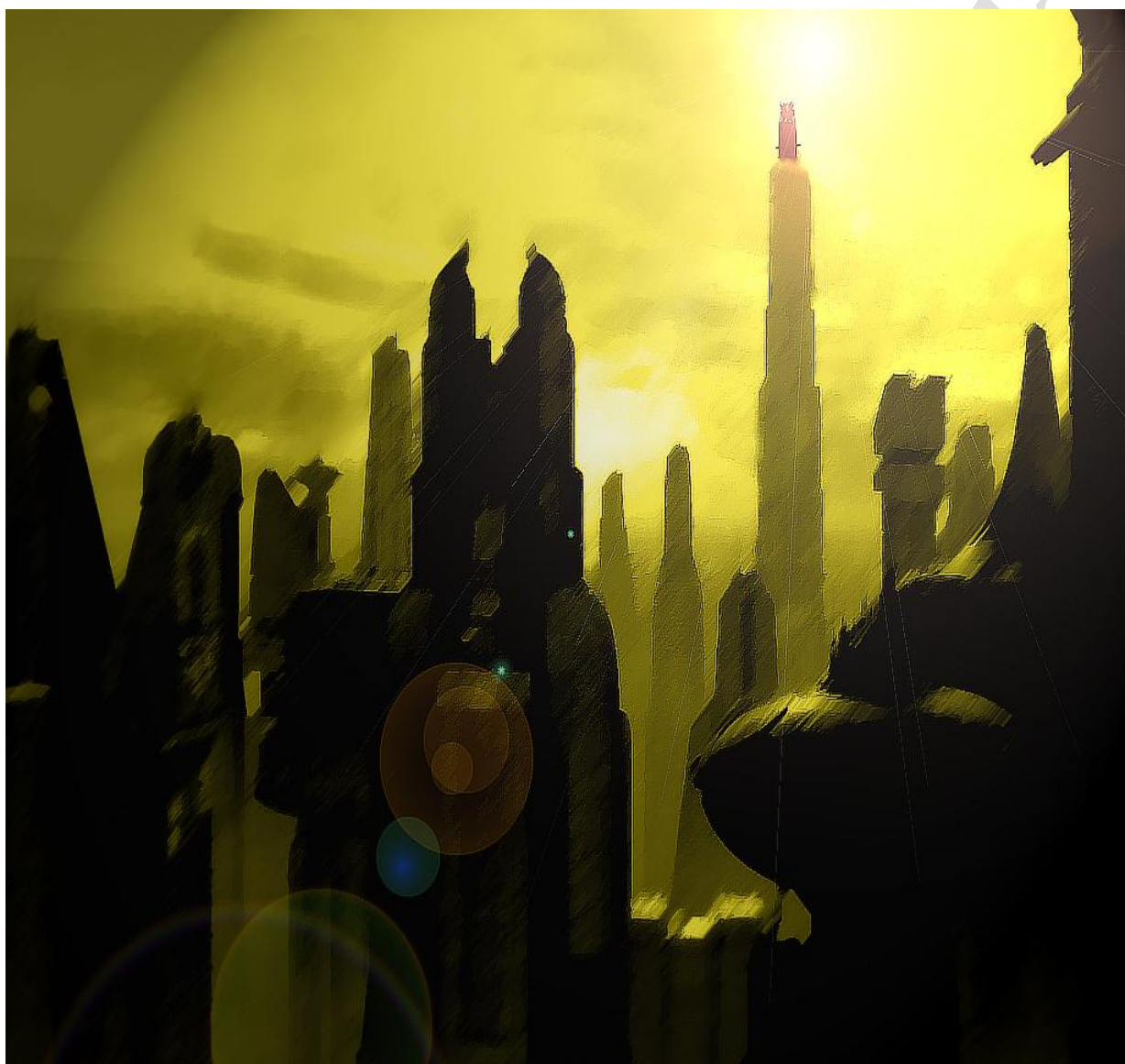


STAR WARS

Civil War I: Crossroads



Written by: Sean P. Funk

Last Updated: June 15th, 2010

¹ Skyline of Coruscant, circa 143.5 ABY; still recuperating from the devastation of the Yuuzhan Vong Invasion



Capture.....	Page 5
Trial.....	Page 59
Strife.....	Page 83
Collapse.....	Page 105
Maelstrom.....	Page 147
Severance.....	Page 171
Extras.....	Page 183
Bonus: <i>Eye of the Storm</i>	Page 207

Dramatis Personae

'leten Kuat: Head of the Kuat family; head of Kuat Drive Yards

Aerex Chakrei: Galactic Alliance Captain

Alona Oamuys: Imperial Vice-Admiral

Alys Nalah Djo: Queen Mother of the Hapes Consortium

Arian Thane: Fondorian Guild Master

Aztin Varss: Galactic Alliance Admiral

Cosh Sonter: Galactic Alliance Captain; Razor One

Dace Wilder: Imperial Commodore

Derrikk Zарmer: Galactic Alliance Admiral

Eida Reed: Imperial Vice-Admiral

Eirta Dalgas: Imperial Admiral

El'kar Urope: Galactic Alliance Rear-Admiral

Fenn Silth: Imperial Admiral

Gaen Cage: Galactic Alliance Spacer First Class

J'r'miah: Galactic Alliance Admiral

Jakob Nion: Jedi Knight

Kath Keldrona: Imperial Vice-Admiral

Kel Tochik: Judge

Kellar Fre'kay: Galactic Alliance Commodore

Kral Boka: Hutt Resistance Fighter; Gangster

Lerona Teta Jade: Princess of the Empress Teta system

Liam Triem: Galactic Alliance Captain

Lon Yash: Galactic Alliance Admiral

Lyra Lyell: Judge

Mathias Malakon: Jedi Master

Mikal Nye: Imperial Admiral

Narklin Danakar: Imperial Grand Admiral; Imperial warlord

Phelan Cain: Jedi Knight; Renegade

Proc Vanis: Imperial Admiral

Rath Oden: Imperial Admiral

Renz: Smuggler

Rogen Thatch: Judge

Sevrina Marnel: Jedi Knight

Sibar Fre'kay: Admiral of the Galactic Alliance fleet

Teilo Fess: Jedi Knight

Thrak Zann: Gangster

Torm E'rad: Judge

**Treis Sinda*: Imperial Knight

Valerie "Lights" Poxleitner: Galactic Alliance Spacer First Class

Vuul Corr: Galactic Alliance Commander

Zara Lailas Gra'tua: Jedi Knight

*Character introduced in Legacy 22: Wrath of the Dragon

Capture

New Imperial City, Coruscant: 143.5 ABY:

We're here, Captain Cosh Sonter thought as he silently sat in the cockpit of his CF9 Crossfire starfighter; blankly, he stared out the forward viewport. Cosh Sonter, nervous for maybe the first time of his life, bit his fingernails to relieve his growing stress. Behind him, his rear-gunner, Spacer First Class Gaen Cage, a young human male from the world of Anaxes, one of the many fortress worlds held by the Sith controlled New Galactic Empire, sat patiently. Cosh Sonter snapped back to reality, and really looked out of the cockpit windshield for possibly the first time during the trip; the hangar bay of the *New Hope* was pitch black. The *New Hope* was actually the re-christened name of the former Sith-Imperial *Dread Lord*, Empress Amelia's flagship during the Battle of Kuat, over six months previous.

Suddenly, the sirens blared and red and yellow flashing lights lit up the hangar; the sudden stimulation startled him for a moment. Cosh Sonter immediately prepped his starfighter through a very stunted pre-flight sequence. Every once in a while, he caught a glance outside his starfighter. The hangar floor was huge, able to fit almost a thousand starfighters; on the deck, mechanics, engineers, and flight operations personnel scurried about their business in a frantic, chaotic jumble.

"You ready to go, Cage?" Cosh Sonter asked.

After a few moments, "Prepped and ready to go!" Gaen Cage replied.

Cosh Sonter nodded to himself, then quickly looked back through the cockpit windshield. He was first in line, meaning he would be the first into battle.

Good, Cosh Sonter thought, *I could use the relief*.

Cosh Sonter was the new Razor One now. Shortly after the Battle of Kuat, Jedi Knight Mathias Malakon gave command of the squadron over to Cosh Sonter. It was a honour and a privilege to lead such skilled and brave men and women, human or alien, into the thick of battle. Granted, now Razor Squadron was the elite fighting team and mascot of the Resistance.

"Okay Razor's, check in." Cosh Sonter ordered.

Over the headset, "*Razor Two reporting in.*"

"*Razor Three good to go!*"

"*Razor Four all system's green!*"

And so the calls came in. After all the Razor's reported in, "Alright Razor's, this is it. This is the big one." Cosh Sonter replied, "If we take Coruscant, we can end this war right here." Cosh paused for a moment, closed his eyes, and took in a deep breath, "Shoot straight and fly well. Out."

After a few moments, another voice could be heard over the headset, "*Razor One, you're clear for launch.*" The flight controller officer informed, "*Good hunting.*"

"Copy." Cosh Sonter replied, "Alright Razor's, we're clear for launch!"

Immediately, Cosh Sonter punched the throttle, and raced the CF9 Crossfire starfighter out of the opened hangar bay doors. He passed the glowing blue atmospheric containment field and into hard vacuum. With skilful precision, he jammed down on the brakes, rolled his starboard wing over, and banked hard right. Cosh Sonter quickly looked over his right shoulder to see if the rest of the Razor's were behind him; they were, and hot on his tail. Cosh Sonter's gaze returned forward as he punched the throttle forward; the massive Sith-Imperial fleet was right before his eyes. The Sith-Imperial fleet consisted of mainly *Pellaeon*-class Star Destroyers, flanked by *Ardent*-class fast frigates, and right in the middle of the gigantic fleet was the *Imperatrix*, an *Imperious*-class Advanced Star Destroyer and another of Empress Amelia's former flagships; presumably, it was now the flagship of the self-proclaimed Emperor of the New Galactic Empire, Grand Admiral Narklin Danakar, one of the many targets the Resistance was hoping to acquire during the course of the battle. The left flank of the Sith-Imperial fleet, estimated at over fifty capital ships, were just starting to turn into the Resistance fleet, while the others lagged behind.

Cosh Sonter punched his CF9 Crossfire starfighter forward at full speed. Narrowly skimming the armoured hulls of both former Galactic Alliance and exiled-Imperial capital ships; and, of course, leading the charge, was the *New Hope*. Even before any real battle had commenced, Cosh Sonter was sweating profusely.

Suddenly, "Contacts! Twelve o'clock even! Lock S-foils in attack positions!" Cosh Sonter shouted, "You ready for your first taste of battle, Cage?"

"I've been waiting for this my whole life." Gaen Cage replied in a somewhat nervous voice.

"Well, you won't have to wait much longer." Cosh Sonter answered.

Suddenly, the first *Predator*-class starfighter zooms passed his cockpit windshield at a phenomenal speed; they looked to be nothing but dark grey blurs as they streaked

across the black void of space. This was followed by another, and another. From behind, he could hear the rear double light laser cannons unleash a flurry of laser bolts.

"Let them pass between us!" Cosh Sonter ordered. Cosh Sonter had to frantically jink and juke in-and-out of passing *Predator*-class starfighters to avoid hitting them. Finally, after a few tense moments, "Alright, Flight One, Razor's Two through Four, with me; Flight Two, Razor Five through Eight, take up the left flank; Flight Three, Razor's Nine through Twelve, take up the right flank. Engage and fire at will."

"Copy, Razor One."

"Flight One, we're taking it right up the middle." Cosh Sonter informed.

Suddenly, Cosh Sonter slammed on the brakes and made a hard turn to port, looking passed his left shoulder as he did. He quickly looked around and saw Flights Two and Three engaging Sith-Imperial *Predator*-class starfighters in the distance; lances of green and red energy bolts filled the dark void of space. After another second, he finished the turn; Razor Two and Three were off to his port side, while Razor Four was on his starboard.

Hot on their tails, Cosh Sonter pursued two Sith-Imperial *Predator*-class starfighters. Cosh Sonter lined up the targeting reticule, and squeezed off a few laser bolts. The green energy bolts streaked passed the hulls of the two *Predator*-class starfighters, missing them by mere metres. Almost immediately, the two *Predator*-class starfighters went into evasive manoeuvres, jinking and juking wildly through the now turbolaser filled vacuum.

Immediately, "How's it look back there?" Cosh Sonter shouted.

"The Imperials are moving up and engaging!" Gaen Cage answered.

Great, Cosh Sonter thought. Cosh Sonter spared a quick glance over to his right; he saw the Resistance left flank, comprised of over forty capital ships, moving up to engage the aggressive Sith-Imperial fleet. Luckily, the Resistance, with the aid of the exiled-Imperials, had some formidable capital ships, including some battle-damaged *Pellaeon*-class Star Destroyers.

Quickly, Cosh's attention returned to the two Imperial pilots in front of him, still jinking and juking, now evading the turbolaser fire from the two *Tri-Scythe*-class frigates flanking either side of them. Cosh immediately squeezed the trigger, letting loose another salvo of green laser fire. He scored a direct hit on the rear *Predator*-class

starfighter; the ion engines exploded with a brilliant orange-blue flame, sending the *Predator*-class starfighter spinning wildly towards an adjacent *Tri-Scythe*-class frigate. Cosh lined up the targeting reticule on the lead Imperial pilot, when suddenly, the flaming *Predator*-class starfighter that he shot down just moments before, careened and smashed into the port hinged-wing of the lead *Predator*-class starfighter. In a moment, both Imperial starfighters exploded into blue flames, sending twisted durasteel shrapnel in all directions. Cosh Sonter banked left to avoid the flying debris, but got caught in the shrapnel shower regardless. Luckily, the small durasteel debris instantly vaporized on his particle shield, leaving his starfighter completely untouched.

Then, over his headset, "*Razor One, we need you to harden the center!*"

"Copy. Heading towards the center now." Cosh Sonter replied.

Cosh Sonter slammed on the brakes again, banked hard left while looking over his left shoulder, then punched the throttle as hard as he could. Cosh Sonter skilfully weaved in-and-out of turbolaser fire coming from both fleets, narrowly evading them by mere metres; the two fleets were getting closer, and as they did, the intensity of the battle increased. The space between capital ships were filled with heavy turbolaser fire; as the massive energy bolts slammed into the armoured hulls of the various capital ships, metal would melt and vaporize, and explosions of flames and shrapnel would be thrown into the hard vacuum of space. The fire, it seemed, eerily danced on the metallic hulls of the capital ships. Cosh Sonter skimmed the surface of one of the Resistance fleet's many *Scythe*-class battle cruisers, finally emerging passed the horizon to witness the *New Hope* in deadly combat with several *Ardent*-class fast frigates and *Pellaeon*-class Star Destroyers. Although the *New Hope* was classified as a Star Dreadnought, at over nine kilometres long, it can take a pounding; but from the sheer volume of turbolaser fire coming from that many capital ships, the *New Hope* couldn't possibly hope to last long.

"Alright Flight One, we're heading into the thick of it." Cosh Sonter informed.

A quick flurry of clicks over the headset confirmed the order, then Cosh Sonter punched the starfighter as fast as he could towards the *New Hope*.

Admiral Sibar Fre'kay, *de facto* leader of the remnant Galactic Alliance, currently has tactical command over the Resistance fleet. Onboard his current flagship, the *New Hope*, his gaze was forward, through the transparisteel viewports. The holographic

displays within the trapezoidal viewports highlighted the numerous combatants the Resistance was up against; three *Pellaeon*-class Star Destroyers off their bow, reinforced by five *Ardent*-class fast frigates, with what seemed like a flight of *Predator*-class starfighters, the odds were definitely stacked against them.

Suddenly, with conviction, "Order the fleet to move closer!"

The officers on the bridge quickly looked up at the brown haired Bothan admiral with obvious confusion in their eyes and faces. There was a moment of hesitation.

"Sir, we're already having trouble holding our shields!" One of the officers on the bridge protested.

With a grumble and a slight ripple of fur, "Move the fleet closer, and engage those Star Destroyers at point-blank range!" Admiral Fre'kay ordered, "Then, bring all turbolasers to bear on the closest Star Destroyer!"

Almost before he finished his command, the *New Hope* started to jerk forward; very quickly, the distance between the *New Hope* and the Sith-Imperial fleet closed. Surprisingly, the Sith-Imperial capital ships seemed to lessen their attack on the *New Hope*.

Surprised, are we? Admiral Fre'kay thought.

"Bring all turbolasers to bear!" Admiral Fre'kay ordered.

Suddenly, the entire bridge of the *New Hope* rocked back and forth as all turbolasers on the *New Hope* fired simultaneously. A gigantic salvo of red turbolaser bolts streaked across the vast darkness of space, and slammed into the armoured hull of the closest *Pellaeon*-class Star Destroyer. Explosion after explosion rocked and crippled the Star Destroyer; once the flames cleared, it was obvious that parts of the hull had melted and vaporized, glowing white-hot, while other parts were simply blown off into space; a cloud of twisted and glowing debris surrounded the Star Destroyer. The damage was particularly devastating, simply due to the close range of the attack; huge craters and gouges riddled the hull, while in other places, huge cracks formed. Another salvo of heavy turbolaser fire; this time, the shields and armoured hull of the *Pellaeon*-class Star Destroyer were completely overwhelmed. Violently, the Star Destroyer exploded from within, sending two halves of the Star Destroyer careening in separate directions; a great ball of energy dissipated into space, followed by a shower of twisted durasteel, of varying sizes, thrown out in all directions.

"Shields at maximum!" Admiral Fre'kay ordered.

The order came too late; the shockwave from the explosion rocked the *New Hope* back and forth violently. The bridge raddled and pitched forward, sending Admiral Fre'kay careening into the polished durasteel floor; the other officers around him slammed into walls, while others managed to grab hold of their consoles. Sparks from electronic equipment showered the personnel on the bridge, and danced on the polished durasteel floor. Almost immediately after the shockwave, the debris shower came; the small bits of twisted, glowing hot durasteel were easily repelled by the *New Hope's* particle shield, but one gigantic chunk of hull slammed directly into the port bow. The razor-sharp chunk of twisted metal carved and cut a long linear groove into the bow. Once again, the bridge shook violently, followed by another shower of sparks; a fire erupted from one of the consoles, but was immediately put out. Finally, after the violent shaking stopped, Admiral Fre'kay picked himself up off the cold metal floor.

"Damage report!" Admiral Fre'kay ordered.

"We've got explosive decompressions in sections twenty-four through thirty-six!" One of the bridge officers reported.

"Fires reported on ay-deck!" Another bridge officer reported.

Immediately, "Seal off those sections, and get a fire crew up to ay-deck and put that fire out!"

Admiral Fre'kay turned to gaze out the forward viewport; the blast took out two *Ardent*-class fast frigates, consumed by fire and debris, and damaged another *Pellaeon*-class Star Destroyer; despite the damage, they resumed their attack. The *New Hope* and the Sith-Imperial capital ships continued to exchanged salvo after salvo of heavy turbolaser fire; the capital ships were side-by-side now, exchanging salvo's of energy bolts at almost point-blank range. In this configuration, both capital ships were able to bring their full weapons batteries to bear, maximizing damage and effectiveness. Suddenly, a concentrated salvo of heavy turbolaser fire stuck the hull of the *New Hope*. The hull of the *New Hope* exploded with blue-orange flames, which seemed to dance majestically across its metallic surface; conversely, the damaged *Pellaeon*-class Star Destroyer, experienced similar havoc. Suddenly, four CF9 Crossfire starfighters streaked passed the forward viewports on the bridge.

"Sir, Razor One reporting!" An officer informed.

"Put it through the speaker!" Admiral Fre'kay ordered.

A moment later, "*Admiral. Need any assistance?*" Cosh Sonter asked in a cocky voice.

"Razor One, run cover for us while we take out those Star Destroyers!" Admiral Fre'kay ordered, "Keep those fighters and bombers off our hull so we can concentrate on taking down those capital ships!"

"*Copy that, Admiral. Razor One out.*" Cosh Sonter answered.

On board the *Sacrifice*, an exiled-Imperial *Ardent*-class fast frigate, Jedi Knight Mathias Malakon nervously waited in the cargo hold of the Corellian-manufactured YT-2400 light freighter known as the *Red Diamond*. Over the course of the Anti-Sith Insurgency, or better known by Imperials as the Second Imperial Civil War, the *Red Diamond*, owned and operated by a smuggler named Renz, had become quite famous. The cargo hold was almost completely dark, but he could still see in front of him. Filling out the rest of the cargo hold were over fifty highly trained and deadly exiled-Imperial stormtroopers; the stormtroopers, however, were not wearing their typical white plastoid armour. Their armour was painted black, and they were helmetless.

Why did I get the stormtroopers? Jedi Malakon thought to himself in the dark.

It was hot in the cargo hold; Jedi Malakon was actually starting to sweat. Jedi Malakon wiped the sweat from his pale-skinned brow, preventing it from dripping into his crystal blue eyes; his short blond hair was already soaked. Jedi Malakon reached out with the Force; he almost didn't need it. The tension in the air was thick and obvious. This was Coruscant after all; galactic center zero-zero-zero. Suddenly, another hard vibration could be felt through the grated durasteel panels of the YT-2400 light freighter; this was followed by another violent shaking back and forth as the *Sacrifice* was hit by another salvo of heavy turbolaser fire.

C'mon, c'mon, c'mon, Jedi Malakon impatiently thought.

Suddenly, sirens went off and the hangar was filled with flashing red and yellow lights; slowly, the hangar doors opened, letting in more light into the hangar bay. Jedi Malakon inched his way to the side viewport and peered into the hangar; there were eleven other *Nune*-class Imperial shuttles, fully loaded with stormtroopers, awaiting in the hangar. There were no mechanics or engineers on the hangar deck; a rather odd sight. Outside the *Ardent*-class fast frigate, through the limited field of view provided by the viewport, Jedi Malakon could see the *Pellaeon*-class Star Destroyer hammering

the *Sacrifice*. Suddenly, a flash of red turbolaser bolts streaked across the dark void of space, and the *Sacrifice* violently shook and rocked again, almost knocking everyone off their feet.

Suddenly, "Prepare to drop!" Renz shouted from the cockpit.

Jedi Malakon immediately relayed the message, "Prepare to drop!"

Another salvo of heavy turbolaser bolts slammed into the hull of the *Sacrifice*, igniting the metallic hull with intense flames; suddenly, the atmospheric containment field covering the hangar bay evaporated. The hangar was exposed to hard vacuum, unleashing a furious wind outside that sucked everything not bolted down away; inside the cargo hold of the *Red Diamond*, the howling of the wind made it almost impossible to hear anything or anyone. Then, without warning, the *Sacrifice* pitched forward, and plummeted towards Coruscant, and New Imperial City. Luckily, the Jedi Malakon and the rest of the stormtroopers grabbed hold of the handles above their heads, preventing any of them from unceremoniously toppling over. The crippled *Ardent*-class fast frigate pitched, yawed and rolled as it fell down Coruscant's gravity well.

"I just hope that planetary shield is down." One of the stormtroopers replied.

Jedi Malakon, just able to hear him over the dissipating winds, looked into his brown eyes, "Our guys on the ground said they brought down the shields. We're just going to have to trust them."

Just then, a low, but constant, rattle could be felt through the grated durasteel panels of the *Red Diamond*. They were falling through the atmosphere now. Shortly after that, outside the hangar, flames lit up the sky. The durasteel hull started to glow from the intense heat from friction as the *Ardent*-class fast frigate fell through the atmosphere; first it glowed red, then orange, then yellow, until finally the armoured hull glowed white-hot. Inside the hangar, the flames blackened and scorched the durasteel walls and duracrete floors. Once again, Jedi Malakon reached out with the Force; there was a collective sense of nervousness, but also an undercurrent of determination. Suddenly, the howling of the winds ceased for a moment, and was followed by an eerie calm.

"Alright, here we go!" Renz shouted.

The *Red Diamond* was the first out of the hangar bay. As the YT-2400 light freighter left the safety of the hangar into the chaos surrounding the *Sacrifice*, it pitched and rolled violently. Renz fought hard against the violent shaking, trying to bring the *Red Diamond* into position; in the fiery debris tail of the falling *Ardent*-class fast frigate.

As Renz struggled against the yoke, cursing every step of the way, Jedi Malakon looked through the side viewport; in between the orange flames, he could see the rest of the *Nune*-class Imperial shuttles following closely behind them. The temperature inside the cargo hold started to climb steeply; many of the stormtroopers started to sweat, as did Jedi Malakon. Almost immediately, Jedi Malakon inched his way forward, towards the cockpit. He found Renz viciously fighting the unresponsive controls, trying to both evade flying debris coming off the disintegrating *Ardent*-class fast frigate, and get them into position behind it; the sweat from the struggle soaked into his short brown hair, and dripped into his green eyes.

"Get the other transports on the horn." Jedi Malakon ordered.

"Get them yourself! I'm a little busy here!" Renz snapped.

Jedi Malakon quickly sat in the co-pilot's seat, and activated the communications system.

"Shuttle's Bacta, Constellation, Delta, Echo, Felucia, you're with us." Jedi Malakon ordered.

"*Confirmed order.*" Shuttle Bacta's pilot confirmed.

"Shuttle's Gamma, Halo, Icon, Juno, Kessel, and Lucas, you'll head towards the temple." Jedi Malakon finished.

"*Roger that.*" Shuttle Gamma's pilot replied.

Jedi Malakon switched the communications system off, and glanced out the forward viewport. In between the fury of flames outside, he could see the *Ardent*-class fast frigate breaking apart. Huge chunks of twisted, glowing white-hot durasteel debris tore off the hull, plummeting towards the city below. Renz jinked and juked the bulky YT-2400 light freighter as if it were a starfighter; it was quite impressive actually. Slowly, the flames started to die off outside, but the debris just kept on flying.

"Alright, take us out of the debris tail and head towards landing point atom." Jedi Malakon ordered.

"Gladly." Renz quickly replied.

Renz quickly banked hard to port, bringing the *Red Diamond* out of the debris tail coming off the *Sacrifice*, and into clear skies; this side of Coruscant was currently draped in the shadow of night, allowing them some visual cover. Jedi Malakon glanced

backwards to see the other shuttles; two distinct formations could be seen, one heading for the Temple of the Sith, and the other heading towards the New Imperial Palace. Jedi Malakon was heading for the latter.

In the distance, another Sith-Imperial *Pellaeon*-class Star Destroyer exploded with ferocious violence. Blobs of molten metal and white-hot twisted durasteel shrapnel sprayed outward in all directions. The flash of light from the explosion lit up the bridge, temporarily blinding Admiral Fre'kay. Suddenly, not a moment later, the massive ion engines from another Sith-Imperial *Pellaeon*-class Star Destroyer surged; blue-white electricity scorched the armoured hull, danced on its metallic surface. Slowly, but surely, the crippled *Pellaeon*-class Star Destroyer plunged into the upper atmosphere of Coruscant, slowly burning up as it did. The *New Hope*, now side-by-side numerous Sith-Imperial capital ships, spread its turbolaser fire in two directions, port and starboard; on the flipside, the Sith-Imperial capital ships seemed divided and began retreating.

"Sir! The Imperial fleet is in chaos!" One of the bridge officers reported, "Their formations are breaking up!"

"This is it!" Admiral Fre'kay screamed, "Order the fleet to disengage and trap and ensnare the Imperials!" He ordered, "I want that fleet taken intact, if possible!"

"Yes, sir." The officer replied.

Slowly, the *New Hope* started to turn to port, bring its broadside to bear on the remaining Sith-Imperial capital ships, only numbering thirty now. Admiral Fre'kay peered through the side viewports, into the Resistance fleet; they were in no better shape. Over half of the fleet was destroyed, another quarter badly damaged requiring several months of repair to bring them back to combat-status. The battlespace above Coruscant was littered with the wreckage of over a hundred capital ships that were destroyed, plus thousands upon thousands of wrecked starfighters and bombers; some of the debris were still glowing from the intense heat. The fury of battle had died down slightly. The *Pellaeon*-class Star Destroyers under Admiral Fre'kay's command, coupled with *Scythe*-class battle cruisers, hammered the Sith-Imperial fleet relentlessly; they were supported by Resistance *Ardent*-class fast frigates, *Tri-Scythe*-class and *ShaShore*-class frigates. Outside the viewport, dogfights between CF9 Crossfire starfighters and *Predator*-class starfighters raged on; small streaks of green and red laser bolts lanced passed the forward and side trapezoidal viewports on the bridge. For a moment, Admiral Fre'kay sighed with relief.

* * *

Cosh Sonter jinked and juked violently, evading the two pursuing Sith-Imperial *Predator*-class starfighters on his tail. Red laser bolts streaked passed his canopy, lighting up the dark void in front of him. Sweat dripped down his pale forehead into his blue eyes, and his knuckles were white with strain.

"Cage!" Cosh Sonter screamed, "Get those Eyeballs off our back!"

He heard several more blasts coming from the double light laser cannons on stern of the CF9 Crossfire starfighter blaze furiously. Gaen Cage grunted and growled viciously, trying his hardest to bring the two *Predator*-class starfighters into the targeting reticule.

"I'm trying damn it!" Gaen Cage screamed back.

Cosh banked left, then right, "Try harder!"

The *Predator*-class starfighters were incredibly fast and agile, making them formidable opponents; it also made them hard to hit. The two *Predator*-class starfighters fired another volley of red laser bolts; instinctively, Cosh banked hard right, evading the stream of energy bolts by metres. Suddenly, Gaen Cage, holding down the trigger on the double light laser cannons nearly constantly, managed to strike a hit on one of the tailing Imperial starfighters. The energy bolts perforated and punctured the spherical cockpit, causing it to implode on itself; black and dark grey smoke trailed behind the fatally crippled starfighter. The second *Predator*-class starfighter narrowly missed smashing into the crippled starfighter, expertly twisted and evaded the wildly spinning tangled mesh of metal.

"I got 'em!" Gaen Cage screamed with success.

"Great kid!" Cosh Sonter screamed back, "Don't get cocky!"

The Imperial pilot seemed more determined than ever to take down its prey; Cosh refused to give him the satisfaction. The tailing *Predator*-class starfighter fired another volley of laser bolts. Cosh Sonter attempted to evade the thick stream of energy bolts, but three bolts managed to clip his wing and engine. Luckily, the energy shields held up, and damage was reduced to a minimum.

"Razor One! Are you alright!" Razor Eight screamed.

"I'm hit but not bad!" Cosh Sonter replied with feverous conviction.

Gaen Cage relentlessly fired the double light laser cannons, trying everything he could to take down the pursuing Imperial pilot. Gaen Cage cursed nearly constantly as he fired bolt after bolt of energy at the incoming Imperial starfighter.

"*Razor One, I'm coming in!*" Razor Eight reported.

"Copy!" Cosh Sonter replied, "Cage, cease fire! Eight's coming in!"

Almost immediately, Gaen Cage ceased his relentless, although futile, barrage of laser bolts. This was followed almost immediately by Razor Eight, swooping in and firing her own barrage of laser bolts. From a higher vantage point, Razor Eight, in her CF9 Crossfire starfighter, had the advantage; quickly, the pursuing Imperial pilot broke off his chase, and banked hard left. As he did, the barrage of green energy bolts clipped the starboard hinged-wing, and perforated the spherical cockpit and ion engines. Violently, the *Predator*-class starfighter exploded, vaporizing the pilot inside and sent white-hot shrapnel in all directions. Razor Eight flew through the explosion and debris cloud unharmed, emerging heroically on the other side.

"Great shooting, Eight!" Cosh Sonter screamed with glee.

Quickly, Cosh Sonter looked behind him, over his left shoulder; he saw the Sith-Imperial fleet in complete disarray and the Resistance capital ships hammering them mercilessly with heavy turbolaser fire; although the Sith-Imperial fleet fought back, their fire was no longer concentrated, and seemed completely ineffective. A quick assessment of the two fleets, and Cosh Sonter knew that they'd won the battle. The hulls on the Sith-Imperial capital ships, including the *Imperatrix*, were riddled with gouges, craters, and cracks; the Resistance fleet, although in no better shape, seemed to have an upper hand. The Resistance fleet started moving their capital ships around behind the Sith-Imperial fleet in a classic close-and-ensnare manoeuvre. For a quick moment, Cosh Sonter saw a clear path that led directly to the *Imperatrix*, one of the most infamous ships during the war. Suddenly, the sensation of exhilaration surged through the very core of Cosh Sonter's mind.

"All Razor's form up on me!" Cosh Sonter ordered.

Cosh Sonter violently slammed on the brakes, rolled the starfighter on its left wing, made a hard turn to port, and gunned the throttle forward; the high-g manoeuvre strained Cosh in his seat, his restraints digging into his chest and shoulders.

A little confused, "Cosh! What are we doing?" Gaen Cage asked.

"We're going after her!" Cosh Sonter immediately answered; anticipating the next question, "The *Imperatrix*!"

"Are you mad!" Gaen Cage replied.

Cosh Sonter weaved in-and-out of turbolaser fire, evaded *Predator*-class starfighters, and made a straight dash towards the infamous *Imperious*-class Advanced Star Destroyer *Imperatrix*.

"This is our chance!" Cosh Sonter replied; he quickly glanced back to see if the rest of Razor Squadron had formed up behind him. They were indeed; all eleven of them, "Tighten up the formation! Single-file!" Cosh Sonter ordered, "We're going in hot!"

Admiral Fre'kay watched as the Sith-Imperial fleet futilely tried to counterattack; their heavy turbolaser barrages were scattered, chaotic, and ineffective. The turbolaser batteries on the hull of the *New Hope* sent off a concentrated and constant stream of heavy turbolaser fire towards the nearest *Pellaeon*-class Star Destroyer, fatally crippling the massive vessel in mere moments.

"Sir! All capital ships are in place!" An officer informed him.

"Tighten the noose!" Admiral Fre'kay ordered, "I don't want any ships to leave the perimeter!"

Finally, after descending through the darkened night sky of Coruscant, now filled with falling debris from the space battle above, they were coming up on the landing point. Jedi Malakon, along with Renz, stared out the forward viewport. The sight was eerie; entire sections of Coruscant, a gigantic city world where the city lights never seemed to turn off, was drenched in shadow and darkness.

"They brought down the power grids." Renz replied in a confused tone.

"That's not easy." Jedi Malakon immediately replied, "But I guess they had to bring down the shields somehow."

After a few moments of awe, Renz replied, "Alright, we're coming up on landing point atom." He informed, "Six minutes."

"I'll go back and tell the troops." Jedi Malakon said as he crawled out of the co-pilot's chair.

He calmly walked back into the cargo hold; the fifty or so stormtroopers were standing about silently, concentrating on the battle ahead. Jedi Malakon knew how unsettling the Imperial civil war had been on the stormtroopers, but that was war. He looked at the blank expression on their faces for a moment.

"We're almost there." Jedi Malakon informed, "Gear up and follow me towards the stern."

The final few minutes of the flight were the most turbulent; the light freighter rocked and shook violently, almost knocking the stormtroopers and Jedi Malakon off their feet. Finally, the *Red Diamond* touched down on a solid surface; Jedi Malakon immediately activated his blue-bladed lightsaber, the bottom half of which was sheared off during his duel with Empress Amelia onboard the *Dread Lord* over six months previous, with a *snap-hiss*. The boarding ramp lowered, and a gust of wind shot up into the cargo hold; Jedi Malakon's brown and tan robes flapped in the wind, and a cool sensation shot through him. He then ran down the boarding ramp, followed by the stormtroopers. The stormtroopers immediately set up a perimeter, guarding the following transports as they descended through the lower atmosphere. After another ten minutes, all six transports had touched down safely; the stormtroopers in the each hold quickly piled out and rallied around Jedi Malakon.

Jedi Malakon made a quick assessment of the nearly three hundred men in front of him; it was weird to lead stormtroopers into battle, but that was the way of war. The stormtroopers in front of him, all wearing black versions of their typical armour, stood with conviction in their hearts, and steel in their eyes.

"Okay. We're about a kilometre east from the New Imperial Palace." Jedi Malakon informed, "We're going to go down this street, and secure builds left and right, working our way towards the Palace. Once there, we need to secure and hold the front foyer. Then, I will lead a team through the Palace, securing rooms. Remember, our primary objective is to capture Grand Admiral Narklin Danakar, alive if possible. All other objectives are secondary." Jedi Malakon paused, and looked around, "Any questions?"

Silence.

"Then let's get moving." Jedi Malakon ordered.

The stormtroopers immediately headed out in classic military fashion. They hugged the walls of buildings, securing buildings and checking alleyways as they went. Jedi Malakon followed up in the rear, making sure there wasn't an ambush behind them. Finally, after moving through the darkened streets, they arrived at the precipice of the New Imperial Palace. The New Imperial Palace seemed odd, drenched in shadows and darkness. Outside the New Imperial Palace, located on the staircase and open courtyard, several barbed- and razor-wire fences were erected, duracrete barriers were scattered about, artificial lights running on batteries were set up, and several repeater blaster emplacements were erect; the Sith-Imperial stormtroopers, wearing upgraded ceramic armour styled in classic stormtrooper fashion, patrolled the Palace. Jedi Malakon and the rest of the exiled stormtroopers paused near the edge of one of the last buildings before the New Imperial Palace.

"Get those rockets up here." Jedi Malakon whispered.

Quickly, two stormtroopers armed with proton rockets came forward; they knelt on one knee, laid the rocket tube on their shoulders, lined up the targeting reticule, and squeezed the trigger. The proton rockets streaked through the air, leaving behind a glowing red trail of ions in their wake. In seconds, the glowing red proton rocket slammed into the gun emplacements, destroying them instantly with a flash of bright orange flames.

"Move!" Jedi Malakon ordered.

Immediately, the stormtroopers charged, firing their blaster rifles wildly into the front foyer at the top of the stairs of the New Imperial Palace. Jedi Malakon led the charge, deflecting blaster bolts as he ran; it was particularly difficult since visibility was almost zero and the only light came from the blaster bolts themselves. The torrent of blaster bolts streaking through the pitch black air was brilliant and amazing. Finally, after running across the open duracrete courtyard, deflecting numerous blaster bolts along the way, Jedi Malakon and the first few stormtroopers reached the first duracrete barrier. They quickly ducked behind the one metre tall barrier; the stormtroopers, still crouched behind the duracrete barrier, blindly fired their blaster rifles towards the New Imperial Palace, laying down suppression fire. Jedi Malakon quickly looked back behind him; the stormtroopers were taking heavy casualties, but managed to reach the first of the duracrete barriers.

More blaster bolts streaked across the air; Jedi Malakon reached out with the Force. He sensed the frantic running about of the Sith-Imperial stormtroopers inside the New Imperial Palace, and the nervousness from those firing upon him. He also sensed

that several groups of Sith-Imperial stormtroopers were moving up towards the second and third floor of the New Imperial Palace, probably setting up more repeater blaster emplacements.

"We've stirred up the mynocks' nest now!" Jedi Malakon shouted, "They're setting up more gun emplacements on the second and third floors."

"What do we do?" A stormtrooper asked him.

Jedi Malakon thought about it for a moment, "Get more rockets up here, now!"

Behind him, two more stormtroopers, armed with proton rockets, approached Jedi Malakon.

"Slam them!" Jedi Malakon ordered.

The two stormtroopers placed the rocket tubes on their shoulders, knelt down and fired upon the New Imperial Palace. Jedi Malakon watched as the glowing red rockets streaked through the air and slammed into the side of the Palace. Chunks of dark grey stone, gouged out by the explosion, fell upon the Sith-Imperial stormtroopers defending the Palace below.

"Fire again!" Jedi Malakon ordered.

Cosh Sonter weaved in-and-out of heavy turbolaser fire like a madman out of hell. His knuckles were white from his death grip on the yoke, and sweat streamed down his face from overexertion. Cosh Sonter growled and cursed as he violently slammed the yoke from left to right, up and down, evading incoming fire coming from all directions. Although he had no time to think, Cosh knew that the turbolaser fire was coming from the two *Ardent*-class fast frigates on either side of him and the *Pellaeon*-class Star Destroyer out in front.

"This is thick!" Cosh Sonter growled.

Cosh Sonter suddenly banked right, narrowly missing an incoming turbolaser bolt aimed directly at him. Finally passed the first wave of protective *Ardent*-class fast frigates and *Pellaeon*-class Star Destroyers, Cosh Sonter shot his starfighter straight across the open void headed towards the *Imperatrix*.

Quickly, "How we doing back there?" Cosh Sonter shouted.

Cosh violently banked left, then right, again narrowly missing an incoming turbolaser bolt from the *Imperatrix*.

"Not too good, Cosh!" Gaen Cage answered.

"Keep up the pressure!" Admiral Fre'kay growled, "I want nothing to get through!"

Suddenly, "Sir! Razor Squadron has broken from our ranks and is making a dash towards the *Imperatrix*!" One of the bridge officers informed.

Admiral immediately peered through the side viewports, futilely trying to find them in the chaos of battle, "Locate their positions now!"

Immediately, the holographic images on the viewport highlighted all twelve starfighters in a bright green colour; amidst the small green dots were gigantic red triangles, highlighting the Sith-Imperial capital ships. Surprisingly, they hadn't taken much damage yet, but that wasn't likely to hold.

"Is Cosh insane?" Admiral Fre'kay asked.

"You're insane!" Gaen Cage screamed from behind.

Cosh Sonter, ignoring the remark, continued to jink and juke wildly, evading the turbolaser bolts by mere metres. A near constant flurry of turbolaser bolts streamed in front of his starfighter. Suddenly, on the sensor board, Cosh noticed that Razor Three and Razor Ten just got shot down from a hailstorm of energy bolts. The heavy turbolaser fire, more adept at firing upon capital ships, were thick enough to present a problem to the starfighter pilots. Despite all the jinking and juking, Cosh persisted.

"Cosh! We can't make it!" Razor Eight screamed.

Cosh banked hard right, then left, evading even more turbolaser fire, "We can make it, Eight!" He screamed.

Razor Eight growled in agony, "You can! But we can't! Ah—" The message abruptly ended.

"Eight?" Cosh Sonter quizzically asked, "Eight!"

Cosh immediately looked at his sensors. Razor Eight was gone. An upwelling of rage started to fill Cosh's heart.

"Damn it, Cosh!" Gaen Cage shouted, "We're getting torn apart here!"

Cosh shook his head in frustration then punched the console in front of him, "Damn it! Break off the attack!" Cosh Sonter ordered, "Repeat, all Razor's, break off the attack!"

Cosh glanced at his sensor board for only a moment; immediately he could see that the rest of Razor Squadron had broken off the attack run and were returning to the Resistance front. Defiantly, Cosh goosed the throttle forward, and continued his mad dash forward.

"Cosh! What the hell do you think you're doing?" Gaen Cage screamed.

Cosh ignored the question; all his concentration was on getting to the *Imperatrix*. The dark void between Cosh and the *Imperatrix* was closing fast; Cosh was flying way above the *Imperious*-class Advanced Star Destroyer. Skilfully, instinctively, he weaved through the torrent of heavy turbolaser fire.

Too much has been lost to just give up now, Cosh Sonter thought.

Suddenly, Cosh pitched the nose of his CF9 Crossfire starfighter down, and lined up his attack run on the bridge of the *Imperatrix*. All of a sudden, a heavy turbolaser bolt grazed Cosh's CF9 Crossfire starfighter; the energy shields managed to protect the starfighter from being disintegrated, but was brought down in the process. Against all reason, without shields or squadron mates, Cosh Sonter charged the bridge of the *Imperatrix*. Turbolaser fire streaked from the left and from the right, missing his starfighter by mere centimetres. The close calls from the turbolasers temporarily blinded Cosh, making it harder for him to line up his targeting reticule.

"Hurry up, Cosh!" Gaen Cage screamed.

Finally, after a few tense moments, the targeting reticule turned red, and a solid tone could be heard. Immediately, Cosh unleashed all six proton torpedoes he had against the bridge; out in front, the proton torpedoes glowed red as it streaked through the hard vacuum of space, leaving behind it a faint trail of glowing ions. Before he could see if he hit his target, Cosh Sonter was forced to pulled up, hard. Cosh Sonter pulled back on the yoke with all his might, burying the yoke into his gut.

Cosh Sonter growled, "C'mon!"

White knuckled, and sweat pouring down his face, Cosh managed to pull up just in time, narrowly missed smashing into the side of the Advanced Star Destroyer.

Then, with great elation, "Direct hit!" Gaen Cage shouted from behind.

The bridge sustained six direct hits from six individual proton torpedoes; the energy released from the attack flash melted the bridge, killing everyone inside in an instant. The hull and metal around the bridge glowed white-hot, and smoke billowed out of the gaping chasm. Cosh managed a quick glance over his right shoulder; in those few moments, he managed to see the *Imperatrix* starting its slow descent into Coruscant's upper atmosphere. Already, flaming wreckage was peeling off the battle scarred hull of the *Imperatrix*; slowly, the hull started to glow from the intense heat from friction with the upper atmosphere.

Over the headset, a flurry of cheers and congratulations were sent. All in all though, the feeling was bitter-sweet.

Admiral Fre'kay watched in astonishment as Cosh Sonter single-handedly took down the infamous *Imperatrix*. Admiral Fre'kay shook his head in disbelief as he watched the *Imperatrix* plummet into the upper atmosphere of Coruscant; orange-yellow flames erupted across the hull as it fell through denser atmosphere. Behind him, the bridge officers were elated with joy, cheering and screaming in triumph.

Amidst all the noise, one of the bridge officers screamed a report, "Sir!"

"Quiet!" Admiral Fre'kay ordered.

"Sir! The Imperials have cleared a path and are preparing to jump to hyperspace!" The bridge officer informed.

Suddenly, the moment of elation turned to dread; the bridge was eerily silent as everyone else went back to work.

"How long till they jump?" Admiral Fre'kay asked.

"Estimated time to jump, five minutes!" The bridge officer informed.

Admiral Fre'kay growled, revealing his menacing fangs, "Move the fleet in!" Admiral Fre'kay ordered, "Trap them!"

* * *

"We're pinned down!" The stormtrooper next to Jedi Malakon shouted, "What now?"

Jedi Malakon thought about it for a moment, "There's no way we can make it through the front! And there are no other entrances!" Jedi Malakon replied, "But I think there's another way!"

"How?" The stormtrooper asked.

"Back there I think I saw an access shaft!" Jedi Malakon informed, pointing to the street they just came from, "If we could use it to infiltrate the Palace, we'd be in business!"

The stormtrooper nodded, "What do you need?"

"Lay down suppression fire!" Jedi Malakon ordered.

The stormtrooper smiled, "Suppression fire!"

Almost immediately, the stormtroopers erupted with a torrent of blaster bolts; the red and blue blaster bolts streaked across the black air, striking the black duracrete walls of the New Imperial Palace, gouging holes into the side of it. Jedi Malakon immediately grabbed six stormtroopers, and made a mad run for the access shaft from the street they just came from. Some stray bolts zinged passed Jedi Malakon, and were easily deflected by his blue-bladed lightsaber. Clearing the open courtyard and running back into the streets, they arrived at the access shaft in the middle of the road. One of the stormtroopers tried to lift it, but it wouldn't budge.

"Let me try." Jedi Malakon replied.

Swiftly, he plunged his lightsaber into the durasteel panel, melting the access hatch. Within seconds they were in; Jedi Malakon was the first to jump in. He landed on his feet; a splash of sewage water followed. Jedi Malakon looked around and secured the path.

"All clear!" Jedi Malakon replied.

The six stormtroopers followed. Silently, they moved through the pitch black sewage tunnel. Jedi Malakon lit the way with his lightsaber, while the stormtroopers used their holographic visors to see in the dark. The stench of the sewer was almost unbearable, but within minutes, they were under the New Imperial Palace. The

duracrete walls around them shook as repeater blaster emplacements fired constantly, and were in turn fired upon.

"I guess we go up." Jedi Malakon replied.

Jedi Malakon climbed up the ladder, and cut a hole through the access hatch at the top. Gingerly, Jedi Malakon lifted and pushed aside, the durasteel access hatch; quietly, he crawled out of the access shaft, and secured the room. It was a storage room, and was almost completely dark. He looked around, and waved the stormtroopers up. Quickly, the stormtroopers climbed up the ladder, and made their way into the Palace.

"Up!" Jedi Malakon ordered, "Quickly!"

Jedi Malakon led the way, running up the stairs of the New Imperial Palace as fast he could. Within minutes, they reached the top floor.

"Throne room." Jedi Malakon ordered.

One of the stormtroopers tried the door handle, "Locked."

"Breach!" Jedi Malakon immediately ordered.

One of the stormtroopers slammed a pad of plastic explosives onto the thick wood double doors of the throne room. Jedi Malakon took the right side of the door; the stormtroopers spread themselves out along the wall. Five seconds later, the plastic explosives blew the door apart, splintering and shattering the luxurious and decadent door. With Force-enhanced movements, Jedi Malakon stormed into the throne room. Forcefully pushing past the splintered debris still in the air, he immediately deflected several blaster bolts aimed towards him with several quick flicks of the wrist. One of the blaster bolts was perfectly deflected back towards its shooter, striking him in the chest.

To his right, another stormtrooper, wearing the new light-grey ceramic armour, rose his assault blaster rifle; in what seemed like milliseconds, Jedi Malakon spun on the heels of his feet, evading the blaster bolts by mere millimetres. Then, with the full power of the Force, Jedi Malakon unleashed a powerful Force Wave. The stormtrooper was sent backwards, slamming into the wall behind him; the assault blaster rifle was sent careening out of his hands. Jedi Malakon charged, closing the distance between the two in less than a second; with perfect precision, he lashed out with his blue-bladed lightsaber. The energy blade carved a glowing orange groove into the ceramic armour, cracking the hardened material. Using the momentum from the spin, Jedi Malakon

lunched and pierced the ceramic armour with the tip of the energy blade, killing the stormtrooper underneath.

Behind him, the six stormtroopers filed into the room, firing wildly at the remaining stormtroopers, now crouched behind the thick black pillars in the throne room. The black and dark grey tiles on the floor, and the white marble walls, sparked after stray blaster bolt struck them. Then, just out of the corner of his eye, Jedi Malakon saw the classic white uniform of a Grand Admiral leave the back of the throne room.

"Keep them occupied!" Jedi Malakon ordered, "I'm going after Danakar!"

Using the Force to enhance his movements, Jedi Malakon charged towards the back of the throne room; the barrage of blaster bolts seemed relentless, but Jedi Malakon skilfully evaded and deflected them. Jedi Malakon twisted, spun, and flicked his lightsaber and body as if they were one; his movements were so fast, they seemed like a blur. Within seconds, he crossed the open courtyard, and began his chase of Grand Admiral Narklin Danakar. Jedi Malakon looked around the back of the throne room, and quickly discovered a hidden pathway; immediately, he charged in. The pathway was dark and dank, but it was short with a light at the end of the tunnel. Barring all caution, Jedi Malakon charged in headstrong, lightsaber in hand. Jedi Malakon emerged at the end of the pathway, only to be greeted with blaster fire. Instinctively, Jedi Malakon ducked behind the wall for cover. Then, moments later, Jedi Malakon realized he had made a mistake. Jumping through the doorway, lightsaber in a guard position, Jedi Malakon had confirmation of that mistake. Jedi Malakon saw a *Nune*-class Imperial shuttle, which had just taken off, making its way up towards the night sky of Coruscant.

Jedi Malakon cursed under his breath; he grabbed his comlink, "Admiral Fre'kay."

A few moments later, after the encryption algorithms had time to adjust, "Yes, Jedi Malakon? Do you have Grand Admiral Danakar?"

"No." Jedi Malakon informed, "He's making his way up towards you now."

Jedi Malakon could hear the Bothan growl in displeasure, "Copy, Jedi Malakon. We'll take it from here." Admiral Fre'kay replied, "Secure the Palace and secure all secondary personnel and targets."

"Copy. Out." Jedi Malakon finished.

* * *

Cosh Sonter, narrowly making it out behind Imperial lines alive, was still riding the adrenaline rush from attacking the *Imperatrix*; his heart was racing, and the tips of his fingers tingled. Regardless of the rush, he still felt like he could sleep for a week.

Suddenly, over the headset, "*Razor One! Grand Admiral Narklin Danakar is coming up from Coruscant headed towards us!*" Admiral Fre'kay informed, "*You're the closest fighter we've got in the area. Shoot him down!*"

The words kicked Cosh out of his trance, "Copy, sir! Out!"

Cosh immediately gunned the throttle to full power, banking wildly through the heavy turbolaser fire all around him.

"We're going after the Grand Admiral?" Gaen Cage asked.

"Looks like it." Cosh Sonter quickly answered.

In a mad dash through the debris-filled battlespace, Cosh managed to catch up to the *Nune*-class Imperial shuttle, highlighted on his targeting computer as the Grand Admiral's. Quickly, Cosh positioned his starfighter behind the Imperial shuttle, lined up the targeting reticule, and squeezed off a few bolts. The green energy bolts just missed wide. Cosh cursed, and squeezed again.

Then suddenly, with a flicker of pseudomotion, the Imperial shuttle jumped to hyperspace, along with the rest of the Imperial fleet. Just like that, it was over.

Several Standard Hours Later: New Imperial City, Coruscant:

It took nearly a standard hour to clear all the rooms in the New Imperial Palace, and secure all important targets, including several Moffs; the rest of the Sith-Imperial stormtroopers and officers were taken to detention cells for the duration of the reclamation. Similar news came from the Temple of the Sith; there, several Jedi Knights, recently brought into service in the Resistance, engaged and killed several Sith acolytes, and apprentices. Most of the Sith Lords and Knights fled to either the Unknown Regions or Korriban. Overall, the liberation of Coruscant went well, although it could have been better.

Mathias Malakon eagerly watched as starfighters, transports, freighters and even smaller capital ships began landing all around Coruscant. Almost immediately, both sides of the battle, the ground and space, were reunited; smiles, cheering, friendly hugs

and handshakes, and the exchange of stories were the most common greetings all around. It also seemed that the New Imperial Palace was the rally point for the reunion. Hundreds, possibly thousands of beings flocked to this site to meet friends. Mathias Malakon watched as the men and women, human and alien, of the Resistance happily celebrated their victory today. Even he was pessimistic that he would ever step foot on Coruscant again after Darth Krayt had annexed from them over six standard years ago.

Suddenly, Mathias Malakon spotted Cosh Sonter, "Ha-hey!" He shouted with a smile on his face.

Cosh quickly hugged Mathias, although, he was less than enthusiastic about it.

Mathias Malakon, filled with joy, "You crazy bastard! I heard you took on the *Imperatrix* alone!" Mathias Malakon chuckled, "Even I wasn't that crazy!"

"Actually, I think you were." Cosh Sonter quickly replied.

Mathias Malakon shrugged, "Well, perhaps. But I wasn't nearly good enough to bring her down!"

