

## **Independence: The Ancient Trap**

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# **Chapter 7**

**GTD Pinecone**

**Unknown**

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The Commanders Hunter class fighter glided through space, its pilot doing the most complex manoeuvres he knew to avoid enemy fire. The Commander had just launched from the Independence and was waiting for the Dice to launch. A bright blue laser beam shot over the top of his ship and hit an advancing Shivan Bomber seriously damaging it and knocking it off course long enough for another to destroy it. Debris flew towards him at near the speed of light. Next to him, the rest of Alpha wing flew in formation towards the Shivans.

“Alpha 1, this is GTD Independence, Command Deck. Wings Alpha, Beta, Gamma and Delta have launched successfully but the rest won't be ready for another quarter of an hour. Think you can last that long?”

“I'll manage!” Almino banked hard to port to avoid a fury missile fired by a Dragon Fighter. As the missile sped past, the cockpit shook. As he spun, he kept his ship straight, pointing towards the Dragon fighter that had come so close to killing him. When he thought he had lined everything up perfectly, he squeezed the trigger built into the flight stick and watched as his new Q-!4 Laser Cannon fired. The Dragon was hit several times but it moved away before it could be destroyed. Almino watched as it moved behind his Hunter and turned, ready to repay Almino by shooting a brand new, very expensive missile into the Hunters engine. Almino stared in horror. In a split second, the missile would be fired at him. The Hunter, although a powerful ship, manoeuvred like a sick potato. There was no way he was going to avoid this impact. He looked behind him. The Front of the Dragon lit up as the missile prepared to fire. The light intensified as the missiles' built in engine powered up then - nothing. He looked behind him and saw the fighter spinning out of control before exploding in a ball of flames so bright they were like a sun. In its place was Beta 2.

“Thought you could do with some help sir! I'm Lt.Davis” Almino sighed a sigh of relief. Never had he come so close to death.

“Thank you SO much Davis. I think I owe you a drink.”

“So do I” Almino chuckled in his fighter.

“Don't get cheeky!” Beta 2 flew away to confront another Dragon.

Almino checked his radar. The Demon class SD Rumour was advancing towards the battle. Strangely, she was not firing any beam weapons. This confused Almino. Why aren't they firing? He turned his ship and saw the Rumour as well as the three cruisers slowly moving forward but they were ignoring the Independence. Then it dawned on him.

“Smart little devils aren't you!” he said to himself. The Rumour was ignoring the Independence because she was moving towards the Pinecone. They were going to attack the Dice near the Pinecone where the Independence's Beam Cannons could not reach to protect her. Ingenious!

“Independence! This is Alpha 1. Do not launch the Dice. I repeat. Do NOT launch the Dice! The Shivans are setting up a blockade!”

“Its too late! She's already on her way!”

Almino thumped the side of the cockpit. “Damn!”

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“This is not good.”

Calma looked out of the window at the battle going on. The ship rocked violently due to the impact of numerous missile impacts. The transport ship had suffered minor damage but a single fighter could soon change that. As Calma looked out, he saw the Rumour moving into position in front of the Dice.

“How long until we reach the Pinecone?” Carver asked. He tried to hide it but was obviously very scared. Calma looked at a monitor hanging from the ceiling.

“4 minutes”

“Can we last that long?” Calma’s face dropped. The only voice he could find to reply in was one of despair.

“I don’t know. Better get ready back there. We want to be ready when we arrive” Calma turned back to his controls. He knew the chances of them getting out were slim. The boarding party grabbed their combat gear and put it on. The new GTVA Ground Troop Combat Gear was lighter but no less comfortable.

“I feel like I’m sitting in a tin can!” one of them remarked.

“At least your safe!” Another replied.

An explosion outside brought all of them to the window. One of the Shivan cruisers had just blown up. Unfortunately, it had taken the last Ursa bomber with it. Still, hopefully the Rumour would go down soon and join the cruiser. In the heat of the battle which rocked the Dice like a ship in the middle of a storm, the Comm System activated.

“Dice, this is the GTD Independence, Command Deck. Please hurry up! Our fighters can’t hold out much longer!”

“Were doing our best but were taking damage!” Another missile impact caused a conduit to explode, killing one Ground Troop and injuring two others. The blood sprayed all over the remaining men. Gas from the damaged conduit filled the transport. The Plasma would turn toxic within minutes unless they stopped the leak. “Get that conduit sealed pronto!” Calma shouted behind him with fear in his eyes. “Independence! We’ve just lost a man! We need fighter cover now!” The gas levels dropped as the conduit was sealed but the damage had already been done. With one man dead and two others seriously injured, Calma doubted that they would be able to get the disk.

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“Bank left!”

Almino flew his Hunter in formation with what was left of Alpha wing. Just him and Alpha 3.

“Prepare to fire!” The two Hunters hurtled towards the Rumour at breakneck speed. With the bombers gone, it would be up to him to take down the Rumour while Beta and Gamma kept the fighters busy. “Target the Rumour!”

