

Independence: The Ancient Trap

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Prolouge

GTD Pinecone

Dubbe System

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The Admiral, a large, fattish man with a round head and whit hair, just finished a long hard nights work in his quarters. Not that it wasn't fun though. Now he was on his way to the Command Deck for more hard work. *If only it could be as much fun as last night* he thought to himself. Still he only had to wait another 4 hours and then he could get back to the more enjoyable work that was waiting for him in his quarters.

He walked along the ships brightly lit corridors and thought about his mission. Map the Dubbe system and assess its strategic importance. What a boring mission. He liked the missions that had his mighty ship fight the Vasudans in the war that had already lasted six long, painful but rewarding years. He liked the exciting missions. Where death greets you around every corner. The ones where you never know quite what's going to happen next. In this mission, the most exciting thing he had seen was an old asteroid.

When Admiral James Scott walked on to the Command Deck of the GTD Pinecone for what must have been the 1 millionth time, he sensed something different. Something was wrong. Something wasn't right. The crew was acting strangely, almost as if they feared something would happen to them. As he turned to look at one of the monitors, he saw what the cause of that fear was.

He looked down at the monitor and a diagram of a strange object, which seemed to be a cloud of gas. It was rotating slowly on its axis and was emitting an eerie white light. He looked at the display, trying to make sense of what he saw. After several seconds of thinking and a large lack of answers, he decided the smart thing to do was to ask someone.

"What the Hell is that?" He asked in a curious, high-pitched voice loud enough for the entire Command Deck crew to hear it.

The ships Commander looked up from a console some distance away to see who was calling. He turned back to continue his work, not taking much notice of the Admirals question, and then, realising who he had just seen, jumped out of his seat and quickly walked other to him, almost tripping over an engineer who was repairing a damaged power conduit on the floor.

"I'm sorry sir, I didn't see you come in. What's the problem?"

"What the Hell is that thing" he pointed at the display in front of them, still trying to figure out what it was he was looking at.

The Commander took a deep breath in, "We aren't sure Admiral. It appears to be a kind of Subspace Anomaly. It shows all the properties of a Sub-Space Porthole but it is spherical and has been open since we arrived in this system three hours ago. We are also detecting some form of radiation. Possibly a Nuclear Reactor, A very large amount of Gas or some kind of Quantum Matrix. We are too far away to tell which it is." The Admiral looked at the Commander and put on a look that made the Commander certain he would not like what's to follow.

"Why wasn't I informed of this? You should have told me as soon as you noticed it. The ship may be in danger!" The Admiral said in a very superior sounding voice. The Commander covered his mouth finding it very hard not to laugh out aloud at what he was about to say next.

"I did sir. You were asleep. In your bunk. With Lt.Lawlow. The *female* Lt.Lawlow."

“Oh! So I was.” He chuckled a bit, remembering his *hard nights work* and then leaned closer to the Commander. So close only he could hear the next thing he said. “Let’s keep that to ourselves, OK I don’t want the rest of the crew to hear about this, understand? The Commanders eyes light up.

“Perfectly Sir” The Commander turned to the main screen. *There’s going to be gossip down in the Bar tonight!*

The Admiral turned around and both men walked to the helm of the ship, stepping down from the Science section into the Operations section of the Command Deck.

“Navigator! Take us to within 2500 metres of the anomaly and hold position. The young Navigator typed a few, well known commands into his console and the ship shuddered as it’s engines powered up, ready to move it closer to whatever it was out there. The Admiral walked over to Science Officer Sobeck and the two men talked about what to do.

“I am unsure as to what it is.” The Science Officer was pretty much the smartest man on the ship. Anyone who argued with him lost. Admiral James was not about to put the theory to the test.

“Could it be of Vasudan origin?”

“It is a possibility but, so far from Vasudan space, also unlikely. To place it here, why, they would have had passthrough the heart of Terran space! ” The Admirals face fell. If that thing was Vasudan in origin, and he found it, he would be a hero! It could help the GTA to at last defeat the PVE! Sobeck walked over to the Science section followed by the Admiral and typed something before he turned back James. The fact that it wasn’t deeply upset him.

“Of course 10 years ago, Before First Contact, this system could have been under their control. There have been reports of planets in this area with artefacts containing text that looks very similar to Ancient Vasudan writing. However, that still does not explain what it is.”

“Or why it’s there.” The Admiral added sharply full of excitement again at the thought that it could still be Vasudan.

Sobeck left the Admiral and went back to work at the science station leaving the Admiral alone to think about his predicament. What should he do? Call in a Science Cruiser? Send A fighter wing? Or should he move the ship closer? He did not know. Suddenly, the navigator, a young ensign, new to the GTD Pinecone, interrupted him. “We are now holding position 2500 metres from the Subspace Anomaly. All systems are at 100% and no problems have been reported from any departments. Awaiting further orders.”

The Admiral turned and thanked the ensign and turned to walk to his chair. Sitting down, he gave only his second order of the day “Send an Angel Scout Fighter to scan it. I want to know what it is we are dealing with before I bother calling in a Science Ship or risk the Pinecone by taking us any closer.”

“Yes Sir, sending an Angel Scout with orders to scan the anomaly.” That ensign was starting to annoy him now. He was far too formal.

