

Gate To Haven

"...and as news of the newly christened GTVJ Mendacus continues to spread, it seems that discontent has remained closely behind. Unconfirmed reports from our sources inside the GTVA say that the NTF is reforming because of this situation with the Shivans, and communities on populated worlds have also made their anger at this situation known. One reaction involved a riot at the GTVA military recruiting offices in Beta Aquilae, though the situation was quickly contained and appears to be an isolated incident."

"Captain..."

"Not a word," came the icy response from Locke as he walked past Sniper and Turel outside the door.

They didn't follow.

"The GTVA general assembly has also been criticized for their decisions involving the defecting Shivans. It would seem that the government is perfectly willing to risk public discontent for these so-called defectors. Oddly enough, some of the strongest supporters of the situation are officers and pilots who fought in the so-called 'Battle of Capella.'

Bridge

"I'm not sure you understand command..."

The Shivan mentally sighed from the middle of the bridge, wondering if the clear comm system was a good thing after all. He was beginning to understand why the Terrans could get frustrated with their superiors and hoped the Vasudans couldn't be worse.

"Captain, you've put down three destroyers and several cruisers. The only losses were the pilot killed by the defector and the defector himself. What isn't to understand?"

"Even so, the rumors of a resurrected NTF involve Battle of Capella survivors who have refused to follow the decision regarding the Shivans. The military has confirmed reports of several battle ships disappearing and the timing for this apparent new insurgency coincided with the latest reports, however the first incidents precede the Mendacus' arrival into Terran-Vasudan space."

"Apparently a lot! Every pilot was briefed on our plans for resolving this conflict swiftly. Ships, personnel, several supply lines, where the Mendacus is going..."

Relishing, the Captain. He knew he wouldn't be able to get away with telling a superior what was wrong with them in a blatant manner for long, but for now he could fall back on the excuse of different customs.

"In other news, experts are saying that the GTVA is on the verge of a major economic depression. Losses to the Neo-Terran Front and the Shivans are finally starting to build up, especially with the Capellan refugees that are concurrently being relocated and the loss of Capella itself. Adding to this, the General Assembly has authorized the Security Council to up their military reconstruction efforts, diverting more funds away from relief and into war readiness."

"I see. Very well Captain, thank you for the report. You'll receive new orders shortly; Command out."

At least he accepts his oversights... The Shivan thought as the screen changed to a black background with the animated symbol of the GTVA and the words 'End communiqué' in an elegant font.

"This has been Jane Rockwell; Aquilae News. Back to you, Tom!"

* * *

The darkness of the room was perfect. The few candles gave enough light to see the basic furniture and items in the room, and gave enough light for Alhazred to do what he planning. He hadn't slept last night; he couldn't. His second in command, his *friend* had been murdered and he did nothing but blame himself. But he might as well pay his respects.

The Shivan doctor looked through some materials in the med bay, found it odd that one of the Terran first-aid kits that he'd been given was missing, and made a note to look into it later

Said kit was on the small cot that had just been put in Locke's quarters. He stood at the pedestal that he kept his Necronomicon on, his back to the door, and a copper dagger in his hand. He looked at his wrist, then the blade and back, before opening the book. After flipping through it a bit, he found the page he wanted. He glanced at the picture on the bottom of the page, and then to the one painted in white on the floor to make sure they were identical. The circle and runes inside matched perfectly. He could do the ceremony now... it was one of the pages that gave him trouble in translating, but he got the chant down, it was simple and a little repetitive. And from what he gathered, it was a blessing to friends gone before their time, a rather bloody blessing, but part of his beliefs, nonetheless. He brought the dagger to his wrist, but brought it away again, his hand trembling. Self-injury wasn't something he was good at.

"Delivery!" Dr. Hargrove exclaimed as the Med Bay door opened and she wheeled in a cart full of Terran/Vasudan medical equipment. The Doctor perked up at the thought of new toys to play with. She had also managed to drag in Turel, in his flight suit since the Blue Lions were on call for another hour. Being the only Vasudan aboard who wasn't immediately busy at the moment, Turel would get to enjoy being the Doctor's guinea pig for learning about the species' anatomy.

