

## **Independence: The Ancient Trap**

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# **Chapter 1**

*44 YEARS LATER*

**GTCD Han-Ronald 101A**

**Vega System**

**1 May 2371**

When Captain Moloch stepped down from the Transport Ship ‘Alton’ onto the Hanger Deck of the GTCD Han-Ronald 101A, he was greeted by the head engineer, Muhammad Alisa. Muhammad was a young, Asian man who had worked at these docks all his life. He was the best ship builder in the business and so, he had been employed by the GTVA to over-sea the construction of the GTVA’s latest Destroyer, the Lawless class GTD Independence. A High tech vessel set to replace the Hecate class. Though the design was still being tested, the ship had already shown an incredible amount of fire power and a very strong hull. If her other systems were as above average as her Weapons ? The GTD Lawless Class would go down in military history as the ship that saved the GTVA!

“Good morning sir! I hope your stay on GTCD Han-Ronald 101B will be enjoyable. If you would follow me sir, I will take you to your ? “ The engineer was interrupted by the Captain who was anxious to see his new ship.

“Yeah, yeah, yeah. Now shut up and let me see my ship.” He sounded like an Army General. The Captain did not normally speak like this but he did not want to wait before seeing his new ship. Muhammad was surprised by his powerful and insulting voice. He had heard that Moloch was a great captain and a wonderful man! From what he had heard so far, he would have to change his sources ? they were way off the mark!

“Yes Sir!” he took the mickey out of the Captain by standing to attention and saluting the man. “Come right this way.” Muhammad turned and marched to a nearby window, followed by the Captain. Moloch slapped him on the face to knock some sense into him. Muhammad came within a millimetre of giving the captain a powerful left hook but instead turned a corner and stopped in front of a large window overlooking the rest of the Fleet Yards.

Out side, dozens of Construction Docks could be seen. All almost identical to 101A and each holding a vessel being built. Most of them contained fighters. Around 15 held cruisers. Only three held Destroyers. Two Hecate and one Lawless class ? The Independence. Muhammad pointed out the ship which hung in space not too far away, surrounded by the massive steel frame of GTCD Han-Ronald 101B. It was very long, yet quite thin. At the front of the ship was a large hub containing 36 Docking Bays, three of which were in use. A long pylon connected that to the main part of the ship which was taller and slightly wider than the Docking Bay area. Two thin pylons extended directly downwards from the middle section. They contained the ship’s main weapons, 12 Heavy Quantum Electric Pulse Cannons. A large yet fat tower on top of the middle section contained the Command Deck as well as the crew quarters. The thin tail end of the ship was home to the Fighter Bay and the thin Emergency Solar Panel ? designed to provide the ship with power if the ship’s 2 reactors are destroyed. Moloch was surprised at how much it looked like the Colossus.

“Is that it?!” the Captain asked in amazement.

“Yes. Yes it is. Is she big enough for you?”

“Are you joking? I couldn’t possibly ask for a better looking ship! She’s beautiful!” He stood

mesmerised by the ships beauty. “When do we launch?!” The Captain felt like jumping up and down in excitement. Only his 17 years of military training stopped him from doing so.

“In three days. We’re just putting on the finishing touches. Paint, carpets, things like that. Little things. If we had to, we could launch today. Not that we are though. You’re going to have to wait!”

“Argh! I hate schedules!” He banged his head against the window. So hard that the sound echoed through the room.

“Don’t worry. The time will come soon enough.” Muhammad chuckled. He liked Captain Moloch. Most of the Captains he had seen were very formal. He hated formal. What he saw on the Hanger Deck was probably just him wanting to see his ship. Muhammad was willing to give him a second chance. Before there was a chance to say anything else, the speakers buzzed with static before activating and the sound of a woman’s voice could be heard.

“Um, would Captain Moloch please report to the Command Deck please. Admiral James is on the line. He has your mission briefing. Thank you.”

“Time to see where were going. See you at the launch.” The Captain stood up and tidied his uniform and said goodbye before walking out of the room, leaving Muhammad on his own. Muhammad stood in the room for a few minutes, staring out in to space, looking at the Fleet Yards he knew so well before leaving through the same door as the Captain.

