

Swords & Sorcery

Introduction

Two years ago Norman Mach, leader of the Planetary Alliance, was presumed dead when the Super-Dreadnought Freedom was sucked through a Time-Hole. In fact, Norman and the Freedom were summoned into the past by Merlin the wizard to save Camelot from being overrun by another kingdom. During his stay in the 7th Century AD Norman was taught the ways of Sorcery. This was to be a great advantage on the side of the Planetary Alliance but it was feared that the Emperor had a surprise of his own.....

Chapter One.

Once again the Alliance was commanded from the Super-Dreadnought Freedom. But now the Alliance was stronger by 2745 people. Norman and Maxiis had spent the last three months designing a new starfighter specifically for the use of the Planetary Alliance.

Jim entered Norman's study.

"Everything going well?", he asked.

"Sure is.", said Maxiis. "We should have the blueprints finished in a matter of hours. Although we can't think of a name."

"I'm sure one will come to you.", said Jim.

"Don't worry.", said Norman. "If we can't think of one then Walter probably can."

"I'll be on the Bridge if you need me.", said Jim.

"Okay.", said Maxiis.

Jim left the study and headed for the Bridge where Chloë was about to relieve Boris from 'Bridge controll'. Jim was in charge of communications for the next three hours before Maxiis relieved him.

"Changeover time, Boris. Anything to report?", said Chloë.

"Nothing much.", said Boris. "Oh, yeah, all Centaurian ships on our side have arrived and are ready for orders."

"Excelent. The Empire won't know what's hit it.", she turned to Walter. "Set a course for Sirius-B construction yard, Walter. And send that command to all ships in the fleet."

"Sure thing, Chloë.", said Walter.

The fleet of six hundred ships turned, in unison, towards their destination and disappeared in a flair of dark blue engine light.

This may be a good time to explain how the Alliance of Planet's 'The Sytsem' originally appeared, and where the once famous 'Internet' went to. Files rescued from the remains of the Old Alliance's now destroyed System will be able to explain this more fully than anyone else. The recovered files are slightly damaged and nothing can be done to fully rectify this without completely destroying the file in the process - they were written in a far outdated language.



The Republic of Planets.
Serving the Galaxy for Prosperity and Peace.

The System.

Miscellaneous Files: System, The - Forming Of

The system has now been on-line for 35 years. It had been in design for 5 years beforehand when it became obvious that the Internet would not last much longer, due to the amount of commercial useage and abuse from some of its 'customers'. 25 years after its launch the Internet had become the main source of media and entertainment for the planet, Earth was at this time the only planet inhabited by humans, and this meant good business for companys. It was this same comercialisation that had brought the downfall of television and radio. This is when designers realised what was going to happen - design on a new Internet was begun. But this time it was to be owned, and run, solely by its users and no comercial companies had a say in what was entered onto it which meant no advertising was entered and The System was born.

The System incorporates the latest in computer languages and a user system which allows touch-button access to all of its files. To this day there is no comercial involvement in the running of The System, which means the upkeep of the computers which run it has to come out of the taxpayer's money. There is no way of getting around this, sorry.

Chapter Two.

"I've got it!", said Maxiis. "Lets call it the Nuclear Party."

"Good name.", said Norman.

"Okay, then, just Nuclear Party it is."

"Yeah. It sounds good to me.", Norman turned to Walter. "Walter, what do you think?"

"I think it's a good name for a thing like that, yeah.", said Walter.

"Then that settles it.", said Maxiis.

"We'd better get up to the Bridge.", said Norman. "It's almost our shift."

Maxiis grabbed the blueprints and they both walked up to the lift.



The Republic Of Planets.

Personal Log.

Norman

12/02/27.

16:41:25

Maxiis and I have just finished the development of a new starfighter that should give us the upper hand against the Empire in the battles to come. I feel confident that we will succeed in our mission although I know that not all of us will survive.

Entry ends.

16:43 04



The Imperial System.

[Protected Sector]

Personal Log.

Emperor Martyiis Gretaurok.

12/02/27

18:25:58

The situation looks bleak for those pitiful rebels. The construction of the new Iron Fist fighter is now fully underway. Soon every starfighter pilot in the fleet will be flying one of my new craft. The rebels don't stand a chance against us now. They will pay for their treason.

I have set research the task of programming an Artificial Intelligence 'front-end' utility for my system. I have noticed that the rebels already have one of these. They have the two finest programmers on their side. The Imperial Artificial Intelligence utility will, of course, be better.

My 'droid seems to be functioning well. It is vital to my plans that it stays this way.

Entry ends.

18:31:02

The republic fleet entered the construction yard. Norman and Maxiis took a transport down to the yard's HQ where they met with the Chairman.

"We have here the plans for the new starfighter we told you about. Do not let the Empire get its hands on them.", said Norman.

"Your fighters are in safe hands.", said the Chairman.

He took a look at the blueprints.

"Very interesting design.", he said. "We could have twelve squadrons of these ready for you in three weeks. Although we must be carefull. The Empire has started to build new fighters of its own."

"Interesting.", said Norman. "But I'm sure that they will not be up to the standard of our new fighter."

"Do not underestimate the skill of the Imperial research department. They have been building fighters for a lot longer than you two have."

"I'm sure. But we have to succeed in destroying some of them. We can't let the Empire have full controll of the galaxy. We must go now. Goodbye."

"See you in twelve weeks."

"You certainly will.", said Maxiis.

The Chairman headed for the construction department and ordered the building of the Nuclear Party fighters to begin imediately. He dearly wanted the Empire to fall.

