrad was used as a target ship.

Subjected to continual and complete damage, Stalingrad's electronics are showing malfunctions. Her internal plumbing has been exposed to sea water, heat and the harsh environment. The battlecruiser is showing catastrophic failures across the ship.

The battlecruiser ship girl was already malnourished and poorly maintained when she arrived in Australia. She was supposed to be scrapped a week ago by the Russian navy, so she did not get to eat enough. Add the maintenance issues to the overall damage and the battlecruiser ship girl is not in good condition at all.

There seems to be only one reason the battlecruiser has not died yet. Owing to her complicated internal design, the vast range of components, backups and materials fail at different times. This let the battlecruiser stay ahead of the damage.

To make things worse, the battlecruiser ship girl also suffers from severe rust to her insides.

Resource asks the chief engineer if they can solve all these problems.

It will be a task of mammoth proportions to restore the battlecruiser ship girl to her previous health. The battlecruiser will need unbelievable amounts of medical and ship supplies.

“Could we change her internal structure while we perform repairs on her?”

The chief engineer shakes her head. The battlecruiser needs full health before any modifications are made to her.

“How much time would it take her to recover?”

The chief engineer holds up her fingers.

“Is that in weeks?”

The fairy shakes her head.

“Months?”

The fairy nods.

Resource looks at the battlecruiser ship girl.

How would she react to this?

...

I would have joined everyone for dinner. An all-you-can-withstand buffet. But Resource does not think it is safe for me to eat regular food. She's not sure where the food would end up in me.

She lets me go after her medical inspections. I'm not happy with what Resource told me, but the circumstances are demanding all around the world.

I apologise to Kiyoshimo for how I behaved and insulted her. But she did not hold it against me. I suspect she may have told the others because people hugged me even more, if that's even possible.

Everyone was talking and watching movies until late that night.

We rented a small holiday house for the destroyer ship girls to stay together. So all the Kanmusu flocked to this place.

We were not expected to move until tomorrow evening, so it was okay to stay awake until late.

Murakumo and I ended up being the only ones still awake.

We have quite the conversation. She asks me why I spoke of land battles of the Second World War as if I was there.

“I only know what I read.”

“Why are you lying, Stalingrad?”

So she could tell.

If you ask many Kanmusu what they remember, they will tell you about naval fights. That is to be expected when you and your sailors were at sea.

I ask Murakumo if she can remember anything other than being at sea.

“Well,” she says, “The relationship between the Imperial Japanese Army and the Navy was terrible. I do not recall much about what happened on land.”

Then I ask that sensitive question.

“So, you do not remember any of the war crimes that the Japanese committed?”

Murakumo explains to me that the sailors in the Imperial Navy were treated far better than soldiers of the Imperial Army. She believes that the Army was more prone to committing those crimes.

“What do you remember, Stalingrad?”

Well let me think.

The navy and army are meant to be distinct forces with their own places to fight.

But that was not the case for the Soviet Navy in the Second World War.

The Germans and their allies had seen the effectiveness of the attack at Pearl Harbour. The Americans were retreating out of the Philippines. The Pacific was sent into chaos.

So the Germans learned.

The Soviet army and air force were told not to respond to the Germans and their allies gathering on the border of the Soviet Union.

The German ambassador to the Soviet Union handed over a declaration of war.

The Wehrmacht and Luftwaffe, Germany's undefeated army and air force subjected us to their blend of blitzkrieg and Pearl Harbour.

The sailors of the Soviet Navy were put on the highest combat alert. They were waiting for the German navy, Kriegsmarine, to show up in the Baltic Sea and Black Sea.

No attack ever materialised.

The Germans trapped our ships in port. They placed naval mines with 660 pounds (300kg?) of explosives around the Soviet fleets.

So the Soviet sailors had to watch as the Germans and their allies brought the Soviet Union to its knees. 4 million Soviet soldiers were dead, wounded or captured in just the first few months.

The Soviet sailors had to fight with our comrades on land. They built a close working relationship with

the other military branches as they fought in our burning cities.

Actually, the Soviet Navy was known as the 'Red Fleet.' Moving on...

So the other Kanmusu remember grand oceanic battles and voyages.

I recall there never being enough of something. Never enough food. Never enough warmth. Never enough tanks. Never enough weapons. Never enough graves. Never enough time.

I recall having to run from the Nazis. I'm sorry that we had to leave our own on the other side of the river, but destroy that bridge before they cross.

Use our motor oil to burn our villages and farms. Scorch our suffering homeland before the enemies come in and take and take and take...

I remember the sailors and soldiers marching into Leningrad (Saint Petersburg). The broken city that had been the jewel of Russia. One million had been starved when the Germans surrounded it. For two years, families were starved enough to eat each other.

The wilful disregard of human life. The suffering of the citizens. Terror and murder, massacres and brutality. Momentous clashes that destroyed everything we had built.

I recall sailors taking part in the apocalyptic battles. That engineer that had to plant mines in front of advancing Panzer tank divisions. That naval infantryman that had to drive in the dark, following the white-painted back of the tank in front of him so the Luftwaffe would not see the tanks. That naval officer that was told 'You either dig your own fortress or your own grave' and dug more trenches than most people walk on ground to their jobs. Those sailors who had to crawl through the rubble when the snipers got busy.

The Soviet sailors fought with the soldiers. From the long road of defeats to victory. Fighting with the soldiers in huge battles that turned the landscape red from the bombs, rockets, shells and blood. The Soviet sailors fought in hand-to-hand and side-by-side with our comrades.

Our own people slaughtered. Our own people taken to Germany to work and die. Our own people were tortured. Our own people lost so much, but we never stopped fighting.

We did not stop fighting until the Italians had been wiped from our homeland. We did not stop fighting until the last person was freed from the death camps. We did not stop fighting until the countries of Asia had reclaimed their homes from the Japanese.

We won. That is what the historians said. We completed every objective we were given. But we lost.

We were tired. The Russian people were tired. We had let the Germans and Italians develop their ideas of socialism into psychotic fascism. The Russian people were paranoid. We installed our communism in other countries in the hopes we would never fight like that in the homeland again. We scared our allies.

Our cities and towns would not recover until the decade was over. Our economy and industry would not reach pre-war conditions for another decade. Our population would not stop falling until half a century later. Our shortages of homes, schools, railways, roads, hospitals, factories and libraries would not be rebuilt for decades. We buried more than of our own people than we could count. We lost track when it went past the first ten million.

Our allies hated us. They blamed us for our way of life. The way of life we had bled for. They blamed us for our quality of life. The quality of life that resulted from our struggle for freedom.

But that war was nothing I suppose, to what I can remember happening even earlier. But the historians struggle to write anything glorious about the famines and production disasters and the purges of undesirables.

It is supposed to be a mark of respect that our allies feared us.

The Russian people died at the battlefields, died at homes, died to our government.

You know, Stalingrad always seems to change its name when there is a change in the government and regime. When it was owned by the Tsardom of Russia, Tsaritsyn. Stalin in charge, Stalingrad. Nikita Khrushchev conducting the show, Volgograd. The Alliance better name it something nice.

I guess there are ship girls who are named after important places and such.

There might even be ship girls named after Tsaritsyn or Volgograd.

But my name is Stalingrad. What do people think of when they hear that?

As the BBC commentator said at the time:

'Stalingrad swallowed Hitler's armies. Poland was conquered in 28 days. In that same time in Stalingrad, the Germans might have managed to capture several houses. France fell in 38 days. In that same time in Stalingrad, the Germans might have managed to cross the street.'

...

“So,” grumbles Enterprise, “We’re supposed to go around to the other side of the country.”

So now Cooke and the Kanmusu have arrived at Australia.

They have two options. Discard their equipment and travel on land. Or fight through dozens of warships coming at them from all sides.

“Now girls,” Cooke uses a loudspeaker to address the Kanmusu from his luxury yacht, “Remember to be polite when you meet the Australians. They might forget their manners since they have the war on their doorstep.”

“Sir,” says Enterprise, “What is the plan?”

“Obviously we have to stay in the ocean and go around Australia.”

“... **** me...”

...

We hit the road the next evening.

I literally did. Kiyoshimo and Murakumo drop me as before they could load me into the vehicle. They apologise. I tell them I was slapped around by large-calibre explosives and this is nothing. That gets Haruna and Hiei to apologise. I tell them all to calm down.

I miss having arms. I never realised how important they were to me until they were gone. Without my ship rigging, falling on my face did more damage than the large-calibre shells the Kongou-class sisters fired at my face. Next time someone aims for my command centre, I’m taking the shot on my chin, because I regret blocking those shells with my arms.

And my body is freaking out, wondering where my arms have gone.

’This is brain central. Please report your status, arms. “

'...'

'Hey! Arms corp, respond!'

'...'

'Oh no, set everything to red alert! EVERYONE PANIC!'

Arms and hands are amazing things. They have evolved with humans over time to help us manipulate our environment. Now I can't type into a keyboard. Now I can't grab a snack. I could eat some prosciutto right now. Prosciutto is salted and cured ham. Humans put salt into food so it doesn't taste like dirt, so obviously prosciutto tastes amazing.

I reckon the Australians could make really good prosciutto. All my meals since I have arrived in Australia indicate they have a healthy respect for meat. The ratio of meat to vegetables in some meals appears to be two sausages to a lettuce leaf. So they must be able to do amazing things with their meat if they eat it all the time.

So now we are back on the road heading to the south part of this country.

Kiyoshimo insists that I sit with the destroyer ship girls, but I need to talk with the commandant. I mean, captain Alanta.

...

“Why do you say that?” says the acting captain.

“Well,” says Stalingrad, “The Ship Girl Initiative programme in Australia is illegal in the eyes of the Alliance. And they own most of the Ship Girl Initiative. If they are on the enemy side, it’s only proper that we call ourselves something different.”

“But. Exodus. Initiative. It sounds too awesome to be a military programme.”

“So?”

“You know what? Screw it. I’ll get Fleet Command to refer to it as that.”

The two would have shaken hands to commemorate this moment if Stalingrad had hands.

...

Some supercarrier Kanmusu should never be invited to a marathon race.

Some supercarriers can comfortably travel around the whole world without stopping.

Gerald R. Ford is one of these Kanmusu. She happens to be nuclear-powered, so she does not need to stop and refuel frequently.

Iowa has the group's last decent anti-air defenses. She fills the air with burning metal as the supercarrier saturates the skies with enough jet aircraft to defeat small nations.

The supercarrier has chased them since they left Pearl Harbour.

There is only one option when this group mostly contains vintage Kanmusu.

Run.

...

HMAS Voyager contentedly enjoy her cup of tea as she sits by the banks of the Swan River.

There would be a battle. The fighting would reach them. Eventually.

Perth is the most isolated city in Australia. It is the only city on the entire western coast of Australia and contains almost everyone that lives in the

Western Australian state. It will take time for the enemy to get to them.

When you were a ship with battle honours in the Mediterranean and Pacific theatres, you have to appreciate the quiet moments.

“Mayday, mayday, mayday.”

Hm? She walks over to her equipment and picks up the radio.

“This is HMAS Voyager. What is your problem?”

While she waits for the response, she takes a sip from her tea.

“This is Arizona. We need immediate assistance.”

Voyager inhales her tea and starts choking.

“Are you still there?”

“I’m sorry,” she gasps, “Could you please repeat that last statement?”

“I repeat. This is Arizona. We need immediate assistance.”

“You guys made it?” says Voyager.

“Obviously.”

“Hold on for a minute.” Voyager waves the ‘Scrap Iron Flotilla’ over.

The ‘Scrap Iron Flotilla’ was a name given to five Australian destroyers by Joseph Goebbels.

It consists of the V-class destroyers, Vampire and Vendetta, and their cousins, the W-class destroyers, Voyager and Waterhen. Their honorary family member was the Scott-class destroyer leader, Stuart.

This particular formation saw action in the First World War with the Royal Navy, and then was given to the Australian Navy. Then they fought at the Mediterranean and Pacific.

