

Briefing Room, Sky Breach Base
Daleem, Kiast System
H -36

The blank-walled briefing room's lights were low as the four members of Bravo Team took their seats. The Zabrek team leader, callsign Spikes, a former KUDF soldier, hated waiting.

This waiting was wasting valuable planning time, he thought.

"Feeling a bit impatient, boss?" The team's demolition and heavy weapons expert chuckled.

The Zabrak rolled his eyes. "Not at all, Smoke. Wonder if this is some kind of test."

"They wouldn't do that to us. Would they?" Smoke mused semi-seriously.

"The tests started only after selection ended," the female Twi'lek combat slicer quipped.

"Yeah, maybe they are checking your sanity, Smoke. About time, too," the Mon Calamari medic smirked.

"Hey, I passed my last eval!"

The door unsealed at the front of the room and through the door walked Executor Len Iode, his uniform pressed and impeccable, a datapad in one hand and specs resting on his nose. The Chiss' face was an emotional blank slate.

"Attention on deck!" Spikes ordered.

"As you were, Bravo Team," Len's demeanor shifted and became more cordial, "Take your seats."

As the team returned to their seats, the holoprojector next to the podium took on a soft blue glow and a ship came into view. Len extracted a single code cylinder from his pocket and inserted it into the podium. The hissing of air being forced from the gap spaces of the door broke the silence. When the sound subsided, red lights came on at each door.

"What you see here, team, is the Dreadnaught-class x60 Heavy Cruiser *Braga*."

"Seems different from a normal Dreadnaught-class. Elongated." the Mon Calamari member said.

“Indeed, Mad-Eye. SenNet analysts have determined that some sort of new weapon has been installed. A deep cover asset made contact with one of our reliable sources and confirmed the weapon is a composite beam laser.”

Len keyed a control and the ship peeled away, showing the tight tributary beam shafts in the center of the ship leading from the engine room to the bow.

“In essence a smaller version of the Death Star superlaser. The weapon is untested so far, but that will change. On top of that, the ship has an unknown stealth system. Our man is unsure of its purpose.” Len paused, looking at the troopers. They were semi-interested, but obviously looking to get to the meat of this briefing.

“The ship is joining Battle Group *Abellio*, Rath Oligard’s personal fleet, to conduct its first mission. Our orders are to get onboard, and destroy the ship from the inside and if possible, grab the specs or any other data of the special weapons systems.”

The team members studied the model hovering next to Len. “How do we know where the ships will be, sir?” the scout asked matter of factly.

“That is classified, Eagle, and not in the scope of this briefing,” Len replied, hating to withhold information, but this plan was risky enough.

The Twi’lek’s lekku twitched; classified meant two things to her, neither of which good.

Spikes rose and moved closer to the model. Quizzically the Zabrak looked up a smile creeping across his face. He thought the plan was daring enough.

“Alright sir, how do we get aboard?”

Len changed the display to a UT-45D transport “We will be dropped off by the *Solari* Battle Group and the naval elements of JTF Satele Shan at the appointed coordinates. The task group will then proceed on a preset course away from our area. Once the enemy arrives, we will drift into position near the *Braga* and infiltrate via the underside docking port near the port stealth nacelle. Extraction will be through the same route.”

Smoke raised his hand. “When do we leave?”

***Solari* Command Center**
Deep Space
H -0.5

Alethia looked tired. After having working directly under her for some time, Len had learned some of her tells. The whole Collective business had caught the whole Council off guard, Len included. Director Maximus Alvinus, the new Jedi commander of JTF Satele Shan was seated next to Len in the medium sized, brightly lit Mon Calamari Cruiser's briefing room.

For the last 40 minutes, the silver-haired woman had been briefing the assembled senior staff of the Task Group around a teardrop shaped white table, including acting Fleet Admiral Arcia Cortel, Commander Ken Iode, and the captains of the assembled ships.

"Per the Admiral's input, the fleet will deploy along vector 1-8-4 and then leave the area at light speed. Battle Group Abellio will arrive eight minutes later. Two minutes later, we will have completed our circle and drop out of light speed. If they haven't already, Bravo Team will make entry into *Braga* and deal with the two weapons. Any questions?"

Len was still a bit concerned about their man on the inside. The Chiss decided to hold his tongue on this question.

Maximus stood.

