

From the second they graduated from the Academy, Ro and Caterina were noted as a team. Far from the traditional theme, of new cadets joining the forces at a rather distanced state from their peers, the two had only grown closer at the prestigious Academy of Modern Combat, using each other as support. The more their instructors had tried to drive them apart, the closer they became, until the heads of the Academy decided to let it go, and see their friendship as an asset.

And an asset was just what was needed in the war against the Glasioux.

As much as top military officials tried to cover it up, the war was going badly. The edges of the Glasioux territory were increasing, at a steady rate towards the Sol system, and attacks on Earth were unrelenting.

But, thanks to the hard work of thousands, and more importantly, sheer dumb luck, there was hope. The Glasioux created their reactors in an almost impossible-to-reach planet of the Glason system. Upon learning this, the Commission of Leaders ordered the *Mediocre* on the 7-month journey to Glason 14.

Upon the *Mediocre* was where Ro and Caterina had been stationed.

And now, they were the first Smashforce assigned to destroy the largest reactor ever seen.

The megareactor, which had been dubbed by General Zikita as "Glasioux's Monster" was the size of a Type 16 planet, which was roughly equal to Neptune of the Sol system. It was made almost one hundred percent of reactor glass, and would take a two-person SmashHit to penetrate.

And now...

"Ro! Help me load this next one!"

Ro shoved a barrel of pressure-melted metal into their SmashHit. Scanning the readings displayed on the external computer, she was slightly disappointed.

"We're only going to be at 25 on takeoff," she called back to Caterina. "How do they expect us to even get to the reactor, let alone disable it!"

"When we destroy their crystalline reactors, the particles will cling to our generator, upping our energy. We can be efficient!"

"Whatever. Nerd!" Ro grinned at Caterina before hopping into the pilot's seat. Their SmashHit was the only ship in the spotlessly white hangar. A few maintenance workers were crowded around the doors, and two cadets stood eagerly on the observation balcony, both aged fourteen.

"Cat! Get in!" Ro looked back at her friend. Her blonde hair was tied tightly into the regulation braids, and her uniform was crisp and clean. Ro had helped her put her hair up, as Caterina, while she looked like a classic 'teens' diva, she was quite challenged with hair and makeup. Ro turned on the control panel, and entered her code. Caterina slipped into the gunners seat, and warmed up the cannons.

The ship slid silently out of the dock, and guided itself onto a preprogrammed route. Ro made alterations to the course, as the large generator pulsed. It looked like it was made of standard colors, but apparently, to the Glasioux it looked like a rainbow. A small opening showed where small ships would come in or out. On a set course for the reactor core, the SmashHit glided effortlessly into the first chamber.

"Caterina! This is just the threshold!"

Caterina shot cannonball-sized shots of metal into the glass-like reactors. There was not much to shoot at, but Caterina was warming herself up, listening to the strangely beautiful sound of shattering glass. She did not spare a single shot, but as expected, gained about three shots worth of energy for each pyramidal reactor she destroyed. Ro was shouting something at her,

but she didn't hear it. She aimed for the button on the circular door at the end of the threshold, and turned back around. "What?"

Once they had moved to the first chamber, Ro looked incredulously at her engine integrity readings. "I counted. You wasted thirty-nine shots in the threshold alone. How are the engine readings at fifty-seven?"

Caterina smiled. "I told you about destroying the reactors. We just need to keep doing it." Large glass-like walls lazily drifted on rails in front of the SmashHit's hull. One shot each sent the walls tumbling, in a million pieces. As a large glass wall rose up in front of the craft, Caterina shattered it with one well placed ball. Reactors sat on slowly rising and falling platforms, glowing, with a beautiful but eerie light. Caterina dispatched crystal after crystal, and soon, the doorway loomed ahead of them. One hit, and the doorway waned to allow them passage.

"Engine readings at sixty-two", reported Ro. Seated facing backwards in the SmashHit, she only saw the destruction of the glass hallways on camera, and the millions of tiny shards of glass, pouring like rain on her windshield. A fog-like haze settled around the non-glass walls of the hallway, as the craft pushed onwards.

"Waste dump ready", she reported. The craft could disgorge waste from the onboard generators as ammunition. The onslaught of heavy metal crumbled the reactors ahead.

The first clone room was massive. Immense glass double helixes spun slowly, as Glasioux sensors took readings. There was no need to destroy them, but they loomed eerily over the SmashHit moving below.

"Augh!" Caterina shrieked as the craft, unprepared, slammed into a doorway. The titanium hull smashed through the heavy crystal, but not at the expense of an amount of energy.

"Hull integrity holding," called Ro. "Energy at seventy-five."

The team sailed into a big, red room. Large flywheels spun, filtering the argon-based atmosphere in the mammoth reactor. Caterina blasted through wheel after wheel, until they were cast into an area that was under construction. Large metal cylinders filled with liquid oxygen swung without method, and Caterina knocked them off their supports. The air was getting significantly warmer, until the next chamber plunged them into freezing cold.