Chapter Three.

3 months later.

"All in favour raise your hand."

Everyone in the room raised their hand. Or the equivalent of their hand as three more planets had now joined the Planetary Alliance.

"Then it is the judgement of this government that we are to declare war on the Empire. At midnight tonight the entire fleet is to have arrived at Sirius. That shall be the first system liberated."

There were cheers all around. The fighter pilots were briefed for the mission.

"You are all gathered here today at a time that will go down in history.", said Boris. "This will be the first battle that will see the downfall of the evil that is the Empire. A-Squadron will be flying the new Nuclear Party starfighters. Your squadron leader will be Admiral Tarq. Do whatever he tells you but keep a close eye out for any of these new Iron Fist starfighters. They may try to attack our ships - don't let them."

"What if they try attacking us?", said one of the pilots.

"Your ships are better equipped than any in the Empire's fleet. You have more firepower than them and more powerful shields than them. They would not stand a chance."

Boris resumed the mission briefing.

"B, C, and D-Squadrons are to be flying the Storm Fighters. You have the same mission as A-Squadron. Protect our capital ships at all costs but don't try any heroics. You have no chance against the Imperial cruisers. Now everyone get to your ships and prepare to make history."

The pilots ran to their fighters as Norman came over the speakers on every ship in the fleet.

"This is Grand-Admiral Norman Mach. We are about to come out of lightspeed in the Imperial-held system of Sirius. It is lightly defended but they might get a distress call out before we can blow away all of their communications posts. I wish you all the best of luck."

There was a sudden jolt as the mighty ships entered existence. Two Imperial Battle Cruisers on patrol duty turned on their shields before any of the republic ships knew they were there.

The battle had begun.

"Shields up!", said Norman. "And launch fighters."

All 60000 fighters launched from the republic ships and were soon met by 150000 Imperial fighters.

A figure appeared on the Freedom's VDU.

"This is Admiral Dukai speaking. You have entered a restricted area. Leave immediately or you will be fired upon."

"Jim.", said Norman. "Open a channel to all our capital ships."

"Channel open.", said Jim.

"This is Grand Admiral Mach. All ships are to open fire on the communications posts. I don't want any of them left standing."

"Close channel, Jim.", said Norman.

Norman turned to Chlöe.

"Chloë, begin firing at the communications posts."

"Yes, sir!", said Chloë.

Norman turned to the VDU which was now displaying a split-screen of the commanders of the two cruisers.

"This is Grand Admiral Norman Mach. We are here to liberate this star system from your vile Emperor's control. Do you wish to fight six thousand Planetary Alliance ships?"

Admiral Dukai spoke up.

"This is Admiral Dukai of the Battle Cruiser Hexx. We have already called for reinforcements. Do you wish to fight the Command Centre Armourgeddon?"

"The last time I met your Command Centre I left it with about half of its systems broken. At the time the Planetary Alliance consisted of one command ship and 5 people. I think you catch my drift. Goodbye."

The two cruisers moved into range of the Freedom and opened fire.

"Fasten your seatbelts everyone.", said Norman. "We're in for a rough time. Walter, charge up the heavy blasters and fire at the nearest of those two cruisers."

"Yes, sir!", said Walter.

A voice came over the com-link of every republic fighter.

"This is Admiral Maxiis. Choose a target and go in for the kill."

The fighters spread out and took out most of the Imperial fighters before trouble came.

"Where the hell did that come from?", said one of the fighter pilots.

"Maxiis!", said Norman. "Keep the fighters away from that Attack Platform."

Maxiis turned to look at the platform.

"I'll try.", he said.

"All fighters are to keep clear of that platform."

"Sure thing", said one of the pilots.

There was a sudden explosion as one of the republic cruisers lost its shields.

Maxiis came over the com-link.

"Norman! We've lost C-Squadron. The platform is attacking us."

"Keep away from it. We'll deal with it as soon as possible.", said Norman.

"It won't be easy but we'll try.", said Maxiis.

Norman turned to Chloë.

"Chloë, move us around to cover that ship. Then charge up all of our guns. We're going to take out both cruisers at the same time."

The Freedom moved around to shield the damaged ship. Two more republic ships turned to fire on the Attack Platform.

Walter was about to play the title-screen tune of a 20th century computer game but then thought better of it.

One of the cruisers exploded. Taking half of the other cruiser with it whilst reducing the freedom's shields to 50% power.

"We should have sent a boarding party. That ship could have been usefull."

"Recharging shields.", said Boris.

"Divert lazer power to the ION Cannons. Lets try and disable that other cruiser."

The battlescape on the VDU dissappeared to show a Centaurian Commander. She spoke in Centaurian.

"The Attack Platform's shields are down.", she said.

"Excelent.", said Norman. "Can you disable it? It may have some valuable information on it."

"We shall try."

Maxiis came over the Freedom's com-link.

"Norman! We're in trouble.", he said. "2 more cruisers, 5 Attack Platforms, and 4 full squadrons of fighters have just entered the area."

Norman turned to the VDU which was now back to displaying the battlefield in a minature form.

"Try and keep the fighters back.", he said. "I'll arange someone to keep those capital ships busy."

"Okay.", said Maxiis.

"The communications posts are all destroyed.", said Jim.

"Send an attack squadron down to the planet's surface.", said Norman.

Norman turned to Boris.

"Open a channel to the Fireheart and the Dark Mass.", he said.

"Channel open", said Boris.

Two figures appeared in the place of the battlefield display.

"The communications posts are down. Move your ships into an attack position and destroy those two cruisers."