The leader of the Blue Lions looked with a determined expression at his book, the dagger tapping from his wrist to his palm and back again, like he was considering which to choose. He seemed to opt for the hand, because a second later he sliced his palm open over an old wine goblet, some of the red liquid spattering off of the knife and hitting the floor.

Locke's eyes widened, but he forced them to remain on the book. Any thoughts about the self inflicted injury not hurting for a few minutes due to shock or anything else were stamped out as the pain hit; sharp, cut-like, reminding him of a deep gash he once received as a hyperactive child. His voice came out shaky as he read...

"...that darkness is fire which evil can light, and burn on the pyre always too bright..."

"Isn't that enough?" Turel asked from his seat on a bed, a little bleary eyed from having so much blood drawn.

"Well, I suppose," the doctor responded, removing the needle from the Vasudan's arm. "I need even more, actually. But I can stave off the more wild tests and experiments for when the Vasudan science team gets here and I can sap from them too..."

"That is not dead which can eternal lie, and with strange aeons even death may die."

"Hmmm... oh yes, skin sample!" exclaimed the Doctor. Before Turel could ask, the Shivan dug a scalpel into his arm and came out with a piece of leathery tissue.

Turel's 'words' didn't translate. Vasudan profanity didn't have Terran or Shivan equivalents.

"That which is spared from life, and those who continue torn by strife..."

The Vasudan pilot's gaze wandered to the right wall a few feet further down the room. It was a bank of freezers, not unlike a morgue but used for different purposes. At least, under normal circumstances. One of them was big enough for a Terran body.

The Doctor was wise enough to shut up and leave the Vasudan to his thoughts of mourning.

"That is not dead which can eternal lie, and with strange aeons even death may die."

And then the sound of something banging against metal rang... from the other side of the wall. Turel and the doctor traded glances of curiosity before scurrying over.

Another sound, and what could have been a moan. But which compartment it was coming from, that was the question...

"That is not dead which can eternal lie, and with strange aeons even death may die."

The Shivan slid a section open... nothing.

"That is not dead which can eternal lie, and with strange aeons even death may die."

"...even death may die..." Alhazred repeated one more time, before picking up the goblet with his good hand and pouring the blood over the seal on the floor. He honestly hadn't expected anything to happen, but surreally, the dark liquid moved and outlined the rune, soaking into the powder, before appearing to sink into the floor. The odd drawing itself vanished with it. This was certainly unexpected.

"Mmmm... what hit me... eh? ...the Hell?! What's goin' on?! Lemme' out!"

"Talk about.... erahhh..." grunted Locke as he pulled a bandage around his hand. "...Taking your beliefs seriously... weird... I need to translate all of that page..."

With that, he went to leave his quarters. He could figure out what exactly happened later. And he quite literally walked into a pilot that was about to ring his door-chime... a pilot he didn't recognize.

"Urm, sorry, Captain!" the pilot quickly snapped, saluting.

"Relax... lieutenant..." replied Locke, returning the salute but not feeling awake enough to put a lot of energy into it, probably due to blood loss. "...do I know you?"

"No sir!" answered the newcomer. "I've just been ordered to transfer from SOC to your squadron. They don't want me leaving this ship, I guess." He handed Locke a pad with the paperwork displayed. Locke took a second to skim it, flipping by the people and reasons for the transfer. He could get to that later. For now he wanted a name. And in his haste he didn't think of hiding his injured hand to avoid explaining it and took the pad in it.

"Captain, are you... okay?"

"Hmm?" replied Locke, who suddenly noticed his injury again. "Oh yes... cut myself polishing a blade... welcome to the Blue Lions... Lt. Robert Edwards..."

Alhazred blinked at the next part. "Call-sign, Xinnny?" he thought aloud. The pilot acknowledged him while Locke remembered the second SOC mission he took...

"...Two of our top pilots, Xinnny and Zero, will take Alpha's three and four respectively."

He hadn't known or had met the other pilots except for Snipes, but Alpha 3 had been the Mara that had moved to take the missiles for him. It made perfect sense. The fighter had been awkwardly sent tumbling in the Juggernauts' direction, the Mendacus must've been there and picked him up. Still, he wanted to know if he was right.

3?" "So you've been on this ship for six months? This is the one that picked you up near Knossos

"...how did you know about that?"

"Lucky guess..." Locke played stupid. "I knew you took a missile for another pilot and got disabled, just put two and two together."