"Director Alvinus, you have a question?" The Deputy High Councilor turned to face the Jedi.

Maximus drew his lips to a small smile, "I was just trying to stretch my legs."

Arcia fired daggers from her eyes at the man, who dropped the smile at her gaze.

"But since you asked... yes. How confident are we in Bravo Team? I mean how do we know they aren't sympathetic to the cause?"

The room went silent.

"Director, with all due respect I don't," Len started but was cut off by the Admiral who locked onto Maximus.

"How dare you question the loyalty of soldiers under your command? They would not have been selected if their loyalty was not almost a guarantee. Pompous Jedi."

Almost playfully Maximus replied, "Are you the one guaranteeing their loyalty?"

The elder Iode spoke, "Everyone, just relax. I am sure Director Alvinus meant no disrespect. These times are trying to everyone."

Cortel almost broke her bearing. "Stay out of this, Commander."

The portly Chiss rose from his chair. "I will personally guarantee the safety of the mission. I had planned on joining them to assist, I can make sure they stay on target."

The Jedi turned to his subordinate. "I trust you, Len."

The black haired woman simply nodded.

The Deputy High Councilor cleared her throat. "You don't have much time to pack lode. Make it fast."

Solari Flight Deck

Deep Space

H -0.25

Bravo Team had formed up in the main hangar next to their U-Wing transport. This particular transport had been modified to look like a burned out hulk and insulated the life signs of anyone aboard.

Spikes stood in front of his assembled team, their shipboard combat uniforms felt too light. He was used to the tougher Rebel Marine armor that most SF troopers wore planetside. So was most of his team.

We saw how well this armor worked on the Tantive IV didn't we. The Zabrak mused to himself before speaking.

"Final equipment check. Remember, we don't have a resupply coming. If you think you might need extra, stow it on the U-Wing."

The group confirmed the order and began checking themselves and each other. Len remembered those days fondly, but had already checked out his gear twice when he marched onto the reflective hanger floor. His black, dark blue, and gray semi-form fitting tac-suit wasn't his favorite, but this suit made him the quietest and carried a lot of bang for the buck. The pouches were placed to break up his portly form, but also made accessing certain equipment and magazines easier.

As the OEF team finished checking themselves, they noticed the Chiss approaching. Falling back into formation, Spikes took his position as the furthest to the right in line.

"What's the special occasion sir?"

Len cracked a smile. "I figured I can't let you have all the fun. Request permission to join the strike team?"

“Granted,” the Zabrak paused and narrowed his eyes slightly, “But may I ask what the real reason is, sir? That you’re joining us?”

Len felt on the spot a bit, but pulled together a story. “I’m here as a second demo man.” He looked to the human team member as he said, “I’m sure Smoke could use a pack mule and I am sure he wouldn’t mind a second set of eyes for placing charges. I never did.”

A devilish grin crept across the medium build human’s face. “Two heads are better than one, sir.”

The Executor refocused on the team leader. “You still have operational command, First Sergeant.”

Len nodded and Spikes returned the nod.

“Stow your gear lode, coordinate with Smoke and Mad Eye. They’ll get you up to speed on how we operate. Let’s move it people, time isn’t on our side!”

The group responded in the affirmative and the team began making the final preparations.

Picking up a container of ammo cartridges Len spoke to the team explosives expert. “I know you guys go by call signs in the field but what are your real names?”

Smoke looked puzzled at the Chiss. “You don’t know the policy?”

“I know most of the policies.”

“OEF SF Directive 1 ‘No members of a special ops team may know the others real name. This is to protect them if captured.’”

Len had never heard of that one, but could see the wisdom. Especially now with a seemingly all powerful enemy.

“Sorry, I didn’t mean to almost have you violate policy.”

Smoke grinned, “Not a problem, it’s really an unofficial one. Some teams ignore it, but the boss man makes sure we follow it to the letter.”

The two finished loading the transport. As the team boarded, Len looked into the hangar bay. The pilots were starting to enter the large space. Some running, some taking their time.

Time for some action.

UT-45D Tail Number L8311G

Deep Space

H -0, Correction H +0.01

The Executor watched his wrist chrono hit zero and start counting up. He nodded to Spikes who in turn announced. "We are now on mission. Eight minutes to contact."

Len looked out of the viewport. "They haven't jumped yet."

The team leader took a couple of steps towards the window. "That's odd. They were supposed to jump at H hour right?"

