



Shield of Lies (Star Wars: The Black Fleet Crisis Series)

By Michael P. Kube-McDowell

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As Leia must deal with a new threat to the fragile alliance that binds the New Republic, Lando becomes a prisoner aboard a runaway spacecraft of unknown origin. The ship is following an unstoppable path to its homeworld, destroyed by Imperial forces. Luke continues his quest to learn more about his mother among the Fallanassi, where his every belief about the use of the Force is about to be challenged. And while Leia ponders a diplomatic solution to the aggression of the fierce Yevetha race, Han pilots a spy ship into the heart of Yevethan space and finds himself a hostage on one of the vast fleet of warships under the command of a ruthless leader.

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Editorial Review

Review

The New Republic faces a terrifying threat from the darkest depths of the Empire.

From the Inside Flap

As Leia must deal with a new threat to the fragile alliance that binds the New Republic, Lando becomes a prisoner aboard a runaway spacecraft of unknown origin. The ship is following an unstoppable path to its homeworld, destroyed by Imperial forces. Luke continues his quest to learn more about his mother among the Fallanassi, where his every belief about the use of the Force is about to be challenged. And while Leia ponders a diplomatic solution to the aggression of the fierce Yevetha race, Han pilots a spy ship into the heart of Yevethan space and finds himself a hostage on one of the vast fleet of warships under the command of a ruthless leader.

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Prologue

Eight months after the Battle of Endor

The Empire's orbiting repair yard at N'zoth, code-named Black 15, was of standard Imperial design, with nine great shipways arrayed in a square. On the morning of the retreat from N'zoth, all nine slips were occupied by Imperial warships.

Under most circumstances, nine Star Destroyers together would have been an intimidating sight to any who might come under their guns.

But on the morning of the retreat from N'zoth, only one of the nine was ready for space.

That was the sorry assessment of Jian Paret, commander of the Imperial garrison at N'zoth, as he looked out on the yards from his command center. The orders he had received hours ago were still playing before his eyes:

You are ordered to evacuate the planetary garrison to the last man, at best possible speed, using any and all ships that are spaceworthy. Destroy the repair yard and any and all remaining assets before withdrawing from the system.

Paret's assessment was shared by Nil Spaar, master of the Yevethan underground, as he rode the work shuttle up from the surface with the first commando team. The orders he had given hours ago were still ringing in his ears:

Notify all teams that an Imperial evacuation has been ordered. Execute the primary plan without delay. It is our day for retribution. Our blood is in those vessels, and they will be ours. May each of us honor the name of the Yevetha today."

Nine ships.

Nine prizes.

The most badly damaged, *Redoubtable*, had taken terrible punishment in the retreat from Endor. The others ranged from old medium cruisers being upgraded and recommissioned, to the *EX-F*, a weapons and propulsion test bet built on a Dreadnaught hull.

The key to them all was the massive Star Destroyer *Intimidator*, moored at one of the open slips. Spaceworthy but completely unblooded, it had been sent to Black 15 from the Core for finish work, to free up a *super*-class shipway at the commands home shipbuilding yard.

There was more than enough room aboard it for the garrison, and more than enough firepower aboard to destroy the yard and the hulls within. Paret transferred his command to the bridge of the *Intimidator* within an hour of receiving his orders.

But *Intimidator* could not leave the yard as quickly as Paret would have liked. He had only one-third of a standard crew aboard, a single watch--too few hands to quickly ready a ship of that size to fly free.

Moreover, nine of every ten workers on Black 15 were Yevetha. Paret despised the gaudy-faced skeletons. He would have liked to seal the ship in the interest of security, or to draft additional work details in the interest of speed. But either act would prematurely alert the Yevetha that the occupation force was leaving N'zoth, threatening the withdrawal from the surface.

All Paret would do was call a surprise departure drill and wait out its lengthy checks and countdowns, letting the normal work details continue until the troop transports and the governor's shuttle had lifted off and were en route. Then, and only then, could his crew close the hatches, cut the moorings, and turn its back on N'zoth.

Nil Spaar knew of Commander Paret's dilemma. He knew all that Paret knew, and much more. For more than five years he had worked to position allies of the underground throughout the conscript workforce. Nothing of importance happened without Nil Spaar's swiftly hearing of it. And he had taken the information he had collected and woven it into an elegant scheme.

He had put an end to the rash of minor "mistakes" and "accidents," demanding that those who worked for the Empire show diligence and strive for excellence--while learning everything they could about the ships and their operation. He had seen to it that the Yevetha made themselves indispensable to the Black Fleet's yard bosses and earned the trust of its commanders.

It was that trust which had allowed the work slowdown in the months since the Battle of Endor to go on unquestioned. It was that trust which had given his Yevetha the run of both the yard and the ships moored in the slips.

And it was the patient and calculating exploitation of that trust which had brought Nil Spaar and those who followed him to this moment.

He knew that he no longer need fear the *Harridan*, the *Victory*-class Star Destroyer that had been protecting the yard and patrolling the system. The *Harridan* had been ordered to the front three weeks ago, joining the Imperial force fighting a losing rear-guard action at Notak.