The Glasioux kept their inner chambers without atmosphere or gravity. The frigidity of the 5th chamber was due to the former. The lack of gravity, although, dramatically heightened Caterina's range. The liquid oxygen tanks that kept it cold tumbled to the ground. Ro took the craft into a freefall of sorts, once gravity resumed, bringing them to the second air-filter chamber.

"Watch the paddles!" Ro was already needlessly worrying. The paddles were easily bypassed. The next obstacle was lasers, and Caterina hated dealing with them.

"I'm going to have to get these lasers one at a time. These are smaller than they are in the training pits."

Ro, however was distracted by her instruments. There were multiple readings on the radiation coming from the main reactor.

"Caterina, they said specifically that this is not a suicide mission, right?"

"Yeah," Caterina replied, distracted. "Why?"

"The readings for the final reactor chamber is more than a thousand joules over what we can tolerate with the SmashHit."

"The icewash will deploy far before then. We'll be incased, so that we can ride the escape package to the exterior."

It was her tone of voice that warned Ro that her friend was grasping. She looked back to Caterina, in her seat, and then looked away. The instrumentation for the package would melt and fuse in the last habitable room. Even if the icewash did deploy, it couldn't completely cover them. Ro squared her shoulders, and returned to her instruments.

Thoughts raged in Caterina's head. She knew that they wouldn't make it out, but she had swallowed the thought. Again and again, she had promised herself that when this was all over, she could see Terrel's face smiling at her. She had never even faced the possibility of never coming back to him. Cannons shot crystals at their vessel, but were easily dispatched. Again, Caterina swallowed her thoughts.

Glasioux keep giant rooms of organic material close to their cores, as the rooms act as large greenhouses, providing food to the staff onboard. There were over seven million Glasioux on board the Glasioux's Monster, only about five thousand soldiers or military personnel. If the reactor blew, the beast would not die, but the millions of innocents on the generator would have to be rescued, as these natural greenhouses would be destroyed. As would the cloning rooms, so no new Glasioux would be born. As would the atmosphere regulating chambers, so the whole station would be on reserved atmospheres. The whole station would be tugged on smaller rescue ships until it reached the Glason system. Then the millions of families could finally be free from the nightmare they surely would be living.

"It's so beautiful!" Caterina sighed. The radioactive protective chamber was comprised of blocks that were a gorgeous shade of lavender to the human eye, with white-hot particles flying by. The gravity was completely gone on this room, and a whiteish-blue glow was emitted from below the SmashHit. The pink and magenta lasers struck across the sky, beautiful, but deadly, and the shards of red-violet glass pierced the tranquil landscape. When Ro dove into another freefall, the patterns on the blocks were revealed, reminiscent of primeval Greek art of Earth. And in the final section of the chamber, eerily lovely navy glass panels pounced on the vessel, gliding close to the tiled floor. The door at the end slowly opened.

"Ro! This is the outer reactor!" Huge barrels of liquid metal swished through the air. Sparks flew from a molten-rock floor, casting the whole room into a fiery glow. Machines churned liquid rock as if it was watery oatmeal.

"Caterina! Do you see the walls?"

"I know!" The walls seemed to have holes, leading to tiled rooms within. They couldn't be anything for living beings, any creature would surely roast in this chamber.

"I'm going to take us down into the trench. The door's at the bottom."

Then, without pausing a beat, she guided the craft into the trench, towards the lava.

The ship careened into the trench. Caterina skillfully smashed the reactors on the way.

"Caterina!! The catwalk!!!"

A red glass catwalk extended to in front of the hull. Caterina swiftly smashed it.

"Great..." mumbled Ro. The door opened, revealing a long black hallway.

"Oh my gosh! This is the main reactor core!" Ro shrieked, showing the most emotion she ever had.

"No no no no no!!!" Caterina screeched.

"Caterina! Calm down!!!"

An icy plasma was discharged into the cabin. *She activated the icewash! She knows it's too late!* The final door opened to a blinding white light...

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The core bombs shook the wreckage of the colossus. Admiral Terrel Ryker stood aboard his state-of-the-art flagship. The main exterior lamps shed light onto the now pitch black Glasioux monster. Shattered glass floated everywhere. The admiral glanced up at it, his expression softening. He was not here on official business, rather to recover the corvette used to infiltrate the core for personal reasons. No one questioned him.

The lava in the outer core was hardening, and only glowing embers remained. Some machinery still churned in vain, others had been shattered. And up ahead, was the broken corvette.

"Stop! What are those two things?"

"Icewashed bodies, sir." The junior officer had been startled by the emotion in the usually stone-cold admiral. "In fact, they still show signs of survival."

"Pull them in!" The admiral practically ran from the bridge. "And get a medic in here!!"

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The first thought that crossed Caterina's mind was *Why am I not dead?*

Staggering from her prior state of unconsciousness, she struggled to open her eyes. Glancing around, she tried to get her bearings.

*I'm in a medical bay. I'm on IV drip. There's no one else here...*

She sat up, carelessly removed the drip, and walked to the hall.

"Hey, does anyone know what--"

Ro and Terrel stood in the hallway. Terrell ran to her and embraced her, and Ro just watched, both wearing expressions of pure joy. Finally, it was Ro who spoke.

"We're alive, Caterina. Thank you so much!"