"Yes, sir.", said the figures.

The battlefield display reappeared on the VDU.

"Cruiser disabled.", said Walter.

"Walter, have the ship we've been protecting board the disabled cruiser."

A Centaurian Commander appeared on the VDU.

"Platform disabled. I have sent down a boarding party."

"Excelent work. Could you try and keep the other Platform's busy. I'll send help."

"Sure thing, sir."

Norman turned to Boris.

"Signal three ships to attack those Platforms."

"Yes, sir.", said Boris.

A human figure wearing the uniform of an Imperial Grand Admiral appeared on the VDU. She spoke up.

"You are indeed an excelent leader, Admiral."

"Who are you?", said Norman.

"Why Admiral Mach I thought you would remember me. After all we have met many times before."

"You do look familiar. Wait, yes I remember now, you're Annabel Traahil."

"Very good. I am commander of the Super-Dreadnought Total Carnage. We shall meet soon and then you shall be destroyed."

"I don't think so. We have about 6000 capital ships here. We have already disabled two of your ships plus we have destroyed a great many fighters and at least one of your cruisers. Have a nice day."

Norman ended the transmission and the battle scene reappeared on the VDU. All the imperial ships had been destroyed.

"Walter, open a channel to the planet.", said Norman.

"Channel opened.", said Walter.

The VDU displayed a room full of broken computer posts and a few corpses. A figure turned to face Norman. Norman spoke up.

"I am Grand Admiral Norman Mach of the Planetary Alliance. We are here to liberate this planet from the evil control of the Emperor. A squad of liberation fighters has already been deployed on the surface of your planet. Prepare to come under Alliance control."

"Are you the good guys or the bad guys."

"We are all good. It is the Empire that is bad - although they do a good job of hiding that fact."

The transmission began to break up.

"We are honoured to be liberated, Admiral. Thank you.", said the man.

The system came under Alliance control only an hour later. The Super-Dreadnought Total Carnage had arrived not long before although it had left in a hurry when everyone started to fire at it. The bodies of all the dead republic starfighter pilots had been loaded aboard the Freedom via tractor beam. The Command Centre never arrived. It had been called away on urgent business.

"Signal the Fireheart, Jim.", said Norman.

The VDU flickered to life and a Centaurian Admiral appeared.

"Is your ship still battle-worthy?", said Norman.

"It is.", said the Centaurian.

"Then you are to stay here and keep an eye out for any Imperial ships. call me if any appear."

"Yes, sir."

The VDU turned off.

"Walter, send a message to all the other ships. We are to enter lightspeed in two minutes and are to arrive at the Sirius-B construction yard by midnight."

"Yes, sir."

Two minutes later the battle-damaged ships entered lightspeed in a flash of engine light.

Chapter Four.

Two months later the Planetary Alliance controlled a quarter of the galaxy. The Emperor was not happy.

"They are likely to attack the Pangean system next, my Lord.", said Olrik.

"No, I think they are more likely to try a more forward attack. The Sol system maybe.", the Emperor replied.

"But, sir, that would be madness. The Sol system is at the heart of Imperial territory. It is the most heav....", his voice trailed off.

"You forget that I know their Grand-Admiral. They will go for the Sol system. It would show their new found strength. And they have the firepower to succeed in what they call 'liberating' it."

"Surely not, sir."

"Unfortunately it is the truth. But that is all about to change. There is a new Star-Cruiser on the way. It shall be the Empire's saviour. With it we shall conquer those systems taken over by the Planetary Alliance. We will then be back in total domination. Now, leave me."

"Yes, sir."

Olrik left the throne room and headed for the bridge where he took control of the Command Centre and oversaw the final stages of construction on the mile long Star-Cruiser

The Emperor turned to a VDU which was showing a disembodied head. Only part of its face could be seen. It seemed like a light was shining from the bottom-right corner of the screen onto its face. This was Imperial Research's latest product. This was the new Imperial System.

"My Lord.", It said. "Research has been trying to reach you. They have completed the development of the Prison."

"Excelent", said the Emperor. "Send them a message telling them to have it on line as soon as possible."

"Yes, my Lord."

The figure morphed into the Imperial symbol and the Emperor turned to a tactical display of the Sol system. He pressed a button and a detailed display of the Earth's orbit appeared. He had decided that this is where the Alliance was likely to attack first. He was wrong.

"The fleet is here, sir.", said Chloë.

"Good.", said Boris. "Have them ready to jump to lightspeed on my signal."

"Yes, sir."

Boris turned to a screen displaying a number. The number was 0000000001. When it reached zero the Navigation Computer would have finished calculating the co-ordinates for the lightspeed destination.

The number reached zero.

"Signal the fleet.", he said. "Enter lightspeed to arrive at these co-ordinates."

"Yes sir."

There was a mass of light as 6000 mighty cruisers entered lightspeed.

"Signal the fleet.", said the Emperor. "We're going to pay a visit on the Altair system. We're going to take back what is rightfully ours and once again rule the whole galaxy."

"But, Lord.", said Olrik. "Altair is the capital system of the Planetary Alliance. It is the second most highly defended system in the galaxy."

"It is no match for our new weapons."

"No, my Lord."

Olrik left the throne room and headed for the Bridge. The new Empire's Savior class ships had taken the size of the Imperial fleet past that of the Old Alliance's fleet whilst it was in the hayday of its existence. The Planetary Alliance stood no chance against them now.

Chapter Five.

Hours passed and then they reached their destination.

"Signal the fleet to prepare to exit lightspeed on my command.", said Boris.

"Yes,sir!", said Chloë.