“Let me see it” The image on the main monitor flickered and changed to show a small fighter no more than 15 meters long leaving the ships Hanger Deck to scan whatever it was outside the ship. The ship had two large engines and two wings. The cockpit sat far in front of the engines giving the pilot the best view possible. Its weapons weren’t that powerful but he doubted that they would be needed in this particular mission. He leaned closer to the monitor and saw the fast little ship getting smaller and smaller as it travelled further and further from the Pinecone. Surely it was close enough to carry out a scan by now. The Communications officer called out to the captain. She had received a transmission from the fighter. It had completed its scan and was returning to the ship.

“Let me talk to him.”

“Yes sir, patching you through now sir.” The speakers buzzed as they played the transmission from the ship.

“Sir, this is Lt. Zack, Alpha 1. I have completed my scan and am now returning to base. The message was full of interference from the anomaly.

“What are the results?” James was getting anxious. The next few seconds would decide whether he became famous or not. Whether he was responsible for the defeat of the PVE or whether it would be some other lucky captain somewhere out there.

“It’s not Vasudan but whatever it is, it is emitting a vast amount of E-Z Radiation. It also seems to have some kind of Quantum Matrix at its centre. Sir, I believe that it’s ? “ The transmission ended suddenly.

“What! What is it? Alpha 1, what do you think it is?”

“Wait a second sir. I’m detecting something new.” For a few seconds, there was silence. Nobody moved. Suddenly, the silence was interrupted by the sudden and terrified voice of Alpha 1. “Sir! Some kind of energy beam has hit my ship! I’m losing power! Weapons are off line. Navigation is down! My engines have lost power! I’m being drifting towards it!”

The Admiral leaned towards the display and was shortly joined by the Commander as well as Sobeck who had heard the conversation from their individual stations. No beam could be seen yet it looked like one had hit the ship. It was drifting towards the Anomaly ? No! It was being pulled towards it! Something was pulling the ship towards the anomaly! The ship was being pulled towards the anomaly at an incredible speed. Within a few seconds, It was right next to it. So close that you could hardly see it. Soon, the white light of the anomaly enveloped it and soon, it was gone. Gone from Sensors, gone from sight. Gone.

“What the Hell!” James stared at the screen in disbelief. He had just lost a good ship and a good pilot to an anomaly in the depths of uncharted space. What would he tell his parents? That he was lost scanning a gas cloud without an enemy in sight? No. No. He should tell them that he died, valiantly trying to save the Pinecone from a thousand Vasudan fighters against which he had no hope of survival. That would sound better. When the ship shuddered, he was jolted back into reality and he leaped from his chair pushing the Commander and Sobeck out of the way. He charged towards the navigational station. “Move us away! I want to be at least 50,000 metres away before we stop.” The ensign tapped the controls that turned the huge Orion Class Destroyer around as fast as he could. The ship, only the second of its kind and soon to be replaced by the Bastion as head of the 3rd Fleet slowly turned away from the anomaly. Then, for no apparent reason, it stopped.

“Sir! We have stopped turning. We are moving towards the anomaly!”

“All engines, full reverse!” The ship shuddered as though hit by a massive bomb as its engines tried to fight whatever was pulling at the ship. What was happening was frightening the ensign. He was losing his calm. Above all else in a situation like this, Command officers needed to stay calm. For a split second, the Admiral thought of replacing him but decided there was not enough time. Suddenly, the shuddering stopped.

“No effect! Engines are off line. Weapons too! Help me!” The admiral had had enough and indicated to the ensign that he was to leave the Command Deck immediately. The young boy rose, and left, running to the lift. Another person, a middle aged woman took his place.

“Try the engines one last time!” He knew it wouldn’t work but he could think of little else to do.

“Still off line. Our speed is off the scale. We will enter that thing in less than 2 minutes!” With

little hope left and even less time, he knew that the fight and ship was lost. All he could do now was try to save at least some of the crew.

“Get as many people as you can in to fighters, transports, anything and get them off the ship. Tell them to hurry! We don’t have much time!” Throughout the ship, red lights flashed and sirens whirled, indicating that the ship was in great danger, and people rushed towards the Hanger Deck and Fighter Bays. Of the 7000 men and women on board, only 1500 had even the slightest chance of escape.

On the Command Deck, only the Admiral and his Command Staff remained. The other crewmen had left for the Hanger Deck. They had a Transport to catch. As for those left, they prepared to die. Suddenly, a loud beeping could be heard from the Communications Console. A Yellow light also flashed indicating that somebody was trying to Contact the Command Deck. The Admiral walked slowly to the console and pushed the ‘ActiveComm’ button.

“Sir! We can not launch the Transports. Some strange force is keeping them trapped in the Hanger Bay! We can’t escape!”

“Blast your way through! Do whatever you must to escape!”

“But sir, if we open fire while in the Hanger Bay, the decompression could blow up the ship!” James banged the panel with his fist so hard that it cracked it.

“Were dead anyway! That’s certain! Get out while you can before it’s too late!” Sobeck tapped the Admiral on the shoulder.

“Excuse me sir but I think it is already too late.” James spun around to see the white anomaly fill the monitor. It was so bright, so very bright. He stood there looking at it as it enveloped his ship and his entire crew. The ship was full of a crackling blue energy. Consoles exploded and people died all around him. He hardly noticed the bulkhead fall on to his head. Suddenly, everything went dark and the Admiral fell in to oblivion.