Mathias Malakon smiled and patted Cosh Sonter on the back; Cosh didn't look nearly as enthused. Suddenly, from the top of the step leading up to the New Imperial Palace, Admiral Fre'kay stood, "Attention! Attention!" Everyone looked up at the Admiral, and the entire crowd of beings settled down, "Today, you have all made history! Today, all the sacrifices you have made finally paid off! Today, you have saved a galaxy! Today, you have ended a war!" Admiral Fre'kay paused for a moment, letting the cheers die down, "I am proud of each and every one of you! The galaxy owes you so much, a debt that might never be repaid... I just hope that having Coruscant back it payment enough."

The crowd of pilots and troopers stood silently, listening to the words spoken by the Admiral. Jedi Malakon looked around at the faces of some of the beings; many had tears in their eyes.

"Would Captain Cosh Sonter please step forward!" Admiral Fre'kay continued.

Mathias looked over at Cosh; he sensed reluctance and hesitation from his old friend. Slowly, Cosh made his way through the crowd, finally emerging from it. Slowly, he made his way up the stairs until he was facing the Bothan Admiral. Cosh looked into the Bothan's violet eyes for a moment. Then, Admiral Fre'kay took something out of his pocket.

"Captain Cosh Sonter, for your bravery during the Battle of Coruscant, and for your death-defying attack on the *Imperatrix*—" Some in the crowd laughed, "we would like to award you the Metal of Bravery, and promote you to the rank of Commander!"

Admiral Fre'kay placed the golden metal around Cosh's neck, and shook his hand with a great smile; the Metal of Bravery was an award that went back to the First Galactic Civil War. It was first awarded to Luke Skywalker, Han Solo and Chewbacca during the Battle of Yavin for the destruction of the first Death Star; the second time it was awarded was during the Battle of Endor to Arvel Crynyd, posthumously, after the successful destruction of the Star Dreadnought *Executor*. This would only be the third time it was awarded in history. Jedi Malakon was filled with pride and joy for his old friend, although looking at Cosh's expression, he began to worry.

"Congratulations. You earned it, Commander." Admiral Fre'kay finished, "Now! Everyone, have fun! That's an order!"

A roaring cheer went up from the crowd. Standing at the top of the stairs, Cosh Sonter, slowly, began walking back down; his head hung over his shoulders. Several pilots, none of whom were with Razor Squadron, went up to congratulate Cosh on the award; Cosh politely smiled, shook hands, and thanked the pilots, but Mathias Malakon could sense that undercurrent of despair emanating from Cosh.

Some time during the night, the power was restored. Over the course of the night, several bars, pubs and nightclubs opened up their doors to the troopers and pilots; a planet-wide celebration broke out throughout Coruscant and New Imperial City. Above, fireworks filled the sky and celebratory fly-bys streaked across the sky. Mathias Malakon and Cosh Sonter followed a bunch of pilots into a small, local pub. There, the drinking began, and for once, the pilots and troopers of the Resistance finally seemed to relax.

Suddenly, one of the pilots stood on the bar table, a glass in hand, "A toast! A toast to the great Cosh Sonter for his heroic, and rather crazy, attack on the *Imperatrix*! A feat, I sure as hell wouldn't want to match!"

A quick laugh, and the pilots drank their various alcoholic beverages. Slowly, Cosh Sonter drank his ale to the toast, then managed to work up the courage to stand up on the bar table himself. Everyone in the bar turned to give eyes to Cosh. He raised his glass, "To our noble dead."

The pub suddenly went quiet, but everyone drank to the toast. Cosh climbed down from the table, and quietly walked out of the pub. Mathias Malakon was right behind him. After working his way through the crowded pub, Mathias emerged outside to see Cosh leaning up against the wall, drinking by himself. Cosh quickly blinked away some tears when he noticed Mathias was outside.

"You want to talk, Cosh?" Mathias asked.

Cosh shook his head, "Not really."

Mathias nodded, "Okay. But if you ever do..."

Cosh nodded, "Yeah. I know."

"Alright. Hey, today's your day, Cosh." Mathias said just before he was about to go back into the pub.

"Mathias." Cosh quickly said; Mathias stopped in his tracks, and looked back at Cosh, "This war. It's far from over, isn't it?"

Mathias paused for a moment, "I fear that it isn't. No, it's not over." Mathias finally spoke, "With Grand Admiral Danakar out there, and beings still obeying his orders, I think this is only the beginning of another war."

Cosh nodded his head in agreement.

"Take care, Cosh." Mathias replied, "Like you said, it's not over. We still have a lot of work that needs to be done."

"Right..."

Eight Standard Months Later: 144 ABY:

Mathias Malakon quickly strode through the crowded halls of the Commonwealth Palace on Coruscant, his tan and brown robes hanging loosely off his shoulders. Beings from all corners of the galaxy seemed to fill the lavish and luxurious foyer of the remarkable palace, going about their various businesses. The air in the foyer was filled with an aura of emotions; most were simply frantic and frazzled emotions, while others seemed quite focused and determined. As Mathias Malakon pushed and shoved his way through the crowd, he saw a familiar being up ahead.

He quickly made his way through the crowd, and shouted, "Admiral Fre'kay!"

The brown-furred Bothan turned around and gazed upon the Jedi. With a smirk, the Admiral replied, "Mathias. Good to see you."

Finally, after pushing his way through the last of the beings, Mathias stood in front of the Bothan, "It's been a long time, Admiral."

Admiral Sibar Fre'kay turned to walk with Mathias, "I assume we're heading to the same place?"

"Yes, Admiral." Mathias Malakon answered, "There's been news from the Outer Rim—"

"Not here." Admiral Fre'kay cut in.

"I'm sorry, Admiral." Mathias Malakon apologized, "This news has got me quite excited."

"As I, Mathias." The Admiral replied, "As I."

Together, they silently walked through the busy hallways and corridors of the palace. Gradually, the crowd of beings thinned out, until very few beings remained. After walking at full stride for several minutes, they finally took a turbolift up to the top floor.

"I here election time is upon us, Admiral." Mathias Malakon spoke to fill the empty air within the turbolift.

"Yes." Admiral Fre'kay replied, "It has beings quite busy, and nervous, as of late."

Mathias nodded, "Yes. I gathered as much." He replied, "Who do the early polls favour?"

The Admiral grumbled, "Too early to say for certain."

"Nothing is for certain, Admiral." Mathias replied, "Are they giving you good odds?"

"They seem to be reasonably kind to me in the media." Admiral Fre'kay replied.

"Then why the agitation?" Mathias asked.

"The others are the ones I'm afraid of." Admiral Fre'kay answered.

Mathias looked over at the Bothan, "Who are they favouring?"

"The two that seem prime to take the position of Consul are Proc Vanis and Tristan Elamm," The Admiral answered, "Although Alona Oamuys seems quite popular as well."

Mathias Malakon nodded in understanding, "All former Imperials."

"Yes." Admiral Fre'kay answered, "That is what worries me."

Mathias shrugged, "Never mind." He replied, "As long as you get the First Consul chair, that shouldn't matter much."

The Bothan looked over at Mathias, "Oh, it does. If they outnumber me, this coalition could far more complicated than originally anticipated."

"I see your point." Mathias Malakon replied, "Nothing would get done."

Bothan growled an agreement.

Just then, the turbolift doors slid open, revealing the upper conference room where the meeting was to take place; inside was dimly lit, with a large oval wood table in the center, surrounded by a dozen synthleather chairs. Admiral Fre'kay stepped out of the turbolift first, followed closely by Mathias Malakon. Already in the room was Admiral Eirta Dalgas, a human female of thirty standard years, commander of the Coruscant Home Fleet, sometimes regarded as the Coruscant First Fleet. She wore an admiral's uniform; a tight-fitted, dark-blue military uniform with thick cloth shoulder-pads and chest-plate bearing a silver-coloured Commonwealth emblem, lined with gold-coloured trim, with an admiral's rank plaque on her chest. A black cape covering the right side of her body finished the ensemble. The uniform was fashioned as a hybrid between Imperial and Alliance military uniforms, simply because of symbolism.

"Good morning, Admiral Dalgas." Admiral Fre'kay greeted.

"Greetings, Admiral Fre'kay." Admiral Dalgas replied, "I see you've brought the High Templar. Excellent."

Mathias Malakon was still getting used to the new title. In fact, he had been wrestling with the idea of a new form of government since they'd taken Coruscant over eight standard months previous. So many things had changed; too many things, in fact. However, at this time, most of the time, he had no time to linger and think of anything else but the situation at hand. It was, after all, of vital importance

"Morning, Admiral." High Templar Malakon greeted.

Admiral Dalgas looked toward the High Templar, "Let's cut the meet-and-greets, and get straight to business." She replied, "What news have you to report, High Templar?"

High Templar Malakon took a step toward the oval table, and answered, "I have just received a report from our Outer Rim intelligence."

"And why is this of great importance, High Templar?" Admiral Dalgas asked.

"Because it contains the whereabouts of Grand Admiral Narklin Danakar." High Templar Malakon sternly answered.

The answer took Admiral Dalgas aback, "Danakar?"

"Yes, Admiral." High Templar Malakon answered, "We've found the bastard. And we can take him down, once and for all."

Suddenly, the attitude of Admiral Dalgas changed completely, "Tell me more."

High Templar Malakon stepped towards the oval table, and activated the holographic projector in the center of the table. A white-blue cone of light emanated from the projector; above it, shone the image of a vibrant and lush world, with thick vegetation along the equator, and ice-covered poles. Orbiting the world was a ring of orbital shipyards.

"Rothana." Admiral Fre'kay answered.

Admiral Dalgas hunched over one of the black synthleather chairs and stared at the holographic image; the synthleather creaked as she placed her weight on the chair. She wore a face of determination. She stood there, studying the image for several seconds.

"What are we going to do about it?" Admiral Dalgas asked.

"This is where the situation gets more complicated, Admiral." Admiral Fre'kay started, "Rothana is deep within the Outer Rim, a region currently contested by the Hutts and Thrak Zann." Admiral Fre'kay punched in several buttons, and the holographic image zoomed out to show the entire region, "Luckily, Thrak Zann has granted us permission to travel through his occupied territory in order to get to Rothana."

"Great, so why are we still standing here?" Admiral Dalgas asked.

"That's the second problem." Admiral Fre'kay continued, "The Outer Rim intelligence team discovered this above the world of Pzob." Once again, he punched in more buttons, and the holographic image panned over and zoomed into another world; this one was covered with thick and dense forests, and crystal clear oceans. Orbiting above the world was an asteroid-shaped object.

Admiral Dalgas studied the holographic image quickly, "What is it?" Pointing to the asteroid-shaped object.

High Templar Malakon stood next to the oval table; the blue-white light emanating from the holographic projector reflected off his face. Although he was only thirty-one standard years old, he appeared a lot older; his face was set taut, with a few wrinkles covering his face, and his hair was starting to grey. He answered, "We believe it to be a former-Imperial superweapon."

"Impossible." Admiral Dalgas replied in disgust, "The Empire hasn't made a superweapon since the reign of Palpatine. Just the thought of it is insulting!"

Admiral Fre'kay stepped in, "We believe it to be a relic from Palpatine's reign."

Admiral Dalgas instantly seemed to calm down, having realized her overreaction, "I was under the impression all superweapons were accounted for."

"As were we." High Templar Malakon answered, "We believe it to be a skeleton for an incomplete superweapon, dubbed the Eye of Palpatine." He explained, "From the reports, it seems that Empress Amelia had come across this skeleton, and began refitting it with armaments during the war." High Templar Malakon paused, and continued with a hint of disappointment in his voice, "We now believe that this superweapon, and not the *Dread Lord*, was in fact responsible for the resource-drain the Sith experienced during the war."

Admiral Dalgas nodded, and swept one of her dark brown bangs from her eyes, "An understandable miscalculation, High Templar." She replied, "What's the status on the Eye of Palpatine?"

"As best as we could hope." High Templar Malakon answered, "The construction of the Eye is still incomplete as far as we can tell. All armaments and shields seem off-line, and personnel appears to consist of a skeleton crew."

Admiral Dalgas stared at High Templar Malakon from across the oval table, "You don't seem so sure about that, High Templar."

"Reports are sketchy on the details, Admiral." High Templar Malakon calmly and sternly replied.

Admiral Dalgas pondered the situation for a moment, "Seems too risky."

"Risky, yes." Admiral Fre'kay answered, "But one we cannot afford to pass."

Slowly, Admiral Dalgas nodded in agreement, "So? Battleplans?"

Suddenly, three other holographic projectors set up at the far end of the oval table shone to life. Above the blue-white cones of light were the figures of three humans wearing naval uniforms.

"Admiral Dalgas, I would like to introduce you to our commanders for this mission." Admiral Fre'kay informed, "Commodore Dace Wilder currently heads operations above Rodia, and will be given tactical command for this mission."

A tall, lanky, but not too unattractive human male bowed his head, "An honour to meet you, Admiral. The *Gallant* and the entire task-force is honoured to be chosen for a mission of this calibre."

The Bothan Admiral nodded, "Above Manaan, Captain Aerex Chakrei has agreed to lend his task-force."

A muscular man bowed his head slightly, "We've had the privilege to take down one Imperial warlord; it is an honour to take down one more."

"The biggest one, in fact." High Templar Malakon added, "I'm sure the Razor's are up to it."

A small smirk crept up at the corners of Captain Aerex Chakrei's mouth, "Indeed."

The Bothan continued, "Lastly, Captain Liam Triem of the *Return to Innocence* has managed to convince Commodore Soryn Marclonus to lend us her three *Interdictor*-class Star Destroyers."

"Any service we can provide, Admiral." Captain Liam Triem replied.

Admiral Fre'kay punched some more buttons, and the holographic image in the middle of the table, showing Pzob, zoomed out to show the entire galaxy. Suddenly, flashing green triangles appeared above three world. Admiral Fre'kay pointed at one of the flashing green triangles, "Captain Aerex Chakrei's task-force above Manaan is to

meet up with the task-force above Rodia. Captain Triem, his *Return to Innocence*, along with the *Enigma* and *Baltar's Revenge*, will also rendezvous above Rodia." He explained, "From there, it should be a short jump to Pzob." The holographic image showed two flashing green triangles move above Rodia, indicating the timing of the operation.

"What about Grand Admiral Danakar?" Admiral Dalgas quickly asked, "He's the real prize."

"Agreed." Admiral Fre'kay replied, "That is why High Templar Malakon will take the *New Hope* and head directly to Rothana."

High Templar Malakon, noticing the sudden displeasure from Admiral Dalgas, immediately added, "If we time this correctly, the task-force should have enough time to destroy the Eye of Palpatine, jump to Rothana, and join me in capturing Grand Admiral Danakar."

Admiral Dalgas shook her head, "You want to retask the flagship to the Coruscant Home Fleet?" Admiral Dalgas rhetorically asked; for several moments, she remained silent, "This all appears to hinge a lot on timing, High Templar."

"It does." High Templar Malakon answered, "Timing is everything. We need the combined strength of the two task-forces, plus those three *Interdictor*-class Star Destroyers, along with the *New Hope*, in order to bring Grand Admiral Danakar to justice."

"Agreed, High Templar." Admiral Dalgas commented, "So, what do you need of me?"

"We need your consent to lend the *New Hope* to High Templar Malakon for this mission." Admiral Fre'kay answered.

After pondering for a moment, "You have my support, Admiral Fre'kay."

Five Standard Days Later: Rothana:

Mathias Malakon stared out of the forward viewport of the *New Hope*; all he saw was the wash of blue-and-white streams of hyperspace. In one way, it was almost nice, soothing. This gave Mathias time, possibly the first time in eight months, to actually think and contemplate the last few months. Much has happened since the liberation of Coruscant; only days after the Resistance took Coruscant, they declared a new government system: the Galactic Commonwealth of Patriotic Worlds. The name seemed a little too militaristic for his liking, but after all, the Galactic Commonwealth, or GC,

was run by an oligarchy of both former Alliance and Imperial admirals and generals, collectively known as the Admiralty. Politicians were in short supply due to Empress Amelia's purge of political opposition to her. Right now, anyways, the government was to be run by three Consuls, Admirals elected by the beings, plus five Admirals from the Galactic Alliance and five Admirals from Fel's Empire; election results were still being processed. So far, the system seemed to work, but he wasn't sure if that would last.

Beings in military acting as politicians, Mathias Malakon thought, it could only result in chaos in the long run...

"High Templar Malakon, we're almost there." A bridge officer informed.

"Thank you." High Templar Malakon answered.

High Templar, he thought. Another big change in the new government was the reformation of the Jedi Order into something dubbed the Jedi Knights Templars, of which Mathias Malakon was its head. During the reformation ceremony, days after the liberation of Coruscant, Mathias Malakon recalled his words: *The Templars will be the shield of the galaxy, and the sword against the darkness!* At the time, he meant it; but now, he was unsure. A large majority of the Jedi that joined the Knights Templars were from the Old Order, naturally, but they were younglings or apprentices when the Massacre of Ossus took place, and were barely trained in the Jedi arts. Even worse, during the war, the Hidden Temple was destroyed, killing many more Knights and Masters. Regardless, it was his job now to provide guidance and set an example to the new Jedi Knights Templars.

"Coming out of hyperspace in three, two, one!" One of the bridge officers shouted.

Jedi Malakon walked to the front viewport; his brown robes hung loosely over his body, but the black ceramic armour he wore underneath clacked when he walked; just one more thing different between the Knights Templars and the Jedi of old. Suddenly, the motley collection of blue and white swirling lights started to coalesce into white streaks of light, then into individual points.

"Report!" High Templar Malakon ordered.

"Scanning..." One of the bridge officers informed, "Contacts! Star Destroyers! Lots of them!"

"Give me everything!" High Templar Malakon ordered.

"Thirty *Pellaeon*-class Star Destroyers... about the same number of *Ardent*-class fast frigates." The bridge officer reported.

High Templar Malakon looked out of the forward viewport and saw the Imperial fleet in front of him. That assessment seemed accurate. All the capital ships seemed to be in lower orbit guarding the orbital shipyards. Behind the fleet, High Templar Malakon could see Rothana. The poles of the world was covered in blue-white arctic ice, while at the equator, lush green vegetation and crystal clear blue oceans flourished. Hovering above Rothana were its orbital shipyards.

"Sir, they're approaching!" Another bridge officer reported.

"Good. All engines, full forward!" High Templar Malakon ordered.

A moment of confusion and hesitation, "Sir?" One of the bridge officers asked, "We're the only ship here."

High Templar Malakon knew this, of course. That was the whole point. The *New Hope* was to jump in alone, and hold out for as long as possible.

"Move forward!" High Templar Malakon ordered in a stern voice, "Train all batteries to fire on the nearest Star Destroyer!"

Immediately, the bridge officers began their work relaying orders and gathering data from the sensor boards; the bridge was immediately filled with busy chatter that blurred together. High Templar Malakon watched as five *Pellaeon*-class Star Destroyers, reinforced with three *Ardent*-class fast frigates approached the *New Hope*. Suddenly, the Imperial fleet fired a fully battery of turbolasers; he watched as the red turbolaser bolts streaked across the void of space, and struck the bow of the *New Hope*. No explosions followed, but the entire bridge of the *New Hope* yawed violently. Sparks rained down from electronic equipment; they seemed to dance once they struck the polished durasteel floor. The officers on the bridge grabbed hold of their consoles, but High Templar Malakon simply stood at the front of the bridge.

He quickly turned to face the officers, "Shields?" High Templar Malakon sternly asked.

"Holding!" One of the officers reported.

High Templar Malakon turned his attention back to the forward viewport, "Fire all batteries!"

Suddenly, a massive barrage of heavy turbolaser fire streamed out from the *New Hope*. The stream of concentrated energy bolts struck the nearest *Pellaeon*-class Star Destroyer. At first, it seemed that the Star Destroyer's shields were holding; then, without warning, the shields failed, and the hull exploded with brilliant yellow-orange flames. When the fog of war cleared, massive craters, charred and blackened from the intense heat, were gouged into the port side hull; radiating cracks formed from each crater, and parts of the hull glowed red-orange. Surprisingly enough, the *Pellaeon*-class Star Destroyer was still operational, and fired another salvo of heavy turbolaser fire. The energy bolts struck the hull, this time overwhelming the shields slightly; small explosions erupted across the bow of the *New Hope*.

"Fire at will!" High Templar Malakon screamed, "Fire at will!"

Another stream of concentrated turbolaser fire exploded across the damaged *Pellaeon*-class Star Destroyer. This time, the energy bolts tore the titanic vessel in half. Molten blobs of metal, white-hot twisted durasteel, and the frozen bodies of unfortunate officers, troopers and pilots were sent in all directions. High Templar Malakon's gaze extended further; he just noticed that two more *Pellaeon*-class Star Destroyers had joined the battle, along with five more *Ardent*-class fast frigates. Together, the Imperial fleet could tear the *New Hope* apart.

"Status?" High Templar Malakon ordered.

"They're surrounding us!" An officer reported, "Should we launch our fighters?"

"No!" High Templar Malakon immediately snapped, "Fire in all directions! Attack everything!"

For a moment, High Templar Malakon could hear the turning gears of the turbolaser batteries rotating to train their sights on their targets. Then, another volley of turbolaser fire, this time aimed in all directions. The turbolaser bolts slammed into the hulls of the numerous *Pellaeon*-class Star Destroyers and *Ardent*-class fast frigates, that now surrounded the *New Hope*; the space around the *New Hope*, it seemed, exploded with vast amounts of bright yellow energy. Then, together, in almost perfect unison, the Imperial fleet fired its heavy turbolaser batteries. The entire hull of the *New Hope* erupted into orange-yellow flames; the bridge of the Star Dreadnought rocked and shook violently, knocking High Templar Malakon off his feet. Sparks rained down all around them, and several consoles erupted in flames.

"We can't take another hit like that!" An officer screamed in terror.

"I know." High Templar Malakon said to himself.

High Templar Malakon picked himself up off the cold, polished durasteel floor, and gazed out the forward viewport. He saw the turbolaser batteries, the ones still functional anyways, still firing upon the Imperial *Pellaeon*-class Star Destroyers. Just off to the right, High Templar Malakon noticed the stream of turbolaser bolts striking a single *Pellaeon*-class Star Destroyer. The constant stream of energy bolts overwhelmed its shields, and the hull burst into bright orange flames and plumes of shrapnel. Although the Star Destroyer didn't explode, the vessel was fatally crippled, and slowly drifted off into deep space.

"Tell the port batteries to concentrate their fire on a single Star Destroyer!" High Templar Malakon ordered.

Within moments, the port heavy turbolaser batteries rotated, and fired. After another few moments, two more Star Destroyers, one port and another starboard, erupted into flames. The hulls flash melted from the intense heat, and blew apart. Out of the corner of High Templar Malakon eyes, he could see beings being sucked out into the hard vacuum of space, along with twisted debris; large chunks of durasteel armour smashed into the bow of the *New Hope*, rocking her violently. The sight of complete and utter death was unsettling, but it had to be done. Suddenly, the Imperial fleet fired another concentrated stream of turbolaser bolts at the *New Hope*. The hull turned white-hot, and parts melted from the intense heat of the energy bolts; the entire vessel rocked back and forth violently and erratically. A massive debris cloud erupted from the damaged hull of the *New Hope*. On the bridge, the air was filled with sparks, now a constant stream, and the violent shaking knocked beings out of their seats. High Templar Malakon, again, was knocked off his feet, and slammed into the durasteel floor.

Growling, "Damage report!" High Templar Malakon ordered.

"Hull breached!" One of the officers managed to shout, "Explosive decompressions reported on sections fifty through seventy-four! Fires on all major decks!"

High Templar Malakon cursed under his breath, "Where the frack are they?" He whispered to himself.

Suddenly, "Contact!"

High Templar Malakon quickly rose, "What is it?"

"Scanning." The bridge officer informed, "Three Interdictor Cruisers! They're ours!"

"About bloody time." High Templar Malakon replied.

High Templar Malakon picked himself up off the floor, and ran over to the side viewports. Barely, he saw one of the *Interdictor*-class Star Destroyers; using the generic hull of the *Pellaeon*-class Star Destroyer, most of the armaments were replaced with four massive gravity well projectors; the main purpose of the Star Destroyer was the project a high-gravity field, an interdiction field, that would prevent other vessels from jumping to hyperspace.

Suddenly, he could feel the increase in gravity weigh down his body. One the holographic displays on the trapezoidal transparisteel viewports, he could see the fabric of space-time warp and steepen. Although the presence of the *Interdictor*-class Star Destroyers were surprising, that didn't faze the Imperial fleet; they continued their relentless bombardment on the *New Hope*. High Templar Malakon knew that the vessel couldn't take much more of this; the shields were failing, and about a third of the turbolaser batters were destroyed. Both fleets, now almost side-by-side, hammered each other with relentless and merciless turbolaser fire. Hulls exploded into great balls of shrapnel and flames; luckily, the *Interdictor*-class Star Destroyers stayed out of the battle, hanging back behind the *New Hope*. High Templar Malakon started to sweat from nerves.

All of a sudden, "We've got more contacts jumping in!" Another officer reported.

High Templar Malakon immediately ran over to the side viewports; he saw the Commonwealth fleet drop out of hyperspace. Comprised of mainly *Scythe*-class battle cruisers with a few *Pellaeon*-class Star Destroyers, reinforced with *Tri-Scythe*-class and *ShaShore*-class frigates and *Ardent*-class frigates, they numbered approximately twenty capital ships in total; all bore the new Galactic Commonwealth emblem, a mix between the old Rebel Alliance and the Fel's Empire emblem. Surprisingly, at least to High Templar Malakon, the hulls from the capital ships were badly damaged and scarred; huge craters riddled some of the larger vessels, while others had scorch marks all along the sides.

High Templar Malakon thought nothing of it. Immediately after the Galactic Commonwealth fleet dropped out of hyperspace, High Templar Malakon shouted, "Send them the targeting data, and bring them in line with us!"

High Templar Malakon watched as the Commonwealth fleet manoeuvred behind the *New Hope*, and collectively, they hammered the remaining Imperial vessels. High Templar Malakon's attention turned back to the forward viewport; now, more and more Star Destroyers and fast frigates were moving in closer to engage the newly arrived Commonwealth fleet. Now both fleets, about even fire power by now, moved in against each other. Each vessel hammered each other with streams of green and red turbolaser bolts; shields were overwhelmed, and hulls exploded with brilliant energy. It was a good old-fashion shoot out.

"Their launching fighters!" A bridge officer reported, "They've got three wings of Eyeballs out there!"

"Launch our fighters!" High Templar Malakon immediately ordered, "Tell them to run cover for us and keep those Eyeballs off our hull!"

High Templar Malakon watched as the starfighters, mainly CF9 Crossfire and X-83 TwinTail starfighters launched from the two lateral hangar bays; the X-83 TwinTail starfighters were privately operated by the Jedi Knights Templars. Almost immediately they were engaged in ferocious dogfights with Imperial *Predator*-class starfighters; smaller specks of explosions were superimposed on the much larger explosions igniting on the hulls of capital ships. The battle was a massive free-for-all; no rational, no logic, just pure destruction.

High Templar Malakon finally thought it was time, "Other all batteries to clear a path towards the orbital shipyards." He ordered, "It's time we end this."

"Yes, sir!"

High Templar Malakon started walking towards the back of the bridge, appointed one of the officers to take command, and exited the bridge. Quickly, he made it down to the hangar bay, where his X-83 TwinTail starfighter was fuelled up and ready for launch. With him were several *Crix*-class assault shuttles and several CF9 Crossfire starfighters. The pilots were hanging around their starfighters; High Templar Malakon could sense that they were itching to get into the fight. Casually, he walked up to them.

"Now is the time." High Templar Malakon spoke, "Our primary objective is to get Grand Admiral Narklin Danakar. If we get him, we can end his eight month campaign against us and finally put an end to this war." He continued, "Okay, so the assault shuttles will be our primaries. Starfighters will run escort and cover for them until they

reach the orbital yards. Once they've landed, I will touch down and lead the troopers into the shipyards," He glanced over at the mix of former stormtroopers and GA commandoes, "We have to move fast if we're going to get him. The rest of the starfighters can get into the fight." High Templar Malakon paused, "Any questions?" Silence. "Let's move."

Quickly, High Templar Malakon climbed into his X-83 TwinTail starfighter, ran through a quick pre-flight check, and ignited the engines. He glanced behind him, and saw that the rest of the starfighters and shuttles were ready to go.

Then, over the headset, "*Assault team, you're clear for launch.*"

"Copy." High Templar Malakon replied, "That's us!"

Purely reflexively, he punched the throttle, and flew through the glowing blue atmospheric containment field. High Templar Malakon quickly looked passed his right shoulder and saw that the assault shuttles and CF9 Crossfire starfighters were right behind him.

Cosh Sonter, geared up and ready to go, sat impatiently in his CF9 Crossfire starfighter; Gaen Cage, his rear-gunner, was also anxious to get into the fight. Other flights were in front of him, making him watch other pilots fly off into battle. Finally, after several minutes of restless waiting, he got the call.

"*Razor One, you're clear for launch.*"

"Copy." Cosh Sonter replied, "Alright, Cage, let's get some."

Cosh raced out of the hangar bay, located on the forward blade of the *Scythe*-class battle cruiser; he immediately banked hard right, and aimed the nose directly into the thick of battle. Already flying about around the *Scythe*-class battle cruiser *Revival* were several flights of *Predator*-class starfighters. Cosh immediately picked a target, and went after it. Expertly, Cosh manoeuvred behind one of the Imperial starfighters, and squeezed the trigger. The first few laser bolts went wide, but the next stream slammed directly into the ion engines; almost instantly, the engines erupted into blue flames, consuming the starfighter. The four other *Predator*-class starfighters broke formation, and scattered.

"Here we go!" Cosh Sonter shouted.

He picked another target, and pursued. The *Predator*-class starfighter jinked and juked wildly; Cosh had to slam the yoke back and forth, left and right, in order to keep up with the more agile starfighter. Cosh Sonter squeezed the trigger, but missed wide. Suddenly, he heard the rear double light laser cannons erupt with a flurry of fire.

"What's going on back there?" Cosh Sonter shouted.

"We've got two on our tail!" Gaen Cage screamed.

"Get them off!" Cosh Sonter snapped back.

Two streams of red laser bolts streaked passed the canopy, lighting up the cockpit. Cosh quickly craned his neck, trying to look behind him; he managed to spot one of the Imperial starfighters behind him. Quickly, his gaze returned forward, and he continued his pursuit of the *Predator*-class starfighter. Cosh squeezed off another few laser bolts, missing wide again. Suddenly, a stream of red laser bolts struck the rear engines of the CF9 Crossfire; Gaen Cage screamed in terror, and smoke billowed into the cockpit.

"Cage?" Cosh Sonter screamed.

"Here!" Gaen Cage replied immediately.

"You hurt?" Cosh Sonter asked.

There was a moment of hesitation, "Just keep flying!"

Cosh Sonter immediately broke off his pursuit, and flew back towards the *Revival*. Luckily, the two pursuing Imperial starfighters decided not to continue. Quickly, Cosh Sonter performed a diagnostic check; two out of three ion engines were fried, and he was losing power.

"What are you doing?" Gaen Cage snapped.

Cosh shook his head, "I'm bring us back in!"

"Man! Get back out there!" Gaen Cage screamed.

"You're hurt, and we're crippled!" Cosh Sonter replied.

"You've flown through worse!" Gaen Cage snapped.

Not this time, Cosh thought; ignoring the reply, he hailed the flight control officer, "Mayday, mayday, mayday. We've been hit!"

"Damage report, Razor One."

"We've lost two engines, and are losing power!" Cosh Sonter reported, "Also, my rear-gunner is injured!"

"Copy, Razor One." The flight control officer replied, "*Just follow the vector.*"

Suddenly, on the cockpit windshield, a holographic image of a flashing green dotted pathway leading from the CF9 Crossfire starfighter to the hangar bay on the *Scythe*-class battle cruiser blinked to life. Cosh followed the vector displayed perfectly, despite turbolaser and laser cannon fire lancing all around him. Just before Cosh entered the hangar bay, he saw the *Scythe*-class battle cruiser fire its main weapons, all located on the front blade. The tactic, known as cross of fire, was a deadly one; a firestorm of heavy turbolaser fire, barrages of proton torpedoes, and a bombardment of ion cannons converged to a single focal point, which was a *Pellaeon*-class Star Destroyer. A flash of light blinded Cosh momentarily, then the full fury of the attack could be seen; the hull of the Star Destroyer ignited with white-hot flames, tearing the ship apart. Just as the blinding light dissipated, Cosh brought the crippled starfighter into the lower hangar bay. Easily, he touched down.

The cockpit canopy flipped open, and Cosh Sonter immediately jumped out. Fire teams and paramedics were on the starfighter in moments. Cosh Sonter watched as the paramedics dragged the injured body of Gaen Cage out of the twisted mesh of durasteel. Cosh managed to see some of the injuries; a large piece of twisted shrapnel imbedded itself into Gaen Cage's right thigh, and he had second-degree burns on his hands and forearms. The paramedics placed Gaen Cage on a gurney, and started to wheel him off the flight deck.

"He'll be alright." The paramedic replied as they wheeled him off towards the medical bay.

Cosh Sonter turned back towards his starfighter; the entire back portion was a billowing plume of black smoke and twisted metal. He walked up to one of the mechanics on the deck.

"Well, your starfighter took quite a beating." The mechanic replied, "Probably take at least a month to repair it."

Cosh shook his head in defeat.

* * *

High Templar Malakon jinked and juked wildly, evading four *Predator*-class starfighters on his tail. All four Imperial starfighters fired relentlessly at him; the entire canopy of his X-83 TwinTail starfighter light up with brilliant red hues. Instinctually, High Templar Malakon rolled his starfighter over, and plunged downward; the agile *Predator*-class starfighters matched the manoeuvre easily. The four Imperial starfighters continued to hammer High Templar Malakon's starfighter; easily, with the aid of the Force, he dodged and evaded the high velocity energy bolts. Suddenly, High Templar Malakon rolled his starfighter onto its port wing, and slammed on the brakes; the four *Predator*-class starfighters, anticipating the next move, immediately broke left. High Templar Malakon, however, simply stayed on his original path and watched as the Imperial starfighters overshot him. Immediately slamming on the throttle, he fought to catch up.

High Templar Malakon lined up the targeting reticule, and squeezed the trigger. A lance of green energy bolts streamed out from the laser cannons, and pierced one of the Imperial starfighters, causing it to implode and burst into blue-orange flames. Realizing their mistake, the three other *Predator*-class starfighters began evasive manoeuvres; High Templar Malakon fired another stream of energy bolts, purposefully wide to port. The nervous Imperial pilot immediately banked right to avoid the stream of energy bolts, but slammed into the adjacent starfighter. Both hinged-wings crumpled under the tremendous force, and smashed together; while mashed together, both starfighters spun wildly into the hull of an Imperial *Pellaeon*-class Star Destroyer.

Smiling, High Templar Malakon lined up the targeting reticule on the last remaining *Predator*-class starfighter he was pursuing. The Imperial pilot, now without wingmen, wildly, uncontrollably, jinked and juked to avoid getting shot down. High Templar Malakon flipped the switch, and locked on. Suddenly, the targeting reticule turned red and a nice solid tone could be heard; immediately, High Templar Malakon fired a proton torpedo. The proton torpedo streaked across the blackness of space, leaving behind a thin trail of glowing red ions. Surprisingly, the *Predator*-class starfighter banked hard right, narrowly missing the incoming proton torpedo; a sense of shock surged through High Templar Malakon. Just before High Templar Malakon banked hard right to continue its pursuit, he saw the proton torpedo bank hard left and make its way around. Back on the Imperial starfighters tail, High Templar Malakon squeezed off another stream of energy bolts; once again, they missed just wide, the Imperial pilot expertly evading the energy bolts. Suddenly, out of nowhere, the proton torpedo flashed passed the canopy, mere tens of centimetres away, and slammed into the ion engines of the proton torpedo. The *Predator*-class starfighter exploded in a

violent eruption of white-hot shrapnel and flash melted metal. High Templar Malakon was forced to bank sharply, narrowly missing the largest of the debris.

Suddenly, "*Assault shuttles landing!*"

"On my way." High Templar Malakon immediately replied.

Just before High Templar Malakon rolled his starfighter over onto its port wing, he glanced off to the side of the cockpit windshield; the GC fleet was now moving in to ensnare the Imperial fleet, trapping it between the planet and orbital shipyards, and the GC fleet. High Templar Malakon smiled at the thought.

Finishing the manoeuvre, High Templar Malakon rolled the X-83 TwinTail starfighter onto its port wing, looked passed his left shoulder, and banked hard left. He immediately soared for the vacant dock that was designated for this mission as the landing point. High Templar Malakon weaved through intense heavy turbolaser fire, both from the remaining Imperial capital ships, mainly *Ardent*-class fast frigates, and the turbolaser emplacements attached to the orbital shipyards themselves. GC intelligence reported that those emplacements on the shipyards were automated and only half were on-line. Regardless, High Templar Malakon jinked and juked, dodged and ducked, though a torrent of energy bolts, finally managing to land on the docking bay.

As soon as he touched down, he jumped out of the cockpit. Already piling out of the dozen *Crix*-class assault shuttles were the strike teams, comprised of former stormtroopers and former GA commandoes; they wore new black heavy assault armour, made of hardened plastoid, similar to those worn by Venom assault teams; they didn't wear any helmets, but rather, a holographic visor that ran across their eyes. They were armed with BlasTech ARC-9965A assault blaster rifles. High Templar Malakon immediately took point.

"Intel says that Grand Admiral Danakar is located on shipyard gee-five, currently docked with the *Goliath*, the Grand Admiral's new flagship." High Templar Malakon informed, "The orbital shipyards should have a minimal crew, but we can't take too many chances. Let's just get to the *Goliath* as fast and as safe as possible, and capture the Grand Admiral. We need him alive; we've gone through too much to just kill him now."

The troopers nodded their heads.

"Alright, let's move!" High Templar Malakon finished.

They immediately ran towards the end of the docking bay; High Templar Malakon's brown Jedi robe flapped in the air as he ran. His black ceramic armour, covering his chest, abdomen, arms and legs, clacked as he ran too. They reached the end of the docking bay, only to be stopped by a pair of blast doors. High Templar Malakon immediately turned to look at the GC commandoes.

"Blow it." High Templar Malakon ordered.

A pair of GC commandoes planted a pad of plastic explosives onto the blast doors and armed it. Everyone stepped back and watched it explode; the plastic explosives went off with a bright flash and a thud, but when the dust cleared, the blast doors were still standing.

High Templar Malakon grumbled, "Let me try."

He ignited his blue-bladed lightsaber, the *snap-hiss* echoed in the large, empty docking bay; he plunged his lightsaber into the thick durasteel blast doors. Slowly, but surely, the energy blade began to melt and cut the metal doors apart. The metal surrounding the intense energy blade glowed orange- to white-hot, and molten durasteel dripped onto the floor. Finally, High Templar Malakon retracted the blade, and with a powerful Force Wave, pried the door open.

Immediately, the GC commandoes piled through the pried open door in classic tactical and military fashion. High Templar Malakon walked through the door after them; the GC commandoes had already secured the hallway. Surprisingly, the hallways were clear of resistance. Without a word, High Templar Malakon started running down the hallway, heading for the most direct path towards docking bay G-5. Within a matter of minutes, after securing and clearing adjacent rooms and offices, they reached the entrance; just outside the blast doors that would lead into docking bay G-5, a squad of stormtroopers were posted outside. Before they had any time to react, the stormtroopers fired their assault blaster rifles. Immediately, High Templar Malakon deflected several blaster bolts, sending them back towards their shooters.

"Back!" High Templar Malakon ordered.

High Templar Malakon watched as the stormtroopers took up protective position around the blast doors. The GC commandoes fired upon the stormtroopers, but couldn't get a clean shot. Without thinking, High Templar Malakon charged into the firefight. With Force-enhanced movements, High Templar Malakon closed the distance within seconds. Like a blur, High Templar Malakon lunged and slashed at the nearest

stormtrooper, nearly cutting him in half with a single swipe of the blade. Following through, High Templar Malakon slashed behind him, cutting down another stormtrooper poised to fire. With elegant motion, High Templar Malakon ducked as the GC commandoes fired a barrage of blaster bolts at the stormtroopers, now out from behind their protective positions. The intense barrage of blaster bolts, flashing mere centimetres above his head, struck the stormtroopers in the chest. Within seconds, the firefight was over, and a cloud of light grey smoke lingered in the air.

High Templar Malakon stared at the blast door in front of him, "Cover me."

He immediately plunged his lightsaber into the blast door, just as the GC commandoes secured a perimeter around High Templar Malakon. Just seconds into cutting through the blast doors, he heard footsteps coming down from both sides of the hallways.

"We've got company." High Templar Malakon informed.

Seconds later, it was confirmed. The GC commandoes fired their assault blaster rifles at the incoming stormtroopers; the stormtroopers retreated, hiding in doorways or within the adjacent rooms. Instantly, the hallway erupted into another firefight; the air was filled with red and blue energy bolts, strike both trooper and metal walls indiscriminately. A blaster bolt came close to hitting High Templar Malakon, making him flinch for a moment; seconds later, another hurdled towards him. Quickly, High Templar Malakon ripped the lightsaber out of the blast door, and deflected the blaster bolt into the durasteel walls. Elegantly, with fluid-like motion, he plunged the lightsaber back into the door. Flecks of molten durasteel splattered onto the floor. Finally, High Templar Malakon cut through the blast doors, and pried it open.

"We're in!" High Templar Malakon shouted.

Immediately, High Templar Malakon jumped through the door, came onto his knees, and rose his lightsaber in a defensive guard. Luckily, there were no stormtroopers to greet him. Seconds later, several GC commandoes piled into the docking bay. At the far end, the *Pellaeon*-class Star Destroyer *Goliath*, still undergoing repairs, was docked. Without a word, High Templar Malakon ran towards the umbilical arm, and into the Star Destroyer. Outside the docking bay, several GC commandoes remained to hold back the onslaught of stormtroopers.

High Templar Malakon, along with three dozen GC commandoes, emerged into the lower deck of the Star Destroyer. They looked down the hallway left, then right; the

vessel looked deserted. Then reaching out with the Force, High Templar Malakon sensed Grand Admiral Danakar.

"Bridge?" One of the GC commandoes said.

"No." High Templar Malakon answered, "The main hangar bay."

They immediately ran towards the turbolift, which brought them down to the main hangar bay. They piled out, at a dead run; High Templar Malakon led the way, charging into the eerily empty hangar. In the distance, the Grand Admiral, wearing the white uniform, a rank plaque bearing a row of six blue command squares on top with another row of three red and three gold command squares below, calmly walked towards a *Sigma*-class long-ranged shuttle.

"Danakar!" High Templar Malakon screamed.

Surprised, the Grand Admiral quickly spun around, and with a blaster pistol in hand, fired three times. High Templar Malakon expertly and efficiently deflected the blaster bolts, sending the third bolt back at the Grand Admiral. The blaster bolt struck his right hand, destroying the blaster pistol and crippling the hand. Grand Admiral Narklin Danakar growled in pain, gripping his right hand, and dropped to one knee.

"Danakar!" High Templar Malakon repeated, "Don't make this any harder than it has to!"

Suddenly, the hangar bay shook violently; pieces of debris fell all around them. A stray shot from one of the turbolasers much have just struck the *Goliath*. The Grand Admiral glared at High Templar Malakon with his ice cold blue eyes; his hair, silver and golden, was messy, and he had a two-day beard. Slowly, High Templar Malakon approached the Grand Admiral, covered by the three dozen GC commandoes behind him.

"In the name of the Galactic Commonwealth, you are under arrest, Grand Admiral," High Templar Malakon declared, "for war crimes, and crimes against the beings of this galaxy! You will be held responsible for your despicable actions during and after the war!"

"I—" The Grand Admiral growled, "don't think so."

Suddenly, over towards the left side of the hangar bay, behind two massive durasteel crates, a gigantic droid came ploughing through. The droid was humanoid, although stood two and a half metres tall; the towering machination sported military-

grade armour, with hydraulic crushing hands, and wheels on its feet. Its head resembled a human skull, although with a massive jaw and glowing yellow eyes; its shoulders were protected with oversized shoulder-pads. In parts, especially around the elbows, knees and abdomen area, the wires and tubes were exposed. With surprising speed and agility, the towering battle droid skated towards High Templar Malakon, ripping up the metallic floor panels as it did.

"Fire!" High Templar Malakon screamed.

In the nick of time, High Templar Malakon leapt out of the way of the giant machination. Suddenly, from the massive hydraulic right hand, three blaster rifles emerged; a flurry of red blaster bolts streaked across the hangar bay, and struck the GC commandoes in the chest. In seconds, six GC commandoes were killed by the battle droid. Instinctually, High Templar Malakon leapt onto the battle droid's back, and plunged his lightsaber into its back. The blue energy blade easily pierced the droid's spine; wildly, the battle droid shook and convulsed, while High Templar Malakon struggled to hang on.

Suddenly, one of the GC commandoes screamed, "Tango, to the right!"

Quickly, High Templar Malakon craned his neck around, and saw another of these battle droids emerge from behind two more crates; High Templar Malakon also noticed that the Grand Admiral had disappeared. High Templar Malakon cursed, then leapt into the air with elegant grace. Suddenly, the battle droid below him exploded as it was hit with barrage after barrage of blaster bolts from the second battle droid. The first battle droid tumbled towards the metallic floor, falling apart into smoking pieces. High Templar Malakon gracefully landed behind the fallen droid, using its hulking mass as protection. Immediately, the rest of the GC commandoes retreated behind the hulking metallic mass too.

"Launch one of your rockets!" High Templar Malakon ordered.

From out of cover, one of the GC commandoes, launched a proton rocket at the second battle droid. The proton rocket streaked across the hangar bay, leaving behind a trail of glowing red ions in its wake; surprisingly, just before the proton rocket would hit its mark, the battle droid snatched the rocket out of the air with its gigantic hand. High Templar Malakon, along with the rest of the GC commandoes were shocked; they watched as the battle droid crushed the proton rocket in its hydraulic hands, and threw it aside.

"Any other ideas?" High Templar Malakon asked; the question was rhetorical, of course. Before any of them could answer, "You keep that thing busy. I'm going after Danakar."

The GC commandoes nodded, and began wildly firing their blaster rifles at the hulking battle droid. The blaster rifles struck the battle droids chest, some ricocheting off its thick armoured plating, some striking its mark. Either way, the titanic battle droid didn't seem fazed. Suddenly, the battle droid lifted its right arm, and three blaster rifles emerged from within its hands; like a torrent river, a constant stream of energy bolts poured out from its hand.

Shaking his head, High Templar Malakon leapt out from cover and charged towards the *Sigma*-class long-ranged shuttle. Unfortunately, by that time, the battle droid had placed itself between their position and the shuttle. With Force-augmented speed, High Templar Malakon weaved and ducked the blaster bolts, only deflecting the bolts he couldn't dodge with his lightsaber. Suddenly, the ion engines on the *Sigma*-class long-ranged shuttle started its ignition sequence. Forgoing fighting the battle droid, High Templar Malakon leapt into the air, over the battle droid, and ran towards the shuttle. The boarding ramp had already been closed, but High Templar Malakon immediately plunged his lightsaber through the armoured hull. Cutting the metallic hull as fast as he could, he immediately climbed aboard.

Having just crawled through the glowing orange hole he just cut, he was greeted with blaring sirens and flashing red lights. He breached the hull, and the flight systems must have automatically shut down. High Templar Malakon immediately reached out with the Force, sensing the Grand Admiral still on the bridge of the shuttle. Forgoing any caution, he immediately ran towards the bridge. Surprisingly, the door leading into the bridge was unlocked; he slowly pushed the button for the door, and watched as it slide open. High Templar Malakon took one step into the bridge, when suddenly, he was attacked by Grand Admiral Danakar. Armed with only a durasteel pipe, the Grand Admiral attacked, swinging wildly at the head of the High Templar. Expertly, High Templar Malakon sliced through the durasteel pipe, and knocked the Grand Admiral onto the durasteel floor.

High Templar Malakon pointed the tip of the lightsaber towards the Grand Admiral, "You are under arrest, Grand Admiral."

"Foolish Jedi." The Grand Admiral retorted, "Sooner, or later, your new Order will fall." The Grand Admiral spat, "Peace. There is no peace."

Not listening to the Grand Admiral's sinister words anymore, High Templar Malakon turned the Grand Admiral over, and placed his hands in binders. Sensing turmoil outside, he looked out the forward viewport. Suddenly, the Grand Admiral started laughing hysterically.

"You're men out there are doom!" The Grand Admiral taunted, "The hunter-killer droid will tear them apart!"

High Templar Malakon looked back at the Grand Admiral, laying chest down on the durasteel floor, with a dead glare, "Not if I have anything to say about it."

Immediately, High Templar Malakon took control of the command console; the Grand Admiral continued his taunts, "You're wasting your time. When you cut through the hull, you triggered the fail-safe."

High Templar Malakon shook his head with frustration, "We'll just see about that." He said to himself.

High Templar Malakon quickly typed in several commands, most of which came up as errors. Finally, after seven attempts, High Templar Malakon successfully sliced into the command console, overrode the fail-safes, and started the ion engines; the powerful twin ion engines roared to life, and quickly warmed up to full power. High Templar Malakon immediately lifted off, using only repulsorlifts, and spun the shuttle around. Skilfully, High Templar Malakon rotated the shuttle, aiming the ion engines towards the hunter-killer droid. When aimed perfectly, while in neutral, High Templar Malakon throttled the engines to full power. The immense heat from the twin ion engines flash melted the armour plating on the hunter-killer droid; just as quickly, internal systems started to fail, and the hunter-killer droid fell apart. High Templar Malakon continued the shuttles rotation, gently bring the shuttle back onto the hangar deck.

High Templar Malakon looked back at the Grand Admiral; he had an expression of pure hatred on his face. Finally, he spat, "It's not over, Jedi! Very soon, you'll understand the true meaning of Imperial victory!"

High Templar Malakon stared at the Grand Admiral, and smiled, "If you're referring to your fleet above Pzob," He started; an obvious expression of surprise flashed across the Grand Admiral's face, "I regret to inform you that we've taken care of them too, along with your new toy."

Another flash of anger, "I'll see you rot in hell for this, Jedi!"

"You first." High Templar Malakon retorted.

With the Grand Admiral in hand, High Templar Malakon forced him to walk down the boarding ramp of the shuttle; the Grand Admiral did so grudgingly, but remained in total control. Quickly, the GC commandoes took him into custody. One of the GC commandoes remained.

"What were those, sir?" The GC commando asked, "Another one of the Empire's new toys?"

High Templar Malakon walked up to the smouldering wreckage of the hunter-killer droids, "I don't think so." He picked up the head, and turned it over; on the back of the head, a manufacture's stamp could still be read. High Templar Malakon shook his head in disgust.

"What is it, sir?" The GC commando asked.

"Thrak Zann."

Several hours after the successful capture of Grand Admiral Narklin Danakar, the remaining Imperial fleet, now only numbering a dozen capital ships, surrendered. The officers and troopers on the Imperial capital ships voluntarily surrendered their vessels, and the Imperial pilots peacefully docked on them. For now, they were taken to various detention cells, the majority of which were located on the GC capital ships. Following the Imperial fleet's surrender, several more GC commando teams stormed the Rothana orbital shipyards, securing them and taking any more Imperials into custody. Overall, it was a good day.

High Templar Malakon supervised the capture of the Rothana orbital shipyards. Although it was a large facility, no resistance was offered. A reasonably peaceful end to one of the bloodiest last-stands during the war. Several Commonwealth capital ships, along with their respective starfighters, docked on the orbital yards were undergoing temporary, quick repairs. Mathias Malakon anxiously wanted to find Commander Cosh Sonter; he heard some rather odd rumours flying around, and wanted to give him some friendly hassle for them.

Before he could find Cosh though, Mathias ran into one of the few remaining Imperial Knights, Treis Sinde. Treis Sinde, a headstrong and old-fashioned Imperial Knight, had a prominent role during the war, mainly on Dac where he and a small

group of Mon Cal Rangers took on the Sith-Imperial war-machine after the numerous massacres and genocides there. Later, he could go on to train more Imperial Knights, most of which proved crucial during the last years of the war. Treis Sinda was regarded as a hero during the Insurgency.

"Ah, Master Treis Sinda." Mathias Malakon greeted, "Are you well?"

The large human male turned to face Mathias; his white hair and beard was cut in perfect military fashion, "Just fine, Jed- I'm sorry, High Templar Malakon." Treis Sinda replied; Treis Sinda was one of the few Imperial Knights that refused to be "integrated" into the Jedi Knights Templars. A few followed his lead, but many decided to join Mathias; because of that, some bad blood had festered between the two. The dispute was probably more on principals than anything else.

"How was Pzob?" Mathias Malakon asked.

Treis Sinda shook his head in disgust. Before he could answer the question, he looked passed Mathias' shoulder, and replied, "I think your friend there can answer that question a lot better than I can."

Mathias quickly turned around, and saw Cosh Sonter storm up towards him. At first Mathias was quite happy to see him, but when he got closer, it was obvious that Cosh was upset about something. Mathias was instantly worried about his old friend. Cosh walked up to Mathias, and smashed his pilot's helmet onto the durasteel floor, shattering it.

"Damn it, Mathias!" Cosh Sonter screamed.

Mathias, shocked with the outburst, quickly looked around the room; everyone was watching them, "Cosh, what's wrong?"

"Wrong?" Cosh Sonter rhetorically asked, "Wrong? I'll tell you what's wrong! You!"

"Excuse me?" Mathias Malakon asked.

"That fracking intel you gave us on Pzob was complete garbage, Mathias! Garbage!" Cosh Sonter screamed, "That fracking thing was completely operational!"

"The Eye of Palpatine?" Mathias Malakon asked, even though he knew full well that the battlestation was what Cosh was referring to.

"Yeah, the Eye of Palpatine." Cosh Sonter answered anyways, "Your intel missed the ball completely, and it cost the lives of *every* one of my men!"

"Cosh—" Mathias Malakon started before getting cut off.

"No! Shut up!" Cosh Sonter exploded, "I want you to hear this. We were completely unprepared for that battle, Mathias! Its shields were still operational! Its turbolaser batteries were complete! Its ion cannons and gravity well projects were fully functional! The only thing they were installing was a fracking cloaking shield!" Cosh Sonter explained, "Some damned intel, Mathias. And because of it, hundreds of good pilots died, needlessly, because of your damned ego!"

Mathias, taking the hint, remained quiet.

"It was a miracle, a damned miracle, that we managed to bring it down." Cosh Sonter started with a rage in his voice; he continued with a growl, "No thanks to you, or your "sources"."

After a few moments, Mathias worked up the nerve to speak, "I don't know what to tell you, Cosh. That was the best intel we had at the time."

"Blast that, Mathias!" Cosh Sonter snapped, "This was another one of your arrogant mission plans!"

"Arrogant?" Mathias Malakon snapped back.

"Arrogant!" Cosh Sonter screamed, "Just look at what you just did! Jumping into battle, single-handedly taking on the entire Imperial fleet!" He paused to stare into Mathias' eyes, "If you had any regard for the men and women under your command, you would have waited!"