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The Command Deck of the GTCD Han-Ronald 101A was a small, dimly lit, round room with half a dozen or so stations around the wall. On the far side of the room was the Communication Officer, the woman who had asked him to come here. When Captain Moloch stepped through the door, the first thing that hit him was how many people they had managed to fit into one small room. There were at least twenty people on the Command Deck and yet the room couldn’t be much bigger than 8 metres in diameter. He pushed his way through the crowds of people, all working to coordinate the construction of his ship until he reached the Communications Officer.

“Um, hello. I’m here to talk to the Admiral.” The room was so noisy that he was surprised that she heard him but she did. She didn’t say anything but pointed towards a door on the far side of the room. Left of the one he came in through. Annoyed that he had to walk back again, he once again pushed his way through the crowds of people until he reached the door he had been told to go through. The door said Commanders Office. Hopefully this would be a bit quieter than the Command Deck. He took a deep breath in and opened the old looking brass door.

As soon as he entered, a voice greeted him.

“Ah, hello Captain. I’m glad you could make it. Thought I would have to assign someone else to the Independence for this mission.” The image on the monitor showed an old fat man in an old fashioned Admirals uniform. He had white hair and a round face.

“Oh no, I beg you, don’t replace me!” The Captain begged.

“Don’t worry, I’m only joking. No need to get upset.” The man laughed in his large leather chair.

“Ok. That’s fine then” the Captain continued, eager to put that embarrassing incident behind him. “I understand that my mission orders are ready now.” The Admiral straightened his jacket and tapped a button off of the screen.

“Ok Captain. You are to go to the Dubbe System to search for the GTD Pinecone. She went missing approximately 50 years ago but with the Vasudan War and the war with the Shivans, this is the first chance we have had to send out a search party. She went missing while performing a

mapping mission in the far reaches of the system. The exact co-ordinates will be sent to you before you launch. The last transmission we received from the ship stated that all was well and that the mission would be complete within two days. The Transmission was sent on 11 July 2327. Obviously, something went wrong sometime between July 12 and July 17 2327, the date she was due to return. It is possible that an attack or accident on the ship caused it to explode. However, some of the crew may have managed to reach a nearby planet in one of the 13 transports she was carrying.” The Captain sat down on a chair and continued to listen. “We want you to do two things. One ? Search for survivors and return them to GTVA Space. Two ? Find out what happened to the Pinecone and salvage her if possible.” The Captain thought for a minute about the potentially dangerous mission she was to go on. Although not the kind of mission he expected, it looked sure to be exciting.

“Admiral, as I understand, you have personally put a lot of free time into campaigning for the search. I was wondering, why is this?” The Admiral took a deep breath in, about to talk about something he hadn’t discussed for 33 years.

“I have a personal reason for wishing to find the Pinecone. My father, Admiral John James was in command of the vessel when she was lost. When I first heard the news that the ship had been lost, I spent the next three months in my bedroom crying. When I was 13, I vowed never to rest until I found out what happened to him.”

“I’m sorry Admiral, I didn’t know.” The Captain looked genuinely sorry for the memories he must have brought back to the old man.

“No. Don’t worry. I don’t! I don’t think my father would have wanted me to cry over him. I would prefer to honour him by finding out what happened. If the choice were mine to make, I would be on that ship with you, searching for my lost father.” Tears rolled down his face. The Captain had never seen an Admiral cry before. He turned and picked up a photograph on his desk. He stared at it for a few seconds, remembering his father, the man in the picture, before replacing it. “I must go now. I must attend a Command meeting in half an hour.”

“Goodbye. And don’t worry ? I’ll find your father.” The Captain leaned forward and turned of the monitor. He knew that there was no meeting to be attended, that the Admiral only wanted to remember his father one last time. He was fine with that. It was the least he could do.

The Captain got out of the chair and walked slowly to his cabin. The Admirals story had really got to him. He found himself thinking about how lucky he was. He had just turned thirty and both his parents were still alive. Not many fighter pilots like his parents live above 30 and his were both 60. Retired now of course. He walked down the brightly lit corridors of the ship and turned in to his cabin. A small room with little space for anything more than a bed and a cupboard. He lay down on his bed, thinking about the mission waiting for him when the Independence launched in three days time.