

Independence: The Ancient Trap

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Chapter 3

GTD Independence

Dubbe System

12 May 2371

The Dubbe System was Silent. No living being had visited the system since the Pinecone 44 years ago. The cosmic dust had floated through the silence of space for billions of years until that silence was interrupted.

The blackness of space was suddenly filled with colour and sound as a huge subspace porthole opened. Immense amounts of Subspace radiation poured out of the hole in the universe followed by the metallic and unmistakable hull of the GTD Independence. The ship rapidly slowed as it exited subspace until it stopped several kilometres from the now closed porthole.

“Subspace jump complete. We’re back in normal space.” The Captain looked around the Command deck and took a deep breath in.

“Ok then. Let’s get to work.” He rose from his chair to address the Command Deck crew, “Navigator, set a search pattern that will allow us to cover the largest area in the shortest time” The helm officer spun in his chair and began to work at the controls.

“Yes sir, setting search pattern Delta 39 now.”

“Science, begin scanning. I want to be notified if we find any thing that might belong to the Pinecone. Hull plating, electronic components. Hell - even a fork from the mess hall would be useful!”

“Beginning search now.” The sensor array of the Independence lit up as it came online, “Sensors are a 30%, 52.5%, 78%, 92.3% - Sensors are online and operating at 100% efficiency.” The Science officer turned to his station and began the scan. He stared at the display, hoping to see something useful. Something that could indicate the presence of the Pinecone in this system.

“Good work. I’ll be in my quarters, getting some sleep.”

The Captain walked towards the large, silver-grey door on the far side of the ships Command Deck and tapped a small button to open it. As he stepped through, he bumped into Muhammad Alisa who was in a rush to get to the Command Deck.

“Muhammad! What are you doing here? You were meant to be getting off at Beta Aquilae. What happened?” The Captain had a surprised yet pleased expression on his face.

“I thought you had heard. A wing of Shivan Manticore fighters destroyed my Transport before it got to the Rendezvous point. I’m going to pick up another transport bound for Deneb at Laramis on our way back. Until then. I’m afraid you’re stuck with me. Hope you don’t mind” The Captain looked at Muhammad and his face lit up.

“I’m sure I can cope! Where are you going in such a rush.”

“I built this ship. It was my hands that spent three and a half years building her. I think I should at least get to see her Command Deck in operation.”

“So do I. Enjoy it while it lasts!” The Captain slid past the engineer and walked down the corridor towards his quarters but was stopped in his tracks when the speaker activated and Lisa

asked for him in an excited voice.

“Captain, please come here. Science officer Tobeck has found something which you may find interesting.”

“I’ll be right there!” The Captain turned around and walked as fast as he could back to the Command Deck. Fortunately, it was only a few metres away. As he entered the door, he turned quickly to the science station at which Tobeck was working.

“Lisa said you found something” He waited for an answer. Hoping it was a good one.

“Look” Tobeck pointed towards the monitor. It showed a small grey blip slowly moving towards them. “This.” Tobeck cleared his throat “This blip is a metal object..” The captain examined the display and saw that in total, the object occupied only a few hundred square metres.

“Yeah, but its too small to be the Pinecone.” Tobeck looked shocked that the Captain thought he would make such a mistake.

“I understand that sir but what I think we have found is waste from the Pinecone. The distribution of the debris and the direction it is travelling in indicates that the ship that dropped it, the Pinecone, was travelling along a course of 287 mark 3. By 714 mark 2. By 531 mark 1.” The Captain was surprised. He did not expect to see this good a lead this soon after arriving in the system. If this debris was from the pine cone, he could follow it until he reached the Pinecone. If his luck stayed this good, he could be home in time for the yearly GTVA Captains Meeting.

“Excellent work Mr Tobeck. Well done!” The Captain clapped his hands together, “Navigator! Set a course to follow that debris trail! Maximum speed!” He ran out of the Command Deck and entered the corridor that would take him to the ships Bar! A find like this deserved a celebration, not a good nights sleep!