The Chiss nodded. "Something must be wrong."

The pilot poked his head in from the cockpit. "CONTACT, strap in!"

A slight nudge caused the team to lose their footing momentarily. Outside the viewport, Battle Group Abellio was starting to engage the Joint Task Group.

Len made his way towards the co-pilot's chair. "Get me Admiral Cortel."

The pilot shook his head as another explosion rocked the U-Wing. "Can't, sir, the Collective ships are scanning all frequencies for comm chatter."

"Damn. Alright, keep to the plan. Try and locate the *Braga*."

The human to Len's left zoned into the scanner. "Lots of interference, but I think I see it."

"Set a course."

Carefully, the pilot navigated the battlefield. Anti-starfighter weapons thundered around the wreckage-camouflaged transport. A couple of near misses made Len remember why he preferred to make his stand on the ground. After an eternity in the Chiss' mind, the target came into view. It seemed odd though, like it was half faded into the background.

"First Sergeant, come up and have a look." Len called to the team leader.

Grasping the safety handle tightly, Spikes took a look at the Dreadnaught-class.

"Looks like some kind of cloaking device." Len nodded in agreement as the Zabrak rubbed his chin with his free hand. Turning towards the pilot he asked. "Are we recording?"

The man nodded. "Absolutely. I can see the hatch, you guys should get in position."

“Right,” Len said as he unlatched the safety belts and stood, “We’ll signal you when we’re ready for exfil.”

The two aliens made their way to the crew area as another explosion gently rocked the transport.

“If we’re not careful, one of these will hit,” Eagle stated flatly as she attached her rifle sling to her combat vest.

The pilot stuck his head in. Len was starting to think that this must have been one of his father’s jokes assigning this pilot. “Wasn’t an explosion. We have a soft seal, but looks like they have the escape system locked out.”

Mad Eye pulled out his decoder and datapad. “Not to worry, I’ll have that door open in a jiffy.”

Lower Forward Escape Hatch
The Collective Ship *Braga*
Deep Space
H +0.5

It took Mad Eye about 15 seconds to pop the hatch, Len estimated, making it look like a nanosecond system glitch. For all the bridge knew the door unlocked and locked, but never opened. The Executor was starting to see for himself why this team was considered the best of the best. Nevertheless, he was still worried about the fact that the the fleet never went to hyperspace. Arcia wouldn’t pull an audible like this in the field, not unless there was a real problem. The good news though was that the ship’s crew would be more concerned with the space battle and probably not notice team’s presence. So far they hadn’t noticed. The quintet used the service crawlspaces plotted out on Spikes’ scanner. It had been lots of ladders and tight dusty corridors. Finally, Spikes stopped and raised his open hand, the team carried the signal all the way back to Len who was bringing up the rear.

In a hushed tone, the team leader spoke. “Two contacts on the other side. Mad Eye take rear, Len, you and I will open and clear. Quiet as can be.”

Len moved with a purpose to the opposite side of the door from the Zabrak, drawing his suppressed scout pistol. The team leader drew his knife and counted down on his hand.

Three...

Two...

One...

The automatic hatch opened and the Chiss moved quickly but silently onto the catwalk below the tributary beams. Sweeping his sector, Len found his target, a so-far unaware technocrat soldier, and leveled his pistol. Next to him, Spikes was closing on his target, knife at the ready.

Fwthmp

Len caught his target before the lifeless soldier hit the floor, easing him to his final resting place.

A twinge of regret pulsed through the portly soldier.

Wrong place, wrong time.

Looking over at his partner the Chiss saw the team leader's target ease to the floor, blood pooling around him. The men nodded at each other and covered their team mates as they made entry onto the catwalk, two by two with Len on the right behind Smoke.

The somewhat cavernous space ran the whole length of the ship and the catwalk with it. At the far end, the soft glow of the hypermatter reactor acted as a beacon for the team indicating their objective.

Should be simple from here. Most of the crew are droids anyway. Len thought as he glanced back at where they came from. An alarm klaxon went off that made the whole team freeze mid stride.

"Battlestations. All hands to battlestations! Prepare the cannon!" The heavily modulated voice, almost like a B-1 Battle Droid, echoed in the maw of the beam shaft.

"We are running low on time." Len whispered.

Smoke charged his DLT-19 "Just going to have to make a break for it."

