

Alliances

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Prolouge

The two stars shone brightly, causing the mass of Shivan vessels to glimmer in the light. Four Mara fighters were heading for the jump node back into the Nebula. A wing of Dragons was following them, but they couldn't stop. The Terran pilots inside were all frantically working their controls, trying to change their courses slightly enough to avoid the gunfire yet still make it to the node in time. Several thousand clicks behind them were a group of Shivan Juggernauts, all of which had jumped in from a third Knossos subspace portal. All of which were heading toward the same jump node as the Maras.

But the pilots weren't concerned with the Juggernauts right now. They were just trying to get to the node. Once their subspace drives came on line, they needed to jump out immediately or be stranded.

One of the pilots read a missile lock. He was out of countermeasures, and he couldn't outmaneuver it or he would miss the window to jump. He wasn't normal to SOC. Although he fully understood that this was a suicide mission, he hadn't really grasped it until now. And he was going to die. The Mara's shields were too weak to take hits from two Shivan missiles one after the other. He was going to die... and just as suddenly, he wasn't.

One of the other pilots suddenly turned and dropped speed. One of the missiles hit the other Mara dead on, knocking out it's engines. The other sped ahead and hit it's forward shield, sending the small fighter tumbling back... back to the Shivans, to the Juggernauts...

The pilot who had originally been targeted looked away. They were at the node. For some reason, another pilot, someone he didn't even know, thought it a good idea to save his life. Probably because he was the only one with the scan data on the Shivan devices. And he looked away as his Mara followed the others into subspace.

The very same pilot was now in Capella. A fleet of Juggernauts had been around the star moments ago. They were gone. The star had gone supernova. The last of the civilian convoy that his squadron was protecting jumped through to Vega. The Terran corvette *Lemnos* didn't even try to get to the node. It could have made it, but so could the Shivan corvette it was stalling. And if that happened, the Terran ship would likely be destroyed anyway, followed by part of the convoy.

The pilot was once again making a mad dash for a node, only this time in vain. He could almost make it, but his Ares wasn't fast enough. The shock wave would hit him a few meters from the node. Once again, he was going to die. Except his time, nothing could save him. The wave hit, the fighter rocked, his hand accidentally slammed on the subspace drive activation button, the heat built, he passed out... and when he woke up, he was in Vega. With several burns of varying degrees, but he was alive.

The shock wave had knocked him into the node a second before his subspace drive engaged. If he had been in any other fighter besides an Ares, the heat would have gotten through the armor fast enough to kill him.

Vega, near the former Capella node

The pilot snapped out of his memories, adjusting the course of his Ares. His patrol was almost done.

Vega was quiet nowadays. But then most of the GTVA's systems were now, with the Neo-Terran Front gone and the Shivans 'blocked' from entering GTVA space. The noisy ones were where the GTVA was commissioning contractors to duplicate the Knossos portal, especially Delta Serpentis.

A wing of fighters passed by in a lazy formation. In front was the heavy Ares fighter, followed by two Erinyes on either side and a Myrmidon bringing up the rear. On the side of all of them was the squadron logo of the 70th Blue Lions.

The pilot in the Ares sighed. He hadn't seen a real battle in 6 months since the NTF was defeated and the jump node to Capella was closed. He was board. There were rumors flying that Admiral Bosch kept several NTF ships away from the Knossos blockade when he left so they could continue the fight, but nothing was heard since Command had declared victory in the NTF campaign. Besides, if any of the NTF was left, they'd have been found already.

A part of Captain Eric Locke hoped the rumors were true. A week into commanding his own squadron and the war was over.

"Board again, Alhazred?"

Locke snapped out of his reverie at the sound of his call-sign over the comm channel.

"What?" he replied.

"Yeah, I guess so..."

Short chuckles were heard from two of the other three fighters, one of them a mere 'heh.' The Vasudan equivalent, which the translator didn't even try to decipher, came from the Erinyes on the left.

"Real funny, Lilith. Maybe I should mistake your call-sign for your ship class..." Locke replied to his wingman.

"Yeah yeah... who would you like invited to your funeral? And should I wear my hair up or down?"

Once again, chuckling came from the other two fighters, although more at Lilith's hair joke. She was renowned on the Aquitaine for it's length. Most sane officers would bust her with a violation of regulations, but she managed to avoid that.