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Commander Almino sat at the bar, talking to one of the fighter pilots also assigned to the Independence. His name was Ensign Calma and he was an old but young friend of the Commanders from the GTD Crest.

“Calma you old fool! What are you doing here? I never expected to see you again! I thought you had been killed when the Shivans took out the GTD Valiant a few years back in the Polaris System.” The Commander had never been so happy in his life!

“Ah, no. I was one of 7 pilots who survived the battle. My weapons were offline and my Bat’s hull was a 1% but I managed to get to the Regulus node with a full squadron of Shivan Dragon class fighters on my tail! Now that’s skilful piloting! Commander Almino chuckled and put his drink on the bar.

“Is that so.”

“Yep”

“Really? Because from what I heard, only 13 Shivans survived the GTC Lime’s laser bombardment of the area. Not a hole squadron.” Calma looked worried. He had been got. But maybe it was not too late to get out of it.

“Yes, I know. But this happened before the Lime arrived.”

“That’s strange. The Shivans didn’t arrive until after the Lime jumped in.” Calma knew there was no way out now.

“Really? I didn’t know that” He said in as innocent a voice as he could manage.

“Yes, I bet” Almino knew he had won but he just had to finish the job and completely bury him. “Another thing. All the ships in Polaris were sent to Epsilon Pegasi, not Regulus. I hope you didn’t disobey orders Clama.” Calma knew there was no way out now.

“Ok, ok! I give in! The Lime had finished the laser sweep and only 12 Shivans were left in badly damaged Manticore fighters. We took them out and my hull was at 87% but, on the way back, I crashed into a large piece of debris from a destroyed transport and knocked out my engines. In the end, Command had to send a support ship to rescue me and tow me back to Epsilon Pegasi! I had never been so embarrassed in all my life!” Almino laughed out loud.

“No! That’s a great one! I wish I could have been there!” Calma was very worried.

“Look Almino, please don’t tell anyone else. I’ll be the laughing stock of the whole squadron!”

“I know! That’s why I’m going to tell every living soul on this ship about you’re great battle with the Shivans!” Almino got up and walked towards the door leaving Calma alone at the bar.

“Thanks a bunch” He whispered to himself.

The captain arrived at the bar just as Almino was leaving and he walked straight over to the bar.

“I’ll have a Kaprom. Strong with just a dash of pepper” The bar man looked very confused.

“A Kaprom?” asked the barman. “What’s a Kaprom?” The Captain was annoyed at having to tell the barman what a simple Kaprom was.

“You know, it’s one of those weird, Blue Vasudan drinks that come in really wide glasses.” The barman still looked confused, “They serve them on the PVD Totem. They’re quite thick and smell like freshly baked bread.” The barman still looked confused so the captain decided to give up and order a more Terran beverage. “I’ll have a Martine, shaken, not stirred.”

“Now that I do know!” The barman went away to prepare his drink while the captain sat down on the chair where Almino had just been sitting, next to Calma. Calma got up to leave but the captain gestured for him to stay.

“What’s your name?” The captain asked.

“Calma. Ensign Calma.” The Captain paused for a second. Trying to remember if he knew the name from some where.

“Calma. Calma. Yeah! I know you!” Calma’s eyes lit up with amazement. He was truly surprised that the Captain knew him. A lowly Ensign from Sirius. “You’re the one that crashed his ship into debris on the way to Epsilon Pegasi. You lost your engines and had to be towed back to base!” Calma’s face dropped. Of all the reasons to know a man, why is it that you’re always remembered for what you do wrong rather than what you do right.

“Yes sir, that’s me. Mr. Crashalot. Sir, I’ll understand if you want to chuck me off right now!” The Captain looked appalled at what he had just heard.

“If I chuck you off for any reason, it’ll be because of what you just said!” He said in a stern voice. The Captain took his drink from the barman and took a sip.

