

Fate of the Immortal: Part II

Chapter III

“*Immortal!*” a voice said on the speaker, “It’s a pleasure to be re-united again. Welcome back to Aurora.”

The Commodore pressed a series of keys on the communication terminal and the image of an Imperial officer appeared on the screen.

“Good to see you Captain. I trust everything went well during our absence”, RogueWing asked. The Rear Admiral had appointed Captain Titus as the leader of the remainder of the Immortal task group during the Star Destroyer’s voyage to Carrida. There, they had picked up a company of Hammer’s Fist stormtroopers, elite soldiers of the Emperor’s Hammer for a mission of extreme importance.

“As would be expected from us sir”, Titus said. “The ships are ready for action with one minor problem. The *Shogun* has a slight engine malfunction but repairs are in effect as we speak.”

“Yes I noticed it was missing. Our departure is scheduled in five days captain, the *Shogun* must be fully functional by that time.”

“She will be repaired before then, Admiral, rest assured.”

“Good. One last thing.” RogueWing clasped his hands behind his back.

“Assemble all our ship captains”, he ordered, “It’s about time you were all briefed on the upcoming operation. Meet me all in twelve standard hours on board the *Immortal*. First I must rest.”

“Yes Admiral, I will notify them immediately.”

“Good. See you then”, he switched off the communicator and turned to leave the bridge. “Captain Vordar, the bridge is yours.”

Coranel Both, Ghost Squadron commander watched the bartender droid cleaning up the bar. On the other side of the room, Major Mosh and Commander Jarek La’an were doing the same. He waited until a group of crewmen left and then signalled. He made a loud sneezing sound and turned his attention to the two squadron commanders.

The two walked towards the droid and started speaking to him. Coranel moved in closer to hear what was being said.

“Oh hello, Major, Commander, how may I be of service?”

“Hey droid. We were just wondering if we could talk to you about something.”

“Why of course, I’m happy to help.”

“Well this is pretty scary, and its been freaking us out ever since we’ve heard it. We’d like to talk to you about it.”

“Do not trouble yourselves on my account, I would be happy to hear about this and try to set your mind at ease. I am not much of a councillor but I will certainly try.”

Coranel snickered at the conversation. *You’ve got to be kidding me.*

“How kind of you”, Mosh said sarcastically. “By the way, I’ll have a piece of Ryshcate to make me feel better.”

Their signal had been sent. Coranel sneaked quietly but quickly behind the bar. The droid distracted by the two squadron leaders was too busy to notice the intruder.

"There you go sir, a nice slice of Ryshcate." The droid moved his metallic head closer towards Mosh, imitating as best he could human behaviour. His vocalizer was now producing a low pitched sound. "I am most intrigued. What is it that is inspiring fear in you, Major?"

Mosh was biting into his cake, ignoring what the droid had asked. He had a weak spot for Ryshcate; Coranel just hoped that wouldn't make him screw up. La'an intervened instead.

"Well, it goes like this. While we were both heading for this place yesterday after a standard patrol shift in space around the *Immortal*, we saw a disintegrated R2 unit on this same deck. The Major and I thought this was weird, so we went to find a technician and reported it. When we came back with the tech, the R2 had disappeared. We didn't find this unusual at the time. We decided it had been discovered by someone else and embarked for maintenance."

Coranel couldn't believe what he was hearing.

"Sir, pardon me for asking, but why would a droid disintegrate? Didn't your suspicions arouse?"

"Sure they did, but accidents do happen. We thought this was just a malfunctioning droid whose circuits had fried or something, until today."

Coranel made his move. First he took a bottle of premium class Corellian brandy. He stashed it under his suit and made another selection. The half full bottle of type II Balmorran whiskey was just waiting to be taken.

Mosh finished his snack and started talking again. "Today, again on this deck, we saw one of the MSE-6 mouse droids in the exact same condition. As we looked, someone chucked another one at us, just barely missing my head. It nearly evaporated on impact. We looked in the direction it was thrown from and saw a dangerous looking droid glaring at us."

"A droid?"

"Yes it had black shiny armour plates," La'an said.

"And glowing red eyes," Mosh added

"His utilities were unlike anything I've seen on a droid before"

"A laser cutter, sharp ends, a drill and I can't stop thinking about that circular chainsaw."

Coranel took four of the many small bottles of ale and a freshly baked Ryshcate cake he had promised Mosh. He made his way out of the bar, again being very quiet making sure not to attract the droid's attention. He made it.

"Oh my sir," the droid cried out. "I think I am the one who is going to need counselling! I understand your grief, I am feeling it myself. This droid is operating on this deck you say?"

"I'm afraid so", Mosh said as Coranel approached them. "I advise you to be really careful for your own good. He's attacked droids before, who knows who his next victim will be."

"Oh my!"

"It's been nice talking to you droid, hope you'll be feeling better. I'm certainly not", La'an told the grieving droid. With that the three pilots left the bar and started for the door.

"You're evil", Coranel told them.

"So are you", Mosh countered. "He'll be wondering where these bottles went sooner or later. He might get in trouble."

"Bah! He's a droid; they won't do anything to him."

"No just a memory swipe or a tour in some crazed disciplinary chamber."

