PROLOGUE

“Transmission from Kokuchou*.*”

The calm voice of Grandpa Rock, who was in charge of communications, echoed in the bridge.

“All pirate ships are in position. The enemy fleet has also been deployed on the ecliptic plane.”

“Thank you.”

Three days ago, Captain Suzuka’d just officially succeeded Hakuchou in place of her father, who was unconscious and seriously injured. She looked down at the main display in the captain’s seat. She’d lost count of how many times she’d reviewed the high-precision display, which was supposed to accurately depict the current positions and vectors of the ‘Red Giant’, *Garnet A*, along with all the enemy and allied spacecrafts deployed around it.

Everything was in place. All ships were on standby, awaiting the signal to commence the operation.

It dawned on her that the fate of the planet rested in her hands, and Suzuka trembled. Closing her eyes, she took a deep breath, before opening her eyes once again.

“Well then, let’s get started.”

“*Are you sure?”*

Grandpa Rock, the oldest man on the bridge, turned at the captain’s seat and spoke in a low, yet clearly audible voice.

“Even though the volunteer army is nowhere to be seen?”

“Despite what the name suggests, the spaceships that have yet to arrive in the operational airspace are merchant ships, cargo ships, private cruisers, and other civilian spacecrafts that aren’t equipped with fire control. Even if we wait for them, it’s not like we can expect them to fight.”

Suzuka dropped her gaze at the main display once more. None of the displayed symbols indicated an affiliation with the regular fleet of the Independence Army.

“Besides, as pirates, we’ve never fought controlled fleet battles before. Although it’s a relief that the other party isn’t a regular fleet, the person leading the enemy fleet is undoubtedly with the military. To attain victory, we must spare no effort and utilize every possible means to win.”

“What method will you use, specifically?”

At Grandpa Rock’s question, Suzuka realized for the first time as a captain that not just the Hakuchou, but her ability to command an entire pirate fleet was being questioned.

“We've never fought a fleet battle before, but we've encountered numerous battle scenarios. From searching for the enemy to confronting them; from making a blunder to cleaning up—all of those tasks, which would have been assigned to multiple ships in a regular fleet, we've overcome them, with just one ship. *Which is why,* a single pirate ship can do the work of an entire fleet.”

Suzuka glanced at the familiar faces lined up on the familiar bridge.

“As long as we do everything necessary, without losing sight of the purpose of the operation, there’s no way we can lose to a mishmash of work fleets!”

“Throughout history, war has been likened to a digital calculation—*disturbingly so*. The side who centered their force in the right place at the right time wins. If a war can simply be won through achievements and sheer will, then the world will be at peace.”

“There’s another reason why we can defeat them.”

Pretending to be at ease, Suzuka forced a smile on her face.

“It’s time.”

After taking a deep breath, Suzuka went on.

“If we start now, we’ll definitely be able to take the lead. Since we can’t rely on the strength of the volunteer army, we’ll leave the post-cleanup and rescue to them. If we make our move now, we don’t have to worry about the rescue ship getting caught in the battle.”

With a smile on her face, Suzuka stared at Grandpa Rock in the radio operator’s seat.

Grandpa Rock raised his hand as if to show that she’d passed.

“Okay. Who’d have guessed that the last big venture of us pirates would be a fleet battle. Seeing the captain’s determination, we might be able to win?”

“Of course we will win.”

Suzuka pouted and looked around the bridge.

“Let’s go, Hakuchou. Commence the final stage of acceleration. No change in operational procedures, avoid electronic jamming until the last minute.”

Suzuka logged into the channel connected to all ships participating in the operation.

“C’mon, pirates! Let’s get down to our last big venture!”

The solar sails were fully outstretched on the nine masts deployed on three sides. As the Hakuchou basked under the sunlight of the Red Giant, its inertial control device was activated at maximum output, reducing the hull’s apparent mass. Soon, it began to accelerate like a fired bullet.

The War of Independence ended three days later.