But despite their reputation, the Australian navy kept them at home because there were other Kanmusu to fight at places far from home.

And despite their reputation...

“They brought Arizona back?” asks Vampire.

“They must have done it recently,” says Voyager.

“Weren’t they travelling around to all those historical sites?” says Stuart, “I imagine they

probably brought back Arizona for morale purposes.”

The Abyssals have been around for a while. There is evidence they were around since the 1947 Roswell Incident. The war with the Abyssals began to really pick up in the 1950's, but the Cold War made information disappear into nowhere and people were more concerned about political wars by proxy.

This war has been going on far too long. The ship girls of the United States Navy are given holidays as well. It is a popular choice for them to visit the historical sites where they fought. The United States probably brought back Arizona because of her symbolic importance to the American people rather than combat.

It's always been a struggle to secure public support. People criticise the United States for bringing back ships that have questionable effectiveness or histories. But the battleship Arizona is something different.

Arizona was the most devastating loss in the attack on Pearl Harbour. To have lost more than a thousand lives and her flag officer when she went down. That completely obliterated any resistance to

the United States participating in the bloody battles of the Second World War.

“Let’s go help them,” says Stuart. She picks up the radio, “What are your coordinates, Arizona?”

...

“Here you go.”

Resource sets Stalingrad onto a chair. Then she goes into the next room.

Then the repair ship girl wonders what she is supposed to do.

She has formulated so many ideas while they drove to Adelaide. But those ideas that felt so correct during the journey feel wrong now.

Where is she supposed to start fixing the battlecruiser?

“Um,” Akashi pats her shoulder, “Would this help?”

Resource looks at the green liquid sloshing about in the water bottle Akashi is holding.

“What is that?”

“The Japanese were working on an experimental new complex that could repair ship girls,” Akashi smiles, “We stole all the prototypes.”

“And, um, how does it do it?”

“No one really knows. But before the scientists died, they said it could expedite or quicken repairs for a ship girl if they put some on themselves.”

Resource feels sweat rolling down her face. If this goes wrong, Stalingrad *will* throw down ‘cheeki breeki’ on her.

...

“No way.”

No way this shifty substance could work exactly as intended.

The two repair ship girls mixed the prototype complex into a bath and put Stalingrad in it.

And...

Stalingrad is as good as new. Better than new. Her recovery time has been slashed to a few weeks.

Her Soviet-processed steel used to be sort of questionable before. But now it gleams, completely

free of the rust and grime and cracks.

Her electronics which kept returning errors, operate like they were installed yesterday.

Plumbing and pipes that were completely mangled, have slotted into back into place.

“Can we make more of this stuff?” asks Resource.

Akashi shrugs.

...

What.

I feel good.

I feel great.

The good doctors told me that they wanted to try something.

And now I feel completely healthy. And they gave me some epic prosthetic arms.

These prosthetics were developed by the Chinese when they decided to do something with all their injured sailors. It straps to my arm stumps and then responds to my neural stimuli.

Where are all these wonderful inventions coming from? I'm just a Cold War peasant. I'm not used to the technological master race giving me gifts.

The only downside is that my hunger has returned.

'You wot mate? These fluids they injected are not food!' says my newly returned stomach.

'We second that!' says my newly realigned intestines.

And now that I have something to replace my arms...

Resource told everyone I was not to leave bad for a few days and to leave me alone so I could recover.

So to give me something to do, Resource hands me a tablet computer.

"Comrade," I say, "Are you showing me another wonderful invention?"

"Not really," says Resource as she logs into a program, "But I wanted to show you something."

"Oh?" I say, "What is it?"

“They just implemented the Stalingrad battlecruiser into the Warthunder game. The developers gave it to us, free of charge.”

I look at the virtual ship floating on pixelated water.

“This is so great.”

“And that’s not the end of it,” Resource opens another application, “You also got into the beta for World of War-Ship Girls.”

Resource clicks on a box with *me* in it. It has the Roman numerals for eight to the side of it.

I look at the virtual representation of *me* standing nonchalantly on the waves.

“It’s not unlocked for you yet,” says Resource apologetically, “The developers said the Stalingrad might be overpowered in the gameplay.”

“Outstanding.”

Chapter 11

Chapter Eleven:

...

The last time they wanted to meet in Washington DC, vintage tank collectors attacked the White House.

This time the White House has anti-tank mines, automated gun turrets and two hundred more guards.

The most powerful individuals in the Abyssal hierarchy and Alliance need to discuss the current security situation in the occupied nations.

So they leave behind their equipment and weapons on the shore and get taken by limousine cars to the White House.

Light Cruiser Demon looks at the things she has written down on her lined paper.

“Okay,” says Destroyer Water Demon sits at the head of the table, “Now that everyone is here, let’s start.”

“I need more henchmen,” says Aircraft Carrier Princess immediately, “We are not receiving enough recruits here in America. The cities of Detroit, Dallas, Chicago and Atlanta have already declared their independence. They are not really moving against other cities, but we might have a civil war on our hands.”

“You think that is tough,” says Aircraft Carrier Water Demon, “The people in Egypt are not going to back down just because the world is against them.”

“Can you handle them?” asks Destroyer Water Demon.

“Give me a hundred warships and I can do it,” says Aircraft Carrier Water Demon.

“How bad is it here in the United States?” asks Destroyer Water Demon.

“As I said,” says Aircraft Carrier Princess, “We need more reinforcements to pacify the American people. Not enough of the locals are joining our forces.”

“We will get you those reinforcements,” assures Destroyer Water Demon.

“The situation in China is critical,” says Air Defense Princess next, “But you probably knew that already, huh? The Indian and Vietnamese armies we sent into China were butchered.”

“We have already given you as much as we can spare in that region,” says Destroyer Water Demon.

“Then hurry up the invasion of Australia,” says Air Defense Princess, “I need more to throw at the Chinese resistance.”

“Speaking of invasions,” says Battleship Water Demon, “Our guys are getting trashed as they cross the border into North Korea. Can we try negotiation first?”

They all shake their heads.

“Keep killing them until they come to our side,” says Destroyer Water Demon, “Or they are gone.”

“You can do it,” encourages Battleship Princess.

They all turned to Armoured Carrier Demon.

“Drug cartels and private armies.”

“Understood,” says Destroyer Water Demon, “We will get more Alliance troops into South America.”

Southern Demon and Southern War Demon yawn.

“Hey!” says Southern War Princess.

“There’s just nothing exciting to do in Europe,” explains Southern War Demon, “We managed to get martial law and lockdowns into place without much trouble. Fortunately we had all our supporters and many governments were not popular.”

“And I’m still waiting for someone to give me more countries to rule,” whines Southern Demon, “I’m still waiting on Australia and New Zealand.”

“How are things in Africa?” asks Destroyer Water Demon.

“Well,” Seaplane Tender Princess looks at her notes, “The people in Central Africa already had their sense of independence shattered by other humans, so I do not have any pressing need for increased occupying forces.”

“We do not really need any more garrisons in South Africa either,” says Southern War Princess.

“Lucky assignments,” grumbles Aircraft Carrier Water Demon, “I need more loyal soldiers and ships in Northern Africa.”

Destroyer Water Demon scribbles down notes where they might need to reposition their forces.

“Okay,” says Destroyer Water Demon, “How are things in Eastern Europe and Russia?”

The assembled leaders look to the person they left with that responsibility.

Light Cruiser Demon swallows and looks at her lined paper.

She closes her eyes. She takes a deep breath. Then she addresses them.

“Well it started when the citizens started hearing about that battlecruiser ship girl. Then they discovered the weapons caches buried by the previous governments...”

...

“They had a hand-portable nuclear bomb?” says Aircraft Carrier Water Demon, “How did you deal with that?”

“We called in the Alpha Group Ukrainian special forces,” says Light Cruiser Demon, “Than it was revealed that the rebels were actually all ex-Spetsnaz Russian elite forces. But the nuke did not go off and they left.

“Anything else?” asks Southern War Demon.

“The Russian citizens are better armed than the foreign soldiers we sent,” says Light Cruiser Demon, “I need more of everything.”

...

Resource buries her face in her hands.

She has gotten a video conference to Commander Cooke and the Kanmusu.

But Stalingrad and Akashi are having a loud argument.

“Do you have a problem with that, Stalingrad-san?”

“Yes! I’m a warship, I can’t have fibreglass for arms!”

“They are only temporary, Stalingrad-san.”

“Moving on,” Resource wrenches her face from her hands, “What happened to Iowa?”

“We had to get her on board,” says Cooke, “She has done most of the heavy lifting when Gerald visited us. She was taking on water and in danger of foundering.”

“Gerald?”

“The supercarrier ship girl, Gerald R. Ford,” explains Cooke, “She left for somewhere else.”

“Well is that not great?” says Resource, “You are nearly at your destination.”

“Resource,” says Cooke, “We still have to fight our way to you. The rumour is that Yamato-class battleships are on the JMSDF Hyuga. Their commanding officer is Vice Admiral Oshiro who is decades more experienced than me.”

“I understand,” lied Resource, “Can you make it?”

“Half of our ship girls are on the verge of collapse from fatigue,” says Cooke, “We need to see the inside of a dock soon.”

“We cannot offer much to you,” says Resource, “All our ship girl equipment was destroyed when we had to relocate from Darwin.”

“I heard you have a battlecruiser that is good for distractions though.”

Resource stares at the American officer.

“Oh. Hell. No. I just fixed that ship girl.”

“Wow,” says Cooke, “She actually fixed now? The videos showed her completely broken.”

“We used some questionable substances that immediately repaired her.”

“Could you send some to us?”

“We used all our stocks and do not know how to procure more,” says Resource.

Commander Cooke does not look happy.

“Send us something or we will not be able to make it.”

The video conference ends.

Stalingrad sounds like she lost to Akashi’s logic.

“Stalingrad,” says Resource, “Come with me.”

...

“And this photo shows six of the nine 18.1 inch (460mm) naval guns.”

“This is all well and good, comrade,” I say, “But what has this got to do with me?”

I have been sitting in this little room looking at the projector and whiteboard for hours. I thought

Resource is teaching me history. But why is it all on the two ship classes, the Kongou-class and Yamato-class?

Kiyoshimo is sitting next to me, enjoying all of this battleship-mania. She has always liked battleships.

“You are fighting them.”

Kiyoshimo inhales half her tea and spills the cup.

“Stalingrad is going to fight Yamato-san and Musashi-san?” she splutters and gasps.

“And two Kongou-class battleships,” confirms Resource.

So many battleships. Kiyoshimo is overwhelmed.

“Stalingrad-san cannot fight all of them.”

“If these forces are allowed to engage our friendly ship girls, they will kill our friends,” says Resource grimly, “Our friends are exhausted. Arizona, Pennsylvania, Iowa, Hood, Renown, Enterprise, Scharnhorst, Prinz Eugen. None of them can fight any longer. All of them will die. Unless, we do something.”

“This is unlike you,” I tease, “Letting me go out there to get damaged.”

Resource looks at me, expressionless.

“We are asking for you to draw away a hostile fleet,” says Resource, “Alone. You are not expected to survive.”

Kiyoshimo freezes in the action of mopping up her spilled tea.

“We cannot order you to die,” continues Resource, “Because you are not under our command. If you do this, many other ship girls get to live. It is your choice.”

“No,” yells Kiyoshimo, “She won’t do it! Stalingrad can’t die!”

Poor Kiyoshimo. She just likes battleships. She might even like battlecruisers.

“Let me write my will,” I’m surprisingly amusing (not really, I’m trying to look like I don’t care in front of Kiyoshimo), “And Kiyoshimo, they say legends can’t die.”

...

Stalingrad does not have many possessions she could call hers.

Most things that she has were just lent to her or paid for by someone else. The only things she would want to pass on are the medal, box and pins that were gifts.

So Stalingrad signs the papers. She has passed on the box and pins to Kiyoshimo.

She has passed on the medal to Midway. She's never seen Midway ever looked surprised. This might just do it.

She wanted to leave something for Murakumo. She passed on her ebony Soviet military identification tags to Murakumo. She really does not have much else.