"You're imagining things, there is no such thing. Besides a memory swipe wouldn't do him any harm after that story you told him. Where did you dig it up from anyway?"

As they arrived at the door and were about to exit the room, a squad of stormtroopers blocked their way.

"Whoops, just what we need", La'an muttered.

"Relax, these idiots won't suspect a thing. Anyways they're stormies not MPs."

One of the stormtroopers, the squad leader, showed his palm. "Halt." The three pilots complied and stopped.

"On whose authority?" La'an challenged.

"My authority", the trooper said. He turned his attention towards Coranel. "Hmm you're body build is strange. It doesn't match your height and stance." He moved in closer. "Yeah definitely strange. Something under your vest isn't part of your body, what's that?"

"Nothing of any concern to you, trooper", Coranel glared at him.

"I assure you it is of concern to me, open up your vest. Or should I ask my men to do it for you?"

The three other stormtroopers were waiting, probably impatient to perform that task.

"Do what you have to."

"Sure thing." He waved forward his men and pointed his blaster rifle. The men approached Coranel and started for his vest. One of the troopers moved his hand towards the zip, when La'an firmly gripped it.

"That's not valid authority", he said to the leader. "I don't see any military police insignia on you, or guard insignia. You have no right to do this, get lost or I'll report you."

"Go right ahead, KJ-984, Nova Company, Hammers Fist Legion," He said unworried. That declaration surprised the pilots, no wonder he had spotted something fishy. "We have orders to patrol the ship, and maintain order."

"On whose bleeding authority?" Mosh barked. "That's the third time we've asked you this." He took a step towards him.

"General Mellard."

This time the trooper opened the vest and all the beverages dropped on the floor. The Rhyshcate also fell. KJ-984's stance eased up, undoubtedly happy with the catch.

"Well, well, well", KJ-984 said. "You've been a very naughty man."

"Why didn't you tell us about Mellard's orders before?" La'an asked. "Why the tough act? We can report you for that can't we? Wouldn't look too good on that perfect record of yours."

"Maybe so. But the same would go to your buddy here."

Coranel laughed at loud. "My record? Perfect? Look it up yourself, Commander Coranel Both, Ghost Squadron leader, Wing XI."

"A pilot, eh?" The trooper lowered his rifle.

"That's right. All squadron leaders by the way if that makes a difference", Coranel said indicating Mosh and La'an, seeing the effect the previous declaration had made.

The trooper seemed to consider for a while. "In that case I'm prepared to let this go, on one condition." The squad commanders braced themselves. "You will join us with all these goods in two hours in quarters 342 on deck 15 for a game of sabaac. You can bring in some people, but *only* the ones you can trust. "

This startled all three of them. "We're not like the other troopers from the legion", KJ-984 commented, "We do enjoy fun. The only reputation we share with the others is the piece that tells we're the best."

"Bah! Who needs reputations?" Coranel said "they're for wankers!"

"Agreed", the trooper nodded. "Well we have another hour of our shift to do until we're off duty. So I guess we'll see you in two hours."

"Right on."

The other troopers nodded in respect and the pilots returned the gesture. They left the IRC and headed for a turbolift.

Major Morin, commander of Nova Company keyed in his communicator. He was not wearing his armour but a black Imperial officer's uniform complete with rank insignia and code cylinders. The general gave his men the assignment of patrolling the Immortal decks and maintaining order to keep them busy. Something his troops weren't made to do. They were trained and hard disciplined for combat, not law enforcing.

"Major Morin to squad one, report in with your status."

"This is KJ-430, leader of squad one. We're patrolling deck five. We've stopped a fight involving technicians and responded to a call on this same level. Nothing serious on both accounts."

"Received, carry on lieutenant. Over and out."

This useless policing could have been handled by ordinary stormtroopers. Furthermore, Navy troopers and military police stormtroopers were trained for this sort of task. Apparently the General wanted to impress everyone aboard with his new acquisition of troops.

"Major Morin to squad two, report in with your status."

"This is KJ-984, squad two leader. We're on level twenty, currently in the Recreation Centre. Nothing to report apart from a bartender droid who claims there's a droid killer aboard. He gave us a full description of the killer, he says is a droid."

"Reassure the droid that there's no droid killer but ask it what it's talking about. Something else might be happening."

"Yes sir."

"Over and out."

He went through all the other squads asking them for status reports and then switched off the communicator. He sighed. This was completely useless. The General was full of pride and a boaster.

The com beeped, indicating someone was hailing him. This was a sound and visual call. Probably the general wanting to ask him how well everything was going. He resisted the urge to ignore the call and answered. To his astonishment, staring at him on the screen was not who he thought it was, but the Rear Admiral himself.

“Admiral RogueWing, what a pleasure”

“Good evening Major, I trust you’re doing well?” the Admiral asked.

“Very well, thank you.” He replied trying to sound as truthful as he could. But the Rear Admiral didn’t look convinced. “May I say, how fine your flagship is and what a pleasure it is to serve on board.”

“Thank you, as I’ve said before, we’re happy to have you with us. Have you been provided with everything you need?”

“Yes sir, the training courses that you’re men have set up for us on the lower decks are excellent. We will start training on them tomorrow.”