Locke sighed again, he wasn't doing very good in the comeback department today. He wasn't doing good today period. First his stealth fighter that he usually flew blew it's comm system, making it unusable for his current patrol. He liked his Ares well enough, but after a few missions in it he'd probably be challenged to a race back to the Aquitaine. Ares' were the slowest fighters. And then he had hit his head getting into it, forgetting that the canopy was lower than the one on the Pegasus. And then to top it off was a new pilot in the squad, who was currently piloting the Myrmidon. Trouble was he was a convict, sentenced to serve in a military branch of his choice. To make things worse, he had had no experience in a fighter at all. Locke hadn't even been told what he had done, or why in their right minds they would put him into an elite squadron.

"Tell me Lilith, is your hair the reason why there are such lines in front of the shower in your bunkroom?" The monotone computer voice sounded, translating the Vasudan speech.

"You bet Turel! I wake up every morning at 0400 just to get in there first and annoy everyone!"

The Vasudan chuckled. "Well, just don't catch it in the drain. You know some of those pipes are rusting, I don't want a wig falling on my head through my ceiling when I wake up."

"Oh really?" Lilith raised an eyebrow and looked at Turel through the comm window (while piping the image from her camera to the others.) She flipped him off. "Well, if that happens, you can take that wig, sit on it AND rotate!"

Now it was Locke's turn to share the laugh. The "gesture" had been meant in good humor of course. Now it was Turel's turn. He pulled his eyelids down with both of his middle fingers and looked at Lilith.

"Could you do that again? I have something in my eyes, and I can't see."

"Great, Vasudan's have learned to flip off, what's next?" Locke commented.

"Shivans do stripteases."

The other pilots pondered that for a second.

"That is... disgusting, Sniper... is it?" Lilith replied, not having actually met the new pilot.

"Good, and yes."

Lilith decided to change the subject. "Captain, what was the ship that disappeared last week? I've heard about five different names."

"I think it was the Vermilion." Locke replied. "Hecate class, brand new, too. You know, all the ships that have vanished could make a small armada..." he trailed off. A few minutes passed, and Locke spoke up again.

"We're done here." Locke announced, checking his objective list. It was just a normal 4 point patrol. He opened his long range comm channel. "GTD Aquitaine, this is Alpha wing, requesting permission to return to ship."

"Permission granted Alpha." The Aquitaine's comm officer answered.

With that, the fighters activated their subspace drives and headed home.

Capella

Capella was no longer a star system. Nothing natural was left, save for dead planetary debris. Supernovas tended to do that. Although there was still something there.

Filling the once proud GTVA territory, aside from the beginnings of a nebula, was a Shivan armada. Seventy Juggernauts were there, rather than the original eighty-two. Twelve of them had stayed behind to continue the process of destroying the star while the others entered subspace.

The rest was the normal assortment of ships: fighters, Cains, Liliths, Demons, Raksashas, and a few Ravanas.

And on one of the Juggernauts were two Terrans, both walking through the massive zero-g ship toward the bridge with magnetic boots. One was wearing the uniform of the Neo-Terran Front, the other a flight suit. Shivans floated and swung past them through the massive corridors.

"I don't care what we're planning... they give me the creeps." The officer whispered after another Shivan bounded past them, glancing in their direction briefly with it's compound eyes.

"You never told me why you agreed. You don't present the image of one who agrees out of fear after walking in on a plan." The man in the flight suit said.

"I was a plant." The officer answered. "A high ranking GTVA officer who 'defected' to the NTF. Easiest way to get someone close to Bosch. It worked better than I thought. I certainly didn't expect to be invited with him by the Shivans. I want to get the hell out of here, although I suppose I

would agree out of fear if such wasn't the case. And you?"

"Would you believe it's classified?" The pilot asked.

"I remember when officers got to say that to pilots..." They both shared a chuckle. "Are they... really going to do this?"

"I think so. I HOPE so. We never found out what Bosch was planning but I'd much rather have an advanced warning as opposed to his solution. If we pull this off and the GTVA can prepare on a scale large enough to win again. Especially with this thing... what *is* Bosch doing, anyway?"

The officer chuckled. "Ah my friend. That's classified."

"I'm not surprised..." the pilot quirked with a smile, not really realizing that the statement didn't make sense. "Wait a minute... if you're not really NTF, does that mean I have to call you 'sir' after all?"

GTD Aquitaine, Eric Locke's quarters, 1930 hours

"Come in!" the pilot yelled after hearing the chime, banging on the screen in the wall. His access terminal hadn't been working right for two days and maintenance still hadn't gotten around to fixing it.

Locke's quarters often spooked those who didn't know him. He almost never turned on the lights, but torches and lightly scented candles were lit everywhere. In one place that was lavishly decorated with candles and engravings was a pedestal, on which sat one of the last remaining copies of the Necronomicon, a testament to his callsign. Most of the walls were adorned with symbols from said book. On one wall hung a metal scythe, engraved with runes on one side of the handle.

