

# The Greatest Admiral

Evan C. Lewis

High in orbit above a boring, unpopulated little planet called Pelos, far away from space debris and any asteroids, with as much open space as one could hope to achieve, Pon gazed upon his glorious armada.

Pon relished in unfurling his space fleet in as far as it could stretch. Like a collector of anything, he had to appreciate his collection. Otherwise, what was the point? Pon had commanded thousands of men, won dozens of battles and travelled hundreds of light years over his life. None of that mattered compared to his ships.

But the collection needed to be completed. Pon gazed into space, staring at one spot in particular. The single missing hub saucer was a flaw that ruined Pon's fleet like smudged paint across the face of a portrait. He could and did appreciate his ships for hours at a time, but the memory of the empty gap stuck forever.

99 starships.

12 war-grade Suncruisers. Silver, jagged and 300 metres long and with enough firepower together to rip a moon in half. One of them housed the control deck where Pon now stood.

50 meteor-class and comet-class galleons. The bulk force of any fleet, 30 and 40 metres long and able to carry a hundred men each, These were the main fighters of any battle. Pon had piloted many in his younger days.

20 hub stations, the civilian ships, able to house tens of thousands of off duty soldiers and the soldier's families. The smooth, golden stations kept to the safe centre of the fleet and would lock down with strong shields at any sign of danger.

17 Hub saucers. These slow green-blue disks were most useful outside of enemy engagement. Filled with warp crystals, photon batteries and electromagnetic transmitter beacons, these drones extended communications and planetary scans for the fleet, as well as provided medical attention to the suncruisers.

*100 ships.* Pon mused over the thought. There was not even a title for one who had commanded 100 ships. One, and you were a captain; 10, a commander; 20, an admiral; 50, a grand admiral. Only a few people in history had ever commanded more.

Mirra Odysseus, saviour of the Milky Way. He had led the last survivors of humanity from the sudden-collapsing sun, Solar, two hundred years ago. 57 ships.

Erin Salafeuer, coloniser of Pastanox. She had led humanity into the new golden age 65 years ago, defeating the pirates who had taken control of humanity's second galaxy. Her defeat of Onterius, the last surviving Pirate Admiral of Pastanox, allowed her to unite all of humanity

under a single union, the Pastanox Constellation. 72 ships.

But the biggest legend of all was a man that was still living and breathing. He was an Admiral of the Pastanox military. Entire planets would celebrate with festivals and banquets if he used them to dock his 1st fleet of Pastanox. children would trade digital simulations of his battles, officers and captains would study his maneuvers, fleet formations and even his everyday mannerisms to have the best chance of climbing the ranks. He was the one, the only, the enslaver of the alien Anoxians, the vanquisher of the Pyrontlese, Grand Admiral Genus Aurelius. 99 ships.

Everyone, however, had forgotten about Pon. At 80 years old, his legacy was now playing on his mind. He worried that all his deeds would soon be forgotten. Despite all that he had done, the people were moving on. His wars were generations old, yesterday's news, old stories. His ships would last though.

Pon grumbled to himself. He sat in the control deck of his leading star cruiser, alone. He liked being left alone. It let him think, and his wit and cunning was the cause for all his success. His cane rested against the chair beside him. It was annoying to Pon, reminding him of his age, but it was needed. He wore a bright-white uniform that was studded with ribbons and medals.

A light flickered and his control terminal began to glow. A smooth sounding, feminine voice spoke.

"Sir," Said the voice. "Federal ships have been sighted within warp range. A grand fleet of at least 20 ships."

Pon's face scrunched. "Hmm," He said. "This isn't their jurisdiction. Are they broadcasting anything Ani?"

"Nothing but their credentials, Sir." Said Ani.

Pon thought for a moment, Stepping up from his chair. He had to balance on his cane to keep standing, but he liked being undistracted by the blinking lights of the terminal .

He pondered.

He finally spoke, "Let's skip communications. Beam me aboard if they don't have their shields up."

"But sir," Said Ani. "This isn't just some patrol fleet, this is a certified armada. They will see this gesture as rude at best, possibly illegal and at worst hostile."

"I have on my full, federal, Pastanox uniform." Said Pon, "And I hardly look like an Anoxian. They will give me my respect."

