

Korroth
Jedi Ranger
Disciples of Baas
House Satele Shan
Clan Odan-Urr
#8488

[Hoth v Satele Shan]

The Invasion of Solyiat

Spheres of Authority

“... isolate the Trepus Mines from the Trans—” The drop pod rocked violently as its atmospheric thrusters engaged. The lone grey-skinned humanoid inside clutched at his harness straps and threw a glance down at the porthole. The planet surface was steadily drawing closer, covered in low-lying silver clouds. “...block their reinforcements.” The azure image of Len Iode flickered back to life in the middle of the pod. “Are you receiving, Ranger?”

“Yes, you’re back. Please continue,” the Pau’an raised his voice over the rattling in the pod.

“We have been talking to the local administration,” the Battleteam Commander resumed. “They seem to think that Hoth are hiding something in the Trepus Mines.”

“SeNet and their muckraking, eh?”

“Well, I wouldn’t know anything about that.” Both Disciples smirked. “We know better than to heed the rumour mill, but the Vatali are taking it pretty seriously. In fact, they are sending a team of civil engineers from Voraskel. They are going shut down the transit tunnel that connects the Transfer Station to the mines.”

“That’d be convenient for us, depending on when it’s going to happen.”

Len nodded. “We have convinced them that right now is the best time to do it. I’m sending you to meet their ship and escort them to the Transfer Station. Hoth are bound to try and stop the Vatali engineers; it’s your job to make sure that doesn’t happen.”

“What kind of resistance should I expect at the Station?” Through the thick transparisteel of the porthole a slim, dark shape began to take form in the clouds below. “I assume Hoth won’t want to alienate their hosts on Solyiat so soon.”

“That’s right. They’ll find ways to delay you, at least until the end of the invasion, but they can’t afford to spark off a diplomatic incident with the Vatali. And, Korroth, that counts for you too. You are to keep the Vatali team safe, understood?”

“Yes sir!” The Pau’an touched his brow in a mock military salute. “I presume our friends’ ship is going to pick me up before I hit the ground?”

“Oh, did I not make this clear?” The Commander, who was about to quit the holofeed, turned back around. “It’s a seaborne vessel.”

“A sea ship?” The dark shape below was getting larger, but it was still impossible to recognise in the uniform cover of fog. “Then I’m not going to land *on* the ship?”

“Of course not. You want to sink it? Don’t worry, the Ratchets retrofitted the pod for water landing. Len out.”

Just as the image of the Chiss flicked out, the pod’s altitude alarm went off. Korroth braced for impact. Suddenly the inside of the pod shook worse than a direct turbolaser hit, and all went dark. The abrupt deceleration almost pulled the Jedi out of his harness, but then the pod seemed to gently turn upside down. A pallid light seeped through the porthole, followed by several jets of water, appearing from all directions.

“Retrofitted my—” The top hatch blew out with a bang, and warm air wooshed into the pod. Korroth scrambled to remove his harness and climb out. As soon as he gained the lip of the opening he pushed off into the water. Swimming as hard as he could, the Pau’an didn’t stop until he was clear of the sinking pod. For a moment he thought the swirling vortex was going to drag him down with the pod, but before long the water became completely still.

Panting for breath, the Pau’an soon noticed the stench. It was like rotten dactillion eggs and slugpowder. *Sulphurous fumaroles*, he thought. *At least it explains the warm water.* Bobbing with his head above the surface, Korroth activated a short-range beacon on his comlink. There was no sign of the ship. All around languid tendrils of mist rose and swayed, barely disturbed by the breeze. The Jedi was pondering if he should stay put or continue swimming when a giant wall of durasteel appeared before him. He looked up and huge white letters streaked past him: VS RANORM.

The Pau’an padded over his kaftan and found that it was not even damp anymore. He nodded to the ensign guarding the bridge and ducked through the hatch. The vessel’s control room

was lined with winking consoles and manned by white-uniformed officers. The windows allowed a clear view of the sleek prow of the ship, but beyond was only calm sea and mist. The atmosphere on the bridge could have been described as quiet and efficient, if it hadn't been for the vociferations of a diminutive Teedo.

"Captain, what possessed you to waylay our prescribed route?" The Teedo croaked. He was dressed in clean-cut civilian clothes, and had a datapad tucked under his arm. "Are you aware that we are already set to arrive six minutes behind schedule?"

"We were engaged in a sea rescue operation, Commissioner." The Captain was a middle-aged Sephi, standing with his hands clasped behind his back. "I'm sure we will soon be back on track."

"And that's another thing. This ship is on special escort duty for Ministry of Transport officials and engineers. You can't just take clandestines on board!"

"You have nothing to worry about Commissioner. Our new passenger is here to liaise with the personnel at the Transfer Station. And," the Captain added before the Teedo could cut in. "The orders to intercept him came three hours ago from the Palace."