"I couldn't wait!" Mathias Malakon objected, "You were half a day late!"

"You play them like they were sabacc cards, Mathias!" Cosh Sonter retorted, "You can't just spend the lives of these men like sabacc chips damn it!"

"That's not what I do, Cosh, and you know that." Mathias Malakon sternly replied, "But I'm sorry anyways."

"Sorry doesn't cut it anymore, Mathias." Cosh Sonter sternly replied, "Because it's not you who has to tell their families that they died for nothing."

"Cosh, wait—"

Cosh, refusing to listen to any more of Mathias' words, began to walk away; he turned around, tears in his eyes, and said "We aren't untouchable, Mathias."

Mathias, stunned by the last few minutes, stood silently. Around him, everyone stared at the High Templar, equally stunned. Standing behind him, Treis Sinde placed a hand on Mathias' shoulder.

"I hate to say it, but he might be right." Treis Sinde replied; Mathias turned to look at Treis Sinde, blinking away some tears, "The Eye of Palpatine cost us too much. It was a bad battle plan, one that should never have been implemented."

"We needed to take it down before it took us down." Mathias Malakon countered, "If the Empire unleashed the Eye, there'd be no stopping them"

"That's not good enough." Treis Sinde replied, "Too many were killed, including some of your Templars."

Uneasily, Mathias walked down the hallway, away from here. He had much to think about. How could the mission of Pzob gone so wrong? How did the intelligence reports on the Eye of Palpatine, the Empire's new superweapon from a by-gone era, been so off?

***Trial**s*

One Standard Year Later: Commonwealth City, Coruscant: 145 ABY:

Over the past year, the Galactic Commonwealth has made great strides in rebuilding the infrastructure within the Deep Core, the Core worlds, and some worlds within the Colonies, while nursing deep wounds on other far-out worlds. Worlds in the Outer Rim were still in turmoil, receiving less aid than those closer to the Core; localized wars have since broken out on some worlds, possibly funded by criminal organizations like the Hutts, the Black Sun, and the new player on the block, Thrak Zann. Even on Coruscant, the city now dubbed Commonwealth City, has extensive and numerous reconstruction projects underway, rebuilding the world-wide city post-Battle of Coruscant. Coupled with the physical rebuilding and reclamation projects underway on numerous worlds, were various political and emotional campaigns, the most prominent of which are something dubbed the Insurgency Trials by the media; the Insurgency Trials were a series of tribunals and court trials where leading members of the Sith-Imperial infrastructure were brought to justice in a court of law. Several members of the Imperial political regime have already been convicted, including Moff, senators, regional governors, judges, missionaries, various Imperial-friendly nobility, and most recently, military personnel. Today marked the last of the Insurgency Trials.

High Templar Malakon, wearing ceremonial Templar robes, walked into the massive courtroom; the room, able to fit over five thousand beings, was packed to the brim. Standing on the second floor balcony, he had a perfect vantage point across the entire courtroom. The interior walls of the courtroom were made of luxurious white and light-grey marble, lined with decadent wood finish. On either side of the courtroom were eight thick, cylindrical marble pillars, supporting a dome roof. At the far end, a semi-circle was cut out of the wall, where, on a one metre tall platform, a semi-circular bench sitting the five judges and three elected members of the Consul were placed; to the left of the judge's bench was the jury box, sitting twelve members of the jury. To the right of the judge's bench was the witness box. Right in front of the judge's bench was the defendant's desk, and to the right of that, was the prosecutor's. Finally, at the back of the courtroom, already filled to capacity, was the seating area; the seating was so filled, in fact, that people stood up along the sides in order to hear the proceedings. All the seats and desks, including the judge's, were fashioned out of wood.

Finally, High Templar Malakon took his seat on the second floor balcony; the balcony was also fashioned out of the same marble material, and lined with wood. The second floor balcony was reserved for high ranking members of the government and otherwise important people. High Templar Malakon reached out with the Force for a moment; the flurry of emotions ran high for this particular trial. Many beings had much

riding on the conviction. Although he couldn't hear any particular conversation taking place, he knew, more-or-less, what it was all about; they all wanted to see Grand Admiral Narklin Danakar fry for what he did during the course of the war. As a Templar, he couldn't really condone any form of capital punishment, but he understood the reasons for it; he definitely understood the desire for punishment. He saw first-hand what that monster was capable of, and exactly what atrocities were committed during the war. Oh, he understood alright.

Suddenly, the crowd of beings became very quite. They all stared at the far end of the courtroom. They watched with hushed tones as Grand Admiral Narklin Danakar, allowed to wear his white uniform, walked across the courtroom, followed by two military police officers. The Grand Admiral walked with confidence and pride, obviously barring any negative emotions that many in the crowd had for him. Finally, after a few moments, he took his seat at the defendant's desk.

Suddenly, many beings in the crowd started roaring comments; "Monster!" "Murderer!" "Imperial brute!"

The Grand Admiral appeared to ignore the comments; regardless, the Grand Admiral had a rather sinister expression on his face.

One of his fellow Knights Templars leaned forward towards High Templar Malakon's shoulder, "This is going to be a farce." He whispered.

High Templar Malakon looked back casually at the Jedi Knights Templar; it had been Jakob Nion, a young human male and one of the first to join the Templar's; High Templar Malakon nodded in agreement, and whispered, "It needs to be done."

Shortly after Grand Admiral Narklin Danakar took his seat, the jury box started to fill up with the twelve selected jury members; everyone knew that the jury members were selected from various sections of the Galactic Alliance or Imperial navy and army. They were beings of different races from all across the galaxy. Regardless of their diverse nature, High Templar Malakon could feel their intent through the Force; they all wanted the Grand Admiral to be severely punished. Not exactly an impartial jury, but then again, he didn't actually think one existed.

Then, the military police officer stood in salute and declared, "All rise."

In unison, everyone in the courtroom rose; this was quickly proceeded with the entrance of the five judges that would be proceeding the trial along with the three members of Consul. The three members of Consul were actually the elected members of

the Admiralty, the current executive and legislative governing body of the Galactic Commonwealth consisting of the highest ranking officers in the Navy. It was always a question whether or not they should actually actively participate in the trial, as they were admirals, not judges, but no one ever brought it out in the open.

The judges, although from different worlds, all had something in common; they were all human, and from worlds within the Core. The three Consuls, however, High Templar knew every well: the first Consul was in fact the Bothan Admiral Sibar Fre'kay; the second was an Imperial Admiral, an older human male named Proc Vanis; lastly, the third Consul was an Imperial Vice-Admiral, a rather young human female named Alona Oamuys. All three Consuls wore their respective military uniforms, while the judges dawned black and white robes.

"Be seated." First Consul Fre'kay spoke.

Once again, in unison, they sat back in the seats. High Templar Malakon could almost feel everyone's heart begin to race. The tension was so thick, he could cut it with his lightsaber.

"I call this tribunal into session." First Consul Fre'kay replied.

"Grand Admiral Narklin Danakar, would you please stand." Judge Lyra Lyell, a forty-four standard year old human female from the world of Bessimir, ordered.

The Grand Admiral, still with an expression of perpetual defiance, remained seated. The judges, obviously displeased, glared at the Grand Admiral; the beings seated in the crowd began their quiet whispers. High Templar Malakon shook his head with the obvious display of disrespect the Grand Admiral was showing in the courtroom today. Finally, after only a few moments, one of the two military police officers standing behind the Grand Admiral forcibly picked him up. Chin up high, the Grand Admiral stood defiantly against the judges.

"Grand Admiral Danakar," Another judge, Judge Kel Tochiki, a thirty-eight standard year old human male from the world of Ralltiir, started, "You have waived your right for counsel. Is that correct?"

Once again, the Grand Admiral said nothing. This time, he simply stood with perfect, disciplined, military posture. The judges shook their heads with disappointment, while the three Consuls simply glared at the Grand Admiral. There was an air of anxiety in the courtroom; it was a powder keg ready to go off.

"It will be put on record that the Grand Admiral has waived his rights for counsel." Judge Kel Tochiki replied.

"Grand Admiral Danakar, you have been charged with twelve counts of murder, including the former Galactic Alliance Triumvirs Bail Antilles and Nu Toreena; four counts of genocide and extermination; one count of imprisonment, torture, and enslavement; along with about three dozen counts of conspiracy." Judge Rogen Thatcher, a sixty-eight standard year old human male from Coruscant, described, "How do you plead?"

Once again, the Grand Admiral simply stood before the judges; a defiant expression plastered across his face.

"Grand Admiral, if you do not speak, this trial will take far longer than it needs to." Judge Rogen Thatcher replied.

Finally, after several moments of silence, "I do not recognize the authority of this tribunal, nor legitimacy of the government before me." The Grand Admiral finally replied.

Murmurs of discord immediately spread across those seated in the crowd. High Templar Malakon leaned forward, anxiously waiting to see how this would all play out; from the beginning, he had worries that it would go very poorly. So far, that thought hadn't been resolved.

"Grand Admiral Danakar, it is not up to you to decide the authority of this military tribunal!" Second Consul Proc Vanis retorted in a stern voice, "Nor the Galactic Commonwealth's legitimacy."

The Grand Admiral's deadly gaze immediately locked onto Proc Vanis; Second Consul Proc Vanis wore an angered expression on his face, obviously displeased with the obvious show of contempt.

"Say's you, traitor to the Empire!" The Grand Admiral retorted.

Second Consul Proc Vanis immediately stood up, and slammed his fist onto his desk, "How dare you!"

"How dare I, Admiral Vanis?" The Grand Admiral questioned, "This trial is a complete farce! Designed for one purpose only: to legally exact your revenge against a beaten foe."

Second Consul Vanis fixed his greying brown hair while glaring at the Grand Admiral. Third Consul Oamuys placed her hand on her forearm, leading him to sit back down.

"It is you, Grand Admiral, on trial." Third Consul Alona Oamuys replied, "Not us."

"Say's the little whore, who fracked her way to the top of the food chain." Grand Admiral Danakar immediately insulted, "Unworthy of being in the Imperial Navy in the first place."

The ruckus in the crowd immediately started to rise with the inappropriate comment; once again, High Templar Malakon began to worry about the emotional tension within the crowd. Third Consul Alona Oamuys, obviously infuriated with the comment, stared at the Grand Admiral with her piercing silverish-blue eyes, "Grand Admiral! If you do not settle down, we will hold you in contempt!"

"So hold me in contempt, whore." The Grand Admiral said coldly and sternly.

Now, severely angered, "Guards!" She screamed, "Take the Grand Admiral away!"

The two military police officers behind the Grand Admiral immediately grabbed his arms and started leading him out of the courtroom. Third Consul Oamuys ran her hand through her shoulder-length black hair in frustration. The Grand Admiral gave little struggle, but continued his insults.

"It is you, you renegade traitors to the Empire, that should be on trial!" The Grand Admiral shouted while he struggled, "You call me murderer! They murdered our Moff's!"

Immediately, the crowd erupted into chaos. Random shouting and screaming radiated off the highly emotional crowd. The guards at the front of the courtroom were forced to hold the crowd back, as they rose from their seats and charged the front of the room. High Templar Malakon immediately stood up to gaze across the surging tide of beings; the pandemonium within the crowd almost caused his knees to buckle. For a moment, High Templar Malakon shook his head in shame.

Judge Torm E'rad, a fifty-nine standard year old human male from Brentaal IV, immediately slammed the hardwood gavel on the wooden sound block, "Order!" He shouted over the crowd, "Order!"

Just before the Grand Admiral was forced out of the courtroom, he screamed, "I did what had to be done for the good of my Empire!"

Those were the last words spoken by the malicious Grand Admiral today. High Templar Malakon's heart raced, and nervousness crept into his psyche. The judges continued issuing orders and demands, but High Templar Malakon couldn't hear them over the crowd. He turned around, and stared at the three Jedi Knights Templars behind him: Jakob Nion; Zara Lailas Gra'tua, a human female; and Teilo Fess, a Mon Calamari male. Teilo Fess had a particular interest in the trials, as the genocide and massacre of Dac was one of the major offences that were to be brought up during the course of the trials.

"That could have gone better." High Templar Malakon replied; after a moment, "Let's get out of here."

High Templar Malakon walked through the Grand Halls of the Courts, just across the Commonwealth Palace; the hallway itself was worthy of the name. With high white and light grey marble ceilings, thick marble pillars, and decadent red and purple drapes hanging above arched transparisteel windows, the Grand Halls was quite a sight. The floors, marble tiles arranged into beautiful patterns, made the hallways filled with the stiletto clacking of beings walking. As quickly as possible, High Templar Malakon, followed by the three Jedi Knights Templars, made their way out of the Grand Halls, towards the outside.

Suddenly, from behind, "High Templar Malakon!"

High Templar Malakon immediately turned around to see someone running up towards him; the three Jedi Knights Templars stood aside, and bowed their heads.

"Phelan Cain." High Templar Malakon replied, "I'm surprised to see you here."

Phelan Cain was a dark skinned, bald human male, who was also a Jedi Knight during the Anti-Sith Insurgency. Rumour had it, and later confirmed, that he was captured on the planet Wayland, where he was later put into a forced-labour camp somewhere in the Outer Rim.

"Well, I thought I'd be able to have a quick word with you." Jedi Cain replied.

"Of course." High Templar Malakon replied; he turned to the three Jedi Knights Templars, "Would you excuse us?"

"Of course, Master." Teilo Fess replied with a quick bow; immediately, the three Jedi Knights Templars exited the Grand Halls.

"So, what's this about, Jedi Cain?" High Templar Malakon quickly asked.

Jedi Cain straightened his posture, "I'd like you to reconsider my offer to be admitted into the Jedi Knights Templars."

High Templar Malakon knew this was coming. Ever since Phelan Cain returned from his imprisonment on Wayland, and the declaration of a new Jedi Knights Templars, High Templar Malakon had gotten several requests from Jedi Cain to be admitted. High Templar Malakon was always hesitant to allow Jedi Cain into the Knights Templars, simply because he sensed an undercurrent of unbridled emotions running deep within him. Jedi Cain just wasn't the same person after he was released from Wayland; something, deep inside of him, was fundamentally, and probably irreversibly, different. High Templar Malakon, simply put, didn't trust him.

High Templar Malakon simply shook his head, "I'm sorry, Jedi Cain." He finally said, "I just cannot allow it."

"High Templar, in this time of desperation, you'll need all the Jedi you can get." Jedi Cain countered, "Especially experienced Jedi."

It was true that the Jedi Knights Templars was quite a bit smaller than its predecessor; after all, after the surprise attack on the Hidden Temple on Taivas, many of the Jedi Masters and Jedi Knights were subsequently killed, leaving behind only the younglings and padawans. Together, they numbered less than one hundred beings. Now, years later, they've grown up idolizing High Templar Malakon for his role in the Anti-Sith Insurgency; it is they who comprise a majority of the Jedi Knights Templars.

"I'm going to put this as simply as I can," High Templar Malakon started, "I sense a growing despair running through you, Jedi Cain. I have a responsibility to teach and train the next generation of Jedi right." High Templar Malakon paused, "I simply cannot have a renegade Jedi running around, influencing them negatively."

"You cannot—" Jedi Cain started before being cut off.

"My decision is final, Jedi Cain." High Templar Malakon finished; quickly, he turned around, and started to walk out of the Grand Halls.

Phelan Cain watched High Templar Malakon walk out of the Grand Halls; all he could do, at that point, was stand and stare.

* * *

Jedi Malakon arrived to the proceedings slightly late; today began the meaty portion of the trial. Slowly, and silently, he slid into his seat on the second floor balcony, and began listening to the proceedings intently. As before, the tension in the room was as high as ever. During weeks before, the trial reviewed the evidence for the twelve counts of murder and assassinations; today marked the first day of reviewing the genocides Grand Admiral Danakar was accused of executing.

"Let us start chronologically, shall we?" First Consul Fre'kay replied, "On the eleventh day, of the seventh month, in the year one hundred and thirty seven marked the first day of the genocide on Dac. Is that correct?"

The Grand Admiral straightened his white uniform, "That is correct."

"And it was Darth Krayt himself, at New Coral City, who declared that ten percent of the Mon Calamari population be exterminated." First Consul Fre'kay continued, "Is that correct?"

"Yes."

"Please, Grand Admiral, would you explain, in your own words, what happened that led up to that day." First Consul Fre'kay asked.

The Grand Admiral hesitated for a moment, then began, "Following the theft of the Empire's new Advanced Star Destroyer, the *Imperious*, over the world of Dac, Emperor Krayt was most displeased with the Mon Calamari peoples."

Over the course of the trial, Grand Admiral Danakar became more cooperative. High Templar Malakon listened intently; he knew of the events that transpired on Dac, but he never really knew why. He had heard of the *Imperious*, though. At the time, the *Imperious* was the pride-and-joy of the Imperial Navy; the very first *Imperious*-class Advanced Star Destroyer. The very model that would give rise to the infamous flagships *Imperatrix* and *Enslaver*. It was later stolen by Admiral Gar Stazi, at the time, the only high ranking Alliance admiral in the navy. He was a hero and a legend; in fact, there was a statue of him in the courtyard outside the Commonwealth Palace.

"Why?" First Consul Fre'kay asked.

"Because it was later discovered that it was in fact Gial Gahan, former Galactic Alliance Triumvirate member and Mon Calamari senator, whom aided the rebels in stealing the *Imperious*."

First Consul Fre'kay grumbled, "How exactly did the remnant Galactic Alliance steal the *Imperious*?"

"Gial Gahan devised a plan for the Alliance rebels to capture the *Imperious*, at the time undergoing final construction at the Mon Calamari shipyards; his planned called for the deactivation of the orbital defences, allowing the rebels to jump into the system." The Grand Admiral started, "Admiral Dru Valan anticipated an attack on Dac in order to capture the *Imperious*." The Grand Admiral explained, "Stormtroopers were placed in strategic locations in just such an event. Once Admiral Gar Stazi's task force, led by his flagship at the time *Indomitable*, jumped in, Admiral Dru Valan's Outer Rim Third Fleet came in from behind, and cornered the Alliance admiral."

"Go on." First Consul Fre'kay replied.

"Admiral Stazi was trapped between the orbital defences on Dac and the Outer Rim Third Fleet. Admiral Valan called for Stazi's surrender. He refused, and instead attacked!" The Grand Admiral iterated, "Somehow, the Alliance hijacked the orbital defence grid, and the turbolaser emplacements fired upon Imperial ships. On board the *Imperious*, the stormtroopers originally planted to re-capture the vessel after the Alliance tried to steal her, were replaced by Alliance troops. They, as you know, stole the *Imperious* in the midst of the battle."

"And what of the orbital shipyards?" First Consul Fre'kay asked.

"A third of it was destroyed during the battle after the *Indomitable* crashed into the shipyards." Grand Admiral Danakar replied.

"Explain what happened after the battle, Grand Admiral." First Consul Fre'kay demanded.

The Grand Admiral took a deep breath, "The Imperials captured Gial Gahan soon after the battle. He confessed to be the sole perpetrator during the sabotage and battle... but we knew he had been lying." The Grand Admiral explained, "Having learned of the treachery on Dac, the Emperor himself traveled to New Coral City. There, an assembly was convened with the prominent Mon Calamari and Quarren members of council."

"And?" First Consul Fre'kay quickly asked.

"With Gial Gahan in binders, Emperor Krayt declared that the treachery of the Mon Calamari people was to come to an end." The Grand Admiral explained, "He

declared that ten percent of the Mon Calamari population was to be exterminated, starting with those at the assembly." Grand Admiral Danakar laughed, "He made an example of them, alright."

There were murmurs from the crowd. High Templar Malakon looked behind him to the back corner of the second floor balcony; there, Mon Calamari Jedi Knights Templar Teilo Fess watched and listened intently. The war was never easy on Teilo Fess, and having to relive the experience wouldn't help. Hesitantly, slowly, High Templar Malakon turned his attention back to the deliberations.

"So it was the Sith who slaughtered the Mon Calamari?" First Consul Fre'kay asked once the murmurs died down slightly.

"Yes."

"And Gial Gahan was killed during the attack?" First Consul Fre'kay followed.

"Yes. By the Emperor's lightsaber." The Grand Admiral quickly answered.

"Grand Admiral, we have footage that clearly show Imperial stormtroopers firing upon the Mon Calamari people." First Consul Fre'kay rebutted.

"Yes." Grand Admiral Danakar replied, "After the Emperor ordered the attack, the Imperial Navy was ordered to follow through."

"And at this time, you were given command of the fleet above Dac?" First Consul Fre'kay asked.

"Yes. Emperor Krayt personally assigned me the duty to exterminate the treacherous beings, and arrest the others to be later put in labour camps." The Grand Admiral replied, "I was a commodore at the time."

"Approximately three weeks after the Massacre of New Coral City, there was an incident at Soheras Trench." First Consul Fre'kay continued, "Would you care to explain?"

Reluctantly, the Grand Admiral continued, "Several Mon Calamari prisoners were killed while in detention."

"How, exactly?" First Consul Fre'kay asked sternly.

The Grand Admiral hesitated to answer, "You know how."

First Consul Fre'kay sat back in his cushioned seat, "Jay-tee twelve, please run footage thirteen and log this under evidence em-one."

Theatrically, the lights dimmed, and the holographic projector at the front of the courtroom, actually attached to the ceiling, began running. The blue-white cone of light showed the image with striking clarity and resolution. The footage, showing a monstrous creature with a gigantic gaping mouth lined with razor-sharp fangs, black leathery skin, four glowing eyes, and unusual glowing blister pods running down the length of the creatures spine. They watched the silent holographic projection; the massive creature tore through a durasteel fence containing the Mon Calamari refugees; the Mon Calamari were obviously frightened. Some tried to flee the monster, swimming with all their might; others, too terrified to even move, simply clutched their loved ones in their arms. The next images would be utterly horrifying; streaks of lighting struck out of the glowing blister pods, and impaled the fleeing and terrified Mon Calamari refugees. Their eyes rolled over into the back of their heads, and after only a few moments, only the twisted, contorted husks of the dead refugees remained.

High Templar Malakon watched in terror, then looked back towards Teilo Fess; he had his webbed hands over his eyes, crying into them silently. The images were hard enough for High Templar Malakon to swallow; he couldn't imagine how hard it must be for Teilo Fess. All around, the murmurs began again, as the beings sitting in the crowd were horrified at the images. Suddenly, the holographic images stopped, and the courtroom returned to normal lighting.

"Explain *that*, Grand Admiral." First Consul Fre'kay demanded.

The Grand Admiral growled, "That was the leviathan." The Grand Admiral answered.

"And what is the leviathan?" First Consul Fre'kay asked.

"It was a creature created through the Force." The Grand Admiral answered; suddenly, High Templar Malakon suddenly became very interested, "The Sith used some sort of alchemy to create it."

"Did you order its creation, Grand Admiral, knowing full well that it would be used as an instrument in the genocide of the Mon Calamari people?" First Consul Fre'kay demanded.

"Darth Wyyrlok's knowledge of Sith magic gave him knowledge of the beast." The Grand Admiral deflected, "Sith scientists created the monster."

"Jay-tee twelve, please display document seventeen and log this under evidence em-two." First Consul Fre'kay ordered.

Again, the courtroom lights dimmed, and the overhead holographic projector showed an Imperial military document; in the blue-white cone of light, the document could clearly be read with fine clarity and resolution. At the bottom of the document was a signature.

"Grand Admiral Danakar, this is an Imperial document recovered after the incident in question." First Consul Fre'kay explained, "In this document numbered ell-u-aitch thirty-four seventeen, it gives one Vul Isen, a known Sith scientists, authorization to use any Imperial resources in the creation of bio-engineered entities that are to be used against the Empire's enemies."

The crowd began their murmurs again.

"At the bottom, Grand Admiral." First Consul Fre'kay continued, "Is that your signature?"

The Grand Admiral refused to respond to the direct question; more sternly, First Consul Fre'kay repeated, "Grand Admiral Danakar, is that your signature!"

The Grand Admiral emanated sinister emotions; once again, First Consul Fre'kay pushed, almost yelling, "Is that your signature!"

Finally, the Grand Admiral snapped, "Yes!"

The murmurs in the crowd immediately erupted into relentless shouting; "Murder! Murder!" "Imperial monster!" "You scum!"

First Consul Fre'kay hammered his gavel, and shouted over the crowd, "Order! We will have order!"

"I ordered the leviathan created!" The Grand Admiral admitted, "The Mon Calamari was a menace to the Empire. I needed them wiped out!"

"You monster!" "Savage brute!" were immediately shouted out from the crowd; proudly, High Templar Malakon noticed that Teilo Fess didn't give into his emotions and lash out verbally at the Grand Admiral. Teilo Fess, however, couldn't bear watching the proceedings, and simply stared at the ground; a wave of emotions, a brooding spectrum, emanated from the young Knight. High Templar Malakon turned his attention back to the courtroom.

"Order!" First Consul Fre'kay demanded.

First Consul Fre'kay, along with the other members of the Consul and judges, glared at Grand Admiral Danakar. Grand Admiral Danakar, almost projecting pride or satisfaction, simply scowled back; High Templar Malakon could almost see a smirk flash across the Grand Admiral's face. He simply shook at the monstrosity of the man.

"I motion for a recess." First Consul Fre'kay spoke; he hammered the gavel, "We will reconvene tomorrow morning at oh-nine hundred hours."

The five judges and three Consuls immediately stood up and walked out of the courtroom; Grand Admiral Danakar, quite pleased with himself, was immediately hauled out of the courtroom, escorted by two military police officers. Everyone, too shocked with the revelation today, remained silent.

The next afternoon, the trial continued. High Templar Malakon had come in late, as usual, and thus the proceedings began. As the day before, he sat in his usual spot on the second floor balcony, overlooking the sea of beings listening to the hearing.

"Grand Admiral Danakar," First Consul Fre'kay started, "would you care to describe what the Empire did on Dac after the incident involving the leviathan?"

The Grand Admiral hesitated.

"Grand Admiral Danakar," First Consul Fre'kay repeated in a sterner voice, "explain your actions after the incident involving the leviathan!"

The Grand Admiral sat in his seat, glaring at the judges before him. Finally, he growled, "I do not understand the question."

First Consul Fre'kay growled, revealing a set of intimidating fangs. Composing himself, he answered, "I am referring to the time, five months after the incident at the Devil's Crevasse."

High Templar Malakon listened intently; they must have moved passed the time where the leviathan was supposedly killed above the Devil's Crevasse. The Devil's Crevasse was a giant volcanic fissure located on the ocean floor on Dac; it was known as Devil because it was notorious for being the home of numerous devilsquid. Casually, High Templar Malakon looked behind him. Today, it seemed, Teilo Fess was not

present at the trial. That was probably for the better; the genocide on Dac only got worse from here.

The Grand Admiral nodded his head, obviously displeased, "I recall."

"Do you also recall the methods and actions the Imperial Navy carried out at this time?" Second Consul Vanis immediately jumped in.

"Yes."

First Consul Fre'kay sat back in his seat, "Explain."

"I know none of the details of its execution," Grand Admiral Danakar replied defensively, "but I heard the Sith poisoned the oceans in an attempt to rid the waters of the Mon Calamari scum."

"So it was the Sith who ordered the poisoning?" First Consul Fre'kay immediately questioned, "Not the Empire?"

"To my knowledge." Grand Admiral Danakar casually replied.

First Consul Fre'kay slowly nodded, stroking his furry beard, "Jay-tee twelve, please display document twenty-one and log this under evidence pee-one."

Theatrically, the lights dimmed, and the holographic projector glowed to life. An Imperial Navy document shone in the glowing bluish-white air; clearly it was an Imperial order, but before High Templar Malakon could finish reading the document, First Consul Fre'kay began speaking again.

"Grand Admiral, this is Imperial Naval document oh-em-em zero-nine-one-zero." First Consul Fre'kay began, "This document gives explicit orders, by the Imperial Navy, to issue the chemical poisoning of the oceans on Dac." Suddenly, the holographic image of the document zoomed in towards the bottom, "Grand Admiral, is that your signature?"

Grand Admiral Danakar glared at the document, obviously none-too-happy with the recovery and revelation of the document in front of him. After a few moments of hesitation, First Consul Fre'kay repeated, "Grand Admiral Danakar, is that your signature!"

Finally, Grand Admiral Danakar growled, "You sly bastards."

The room gasped. The judges were obviously displeased with the remark.

"That is not an answer, Grand Admiral." First Consul Fre'kay growled back, "So I repeat the question one last time; is that your signature?"

"Yes!" Grand Admiral Danakar screamed, standing from his seat, "But I didn't give the order!"

First Consul Fre'kay hammered the gavel on the hardwood platform, "Sit down before we hold you in contempt!"

The Grand Admiral seemed defiant, refusing to sit back in his seat. The beings sitting below High Templar Malakon were stunned, too stunned to even murmur or gasp. The tension in the courtroom suddenly turned thick.

"Sit down, Grand Admiral!" First Consul growled.

Reluctantly, the Grand Admiral sat back down. His stare remained on First Consul Fre'kay; the glare seemed to drill into the Bothan. Likewise, First Consul Fre'kay glared back, growled, displaying his impressive pair of fangs.

"Grand Admiral, this here is an Imperial document!" Second Consul Vanis interjected.

"It is an Imperial document, but it was not the Empire who issued the order." Grand Admiral Danakar explained, "The order came from the One Sith, who used Imperial bureaucracy to cover their tracks and legitimize their decisions."

"So, who issued the order?" Second Consul Vanis sternly asked.

"At the time, Coruscant was rather divided." Grand Admiral Danakar explained, "The Council of Moffs and the One Sith were at each other's throats."

High Templar Malakon recalled the incident well. After a costly mission on the world of Had Abbadon, Darth Krayt, the Emperor at the time, was gravely injured. As a result, Grand Moff Morlish Veed was given the title of Regent of the Empire. However, about five standard months into the arrangement, which was about a standard month before the incident in question, the arrangement soured. Darth Wyyrlok aggressively claimed the throne for himself, causing a rift. This led to a showdown on the streets of Coruscant, where the world was, quite literally, teetering on the brink of war.

"Who did you answer to?" Second Consul Vanis growled.

Grand Admiral Danakar sat back in his chair, brooding.

Suddenly, an outburst from Second Consul Vanis, "I grow tired of asking questions repeatedly, Grand Admiral, so this will be the last time." He replied with a hint of anger behind his words, "Who did you answer to!"

Finally, "I got my orders from the Sith."

There were murmurs in the crowd. It wasn't exactly shocking. The world of Dac was annexed by the Sith, and it was held under Sith influence for many years. It wasn't surprising that the Imperials residing over Dac would still follow Sith orders. Those under the Empire were known to simply follow orders, not really thinking about the consequences and such.

Second Consul Vanis seemed like a beaming light in the Force, but slowly dimmed as he started to calm back down. Finally, after a few seconds, First Consul Fre'kay took over, "What happened after the poisoning was underway?"

"After the Sith had ordered us to poison the oceans, we met with some resistance." Grand Admiral Danakar explained, "Admiral Gar Stazi appeared above the world and attempted to evacuate as many Mon Calamari and Quarren as he could."

"And how did the Empire respond?" First Consul Fre'kay asked.

"We opened fire." Grand Admiral Danakar coldly answered.

There were some obvious emotions that emanated from within the crowd of beings under High Templar Malakon; waves and waves of negative emotions bombarded him. Suddenly, all High Templar Malakon could do was close his eyes, and fall into a meditative trance. Unfortunately, even though going into a meditative trance might calm him down, it sure wasn't going to do anything for everyone else in the courtroom.

"You must be so proud of yourself, Grand Admiral," Second Consul Vanis sarcastically remarked; the comment even drew attention from the judges, whom remained relatively quiet during the proceedings, "with everything you've accomplished."

With a tinge of anger, "You have no right to judge me, Vanis." Grand Admiral Danakar replied, "Coward."

Second Consul Vanis immediately stood up from his seat, "You are the coward, Danakar!" He screamed, "You fought against an enemy who couldn't defend itself! You massacred innocents, you fiend!"

Grand Admiral Danakar immediately stood up from his seat as well, tipping the chair over, "We had our orders, and we followed them! What about you, Vanis? What secrets hide in your closet?"

First Consul Fre'kay, obviously disturbed with the sudden outbursts from both men, stepped in, "Enough!" He ordered; slowly, Second Consul Vanis sat back down, "Grand Admiral, you are found in contempt of court. Sergeant, bring the Grand Admiral back to his cell."

First Consul Fre'kay hammered his gavel. The Grand Admiral looked back at the two military police officers approaching him. He didn't offer any resistance. The two military police officers grabbed Grand Admiral Danakar's arms, forcefully, and led him out of the courtroom. There was a moment of pause after the Grand Admiral had left.

"The court will reconvene tomorrow morning at oh-nine hundred hours." First Consul Fre'kay ordered with a final hammer of his gavel.

The five judges and three Consuls immediately stood up and walked out of the courtroom. The courtroom was filled with a dark sensation. Almost sick to his stomach, High Templar Malakon came out of his trance, and walked out of the courtroom.

Grand Admiral Narklin Danakar's trial lasted for just over two standard month. Review of the various atrocities and crimes committed by this man, if you could call him a man, was simply unbelievable. Over the course of the trial, High Templar Malakon was reminded of the horrors bestowed upon him during the war; a lot of bad memories. Like the first day of the trial, several more outbursts erupted from within the crowd or from the Grand Admiral himself; and like the first day of the trial, the Grand Admiral was often offensive and later held in contempt. That was the worst, dragging the trial on for what seemed like forever. Thankfully, today was the sentencing; and, as predicted, the courtroom was as packed as ever. Beings even stood up on the second floor balcony, anxious to hear the final verdicts. High Templar Malakon also anxiously awaited the sentencing, and sat impatiently on the second floor balcony.

The courtroom suddenly became quiet; it was almost eerily quiet. Grand Admiral Danakar, wearing the white uniform he wore through the course of the trial, proudly marched towards the defendant's desk and sat down; two military police officers followed closely behind him, and stood like statues behind the Grand Admiral. Soon after, the jury started to be seated within the jury box. The crowd began

murmuring; the tension in the courtroom grew to unimaginable levels. High Templar Malakon, on the other hand, kept silent.

"All rise." The military police officer declared.

In unison, everyone in the courtroom rose; the Grand Admiral, surprisingly enough, did so too. Slowly, the judges and the three Consuls walked into the courtroom, and took their seats at the judges bench.

"Please, be seated." First Consul Fre'kay declared.

Again, in unison, everyone sat back in their seats. There was a short pause before the Consuls spoke, allowing for the crowd to settle down.

"We have carefully reviewed the decisions made by the jury, and we have come to an agreement." First Consul Fre'kay announced, "Grand Admiral Danakar, would you please stand up." Slowly, the Grand Admiral complied; First Consul Fre'kay nodded in approval, and continued, "Would the jury please read the verdicts."

One of the jury members, sitting closest to the judges, stood up with perfect military posture. He was a young former Alliance colonel within the army. High Templar Malakon didn't know the colonel personally, but with the popularity of the trial, everyone probably knew of him now.

"On the twelve counts of murder, including the planned and executed assassinations of Nu Toreena and Bail Antilles." The young colonel declared, "We find the defendant, guilty."

A sudden uproar from the Ithorians and Corellians in the crowd surged forth. Nu Toreena was in fact an Ithorian who was a member of the Galactic Alliance Triumvirate; she was, unfortunately, responsible for the debacle over Caamas during the Sith-Imperial War, which led to the defeat of the Galactic Alliance. Bail Antilles was another member of the Galactic Alliance Triumvirate; as a charismatic Corellian, he was popular among the beings of the Galactic Alliance. The wave of emotions and passion from the beings in the crowd almost overwhelmed High Templar Malakon.

First Consul Fre'kay gently hammered the gavel, "Order!"

After a few moments, the colonel continued, "On the four counts of genocide and extermination on the worlds of Dac, the Sanctuary Moon of Endor, Tynna, and Lepi," The colonel listed, "we find the defendant, guilty."

Another uproar from the crowd ensued; the emotional tension hit an all time high. High Templar Malakon immediately looked back at Jedi Knights Templar Teilo Fess, and smiled and nodded in approval; a quick glance at Teilo Fess, and he could tell the Mon Calamari had tears in his large, bulbous black eyes. A feeling of elation, or possibly even closure, surrounded Teilo Fess. Harder, First Consul Fre'kay hammered the gavel on the hardwood platform several times.

Allowing the crowd to settle down, the colonel continued, "On the count of imprisonment, torture, and enslavement of the people of Ryloth," The colonel stated, "We find the defendant, guilty."

The Twi'leks in the crowd cheered and praised; them, as a peoples, have been through too much in their history. It was probably the first time they've ever got justice as a peoples.

"On the thirty-four counts of conspiracy, including conspiracy to commit murder, genocide, enslavement, torture, and other crimes against peace," The colonel finished, "We find the defendant, guilty."

The final verdict did it; all counts were guilty. The crowd went absolutely crazy; a frenzy of cheers and screaming filled the courtroom like never before. High Templar Malakon, sitting up on the second balcony, couldn't help but smile a little bit. *Justice*, he thought, *justice*. He nodded, thinking inwardly; all the horrors unveiled, all the wrongs over the course of the war... finally, justice. Or was it? High Templar Malakon looked around. All around him, various government officials and military personnel shook hands and congratulated each other; High Templar Malakon also shook hands with the various V.I.Ps. Over the uproar from the crowd, First Consul Fre'kay hammered his gavel several times, trying to re-establish order.

Finally, as the crowd settled back down, First Consul Fre'kay could be heard, "Order! Order in the court!" He shouted while hammering his gavel; after the crowd finally settled down and became silent, did he continue speaking, "From your own testimony, and in light of evidence put forth during this trial, the carnage put forth by you and your men are beyond comprehension and despicable in every way." He started, "As I see it, any sentence less than death would simply not suffice."

The crowd began another celebration, but quickly settled down; soon after, First Consul Fre'kay continued, "Thereby the authority bestowed onto me by the Galactic Commonwealth of Patriotic Worlds, I sentence you, Grand Admiral Narklin Danakar,

to death by firing squad." He announced, "The sentence is final, and will be carried out tomorrow afternoon at twelve hundred hours."

The five judges and three members of Consul immediately stood up and left the courtroom; soon after the sentencing, the crowd screamed and cheers in celebration. High Templar Malakon watched the crowd, for only a moment, as the celebration took place; he saw the tears of joy in beings eyes, the mournful cheers for loved ones lost, and the general relief that finally, the war might be put to an end. Instinctively, High Templar Malakon reached out with the Force, and sensed the emotion of the crowd below; the sensation was almost overwhelming. Like waves in an ocean, the emotions washed over him over and over again; sometimes, like a sledgehammer, the emotions were so powerful, the smashed into him. The overall strength of the emotions caused him to take a seat.

After a few more moments, the two military police officers escorted the Grand Admiral out of the courtroom. High Templar Malakon noticed the utter lack of emotion coming from Grand Admiral Danakar; that wasn't exactly surprising. Everyone, more-or-less, knew what the outcome of the trial was going to be like; including, especially, Grand Admiral Danakar. He always proclaimed this trial a farce; maybe it was. But, in a way, it was still justice.

Many members of the Commonwealth government and military stayed behind in the courtroom; High Templar Malakon, however, left almost immediately. He always felt uncomfortable in the courtroom. He immediately came out into the Grand Halls of the Courts; outside the courtroom, the Halls were eerily empty and quiet. Everyone, after all, were inside the courtroom itself. Following the hallway towards the central main entrance, High Templar Malakon came across two Imperial naval officers talking quietly by one of the large marble pillars.

"You notice that the jury were mostly from the Alliance." One of the Imperial officers quietly replied.

"Of course." The other answered, "Although, I never like Danakar, I think they were a little too harsh on him. That trial, it was more about revenge than actual justice."

The first officer nodded, and looked at High Templar Malakon as he walked by. For a moment, High Templar Malakon locked eyes with the officer. Quickly, the two officers straightened out their uniforms, and returned back into the courtroom. Walking

out of the Grand Halls of the Courts, alone, he came across someone he ever thought he'd see again.

"Cosh." High Templar Malakon replied.

Commander Cosh Sonter, leaning up against one of the pillars outside the Grand Halls, slowly turned his head to look at High Templar Malakon. There was a hint of surprise that flashed across his face.

"Mathias." He replied.

High Templar Malakon looked back into the Grand Halls, "I didn't see you up there with the rest of the vee-ie-pees."

Cosh Sonter shook his head, "I wasn't up there." He replied, "I stood by the door on the first floor."

High Templar Malakon nodded, "I didn't think you'd attend."

"I didn't want to, not at first, but after everything we went through," Cosh Sonter started, "I thought I should see it through."

"Yeah."

"I never like these Insurgency Trials, Mathias." Cosh Sonter stated, "I hated the thought of reliving the war. I always felt we should try to move on, you know?"

"Me too, Cosh." High Templar Malakon replied, "I tried to make an effort to come to as many as I could, but sometimes..." He shook his head, "It was especially difficult this time."

Cosh Sonter nodded, "Opened up old wounds." Cosh Sonter replied, "Me too."

After an awkward moment of silence, High Templar Malakon broke in, "I heard you've trained the new recruits for Razor Squadron."

Cosh Sonter nodded in confirmation, "Yeah. They're a little green right now, but I've put them through their paces." He replied, "They should work out just fine."

"That really great to hear, Cosh." High Templar Malakon replied.

Cosh Sonter nodded, "Yeah." He quickly replied, "But, if you'd excuse me, I'm on call over by the base."

High Templar Malakon nodded, "Of course, you're a busy man." He replied, "Me too, actually. Those younglings won't train themselves."

A quick laugh, and Cosh immediately walked down the white and light grey marble steps into the vast courtyard below; the open courtyard was surprisingly empty. It was still uneasy between him and Cosh; this was the first time they exchanged words since Rothana. It pained High Templar Malakon that things had gotten so bad between the two; he didn't realize how much it hurt until just this moment. He had been too busy to notice, as terrible that was. High Templar Malakon took a deep breath, let it out slowly, and proceeded down the stairs; the afternoon sun basked down upon his face. It felt nice. Slowly, he walked back towards the Temple of Knights, taking his sweet time.

No rush.

Property of Sean P. Funk

Strife

Property of Sean P. Funk

Three Standard Months Later: Commonwealth City, Coruscant: 145.5 ABY:

Through the newly refurbished Commonwealth Palace, formerly the New Imperial Palace, High Templar Malakon quickly walked through its angular durasteel corridors. There were still construction projects actually renovating the Palace, mainly to remove some of the militaristic detailing, and installing more "friendly" motifs. The Commonwealth Palace was unusually crowded today; rumour had it that something of "major proportions" had happened in the Outer Rim. High Templar Malakon ran towards the turbolift, which took him to the top floor, restricted to only those with the highest security levels. He stepped out of the turbolift into the darkened council chambers. Already inside were the three members of Consul, and the other members of the Admiralty, all seated around a wooden circular table with a holographic projector in the middle; they were already in the middle of their discussion when High Templar Malakon walked in; they all wore dark blue admiral uniforms. First Consul Fre'kay wore a clean white military uniform with gold trim.

"Did I miss anything?" High Templar Malakon asked as he took a seat.

"We just started." Second Consul Proc Vanis answered; he wore a dark grey military uniform with silver trim. A plaque on his chest denoted him as a fleet admiral.

"So, what's the situation?" High Templar Malakon asked.

Immediately, First Consul Fre'kay tapped a series of buttons on the console in front of him, and a holographic display projected into the air in the middle of the circular table. The glowing blue-white rotating image depicted the Slice-side of the galaxy.

"War has broken out in the Outer Rim." First Consul Fre'kay replied.

"Between who?" High Templar Malakon asked.

"Thrak Zann and the Hutts." Third Consul Alona Oamuys answered; she wore a black uniform with bronze trim. She continued, "As we all know, after the death of Empress Amelia, the Hutts and Thrak Zann have been at odds with each other. So far, it was contained and only escalated into small skirmishes between the two rival gangs."

"Now, we've got a full blown war on our hands." Second Consul Vanis continued; the holographic zoomed in to show Hutt Space, a region of the galaxy occupying parts of the Mid and Outer Rim that was in direct control of the Hutts, "Thrak Zann has taken a fleet and invaded Hutt Space."

High Templar Malakon studied the holographic image carefully. The image showed Thrak Zann's fleet moving passed the world of Unagin, into Hutt Space.

"The last report stated that Thrak Zann's fleet was moving passed Tsyk, moving along the Hollastin Run." Second Consul Vanis explained, "By our current projections, Thrak Zann should be within striking distance of Nal Hutta within months."

High Templar Malakon thought about the situation for a moment, "What kind of forces are we dealing with?"

First Consul Fre'kay punched a few more buttons, and a schematic diagram outlining Thrak Zann's known forces was displayed on the holographic image, "We don't currently know the full strength of the Hutt forces, but we assume them to be quite sizeable." First Consul Fre'kay explained, "Thrak Zann, on the other hand, has quite an irregular fleet, consisting of just over three hundred fully equipped, refurbish and retrofitted *Venator*-class, *Victory*-class and *Imperial*-class Star Destroyers, coupled with some more modern *Turbulent*-class and *Pellaeon*-class Star Destroyers." He shook his head, "How they got the latter is beyond me."

High Templar Malakon thought about it for a moment, then it clicked, "From Narklin Danakar."

"Excuse me?" Second Consul Vanis asked.

High Templar Malakon composed himself, "While on Rothana, my strike team encountered two hunter-killer droids of unknown origin, at the time." He explained, "When the Grand Admiral was taken into custody, I examined the droids myself. They had the manufactures stamp of Thrak Zann."

"That doesn't necessarily mean anything, High Templar." Second Consul Vanis retorted.

"No, not directly." High Templar Malakon agreed, "But it might prove to be the reason why Thrak Zann has those *Pellaeon*-class Star Destroyers, a model, to the best of my knowledge, that is illegal to sell to private owners."

The Imperial members of the Admiralty grumbled at the thought.

"Could he have stolen them from one of our shipyards?" One of the former Imperial members of the Admiralty, a sixty standard year old human male named Fenn Silth, asked.

"Not possible." Second Consul Vanis quickly replied, "They all have fail-safes that render them inoperable in the event of theft."

"Then, the most likely explanation, is that the Grand Admiral traded the vessels for... who knows what." High Templar Malakon replied.

"Regardless of how he came to acquire these ships, what do we do about this?" First Consul Fre'kay asked.

"Peace-making operations?" High Templar Malakon suggested.

"No way." Second Consul Vanis immediately replied.

"The Hutts have no diplomatic relations with the Commonwealth." Third Consul Oamuys explained, "They didn't have diplomatic relations with the Alliance or the Empire, as well."

"So we can't go through Hutt Space." High Templar Malakon replied, "What about the other way, through Zann occupied space?"

"Impossible." Third Consul Oamuys answered, "Thrak Zann has his territory locked up tight."

High Templar Malakon was feeling slightly frustrated, "We went through it before, when we needed to get to Rothana... and Pzob."

"That was over a year ago." Second Consul Vanis replied, "Things have changed."

Suddenly, one of the former Alliance members, a forty-three standard year old blue-skinned Twi'lek male named Derrikk Zarmer, put forth a question, "Wait a minute. If High Templar Malakon is correct, why would Thrak Zann allow us to take down Narklin Danakar?"

Suddenly, the room erupted into murmurs. High Templar Malakon could feel the room permeate with emotion. It was a good question, and one without a simple answer.

"Thrak Zann is smart." Second Consul Vanis replied.

"If he continued strengthening Danakar, by supplying him with weapons and materiel," Third Consul Oamuys continued, "Sooner or later, Zann knew he would have to fight him for power in the Outer Rim."

"He used us to take down one of his potential future competitors." First Consul Fre'kay agreed.

"So Thrak Zann is unlikely to help us..." High Templar Malakon started.

"It wouldn't matter even if he did." Second Consul Vanis explained; he punched in some more keys and the entire Slice-region of the galaxy was shown on the holographic display. Red blinking dots were marked on the holographic image, "When Narklin Danakar used scorch world tactics during his eight month campaign, he littered the major hyperspace lanes, including the Corellian Run, Reena Trade Route, and the Manda Merchant Route, with mines. There's no way we could safely navigate a fleet into Zann occupied territory."

"It's simple." Third Consul Oamuys replied, "Thrak Zann wants something from the Hutts, and until he gets it, he won't back down."

Another wave of murmurs; after only a few moments, one of the former Imperial members, a thirty-one standard year old human male named Kath Keldrona, put forth a question, "Why do we even care about two gangsters fighting it out?"

Suddenly, the room turned into a ruckus; another former Alliance member, a male Gotal named J'r'miah, stood up and shouted, "We care because it affects all of us!"

"Listen! Only recently have the civil wars in the Inner Rim, Expansion Region, and Mid Rim quieted!" A former Imperial member, a thirty year old human female named Eida Reed, shouted, "Only now have they begun to join the Commonwealth! We should put forth the Marshall Plan!"

The Marshall Plan was a great plan, on paper; it outlined the use of funds and resources to aid in reconstruction efforts on war-torn worlds. Some have speculated that the Marshall Plan was simply another propaganda piece to bring forth more worlds under the banner of the Commonwealth; not necessarily a bad thing, but one that must be observed with great care and caution.

"The Marshall Plan is just another one of your Victory Without War schemes!" A former Alliance male Duros named Aztin Varss screamed, "Look how that turned out!"

"We all wear the same emblem on our chest, you grey-skinned bastard!" A fifty-five standard year old former Imperial member named Rath Oden shouted.

"You fouled mouthed scum!" Aztin Varss screamed.

Immediately, First Consul Fre'kay stood up and demanded, "Let's keep this civil!"

Immediately, the members of the Admiralty quieted down, and sat back in their seats. High Templar Malakon could still feel tension in the room, although more of an undercurrent.

"Obviously some members in the council have strong feelings towards the Marshall Plan, positive or negative," First Consul Fre'kay pointed out, "but I don't think we could simply ignore the upcoming war in the Outer Rim."

"That's right!" J'r'miah retorted, "This war is too close to Bothan Space, and could possibly spread further passed the Hutt territories!"

"The Bothans have reported numerous raids taking place within their territory." Another former Alliance member, a male Kel Dor named El'kar Urope, informed.

"Might I remind you that the Bothans have remained independent since the conclusion of the war." A former Imperial member, a fifty-seven standard year old human male named Mikal Nyeb, proclaimed.

"I would have thought the Outer Rim would have been important to you Imperials, especially since Bastion is deep within it." El'kar Urope countered.

"Bastion is on the other side of the Outer Rim, El'kar." Mikal Nyeb reminded.

"Regardless. What about other worlds? Like Dac?" J'r'miah asked.

"Dac is sufficiently far away from the fighting." Fenn Silth commented, "It is in no immediate danger."

"We can't simply sit here and do nothing!" Aztin Varss proclaimed.

"And what, exactly, would you have us do?" Mikal Nyeb forcibly asked, "We are still reeling from the last war! You expect us to fight another one so soon!"

Frustrated, Derrikk Zarmer commented, "The Marshall Plan has one critical flaw."

"And what is that?" Kath Keldrona asked.

"We have insufficient funds and resources to aid in reconstruction efforts in the Deep Core, Core and Colonies." Derrikk Zarmer answered, "Our funds would be futile

in aiding the war-torn worlds between the Inner and Mid Rims. Our economy is simply not up to the task for what the Marshall Plan demands."

Murmurs spread throughout the council; finally, Eida Reed spoke, "Then we'll have to cut back on some of the funding going to the Core and give it to the world from the Inner to Mid Rims."

Immediately, a former Alliance member, a twenty-eight standard year old human male named Lon Yash from Corellia replied, "What about the worlds of Kuat, Fondor and Empress Teta?" He asked, "Those worlds were critical in the war-effort! You can't just strip them of their funds and give it to someone else! That's not right!"

"Galactic unity is more important now." Eida Reed replied.

This discussion was turning south again, High Templar Malakon sensed. Although the mention of Empress Teta had struck a chord with him, he had to, unfortunately, agree with Eida Reed. Galactic unity was important, he just didn't know if the Marshall Plan should be its vassal. On the other hand, could he just ignore the coming war in the Outer Rim, and pretend it didn't matter? Too many questions today.

"This bickering is pointless." Second Consul Vanis stated, "Let's just put this to a vote. All in favour of the Marshall Plan." The five former Imperial members, plus the Second and Third Consul put up their hands, "And those in favour of intervention in the Outer Rim conflict?" The five former Alliance members, plus the First Consul put up his hands. With a smug smile, "The Marshall Plan, it is."

High Templar Malakon, of course, didn't have a vote as he wasn't officially part of the Admiralty. To be honest, he didn't know what he would have voted for even if he had an opportunity.

"This council is adjourned." First Council Fre'kay announced.

Almost immediately after the Admiralty had its meeting, High Templar Malakon caught up with a speedily walking First Consul Fre'kay. First Consul Fre'kay pushed passed the crowds, making his way to the exit. Finally, High Templar Malakon caught up to him, just outside the Palace.

"First Consul!" High Templar Malakon shouted; luckily, First Consul Fre'kay paused, and turned towards High Templar Malakon, "Just where are you going off to in such a hurry?"

"It's best if you don't know, High Templar Malakon." First Consul Fre'kay replied; and with a ripple of his brown fur, he took off.

"Just make sure that you won't regret any decision you make, First Consul." High Templar Malakon proclaimed.

High Templar Malakon stared out into nothingness, leaning up against the guardrail that surrounded the marble inner courtyard within the Temple of Knights. His mind was racing, processing unruly amounts of information, most of which he didn't even understand fully; the situation was overwhelming, to say the least. In what seemed like mere moments of time, the galaxy around him seemed to fall apart. Too much information, changing too quickly; High Templar Malakon was astonished at how much could change so quickly. Suddenly, the sudden crack and sizzle of lightsabers snapped High Templar Malakon out of his delirium. Before him were two dozen Jedi Knights Templars, human and non-human, male and female, but all of whom were incredibly young; the average age of current Jedi Knights Templars was seventeen standard years of age, with some as young as fourteen. The lack of surviving Jedi Knights during the Insurgency hampered, possibly even crippled, High Templar Malakon's efforts to rebuild the Order; today's Jedi Knights Templars grow up during the Insurgency, hearing of the heroic actions of Mathias Malakon and his former Master, Yuun Lii; over time, they grew to idolize him.

High Templar Malakon watched the young Jedi Knights Templars worked through their rigorous training regime; they swiftly moved through the precise and rapid manoeuvres of Djem So, the fifth lightsaber form best known for being very aggressive and heavily combat-orientated. They were raw, unrefined, inelegant. The swath of energy blades, from blue, green, and violet, was mesmerizing. Something that High Templar Malakon always found curious was that most of the current Jedi Knights Templars use a lightsaber lance, just like he had during the war; he wasn't sure if they simply chose the weapon to replicate him, or if they found the weapon superior. It didn't matter. That was another thing High Templar Malakon wondered; did he make the right decision? Before the Jedi Knights Templars were formally founded, High Templar Malakon had made the decision to train the next generation of Jedi heavily in lightsaber combat, obviously at the expense of philosophy. The Jedi Knights Templars reflected that; they greatly trained their bodies, honing and moulding them into perfect warriors, but lacking any philosophical foundation. It was a gamble, but a gamble that came out of necessity. He often wondered what Master Lii would think of him now.

