

The Trenches of the Sky

32 ABY

Imperial Storm Campaign

The crew pit sat below the footline of the luckier officers. Or, perhaps, the less lucky. That view depends on how risky you want your career path to be: the lower, the slower, but the safer. Too many times have deck officers, holding datapads for their bosses, been thrown to the ground, or choked, or shot. I had heard stories of Vader slaughtering entire bridges over small mistakes, and even though I'm not sure if the pit officers survived, I'm certain if anyone did it was them.

My name? Depends on who you ask. 'Senior Sensor Officer' to the semi-respectful, 'You there' to the less, and 'First Lieutenant Rechart' to the more. Marenta oscillated in between each of them, mainly choosing based on the stress of the environment. Right now, it was calm.

"Lieutenant Rechart, your report, please." She called out from the front of the bridge. She was staring out of the bridge viewport, her mind certainly elsewhere, quite excusably. From what I had overheard, it seemed as if the Ishtari were more powerful than we had bargained for.

I looked to Cobell, standing on my left. He pushed a few buttons on his station, passed me a datapad, and I read the words appearing aloud to Marenta. "They call it Harran. Initial sensor returns confirm a three planet system around a central red dwarf star. None of the preliminary readings appear to differ from Imperial records. The inner planet shows as terrestrial..." I saw the report's length and glared at Cobell, who offered only a shrug and a smile as any form of repentance. Still glaring, I forwarded the entirety of the report to Marenta's aide's datapad and skimmed aloud the rest.

"140 million Harrani, agricultural and decentralized. Second planet obliterated by orbital bombardment, dangerous debris and gravity fluctuations. Third world uninhabitable. No Ishtari presence on any of the three."

The new guy on the bridge stepped forward to beside Marenta, indicating the end of my part in the process. I think they called him 'Jet something.' He talked to her about strategic importance, something about bad news from the *Hammer*, and about the Harrani, but I wasn't listening. I was too busy rounding on Cobell.

"What the kriff, man? By the time I would have finished reading that we'd have already jumped out of the system!" I rolled my eyes, and chuckled. "The one night I cover your drinks because you forgot, this is how you reward me?"

He laughed and shrugged again. "You know as well as I do that we needed those drinks desperately, those pilots down there are intolerable without them."

"That's the truth." I shook my head in confusion. "Weirdos."

"What time does our shift end?"

"Twenty-two hundred."

"I thought it was twenty-one!"

"And I thought you knew how to write sensor reports. Clearly we're both wildly incorrect." I paused, slightly confused. "How the kriff did you forget when our shift ended? It's the same every day."

He brushed aside my question, perhaps by accident of his exquisite selective hearing, perhaps intentional. "Drinks tonight? After we get off?"

I rolled my eyes. "Sensor report lesson tonight?"

"Give it up, shithead," he smiled. "I do them how I do them."

"But you're not the guy who has to read it aloud to Marenta!" I snapped back, matching his smile.

"Goddamnit, Rech, drop it! I just want some drinks."

I wagged my finger, chuckling aloud now. "That's my condition, Cobell."

We were rudely interrupted by the officer on my right. I didn't know his name. "Personal conversations on your own time!" I bristled, but it had come at a fortuitous time. Marenta was walking over to our pit, clearly her and Jet-something having met some sort of tactical consensus.

"Good work, sensors. You can power them down now, there's nothing for us here," she said.

I saluted, and signaled to the rude fellow on my right. He stared for a second, then complied. I shifted my head to the left, caught Cobell's eye, and mouthed *jackass*, tilting my head to the man on my right.

He mouthed back some word I didn't understand, probably a local expletive I hadn't yet picked up from him: his vocabulary varied because of his pre-Empire background. It was followed with rolled eyes, then *Fine. Damn you. I'll see you tonight.*

Twenty-two hundred couldn't come soon enough.

#