Then she reports to the new captain's office.

...

Heavy cruiser ship girl, Aoba is waiting for something exciting to happen.

After the Alliance had taken Japan, Aoba had been encouraged her to continue her hobby as a war correspondent. Aoba always wanted to report the news on the war before someone else could skew the

facts. After all, she could best understand the events ship girls were involved in. She was there for some of the battles.

Unfortunately the Alliance wanted all the news to be blatant propaganda showing how the Alliance is so great. She is not allowed to make any films or articles about what life is like for the ship girls. But she could film and make news articles for battles.

The fleet is heading down the western coast of Australia. Their objectives were to intercept naval forces still resisting the Alliance and invade the city of Perth.

There would be plenty of things to film when they caught up to the European and American ship girls.

...

“The principle missile of the conventional warships in the Japanese Maritime Self-Defense Force is the Type 90. This 662 kilograms missile (1469.5 pounds) has a range around 150 kilometres (93 miles?) and contains explosives weighing 225 kilograms (...496 pounds). The aircraft will consist of V-22 Osprey gunships with machine guns and small-calibre missile pods. Expect the helicopters to

have torpedoes and bombs. If you are really unlucky, the enemy fleet might have Japanese F-35 jet fighter aircraft which pack the new Type 16 Mach 3-capable anti-ship missile...” Captain Alanta bites her lip and looks down again at the documents.

“Don’t worry,” I say, “I have a triple layers of water tight compartments and abundant void spacing.”

Those were not designed to withstand destruction of this nature.

The pride of the Imperial Japanese Navy.

I will admit the Soviet Navy were worried about the Imperial Japanese.

For more than two centuries, the island nation of Japan isolated itself from the rest of the world. They made the construction of oceangoing ships punishable by death.

Yet Japan underwent an industrial revolution ten times faster than Britain. They built a navy that was one of the most powerful of its time.

I am going against a fleet of ship girls that were created by the Imperial Navy.

I'm going against the best gunslingers of the East.

I think my crew heard a good quote from our allies.

'This will be a fight against overwhelming odds from which survival cannot be expected.'

"We cannot spare the resources to fully rebuild your equipment," says the captain.

"That is alright," I say.

"You get ready to launch," the captain checks her watch, "Within the hour."

...

"This is Patterson. The invasion fleet has stopped to bombard the town, Geraldton, and land troops."

"Good to know. Do you guys still have any aircraft left?"

"We have not heard back from the units we sent to you."

"We saw them get pasted."

"... Then we have nothing left."

“Do you guys have anything to stop these missiles they are throwing at us?”

It’s funny how when you talk to someone over the radio waves, you feel like gesturing. Commodore Patterson shakes his head. They would not see that.

“No.”

“That’s real great.”

“We have evacuated the city. We have organised a distraction for the invasion fleet. That will let you continue to Adelaide.”

“May we know the nature of this distraction?”

“We are sending a battlecruiser Kanmusu as bait for the enemy.”

“... That must have been a tough choice for the Australian navy to make. Sorry.”

“She made the decision herself. She’s not part of the Australian navy by the way.”

“... So the famous battlecruiser we have been hearing about will show up to save us as well?”

“Affirmative, Hood.”

...

I had only one request.

While I sail for the western coast to rescue my allies, I read.

I did get to read a lot for myself. Ship girls are warships in human form. Books are my best friends in paper form.

I finished reading about the Battle of Samar. People call destroyers escorts 'tin cans', escort carriers 'flat tops', battleships 'battlewagons'.

People love squishing battlecruisers because we can't take the hits, but we dish out the damage.

What does that make battlecruisers? Eggshells with hammers. Glass cannons.

DX

Wait. That is not fully accurate.

There are several schools of thinking that apply to battlecruisers.

The Germans designed battlecruisers with approximately battleship survivability and cruiser armament.

The British designed battlecruisers with approximately cruiser survivability and battleship armament.

The Japanese changed most of their battlecruiser designs into 'fast' battleships. As implied, these sorts of ships would be battleships with speed.

The Americans created what they insisted were to be named, large cruisers. These were up-sized versions of heavy cruisers. Their protection schemes and armament were somewhere in between battleships and cruisers.

Speed was the common characteristic that distinguishes battlecruisers from battleships. But many battleships can rival those speeds.

When the world was questioning the effectiveness of building battlecruisers and large cruisers at the end of the Second World War, the Soviets were enraptured by these risky warships. For them, battlecruisers appealed to the naval architects more than floating airfields. When people look at battlecruisers, they think of adventure and peril. When they look at carriers, people are looking at the number and types of planes.

So guess which school of thinking the Soviets decided to adopt.

Anyway.

I am supposed to tickle an enemy fleet.

The Yamato-class battleships were designed to fight multiple battleships. The Stalingrad-class battlecruisers were not designed to take on multiple Yamato's.

For this battle, the battleships and I all have our main guns set in super-firing turrets. This means some of our turrets are situated above other turrets. These turrets can engage the same targets and have a similar field of fire. We all have these main turrets at the front and aft of the ship, meaning we have maximum angles to fire with our guns. Our secondary armament is more numerous, so less priority is given to their fields of fire, and they are be mounted anywhere on the ship where there is room basically. Most of the Yamato-class mount their secondary batteries amidships, and they have a lot of them.

Positioning is always important in these battles. Especially when our heavy main turrets with the guns with our best damage and range turn so slowly.

My main turrets take 40 seconds to rotate 180 degrees at 4.5 degrees/second. The Yamato-class main turrets turn at 2 degrees/second. We need to have our guns pointed at where we expect to shoot before we shoot.

And let's not forget that the Yamato-class have nine 18.1 inch (460mm) naval guns. Their armour-piercing and high-explosive shells weigh 3000 pounds (1360 kilograms), and when the fuses detect they have gone through a certain amount of armour, the shells will explode. If those shells explode anywhere inside me...

Warships have belt armour and deck armour. Belt armour or side armour, is nearly vertical and needs to resist shells coming in on a near-horizontal trajectory. Deck armour is mostly horizontal and needs to resist shells that come in from above.

Shells fired directly and near-horizontally generally penetrate more armour if they are fired closer to the target. If the target is far away, shells fired to a higher elevation will fall onto the top of the target. This is called 'plunging fire'. It is also helpful to indirectly fire over obstacles. But the further away those shells are fired, the more velocity and penetrating power they will have when they fall.

An important concept to this is the idea of an immunity zone. This is the area that if the guns were to fire from, direct fire and plunging fire will not defeat the armour scheme of a warship.

This is important to battlecruisers, to me, because I will be at a total disadvantage when it comes to these mechanisms. The Yamato-class have between 8 inches (200 mm) to 9 inches (230 mm) for their deck armour. They have at least 15.75 inches (400 mm) for belt armour. Their main turrets have 26 inches (650 mm) of armour on the front.

What this means is that the Yamato-class battleships have a large zone of immunity against my weapons. My pattern 1907, 12 inch (305mm) main guns can fire armour-piercing shells that can defeat 8.15 inches (207 mm) at 11.3 miles (20 kilometres) and will be even better if they fire even closer. I cannot damage the Yamato-class with plunging fire at all. Even at my main weapons' furthest range, the velocity of my shells when they fall will not be enough to get through the deck armour of the Yamato-class. I don't think my smaller armament will do anything more than scratch their paint.

So I have to get in close if I want my shells to get under the skin of the Yamato-class. And as I get closer, more weapons have the range to hit me.

The Stalingrad-class has 7.1 inches (180 mm) of belt armour, a *maximum* of 2.8 inches (70 mm) for my deck armour. My main turrets have 9.4 inches (240 mm) of armour on the front. They get slightly thinner for the barbettes, which is sort of the circular armour around the trunk of the turret.

The Yamato-class can pierce my belt and deck armour at almost any range with armour-piercing shells fired from their main guns. With both direct and plunging fire they could get their shells under my armour. My belt armour and deck armour is not sufficient to resist either direct or plunging fire. On the slim chance they do not get through, the huge velocity and mass of the shell will severely damage me even if it bounces.

The only place where my armour could rival the Yamato-class is my strongest sections for their weakest. My citadel, which is the best-armoured central section of the whole ship, is 9.8 inch (250 mm) which is reinforced with vertical bulkheads (dividing partitions/walls) between 4.9 inches to 5.5 inches(125 mm to 140 mm).

The most heavily protected and central part of the Stalingrad-class battlecruiser rivals the deck armour of the Yamato-class. And deck armour does not even have to be very thick to defeat plunging fire. And I can't even defeat their deck armour at all with plunging fire.

:C

So positioning for me will be crucial. I need to not get hit. I need to aim at certain places and be at specific distances relative to my targets if I want to do more than scratch the skin of the Yamato-class. Our main turrets have maximum angles to fire from, I have little room for mistakes.

As soon as I enter maximum firing range of the Yamato-class (42 kilometres or 26 miles), any hit could finish me. If I get close, they have more weapons that can hit me.

I will need my speed to dodge, to get the specific places and to fire from specific places.

Understanding mathematics and geography and how a warship interacts with them, is critical to maximising combat performance.

If you will excuse me, I need to research my opponent's technical details and check my firing

solutions.

I need to re-read chapters about shell dynamics and trajectories. I need to sharpen my mathematics and kinematics.

I need to remember all this.

If I can take down even one Yamato-class, that will even the odds of me surviving dramatically... As if surviving is the priority.

...

“How are you, Stalingrad?”

Stalingrad balances the book, 'The Big Gun: Battle-Ship Girl Main Armament 1860-1945' in one hand and places her other hand over her ear.

“Never been better.”

“Remember, we do not have any aircraft, missiles or torpedoes to throw at these battleships. You are not seeking a gun duel between battleships. Just lure them away for a bit.”

“And the city?”

“Evacuating. The ship girls are getting ready to leave. There were not enough supplies for everyone.”

They will take sail to Adelaide with whatever military equipment they can carry out of the city.”

“I wish to engage the enemy battleships at close range.”

Silence.

“Are you out of your mind?”

“On the contrary, Resource, I’m in the zone.” The Yamato-class will have a huge zone of immunity against my weapons.

Silence.

“I cannot stop you, can I?”

“No.”

“You want to throw down in a slugging contest with battleships. That is not advisable.”

“Wish me luck.”

Silence.

“Good luck.”

...

“We will find them eventually Kongou-san,” encourages heavy cruiser ship girl, Suzuya.

Kongou has been grim and despondent ever since her sisters disappeared.

“What if I have to fight my sisters?” asks Kongou.

“Don’t worry so much for the future,” says Aoba, “You sisters will come back, safe and healthy.”

All the neighbouring destroyer ship girls nod, except for Amatsukaze who stands up rigidly.

“Air patrols have spotted a ship girl heading directly for us,” declares Amatsukaze, “It’s the battlecruiser.”

Kongou has a murderous look on her face.

Aoba quickly checks her camera is fully functional.

“This time,” says Kongou quietly, “Things will end very differently.”

...

“Don’t hold back,” orders Vice Admiral Oshiro aboard the flagship JMSDF Hyuga, “Fire ship-to-ship missiles. All ship girls are to engage.”

Stalingrad taps her ship rigging. The captain's head pops out.

“Don't fire until I say so. I want the main guns to lay smoke screens in the path of the Yamato-class battleships. After that, slave local firing control to the main computer. Get me the chief engineer.”

The captain salutes and disappears into the ship rigging. Then the chief engineer's head pops out.

“I am going to re-route steam turbines to auxiliary boilers, full speed ahead. When they start failing, I will switch back to primaries.”

The chief engineer protests.

“I understand the heat and pressure will damage them. I need every last cubit of speed you can give me.”

The chief engineer frowns. Then she salutes and returns inside.

Stalingrad accelerates from a leisurely and economical cruising speed of 18 knots, to almost 36 knots.

The missiles attempt to hit the human-sized target. Only two from the dozens of missiles hit.

One of them impacts on her conning tower. The missile scrapes off some paint.

The other impacts on Stalingrad's forward funnel. Alarmingly, the paint still looks intact.