Gradually, High Templar Malakon found himself staring at the architecture of the Temple of Knights; he was built from the remnants of the Temple of the Sith, which was the former Jedi Temple on Coruscant. The building itself preserved the pyramidal structure of both former buildings, but added more transparisteel panels and white marble columns for a softer and richer atmosphere; the entire architecture of the building was built around pyramids. The high-vaulted ceilings tapered into pyramids, held up by evenly spaced elongated pyramidal columns made of white marble. High Templar Malakon closed his eyes, and let the warmth of the sun bask upon him.

Suddenly, "High Templar."

High Templar Malakon snapped out of his world and returned to reality; he quickly turned to see Jakob Nion standing behind him. Jakob Nion wore the traditional brown and tan robes, coupled with the jet-black ceramic armour underneath. Composing himself, "What is it, Knight Nion?"

"I was asked to inform you that your fighter is fuelled and ready for launch." Jakob Nion informed.

"Thank you, Knight Nion." High Templar Malakon replied.

Jakob Nion turned around and started heading into the depths of the Temple, when High Templar Malakon called, "Jakob, walk with me."

Jakob Nion immediately turned around, and nodded his head. High Templar Malakon headed deeper into the Temple of Knights, Jedi Knights Templar Nion following closely behind. They walked down decadent hallways, floored with luxurious beige carpets, the walls lined with synthsilk violet drapes.

"Jakob, you are the eldest Jedi Knights Templar," High Templar Malakon started; at twenty-one standard years of age, Knight Nion was considered elder, "and as such, you must understand the responsibilities that come with such status."

"High Templar, I don't understand." Knight Nion replied.

High Templar Malakon sighed, "Certain galactic events have transpired, most of which I am not at liberty to divulge, but they have certainly complicated current matters." High Templar Malakon explained, "As such, they require my full attention. Therefore, I am not able to perform my duties here."

Knight Nion sent out a flicker of shock through the Force. The decadent hallways were nearly empty, allowing for much speed and haste will walking. Before High

Templar Malakon had even noticed, he was standing in front of the blast doors that led into the Temple of Knight's hangar bay. The massive durasteel blast doors slid open, upon High Templar Malakon's command, and they both entered the moderately sized hangar. The hangar bay, newly built and shiny new, was filled with a dozen brand-new X-83 TwinTail starfighters, a fighter built by Incom Corporation exclusively for Jedi Knights during the Insurgency. High Templar Malakon walked over to his designated starfighter, and climbed aboard.

The cockpit still opened, High Templar Malakon added, "Knight Nion, it is my wish that you take over duties here in the Temple while I deal with these events. Understand?"

Knight Nion was wide-eyed with shock, "High Templar..." He started, "Thank you for the honour."

High Templar Malakon nodded and smiled, "Make me proud." He replied; he closed the cockpit windshield while Knight Nion stepped back from the starfighter. High Templar Malakon saluted, and engaged the repulsorlifts.

A sudden whirlwind of dust kicked up off the permacrete deck. Jakob Nion's tan and brown robes fluttered in the sudden gust of wind. Then, just as fast as they came, the winds ceased. A bright lance of bluish-white light blinded Jakob Nion for a moment, as the sublight engines on the starfighter ignited. Out the far end, the X-83 TwinTail starfighter soared through the hangar and made its way towards the sky.

Three Standard Days Later: Selonian Shipyards, Selonion, the Corellian system:

In one of the conference rooms located on the rather vast, and rather brand new, orbital shipyards over the dominantly oceanic world of Selonion, Admiral Lon Yash waited. He stared out of the large, rectangular transparisteel viewport, down towards the crystal clear purplish-blue oceans below; specks of green, just some of the numerous small islands that dotted the world, broke up the mash of colours. Above, swirling white clouds formed; overall, it was quite a beautiful sight. And above all that, were the brand new orbital shipyards, built merely fifteen standard years previous; the gigantic mechanical ring orbited the entire oceanic world. Already, ship-building operations, both civilian and military, were underway. Coupled with those above Corellia, the Corellian system was a powerhouse of military-industrial might.

Suddenly, the sliding doors behind slid open, and his secretary walked in; Lon Yash turned around. His secretary was a beautiful and slim young woman from

Corellia; with lush golden-yellow hair, and piercing blue eyes, she was the envy of most women, and desired by most men.

"Sir, your guests have arrived." The secretary informed.

"Thank you." Lon Yash thanked, "Please, let them in."

The secretary bowed her head, then led in two men into the conference room. The two men took seats opposite of Lon Yash.

"Will there be anything else, sir?" The secretary asked.

"Ah, yes, dear." Lon Yash replied, "Please bring us some refreshments."

The secretary bowed again, and exited the room. Within moments, she came back and served them a luxurious brew of coffee, specially imported from Belsavis. Moments later, after pouring the beverages, she left the conference room.

"Alright, gentlemen." Lon Yash replied, taking a sip of his coffee, "Let's get down to business."

"What exactly is the business we travelled here to discuss?" The Fondor representative, a human male by the name of Arian Thane, asked.

"Yes." The Kuati representative, a human male named 'Ieten Kuat, head of the Kuat family, seconded, "We are quite a busy people."

"Yes. This is true." Lon Yash replied, "However, the way things are going in the Admiralty, they might not progress any further."

"What do you mean, Admiral Yash?" Arian Thane quickly asked.

Lon Yash spun in his chair, looking out of the transparisteel viewport, "I regret to inform you, that the current funds provided to you by the Commonwealth, might dry up faster than you have anticipated."

"What do you mean, dry up?" The Kuati representative quickly asked.

Lon Yash spun his chair around and looked upon the Kuati representative; the Kuati were always known for their ridiculous fashion sense, especially the hats. The Fondorian representative, Arian Thane, also waited in anticipation for the answer. After a moment, Lon Yash gave them the answer, "The Admiralty, in all its wisdom, has decided to proceed with the Marshall Plan."

"What does that mean for us?" 'Ieten Kuat asked.

"It means—" Lon Yash started, "That the reconstruction funds that you've enjoyed for the last two years are about to be reassessed and reclaimed." Then, interlocking his fingers, "Then given to other worlds between the Inner and Mid Rims."

"How can they possibly do this?" Arian Thane protested, "After everything we've sacrificed!"

Lon Yash, with open hands, "I realize the hardship the peoples of Kuat and Fondor are going through." He stated, "After all, the nature and size of your major orbital shipyards make them prime military targets."

"Exactly!" Arian Thane shouted, "Our shipyards were targeted many times during the war! Even my the Alliance..."

"Yes, well, that I wouldn't know about." Lon Yash protested; looking over to 'Ieten Kuat, "And of course Kuat, the largest shipyard in the galaxy, and the host to one of the most spectacular final battles in the war, are still recovering, yes?"

"We are." The Kuati representative confirmed, "Kuat Drive Yards suffers greatly. Production is greatly reduced with the conflicts and seizures on our satellite worlds, or from failures in transportation. Plus our orbital shipyards have suffered great damage during the war. The Ten Families are greatly concerned for our future."

Kuat Drive Yards was the single largest civilian and military shipbuilding corporation in the galaxy; it was owned by the ten most powerful families on Kuat, the original founding families. It evolved and expanded onto other worlds, most of which were located within the Core or the Outer Rim. Unfortunately, because of the Anti-Sith Insurgency, several worlds marked by Kuat Drive Yards were destroyed, along with their orbital shipyards and manufacturing facilities. These disturbances to production, along with growing transportation problems, greatly hampered, and threatened to bring down, Kuat Drive Yards.

"Yes. We, too, are concerned for the production capabilities of Kuat Drive Yards; with many of your satellite shipyards located within the Outer Rim, Kuat cannot recover as speedily as we'd hoped." Lon Yash replied to the Kuat representative, "So, obviously, with the Marshall Plan in effect, funds will be rerouted to other worlds, and military contracts would probably be either downsized, or axed all together."

"That would bankrupt us!" Arian Thane protested further.

The Kuati representative was not so easily emotional, "What, exactly, are you offering, Admiral Yash?"

"Ah, yes. Straight to the business. I like that." Lon Yash replied, "I propose, that if the Commonwealth is unwilling to offer you reconstruction funds and military contracts, then the worlds of Corellia will."

A slight smirk appeared on the Kuati's face, "What is Corellia compared to the Commonwealth?"

"That, gentlemen, is why I have brought you here." Lon Yash replied, "Here specifically. Selonian, home of the brand new, and fully operational, Selonian shipyards. The fourth largest in the galaxy; it, in and of itself, is a major military powerhouse. Coupled with Corellia, the third largest shipyard in the galaxy, we rival even you in both production volume and production quality."

The Kuati, taken aback, quickly replied, "So what?"

"Corellia, as you probably know, was relatively unharmed during the course of the war." Lon Yash explained with an air of pride and confidence in his voice, "Our worlds are intact, our production systems are fully operational, and our trading depots are as profitable as ever. Overall, Corellia is a major player in the galactic scene; much more so than in the past."

"And?"

"And, we offer assistance." Lon Yash explained.

"In exchange for?"

"In exchange for Corellian assistance, which will include funds for rebuilding your orbital shipyards and city centres, plus very lucrative military contracts," Lon Yash outlined, "You will provide us with exclusive rights to purchase Kuati and Fondorian products."

Both the Kuati and Fondorian representatives were taken aback by the offer; this was borderline treason by the articles of the Commonwealth.

"Are you talking of secession?" The Fondorian representative asked.

"Yes." The Kuati representative seconded, "By offering you exclusive buying rights to military products, this will not sit well with the rest of the Admiralty."

Lon Yash gave a cold, hard stare, "So be it." He growled a reply, "If the Commonwealth is unwilling to aid you, then, what hold should they have over your products? They take only what they need, when they need it, then toss you aside until it's in their interests to help you again. Is that the kind of government you want to be a part of?"

"And if we agree?" The Kuati representative asked.

"We would be equal trading partners." Lon Yash answered, "We buy from you; you buy from us. We are equal in any economic or political quandaries, and our military forces will be united."

The two representatives thought it over for a good while. Finally, the Kuati representative spoke, "If we agree, what would be the details to your offer?"

With a smile, Lon Yash replied, "Well, let's just work that out, shall we?"

One Standard Day Later: Commonwealth City, Coruscant:

First Consul Fre'kay walked into the Commonwealth Freedom Base, home of the largest Commonwealth fleet in the galaxy, the Coruscant First Fleet. Inside the large hangar bay, sparkling brand new, were thousands upon thousands of CF9 Crossfire starfighters and *Predator*-class starfighters; there had been talks about standardizing the starfighters to be used for the Commonwealth, but they hadn't progressed farther than that just yet. The hangar bay was busy with activity; many starfighters needed vital repairs, while others simply needed tune ups. Above, on the airbase, training lessons were being run, training the next generations of starfighter pilots.

First Consul Fre'kay made his way into the back of the hangar where all the offices were. He quickly made his way up to the top floors where other Admirals that were not brought under the Admiralty were stationed. In one of the offices was Commodore Kellar Fre'kay; First Consul Sibar Fre'kay's younger cousin.

"Cousin." First Consul Fre'kay said as he walked through the door.

The Bothan's violet, gold-flecked eyes widened with surprise, "Sibar? What are you doing here?"

"I came to discuss some important matters with you." First Consul Fre'kay answered.

"Of course." Commodore Kellar Fre'kay answered, "Please, have a seat."

First Consul Fre'kay sat down, and explained, "I suppose you are aware of what is happening in the Outer Rim."

"Yes—" Commodore Kellar Fre'kay answered before getting cut off.

"No specifics." First Consul Fre'kay answered.

"What is it you need me to do?" Commodore Kellar Fre'kay asked.

First Consul Fre'kay leaned forward, "I need you to put your troops, only those you can trust, on stand-by. Quietly, of course."

"Of course." Commodore Kellar Fre'kay replied, "For what?"

"For when I call you."

Selonian Shipyards, Selonia, the Corellian system:

"*Sir, your guest has arrived.*" Lon Yash's secretary called; Lon Yash had been admiring the beauty of Selonia while waiting for his visitor.

"Excellent, please, let her in." Lon Yash answered.

"*Would you need anything else?*" The secretary asked.

"No." A voice came from behind.

Quickly, Lon Yash spun his chair around, and saw his guest standing by the doorway, "Please, come in. Have a seat." He pushed the button for the secretary, "We won't be needing anything."

"Let's make this quick, shall we?"

"Yes, of course, Princess Jade." Lon Yash complied.

"Why, exactly, did you bring me out here?" Princess Jade, wearing luxurious, gold-lined and gem-encrusted formal clothing, asked.

"For an opportunity, Princess Jade." Lon Yash explained.

"What kind of... opportunity?" She cautiously asked.

"I know that Empress Teta was hit hard during the war." Lon Yash explained, "It was made an example of many times during the war, correct?"

"Yes. We fought hard to get her back." Princess Jade answered, "We fight hard still, in fact."

"That, Princess, is exactly why I brought you out here." Lon Yash replied.

Princess Jade narrowed her eyes, "Be simple, Admiral."

"I am offering to make Empress Teta the galactic superpower it once was before the war." Lon Yash answered.

"How?" She quickly asked.

"The Corellian system, as you can clearly see, is doing quite well for itself." Lon Yash explained, "We are willing to offer Empress Teta assistance."

"What kind of assistance?"

"Funds." Lon Yash quickly answered.

"We already have funds coming from the Commonwealth." Princess Jade corrected.

"Yes, this is truth." Lon Yash replied, "At least, for now, you do."

"Explain."

"See, the Admiralty has decided to put forth the Marshall Plan, which is—" Lon Yash started to explain before getting cut off.

"I know what the Marshall Plan is, Admiral Yash." Princess Jade answered.

"Oh, good! Then you know what repercussions it would have on the people of Empress Teta." Lon Yash replied; after a few moments of silence, it was obvious that Princess Jade still didn't get it, "Well, then. Maybe not." He replied, "I'll put it simply. When the Marshall Plan is put into effect, the funds that Empress Teta is currently using to rebuild its fallen cities and crippled fleet, not to mention its vast medical expenses for its injured and wounded people, will, quite literally, run out."

"The Commonwealth would do no such thing!" Princess Jade proclaimed.

"It can, and it will!" Lon Yash rebutted.

Princess Jade thought about the statement for a moment; she knew the economic and military turmoil the Commonwealth was still struggling against, even after a

standard year of so-called peace. She knew of the political strife in the outer reaches of the galaxy. She knew the situation as well as anyone else, but she couldn't find a fault in Admiral Yash's arguments. Not yet, anyways.

"And what of you, Admiral Yash?" Princess Jade finally said after a few moments of thinking.

Lon Yash let out a deep breath, "As I said before, Corellia and its worlds are offering its assistance."

"Exactly?" Princess Jade asked.

"Medical supplies for your injured and wounded." Lon Yash started, knowing full well to appeal to the Princess' soft-spot to her people, "Funds for reconstruction projects for the entire system devastated by war. And, further funding to bring your military back to pre-war might. Empress Teta will be a superpower once more."

"In exchange for?"

Lon Yash smiled, "In exchange for Empress Teta's hand in friendship."

Princess Jade narrowed her eyes in confusion; then, it hit her, "Secession." She bitterly replied, "Just like Corellia."

"You make it sound so bad." Lon Yash replied.

"This is treason, Admiral Yash." Princess Jade replied, "You know that."

"Treason is what they are planning on doing to the worlds that fought and sacrificed too much during the war!" Lon Yash countered, "Worlds like Empress Teta! A world who sacrificed many of its citizens during the war. Now, ravaged and devastated, only to be tossed aside like common trash."

Princess Jade shook her head, "I don't know, Admiral Yash." Princess Jade replied, "I don't like it."

"Think it over, Princess." Lon Yash replied, "I think you come around."

Hapes, the Hapes Cluster:

Suddenly, a green-bladed lightsaber came down onto High Templar Malakon's head. Quickly, with Force-enhanced reflexes, High Templar Malakon blocked the attack with a horizontal parry with his blue-bladed lightsaber. A sudden explosion of light

emanated from the clash, and the two lightsabers crackled as they struck each other; a short stream of sparks followed. Expertly, High Templar Malakon disengaged, and spun on his heels, moving away from the attack zone.

"Good." High Templar Malakon remarked, "Your skill-set has improved drastically."

Queen Mother Alys Nalah Djo confidently walked towards High Templar Malakon, "You've seen nothing yet."

She quickly spun her rancor-toothed green-bladed lightsaber in her right hand, and leapt into the air. She came down hard against High Templar Malakon's raised blade, smashing him towards the side. Quickly, she rolled onto her feet, and engaged the High Templar. Her slashes and strikes were lightning fast, with perfect precision and control; High Templar Malakon's blocks and parries were equally in control. He expertly deflected and blocked the fast and furious attacks, slapping them off to the sides each time. The duel was a mere blur; everything was based on instinct. Then, with perfect timing, he rolled under one of her horizontal strikes, emerged onto his feet, and kicked the Queen Mother in the side; the impact shocked the Queen Mother, causing her to lose to balance and tumble onto the training mat.

"Not quite there yet, I'm afraid." High Templar Malakon remarked.

"We'll see." She taunted.

Emerging onto her feet in an instant, she charged again. Her proficiency in Djem So, an aggressive lightsaber form, was clearly at a knighthood level; in counter to that, High Templar Malakon utilized his masterful skills with Soresu, a defensive lightsaber form. The lightsabers clashed in the dimly lit room, temporarily sending light waves radiating from their impact centers; sparks rained down from the energy blades as they sizzled against each other.

Suddenly, High Templar Malakon disengaged, and leapt over the Queen Mother; anticipating the manoeuvre, she immediately turned around and blocked the incoming strike. With a forceful push, High Templar Malakon shoved the Queen Mother off his blade. Moving backwards, Alys Nalah Djo quickly switched her lightsaber form to Soresu, a lightsaber form she was far more proficient at. Really testing her, High Templar Malakon charged full throttle. He savagely attacked her with overpowered downward strikes, surprising horizontal slashes, and wild twisting lunges. Skilfully, she deflected each attack perfectly.

High Templar Malakon growled, and lashed out again. With a Force-enhanced manoeuvre, High Templar Malakon charged forward, and performed a furious downward smash. Queen Mother Alys Nalah Djo blocked the savage attack perfectly. Then, following through, High Templar Malakon spun on his heels, and flicked her lightsaber off to the sides; this left her wide open. Continuing his spin, and reversing his grip on his lightsaber, he aimed the tip of his blue energy blade towards her. Caught completely off-guard, she relented.

Queen Mother Alys Nalah Djo shook her head in defeat, "Damn."

"No worries." High Templar Malakon replied, "You've improved considerably since the last time I was here. I only wish that my students at the Temple were half as along in their training as you are."

The Queen Mother began putting her training equipment, along with her rancor-toothed lightsaber, away. She towelled off, wiping the sweat pouring from her forehead and soaked blonde hair, "Well, you haven't been around much lately." Queen Mother Alys Nalah Djo countered.

High Templar Malakon nodded his head slightly, also putting away his gear, "Yes. I'm sorry for that. But the Commonwealth—"

"Yes. Understand." The Queen Mother replied, "We, too, are still recovering." She said as they left the training room located in the Fountain Palace and headed into the interior.

High Templar Malakon followed closely behind, "How so?" He asked, "I thought for the better part of the war, the Empire left you alone."

"Yes. For that war." The Queen Mother replied, "But during Narklin Danakar's scorched path towards the Outer Rim, Hapes was top on his hit list." High Templar Malakon nodded his head in understanding, "He left some of our Rim Worlds in pretty bad shape."

"I'm sorry." High Templar Malakon replied; he felt a sudden surge of guilt for not knowing the situation of the Hapes Consortium.

Queen Mother Alys Nalah Djo shook her head and held up her hand, "No need for apologies, Mathias." She replied; after a few moments of silence, the Queen Mother stopped in the middle of the luxurious hallway, and asked "So, what's on your mind, Mathias?"

High Templar Malakon stopped as well, "Is it that obvious?"

"Yes." The Queen Mother replied, "And I didn't need the Force to sense it either."

High Templar Malakon gave a quick laugh, "It just the growing burdens of a new government." He explained.

"Oh, yes." Alys Nalah Djo replied, "Growing pains?"

"In a way."

The Queen Mother nodded, "The Commonwealth cannot spread itself too thin, Mathias." She warned, "That is always the danger of new governments. Overreaching their limits."

"That's the thing." High Templar Malakon continued, "The Admiralty has instigated the Marshall Plan. Its—"

"Yes. I'm familiar with the proposal, although I had not heard that it was already in effect." Alys Nalah Djo answered.

"It isn't. Not at the moment, anyways." High Templar Malakon confirmed, "But it will be."

"I see..." The Queen Mother replied.

High Templar Malakon let it out, "On paper, the Marshall Plan seems like a great idea!" He stated, "But, there's something that's just worrying me."

"Almost everything can look good on paper, Mathias. That's the danger of politics." The Queen Mother warned, "The Marshall Plan involves a reallocation of reconstruction funds from the Core into the newly peaceful Inner to Mid Rim worlds. A great idea, yes. But what it leaves out is just that; who loses funds."

"The Core worlds, I suppose." High Templar Malakon answered.

"Not just the Core worlds." The Queen Mother pointed out, "But worlds that were crucial during the war. Worlds that put their necks on the line."

"That's right..." High Templar Malakon replied.

"I know this full well, Mathias." The Queen Mother explained, "Ever since the liberation of Coruscant, reclamation and reconstruction projects had started in the Core."

I can tell you this with absolute certainty; two years, with limited funding, is not enough time to fully rebuild a ruined world."

"Good point." High Templar Malakon answered.

"If reconstruction funding diminishes, or even drops off completely, these worlds might feel they're being unfairly treated."

High Templar Malakon simply nodded in agreement this time.

"Like I said before, don't spread out too quickly." Alys Nalah Djo warned.

"Those are some good points." High Templar Malakon replied, "Then we've got this situation in the Outer Rim."

"Ah yes. The so-called Zann Wars." The Queen Mother replied, "That scavenger of beings misery." She growled, "Well, I don't think you can do anything about that. Not at the moment, anyways."

"We can't just stand back and do nothing as another war ravages beings lives!" High Templar Malakon rebutted.

Queen Mother Alys Nalah Djo took in a deep breath, "I know this goes against your Jedi teachings, but right now, you'd do more harm than good."

"I don't believe that." High Templar Malakon immediately retorted.

"Listen to me, Mathias. I am a politician, as regretful as that is," Queen Mother Alys Nalah Djo remarked, "I understand the position you're in. And I am telling you, you cannot help those beings in the Outer Rim, whether you like it or not."

"If there's even a chance to could stop that war, shouldn't we at least try?" High Templar Malakon asked.

A slight chuckle, "If only everyone was as idealistic as you." The Queen Mother remarked, "If you try to stop Thrak Zann's war against the Hutts, and it works, what happens? You've brought the Commonwealth into another long, drawn-out war with no end in the foreseeable future. More resources, desperately needed by the Commonwealth, squandered. More casualties of war, more turmoil in the Outer Rim." She explained, "But, if you commit your forces, and they fail... the Commonwealth is doomed to die a slow, painful death of which there is no escape. It's a perfect lose-lose situation, Mathias"

High Templar Malakon shook his head, "These politics... they're so new to me." He replied, "I just don't understand... I was always better on a battlefield than in an office."

"Just think of politics as the ultimate battlefield. In this case, you have to consider expansionism and triage." Alys Nalah Djo replied, "Just remember, in war, you can only die once. In politics, you can die again, and again, and again."

High Templar Malakon hung his head in confusion; he remained silent for many more moments, until he finally said, "I definitely have much to think about."

"Yes." The Queen Mother remarked, then began walking down the hallway again, "But enough about politics. I'm famished. You hungry?"

High Templar Malakon nodded, "Most definitely, Your Majesty."

Collapse

One Standard Week Later: Commonwealth City, Coruscant:

High Templar Malakon sat impatiently as Third Consul Oamuys gave her proposal to the rest of the Admiralty. Everyone, with the notable exception of Second Consul Vanis, sat around the round table listening to Oamuys, as she hovered around the holographic image displayed in the middle of the room. The bright blue holographic image showed various graphs, tables and other such figures, outlining her proposal for the Marshall Plan.

"... and by our estimates, we should be able to fund the ruined worlds from the Inner to Mid Rims." Third Consul Oamuys concluded.

"But these only include the worlds that have come forth, correct?" First Consul Fre'kay asked.

"That is correct." Third Consul Oamuys answered, "Only those that have come forth seeking our aid, approximately a dozen worlds in total, shall receive it. The other worlds, it seems, are quite alright with being independent at the moment."

"And what about the future?" First Consul Fre'kay asked, "Surely, other worlds will trickle in after they see the benefits of the Marshall Plan. How do you propose to deal with them?"

"Yes. Our budget, at this moment, is quite tight." Third Consul Oamuys replied, "But after a few months, possibly years, after the reconstruction projects are near completion, that should free up some additional funds for other world."

"And what if the volume of worlds is too great to simply reallocate funds?" First Consul Fre'kay drilled, "What if there simply isn't enough to go around?"

Third Consul Oamuys was obviously angered by the constant drilling, "We have come up with several back-up plans that reallocate funds from other sectors, not including the ones in this proposal, to be distributed by the new worlds."

First Consul Fre'kay growled under his breath, "Very well, Third Consul."

Suddenly, from behind, Second Consul Vanis stormed into the council meeting room. He quickly took up his seat, "I'm sorry for being so late."

"Third Consul Oamuys was just outlining the Marshall Plan, and addressed some of our concerns." First Consul Fre'kay explained.

"It is of no matter." Third Consul Oamuys replied, "The Second Consul has already heard this proposal. He is well aware of its details."

First Consul Fre'kay looked around the room; as did High Templar Malakon. There didn't seem to be any more questions, "So, if there is nothing further, I suppose you may continue with the proposed plan."

"Very good, First Consul." Third Consul Oamuys thanked, "I assure you, we will implement the plan post-haste."

"I'm sure." First Consul Fre'kay replied.

Everyone then started to get up out of their seats, and stretch their limbs after a rather lengthy meeting. Even High Templar Malakon, with all his meditative trances and stretching exercises, felt tense. He watched as Second Consul Vanis approached Third Consul Oamuys, and whispered something in her ear. He was too far away to hear what it was, even with the Force, but he knew something was up. Almost immediately, both stormed out of the council meeting room, leaving everyone else behind. Slowly, the other former Imperial members of the Admiralty also filed out of the council meeting room, along with Lon Yash.

Admiral Fre'kay approached High Templar Malakon, "What do you think?"

"I think Vanis is up to something." High Templar Malakon answered.

"Agreed." First Consul Fre'kay replied, "No one can be that late to a meeting without it being serious."

The other four former Alliance members of the Admiralty crowded around. They listened intently to the conversation.

"It must be something big, and something Vanis doesn't want us to know about." High Templar Malakon replied.

"I'll see what I can dig up." First Consul Fre'kay replied.

"But do it quietly." High Templar Malakon suggested, "We don't want to tip off Vanis that we're onto him."

First Consul Fre'kay nodded, "I'll call you over your secure comlinks when I've got something."

"We'll be waiting." High Templar Malakon replied.

* * *

Both Second Consul Vanis and Third Consul Oamuys quickly made their way out of the Commonwealth Palace. Once outside, they walked down the stairs at a hurried pace; the sun, Coruscant Prime, was beating down on them. It was in the middle of the afternoon, and it was quite hot outside. Finally, after a few moments, Third Consul Oamuys finally broke the silence.

"Vanis, what is going on?" Third Consul Oamuys asked.

"I just got a report from the Outer Rim." Second Consul Vanis explained.

"And?" Third Consul Oamuys quickly asked.

"And, it appears that Thrak Zann has broken through the Hutt lines and is currently bombarding the surface of Nal Hutta." Second Consul Vanis answered.

"For how long?" Third Consul Oamuys quickly asked.

"Almost a day now." Second Consul Vanis answered.

Third Consul Oamuys was taken aback, "How could this have happened? How could he move so quickly?"

"I don't know." Second Consul Vanis remarked, "But the important thing is to keep this information away from the other members for now. We need to implement the Marshall Plan as quickly as possible."

Third Consul Oamuys smiled, "It has already been put forth."

Second Consul Vanis quickly turned to stare at Oamuys, "What do you mean?"

"I issued the order for the reallocation of funds yesterday." Third Consul Oamuys explained, "The Marshall Plan is in full swing now."

"You risk much by jumping the gun, Oamuys." Second Consul Vanis warned, "If the other members found out that you issued the Marshall Plan before discussing it with them, we could lose favour."

"Not a worry, Vanis." Third Consul Oamuys calmed, "I've hired a top slicer to change the time stamp on the order. Everything will look legitimate."

"Very good." Second Consul Vanis replied.

They began walking through the open courtyard in front of the palace; the courtyard was full of beings walking about their daily lives.

"Funny, isn't it?" Third Consul Oamuys asked.

"What is?" Second Consul Vanis asked.

"Us. We're pushing the Marshall Plan forward, while the other members of the Admiralty, at least the Alliance members, wanted to go to war with Thrak Zann." Third Consul Oamuys explained, "Seems backwards, doesn't it."

"It does." Second Consul Vanis replied, "But we know full well the power the Victory Without War protocol had." Vanis explained, "We can spread our influence much further and faster, with less hassle, using the Marshall Plan, then open warfare."

"Yes. That does seem so, doesn't it?" Third Consul Oamuys rhetorically asked.

"Yes. It does." Second Consul Vanis replied.

Admiral Lon Yash returned to his luxurious office; filled with several volumes of books regarding the art of war and politics, several lavish original paintings, and other such luxuries, his office was one to be envied. In Lon Yash's private office, he activated three long-range communication terminals located in the center of his office. The lights were dimmed, and the room was empty; all except him. Suddenly, three glowing blue figures were projected into the air. Lon Yash stood in front of the three glowing blue figures, straightened his posture, and addressed them.

"Representatives Arian Thane, 'Ieten Kuat." Lon Yash greeted, "So nice to hear from you. And Princess Jade," He greeted again, "so gracious of you to bask us with your presence."

"Enough of this!" Princess Jade retorted, "What do you want, Admiral Yash?"

"I have come to inform you that the Marshall Plan has been officially put into action." Lon Yash replied, "You should see a drop in funds, about half if I recall correctly, very soon."

"We already have." 'Ieten Kuat, of Kuat and Kuat Drive Yards, replied.

"Less than half the funds we originally were promised!" Arian Thane corrected.

Lon Yash grumbled, "That was less than discussed, if I recall correctly..." He said to himself, "No matter. Now see what the Commonwealth is capable of? Do you see how much you are worth to the Commonwealth?"

"We do, Admiral Yash." Arian Thane replied.

"So, what say you?" Lon Yash replied.

Arian Thane was the first to reply, "You have the support of the peoples of Fondor."

"Thank you." Lon Yash replied.

"Kuat, the Ten Families, and Kuat Drive Yards and all its subsidiaries also pled its allegiance with Corellia." Ieten Kuat answered.

"That is most excellent." Lon Yash thanked, "Princess Jade?"

Princess Jade grumbled, thinking of the situation she found herself in. Lon Yash impatiently waited for her reply; finally, breaking the silence, Lon Yash spoke, "Surely, Princess Jade, the peoples of Empress Teta cannot survive with the diminished funds provided by the Commonwealth!" He convinced, "Your people, your worlds, will suffer for it. That, I promise you!"

Princess Jade, knowing full well that the funds, less than half of her original budget allotted to her by the Commonwealth, could not heal and feed her people, let alone rebuild the ruined cities and revive its crumbled economy. Empress Teta was in bad shape; after the Empire under the Sith decided to make an example of Empress Teta, things have been bad there ever since.

"Princess Jade!" Lon Yash demanded.

Grudgingly, "I accept Corellia's kindness, Admiral Yash." She finally spoke.

"Most excellent indeed!" Lon Yash proclaimed, "I have already arranged for the funds to be transferred to your respective treasuries. They will be sent as soon as possible." He explained, "Now, there is a great deal of paperwork that needs to go into such a matter, but considering we are dealing with the lives of billions of people, I will forgo the paperwork for now, and send the funds. Hopefully, in a few standard days, you would have signed the treaties, and make your allegiance to Corellia official."

"Most gracious of you, Admiral Yash." Arian Thane replied with a bow.

"Yes. Most gracious of you." Ieten Kuat added.

Lon Yash distinctly noticed that Princess Jade was still uneasy and unsure of her allegiance to Corellia, and thus didn't say another word, but that was fine by him. As long as there was no trouble, and he had her resources and military under his thumb, everything was absolutely fine.

"You will also find several contracts shuffled in with the paperwork." Lon Yash continued, "I think you'll find the contracts most lucrative. Thus, when your orbital shipyards are fully operational, you may be relieved to have funds to build your famous warships. Soon, the money will flow, and we all will prosper."

"Very kind." Arian Thane replied with a bow.

Lon Yash smiled, "I hope to see you recovered very soon."

Suddenly, the holographic projectors shut off, and the room was dark once more. Gradually, the lights within his office returned to normal, and Lon Yash sat back down on his seat, behind his desk. He put his feet up on his desk, let out a great sigh, and smiled to himself. He successfully executed a brilliant separatist movement; treasonous, probably, but he wasn't thinking about himself. No. He was thinking about Corellia. *The Confederation*, he thought, *will rise to power again*.

Later that evening, First Consul Fre'kay called a private meeting in his office. High Templar Malakon was the last to arrive; inside, Admiral's J'r'miah, Derrikk Zarmer, and Aztin Varss, and Rear-Admiral Urope were present.

"Where is Yash?" First Admiral Fre'kay asked.

"He's busy." Derrikk Zarmer replied.

First Consul Fre'kay shook his head, "So be it. He doesn't need to be a part of this."

First Consul Fre'kay punched in a few keys, and suddenly, a holographic image of Nal Hutta shone up into the air. The world of Nal Hutta, glowing blue, rotated slowly as it hovered in the middle of the room, riding above a blue cone of light. High Templar Malakon looked upon the real-time image in horror.

"Nal Hutta is being attacked?" High Templar Malakon asked.

"Yes." First Consul Fre'kay replied, "It appears that Thrak Zann has made significant strides within Hutt Space, and is currently bombarding the world from orbit."

"What are their forces like?" El'kar Urope asked.

"As far as we know, Thrak Zann has his entire fleet intact." First Consul Fre'kay replied, "All three hundred Star Destroyers are present and currently engaged above Nal Hutta."

"How can that be?" J'r'miah retorted, "The Hutts would have put up resistance for sure!"

"We have no reports on the Hutts, unfortunately." First Consul Fre'kay informed, "It is entire possible that the Hutts did attempt a counter-strike, but it failed."

"Rather miserably." Derrikk Zarmer replied.

High Templar Malakon finally broke in, "So this was Vanis' secret."

"Obviously he knew that if word got to us about Thrak Zann's attack on Nal Hutta, we would never agree to go forth with the Marshall Plan." First Consul Fre'kay iterated.

"Damn that Vanis!" Aztin Varss replied, "He deceived us!"

"Yes." El'kar Urope added, "They're implementing another Victory Without War scenario!"

"Which may not be a bad thing." High Templar Malakon replied.

"But it may not be the correct thing, either." First Consul Fre'kay added.

"What do we do about this?" El'kar Urope asked.

"We can't just sit on our hands now!" Derrikk Zarmer added.

"I have already put into motion a contingency plan should the conflict in the Outer Rim turn south." First Consul Fre'kay replied.

"What is this plan?" High Templar Malakon asked.

First Consul Fre'kay held up his paw, "Its best you do not know. At least, not at this time."

High Templar Malakon nodded, "Okay. We'll trust your judgement for now. But we can't simply let Vanis get away with this."

"Can we confront him with it!" J'r'miah asked, "Charge him with obstruction of galactic security!"

"That seems unlikely." High Templar Malakon replied, "We have no real evidence. Only conjecture."

"Then we get evidence." J'r'miah replied.

"No." First Consul Fre'kay ordered, "Charging Vanis won't do us any good. The rest of the Admiralty already agrees with him and won't turn against him, no matter what." He explained, "We don't want to tip our hand too soon."

"So we do nothing!" J'r'miah retorted.

"For now." High Templar Malakon replied, "The First Consul is correct. Let's see how Vanis plays this out."

Later that night, almost midnight in fact, Second Consul Vanis called an emergency meeting. High Templar Malakon immediately stormed into the council chambers on the top floor of the Commonwealth Palace; the thirteen members of the Admiralty were already discussing the recent events. In the middle of the circular table, a blue-white holographic image was displayed. Some members were pacing, with others argued about what to do next, if anything.

"What did I miss?" High Templar Malakon asked.

Second Consul Vanis turned to look at High Templar Malakon, "Plenty. Take a look."

High Templar Malakon leaned forward to take a closer look at the holographic image. The image was of Nal Hutta, the same image he saw earlier that evening; several Star Destroyers, he couldn't tell which class, hovered overhead, bombarding the surface with wave after wave of heavy turbolaser bolts. The planetary shields over Nal Hutta seemed to be holding together; the shield sparkled brightly with each turbolaser strike. Looking passed the translucent holographic image, High Templar Malakon stared at the other former Imperial members of the Admiralty. They seemed genuinely surprised by the recent turn of events.

"This is live footage from Nal Hutta; Thrak Zann has already begun their bombardment." Second Consul Vanis informed, "They've already seized Nar Shaddaa."

High Templar Malakon nodded at the holographic images displayed in front of him, "How long has this been going on?"

"A little under two standard days now." Second Consul Vanis answered.

"Why didn't we hear about this sooner?" High Templar Malakon sternly asked Vanis.

"We didn't hear about it until now!" Second Consul Vanis screamed.

High Templar Malakon stared coldly at Second Consul Vanis; he knew that Second Consul Vanis had been lying, and lying well, but he couldn't do much about it now. That was unfortunate. He really wanted to see Second Consul Vanis squirm for his deceit.

"What kind of defences do the Hutts have?" High Templar Malakon asked.

"As far as we can tell, not much." Third Consul Oamuys answered, "We had reports that the Hutts engaged Zann over the world of Rorak Four, and was subsequently defeated." She explained, "So far, all the Hutts have on Nal Hutta is that planetary shield."

"And that won't last long." First Consul Fre'kay replied.

"I don't care how powerful a planetary shield is," Second Consul Vanis replied, "Three hundred Star Destroyers, and that thing is going down."

High Templar Malakon shook his head in disbelief, "How could this have happened? I thought you guys said Thrak Zann wouldn't get to Nal Hutta for another month?"

"We did." Second Consul Vanis answered.

"And?" High Templar Malakon asked.

Second Consul Vanis hesitated for a moment, thinking about what he was going to reply, "I don't know."

"Clearly, we missed something." Third Consul Oamuys replied, "Something Thrak Zann has, or the Hutts didn't."

"The Hutts have been known for their infighting and treachery amongst themselves." Fenn Silth replied.

"No. That's not it." High Templar Malakon replied, "During the Yuuzhan Vong invasion, the Hutts put aside their differences, and unified their forces. The Hutts, when facing a common threat, can be quite resilient."

"Then, something else." Kath Keldrona suggested.

Second Consul Vanis finally answered, "A traitor."

"Thrak Zann bought one of the Hutts?" High Templar Malakon asked; Second Consul Vanis nodded, "That's possible, I guess."

"It's very possible." Second Consul Vanis replied.

There was another moment of silence from the Admiralty; everyone, once more, watched the orbital bombardment of Nal Hutta. The former Imperials in the room watched the images play forth in frightened awe, while the rest tried to be surprised by the event.

"What do we do about it?" High Templar Malakon asked.

"Nothing." Second Consul Vanis quickly answered.

"Nothing?" High Templar Malakon questioned, "Why?"

"There's nothing we can do!" Second Consul Vanis retorted, "We've already put forth into action the Marshall Plan, remember?"

"Well, that was rather fast." High Templar Malakon replied.

"We are efficient." Second Consul Vanis retorted.

"Obviously something is different with Thrak Zann, something we didn't anticipate previously." High Templar Malakon countered, "We should at least try to quantify and ascertain the magnitude of the threat he poses, and put it down quickly, before he can spread his influence too far."

"In a dream world, maybe, High Templar." Second Consul Vanis replied, "But we have limited resources as is; our infrastructure is simply not stable enough for us to intervene in another war so soon after the last." He took a deep breath, "We cannot risk getting involved... not at this time, anyways."

The room was silent. Everyone simply gazed into the holographic image before them. Finally, Third Consul Oamuys spoke, "Why aren't the rest of you disturbed about this turn of events?" Obviously meaning the former Alliance members of the Admiralty.

"It's late." Derrikk Zarmer quickly replied.

Suddenly, First Consul Fre'kay got up and out of his chair, and stormed out of the council meeting room; even without the Force, High Templar Malakon could tell this was upsetting him. The rest of the Admiralty watched as he left, some stunned, some grateful. High Templar Malakon watched him leave as well.

"Nevertheless, despite the turmoil in the Outer Rim, we've got worlds to rebuild." Second Consul Vanis replied, obviously indifferent to First Consul Fre'kay's departure.

"Yes. We have several meetings tomorrow with representatives from the worlds that we mean to help rebuild." Third Consul Oamuys added.

"Then, I motion that we get some much needed rest tonight." High Templar Malakon suggested.

For two whole days they sat through these meetings. This day in particular was long and dry, but at least it was the last meeting of the day. They sat through a dozen of these meetings, all from worlds whom came to the Galactic Commonwealth in search of aid. They held the meeting in one of the assembly halls, a medium-sized room but with one important difference. The Admiralties podium, an oval table that sloped upwards where all thirteen members could sit, was placed at the far end of the room; below, at the very bottom, the representatives stood. First Consul Fre'kay sat at the very top of the oval podium, with Second Consul Vanis to his right, and Third Consul Oamuys to his left. High Templar Malakon stood in the back corner, observing the meeting taking place.

Right now, the representative of Obroa-skai, stood in front of the Admiralty; he was an Obroan, a lanky humanoid race. Obroa-skai wasn't a military or strategically important world, but it did hold once great importance. Knowledge. Obroa-skai was the galaxies library world; holding vast databases, mostly reconstructed after their destruction during the Yuuzhan Vong invasion, they held onto the galaxies most intricate and important knowledge and secrets. During the Insurgency, Darth Krayt

raided the world, harvesting and hording its knowledge; similarly, Empress Amelia did the same, placing a small fleet above the world to "protect" it.

"Your plea from the peoples of Obroa-skai has touched us." First Consul Fre'kay blandly replied.

"The Galactic Commonwealth is willing to provide you with the necessary funds to rebuild your cities and reconstruct the lost databases on your world, representative." Second Consul Vanis added.

"Thank you." The Obroan thanked with a bow.

"Back in your suite, you will find all the necessary paperwork that is to be signed." Second Consul Vanis informed, "Once signed and authorized, we will provide you with our aid."

"Thank you." The Obroan thanked again.

Suddenly, there was a knock on the door. High Templar Malakon looked towards the door with a confused expression; this was supposed to be a closed meeting. He looked back up towards the First Consul, who motioned him to open the door. Gingerly, High Templar Malakon opened the white double door; outside, a naval officer stood with a worried expression on his face.

"What is it?" First Consul Fre'kay shouted.

The naval officer stepped into the room, "Sirs, you are urgently requested in the war room."

First Consul Fre'kay looked back down towards the Obroan, "This meeting is adjourned."

The Obroan immediately bowed his head, and stepped out of the room. The Admiralty, as a collective, immediately climbed down from their oval podium, and filed out of the assembly room in a rather orderly fashion. High Templar Malakon was the last to leave the room, and followed behind the members of the Admiralty. They walked down the busy corridor, led by the naval officer and First Consul Fre'kay. Finally reaching the war room, a huge holographic display of Nal Hutta was shown; Second Consul Vanis cringed slightly at the sight.

"What's going on?" First Consul Fre'kay immediately asked.

"It's over." One of the officers in the room answered, "The Hutts' planetary shields have fallen. Nal Hutta will be overrun with Zann's thugs in mere hours."

High Templar Malakon gazed closer to the holographic display. The orbital bombardment had ceased, and the planetary shields were down. It was impressive what could change in what seemed like mere moments. High Templar Malakon watched closely; he could already see Zann's forces transporting troops to the swampy-industrial surface of Nal Hutta.

"That's impressive." High Templar Malakon replied, "They're already starting to occupy Nal Hutta. Zann moves fast."

"I think it's pretty obvious that Thrak Zann was in a hurry to get something from the Hutts." First Consul Fre'kay replied.

"And we still don't know what that is?" High Templar Malakon asked, briefly looking over at Second Consul Vanis as he spoke the words.

"No. We can only speculate." Third Consul Oamuys answered.

"Such as?" High Templar Malakon asked.

"Spice." Third Consul Oamuys answered, "What else?"

"Zann already has spice reserves on Ryloth and Tatooine." J'r'miah replied.

"More spice, then. Greater manufacturing capabilities. Better and more production. Wider networks." Third Consul Oamuys answered, "The Hutts have all those things."

"If we're right, then we should expect spice levels in the Outer Rim to increase sharply." Second Consul Vanis replied, "We'll be monitoring the situation carefully."

High Templar Malakon shook his head; this was far worse than he had originally anticipated. *Spice*, he thought, *the worse substance in the galaxy, and now there's going to be more of it.* He almost regretted not pushing forward with a peace-making mission, but it was too late for that now.

"Monitor?" El'kar Urope asked, "That's all we're going to do is monitor Thrak Zann's illegal activities?"

"Hold your tongue." Third Consul Oamuys snapped, "It's all we can do."

"I've heard that before," El'kar Urope replied, "and I don't believe a word of it."

"It is of no concern." Second Consul Vanis added, "We cannot intervene now. Thrak Zann's war is over."

"That's it then." Third Consul Oamuys answered, "Nothing more to be done."

"Or can be done." Second Consul Vanis added.

Without another word, First Consul Fre'kay grudgingly walked out of the war room; the other members of the Admiralty, with the exception of Second Consul Vanis and Third Consul Oamuys, began leaving the meeting too. The holographic images still shone in the middle of the room, while Second Consul Vanis and Third Consul Oamuys quietly talked amongst themselves. Slowly, unsurely, High Templar Malakon left the meeting too. *Vanis and Oamuys sure played their cards well*, High Templar Malakon thought to himself.

Headed directly to the Commonwealth Freedom Base from the Commonwealth Palace took about fifteen minutes by automated air-taxi. While on the automated air-taxi, First Consul Fre'kay had some words with the other former Alliance members of the Admiralty; the only member who was not present was Admiral Lon Yash. The automated air-taxi, with its open roof and moderate winds blowing passed them, made it perfect location for a secret conversation that didn't officially happen; it was unlikely to be overheard.

"This is outrageous!" El'kar Urope proclaimed.

"Yes." Aztin Varss seconded, "We do nothing as Thrak Zann plunges the Outer Rim with spice! It will make it ten times harder to free those worlds from his criminal hands in the future!"

"We must be careful of our actions here." J'r'miah cautioned, "This could be seen as treason."

"This is treason." First Consul Fre'kay corrected, "But I've already put in motion a plan for us to intervene with Thrak Zann." First Consul Fre'kay outlined the plan in loose detail; to the other members of the Admiralty, it seemed reasonable.

"Please, let me represent the Commonwealth in this matter." Derrikk Zarmer asked.

First Consul Fre'kay nodded, "Very well." He replied; he looked up, and they were already at the Commonwealth Freedom Base, "I don't think I have to tell you all to keep this conversation to yourselves."

Only First Consul Fre'kay and Admiral Zarmer stepped off the air-taxi; the rest remained behind, and simply watched. First Consul Fre'kay immediately stormed into the massive hangar bay, still busy with activity, and into the offices at the top floors. He immediately walked towards his cousin's office, and barged in. Luckily, there was no one else in the room except for Commodore Kellar Fre'kay.

"It is time, cousin." First Consul Fre'kay replied.

Commodore Kellar Fre'kay looked up at his cousin, "So soon?"

"The conflict moved faster than originally anticipated, cousin." First Consul Fre'kay replied.

Commodore Kellar Fre'kay nodded, "I understand, cousin. I won't let you down."

Without another word, First Consul Fre'kay closed the door behind him, and exited the hangar. He knew, full well, he could be charged with treason at any time. There was no going back now.

Three Standard Days Later: Bilbousa, Nal Hutta:

The *Crix*-class diplomatic courier shuttle touched down in the dusty terrain of Nal Hutta. The boarding ramp lowered, and Admiral Derrikk Zarmer, accompanied by a platoon of black armoured, helmetless GC troopers; following closely behind Admiral Derrikk Zarmer was Jedi Knights Templar Jakob Nion, wearing typical black ceramic armour, covered by a brown and tan Jedi robe. Like a ferrocrete wall, the stench of Nal Hutta smacked them; the world around them seemed almost primordial. While coming down in the shuttle, they noticed vast swamplands, marshes, and other types of wetlands; by contrast, the cities of Nal Hutta were heavily polluted, high-density metropolitan centres covered in industry. Low-laying smog clouds, dense with hydrogen sulphide, carbon monoxide and carbon dioxide, sulphuric acid, nitrogen oxides, and ammonia were thick in the air; that was the source of the foul stench of Nal Hutta. The atmosphere had an unusual yellow-orange tinge because of the high concentrations of pollution in the air; after millennia of constant exposure to pollution, even the vegetation adapted, and grew greenish-yellow. From the history books, Admiral Zarmer also knew that the wildlife of Nal Hutta had been drastically changed;

ever since the Yuuzhan Vong invaded and Vongformed this world, it had never quite recovered. Thus, the swamplands were quite a dangerous place to venture out alone, simply because you were never sure what Vongspawn might be lurking out there. With all that, was quite a remarkable world, to be honest.

Admiral Zarmer walked towards the delegation that Thrak Zann had sent out for them. From a far, they could already tell that they were quite heavily armed and armoured. A majority of the beings were Weequay, Gamorrean, Twi'lek, or Rodian; they all had scars on their faces, probably from battle, and wore a conglomerate of varying armour.

"General Zann will see you now." One of the Weequay's replied.

"Very good." Admiral Zarmer replied, "Take me to him."

The Weequay held out his hand, "Not so fast. Your troopers will have to say outside."

Admiral Zarmer nodded, "This is my aide," He pointed to Knight Nion, "He is to accompany me wherever I go."

The Weequay gave the Jedi Knights Templar a look up-and-down, "Okay." The Admiral stepped forward but was abruptly stopped, "Your blaster."

Reluctantly, Admiral Zarmer handed over his hold-out blaster; then, the Weequay replied, "Follow me."

As Admiral Derrikk Zarmer and Jedi Knights Templar Jakob Nion walked with the Weequay towards the Winter Palace, formally the Hutts Palace. The Palace itself was located on the island they touched down upon; with the stagnate water surrounding them, and the intense heat, it was uncomfortable for almost any other being, except the Hutts. Admiral Zarmer could tell there used to be trees and other such vegetation, now just a barren wasteland. Overhead, the *Ardent*-class fast frigate *Protectorate* hovered above the Palace; this was the only capital ship they had, and it was the one they entered the system with. Just before they entered the grand, brown-stone, dome-like palace, Admiral Zarmer heard two CF9 Crossfire starfighters streak passed the Palace, making a classic fly-by.

They walked through the vast, empty, dank and dark hallways of the Winter Palace, formally the Hutt Palace, until they finally arrived in the throne room. There, Thrak Zann, a scowling, long white-haired man with death-like green eyes, paced on

the open floor. All around the throne room were more of Thrak Zann's thugs, armed with blaster rifles and pistols. He turned to look at Admiral Zarmer.

"Hello, General." Admiral Zarmer greeted.

"Why have you bothered me?" Thrak Zann immediately questioned.

Admiral Zarmer cleared his throat, "I am here representing the Galactic Commonwealth—"

Thrak Zann cut in, "The Galactic Commonwealth! To what purpose would they have with me?" Thrak Zann screamed; then, he became very quiet, "Oh... I see... to overthrow me, perhaps? To kill me!"

"No, General." Admiral Zarmer replied, "We do not care for your military campaign in the Outer Rim?"

"Then why are you here?" Thrak Zann demanded.

"You misunderstand our intent?" Admiral Zarmer replied.

"Then, what is your intent?" Thrak Zann sternly asked.

"We, the Galactic Commonwealth, would like to aid the suffering beings—" Admiral Zarmer started before getting cut off.

"Suffering!" Thrak Zann shouted, "What suffering?" He immediately pointed to the other beings around the room, "Could we have done all this if we were suffering!"

"I didn't mean any disrespect—" Admiral Zarmer defended.

"But you did!" Thrak Zann proclaimed.

"No, no!" Admiral Zarmer retorted, "We simply wanted to aid the beings within occupied territories with—"

"Occupied territories!" Thrak Zann screamed, "How dare you come in here and insult me! After everything the Hutts have done against me, you say we occupy them!" Thrak Zann pointed towards Admiral Zarmer and Knight Nion, "Seize them!"

Suddenly, Jedi Knights Templar Jakob Nion activated his green-bladed lightsaber, and went into a defensive guard; the *snap-hiss* echoed within the room. A torrent of blaster bolts shot out at him from three different directions. Expertly, he deflected the blaster bolts, sending them careening into their shooters. Within moments,

three of Thrak Zann's thugs had dropped to the tan stone tile floor, gaping cauterized wounds in their chests. The torrent of blaster bolts continued; Knight Nion skilfully deflected the blaster bolts away from the defenceless Admiral. Suddenly, Knight Nion fell to the stone floor, face first; he was clearly dead, with sizzling pink-purple shards imbedded in his back. Quickly, Admiral Zarmer looked up at Thrak Zann; he was holding a short-barrelled one-handed shotgun pulled from his sleeve.

Admiral Zarmer put up his hands in defeat, "Wait, don't!"

Suddenly, Thrak Zann fired; the pink-purple shards imbedding themselves into his blue skin. Bones shattered and flesh boil. Then, with authority, "Destroy them!"

Commander Cosh Sonter was flying escort for the *Protectorate*, along with his rear-gunner, Gaen Cage. On Cosh's starboard wing was a new recruit to Razor Squadron, Spacer First Class Valerie "Lights" Poxleitner. She was a young, brash, aggressive pilot from Corulag who joined the Razor's, according to her, against the will of her parents. Regardless, she was an amazing pilot, although a little green. Together, they just passed the portside hull of the *Ardent*-class fast frigate.

"Alright, let's make another pass at the palace." Cosh Sonter ordered.

"Copy that." Lights replied.

Suddenly, an alarm blared from behind, and the MASTER CAUTION alarm flashed. Cosh Sonter was completely taken aback, "Cage, what is that?"

