



Star Wars

Fan Fiction of the Expanded Universe

The Legends End Saga

The Solar Dreamer

Part One: The Decline of the Galactic Empire

by

Nathan Neuharth

Cover Photograph by ESA/Hubble

A long time ago in a galaxy far, far away...

The Battle of Yavin

0 BBY and/or 0 ABY

Year Zero

Stormtrooper DR-1974 is angry. Terrorists are attacking the Death Star, the Empire's moon sized super weapon. A mobile space station with the laser capability to destroy a planet from a distance. A metallic sphere floating through space. This super weapon is one of Emperor Sheev Palpatine's more awesome achievements. He is proud to be a part of the Imperial Navy.

DR-1974 is officially no longer a stormtrooper but a TIE Fighter Pilot. He is satisfied with his promotion but misses being regular stormtrooper. He loves flying and he's good at it, but he's a good soldier to have in a fight as well. And his heart burns for the Empire. Palpatine brought the entire galaxy into a new order, an age of peace and unity. The rebels should be grateful Palpatine ended galactic chaos. The Empire provides. It provides sustenance. It provides structure and stability. It provides law and order. It provides leadership. The Rebel Alliance are mongrel, selfish, terrorist and nothing more.

Inside the cockpit of his TIE Fighter is a snug fit, spacious enough to move around and pilot the star fighter like a champion but not much more. It has no life support or hyperdrive. He likes the black flight suit and helmet. This is his first time taking the starfighter out for actual combat. Before this has all been training exercises, escorts, and patrols. The promotion is bittersweet. It happened now a few months ago. He loves flying between the stars but he hasn't had much opportunity to get to know his fellow Imperial Pilots. DR-1974 left behind a great many long friendships with the 333rd Legion. They are still his friends, he's just not stationed with them anymore. Now he is assigned to the Death Star. Given time he will bond with fellow pilots.

Many of his closest friends graduated with him at the military academy on the planet Carida. He has heard that many of his old pals are stationed on an outer rim world he's never even heard of. A desert planet with twin suns called Tatooine.

Stormtrooper DR-1974's birth name is Daxam Rad born on the planet Bakura twenty-four years ago. He graduated at the top of his class and could have been an officer immediately based on his

performance and testing at the academy but chose grunt duty instead for the combat experience. He'd prefer the company of grunts over officers any day.

The rebel attack on the Death Star is foolish. It's a suicidal attack. They have no hope of winning against not only the Death Star but squadrons of TIE Fighters and Imperial Star Destroyers (massive battleships). He looks out his cockpit window ahead at the dogfights gathered around the Death Star and the moon Yavin 4. The fight has been going on for a while now and it was unexpected, but maybe not. The Death Star is near the moon of Yavin to destroy the secret rebel base.

"What in all the world do they think they are going to do?" TIE pilot TT-1145 chuckles through the starfighter's comlink, a private channel. TT-1145 and DR-1974 are the wingmen of Captain Pirin, a veteran stormtrooper serving the Empire since the Clone Wars. He's a gruff old soldier, but inspires the troops under his command. His command is Imperial Night Squadron. Pirin is a clone that has survived decades of battles.

"Cut the chatter." Captain Pirin barks into their comlinks. "Night Squadron form up on me." He orders the entire twelve TIE squadron. "We're taking the group of Y-wings aft of our sister squadron."

Captain Pirin's dozen H-shaped starfighters fall into attack formation in alignment with him. They fly directly into an oncoming squadron of Y-wings. DR-1974 is curious about these cumbersome looking starfighters. He's never piloted one but knows they aren't as fast as TIE but they have tough hulls and shields. He takes note that they are far removed from the main cluster of fighting around the Death Star.

Daxam feels sweat on his lower back along with a rush of adrenaline from a mix of fear and excitement. He is nervous. One wrong move and he will die in a silent explosion in the vacuum of space. He thinks about his family, not knowing why they come to mind. His loving father Trom Rad and aristocratic mother Vesnu Wane. Both were killed by rebel scum when he was a teen. This is what prompted his enlistment in the Carida Academy. To bring the rebels who killed his parents to justice. It's not common for Bakurans to enlist.

This is not his first fight, but it is his first fight among the stars. Most recently before the promotion he fought insurgents on the ground on the planet Stewjon. He killed rebels as his fellow stormtroopers gave their lives in service to the Empire.

Now Dax swivels and twirls out of the line of a barrage of turbo laser bolts from one of the incoming Y-wing starfighters. He ends up behind the rebel pilot and in a secret state of mind Daxam Rad has come to think of as his battle mind. It's a kind of trance he falls into during a fight. Like pure instinct takes over. He does not think. He acts. Around him is nothing but laser fire, proton torpedoes, concussion missiles, explosions, starfighters zooming passed and chasing each other. His thoughts focus. He squeezes the trigger. The Y-wing in front of him silently bursts into flames which quickly burn out in the vacuum of space. Dangerous pieces of shrapnel scrape his TIE fighter.

Everything happens very quickly. Their dogfight quickly distances itself even further from the main battle around the Death Star. Everything is a blur of slow motion. Quick sharp commands through the comlinks. They are winning the fight. He hears TT-1145 shout. "Nice shooting 74."

DR-1974 loses track of time. It vanishes. In an instant the Death Star explodes and he feels the shift in the galaxy, the deaths of millions of Imperials aboard the battle station. His eyes widen in shock. He barely notices the explosion over the wave of death. Everyone fighting pauses at the sight of explosion.

"Imperial Night full retreat on my coordinates." Is Captain Pirin's stoic order.

DR-1974 watches another of his fellow pilots dies as his ship explodes in retreat. Imperial Night Squadron began with twelve TIE Fighters and only five remain. Daxam took out two Y-wings. He wonders what Pirin has in mind for their retreat. They have no hyperdrives. They'll be forced to surrender or die. They were stationed on the Death Star because they were some of the best Imperial pilots. Where are they retreating too?