The entire fleet entered normal space. But the Command Centre was nowhere to be seen.

"Where the hell has it gone?", said Boris.

"The scanners show no sign of any onther ships at all - except ours, that it.", said Jim.

"I'm going to get Norman.", said Chloë.

Chloë found Norman and Maxiis together in one of the science labs. They were trying to hack into the Imperial System but not having much luck. Walter was helping them.

"We need their password.", said Maxiis.

"But we have no idea as to what it could be.", said Walter.

"It'll be something like "All hail the Emperor".', said Norman.

"Yeah, but in what language?", said Maxiis.

"What languages does the Emperor speak?", said Norman.

"According to his personal file he speaks modern English, 20th Century English, and Latin.", said Walter.

"What's the difference between modern and 20th century English?", said Maxiis.

"It's all to do with the way words like 'book' and 'film' are pronounced.", said Walter. "I think he just put that on his file to make him look intelligent."

"Well.", said Norman. "That probably narrows it down to two possible languages.", said Norman.

"How'd you work that one out, then?", said Maxiis.

"Well, the Emperor is going to want a password in a language that he can speak isn't he."

"Okay.", said Maxiis. "Sounds reasonable."

Norman phoned up the Imperial System. It had taken them hours just to find the proper 'phone number' for the System. After a few minutes the password screen appeared. Norman typed in "All hail the Emperor." and pressed the 'Transmit' key. The screen cleared and both Norman and Maxiis crossed their fingers. Walter would have done the same but he didn't have any fingers. Then something appeared on the screen. It read

"PASSWORD: INCORRECT!"

"Bugger!", said Maxiis.

Norman hung up and then re-dialed. The password screen appeared and he typed in the words 'omnes Imperatorum ave' and pressed the 'Transmit' key. Everyone crossed their fingers again.

The screen cleared and was replaced by the AI Front-End new Imperial System who immediately sounded the alarm at the Imperial headquarters on Titan.

"Who the hell are you?", said Maxiis.

"I am It.", It said.

"You're what?", said Norman.

"I am It. I am the new Imperial System. Designed to keep order in the Empire.", It said.

"Who are you?"

"I am Grand Admiral Norman Mach. Leader of the Planetary Alliance. This ", he said, turning to Maxiis." is Admiral Maxiis Tarq and this ", he said, turning to Walter." is Walter.

He is the Planetary Alliance System."

"The 'Alliance shall be destroyed. The Empire is the way forward.", It said.

"Since when?", said Walter.

"What are you doing?", It said to Norman.

Norman was sitting at a VDU at the other side of the room. He was typing ferociously.

"Nothing.", he said.

He was actually trying to bypass this tiresome life-form. He needed information on the new 'Imperial Superweapon'. They had heard rumours about it but weren't quite sure whether to believe these rumours or not.

"This is a boring conversation.", It exclaimed. "I'm off."

The VDU cleared but Norman didn't care.

"I'm in.", he said.

"In where?", asked Maxiis.

"The Empire's main-access drive. Now we can get any information we want without the Empire knowing."

"Look up the details on the Command Centre.", said Maxiis. "There may be a weakness somewhere."

"Well, you will have to wait a bit because I'm down-loading everything to our drive.", said Norman. "That way we won't have to phone up that sad computer again."

"That's okay but if you're downloading everything then you're going to get a copy of that sad computer.", said Maxiis.

"That can be easily sorted out.", said Norman, turning to Walter. "Walter, run the dissection program and get rid of all the files that run that It program, please."

"With pleasure.", said Walter. "Our drive, or theirs."

"Both - no, wait. Just delete theirs then open up the main file on our drive. I have an idea that could render the whole Empire helpless."

"Maxiis, you're needed on the Bridge.", said Chlö.

"Okay.", said Maxiis. Turning to Norman he said. "I'll see you later."

"Sure. I shouldn't be much longer anyway.", said Norman.

"Begin countdown for the jump to Normal Space.", said the Emperor.

"Countdown begun. Jump to Norman Space in 15 seconds.", said the Commander.

"Signal the fleet, jump to Normal Space on my signal.", said the Emperor.

"Ready for the jump, sir.", said the Commander.

"Jump to Normal Space.", said the Emperor.

"Fleet signaled, my Lord.", said Olik.

The Emperor's fleet, which was the Elite in every field of the Imperial Military, entered the Altair system and began to cause chaos.

"Get an emergency fleet together.", said Maxiis. "We are to meet in the Altair system."

Maxiis turned on the ship-wide communicator.

"This is Admiral Tarq, all personell to battle stations. This is not a drill. Repeat this is not a drill.", he turned to Jim. "Put the ship on Red Alert and take us to lightspeed, you know the destination."

"Course set. Lightspeed in 15 seconds."

The Red Alert siren was wailing all over the ship as the crew got to battle stations. The communication speakers came on again.

"All starfighter pilots are to report to Mission Briefing.", said Maxiis.

Norman was oblivious to everything that was going on. He was deep into re-writing the Imperial System's main AI file. Now It would be working for the Planetary Alliance.

Chapter Six.

Boris was conducting the Mission Breifing as Norman had not yet arrived.

"The Empire has attacked our Capital at Altair. An emergency fleet had been deployed to fend them off. We will be the first ship to arrive and so will be deploying the first wave of 'Fighters."

One of the pilots raised their hand.

"Sir, how long will we be out there before re-enforcements come in?"