"Holy stars!" Gaen Cage screamed, "They're painting us!"

"What!" Cosh Sonter immediately screamed.

Over the headset, "*Razor One! What the hell is going on?*" Lights screamed.

Suddenly, the MASTER CAUTION changed to SAM; with a wide-eyed expression, "They fired! Scoop it, now!"

"Break Lights!" Cosh Sonter screamed into his headset.

Immediately, Cosh Sonter made a hard break to port while Lights broke starboard; the high-g manoeuvre was gut-wrenching. Cosh Sonter immediately punched the throttle to maximum, trying to put as much distance between him and the incoming missile. Everything outside the windshield seemed like a blur.

"Report!" Cosh Sonter ordered.

"Single missile in the air! Ten kilometres and closing fast!" Gaen Cage reported, "Its tracking us!"

Cosh Sonter jinked and juked all across the sky; atmosphere, unlike the vacuum of space, put up resistance and friction. It was a lot harder to make tight banks and pick up speed. The wings, with every bank and turn, bent and flexed; together, they made an eerie creaking noise. Suddenly, another alarm went off.

"What is that?" Cosh Sonter screamed.

"Second missile in the air! Five kilometres away!" Gaen Cage screamed, "Its tracking Lights!"

"Lights! You got that?" Cosh Sonter asked.

"*Copy! Going evasive now!*" Lights informed.

Suddenly, Cosh Sonter rolled over onto his head; Cosh Sonter looked up, towards the ground, frantically trying to find the incoming missile.

"Where is it?" Cosh Sonter screamed.

"I don't see it!" Gaen Cage screamed, "Go vertical! Now! Now! Now!"

Immediately, Cosh Sonter rolled back, and pointed his nose up. Climbing as fast as he could, he tried to outrun the missile for a moment. The blood started to rush down to Cosh's feet, making his vision appear darker; to counter that, Cosh squeezed his muscles together, forcing the blood back into his head. Cosh Sonter immediately began banking hard left, then right, dancing around the sky as much as he could to avoid the missile.

Suddenly, from behind, "I see it! Hard right, now!"

Cosh Sonter immediately rolled onto his starboard wing, and banked hard right. In the back, Gaen Cage growled as the high-g manoeuvre violently shook him around. The manoeuvre came just in time, as the homing missile streaked passed the starfighter by mere tens of metres.

"I lost it!" Gaen Cage screamed, "No joy! No joy!"

"Frack!" Cosh Sonter growled.

Cosh Sonter immediately rolled onto his port wing, and banked hard left. As he made the tight turn, he looked over his left shoulder. He could see the smoke trail left behind by the missile, but not the missile itself.

From behind, "Acquired! It's coming back around!"

Rolling onto his starboard wing, he immediately broke right again. The strain on the yoke was obvious as Cosh made the high-g manoeuvres; his knuckles were white with strain, and sweat poured from his forehead. His jaw ached because he clenched his teeth together tightly. Instinctively, he pointed his nose up again, and climbed; his vision was beginning to fade again.

"Lights!" Cosh Sonter shouted, "How you doing?"

"*Just great!*" Lights screamed sarcastically.

Cosh Sonter shook his head; immediately, he rolled his starfighter over onto its back, pointed the nose downward, and dove. The awkward manoeuvre made for negative g-forces, a particularly dangerous move. Everything in his cockpit viewport was a blur or streaked across the windshield too fast to see. The high-g manoeuvre forced Cosh into the back of his seat; the restraints across his chest cut into his flesh.

"It's coming straight for us!" Gaen Cage screamed.

"I know!" Cosh Sonter snapped back; then, while diving towards the hard deck at a fantastic speed, he hailed the *Protectorate*, "*Protectorate*, we've been engaged!"

"*Copy, Razor One!*" The *Protectorate* flight officer informed, "*We've got company too!*"

Suddenly, Cosh Sonter rolled his starfighter over, levelled his starfighter, rolled over to his port wing, and made a sharp bank at full speed. The manoeuvre jostled and bumped Cosh Sonter side-to-side in the cockpit seat.

"Where is it?" Cosh Sonter screamed.

"Above us! Coming down!" Gaen Cage informed, "Scoop it!"

Immediately, Cosh Sonter pointed the nose of the starfighter into the sky, and made a near vertical climb towards the clouds.

"It's climbing!" Gaen Cage screamed.

Then immediately, half rolling his wing over to port, he made a hard downward break towards the ground. The manoeuvre was awkward, and strenuous, but it worked. The missile missed the starfighter by mere tens of metres again.

"Missile turning about!" Gaen Cage screamed, "We're screwed!"

No we're not! Cosh thought, "Find Lights!"

"What?" Gaen Cage questioned.

"Find her now, damn it!" Cosh Sonter screamed.

Within seconds, while jinking and juking across the sky, the cockpit windshield highlighted Light's position with a bright green marker. Cosh was above her position, going in the same general direction. Cosh, in the half second he looked at her starfighter, could immediately tell she was in trouble. She was jinking and juking, dancing through the air, but the glowing blue missile was hot on her tail. Immediately, Cosh Sonter gunned the throttle to full power, and aimed his nose directly at the second missile.

"What the hell are you doing?" Gaen Cage screamed.

"Saving a life!" Cosh Sonter snapped.

He lined up the targeting reticule, and squeezed the trigger. The laser bolts were nowhere near aimed, and they simply streaked passed the glowing blue missile. This time, he squeezed the trigger and didn't let go. A constant stream of energy bolts shot out passed the starfighter; once again, the energy bolts hit nothing but air. He quickly looked down at his temperature gauge; the indicated that the laser cannons were dangerous, red-hot levels.

"It's closing fast, Cosh!" Gaen Cage screamed.

Cosh Sonter immediately rolled the starfighter over onto its back, and dove towards the ground at full speed. The manoeuvre caused the missile to overshoot for only a moment, but soon regained its homing lock. Rolling back onto its belly, Cosh Sonter immediately pulled up; with all his strength, Cosh Sonter pulled back on the yoke, nearly burying the yoke into his gut. Just in the nick of time, the starfighter started to pull up, nearly missing smashing into the ground. Cosh Sonter had the second missile in his sights; instead of shooting at it, and risking hitting Lights, he floored the starfighter. The intense speed of the starfighter made controlling the vessel

especially difficult; the cockpit shook constantly, and sometimes violently, but Cosh Sonter fought forward.

"*Razor One!*" Lights screamed over the headset, "*What the hell are you doing?*"

"Shut up, Lights!" Cosh Sonter snapped.

Suddenly, Gaen Cage screamed from behind, "Missile coming around! Its tracking us again!"

I got it! Cosh Sonter thought. He looked down at his sensors for a moment; the distance between Lights and the second missile was approximately two kilometres and closing fast. Tight, but not that tight. At full speed, Cosh Sonter made for the gap between the two.

"Oh!" Gaen Cage moaned, "I've got a bad feeling about this!"

Within seconds, Cosh Sonter had positioned himself between Lights and the second missile. Cosh Sonter made small adjustments, slight jinking and juking manoeuvres, but more-or-less stayed behind Lights' ion engines.

C'mon, c'mon, c'mon! Cosh thought as he adjusted his starfighter ever so slightly.

"*Razor One!*" Lights screamed, "*Are you crazy!*"

"Are you crazy?" Gaen Cage screamed. Suddenly, another alarm blared behind him, "Congratulations, Cosh! We've got two missiles tracking us!"

"That's the point!" Cosh Sonter snapped.

"Change your vector!" Gaen Cage screamed, "Now! Now! Now!"

Cosh Sonter immediately made a hard right, and climbed upwards towards the sky. Both missiles were hot on his tail, and closing their distance fast. Jiking and juking, he climbed for the sky. Cosh Sonter tried every evasive manoeuvre he could think of, but they were still on his tail.

"Try breaking the lock!" Cosh Sonter shouted, "Fire ion flares!"

"Copy!" Gaen Cage confirmed.

Suddenly, from underneath the starfighter, loud banging noises could be heard, almost like someone was hitting the hull with a ten-pound sledgehammer. The air around them erupted with a blue-white glow from the flares; the decoy flares burned at

over five thousand degrees centigrade, ionizing the air around them. They were designed to break the lock from an incoming homing missile by providing another ion source in the region. Gaen Cage watched as the ion flares streaked through the air behind them, haloed by faint blue ions. The first missile flew straight passed the decoy flares, while one of them lost its track, hit an ion flare and exploded with a brilliant orange-yellow fireball. The concussive force of the explosion rocked the starfighter slightly.

"We lost one!" Gaen Cage reported.

Great! Cosh thought. Cosh, counter intuitively, started to slow down; he tried to close the distance between him and missile as much as possible, as safely as possible. In the back, Gaen Cage more-or-less kept quite. Looking down at his sensors, he could see that the distance was slowly decreasing. Suddenly, Cosh Sonter pointed his nose upwards in a near vertical climb; underneath, the glowing blue missile passed them. The missile streaked passed the ion engines a mere fifteen metres away.

"It overshot us!" Gaen Cage reported.

Completing his roll over, Cosh Sonter levelled out his starfighter.

"No joy!" Gaen Cage screamed, "I can't see it!"

Cosh Sonter punched the throttle to full power, increasing his speed as fast as possible.

Suddenly, "It's back on us!" Gaen Cage screamed, "Portside! Closing fast!"

Cosh Sonter immediately rolled his port wing over, and made a hard bank towards port. The high-g manoeuvre forced both of them back into their seats.

"I'm going for a head-on pass!" Cosh Sonter screamed.

"Frack man!" Gaen Cage screamed.

Cosh Sonter, completing his portside bank, was now lined up perfectly with the incoming missile. He lined up the targeting reticule and squeezed the trigger. A stream of green energy bolts lanced out of the starfighters laser cannons. The energy bolts missed the missile by mere metres.

"C'mon!" Cosh Sonter screamed in frustration.

"Take it down, Cosh!" Gaen Cage screamed.

But it was too much, too fast. The distance between the starfighter and the missile closed too quickly. In desperation, knowing full well he wouldn't be able to shoot down the missile, Cosh Sonter rolled his starfighter onto its port wing.

"Hang on!" Cosh Sonter warned.

Suddenly, the missile streaked passed the starfighter; the sound of shattered transparisteel and fatigued durasteel rang through the cockpit. Immediately, the starfighter began to jerk through the atmosphere wildly. After the initial jolt, the starfighter rocked and shook, growing with intensity with every passing moment.

"It clipped us!" Gaen Cage informed.

Cosh Sonter fought against the unresponsive controls with all his might; the yoke, no matter what direction he forced it in, wouldn't read the motion. Moments later, warning alarms blared within the cockpit; the alarms were almost deafening at this point.

"Missile arcing right!" Gaen Cage screamed, "Break right! Break right!"

Cosh Sonter tried for a moment, "I've got no turning, Cage! The controls are shot!"

The missile closed in on the starfighter rapidly; suddenly, Gaen Cage screamed, "Oh frack!"

Detonation. The missile exploded about a metre away from the three rear ion engines, crippling them fatally. Shrapnel tore through the hull, piercing and puncturing the durasteel armoured hull. The entire starboard side of the starfighter was torn to pieces and scorched by the blast. Suddenly, the wind poured into the cockpit, obscuring Cosh Sonter's vision even more. Then, suddenly, the two vertical S-foils on the starfighter tore off, and cracked the windshield. Cosh Sonter managed to cover his face with his arm before the transparisteel shattered and rained down upon him. Uncontrolled and flying wildly, the starfighter plummeted towards the ground like a rock.

"Holy frack!" Cosh Sonter screamed, "Eject! Eject!"

Cosh Sonter reached down between his legs and pulled the eject cord; immediately, the explosive bolts around the cockpit canopy went off in secession, and ripped off. Then, ion engines attached onto his seat kicked in, and shot Cosh Sonter into the air at an incredible speed. Gaen Cage, slower to pull his eject cord because the

explosion had ripped apart the rear of the starfighter, finally pulled the cord. The explosive bolts went off in secession as well, and the ion engines attached to his seat shot him out of the crippled starfighter.

The parachute on Cosh Sonter's flight-suit opened up, and he gently drifted towards the ground; below him, his ejection seat fell off and plummeted towards the swampy terrain. They had ejected at over two kilometres above ground, allowing for a relatively safe drop. He watched as the crippled CF9 Crossfire starfighter tore to pieces as it fell, finally crashing into the swampland below. The starfighter careened into the dense vegetation, erupting into flames as it skidded along the moist ground. Moments later, Cosh Sonter saw Gaen Cage's parachute open up. Slowly, they drifted towards the dense and wild swampland below. Cosh looked over his right shoulder and saw the *Protectorate* in battle with unknown starfighters; it was just then that Cosh realized how far away from Bilbousa he was. He was at least thirty kilometres away, probably more. All he could do now, was sigh.

Lights, in her own CF9 Crossfire starfighter, made her first assault landing on the hangar bay deck. The starfighter crashed into the duracrete deck, and skidded along the floor for over ten metres, tearing up material as it did. The landing had been rough and bumpy; she was violently shaken side-to-side inside her cockpit. Finally, after coming to a complete stop, she popped the canopy and jumped down. Her back ached, and her neck was strained, but she dealt with it. She removed her flight helmet and swept her black, platinum streaked hair aside, and walked towards the nearest Razor pilot.

"Where the hell is Cosh?" Lights demanded; she placed her hands on her narrow waist. Her deep green eyes drilled into the pilot.

One of her fellow Razor pilots, a young human male, ran up to her, "Cosh was shot down!"

"Then what the hell are we doing here?" Lights shouted, "Let's go get him!"

Another Razor pilot, a Sullustan male, came up from behind her, "Commodore Fre'kay has ordered the ship to jump into hyperspace!"

"We can't leave him!" Lights screamed.

"It's too late, Lights." The Sullustan pilot retorted, "The Admiral has been killed and the *Protectorate* is taking a beating!"

She immediately pushed passed the Sullustan and ran across the hangar deck towards the turbolifts. Before she even made it half way, she could feel the pseudomotion of jumping into hyperspace. An overwhelming sensation of failure and loss swelled up within her. She dropped to her knees and began to weep; her held her hands over her face, and cried into them.

Cosh Sonter crashed into the dense brush of Nal Hutta; his parachute, in fact, got snagged on several branches of a deformed tree, the likes of which he had never seen before. Below him, about five metres down, were the convoluted and malformed root system of the tree he was currently snagged on. Carefully, he pulled the release cord, dropping him towards the soft, moist ground. He rolled on the moist dirt, finally coming to a stop after skidding a metre or so. Grudgingly, he picked himself up, and brushed the clumps of dirt stuck to his flight-suit off. He quickly looked around at the swamp around him; he was standing on, probably, the only morsel of dry land for kilometres around. The swamp was filled with foul-smelling greenish-brown water, filled with odd fauna and dead vegetation. The flora around him was strange and unfamiliar; generally, they all had odd root systems, brownish leaves, and deformed branches.

This was not the welcoming I would have liked, Cosh comically thought to himself.

He looked at his left wrist-band; it had several electronic gizmos, one of which was a homing beacon that led back to his ejection seat. It was still functional, even after a crash landing, and was blinking red.

"Good." He said to himself, "Now I just have to find it." He looked at the swamp, "And make it there alive."

He pulled out his hold-out blaster pistol, and waded through the swamp. It was even worse than he had originally hoped; the water was chest high, and the water was unusually warm. Streams of bubbles emanating from the bottom of the landlocked stagnate pool of water erupted on the surface, releasing foul-smelling ammonia and something else that smelled like sulphur. Dead leaves from the odd contorted plants fell all around him; the surface of the water had an odd mist to it too. Every step he took forward, he felt as if he was going to sink deeper into the swamp; the dead vegetation at the bottom of the swamp collapsed as Cosh took each step, making for some pretty uneven and unstable ground. Finally, after a couple dozen more steps in the swamp, the water level seemed to drop off slightly.

"Thank the Force." Cosh Sonter said to himself.

He started running towards the direction the beacon was telling him. The water, although still as disgusting as ever, was only knee high now. As he ran through the smog-filled air, shivers ran down the length of his spine. The hot and humid air made the entire journey oddly uncomfortable; not only was the environment hostile, but the insects and other life forms around him were creepy. Insects always bothered Cosh; as Cosh listened to the life forms around him, he noticed that most of the ambient sounds in the swamp actually came from these creatures, whatever they were. After fifteen minutes of trekking through the dense brush and knee high foul water, he could see his ejection seat. Already the swamp had claimed the ejection seat; it was covered in dead leaves, insects crawled all over it, and it even looked like the tree roots were trying to attack the foreign object. Quickly, Cosh brushed the dead vegetation and insects off the ejection seat, and sat it upright.

"Okay." Cosh Sonter said to himself, "Let's hope you're still intact."

He went around and ripped the back of the ejection seat off. Inside was a survival pack and a compact blaster rifle. He immediately threw the survival pack over his shoulders; the next thing he check was that the blaster rifle had a working energy pack. It did. So he holstered his hold-out blaster pistol, and carried the compact blaster rifle in his arms. Before leaving, he checked to make sure the homing beacon on the ejection seat was still working. It was. That might be the only thing that Cosh could count on if anyone comes looking for him.

Cosh Sonter took a deep breath, regretting that he did, then breathed it out, "Now to find my rear-gunner."

Grudgingly, he started on his trek towards Gaen Cage's ejection seat. Gaen Cage had ejected after Cosh, and closer to the ground, so he shouldn't be too far away from Cosh's landing spot. Willing himself to move, he waded through the swamp again.

After about a standard hour of trekking through the waist high waters of the swamp, dense malformed brush, and unknown fauna, he emerged onto relatively dry land again. The dark-brown and black soil was soft and loose, making it hard to climb onto and walk through. The soil mixed with the water, making a thick and slimy mud. Overall, it was just a mess. Cosh Sonter ignored it, and walked onto the small island of reasonably dry soil. After pushing passed some of the thick tree and vine vegetation,

Cosh could see a clearing ahead. In the middle of the clearing, about twenty metres away, he saw Gaen Cage on one knee trying to work with his ejection seat; Gaen Cage was struggling to get the back of the ejection seat off.

Cosh Sonter shook his head, "What a goof." He said with a slight laugh.

Cosh took a couple of steps forward, not quite making it into the clearing, when suddenly, from the far end of the clearing, the crack of a blaster bolt streaked out of the darkness and struck the ground mere metres away from Gaen Cage. Cosh Sonter immediately ducked down, raised his compact blaster rifle in preparation, and looked through the dense vegetation to locate the shooter; his heart was pounding with fear, and he couldn't tell if the sweat pouring down his face was from the heat or from terror. Gaen Cage, also frightened by the sudden shot, ducked behind the ejection seat; Gaen Cage only had his hold-out blaster pistol in his hands. It wasn't looking good.

Suddenly, out from the darkness of the dense vegetation on the other side of the clearing, about two dozen thugs came out. He watched intently as more and more thugs poured into the clearing. The thugs, varying in races from Weequays, Gamorreans, humans, Twi'leks, and some others that he had no idea what they were, stormed into the clearing. They were armed with, what looked like, much used and antiquated blaster rifles of varying makes and models, and an amalgamation of armour of varying colours and styles. They immediately spread out and encircled the ejection seat.

"Move, Cage!" Cosh Sonter whispered to himself, "Move!"

As Cosh looked on, more and more of Thrak Zann's thugs poured into the clearing. By now there were over a hundred thugs, all heavily armed and threatening. Cosh shook his head with disbelief.

How the hell did they find us so fast? Cosh thought.

Smartly, Cosh thought, Gaen Cage didn't fire back. Instead, with a sigh, Gaen Cage threw down his hold-out blaster.

"Damn." Cosh Sonter whispered to himself.

One of the Rodian thugs moved up and picked the hold-out blaster pistol up. Cosh Sonter watched as Gaen Cage and the Rodian seemed to be talking; at first it looked friendly, then it turned ugly real fast. Although Cosh couldn't hear the words, it didn't look good at all. Gaen Cage was shaking his head side-to-side, while the Rodian didn't look to pleased.

"What the hell?" Cosh Sonter asked himself.

Suddenly, two Gamorreans approached Gaen Cage, and picked him up off the muddy ground. Gaen Cage wiped the mud off his flight-suit and followed them towards where the thugs came in from. Then, suddenly, the Rodian pulled out the hold-out blaster pistol and shot Gaen Cage in the back of the head.

"No!" Cosh Sonter screamed.

Wide-eyed with shock, Cosh Sonter fell onto the muddy ground. The scream echoed within the clearing, but he hoped they didn't hear him. That hope lasted for about a nanosecond, when suddenly, he heard shouting from the thugs. They were shouting in some language, probably Huttese, that Cosh Sonter didn't understand, but he got the point. Immediately, he picked himself up and started running deeper into the swamp that he just came from. Almost immediately, a stream of blaster bolts streaked passed Cosh's head; the high energy bolts struck the trees and ground all around him. The tree branches erupted and splintered, while the soil simply shot upwards. Cosh Sonter weaved in-and-out of the trees, trying his best to evade the incoming blaster bolts. Regardless of how much he weaved or how fast he ran, the blaster bolts were relentless.

"Oh frack!" Cosh Sonter screamed as one of the blaster bolts exploded next to a tree, mere centimetres from his head.

Just in the distance, Cosh could hear Thrak Zann's thugs move into the dense brush of the swamp. The chase was on now.

Commonwealth City, Coruscant:

For one of the few times in his life, High Templar Malakon was actually on time to one of the Admiralties meetings; in the center of the room was a holographic depiction of Nal Hutta, slowly rotating within the darkness of the room. There, the debacle on Nal Hutta was being explained by the furious Second Consul Vanis; the rest of the Admiralty, especially on the Imperial-side, glared across the room at First Consul Fre'kay. The rest, especially Admirals J'r'miah and Varss, and Rear-Admiral Urope, looked ashamed and uneasy. High Templar Malakon, who tuned out for a moment, snapped back into the meeting.

"-misappropriation of Commonwealth resources and vessels is just the start of the disaster we are finding ourselves in!" Second Consul Vanis screamed, "Thrak Zann

has now officially declared war on the Commonwealth for, what he says is, an unwarranted and unprovoked attack on his person."

"That is absolutely untrue!" First Consul Fre'kay rebutted, standing up in an excited gesture.

Second Consul Vanis glared at First Consul Fre'kay, "We'll get to you soon enough. Sit down, sir."

"Whether or not it is true is irrelevant." Third Consul Oamuys remarked, "Worlds are believing it."

"That's right." Second Consul Vanis continued, "More worlds now seem to be allying themselves with Thrak Zann." Second Consul Vanis punched in a few keys, and the holographic projection turned into a three-dimensional bar graph, "As we can clearly see here, spice has already increased considerably within the occupied territories; other satellite worlds are already reporting record imports of spice and other contraband."

"So Thrak Zann is using the Hutts connections and networks to expand his criminal organization." J'r'miah remarked.

"It's not just Thrak Zann expanding his illegal business enterprise!" Second Consul Vanis screamed, "It's Thrak Zann moving his pieces into position to invade the interior!"

"I don't believe that!" Aztin Varss retorted, "Thrak Zann wouldn't be so stupid to try to invade us!"

"You were stupid enough to try to reason with Thrak Zann in the first place." Second Consul Vanis snapped.

Aztin Varss, obviously angered by the remark, held his tongue.

"Forget the possibility of invasion for just a moment!" First Consul Fre'kay finally erupted, "We've still got a pilot shot down on the occupied world of Nal Hutta! There's something that must be done."

"Who is it?" High Templar Malakon asked.

Second Consul Vanis glared at High Templar Malakon, "We're not sure at this moment." He said sternly.

"Okay, so, what do we do about this?" El'kar Urope asked, "We can't simply do nothing now."

"Yes." Third Consul Oamuys replied in a cold voice, "You've made sure of that now, haven't you."

"And what exactly are you accusing!" El'kar Urope shouted, standing up from his seat.

"Don't try to deny it!" Second Consul Vanis screamed, "We know that you, the First Consul, Admiral Varss and Admiral J'r'miah sanctioned this unauthorized and treasonous action!"

The accusation of treason wasn't actually surprising, it was expected actually, but it still came as a shock to High Templar Malakon. The Admiralty was falling apart at the seams. High Templar Malakon couldn't help but shake his head in shame and disbelief.

"How dare you try to take advantage of this situation for your own ambitions!" El'kar Urope remarked, "This is an outrage—"

"No!" Second Consul Vanis screamed, "The outrage is you Alliance pukes going behind our backs and instigating an illegal action! And then, to make it worse, to frack it up so badly!"

"I hardly—" El'kar Urope started before being cut off.

"Hardly? You don't think the death of Admiral Zarmer is enough?" Second Consul Vanis screamed.

"Insolence! You use the death of one of your colleagues as such!" El'kar Urope retorted.

Second Consul Vanis growled in utter and obvious anger, "Troopers!"

Suddenly, all around High Templar Malakon, over a dozen armed GC troopers stormed into the council meeting room through the main turbolift. With military precision and discipline, they piled into the room. Obviously, this had been prearranged. The GC troopers wore unique black armoured suits with holographic visors across their eyes; the armour were segregated plates of hardened-plastoid, underlined with high-temperature retardant material. Each GC trooper wore the Commonwealth emblem on his or her right bicep. The GC troopers immediately

surrounded the table. Instinctively, High Templar Malakon rose to his feet and activated his blue-bladed lightsaber with a *snap-hiss*; he immediately dropped into a defensive guard. High Templar Malakon looked around the room; for the first time, he noticed just how similar they looked to stormtroopers. High Templar Malakon wondered just how many of the GC troopers in the room were former Imperials; probably all of them, but High Templar Malakon could confirm that. It was just speculation.

"Put down your lightsaber, High Templar!" Second Consul Vanis ordered.

"Not until those troopers are removed from this room!" High Templar Malakon countered.

Suddenly, from behind, a familiar voice sounded out, "Please." He said in a deep voice, "Let's not make this messy."

High Templar Malakon turned around; he was surprised to see Treis Sinde standing there, his silver-bladed Imperial lightsaber in hand, but not activated. Treis Sinde was wearing the classic crimson phrik-laced plastoid armour of the Imperial Knights, although helmetless. Reluctantly, High Templar Malakon deactivated his lightsaber. Quickly, High Templar Malakon's gaze returned to Second Consul Vanis.

"Regardless of what you might think," Second Consul Vanis growled, "they committed an act of treason." He pointed to one of the GC troopers, "Trooper, arrest the First Consul, Admirals J'r'miah, Urope and Varss on the charge of treason against the Commonwealth."

"This is disgraceful!" High Templar Malakon protested.

Second Consul Vanis pointed to High Templar Malakon, "Hold your tongue, High Templar, or I'll put you under arrest too."

First Consul Fre'kay came to High Templar Malakon's side, and placed his paw in his shoulder, "High Templar Malakon knew nothing of the operation." He replied, "It was us, and only us."

"But—" High Templar Malakon began.

"No, Mathias." First Consul Fre'kay interrupted, "There's nothing you can do for us now. Just, watch your back."

Grudgingly, Second Consul Vanis growled, "Remove them."

Slowly, the four accused Admirals were escorted by the GC troopers out of the council meeting room; Treis Sinde was the last to leave the room. Left behind were all former Imperial admirals; surprisingly, and rather conveniently, Lon Yash was nowhere to be seen. There were several moments of awkward silence.

Taking a moment, High Templar Malakon asked, "What of our down pilot?"

"There's nothing we can do about that little incident." Second Consul Vanis remarked, "We have to think about the bigger picture."

"Yes." Third Consul Oamuys added, "Defence against Thrak Zann."

"How?" Mikal Nyeb asked.

"Well..." Second Consul Vanis started, but High Templar Malakon already was walking out of the council meeting room and towards the turbolift. High Templar Malakon couldn't bare listening to the garbage put forth by these former Imperials. He didn't know if this was an orchestrated take-over by the Imperials, but he didn't like it.

Quickly, he entered the turbolift, and exited on the main floor. The whole experience from the last ten minutes left a bad taste in High Templar Malakon's mouth. Without stopping, without talking to anyone else about it, High Templar Malakon hailed an air-taxi and took it to the Commonwealth Freedom Base. Immediately, he ran into the hangar and searched the rear portion of the hangar. It was this section that civilians were allowed access to. Finally, about after thirty minutes of searching, he found what he was looking for; an old, beat up YT-2400 light freighter.

Almost without searching any further, "Mathias?"

"Renz." High Templar Malakon replied.

"What are you doing here?" Renz asked in a confused voice.

"Not here." High Templar Malakon replied, "Meet me in the back of the hangar in five minutes."

Quickly, High Templar Malakon hurried out of the hangar and headed towards the back; nonchalantly, Renz followed about three minutes behind. They came together, and in whispered tones, they conversed.

"We've got problems, Renz." High Templar Malakon informed.

"I don't suppose you mean logistical problems..." Renz replied.

High Templar Malakon shook his head, "The Admiralty has shattered." He explained, "The First Consul, and the rest of the Alliance admirals have been placed under arrest."

"What?" Renz questioned, "For what?"

"Treason." High Templar Malakon answered.

All of a sudden, a very serious expression flashed across Renz's face, "Oh, boy."

High Templar Malakon nodded, "I'm going to need your particular... skill sets."

"You got it."

That night, the First Consul and the three former Alliance admirals were placed in a detention hall, not far from the Palace; it was an intermediary location before being moved off into a maximum security prison. Treason, as he found out, didn't necessarily need an immediate trial to be convicted.

It was the middle of the night; the sky of Coruscant was pitch black, and studded with stars. Just visible across the horizon were the Rings of Coruscant, and one of its three moons. High Templar Malakon, along with three Jedi Knights Templars, all wearing black ceramic armour and brown Jedi robes, strode up to the detention hall. The night was windy, and their robes flapped in the gusts of winds. High Templar Malakon took out a pair of electrobinoculars and stared at the entrance. There were three GC troopers standing guard in front of the main entrance to the detention hall walls; beyond the ten metre walls, was the actual detention hall.

"How does it look?" Knight Zara Lailas Gra'tua asked.

"Guarded." High Templar Malakon replied.

He watched further, and suddenly, the three GC troopers started to move off. They were soon replaced by three other GC troopers.

"Shift change." High Templar Malakon whispered, "Now's our chance." He looked at the Jedi Knights Templars, "Avoid the lights, and move quickly and quietly."

Then, with Force-enhanced movements, the four Knights Templars swiftly crossed the dark yet open courtyard. Expertly, and with incredible timing, they moved passed the four roaming automated lights; surprisingly, their footfalls were utterly

silent. Quickly, they moved towards the main entrance, a giant pair of blast doors. Suddenly, the three GC troopers spotted the Jedi Knights Templars; a surge of shock ran through both the Knights Templars and the GC troopers.

"No!" High Templar Malakon ordered the Jedi Knights Templars, "Stand down!"

High Templar Malakon casually walked up to the three GC troopers, and gave a smug smile, "Shift change, huh?"

One of the GC troopers, a former Alliance commando, smiled, "Right this way."

High Templar Malakon waved the three Jedi Knights Templars to come closer. The GC trooper activated the blast doors; it slowly opened, and the Jedi Knights Templars slipped through. They were followed by the three GC troopers. Quickly, they moved along the pathway, across the inner courtyard, towards the detention hall.

"How many do we have inside?" High Templar Malakon asked.

"Dozens." The GC trooper answered.

"Good." High Templar Malakon replied, "We need to do this fast if we're planning on getting out alive."

"Understood." The GC trooper replied, "Pick up?"

"Later." High Templar Malakon answered.

They were at the precipice of the detention hall. Slowly, they opened the door; the three GC troopers were the first inside. After securing the foyer, they waved the Jedi Knights Templars inside. They immediately walked into the foyer.

"Where are they?" High Templar Malakon asked.

"Detention level bee-one." The GC trooper answered.

"Let's move then." High Templar Malakon replied.

Swiftly, they moved through the detention hall, securing each corridor, and checking each room. Luckily, since it was past midnight, the patrols from GC troopers were to a minimum. Very quickly, they made their way down one level, and reached detention level B-1.

"Cell numbers?" Teilo Fess asked.

"No need." High Templar Malakon corrected, "I can sense them."

High Templar Malakon led the way, and immediately ran down the cell block. The cell block was cold and dark, but it was no problem for the Jedi Knights Templars. Finally, they came across four cell blocks in a row.

"These." High Templar Malakon ordered, "Get in."

The GC troopers immediately began working on the adjacent command consoles. They had planned to slice them out of the cells instead of cutting them out. This way, it was less conspicuous. Suddenly, one of the Jedi Knights Templars shouted.

"Up top!" Knight Sevrina Marnel, a female Zeltron, shouted.

Suddenly, a blaster bolt streaked passed High Templar Malakon; just as High Templar Malakon activated his blue-bladed lightsaber, another blaster bolt was fired at him, which was expertly deflected back towards its shooter. The blaster bolt struck the guard square in the chest, burning through the cloth of his uniform; the guard fell off the guardrail, and plummeted towards the ferrocrete floor below.

"Frack it!" High Templar Malakon ordered, "Cut them out!"

Immediately, the other three Jedi Knights Templars activated their lightsabers; the simultaneous activation caused an echo from the *snap-hiss*. The detention cell block doors were made of thick durasteel, making it hard to cut through quickly. The metal flash melted and glowed from orange- to white-hot. Sparks rained down from the lightsabers, and specks of molten metal sprayed onto the ferrocrete floor. Suddenly, more guards came running down the second floor corridors. The three GC troopers immediately provided covering fire, firing wildly into the rafters above. The energy bolts struck the ferrocrete walls, igniting it momentarily.

Finally, "I'm through!" High Templar Malakon informed; he glanced to the side and saw that the other Jedi Knights Templars were through too.

With incredible control of the Force, High Templar Malakon pried the thick durasteel door open. Inside, Sibar Fre'kay sat upright on his small bed. He looked up at the High Templar, his violet eyes wide with surprise.

"We're here to get you out, sir." High Templar Malakon explained.

"Then let's get out of here now!" Sibar Fre'kay replied.

Sibar Fre'kay stepped out of his small and cramped cell, and looked to his left. The three other detained Alliance admirals were also freed. He looked towards High Templar Malakon.

"Where to now?" Sibar Fre'kay asked.

"The same way we came in from." High Templar Malakon answered, "Let's move!"

Immediately, they ran to the other end of the cell block; above, more and more guards poured in. They fired wildly from above, most of which missed by a great margin. Leading the group was High Templar Malakon, while the rear was guarded by the three GC troopers. Suddenly, in front of them, five guards appeared and fired upon the group. Lashing out with phenomenal speed, High Templar Malakon deflected the blaster bolts with his sizzling blue energy blade. Then, with Force-enhanced movements, he charged forward; he looked to be a blur to the normal eye. Suddenly, High Templar Malakon was standing right in front of the guards; he lashed out with his lightsaber, cutting three blaster pistols in half. From behind, a guard fired upon High Templar Malakon; he side-stepped the blaster bolt, and grasped the blaster pistol with the Force. Then, with a tremendous surge of power, he crushed the blaster pistol beyond use. Another guard immediately fired upon High Templar Malakon; with incredible reflexes, he deflected the bolts back at the shooter. The energy bolts struck the blaster pistol, blowing it apart into four separate pieces. The three guards that he had attacked first now had their electro-batons out; with another surge of power from the Force, High Templar Malakon unleashed an epic Force Wave. The powerful pressure wave sent the five guards careening into the ferrocrete walls behind them. They struck the walls, cracking the ferrocrete; the impact knocked them unconscious instantly.

"C'mon!" High Templar Malakon ordered.

They were already moving forward. They hurried up the darkened stairs. As they ran down the hallways they came in from, they encountered no further resistance; they could, however, hear the footsteps of guards scurrying about within the detention hall above them. The flurry of activity was worrisome. Finally, they reached the front foyer.

"Knights first." High Templar Malakon ordered, "Troopers, guard our backs."

"No problem." The GC trooper replied.

With another surge of power, High Templar Malakon sent a powerful Force Wave into the front doors. The doors splintered and fractured from the incredible power from the Force. Then, immediately following behind, the four Jedi Knights Templars leapt through. They were almost immediately greeted by blaster cannon fire from two watchtowers at opposite sides of the inner courtyard; this was coupled with several spotlights shining down upon them. The four Jedi Knights Templars immediately and expertly blocked the incoming blaster bolts. Those that they didn't block with their blades, they allowed to pass, usually striking the ferrocrete blocks beneath them. Because of the intensity and power from the energy bolts, making perfect angles with the lightsaber blade was almost impossible; as a result, energy bolts blocked by the lightsaber blade usually ricocheted wildly.

Suddenly, the blaster fire from one of the watchtowers ceased completely; High Templar Malakon looked behind him, "Did you hit it?"

"No!" Knight Zara Lailas Gra'tua screamed, blocking another blaster bolt.

Suddenly, the four Alliance admirals and the three GC troopers came running out. High Templar Malakon was initially surprised and wanted to tell them to go back, but he quickly saw that wasn't going to happen. Behind them, several more platoons of guards had coming pouring into the foyer.

Before asking what happened to the first watchtower, the second watchtower also became silent; one of the GC troopers shouted, "That's our backup!"

Guarding the back, and deflecting any incoming blaster bolts, the four Jedi Knights Templars fought. The torrent of blaster bolts was intense, and the four Jedi Knights Templars were unable to deflect all the blaster bolts sent their way. As a result, one of them, Knight Sevrina Marnel, caught a blaster bolt in the shoulder; the energy bolts seared through her flesh, passing straight through her bones. She screamed as she collapsed onto the ferrocrete pavement below her.

High Templar Malakon immediately ran over to pick her up, "We're leaving!"

The other two Jedi Knights Templars provided some cover, deflecting the blaster bolts as best they could, while High Templar Malakon carried the injured Knight Marnel under her shoulder. After only a few paces, she screamed in pain and agony.

"Put me down!" Knight Marnel demanded.

"I can't!" High Templar Malakon explained, "We've got to keep moving!"

"Put me down!" She demanded again, "You won't make it with me slowing you down!" He looked into her bright blue eyes; tears had filled them, "Please, let me down."

Reluctantly, he came under her shoulder. She still stood under her own power, and slowly rose to an upright position. The two other Jedi Knights Templars gave a questioned look towards High Templar Malakon; he simply shook his head. They understood; this was probably a one-way ticket. They began running towards the front gate, the two gigantic blast doors. High Templar Malakon quickly looked back over his right shoulder. Proudly, he saw her stand tall, defiant as ever, deflecting every incoming blaster bolt sent her way with her only working arm. She growled and fought, determined to give her comrades the most time she could possibly give them. Her movements, although not as elegant as before, were efficient and effective.

As per standard procedures, the front blast doors were locked and the access codes were wiped from the database. The three GC troopers, plus those on the wall, started firing back towards the front foyer, keeping the guards inside from getting out. Agonizingly, Knight Marnel fought hard, deflecting as many energy bolts as she could; slowly, the number of bolts she deflected decreased, and her intensity dwindled. High Templar Malakon finally reached the blast doors.

"Now what?" Sibar Fre'kay asked.

Arrogantly, High Templar Malakon simply pointed towards the adjacent wall. Suddenly, four concussion missiles streaked through the air and struck the ferrocrete wall. The wall exploded with a great plume of bright orange-yellow flames, sending huge chunks of ferrocrete into the air. Hovering outside was the *Red Diamond*, its boarding ramp open.

"Get in!" High Templar Malakon ordered.

Immediately, the four Alliance admirals jumped onboard. They were followed by the three GC troopers, then the dozen GC troopers that repelled down from the wall. The Jedi Knights Templars were the last to board. Finally, after everyone else had piled onboard, High Templar Malakon Force-leapt onto the boarding ramp. He looked back, determined to save Knight Marnel, but it was too late. Just at that moment, three blaster bolts defeated her lightsaber barrier, and struck her in the chest. The blaster bolts burned through her pink flesh, blasting fist sized holes into her. She dropped to the ferrocrete pavement like a sack of meat.

Angered, High Templar Malakon pounded the metallic floor of the boarding ramp. Almost immediately after that, the *Red Diamond* took off, and closed its boarding ramp. High Templar Malakon, tears in his eyes, picked himself up off the cold metallic floor and headed for the cockpit. As he walked by the now fifteen GC troopers, all former Alliance commandoes, they saluted him; the four Alliance admirals, tired from their ordeal, sat within the various booths and smiled at him as he walked passed.

He barged into the cockpit, "Are we home free?"

"Not by a long-shot!" Renz shouted; he pointed towards the sky, and High Templar Malakon could see what Renz meant, "Star Destroyer."

Renz, against all reason, actually headed straight for the *Pellaeon*-class Star Destroyer hovering overhead. High Templar Malakon was going to ask Renz what the hell he thought he was doing, but he thought better of it. By now, he trusted Renz's judgement. Suddenly, the sky erupted with the flashes of turbolaser fire; Renz immediately jinked and juked between the turbolaser bolts. The banks were so hard, in fact, that High Templar Malakon almost toppled over onto his face; quickly he grabbed the door frame, bracing himself for the high speed manoeuvres.

"Don't worry!" Renz shouted, "I've got a few tricks up my sleeve!"

Suddenly, Renz rolled over onto the starboard-side, and broke hard right. Just missing a flurry of turbolasers, he levelled out the *Red Diamond*. Now running parallel to the *Pellaeon*-class Star Destroyer, but in opposite directions, the Star Destroyer pummelled them relentlessly with heavy turbolaser fire. With white-knuckle strain and drenched with sweat, Renz weaved in-and-out of the turbolaser bolts; there were definitely some close calls. Within seconds, they were out of range of the *Pellaeon*-class Star Destroyer, and making for orbit. The steepness of the climb surprised even High Templar Malakon; the climb was nearly vertical.

"Once we're out of Coruscant's gravity well, we'll jump to hyperspace." Renz informed, "Any idea where too?"

"Caamas I think is the rally point." High Templar Malakon answered.

"Poetic." Renz murmured.

They finally left the upper atmosphere of Coruscant in, what High Templar Malakon thought, record time. High Templar Malakon peered through the forward

viewport; the orbital defences surrounding Coruscant were suddenly in a flurry of activity.

"Those orbital defences are launching fighters!" High Templar Malakon informed.

"Don't worry!" Renz replied, "Once they've reached us, we'd've already jumped to hyperspace!"

High Templar Malakon wasn't all too sure about that. He noticed that the launched fighters were definitely *Predator*-class starfighters. Several tense moments passed, then suddenly, one of the *Predator*-class starfighters fired a flurry of laser bolts from the portside. The laser bolts strafed the topside hull of the YT-2400 light freighter; as a result, the freighter shook violently.

"Are you kidding me?" High Templar Malakon screamed.

There were several flashing lights on the forward console, one especially caught High Templar Malakon's eye: MASTER CAUTION. Renz seemed to ignore them, at least for the moment. Jinking and juking, the flight was wild and bumpy. High Templar Malakon looked out the portside viewport and saw several more *Predator*-class starfighters inbound and closing fast.

"Hold on!" Renz shouted; punching a few keys on the navicomputer, he pushed the lever forward. Suddenly, the lights streaked into lines, then suddenly, they meshed together into a blue-white flurry of swirling lights.

They'd made it.

Maelstrom

Two Standard Days Later: Thoja, Nal Hutta:

Cosh Sonter had been running almost non-stop for two standard days. About a standard day previous, Cosh Sonter managed to evade capture from his pursuers, about a hundred of Thrak Zann's thugs; this gave Cosh, what he thought, was at least a twelve standard hour lead on his pursuers. The swamplands were dense with unusual, malformed and sickly vegetation, and the terrain was particularly rough. About seven standard hours ago, Cosh Sonter encountered a snake-like creature, covered with thin, thorny spines, with a mouth filled with long, needle-like fangs; it was one of the Vongspawn creatures that still inhabit the swamplands of Nal Hutta. For the first time during his pursuit, Cosh Sonter had to use his hold-out blaster.

Cosh Sonter came towards a clearing; behind it, he heard the chatter of beings. From with survival pack, Cosh took out a pair of macrobinoculars. As he peered down the scope, he saw what the chatter was all about. Ahead of him were several, about eight, mobile artillery vehicles surrounded by several dozen of Thrak Zann's guards; the mobile artillery were lined up in a perfect straight line, a typical bombardment formation. Beyond the artillery, Cosh couldn't really tell, but he was sure there would be hundreds, if not thousands, more of Thrak Zann's thugs.

Zann is looking to invade someone, Cosh thought.

Thinking better of it, Cosh immediately went back into the brush. Quickly, Cosh ran through the relatively less dense vegetation and knee-high water, going around Thrak Zann's thugs. After running through the swamp for another half hour, Cosh decided to stop. He walked toward the treeline. Gradually, the vegetation got less dense, and the stagnant water got shallower and shallower. Soon, he could see through the dense brush; the vegetation cleared and the water dried up. Beyond, there were stone huts and other small synthstone buildings; it was a small village or town. The village, however, was in ruins; the buildings were crumbling, and there were bodies laying dead on the moist, muddy soil.

There must have been some fighting here recently, Cosh Sonter thought as he peered through the dense vegetation.

In the distance, in front of him, he could hear the crackling of blaster rifles and the horrible screams of crying and wailing beings. Cosh Sonter was hesitant to go into the village; if he did, there was a very good chance he would be spotted. But going around, he estimated, it would take another three standard days to move through the swamps.

Barring caution, Cosh Sonter moved into the village. Crouched, he stepped out into the clearing; he looked left, then right. It was clear, so far. Then, at a dead run, he sprinted to the nearest building; his feet sloshed on the muddy ground as he ran. Three of the building's walls were blown apart by, what Cosh thought, artillery fire. Cosh immediately slid behind the last remaining wall of the building, leaned up close against it, and slowly inched his way forward, using the wall as cover. He slowly made his way to the edge, where he peered passed the ruined wall; the first thing Cosh saw was another destroyed building with its roof collapsed and one of its walls torn down. The wall facing Cosh read: *Welcome To Hell*.

Cosh chuckled, "You got that right."

Cosh looked further passed the wall; the streets were clear, of anything living anyways. This particular street looked to be one of the many killing zones he heard about on Nal Hutta; the street were filled with dead bodies of various beings, probably all former Hutt citizens or slaves. Mud and crud covered their bodies, and they were left out to rot in the hot, humid weather; disturbingly, he saw no weapons among any of the dead. They were completely defenceless, Cosh supposed. The stench was almost unbearable, but Cosh Sonter dealt with it. Coming out of cover, Cosh moved swiftly down the muddy street, passed the dozens of rotting dead bodies; he checked the alley adjacent to him. Empty. Quickly, he ran across the alley; he quickly hugged the wall of the next building, using its stone walls as cover. This building was, more-or-less, intact. Cosh Sonter continued moving down the street, when suddenly, a loud pounding sound resonated through the air, and shook the ground. The blaster fire got louder, and the screams got clearer and more audible.

There's a fight up ahead, Cosh thought.

Slowly, Cosh Sonter moved ahead. There was another building ahead of him; quickly, he ran towards it. Leaning up against the brick stones of the building, he inched his way to the corner of the building. As he peered passed the wall, he saw the fight. There was a large clearing, a central courtyard, where the fighting seemed to be concentrated. Thrak Zann's forces, he supposed, were at the far end of the courtyard, hammering the buildings with artillery; through the smog across the courtyard, he could see several of Thrak Zann's thugs moving across the open clearing, firing their blaster rifles wildly into the buildings.

Leaning further passed the wall he was behind for cover, he saw what buildings Thrak Zann's thugs were firing upon. Two buildings in particular, reasonably intact,

were their main targets. In those two buildings, several beings, he couldn't see who, wildly fired repeaters and blasters onto the courtyard. He watched as the two opposing forces fought it out; he watched as several of Thrak Zann's thugs were blasted apart. The energy bolts tore through the meaty flesh of Thrak Zann's thugs, blasting fist-sized burning holes into their bodies. Suddenly, a loud and constant rumble resonated within the air, and the moist soil shook violently. Through the smog across the courtyard, Cosh Sonter saw what it was; it was an First Galactic Civil War-era TIE ap-1, a Santhe/Sienar tank manufactured over a century previous. The odd trapezoidal treads rolled forward, crushing the stone bricks in front of it. The Hutt resistance, Cosh assumed, immediately began firing upon the TIE ap-1, informally known as the TIE Mauler; the blaster bolts simply ricocheted off the armoured hull, doing little to no damage. Suddenly, the three heavy blaster cannons attached to the bottom of the spherical cockpit blazed to life; the blaster bolts tore through the foundation of the stone structure. Chunks of black and grey stone erupted into dust and flames.

Instinctually, Cosh ducked behind the wall he was leaning up against. The roar of the three heavy blaster cannons deafened him to everything else. Within moments, Cosh managed to build up the courage to peer passed the wall again. He watched as the building toppled over into the courtyard, smashing into millions of pieces. From behind the TIE ap-1, what seemed like hundreds of Thrak Zann's thugs moved forward, guns blazing. The second building, the one directly adjacent to the toppled structure, immediately erupted in repeater and blaster fire; suddenly, two proton rockets streaked through the air, and smashed into the TIE ap-1. The glowing red rockets erupted in a brilliant orange-yellow fireball; the TIE ap-1 exploded into a cloud of flames and shrapnel. The high-velocity twisted durasteel hull shredded the thugs surrounding it; some were killed instantly, while others moaned in pain and agony.

Suddenly, out of that second stone building, poured the Hutt resistance force; Klatooinians, Niktos, Nimbanel, Vodrans, Weequays, and a whole other variety of species streamed into the courtyard. A massive firefight erupted within the courtyard; at almost point-blank range, the Hutt resistance and Thrak Zann's thugs fought. When blaster packs ran dry, hand-to-hand combat ensued. From above, the beings in the second building provided covering fire with heavy repeater blaster fire. The fighting was messy, unbridled, and vicious; it was like nothing Cosh had ever seen before.

The ground shook, and a powerful shockwave came over Cosh. Through the air, a bright blue energy bolt streaked through the air. It was an artillery shell. Suddenly, the artillery shell arced, dropped, and slammed into the second building; the building erupted in a gigantic fireball. Grey stone rained down all around Cosh. Quickly, Cosh

immediately ran away from the fighting in the courtyard. The air was thick with the stone dust, causing Cosh to cough relentlessly. To Cosh's surprise, the ground shook several more times, proceeded with several shockwaves. Quickly, Cosh looked up into the air; several more blue energy bolts streaked through the air.

"Oh frack." Cosh Sonter said to himself.

Cosh Sonter looked directly in front of him; there was the treeline about a kilometre away from his position now. Instinctively, Cosh Sonter ran for the treeline and into the swamp. Suddenly, in between Cosh and the treeline, the artillery shells slammed into the muddy ground; huge columns of dirt and sludge shot up into the air as a result. Cosh Sonter immediately fell onto his belly, and covered his head with his arms. Cosh looked up, and saw that the artillery shells weren't aimed at him, but rather from the incoming Hutt resistance forces coming out from the treeline. Thousands upon thousands of beings, of a whole variety of species, poured out of the swamp. They charged forward, running passed the artillery bombardment; several were caught in the blasts, and were blown to pieces or shot up into the air. Shell after shell rained down from the yellow-orange polluted sky; the soggy soil was fully of craters, carved out by the immense energy from the artillery shells. Nevertheless, the Hutt forces moved forward, to what Cosh thought was, fearlessly.

Within moments, the first wave of the Hutt resistance came over Cosh Sonter. The first wave of the Hutt forces ignored Cosh, but that was short lived. Suddenly, a huge Kajain'sa'Nikto stood in front of Cosh. Slowly, Cosh's gaze rose to meet the towering being in front of him. Instinctively, Cosh raised his hands. Suddenly, the Kajain'sa'Nikto grabbed Cosh; he struggled for only a moment, the stopped. The Nikto finally pulled Cosh's arm out.

"*Comowalta?*" The Kajain'sa'Nikto asked in Huttese.

Cosh pulled his arm back and gave the Nikto a confused expression; then, he noticed that his arm had the Commonwealth emblem on it. Excitedly, Cosh pointed to the Commonwealth emblem on his left bicep, "Commonwealth!"

"*Comowalta.*" The Kajain'sa'Nikto replied.

"Yes! Yes! Commonwealth!" Cosh Sonter replied, "I am with the Commonwealth!"

The Nikto pointed towards the sky.

"Yes!" Cosh Sonter replied, also pointing towards the sky, "I was shot down."

The Nikto immediately took Cosh by the arms, and led him to one of the few undamaged buildings around. Several Hutt soldiers were outside, fighting Thrak Zann's forces. The constant thud of blaster fire were ringing in Cosh's ear. The Nikto led Cosh into the basement, where he met with another being. This time, it was a Toydarian; the Toydarian had a scar running diagonally across his face, a scar on his left wing, and large tusks protruding out of his mouth.

The Nikto and the Toydarian spoke for several minutes, presumably about Cosh, then the Nikto left. The Toydarian slowly hovered toward Cosh.

"So, you are the pilot shot down we heard about, yes?" The Toydarian spoke.

Reluctantly, Cosh answered, "Yes. I am a Commonwealth pilot--"

"Commonwealth!" The Toydarian cut in, "Does the Commonwealth plan on rescuing you?"

He sure hoped so, but Cosh replied, "I don't know."

"Well... that's a shame." The Toydarian replied, "If we could garner the help of the Commonwealth, after all we did for them during your war with the Empire, that would make you quite valuable."

Cosh Sonter suddenly remembered; during the Anti-Sith Insurgency, the Hutts were under the control of the New Galactic Empire, at the time led by Darth Krayt, later by Empress Amelia. To the best of his knowledge, the Empire left the Hutts more-or-less alone; but after the destruction of Da Soocha, a world in Hutt Space, the Hutts aided the Galactic Alliance remnant with safe passages and the acquisition of supplies. The Hutts actually proved quite useful, especially in the battles in the Outer Rim.

"But, since the Commonwealth doesn't seem likely to come to your rescue," The Toydarian continued, "what reason should we keep you alive?"

Cosh Sonter couldn't really think of anything at the moment.

Suddenly, the Toydarian swooped in closer, a hold-out blaster in his hands, "You are of no use to us, pilot!" The Toydarian put the end of the barrel on Cosh's head, "You could be a spy! Planted here by Zann!"

Cosh Sonter put his hands up in the air, "Wait! Wait! Wait!"

"Yes?" The Toydarian replied.

Cosh had to think fast, "I know where their artillery is." He finally muttered.

The Toydarian seemed to cool down, but still had the end of the hold-out blaster pistol pointed towards Cosh, "So what?"

"So? So I know that that artillery has been hammering your forces relentlessly." Cosh Sonter explained, "And I know that you can't see them through the dense smog. So, I know where they are."

"How do you know this?" The Toydarian asked.

"Because I came in that way when I approached the village." Cosh Sonter answered.

"Well, my men are already moving through the swamp to get around them." The Toydarian explained.

Cosh shook his head, "No good. Thrak Zann would have already have patrols guarding the swamps." Cosh Sonter explained, "I only arrived when they were setting up."