Xinny snorted.

"Yeah, well, he was the only one with the scan data we needed to get back... His call-sign was Alhazred, I think... guy couldn't have flown a box, I don't know what the brass saw in him asking him to volunteer... musta' just known someone high up and got it to get a nice career advance... he was already a Commander too, youngest sounding I've ever flown with... I'd still like to know how you know so much, Captain."

I'm going to have fun with this... Locke thought, before speaking again.

"Well, this seems to be in order. Welcome again, lieutenant." Locke said, handing the pad back. "If you have any questions, just find Captain Locke; Call-sign Alhazred."

Locke walked away giving the pilot a mock pat on the shoulder, chuckling. Standing there for a minute, Xinny let his mind realize how badly he had just screwed himself over.

* * *

Medical

"Captain, would you PLEASE sit down?!" the Doctor begged, as he saw the woman put on the translator

Lilith zipped her uniform jacket. Now fully clothed, she turned around.

"No, I will NOT. In less than a day, I've been stabbed, poisoned, DEAD, frozen solid, and suddenly alive again. You'll excuse me if this is a lot to take in..." she answered, pacing around. "So... I was dead."

"Yes."

"You're sure?!" she snapped.

"Yes, I'm sure!" The Shivan answered, turning to Turel. "You're her friend, calm her down!"

"Lilith... please, let him run some tests. I'm glad you're alive but this isn't exactly normal..."

"Turel, thank you, but shut up." The Terran replied.

The Vasudan rolled his eyes.

"Look, Captain, you want to know what happened, so do I. Why don't you let me figure it out?" the Shivan proposed.

"Fine..." she sat down, too on edge to come up with an argument to his logic.

"I'll find Captain Locke, he should be told about this immediately... okay, I won't find him." Turel corrected himself as Locke walked through the door, holding a bandaged and bloody hand.

"Find me? Why... what's... going on?" said Locke, noticing his now-alive second in command.

"We'd like to know ourselves..." the Doctor added. He ran an odd looking scanner over her. "Hmmm... brain activity's fine, vital systems working right... what's this?"

"What?" she asked. He responded by grabbing a syringe off of the table and drawing blood in record time.

"I have absolutely no idea... but at least now I have something to run a test on. That looks very nasty, Captain Locke. What did you do, have second thoughts about suicide?"

"Very funny. Would you happen to have a thinner bandage?"

"I do, and lucky you, they're coated with a rather stinging disinfectant."

"Yah hooo..." Locke answered sarcastically. Still, he couldn't fly with the huge wrapping that was around his hand right now.

Medical suddenly rang with an odd, repeating sound. Sort of like an electronic click that resonated, stopped, and repeated.

"What's that?" Locke asked, to no one in particular as the Doctor pulled a thin band of black material around his hand.

"Condition red. We're probably about to go into combat. You'll have to forgive the obviousness of this thing; it's made to blend in with our armor. Consequently, it won't blend with your skin." The doctor answered. And sure enough, the Captain's voice came over the intercom system.

"Combat alert! All hands to battle stations, all pilots report to the flight deck! Repeat, all hands to battle stations, all pilots to the flight deck!"

"Ah good, I need to get out of this room! Assuming, Doctor, that there isn't a problem with that?" Lilith inquired.

"I can see no reason why you couldn't, Captain Drake," the Doctor added. "You're in perfect health. I think"

"Thanks Doc. Why the hell are we standing around here?! Let's go!"

* * *

"Captain on deck!"

"At ease!" signaled Locke as he made his way to the podium, having been briefed by Commodore Ronald. He liked it a lot more than the cramped briefing rooms aboard the Aquitaine, which had to be small so there could be enough for every squadron. That, and he liked the real images instead of red and green icons.

"Here's the situation," he said, pressing a button. The large screen on the wall behind him changed from the GTVA symbol to a briefing grid. "Intelligence has learned that the Aquilae New Haven shipyards are supporting the NTF. Unfortunately, because of the losses we suffered to the Shivans in Capella and now to new NTF defections, we don't get to go on search and destroy like normal pilots."

He let the chuckles die down, pressing a button to change the display. On the wall behind him, the screen on the podium, and on the screen on the desks in front of the chairs, the view now showed a simulation of the shipyards and a few capital ships.