He sees another group of retreating TIE Fighters and a Star Destroyer comes out of hyperspace, appearing as if from nowhere. A group of rebel starfighters comes between them and their escape.

"What do we do?" DM-8902 says through the comlinks.

"On me." Pirin orders. "Burning atmosphere."

DR-1974 immediately realizes they are landing on the moon Yavin 4. The rebels have a military outpost on this moon. It doesn't seem like a great idea. He realizes it's desperation. Captain Pirin leads them to the far side of the moon, away from the rebel base. DR-1974 can feel everyone's tension. If they are spotted they are done for.

"We're hitting atmosphere?" DN-1998 asks incredulously.

DR-1974 stays silent and focused. He agrees with Captain Pirin. Hiding out planet side is the only way to avoid capture.

"Affirmative." Pirin answers. "Route all reserve power to the shields."

Shields! This old clone trooper is a genius. These fighters are modified. They hadn't even received the specs on the modifications before the battle. Pirin made the designs himself. He has a sudden realization that Captain Pirin must be higher up the Imperial military's food chain than he realized. Why was he allowed to make these modifications?

As they burn through the atmosphere of the jungle moon Yavin 4 DR-1974 knows they may survive because of Captain Pirin's orders. He can feel the temperature rise inside the cockpit and his flight

suit. The ship's sensor alarms sound and blink. He holds tight, steering the TIE to an opening in the jungle big enough to land with the others. His hands tremble. His jaw is clenched. He's breathing heavy.

It all happened very fast in hindsight. Tree branches covered in green leaves whipping by and snapping against the metal hull and wings of his Imperial starfighter. A rough landing. DR-1974 sits in the cockpit thoroughly shaken. He breathes deep, calming himself. He takes off his black and glossy helmet relieved to breath unfiltered air. He can't believe he's survived the battle. He can't believe the Death Star was destroyed. The terrorist won the fight.

Climbing of of the grey starfighter he stares across the tall green grassy field and surrounding thick trees. The landscape is naturally beautiful and for a moment makes him miss his home on Bakura. He hasn't been there is years.

DR-1974 looks over the other four TIE fighters. They are all slightly smoking from the heat of passing through the atmosphere. If is wasn't for his flight suit his hands would burn touching the metal. They are all the remains of Imperial Night Squadron. DR-1974 is the only one with his helmet off. He joins the other TIE Fighter pilots in the center of their ships on the grass.

Captain Pirin gives orders. "Everyone gather branches and brush to camouflage our ships. We don't need the Rebel Alliance finding us parked here."

"Yes, sir." All four pilots respond and begin hiding the starfighters beneath long, leafy branches. After twenty minutes the ships are fairly well hidden.

"It will have to do." Captain Pirin removes his helmet and looks his pilots and the ships over. His skin is olive. With tight wrinkles around his dark eyes. Pirin's dark hair is trim and short, greying. A scar splits is left eyebrow in two. He's never told his troops how he received the scar. It must have been a close call. DR-1974 guesses it's from the Clone Wars. "I spotted what looked like stone temple ruins not far from here. We will set up camp there. Be ready for the long haul. We may be living on this moon for some time. The rebel base is on the other side of the planet, but it will be difficult to fly away without hyperdrives in our TIEs."

The rest of the pilots remove their helmets, nodding grimly.

TT-1145 says. "Captain Pirin, sir. You didn't let us know about the modifications to our starfighters?"

Pirin eyes 45. "We were attacked before I had a chance to follow through with my new orders. Select a group of the Empire's best pilots to be assigned to my Imperial Squadron. Imperial Squadron is being reassigned to espionage and intelligence as a part of the 13th Legion and the Star Destroyer Eternity." He measures their surprised reactions. "You are my first choices to fill those roles. So you better survive this delay."

"Yes, sir." TT-1145 gives a curt nod.

They begin hiking through the humid jungle, seeing alien birds and hearing the chirps, chatter, and scurrying of other unseen animals on the ground around them. Everyone of them has a black blaster in hand. DR-1974 wonders how they will every escape this moon. "Are there indigenous people and colonization of this moon?"

"No." Captain Pirin answers. "The people of this world are extinct. The only colony is the rebel bases."

"Understood, sir." He responds.

Captain Pirin continues. "Most of the rebels are on the others side of the moon. There is a rebel outpost not far from here." He talks as the hike. "DM-8902 will be in charge of hunting and gathering food. You will be keeping our new home in the Massassi temple maintained."

"Massassi?" DR-1974 asks.

Pirin nods. "The dead race that was native to this moon. The rest of us will make our way to the rebel outpost in a could of days to steal supplies and hyperdrives. I can modify our ships. At best we will be here a few weeks. The most important objective is to remain undetected by the rebels."

"Yes, sir." DR-1974 says along with the others.

"Captain." DN-1996 asks. "Why don't we just steal rebel starfighters that already have hyperdrives in them?"

The four Imperial pilots are traveling through the jungle together toward the rebel outpost. Their flight suits designed to protect from the elements, the heat of the jungle. Captain Pirin answers. "The astromechs would inform on us. I know how to modify ships, add hyperdrives and nav computers."

DN-1996 is a handsome young trooper, with dark sandy blond hair and blue eyes. He smiles. "I have restraining bolts and I know how to program droids."

The captain arches an eyebrow looking at the young pilot as the walks, pushing branches and tall weeds out of the way as they walk. "There is nothing in your file about droid programming."

"It was back home on Coruscant." 96 answers. "There is a lot of education available to some of us."