“Good. I’ve heard from General Mellard that he has briefed you on our mission. I hope you don’t find all this too hard to take in. Everything must have happened very quickly for you, with the sudden transfer to our ship and that briefing right after.”

“It has been a surprise, to say the least, but I’ve been coping well.”

“I’m glad. Only three of us know the characteristics of this mission, but we will soon be joined by others. I have called for a meeting involving my captains and the *Immortal’s* wing commander. I’d like it if you would join the General and me.”

“It would be a pleasure sir.”

“Likewise. Speaking of the General, has he given you anything useful to do?”

Morin gave a short nod. “He has assigned us a task.”

“I have noticed some of your men patrolling earlier on. Deck twenty five I think it was.”

“Yes one of my squads is assigned there.”

“I see,” RogueWing said, “may I ask what that assignment consists of?”

“Yes sir, maintaining order on that deck. I have squads stationed on all necessary decks.”

“General Mellard gave those orders”, that was not a question. The Rear Admiral stayed silent for a moment. “What do you think of those orders? I’m looking for an honest answer Major.”

“Yes sir.” Morin saw where this was leading. The Rear Admiral didn’t like this either or else he had read through his mind. “As much as I respect the General and accept to follow his orders without question, I find that my men are being used for an unimportant task they were not made to do.”

“My thoughts exactly Major. I will speak with the General.”

“There is no need for that sir”, he urged.

“Oh but there is. You know as well as I do, that this wasn’t just an innocent assignment to maintain order. I wasn’t asked if this could happen on my ship and I won’t have it. I already have men to perform these tasks; yours are being wasted to appease one’s pride. You needn’t worry. I won’t mention your opinion to the General.”

Although he wanted to dispute he was not worried about that, he knew that it would be useless. “Thank you sir.”

“That’s alright. With respect to you and your men, I don’t want my crew to get jittery each time they see an elite stormtrooper walking around. It makes them nervous and they might think they’re being watched. And Problems would surely arise.”

“No offence taken sir. I fully understand.”

“Good. If you’ll excuse me, I have to lie down. Oh and welcome to Aurora.”

“Thank you Admiral,” he smiled, “goodnight.”

The Rear Admiral’s image disappeared and the comm. fell silent. Morin smiled.

Tomorrow he would train his men and prepare them for the tasks they were made to do.

Mosh, Coranel and La’an stopped in front of the door of quarters 342. With them, were Airamags, Vampire’s new commander, Tremayne a flight leader in Ghost, Nuno flight leader in Phantom, Bobxavi and Crsepe both flight leaders in Phantom, and Mark and Dierdre Varn, pilots in Vampire. All the lieutenants had been left out.

Mosh pressed on the signal button next to the door. Moments later, a voice came out of the speaker. “Yes?”

Mosh moved his head closer to the speaker. “We’re uh, here for a game of...we’re acquaintances of KJ-”

“984”, La’an filled the blank.

“Password?” the voice demanded.

“Uh, missed that part”, Mosh turned towards the others, “what was it?”

“There wasn’t one,” La’an said helplessly.

“Right password. Come in and have fun.” The door opened and coming towards them was a strongly built man in civilian tunic.

“Hey, I’m the guy from earlier,” he looked at the pilots. “Sorry about the password, a few people tried to smuggle in our games before. When we ask for a password they usually try and guess. I see you came dressed appropriately. Oh and you’ve brought the goods.” He gave a chuckle.

“Yeah. Hope you don’t mind about sharing with more people though”, Mosh said. He introduced each newcomer in turn and watched as KJ-984 called a group of men forward.

“Not a problem at all. Gentlemen, here’s Dax, Johin, Hixer, Queue and good old Mynock. Queue and Mynock are detachment leaders like me. And I’m Morrnt by the way.”

“I’m Mosh and this is La’an. I think you already know the name Both.”

Morrnt chuckled. “Indeed. Mosh and La’an, hmm, I heard your name somewhere today. Where was that?”

“In the recreation centre,” Dax replied.

“I don’t think we told you then,” La’an raised an eyebrow.

“Ah yes,” Morrnt said in remembrance. “No you didn’t, a droid told us your names.”

“The bartender droid?” Coranel laughed.

“Yeah that’s the one.”

“No wonder. These two freaked him out.”

“Yes was it something about a droid killer on deck twenty?” Morrnt asked.

“It was a diversion. We got the droid distracted while *he*,” Mosh said glaring at Coranel, “went behind the bar and *borrowed*.”

“I see. Well we spent ages trying to convince him there wasn’t a droid killer aboard, yet alone a droid that killed. Then we were ordered to investigate anything that could be in relation with what it reported to us. For filling our day with extra work, you owe us a drink.”

“Sure, we have a good selection of booze here,” Coranel said.

“I noticed earlier. If anything, you do have taste Both. All have a seat, the table is set down there.” he indicated.

Coranel snickered. “Sweet.”

Chapter IV

Colonel Gunman took the crutch from his wardrobe and rested his right arm on it. He would have to use it for a couple more days until his foot cured from the injury he picked up on his last hostile engagement. The pain had eased a lot since then, and he could now move more or less freely. He hoped to recover fully in time for the upcoming operation he knew nothing about. He’d learn soon enough, the meeting was scheduled in fifteen minutes. The thing that bothered him the most was the fact that his fighter had severely been damaged. It would never be repaired in time and replacements usually took a while. He sighed.