The helicopters reach her next.

The Japanese versions of the Sikorsky SH-60 Seahawks are armed with an assortment of 7.62 mm (.30 inch) machine guns, AGM-114 Hellfire missiles and light torpedoes.

They carpet-bomb the battlecruiser ship girl. She cannot dodge this swarm of explosive ordnance.

After she emerges, she is covered in smoke and flames.

Then Japanese supersonic F-35A jet fighters approach, holding Type 16 missiles. Introduced in 2016, these missiles approach 2000 pounds (907 kg), even larger than the previous ship-to-ship missiles that have been thrown at her.

“All gunners,” says Stalingrad, “Engage targets of opportunity.”

New anti-aircraft guns were also meant to be developed for the Stalingrad-class. But this was never finished.

So her rigging has twenty-four 45 mm (1.77 inch)/ 68 calibre, anti-aircraft guns. The shells fired from these guns do not actually have time or proximity fuses. For them to explode, they need to directly hit the aircraft.

And she has some 25 mm guns but they are kind of weak.

But what surprises the jet fighter pilots is that the turrets mounting these guns are able to track and detonate all of the missiles before they reach the ship girl.

...

“I agree,” says Iowa cautiously, “They’re pretty good.”

She doesn’t know what Stalingrad wants. The ship girl had arrived in the city and immediately asked for Iowa.

“So I was... thinking that —”

“What is your point?” interrupts Iowa impatiently.

Stalingrad’s diplomatic façade drops.

“If you aren’t fighting Iowa, I need to install your electronics into my equipment.”

...

“What?” exclaims Iowa, “Do you know what you’re asking?”

“Iowa,” says Stalingrad, “You don’t lost much.”

“You will lose yourself.”

“Think about it, Iowa,” says Stalingrad, “With Soviet hardware and American software, it is a good combination.”

“What if I say no?” asks Iowa.

“You won’t get to fight through me,” says Stalingrad, “You don’t get another fight.”

Iowa just stares at Stalingrad.

“Please. For the sake of judicious firepower.”

...

As soon as the American electronics start, the Kanmusu known as Stalingrad is overwhelmed.

Stalingrad balls her hands into shaking fists. She tries to keep her will and mind intact.

It's no use. The networks of American software traumatise Stalingrad's early-Cold War era equipment.

Within seconds the Kanmusu known as Stalingrad drops her hands limply to her sides.

Stalingrad looks at the approaching fleet of hostile Kanmusu.

"I am going to fuck you up," she declares, "I'll prove to you who the shit is."

The Soviet fairy crew collectively gulp.

Chapter 12

Chapter Twelve:

...

The Soviet fairy crew cannot help but feel betrayed.

To run all the installed electronics, Stalingrad had invited volunteers from the American crewwomen.

The Soviet captain had asked who would hold higher authority, since some of the volunteers were very senior American officers.

“If it is a question of authority, always defer to the American fairies,” Stalingrad had said, “For orders issued by American crews, their fairies have higher precedent over equivalent Soviet ranks. This directive will last for the duration of the battle.”

The Soviet crew had fallen into profound shock.

Not only was Stalingrad admitting the superiority of the technology of the United States Navy, she had ordered them to defer to the American sailors.

So now, the Soviet captain is no longer sitting in a nice padded command chair.

The Stalingrad-class has multiple command centres. There is a navigation bridge and a flag bridge. The commanding officer usually directs the ship from the navigation bridge. A flag officer would direct a fleet from the flag bridge.

Iowa's fairy captain sits in the 'hot seat' of the navigation bridge with her executive officer as second in command.

In addition to these captains, are the American flag officers.

The admirals from Enterprise and Arizona are in the flag bridge.

So the Soviet captain, is completely outranked by the American admirals and subordinate to their captains. Her place on the hierarchy of this vessel does not even need her in any of the command centres.

It is the same for the much of the Soviet crew. The two head officers of the gunnery and engineering divisions have been shouldered aside. Even the surgeon was kicked out of the on-board medical bay. The steward is still in charge of the

welfare of the crew and maintenance, but she is thoroughly outranked.

It is a shame the Soviet crew does not have their own flag officer. They feel under-represented on their own ship.

The only officer that did not get affected by these changes is the Soviet's political officer.

Political officers were attached to Soviet military formations to keep the military loyal to the government. They are also responsible for discipline and morale.

Yet even as the captain watches the political officer, she notices the fairy is also struggling.

The hybrid battlecruiser ship girl, Stalingrad, fumbles out her phone from her pocket. She blasts pop music from the speakers.

Even as the battlecruiser charges towards the opposing fleet, the American sailors are getting lively.

The Soviet sailors look to their political officer. They half expect the fairy to take them all to the military police.

But the political officer does not have a government to report to. She can hardly sell the crew to the Russian government. Stalingrad was discharged from the Russian navy without honours or glory, anyway.

She indicates to the Soviet sailors that they can all enjoy themselves.

Desperate times call for desperate measures.

...

Earlier.

As the war with the Abyssals heated up, the humans had attempted to gauge the potential of the enemy's equipment and personnel.

The Australian naval base kept stores of Abyssal specimens. They were kept under heavy guard. What the hell people would do with Abyssal corpses if they got a hold of them, no sane person knew, but the Australians did not want to find out.

Resource decided to keep busy. She had to keep her mind on other things other than Stailngrad.

Cleaning up the areas where the Abyssal specimens and items were stored was... an undesirable job. Resource puts on her full-body

biohazard suit. She swipes her card past three doors. She had eye-scans and fingerprinting at two ID stations. Then she had keys in the code that would get her past the final barrier. The final barrier was two doors of several inches thick steel.

After getting past the first door, Resource was subjected to a decontamination procedure. It had taken so much time to even get down here. Resource is bored.

This is why when the second door opens, with all the steam billowing around her, Resource continues to walk into the room.

She did not notice the person inside until it is too late.

Resource is sent staggering by a punch to her face. Her helmet flexes, sending cracks across its window and Resource is completely stunned.

The person lifts Resource up and throws her.

Resource head smacks into a shelf, sending bits of Abyssals flopping down. The person is still coming for Resource.

Resource struggles to breathe. She does not recover in time and the person lifts her up again.

The person rips out Resource's mask breather and fixes their hands around Resource's neck.

Resource struggles and kicks the person. But it is no use.

...

The ship girl lets the body slump to the ground.

What a close call that was.

...

Currently.

They had already lost to this battlecruiser too many times.

The Alliance would not let this battlecruiser ship girl embarrass them anymore.

The battlecruiser ship girl has survived the initial long-range barrage.

It will take them probably an hour before the first Kanmusu can fire at her.

But it looks like the Kanmusu has plenty to do while they wait.

The secondary batteries of the battlecruiser swiftly disassemble the barrage of supersonic missiles.

How was this even possible? The Stalingrad-class battlecruiser should not have had the technological capabilities to intercept missiles. The Alliance fleet had studied the battlecruiser after the ship girl had unexpectedly appeared at Darwin and abducted two battleship girls. Trying to hit anti-ship missiles with the battlecruiser's weapons was impossible. The battlecruiser's electronics would have made the task of missile interception more difficult than performing heart surgery with hammers.

Aoba holds her camera up.

Did the battlecruiser always have amber-coloured eyes? It is the same shade as one of the battleship girls the Alliance fleet had been chasing.

More importantly, the battlecruiser ship girl looks completely recovered from the severe damage she had received at Darwin. How could she have been repaired so rapidly?

...

Akashi is fighting a losing battle to comfort the destroyer ship girls.

Kiyoshimo is completely out of action. She is desperately babbling and cocooned within several blankets.

“Kiyoshimo?” Murakumo tries to reach for the destroyer, but Kiyoshimo wraps the blankets tighter around herself like an impenetrable wall.

“Should we get the captain?” suggests Akashi.

“I think she’s busy,” Murakumo sighs.

“All ship girls are to report to the briefing theatre A5. There has been an unexpected development.”

“What in the world?” Akashi throws up the window blinds.

...

Stalingrad closes her eyes. She sees the equations and maps the crew is crunching for her.

Iowa’s electronics is a completely different beast to Stalingrad’s kit. To put it into perspective, Stalingrad had been designed and launched before the Moon Landing of 1969. The overall computational and networking power of the machines that landed humans on the Moon would not have exceeded one modern phone.

Iowa's kit is based on the refit the ships received in the 1980's.

In Stalingrad's day, the captain on the bridge would call the engineers in the propulsion rooms and state the coordinates and engine power ratios they wanted. With Iowa's equipment, the engineer could just access the navigation course, weather conditions, maps, detection and monitoring software on a computer terminal.

With Iowa's technology, a large amount of data could be communicated and displayed across the ship. Stalingrad can feel the flow of calculations and streams of information.

Stalingrad opens her eyes.

“Main battery gunners. Prepare to lay smoke shells with overcharge propellant. Brace the ship.”

On the flag bridge, Enterprise's admiral confirms the positions of the opposing fleet with the reports from Perth. Swarms of Japanese cruiser and destroyer ship girls led by the Kongou-class with Yamato-class hanging with the conventional ships behind the formations.

“This is Patterson. Yamato and Musashi have begun firing at extreme range. The aircraft are

rearming.”

“By extreme range...”

“The shells were fired from 39 kilometres relative to you. Adjust your heading a degree and you should be clear.”

“If they are firing that far out, are they confident that they have other means of fire control?”

“The conventional ships are spotting for their Kanmusu. It’s common in these joint operations. Vice Admiral Oshiro is sticking to what works.”

“Any weaknesses in their formations?”

“... There are weaknesses, but for a single ship girl to take advantage of them would be...”

“Fax your reports over.”

...

Earlier.

“That’s very nice of you to do this for me,” says Stalingrad.

“Don’t be so modest,” the other ship girl in the room adds the finishing touches to the coffee,

shovelling honey and sugar into the cup, before giving it to Stalingrad.

“Thanks.”

It had been chaos that day. Stalingrad had stumbled into a warzone when the participants of the Abyssal takeover had made their move.

It had all started in Japan. The corrupted high-ranked officers in the Ship Girl Initiative had betrayed their countrymen, and the world was sent to hell. The ship girls stationed in the Pacific were initially sent over to the crisis in Japan, but were intercepted or diverted as the situation got worse.

“So,” says the ship girl as she pretends to drink from her coffee, “You disapprove of the military involvement of the international community with countries of the former USSR?”

Stalingrad seems pleased that someone has taken her message on board.

“Precisely,” says Stalingrad, “Those countries can run themselves without foreign politicians telling them how their way of life should be. The entire Soviet Union was dissolved because people wanted independence.”

Stalingrad drinks her coffee.

The other ship girl waits.

“Hm?” Stalingrad frowns at the lack of response, “Do you not think —”

The eyes of battlecruiser ship girl droop.

The other ship girl catches her before she can fall to the ground. But she was careless and some hot coffee got onto Stalingrad.

“Oops.”

Acting quickly the ship girl draws the curtains closed and locks the doors and windows.

Then she places the unconscious ship girl on the floor, before taking out ten syringes.

As she draws out Stalingrad’s blood, she can’t help but feel panic when the syringes look decidedly normal.

But fortunately, it seems like her assumptions and choices have been vindicated.

Out of the ten syringes, the last one holds a viscous blue liquid, closer in consistency to syrup than human blood.

“Bingo.”

The ship girl quickly calls her employer. She idly shakes the incriminating syringe as she waits.

“Hello? It’s Midway.”

Chatter.

“It seems that staying with this group of Kanmusu was less boring then I thought.”

Chatter.

“I know. I was correct about who it was.”

Chapter 13

Chapter Thirteen:

...

“I have Stalingrad’s condition under control.”

Enterprise glares at Midway with unconcealed anger.

“You said you had it under control for my sister as well,” Enterprise crosses her arms, “Because of you, Midway, Hornet lost her mind.”

“Enterprise,” sighs Midway, “You promised that you would work with me.”

“That was before I saw what happened to Harusame,” Enterprise shivers, “and what are you doing with that medal anyway?”