Cosh Sonter didn't actually know if that last comment was true or not, but he had sounded convincing. The Toydarian seemed to calm down and think about the situation more. Slowly, the Toydarian lowered the hold-out blaster pistol and holstered the weapon.

"So what are you offering?" The Toydarian asked.

Cosh took a deep breath, "I'll help you take down the artillery,"

"If?" The Toydarian quickly asked.

"If, you get me to my rendezvous point." Cosh Sonter finished.

The Toydarian thought about the proposition for a moment; Cosh hoped that the Toydarian would except the offer. The Toydarian stared at Cosh for a few moments.

"Where is the rendezvous point?" The Toydarian asked.

Cosh walked over to a map, and pointed out the position of the rendezvous point; just then, Cosh realized how far away from the rendezvous point he really was. The Toydarian stared at the map for a moment.

"Deal." The Toydarian replied.

Cosh Sonter let out a sigh of relief.

Quickly, the Toydarian asked, "What will you need?"

"A dozen of your men, and lots of explosives." Cosh Sonter answered.

The Toydarian gave a wide smirk, "Neither will be a problem."

Immediately, the Toydarian went into action. He summoned a dozen beings, of various species, into the basement; he then ordered them to carry as many thermal detonators and rockets as they could carry. Cosh Sonter was actually quite impressed with the arsenal the Hutts had. Cosh was ready to leave, when suddenly, he just remembered.

"Oh, do you have a blaster pack that would fit a—" Cosh Sonter started to ask.

Suddenly, the Toydarian threw several energy packs towards Cosh Sonter; the energy packs skidded along the cracked pavement and finally came to a stop by Cosh's feet. Cosh chuckled, and knelt over to pick up the three energy packs. He threw them in his pack, and ran up the stairs. There, he was greeted with the constant pounding of artillery, and buzzing of blaster fire. The battle, it seemed, still raged on quite intensely. At the top of the stairs, the dozen men assigned to him were waiting.

Immediately, "Alright. Follow me!" Cosh Sonter ordered.

Behind the safety of the ruined buildings and structures, they ran down the various streets and alleyways, making their way towards the Thrak Zann camp. They had to move as fast as they could, simply because time seemed to be running out. Thrak Zann's forces were pushing towards the Hutt lines faster with every passing minute. Luckily, the steady pounding of artillery seemed to cover their footfalls quite easily. After only ten minutes, they reached the halfway point, just where the Hutts and Thrak Zann's forces met; Cosh Sonter looked down one of the alleyways and saw the battle first hand. The two forces were scattered about, wildly firing at each other with vicious intent on their faces; the battle was pure and utter chaos. Obviously with no military backgrounds, these thugs simply fought it out with malice and happenstance.

Covering the alleyway with his compact blaster rifle, Cosh waved the dozen Hutt resistance fighters forward. They moved quickly, and rather sluggishly; the latter could be forgiven. They were carrying several pounds worth of thermal detonators and rockets. After the last Hutt fighter passed Cosh, he moved out of his covering position

and moved forward. Up ahead, was another alleyway. Before any of them crossed the alley, they waited for Cosh to move forward.

Finally making his way up the line, he peeked down the alleyway. There were three of Zann's thugs moving up the alleyway, either hopelessly thinking of flanking the Hutt lines, or escaping the battle; he couldn't tell. Cosh immediately retreated behind the wall, and looked back at the Hutt fighters. He held up his hand in a stopping gesture, then indicated that three were coming. Slowly, the Hutt fighters hugged the near wall, behind Cosh, and remained silent. Just then, several artillery shells were launched into the air; the pounding deafened Cosh for several moments.

That's my moment, Cosh thought.

Cosh patiently waited for the artillery shells to go off again; moment after moment passed, and nothing. The three thugs were moving up the alley, closer and closer to their positions. Sooner or later, Cosh was going to have to take them down. Finally, three artillery shells were fired into the air. Immediately, Cosh leaned out behind the wall, and fired a plethora of energy bolts. The energy bolts struck the three thugs, all of them Weequay, in the chest; they immediately dropped to the floor, dead. Luckily, the artillery shells bombardment covered the noise of the blaster fire. Letting out a sigh of relief, Cosh Sonter waved the Hutt fighters forward.

They continued running down the various muddy, body-filled streets and alleys until they finally reached Thrak Zann's camp. Cosh Sonter looked down another alleyway, and saw the camp in full action. The front portion were simply thugs, pouring out into the courtyard ahead; the back portion consisted of various materiel, weapons, and the eight mobile artillery vehicles Cosh Sonter saw earlier. Surrounding the artillery were several dozens of thugs, carefully guarding the weapons. The artillery bombardment continued, now at almost a constant rate.

"Okay, we're here." Cosh Sonter informed, "We're going to move behind the artillery, and together, we're going to take them out." He explained, "We have to destroy them all at once because we can't afford to lose them."

The Hutt fighters nodded, but Cosh wasn't actually sure if they understood a word of Basic. Regardless, then the chips were down, they'll probably figure out what to do from there. After all, these thugs were more like brawlers rather than trained soldiers.

"Let's move!" Cosh Sonter shouted over the artillery bombardment.

Quickly, down another street, they ran towards the back of the mobile artillery vehicles. Within minutes, they were behind their lines; Cosh quickly ordered them to spread out. Taking cover behind the last ruined structures before the courtyard, Cosh ordered the attack.

"Now!" Cosh Sonter screamed.

Immediately, a flurry of glowing red proton rockets streaked through the air, leaving behind a faint trail of ions. The proton rockets slammed into the mobile artillery vehicles with incredible explosive force. Within seconds, four out of the eight mobile artillery vehicles erupted in a plume of flames and cloud of shrapnel. Suddenly, a flurry of blaster bolts were shot their way.

"Move forward!" Cosh Sonter screamed.

Leading the way forward, Cosh Sonter fired wildly at the opposing Zann thugs; the blaster bolts missed high, but they weren't meant to hit anyone. Rather, it was merely covering fire. Finally, after a few more seconds of running, Cosh Sonter took cover behind a crate of materiel; quickly following, three Hutt fighters came up from behind. Cosh immediately waved them up further, and Cosh came out from behind cover. He fired at two of Zann's thugs, dropping them immediately; the blaster bolts burned through their makeshift armour, killing them instantly. Cosh looked to his right, the rest of the Hutt fighters were moving forward as well; suddenly, three of them knelt down, and fired their proton rockets. The glowing red proton rockets streaked through the air and smashed into the mobile artillery vehicles. In another plume of flames and shrapnel, they exploded.

Now, Thrak Zann's thugs had caught on to what was happening, and started fighting back in full force; they still had one more mobile artillery vehicle to take down, however. He quickly turned around.

"Take down that last vehicle!" Cosh Sonter ordered.

Cosh immediately turned his attention back around and fired wildly at Thrak Zann's thugs; the thugs came at them with ferocious intent. Busily, almost too focused, Cosh fired into Zann's thugs at a steady pace; quickly, he pulled out the energy pack and slapped another one in. Then, out of the corner of his eyes, he saw a Hutt fighter get shot down by a torrent of blaster bolts. The bolts seared through his armour, shattering it almost instantly, and burned through his soft flesh.

He cursed under his breath, then shouted, "Cover me!"

The Hutts fought harder than ever before; like brawlers, they relentless fired their blaster rifles, wildly hitting anything that moved in front of them. They shot down the first wave of Thrak Zann's thugs, but they seemed endless; like waves on the ocean, they just kept coming in, relentlessly never ending. Meanwhile, Cosh Sonter ran towards the fallen Hutt fighter. He was clearly dead, but that wasn't his intention at all. He picked up the rocket launcher, lined up the sights, and squeezed the trigger. The proton rocket shot out of the tube with a stream of white smoke and glowing ions; moments later, Cosh saw the proton rocket streak through the air and smash into the last remaining mobile artillery vehicle. In another explosion, the vehicle tore itself apart and erupted into flames.

The shockwave poured over Cosh; the pressure wave smacked into him like a ferrocrete wall. His vision was blurry, and his ears rang intensely; his balance was off, so he couldn't even stand up. Slowly, his senses returned to him, and he watched the giant fireball rise into the atmosphere. After watching the explosion in mesmerized awe, Cosh immediately snapped back to the real world. He picked up his compact blaster rifle, and fired it wildly into Thrak Zann's lines. Blaster bolts streamed passed Cosh by mere metres; the blaster bolts struck dirt, stone and twisted durasteel, all sparking on contact. Cosh growled in anger, firing at anything that moved in front of him. Suddenly, Cosh Sonter heard a familiar sound from behind him.

Starfighters, Cosh Sonter thought.

But there was something distinctly different about the roar of the ion engines. After only a few moments, Cosh Sonter looked behind him and saw why. The starfighters were in fact *StarViper*-class attack platforms; starfighters commonly used by Thrak Zann's naval forces. The attack platforms were silhouetted by the orange-yellow sky. There were five of them, flying in perfect V-formation, headed straight towards them.

"Everyone down!" Cosh Sonter screamed.

Seconds later, the *StarViper*-class attack platforms flew passed; moments after the flyby, the buildings around them exploded. The buildings shattered like glass, raining chunks of debris, some the size of boulders, others merely dust particles, all around them. It had happened so fast, Cosh didn't know what hit him. Slowly, after the dust had settled out of the air, Cosh looked back up into the sky. Immediately after the five attack platforms flew overhead, the Hutt fighters rose and fired wildly into the air.

"Stop!" Cosh Sonter screamed, "Don't waste your ammo!"

The Hutt fighters then turned their attention towards the thugs on the ground; most of Zann's thugs had taken cover behind fallen buildings or rubble, trying to avoid both enemy and friendly fire. With another push, Thrak Zann's thugs pressed forward; the Hutt fighters fought them off relentlessly. Cosh fired at the incoming thugs as well; but just in the distance, he saw the attack platforms turning around.

"They're coming around again!" Cosh Sonter screamed over the roar of battle.

The attack platforms, although not particularly fast or agile, were incredibly powerful and heavily armoured. The unique bladed wings provided them with an aggressive look, with the added benefit of harbouring more weapons. This time, Cosh didn't take his eyes off the *StarViper*-class attack platforms. They launched a salvo of proton torpedoes towards their position; the glowing red torpedoes streaked through the smog-filled air in mere seconds, strike the ground in front of them. A giant cone of stone and dirt shot up out of the explosion, leaving behind a crater; suddenly, the shockwave washed over them. The force from the impact lifted Cosh off the ground and sent him flying through the air; he finally landed, with the rest of the Hutt fighters, about five metres away from where they stood previously. Huge chunks of stone and debris rained down all around them; there was a constant ringing in Cosh's ear that he tried to shake out, to no avail. Just at that moment, the five *StarViper*-class attack platforms streaked passed their position again.

Surprisingly, one of the Hutt fighters, a Klatooinian, had an unusual mortar-like weapon in his huge arms; he fired the weapon, and a single shell flew out. Cosh Sonter watched as the shell suddenly arched towards the *StarViper*-class attack platforms. Then, from behind, the shell smashed into the ion engines of one of the *StarViper*-class attack platforms, crippling it fatally, causing it to spin towards the ground.

Cosh immediately grabbed two more Hutt fighters and pointed towards the mortar-like weapon, "Find more of those!"

They seemed to understand, and immediately went on a search. Moments later, they came back with the weapons. Cosh, quickly, inspected the weapons; on the side it read: ZANN INC., LAU-65D/SGM-151 MISSILE POD. Cosh immediately pointed towards the four incoming attack platforms. Almost in unison, they fired a shell each. Using his macrobinoculars, he watched the shells fly up into the air, fins pop out and rocket engines ignite, then streak through the air towards their intended target. One of the shells struck an attack platform dead on, blowing the starfighter into flaming, twisted pieces. Flaming debris rained down into the thick swamplands below. The

other attack platforms evaded the incoming shells, causing them to deviate from their intended attack vector.

"Keep it up!" Cosh Sonter ordered.

Cosh immediately turned around and fired another steady stream of blaster bolts towards Zann's thugs; he could see, just off into the distance, that Thrak Zann's forces were starting to retreat back into the smog. He dropped at least three that he could see, but the smog rolling in was getting thicker, obscuring his vision. Out of the corner of his eyes, he saw the Hutt fighters wildly fire into the incoming forces.

"Defend this position with everything we've got!" Cosh Sonter screamed.

Suddenly, three Hutt fighters threw their thermal detonators into the frontlines. Moments later, the small spheres exploded with violent malice. The explosions ripped through the flesh of the beings standing within its proximity, while sending others into the air. Then, just beyond the horizon, Cosh saw three *StarViper*-class attack platforms turning about and closing in from the sides. With a flurry of heavy laser bolts, the three attack platforms fired upon their positions; the powerful energy bolts slammed into the ground, vaporizing the stone instantly. As they made their pass, one of the Hutt fighters managed to fire a shell from the missile pod into the before being torn apart by the energy bolts. The shell flew up into the air and detonated upon one of the attack platform's wings; the explosion was so close, Cosh Sonter was forced to take shelter behind one of the flaming artillery wrecks. The *StarViper*-class attack platform spun towards the courtyard, slammed into the stone tiles, skidding forward, and careened into one of the stone structures within the village, exploding upon impact.

Cosh made a quick assessment; five Hutt fighters were killed during the strafing run. Cosh shook his head, "Hold them off!"

The Hutt fighters, either too crazed from spice abuse, or genuinely fearless, stood back up and fired relentlessly into the lines of thugs approaching. Cosh ran over to one of the missile pods; on the missile pod was a holographic display showing where the attack platforms were coming from. Quickly, he slapped another missile into the missile pod, and trained the locking mechanism onto one of the attack platforms. Finally, the targeting reticule turned red on the holographic display, and Cosh fired the weapon. With a powerful thud, the missile shot up into the air; then, the rockets ignited and tracked the attack platform. Within a second, the missile smashed into the side of one of the attack platforms; the explosion was so violent that it vaporized durasteel and shattered the starfighter into millions of tiny pieces. On the holographic display, Cosh

watched as the last attack platform turned about; slapping another missile into the hold, he aimed. The attack platform jinked and juked wildly through the yellow-orange sky, making a missile lock almost impossible to get. Finally, after a few moments of tension, the targeting reticule turned red, and Cosh fired. The missile shot out of the tube with a thud, then streaked towards the incoming attack platform. Laser cannons blazing, streams of energy bolts shot out towards him. Immediately, Cosh Sonter jumped out of the way, just missing getting cut in half by a torrent of laser bolts. From above, Cosh heard the missile smash into the attack platform; flaming debris rained down all around him as the crippled attack platform plummeted towards the ground.

Cosh immediately picked himself up and moved to the front of the line. Using his macrobinoculars, he peered into the thick smog. Suddenly, he came across an image that brought fear into his heart. Three TIE ap-1 tanks rolled out of the smog, flanked by hordes of Thrak Zann's thugs, advancing on their position.

Immediately, "Maulers!" Cosh Sonter screamed, "We've got Maulers incoming! Get those rockets up!"

The last remaining Hutt fires immediately dropped their blaster rifles and loaded their proton rockets. He wasn't sure if it was the battle, or maybe fear was finally creeping up within them, but they seemed slower than before. Cosh Sonter laid down as much covering fire as he could, taking down several of Thrak Zann's thugs in the process, but he was running low on energy packs. Suddenly, his energy pack just ran dry; with quick military precision, he took out the empty energy pack, and slapped in a new one, his last one.

"Last pack!" Cosh Sonter screamed over the battle.

Finally, the Hutt fighters got up and fired their proton rockets; he watched as the proton rockets streaked through the air in what seemed like slow-motion. Surprisingly, some of the rockets missed their mark, slamming into the stony ground just in front of the TIE ap-1 tanks. The rockets that veered wildly off-course and smashed into the stony ground immediately flash melted the stone tiles; what seemed like tonnes of debris shot up into the air, along with several of Thrak Zann's thugs. One of the rockets, however, hit its mark; the TIE ap-1 tank exploded with a fury. Its two treads exploded sideways, crushing the thugs underneath its weight; the spherical cockpit vaporized and ignited in a brilliant explosion.

Suddenly, the three blaster cannons underneath the spherical cockpits from the other two TIE ap-1 tanks blazed to life. The powerful energy bolts smashed into their

positions, killing another Hutt fighter, tearing him into shreds. All around him, the powerful energy bolts exploded all around him; dirt and stone shot up from the ground where the blaster bolts struck. Cosh had to immediately take cover behind some burning wreckage, barely avoiding being cut down himself. Gradually, the ground shook violently, and one of the TIE ap-1 tanks rolled over their positions. For a few frightful moments, Cosh watched as the former Imperial tank rolled over the flaming, twisted wreckage and stony debris he was under; he got a long and terrifying look at the underbelly of the tank.

Purely on instinct, Cosh picked himself up off the ground, and ran towards the TIE ap-1 tank; armed with only a compact blaster rifle and a thermal detonator, he ran with all his might. Just up ahead, the TIE ap-1 slowed down and began to turn. Quickly, Cosh Sonter jumped onto the tank, and started blasting the left tread apart; the tank didn't seem hindered by the blaster fire, but that wasn't the point. After several pieces flew off from the constant blaster fire, Cosh activated the thermal detonator in his hand and shoved it into the space he just created. Immediately, he jumped off the tank and rolled onto the soft, moist, muddy ground. He hit the ground running, trying to get as much distance between the tank and himself. Just then, the TIE ap-1 tank rolled forward, headed back towards the rest of the Hutt fighters; then, suddenly, the thermal detonator exploded, ripping the left tread apart and puncturing the spherical cockpit with high-velocity razor-sharp shrapnel. Flames all around, the pilot struggled out the top hatch of the TIE ap-1 tank, an obvious puncture wound to his chest, which was bleeding profusely; reflexively, Cosh Sonter fired his compact blaster rifle. The energy bolt struck the tank pilot in the chest, burning a fist-sized hole into his flesh, killing him instantly.

Cosh looked beyond the flaming tank wreckage; the last remaining TIE ap-1 tank was still blazing blaster cannon fire onto the last remaining Hutt fighters. From behind the tank, Thrak Zann's thugs were quickly approaching. Their battle cries filled the air. Not knowing what else to do, Cosh blindly ran towards the tank, screaming various profanities and curses, firing wildly into the armoured hull. Suddenly, the spherical cockpit of the TIE ap-1 tank exploded; the shockwave from the explosion sent Cosh off his feet, careening into the muddy ground.

Moments later, Cosh understood. Behind Thrak Zann's forces, the Hutts made their push forward. Blaster fire tore through Thrak Zann's thugs, and rockets smashed into the TIE ap-1 tank. The tank exploded, tearing apart everyone within the blast radius. No one was spared; the fighting was brutal and savage. In the few seconds he saw, thugs on both sides were cut down by intense blaster fire; blaster bolts ripped

through the flesh of various beings, barely cauterizing the wounds as they passed through muscle and organs. Within moments, Thrak Zann's forces, consisting of hundreds and hundreds of thugs, mercenaries, and bounty hunters, were shot down and killed with savage brutality. Cosh, exhausted from the battle, couldn't even manage to pick himself up; he barely had enough energy to focus his eyes on the battle. He simply laid on his back, listening to the savagery beyond.

Approximately an hour after the battle, Cosh Sonter was summoned to see Kral Boka. He was surprised to see that Kral Boka was in fact the Toydarian he had conversed about before the battle. As Cosh walked through the smog-filled courtyard, he noticed that many of the Hutt resistance fighters were walking around; they were picking up weapons, ammo and materiel. The dead were left to rot where they lay. The Toydarian floated above the wreckage from the battle, right in the middle of the courtyard where most of the fighting had taken place. Cosh, escorted by two Hutt fighters, one a Weequay, the other a Rodian, brought him in front of Kral Boka.

"Ah!" Kral Boka proclaimed, "You did very good, yes?"

"Alright." Cosh Sonter replied, "I held up my end of the deal, now it's time for you to do the same."

"Not so fast—" Kral Boka replied.

"What!" Cosh Sonter screamed; suddenly, the two escorts aimed their blaster rifles towards Cosh.

"I was just saying, the route to your rendezvous point is tricky and dangerous." Kral Boka informed.

"I'll risk it." Cosh Sonter replied.

"Ah, but I will not." Kral Boka countered.

"What do you mean?" Cosh Sonter sternly asked.

"The route to your rendezvous point would take you pass another village, Ralgadorr." The Toydarian explained, "It just so happens that is where we are headed to next."

"And..." Cosh Sonter slowly started, "You want me to follow you?"

"For your safety, I would strongly advise you stick with us until then." Kral Boka replied.

Cosh Sonter sighed; there was nothing much he could do, "How far away is this village?"

"Far." The Toydarian answered, "At least one day's hike."

"Alright." Cosh Sonter answered, "Then let's get moving."

Selonian Shipyards, Selonia, the Corellian system:

Lon Yash impatiently sat in his chair, staring out of the transparisteel window looking onto the bluish-purple world of Selonia; he quickly gulped his drink, a rather expensive brand of Corellian whisky, and quickly activated his private, and encrypted, communications system. He turned around, facing the three holographic projectors in front of him. Gradually, the lights dimmed, and the three holographic projectors shined to life. A bright blue cone of light appeared in front of him; hovering above were 'Ieten Kuat of Kuat and Kuat Drive Yards, Arian Thane of Fondor, and Princess Jade of Empress Teta. Just days before, he received the official paperwork and treaties, signed and initialled all in the right places, from all three world leaders.

Lon Yash leaned forward, and spoke in hush tones, "We've got problems."

"What is it, Admiral Yash?" Arian Thane quickly asked.

"The Admiralty has finally fractured." Lon Yash explained, "As you know, the First Consul and the rest of the Alliance representatives were arrested and charged with treason; luckily, I was off-world at the time."

"We already know this." Princess Jade replied.

"Ah, yes. But did you know that some former Alliance commandoes, as well as your precious Jedi Knights Templars, were seen breaking them out of their detention cells?" Lon Yash asked.

Princess Jade was obviously surprised, "No."

"Yes, well. Because of that, Second Consul Vanis is furious." Lon Yash explained, "He is cracking down on all former Alliance military personnel. This could lead to a full-scale war very soon."

"What are you asking of us?" 'Ieten Kuat asked.

"We must proceed ahead of schedule." Lon Yash replied.

Princess Jade shook her head, "You want us to declare our secession from the Galactic Commonwealth."

Lon Yash stared at the Princess, "Listen, Princess Jade." He said in a stern voice, "You've already signed the contracts and treaties. You've *already* declared your secession. Now, we must let the Commonwealth know it."

"This is dangerous, Admiral Yash." Princess Jade objected, "What if Vanis comes after us?"

"He won't." Lon Yash replied, "Not yet, anyways."

"Why?" Princess Jade asked.

Lon Yash quickly worked through his thought process and smiled, "He's got bigger issues to deal with; first most, the arrest of the First Consul." Lon Yash answered, "Now is the perfect time. The Commonwealth is too preoccupied with its own infighting, it would be forced to ignore our secession for the time." He continued, "By the time the infighting within the Admiralty is settled, we would have already strengthened our infrastructure enough that Vanis would be forced to recognize us as an independent state."

"Kuat is with you, Admiral Yash." Ieten Kuat proclaimed.

"As is Fondor." Arian Thane added.

Lon Yash gazed towards Princess Jade; she was obviously debating the arrangement she had made with Lon Yash. Impatiently, Lon Yash snapped, "Princess! Now is the time! If we delay, even for a day, we could get roped into a war we desperately need to avoid! Are you with us?"

Princess Jade finally spoke, "For now, Admiral Yash. For now."

"Good." Lon Yash replied, "I will handle things from here. Be well."

One Standard Day Later: Ralgadorr, Nal Hutta:

The one day trek through the swamplands was treacherous; several of the beings died along the way, mostly from attacks by those Vongspawn snake-like creatures. For Cosh, the trudging through waist high water, intense heat, and ridiculous humidity, was about all he could take at that moment. Finally, they came out of the swamp and

onto relatively dry land; just a head of them was the village of Ralgadorr. It was a small village, smaller than Thoja, but it was intact; the buildings and structures, mostly made of stone or other forms of duracrete, didn't seem touched by war. Not yet, anyways. The Hutts had informed Cosh that there was an anti-aircraft cannon in the middle of the open courtyard, directly in the middle of the village. Cosh had agreed to help the Hutts take down the anti-aircraft cannon, simply because if the Commonwealth did send someone, that AA-cannon might take them down as well.

They waited for night; within hours, it came. Dawning an all-black attire, Cosh Sonter and about two dozen Hutt resistance fighters scurried into the edge of the village. They rallied upon one of the stone buildings, coming in from the north. Cosh looked down the street; the village was eerie. Deserted, or eradicated, the former villagers were nowhere to be seen; the village, as a result, was quiet. Down the street, a lone thug was on patrol; the thug was moving towards Cosh and his Hutt fighters. As soon as the thug got close enough, Cosh came out from behind the corner and fired two shots from his hold-out blaster pistol. The energy bolts struck the thug in the chest, burning fist-sized holes into his flesh and ribcage. The thug didn't know what hit him, and collapsed onto the pavement.

Cosh immediately waved the two dozen Hutt fighters from out of cover; together, they silently moved through the dark, vacant street. After walking down the entire length of the street, they peered into the courtyard with his macrobinoculars; in the middle, lay the anti-aircraft cannon. Nestled right next to the AA-cannon were several sandbags with repeater blaster emplacements; each repeater blaster emplacement was armed with two men, and there were four emplacements in total. On the rooftops, Cosh saw two beings stationed on four different rooftops; one armed with a sniper-rifle, the other a spotter. And between them and the AA-cannon were several hundred of Thrak Zann's thugs, sleeping for the night in makeshift beds; barrels of fire, filled with some sort of fuel, stood at random intervals within the camp itself.

Not wanting to hazard moving around the makeshift camp, Cosh motioned the Hutt fighters towards the rooftops. Silently, they moved around, and behind one of the stone buildings were Cosh saw there were snipers. Silently, they opened up the back door; Cosh had his hold-out blaster ready to fire. Nothing. No one was inside.

"Move up." Cosh Sonter whispered.

The Hutt fighters broke up into two teams of twelve, and moved up the stone stairs of the building. There were only three floors, so they moved up quite fast. Cosh led one of the teams up; by the time he reached the top of the stairs, he peeked through

the door. He saw the sniper and the spotter, both human males, both gazed out into the courtyard. Silently, Cosh Sonter sneaked through the door, and took out his survival knife; he tip-toed his way forward, trying to keep as quiet as possible. Suddenly, the spotter turned around and looked upon Cosh with a wide-eyed expression. Immediately, Cosh threw the knife at the spotter; the knife sliced through the air, and pierced the ribcage of the spotter. The sniper then turned his attention to Cosh; the sniper raised his sniper-rifle at Cosh Sonter, poised to fire. Cosh stumbled to get his hold-out blaster pistol out of his holster; fear permeated through Cosh's mind. Suddenly, from behind, one of the Hutt fighters fired his blaster pistol; the blaster bolt shot through the air, hitting the sniper in the face.

Cosh Sonter turned around and nodded at the shooter in thanks. Then, running forward, picking up the sniper-rifle, Cosh peered onto the courtyard. Luckily, no one heard the blasts. Cosh let out a sigh of relief; they hadn't screwed up the mission yet. From up top, Cosh had a great vantage point; however, the low-laying smog obscured his vision, limiting the effectiveness of the sniper-rifle. Cosh checked the barrel of the sniper rifle; it was sound suppressed.

Taking aim, he looked across the courtyard onto the other rooftops; the Hutt fighters, meanwhile, covered his back. One-by-one, Cosh picked off the snipers and spotters on each roof top. He didn't do it very quickly, since he didn't want to raise any suspicions. After clearing the rooftops of snipers, Cosh motioned that it was all-clear. Almost immediately, two Hutt fighters, a Twi'lek and a Gand, came forward with rocket launchers ready over their shoulders.

Now was the hard part; they took aim, then launched their proton rockets at the AA-cannon. The glowing red proton rockets streaked through the night, smoggy air, then crashed into the AA-cannon. In a flash of brilliance, the AA-cannon erupted into flames; the explosion killed several beings standing next to the AA-cannon as well. Suddenly, the camp below, startled by the explosion, was alive with activity.

"Fire! Fire! Fire!" Cosh Sonter screamed.

Immediately, from the rooftop, the Hutt fighters fired their blaster rifles and pistols. The sheer number of blaster bolts raining down from above pelted Thrak Zann's thugs below. Because of the darkness, and the smog that rolled over the camp, Thrak Zann's thugs were clueless as to where to fire; as a result, they fired wildly in all directions. Many of Zann's thugs were killed by friendly fire. Then, from behind, Cosh Sonter could hear the battle cries from the Hutt fighters getting closer. Quickly, Cosh Sonter ceased his firing, and ran to the opposite end of the rooftop. Peering across the

horizon, he saw the Hutt fighters pour out of the dark swamplands, running towards the village.

"Keep up the fire!" Cosh Sonter ordered.

Immediately, Cosh Sonter ran back and started firing his compact blaster rifle wildly into the crowd of thugs below. Suddenly, the repeater blaster emplacement erupted to life; the energy bolts cut through the stone bricks protecting the Hutt fighters on the roof. Cosh immediately dropped to the floor and covered his head with his hands; he watched as several Hutt fighters were torn to pieces by the high energy blaster bolts. Then, working up the courage, Cosh Sonter stood up and aimed the sniper-rifle; through the scope, he could barely see the repeater blaster emplacement through the smog. Suddenly, the repeater blaster emplacement roared to life again; Cosh Sonter ducked the energy bolts, barely missing the them. Just before he ducked, though, he could see the flash from the repeater blaster. Moving sideways, Cosh Sonter took up another sniper position, lined up the crosshairs, and fired. The being manning the repeater blaster emplacement dropped to the pavement, and the blaster bolts ceased. Suddenly, from behind on the ground, the Hutt resistance fighters finally made it up the street and engaged Thrak Zann's thugs. The fighting below was vicious and deadly; for a moment, the only light that could be seen were from the blaster bolts that streaked through the smoggy air.

Cosh retreated behind cover, not wanting to get shot at this stage. He listened as the roar of battle raged on. Beings screamed in terror and agony, and the blasters fired constantly. Occasionally, there were explosions from thermal detonators, and the other repeater blaster emplacements blazed to life. Soon, after only a few minutes, the battle in the courtyard was over.

After the battle had ceased, and Thrak Zann's thugs were hauled off into the center of the courtyard and shot dead, Cosh Sonter made his way towards the courtyard. He could see the Toydarian floating above the carnage, barking orders to the men. As he walked forward, he could see the Hutt resistance fighters collecting weapons, gathering ammo, and harvesting materiel. The sight was disgusting; gathering weapons from the cold, dead hands of a foe, only to be used later in another battle. The Toydarian turned to look at Cosh.

"Ah! There you are!" Kral Boka proclaimed, "I hoped you weren't dead!"

Cosh finally stood in front of the Toydarian, "Okay, Boka. We had a deal." Cosh Sonter demanded, "How do I get to the rendezvous point?"

The Toydarian hovered in front of Cosh for a moment, "You know, you're pretty good in a fight." He replied, "We could use someone like you. We could make you very rich, yes?"

"No." Cosh Sonter sternly replied, "How do I get there."

The Toydarian sighed, "I didn't want to do this..." He replied, "Seize him!"

"What!" Cosh Sonter screamed.

Suddenly, the Toydarian pulled a hold-out blaster pistol out of his holster, "We cannot risk you falling into enemy hands, pilot."

"Backstabbing bastards." Cosh Sonter growled.

"No matter, pilot." The Toydarian replied, "As long as you're with us, you'll be safe."

Cosh Sonter looked around him; three Hutt resistance fighters approached him with hold-out blaster pistols in hand. With a sigh, "Fine."

"Great!" The Toydarian replied, "Now, you can help us—"

Suddenly, Cosh Sonter leapt forward, and knocked the hold-out blaster pistol out of his hands. Then, with lightning fast reflexes, he grabbed the Toydarian around the neck; then using his own hold-out blaster and the Toydarian as a shield, he fired three shots at the Hutt resistance fighters. The three energy bolts lanced out of the barrel and struck their marks square in the chest; as a result, the three Hutt resistance fighters dropped to the pavement.

"*Ap-xmasi keepuna!*" <Don't shoot!> The Toydarian shouted.

"Quiet!" Cosh Sonter barked.

Suddenly, he could see that the commotion had stirred up some attention, and the rest of the Hutt resistance fighters gazed upon him. Cosh Sonter's eyes went wide.

"*Bona nai kachu!*" <You're in trouble now!> The Toydarian replied, "*Kako kreespa!*" <Burn him!>

"Shut up!" Cosh Sonter demanded.

Slowly, Cosh Sonter started to back up, the Toydarian in his arms, away from the courtyard. He immediately saw that the rest of the Hutt resistance fighters were slowly approaching him too, armed to the teeth with blaster rifles.

"You're bantha *poodoo*, now." Kral Boka growled.

Then, just before the Hutt resistance fighters were ready to charge forward, there were explosions off to the westside of the village; several fireballs lit up the night sky. Instantly, the Hutt resistance fighters turned their attention towards the explosions; they all had confused expressions on their faces. Suddenly, pouring out from the swamps and into the village, several hundred of Thrak Zann's thugs charged. All of a sudden, the two forces erupted into violence, firing wildly into one another with blaster rifles.

Immediately taking advantage of the situation, Cosh Sonter smacked the butt of his hold-out blaster pistol across the skull of the Toydarian in his arms. The Toydarian collapsed onto the ground with a growl. Then, as fast as he could, Cosh Sonter ran east, away from the fighting; he headed towards the swamplands as fast as he could. All around him, blaster bolts lanced through the air; they shot passed Cosh, hitting the pavement and stone wall all around him. Suddenly, Cosh Sonter felt a sharp pain surge up through his leg; almost immediately, he collapsed onto the ground. Cosh Sonter screamed at the top of his lungs; wave after wave of pain flowed upwards into his spine. He grabbed his thigh; his hand was instantly covered with blood. Cosh rolled over and looked behind him; hovering at the end of the street, near the courtyard, was Kral Boka, a hold-out blaster pistol in his hands. Cosh looked down at his leg; the blaster bolt passed cleanly through the fleshy part of his thigh.

"Where do you think you're going in such a hurry?" The Toydarian taunted.

Immediately, purely on instinct, Cosh pulled out his own hold-out blaster pistol; both fired at one another. Cosh squeezed the trigger several times; the blaster bolts lanced through the darkness of the street, and struck the Toydarian in the chest and head, dropping him to the floor immediately. Luckily, the Toydarian's blaster bolts missed wide and short. After taking two quick breaths, Cosh Sonter dragged himself onto his feet, and limped his way towards the swamplands as fast as he could bare. With every step, pain and agony surged up through the wound; coupled with the fact that he was much slower now, doubt crept into Cosh's mind.

Nevertheless, Cosh Sonter limped and crawled his way towards the dark, dense swampland. Behind him, the roar of battle continued to rage. The screams of war, and

the concussion of bombs and blasters could be heard clear through the night air. Working through the agony, Cosh Sonter crawled through the dense swampland; he couldn't see two metres in front of him, but nevertheless crawled forward. The more steps he took, the farther away from the fighting it took him. Soon, after about fifteen minutes of limping and crawling through the mud, around trees, and trudging through knee-high stagnate water, Cosh couldn't hear the battle anymore.

Stopping to take a breath, he looked around the dark swampland; he couldn't see anything. Cosh Sonter cursed under his breath, then tried to tend to his wound. He opened up his survival pack and took out some bandages, gauze, and disinfectant; he quickly tied a makeshift tourniquet to try to stop the bleeding. Tying the tourniquet was especially painful; the surge of pain brought tears to his eyes. It seemed to work, but the pain was as agonizing as ever. Barring walking through the swamp alone and in the dark, he decided to rest there for the night. Tomorrow, he would continue towards the rendezvous point, wherever that was.

Severance

Onboard the *New Hope*, above Caamas:

The *Red Diamond* just landed within one of the *New Hope*'s hangar bays. Immediately after touching down, the landing ramp lowered. High Templar Malakon was first to exit, followed by Admiral Sibar Fre'kay, the rest of the former Admiralty, then the Jedi Knights Templars; Renz had decided to stay back and work on the YT-2400 light freighter. During the course of the escape, the *Red Diamond* experienced some hits from various blaster bolts and turbolasers. High Templar Malakon disembarked the light freighter, and was immediately greeted by a delegation of former Galactic Alliance high ranking officers; they were all wearing their Commonwealth issued uniforms, which looked oddly Imperial. Among those officers to greet High Templar Malakon was Commander Vuul Corr, a dark-skinned, muscular human male, whom since the end of the war was given command of a small task group, part of the Eastern Slice Second Fleet, designated to patrol the borders of the Colonies; High Templar Malakon remembered Commander Corr from the failed campaign on Manaan.

"First Consul." Commander Vuul Corr greeted.

Admiral Fre'kay rose his hand and shook his head, "It's just admiral now, Commander Corr."

"Yes, sir." Commander Corr replied, "I was getting worried you didn't make it off Coruscant."

"We made it off just fine." High Templar Malakon answered, "But we had to evade some Imperial Star Destroyers along the way. So, that makes us late."

"Understood." Commander Corr replied.

Immediately, the delegation headed for the bridge; as they walked, no one said a word. Talking about sensitive matters in public corridors was not a common practice, especially in the military. As High Templar Malakon walked along side Admiral Fre'kay, he noticed that the corridors were busy with activity. Finally, after walking for nearly ten minutes and taking a turbolift up, they reached the bridge. Like everywhere else on the *New Hope*, the bridge was alive with activity.

Immediately, they went into the private conference room. All the officers encircled a round table in the middle of the room; suddenly, the holographic projector, situated in the middle of the table, shined to life and the lights in the room dimmed theatrically. A holographic image of Coruscant projected into the air, slowly rotated about. The massive Coruscant Defence Fleet orbited above the city-world.

"What's the situation around Coruscant now?" Admiral Fre'kay asked.

"The Imperials are starting to crackdown on security." Commander Corr explained; it appeared that the rest of the officers whom comprised the delegation had already heard this, as they were not surprised, "Vanis has gone nuts. He's already re-routed the Second and Fourth Fleets back to Coruscant, strengthening the Defence Fleet."

"What of the Alliance?" Admiral Fre'kay asked.

Commander Corr was hesitant at the mention of the Alliance, but nevertheless answered the question, "Several Alliance officers have been arrested under the suspicion of treason or conspiracy to commit treason." Commander Corr replied, "Those whom escaped are here now."

"That bastard." Admiral Fre'kay growled; his brown fur rippled slightly.

High Templar Malakon looked around the conference room; there weren't that many Alliance officers here. Many of them were young men, barely old enough to have enlisted in the military during the Insurgency. The Imperials must have really cracked down on the Alliance fast.

"There have been reports of Imperials trying to arrest officers above other worlds as well. Corulag was one major instance of this." Commander Corr continued, "The result was less than ideal... for the Empire."

"Show me." Admiral Fre'kay demanded.

The holographic image quickly dissolved and reappeared as the fortress world of Corulag. It showed several Commonwealth *Pellaeon*-class Star Destroyers, reinforced by Commonwealth *Ardent*-class fast frigates fighting amongst themselves. The battle was vicious; the turbolaser batteries were fired at point-blank range, dealing serious damage to each capital ship. Fireballs of flames and shrapnel littered the hulls of the various capital ships.

"As it turns out, the vice-admiral assigned to the task force above Corulag, a former Alliance commander, refused arrest." Commander Corr explained, "After the Imperials forcibly tried to take the officer into custody, his men on the bridge attacked the Imperials. A naval battle ensued."

"The result?" Admiral Fre'kay asked.

Commander Corr hesitated for a moment, "This is real-time, sir."

"This is despicable, even for a man like Vanis." J'r'miah replied in disgust.

"He probably had this all planned out." El'kar Urope added, "His own little coup."

The Bothan admiral growled; then, after regaining his composure, "What else has happened while we were gone?"

Commander Corr swallowed, "With the emplacement of the Marshall Plan, and the recent debacle on Coruscant, Admiral Yash has led a separatist movement that has just announced its secession from the Galactic Commonwealth."

"That little rodent Yash!" Aztin Varss screamed.

"No wonder he was never at any of our meetings!" El'kar Urope proclaimed, "He was out sowing the seeds of secession!"

"Who has seceded from the Commonwealth?" Admiral Varss growled.

Understandably intimidated, "The Five Worlds of Corellia, Kuat and its subsidiaries, Fondor, and—" Commander Corr paused and looked towards High Templar Malakon, "Empress Teta."

High Templar Malakon looked down in depression, and let out a long sigh. He clenched his hands into fists, and closed his eyes in disbelief for a moment. This was the worst scenario High Templar Malakon could of thought of. *Empress Teta*? He thought, *why*? Slowly, he shook his head in doubt. Never in all his years would he think Lerona would betray him.

Commander Corr continued, "Admiral Yash has taken elements of the Arrowhead Fleets, the Deep Core Fleets, the Eastern Slice Fleets, and the Southern Fleets with him." He explained, "As far as we can estimate, the seperatists under Admiral Yash are quite formidable."

Ignoring High Templar Malakon's obvious displeasure, "Is there any way that Yash would join forces with us?" Admiral J'r'miah asked.

"No chance." Admiral Urope immediately answered, "Yash is a power-hungry egotist. He would never ally himself with us, knowing full well that he would have to share power with us." He explained with a hint of revulsion in his tone, "That's

probably why he went behind our backs on this and approached those systems in private."

Admiral Fre'kay stood in disbelief, "Those worlds have some of the largest orbital shipyards in the galaxy." He explained, "With those under Yash's thumb, he could build a navy faster than anyone in the galaxy."

"Not to mention those were some of the largest fleets in the Commonwealth." Admiral J'r'miah added.

After a few quite moments, "We should definitely keep an eye on Yash." Admiral Varss suggested.

"More than that." Admiral Fre'kay replied, "What is Vanis doing about this?"

"Not much at the moment." Commander Corr answered, "The news of Corellia's secession isn't sitting well on Coruscant, but as of yet, there isn't much activity directed towards Corellia or the other worlds that seceded."

"That's surprising... especially coming from Vanis." High Templar Malakon replied.

"Surprising, but understandable." Admiral Fre'kay replied, "Vanis is focusing on us at the moment. He can't split his focus on Corellia. That's probably why Yash announced his secession now."

The rest of the admirals had already come to that conclusion, it seemed. Finally, after waiting patiently enough, High Templar Malakon spoke, "What about Thrak Zann?"

Commander Corr straightened his posture, "We have reports that Thrak Zann is currently moving from Hutt Space towards Bothan Space."

"Thrak Zann is planning on attacking the Bothans!" Admiral Fre'kay growled in rage.

Commander Corr, taken aback by the sudden outburst, quickly replied, "No, sir!" Admiral Fre'kay immediately calmed down, "It appears that Thrak Zann has taken a shuttle towards Bothawui. It is currently unknown what he is planning."

"I think it's pretty obvious, Commander." High Templar Malakon replied, "He wants an alliance with the Bothans."

Admiral Fre'kay shook his head, his brown fur rippled with disgust, "Bothawui has the seventh largest orbital shipyard in the galaxy." Admiral Fre'kay informed, "If Thrak Zann entices an alliance with the Bothans, they'd have a powerful foothold in the Mid Rim."

The revelation that the Bothans might get roped in with Thrak Zann obviously displeased Admiral Fre'kay.

"Why has it taken this long to get reports from this region?" Admiral Varss asked.

Commander Corr, once again, straightened his posture, "To be honest, sir, we've been having some technical difficulties getting information in and out of the Outer Rim. The HoloNet seems to be... malfunctioning."

"Down transmitter?" Admiral Jr'miah asked.

"All of them?" Admiral Urope replied, "Unlikely."

"A jamming signal then." High Templar Malakon replied, "Some sort of computer virus?"

"That seems very improbable." Admiral Fre'kay replied, "The HoloNet has some of the best firewalls and anti-slicer programs installed. Their encryptions are top-of-the-line. Slicing in and implanting malicious software seems very improbable indeed."

"But not impossible." High Templar Malakon replied.

Admiral Fre'kay nodded, "Not impossible."

"Can we still contact our fleet above Dac?" El'kar Urope asked.

Commander Corr shook his head, "We have had no contact from Dac since Thrak Zann moved against Hutt Space."

There was a slight murmur from the Alliance admirals.

After a few moments of silence, "What about the pilot?" High Templar Malakon asked, "What do we know about the situation around Nal Hutta?"

"Nal Hutta seems to be Thrak Zann's new central hub. All his operations, including military and illegitimate, seem to stream out of Nal Hutta now." Commander Corr explained, "As for the pilot in question, we have no word on his current... status."

"Who is the pilot?" High Templar Malakon asked.

Deflecting, "The *Protectorate* just arrived above Caamas less than a standard day ago." Commander Corr replied, "Reports are still streaming in."

"I don't need to know the details, just the name of the pilot." High Templar Malakon replied, "Who is the pilot?"

There were a few moments of hesitation and silence, until finally, "Commander Cosh Sonter, High Templar." Commander Corr finally, grudgingly, answered.

High Templar Malakon was completely taken aback by the revelation. For several moments, he couldn't even comprehend the magnitude of the situation. He was wide-eyed with surprise, and completely shocked to hear the news. Slowly, he fell into a lull depression.

"I'm sorry, Mathias." Admiral Fre'kay replied.

High Templar Malakon simply stood where he was, stunned and confused about the news just presented to him. He couldn't imagine how this could of happened, and how he didn't even know what had happened to his friend.

"Okay. So that's the situation we've got ourselves in..." Admiral Fre'kay started.

High Templar Malakon didn't hear a word of what was said next; the world seemed to slowly fade away, into the background, from him, isolating him within his own thoughts. A flurry of emotions surged up through him. He didn't know what he was going to do. Suddenly, he snapped back towards reality, after what seemed like an eternity.

"... moving towards the Mid Rim." Commander Corr finished his statement.

Suddenly, High Templar Malakon stormed out of the conference room. Suddenly, he knew what he had to do. The rest of the officers in the conference room were surprised at the sudden departure; well, maybe not surprised, but disappointed. Almost immediately, Admiral Fre'kay hurried out to catch up to him.

"Mathias, I know what you're thinking." Admiral Fre'kay started, "And I don't blame you. But you've got to think about the bigger picture here!"

"And what's that?" High Templar Malakon replied, still walking down the corridor, headed towards the turbolift.

"That we've got a gigantic clusterfrack on our hands, Mathias." Admiral Fre'kay growled in a rather angered tone; he paused, a ripple surged through his brown fur, "The galaxy has torn itself apart, and we're going to need you here, functional and alert!"

"Sir, with all due respect, I am not going to be functional and alert when I know Cosh is out there fighting for his life on a hostile world." High Templar Malakon countered.

"And what? You're going to rescue him I suppose." Admiral Fre'kay retorted, "Mathias, what you're talking about is suicide! You don't even know if he's still alive!"

High Templar Malakon stepped onto the turbolift, and turned to face the admiral, "Cosh is alive. I know it."

The turbolift doors slide shut, and shot High Templar Malakon down towards the hangar bay floor. He immediately stepped off the turbolift and ran towards the main hangar deck. He searched the massive hangar for Renz; finally, after what seemed like forever, he found him. He walked over towards the YT-2400 light freighter; Renz was on top of the freighter, working on his ship.

High Templar Malakon gazed up for a moment and watched what Renz was doing. Renz had a laser in his hands, removing the paint on the hull. Briefly, High Templar Malakon saw what he was removing; it was a black Commonwealth emblem. Then he remembered; all Commonwealth vessels, civilian or military, were required by law to embody the emblem. Then, not wanting to waste anymore time, High Templar Malakon coughed; the gesture caught Renz's attention.

"Oh! It's you!" Renz replied, "Done so soon?"

Renz turned back around and finished removing the rest of the Commonwealth emblem. The laser burned the paint off the hull with a brief puff of smoke. He then placed another template on top of the hull, in the same place where the emblem had been before, and started spray painting the hull black.

"Hey." High Templar Malakon started, "Do you know of any routes into Nal Hutta that might not be known by anyone... respectable?"

Renz finished spray painting the hull, then slid off the ship. High Templar Malakon looked passed Renz; he was repainting the hull of his light freighter with something High Templar Malakon couldn't quite see from his vantage point.

Renz turned around, "Hutt Space, huh? Why?"

"Listen." High Templar Malakon replied, "Cosh has been shot down over Nal Hutta." He could tell that Renz was even surprised slightly, "And I'm going to get him back."

Renz slouched in a shocked depression; finally, after thinking about the question for several moments, "There might be a route into Hutt Space... although, I've never tried it myself."

"Dangerous?" High Templar Malakon asked.

"Not sure." Renz replied, "The Hutts were famous for mining the borders of their territory. And there's no telling what Thrak Zann did since." Finally, Renz looked up towards High Templar Malakon, "Why are you asking all this?"

"You want in?" High Templar Malakon asked.

Renz walked up to High Templar Malakon, wiping his hands of the grease and paint covering them with a towel. High Templar Malakon stood steady, waiting for a reply. Suddenly, something behind Renz caught his eye; Renz followed High Templar Malakon's line-of-sight, looking at the emblem.

"Yeah. I figured... we're no longer the Commonwealth." Renz answered, "Might as well go back to the Alliance."

High Templar Malakon nodded; tears started to well up at the corners of his eyes. It had been a while since High Templar Malakon gazed upon the Galactic Alliance emblem; it was beautiful to see again.

"You can count me in." Renz answered.

High Templar Malakon blinked the tears from his eyes, then placed a hand on his shoulder, "Thank you."

"When do we leave?" Renz asked.

"Now." High Templar Malakon answered.

"Alright, let me just get my stuff." Renz replied.

After about ten more minutes, Renz was finally read to lift off. Although they weren't officially given clearance to take off, Renz usually ignored those kind of rules

anyways. High Templar Malakon took up the co-pilots seat; Renz in the pilot's seat, the yoke in his hands.

"Let's rendezvous with the *Protectorate* first." High Templar Malakon suggested, "I think I know where we can get more help."

"Sure thing." Renz replied.

They flew out of the port lateral hangar of the *New Hope* and banked gently towards the left. They flew past several Alliance, former Commonwealth, capital ships; the capital ships, at the moment anyways, were in disarray. They mostly consisted of *Scythe*-class battle cruisers, *Tri-Scythe*-class and *ShaShore*-class frigates, *Sabertooth*-class Assault & Rescue vessels, and a handful of *Ardent*-class fast frigates and *Pellaeon*-class Star Destroyers. The latter were probably Imperial vessels under the command of Alliance officers at the time of the collapse.

While flying towards the *Ardent*-class fast frigate, the *Protectorate*, in front of them, Renz asked, "So, what's happening up there?"

High Templar Malakon shook his head, "Well, it finally happened." He replied, "A war between the Admiralty. The worst kind of war."

"What's that?" Renz asked.

"Civil war." High Templar Malakon answered.

Renz looked over at High Templar Malakon with fear in his eyes. Everyone had heard of the First Galactic Civil War, and how long and brutal that war had lasted; a short-lived, but equally vicious war, the Second Galactic Civil War, also known as the Confederation-Alliance War, tore the galaxy apart. If history was any indicator of things to come, this war, High Templar Malakon thought, would be much, much worse. A sickening sensation ran through High Templar Malakon's stomach.

They passed the atmospheric containment field of the *Protectorate* and touched down; a spit of dust shot out from under the light freighter, kicked up by the powerful repulsorlifts. Renz lowered the boarding ramp, but remained seated in the cockpit. High Templar Malakon immediately stepped out of the *Red Diamond*, and was greeted by Commodore Fre'kay.

"High Templar, we were told to expect you." Commodore Fre'kay replied.

"And your orders?" High Templar Malakon asked.

"Make sure you didn't leave the system." Commodore Fre'kay answered, "Of course."

"And?" High Templar Malakon sternly asked.

"And, if you're about to do what I think you're about to do," Commodore Fre'kay replied, "Then you won't get any resistance from me."

High Templar Malakon smiled, "Good. Now, Commodore, I'm going to need you to rally all your men here." He informed, "Everyone. Officers, pilots, even the janitors."

"Consider it done." Commodore Fre'kay replied.

For about ten minutes High Templar Malakon watched as a near constant stream of personnel flowed into the relatively small hangar bay. Finally, working his way through the crowd of personnel, Commodore Fre'kay made it to the front of the mass. There, High Templar Malakon was waiting for him.

"That's everyone." Commodore Fre'kay informed.

High Templar Malakon stepped atop one of the small step ladders on the hangar deck, and shouted over the crowd, "As you all know, one of our pilots was shot down, and is now fighting for his life on the hostile world of Nal Hutta!" He began, "It is my intention, to go behind enemy lines, and retrieve him! This is a decision I have made for myself!"

He looked around the crowd; all their faces were determined and serious. It was eerie; they were all so quiet. He continued, "No one should feel obligated to join this mission! Anyone that wants to join, is welcomed to do so!" Suddenly, High Templar Malakon became very serious, "Make no illusions! This is likely to be... a one-way trip!"

The crowd started to murmur; regardless, High Templar Malakon continued, "All volunteers, step towards the starboard-side!" He pointed towards the starboard-side of the hangar bay, "Everyone else, to port!" He paused, "Make your choice!"

There was a moment of hesitation within the crowd. Surprisingly, the first person to walk towards the starboard-side was one of the new recruits to Razor Squadron; High Templar Malakon couldn't remember her name. Suddenly, it came to him. Lights. Lights was her name. As expected, the rest of Razor Squadron soon followed; they all had a determined and confident aura around them. Slowly, volunteers trickled over towards the starboard-side. Officers, soldiers; commissioned

and non-commissioned personnel, alike. It appeared that everyone was willing to risk their lives to get Cosh Sonter back. High Templar Malakon nodded his head in pride. The gesture brought tears to his eyes, but he quickly blinked them away.

"Alright." High Templar Malakon replied, "Let's go get our pilot!"

