

## **Holding the Line**

**Seridan Brehevik #13767**

Seridan gasped for air. There was none. Air was ripped from his lungs as he snapped back to reality. He flailed his arms out, feeling nothing. He sensed his arm hitting something, but felt no resistance. He then felt his body move in one direction, spinning. Zero Gravity. Vacuum. He had at most two minutes of air before serious damages occurred. Survival was foremost. He spotted the emergency button on the far wall, and pushed it via the Force. No response. That meant most systems were offline, and the nearest air supply was stored in the nearest airlock. He was in the mess hall, and knew the nearest airlock was about 150 metres away, down the corridor and to the right, then the left. That said, he didn't know how he knew that. Was this a friendly ship? Had he committed the floorplan to memory? Why was he on a desolate shipwreck? All of these cluttered his mind. He couldn't feel any other life-sources nearby. He swivelled in space, rotating his lower body in the opposite direction to the torso. The mass differences between his legs and his core, arms and head meant that this motion controlled his spinning. He reached out to the nearest object - a chair, and threw the chair behind him. This gave him a small amount of velocity towards the nearest table, thanks to a little bit of physics called momentum. Upon reaching the table a few seconds later, he threw that behind him as well, building up velocity towards the wall. Upon reaching the wall, he used a door handle to propel himself, before using another handle to turn and push himself off perpendicular to the wall, towards the door.

As he flew, a number of items drifted into his path. Pushing them out of the way telekinetically would alter his current course. So, as he impacted with them, he reached towards them with his arms, made himself 'lay' straight, and then using only his fingers, moved them out of his way. He then systematically pushed until the end of the corridor. Pushing off, then catching himself at the end. Then turning, and repeating. Pushing off, and... fainting? Blackness consumed him, and he lost all concentration.

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Saladrin had had a hectic day. First, his superiors had him on detention duty clearing the dishes, then he had to go prep the lasers for space-combat. They weren't having a laugh, either - one hell of a dogfight was going on outside.

The Plagueian fleet may have arrived after the Urrian fleet, but they were fierce, and outnumbered their opposition. Both sides spat multi-coloured rays of high-energy light at each other, either catching them on shields or absorbing the blasts themselves on their metal hulls. The explosions caused by these bolts of pure thermal energy reverberated throughout the hull.

Saladrin was scrubbing the grease filter of one of the turbo lasers - something he'd done thousands of times before - and was absentmindedly staring out of the window at the battle. People were running around, shouting orders into their wrists, and not paying attention to Sal. After all, he was a lowly engineer cadet and was routinely cleaning one of the hundreds of laser weapons aboard the ship. Another rumble vibrated through the floor; another hit. Just port of Sal's position was an ion cannon - it fired and hit the underside of another Star Destroyer, right in its

shield systems. Laser fire suddenly targeted this ship, breaking apart its vital systems: navigation, propulsion, weapons, the bridge. Sal watched as it was torn apart, leaving a corpse of a ship. It drifted, still maintaining its momentum. With time, its irregular motion and the local gravitational field, it would eventually fall to the planet's surface.

As he turned back to check his greasing of the hydraulics, two men strode purposefully around the corner, heading for the turbolift to the bridge. Their uniforms designated them as lieutenants and watchstanders of the ship. Sal recognised the one on the left - it was his high superior, Old Clockton. Clockton was well known for his slightly creepy, forward-leaning gait when he walked, but he was known to be fair yet stern. He buckled down, rubbing furiously at the hydraulics - simultaneously trying to disappear and be noticed for good things.

Clockton stopped abruptly beside him. He snapped, "Cadet Brin, is it? That hydraulic looks well greased - go to the Board and see if you need to do anything further. You are taking up a part of this corridor."

He was stalking off just as suddenly as he'd stopped. Sal didn't quite know how to process it, but nodded curtly to the lieutenant's back.

"Yes, sir."

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Seridan bruised a shoulder as he collided with the far wall, and bounced back the way he'd come. He slowly came to, and slid his fingers along the wall to slow himself down. As he did, a tearing sort of pain emerged from his side. Reaching down with his free hand, he felt it move through a liquid - slightly thicker than water. Lightly prodding himself around the affected area, pain screamed at him to stop. He narrowed down the area when he poked his finger into the inch-wide cut in his side. He almost cried in agony, but caught himself.

*Right. I'm losing blood, and have no oxygen. Airlock is just up here. I need to get there. Now.*

He pushed off again, pressing on the wound. Blood wouldn't clot in a vacuum - even one with enough pressure - somehow - to not pop into a load of floating chemicals. However, pressing on the wound would still restrict the amount of blood leaking out of his body. His chest was aching, a grand pain piercing his lungs, and numbness creeping through his arms. He had maybe a minute before oxygen deprivation started taking more permanent effect.

This time, as he flew down the corridor, he stared intensely at the wall that he was going towards. Without focussing entirely on it, his collection of maladies would overcome him. As he neared the wall, he dragged his free hand along the ceiling, spinning himself in a right angle. Then, as he hit and bounced off the wall, he pushed off round the corner. The 'trip' was much shorter, this time, as nearly immediately, he grabbed a handle and swung into a small compartment on the wall - an escape pod. Without power, he had to fix his feet on the ceiling and shove the door closed, spinning a latch to fix the seal closed. Seridan started to feel the edges of his concentration start to

unravel. He manoeuvred his way over to the control panel on the wall, turning on life support and artigrav. He fell to the floor, and he was forced to breathe out. Good thing the pod was flooding with air.