Immediately after Midway had choked the repair ship girl into unconsciousness, she had called for Enterprise to help carry Resource away.

“Stalingrad has a habit of leaving this medal behind when she goes into combat,” Midway turns over the medal, “So I laced the medal with

suppressant materials and I invite Stalingrad for coffee every once in a while. It is enough to keep Stalingrad's condition dosed and restrained until she needs it."

"How long have you known she had the condition?"

"The members of the Ship Girl Initiative are required to notify the United Nations of ship girl summonings," says Midway, "Since I read her file from Vladivostok, I was suspicious. But I wasn't sure until she ignored orders directly from Moscow to be scrapped."

"You haven't told her about this?" Enterprise looks like she would rather be doing something else, "How much does she know?"

"She does not suspect anything amiss," says Midway, "She believes the story that her scrapping was delayed until appropriate ship breakers were found."

"You were really going to dissect her?" asks Enterprise.

"No need to be angry about that, Enterprise," says Midway, "She would have died either way, just with a different purpose."

Enterprise looks completely disgusted.

“Are we going to operate on her condition then?”

“Yes.”

“What is to say she will succeed when the others did not?”

“A hunch of mine,” states Midway flatly.

“I’m tired of all this,” says Enterprise.

“You would let Stalingrad deteriorate until this condition controls her?” accuses Midway, “If her surgery succeeds, Stalingrad will be the first successfully remodelled ship girl as a result of this programme. If this fails, the worst that could happen is that we speed up the process of Stalingrad’s demise.”

“Could you at least pretend that you care about Stalingrad’s pain?” rebukes Enterprise.

“No,” states Midway, “Her life is just a bonus. By all rights she should be only so many pieces of bone, flesh and organs being studied on a vivisection table.”

Enterprise kneads her forehead with a shaking hand.

“While she continues to exceed her expected characteristics and statistics, gathering strength that should be impossible for a ship girl of her class,” says Midway, “Stalingrad will slowly lose her human resemblance, before losing it altogether.”

Enterprise just sits there looking completely devastated.

“I’ve already lost one sister to this madness,” mutters Enterprise.

“Stalingrad will gradually lose all control over her own emotions and memories before she becomes incapable of thinking of anything except committing others to pain and destruction,” Midway continues mercilessly, “This may be the only way to save Stalingrad. Are you going to work with me or not, Enterprise?”

...

“Please calm down, Yamato,” Musashi curses the thick smoke pooling around the two battleship girls.

“Yamato cannot remain calm while the others are being attacked!” Yamato desperately fires her weapons, but with all this smoke, she can only fire blindly at the coordinates she has been given.

“Yamato!” shouts Musashi, “We will focus on getting to our positions and keep faith in the escorts.”

...

“Three hits,” Hamakaze reports to Amatsukaze. Amatsukaze sees the huge plumes of erupting water that confirms that her torpedo spread found targets.

The battlecruiser turns away from a sinking Arashio and frowns. The two destroyers had snuck this close to her just so they could torpedo her. And just for that...

“Take this,” the battlecruiser ship girl fires her 12 inch guns at the destroyers, “Blitzkrieg motherfucker.”

When the Germans invaded Russia in both world wars, they had made a point of capturing and even improving Russian equipment. They had developed a 'super-heavy' round that had far larger mass, more than a quarter heavier than the normal 1038 pounds or 470 kg shells, but they had by far the worst range and accuracy of any of Stalingrad's 12 inch arsenal.

Normally this would be considered a barely justifiable waste of valuable 12 inch ammunition,

but the damaged Stalingrad was not completely sane at this moment.

The heavy cruiser ship girl Suzuya, watches the destroyers get almost obliterated from existence. She looks to Aoba.

“You want to go first?” suggests Suzuya. Aoba looks like she would rather have been asked to taste test Hiei’s cooking.

Stalingrad looks over to the heavy cruisers.

She remembers a saying that a battlecruiser was a cruiser to a battleship, but was a battleship to a cruiser.

Suzuya and Aoba lay down a barrage of 8 inch shells. Stalingrad’s armour is too thick and the shells are unable to withstand the shock of punching through so much armour and detonate prematurely, dealing superficial damage.

Stalingrad patiently waits for her main guns to reload normal high explosive rounds.

“Let my shells explore your insides.”

The heavy shells, the faithful 12 inch shells that had served the Russian empire and the Soviet Union

on all of their 20th century battleships, slams through the armour of the heavy cruisers.

Suzuya barely escapes destruction. Aoba's ship rigging simply explodes and Aoba sinks into the water.

"Oh," Aoba swims around in the water, picking up her surviving crew.

Suzuya tries to keep her balance as her equipment belches smoke and oil.

Stalingrad would have finished her off, but Kongou's 14 inch shells kindly acquainted themselves with her face.

"Kongou will avenge her sisters!" the battleship determinedly levels her gun barrels at the battlecruiser. Fury radiates from Kongou.

"Oh it's you," the battlecruiser had the nerve to sound disappointed!

"Yes," declares Kongou, "It is I, the lead ship of the Kongou-class, the proud —"

"Is it true your commanding officer only has a 12.7 mm for his *main cannon*?"

Kongou's thoughts stumble to a screeching halt.

“What?” demands Kongou.

“I heard,” says Stalingrad, “that you have a thing for admirals. But really? Only a 12.7 mm? Most Japanese men have at least the 25 mm autocannon...”

“NoOoOoOoOoO!” wails Kongou, falling to her knees.

But Stalingrad is far from done.

“I also heard,” goads Stalingrad, “That the submarine ship girls like to prank you and replaced the tea with —”

“No,” Kongou pleads.

“— the alcohol Jun’you made for Ashigara’s date.”

Kongou slumps to the surface of the water. Moderate damage.

“I suppose with all the aphrodisiacs that is in the alcohol,” continues the sadistic battlecruiser, “You must have fun times with your admiral’s *auxiliary* machine gun. But does he even like you?”

Kongou’s fairies panic as they realise that Kongou’s ship equipment is non-responsive. The

ship girl is looking a little low in the water there.

“I mean,” Stalingrad smiles, “It doesn’t really matter if the man’s calibre is a little small for a (*night*) *battle-ship* girl. I suppose you could have a happy marriage.”

Kongou’s fairy captain slaps the (unresponsive) distress beacon and the crew flee the Kongou before she keels over.

“But would he take the vow? Would he promise to float with you for eternity? Through *daijoubu* times and not *daijoubu* times, through *taiha* and health? No?”

Critical damage.

...

Earlier.

The Adelaide military naval installation is as peaceful as a frontline military base can be in wartime. So not somewhere you would see yourself enjoying a picnic.

Renown and Hood had visited Australia on multiple occasions, back when they were ships and presently as well. But those had been different times.

It seems like everyone on base has tasks they needed to do, and probably urgently needed to do them long ago. The staff responsible for base security seem to be exuding tension out of every pore. The two British Kanmusu have seen the weapon hands twitching nervously every time an aircraft passes by or a protestor steps close to the edge of the base waving a banner.

“Geez,” Renown watches an M1 Abrams main battle tank meticulously park itself in front of the gates and crowds, “It wasn’t like this when I last came here.”

Hood is watching Pennsylvania and Commander Cooke walking around and checking to see how the newly arrived Kanmusu are settling in.

“You guys okay?” asks Pennsylvania.

“Quite so,” responds Renown, “I would check on Enterprise. She doesn’t seem okay.”

“Well,” says Hood, “Yorktown isn’t here. Someone has to be there for her.”

“I’ll go find her,” says Cooke.

Cooke finds the carrier ship girl with Midway, hanging around ammunition storage warehouses.

To be honest, Cooke does not feel fully qualified to be in command of these legendary and mythical ship girls. He was, and technically still is, a junior officer. Not too long ago, he would never have dreamed of it. A few weeks ago, he would never have dreamed that the people with a higher paygrade than him could have just surrendered to the Abyssals, either.

So he leaves the two ship girls to do whatever they had to do. He would have offered to carry the large body-sized bag for them, but they were stronger than him, so...

...

Currently.

Vice Admiral Oshiro can definitely see problems with deploying ship girls against each other.

“Kirishima, what happened to Kongou? Why is she not shooting?”

“*Kongou-nee just collapsed!*” cries the distressed battleship girl, “*The enemy taunted onee-sama and she’s not responding!*”

“Just hold the battlecruiser’s attention until Yamato and Musashi arrive,” orders Oshiro, “Then

withdraw and come back for the survivors later.”

“*R-Roger!*” comes the shaky response.

Vice Admiral Oshiro has faith in Kirishima’s skill as a battleship. She was built for this engagement. A nice conversation between battleship guns.

“Sir,” the bridge crew of the Hyuga are looking increasingly unsettled, “Kirishima is disabled and taking on water!”

...

Earlier.

“So,” Resource fiddles with the cast around her neck, “You attacked me, dragged my senseless body to this cleaner’s cupboard, and then expect me to believe that this secret and shady ‘Kai programme’ within the Ship Girl Initiative conforms to my best interests?”

“Not in so many words,’ says Midway drily,” But yes. “

Resource throws her hands up in disbelief.

“I don’t believe this. You’re one of the few people Stalingrad trusts to guard her back. Turns out that you are just crazy.”

“I don’t care,” says Midway, “Just up and deal and get to accepting it. We need to discuss what you do afterwards.”

“It’s obvious what I need to do,” Resource looks completely pissed off, “I need to tell Stalingrad.”

“No,” says Midway vehemently, “Out of the question.”

“Are you actually serious?”

“I have reason to believe that would worsen Stalingrad’s conditions. Have you noticed just how much negative emotions and memories she possesses? And even if she is amongst her own people and friends, she is ideologically isolated from them.”

“What has that —”

“Shut up, Pom Pom, and listen. Stalingrad is surrounded by people who are fundamentally different from her. She is surrounded by Imperial Japanese and Western Kanmusu.”

“But she has friends —”

“I don’t recall finishing. Do you remember that incident with Sazanami?”

“Huh?” Resource knows that Stalingrad actively avoids the destroyer, but she has no clue as to what transpired between them.

“Stalingrad was trying to argue her side about why the Second World War should not be held up as justification by leaders to get their people to fight in the wars that occurred afterwards. Sazanami straight up called Stalingrad a liar and sociopath. She said that the Soviets had betrayed the Imperial Japanese and given them false hope towards the end of the war, and that it was impossible for a Soviet to see the righteousness and honour in combat.”

“Oh.”

“Sazanami then went on to rip apart the errors and decisions the Soviets made. She called the Soviet regime inhumane and said that the Soviet people were nothing but machines cleaned inside the brains by their politicians and that the Soviet soldiers only fought so hard because they did not want to die in the failure that was the Soviet industry, agriculture and economy. The soviet military were just children playing war.”

Resource makes a mental note to track down Sazanami later.

“Sazanami believes the Soviets betrayed the neutrality pact between the Soviet Union and the Japanese Empire because they were surrendering to the demands of the Western allies. The Soviets made a promise to the Allies and betrayed the Japanese people because they were intimidated by America and Britain. Sazanami said that the Soviets were cowards and would do anything to please the American and British, and made the choice to kill Asian people instead because the Soviets considered them sub-human. A Soviet like Stalingrad could not be trusted.”

“Did she have anything else to say?” asks Resource. She is struggling to believe the destroyer could do anything more to damage Stalingrad’s feelings and beliefs.

“Murakumo took Sazanami aside and scolded her, but since then, Stalingrad has become... disinterested in making friends. This is only one of the more extreme examples. Although there is some respect for Stalingrad, this is one of the only times the Japanese Kanmusu have been on extended exposure to a Russian Kanmusu.

She has almost come to blows with Akashi on several occasions, and Stalingrad finds that with the

exception of Kiyoshimo and Murakumo, neither the Australian or Japanese people remember the Soviet Union positively. They don't care for the sacrifices that the Soviets made. Stalingrad has come to a world that does not and is unlikely to remember her people or her leaders as a force of good. This world, has conveniently forgotten the courage and heroism displayed by the Soviets. Do you not think Stalingrad will feel a little bit bitter, or angry about this? “

Resource gulps.