Maybe I’ll be put on the top of the priority list and replaced with a new fighter quickly.

He moved towards his bed side table and took his single code cylinder. He slid it in his left pocket. He was in his complete duty uniform and ready to go.

He walked towards the door of his quarters and opened the door. He walked out and made his way towards the nearest turbolift. Upon pressing the switch, he didn’t have to wait long, as the elevator made a quick descent towards his level. He entered and spoke into thin air “Level fifty”. He took the code cylinder from his pocket and inserted it into the terminal.

“Confirm authorisation”, a voice said.

“Confirming authorisation, Colonel Gunman number eight four four.”

The turbolift started to ascend. Again it didn’t take long, he barely waited a few moments and the door opened. He looked at the time on the terminal before exiting and noted that he was ten minutes early.

He made his way down the corridor and went past many rooms, until he came towards two double-doors with a pair of navy troopers guarding them.

One of the troopers took a quick look at his uniform. “Colonel Gunman?”

“That’s me,” he said giving a short nod.

“Please proceed,” the trooper told him while opening the doors.

He thanked the trooper and entered.

The room was very large and had all the characteristics of a briefing area. It contained a spacious dark table complete with chairs, a three-dimensional holo-projector and a flat screen monitor, computer terminals and comm. units in front of each seat and water bottles with cups and holders for them.

Fancy.

Gunman also noticed five men already seated in different areas around the table. He identified them immediately as captains and saluted when they had turned their attention towards him. "Good morning, gentlemen."

"Good morning Colonel," one of them said

A droid appeared and walked sluggishly towards him. "Please take a seat sir, if you need anything during the briefing, just type your request on your computer terminal and I'll provide you with it."

"Thank you," he chose a chair and took a while before actually seating.

"I hope the injury isn't too bad," the same one said.

"It was at first but its healing well, soon it'll disappear," Gunman replied.

"Ah good, it would be a shame to have our starfighter complement leader out of action."

"When even if it heals completely I'll still be out of action if my ship isn't repaired or replaced."

"Well if this operation is as important as it sounds, I'm sure you'll have a fighter fairly quickly."

Two men entered the room; the first was Rear Admiral RogueWing, the second Captain Vordar. Everyone who was seated stood up as a polite gesture. RogueWing took the master's chair, as head of the briefing. As he seated himself, another two men entered. General Mellard and Major Morin took seats at each side of the Commodore, as to why, Gunman had no idea.

"Please, be seated." Everyone complied. RogueWing looked down on his terminal and typed. "I'm sending over to you now, the details of our upcoming mission including historical content. Please take the time to read it."

Gunman looked down on his monitor and started to read.

The Unknown regions? What the hell... Super Weapon.

He read through the rest and looked up. This was even bigger than he thought. In turn, each captain looked up.

"Until now only three of us knew about this excluding the Command staff. They are General Mellard and Major Morin, leader of Nova company, Hammer's Fist Legion," RogueWing continued. "The whole of this company has joined us to help us in our efforts, hence our trip to Carrida. Now there are ten of us who know about this and tomorrow there will be hundreds. You have the authorisation to brief your men on this, so don't forget to save what I have sent you on your data pads."

He filled his glass with water and took a sip. "Now moving on to questions. I have the intention for you to be utterly prepared so don't hesitate to ask them."

The captain who had spoken to Gunman earlier on raised a hand.

"Captain Titus, go ahead"

"Admiral, this is a very important mission which we have to accomplish on the grounds of expanding EH domain. If we're going to fight an alien force of unknown power which has managed to fend off Grand Admiral Thrawn, why is a single star destroyer with smaller support craft being sent to perform a task the best Imperial Navy Commander failed to do."

RogueWing took another sip. "Firstly, I would remind you that Admiral Thrawn wasn't fended off. He had been interrupted and called back by the Emperor which stopped him from getting his hands on that alien technology. Secondly, Admiral Thrawn

had come victorious from his last engagement with that alien force even though he had lost the Star Destroyer *Nightmare*”

“His task was to conquer the Unknown Regions, ours is a much smaller task. All we need to do is neutralise that super weapon threat, so that a larger EH fleet can move in and expand the domain without brute opposition. A single Star Destroyer with support craft is better suited because we’ll be able to operate quietly. A bigger fleet would be discovered quickly and dealt with. We will move silently, searching for clues on where this weapon is and then strike at it. The other reason why a bigger fleet is not sent, is the fact that we cannot withdraw too many of our capital ships from our territory at the moment. The New Republic has launched a major offensive against us and we need to counter. Once their offensive is destroyed, the fleet will have space in which to operate without worrying about protecting our current territory.”

“I understand, however it doesn’t seem fair,” Titus said grimly.

“Nothing ever is Captain, especially now when the EH is weak. Next question.”

The *Immortal* Captain Vordar raised his hand. “Admiral if I may.”

“Of course Captain.”

“With all due respect to the General and the Major, I do not understand the need for elite stormtroopers, even though it seems normal to have them aboard considering what we’re up against.”