"And what? Die in a blaze of glory? Doesn't sound like a good plan to me." Eagle leveled her E-17d towards engineering. There were two doors on each side with a transparasteel window offering a view of the beam shaft, though the catwalks were probably not visible up close. "I've got at least 10 techs, probably armed and one heavily cybered Chiss. Looks like he is the boss."

Len pulled out his datapad and flipped through to the "Persons of Interest" section, stopping on a Chiss who was missing an eye and his lower jaw.

"Klisk'neaka'aesa a.k.a 'Click'. Graduate of the Ascendancy Academy of Science and Technology with a degree in engineering." Len raised an eyebrow, "Seems as though he's a

genius freelance weapons maker. Well well, guess who had an unfortunate run in with Clan Plagueis?”

“Our boy?” Eagle replied coolly, her weapon still trained on the engineer.

“An unknown Sith took his lower jaw and eye in place of his life for not completing a project to his satisfaction.”

“Sounds like the perfect man to build weapons for the Collective,” Mad Eye mused aloud.

“Yeah he does,” Spikes replied, “Let’s see what he has to say. Len, you and Eagle head over to the catwalk across from us. Smoke, prime up an ion grenade make sure it’s set on the highest level. Mad Eye, can you access the security mainframe?”

The Mon Calamari visually swept near by and pointed. “Next column has computer access, I’ll see what it is tied into.”

“We’ll cover you. Eagle, find a nice cross over point for you and Len.”

The Twi’lek nodded moving to the railing of the catwalk checking the strength of the steel that helped support the tributary beam tubes. Meanwhile the rest of the team circled around Mad Eye and the terminal.

“I’m in. I can see sensor management: cameras, audio, but it’s pretty well locked up. It will take me some time.”

“How much?” Len asked.

“Ten minutes tops.” The Mon Cal sighed, “But that’s assuming they don’t have traps set.”

“You have six. Do what you can.” Spikes shot back.

Eagle rejoined the group. Taking position right next to Len. “Second from the right. It has some give, but we should be able to make it across.”

The Chiss nodded. “Spikes, we’re moving out.”

The team leader nodded as the duo got into position. Eagle went across first while Len covered her. The chasm was only 20 feet deep and a fall wouldn’t be lethal. However, the dozens of augmented technicians and soldiers monitoring the laser’s systems would definitely do the trick. Slowly, the Twi’lek pulled herself across, her lekku pointing towards the deck below. One of the technicians froze as he was walking; Eagle did the same after pulling herself up higher. Len drew a bead on the tech, who he saw was armed with some sort of pistol.

No. No. No. No. No.

The tech turned on his heels and briskly walked over towards a now beeping console.

The Force is with us.

Len breathed a sigh of relief. Eagle scrambled the rest of the way before paging her partner to follow. A quick glance revealed that Mad Eye was finishing up his work in the system and the other half of the team would be heading to the upper engineering control room.

You can do this. Len extended his arms out over the safety of the catwalk railing and grabbed onto the cable. The liquid cable line gave a little under the portly Chiss' weight as his feet left the ground and his upper body took his weight. His feet slipped below the railing and he tried to swing his leg up hook the cable, but he missed. Len's heart raced, he was tall and probably would be noticed if his legs extended the whole way. Willing his legs to raise, he felt a tightness in his low back followed by warmth as he managed to stop his downward momentum and haul his legs up.

I'll be feeling that tomorrow.

The Chiss began to make his way across the chasm, looking down at the techs and guards, still blissfully unaware of the team. Heights had never been his favorite thing, but he needed to complete this mission. A little height wouldn't stop him. Hand over hand he pulled himself along. The soldier thought about what would happen if he fell in the worst case. The thoughts crept, but he commanded himself to keep going hand over hand over hand over hand...

Len was surprised when he reached the other side. Immediately, he grabbed the railing one hand at a time and pulled himself over quickly stumbling slightly.

"You okay?" the scout sniper said, steadying the Executor. "You look a bit pale."

Len shrugged it off. "Yeah, just got in my own head a little is all. Thanks for the hand."

"Next time Smoke can go across." Eagle chuckled.

The duo watched the viewport making sure the engineer never looked up and none of his subordinates did either. Moving quickly, but not recklessly the pair made their way up to the hatch outside of the upper engineering control room when Len's comlink vibrated quietly.