"There are number of newly constructed ships in dry dock at the yards. We can't afford to lose them. As you can see, three of the destroyers are refitted Orions, the GTD Amadeus, the GTD Legion, and the GTD Intrepid, derelicts from the Great War repaired and functional. The Hecate is the newly built GTD Alahenena. One minute after we jump in, the Mendacus will enter the field of engagement below the installations and blow out the engines of the Orions. The Alahenena is where things get interesting. The Mendacus can't get every fusion drive on it without destroying it;

Gamma wing, that's where you come in. Your mission is to disable the Hecate's engines and weapon system, then knock out the weapons on the Orions. Delta wing, you're their cover. Once this is done, Command will send in troop transports to capture the ships. The destroyers are about to move as we speak, so we have a small window of opportunity to capture them as they leave the docking rings."

He hit another indicator, focusing the display on the Arcadia class installation that formed the heart of the shipyard. "Alpha wing, we get to handle the GTI Haven. We don't have engines to disable, but we absolutely MUST get the weapon system and fighter bay down. Out of everything at the shipyard, the installation is the only thing with fighters and they'll be NTF loyal. If they're allowed to continuously launch, we'll never be able to get our transports docked."

One more change in the display; this time zooming in on the Mendacus. "A few more things. We aren't as much against the odds here as it seems. Captain Norath's full squadron will be in the field of engagement and his corresponding wings will have the same objectives as ours. And no one even THINK of using a Helios on any of those destroyers. We only have one left in our current allotment anyway. Also, I've been told that once liberated, New Haven will be the construction site for something called Project Abaddon. Everything besides the name of it is classified level Omega, so this is important. I wouldn't cause overly large amounts of damage to anything unless you want Command to skin us alive. Oh and, finally, after this mission, we all get shore leave on the Haven or Aquilae Prime while the Mendacus undergoes re-fit."

The entire squad, save for Sniper, cheered gleefully. Pilots pumped their arms into the air or collapsed into their chairs at the thought of some rest.

"That's all, get your load-outs set and get to your fighters. Dismissed!"

"Alpha 2... great. Probably did it on purpose." Xinni commented to himself, noting his wing placement.

"Make a bad first impression with the captain?"

"Huh?"

"Might be interesting... I don't think I've ever seen him annoyed at someone he didn't actually want to kick out," the woman went on.

"Is that so..." he started, catching himself as he noticed her rank pin signified Captain. "...Ma'am?"

"Well at least you learn fast, lieutenant." Lilith chuckled, getting up.

Watching out of the corner of his eye as the last of his squadron left, Locke made a minor adjustment to his load out and turned to leave. As he glanced up, he noticed someone was suddenly sitting down again in one of the chairs.

"We meet again, Captain," she said, her legs and arms crossed.

It took him a second to place the face.

"Major Griffith... I didn't know you were aboard," He replied. "Is there something I can do for you?"

"Actually, yes," The intelligence officer replied, standing up. She walked over to him. "I can't force you of course, I'm not your superior on the ship, after all. But... I can see to it it's worth your while."

"Major, I DO have a mission to fly..."

"I know, I know. This won't take long. You see my problem arises when you are forced to

stop those fighters from launching. We have a wing of new prototype bombers in that fighter bay. Very advanced. And I'd like to see them remain in one piece. If you can ensure that, I'll make sure the wing is shipped here for the OpEval period. The NTF won't fly them, they aren't quite finished yet. I might even be able to get you some more Helios torpedoes, if you're lucky."

"That's a tall order major," he replied, thinking. "Where are they located in the fighter bay?"

"If they haven't been moved around, probably in the back. Why?"

"The hull around the launch exit on the Arcadia class installation is thin. A non-direct hit with enough force to the hull on the side or top might physically close it, as opposed to planting a torpedo right inside."

He reached over to the pedestal, still on his load out screen. A few presses and his Artemis D. H. was replaced with a Myrmidon superiority fighter, with the squad's last Helios torpedo loaded onto it.

"Consider it done."

* * *

GTI Haven, command and control center {New Haven Shipyards}

"Are the destroyers ready?"

"Yes sir..." replied an ensign. "The Alahenena is reporting some trouble with the docking rings, but they're moving out now."