"But Sir, they might not know who you are--"

“Beam me.” Said Pon. “I will sort this out face to face like we used to.”

“Setting coordinates, Sir.” Lights on the terminal flared.

Pon sat down in his command chair. “No,” He said. “Allow me.”

He raised his hand, palm up, and a digital simulation floated above the terminal. His hands shook as he poked and waved through the wispy, luminescent pictures.

The terminal crackled again. “Sir, I know you like doing things by yourself, but I am the expert on these things. If you would allow m-”

Pon prodded a virtual switch and the sound cut off.

“That’s better.” He said.

He waved and twitched his fingers within the display. Lights changed colour, pictures and patterns moved, expanded, swivelled around his hands.

“It’s not that hard.” He grumbled

Bright red text appeared, covering the rest of the simulation.

*Confirm fleet to fleet transportation. Yes/No.*

Pon reached to touch the *yes* but as he did the text flicked to the side, a new message had popped up.

*Medication alarm - 0200 hours.*

Pon missed and pressed no.

“Stupid, ruddy thing.” He said.

Continuing to curse the machine, Pon programmed the process for a second time. The confirmation reappeared. Pon paused for a second this time in case it decided to jump around again. He pressed yes and sat back in his chair.

Sparkling lights surrounded him and he felt his body become lighter by the second. He looked over his uniform, tucking it neatly into his belt and straightening a medal that had tilted slightly out of place.

Then he disintegrated.

Security officer Phillips was bored, toying with his plasma baton and muttering to himself about how he had better things to do than guard entrance to the escape pods when he heard a suspicious scraping sound. It sounded like something was dragging across metal.

He looked up and down the corridors but there was nothing there. It was probably nothing. Then he heard it again, closer this time. He looked around again but there was still nothing.

He clutched his baton close to his chest. *It's the Anoxians, in the ceilings. They must have gotten on board when we docked on Elos.*

A loud bang erupted from within the escape pod room.

"AIEEEE!" Phillips screamed and jumped back. He pointed his baton at the door. "Don't come in here- Anoxian scum. Or we'll blast you with- with our photon guns."

Nothing responded. The wheel on the door slowly started to spin, centimetres at a time. Phillips stepped back, tripping and stumbling into a corner. The door spun further and further before... *click*.

Phillips let out a small whimper.

The door thrust open. Revealing Pon, dragging behind his cane.

"What kind of welcome is this?" Said Pon. "For a man with my rank? Despicable? Is this how you treat all your guests?"

Phillips's eyes were still wide. He opened and shut his mouth, speechless. He didn't know what to say, but he was glad that his eyes weren't being turned into eggs by a parasitic alien race.

Pon glared down at the Phillips, still cowering on the floor. "Who are you?"

"S-security officer Phillips-" Phillips noticed the medals on Pon's uniform. Silver, gold, red, purple. Phillips didn't know what half of them meant, but he recognised one. The green-blue cross of an admiral. He leapt to his feet. Phillips had never personally met anyone above the rank of captain before. "-Sir." He saluted.

"Sir indeed. Now which way is the control deck for this ship? And how far?" Asked Pon, pointing to his cane. "It better not be far."

"I-I can show you sir. But all - all guests have to register through the engineering quarters." Phillips fumbled through his belt and pulled out a key card. "I'll have to let you through all the doors."

Pon grunted in acceptance.

Pillips walked down the corridor, with Pon ambling behind.

“I’m so sorry Sir, I don’t know what happened, you shouldn’t be able to beam into anywhere but the engineering quarters.” He fumbled while scanning the keycard, the door flashed red, then red again.

“That’s absurd.” Said Pon. “I will have some words for your Admiral” Sweat started to drip down Phillips’s nose. The door finally beeped and slid open, Phillips let out a sigh of relief.

“Of course, Sir.” Said Phillips, “I’m s-sure the engineers will be very sorry.”

“They will be, and they’ll all be dishonourably discharged too.” Pon leaned over Phillips’s shoulder as he was trying to open another door. “50 years ago they would have been jettisoned into space for treating an admiral like this.”

The door flashed red, once, twice and three times. Phillips nervously turned around, facing the man in charge of more people than he had ever seen.

“S-S-Sorry sir. If I fail once more we’ll have to wait five minutes before trying again.”