"Plan B, troopers." Captain Pirin smiles. "We're going to get retraining bolts on the astromechs and steal their Y-wings. We can retrieve the TIE Fighters at a later date. I have the intelligence report on a data pad on the outpost. It was going to be the first mission of Imperial Night Squadron. To eliminate the base. Point. We hit the medical supplies, rations, and weapons locker. Bacta and droids."

DR-1974 smiles. "I want to test out a Y-wing."

Captain Pirin scowls a moment. "We're leaving thermal detonators. Completing the mission. We still serve. Those of us of the Thirteenth Legion are under Darth Vader's command. A special forces and special interest group."

The pilots nod in silent agreement and solemn expressions.

"Huge bugs." DN-1996 swats at a fist sized flying insect with a long needle face.

Everything plays out flawlessly. These are troopers Captain Pirin hand picked for Imperial Night Squadron and the Star Destroyer Eternity. They are some of the best men the Empire has to offer. He's surprised he lost seven in the Death Star battle. They are in and out of the rebel outpost undetected in a short time. Retraining bolts on the astromech droids. Detonators planted. Timers set.

As the TIE Fighter pilots start up the Y-wings, loaded with stolen supplies, the outpost alarms blare to life. The Y-wings lift off the small rectangular launch pad just as the small group of rebel soldiers charge out from another room firing blasters just in time to be killed by the thermal detonators exploding.

DR-1974 doesn't give the dead rebels a second thought. He killed rebels on Stewjon. On Calamari. On Alderaan. It's war.

The return to the ancient Massassi temple, landing the Y-wings closer to the temple than the TIE Fighters. Only a short walk. The four astromechs follow them. DR-1974's droid is R3-D3. It looks like an R2 unit except it has a clear dome. "Permission to keep the droid, Captain."

Captain Pirin looks at the pilot, then at the droid, and back at DR-1974. He laughs. "Permission granted. To all of you."

DR-1974 pats his R3 unit as they walk. "Alright, bud." He whispers to the droid.

The outer stone walls of the temple are covered in vines and overgrowth. Inside the temple they find the provisions collected by DM-8902. But DM-8902 is a charred, smoldering corpse. Mysteriously his flight suit is not damaged.

"I don't know." Captain Pirin is kneeling next to the pilot's corpse. "I don't know how this soldier died."

"It's bizarre." DN-1996 says. They've become more comfortable speaking openly with the Captain since being stranded on Yavin 4.

TT-1145 shakes his head, hands on his hips looking down at the charred pilot. "Doesn't make sense."

"We will stand guard in shifts while DN-1996 reprogram so the astromechs. We sleep and guard in pairs. Armed at all times. Comlinks ready."

"Yes, Captain." They cadence.

"I'll take first watch while DN-1996 works." Pirin says. "Get some sleep."

DR1974 smiles to himself. It's only been days and they may escape this moon and make it back to the Imperial Navy.

In the dead of night DR-1974 is awoken from deep sleep. He jumps to his feet, blaster in hand, sensing a presence in the shadows. TT-1145 lies on the floor near the wall snoring quietly. A light glow comes from the doorway where Pirin and DN-1996 are. The stone floor is cold against his bare feet. "Who are you?"

From the darkness a figure steps forward materializing with a bright white grin and burning yellow eyes. Long hair. Cloaked in shadows. "I am Exar Kun, Bakuran." They seem to be encased in an aura of silence.

"What do you want?" DR-1974 asks quietly surprised this tall, frightening man knows he comes from Bakura.

"War has stirred my ever restless spirit. The Force has brought you to me to learn the dark side."

"The Force?" He whispers, his finger on the trigger.

"I am the Dark Lord of Sith."

"Why me?"

"Your grandfather was a Jedi during the clone wars. His name was Raad. The bloodline stretches into the past. I sense you have already taught yourself how to use the Force at time. The battle mind, as you call it. Your hyperspace trances. I will teach you the ads of the Sith. You will perform a task for me." Exar Kun commands.

"Why would I want to be a Sith if my family were Jedi?" DR-1974 posits his blaster at the Sith's smirking face.

"Darth Vader and Emperor Palpatine are Sith. Palpatine is Darth Sidious. The Empire is secretly a Sith Empire." Exar Kun offers. "You are Daxam Rad, son of Trom."

"Will you teach me to make a lightsaber?" Daxam asked. Awed and frightened.

"I sense your fear." Exar Kun says. "I sense your shame for killing hidden behind a wall. That is a weakness. The shame."

"I kill enemies of the Empire." The young Bakuran says. "I kill rebel terrorists."

Exar Kun laughs. "The Rebel Alliance did not kill your parents. The Empire killed your parents. Your parents were rebel sympathizers."

"You're lying." Daxam growls.

"Learn the truth for yourself. You know I speak the truth about the Force. Access Imperial Intelligence data systems. Your parents were rebels by the time they were killed. There is a report on it. A Grand Admiral Thrawn is responsible for it. Their deaths."

"Nonsense." Daxam whispers.

"Take this." Exar Kun holds out a shining artificial diamond of some sort. "My Sith Holocron. I will teach you what I can while you are here. The Holocron will teach you when you leave. On the Holocron is the template to clone me. Follow the instructions. You will go to the planet Kamino for the cloning. When the clone is full grown bring it to me. My spirit will possess the body."

Daxam accepts the Holocron, thinking of his loyalty to the Empire. Two Sith Lords ruling the Empire. He could be a third Sith within the Empire. His young dreams run wild with possibilities.

"Maybe." Daxam says dreamily. His grand father a Jedi Knight during the Clone Wars? "I need to get some sleep." He doesn't take note of the Sith mind trick influencing him. He feels a sudden calm and utter lack of fear of the dark and ancient spirit of Exar Kun.

"I will be there as well." The Dark Lord of Sith whispers.