"Very well. Clear them for departure," the CO went on. "And wipe the communication logs, while you're at it. We don't need Command getting nosy and hearing our conversations with Admiral Shima."

"Yes sir," replied the same ensign, whose eye was now caught by something on his scanner. "Sir, I'm reading incoming jump signatures, inside the yard."

"What? There was nothing scheduled for arrival until later this evening... what is it?"

"Fighters... Terran and Shivan. Reading friendly IFFs."

"Why would... damn! Scramble all fighters and recall the wings on patrol! NOW!"

* * *

"This'll never work," came Sniper over the comm.

"I know." Locke answered. "But it's procedure." He switched his comm. channel so the installation would hear him. "GTI Haven and all destroyers, this is Alpha 1 of the 70th Blue Lions, GTVJ Mendacus. You are ordered to power down and surrender immediately!"

No answer. Until a wing of Perseus fighters launched from the Haven, and two wings of Hercules mkIIs emerged from subspace. Command switched their IFFs as soon as they began firing.

"All fighters, break and attack! You have your orders!" commanded Locke. He could hear Norath give the same order to his squadron. Shunting power to his engines, he shot towards the Haven leaving Alpha wing behind him. "Alpha wing, take out that subsystem as soon as you can. I'm gonna' get that fighter bay right now, and I only have one torpedo."

Watching the superiority fighter zoom ahead of her, Lilith opened her comm. channel. "Begging your pardon sir but are you INSANE? Those fighters are heading right for you!"

"And more are already launching," retorted Locke. "It's gotta' go now before we get swarmed, and I can get there the fastest."

"Stealing all the glory for yourself," commed a Shivan. "Typical Terran."

"Shut up Norath. Help us with that weapon system."

Command took this time to blast in. "BOTH of you shut up! You're on a tight schedule! The Mendacus is due to arrive in 45 seconds. Start your objectives!"

Neither dared answer. Locke continued to speed ahead, playing chicken with the wing of incoming interceptors. They decided that caution was the better part of valor and broke formation, instead ignoring him and heading for the bombers.

"Umm... excuse me... are we actually going to try to take out Perseus fighters, who outnumber us, in bombers?" chimed in Alpha 2.

"It'll be fun, Lieutenant." Lilith answered in a forced cheery tone. "But then, you're in a Zeus and I'm in an Artemis D. H. so feel free to complain."

But he didn't have time. The five interceptors were upon the two bombers, taking pot shots while trying to run circles around the less maneuverable craft. Using the D. H.'s uncanny turn rate, Lilith caught one off guard and kept it in her sights, dissolving the fighter's shields and shredding its thin armor with her Subachs. Xiny, having much less maneuverability but equipped with the stronger Prometheus S, managed to scrap another.

But there were still three more, and no Alpha 4 this flight. Realizing he was the easier target, they tried to gang up on Xiny and best him through superior numbers. This didn't happen, because 2 bombers from Norath's wing, Naheemas, came from behind and destroyed them before they were even aware that there were fighters on their tail.

"What the hell," cursed Locke as he weaved around beam fire. He'd done so before, that wasn't what bothered him. What bothered, and surprised him was the source. "Command, since when do Arcadia class installations have beam cannons?"

"Since now, Alpha 1. The NTF crew must have been able to mount some on before transferring to the Destroyers, in case of this very situation."

"Fun..." Locke muttered to himself, suddenly realizing that complaining to Command wasn't going to make the beams go away. "Fighter bay, fighter bay, where is that fighter bay... gotcha."

It was perfect. Right above the outer door was one of the crudely mounted anti-fighter beams. He set it as his target, set his secondary weapon to the lone Helios torpedo, and tried to hold the fighter steady while his targeting system gained aspect lock. A beam passed through his shields and sent the easy-to-hit Myrmidon for a roll, but Locke managed to keep her steady enough to get the lock, and fire.

"C'mon... c'mon," he urged, jetting away but looking back to see the bomb streak towards the beam. A wing of Artemis bombers flew out of the installation, and the beam was firing at the torpedo... firing and missing. The Helios hit perfectly, obliterating the beam, putting a hole in the station, and sealing off the fighter bay in a mass of tangled, burning metal.