Property of Sean P. Funk

Extras





Light-side Users Force Table:

Tier 1	Tier 2	Tier 3	Tier 4	Combo 1	Combo 2
Force Push	Force Whirlwind	Force Repulse	Force Wave		
Force Suppression	Force Breach	Hinder Force	Blind Force		
Throw Lightsaber	Advanced Throw Lightsaber	Master Throw Lightsaber	Lightsaber Shield		
Force Assist	Force Combat	Master Force Combat	Perfect Force Combat		
Burst of Speed	Knight Speed	Master Speed	Teleport	Forcible Transport (Wave, Teleport)	
Force Resistance	Force Protection	Master Immunity	Impervious	<i>Protection</i> (Breach, Immunity, Energy, Armour, Valour, Barrier)	<i>Force Light</i> (Protection, Battle Meditation, Redirect, Heal)
Energy Resistance	Improved Energy Res.	Master Energy Res.	Perfect Energy Res.		
Affect Mind	Improved Affect Mind	Master Affect Mind	Dominate Mind		
Force Body	Improved Force Body	Master Force Body	Body Meditation		
Battle Meditation	Improved Battle Meditation	Master Battle Meditation	Perfect Battle Meditation		
Force Deflection	Improved Deflection	Force Redirection	Perfect Redirection		
Mind Trick	Improved Mind Trick	Master Mind Trick	Perfect Mind Trick		
<i>Heal</i>	<i>Improved Heal</i>	<i>Master Heal</i>	<i>Perfect Heal</i>		
<i>Force Aura</i>	<i>Force Shield</i>	<i>Master Armour</i>	<i>Perfect Armour</i>		

<i>Force Valour</i>	<i>Knight Valour</i>	<i>Master Valour</i>	<i>Perfect Valour</i>	<i>Force Enlightenment</i> (Speed, Armour, Valour)	
<i>Daze</i>	<i>Stun</i>	<i>Stasis</i>	<i>Stasis Field</i>		
<i>Daze Droid</i>	<i>Stun Droid</i>	<i>Disable Droid</i>	<i>Destroy Droid</i>		
<i>Force Barrier</i>	<i>Improved Barrier</i>	<i>Master Barrier</i>	<i>Perfect Barrier</i>		
<i>Revitalize</i>	<i>Improved Revitalize</i>	<i>Force Resuscitation</i>	<i>Perfect Resuscitation</i>		
<u>Drain Life</u>	<u>Improved Drain Life</u>				
<u>Shock</u>	<u>Force Lightning</u>				
<u>Drain Force</u>	<u>Improved Drain Force</u>				
<u>Fear</u>	<u>Horror</u>				
<u>Slow</u>	<u>Affliction</u>				
<u>Wound</u>	<u>Choke</u>				
<u>Force Scream</u>	<u>Improved Scream</u>				
<u>Force Ignite</u>	<u>Force Engulf</u>				
<u>Sith Alchemy</u>	<u>Improved Alchemy</u>				

Galactic Federation of Free Alliances Fleet:

	X-83 TwinTail starfighter	CF9 Crossfire starfighter	BB-2 Starfire fighter-bomber
Climbing Rate:	Low	Moderate	Low
Manoeuvrability:	Moderate	Low	Low
Armament:	Moderate (Enhanced heavy laser cannons; proton torpedoes)	Heavy (laser cannons; double light laser cannons; proton torpedoes)	Heavy (laser cannons; light laser cannon; interceptor missiles; proton torpedo salvo; ion bomb)
Speed (in atm):	1200 km/hr	1200 km/hr	1200 km/hr
Shielding/Armour:	170 hp	150 hp	170 hp (+ regenerating shields)
Sensory Package:	Astromech Droid	Navicomputer	Navicomputer
Hyperdrive:	Class 1.0	Class 1.0	Class 1.0
Special Feats:	None	None	None
Make:	Incom Corporation	Incom Corporation	SoroSuub Corporation

	J-1 shuttle	Crix-class Assault Shuttle	MT Dropship
Climbing Rate:	High	Moderate	Low
Manoeuvrability:	Moderate	Moderate	Low
Armament:	Light (Double laser cannons)	Light (twin laser cannons; two blaster cannons)	Light (laser cannon; concussion missiles)
Speed (in atm):	850 km/hr	850 km/hr	850 km/hr
Shielding/Armour:	110 hp	200 hp	300 hp
Sensory Package:	Navicomputer	Navicomputer	None
Hyperdrive:	Class 2.0	Class 1.0 (backup 10.0)	None
Complements:	One X-83 TwinTail starfighter	Two Landspeeders or six speeder bikes	Depends on configuration
Personnel:	Crew: 2 Passengers: 20	Crew: 5 Passengers: 50	Crew: 15 Passengers: 200
Make:	Koensayr Manufacturing	Corellian Engineering Corporation/ Mon Calamari Shipyards	Corellian Engineering Corporation

	<i>Sabertooth-class Rescue & Assault Vessel</i>	<i>ShaShore-class frigate</i>	<i>Scythe-class battle cruiser</i>	<i>Tri-Scythe-class frigate</i>
Armament:	Light (30 turbo; 20 point-defence)	Moderate (60 turbolasers; 20 point-defence; 20 torpedo)	Heavy (30 hvy turbolasers; 60 turbo; 20 ion; 40 torpedo)	Moderate (100 turbolasers; 20 point-defence; 40 torpedo)
Armour:	780 hp	900 hp	1900 hp	920 hp
Hyperdrive	Class 1.0 (backup 10.0)	Class 1.0 (backup 10.0)	Class 0.75 (backup 8.0)	Class 1.0 (backup 10.0)
Complements:	None	CF9 Crossfire starfighter (24); shuttle (2)	CF9 Crossfire starfighter (36); shuttle (4)	CF9 Crossfire starfighter (12); shuttle (2)
Personnel:	Crew: 800; Troops: 300	Crew: 1200; Troops: 250	Crew: 5200; Troops: 1500	Crew: 1400; Troops: 250
Make:	---	Mon Calamari Shipyards	Mon Calamari Shipyards	Mon Calamari Shipyards

	The New Hope (Dread Lord-class Star Dreadnought)
Affiliation:	Galactic Alliance (Varies)
Armament:	Heavy (550 hvy turbo; 500 turbo; 10 long-range turbolaser; 4 planetary ion; 75 ion)
Armour:	5000 hp
Hyperdrive	Class 0.5 (backup 5.0)
Complements:	<i>Predator-class starfighter (600); Neutralizer-class bomber (100); shuttles; walkers (100)</i>
Personnel:	Crew: 712,000; Troops: 150,000
Make:	Kuat Drive Yards

New Galactic Empire Fleet:

	<i>Predator-class starfighter</i>	<i>TIE/D Mark II Defender</i>	<i>Fury-class starfighter</i>	<i>Neutralizer- class bomber</i>
Climbing Rate:	High	High	High	Moderate
Manoeuvrability:	High	High	Moderate	Low
Armament:	Light (two double medium laser cannons)	Heavy (four cannons; two ion cannons; two proton torpedoes)	Light (Adv. Hvy laser cannons)	Moderate (double medium laser cannon; proton torpedoes)
Speed (in atm):	1500 km/hr	1680 km/hr	1320 km/hr	1500 km/hr
Shielding/Armour:	100 hp	175 hp (+ regenerating shields)	180 hp	120 hp
Sensory Package:	Navicomputer	Navicomputer	Navicomputer	Navicomputer
Hyperdrive:	Class 1.0	Class 1.0	Class 0.75	Class 1.0
Special Feats:	None	None	None	None
Make:	Sienar Fleet Systems	Sienar Fleet Systems	SoroSuub Corporation	Sienar Fleet Systems

	<i>Nune-class shuttle</i>	<i>Sigma-class long-ranged shuttle</i>
Climbing Rate:	Low	Low
Manoeuvrability:	Moderate	Low
Armament:	Moderate (Medium laser cannons; double hvy laser cannons)	Light (Double hvy laser cannons)
Speed (in atm):	900 km/hr	950 km/hr
Shielding/Armour:	150 hp	130 hp
Sensory Package:	Navicomputer	Navicomputer
Hyperdrive:	Class 1.0 (backup 10.0)	Class 1.0 (backup 8.0)
Complements:	None	None
Personnel:	Crew: 8 Passengers: 35	Crew: 1 Passengers: 10
Make:	Sienar Fleet Systems	Sienar Fleet Systems

	<i>Ardent-class fast frigate</i>	<i>Pellaeon-class Star Destroyer</i>	<i>Imperious-class Advanced Star Destroyer</i>	<i>Interdictor- class Star Destroyer</i>
Armament:	Moderate (50 hvy turbolasers; 30 turbolasers; 50 point-defence)	Heavy: (50 hvy turbolasers; 50 turbolasers; 40 ion; 50 torpedo)	Heavy: (50 hvy turbolasers; 50 turbolasers; 40 ion cannons; 50 torpedo)	Light (4 interdictors; 10 hvy turbolasers; 10 ion cannons)
Armour:	1200 hp	2350 hp	2500 hp	2200 hp
Hyperdrive	Class 1.0 (backup 12.0)	Class 0.75	Class 0.75	Class 0.75
Complements:	<i>Predator-class starfighters (12)</i>	<i>Predator-class starfighters (48); Nune-class shuttle (6)</i>	<i>Predator-class starfighters (48); Neutralizer-class bomber (12); Nune-class shuttle (6)</i>	None
Personnel:	Crew: 1400; Troops: 200	Crew: 8450; Troops: 2700	Crew: 6700; Troops: 3000	Crew: 7000 Troops: 1000
Make:	Kuat Drive Yards	Kuat Drive Yards	Kuat Drive Yards	Kuat Drive Yards

	<i>The Imperatrix (Imperious-class Advanced Star Destroyer)</i>	Eye of Palpatine
Affiliation:	Galactic Empire (Grand Admiral Narklin Danakar)	Galactic Empire (Grand Admiral Narklin Danakar)
Armament:	Heavy (50 hvy turbolaser; 50 turbolaser; 40 ion cannons; 50 torpedo)	Superweapon (12 planet. Turbo; 12 planet. Ion; >1000 turbolasers + ion cannons; torpedo launchers)
Armour:	3000 hp	10,000 hp
Hyperdrive	Class 0.5 (backup 8.0)	Class 0.4 (backup 4.0)
Complements:	<i>Predator-class starfighters (48); Neutralizer-class bomber (12); Nune-class shuttle (6)</i>	<i>Predator-class starfighters (>1000); Neutralizer-class bomber (>1000); Nune-class shuttle (>100)</i>
Personnel:	Crew: 6700; Troops: 3000	Crew: 1,000,000 Troops: 750,000
Make:	Kuat Drive Yards	---

	AT-AHT	AT-RCT	Century Mark V Tank	Kybuck Speeder Bike
Armament:	Heavy (Hvy laser cannons; hvy blaster cannons)	Light (double medium blaster cannons; suppression cannons or grenade launcher)	Medium (dual hvy blaster cannon; light and medium blaster cannons)	Light (weapon)
Armour:	350 hp	120 hp	200 hp (+ regenerating shields)	50 hp
Speed:	80 km/hr	90 km/hr	60 km/hr	500 km/hr
Complements:	8 speeder bikes or 3 AT-RCTs	None	None	None
Personnel:	Crew: 5 Troops: 60	Crew: 2	Crew: 3	Crew: 1
Make:	Kuat Drive Yards	Kuat Drive Yards	Santhe/Sienar Technologies	Aratech Repulsor Company

Thrak Zann's Crime Syndicate Fleet:

	StarViper-class attack platform	TIE/sa Interdictor
Climbing Rate:	Moderate	Low
Manoeuvrability:	High	Low
Armament:	Heavy (twin double hvy laser cannons; proton torpedoes)	Heavy (laser cannons; proton torpedoes; conc. missiles; bombs)
Speed (in atm):	1320 km/hr	850 km/hr
Shielding/Armour:	160 hp	200 hp
Sensory Package:	Navicomputer	Navicomputer
Hyperdrive:	Class 1.0	Class 1.5
Special Feats:	None	None
Make:	MandalMotors/ Mandal Hypernavics	Sienar Fleet Systems

	Venator-class Star Destroyer
Armament:	Moderate (8 hvy turbolasers; 2 medium turbolasers; turbolasers; 52 point-defences; 4 torpedo tubes)
Armour:	2000 hp
Hyperdrive	Class 1.0 (backup 15.0)
Complements:	<i>StarViper</i> -class fighter (240); TIE/sa Interdictor (36); shuttles
Personnel:	Crew: 7400; Troops: 2000
Make:	Kuat Drive Yards (Mod. By Thrak Zann)

	TIE ap-1 (aka Mauler)	TZ-1 Hunter-Killer Droid
Armament:	Moderate (triple medium blaster cannons)	Moderate (two triple blaster rifles)
Armour:	100 hp	65 hp
Speed:	90 km/hr	30 km/hr
Complements:	None	Proton rockets
Personnel:	Crew: 1	A.I.
Make:	Santhe/Sienar Technologies	Thrak Zann

The Fringe: Renz:

	Red Diamond (YT-2400)
Climbing Rate:	Low
Manoeuvrability:	Moderate
Armament:	Light (Hvy dual laser cannons; missile tubes)
Speed (in atm):	1000 km/hr
Shielding/Armour:	250 hp
Sensory Package:	Adv. Navicomputer
Hyperdrive:	Class 0.5 (backup 8.0)
Special Feats:	Adv. Sensors + Stealth
Make:	Corellian Engineering Corporation

Approximate Hyperspace Travel-Time Equations:

Distance (parsecs):	Approximate Time-Travel Equations:
≤ 10 pc	(1 hr · (distance in parsecs)) · (hyperdrive class)
11 pc < distance ≤ 100 pc	(10 hrs + (½ hr · distance in parsecs / 4)) · (hyperdrive class)
101 pc < distance ≤ 1000 pc	(22.5 hrs + (½ hr · distance in parsecs / 50)) · (hyperdrive class)
> 1000 pc	(32.5 hrs + (½ hr · distance in parsecs / 150)) · (hyperdrive class)

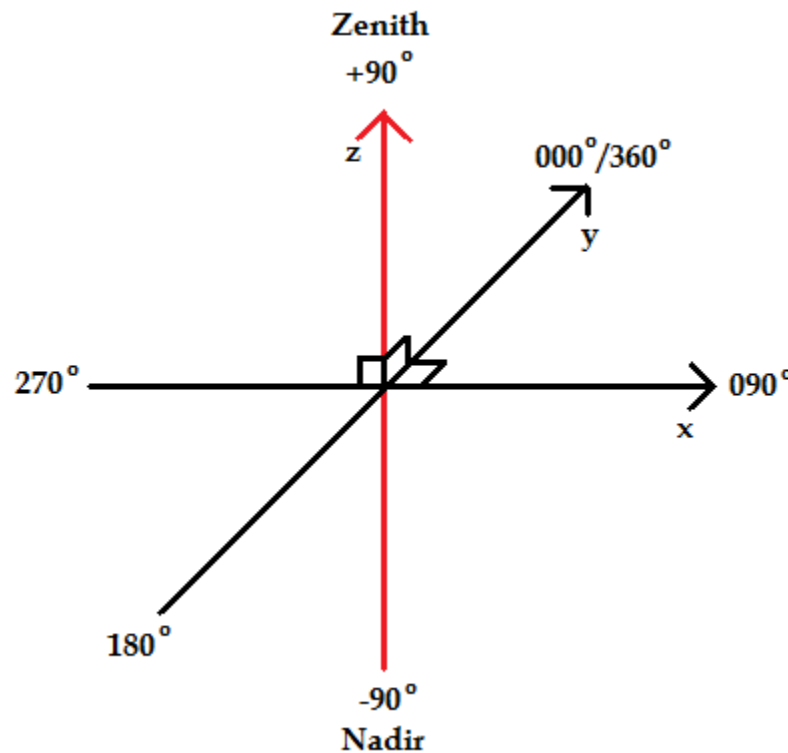
Path Modifiers: Major/commercial lanes: dec. 30%; Secondary lanes: dec. 20%;
Hyperspace beacon present: dec. 10%; Standard lane: standard time; Uncharted lane:
inc. 25%;

Pilot Skill Modifiers: Extensive knowledge: dec. 30%; Limited knowledge: dec. 20%;
Hearsay knowledge: standard time; No knowledge: inc. 25%;

Gravity Modifiers (each): Planets/planetoids: inc. time 0.1%; Stars: inc. time 0.5%;
Hypergravity anomalies (black hole, neutron stars, star clusters, interdiction fields, etc):
inc. time 1% to 5%;

Phonetic Alphabet:

A	Atom	N	Nebula
B	Bacta	O	Optic
C	Constellation	P	Prince
D	Delta	Q	Quasar
E	Echo	R	Rho
F	Felucia	S	Sabacc
G	Gamma	T	Tango
H	Halo	U	Uniform
I	Icon	V	Vortex
J	Juno	W	Whiskey
K	Kessel	X	X-Ray
L	Lucas	Y	Yavin
M	Meteor	Z	Zeta

Spherical Coordinate System:

Bearing: denotes a direction, ranging in angles 000° through to 359° on the xy-plane

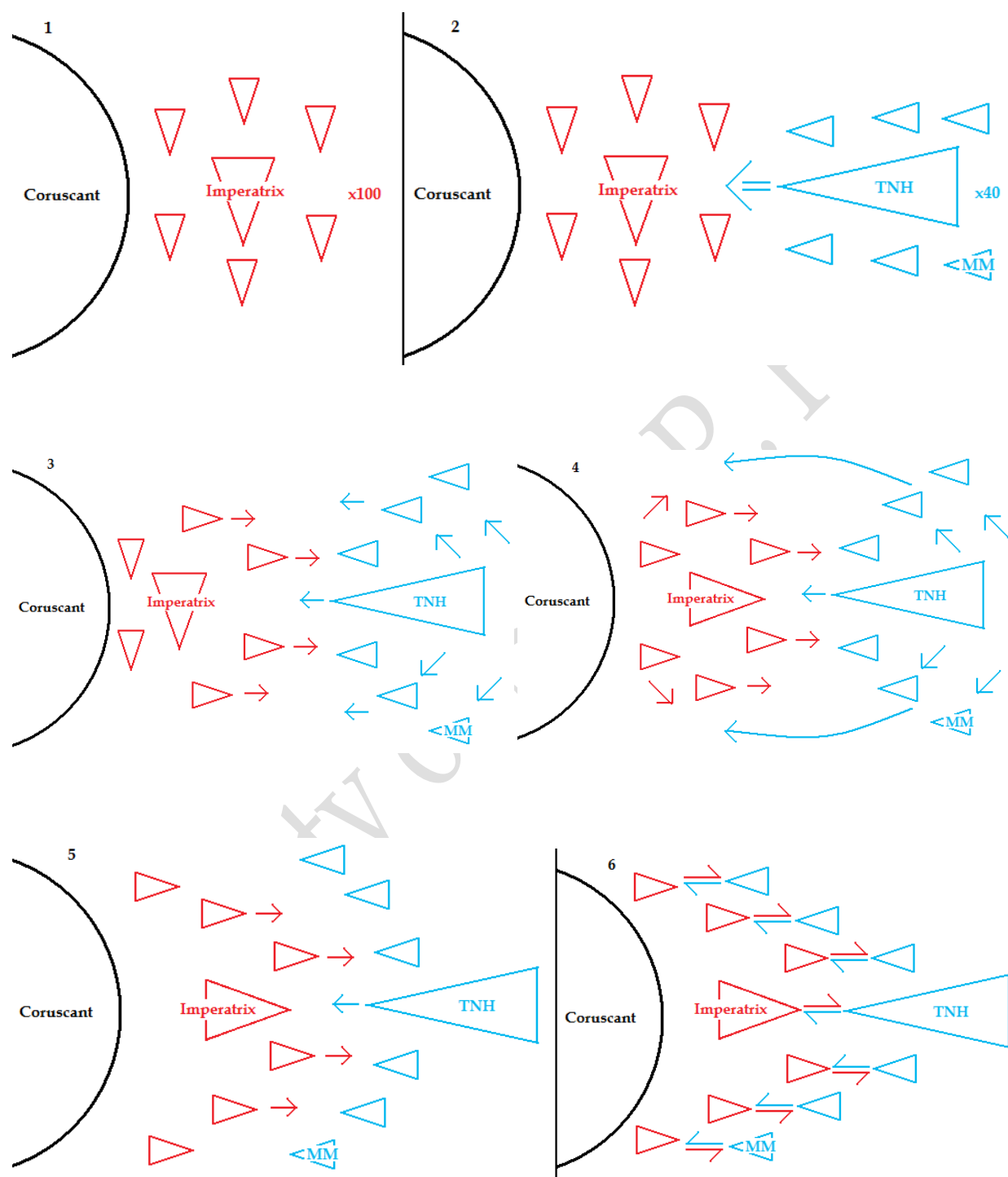
Zenith: denotes a vertical angle, ranging from +00° through to +90° on the upper half of the xyz-space

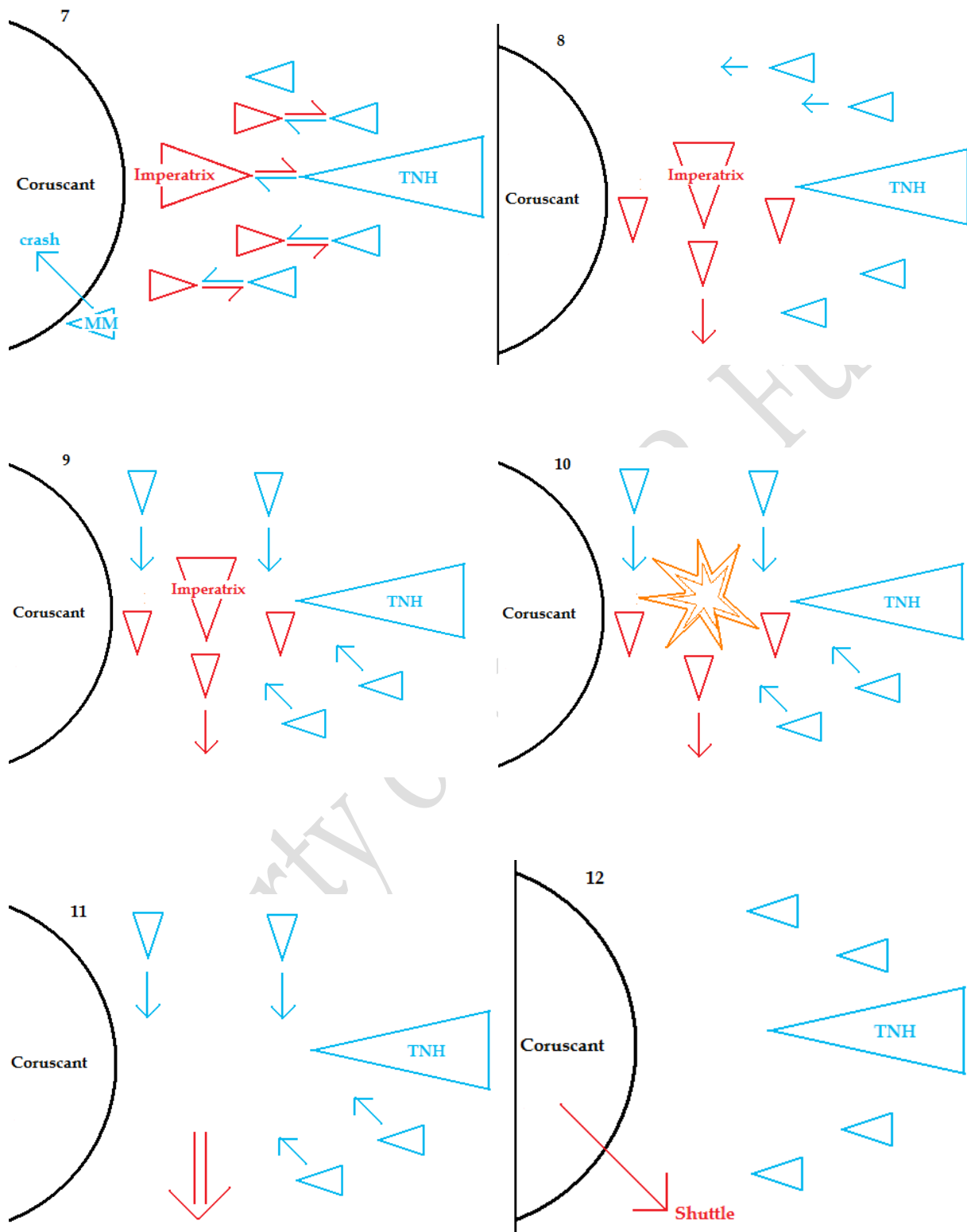
Nadir: denotes a vertical angle, ranging from -00° through to -90° on the lower half of the xyz-space

Range: denotes the distance an object is from the origin (0,0,0) while in xyz-space; modifiers include adding the terms 'closing' or 'retreating' to denote an object incoming or outgoing, respectively (if known, a velocity for the object may be added)

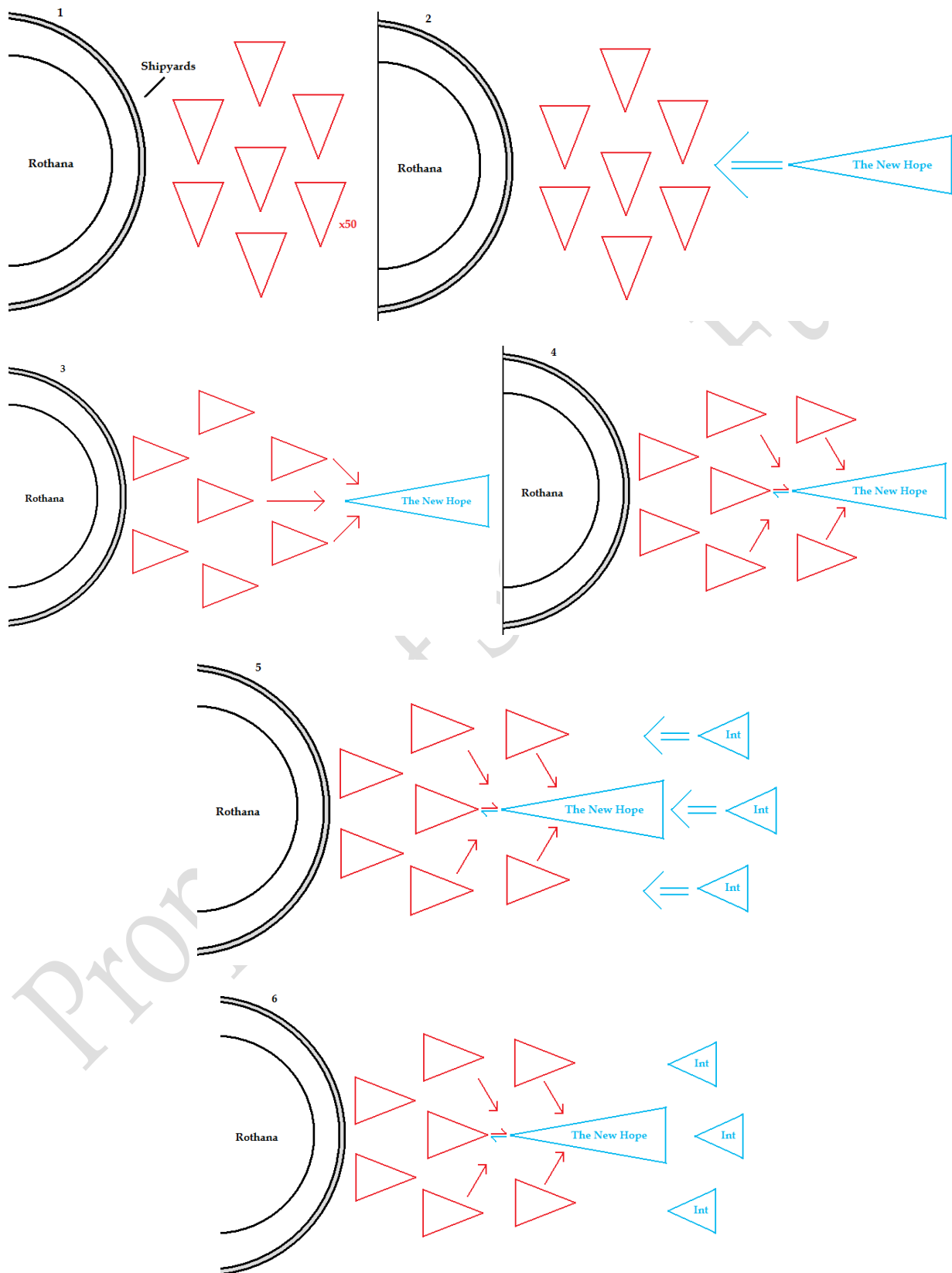
E.g.) Bearing two-one-zero, nadir forty degrees, range ten kilometres retreating (this denotes a target located at seven o'clock (behind you), and below the horizontal plane by forty degrees, and ten kilometres away, heading away from you)

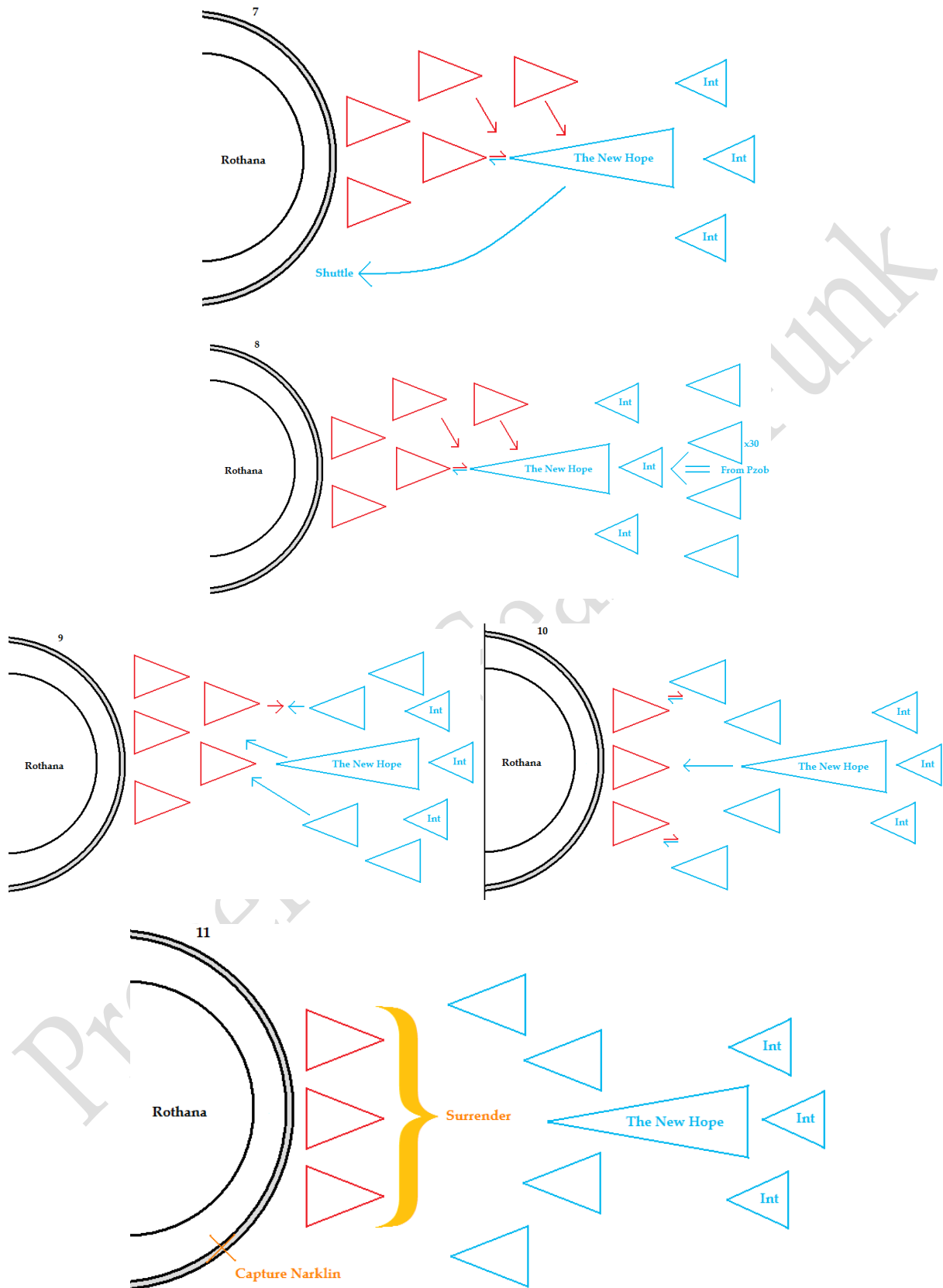
Battle of Coruscant: 143.5 ABY:



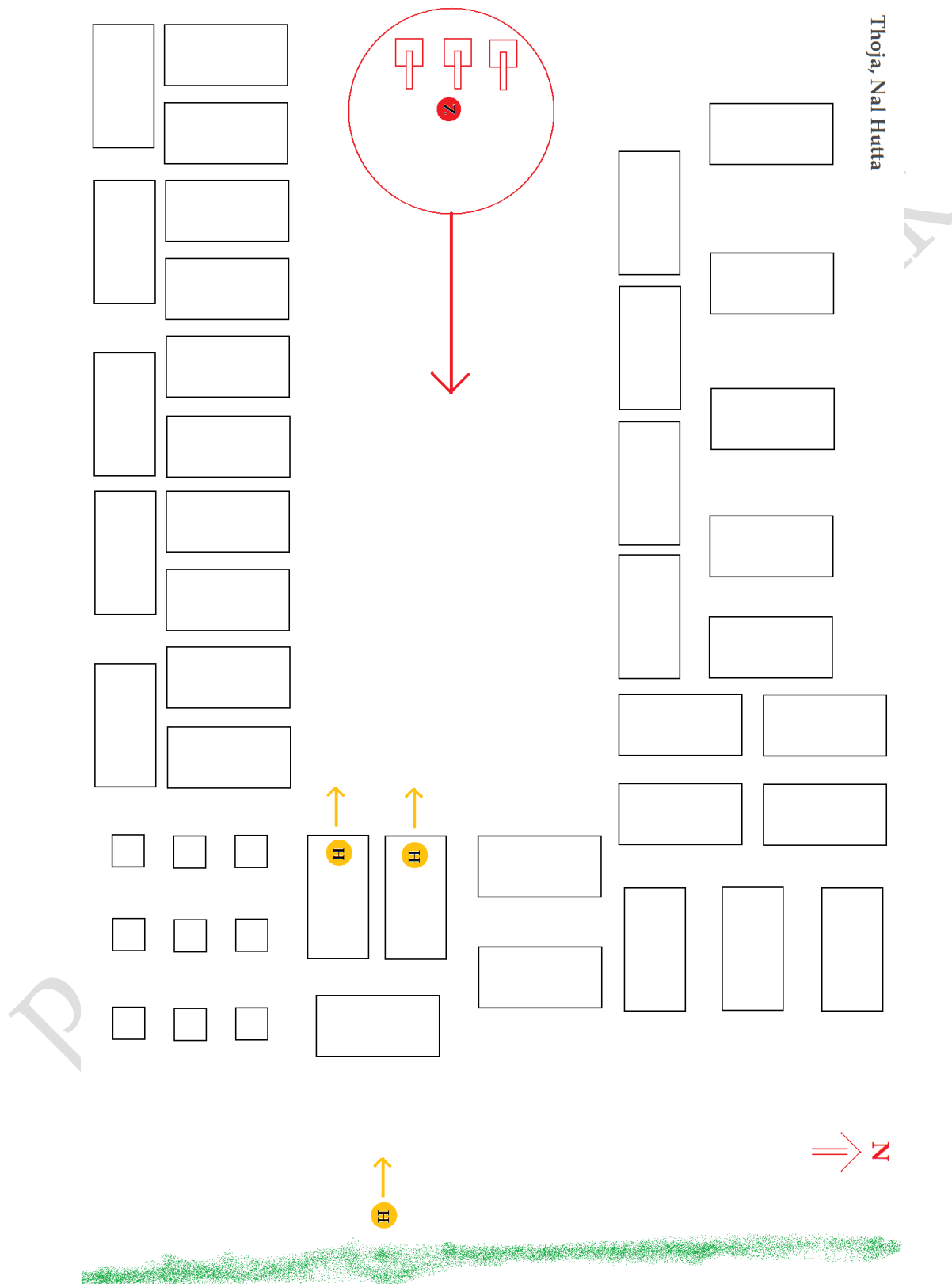


Battle of Rothana: 144 ABY:



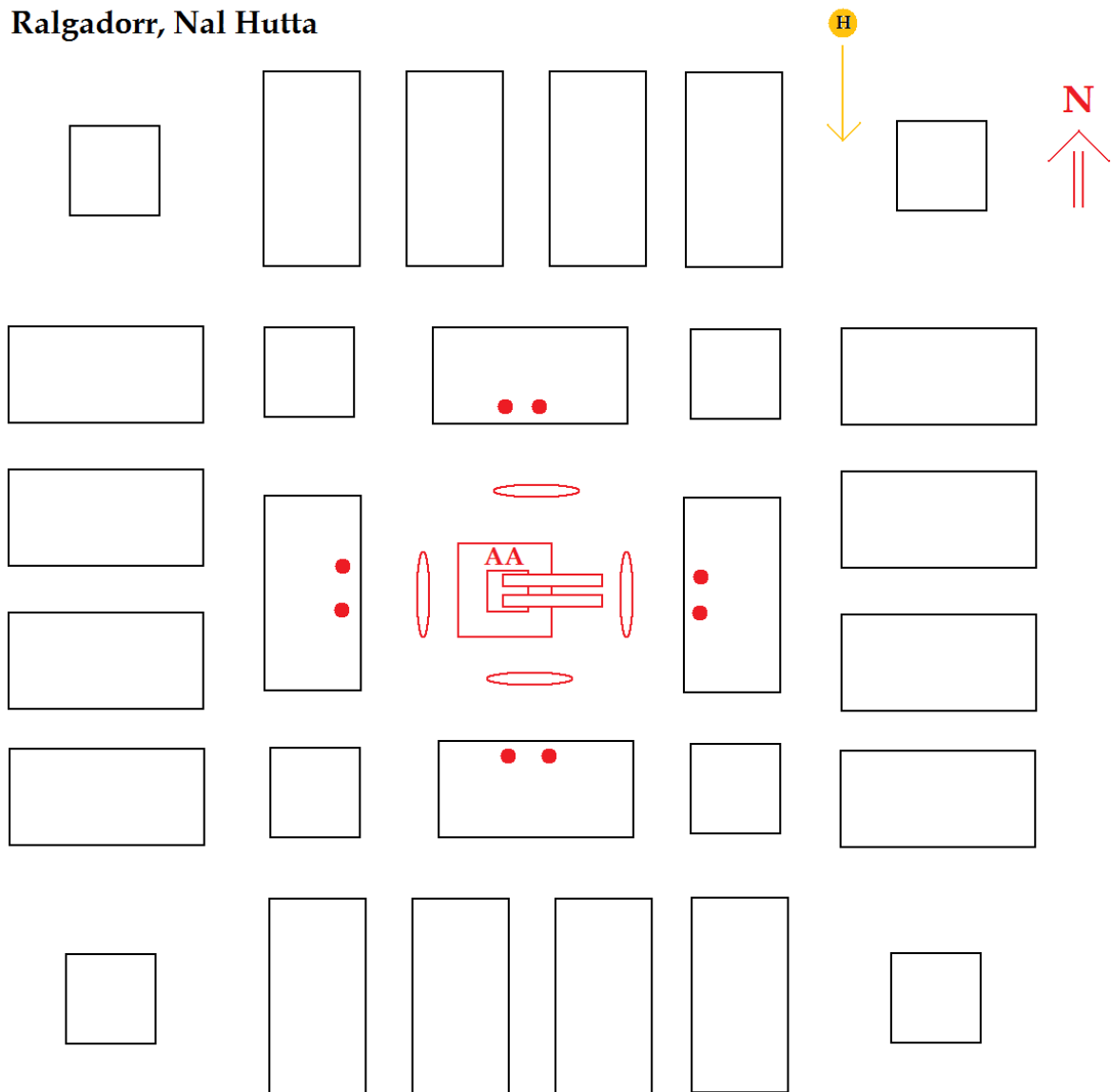


Thoja, Nal Hutta schematics diagram:



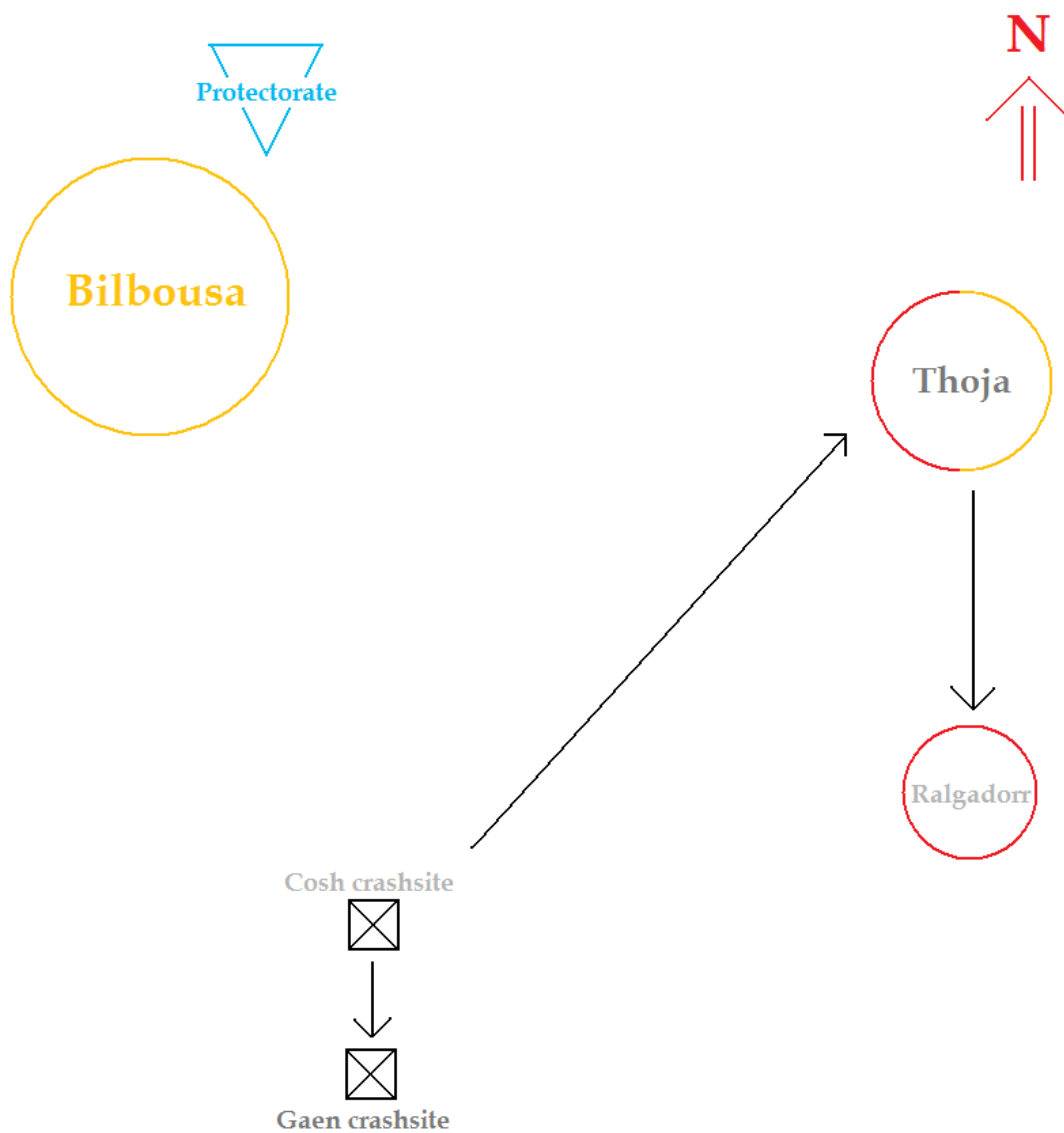
Ralgadorr, Nal Hutta schematic diagram:

Ralgadorr, Nal Hutta



PROT

Battle of Nal Hutta schematic diagram:

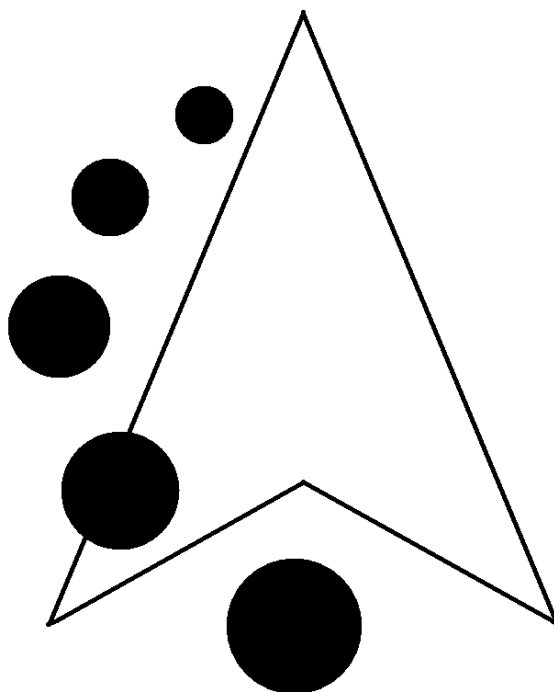


Galactic Commonwealth of Patriotic Worlds emblem:



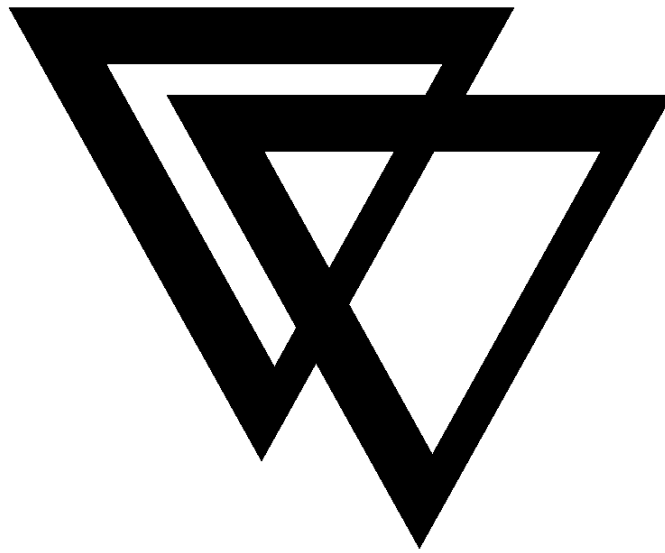
A fifty-fifty mix between the Fel Empire emblem and the Alliance starbird

Neo-Confederation emblem:



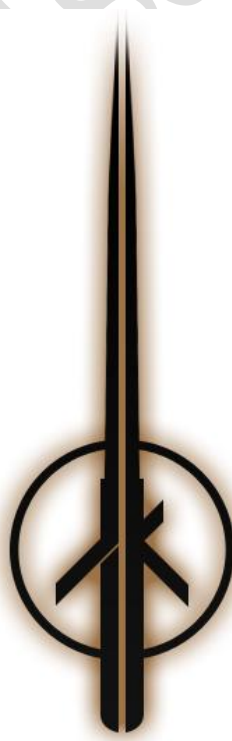
Represents a Star Destroyer in the middle, with the original five worlds (Corellia, Kuat, Fondor, Empress Teta, and later Hapes) of the Confederation surrounding it

Thrak Zann's emblem:



The double-*del* logo; the two triangles can make a T and a Z, the initials of Thrak Zann himself

The Jedi Knights Templars emblem:



Represents the sword and the shield of the galaxy, the role the Jedi Knights Templars play in the Galactic Commonwealth

Author's Notes:

This was my first foray back into Star Wars in over half a year, and I must say, it was definitely exciting again. Back when I was planning on writing the first trilogy of books (dubbed the Dark Age Trilogy) based around the character of Amelia, I had two major problems to deal with. The first was how do I make a story about a character with immense Force powers (after all, she is the Sith'ari) interesting; I think I solved that problem rather well in the first trilogy, basing the second and third books not on Amelia herself, but rather on supporting characters that interact with her to some degree. The second problem was how do I follow up on the prophecy? If you recall, the prophecy of the Sith'ari states two things; one, a perfect being with unrestricted and all-powerful Force powers; the second, was that the Sith'ari would bring the Sith to its own destruction, but in their destruction, they would rise more powerful than ever before. The second part of that prophecy was a real conundrum for me for a long time.

I had to think of a good, non-cheesy way to (at least argue) that the Sith (or in my mind, the dark-side of the Force) could possibly return more powerful than ever. It took a lot of time to find a story I felt was convincing, but along the way, I came across other ideas. I immediately rejected resurrecting Amelia, either by the Force itself or through cloning (I hate clones!), so that was out. I rejected the idea of the One Sith regrouping on Korriban and invading the galaxy again (like that's not predictable enough). So, something. Eventually I figured that if the galaxy tore itself apart in another all-encompassing civil war (not unlike the Second Galactic Civil War, aka the Confederation-Alliance War), and the dark-side of the Force simply stayed back and watched the galaxy tear itself apart, technically, relative to its original position, the dark-side of the Force has grown in power.

But then I came across another problem. Who would these dark-side practitioners be? I didn't want it to be the One Sith anymore; they had their time in the spotlight. I didn't want it to be some "lost tribe" of the Sith (although I did quite enjoy the Lost Tribe of the Sith e-book series), cause I thought that was cheesy. Eventually, I came up with an idea (one that will be revealed later in the series, so I won't say any more).

So after figuring out the nut-and-bolts of the storyline and plot, it finally came down to outline and write the book itself. Very quickly going through pre-production, I knew that this was going to be a very different book from the last three (and indeed it did turn out very different). This book was less about a war (although it starts with the

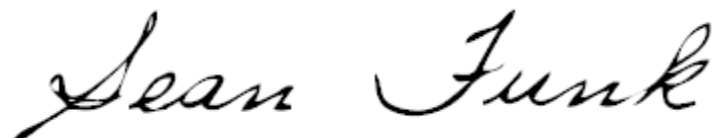
last battles in the Anti-Sith Insurgency), and more about politics. By this time, I was so used to writing battles and lightsaber duels, I really didn't know what else to do.

The politics, and even the trial section itself, worried me greatly. Could I convey, in only so many pages, the complexity of a brand-new government system without long, drawn-out, boring exposition? I came up with idea to only reveal bits and pieces of the government system only when it became relevant; that way, I don't spend ten pages outlining the government system. Regardless of any of that, the complexity of politics itself was intimidating; a government with both Imperial and Alliance members working together was a recipe ripe for disaster. Could I manage to discuss the politics, the view-points, of each character, whether they be Imperial and Alliance? That was tricky, so I only focused on the main players.

The trial itself was troublesome too; it was, inescapably, a long "boring" trial. But, it was an integral part of the story, so I couldn't cut it out. Before I get into this anymore, I just want to point out that (obviously) the Insurgency Trials is heavily based on the Nuremburg Trials. So, how do I make a trial not boring? My solution? Include scenes where Narklin Danakar refused to co-operate (leading to some intense courtroom drama), and the actual trial scenes included a subject that was gruesome and interesting (the genocide of Mon Cal; outlined in *Legacy: Alliance, Wrath of the Dragon*, and *Storms*). Finally, the verdict, the point where everyone was waiting for. Overall, I think the pacing of the trial is as best as it could be.

Pacing was a great concern with this novel. Would all these trials and politics slow down the novel too much before the "stunning" ending? Luckily, I had some interesting sub-plots thought up of before I actually wrote the novel. Mainly, the sub-plot with Lon Yash and the re-emergence of the Confederation (seen in the *Legacy of the Force* series). That added an extra layer of deceit and intrigue, which hopefully, made the reader that much more interested in the final outcome.

Overall, this novel was a pleasure to write, although quite a bit more difficult. Luckily, it only gets better from here. Stay tuned for the sequels.



Sean P. Funk

STAR WARS

Eye of the Storm



Written by: Sean P. Funk

Last Updated: February 13th, 2010

² Imperial propaganda piece ca. 2 BBY: top: Join the Imperial Army; bottom: See the stars! Rule the galaxy!

Dramatis Personae

Razor Squadron:

Cosh Sonter: Commander; Razor One pilot
Gaen Cage: Spacer First Class; Razor One rear-gunner
Darael To-ni: Wing Commander; Razor Two pilot
Alon Akura: Spacer; Razor Two rear-gunner
Miles Corliss: Flight Officer; Razor Three pilot
Gavin Rann: Spacer; Razor Three rear-gunner
Geoff Winters: Squadron Leader; Razor Four pilot
Erri Lassic: Spacer; Razor Four rear-gunner
Kei Piorgi: Captain; Razor Five pilot
Mia Sevannar: Spacer; Razor Five rear-gunner
Tadia Zione: Captain; Razor Six pilot
Tam Damaris: Spacer; Razor Six rear-gunner
Ara Sallian: Captain; Razor Seven pilot
Ptre Danigo: Spacer; Razor Seven rear-gunner
Orrell Groman: Spacer; Razor Eight pilot
Fien Devin: Spacer; Razor Eight rear-gunner
Zaq Oldin: Lieutenant; Razor Nine pilot
Thena Morningstar: Spacer; Razor Nine rear-gunner
Otaro Benoo: Lieutenant; Razor Ten pilot
Bri Odia: Spacer; Razor Ten rear-gunner
Io Cunda: Spacer First Class; Razor Eleven pilot

Kain Zythor: Spacer; Razor Eleven rear-gunner

Solan Yamamura: Spacer First Class; Razor Twelve pilot

Anna Maydar: Spacer; Razor Twelve rear-gunner

**Treis Sinda*: Imperial Knight

Cole Arden: Jedi Knights Templar

Jol A'kazz: Jedi Knights Templar

**Character introduced in Legacy 22: Wrath of the Dragon*

For over eight standard months, the remnants of the New Galactic Empire have cut a vicious path towards the Outer Rim

A new government, dubbed the Galactic Commonwealth of Patriotic Worlds, has instigated itself on Coruscant

Meanwhile, conflicts within the Outer Rim make fleet movements difficult

Grand Admiral Narklin Danakar, the self-proclaimed Emperor and Warlord of the Empire leads his brutish campaign against the Galactic Commonwealth

From a by-gone era, a superweapon dubbed the Eye of Palpatine, has been re-discovered by Grand Admiral Narklin

*In an effort to prevent mass genocide, the Galactic Commonwealth attempt to stop and capture Grand Admiral Narklin Danakar once and for all
The show down would be at Rothana, but the Eye of Palpatine is in orbit above Pzob...*

Pzob, K749 system: 144 ABY:

Commander Cosh Sonter sat impatiently in his CF9 Crossfire starfighter; he had been sitting in the cockpit of the small, cramped starfighter for almost two standard days, and his body was aching in ways he never thought possible. He had tried to sleep, but the blue and white swirling lights of hyperspace streaking passed the windshield kept him awake. Regardless, they were nearing their intended exit vector pretty soon anyways. Their mission today was of critical importance: destroy the Empire's new superweapon, the Eye of Palpatine. The Eye of Palpatine was actually a superweapon from the first Galactic Empire, half completed during that time over a hundred standard yards prior; now, it seems, the current Empire was trying to resurrect her. In order to get to the world where the superweapon orbited, Pzob, they needed to get deep within the Outer Rim; currently, the world was a contested planet between Thrak Zann and the Hutts. The Galactic Commonwealth, the new galactic government that succeeded the New Galactic Empire, were allowed to penetrate deep within the Outer Rim in order to stop the Empire.

Suddenly, the cockpit lights flashed on, "Alright Razor's, looks like we're here." Cosh Sonter informed, "Prepare for reversion."

"Copy, Razor One." Razor Two reported.

"Affirmative." Razor Three continued.