Locke himself wore a long coat over his uniform (sans the jacket) with the hood down. On the back was the Blue Lions' squad logo. And if necromancy was sorcery, he would be very tempted to put some kind of bad mojo on the maintenance crew for taking so long to fix one little problem.

"Maintenance still hasn't come by, I see." Admiral Petrarch casually stated as he walked in. The Admiral was not a tall man, and his receding hair had a tint of gray, but his presence still earned him respect.

Shit! Locke screamed in his mind, quickly standing at attention and saluting his superior. "Sir!"

"At ease, Captain." The admiral replied, returning the salute. "This is off the record. I've been ordered to inform the crew of this on a need to know basis, Despite the fact everyone will be told sooner or later. I think it would be prudent to let the pilots know ahead of time so you can be ready. I'm informing the squad commanders personally, and I want you to brief your pilots on your next duty shift. None of this is to be repeated outside of your squadron yet, is that clear?"

"Yes sir!"

"Good. This is the command briefing." Petrarch said as he gave Locke a small disk. The Admiral left, and Locke played the file.

It was a surveillance drone recording. Three corvettes were on patrol, one Sobek and two Deimos'. A subspace node opened off to the side of them, and a Hecate class destroyer jumped in parallel to the corvettes. A few seconds later the beam cannons, anti-fighter and otherwise, on the side and front of the Hecate fired. One of the Deimos' was sliced in half, while the other two ships returned fire as they took damage. In the next volley, the remaining corvettes were destroyed. The Hecate jumped out, with minimal damage to its hull. The Admiral's voice came over as the scene repeated in typical command briefing fashion.

"At 0115 hours, The GTCv Harpoon, the GTCv Malcolm, and the GVCv Pstotle were destroyed by the GTD Vermilion while patrolling Ross 128. An hour later..." Petrarch's voice explained, "The ships that have gone MIA over the past two weeks appeared and declared themselves loyal to the NTF."

The picture changed to star map, showing wire frames of the Aquitaine and several other GTVA ships, and highlighting Ross 128. "Allied Command has ordered the Aquitaine and several other ships to enter Ross 128 and assess the threat. If possible, our battle group is to put down the insurrection swiftly. If not, we will await Allied reinforcements. We will leave tomorrow afternoon at 1400 hours."

Capella

"How exactly are we pulling this off?" The NTF plant asked.

"Well..." the pilot answered, pushing buttons on one of the non-important consoles of the Juggernaut's bridge, trying to find what he was looking for in the unfamiliar language. "Here it is. First, we wait until the Shivans bring the Knossos on line."

The screen showed a Knossos portal.

"This ship's orders are to go through the portal once the node stabilizes and just destroy everything we see. What we're actually going to do..."

The screen showed the Sathanas moving to the Knossos.

"...is destroy the Knossos as we go through. See, the node won't permanently open unless the portal is active for several hours. We'll blow it after our escort goes through, and then go through ourselves before the reaction stops." The Sathanas on the screen fired at the portal, destroying it. "The node will collapse a few minutes later. This is the last Knossos the Shivans have; they never bothered to learn how to duplicate it. And the device can't be shut down once it's active, so they can't move one of the others. From what this ship's captain tells me, the Shivans have minimal scientific resources; just what they need to make more weapons and the like. It'll be years, maybe a decade or two, before they can figure out how to make a new one. I've got a friendly IFF signal ready to transmit once we get there, plus, the comm operator will send a message to the Shivan fleet just as we jump saying I escaped and managed to reach weapons control before they killed me. He'll send it as we go through."

"And let me guess..." The officer answered. "We blow the escort to kingdom come once we reach Vega?"

"That's the idea. I just hope there's no GTVA ships nearby, it'll be easier to broadcast to several from a distance rather than send to one that'll be trying to blow us all to hell."

"Something tells me it wouldn't be a problem. The Colossus almost blew her weapons grid when the first Sathanas was destroyed. I don't think we'll have to worry about being blown away before we can convey our intentions."

"Terrans..." a deep, rumbling voice came. The two looked over to the Shivan floating at the command station. The ship's commanding officer had learned Terran Standard to make what was coming easier. "...perhaps you should take the comm station now. We will be departing in one of your hours."

The officer removed the NTF insignia from his uniform and replaced it with his GTVA pin, and followed the pilot over.

GTDA Aquitaine, pilot's lounge, 2000 hours

"What'll it be, Captain?"