"It could be anything from five to ten minutes. We'll tell you when they get there. Now, all our available starfighters are to be used in this battle, and you will be taking on odds of five to one in their favour, but we must not loose this system. If we do then the Empire will have an

advantage. At the moment, well as far as we know, both sides have equal territory meaning equal resources and manpower. If the Empire wins Altair then our resource supply drop drastically. We must win this fight."

A voice came over the speakers.

"All pilots to their starfighters. We are about to enter Normal Space."

The freedom entered the Altair system to find only one Imperial ship in the system. There were no other ships there at all - Imperial or otherwise.

Chapter Seven

"My Lord, a ship has entered the system.", said Olrik. "It bears Rebel markings."

"Ah, excellent.", said The Emperor. "Shields up and go the Blue Alert."

"Yes, Lord."

The Command Centre raised its shields and launched 2 squadrons of Iron Fist fighters. The Freedom raised its shields, launched its first wave of fighters, and pulled back, slightly, from the fighting.

"Signal the fleet.", said the Emperor. "Remove blackout shields."

"Yes, Lord.", said Olrik.

"Sir!", said Boris. "The radar has detected several thousand Imperial ships. They seem to have come out of nowhere"

"Take us forward, Jim.", said Norman. "Nice and slowly."

Norman turned on his ship-wide communicator.

"Imperial ships have entered this sector. Everyone to battlestations. Red Alert!"

A wailing noise, signalling Red Alert, came over the entire ship, along with a red tint to all the lights.

"Maxiis, how long until the rest of the fleet arrives?", asked Norman.

"The first ship should arrive in two-and-a-half minutes.", replied Maxiis.

Norman opened a communications channel to the Weapons Bay.

"Weapons Bay this is the Bridge. Load all missile bays with the strongest missiles we have."

"Yes, sir.", said one of the Weapons Bay officers.

"We are within range of one of the Imperial ships.", said Chloë.

"Put it on screen.", said Norman.

One of the Empire's Saviour-Class ships appeared on the screen, turned to face the Freedom, and fired at them.

"Hull down to 95%.", said Maxiis.

"Raise shields and target that ship.", said Norman. He turned to Boris "Fire one missile."

The Freedom fired at the Imperial ship.

"Sir, our shields are down to 25%.", said an Imperial officer.

"Return fire. Full power to the lazer array.", said the ship's Commander.

"Shields down 15%", said Maxiis.

"Fire two more missiles.", said Norman.

The Freedom fired two more missiles which landed near-direct hits on the enemy ship's Bridge and main engines, reducing its shields to zero and totally destroying its hull.

The explosion, caused by the destruction of the Imperial ship, reduced the Freedom's shields and caused the ship to rock slightly.

"Fasten your seatbelts, everybody.", said Walter. "It looks like we could be in for a rough ride."

There was a huge flash of blue light as the rest of the Planetary Alliance's emergency fleet arrived. (The Freedom being the first of the emergency fleet to arrive.).

"Signal the fleet.", said Norman. "Tell them to raise shields and launch their 'fighters."

The other ships launched their 'fighters and soon the whole system was covered in red lazer fire. The only interuption to this display was a huge flash of green light as the Command Centre fired its main gun, reducing one of the Alliance's ships shields to zero and its hull to 6%.

Norman jumped to his feet.

"Put the Command Centre on screen.", he said. "And tell that ship to get out of the battle zone."

The battlefield display dissappeared from the VDU to be replaced by a close range view of the Command Centre.

"Can you get a closer look at its main gun?", asked Norman.

"Sure thing.", said Maxiis. "How about that."

"That's fine.", said Norman. "Walter, any ideas what it is."

"I have no idea whatsoever - but it looks to me like it would have an awesome drain on the ship's power. I bet they don't use it more than twice.", said Walter.

"Well lets hope that they don't. We don't need any more crippled ships.", said Boris.

"Shields recharged.", said Maxiis. "They are now back at full strength."

There was a huge crash as a comet hit the ship, knocking the ship's camera off.

"Shields down to 75%.", said Maxiis. "And the VDU is bugged."

It may be a good time to note that since the early 21st Century, when the first manned shuttle to Io was launched, glass windows on spacecraft have been disused as they proved too dangerous. They were replaced by a camera on the front of the ship which sent a picture to the VDU on the bridge of the ship. This proved safer when passing through asteroid belts as an asteroid could hit a ship and not come crashing through the windscreen.

"Can we link up to the secondary camera?", asked Norman, anxiously.

"I'll try.", said Maxiis. After pressing a few buttons he said "That's bugged too."

"Damn.", said Norman. He opened a communications channel to the engine rooms and said "This is the Bridge. The Windscreen Cameras have been damaged. Be ready to enter lightspeed if necessary."

Someone replied "We are awaiting your command, sir."

"Walter, can we get the battlefield display back up.", asked Norman.

"I think so.", said Walter. "I'll give it a try."

The VDU's speakers emitted a high-pitched wail and then a white line appeared on the screen. After a few minutes other colours became visible. Then the screen went blank for a while. Norman sat down and stared at the screen. Suddenly the screen went black and the battlefield display appeared.

Then it disappeared again to be replaced by the Altairian Governor.

"What the hell is going on?", he shouted.

"The Empire is attacking this system - why? Hadn't you noticed?", replied Norman.

"That's not what's happening down here. 6 military transports have just landed - Alliance transports I should add - and the occupants have started to destroy the capital city. The terrorists are all wearing Planetary Alliance uniforms."

There was a sudden jolt as an Imperial ship rammed the Freedom.

"Shields down to 52%", said Maxiis.

"Fire 3 missiles at the attacking ship then let loose with all weapons on the nearest Imperial ships."