The day the Imperial pilots finally get to leave DR-1974 makes a mental note that they are abandoning these five modified TIE Fighters in the jungle of Yavin 4. He thinks about his conversations with Exar Kun. He has the Holocron. A holographic artificial intelligence record of Exar Kun and his cloning template. A recent development. The dark spirit has always been influencing the galaxy from this moon.

Captain Pirin leads the remaining three pilots in the stolen Y-wings with memory wiped astromechs, restraining bolts removed. DR-1974 was naive to think the war was over. He realizes the Emperor was not aboard the Death Star. The Imperial Fleet is intact. But he guesses about two million of his fellow Imperials died when the battle station exploded.

A few days later the Y-wings come out of hyperspace together in orbit around the core planet Coruscant. DR-1974 counts four Victory class Star Destroyers and a pair of Interdictors. The planet itself is the bright center of the galaxy. It is so old, the entire world is one city, with layers built upon layers. The world has a long history. Some believe this is the planets humans came from before they began to colonize the galaxy.

"Unidentified pilots. Your ships are registered as members of the Rebel Alliance. You are hereby ordered by the law of the Empire to surrender immediately or be terminated." The voice says with an edge to it over the com systems.

He responds on a private channel so the other pilots can't hear. "Imperial. This is Captain Pirin survivor of the battle of Yavin and three other members of Imperial Night Squadron. My clearance code is axis vortex niner one oh niner paradox pariah. Relay that to intelligence."

"Hold your orbit, Y-wings." The voice says on all their com systems, sounding irritated.

Several moments of silence pass.

The voice returns, sounding defeated. "Captain Pirin you and your squadron are to report to the Star Destroyer Eternity at the coordinates I'm sending to you now."

Captain Pirin speaks into the com. This time the open channel. "That's fine. We've been traveling and surviving a few weeks now. We need to land and get a good nights sleep and meal before we meet the Eternity."

There is another moment of silence. "Affirmative, Captain. Sending coordinates for landing and lodging now."

Re resort

"Roger that." Captain Pirin barks. "Let's go boys." He says on a private Imperial Night only channel.

"It's a pleasure resort." TT-1145 chuckles to the others.

"Why not military bunks?" DR-1974 asks.

"It's not a just a resort." DN-1996 says. "It's Imperial City." Imperial City is the capital of the Empire.

"You think the Emperor is here? In the palace?" TT-1145 asks.

"It's possible." Captain Pirin sounds amused.

"Looks like home to me." DN-1996 smiles into his comlink.

After massages, a fine dinner, a good sleep in luxurious private suites, and a hearty breakfast the four pilots are ordered to don black stormtrooper armor and are then escorted by four members of the Crimson Royal Imperial Guard. They are silent, vigilant, and armed with long force pikes.

The Royal Guard escorting Daxam Rad is a Force sensitive Mandalorian named Kana San. His thoughts are preoccupied by his notorious father. A bounty hunter named Ming San that is not respected by many even in his own trade because of his parading as Jango Fett years ago during the Clone Wars. It's not something the Mandalorian people were proud of and Ming was exiled. Kana did not have to leave with his father but he chose to. Ming did it because Jango Fett could charge a higher price than he could.

It was an insult to the other Mandalorians. Kana served as his father's bounty hunter apprentice for a very short time before they came into contact with Darth Vader, turning in an Imperial bounty on a rebel spy they captured. Vader sensed Kana San's Force sensitivity and brought him before Emperor Palpatine. Kana San joined the Royal Guard and became an apprentice of Darth Sidious and one of the Emperor's Hands.

The guards bring the black stormtroopers into a tower room with a window looking out over Imperial City. There are buildings and air speeders as far as the eye can see. Each of the guards takes a position in the room standing silent watch. The room is quiet except for the heavy filtered breathing of the black cloaked Darth Vader. The Dark Lord of Sith is gazing out the window of the tower room. Around the red carpet and a circle of chairs.

Darth Vader speaks in his deep commanding voice. "Captain Pirin. Do you know what this room was?"

"Yes, Lord Vader." Captain Pirin stands at absolute attention, as do his pilots. "This was the Jedi Council Chambers."

"It had to be reconstructed." When Darth Vader says this DR-1974 senses a hint of regret in his voice?

The Emperor Sheev Palpatine sits in his black robes, his face hidden by the shadow of his hood. Only his yellow eyes are visible. The eyes remind DR-1974 of the eyes of Exar Kun. He wonders if Vader's eyes are yellow beneath his black glossy mask.

All of them kneel when they realize the Emperor is in the room.

"I am pleased at your success in surviving the destruction of the Death Star." Palpatine hisses. Captain Pirin your loyalty has gone unquestioned since the Clone Wars. This pleases me. There are so few of the clones left. I am promoting you to admiral in command of the Star Destroyer Eternity."

"Thank you, Master." Captain Pirin bows low.

Master? DR-1974 questions.

Darth Vader ignores them.

The Emperor continues. "I believe Grand Admiral Thrawn was correct in his recommendation of you serving as the leader of this new Imperial intelligence operation. I have agreed to the full schematics of your design for modified TIE Fighters for the Eternity. You will be supplied with TIE Interceptors. TIE Phantoms. TIE Bombers. TIE Defenders. Lambda Class Shuttles. A full crew. You may rise. All of you."

"Thank you, my Emperor." Captain Pirin nods. "I would not exist without you."

"I am promoting your three pilots to be captains. Each his our starfighter squadron." The Emperor stands to leave. "You will take one of my Royal Guards with you. Through him you will have direct communication with me."

"Yes, my lord." Pirin says.

As the Emperor, Darth Vader, and three of the four Royal Guards exist, the two Sith Lords pause before DR-1974. The Emperor grins at him. "The Force is strong in you."