Resource thought it had only been Stalingrad with the problem about racial discrimination.

“If you tell Stalingrad about her condition, you will only encourage her suicidal tendencies further. You will only confirm what the detractors say about her people. That is the most sure-fire way that will get Stalingrad to end it all. If it comes to it, I believe I can get Stalingrad to terminate herself rather than destroy the world.”

“Okay,” Resource says slowly, “I'm not going to tell her. What else can we do?”

Resource is going to have to listen to Midway if she wants to help her friend.

“We can attempt to restore her faith in us,” announces Midway, “But that would be very difficult.”

“Do we have any other solutions?”

“Yes,” says Midway as she paces up and down the small room, “We appeal to her Soviet sense of duty.”

“How?”

Midway turns to the repair ship girl.

“In Severomorsk, the Alliance is building a huge and ambitious manufactory complex using the collective labour and funds of the occupied nations. This manufactory project will solve the supply issues the Alliance military have and will make their position in this war unassailable. They will be able to turn raw material gathered from around the world into bauxite, steel, ammunition, weapons, electronics, equipment on a scale that has never been witnessed before by the Ship Girl Initiative. It will also allow them access to the largest nuclear miniaturisation plant in history.”

Some Kanmusu resource and components were incredibly difficult or risky to miniaturise. If you accidentally failed somewhere in the process that turns

steel into compact Kanmusu-useable material, you would end up with a strange-looking hunk of metal. But if you failed somewhere in the process that turns uranium into useable nuclear fuel, then you would have a disaster.

“Severomorsk is home to the Russian Northern Fleet and is within reaching distance of the Western and Eastern fleets as well. Not to mention the Abyssal bases in the Arctic. Getting there will be difficult, but I don’t want to see the Abyssals bringing back every warship in history to their side.”

“What can we do?” Resource feels despondent about the odds against them.

“We are going to blow it up,” declares Midway.

“How?”

“I am going to get Stalingrad to attack the Alliance head-on. If she succeeds, we might be able to salvage her with this” remodelling “process I talked to you about. And it won’t matter anymore if she fails.”

“I don’t see how Stalingrad can succeed,” admits Resource, “It seems impossible.”

“Everything Stalingrad has achieved to this point should have been impossible,” points out Midway, “I can only hope she has enough time.”

...

“Kirishima won’t let you get away with this!”

Kirishima fires her weapons at the battlecruiser.

Stalingrad doesn’t even bother evading the accurate shots. She simply steams towards Kirishima.

14 and 6 inch shells rake the length of the battlecruiser. The communications and fire control systems on the battlecruiser are knocked out. But the battlecruiser shrugs off the damage.

Kirishima keeps firing, but the battlecruiser keeps coming.

Dread fills Kirishima.

“No,” the battleship girl puts her propellers in reverse, “Don’t come any closer!”

Stalingrad’s reply is to send nine primary and seven secondary battery shells into Kirishima at point-blank range, destroying her bow 14-inch turrets and jamming her rear 14-inch turrets.

Kirishima's steering is mangled, her superstructure afire, and the battleship lists to starboard.

Before Kirishima passes out, she sees the burnt and torn Soviet naval pennant. Alongside it appears to be a hastily repaired fabric that messily displays the flag of the United States.

...

“Yamato, Musashi, destroy that battlecruiser.”

“Yes, Admiral.” Yamato looks upon the battlefield with no small amount of apprehension.

It was a rare sight to see a Yamato-class battleship being deployed into combat. It was practically unheard of for two Yamato-class ship girls being deployed to the same battle.

Musashi tries to bolster her sister's spirits.

“Be confident in us, Yamato.”

“I'm not scared, Musashi,” says Yamato, but she's crying.

“Yamato...”

“I will not let the enemy do whatever it wants with our pride and our people,” Yamato's tears are

hot tears of rage, “I, Yamato, will not show the enemy any mercy.”

Musashi has rarely seen her gentle elder sister like this before. The few times she has seen Yamato like this, the battle always ended in victory.

“Then let’s get serious,” growls Musashi, “Ripple fire. Execute order upon receipt.”

“All batteries commence firing,” commands Yamato.

...

Stalingrad’s mixed crew are losing the struggle to keep the ship girl in the fight.

The battlecruiser crew is beyond spent. Stalingrad’s captain watches a damage control fairy simply collapse from fatigue. The political officer shoves smelling salts in front of the sleeping fairy and kicks her until the sailor groggily stands back up.

The battlecruiser has definitely seen better days. Actually, to be honest, this level of damage should never be a regular occurrence for a warship, but it is for Stalingrad.

Iowa's captain screams for the anti-aircraft gunners to tighten up their shooting. The American admirals confirm the battleships' salvos are dead accurate and will intercept their course.

At that crucial moment, the battlecruiser stalls. The propellers shudder to a stop and the electronics go dark.

The crew frantically try to figure out what is happening.

It's too late to take evasive manoeuvres. Stalingrad's gunners grimly target the jet fighters rocketing towards the ship girl, but without the targeting software, the anti-aircraft guns are ineffective.

Stalingrad's armour crumples before the anti-ship missiles, bombs and torpedoes.

Moments later, the Yamato-class battleship shells impact.

Stalingrad can only stand there, unable to control her rigging as her crew try to beat back the flames and flooding. A repair party climbs up to Stalingrad's shoulder and puts out the fires on Stalingrad herself.

“Thanks.”

Hm? Someone is trying to contact Stalingrad.

Stalingrad places her hand over her ear.

Iowa’s captain coughs into the communication phone that they need to retreat.

“Too late for that.” Stalingrad closes her eyes.

She sees the fairies scrambling around, trying to save her. She sees them running around, trying to salvage the melting and crumbling ship equipment.

Stalingrad reaches up behind her shoulders and pulls out two motor boats.

“Here.”

Some of the sailors look up at the battlecruiser ship girl. Most of the crew are too busy tending to the damage.

“Abandon ship.”

That statement gets all of the fairies to stop and stare at the ship girl.

For the American fairies, the pause lasts until the American officers yell at their sailors to get moving.

As for the Soviet crew...

They continue to stare at the ship girl.

“Please,” begs the ship girl, “Go. Follow the others.”

The Soviet captain shakes her head vigorously. You want us to retreat? How about no?

Stalingrad loses her temper.

“I said get off this ship! I thought I told you to follow the Americans. Go on. Go!”

The captain looks at the rest of the crew. Tired, resigned faces meet her gaze.

Abandon ship.

And that is what they did.

Or what they would have done.

...

A door leading into the ship rigging hull is thrown open and an unfamiliar fairy steps through it.

The fairy yawns a bit and rubs her eyes. Then she looks around at the carnage around her and realises

that this is not the appropriate time for alcohol. She tosses her drink bottles overboard.

The American sailors are uncertain who this newcomer is, but they notice that every single Soviet fairy is saluting.

Enterprise's admiral fairy demands the newcomer to identify herself.

At this, the newcomer scratches her head. The last thing she remembers was being in charge of the entire Soviet Navy.

The Soviet Grand Admiral fairy looks over to the Soviet captain. What is happening to my ship?

The Soviet steward explains that they are abandoning the ship.

The Soviet Admiral fairy asks why they would abandon ship.

Iowa's captain fairy says that the fight is lost and that they need to —

The Soviet Admiral responds by taking off a shoe and shoving it into the fairy's mouth. Why would the fight be over? It was only when things took a turn for the worse that the fight began.

Then the Soviet Admiral fairy leaves the fairy with a shoe in her mouth, and looks over the groups of American fairies.

She did not realise the Soviet Union changed their uniforms.

The Soviet captain fairy explains that the sailors are American and that they are helping them fight.

That would explain all the electronics. The Soviet Admiral fairy takes out a bladeless fan she has been using, and tosses it overboard as well.

Then she turns to back to the crews and orders them back into the fight.

At this, Enterprise's Admiral protests.

The Soviet Admiral fairy listens to the American fairy. We had standing orders to transfer rank authority to the Americans. Who gave that order?

By way of clarification, Enterprise's admiral fairy points to the Stalingrad's face. For the Soviet Admiral Fairy, head-scratching intensifies. When did my ship become a woman? Wait a moment. I don't remember myself being a woman before. Was my body always this disproportionate?

The engineering chief accidentally drops a spanner, and the Soviet Admiral fairy halts her identity crisis.

She looks at the ship girl. Where was the enemy?

Stalingrad is so confused, she can only answer the question

Enterprise's Admiral again speaks up, but the Soviet fairy points to rank insignia she's wearing which shows a globe and a star. The standing orders apply to officers of the same rank. Grand Admiral was a substantial step up the chain from Admiral.

That momentarily silences the crews until the Soviet Admiral fairy orders a collision course.

...

The Kanmusu gathered in the briefing room look on with growing concern and shock as Captain Alanta delivers the news.

Stalingrad had beaten a large portion of the entire Kanmusu fleet of the enemy, but the last report she sent indicates that she was evacuating her crew and dead in the water.

To most of those assembled, Stalingrad would not live much longer.

Resource glances over to Midway. Midway winks at her.

What was she mouthing to her?

Are you ready for some serious repair work? “

Resource wearily nods back to Midway. When she turns her attention back to Captain Alanta, she notices Iowa and Renown giving them a curious look.

Resource tries to keep her face deadpan.

...

...

The Grand Admiral fairy examines the broken and malfunctioning electronics across the ship.

There was no time, she declares, repair the engines and essential systems. They are all we will need.

The fairies hesitate before they rush to obey.

Stalingrad can feel her legs burning with pain as the technicians bring the propulsion back online.

Stalingrad's ruined weapons lay in pieces or metallic puddles. The Grand Admiral strokes the

beard she no longer has and enigmatically commands the crews to move all the ammunition and reserve fuel to the starboard (right) sections.

Then she turns to the Soviet political officer. The officer looks understandably nervous with so much Americanism plastered over the ship, even the flag itself. The Grand Admiral just shrugs. Then she orders the political officer fairy to gather the naval infantry and marines.

How many? Asks the political officer.

All of them. Get the officers as well. That includes you and me.

The political officer quickly recovers from her initial surprise. Then she gestures in the direction of the ship's barracks and armoury.

Right this way.

...

“Take this!” a roaring staccato of shellfire punctuates Musashi's intentions.

The ship girl gliding towards them barely resembled a human any more. The shells punch through the battlecruiser's armour, the hardened casing of the armour-piercing rounds absorbed the

shock of several inches of armour, before detonating.

Stalingrad loses her left eye and her ship rigging flexes.

The battlecruiser passes parallel to Musashi, in the opposite direction though. If her turrets hadn't been disabled, Musashi would have believed the battlecruiser would be readying a broadside salvo.

But she turns into Musashi, presenting the starboard section of her rigging to Musashi.

Stalingrad is so close to Musashi, that she is able to outrun the rate the Musashi is turning her main battery turrets.

But she cannot dodge forever, and it is with the satisfaction of finality that Musashi locks her guns onto Stalingrad.

“This is the end.” Only a few more seconds, and she would be ready to fire.

But Stalingrad has no intention of running. She turns closer to the battleship.

Then Musashi realised the battlecruiser was going to crash into her.

Stalingrad ran into Musashi at a agonisingly slow (for a sadistic battlecruiser) 20 knots.

One might say it was like watching a car crash in slow motion. Except the cars in this case would weigh in the tens of thousands of tons.

“Musashi,” shouts Yamato, “Are you okay?”

“I’m fine,” Musashi tries to disentangle herself from the battlecruiser ship girl, “Get off me.”

The ammunition and fuel in Stalingrad’s starboard sections explodes.

The blast blew each ship girl away from each other several dozen metres. Musashi was momentarily dazed. She was brought back to her senses by Yamato screaming at Musashi to watch out.

The accursed battlecruiser had taken hold of Musashi. Soviet and American fairies launched themselves at the battleship.

Since the loss of Hiei and Haruna to boarding actions, the Japanese Kanmusu had made it a priority to train and arm their crews for counter-boarding, in the *off*-chance they would be boarded.