“It is possible that we will need to deploy troops during the operation. The briefing I gave you doesn’t include this next bit of information. Even though the Command Staff does not order it as a primary objective, they wouldn’t mind learning from this new technology. It is unlikely we’ll be able to bring the weapon back home with us, so instead we would board it get as much information, sabotage it and leave. In order to do that, we will need the best troops to fight against the unknown, thus the Hammer’s Fist. Major Morin’s company has proved itself formidable in the past and I’m sure they will be able to handle any task that is thrown at them throughout the operation. Any more questions?”

He took another sip of water.

Gunman had a little trouble taking this in. It didn’t seem real. He looked down on his monitor again.

A Star Destroyer, a dreadnaught, a frigate, a strike cruiser and a corellian corvette against whatever is out there.

He raised his hand.

“Yes Colonel.”

“Admiral, my squadrons will be ready, but I have only four out of the original six. If we’re going after something this big, we will need all the fighters we can muster. I’m twenty four short excluding the many empty spots in my active squads.”

“The Command Staff has considered this and two squadrons will be sent over to act as replacements to Falcon and Ranger. One of them is the elite Avenger squadron, like Nova Company, the best is needed.”

Avenger squad, just great, well at least we’ll have a better chance of surviving this.

“Oh and due to the urgency of our mission, you’re on the top of the priority list for a replacement starfighter. You’ve been issued a TIE Praetor, the fighter reserved for Praetorian Elite Squadron only.”

Bah.

"Anything else? No? Then brief your men and have them prepared. You have four days. Dismissed. Oh, General Mellard, may I have a word with you."

Chapter V

The wing XI pilots were all assembled in their briefing lounge. They had just learned.

"I don't like this one bit," Lieutenant Colonel Mark muttered.

"To tell you the truth Mark, I don't think anyone who's involved likes it, but we've been ordered to do this and do it we will," Gunman told him.

"What about the two squads we're missing," Captain Crsepe said. "That's only four squads we have and they're a few pilots short. We're going to need more than that for whatever we're up against."

"That is why we'll be borrowing two full squads; one of them is Avenger Squad."

This provoked some muttering from the pilots. "The other is a squad which isn't part of the TIE Corps but in the EH nevertheless. They must be part of a smaller capital ship."

"This mission is suicide," Beauchamp, a Demon pilot said.

"Will Avenger be under your command or acting on their own?" Mosh asked.

This made Gunman think. He had only been told that they would come to act as a replacement for one of the two lost squads but that was all. And it could be very probable that they would act independently.

"I haven't been told much about the two new squad's arrival. They'll be here to replace Falcon and Ranger, but I haven't been let in on the specifics."

A pilot raised his hand.

"Commander Leeartic, go ahead."

"This weapon technology, do we have any idea what it is, what it does?"

"Well not really but as you already know the whole thirty-eight thousand on that destroyer were killed within days of its blast. Other than that, the reactor core shut down as did other important equipment. So it seems like it affects life forms without actually *destroying* things."

"It took days to inflict that kind of damage on the *Nightmare* though," Leeartic said thoughtfully.

"It's still dangerous," Mosh told him. "Sure it takes time to do damage to its target, but look at the mess it did. It killed the whole crew leaving the destroyer unharmed apart."

"That's because it wasn't designed to harm ships," a new voice said. Two men walked in the briefing lounge. One was RogueWing, the other Admiral Mell Kerrigan the battle group commander. Everyone was surprised but managed to stand at attention. The admiral waved them down and took a seat well away from them to be able to speak to them all. He continued. "Thrawn had managed to catch the aliens off guard. Their weapon was virtually undefended, transferring from one area to another quietly. But he had learned of this and launched an attack. The aliens didn't have much choice of defending themselves, so they decided to use their weapon on his destroyers. The

Nightmare took its blast and made a carefully calculated hyperspace jump. We've done a little research on Kratz, her captain. He was a careful leader and always made necessary precautions to protect his ship if anything were to go wrong. As soon as he jumped in with the rest of Thrawn's fleet, he calculated many exit vectors. The jump he would make would depend on how serious the situation which would force him to flee would be. It is now known that the course he was on would take him to the Core Worlds."

"Why the Core Worlds and not Imperial occupied space Thrawn had conquered in the Unknown Regions?" Leeartic asked.

"Because he thought the situation was very serious and that the whole fleet would be lost. He would go to the Core Worlds, report to High Command exactly what happened. But within less than a day the destroyer's main reactor core shut down, so did many of the ship's systems and his men started to die."

"Well its clearly effective against ships too, what better use could there be for it?" Gunman said.

"Worlds. This alien race would move their weapon into place and target a planet. They would blast it. Within days, all life and vegetation on the planet would die and the water would contaminate. This leaves the world completely dead again without destroying it. Total annihilation"

"Blast," one of the pilots said.

"This thing is like a Death Star, only better," Leeartic said grimly.

In the background, someone went sick. Most of the pilots went pale. Gunman had thought this couldn't get any worse than it just did.

"Now that we know this, it's even more imperative that we get rid of this thing. You have the honour of doing that."

"Have these aliens used this thing before?"