"I sense the dark side in him." Darth Vader sounds indifferent.

"Very good." The Emperor smiles.

The Battle of Hoth

3 ABY

The leader of Imperial Night Squadron, Captain Daxam Rad, is now a more seasoned soldier. His squadron respects him and trusts his judgment when it comes to military tactics. Even more so they respect his skill in a starfighter dogfight. His skill as a pilot is uncanny. Officially still DR-1974 within Imperial records. That suits him fine. He thinks people should have more than one name. Everyone has more than one persona.

Captain Rad is feeling serene flying his TIE Interceptor around the cold and snowy planet of Hoth. He is scouting for any signs of the Rebel Alliance. A probe droid sent out a coded report before it was destroyed on Hoth very recently. A rebel military base is hidden on the ball of ice somewhere. The rest of his squadron are searching as well.

That's what Imperial Night and the crew of the Star Destroyer the Eternity do. Covert operations. Espionage. Sabotage. Assassination. Seek and destroy. The mysterious single Royal Guard goes on special assignments for the Emperor. They will find the rebel base. He has no doubt. They are closing in.

Captain Rad answers directly to Admiral Pirin. Pirin is aboard the Eternity in a distant orbit waiting to join the armada of the Imperial assault of Hoth. Rad is accompanied by his friends DN-1996 and TT-1145. Now they are Captain Barin Ander and Captain Lanse Duskhunter. They have been

stationed together since they were assigned to the Death Star three years ago. He couldn't ask for better friends. They squadrons are searching the planet as well.

Lanse Duskhunter, born on the world of Corscant. Captain of the Imperial Nova Squadron. Barin Ander, born on the world of Naboo. Captain of Imperial Star Storm Squadron. The three undisputed best starfighter pilots of the Super-class Star Destroyer Eternity.

"Do you think this will be the end of it?" Barin says to the others through the comlink of his TIE Interceptor. A private channel.

"It will be a decisive battle." Daxam answers.

"We won't be planet side." Lanse says to them.

"Target practice." Barin moans.

"What is the story with the Royal Guard?" Lanse asks.

"Seems odd without Darth Vader or Emperor Palpatine aboard." Barin says as the soar over the white planet scanning to the base.

"The Royal Guard only guard the Emperor, not Vader." Lanse explains.

"Admiral Pirin or something aboard the Eternity must be important to the Emperor." Daxam muses.

"He goes on special missions for the Emperor. He's the Emperor's assassin. It's convenient to keep him hidden aboard the Eternity. He able to constantly travel covertly and his entire existence is unknown to anyone that is not aboard the Eternity." Barin says.

"Pirin is one of the original clone troopers. He was at the battle of Geonosis." Lanse says.

"He probably knows a lot of things that aren't in the history holos." Daxam responds. He's worried. He has carried the Sith Holocron with him since the ghost of Exar Kun gave it to him. Could they be interested in finding it? The Royal Guard? The Emperor?

Barin and Lanse continue their discussion as Daxam thinks about the very few times over the past three years. In the beginning he learned some useful skills with the a Force from the hologram of Exar Kun. Like telekinesis and meditation. How to sense life around him. When he felt the dark side that Exar Kun led him to, and what it made him do. He shivers with guilt and bile rising at the back of his throat at what he did. It makes him hate the dark side. In turn he's begun to question Darth Vader and Darth Sidious. Both Sith Lords. Both of servants of the dark side of the Force. Evil. An evil Empire? Now even things he's done as an Imperial are beginning to bother him. Villages and cities attacked. Civilians killed. No tolerance for aliens. Daxam is not xenophobic.

His thoughts are interrupted by a voice over their com systems. The base of the Rebel Alliance has been found. Return to the Eternity. Squadrons Nova, Night, and Star Storm."

"So it begins." Barin says.

The battle of Hoth begins. The Star Destroyer Eternity and its TIE squadrons watch from a safe distance. "Give them hell, boys." Barin says into his com system as they watch rebel ships attempting to escape the Imperial blockade. "We should be out there."

Hours pass. They get tired and cramped in their starfighters. It's a test of endurance. But they do it often. Some times for days at a time.

"Com silence." Captain Rad says into the com channel open to all three squadrons. "Be ready."

Feeling the tension, Daxam thinks about the tension he felt not long ago. He hired a bounty hunter and mercenary named Kator Ekin. A Zabrak with his people's typical crown of horns. This one was born and raised on the witch planet of Dathomir. He's old and experienced. Another survivor of the Clone Wars. Daxam hired him to investigate the death of his parents. He found a way to contact him sifting through Imperial Intelligence data. He hired a dozen bounty hunters for a mission. The infamous partners Zuckuss and 4-LOM among them.

He needs to find some kind of peace to cool the resentment inside of him. That resentment leads to the dark side. Exar Kun told him it was the Imperials. Not the rebels. It can't be true. He used the Holocron to ask the Sith Lord. Only he is an artificial intelligence, not the dark spirit who told him. He did teach Daxam to build a lightsaber. It's a blue lightsaber.

He has to confirm that Exar Kun's claim is a lie. He trusted the old Zabrak bounty hunter enough to send his droid with him. Echo. The same R3 unit they stole from Yavin 4 three years ago. Daxam never wipes his memory and takes him out in the Y-wing often. Echo will access the Intelligence data aboard the new Death Star. A classified project. He feels the Force guiding him to investigate this. He knows he is a Jedi, not a Sith.

"Here they come!" Captain Barin Ander shouts through his com system to all three squadrons.

"Hit them before they can jump to hyperspace!" Captain Lanse Duskhunter orders.

"Clone Squadron is being deployed." Admiral Pirin says through all their com systems. Clone Squadron is made up of a dozen clones made from a template of Admiral Pirin. Daxam thinks the Empire must be getting desperate if they are considering a new clone army. But this dozen are a prototype.