“Are you CRAZY! We can’t take down the Rumour! She’ll kill us before we get close!” Alpha 3 was not wrong to be scared. In fact, any sane man would be scared of what they were about to do. Almino just hid his fear. Alpha 3 banked hard to port to avoid crashing with a piece of Cain cruiser that was floating around in the void.

“Don’t worry! I have a plan. Take your ship up close to the Rumour. Hold position at the following co-ordinates: 120.3 by 336.3 by 429.6. It’s a blind spot where her turrets can’t reach you. Once you’re there, fire like your life depended on it, which it does.”

“Yes sir!” Alpha 3 broke formation and sped towards the co-ordinates Almino had given him. Almino, instead of following him, flew right in front of the massive Shivan Destroyer.

“I’ll distract it so you have a clear run!” The Demon’s turrets were trained on Almino’s ship as he made his pass. They fired, but, thanks to Almino’s above average piloting skills, few hit. He turned around and made another run. This time he was not so lucky. A bright blue laser beam from the Rumour hit his weapons control computer. He looked outside and, to his left, saw what was left of a multimillion dollar computer floating outside in 32 pieces.

“ALERT. ALERT. WEAPONS SYSTEMS ARE OFF-LINE” His little virtual friend had no trouble explaining the problem. With no weapons, Almino was quick to move away from the Rumour. When he was out of range, the turrets switched to Alpha 3 who was still not at the co-ordinates. The turret fire hit him and sent him flying out of control towards the Demon class Destroyer. Just when Almino was sure he was going to hit, he pulled up and settled down in the Rumours blind spot.

“I’m in! Beginning to fire” Almino was relieved. He checked the time. 47 seconds until the Dice came within the Demons range. Although Alpha 3 was now in position, he doubted that he could destroy it in time. The Commander decided that it was time he helped.

“Independence! I need a repair ship. Now!”

“Yes sir, repair ship being deployed. ETA 30 seconds” Too long. If the repair cycle took 20 seconds and it would take 30 seconds to reach the Demon afterwards ? he would be 40 or so seconds too late. Still he had to wait. With no weapons, he had little choice.

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Carver looked out of the window. The Demon was so close that it filled the entire screen. A few bright beams passed the window. Carver tried to see what they had hit but it was too far. All he saw was debris. Debris that looked remarkably like a Ulysses.

“21 seconds until we’re in its range. We’re doomed. Our hull is already down to 40%. We can’t survive the Rumours Beam Cannons as well!”

The rest of the Transport ships crew joined him. The Demons main Beam Cannon charged up, ready to fire. Only a few seconds were left. The Demon was itself at 81% and he had neither heard of an 80% ok Demon being destroyed by 1 ship with no bombs in 21 seconds. Things did not look good.

“It’s been good knowing you” Calma said in a voice that admitted defeat. The others turned around and nodded.

“You too” They walked back to their seats and started to pray for their safety. Suddenly, the cabin was filled with the sound of a young, male officers voice. Alpha 3’s. Everyone jumped in surprise and Calma rushed to the controls.

“Tell my family, I love them and that I will never forget them. Please” The voice was that of a man who knew his death was near.

“What! What the hell are you doing! Pilot, pull up!” Calma rushed back to window. Alpha 3 was preparing to turn on his afterburners while he was facing the Rumour. He was going to ram her main reactor and, in so doing save their lives!

“Pilot! Pull up now! That’s an order!”

“I’m sorry sir.”

Alpha 3 closed his eyes. The ship moved closer and closer to the Rumour. Closer and closer to Alpha 3’s death. He was so close that he could see the bolts that held the ship together. The ship’s nose crashed into the massive ship with guns firing. Fire enveloped the small fighter’s nose and rushed up to her engines. The hull plates of both ships melted due to the heat of the impact. Still the fire burned. Eating away at the Hunter’s engines until it reached the reactor. Which it did. The explosion completely destroyed the Rumour’s Reactor Core causing fire to spread through the ship like wildfire. Within seconds the ship was orange with fire. Then it happened. The Rumour’s key systems went down one by one. Hundreds and thousands of small explosions enveloped the ship until the massive explosion caused by the Reactor completely destroyed the Rumour and with it, all remains of Alpha 3. The shock wave sped through space at 1000’s of kilometres per hour. Several damaged Shivan fighters were destroyed because they had got too close to the dying ship. The rest were flying away at full throttle. For those Shivans, full throttle was not full enough. The shock wave hit them and sent them flying through space into the Independence.

“This is the Independence! We have taken heavy damage! Please assist!”

Almino ignored the message and closed his eyes tightly as the shock wave slammed into his ship. With shields low and a not too good hull strength too, he feared for his life. Fortunately, thanks to some good energy management, he was able to turn his good side into the wave and ride it all the way back to the Independence where a support ship was waiting for him. Now that the Rumour had been destroyed, the remaining Shivans were retreating with Gamma wing in hot pursuit. Then came something that made Almino’s day. Calma’s voice.

“Alpha 1, this is the GTT Dice. We have successfully docked with the Pinecone and are moving in now. Standby. Dice out”. Almino laid back in his small, cramped cockpit and closed his eyes. Thanking God that the Dice had made it even if it was heavily damaged.