Seemingly placated, the Commissioner turned to leave and finally spotted Korroth. With a significant "Hmph!" he stepped out of the hatch and exited the bridge.

"Since you and Commissioner Papel are already introduced," said the Captain with an amused smile, extending his hand to the Pau'an. "Captain Lugan of the VS Ranorm."

"Ranger Korroth, from Clan Odan-Urr." The Jedi shook the Captain's hand.

"A pleasure to have you on board. Don't mind the Commissioner, he's been griping about timetables and notary-stamped manifests since we embarked."

"I suspect he's just doing his job. He must think this is pretty important business we're on."

"Oh, I don't think the Commissioner is much interested in the why. He just wants to carry out his duties to his own standards of precision. But the Palace certainly thinks it's an important matter. And... so does your Clan, I'd say."

"What would make you say it?"

"Apart from your presence here?" The Captain glanced at his command consoles. "We have detected ships—a whole fleet—in orbit, and pod drops throughout the Trepus continent. When the admirals at the Palace get wind of this, they are going to be spooked, I can tell you."

“I assure you Captain,” the Odanite replied. “As the Clan leaders are undoubtedly assuring the Voraskel Palace, that none of this is directed at the Vatali or the Solyiat administration. It is merely an internal military exercise.”

“I’m sure the admirals will be reassured. But the fact still remains—this ship is heading right into the thick of it, and I still don’t know exactly what’s going on.”

“That’s why I’m here. The last thing we want is for the Clan’s activities to interfere with the work of your government’s delegates. Though,” Korroth peered through the murk surrounding the ship, but as yet there were no signs of the Station or the coastline. Just rolling banks of fog. “It would be of help were I to grasp the political situation better. What does the Palace believe that Hoth is hiding to take such an interest? Surely they can’t think that the Trepus Mines have anything of value left in them.”

“You must understand, Ranger, that the Solyiat administration thinks mainly in terms of mining charters, and the Voraskel treasury is like a kath hound when it smells new export duty revenues. Your Clan’s activities in the abandoned mines must have convinced them that a new seam had been discovered, at the very least. Shutting down the transfer tunnel is a holding action for them. It gives the government a bargaining—”

“Sir, comm range!” A Sephi officer interjected. As soon as he said it the comm station started flashing. At a nod from Captain Lukan the officer flipped the connection, and a crepitating voice invaded the bridge.

“Unidentified sea vessel. Trepus Transfer Station. You are entering a militarised zone. Revert course immediately. I repeat, you are entering...”

“Second,” the Captain spoke over the transmission, calling over one of his lieutenants. “Broadcast our transponder codes and open two-way communication.”

“Yes sir.”

“Trepus Transfer Station.” The Captain turned to face forward, though the mist remained as inscrutable as before. “This is the Vatali Ship Ranorm on assignment from the Kiasst Ministry of Transport. We will dock with you at eight-forty-six standard hours to debark a team of Ministry officials. Have you been informed of their arrival?”

The comlink went quiet. The ship continued to cut through the still water, unswerving. “Captain,” Korroth broke the wait. “Hoth probably know of your government’s intentions, but our arrival at this juncture will be a surprise. They might think we are a part of the military exercise.”

Captain Lugan sighed. “I feel like my ship has become a pawn on more than one dejarik table.”

“I promise you,” Korroth stated, looking the Sephi in the eyes. “I won’t let any harm come to your crew or passengers.”

The Captain shook his head. “That’s not the issue. I need to know how far I can push this... Hoth.” He held up a hand to forestall the Jedi. “And now is the time for action, not words. Helmsman, come left to three-eight-eight, five-six-eight and increase to full speed.”

Out of the bridge’s forward windows a shadow began appearing through the fog, still far in the distance. The prow of the ship took a shallow turn and pointed straight for it.

“VS Ranorm,” the comlink voice crackled through the bridge again. “We cannot berth you at this time. You must turn about immediately and leave this area.”

“Trepus Transfer Station,” the Captain replied. “We receive your request but will not change course. We will use your docks to access the underground transport system, which is under the jurisdiction of the Solyiat Vatali administration. You are not to obstruct us in any way.”

“Vatali Ship. We are issuing a final warning. This is a militarised zone; you are to leave the area for your own safety.”

“Sir!” An officer piped up. “The Station is targeting us. Two turbolaser batteries on their control tower.”

“All-right. Steady as you go, helm.”

“It’s just posturing,” Korroth reassured the Captain. “They can’t risk sinking a Vatali vessel.”

“We’ll see.”