And so it went. After only a few seconds, they reached their exit point. Suddenly, the hyperdrive deactivated, and they began their reversion back into realspace. The slurring blue and white lights of hyperspace gave way to long, white streaks of light; then, they coalesced into single points of bright white light. Just ahead, about three hundred kilometres in front of Cosh Sonter and the rest of Razor Squadron, was Pzob; the world was a vibrant and lush world, with thick, dense forests and crystal clear blue oceans. The atmosphere was spotted with fluffy white clouds, and the oceans stirred up crashing waves. Orbiting just above the lush world of Pzob was the Eye of Palpatine; the gigantic superweapon, a battlemoon to be more accurate, was a large asteroid-like structure, dotted with hundreds, possibly thousands, of turbolaser emplacements, ion cannons, missile tubes, and tractor beam batteries. Also included within its already impressive arsenal, were twelve planetary turbolasers, and six planetary ion cannons; the entire surface was supposed to be protected by six planetary shields, strong enough to prevent almost any measure of orbital bombardment from numerous Star Destroyers. Galactic Commonwealth intelligence reported that the planetary turbolasers and ion

cannons should not be operational, and the planetary shields should be off-line. If so, then the battle should be reasonably easy.

Cosh looked down at this sensors for a moment; from their reversion into realspace, their sensors automatically began scanning the space. Hovering near the Eye of Palpatine, were several orbital construction yards. It looked like the battlemoon was still undergoing construction, leaving it reasonably vulnerable to attack. Finally, the sensor package relayed a report; planetary turbolaser batteries and planetary ion cannons were off-line, and there was no indication that the shields were up.

"Razor One, contacts incoming bearing one-eight-zero." Razor Nine reported.

"Copy." Cosh Sonter replied.

Mere seconds passed, then suddenly, a flotilla of capital ships appeared behind Razor Squadron; Cosh Sonter immediately looked passed his left shoulder, and watched as the ships reverted back into realspace. The capital ships wore the emblem of the Commonwealth on their hulls; a fifty-fifty mix of the Alliance starbird and the Empire emblem. The flotilla consisted of mainly former Alliance capital ships; several *Scythe*-class battle cruisers, many more *ShaShore*-class and *Tri-Scythe*-class frigates, backed up by a few *Pellaeon*-class Star Destroyers and *Ardent*-class fast frigates.

Suddenly, over the headset, *"Razor One, repeat, Razor One, do you copy?"*

"Razor One here, go ahead *Harbinger*." Cosh Sonter replied.

"Are we a go?" Harbinger command asked, *"Repeat, is the mission a go?"*

"Tell Commodore Wilder we're a go." Cosh Sonter answered, "Move into attack position and take down that battlemoon. We'll run cover for you."

"Copy, Razor One." Harbinger command replied, *"See you on the other side."*

"Copy. Out." Cosh Sonter replied, "Alright Razor's, let's get some! Lock S-foils in attack position!"

Immediately, Cosh Sonter punched his throttle to full power, and sped forward as fast as the starfighter would allow; Razor Squadron closed the distance between them and the battlemoon incredibly fast. Suddenly, once they were within range of the battlemoon, thick red lances of concentrated energy streaked passed the canopy of the CF9 Crossfire starfighter. Cosh Sonter looked out towards the battlemoon in front of him; the turbolaser batteries were blazing with intensity as they fired salvo after salvo

of energy bolts towards them. The energy bolts only grew with intensity as they neared the Eye of Palpatine.

"Keep it loose, Razor's!" Cosh Sonter ordered, "We don't want to give them anything to shoot at!"

"Copy, Razor One." Razor Four replied.

Within moments, Cosh Sonter, leading the Razor's in towards the Eye of Palpatine, was within striking range of the battlemoon. He didn't even bother to aim; he simply squeezed the trigger, letting loose a stream of energy bolts. Most of the energy bolts struck the black rocky-metallic surface of the asteroid-like battlemoon, but several lances of energy struck one of the heavy turbolaser emplacements. The turbolaser battery exploded with a brilliant flash, followed by a roaring plume of orange-yellow fire and shrapnel. Cosh Sonter immediately pulled back on the yoke, forcing the starfighter to climb as fast as possible; Cosh, unable to pulled up and out in time, was forced to fly through the fireball. It only took a second or two, and then he was out of the fire and back into the void of space. Quickly, he looked passed his right shoulder, and saw the rest of Razor Squadron making their attack runs on the surface of the battlemoon; behind him, sitting in the rear-gunner's position, was Gaen Cage. Gaen Cage was firing wildly into the battlemoon using the rear double light laser cannons to their full extent. The light laser bolts were weak, and only made pecks in the surface of the battlemoon, but Gaen Cage didn't care; he howled and roared with excitement as he fired his rear cannons. After only a few moments, Razor Squadron successfully made their first attack run.

"Harbinger! Decoy successful! Commence attack on the Eye!" Cosh Sonter replied.

"Copy, Razor One." Harbinger command replied, "Here we go!"

Suddenly, just passed Cosh Sonter's left shoulder, the *Harbinger*, a *Scythe*-class battle cruiser, along with several other Commonwealth capital ships, began their orbital bombardment on the Eye of Palpatine. The massive energy bolts streaked brilliant red and green across the dark void of space, finally striking the rocky-metallic surface of the battlemoon. The energy bolts struck with tremendous force, rocking the battlemoon back-and-forth and side-to-side; the construction yards adjacent to the battlemoon were completely destroyed in the first wave of the attack. Flashes and plumes of fire and debris shot out of craters and pits on the Eye of Palpatine after each hit.; the flames, in a microgravity setting, danced elegantly across the rocky-metallic surface of the battlemoon. The unique configuration of the turbolaser batteries on the *Scythe*-class

battle cruisers dealt tremendous damage; the Cross of Fire, as it were called, focus all the guns on the battle cruiser onto a single focal point, concentrating all the energy bolts into a single point. The result on the Eye of Palpatine was devastating; the hull, consisting of black igneous rocks and crystalline metal, glowed orange from the intense heat of the energy bolts. Several turbolaser batteries on the Eye of Palpatine were destroyed after only a few moments; at this rate, Cosh Sonter figured, the battle would only take a few minutes.

Suddenly, over the headset, "*Contacts!*"

"What is it?" Cosh Sonter immediately asked.

"*Behind the planet!*" Razor Three informed, "*We've got Star Destroyers!*"

Cosh Sonter immediately looked towards the planet; indeed, five *Pellaeon*-class Star Destroyers, reinforced with three *Ardent*-class frigates, were coming from behind the planet, headed their way. Cosh Sonter sank in his seat.

"*Harbinger!* We've got company!" Cosh Sonter informed.

"*Copy, Razor One.*" *Harbinger* command informed, "*We see them!*"

Cosh looked passed his left shoulder, and saw that several Commonwealth capital ships were moving out of attack formation and started moving towards the incoming Imperial Star Destroyers. Suddenly, without warning, the cockpit of Cosh Sonter's CF9 Crossfire starfighter filled with a blinding white light; Cosh Sonter, momentarily dazed, was forced to close his eyes and look away from the incoming Star Destroyers. For a moment, Cosh thought he was hit, and that he was dead.

But then, groggily, he heard something over his headset, "*Harbinger is gone! Oh my stars! The Harbinger is gone!*"

Cosh Sonter immediately looked back towards the *Harbinger*; he watched, just in time, to see the *Scythe*-class battle cruiser, along with five other Commonwealth capital ships, explode with a violent eruption of energy. Giant fragments of white-hot, twisted hull and debris drifted apart as a plume of fire erupted out of the *Harbinger*; several starfighters, too close to the capital ships, were caught in the explosion and instantly incinerated. Cosh Sonter was wide-eyed with disbelief; suddenly, he turned his attention back towards the Eye of Palpatine.

"That blast came from the Eye!" Cosh Sonter informed, "That thing's operational! Break off the attack! All wings, break-break-break!"

Cosh immediately pulled up and to port, away from the Eye of Palpatine; just in the nick of time, a salvo of heavy turbolaser fire streaked passed his cockpit windshield. The flashes from the intense energy bolts momentarily blinded Cosh.

"Cosh!" Gaen Cage screamed from behind, "Book it!"

Cosh Sonter immediately went into evasive manoeuvres; he jinked and juked wildly, just missing the energy bolts lancing passed his starfighter. Suddenly, in the midst of evading the flurry of laser bolts shot from the Eye of Palpatine, Cosh Sonter heard a scream over his headset.

"Who was that?" Cosh Sonter screamed.

"Eleven!" Gaen Cage screamed back, "He bit it!"

"Frack!" Cosh Sonter screamed in anger.

Suddenly, one of the turbolaser bolts streaked passed the cockpit windshield, and clipped the starboard-side wing; the starfighter suddenly rolled over to port. Cosh Sonter immediately fought the yoke, trying to bring the starfighter under control; behind, Gaen Cage screamed in terror. Cosh couldn't blame him; this mission just turned into a gigantic clusterfrack. After a few moments of fighting the controls, Cosh managed to bring the starfighter back to level; the starfighter wasn't flying as well as it was before, though. The cockpit shook at a steady pace, and the starfighter wanted to pull towards starboard. Regardless, Cosh Sonter continued the fight.

Just then, the five *Pellaeon*-class Star Destroyers and three *Ardent*-class fast frigates came into play; they positioned themselves around the Eye of Palpatine, and launched their fighters. Suddenly, the Eye of Palpatine ceased its bombardment of heavy turbolaser fire; Cosh looked down at his sensors, and read the read-out.

"The Eye's got its shields up!" Cosh Sonter informed.

Gaen Cage shook his head, "How screwed are we?"

Cosh Sonter looked back down at his sensors and saw how many *Predator*-class starfighters were on their way; thousands of them, "Very." He answered, "Alright Razor's! This is it! Move in and intercept those Eyeballs! Keep them off our ships for as long as possible!"

"Copy." Razor Two replied.

Cosh immediately rolled his starfighter onto its starboard-side wing, and banked hard right. Behind him, the rest of Razor Squadron followed. Within moments, Cosh could see the wings of *Predator*-class starfighters through his transparisteel cockpit windshield. Suddenly, several red lances of energy streaked passed his canopy; Cosh Sonter immediately banked left, then right, evading several energy bolts by mere metres. Then, with a heart filled with rage, Cosh Sonter lined up his targeting reticule, and squeezed the trigger. A steady stream of green energy bolts shot out of the laser cannons on his starfighter; three bolts struck a *Predator*-class starfighter, causing the spherical cockpit to implode, sending it careening into an adjacent starfighter. Seconds later, Cosh passed through the rest of the *Predator*-class starfighter wings; he weaved in-and-out of the passing starfighters, missing their hulls by mere metres. From behind, Gaen Cage fired his light laser cannons at the passing starfighters, just missing some in most cases.

Finally weaving out of the wings of Imperial starfighters, they emerged onto to be greeted by a flash of turbolaser fire from one of the *Pellaeon*-class Star Destroyers. The energy bolts were dense, making weaving through the streams of energy bolts particularly difficult.

"Oh frack!" Cosh Sonter screamed.

Cosh immediately rolled his port wing over, and banked hard left, away from the Star Destroyers; the rest of Razor Squadron followed. Coming out of the hard turn, Cosh immediately punched the throttle to full, speeding towards the Imperial starfighters at full power. Turbolaser fire from the Star Destroyers behind him continued with intense fury. Coming up from behind the starfighters gave them the advantage. Coming within range, Cosh Sonter squeezed the trigger. Energy bolts lanced forth, just missing the *Predator*-class starfighters in front of him; immediately, the Imperial starfighters scattered in all directions.

"Weapons free! Repeat, weapons free!" Cosh Sonter ordered, "Have at 'em, Razor's!"

Cosh immediately chose a target, and began his pursuit. The Imperial starfighter jinked and juked wildly from left to right. Cosh slammed his yoke side-to-side just to keep up with the more manoeuvrable starfighter. Cosh Sonter, frustrated with the sudden turn of events, squeezed the trigger without aiming; the energy bolts lanced passed the starfighter just wide and to starboard. Suddenly, the *Predator*-class starfighter rolled over and dove downward; the manoeuvre caught Cosh off-guard, forcing him to act quickly. Cosh immediately rolled over, and dove, chasing the

Imperial starfighter. Halfway through the dive, another *Predator*-class starfighter came into view, just out of the corner of his eye.

"Damn it!" Cosh Sonter screamed.

He immediately tried to roll over to port, but it was too late; the two starfighters collided. The collision rocked the starfighter violently back and forth; the controls, for several seconds, were completely unresponsive. Luckily, the *Predator*-class starfighter only scrapped the bottom of the CF9 Crossfire starfighter; however, the Imperial starfighter had its port hinged-wing torn off from the collision, causing it to spin out of control. The CF9 Crossfire starfighter yawed left and right wildly; forcing the starfighter to respond, Cosh eventually brought the starfighter back into control.

"What the hell was that?" Gaen Cage screamed.

"Sorry." Cosh Sonter murmured.

Cosh immediately looked around for another target; the dogfight was complete chaos. Then, over the headset, "*Eyeball on my six! Can't shake him!*"

"It's Razor Eight!" Gaen Cage informed.

"On my way!" Cosh Sonter replied.

Razor Eight wasn't far away; seconds later, Cosh saw a *Predator*-class starfighter pursuing Razor Eight. The Imperial starfighter was hot on his tail, firing red energy bolts at the CF9 Crossfire starfighter; with great skill, Razor Eight jinked and juked wildly though the vacuum of space, just missing the energy bolts on either side of his starfighter. Eight's rear-gunner was wildly firing his light laser cannons, missing the pursuing Imperial starfighter. Coming in from the front, Cosh Sonter sped forward.

"*Damn it, where are you?*" Razor Eight screamed.

"I got 'em, Eight." Cosh Sonter replied, "Break left on my mark." A few tense moments pass, "Now! Break-break-break!"

Suddenly, Razor Eight broke left, leaving a clear shot at the *Predator*-class starfighter in front of him. Cosh Sonter immediately squeezed the trigger, not bothering to aim. The *Predator*-class starfighter tried to break towards the right, but the energy bolts already perforated the thin hull of the starfighter. The green energy bolts pierced the port hinged-wing, tearing it to pieces, and the spherical cockpit, causing it to implode. Cosh Sonter was forced to fly through a small debris cloud left behind by the

Imperial starfighter; small flashes sparked across the CF9 Crossfire starfighter's particle shield as metal vaporized. Cosh Sonter smiled at the successful kill.

"Thanks, One." Razor Eight replied.

"No problem, Eight." Cosh Sonter replied.

"All flights, come back!" Gallant command replied, "Repeat, come back! We're getting hammered here!"

Without another word said, Cosh Sonter immediately rolled his starfighter to port, and sped towards the Commonwealth capital ships. In the quick seconds of the turn, Cosh could see that the remaining Commonwealth capital ships were indeed in bad shape. Several flights of *Neutralizer*-class bombers, escorted by squadrons of *Predator*-class starfighters, were making strafing runs on the hulls of the capital ships; coupled with a bombardment from the five *Pellaeon*-class Star Destroyers, the Commonwealth capital ships were riddled with craters and pits. Several wings of CF9 Crossfire starfighters, and the rare X-83 TwinTail starfighter were trying to fight off the assault.

Closing the distance incredibly quickly, Cosh Sonter immediately engaged one of the flights of *Neutralizer*-class bombers; disregarding the three *Predator*-class starfighters escorting the bomber, Cosh squeezed the trigger. The energy bolts lanced forth, and struck the starboard-side hinged-wing, ripping it off the hull completely. The hinged-wing actually struck one of the escorting *Predator*-class starfighters, piercing the cockpit windshield, causing the starfighter to careen into the hull of a *Tri-Scythe*-class frigate. With a dense black trail of smoke behind it, the bomber plunged into the hull of the same *Tri-Scythe*-class frigate, the two remaining starfighters immediately broke off and behind, then engaged Cosh. Suddenly, the two Imperial starfighters fired a stream of red energy bolts at Cosh.

"Take them out!" Cosh Sonter ordered.

Almost immediately, Gaen Cage fired his double light laser cannons. Cosh Sonter, however, was forced to weave in-and-out of the red energy bolts, dancing across the dark void of space. Suddenly, seconds later, Cosh heard two explosions from behind.

"You got 'em?" Cosh Sonter immediately asked.

"Got 'em!" Gaen Cage screamed with delight.

Cosh Sonter smiled, then immediately broke off to engage more targets. A quick assessment of the quadrant of space around him told him that the Imperial starfighters were now meeting heavy resistance from Commonwealth starfighters. He looked ahead towards the Commonwealth battle line; the *Gallant*, a *Scythe*-class battle cruiser that now had the flag, was getting pounded by two *Pellaeon*-class Star Destroyers and swarms of *Predator*-class starfighters.

Suddenly, from behind, "The Eye! Shields are down!"

Cosh immediately looked to his left and saw the planetary turbolasers powering up; the immense planetary turbolasers glowed with an eerie green-blue halo. Cosh immediately screamed, "All wings, break—"

Suddenly, Cosh was blinded by a bright white flash that lasted several seconds. Cosh screamed with pain as the blinding light burned his retinas; he immediately covered his eyes with his arm and looked away. Moments later, the bright white flash of light dissipated, and Cosh could see again. The *Gallant* was torn to pieces, slowly drifting apart from the force of the explosion; pieces of white-hot twisted hull, of varying sizes, flew through the vacuum of space in all directions. Blobs of molten durasteel drifted through space, still hot enough to glow bright orange-yellow in the coldness of hard vacuum. Any nearby starfighters, both Imperial and Commonwealth, were consumed by the explosion, immediately vaporized or torn apart.

"Holy stars, Cosh!" Gaen Cage screamed.

Cosh immediately looked back, passed his right shoulder, and saw that several other Commonwealth capital ships were destroyed too. Cosh immediately counted; it looked to be five other capital ships, mainly *Scythe*-class battle cruisers and *Tri-Scythe*-class frigates. The Commonwealth battle line was now littered with the remnants of destroyed capital ships; huge chunks of twisted hull, some still glowing hot from the explosions, and molten blobs of metal float nearby damaged Commonwealth capital ships. The sight was disheartening.

"Retreat! All ships retreat!" *Resolute* command ordered.

Cosh Sonter was completely taken aback, "What? Negative! We have to stay and fight!"

"Razor One! We can't repel firepower of that magnitude!" *Resolute* command informed, "We must retreat!"

"Negative! We've only got one shot at this!" Cosh Sonter shouted.

Then, from behind, "Cosh, the shields are still down."

Cosh Sonter immediately looked to port, at the Eye of Palpatine, and then to his sensors; indeed the planetary shields that protected the battlemoon were temporarily down at the moment. In a split second decision, Cosh Sonter committed to the mission fully.

"All Razors, form up on me!" Cosh Sonter ordered, "We're going in!"

"*Razor One! You are disobeying a direct—*" *Resolute* command ordered before being shut off.

"We didn't hear that." Cosh Sonter replied, "We're going in, and bring that battlemoon down!"

"*We're with you, Razor One!*" Razor Two replied.

"*Same here!*" Razor Three added.

Cosh Sonter immediately rolled his starfighter onto its port wing, fighting the controls slightly, then banked hard left. He pointed the nose of his starfighter at the Eye of Palpatine, and punched the throttle to full power. Cosh immediately weaved in-and-out of the any remaining Imperial starfighters, no bothering to engage or destroy them. The rest of Razor Squadron did the same, staying close behind Cosh Sonter.

As Cosh neared the battlemoon, "Alright, we're going to have to land on its surface. Two through Eight, you're with me! Nine through Twelve, provide covering fire."

Suddenly, over the headset, "*Do you mind if we tag along?*"

Cosh immediately looked passed his right shoulder, and saw a *Predator*-class starfighter, bearing the Commonwealth emblem, flanked by two X-83 TwinTail starfighters, coming in, "It would be my honour, Master Sinder."

Speeding along as fast as they could, weaving through intense and thick energy bolts from the Eye of Palpatine, they made their way towards the massive battlemoon. Cosh Sonter jinked and juked madly, dancing across the void of space like a madman. Narrowly missing a energy bolt, he immediately saw a reasonably good landing point.

"There! That crater on the dorsal bow of the Eye!" Cosh Sonter informed.

"Copy. I see it." Treis Sinde replied.

Within moments, Cosh Sonter finally landed on the rocky-metallic surface of the Eye of Palpatine. He immediately sealed his helmet, screwed on his gloves, and grabbed his compact assault blaster rifle.

"You ready Cage?" Cosh Sonter asked.

"Ready as I'll ever be!" Gaen Cage answered.

Immediately, Cosh Sonter opened the cockpit canopy and jumped down onto the black rocky-metallic surface of the Eye of Palpatine. The surface of the battlemoon was covered in an ashy, dusty substance that was dark grey in colour. It was only then that Cosh realized that the battlemoon itself was an actual stony-iron asteroid, explaining the surface topography and composition. Cosh immediately looked up, and saw the rest of Razor Squadron begin landing within the crater. The blackness of space was temporarily filled with bright lances of energy bolts that streaked across the void. In the distance, Cosh could see the Commonwealth capital ships moving back. Suddenly, while Razor Eight was landing, several heavy turbolaser bolts converged together and struck the hull of his CF9 Crossfire starfighter. The starfighter exploded with a giant ball of fire, raining debris onto the surface of the battlemoon; fragments of twisted hull rained down upon the landing Razor's, causing some momentary anxiety and fear. Razor Seven got clipped by one of the flaming fragments, causing the starfighter to spin wildly out of control.

"Watch out!" Cosh Sonter screamed as he leapt out of the way.

Razor Seven's starfighter flew just overhead of Cosh, finally careening into the side of the crater. The starfighter tore itself apart as it skidded along the battlemoon's rocky-metallic surface, finally smashing into the side of the crater. Cosh immediately picked himself up, and along with Gaen Cage, began running towards the crashed starfighter. Because of the low-gravity, running was especially difficult; within seconds, Cosh and Gaen were at the downed starfighter. The starfighter ion engines sparked viciously, and plumes of fire and black smoke spewed out of the starfighter. Cosh leapt into the air, and landed on the cockpit windshield; immediately, he popped the canopy off, and grabbed the pilot. Clearly, she was dead; a razor-sharp piece of transparisteel from the windshield pierced the pilot's heart, killing her instantly. Cosh immediately jumped off and ran towards the back; Gaen Cage was already there, trying to pry off the rear windshield. It was no use, and it appeared that the fire had already spread to the rear portion of the starfighter anyways.

Cosh shook his head, and Gaen Cage screamed, "Damn it!" As he kicked the loose soil.

Cosh looked behind him and saw the rest of Razor Squadron had landed safely; they were already out of their starfighters and running towards his position. Cosh walked away from the flaming wreckage, and rallied along with the other Razor pilots; Treis Sinde, an Imperial Knight wearing his typical crimson phrik-laced hardened-plastoid flight-suit, and two Jedi Knights Templars, both young human males, barely eighteen standard years old, pushed their way forward. He remembered the Knights names; the younger one, a blond, was Jol A'kazz; the slightly older one, with long brown hair, was Cole Arden. The Jedi Knights Templars both wore black battle-armoured flight-suits.

"What now?" Treis Sinde asked in a deep voice.

"We find our way in." Cosh Sonter answered; he looked up towards the edge of the crater and pointed, "That way seems as good as any."

Cosh led the way, and hiked up the side of the crater; the slope was especially steep, making climbing much more difficult than originally expected. Finally, after a few minutes of hiking and climbing up the side of the crater, they were at the top. Cosh peeked passed the edge of the crater, only to be greeted by a light turbolaser turret; the light turbolaser turret, imbedded in the rocky surface of the battlemoon, immediately fired a salvo of energy bolts, striking the ground just shy of Cosh and the rest of Razor Squadron. Instinctually, Cosh ducked behind the edge of the crater. Then, without warning, Razor Nine streaked passed them and fired a proton torpedo. The glowing red proton torpedo shot through the darkness of space, and smashed into the light turbolaser turret; the turret instantly exploded with a brilliant flash, followed by a towering fireball. Molten metal and white-hot debris spewed out from the explosion, raining down into the crater below. Cosh just managed to see Razor Nine streak passed them, overhead, and bank hard left.

"Let's go!" Cosh Sonter ordered.

Cosh immediately leapt out from behind the edge of the crater, and stormed forward. About five hundred metres away was a small rocky hill, just in front of the flaming turret. Crossing the distance as fast as he could, running low to the ground, Cosh finally made it to the rocky hill. On his belly, Cosh crawled forward; just reaching the top of the small rocky hill, Cosh peered forward. Just ahead were more gun emplacements, varying from laser cannons to heavy turbolasers.

Cosh cursed under his breath, "We can't get through that without some cover."

Razor Two then looked up towards the dark void of space, then pointed, "I think it's coming."

A squadron of BB-2 Starfire fighter-bombers were flying through the flurry of energy bolts. Two were destroyed on their way towards the Eye of Palpatine, eventually crashing into the rocky-metallic terrain of the battlemoon. Then, with incredible accuracy, they launched salvo after salvo of proton torpedoes, followed by laser cannons. Within seconds, the terrain in front of them lit up with a brilliant flash of heat and shrapnel. Pulling out just in time, the BB-2 Starfire fighter-bombers climbed away from the Eye of Palpatine. Cosh immediately looked around and assessed the situation; almost all of the gun emplacements were destroyed, except for one laser cannon emplacement.

"Courtesy of the Wild Bombers." Wild Bomber One replied, *"Go get some!"*

Cosh smiled, then stood up, "We're in business!" Cosh Sonter screamed.

Cosh immediately ran forward as fast as his legs would allow; the laser cannon turret unleashed a flurry of energy bolts. The red energy bolts smashed into the ground in front of and beside Cosh, causing him to jump into the air to avoid being hit. The rest of the Razor pilots and rear-gunners were experiencing similar troubles. Cosh made a mad dash towards the other side of the plain, about a kilometre and a half wide. Suddenly, Treis Sinde and the two other Jedi Knights Templars ran forward, using the Force to propel themselves faster; they activated their lightsabers, and stood between the Razor's and the turret, deflecting energy bolts harmlessly off to the side. The flurry of energy bolts was intense; even Treis Sinde was having trouble deflecting the laser bolts.

"Hurry up!" Treis Sinde shouted, "We can't keep this up for long!"

Cosh Sonter immediately made it behind one of the small cliffs on the surface of the Eye of Palpatine, then turned around and provided covering fire. He fired his compact assault blaster rifle towards the laser cannon turret.

"Move up!" Cosh Sonter ordered.

When the Razor's finally arrived behind cover, they too fired upon the laser cannon turret. Finally, Treis Sinde and the two Jedi Knights Templars began their retreat, deflecting laser bolts as they did. Within moments, Treis Sinde and the two Jedi

Knights Templars made it behind cover; Cosh immediately pushed forward and led the way. Cosh peered passed the cliff edge, and saw that the surface was clear of obstructions; the terrain in front of him was simply rocky hills and the occasional crater and linear crack.

"Let's move." Cosh Sonter ordered.

Cosh immediately leapt forward, and began running straight ahead; immediately, the rest of Razor Squadron followed, with Treis Sinde and the two Jedi Knights Templars trailing behind. After about a minute of running, the ground beneath them began to rumble and shake; the shaking, in fact, almost caused Cosh to stumble and get knocked off his feet. The sound of gears grinding and hydraulic rams pushing could be faintly heard through the rocky surface. Immediately, he jumped forward, and crawled towards the nearest rocky hill; the rest of Razor Squadron followed.

"What is that?" Razor Two asked.

"No idea, Darael." Cosh answered; the shaking was getting steadily strong, then he looked up, "Six! Move your ass!"

"Coming!" Razor Six screamed.

Suddenly, the shaking stopped, and a salvo of energy bolts streaked passed them from overhead. The red energy bolts from a light turbolaser smashed into the ground in front of Razor Six; she screamed in terror and pain as the energy blast exploded in front of her, launching her into the void.

"Tadia!" Cosh Sonter screamed.

Her body shot upward at least ten metres, along with a tonne of rocky material, finally crashing back down onto the rocky-metallic surface of the Eye of Palpatine. Her landing was rough, and it looked like she broke her neck on the way down. Cosh immediately ran forward and grabbed Tadia Zione, Razor Six's pilot, by the flight-suit and began dragging her forward. After only a few paces, Cosh fell to the ground; suddenly, he looked up and saw what had killed her. It was an All Terrain Armoured Heavy Transport, an AT-AHT, the successor to the AT-AT; they were the Empire's massive killing machines. Standing over twenty metres tall, twenty-five metres long, they were armed with two light turbolaser batteries on the head, with two more light turbolasers on either side of the trooper transport, and one on the dorsal hump, making it a powerful walker; they were heavily plated with thick durasteel amour, which was jet black in colour, giving it a menacing appearance. Cosh, frozen with fear, stared at the

head of the AT-AHT; suddenly, the head of the AT-AHT looked away from Cosh, and up into the void of space. Cosh looked up too, and saw that Razor Nine was coming in through the flurry of energy bolts headed towards them.

"*Incoming!*" Razor Nine screamed over the headset.

Razor Nine fired a steady stream of laser bolts at the hulking mechanical beast, most of which found their mark; spots of bright orange-yellow pitted the surface of the AT-AHT where the energy bolts struck. However, the heavy armour of the giant walker easily protected it from the relatively weak energy bolts.

"That armour's too tough for blasters!" Cosh Sonter informed.

Suddenly, the AT-AHT fired its five light turbolasers at Razor Nine. The energy bolts lanced passed the CF9 Crossfire starfighter, missing it by mere metres. Razor Nine immediately began evasive manoeuvres, but it was too late. Several turbolaser bolts smashed into the cockpit and wings of the CF9 Crossfire starfighter, causing it to careen into the surface of the Eye of Palpatine. The CF9 Crossfire starfighter smashed right next to the AT-AHT, right where the loading dock had been; a great plume of fire rose up from the explosion, partially consuming the AT-AHT in fire.

Not waiting to see the outcome, Cosh Sonter immediately began running forward, toward the rocky hill in front of him. Providing some covering fire, the rest of Razor Squadron fired their compact assault blaster rifles at the hulking AT-AHT. Although the gesture was completely useless, it did provide some time for Cosh to run toward the rocky hill. Suddenly, the two light turbolaser cannons on the head of the AT-AHT fired towards Cosh. The energy bolts exploded behind Cosh, sending him careening forward. Rocky debris rained down upon him, and a powerful high-pitched tone rang in his ears. Finally making it behind the rocky hill, Cosh immediately crawled forward. Suddenly, the ground beneath them shook violently as the AT-AHT took its first step forward. Several more salvos of light turbolaser fire were sent into the side of the rocky hill, digging and pitting into the hill. Rocky debris shot up from each impact, pulverizing rock and slowly digging through the hill itself.

"We're pinned down here!" Cosh Sonter screamed.

The AT-AHT walked even closer, constantly firing its light turbolaser batteries towards the hill. With each step, the ground shook violently, as if they were caught in a surface-quake. The sound was deafening, and fear slowly started to swell up from

within Cosh Sonter with each step of the AT-AHT. Cosh looked towards the rest of Razor Squadron; they too, were scared out of their minds.

Suddenly, from above, *"I've got you covered, One."* Razor Ten replied.

Razor Ten streaked through the void of space, headed directly towards the AT-AHT. Momentarily, the AT-AHT turned its attention onto Razor Ten, firing its light turbolaser cannons onto the incoming starfighter. Expertly, Razor Ten weaved in-and-out of the energy bolts. Suddenly, Razor Ten fired two proton torpedoes at the AT-AHT, then pulled up sharply.

Cosh watched as the two glowing red proton torpedoes streaked through the dark void of space, leaving behind them a faint trail of glowing ions; suddenly, "Get down!"

An instant later, the first proton torpedo smashed into the side of the AT-AHT; the intense energy flash melted the thick durasteel armour, opening up the troop transport to the harsh vacuum of space. The second proton torpedo followed shortly after, smashing into the head of the AT-AHT; the cockpit flash melted as well, killing the two Imperial pilots inside. Bits of twisted, white-hot debris from the AT-AHT rained down upon them; Cosh watched as the AT-AHT buckled and crashed into the ground of the Eye of Palpatine, kicking up the soil from the impact.

"Thanks, Ten!" Cosh Sonter announced; Cosh then looked passed the glowing orange wreckage of the AT-AHT, and saw that the loading dock, where the AT-AHT came up from, was ripped and pried open, "We've got an opening!"

Cosh immediately leapt out from the top of the hill, and ran forward. After about a hundred metres, he ran passed the glowing orange wreckage of the fallen AT-AHT, and came across the loading dock. The loading dock itself, a giant hydraulic lift that was typically used for bringing in heavy equipment, had crumbled and collapsed from the force of the impact with the CF9 Crossfire starfighter. After a few moments, the rest of Razor Squadron, and Treis Sinde with the two Jedi Knights Templars, arrived next to Cosh Sonter.

"Looks like we're going down." Treis Sinde replied.

Cosh Sonter looked back, "Break out the repelling gear."

Immediately, the Razor's took out the various clamps, rope, and stakes; within minutes, they were hooked up, and ready to descend. Slowly, they descended through

the long, dark shaft of the loading bay; Cosh was the first down, followed by Treis Sinde and the rest of Razor Squadron. It took them less than a minute to finally descend through the long shaft; they arrived within the loading chamber. Inside were huge crates filled with equipment; at the far end of the loading chamber was a small platoon of stormtroopers. Cosh immediately unhooked himself from the rope, and took cover behind a crate. Just in time, he leapt behind the crate, narrowly missing being shot by blaster bolts. Just before going back into the battle, Cosh looked at the crate he was hiding behind; it read: CLOAKING EQUIPMENT. Cosh immediately came out of cover and fired his compact assault blaster rifle; the blaster bolts streaked across the long loading chamber, striking one of the stormtroopers in the chest. The hardened-plastoid, an older generation of stormtrooper armour, instantly shattered; the chest cavity of the being inside exploded from the intense energy from the blaster bolt.

Cosh looked to his right, and saw Treis Sinde unhooking his clamp. Immediately, he ignited his silver-bladed Imperial lightsaber, and charged at the five remaining stormtroopers. The stormtroopers wildly fired their blaster rifles at him; expertly, he deflected each blaster bolt. One such bolt struck the stormtrooper whom fired it, killing him instantly. Immediately, Cosh Sonter fired his compact assault blaster rifle, providing covering fire for the rest of the repelling Razor's. Cosh took down one more stormtrooper before Treis Sinde closed the distance and lashed out. With a quick horizontal slash, Treis Sinde cut one of the stormtroopers in half; reflexively, he dodged another blaster bolt shot at his head. With a quick gesture, Treis Sinde pierced the chest armour of one of the stormtroopers; then, with a smooth motion, he tore it out, and deflected another blaster bolt aimed at him from the last remaining stormtrooper. The blaster bolt ricocheted off the silver energy blade perfectly, striking the stormtrooper in the chest. Within seconds, the ordeal was over.

"C'mon!" Treis Sinde shouted across the loading chamber.

Just then, the last of the Razor pilots unhooked himself, and began running towards Treis Sinde. Immediately, they ran into a problem; the blast doors leading into the rest of the battlemoon was securely shut.

"Slice?" Cosh Sonter asked.

"That's one way to put it." Treis Sinde replied.

Suddenly, Treis Sinde plunged his silver-bladed Imperial lightsaber into the thick durasteel blast door; this was immediately followed by the two Jedi Knights Templars, igniting their blue-bladed lightsabers, and plunging it into the door. Slowly,

the metal around the three energy blades melted and glowed white-hot; blobs of glowing orange-yellow molten durasteel splattered onto the permacrete floor. After over a minute of slow cutting, they finally pried the blast door open. Treis Sinde was the first through the blast door, followed by the two Jedi Knights Templars, then Cosh and the rest of Razor Squadron. The room they emerged into was pitch black; seconds later, the lights flicked on, lighting up a long white corridor, fashioned in classic Imperial style.

"Now what?" Razor Three asked.

"Find a turbolift." Treis Sinde replied, "We need to go down to get to the generator room."

"To do what?" Razor Three asked again.

"To blow it up, Miles." Cosh Sonter answered.

Miles Corliss, Razor Three's pilot, nodded in agreement. They then ran down the corridor, meeting no resistance as they did. The corridor seemed to go on forever; eerily, the entire corridor, including the room that flanked it, seemed to be empty. That wasn't surprising considering the Eye of Palpatine was still being built, but it was still eerie. Finally, at the end of the corridor, they found three turbolifts.

"We're not going to be able to fit into one." Razor Four replied.

Cosh looked at the group he had, "Geoff is right. Two, Three, Four, you're with me. Five and Six, you'll take the second lift." Cosh ordered; he then looked at Treis Sinde, "You and the Jedi are with me."

They piled into their respective turbolifts, and pushed the button for the sub-basement. The turbolift was incredibly fast. They quickly exited the turbolift, with Treis Sinde out first. Cosh Sonter, the last to exit, suddenly heard something.

"Hey! Listen." Cosh Sonter replied.

It sounded like grinding metal, a high-pitched shrieking sound. Suddenly, it hit him.

"They've stopped the other turbolift!" Cosh Sonter shouted.

Suddenly, the turbolift doors slid opened, and was quickly followed by screams and blaster fire. The firefight was short, and soon, silence filled the room.

"We have to keep moving." Treis Sinda replied, "Now that they know we're here, they're going to try to get to the generator room before us."

Cosh's heart sank, but he knew it was the right thing to do. Immediately, Cosh followed Treis Sinda as he ran down the darkened corridor. Finally, after only a few minutes, they arrived at the entrance of the generator room.

"Ready?" Treis Sinda asked.

"Always." Cosh Sonter immediately replied.

Treis Sinda nodded, and one of the Jedi Knights Templars, Cole Arden, opened the door. The double doors slide open, revealing the towering generator room. The generator itself, two long columns with pyramidal structures at the end, with the points pointing towards each other, was massive; in between the two points was a powerful electrical arc that generated power. The generator room itself was a giant cylindrical room with six bridges extending from the edge towards the tips of the two pyramids.

"Plant you're explosives near the arc reactor." Treis Sinda ordered.

Immediately, breaking off into pairs, Razor Three and Razor Four headed across the thin, durasteel grated bridge, running towards the arc reactor. Cosh Sonter peered over the ledge; the generator room extended downward into darkness, with another set of ledges and bridges above and below them.

Suddenly, a blaster bolt shot through the entrance and struck Razor Two's rear-gunner in the head. The blaster bolt splattered skull and brain matter across the grated floor. Immediately, the two Jedi Knights Templar activated their blue-bladed lightsabers with a *snap-hiss*, and began deflecting blaster bolt after blaster bolt. Their lightsabers arced and lashed out with incredible speed; they were almost too fast to see. They pushed forward, trying to intimidate and repel the stormtroopers attacks. Immediately Cosh Sonter and Gaen Cage began firing at the horde of stormtroopers running down the corridor; they killed several, but the horde of stormtroopers just kept coming. Darael To-ni, Razor Two's pilot, was shocked from the sudden death of his rear-gunner, hesitated for a moment; finally, snapping out of his daze, he too began firing down the corridor. Together, they dropped and killed several stormtroopers; the stormtroopers behind were forced to trample and crush the fallen ones. Regardless, they fired their blaster rifles relentlessly.

Treis Sinda shouted across the void, "Hurry up! We've got company!"

Razor's Three and Four immediately quickened their pace. Suddenly, from below, another platoon of stormtroopers began firing upon the bridges. Treis Sinde immediately activated his silver-bladed Imperial lightsaber and started deflecting blaster bolts from the ledge. The blaster bolts would spark when they struck the durasteel. Suddenly, the far bridge, the one holding Razor Four, buckled from each blaster bolt hit. Razor Four, both of them, immediately grabbed hold of the railing to sturdy themselves. Finally, after a few more strikes, the bridge collapsed completely, and fell into the bowels of the battlemoon.

"No!" Treis Sinde screamed.

Immediately, Cosh Sonter looked behind him, and saw that one of the bridges had fallen. Wide-eyed, he immediately ran to Treis Sinde's position, and saw the stormtroopers below; Treis Sinde was busy deflecting blaster bolts, trying to protect Razor Three as they planted the thermal charges. Cosh Sonter immediately fired upon the stormtroopers below, taking down two within seconds. Suddenly, the stormtroopers concentrated their fire on Cosh; immediately, he ducked behind the ledge, just evading a flurry of blaster bolts.

"What's going on back there!" Darael To-ni shouted.

"They're inside!" Cosh Sonter screamed.

"What are—" Darael To-ni screamed just before being struck by a blaster bolt.

Cosh suddenly realized that the stormtroopers were far too close now; they didn't have much time left to bring down the power generator. Just then, the two Jedi Knights Templars ordered Gaen Cage back as they deflected the onslaught of blaster bolts; the Jedi Knights Templars were forced to retreat backwards from the assault. Their movements appeared tired, and slower than before. Gaen Cage came running behind Cosh Sonter, and began firing at the stormtroopers below. Cosh Sonter followed, firing wildly into the platoon of stormtroopers. Aiming was irrelevant; they just needed to provide enough cover for Razor Three to get the job done. Treis Sinde, sweating profusely now, continued to deflect and block the incoming blaster bolts.

Suddenly, Miles Corliss, Razor Three, shouted, "Done!"

"Get back here now!" Cosh Sonter ordered.

Razor Three, both pilot and rear-gunner, ran across the long, grated durasteel bridge. Suddenly, the intensity of blaster fire increased; each blaster bolt struck the

bridge, causing it to yaw and roll. Suddenly, Razor Three's rear-gunner was struck by a blaster bolt on the left shoulder; he screamed in pain from the sudden shock, and almost fell over the railing. Razor Three's pilot grabbed him.

"Hang on!" Miles Corliss shouted.

"Gavin, hang on!" Cosh Sonter ordered.

Gavin Rann, Razor Three's rear-gunner, hung onto Miles' arm for dear life. He looked down into the dark abyss below as he strained to hang on. Just then, another flurry of blaster bolts struck the bridge, causing it to roll over completely. With a scream, both Gavin and Miles fell off the bridge; they screamed all the way down, finally plunging through the dark abyss and out of sight.

"No!" Cosh Sonter screamed in agony, reaching out towards them.

A few moments later, Treis Sinda picked Cosh Sonter off the grated durasteel floor; tears were in Cosh's eyes.

"We still have a mission to do, Commander!" Treis Sinda replied; he held out the detonator, "And we've still got a card to play."

Cosh Sonter nodded, and picked Gaen Cage up off the ground as well. Then, one of the Jedi Knights Templars screamed in pain. A blaster bolt lanced passed through his defences, and struck the Templar in the shoulder; the bolt passed clean through his armour, through his flesh, and out the other side. He immediately collapsed onto the ground in pain. Treis Sinda lunged forward, deflecting blaster bolts as he did.

Cole Arden, the other Jedi Knights Templar, replied, "Get him out of here! I'll hold them off you for as long as I can!"

Quickly, Treis Sinda dragged the injured Jedi Knights Templar, Jol A'kazz, behind the entrance and into the generator room. His wound was bleeding profusely, and his left arm dangled uselessly.

Treis Sinda looked up, "Cole! Get out of there!"

Suddenly, with a quick spin, Cole Arden plunged his lightsaber into the door controls, forcing the double doors shut. Outside the metallic double doors, blaster bolts and the flurry of the lightsaber could still be heard.

"Cole!" Treis Sinda screamed as he pounded the metallic doors.

Just then, Cosh Sonter and Gaen Cage prepared their ascent gear; it consisted of a grappling hook and a motorized gear that could pull a being upwards. Treis Sinde returned to Jol A'kazz, and clutched his hand.

"Let me do it." Jol A'kazz replied, looking at the detonator.

Just outside the door, a scream could be heard, followed by a moment of silence from the blaster bolts. Then, the stormtroopers outside the door began banging the durasteel door with something. Treis Sinde felt an uncontrollable rage start to swell up from inside his person. Jol A'kazz slowly took off his helmet, then looked at Treis Sinde. He looked into Jol's eyes.

"Let me do it." Jol A'kazz asked again; Treis Sinde nodded, and gave him the detonator, "I'll give you as much time as I can."

"I know you won't let me down." Treis Sinde replied with a smile.

Jol A'kazz smiled back. Cosh Sonter, understanding the sorrow and heartbreak, gave the former Imperial Knight a moment, "Master Sinde. We've got to go."

Together, they fired their grappling hooks; it locked onto the top of the center column. Then, they hooked the ropes onto themselves with clamps, and hoisted themselves up towards the ceiling. They ascended rapidly, finally emerging at the top of the column at the center of the generator room. Cosh Sonter looked up.

"Hatch!" Cosh Sonter pointed.

Treis Sinde immediately reached up, and twisted the handle to open the hatch. Just above the hatch was a ladder that led up to the surface of the battlemoon. They secured their helmets, and began climbing upwards. Gaen Cage, the last one up, closed the hatch behind him. Treis Sinde finally reached the top of the ladder, only to be greeted with another hatch.

"This is it." Treis Sinde replied, "We're going onto the surface now. Move quickly, and stay behind me."

Cosh Sonter nodded, then Treis Sinde twisted the handle. There was a sudden rush of air escaping as they opened up to the vacuum of space. Quickly, Treis Sinde climbed onto the surface, then helped pull Cosh Sonter and Gaen Cage up. They were on the surface of the Eye of Palpatine alright. Above them, the turbolaser emplacements fired relentlessly at the Commonwealth capital ships, which were now further back than before; starfighters, Imperial and Commonwealth, streaked passed them, firing

relentlessly at each other. Cosh Sonter took a closer look; the Commonwealth capital ships were in bad shape, and it appeared at several more had been destroyed. Luckily, two Imperial *Pellaeon*-class Star Destroyers had also been destroyed, although it didn't appear to amount to much over the course of the battle.

"Move!" Cosh Sonter ordered, "Get back to you starships!"

Cosh Sonter looked around the battlemoon for a moment. Streams of energy bolts lanced forth from the battlemoon, lighting up the dark void of space. Luckily, the turbolaser emplacements seemed to be busy firing at the various capital ships and starfighters that were zooming by. Some turbolaser emplacements were smouldering masses of wreckage, while others didn't fire at all. It was eerie; he saw the turbolasers fire, what seemed to be, endless streams of energy bolts, yet, there was no sound. They immediately ran for the bow of the battlemoon, towards the crater where they all landed. They easily ran across the surface of the battlemoon, and within ten minutes, they could see the crater where they landed.

"There!" Cosh Sonter shouted, "I see it!"

From behind, a stream of red energy bolts poured out in front of them. Cosh Sonter immediately skidded to a stop; Gaen Cage, running close behind Cosh, slammed into him. Unfortunately, Treis Sinde was in front of them, and was sent forward, careening into the rocky surface. Cosh immediately picked himself up and turned around. It was an All Terrain Riot Control Transport, an AT-RCT; they were the hulking two-legged walkers the Imperials used as fast armoured transports. Standing on the open-canopy platform were two Imperial stormtroopers, wearing the new ceramic armour. One of the stormtroopers pointed at Cosh, then the laser cannons blazed to life.

"Run!" Cosh Sonter screamed.

Immediately, Cosh rolled over to his side. The laser bolts lanced forth, barely missing cutting Cosh in half. Finishing his roll, he came up onto his knees, and fired on the AT-RCT; the blaster bolts streaked through the vacuum of space, striking the open-canopy platform. Sparks rained down from the metallic platform, forcing the two stormtroopers to take cover. Gaen Cage, also on his knees, fired wildly at the AT-RCT. Suddenly, one of the stormtroopers came out of cover, and fired at Cosh with a blaster pistol. The relatively weak blaster bolts streaked through the black void of space, and passed Cosh. Lining up his holographic sights, Cosh squeezed the trigger of his compact assault blaster rifle. A steady stream of blaster bolts shot out, and struck the stormtrooper in the chest. The stormtrooper fell backwards and out of sight.

Suddenly, a huge explosion rocked the Eye of Palpatine violently. Cosh gazed passed the AT-RCT and at the stern of the battlemoon as it slowly was consumed with sparkling flames. A brilliant blue-orange fireball ripped through the thick rocky-metallic hull, ejecting tonnes of debris into space. Very quickly, a shockwave ripped through the hull of the Eye of Palpatine, cracking the rocky surface with gaping crevasse.

"Run! Run! Run!" Cosh Sonter screamed.

Cosh Sonter picked Gaen Cage up off the rocky and dusty ground, and they ran for their lives. Just then, the Eye of Palpatine rolled onto its dorsal side and plunged downward towards the planet Pzob below. The AT-RCT fell off the surface of the Eye of Palpatine, and plummeted towards the planet on its own. Cosh Sonter, immediately leapt forward into the crater, followed by Gaen Cage and Treis Sinde. They slid down the side of the crater, and ran towards their starfighters. Treis Sinde reached his first, and immediately started up his engines and took off; he gave a quick nod as he took off. Finally, they found their starfighter; Gaen Cage leapt into the air and landed on the rear cockpit of the CF9 Crossfire starfighter. He popped the canopy off, and strapped himself in.

"C'mon!" Gaen Cage screamed, "Hurry up!"

Cosh Sonter leapt into the air, and landed on the forward cockpit with a thud. His ribs ached from the sudden impact, but he pushed it towards the back of his mind. Suddenly, the Eye of Palpatine violently rolled and yawed as it fell through the upper atmosphere of Pzob. The CF9 Crossfire starfighter disengaged its locking mechanism, and fell off the surface of the battlemoon. Cosh immediately grabbed hold of the cockpit windshield with all of his strength, trying to pull himself into the starfighter. The atmosphere was getting thicker, and it became increasingly difficult to move as he fell downward. The thin air rushed past Cosh, picking him up off the starfighter; the wind howled around him, almost deafening him to the sounds around him.

"Get in here, damn it!" Gaen Cage screamed in terror as they plunged through the upper atmosphere.

Finally, Cosh Sonter mustered the strength to pull himself into the cockpit, and strapped himself in. He closed the cockpit windshield, and started up the engines. Just then, another CF9 Crossfire starfighter, one of the Razor's, smashed into his; the force of the impact caused the starfighter to spin wildly through the atmosphere. Luckily, their

starfighter was unharmed by the sudden impact, except for a large dent on their starboard-side.

"What the frack!" Gaen Cage screamed.

Cosh immediately engaged the engines, but the starfighter was wildly spinning towards the surface of Pzob with too much speed; everything passed the windshield blurred and streaked violently across. Cosh was unable to see anything outside his forward windshield. Suddenly, the temperature gauges started to climb, and lances of fire peered across the cockpit windshield; the intensity of the flames lit up the cockpit, partially blinding Cosh.

"Altitude, two hundred kilometres!" Gaen Cage reported.

Cosh Sonter fought against the controls with all his might, but they didn't seem to budge; Cosh was drenched with sweat from over-exertion, and his knuckles were bleach white from his tight grip. Frustratingly, he gave up on the yoke in front of him, and let go. He engaged the repulsorlifts, and tried to counter the angular momentum from the wild spin. After a few tense moments, the spinning started to subside, but now the starfighter was consumed with flames.

"Seventy kilometres!" Gaen Cage reported, "Get us out of here!"

Cosh Sonter looked outside of the cockpit windshield; the Eye of Palpatine was falling right next to them, it too consumed with flames; huge chunks of debris, probably former turbolaser emplacements, tore off the massive hull and burned up as they fell through the atmosphere. Finally, the starfighter's spinning slowed down, and the controls were responsive again. Immediately, Cosh Sonter kicked the throttle to full power, and pulled back on the yoke with every ounce of strength he had left. The starfighter started to slow down, then began to climb. The quick change in vector caused the starfighter to yaw and creak; the forces acting on the starfighter must have been tremendous. Very quickly, Cosh Sonter forced the starfighter to climb at an incredibly steep angle.

"Climb! Climb! Climb!" Gaen Cage screamed, "We have to clear the impact zone!"

The starfighter continued its steep climb through the atmosphere. Suddenly, moments later, the Eye of Palpatine crashed into the surface of Pzob; there was a bright flash of light, blinding Cosh for several moments. Then, once the light disappeared, the extent of the damage could be seen. The oceans flash boiled in mere moments, and the rocky crust melted; vaporized rock shot up through the atmosphere, along with molten

rock and other such debris. The forests of Pzob flash ignited, burning the vegetation to the ground. Surprisingly, the Eye of Palpatine itself vaporized on contact; a huge crater, probably five hundred kilometres wide, filled with molten rock, was gouged into the crystalline basement of the world. The shockwave from the explosion rose quickly through the atmosphere, actually peeling it off the planet as it did.

"Brace!" Gaen Cage screamed.

Suddenly, the shockwave struck the starfighter, causing it to pitch, roll and yaw violently; Cosh Sonter was bounced back-and-forth, side-to-side within his cockpit. From behind, Gaen Cage screamed as he too was bounced around in the rear cockpit. Cosh Sonter fought and struggled against the yoke, trying to bring the starfighter back into his control. The starfighter spun, and jostled violently, knocking Cosh around the cockpit with aching force; even within the cockpit, Cosh could hear the creaking and bending of fatigued metal. Finally, after a few seconds, Cosh regained control, and continued his upward climb through the upper atmosphere; molten rock fragments started to appear next to the starfighter as they climbed. The molten fragments of rocks looked like shooting stars, burning brightly as they flew through the thinning atmosphere. Finally, after a few more seconds, they were out of the atmosphere completely, and headed towards the Commonwealth battle line; the Imperial Star Destroyers, probably shocked at the sudden destruction of the Eye of Palpatine, recalled their starfighters and prepared to jump out of the system. Seconds later, the remaining Imperial Star Destroyers and fast frigates stretched from pseudomotion, and jumped into hyperspace.

"Cage, find Ten and Twelve." Cosh Sonter ordered.

After a few tense moments of silence, Gaen Cage replied, "I can't find them out there, Cosh."

Cosh Sonter closed his eyes; tears began to swell up at the corners of his eyes. A flurry of emotions began to boil up from within him; the emotions got stronger and stronger with every passing moment. *Gone, their all gone*, Cosh thought. In a burst of rage, he punched the side of the cockpit. *Damn it!* Slowly, he returned to one of the few remaining *Scythe*-class battle cruisers left, dubbed the *Revival*. The fleet still had about twenty capital ships, less than half its original strength, although all were badly damaged; it would take several months for the capital ships to be repaired and fully operational again.

"-recalled! Repeat, all flights are to be recalled!"

Cosh Sonter looked passed his left shoulder; the world of Pzob was completely destroyed. The once lush, vibrant world was now a molten slagged world. Where once crystal clear blue oceans and thick, dense vegetation were, oceans and rivers of molten rock flowed. Vaporized rock started to cool, and rained down on the world. The once crisp atmosphere was now no more, stripped completely off the world from the force of the impact and subsequent shockwave. Pzob was now a dead planet. Suddenly, Cosh's shoulders and chest began to ache with unnatural intensity; he pushed the pain aside and out of his mind.

"*Revival*, we're heading in." Cosh Sonter soberly replied.

"Copy, Razor One." *Revival* command replied, "Happy to have you. Just so you know, our Interdictor's are on the way. We've still got another battle to win, Commander."

"Copy. Out." Cosh Sonter replied.

Just another battle...



<http://darkness.emerges.tripod.com>