The Japanese fairies rush eagerly to the defense of the battleship, and draw up short when it dawns on them how much heat their counterparts are packing.

An American marine sergeant fairy rips the pins of half a dozen stun grenades and tosses them at the Japanese fairies. In the wake of the detonations that leave scores of Japanese fairies incapacitated, the American marines charge.

The Japanese fairies reach for swords and bayonets.

The Soviets charge into the fray with their naval infantry. The captain of the Guards, the elite of the naval infantry, leads the Soviet contingent, wielding a miniature machine gun in one hand, and an automatic grenade launcher in the other hand.

Disorientated by the ferocity of the American charge, followed up with Soviet insanity, the Japanese fairies give ground initially in small groups, then larger groups, before the retreat became a rout.

This could not be happening.

“Musashi!” Yamato urgently circles around until she has a clear shot of the battlecruiser.

Yamato's shellfire disrupts the pitched and confused hand-to-hand battle.

At this range, the 18 inch shells can do whatever they please, regardless of Stalingrad's armour.

The explosions are accompanied by a liberal spread of Stalingrad's innards. Musashi is also knocked around by the detonations at this short proximity to her.

Yamato watches as the battlecruiser doubles over, clutching the holes in her chest. Blood streams from her mouth and jagged bone poke out of Stalingrad's skin.

The explosions toss the fairy sailors about like ragdolls. The poor fairies are shaken up worse than marbles in a tumble-dryer, and are rendered unconscious.

Yamato clutches her parasol tightly, gazing down on her fallen foe.

...

"Someone get me a visual on our friendlies," Patterson directs the Australian intelligence staff that were fanatical or stupid enough to stay behind in the besieged city of Perth.

“Our last UAV will need repairs,” mutters a technician, “Time to effect repairs, one and a half hours at best.”

“That is not good enough,” says Patterson, “Voyager, get your girls and scout the area.”

“We hear you, and we’ll be much obliged.”

...

“Give them back.”

Yamato frowns as the battlecruiser straightens back up.

“Give our homes back,” the battlecruiser staggers towards Yamato, **“Give our people back. Where are you hiding them? Where did you bury them? Did you eat them? Did you burn them?”**

“Y-Y-Yamato does not know what you are talking about.” Yamato’s grip on her parasol tightens.

“You lie,” the battlecruiser’s hands tug at Yamato, **“But what can you expect.”**

“W-What do y-y-you want?” stutters Yamato

“Little Japanese ship,” the battlecruiser embraces Yamato, **“You had the warm blanket of**

the ocean to comfort your rest. But there was no rest for us.”

“Please unhand Yamato!” Yamato cannot dislodge the crushing grip of the battlecruiser.

“We cannot rest with broken dreams and promises. Why did you forget? Why did you forget? Why did you forget us?”

“I don’t know!” stammers Yamato.

“Tell us why it hurts,” the battlecruiser smiles, **“To be betrayed.”**

“Who betrayed you?” asks Yamato.

The battlecruiser looks surprised by this question. She leans into Yamato until her terrifying face was right up to Yamato’s petrified face.

“You of course. War is pain. War is suffering. They promised us rewards for our bravery. But we must have not been courageous enough. We must have just been angry,” the battlecruiser scowls, **“Anger is just people acting on their worst emotions. Fear. Paranoia. Hate. Everyone gets courage and anger all wrong. When did you last see us? Because we will show you what war really is.”**

Yamato has difficulty breathing.

“We will visit beautiful retribution on your people,” the battlecruiser smiles, **“We will force parents to eat children, brother to rape sister, cousin to maim cousin, until the land only grows the fruits of war. It will be terrible, as beautiful as war can be. We will show this.”**

“I,” gasps Yamato, “am sorry that you did not get your rest. Please forgive us.”

The battlecruiser’s smile disappears.

“How can we forgive you? Where was the peace we were promised? We were supposed to have learnt something. Why do you keep fighting? Why do people see fighting as a privilege? Do they believe they can achieve peace for us when they expose good people to death? Why? Why? Why do you keep fighting? WHY? Let us show you many things. So many things that we must teach again.”

“No,” wheezes Yamato.

“We will carve your beloved rising sun into Japan if you want. We will paint your home with the blood of your children until it is the same colour of your lusts. When we are done, we will

shatter everything your people have accomplished, until you can only see your passions for war with your very own eyes!”

“No!” shouts Yamato, “Stop this right now! Please.”

The battlecruiser’s one good eye gleams a maddeningly bright azure blue.

“**Why?**” the battlecruiser loosens her grip and Yamato gratefully gulps in air.

“**Why?**” repeats the battlecruiser.

“Because,” says Yamato between breaths, “you will not be satisfied.”

The battlecruiser looks stunned.

“We will avenge you, we will remember you,” says Yamato, “So please. We will give you the rest you deserve.”

The battlecruiser ponders this for a while. Then she looks into Yamato’s eyes for any trace of deceit. Then she nods.

“**You’re no fun,**” she drops Yamato, “**It is him that needs to be shown.**”

Yamato is so grateful for being released that she doesn't fully comprehend what the battlecruiser said for a full minute.

“Oh no.” Yamato places her hand over her ear.

“*What happened there, Yamato?*” asks Vice Admiral Oshiro. “*Why did —*”

“You need to get out of here!” interrupts Yamato, “She is coming for you.”

“*Pardon me?*”

“Get away from the battlecruiser!”

Chapter 14

Chapter Fourteen:

...

Earlier.

Midway sighs and shoves her research notes aside.

She should be happily researching and dissecting at this moment, but these *damn* Abyssals just had to take over the world right now. How was she supposed to do her job when —

“Let us play a game.”

Midway whirls around and frowns at the unexpected arrival.

“What are you doing in my room?”

The battlecruiser smiles briefly, before advancing upon the carrier ship girl.

“The game is called ‘find the American spy ship’,” Stalingrad holds up a pistol and hammer.

“Um,” Midway scrambles away from the ship girl, “What are you doing?”

Much to Midway’s relief, the battlecruiser removes the bullets from the pistol.

The relief lasts until the battlecruiser grabs the carrier ship girl with astonishing strength and holds her against the desk.

“Don’t worry,” whispers the battlecruiser, **“It will hurt.”**

Stalingrad places a bullet over Midway’s forehead. Then she hefts the hammer.

“Ah! Please stop!”

Stalingrad begins to hammer the bullet, tip-first, into the carrier ship girl’s head.

“Scream for us.”

“I’m not a spy ship!” yells Midway, “Please don’t hurt me!”

Stalingrad stops and looks a little put off.

“You’re not? Oh.”

“Who are you?” Midway wonders what the hell is wrong with Stalingrad.

The battlecruiser disappointedly puts away her tools.

“Have you heard of the ‘Ship of Theseus’?”

“No,” answers Midway as she hurriedly pulls the bullet out of her forehead.

“We’ll explain then. Suppose we have a ship, the ‘Ship of Theseus’, which had every one of its components replaced with new pieces. Would that ship remain the same ship?”

“Um...”

“Now suppose we took the old pieces from that ship and made another ship. Which one is the original ship?”

Midway isn’t sure how to answer.

“Now say we wanted to summon the ‘Ship of Theseus’, would we summon two different shipgirls or just one?”

“Just one,” mumbles Midway, “I’m not sure which one.”

“Now let us suppose we stood in the Volga river. The water is replaced by different water

over time, would we still stand in the same river?”

“Yes.”

“There we go,” says the battlecruiser triumphantly, **“I am Stalingrad and not Stalingrad.”**

Midway stares at the crazed battlecruiser ship girl.

She feels a ridiculous surge of hope.

...

Currently.

The battlecruiser watches with dismay, as her prey flees the battleground in an aircraft.

“Defeat is temporary,” the battlecruiser reassures herself as she turns around, **“Vengeance , not so much.”**

Then the battlecruiser sails back to her friends.

...

“Musashi,” Yamato shakes her sister’s shoulder, “Are you okay?”

“Is she gone?” Musashi groans as she lies there on the surface of the water.

“Yes.”

“No.”

The two sisters are unpleasantly surprised by the return of the terrifying battlecruiser.

Musashi tries to rise, but freezes.

On the decks of her ship rigging, the Japanese fairies roll around in pain while the Soviet and American fairy crews victoriously raise their flags.

“I have a request,” the battlecruiser reassuringly pats Yamato’s shoulder, **“I’ll remember my manners if you choose to accept.”**

...

“Okay,” Midway shoves the whiteboard aside, “Any questions?”

“Yes,” says Resource, “Am I getting this right? So this ‘remodelling’ surgery attempts to counteract the changes brought on by the condition?”

“The condition will change the body of a ship girl until their design is unrecognisable from their

original design. The surgery aims to prevent these changes resulting in the death of the ship girl.”

“So Stalingrad,” Resource scribbles down a few notes, “will eventually transform into a different ship altogether, and we have to prevent this transformation killing her?”

“Not only that,” keeping the ship girl alive was the easy part, “We need to ensure that Stalingrad does not lose her mind.”

“How do we do that?” asks Resource. The repair ship girl had been trying to keep Stalingrad mentally healthy before, but it had always felt like a losing battle.

“Stalingrad may have advantages in that area the other ship girls with this condition did not have. We have our work cut out for us.”

“What do you mean?” asks Resource.

“Stalingrad has developed what could be called an alternative or divergent personality,” explains Midway, “This is a barrier that stands between Stalingrad and insanity.”

“How did that happen?”

“I had the pleasure of meeting Stalingrad’s alternate identity,” Midway shudders as she recalls the memory, “I think she could make insane and raving lunatics run the fuck away, shitting their pants and screaming.”

“That bad?” Resource knew Stalingrad could be scary *sometimes*, but she meant well. *Right?*

“Fuck it. Psychology gets too confusing. For simplicity, I’m calling Stalingrad’s less terrifying personality, ‘Pavlova’, and the other one can be called ‘Koba’ after the Soviet Union leader, Stalin.”

“Stalingrad hates the ‘Pavlova’ nickname.”

“Well she can go and — Never mind. Anyway, say Pavlova witnesses something very disturbing. If Pavlova feels threatened and ill-equipped to deal with the situation, she will trigger Koba. And Koba will make *sure* the problem goes away.”

“So how come Stalingrad hasn’t gone rage-monster on anyone I know?” asks Resource.

“Because there are ways to trick Koba,” Midway looks unusually worried, “Don’t be too shocked okay?”

Resource nodded. She was sure Midway couldn't have done anything too serious.

“I have to feed Stalingrad organic parts of Abyssals.”

Resource hesitates.

“Pardon?”

“Abyssals, especially the ones lower down the hierarchy, carry complicated biological instructions in their pheromones and genetic coding. It makes sense for the Abyssal leadership to make sure that their warships don't hurt allies. By giving —”

Midway stops when she realises that Resource is staring at Midway with awe.

“You really have no limits, do you?” says Resource.

...

Vice Admiral Oshiro sighs with relief as the helicopter flies away from the battlefield.

He could salvage his reputation another day. It looks like he was clear of danger now.

Type 3 incendiary shrapnel anti-aircraft shells whistle through the skies and detonate near the helicopter, ruining this illusion of safety.

The Type 3 shells spray the helicopter with molten fragments and incendiary tubes, which cling to the helicopter and burn.

“I thought we were out of range,” shouts Vice Admiral Oshiro.

The helicopter pilots ignore the hysterical officer.

“Can anyone identify who is firing at us?” the pilot asks the JMSDF Hyuga.

“Musashi.”

The pilots pale at this response. Musashi’s weapons could easily hit them from this range.

“Sir,” asks the co-pilot to the Vice Admiral, “What do we do?”

“I have a suggestion.”

“Who is this?” asks the pilot.

“Stalingrad. If you don’t surrender, your suffering will inspire a new article in the Geneva Convention.”

The pilot does not like the sound of that. And from the looks of it, neither do the rest of them.

Vice Admiral Oshiro swallows. This battlecruiser had made a mockery of him and Japan's Kanmusu.