The bridge went quiet as the Sephi officers tended to their instruments or gazed out of the windows. The ship, silent as the water, cut through the fog banks like a blade. Studying the dark shape of the Station, the Pau’an reflected on the last words of Captain Lugan. How far could they push Hoth? Korroth had faith in his clanmates—nobody wanted people to get hurt for a military exercise. But even a mock invasion carried real risks. Would Hoth weigh the probability of accidents against mission success the same way he did? How did the Pau’an himself weigh it? The charcoal shadow of the Station was still too distant to yield anything of his Hoth brethren’s state of mind.

A sudden flash of scarlet light drenched the bridge. The window panes rattled. Some of the officers threw themselves to the ground, one of them shouting “We’re hit!” The bridge fell

silent again. Neither Captain Lukan nor Korroth had flinched, though the Pau'an was blinking through the lightburst's purple afterimage. With an arched eyebrow, the Captain turned to his Second, waiting for her to get up.

"No damage reported sir." The lieutenant cleared her throat. "It passed off our starboard side and impacted the water three clicks behind us."

"A warning shot," the Captain stated.

"Captain!" A panting Commissioner Papel burst through the bridge's hatch. "What is the meaning of this?"

"Commissioner, I must ask you to return to your quarters until we are docked."

"Docked? *Docked?*" The Teedo's voice rose in pitch. "Are you aware that someone just fired at this ship?"

"The Transfer Station is having trouble accepting our authorisation, but we are getting the situation under control."

"Did you not tell them," the Teedo offered. "That you are carrying government officials onboard? What possible cause would they have for shooting at us?"

"You see, Commissioner," the Jedi spoke. "My colleagues at the Station have established this as a militarised zone, and they are labouring under the impression th—"

"VS Ranorm," the comlink voice imposed itself on the bridge. The attention of everybody present turned back to the Station, which now stood clearly contrasted against the chalky murk of the fog. "Since you are not complying, our next action will be to attempt to disable your engines." The officers started murmuring amongst each other.

"Silence!" The Captain bellowed. "Reduce speed to fiver-fiver."

"We request," the Station's voice continued. "That you come to full stop so that we may acquire target without risk to your crew or personn—"

"Brace for high-speed turn." At the Captain's orders Korroth grabbed onto some handrails, but his attention was already focused on the Station's turbolaser towers, now clearly visible through the forward windows. Through the Force, the Jedi could feel the reciprocal attention of the gunners, directed presently towards the ship. Despite their statement, Korroth perceived that they were not going to wait for the vessel to halt.

“Right standard rudder, helm,” the Captain ordered, and the centrifugal force of the turn started pulling Korroth in the opposite direction. But the Jedi felt another pull, a flow of energy that lay below the conscious process.

“Captain, pull left now!” The Pau’an blurted out.

“What?”

“Do it or they’ll hit us!”

“Helm hard aport!” The bridge, the highest structure on the ship, swung to the opposite side. The whole ship tilted like an ear of wheat in the wind. Anything that was not pinned down—datapads, mugs, a few crewmen—flew across the bridge. Korroth caught the Commissioner’s sleeve to steady him. A crimson bolt streaked past the windows. It hit the water not twelve metres behind the ship, sending up a fountain of steam and spray.

“Steady, helm.” The tilt of the vessel eased until it was travelling in a straight line again. The Captain looked at Korroth, but the Jedi had his eyes closed. His mind was open, receiving the ripples that propagated through the Force from the Transfer Station.

“Captain,” the Pau’an spoke softly. “Prepare for another strike.”

The Sephi nodded once and turned to his officers. “Right easy. Mind your helm.” The prow swept gently to the right, turning like a magnetised needle towards the Transfer Station. The vessel’s graceful movement belied its velocity, with the Station and the visible coastline drawing closer every second.

“Swing left!” The Pau’an exclaimed.

“Left twenty degrees rudder!” The ship deviated from its path. A laser bolt erupted from the Station’s tower and screeched over the bow of the ship. “Shift rudder,” the Captain commanded, and the vessel steered back in the opposite direction. It was soon pointing straight for the Station, offering the smallest targeting profile.

“Captain, ease slightly to the right.” The Captain complied with Korroth’s instructions, and the ship began to veer off. “Now, hard left!” The ship cut back in the other direction, foaming waves unfurling from its hull. A shot was fired again, and the water boiled and frothed on the *Ranorm*’s starboard side. The impact sent up sprays of water, which pattered on the bridge’s windows.

“Come back right to three-eight-eight, five-six-eight.” The Captain looked up at the Station now looming above them. At its seaward base a cavernous structure emerged out of the water, and the Vatali ship headed straight for its entrance. “Cut power to forward engines.

Prepare to reverse propellers.” The *Ranorm* sped towards the docks. “Mind your helm; left easy rudder. Power to reverse propellers... engage!”

The vessel shuddered and groaned. Everybody on the bridge was thrust forward by the momentum. The ship slid into the opening, decelerating rapidly, until the tip of the prow touched the back of the docks, and the seven tonnes of durasteel came to a screeching halt.