"I don't know... what's the strongest stuff you got?" Locke replied to the bartender as he sat down. The hood of his robe was up, the customary way of wearing the thick leather overcoat in public.

"Hmm... that's tough. A Vasudan Twilight, if I have to guess." The bartender answered.

"I'll take that. Leave the bottle." Locke said. He felt like getting a little drunk.

The bartender went off to get the order, and someone sat on the stool next to Locke.

"May I join you Captain?" a computerized voice asked.

"Of course Turel." The Squadron Commander answered as the bartender brought the drink. "What's on your mind?" Locke asked.

"Nothing in particular Sir..."

"We're off duty, you don't have to call me that. Maybe I'll make that a rule for the Blue Lions even while on duty; don't call the commander Sir." Locke joked. He hated being called sir. He downed a shot of the drink and choked.

"Vasudan drinks often have a higher amount of alcohol than Terran ones." Turel stated, forcing a monotone voice through the translator.

"Yeah... {choke} I noticed... I think... {choke} I'll get some of those new pills that sober you up before I get smashed... {choke choke} I'll be right back." Locke coughed as he stumbled away.

Turel nodded and ordered a small dish. He found that sampling Terran food could be quite... exciting since his assignment in the Terran/Vasudan officer exchange program started.

"Hey... hey, Vasudan!"

Turel turned around. "Yes?"

"What the fuck you doing here?! Huh?"

"I beg your pardon?" Turel answered to the human, understanding the profanity but not the purpose of using it.

"Your dumb ass race killed my grandfather in the war! Give me one good reason why I shouldn't kill you right now!"

The human wasn't drunk, Turel guessed from the lack of alcohol on the man's breath. No, what he was dealing with was a bona-fide racist. He also noticed that the pilot's uniform had the squad insignia of the Blue Lions. "Perhaps because that war was almost fifty years ago?"

"Hah! I should've joined the NTF when I had the chance!" the human pulled a knife and held it at Turel's neck. A crowd was starting to gather. The Vasudan didn't flinch.

"Perhaps, Terran, it would interest you to know that *my*... grandparents, as you call them, were killed when a wing of GTA fighters mistook their transport for the one they were supposed to destroy."

"All the better, less of you bas-"

He never finished his sentence. He didn't even get to scream. A hand wrapped around his neck and threw him back first onto the bar. It didn't let go as the knife careened away.

"Listen to me *very* carefully." Alhazred stated coldly as he held the pilot down by the neck. "If I EVER hear so much as one comment out of you insulting a squad mate again OR any more of

your racial garbage, I will have you kicked out of this squadron so fast you'll go through the hull! And FURTHERMORE..." Locke squeezed harder, prompting an airless gasp from the pilot. "I do NOT want to hear any shit about joining the NTF. Am I understood!?"

The pilot gasped again, trying to breath in. "Yes... sir."

"Good."

Locke let him go and sat back down as if nothing happened. But then he grabbed the bottle of Vasudan Twilight.

"Perhaps you should... never mind." Turel stopped as Locke chugged.

"Tell me Turel, how can you sit there without moving while someone has a knife to your throat? Weren't you... nervous or anything?"

"Vasudans do not have vital blood vessels in the front of our necks."

"Ahh." Alhazred replied, chugging some more. "Turel, if you don't mind me asking... was that true, what you said? Your grandparents?"

Turel simply nodded.

"I'm sorry." Locke went on. "You know, it embarrasses me to think that some of my race would do that. Mister unwilling-to-let-the-past-die over there is a great example. I just *love* the thought of having him in my squad."

"It's not like we were any better during that war... yes, I distinctly remember learning about the Sirius medical ship massacre." Turel said.

"Is he drunk yet Turel? He sung some old 20th century earth rock this one time..."

The two turned around, finding Lilith standing behind them with a pad. Alhazred didn't even try to deny what she was talking about, he couldn't outwit Lilith if his life depended on it. She had the advantage of being his second in command and of holding the same rank as he did, meaning his only authority over her pertained to the Squadron.

"Did I miss something?" she said, eyeing the broken glass on the floor and the counter.

"You could say that." Locke answered.

"Well, I have just the thing to brighten you up." She remarked sarcastically. "I did some digging, and I found out exactly what our gross little Sniper did. I think I know why we weren't told in the first place. His call-sign fits him nicely." She handed him the pad.

Locke read the display. "Convicted at blah blah blah, sentenced to military service... convicted of following crimes... rape... oh, joy."

"Go on, Captain. That's not the half of it."

Locke read on. "Also convicted of manslaughter and..." Locke's eyes darted back to the words he just read. He was too shocked to read it aloud. "Becky, you ARE kidding!"