The four squadrons and the Star Destroyer open fire on escaping rebel ships with a barrage of turbo lasers, ion cannons, proton torpedoed, and concussion missiles. A group runs straight into them. Four dozen rebel starfighters and a trio of Blockade Runners. Captain Rad falls into his Jedi battle mind trance. Caught up in the cluster of starfighters. A swarm of laser fire, explosions, shouts over comlinks.

After several hours it's over. Too many members of the Rebel Alliance escaped the frozen world. They took heavy losses.

"That was exhilarating." Captain Ander says into th private channel just between Captains.

"Night One report." Captain Rad says.

"We lost Night Two and Night Eleven." Night One answers.

Star One reports. "Star Five, Seven, and Eleven."

Nova One reports. "Nova Two, Three, Eight, Ten, and Eleven."

"This is a clone Two reporting the loss of Clone One."

"Ten dead." Captain Ander says across their private channel. "That's a damn shame. Too many dead pilots."

Admiral Pirin says into the com systems of his squadron captains. "All squadrons return to Hoth scanning for survivors. Take prisoners."

"Yes, Admiral." All three Captains and Clone Two answer.

"All squadrons." Rad says to all pilots. "In groups of three. Returning to scanning Hoth. Objective survivors both Imperial and Rebellion. We are taking prisoners."

Each squadron splits up into predetermined trios. The three Captains stay together again. In a short time they are flying low over the snowy glaciers of Hoth. Their eyes sharp on the white landscape and their ship's sensors.

Their diverse TIE models scream as they race over the frozen planet. For a long enough distance they see nothing but blowing snow over dunes and hills of snow and ice chunks. Daxam thinks this world was a good location for a hidden base. They could live beneath the ice and snow, underground, with an unlimited water supply.

"Look at that." Laws says to the other two. They all see it. A black hole. The pass over a deep round chasm.

"Let's go around for another look." Barin says.

"Agreed." Daxam replies.

The three TIEs loop around and pass over black hole in the white ice again.

"I'm going to land and have a look." Daxam tells his fellow captains.

"It's just a hole in the ice." Barin sighs.

"Just cover me while I'm down there." Daxam snaps. His TIE Interceptor lands near the abyss.

"I'm not picking up any life signs there." Lanse points out.

"Maybe they are cloaking themselves some how." Daxam says before climbing out of his grey starfighter. "It's a deep hole."

"I'm landing." Lanse says.

"Duskhunter!" Barin growls. The arrogant one of the three shakes his head beneath his black helmet and respiratory equipment. Although all the ships assigned to the Eternity are modified of experimental. All their TIE have internal life support, shields, and hyperdrives. He is loyal to Lanse and Daxam. "I'll circle the perimeter."

Both Daxam and Lanse look up as the three winged TIE Defender zooms over the top of them. The Defender is the most heavily armored of the TIE fighters. It's hull stronger than any other TIE. Each of the squadrons have their own style starfighter.

The Imperial Night Squadron is made up of TIE Interceptors. Imperial Nova Squadron are TIE Defenders. The Imperial Star Storm Squadron fly TIE Phantoms (TIEs with three wings and cloaking capabilities. Clone Squadron is modified TIE Fighters.

Captain Rad and Captain Duskhunter step over to the edge of the cliff. Their black boots crunch in the snow. Both men have their blasters in hand. They peer into the abyss. "It seems unnaturally dark." Duskhunter says.

"It is an abyss." Daxam whispers, sensing into the darkness below. Feeling with then Force.

"I don't think there is anything down there." Duskhunter fires a bright blaster bolt down into the pit. It disappears. They don't hear it hit anything.

Daxam squeezes the Sith Holocron in his black gloved hand. He hesitates a moment. Then throws it into the seemingly bottomless pit. Exar Kun be banished from his life.

"What was that?" Duskhunter asks.

"Nothing. Let's get back to our ships."

"Roger that." Duskhunter nods.

Once they are in their starfighters and lifting off the snow blanketed ground Barin speaks through their private com channel. "You guys need to come see this." He loops around to be in synch with the other two and he leads them over the aftermath of the ground battle of Hoth. It is a smoking, burning, graveyard. The rebel base crushed and burning in places. Fires from crashed vehicles. The snow field is littered with wrecked AT-ATs, AT-STs, rebel snowspeeders, and blaster cannon outposts. even a few X-wing starfighters. Dead tauntauns, snowtroopers, and rebel soldiers are scattered across the snow.

Daxam had been feeling relief from discarding the Exar Kun Holocron, but now he feels the pain of death, the fear, suffering, anger, sorrow, guilt. It's suddenly overwhelming. He realizes he can't continue to serve the Empire. He can't join the rebels, because they killed his family. Maybe he can become a space pirate. A smuggler. A bounty hunter. Maybe a mercenary. Whatever pays the bills. Maybe he can go to work for the Hutts. Or the Black Sun. No. Not if he is a Jedi. Maybe he should return to Bakura and serve his people as their Jedi Knight. Or serve on a local, planetary police force some where.

Can he call himself a Jedi Knight? Is he still the level of a padawan? How will he learn more? That's what he needs to do. Search for Jedi lore. There must be Jedi Holocrons, data pads, even old scrolls or books somewhere in the galaxy. Maybe there are a few Jedi out there that survived the purge.

"It's over." Daxam says. "All squadrons return to the Eternity."

Aboard ten Super-class Star Destroyer the Eternity, the old clone Admiral Pirin stands of the command bridge looking out at the stars with his hands cases behind his back. He is looking at the white world of Hoth. A scowl on his face. His green and grey uniform is immaculate.

