

Imperial-II Star Destroyer Hammer, First Recon Division, Emperor's Hammer Strike Fleet. 30 ABY.

With grudging resignation, Araujo decides to stand up and walk his way to the bridge as requested. The path seemed longer and tiresome as he really did not want to go there. And somehow, as he left the lounge, a feeling of immense burden on his body almost prevented him from walking, the sorrow had an unclear origin. Slowly walking his way down the hallway, he shook his head and decided to walk briskly towards the elevator. When it opened, he was greeted with a smile by the ever optimistic COL Genie. Araujo saluted Genie and the other two officers that left the elevator right there, thinking for a moment he wanted to be one of those men, just worrying about administrative work or technical jobs, without any larger responsibilities. Somehow, Genie perceived Araujo's mood and tried to soothe him with a pat on his shoulder -"It'll be an easy one" cheerfully said Genie. Araujo looked back at him and did his best to nod in agreement although he wasn't so sure of the possible outcome of the mission.

The bridge had the usual activity levels, the usual background hum. Two officers were standing on the walkway, next to the bridge's ready room. Admiral Phoenix Berkana and Wing Commander Narven Task were discussing the details on the new assignment when the two CMDRs present on the ship arrived and saluted. Araujo could notice nobody on the bridge turned to look at them so this might actually be just routine tasks or at least not a suicide mission.

After returning the salute, the Wing Commander hands out datapads to the Squadron Commanders who begin reviewing them. Task was what Araujo would just describe as a "generic man" with no distinctive physical or personality traits save for being a soft spoken masochist by taking the burden of leading these ...highly unconventional squadrons. On the other hand, Admiral Berkana's distinctive beard would be unique among most imperial officers but not in the EH. The man was a source for information and always managed to organize the operations on the ship. Araujo heard he had a distinctive service in the fleet and he knew for sure the man was a patient and supportive leader so he came to terms with working under his command.

- "Gentlemen" Berkana looked back and forth between Genie and Araujo, turning and gesturing towards a conference room -"follow, please". Araujo felt a shiver down his spine. This means serious business, he thought.

After all the four men entered the room and Berkana invited the CMDs to have a seat, he signaled Task and the Wing Commander turned on a holographic display. The image of a planet could be seen.

- "So, sensors have detected a nearby system with an industrialized society." He turned and gestured toward the holographic display that now showed a number of imperial ships.

- "Battlegroup I, will jump to the external border of the system and wait while conducting deeper scans and scouting as our personnel joins us.

Lambda will stay with the rest of the fleet to give a demonstration of their skills to boost the morale of our forces. Then, they will join the rest of the squadrons which, as you might know, are already on the SSD for an award ceremony for their results on the recent internal competitions.

Lambda will have its support personnel transferred to the STRKC Axe via one of Tweezers Squadrons transports and they'll be stationed temporarily on the Axe which will join the main fleet as well"

I will be attending the ceremony. Narven Task will be in charge and Alpha Squadron will stand ready if there is anything. After the ceremony ends, we will join the Battlegroup and deep scans and scouting should be finished by then. The jump might last a couple hours, more than enough time to be ready for when the BG arrives. Questions?"

Araujo felt the pain on his stomach. Right, standing by for trouble. Whatever happens will be our responsibility to solve unless we are not alone on the ship. -"Will the Axe's T/F squadron transfer here to make room for Lambda?"

-"No, the Axe reported they can accommodate Lambda this time" replied Phoenix

Araujo silently cursed under his lips.

So, after explaining a few more details and dismissing the men, the two CMDRs headed out. Since Alpha has to remain on guard and the jump will take a couple hours, Araujo took a moment to approach the hangar, silently watch Genie and his men departing to the Axe, then heading to the lounge looking for a snack to cope with anxiety. The effects of the hyperspace jump could be felt while he was on his way to the lounge. There we go... he thought.

While enjoying the snack, he could perceive a smell of cinder and a noise. He made a mental note to tell the HVAC technicians to check the ventilation system. He thought he could have a relatively peaceful assignment.

He was wrong.

15 minutes later, the ship dropped out of hyperspace "That's a bit too soon", everybody at the lounge started looking at each other and 5 seconds later the red alert klaxons could be heard and the red alert was given. "Red alert, we are under attack!" a voice spoke in a somewhat cold tone for the occasion. For a brief moment, he expected the ship to be malfunctioning instead but no, not the case. Now, he had to meet his squadron with the anxiety of not having informed his men, feeling guilty for walking around before talking to them. Then the speakers pronounced the words:

-"Alpha Squadron, report to the briefing room." said the Wing Commander or so Araujo thought that was likely Task's voice on the comms.

Pulling his datapad to message everyone on the squadron, he feared he'd get in trouble for letting it slip so he wanted to send a notification at least. Then he set to meet them in the briefing room.

He waited at the entrance for the pilots. In a mere couple minutes Pryde, then Horus, Syntroth, and the others came and saluted him. His anxiety slightly winding down as each one of them arrived. Then, they all entered the room. He had a mix of relief that he wasn't alone on this but also felt the burden of the responsibility for his men's lives.

The briefing officer saluted the pilots, they sat on all the available chairs - exactly twelve plus two for the officers, and he turned on the holographic display. So much for a peaceful assignment. Araujo told himself.