**Approaching Ptolomea Orbit, 34 ABY**

“Attention on the bridge”, a crewmember exclaimed, as Captain Sparky von Wagglehorn III strode confidently into the bridge of the *Vanquisher,* an Acclamator-I class assault ship. With a tip of his hand, Sparky signaled the bridge crew to get back to their duties and swept his eyes across the bridge. The processed air was chilly, and seemed to match the grey durasteel plating that seemed to cover the interior of the bridge. As he cast his eyes upward towards the viewport, he grinned slightly at the beauty that was the starscape outside his ship. As the crew got back to work at their stations, Sparky noted the tension that seemed palpable, even almost physical in nature. The gentle hum of the engines wasn’t loud enough to drown out the buzz of crew small talk as a spec in the viewports seemed to grow.

With a word, Captain Sparky silenced the bridge, “Ptolomea.” Crew that wasn’t otherwise engaged in their primary duties turned in their stations to listen to the captain speak. Sparky continued, “Ladies and gentlemen, within a standard hour, we’ll be in orbit surrounding Ptolomea. As you may already know from ship scuttlebutt, we’ve begun a series of raids and assaults on numerous communication hubs across the planet. I know you also know that we do not have any soldiers on board the *Vanquisher* for this assault, and I’m sure you’re wondering just how we’re going to accomplish our task of eliminating, vanquishing if you will (Sparky paused for the polite smiles and laughter), our target: a hub in Jormungand Quarry. I assure you, the Empire has provided us the means to accomplish this task and we will do our duty. That is all. Get back to it, and XO – let me know when we’re in orbit”

With that, Sparky turned step sharply and strode off the bridge, trying to hide how conflicted his own emotions were as he entered the lift. Pausing for effect. He himself wasn’t certain of the mission. His orders lately had seemed increasingly disparate and conflicting. Prior to taking command of the *Vanquisher,* he’d even spent time fighting WITH Excidium, and now he was ordered to destroy them. Sparky had attempted to reach out to some of his colleagues at the outbreak of hostilities, but the communication blackout had prevented any responses. He wasn’t certain how much longer he could commit his honor to the empire. Back on Judecca, he’d spent 10 days rotting in a “holding area” at the outbreak of the conflict because he’d refused to torture a captive Excidium soldier. While he was pleased to be released to active duty, he was uncertain of the future.

Sighing heavily, he dismissed his thoughts and walked into the open hold as the lift doors opened with a hiss. He walked calmly into the main hold of the *Vanquisher* to examine his top secret cargo. The hold was a buzz with activity. The two soldiers by the lift door immediately snapped to attention as he walked by. Where the hold was once filled with eager soldiers, it now held the Empire’s secret test weapon. Imperium scientists and technicians rushed around the short, squat, fighter sized object sitting on the hold’s floor. It was shaped as cube with solar panels on four sides that could extend outward, and a main cylindrical structure protruding from the “front”. It was known as the YS-33, or “Atomizer” as the techs called it. Sparky was certainly not a scientist, but he understood that this satellite, when deployed, could focus a beam that could penetrate deep rock to a set depth, rendering any electronics in the ray ineffective. Apparently it melted their main chips or something. Sparky didn’t know, and really didn’t care as long as it worked.

Sparky noticed a single technician fiddling with some sort of device he was trying to fit on the cylindrical “cannon” part of the satellite, far from where the rest of the techs were prepping their equipment to launch the satellite. Sparky strode towards this lone tech, his boots echoing on the hard metal floor of the hold. As he approached, the tech looked up wide eyed at Captain Sparky. Sparky glanced at the tech’s hands and realized that this tech was holding a detonator of some sort! As Sparky opened his mouth to yell, the tech pressed the button. That was the last thing Captain Sparky remembered for quite some time.

**Judecca, Wagglehorn Home, 34 ABY**

Jenessa yawned as she shuffled into the living room, cursing silently as she tripped over a stray toy and flopped into an easy chair. She could hear the children stirring on the monitor, but thought she’d try and catch the news briefly, as she turned the holoscreen on. She thought of her husband, Sparky, deployed to this new flashpoint. *This damn conflict keeps us apart yet again, and I’m stuck watching the news for any updates –* her thoughts froze as the announcer on JNN continued, “While reports coming from Ptolomea, the latest front of this new flashpoint, are sketchy at best, we’ve heard that that the *Vanquisher* has been disabled or destroyed in orbit of Ptolomea. We expect more formal news from our Empire sponsors shortly – “. He stopped talking and looked off screen, seeming to listen, then glanced back at the camera, looking stricken and said , “Uh, I’m being told that’s um…not accurate.” Regaining composure, he says, “The official news is in from our Empire affiliate, the war continues well, and victory is all but assured! Citizens should not be worried.” Jenessa didn’t hear, or care to hear, as she sank into her chair and let the tears begin to fall.