"Exec, this is Spike. We're in place."

Raising the comlink to his mouth, Len replied, "Copy that, we are, too. I've got my adhesive ready."

"Smoke is ready on our side. I'll count us down."

The two stacked up on the door. Iode primed his grenade, his dominant hand on the grip of his rifle, as Eagle drew her DL-44, her off hand hovering over the door control.

"Set."

"Three... Two... One... Hit it."

The door whooshed open, Len tossed his grenade in, Smoke's was a second behind. Both detonated at the same time covering the occupants with strong adhesive and shorting out the unshielded equipment. Including some of the technician's cheaper augments. The moment after the grenades went off Eagle pushed through the door heading towards the other team, right behind her was Len pushing towards the left. He encountered no resistance all the way through to the back wall which was all glass and gave a view of the hypermatter reactor. As the Chiss finished his sweep he became aware of the blaster fire coming from his team and some the crew. Taking cover behind a computer console and desk, he peered around the corner. Similarly positioned on the opposite side were Spikes and Smoke, with Mad Eye laying on top of an adhesive covered Chiss, covering himself by firing. Blaster bolts struck the walls and the center console the techs were using as cover, trying to not get hit by the Mon Calamari's fire. Most of their comrades were either knocked out from what Len surmised was an electrical surge caused by the ion grenade or dead from the team member's blasters. Len rolled to his stomach and fired. Two shots missed and the third struck the one tech's mechanical arm. The two survivors moved quickly out of Len's vision.

Kark, The soldier thought.

"They're heading to the side hatch!" Mad Eye called before taking fire.

Len and Spikes stood and fired towards the hatch. The two techs got off a half-dozen shots, one grazing Len's dominant arm causing him to wince, another slamming into the console in front of him. One hit Mad Eye squarely in the chest and three hit the window above the Mon Calamari. The two OEF soldier's shots missed initially, but eventually the crossfire found their marks, just as the two reached the door. The squad closed in on Mad Eye's position.

Eagle knelt beside the wounded soldier. "You okay?"

"Just a bit singed. They hit the armor."

“Do you know what you have DONE!” The cybered Chiss seethed with anger, his accent curling at the end of the sentence. Mad Eye hauled him off of the floor, suppressing a groan. Len started searching him, checking his pockets.

“Main weapon at 65 percent, sir.” A voice crackled through the comm.

“Let me speak to them, or they will know you are here.”

Len arched an eyebrow. “Really?”

“Yes! I am the man who got you onboard. Hurry!”

“Weapon at 75 percent. Sir, are you there?” The voice was a bit irritated now.

Spikes and Len shared a look.

“Spin him Mad Eye,” Spikes ordered flatly.

Len raised his rifle and the other Chiss spoke. “Understood. Lock down that last capacitor, make sure the focusing mirror is ready.”

“Aye, sir!”

Smoke hit the cut transmission button on the console as Len lowered his rifle and stepped closer to the engineer. Turning his wrist over to the datapad.

“Give me your activation number.”

Click looked at the ground then directly at Len. “5 3 2 Aurek Blue”

As he entered the sequence an air of discomfort swept the room. For Len the computer couldn't process fast enough. The rest of the team deployed to cover the entries, with a grunting Mad Eye and the soldier Chiss holding Click in the middle by his station. Len grabbed the cybered Chiss by the collar and looked to the Mon Calamari next to him.

“Mad Eye, get Smoke to help you with that wound.” Dropping all empathy from his face, he turned his head towards the other Chiss “You, what is your mission?”

“Current I assume?” Click replied an air of cockiness, “Infiltrate a low level Hutt Cartel, but that got blown to karking hell when the Technocratic Guild show up. My cover was solid though thanks to the mission against Plagueis. I ended up infiltrating their ranks.”

Len's datapad vibrated, rolling it over the display showed:

SenNet Officer 454

Name: Klisk'neka'aesa

Aliases: Click

Speciality: Starship weapon design

Assignment: Infiltration of Crime Ring Dossier 4532 (Hutt Cartel)

*Status: **Unknown***

Covertly Len forwarded the message to the team and lowered his arm.

“Mad Eye get the data. Smoke, set up.” Spikes called out watching his door from cover.

Both team members nodded and went to their tasks, with Smoke heading out the maintenance hatch into the reactor room. The Executor dropped all emotion from his face and looked his shorter, thinner captive in the eye.