Below the three Orion class destroyers, a subspace vortex opened, now familiar as the size that meant the Mendacus was coming through. The massive ship was almost perpendicular to the destroyers as it emerged, and three of its deadly beams charged up and fired seconds later.

But only two of them found their mark. The GTD Legion and GTD Constantine were hit squarely in the engine subsystem housing, but the GTD Intrepid took the hit further down on the hull. It was still badly damaged, and trying again would certainly destroy the ship.

"Gamma wing, break from the Alahenena disable the Intrepid. Delta, continue escorting" ordered Command.

"Acknowledged, Command." Sniper commed. "Gamma wing, you heard him, disable the Intrepid."

His wing obeyed faithfully, despite the lack of enthusiasm his voice showed. Apparently Turel had mentioned that he seemed to be an excellent wing leader from when he had to 'substitute' for Lilith. He still didn't like it. In any case, the Cyclops torpedoes necessary to disable the ship before it could jump out brought it dangerously close to hull failure, but in the end, it was rendered immobile. This, however, left a problem.

"Command, we'll destroy the Intrepid if we try to take out its weapon system."

"Acknowledged, Gamma 1. We're scrambling fighters equipped with Akhaton cannons from the GVD Seti. It's slower, but the only option. Knock out the weapon systems on the other destroyers if you can."

"Roger that."

With that, Gamma Wing turned towards the Legion.

"Epsilon, how are you coming with the Alahenena?" inquired Command.

Plodding along the destroyer were three Nephilim bombers. The Shivan wing leader reported in.

"Objective is nearly complete Command, the destroyer has only one more drive to knock out. We're bearing down now."

"Roger that Epsilon. Focus on their weapon system once you're done. All fighters, completion of preliminary capture objectives is nearing, we're prepping the troop transports for launch. Make sure they get to their destinations in one piece once they jump in."

"GTD Alahenena disabled," one of Epsilon wing reported.

"Legion and Amadeus are disarmed, Command," followed Sniper.

A few seconds after that, a wing of Thoth superiority fighters jumped in.

"Theta wing on station, targeting Intrepid's weapon system."

The Vasudan fighters were armed only for that task, their guns filled with Akhaton disruptors. With four of them on each fighter, however, their target wouldn't remain operational for long.

Command came in with a situation report. "We are receiving a transmission from the GTI Haven. Our military personal aboard have been sent a brief on the situation and why we are attacking, they say they are currently attempting to gain control. Alpha, get those weapons disabled so we can send in the Calvary."

"Alpha 2, break off, get the hell outta' the way!"

"Roger that!"

Spinning around as fast as he could, Xinnny gunned his afterburners and retreated away from the station. The anti-fighter beams were still shaving numbers off of his hull integrity, but he would live. The important thing was that his little distraction had worked. While the beams near the weapon system were concentrating on him, Lilith brought her lighter-armored bomber around unmolested down the line of Naheemas that were harassing turrets and launched double Cyclops torpedoes.

Both found their mark, and the subsystem was no more. The beams firing on Xinnny began to miss widely, as did any other fire from the station.

"Good job pilots, every engine and weapon system around here is down. We're sending in the transports. Keep the remaining fighters off of them."

As Command said that, the transports arrived. Most were Elysium class, with one each for the three Orions and two for the Hecate and station. The two heading for the Alahenena were Vasudan Isis transports.

"What's that Terran expression again?" Norath pondered aloud, to everyone nonetheless, as he tried to bring an enemy Herc into his sights. "Hmm, oh yes, who's your daddy!"

Every Terran in range groaned as his target went up in flames.

A few minutes of this, and the NTF fighters were almost no more. The transports had long since docked, and the Intrepid was under Allied control.

"I think you're going to die," Locke said to himself as he chased down an Artemis bomber and tore it apart with his Kaysers. He took a second to see how they were doing. It looked like the NTF fighters would lose due to pure numbers. Norath's squad had lost a pilot, and Norath himself was chasing down the Hercules MKII that was responsible. As the fighter exploded, however, a swarm of tornado missiles caught him at near point blank range from another fighter, followed by cannon fire from the enemy pilot.

"Mayday, mayday, Allied fighters please assist!" was Norath's request for help. Lock glanced just past the Naheema taking a pounding, past the new fighter that was also bearing down on the Shivan. Gamma wing was almost right there.