Pon leaned over the guard, his face was taut, it looked ready to snap like the twitching scythes of an Anoxian reaper. But instead of going for the kill, Pon just spoke.

“That is most unfortunate, and something I may need to tell your admiral. But you are an officer, no?”

“Y-Yes.”

“And an officer of security, no less. Surely you can remotely unlock the doors of the ship.”

“Th-that’s only for emergencies.”

“Ah yes, that is true.” Said Pon. “In that case you can call for the Admiral to come get me personally.”

“H-He can’t come down all the way here? He’s the Admiral.”

“And what am I? A peacock? Look at my medals, what do they say? Call him down, or otherwise, unlock the doors.”

Pillips resigned, hands shaking, he flipped a switch on his belt. “U-Unlock all doors. Officer code 290534. Unlock all doors.”

The door beeped and slid open. Pon stepped through.

“There is no need to accompany me.” He said. “If you are lucky, I will have forgotten your

face by the time I speak to the admiral.”

“Y-Yes sir.” Said Pillips.

The door closed between them and Pon limped along on his cane.

Everyone in the engineering room was busy, busy running a 10 kiloton, 1000 man spaceship. Scientists and Officers ran back and forth, calibrating trajectories, maintaining weapons, charging batteries. A giant digital simulation dominated the centre of the room. A dozen engineers manipulated it from all angles as millions of tiny bits of information and input whizzed around inside.

Chief engineer Ombi stood half a head shorter than most in the room, But her voice echoed over everyone’s heads.

“Bo-Bee! I needed an A.I. pilot programmed for that galleon yesterday. Jamo! Where are the warp crystals? Iri!”

A tiny blue man squeaked and looked up at Ombi. His feet wobbled on the spot and his cheeks started to glow orange.

“Yes?” He squeaked.

“Good work. Keep it up.”

The doors to the corridors slid open and Pon ambled through.

“Who the hell is that?” Shouted one of the scientists.

“How did you get in here?” Asked Ombi.

“You beamed me into the wrong room.” Said Pon. “You must have miscalculated.”

Ombi folded her arms. “That’s impossible, we only ever beam people into the integration room.”

Pon stepped further into the room and only then did Ombi notice his admiral’s cross. Her eyes widened.

“Then how was it that I ended up in the escape pods? Hmm?” Asked Pon.

Ombi glanced over at an officer sitting working on the simulation. She raised her eyebrow. The man flicked his wrist and stared at an image, he looked back at Ombi and shook his head.

“I’m sorry- Admiral.” Said Ombi. “Your engineers must have beamed you onto our ships themselves. *They* must have gotten their calculations wrong.”

“Impossible,” Said Pon. Waving his cane at Ombi. I was calculating it myself. And I don’t make mistakes, I’ve been doing this for over 65 years. You must have beamed me and messed it all up before I could finish doing it properly.”

Ombi was doubtful, but she didn’t want to push back against an admiral.”

“I’ll have to call the control deck,” She said. “Tell them that you’re on board.”

“Please do.” Said Pon, “I want to meet the man that runs this mess of a fleet.”

Ombi reached for her belt, but it turned on by itself.

A voice barked out of it. “Chief engineer Ombi. This is second officer Telenon. We have reports from diagnostics that a person has beamed on board from a foreign fleet without permission. The ships are federation but they aren’t responding. Have you received anyone yet?”

Ombi said, “Yes, it -er- it appears to be their commander.”

“Their-? Hold on. Switching comms. The admiral wants to speak with you.”

Ombi’s face froze. “The Admiral?”

The simulation in the centre of the room suddenly evaporated, and a massive virtual head and shoulders rose from the centre. The hologram pictured a middle aged man in a white uniform. The uniform was just like Pon’s, it was white and peppered with gold and silver medals, including a particularly bright green-blue cross. The face itself was thick-jawed, bald and boasted a short-cut, pepper beard. His eyes seemed to stay set in place, while his head slowly peered at the people in the room. He set his gaze on Ombi.

“Chief Engineer. People can not materialise on my ship without my permission.” His voice rumbled like an earthquake, but was purposefully slow. “Who is this intruder?”

Ombi took a deep breath. The admiral nearly always spoke to her through his subordinates.