“Says you’re dead. Luckily, I’m good at correcting mistakes.”

The portly Chiss drew his scout pistol letting go of his target and stepping back.

Click was starting to crack. “My loyalty is to Odan-Urr.”

Len let some irritation show. “Then why did you build this weapon for them?”

“Rath gave me the concept, I completed the design and implement it.”

“That still isn’t a why.” He leveled the pistol at the engineer’s head

The skinny Chiss looked into Len’s eyes. “Why did I complete a weapon to destroy ships in a single shot? Because Odan-Urr needs to be free, this could end the threat from the other Clans. From Pravus.”

“A weapon like this paints a target on anyone who wields its back!”

“You see the logic though. As long as it is a secret that we have it, it is an advantage. Rath gave this to us, even if he does not yet know.”

The Executor could see the logic. At the same time though, this all seemed strange. Their contact happened to be the engineer who designed the weapon.

“I have half of the data. It will take to much time to get the rest,” Mad Eye relayed grimly.

The prisoner turned to the Mon Cal. "Let me access it. Then even if you do kill me it will not be a loss."

"Walk Mad Eye through it."

The Chiss began to move.

"From here."

The engineer sighed. "Fine. Open the security window and enter 'BlueMilk34' as the password. That should give you total access."

The slicer entered the password, but the system remained locked. "No dice."

"Try 'BlueMilk44'."

Len thought he caught a slight smile from the man. It was then all the pieces fell in place. He lowered the pistol and grabbed the other Chiss by the throat, slamming him into the console next to a startled Mad Eye.

"Which door."

The Chiss spat at the man holding him. Everything went red for the portly Chiss, he slammed the engineer's head into the console, then drug him to next to the door. The man put up no resistance.

"Freedom at last. Freedom from the Jedi, the Sith. Finally to control our own destiny. Think of it lode. Join us or KILL ME! My work is DONE either way."

Smoke practically ran up the ladder. "Two teams, Take cover!"

On the other side of the door, a soft whine was growing sharper. Len released his prisoner, but before either Chiss could move, a steel- and ear-shattering explosion ripped through the control room. The portly Chiss could feel the heat as the shockwave pushed him onto his back. Dazed, the soldier tilted his head, his lower body was covered in blood. Draped unceremoniously over the center console was Click — most of him at least. Technocrat Soldiers, almost identical with movements that were unnaturally smooth, stormed the room, five in all. He tried to aim his pistol, but only the grip remained. His hands and arms were struggling to respond as he grappled for his rifle. One of the soldiers noticed Len moving and aimed his blaster. Suddenly a second explosion rocked the room enough for the Technocrat to hold his fire to make sure he wouldn't miss, this wasn't a breaching charge. The window overlooking the reactor room shattered, covering the occupants in broken glass. Alarms began blaring.

The Battle Droid voice returned. *“Reactor Power Regulator failure. Breach in three minutes.”*

As the breaching team attempted to recover, Bravo team lit up the soldier standing over Len. This drew the other four's attention and the heavily cybered troopers took cover, responding with withering fire. Len pulled a denton charge out, setting the timer for 3 seconds and threw it across the room. The charge blew, taking out the back quarter of the room, which collapsed onto the deck below.

“Reactor Power Regulaaaaaatoorr failure. Breach in two minutes.”

“GO!” Spikes shouted but Len couldn't tell from where. Next thing the Chiss knew, Smoke was behind him, dragging him out onto the catwalk.

“Gotcha Exec. Everyone's headed out the way we came, We're headed for the escape pod.”

Len leveled his rifle at the door as the second team swept in. The soldiers opened fire, hitting the first two, but the next two were too quick. From across the room, the rest of Bravo Team was firing at where Len had been shooting.

“What about the data?” Len tried to stand, a bit wobbly on his feet from the blast.

“I have a copy.”

Len looked over and saw that Mad Eye, Spikes, and Eagle were also backing out of control room. In the pit below, most of the crewmen were scrambling towards the exits. As they did however they were being cut down by blaster fire.

“Looks like they are tying up loose ends. Keep moving.” Spikes called out over the comm.

Another wave of fast moving troops ran into the control room, taking firing positions in the doorways. The team and the Executor fired at the enemy, who fired back. Neither landing hits.