The crimson robed Royal Guard stands next to him silent and still. Admiral Pirin glances at him. Pirin is in complete command of the Eternity except for this man. He doesn't even know his name and that makes him always hesitant. They seldom speak. If fact Pirin is the only person on the entire ship he

speaks to. And it's to give orders. All Pirin ever knows is he is on classified assignments for the Emperor. The same as Pirin. Pirin spent time fighting alongside with several Jedi during the Clone Wars. He had been friends with some. This Royal Guard reminds him of those Jedi. Only dark.

Kana San catches Admiral Pirin's glance. He doesn't care. He is the Emperor's Hand. He is a Force sensitive Mandalorian. He is a Royal Guard. He takes part in the shaping of the galaxy. He was a stormtrooper for a time. Grand Moff Tarkin discovered he was a Mandalorian and had him tested and assigned to the Royal Guard. It was the Emperor himself who sensed Kana San's connection to the Force. That was enough to make him one of the Emperor's Hand. Many Hands think they are the only one. Kana knows a Hand has many fingers.

In the beginning he was secretly insulted that he was assigned away from the Emperor and equally so when he realized he is not the only Hand. He has accepted his allegiance to the Empire. He enjoys observing the crew of the Eternity. They are strictly Imperial Intelligence. The starfighter pilots and stormtroopers the best of the best. They came with the scientists, engineers, computer programmers, astrophysicists, and never trade about the ship.

"The Empire is victorious." Admiral Pirin says to the entire crew and looks to the Royal Guard. There is a quiet murmur of celebration.

The Royal Guard says nothing.

Admiral Pirin smirks and says to the Royal Guard, "The Emperor has approved two new squadrons. A dozen TIE Bombers of Imperial Death Squadron and a dozen TIE Hunters of Imperial Ghost Squadron. I need to promote two new Captains and selected twenty-two new pilots. Any recommendations?"

Admiral Pirin is speechless when the Royal Guard responds. "I recommend Clone Two be promoted to Captain of Clone Squadron. I further recommend starfighter pilots Gam Zabenés and Thon Wodros be promoted to captain of the new squadrons." A vocalizer distorts his voice.

Pirin nods. "Thank you for the recommendations."

The Royal Guard continues. "I will be taking my Interceptor to the surface of Hoth for a final inspection before we leave the system, Admiral Pirin."

"Understood." Pirin nods, looking back out at the white planet. "The squadrons are just returning now."

Kana San's red TIE Interceptor lands at the same black hole Captains Rad, Ander, and Duskhunter had been. He can see where two ships landed in the snow. He has been watching Daxam Rad closely, suspecting he is also Force sensitive. Maybe both would have been Jedi before the Clone Wars. He has bugged Lanse Duskhunter's comlinks to monitor Rad. He listened to everything. He knows Rad threw something in the hole.

As Kana San climbs out of his red Interceptor he is grateful the Emperor has come to the Eternity twice personally to check the progress of the clones. Kana San has been instructed to select templates from best of the Eternity's crew to clone. Things are that bad. It may be a second Clone War. On the other hand Kana San has suggested a droid army instead. Prototype droids are being built aboard the Eternity.

Using the Force Kana San reaches out sensing for the faint presence of Daxam Rad's touch deep in the abyss. He focuses. Closes his eyes. The hole is deep. Minutes pass. Kana San sweats. The Sith Holocron of Exar Kun flies out of the black hole and into the red gloved hand of Kana San. He stumbles back, smiling between deep breaths. Touching the Holocron sends a surge of the dark side through his body. Faint, but he feels it.

He feels excitement. Only a Force user may access the data on a Jedi or Sith Holocron. It contains the record of a Jedi or Sith, their brain patterns, an artificial intelligence, a hologram. A teacher. A historian. Some times more than one has corded themselves on a Holocron. This explains Daxam Rad's sudden leap in Force talents. But why would he throw it away?

Kana San climbs into his starfighter and sits in the cockpit staring out at the black hole in the snow before him. Darth Sideous and Darth Vader are both Dark Lords of Sith. Kana San would be a better servant to the Emperor if he were a Sith warrior. He hasn't reported suspicions of the Holocron's existence. What is the Sith philosophy regarding this? He will access the Holocron and ask it that very question. That will decide his fate. The Force.

Later when he has docked his starfighter aboard the Eternity he walks swiftly to his private quarters. He doesn't draw much attention. The crew are used to him and avoid him. He thinks of himself as the Darth Vader of the Eternity. They fear him.

Kana smirks under his mask. The Eternity is the right ship for him. He will make sure the Sith Empire lasts forever. He sits in a chair in his quarters. The lights are off. Normally he spends his time in this apartment meditating, practicing fighting skills, researching assignments, eating, and sleeping. He is in full uniform as a symbol of his authority. He is a very high ranking member of the Empire. He is a Mandalorian warrior. He is the Emperor's Hand. He will be a Sith. He concentrates on the black crystal in his palm.

The Holocron floats and spins before him. The image of the yellow eyes and long dark hair of a man appears before Kana San. He is a dark man hidden in shadows. This is no simple Holocron. Kana

San sense this hologram is linked to a dark spirit far off. He senses the dark power of that spirit. Like Sidious and Vader.

They hologram and Kana San stare at each other. A test of wills. They study each other. Kana San maintains perfect still posture the entire time.

The hologram-spirit speaks. "Where is Daxam Rad?"

"He is aboard this ship. The Eternity." Kana San answers.

"I am Exar Kun. Dark Lord of Sith."

"I seek the ways of the Sith. I am Kana San. Mandalorian warrior and Imperial Royal Guard. Son of Ming San."

The Dark Lord smiles. "I was born four thousand years ago. I have many things to teach you, my apprentice. Kneel."

Kana San kneels.

"I am your master now. Rise, Darth Maris."