“He’s over there.” She said, pointing at Pon.

Pon stepped up from his chair. He saluted the visage, but no hand appeared in response. Pon squinted, he couldn’t always focus very well on digital simulations, but this man seemed recognisable.

“Admiral.” Said Pon. “Your engineers have beamed me away from your control deck. This is a very improper way to treat a federal leader, and I don’t think the Pastanox senate would

be happy upon hearing it. But all will be forgiven if you can come and escort me to the control deck.”

The head tilted down to look at Pon. “And who are you?”

Pon lifted his cane and clasped his hands behind his back, standing as tall as he could. His legs wobbled as he kept his balance.

“You don’t recognise me?” Said Pon. “The battle of Eniere? The legend of the Saddle Cascade?”

The head tilted down, scanning Pon’s medals. It ignored Pon’s questions. “This federal fleet, orbiting Pelos. It is yours?”.

“Mine and mine only.” Said Pon, “And Pelos is not your quadrant to be patrolling. But we can discuss all of this face to face.”

The bust seemed to lean in, although the hologram stayed in place. “I have jurisdiction over Panstanox in its entirety. I am a Grand Admiral. Not the captain of some patrol fleet.”

Pon frowned. Who did this young man think he was? Mira Odysseus himself? He was not going to be disrespected by some upstart.

“An admiral? Hmm? Of how many ships.” Pon smiled.

But the hologram shifted, revealing the rest of its body. The uniform came into view in its entirety, there were dozens upon dozens of medals, ribbons and pins, they dazzled across his chest like a broken rainbow. Pon realised why he had recognised the face.

“Who am I? Who am I? I am the second ever admiral of the Pastanox star fleet,

the enslaver of the Anoxians, the vanquisher of the intergalactic Pyrontlese. I am Grand Admiral Genus Aurelius. You may command a large fleet, Sir. You may be an admiral, Sir. But do not think that we will be meeting face to face as equals. I have a need to take port in Pelos, you and your fleet will aid me or leave me be. Do you understand?”

Pon returned his cane to the ground and slumped. “Yes, admiral.”

“Yes, indeed.” Said Aurelius. “Chief Engineer.”

“Yes, Admiral?” Said Ombi.

“Retrace the beam and send this man back to his ship.”

Pon spoke, his voice was quieter. “I - My engineers may have miscalculated my transportation, I may need to be beamed back by your labs.”



“Not possible.” Said Aurelius. “Your shields are still up. You will be sent back on an escape pod. Chief engineer, see to it.”

“Yes, Admiral.” Said Ombi.

The hologram flickered and disappeared, the room grew darker. Ombi looked over at Pon. His shoulders were forward and his neck drooped low. With the light no longer reflecting off his medals, he simply looked like an old man.

“I’m sorry admiral,” She said. “You know, I’ve heard of the Saddle Cascade.”

A spark appeared in Pon’s eyes. He stretched a little taller.

“You have?” He said

“Yes. Of course,” She said. “I’d be happy to talk to you about it. But we’ll still have to go to the escape pods and send you on your way.”

“I suppose I have no choice.” Said Pon. “The senators won’t listen to me over someone like Aurelius.”

Ombi retrieved her keycard from her belt to open the door, but it slid open automatically.

“Oh, that’s weird,” She said.

Pon chuckled. “They’ve all been unlocked. I managed to convince your security officer. I suppose I still demand some respect, even if my time is nearly over.”

“Of course you do,” Said Ombi. “You’re an admiral, there must be thousands under your command.” Pon stumbled along the corridor, Ombi grabbed him by the arm and helped him walk.

“When I was a girl,” She started. “All the boys wanted to be like Genus. He was young at the time, but already a captain and well on his way to becoming an admiral. They all had his battles as simulations, they all knew his stories about how he united the furthest edges of Pastanox.”

Pon grumbled.

“But I didn’t care about him,” Said Ombi. “I didn’t care about the vanquishment of the Pyrontlese, or the scourge of the Anaxions. My legend was Erin Salafeuer.”

Pon stopped for a moment, and grabbed Ombi’s arm.

“I knew her.” He said.

Ombi froze. “Personally?”

“Yes.” Said Pon. “Oh, hoh. But she didn’t like me very much. I was a bit of a rebellious young man back then.”