"I'm afraid not."

"And they sentence him to military service? Hell, they even give him a damn choice?"

"Seems so." Lilith answered with a not-so-lighthearted smile.

Alhazred rubbed his temples. "That's it. I'm going to bed."

* * *

Capella

"There they go..." the pilot commented as the Demon class warships jumped through the Knossos. The Sathanas was not far behind.

The Shivan captain gave an order in an unfamiliar language. The Juggernaut's four heavy beam cannons roared to life, slicing through the eight structures of the Knossos as they moved through each other. All eight parts split in half and drifted away, and the Sathanas jumped through to Vega.

GTD Aquitaine, bridge

"What the hell..." was all Admiral Petrarch could say as he watched the two Demons jump into the system. Fighters and bombers swarmed out of the Shivan capital ships. Petrarch ordered the pilots to scramble and the Aquitaine's beam cannons armed, and finally he ordered the communications officer to inform Allied Command of the situation.

"Sir, something else is coming out of subspace!" one of the officer's reported. Most of the fighters were out and were about to engage the Shivans... and the bridge crew stared in horror as a Sathanas Juggernaut jumped in.

The readout on Petrarch's personal console told him the Sathanas was powering its forward beam cannons.

"All hands, brace for im..." he started into the intercom. The Admiral was too shocked and confused at what happened when the Juggernaut fired to finish the sentence.

The Juggernaut's heavy beams converged on the center of one of the Demons. A few seconds passed, during which the massive weaponry tore through its target, until the Demon's hull buckled and the ship exploded. The beams died down, only to charge again and repeat the process with the other Demon.

"What the hell just happened?" one of the pilots asked to no one in general.

"I don't care what just happened, we've got enemy fighters swarming around! Blue Lions, break and attack! And no one try to play hero on that Juggernaut!" Alhazred ordered.

A wing of Nephilim bombers headed for the Aquitaine, while a wing of Naheemas suddenly turned and headed for the Juggernaut. The Aquitaine's anti-fighter beams fired at the bombers, destroying half the wing. The other half outmaneuvered the GTD's gunners and fired, hitting the Aquitaine hard with their torpedoes.

"Get out of there, Aquitaine! You don't stand a chance!" the officer on call at Allied Command ordered.

"I would like nothing less, but the torpedoes that just hit us knocked out our subspace engines. We aren't going anywhere." Petrarch reported.

Alhazred glanced over his squad's craft. Turel was the only one flying an interceptor, and his Pegasus was just as fast.

"Turel, on my wing. We need to take out those bombers."

On the Aquitaine's bridge, Petrarch was watching the Juggernaut intently. He hadn't noticed it, but for some reason, the Juggernaut was giving off a friendly IFF signal.

The Sathanas had destroyed the Naheemas that had turned toward it. Another bomber wing was heading for them.

"Helm, bring our starboard side to bear on the incoming fighters." Petrarch ordered, noting the last ones had hit their port side. "Gunners, fire at will."

"I've got it!" Alhazred stated, aligning his fighter exactly with the last torpedo fired by the Nephilims. He pressed the missile trigger and watched as dual Tempests rushed out and slammed into the torpedo.

"One down!" Turel reported as the bomber he had attacked exploded. The other was trying to get far enough away to launch more ordnance at the Aquitaine. Alhazred outran it easily. As his fighter zoomed past, he spun around, and fired.

The Pegasus could only load two guns, but that was all Locke needed with the weapon authorization he had. The synchronized Kaisers fired six times before Alhazred let go of the trigger. The first 2 shots hit the bomber's shields. The next bit into its hull. The next two hit dead center, and the bomber exploded as the last shot hit.

Locke's Pegasus rocked from gunfire, and several shots flew underneath him. Realizing a fighter had come up behind him, he hit his afterburners and sped off.

The Sathanas

"Almost got it..." the pilot reported. "Damn it! This thing has no compatibility with our comm systems whatsoever!"

"All of the fighters that the Demons launched have been destroyed." The officer passed on as he walked over. "The Captain tells me the destroyer is coming to bear..." the ship shook for a split second. "...and I would venture a guess that it's firing."

"What ship is that?" The pilot asked.

The officer looked at a screen showing the destroyer and zoomed in on the name.

"The Aquitaine. Admiral Petrarch's ship."

"We can try now..." the pilot said, still frantically hitting switches and crossing wires in open panels. "...but we may not get much."

"Put me on." The officer ordered.

GTD Aquitaine

"Sir, we can't hit its heavy beam cannons from here." One of the gunners reported.