"Yes, sir.", said Boris.

Norman turned back to the Governor.

"I can honestly tell you that those troops down there were not sent by the Planetary Alliance.", he said. "It seems like the Empire has got hold of some of our uniforms - which wouldn't be hard as they are the uniforms of the Old Alliance. They have probably used their own transports and painted our emblem on them. I will send down a strike team to help you get rid of them."

"Thank you.", said the Governor.

The battlefield display returned to the screen.

"Shields are back up to 85%", said Maxiis.

"16 Imperial ships have been destroyed - 5 of them by us.", said Jim.

"How many of them are left?", asked Chloë.

"40.", said Jim. "The rest have fled."

"And the Command Centre?", said Norman.

"It's still here", said Jim.

"Right.", said Norman. "Boris, Bring us around so that we are between the Command Centre and the planet."

"Yes, sir.", said Boris.

"Maxiis, you have the Bridge. I'm taking a strike team down to the surface.", said Norman.

"Yes, sir.", said Maxiis.

Norman got up and left the bridge. Maxiis's voice came over the ship-wide com.

"All strike team members are to report to the debriefing room."

"What is that ship doing?", asked the Emperor.

"I don't know, my Lord.", said Olrik.

"Keep an eye on it. See what they do."

"Yes, my Lord."

The large, red, assault transport landed on the planet's surface. The door opened and Norman stepped out, followed by a whole assault team. Norman was carrying a huge assault lazer-cannon. The strike team were carrying standard lazer cannons.

"Spread out and stay alert. Lets get rid of those imperial scum.", he said.

"Yes, sir!", said the strike team, in unison.

It wasn't long before the strike team covered the whole of the besieged city. Norman was under heavy assault. Lazer fire was everywhere. Most of it was aiming at Norman. He dived behind what was left of a wall after a grenade had landed by it. He pulled a grenade out of his coat pocket, primed it, and threw it in the general direction of the main lazer fire.

The grenade exploded and most of the lazer fire stopped. Norman got up and started firing at the troops still firing at him. Then something exploded in front of him. The blast was so great that he lost his sight and fell unconcious. Another explosion made the remaining part of the wall he had been hiding behind fall on him.

16 of the Imperial ships had been destroyed. The other four had fled. 6 Alliance ships had been destroyed. The others were circling the command centre.

"All ships are to attack that command centre.", said Maxiis.

The command centre's shields soon started to come down.

"Shields down to 2%.", said one of the Imperial officers."

"Fire the supergun at their flagship.", said the Emperor.

The Command Centre fired its super weapon at the Freedom.

"Shields at 0.", said Jim.

"Hull at 2%.", said Boris.

"Pull back and fire all missiles.", said Maxiis.

The Freedom pulled back from the battle and fired 400 missiles at the Command Centre, causing it to jump to lightspeed.

Chapter Eight.

The fleet had gone back to their systems - all except the Freedom. It was still in orbit around Altair, searching for Norman.

"Sir, we have found no trace of the Admiral.", said one of the strike team.

"Then look again. He has to be found.", said the strike team commander.

The commander took out his TV-Comm. unit and open a channel to the Freedom.

"This is the Freedom.", said Maxiis.

"Admiral, there is no sign of Grand-Admiral Mach. I have sent the team out to look for him again.", said the commander.

"Okay. Notify me on their findings."

"Yes, sir."

Maxiis turned off the comm unit and turned to Boris.

"Any sign?", he asked.

"Yes.", said Boris. "One of the scanners has picked up a life sign. It's pretty weak and I'm haveing trouble locking on to it."

"Where is it generally?"

"Sector A,31. I'd hurry up, it looks like we might loose it."

Maxiis quickly turned the comm back on.

"Commander! Get all of your troops to search sector A,31. We've picked up a faint life sign.", he said.

"Yes, sir!", said the commander.

The commander changed channels on his comm unit and ordered everyone to search sector A,31.

Half and hour later Admiral Norman was being taken to the medical deck on the Freedom.

"Don't try to move.", said someone. "You've just had a nasty operation."

"Where am I?", asked Norman.

"You're on the flagship. On the medical deck. We've had to amputate your arm, and you've lost your sight."

"Ah, that's why I can't see anything."

"Don't worry, though. The surgeon has fitted you an artificial arm - and Maxiis is preparing some cybernetic implants to allow you to see again."

"How did the fight go?"

"Thankfully we won. I think the Command Centre ran low on power as it left in quite a hurry."

There was a knock on the door. Maxiis came in, carrying a small box.

"Chloë, it's your turn on the bridge.", he said.

"Right.", said Chloë, turning to Norman she said "I'll see you later."

"Yeah, bye.", said Norman.

Chloë left the room. Maxiis closed the door then turned to Norman.

"No more action for you for a while.", he said.

"You wouldn't believe the size of that missile.", said Norman. "It's a wonder I'm still here."

"You almost weren't. It's lucky that the strike team found you when they did. Much later and you would have died."

"Remind me to thank them when I get out of here."

"Okay - oh, yeah, when the doctors were running some tests on you they found that you have more brain activity than anyone should. They were wondering if anyone had picked this up before. Any ideas?"

"Yes. It's probably from when I was sucked through that time hole thing, remember that? Well I came out over Earth in the 6th or 7th century. A wizard type blokie taught me teleconesis so that I could win this competition and help stop an invading kingdom or something. I can't remember it that well now."

"Well, I'll tell them. By the way I'm supposed to take you down to the theatre so that they can put in some implants to make you see again."

"Okay."

"Is that okay?", asked a surgeon.