“Smoke, Exec, this is Spikes. Were entering the service shaft now. Time has about 30 seconds till that thing blows. Pod is down one level to the right.”

As the duo entered the shaft, another explosion twisted the back half of the ship like a twig. Pieces of the weapon were collapsing onto the deck below taking out both catwalks. Len sealed the hatch behind them. Darkness fell over the whole space as the main power failed. In the access area he could see the dimly glowing “Escape” sign. The pair slid down the angled ladder, jumping off at the access tunnel for the forward starboard escape pod.

“Thank the Force,” Len stated when he saw that the emergency power was still on. Both men hauled themselves into the pod. Len rammmed the big crimson “FIRE” switch, sealing the hatch

and giving both soldiers the feeling a batha was sitting on them. The hard acceleration ended, a huge glow emanated from behind them and the pod tumbled.

Not like this, Len thought before the blackness hit him.

T-70 X-Wing, Raava Leader

Deep Space

H +1.0

“*Solari* Command, this is Raava Leader. The power buildup is getting worse, wait.”

“*We read it too, Raava Leader*,” Ken Iode’s digitized voice replied urgently. “*Move your Squadron to minimum safe distance.*”

“Roger that *Solari*. We have multiple ruptures on the hull, looks like any second now. No sign of the transport of any pods.”

Solari Command Deck

Deep Space

H +1.0

Fleet Admiral Arcia Cortel moved beside Commander Ken Iode at his station.

“Report.”

“Seems as though they succeeded,” replied the man, a tinge of sadness in his voice.

“Len will make it,” Arcia assured the pilot. “Bravo Team is the best and your son is none too shabby a soldier himself.”

A crewman shouted across the bridge. “ADMIRAL! The *Braga*’s hull has breached. The *Remembrance* indicates that the flanking frigates are breaking their attack.”

“Calm yourself, Petty Officer, there is no need to shout,” Cortel replied coolly.

“Admiral,” another crewman stated calmly, “The *Proxia* indicates the fighters are letting up.”

“Send an aid ship to assist them. They got hit hard.” Turning back to the first crewman. “Do the same for the other ships that were hit.”

Ken turned back to his monitor. “Sigma is moving to cover...”

An explosion rocked the fleet. The *Braga* was ripping apart, a light green bolt discharged as a last act of defiance. However because of the breakup, the shot impacted on a fighter escort blowing a huge hole from bow to stern.

“The enemy is jumping to hyperspace.”

Round one to me, the Ice Admiral thought.

“Send me damage reports. Begin rescue procedures and have the fighters mop up. Navigation plot a course home, we move when the rescue ships are recalled.”

A chorus of “Yes Admiral” and other variations echoed as each section was addressed. Ken returned to his scopes, watching for any beacons. Finally he stood and headed for the flight deck.

T-65b X-Wing, *Gray One*
Deep Space
H +1.10

Ken had scrambled down to the flight deck and hopped in his personal fighter after a brief stop to get in his flight suit. As he left the hanger, he felt slightly better; open space always lifted his spirits. The remaining ships were all OEF except for the wreckage of the *Braga* that was little more than a burning hulk of the forward section and tiny pieces for the aft sections. He tuned the scanners as high as they could go, but all that was there was wreckage.

The Human’s heart sank. His adopted son couldn’t have survived.

“*Gray one, this is Raava Leader. You okay, Ken?*” The squadron commander was sincere in his worry. Not only was the former Imperial a friend, but he was worried what the Ace was doing here.

“Honestly Brek, I’m horrible. Please tell me you found something.”

The other pilot sighed. “*I found nothing in sector 3-4-9, but check 3-5-0 we haven’t gotten there.*”

Ken pushed the stick towards that sector. “Thanks Brek, I owe you one.”

“*Just don’t let the Admiral know, okay?*”

Both pilots chuckled briefly, the former Imperial pushed the throttle of his X-Wing to 75 percent. The scanner still showing nothing as he came closer to the shipwreck. Suddenly a small blip appeared. Ken shifted in his seat and picked up his visual scanning. His heart started racing

when his eyes saw the unlit pod. The damage was bad, he thought it might be breached. Pointing the nose of the craft down, slowing, As he approached, his heart stopped.

"This is Commander Ken Iode of the OEF Ship Solari. I have located a pod in sector 3-5-0. I require urgent assistance. I repeat, I need a rescue shuttle NOW!"