They continued walking. But slowly, Ombi was eager to talk with the old admiral. She had been trying to cheer the veteran up, but now she was enthralled.

“I’m sorry Sir. When you mentioned the Saddle Cascade, I thought you meant you were just a survivor.”

“Oh no,” Said Pon. “I was much more than that, I may not have been an admiral. But I was there in the midst of the battle. I even had my own small fleet.”

They had reached the door to the escape pods. Phillips was standing at duty, trying to appear as official as possible.

“S-So sorry about before, Sir.” Said Phillips. “I have received word that you were to be given a pod. It is all ready.”

Pon chuckled. “A pod, Ha! How far I have fallen.”

Phillips slapped a button and the wheel span and the door opened, revealing a row of doors, all leading to tiny metal closets.

Ombi slammed the door shut. “No,” She said.

Phillips looked at her in surprise.

“No.” She repeated. She looked at Pon. “The very least we can do is get you a proper transport. It may take some time to negotiate, but I can do it. You’re an admiral, and protocol dictates that we treat admirals from federal fleets with the utmost respect. Let’s go to the hangar and get you proper transportation. If that’s okay with you, Sir.”

Pon smiled. “I’ll accept, if only to get the chance to tell you more about the Saddle Cascade.”

Phillips stuttered. “B-But.” He looked at Pon, who pointed to his admiral’s badge.

“Certainly Sir. I’ll notif- I’ll notif- I’ll notify the admir- You know I’m sure he’ll figure it out himself.”

A blue grid spanned across the hangar, separating it from space. At any one time, one, two or sometimes three galleons were crossing the barrier into or out of the hangar at lightning speed. Hundreds of officers scattered across the hangar floor, directing and launching the war ships.

Several medical ships were parked in the hangar. Scientists ran between the hub-saucers and the galleons, bringing equipment and medicine.

On the upper deck, overseeing it all. Pon sat at a chair with a mug in his hand.

Ombi sat down in front of him.

“They think you’ve already left,” She said. “I’m sorry, I didn’t think there’d be this much delay. Your control deck must be panicking that you haven’t returned.”

“Oh that’s alright,” Said Pon. “My second in command, Ani, runs everything most of the time these days. She’s much better with all the modern technology than I am.”

“Oh good,” Said Ombi. “I did manage to get you a flight in the end. You’d think being chief engineer I wouldn’t need to go by the books, but I had to give up my belt as insurance.”

She smiled at Pon. “But before you go, if you have the time, I’d love to hear about the Saddle Cascade.”

“And I’d love to tell you about it,” Said Pon. He coughed. “Pardon me, it must be the tea.”

Ombi jumped at the opportunity. “Did you fight the pirates yourself? What were they like? I’ve heard so many stories about how vicious they were”

“Oh, the Pirate Admirals?” Said Pon. “They were vicious indeed. Deadly as they were clever. And they didn’t follow the rules. They had these ships, leech-jaws, black hunks of metal they were. They would latch onto civilian hubs and hub saucers and rip them apart. They struck fear in everyone’s hearts, they did. Everyone’s but Erin’s”

“What was she like?” Said Ombi. “Was she as calm in danger as they say?”

“Oh, she definitely was. And she was fierce herself.” Said Pon. “We butted heads a few times. Especially- Especially at the Saddle Cascade.” He wheezed as he spoke.

“The saddle cascade was where she finally defeated the last Pirate Admiral? What was his name?”

“Osterius. Her most fierce rival, he- he.” Pon clutched his chest in pain. “Argh.”

“What’s wrong?” Asked Ombi.

“G-Get a doctor.” Pon’s voice was raspy. “The tea. It’s burning my throat.”

Ombi jumped up from the table. “Oh my! Yes, yes. I’ll be back,”

She sprinted out of the upper deck and raced down the corridors. The doors each whizzed

open moments before she slammed into them.

“Where, Where, where was it?”

She found a door and rushed in. Moments later she was sprinting back through the corridors. It was Genus, she knew it. She had heard stories, he hadn’t gotten to be the most powerful man in the galaxy without some foul tricks. But to do it to an old man, past his prime. What threat was a retiring admiral?