"Chances are they did. How many times they've used it though, is a question which is left unanswered. I'm sure you'll find out once you're there. Pilots, before I knew about what it could do, I was against this mission and I tried what I could to convince the officers of the Command Staff not to go through with this. Now that I've learned of its power, I have to agree with them. I can't possibly imagine what you're going through right now, being the undertakers of this operation, and I'm sorry it has to be you, but at the same time it has to be someone. You have been chosen to do this because we all believe you're capable of doing so. You have shown a lot of bravery in the past and have accomplished many dangerous and important missions. The term *Immortal* has become more than just the name of this ship, it's now a title, a reputation she has earned. And I if you succeed in this mission, the whole galaxy will be indebted to you."

With that Admiral Kerrigan stood up and left.

Chapter VI

"Well it might be that we're ridding the galaxy of this thing, but doing that gives the Command Staff a good advantage too."

"In what way?"

"They send us out there on our own to get rid of this super weapon so that a larger EH fleet can move in and conquer. They have us believe that we're doing good to the galaxy but what they really want is to expand the domain. Once that bigger fleet moves

in, they have less on their hands to face but they also gain the respect from the Unknown Regions worlds. We'll be seen as the people who got rid of their biggest menace, their saviours. Once our invasion fleet moves in, they'll accept us and no-one would dare oppose us because we destroyed what they could not. They'll either be too scared to fight against us, thankful or even both."

The lieutenants around the table nodded. Splot was right, the Command Staff had their own reasons.

"I have a bad feeling about this," Murdoch said.

"Yeah, me too. Chances are we'll be sent to destroy that thing ourselves with a fighter attack. Who knows what they have in stock,"

"Our fighters are adequate enough," Eamon told them. "You guys in Phantom have the TIE Phantoms, pretty useful to sneak in undetected. I'm sure they will give them something to think about."

Splot and Favdaukar nodded. "Then there's the experimentals, with you're turbolaser cannons, pretty useful to cause some damage. What I'm trying to say is when Thrawn went there, he didn't have that much in means of technology. Standard TIE/In and Interceptors weren't a lot and he managed to defeat them."

"Sure but it's not all about fighters Eamon," Beauchamp countered. "First off this was Thrawn, the best strategist the Empire ever had. He came from the Unknown Regions which gave him a good advantage. Second, there's the capital ships to worry about. We only have one Star Destroyer while he had an armada of them."

"Yeah but his task was to conquer the whole area, ours is to clear the way by destroying a single installation."

"This isn't just an installation, this is a Super Weapon that shoots back and who knows what kind of protection it has," Beauchamp told him.

"The Rebels did it twice. And that wasn't easy, they had to fly into a trench and an infrastructure, we don't. They also had a large Imperial Fleet against them."

"Except that here we don't know what we're up against, whereas the rebels did. And I'm pretty sure their cap ships will fire back. At Endor, we didn't. I appreciate your optimism Eamon but this is just suicide."

A loud wailing alarm sounded, signalling the pilots to report to the ready room.

"What's going on now," Splot muttered. All the pilots stood up and exited the room at fast pace. They ran towards the nearest turbolift and descended to the hangar bay. Once on the lower level on the ship, they jogged across the hangar and entered a room. All the other pilots were already there, including the Wing Commander.

"Fifty seven seconds, good. Although I would of expected the lieutenants here a little earlier. Times change, the higher ranks use to be the later ones in the day," the Colonel said.

"Maybe you're growing old," Coranel mocked.

"Maybe. Okay, as you've all guessed, this was a drill. Why the need for another one you ask. Because the one minute deadline is now too long. This operation is unlike anything we've done before, and we must be prepared for this new foe. One minute is grandpa timing, I now want forty seconds."

“And I thought one minute was too difficult.”

“If you want to be lazy, you should have joined the army Airmags.”

“We only have two more days before we leave so we need to prepare you all for action. Today on your schedule, you have a date with the space simulator. First you will all be in the same team flying against AI. Then, we’ll pit you against each other. Each kill is worth one point, if you finish the mission without getting killed you get three points, overall top gun of the mission gets ten points. If you lose a wingman, you lose one point, if you die, you lose five points and for each wingman that survived once the mission is over you receive a point. Today’s overall winner wins free drinks and bragging rights. Man your simulators and good luck.”

Coranel stood up and walked towards Mosh.

“Hehehe, now Mosh I get to kick your ass.”

Mosh chuckled. “I’d love to see that.”

“Lead the way.”

After hours long of flying the pilots walked in the Imperial Recreation Centre. The overall top gun of the day was Lieutenant Colonel Mark, second was Major Nuno and third was new *Immortal* arrival Captain Gistenjunge.

“Well it’s clear I own you all,” Mark said grinning. “Drinks now!”

“Well done Mark,” Gunman patted him on the back. “But if I had participated, you know I would have won. We still have two days until we leave, maybe I’ll show you how it’s done tomorrow.”

“Bah, even the Wing Commander is full of himself,” Tremayne said. “What is it with you people?”

Lieutenant Dirty Vader walked next to his squad mate. “The colonel may be full of himself Tremayne but I’m not, I’m just the best.”

“That’s nice coming from the person who came last today,” Gunman retorted.

“Positions and points are nothing, and besides computers are unfriendly to me.”