"It seems alright.", said Norman. He waved a hand in front of his face. "No, wait. It all goes blurry when something moves."

"Okay, just relax and we'll soon have that fixed."

The doctor fiddled with some wiring in Norman's new eyes and typed some things in on a nearby computer. Then he turned back to Norman.

"Is it okay now?", he asked.

Norman waved his hand in front of his face again and then looked around for a few seconds. Then said

"Yes, it seems to be working fine."

"Okay. Now just sit still for a while and then you can go."

The doctor disconnected a few wires joining Norman's new eyes to the computer then stitched up the incisions in the side of Norman's head. After that he said.

"That it. You can go now. The anesthetic won't wear off for a while yet but if you have any problems after that just come and tell me."

"I will.", said Norman. "Thank you. Goodbye."

Chapter Nine

After a few months, Norman and Maxiis had almost finished their study of the Emperor's Command Centre. At the time the Freedom was in orbit around Altair preparing to take fresh supplies on board.

"This is Altair Supply Transport One requesting permission to dock with Super-Dreadnought Freedom, over."

"Supply Transport One, this is Super-Dreadnought Freedom, permission granted. Docking Bay Seven is open for your use."

The transport began docking manouvers and within minutes had landed on the Freedom.

"Successfull docking. Supplies are now being unloaded.", said the transport's captain.

"Excelent. Carry on.", said Jim, from the Bridge.

The lift doors opened and Norman stepped onto the Bridge.

"Changeover time.", he said. "The Freedom is now under the command of Grand-Admiral Norman Mach."

Jim got up and announced that he was not to be disturbed for several hours. He wanted to catch up on some lost sleep.

A worker carried a large crate off one of the newly docked transports. She headed to one of the supply lockers and left the crate there. When the intruder was sure that no-one was looking she crept over to the computer room.

The computer room was, as usual, locked and so the intruder took a gun out of her pocket and shot the lock off, hid until she was sure that no-one had heard her, then entered the computer room.

Out of another pocket she took a small bomb. She looked around the room and located the

main network running The System and wired the bomb into it. She then set the bomb to go off in ten minutes and left the room, closing the door on her way out. She managed to find a transport just as it was preparing to leave and climbed aboard.

"Sir, the last transports are preparing to leave.", said Boris.

"Are all the supplies packed safely for the trip?", asked Norman.

Boris turned to his computer and called up the ship's inventory. He then turned back to Norman,

"Yes, sir. All supplies are accounted for."

"Scan the ship for any unwanted extras and then prepare for lightspeed."

"Yes, sir."

The ship shook violently as an explosion ripped through its computer room. All the lights dimmed then went out and an emergency warning siren was cut off. Norman jumped to his feet and ran to one of the computers.

"The computers are down. The power's been cut.", he said.

"That means we're on battery backup," said Boris, "and that won't last very long."

"Do the comms. still work?"

"They should do, they're not linked to the main supply." Boris pressed the communications button and a red light came on. "Yes, they still work.", he said.

"Good.", said Norman. He pressed another comms. button and said, "Attention! We have lost main power. All life support functions are running on battery backup. Everyone is to abandon ship within the next ten minutes. This is not a drill."

"We'd better go, then.", said Boris.

Ten minutes later the entire ship was empty. Everyone on the ship had left on whatever ship they could find. Norman was flying his own personal fighter. He sent a message to Maxiis.

"Maxiis, I'm hanging around here for a while. Can you take the landing party down?"

"Yeah, sure.", said Maxiis.

Maxiis led the group down to Altair Starport while Norman waited around the ship. Just as he had expected an Imperial boarding team entered the system not long after the others had landed. Norman hid his fighter on the opposite side of the Freedom to that of the Imperial ship. After they had landed so did he.

Maxiis helped everyone off the transporters and then turned to survey the scene. He announced that he had talked with the orbiting construction yard and it would be at least a month until the Freedom was fully operational again. He also announced that they had lost

the onboard system, Walter, but there may be a chance of getting him back.

Norman watched as the Imperial boarding party left their ship. He noticed that they were all wearing pressure suits and remembered that there wasn't much oxygen left on the ship. The Imperials obviously knew that too, he would have to find out how - but first he would have to get to one of the storage rooms and get a pressure suit before the air became unbreathable. The half-light from the red warning lights allowed him to move around the bay without being noticed.

He waited until the troops left the docking bay and ran off in the direction of the storage bays.

"My Lord, the boarding party reports that they are on board the Freedom.", said Olrik.

"What is the ship's status?", asked The Emperor.

"The whole ship is without power and its life support units have been destroyed. The ship's lightspeed drive has also been damaged by our bomb."

"Excellent. See to it that the ship cannot be repaired."

"Yes, Lord."

Chapter Ten.

Norman fixed his gun belt to his pressure suit and made sure his suit was on properly. He then left the storage room and went to look for the Imperials. It didn't take him long to find them as they were heading for the engine room. He noticed that one of them was carrying a large box which he recognised as the System's backup box. He couldn't let them have that, not after he had destroyed their System. He drew his gun and fired.

The troops turned and fired back. Norman jumped through an open door and kicked it shut. He ran through another door and back out into the corridor the troops had come down. He turned a corner and fired at the troops, who were trying to open the door he had shut. A warning siren went off, indicating that the ship's air had just become totally unbreathable. Norman used the shock brought about by the sudden noise to his advantage and fired at the troops, managing to puncture one of the troops' pressure suits before they could retaliate. Norman ran off down the corridor, with the troops in pursuit.