"Helm, bring us closer and to the Juggernaut's starboard side. We can't retreat, but maybe we can-"

"Sir!" the communications officer yelled. "There's a... signal coming in. From the Shivan Juggernaut."

"We're getting it too, Admiral." Command reported. "It's audio only..."

"Put it through." Petrarch ordered. A burst of static came over the speakers, and a faint human voice.

"Att...Com...and, thi.....Edomas.....friendly, repea..."

"Can you clear that up?" Petrarch asked the comm officer.

"No Sir, the interference is at their end."

The static suddenly lessened, and another voice could be heard in the background.

"I think I've got it, try again."

"Attention GTVA Command and GTD Aquitaine! This is General Edward Thomas. This ship is friendly, I repeat, this ship is friendly! Do not fire!"

"Hold your fire, Aquitaine!" Command ordered, a bit fast with just the word of a supposed general to take. "All fighters, return to your ship!"

GTDA Aquitaine, pilot's lounge, 2235 hours

Alhazred sat at the table closest to the room's large window. One leg was on the chair in front of him, and his overcoat was draped over the back of the one he was sitting in. Outside the window, the Sathanas Juggernaut hung in space, motionless. It was the cause of the insomnia that had gripped the ship's crew.

"Mind if I join you?"

"Be my guest, Beck." Locke replied, before turning his head back to the window. "You can't sleep either?"

"Not with that thing out there. What do you think they're doing?" Lilith asked.

"Damned if I know." Locke replied. "I haven't heard anything about what's going on."

"Captain... did you really destroy one of those... things?" Lilith asked, not really believing the stories.

Locke chuckled. "Is *that* how it's being told? I didn't think I was *that* well known. No, the Colossus destroyed the first one, I just took out some beam weapons. Damn, that thing was a shame. Twenty years to build and it's gone in twenty minutes. Did you get to see it? The Colossus I mean?"

Lilith shook her head. Locke didn't think she had.

"What's SOC like?" Lilith suddenly came out with

"Why?"

"I was offered an assignment in it. Nothing big, but still, I heard you worked for them a couple times?" She explained.

"Well, I *did* get to fly a Shivan fighter. And I almost got fried on that one. One of the other pilots saved my ass. Let me tell you a story..."

"Captain Locke to the war room. Captain Locke to the war room." The intercom sounded.

"How do they know I'm awake?" Locke pondered as he stood and swung his overcoat on, leaving the hood down. All of this and he still had to brief his squadron about the new NTF situation in the morning.

GTDA Aquitaine, war room

The war room was usually heavily manned at all times, with technicians and operators working the many systems or plotting on the clear star maps, even in peace time. But for some reason, it was empty.

"Admiral." Locke saluted as he walked into the room, greeting Petrarch. There was a woman in the room, wearing the uniform of a GTVI officer. Petrarch returned the salute.

"Captain. This is Major Crystal Griffith, from the GTVI. Your squadron is being... re-

assigned."

"Pardon sir?"

"I'll explain Captain." The Intelligence Officer offered. She walked over to the center table and flipped a switch on a hand unit. The lights dimmed, and a holographic image appeared over the table in green wire frames. "I assume you know what this is?"

"Yes Sir. Shivan Juggernaut Sathanas." Locke nodded. "And I have a feeling it's the one sitting a few clicks off of the Aquitaine's starboard bow?"

"Indeed it is Captain." Griffith answered. "And as for <i>why</i> it's there, to put it simply, the crew has... switched sides."

Locke blinked. He took a second to process that. He figured from the transmissions from the Juggernaut that some NTF officers got scared and commandeered the ship, and hadn't really noticed that that wouldn't be possible

"Before you ask Captain, yes, I am serious. We've already registered and christened the ship the GTVJ Mendacus." Griffith went on. "You see, about a year ago, a certain General Edward Thomas defected to the NTF. The rebels couldn't have asked for something better; an experienced general with knowledge of GTVA movements to prove his loyalty. The fact of the matter is, we spent months building him a reputation that would coincide with his defection. We made sure his information was accurate. We told him to get any information he could. I'm sure you've guessed by now that he was a plant."

"I have." Locke answered.

"We sent him off... and aside from the normal information he sent us. We never heard from him again. Until now. When Bosch and his immediate subordinates were picked up by the Shivans, Thomas was invited with them. The full situation will be told to you at a later date."

"If I may ask..." Locke spoke up. "What does this have to do with me or my squad?"

Petrarch jumped in. "What is being planned requires the utmost haste. The Aquitane is the only ship in this part of the system. And the Blue Lions, being the ship's elite squadron, is the only logical choice for this."