She turned on the comms in her belt, still running. “I need medical care. ASAP.” She huffed, “I need medical attention in the observation deck in the hangar. Someone is sick. Chief officer code 195420.”

She reached the upper deck. But Pon wasn’t there. She ran to the table. Oddly, the mug was completely empty. There was a note beside it.

*Thanks for the chat, young lady. But there are better legends out there than Erin Salafeuer.*

Shouting and stomping echoed up from the hangar. Ombi leaned over the railing to see a medical team rushing out of a stationed medical ship, a hub saucer. They were responding to her call.

But there was another figure on the floor. One that stood out among the silver and black clothed officers. It was Pon, slowly shuffling along on his cane.

“How did he get down there?” Ombi whispered to herself. “He’d need to have a security officer code-”

She watched, as Pon slowly walked the full length of the hangar. Officers, never having met anyone with so many medals, threw their equipment to the floor and saluted as he walked by. Pon saluted them back, each and every one. Finally, Pon stopped, right in front of a medical ship. A green-blue hub saucer. With every medical officer having rushed off to attend to the upper deck, and with all the officers standing and saluting him, Pon was able to waltz right up the ramp and straight inside. The ramp slowly raised and the hub began to spin, rising into the air.

“Oh my.” Said Ombi.

First, the saucer swung to the left, then to the right, and with a final twirl in the correct direction it launched off through the barrier and into space.

Pon stood on his control deck. His cane was at his feet, and his hands were by his sides. His knees still shook, but he stood tall and firm. His armada floated before him, the final green-blue saucer filling the final gap.

100.

The voice on his terminal crackled. “Amazing work, Sir. What should I call you now? Grand admiral? Supreme being?”

“Hold on now darling,” Said Pon. “Let’s not get ahead of ourselves. Have we primed for warp?”

“Yes,” said the voice. “We’ve been primed ever since you beamed aboard, Sir.”

“And I wasn’t followed, was I? How many life forms do I have across my fleet.”

The voice responded. “1, Sir. As always.”

“Great, said Pon. I’ll run warp myself. You can go now, Ani.”

“Turning off, Sir.” The voice crackled and disappeared. The glow on the terminal ceased.

Pon breathed in, soaking up his collection. Supreme being. He laughed. Ani was funny for an A.I.

The terminal crackled again. A new voice came through.

“This is Grand Admiral Genus Aurelius,” It said. “Speaking from the 1st Pastanox fleet. I speak to the commander of the fleet orbiting Pelos. You have committed a hostile act against a grand armada. Explain yourself, Admiral”

“Admiral?” Said Pon. He tried to say it as dramatically as he could. “Now when did I ever say I was an Admiral?”

The voice exploded. “Stop wasting my time. What rank are you? We are scanning that you have over 50 federation ships yet I have never heard of you.”

“Oh, Genus, I really don’t know. There’s no title for someone like me. It’s 100 ships, and that’s never been seen before.”

Pon raised his hand and a simulation flickered over the terminal. He began to move through it with his shaking hands. Using the technology was exhausting for him, but he never made a mistake.

“100?” Said Aurelius. “That’s impossible. I’ve met every Grand Admiral in the federation and I have never seen your face before. Identify yourself.”

“You really should read your history.” Said Pon. “It’s a shame, Erin was much more well read.”

“Give me back my ship and tell me who you are.” said Aurelius. “Or I will have to open fire.”

Warnings popped up over the simulation.

*Warning - Lasers detected*

*Warning - Photon bombs detected*

*Warning - Magnetic charges detected*

Pon swiped them off one by one.

“I’m afraid you won’t have the chance.” Said Pon. “I suggest you salute for your superior and say your goodbyes.”

“I will not salute you,” said Aurelius. “I am Grand Admiral Genus Aurelius, The enslaver of the Anoxians, vanquisher of the intergalactic Pyrontlese. Who in God’s great galaxy are you?”

Pon smiled.

“I am the victor of the battle of Enerie, Fighter of the Saddle Cascade.”

Another message appeared in the simulation.

*Confirm warp. Yes/No.*

“The one and only, *still* surviving-”

He aimed carefully and poked the display. One by one the ships in his fleet blinked into the distance, warping away.

“Pirate Admiral. Osterius Pon.”

Copyright © Evan Lewis, 2021