A stray laser hit one of the roof supports, causing it to fall to the ground. Norman was just able to jump it in time. Then he stopped, turned and threw himself against it just as the troops jumped over it. He rolled over on his side and fired, killing a few of the troops instantly. The other troops aimed and fired their lasers at Norman as he lay there on the floor.

Nothing happened. Norman had obviously been in the military longer than they had as he knew just how many shots the standard laser got from one battery pack. As the troops loaded another battery pack into the lasers he took aim and fired, killing every one of them. He got up and a huge explosion knocked him off his feet. He obviously hadn't found all the troops and the ones he'd missed had better weapons than he did. He looked over the top of the roof support and saw just what had been shooting at him.

On the other side of the roof support sat a large storm tank. How it had got down such a thin

corridor he didn't know but he didn't feel it would be a very good idea to ask it. He felt around his gun belt, looking for a grenade then realised that he didn't have one. The tank started to move forward. It must have recharged its gun, he thought. He had no other options, he'd have to chance running. The air had cleared of smoke from the last shot the tank had taken and Norman could now see that it had put a hole straight through the far wall. He grabbed the nearest corpse and threw it at the tank. The tank fired and Norman ran through the hole in the wall.

The red lighting didn't make it to clear at first but Norman soon recognised the room he was in as the Bridge. That meant there was only one way out apart from the way he had just come in and the tank would definitely not be able to follow him through it. He ran towards the stairs just as the tank was coming through the hole in the wall.

The tank fired and Norman jumped down the stairs as the roof above his head started to give way. He hit the ground hard and his gun fell into a cooling duct. Norman didn't have time to get it, he would have to find another. Then he remembered his experiences on Dark Age Earth. Storm tanks were notorious for being extremely sensitive to large bursts of electricity. Through the debris Norman could just see the tank at the top of the stairs. The tank obviously couldn't see him as it seemed to be looking around trying to find him. Norman concentrated hard and threw a huge burst of ball lightning at the tank. There was a huge explosion that rocked the whole ship and when the dust cleared the tank was gone. Norman fell to the ground and tried to get his breath back. Throwing lightning took up too much energy, he would have to find something simpler.

It was getting hard to see, the batter packs for the emergency lights were beginning to run out. Norman ignited his right hand, another trick he had learnt from Merlin, and carried on searching the ship for Imperial troops. After a while he decided that the ship was deserted, except for him, when he can access the System backup box that one of the troops had been carrying. It was crushed to pieces. The tank he'd met must have come down this corridor. He looked around at the walls and ceiling, they were all bent out of proportion. Then he heard footsteps coming towards him. He put out his light and ducked into a nearby doorway. He could hear a muffled voice nearby.

"W.....t... b....x."

"I.....you.....h..d.....t"

"N.....t....as y..r job.....it"

The voices came nearer and Norman could just make out two troopers. Norman elbowed the first in the face and grabbed the other as the first fell to the ground, groaning. Norman struggled with the second trooper and then managed to knee him in the face before being hit on the head from behind. Norman fell to the floor, unconscious.

Chapter Eleven

"Maxiis, we've intercepted a transmission on an Imperial Frequency.", said Chloë.

"Put it on my monitor," said Maxiis " and make sure they don't know we're listening."

Maxiis pressed the 'Mute' button on his monitor as a picture came up on the screen.

What looked like an Imperial trooper in full combat gear was reporting to his commanding officer.

"Sir, we have captured one of the commanding rebels."

"Excelent. Show them to me."

The trooper picked up Norman, who was still unconcious, and showed him to the screen.

Maxiis' face went pale.

"Good work. Search the ship, take anything of interest and capture any other rebels on board, then destroy the ship."

"Yes, sir!"

There was a sharp noise and the screen went black. Maxiis turned off his monitor and called an emergency meeting with all the Aliance's commanding officers.

"We are to search the ship and take anything of interest. If there are any more rebels then we are to take those aswell. Notify me when the whole ship has been searched."

"Sir, how did the rebel get on board? Our scans showed no life forms aboard when we boarded."

"He must have followed us and landed after we did. You will go and find his ship, when you have found it you will take it on board our's."

"Yes, sir."

The commanding troop turned to the rest of the troops and said, "You all heard your orders now go and search the ship!"

Maxiis walked into the assembly hall of the Republic War Building. The room had been filled with the noise of people talking but everything went quiet as Maxiis aproached the microphone at the front of the room. Maxiis stepped up to the microphone and began to speak. There was a slight tone of sadness in his voice.

"As you will all be aware the commander of the republic fleet, Grand Admiral Norman Mach, has been captured by the Imperial military. At this moment a strike team is on its way to the Super-Dreadnought Freedom in an attempt to rescue the Admiral. We do not know whether the Admiral is still alive but we have been able to scan the Freedom for Imperial weapons.

The Imperial strike team on the Freedom has been identified as IST-1, the cream of the Imperial military, and we have also identified 6 strike tanks and also a large amount of debris. We believe the Empire has deployed this strike team to steal classified Republic war documents and not to capture the Freedom's crew. The Admiral just happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time. Would anyone like to bring anything to the meeting?"

One member of the 'audience' raised their hand. Maxiis signaled them to speak.

"May I ask who is leading our strike team?"

"Commander Chloë Grenfield has volunteered to lead the team.", said Maxiis. "She is a qualified team leader and knows the layout of the Freedom well. Any other questions?"

Noone else raised their hand.

"Then this meeting is concluded.", said Maxiis. He stepped down from the microphone and left the room.

Chapter Twelve

"Sir, a ship has just docked in bay 19."