"For what? You said we're being transferred Admiral..."

"To the Mendacus." Griffith finished.

"Begging your pardon Sir but... WHAT?!" Locke exclaimed.

"We've had a plan of what to do in case Shivans ever defect since the first Great War, Captain. It's one of the few things of the old GTI that we managed to pick up after the Hades rebellion. This speedy handling of things is a part of it. With the information we just received, it's changed a little bit. But the fundamentals remain the same. Believe it or not, none of this is confidential in the least. It will be made public in several days. Despite the claims of General Thomas, his companion, and the Shivan crew, we can't take the chance that they're trying to set us up. A large portion of that crew is being replaced with Terrans and Vasudans to ensure that ship stays on our side. The Shivans have agreed to this and are cooperating fully. By this time tomorrow, most of the ones taken off will be assigned duties in the GTVA. You are the replacement for a Shivan squadron. Despite it's size, that Juggernaut only has two fighter squadrons. It's made with direct assaults in mind, as opposed to fighter skirmishes. We're replacing one of those squadrons. With the Blue Lions."

"Sir..." Locke started to protest.

"This is a direct order Captain, you don't have a choice here." Griffith cut him off. "Your Squad's fighters and ordinance have already been transferred. You and your pilots will follow in the morning. You'll pilot the transport yourself, it's staying there since Shivan transports don't accommodate Terrans or Vasudans without heavy modifications."

Petrarch jumped in again. "You'll brief your Squad on the new NTF situation on the Juggernaut, Captain. The Sathanas will play a large role in solving this problem. For reasons that the Shivan commander will brief you on, we must defeat the NTF once and for all, and quickly. You are dismissed Captain. Get some sleep, you'll need it."

Locke saluted his superiors and left, several things on his mind. His most prominent thought was simple:

Sleep? What the hell is that?

* * *

GTD Aquitaine, Blue Lions' briefing room, 0700 hours

Locke quickly scanned the room, making sure everyone was present and accounted for.

Locke shouted above the murmurs of his squad. They silenced, and paid attention.

"I'm sure everyone is wondering exactly what the hell is going on around here. Well, you're all going to find out. We're being transferred."

More whispers and a general air of disbelief followed.

"I want everyone packed and ready to go by 1100 hours. Our transport is in bay 7."

"Captain..." Lilith stood up. "Where exactly are we being stationed? And what does being transferred have to do with what's going on here?"

"I'm not even going to try to explain it now, it's fairly... extraordinary. You'll all get a new command briefing upon our arrival. We don't have a choice, as was made very clear to me early this morning. This is a direct order from GTVI. And before anyone gets a chance to ask after you see exactly where we're going, transfer requests will be denied." Locke finished. "Dismissed."

GTD Aquitaine, Captain Locke's quarters, 1045 hours

Alhazred went through his packed belongings to make sure he hadn't forgotten anything. Everything but the book pedestal and scythe was in two extra-large military issue duffel bags. He had had the bladed weapon brought to the transport already. His ceremonial necessities were in one bag, and the Necronomicon was in the other. His overcoat and his other clothes were folded over the book, which in turn was jammed in with his flight gear. Satisfied, Locke brought the bag straps over his neck, tucked the meter-and-a-half high pedestal under his arm, and left. The more he thought about it, the less he liked this idea. He could live with being on a defected Shivan Juggernaut for awhile, the question was, would his squad stay calm long enough to take their briefings and have the situation explained. He wondered if maybe he should have dropped the whole bomb the night before after all.

Silly me, I forgot to tell maintenance exactly how to get the paint off the walls... he thought with more sarcasm than a high school druggie had for authority. He headed for the docking bay, it would take him good 10 minutes to get there since the lifts near his quarters were knocked out when the Aquitaine was bombed.

"That is everyone except Captain Locke." Turel reported. He and Lilith were taking account of everyone who boarded the transport to ensure the entire squadron was on.

"I've got that too. He's still got..." she looked at her watch. "Three minutes before we can rag him for being late."

"I'll pass." Locke stated as he walked up. "Everyone on?"

"Everyone but us. I assume our fighters are already at our new post, wherever that may be? Oh. There's no transport pilot." Lilith asked.

"They are. And I'm the pilot. After you?" Locke motioned. Lilith and Turel boarded, and Locke followed, heading for the cockpit. He was thankful the transport had no windows except up front. He trusted his squadron to accept what was going on once it was explained to them, but he also knew that any sane person would severely question it first, and he preferred that that happen in the nice, open docking bay rather than a cramped transport.