He knew that Paret could not seal the *Intimidator* against his men, even by ordering a battle-stations

lockdown. More than a dozen external hatches in Sections 17 and 21 had been rigged by Yevetha technicians to report that they were secured when they were not, and to report that they were closed when they were not.

He knew that even if *Intimidator* got free of the slip in which it was moored, it would not have a chance to escape or turn its guns on the abandoned vessels. The packages of explosives concealed inside *Intimidator's* hull would break it open like an egg the moment its shields went up and blocked the signal that was safing the bombs.

As the work shuttle neared the receiving dock, Nil Spaar felt no fear, no apprehension. Everything that could be done had been done, and there was a joyful inevitability about the fighting to come. He had no doubt what the outcome would be.

Nil Spaar and the first commando team entered *Intimidator* through the hatches in Section 17, while his second, Dar Bille, and the backup team entered through Section 21.

There was no talking. None was necessary. Every member of both teams knew the layout of the ship as well as any Imperial crewman. They moved through it like ghosts, down corridors closed or cleared by friends on work devils, through crawlways and up access ladders that appeared on no construction blueprint. In minutes they had reached the bridge--without ever being challenged, or drawing a weapon, or firing a shot.

But they entered the bridge with weapons drawn, knowing exactly which stations would be occupied, where the guard suction was, who could sound a shipwide alarm. Nil Spaar shouted out no warnings, made no theatrical announcement, demanded no surrender. He simply walked briskly across the deck toward the executive officer, raised his blaster, and burned the officer's face away.

As he did, the rest of the team fanned out behind him, each to his own assigned target. Six of *Intimidator's* bridge crew were struck down in the first seconds, sitting at their stations, because of the power that rested at their fingertips. The others, including Commander Paret, quickly ended up facedown on the floor, hands bound behind them.

Taking the ship was not difficult. Timing the raid to avoid retribution had always been the challenge.

"Signal from the governor's shuttle," called out a Yevetha commando, slipping into the seat at the communications station. "The transports are leaving the surface. No trouble reported."

Nil Spaar nodded approvingly. Acknowledge the signal. Advise the crew that we're moving out to pick up the garrison. Notify the yard that *Intimidator* is leaving."

Like a cluster of insects returning to the hive, the flea of Imperial transports rose from N'zoth toward the great dagger-shaped Star Destroyer. More than twenty thousand citizens of the Empire were crammed into the insect fleet--soldiers and bureaucrats, technicians and families.

"Open all hangars," said Nil Spaar.

Their destination in sight, the transports slowed and began to align themselves on approach vectors.

"Activate all autotargeting batteries," said Nil Spaar.

There was a collective gasp from the prisoners on the bridge, who were watching the same display screens as the Yevethan commandos who now occupied their stations.

"You're all cowards," Commander Paret called out to the invaders, his voice bitter with contempt and anger. A real soldier would never do this. There's no honor in killing the defenseless."

Nil Spaar ignored him. "Lock on targets."

"You vicious, pathetic fool. You've already won. How can you justify this?"

"Fire," said Nil Spaar.

The deck plates barely vibrated as the gun batteries erupted and the approaching transports disappeared in balls of fire and fragments. It did not take long. None escaped. Moments later the communications station began to scream with shocked and panicked inquiries from all over the ship. There had been many witnesses to the carnage.

Nil Spaar turned away from the tracking display and crossed the bridge to where Commander Paret lay on the decking. Grabbing the Imperial officer by the hair, he dragged Paret out of line and rolled him over roughly with his booted foot. Seizing the front of Paret's tunic with one hand, Nil Spaar lifted him half off the deck. For a long moment he loomed over the officer, looking like a tall, vengeful demon with his colt, black, widely set eyes, the white slash down his nasal ridge, and the deep scarlet-splashed ridges that furrowed his cheeks and chin.

Then, hissing, the Yevethan made a fist with his free hand and cocked it back. A sharp, curving dewclaw emerged from the swelling at his wrist.

"You are vermin," Nil Spaar said coldly, and slashed the claw across the Imperial captain's throat.

Nil Spaar held on through the commander's death throes, then dropped the body carelessly to the floor. Turning, he looked down into the pit at the commando who had taken over the communications station.

"Tell the crew that they are the prisoners of the Yevethan Protectorate and His Glory the viceroy," said Nil Spaar, wiping his claw on the trouser leg of his victim. "Tell them that beginning today, their lives depend on their being useful to us. And then I wish to speak to the viceroy, and tell him of our triumph."

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Yolanda Ocasio:

Have you spare time for any day? What do you do when you have much more or little spare time? Sure, you can choose the suitable activity for spend your time. Any person spent their very own spare time to take a walk, shopping, or went to the Mall. How about open or read a book allowed Shield of Lies (Star Wars: The Black Fleet Crisis Deries)? Maybe it is to get best activity for you. You know beside you can spend your time along with your favorite's book, you can smarter than before. Do you agree with it is opinion or you have some other opinion?

Randy Johnson:

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Leslie Mickle:

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