Seridan now had a bigger problem - his wound. In the zero-G of the ship, the blood had pooled in a sphere around the wound, but now, all that had fallen to the floor, making quite a slippery surface. At least with artigrav and breathable air, he could clot. He pressed against the wound, using his eye-bandage to help clot it.

As he started fumbling with the launch sequence, a small fault with the air compression systems started weakening an edge of a pipe. In the face of prolonged oxygen deprivation, and substantial blood loss, he was doing startlingly well at both remembering and inputting the right instructions. However, as he finalised the target coordinates, the compression systems started releasing the air too fast. The weakness in the pipe began to split, and suddenly there was a tear - a place where the thoroughly different pressures met unobstructed. Air from the compression system was then ripped through the tear in a great explosion. The rupture didn't kill Seridan, but it did break the pod from the rest of the ship, propelling it outward. There was a safety valve which stopped the air getting sucked from within the pod, and so he had a pod's worth of air.

*This maybe will last me a good few minutes. Should be enough time.*

He laid back against the hard, steel wall. Florrum awaited. Whatever had happened there, the Blind One couldn't remember.

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When Sal had gone to check the Board - the place where all the odd jobs were digitally listed and prioritised - he'd found that there was nothing for him to do. The only things listed were things that required specialist training, and Sal was unqualified. He went to the Engineer mess room (commonly called the Rivin Dell) and picked up his Sudoku book, checked his notifications, then kicked off his boots and leant back on his self-modified chair. A *\*ping\** from his wrist notified him of an announcement from the captain. Sal tapped a few controls on his datapad and he started reading - it was something about enemy escape pods: the Consul had apparently ordered the destruction of any seen coming from enemy ships. He stowed his datapad back into his pocket.

As he worked through the numeric puzzle, he periodically glanced out of the window, surveying the expanse of space this side of the ship faced. Every now and then, a ship would slide through the periphery of the window, but for the most part, it was a blank slate of stars and other galaxies.

Sal stretched his feet out onto Smelly Jym's chair - he had Rivin Dell to himself, and was making best use of that.

'There an 8 there and there, so there must be an 8... here. In this line we have 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8 and 9, so 6 must go here,' he muttered to himself as he filled in the last few squares of a 'Medium' level

puzzle. Hitting his chair with pride, he closed the book and glanced up. A desolate piece of waste had drifted into view - a twisted hull of a ship.

*It's the ship from earlier, thought the Cadet. It looks so... alone, despite having a backdrop of stars, which are like huge life-factories, indirectly.*

As he continued contemplating the loneliness of a piece of metal, a small rupture blew out on the side of the ship - not uncommon with wrecks. Sal noticed, and pulled a pair of binoculars from Jym's end table. Debris was floating out of the wreck, along with a few bodies. But there was also a faster-moving block - a mess table? - moving away from the ship. Upon closer inspection, it was something far more noteworthy. Sal dialled up his superior immediately.

Ten minutes later, Sal was being marched along the bridge by two lieutenants. The bridge was eerily calm, given the battle. Watchstanders were stationed around the bridge, querying things with the captain almost like clockwork. The captain watched over her crew like a proud mother, confident in her lieutenants' abilities, and only intervening when she disagreed. Outside the viewport, it seemed the battle was diminishing; it seemed to have passed a climax and was now 'finishing up'.

Sal was led up to a tall Arkanian. Sal had only heard stories of Vorust Traund - talking to him seemed slightly daunting.

Traund span to face him, and started speaking immediately, "I hear you spotted a pod from the wrecked ship to the portside."

"Yes, sir."

"Life-forms aboard?"

The lieutenant at his left shoulder replied, "Yes, Commander. One"

"Wait here."

Traund span around and appeared to have a conversation via his comlink - Sal guessed the person on the other end was the Consul herself - Alora Kituri. His face appeared to get tighter and tighter as the conversation continued. Then, all of a sudden, the Arkanian marched back to Sal.

"We sent a boarding party to that wrecked ship - a team of Jedi intending to claim it as our own. This was concealed from the others, in case our communications were intercepted. After the shields were taken out, we sent a message to get them out, but one remained behind to confront the captain. Our allies acted instinctively and crippled the ship, with this one Jedi still inside. This escape pod could hold that Jedi, or it could hold an important enemy. The *honourable* Consul believes that you should decide the fate of the pod."

"Who's the Jedi?"

"I'll tell you afterwards," Traund responded, a slight smile on his lips. He seemed to be enjoying this.

Sal paused. He had lost everyone he had cared about. His entire family killed, his former gang-members massacred. Intelligence placed their deaths at the hands of the Iron Legion. SeNet had managed to find out the rough regions in which each Clan's soldiers were active. Plageuis' troops were indicated to have killed around Seher: his loved ones. He shouldn't take the chance that it was this Jedi. Pulling back from a purely emotional response, he reasoned that the Jedi would have gone to the bridge to seek the captain, and he'd seen the numerous lasers that had hit that ship's bridge. The Jedi was most likely dead.

"Shoot it down."

"It will be done." Traund span away and took a step before saying over his shoulder, "the Jedi was Seridan. Wasn't he the one who picked you up off of the streets and gave you a proper chance in life?"