One pre-flight check later, the transport was on its way.

GTVJ Mendacus, flight deck

Locke set the transport down on the deck. The sound of the transport landing was unique. He could already hear several of the pilots asking each other if there was any reason or place to land after just taking off. Locke stood and made sure to be the first one out, assuring everyone that they were indeed 'here.'

The flight deck was just plain freaky. A heavy mist was settled on the floor and rose two feet up. The large room was dimly lit with red lighting. Shivan fighters and bombers lined several places on one of the walls, some on shelves higher up. On the other wall, organized in the same fashion, were the Blue Lions' craft. The walls themselves were lined with carved patterns, and every so often there was a plate of red giving off light. The room radiated a sense of life, as if the walls were watching them.

Lilith and Turel were the first out of the transport.

"It appears we did not go far after all." Turel stated, eyeing the Aquitaine through the open bay doors.

"Wait a minute..." Lilith started, realization sinking in. "If that's the Aquitaine, then we're... Captain, are we...?"

Locke noticed that his squadron was starting to leave the transport. *Now's as good a time as any...* he thought as the rest of them took in their surroundings, some of them realizing the same thing as Lilith and Turel.

"Yes." Locke stated flat out. "This is the Shivan Juggernaut. And yes, this is our new post."

"Captain, if I may ask..." Sniper spoke up as the murmurs of confusion started up. "Exactly what *is* going on?"

Locke didn't get to answer. Footsteps echoed through the massive room. A Terran in a GTVA officer's uniform walked up to the group and saluted Alhazred.

"Yes Sir." Locke saluted back, noticing from the rank on the man's uniform that he was a commodore.

"Commodore Ethan Ronald, ship's XO. I came down to show you to your briefing room and the part of the ship where your squad's quarters are housed. And the Captain would like to see you after you brief your pilots."

GTVJ Mendacus, Blue Lions' briefing room

The briefing room had a much more welcoming atmosphere than the docking bay. Although the room was still made of the same black material lined with designs of glowing red, it was considerably brighter and less humid. Whatever the Shivans sat on (if they even sat) had been replaced with seats to accommodate Terrans and Vasudans. Locke stood at what looked reasonably like a podium. Much to his squadron's relief, he explained what was going on as was told to him earlier, ending with the new NTF situation.

The pilots took some comfort in finally understanding the situation. They took more comfort in the fact that the Shivans were vastly outnumbered on the ship by Terrans and Vasudans. Most noticeably, they delighted in the fact that they would be fighting again.

At least, almost all of them.

"And you expect us to stay here on this Shivan piece of shit?!"

Not again... Locke sighed. "As you were, Ensign!"

It was the same pilot that had attacked Turel.

"For what? Asking a question?"

Locke sighed. He was really getting sick of this guy. He stood down from the podium and walked over to the Ensign. When he got there, he hit the button to open the door.

"Yes, I expect you to stay here." Locke flat out stated. "You heard me yesterday, transfer requests will be denied. If you want out, there's the door." The squad leader pointed out into the hallway. "Just give me a letter of resignation on the way."

The pilot sat down.

Locke dismissed the Squadron. Almost every pilot went to their quarters, both amazed that none of them had to share rooms anymore and to think about what was happening. Lilith and a couple others went back to the docking bay, itching for a look at the Shivan fighters.

Locke, however, had an appointment with the Shivan Captain.

Commodore Ronald was waiting outside of the briefing room to lead Locke to the bridge. Locke quickly stepped against a wall as an alien like nothing he could picture rounded a corner and bounded past them.

"Was that a..." he stuttered out, watching the multi-limbed creature continue on and out of sight at a speed faster than any Terran or Vasudan could dream of, even with the gravity on in this part of the ship.

"Yes." Ronald replied, smirking. "I had the same reaction. The Captain can speak Terran Standard fluently."

"That'll... make things easier."

A few lift rides later, and the two were on the bridge. The only Shivans were the Captain, the communications officer, and the helmsman. The primary gunner station was being manned by a Terran, with two Vasudans on the secondary consoles. A Vasudan had the Navigation station. The Captain was standing on his three hind limbs. It looked rather odd, but the Shivan could easily walk with gravity this way. He turned around, and after a second, spoke.

"Captain Locke, I presume? You'll forgive me, I have not yet had time to learn any Terran greetings."

"That's... alright."

"Come with me, Captain. We have much to discuss."

Author's notes: This continues from FS2. Complete with some HP Lovecraft thrown in... oh yeah, this is NOT a self-insertion (you'll see why I have to say this once you start reading...)