“I don’t understand sir”

“I’m not disappointed at what happened. What happens, happens. There’s nothing we can do about it. All we can do is try to get through it and you did that very well.” Calma looked at the Captain. He didn’t understand but was still interested in what he had to say. “When you returned, everyone in your wing made fun of you. Many people I know? including myself at your age?”

would have rather quit the GTVA than go through that.” Calma looked at the Captain, beginning to understand what he was saying.

“The thought did cross my mind” The Captain took another sip.

“But you didn’t act on it and that’s what makes you strong. Don’t forget that.”

The speakers in the Bar activated and, once again, Lisa’s voice could be heard.

“Sir. Can you please come to the Command Deck. Mr.Tobeck believes he may have found the Pinecone.”

“I’ll be right there!” The Captain replied. He drank the last of his drink and placed the empty glass on the table. He rose from the chair and walked towards the exit. Ensign Calma sat there for many minutes, trying to make sense of what the captain had told him. Trying to figure out what the Captain was trying to say.

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The Captain entered a Command Deck full of people. Frightened and confused people. He turned immediately to Tobeck who was looking at a diagram on one of the science station monitors. The display showed a large sub-space anomaly of some kind. It was spherical and was emitting an eerie white light. It appeared to be roughly the size of the Capella sun before it went Supernova. Easily large enough to swallow the Pinecone.

“What is it” he asked. Tobeck didn’t have an answer to offer but guessed at what it could be based on the readings he had gathered.

“Well, I’m not sure really. Were picking up lots of readings but they contradict each other. The Subspace scanners say its there, but the Matter Reader says it isn’t. It’s very strange.”

“Can you guess at what it is?” Tobeck paused to think. He didn’t want to suggest an answer, only to find out that its wrong.

“Well. Judging by the large amounts of E-Z radiation and the apparent existence of a quantum matrix, I’d be forced to say that it’s a jump gate of some kind.”

“A jump gate!” The Captain shouted out with joy, “ That could certainly explain the disappearance of the Pinecone. Run a scan. See if there is any debris in the area.”

“Yes sir. Running scan.” One of the junior science officers began a scan of the area.

“Negative sir. No sign of debris although the E-Z radiation would hide any that is very close to the anomaly.”

“Could we get a clear scan if we moved closer?”

“Yes, we probably could but seems how we don’t know what it is, I would not suggest we get too close.” This junior science officer sure knew his stuff.

“Thank you for the warning ensign. Helm, move us to within 2500 km but be prepared to reverse at a moments notice if we have to.”

“Aye sir. I am moving to within 2500 km and am keeping the engines to emergency stand by.” The ship shuddered as the engines powered up, ready to move the ship closer to the anomaly. As the ship moved closer to whatever it was out there, the Captain new he would regret making his last order.

“Sir” The Tactical officer shouted across the Command Deck, “ Some kind of beam has been fired at the ship. Were loosing power!” The Captain shot out of his chair and ran over to the Tactical Station.

“Full reverse!” The ship shook violently as her engines tried to fight whatever was pulling the ship towards the anomaly.

“No effect!” replied the Helm officer, “We’re still being pulled in!” The ship continued to shake as her speed increased. “We will enter the anomaly in 23 seconds!” The main bulk head fell, narrowly missing the captain and pulling a clump of wires down with it. “We’re breaking apart!” The Helm officer shouted. The sound of the engines was now so loud that you could hardly hear your self think! “We must disengage the engines or the stress will rip us apart!”

“Are you crazy?” shouted the Captain. “We’ll be pulled in!”

“Sir, the engines are losing this battle. We’re going to be pulled in whatever we do but we have the choice of going in whole or in a few thousand pieces. What’s it to be, Captain?” The Captain thought for a second.

“We’re going in whole! Helm, shut down the engines and brace for impact!” Crackling blue energy filled the ship as it entered the anomaly at near the speed of light. No ship had got near the speed of light outside of subspace. As it entered the anomaly, the ship was flooded with bright, white light. Brighter than a star! The anomaly expanded as the ship came closer, then, the GTD Independence and all its crew were gone.