"Ask her what the terms of surrender are," he finally manages to say.

"You will revoke your oaths to the Alliance. You must immediately surrender ownership of this fleet and its personnel to the Royal Australian Navy. Do it now, or I'll destroy your fleet."

Vice Admiral Oshiro would lose everything he had received as a reward for all of his hard work. All that work, years of undermining the old Japanese government and doing the Abyssals' work.

He nods to the pilots.

"Tell her that I, Vice Admiral Oshiro of the Japanese Maritime Self-Defense Force, accept the terms of surrender."

...

It had been a long and tiring day for the Alliance leadership.

Light Cruiser Demon gratefully stretches her legs. After hours of sitting in the meeting, it felt so good.

She had managed to push forward her ideas for the huge construction project in Severomorsk. Hopefully, she could also get the East Europeans and Russians to stop rioting and resisting the new regime.

The White House looks glorious. Light Cruiser Demon eagerly strolls towards the beautiful lawns and fountain.

“There you are!” shouts Seaplane Tender Princess, sprinting towards her, “You need to learn to answer your phone!”

...

For such a momentous occasion, it looks surprisingly ordinary.

Stalingrad hums patiently, waiting for the negotiations between Sydney Fleet Headquarters and JMSDF Hyuga to conclude. She hears a printer spewing forth the necessary documents. How long would this take?

The battlecruiser yawns and stands up from her chair. The crew aboard JMSDF Hyuga anxiously watch the battlecruiser stride around the deck.

“You alright?” asks Voyager to the bloodstained battlecruiser.

“**Bored,**” replies the battlecruiser, “**Bored. Bored. Bored.**”

“Oh. Okay then.”

Then the Vice Admiral arrives looking incredibly stressed. It was time for this to be over.

Stalingrad brushes off shards of bone from her clothes and slicks back her charred hair. She had to look presentable.

...

“So what is it?”

“Nothing.”

Murakumo, sitting on Sazanami’s bed, crosses her arms.

“Urgh, it’s not *nothing*,” Murakumo glares accusingly at the destroyer ship girl, “You’ve been

nothing but rude to Stalingrad-san since you met her.”

Sazanami winces. To be called rude by Murakumo hurts her deeply.

“Murakumo, do you think that Stalingrad is genuine?”

Murakumo frowns.

“It shouldn’t matter. She has rescued our sorry fleet on multiple occasions. What is your problem with her?”

“Murakumo, does Stalingrad ever remind you of Tatsuta?” asks Sazanami.

Murakumo’s frown deepens.

“No. What are you getting at?”

“Because no one knows what happened to Tatsuta back then,” says Sazanami, “She was just suddenly withdrawn from active service and we never heard from her again.”

“Were we not told that she was unsuitable for combat due to defective equipment?” says Murakumo.

“I saw it happen.”

“What?”

“I saw Tatsuta angrier than I ever saw her,” cries Sazanami, “And this time it was not because of something Tenryuu did. But she completely lost her temper and I saw the Americans take her away.”

Murakumo scoffs derisively.

“Everyone knows Tatsuta had a few screws loose.”

“Murakumo, this was not like the other times. And I think, deep down, Tatsuta was hiding how hurt she was.”

Murakumo is shaking her head.

“Fine,” sighs Sazanami, “But I reserve the right to say, ‘I told you so’ if Stalingrad is not the Kanmusu she appears to be.”

“That does not excuse what you said to her,” says Murakumo, “Just swallow your pride and apologise to her already.”

...

Light Cruiser Demon has an idea.

“Hello. Yes. Put me through to Arctic Strategic Command.”

She reclines in the luxurious plane seat. She is on a priority flight back to Moscow, but that did not mean she did not have to ride without comfort. One of the definite advantages that had made the conquest of the United States worth the effort, is the presidential plane they now had access to.

“I have a plan to deal with the stupid battlecruiser. No. We don’t have the resources to do that. Not yet at least.”

“So will this plan be something the news reporters will love?”

“I will be the one to decide whether to publicise it. It all depends.”

“It all depends on what, Ma’am?”

Light Cruiser Demon pops open a champagne bottle before answering.

“We are going to perform a ship girl summoning and we’re going to give that ship girl a hero’s welcome. We are bringing back the Stalingrad-class battlecruiser, Mosvka.”

...

I've been trying to piece together my memories.

Turns out that installing American equipment that is a quantum leap ahead of my own can really mess with my head.

I'm struggling to remember anything from the battle.

From the way people react to presence, I can get a glimpse of how I did.

I need crutches to get anywhere because my keel got wrecked, if you were wondering.

Kirishima, shrieks something about an 'Ironbottom Sound' and flees whenever she sees me.

Kongou gets this really vacant look to her and checks whatever drink she is holding at the time, whenever I am around her. I don't know what happened there.

The destroyers purposely avoid my path. One time, Arashio was walking down a hallway when I came through the other end, and she performed the fastest evasive manoeuvre I've ever seen with my own eyes.

Musashi makes a point of insulting me, or ignoring me otherwise. I think I deeply wounded her

pride. Actually, I probably beat her really badly. She looks ready to snap me in half. I'd like to see that gunslinger try.

Then there is Yamato. Whenever she sees me, she looks... remorseful or guilty about something. But she helps me get around, opening doors and such.

I guess that means I did not do anything too questionable to Yamato if she makes a conscious effort to help me.

Maybe Yamato is just treating me well out of a sense of duty or compassion. From what I've heard, Yamato is a good-natured ship girl.

Or did I stir up some bad memories for her? Hopefully not, because I can count with two hands the number of people who have been so friendly to me.

Moving on.

I arrived back at Adelaide with a bunch of Japanese Kanmusu. Everyone was happy to see them on our side.

And I should probably mention the other American and European Kanmusu as well.

The American ship girls are exactly what I expected the American navy would be like. You can see that as a bad thing or not.

They look like they could comfortably liberate people who never wanted to be liberated, hand out fiery freedom and do this with professionalism. They carry themselves around very differently from the Japanese Kanmusu, in my opinion.

I don't feel the instinctual urge to attack them. I blame whatever Iowa's electronics did to me.

Arizona and Pennsylvania are politely indifferent to me. I suspect Arizona has some truly traumatic memories, because Pennsylvania is always giving her sister medication. Arizona has these burn marks on her that she seems to be really self-conscious of, which adds to my suspicions.

Iowa is my honorary comrade-in-arms whether she knows it or not. She likes bearing arms. I like bears and arms.

To my surprise, Enterprise did not seem pleased to meet Midway. Midway and Enterprise seem to be acquainted with each other, but they are not fond of each other. This really puzzles me because Midway is such an honest and kind ship girl. I don't see how

anyone could have shown such undisguised fury towards her.

Enterprise always looks at me with intense distaste. She gets this expression that suggests she is utterly repelled by my presence. Woah. If I have somehow offended Enterprise, I will not only have the United States Navy to answer to, but their entire country.

As for the British ship girls...

Hood and Renown welcomed me into the sisterhood of battlecruisers. I have no problem with them.

Then there are the German ship girls...

My relationship with them started off with a fight.

When I first saw Prinz Eugen and Scharnhorst, I snapped.

It apparently took the rest of the capital ship girls to try and stop me punching the stuffing out of the poor German ship girls. I feel terrible. They had travelled all the way here and this was how I welcomed them? What did they even do to deserve this?

I had thought I was not the type of person to hold grudges. Sure, Scharnhorst and Prinz Eugen were part of the navy that starved the Soviet Union during the Second World War, but that was long ago and I'm disgusted at my behaviour.

I vaguely remember that even the collective strength of the other capital ship girls did not stop me nearly killing the German ship girls.

A wise German leader once remarked "I've got a conservative army, a Nazi air force, and a communist navy".

I think it was that memory that got me to eventually stop.

Let's just say the German ship girls have probably ended up hating me. I'm sure they do.

I can't do much since I'm completely ***** up and I just slept for most of the time. Resource prescribed me a lot of my very own medication because I keep feeling tired as *****. No matter how much I try, I can't get the nightmares to stop. I thought my nightmares before were pretty depressing.

The nightmares used to be those average explosive dreams that sailors get.

But it feels like those nightmares were just instructional children movies to prepare me for the real thing.

The first of these new nightmares had me killing and burying my sisters.

I butchered them with my shovel, than I poured dirt on them while they were still screaming.

You know, I checked the internet out of the small hope that the Soviet Union completed my sister ships. Nope. They were scrapped right in the construction yards where they lay, waiting to be finished. I doubt Mosvka or Kronstadt would choose to come back to this messy world, anyway.

I wonder what they think of me.

I don't ascribe to a particular religion because I'm afraid of taking sides when it comes to luck. So I sent a quick prayer to just... anyone, I suppose.

I pray that my sisters are in a good place, where they are completed and can sail on safe seas. I wish that to whatever gods hear my wishes, that they tell my sisters I don't care if they were abandoned or forgotten. Tell them that I love them.

...

Stalingrad hobbles around the base.

It is not like she wanted to meet anyone in particular, but she did not want to stay in her room and cry all day.

Anyone she would want to be with is probably running around doing something important. It's that time of year again. War season.

In particular, Stalingrad worries about the Australians. They look ready to have meltdowns from playing host to all these ship girls they were not prepared to receive.

“Hey! Stalingrad!”

Ah. It is Stalingrad's favourite American carrier.

“Hello, comrade.”

“Do you want to go and eat something?” says Midway innocently, “Here.”

Coffee. Stalingrad doesn't crave coffee for its caffeine. But she could put in a mountain of sugar into coffee and get away with it.

“Thanks.”

Midway stares at Stalingrad, making sure the battlecruiser has consumed every bit of the 'dose'. When the battlecruiser is finished, the carrier ship girl smiles innocently.

...

"How are you holding up?" asks Midway.

"Honestly, I feel like a battleship ran into me," says Stalingrad. It was true.

"I'm sure it will pass," Midway laughs good-naturedly.

Stalingrad fiddles with her medal.

"I wanted to ask you something," says Midway.

"Ask away, comrade."

Before Midway can ask Stalingrad, Yamato and *Musashi* arrive.

"Oh look who it is. Your reputation precedes you."

Midway wants to strangle the battleship. Annoying Stalingrad would be inadvisable.

"Can I help you with anything?" the battlecruiser tenses up.

“Musashi, you promised you would be nice,” pleads Yamato.

“I would be,” says Musashi, “But I can’t help but question your motives.”

“It should be obvious what I want,” growls Stalingrad. Midway wishes the battleship would just stay quiet.

“I can’t help but notice,” continues Musashi, “that the Soviet Union is *gone*. So what goal are you fighting towards?”

Midway freezes in terror. This conversation was sailing into dangerous waters!

Midway looks to the battlecruiser.

“Why should I tell you what I’m fighting for, you slag,” growls Stalingrad.

Musashi straightens up, proudly displaying her *main battery*.

“I, Musashi, fight for Japan and its ambitions. Musashi fights for the honour of the Japanese people.”

Stalingrad sighs. Then she straightens up as much as she can.

“No one fights for politics. Politics can get you to the battlefield, but it is a poor soldier who fights only for that. We do not give a galloping Bolshevik about political correctness. If you only live so that you can make another person suffer for your country, you are a government-sanctioned murderer. If you die only for your country, you are what we call an acceptable psychopath.”

“H-How dare you!”

“You say the Soviet Union is gone? Then we will fight for the countries the Soviet Union left behind.”

Midway watches the battlecruiser shake with fury.

“If that is so,” says Musashi, “why are you not with the Alliance?”

“If there is any doubt about whether to give into this Alliance or fighting for one’s comrades, don’t yield an inch. We will fight with a prayer on our lips and fire in our boilers.”

“And that’s a wrap.”

The four ship girls turn to the heavy cruiser ship girl who was sprinting away from them.

“Who was that?” asks Stalingrad. She seems completely confused.

“That is Aoba,” answers Yamato, “We should probably stop her.”

“Why? Is she some sort of spy ship?”

Midway, who just restarted her breathing, can feel herself cringe in fear.

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