“You think that the simulator doesn’t like you, hence you losing?” Tremayne asked him.

“Exactly.”

“Other than that you’re good when flying for real?”

Dirty nodded.

“So how come your fighter’s computer systems don’t affect you then?” Gunman said.

“Bleh, you’re too smart for your own good.”

Gunman looked surprised. He looked down and pointed down at the ewok stuffed toy the lieutenant was holding in his right arm.

“Oh that’s it? Not even your Kettch excuse?”

“Well of course Kettch has something to do with it.”

The Colonel shook his head.

“Just make sure he doesn’t get in the way when things get really serious.”

The Ghost Squadron Leader walked towards the group of pilots.

“Cor, pretty good performance,” Gunman said, glad for the interruption.

“Thanks, I beat Mosh which is what I wanted to do. Well, he got me too. One-one, we’re both happy.”

“Good good, oh sorry Mark, I’ll get those drinks for you.”
“Its alright, I’ll get them,” Coranel waved him off, “I was about to anyway. What was it?”
“Kuati cocktail, I want to try it out.”
Coranel nodded. “And for you?”
“I’ll have a whiskey, Corellian,” Gunman said.
Coranel then glanced at his two pilots, and went for the bar after they refused.

Chapter VII

The communication unit in Rear Admiral RogueWing’s office beeped. He keyed in and switched on his flat-screen monitor. A two dimensional image of the Battle Group Commander appeared. He smiled at RogueWing.

“Admiral,” RogueWing said. “I trust your trip back went well.”
“It did, thank you. Are your men doing well?”
“Yes, the *Shogun*, the dreadnaught which had an engine problem is now fully functional. Colonel Gunman has been training his pilots well and is reporting them ready for action. General Mellard reports a similar case with the Hammer’s Fist company we have aboard and his regular troops.”
“Good, you’re bravery will be greatly remembered RogueWing. We all know this isn’t easy.”

“Thank you.”
“I have a message here from the Grand Admiral. I’m sending it over to you now, he wishes you to broadcast it to everyone taking part in the operation tomorrow once you leave.”

“I will.”
“I also have news for Colonel Gunman, bad news I’m afraid. I’d like you to tell him that Avenger Squadron are needed on the battle front against the New Republic and won’t be coming. The other squad won’t be transferring either but for a different reason: the Rebels wiped it out. I’m afraid we haven’t got another squadron available. The New Republic has been very tough at the moment and we’re going to need a lot to fend off their offensive. On the bright side, his TIE Praetor is on the way along with a few more substitute fighters. We’ve sent a freighter to deliver them and it should be in Aurora in a few hours.”

“Thank you, I’m sure he’ll be pleased with his new fighter despite his two missing squads.”

“I hope so,” the Admiral said. “Well I better get going. I have to help plan a defensive against the Rebels before they strike again. I’ve just been called over.”

“Good luck.”
“Good luck to you and to your men. I’ll see you soon.” the Admiral smiled and his image disappeared.”

Gunman climbed off his simulator. As he went down the small ladder, Lieutenant Colonel Mark waited. He was grinning.

“Well not bad Colonel, that *was* impressive.”

Gunman smiled. "You didn't do to bad yourself, but I anticipated your roll to port."

"Yes you did."

"But if you went starboard you wouldn't of survived much better either."

The two pilots chuckled.

"Well I better be off, no drinking for me tonight, I feel like an early night in."

"Are you sure?"

Gunman nodded.

"Okay, I guess I'll see you tomorrow then."

"Most likely."

After returning Mark's salute, he left the simulator chamber and headed for a turbolift. After a few moments the door to the turbolift opened and coming out with a group of technicians was Captain Vordar.

"Ah Colonel, what a coincidence," the captain said. "Your new starfighter has arrived. I'm here to oversee its transfer. Would you care to join me?"

Ah finally

"It would be my pleasure Captain."

As they proceeded across the docking area, a starfighter entered through the large whole which allowed small vessels to enter and exit the *Immortal's* landing bay. The fighter had a similar shape to the TIE Advanced, also known as TIE Avenger but with a glowing blood red view port. It had the original four SFS L-S1 laser cannons but housed even more firepower. A pair of ion cannons were situated in the middle part of each wing. This ship was only in use by the elite squadron Praetorian and was designed for them. Gunman had been handed one to replace his old fighter and give him an edge in the upcoming mission. And now seeing this ship being delivered to him, he could hardly wait to fly it. He had his flight suit on, his helmet in hand; he was ready to fly right now.

"It's an impressive looking fighter," Vordar said.

"Yes it is," Gunman lied.

"There's more than just this one. The others are not as advanced but they've been delivered to us to act as replacements in case anything was to go wrong. They'll be here shortly."

Only Avenger and that other squadron to come and we'll be all set.

The TIE Praetor finally landed. After a few moments the pilot came out. He was just a freighter crewman trained with the basics of piloting a starfighter and making his living transferring craft like this one. He had just flown a ship a lot of starfighter pilots would only dream of seeing, and he was just a delivery man.

After waiting a while longer, the other fighters started to arrive. Gunman identified them as two TIE Advanced, a TIE Phantom and an Experimental M1.

Replacements for Ghost, Phantom and Demon, good.