"Gamma 3, break off and provide support!"

"Yes sir!" came the sharp reply. The pilot brought his Medusa around, peppering the Herc with Subach fire and Tornado missiles. The Herc never knew what hit him.

"I... owe you one, pilot," commented Norath. "Just don't tell anyone."

"No problem si-Agggghhhhhhh!"

Snapping his head back around to where Norath was, Locke saw that the second fighter coming in had caught his bomber pilot and had torn him apart before he could do anything. Righting his craft, Norath swung around and vaporized the NTF pilot with everything he had.

A Vasudan came over the comm. channel. "Command, we have secured the GTD Alahenena. The destroyer is ours."

"So's the Legion, Command!" an exhilarated Terran Marine reported.

"Roger that marines, bring the destroyers back to their docks when you've got the engines working again. All others, do the same once you're able. Mendacus, make preparations to dock at GTI Haven for refit. We will control the station in a matter of minutes.

"Affirmative, Command, Mendacus moving to dock. All fighters, return to the ship. Mission accomplished."

* * *

"That was one hell of a bombing run," Lilith chided as she climbed down from her Bomber.

Xinny looked at the tears in the armor of his own. "You're telling me."

She started to laugh... but a sudden wave of nausea gave her other ideas. "Heh, yeah, beams seem to like you... Lieutenant... "

"Err, Captain, is something wrong?"

"I'll live, flu probably. I just need to remember where Medical is...

* * *

Medical

"Captain Drake! I was just going to look for you."

"Pardon me?" she asked, now clutching her stomach as she walked through the door.

"We must talk."

In his usual bedside manner, the cranky Shivan ushered her over to a part of the room where the wall had a screen.

"Captain, have you been feeling ill lately?"

"Yes... that's why I came down here."

"I see," he continued, walking to a tray table to grab something. "I think I've found out what happened."

She perked up at this. "Oh?"

"Yes, but... it isn't all good. Let me explain."

The Shivan raised a pad and entered a command, bringing up a wire frame schematic of the Mendacus. "This is going to seem a little... off-topic at first, but stay with me. First thing's first, I need to tell you a little bit about this ship."

She nodded.

"The... Sathanas juggernaut, if I remember your name correctly, is made almost entirely out of what is, originally, an organic compound."

He entered another command, and the display changed to a profile of an odd looking, organic cell.

"The best way to put it is that the material is 'killed' before used in ship construction. Other class vessels take a much smaller percentage of this material in their design. The Sathanas uses it so much because it optimizes the ship for the supernova reaction. Anyway, this is your blood."

That said, he held up a vial of liquid. The contents were thick and blackish, dotted with spots of red.

"...what?"

He chuckled. "That was my reaction exactly. Though this nice color change helped me figure out what was so strange about your blood. Do you... need a bucket?"

"No thanks," she waved him off. At least she HOPED she didn't need it, she was feeling worse by the minute. And a headache was starting to creep through her head.

"Anyway, I don't know how it got there, but there is hull material in your blood, and it's been 'revived,' if you will. I analyzed the effects of this, based on what it did to your blood. I'll have to run a test to be sure, but as near as I can figure, the material has some sort of regenerative effect on Terran physiology."

"So the stuff you use to build ships with brought me back from the dead?" she asked, a little weirded out by it. "It's like, some kind of cure for death?"

"Unfortunately, no. I do know where it came from on the ship. Captain Locke's floor. Or the

ceiling of your... compartment. His quarters are right above it. A section of the metal there has been turned rather brittle. It's possible that when he cut himself, his Terran blood regenerated the organic parts of the metal and, gravity being what it is; it leaked down and soaked into you. It looks like your blood is keeping it alive. But the problem is, while it revived you, it seems like the material is also somewhat toxic to your body. That's why you're sick right now. It's killing you more then curing you as each minute goes by."

She sighed. "And let me guess, you can't get it out, right?"

"Of course I could. I'm a doctor, not an ignoramus," he replied. "But I'm not entirely sure it's continued presence wouldn't be required for your continued life. In other words, taking it out might kill you. I'll try it, if it's your wish, but I think the alternative is safer."

"I'm tempted Doc. If it stays, it kills me. If it goes, it MIGHT kill me. The alternative better be good."