"Is it alright if I take my new fighter out for a spin?" Gunman asked.

Vordar smiled broadly. "Go ahead, but clear your departure with Control first and don't shoot at anything friendly."

"No problem, thanks."

He walked towards the TIE Praetor and climbed up the ladder that led to the cockpit. He seated himself inside and glanced around it. The seat was more comfortable than the Advanced type and more spacious. The controls were the same as all other TIE

designs, but unlike the Advanced it featured more buttons and switches. He would have to read a manual to learn their use but he would be fine with the basics at the moment. He pulled on his helmet and keyed in the comm.

“This is Colonel Gunman number eight four four piloting TIE Praetor, requesting launching clearance.”

“You are clear for launch Colonel, have fun.”

“Thank you.”

He started the ion engines and waited for them to turn green on his monitor. It took barely a moment and his systems showed 100% efficiency. He pulled back on the yoke and the fighter started to climb. He then twisted to the left the panel mounted on top of the yoke and the fighter turned to port. He accelerated the throttle to one-third and went through the pit, exiting the *Immortal* and heading for space.

When he was one kilometre away from the Star Destroyer, he kicked the throttle to full and looked at his display. The speed on the display kept on increasing until it reached over 150 MGLT.

Faster then the Advanced, now lets see how manoeuvrable she is.

He pressed his foot on the right rudder pedal and made a roll to starboard. He was surprised at how quickly and swiftly the fighter executed the sharp turn. He was also happy that the pain in his foot seemed to have vanished. He started making random evasive manoeuvres and the fighter maintained its smoothness despite the sharpness of his movements.

One more thing to try.

He charged his weapon systems at maximum rate which made his speed decrease. Within a few moments, they had fully charged. He pressed the triggers on both ends of the panel and brilliant flashes of green lit up the cockpit as laser cannon blasts shot out in the vacuum. They seemed to fire at a faster pace than in other TIE designs he had flown. He linked them so that they would fire in quad bursts and pressed the triggers again. Four light green lasers shot out simultaneously and another four blasted out barely after.

Damn she does fire faster

He linked together both his lasers and ion cannons and fired. This time light blue bursts accompanied the green ones and the sound was different.

It's a TIE Defender's systems in a TIE Advanced's hull... only better. If they allow me to, I'll keep this ship.

He turned the fighter around and headed back towards the *Immortal*. He sent the laser recharge rate to maintenance level and watched as the speed started to increase again. Gunman smiled and suddenly he felt that this mission he would go on the next day wouldn't be so bad after all.

Chapter VIII

RogueWing stood on the *Immortal's* bridge as he was speaking to Gunman his starfighter supplement's commander.

“I'm afraid that Avenger and the other Squad will not be coming with us. Avenger is needed at the battle front against the New Republic and all the pilots in the other squadron were killed. We're going to have to leave with only four squadrons.”

“Will that be enough Sir?” Gunman asked. To his surprise, the Colonel didn’t look much concerned.

“I’m sure it will be. The *Immortal* already has good pilots, nothing can stop her.”

“Yes sir,” Gunman said smiling.

“I’ll speak to you later Colonel. Over and out.”

RogueWing keyed off the channel and the Colonel’s image disappeared. He opened a new channel, one that would let him speak to everyone aboard the *Immortal*. His voice would be heard on all corridors and rooms of every deck. He then added on another channel, one that would let everyone on the other ships under his command hear him.

“Crewmen, troopers and pilots,” he said. “We’re about to leave for the Unknown Regions. Some of you have learned of our mission through briefings, others have heard rumours. I have a message here destined to all of you from the Emperor’s Hammer Supreme Commander, Grand Admiral Ronin himself.”

He played the message and a cold voice took over the speaker.

“*Immortals*, as you already know, I am sending your ship and her task fleet on an operation never undertaken by our Strike Fleet before. While we defend our territory from a massive Rebel offensive in a battle to preserve Imperial power, you will be charged with the duty of clearing us a path in the Unknown Regions. I don’t need to inform you again on the characteristics of this mission but I will insist on the following point: ridding the Unknown Regions and the galaxy itself of this weapon is imperative to the success of the Empire and the survival of its people. If you do not, we’ll be unable to expand our domain and re-establish former glory. Think of your mission as a critical stage in the revival of the Empire and a focal point to bringing peace and order back to the galaxy. Soon, the Rebel offensive will be crushed by our superior forces. Once that happens, I will lead our own offensive in the Unknown Regions in a quest to bring Imperial authority to its worlds. Once we accomplish this, we will gain back our galactic seat of power and make our way to total domination. Soon the Empire will be even greater than it was, but to make sure that happens, we must not fail. *You* must not fail.”

“And fail we won’t. The *Immortal* will be victorious again,” RogueWing finished. He cut off all the channels and walked to the forward view port. Captain Vordar came to his side.

“We’re ready to leave Sir,” the captain told him.

“Let’s go. The unknown regions are waiting for us Captain.”

“Engage hyper drive engines,” Vordar said projecting his voice down the crew pit.

The *Immortal*’s speed started to increase, and the stars became lines. After that, a blue worm hole replaced what had previously been black and white.

.....

-==To be Continued==-