"I've already managed to synthesize a counteragent that will negate the poisonous side effects. You would need a daily injection, starting right now, until and unless I can duplicate the counteragent's effects mechanically."

He held up a syringe filled with a dull blue liquid.

"That's the only thing that'll have solid results?" she inquired.

"It is."

"I hate needles. I want you to know that. Please tell me it's going in my arm," she deadpanned.

"My apologies, no."

"Oh c'mon doc, I really hate that!"

"What?" he asked, cocking his head in confusion. "Whatever... turn your head to the side please, I need to find your jugular."

* * *

Two days later

"Tired, Commodore?"

"Is it that obvious?"

Commodore Ronald knew the answer to that one, however. He had slumped into the chair that had been bolted in next to the Captain's command station immediately after sitting in it. His eyes had rather large bags under them, and his hair looked like stress itself had disheveled it.

The Captain chuckled. "Yes. Have you actually slept since the refit started?"

"No. I really hate refits. And I hate whoever decided that the ship's XO had to supervise every second."

"I see... well, that would explain it, you Terrans require 8 hours of sleep every night, if I remember. I much prefer my 3 hours. It's easier to sleep in."

"Lucky. Are you planning on taking advantage of the shore leave, Captain?"

"Perhaps. I could use a better understanding of your cultures."

Ronald sat up. "You know, there's this great Terran/Vasudan event held on Aquilae Prime around now, covers a whole street of the largest city. And it's right on top of this old style pizza

house..."

"Are you offering a tour, Commodore?"

Blinked, he answered with, "I suppose I am."

"You know, none of us have a real understanding of Terrans and Vasudans... Hmm..."

"I get the feeling that you have an idea."

The Captain's eyes turned, like he was glaring. But it was also the equivalent of an evil grin. "I do, I do... it might be a disaster, but it's an idea nonetheless..."

* * *

Captain Locke's quarters

Leaning against the wall, Locke sighed. This was the one aspect of having his own squadron that he didn't like. Actually, if *anyone* in a command position liked it, they were seriously sick in the head. Figuring out how to type the letter with the screen's control pad was interesting, but it didn't keep him from the actual task for long. The door chime rang.

"Come in."

The door opened, and in walked Norath.

"Well, this is a surprise."

"So is what I have to tell you," Norath's tone of voice indicating that he didn't like it and that Locke probably wouldn't either. "What are you doing anyway?"

"If someone dies in our military, it's customary for the officer he served under to inform the family personally if it's possible, rather than letting them get a procedural message. Sniper was going to do it, being the wing leader, but..." he drifted off.

"I see. Well, be that as it may, the Captain had an idea."

"Jesus... this kid lived in my hometown, why am I writing a letter..." he deleted it. "What idea?"

"Everyone going on shore leave has to be... 'accompanied' by a Shivan, so we can get a better understanding of your culture."

"You're kidding," a face-flopping Locke answered, endless possibilities for hate-crimes coming into his head.

"I am not. And, us being the only squadron leaders aboard and therefore being able to relate to each other, guess who *I've* been paired up with."

A laugh was his answer, followed by, "Norath, no."

"Yes."

"No!"

* * *

"What did I do to deserve this?"

"How should I know?"

"Shut up, Norath."

He did so, more to hear Sonin over the comm. system.

"Captain Locke, Captain Norath, you are cleared for departure."

As one, the Pegasus and Dragon fighters lifted up and moved out of the fighter bay, circling around the Mendacus rather than GTI Haven. The Juggernaut was perpendicular to the station from its docking point, with a Ganymede docking ring locked around the upper left arm. It was a strange sight. The Mendacus came very close to taking up as much volume as the installation. As it was, it was actually longer than GTI Haven if the beam arms were factored in.

Norath decided to start a conversation on their way down. "So, my dear compatriot, tell me about this round ball of endless gravity that we're heading for."

"There isn't much to tell... it's one of the largest colonized worlds, so much so that it's populated to the extent that almost makes it look like a race's home planet. I won that scythe in a weapon museum contest. I grew up here, I guess you could say my memories are... not fond."

"Well, who has fond memories of their home..."

"Normal people, Norath. Not pilots."

The Shivan sighed. "What did I do to deserve this..."

"How should I know?"

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...)