Darth Maris stands.

Exar Kun continues. "I will train you to be a Sith warrior. You will construct a lightsaber. You will create a clone body to host my spirit. My clone template is in the data of this Holocron. This seed will be planted on the world of Kamino. We will turn this Empire into a true Sith Empire. An Empire with a Sith army."

"Daxam refused." Darth Maris whispers.

"Yes." Exar Kun answers.

"Interesting. Obviously he is Force sensitive."

"And surprisingly talented with little training. He seems to have first realized he was using the Force training at the Academy of Carida. It is why he rose so quick. It's why he is one of the best starfighter pilots."

Darth Maris nods. He knows Exar Kun will never be his true master but he will learn what he can.

"I can teach you to read thoughts." Exar Kun grins.

This spooks Kana San and he's thankful for the red mask hiding his face. He quickly changes the subject. "Who was the last person to access the Holocron before Daxam?"

"Darth Cyranos. During the Clone Wars."

"Tell me of Darth Cyranos." Kana San whispers.

"He was a secret student of Darth Tyranus. The former Jedi Count Dooku. He was breaking the rule of two set by Darth Bane. Without telling Darth Sidious. Darth Sidious found out and sent several bounty hunters to kill Darth Cyranos. After that I lost contact with him. I assume he was killed by one of the bounty hunters."

4 ABY

Captain Daxam Rad is on the dry and hot desert planet of Tatooine in the seedy space port city of Mos Eisley. He is becoming fond of this backwater planet with its wild lawlessness and its alien and cultural diversity. There are more alien species in this city than Daxam can identify. It is a hidden haven in some ways. But the desert is dangerous, as are native beasts and Tuskan Raiders.

He is always on a secret mission for the Empire. He has learned to make these missions and all his intelligence connections and travels useful to him personally. Today Imperial Night Squadron are on a mission to find a rebel named Luke Skywalker. They suspect he will attempt to rescue his ally Han Solo from the crime lord Jabba the Hutt. Everyone in the squadron is watching Jabba's palace. Everyone except Daxam. That is how things are. Daxam just received a report from Night One that the mission failed. Skywalker and his friends killed Jabba the Hutt and escaped.

Daxam is not wearing any clothing that identifies him as an Imperial. The old Zabrak bounty hunter sitting across from him is wearing some light armor over his flight suit. The Zabrak has a hood up hiding his crown of horns. The bounty hunter grins. "Good to see you, Captain Rad."

Daxam has been losing faith in the Empire for some time now. He's hired Kator Ekin to find out the specifics of his parents' death. The bounty hunter proved his skill already by uncovering a historic datapad of his grandfather's life and experiences during the Clone Wars. He was killed on the planet

Bimmisaari with something called Order 66 was executed. Meaning the Jedi Purge. His grandfather was the Jedi Knight Jacen Raad.

As Kator slides the data pad across the table at the booth in the cantina Daxam wonders what revelation awaits. He's almost afraid to let his fingers touch the data pad. "The holo of your parents death." Kator shakes his head. "Listen, kid. I like you. Do yourself a favor and don't watch the holo."

"Thank you." Daxam pockets the black data pad. "I'm out of time. I have to go."

"Where are you headed?" Kator asks.

The bounty hunter and Daxam have become friends. "Endor." He answers. "The buzz is it will be the last battle. The defeat of the Rebel Alliance."

"I'm a merc either way." Kator shrugs. "Thanks for the credits. If you have any need again you know how to contact me."

"If I were to contact you one day to be on my payroll, what would you say?" Daxam asks.

"I'm not an Imperial." Kator shakes his head.

"I mean as an independent contractor." Daxam says. "My own ship and crew. My own squadron."

"Mercs?" The elder alien thinks about it.

"Anything could happen."

"I'd be on board." Kator says as he stands to leave. "It's always a pleasure, Captain Rad."

The Battle of Endor

Daxam Rad has been sitting in the dark of his private quarters for hours. He watched the holo of his parents. His life has been shattered. Everything he believed is a lie. It's clear on the holo his parents were killed by stormtroopers. The same thing he became. He feels numb. He feels rage beneath it.

According to the data provided his parents were rebel sympathizers. Daxam Rad left his home of Bakura and went to the Carida Academy to become the best stormtrooper he could be. He came for justice. No more. He is not an Imperial.

The comlink in his room sounds. "Captain Rad. Admiral Pirin requests you report for duty."

"Understood." Daxam replies.

Walking through corridors Daxam stops at the command bridge to speak with Admiral Pirin. The Admiral looks at Daxam with surprise. "DR-1974?" Clearly indicating the Admiral's disapproval.

"I know there are teams of biker scouts going to the surface." He stands at full attention.

The old Admiral looks at him saying nothing.

"Permission to pilot a scout shuttle to the surface, Admiral."

The Admiral looks Daxam in the eye. For a moment Daxam thinks he's going to ask why. Instead Admiral Pirin answers, "Permission granted. Place Night One in charge of the squadron."

"Yes, sir." Captain Rad says. "Thank you, sir."

Not long later Rad is piloting a Lambda class shuttle to the surface of the forest moon of Endor. A dozen biker scouts and a dozen speeder bikes. All armed as snipers. They are landing at the rebels point of attack on the moon. The only place that makes sense. The shield generators protecting the new Death Star. Larger than the first and not yet completed.

Captain Rad has brought his astromech Echo along to serve as navigator and an Imperial protocol droid he has named Cinder. He had Cinder's mind wiped and secretly had him reprogrammed to belong to him. He's armed with a blaster, three thermal detonators, and an outrageous number of credits.

All the scouts are in the back. Daxam is alone with his droids in the cockpit. As they approach the moon the rebel fleet blinks out of hyperspace and is met by the Imperial fleet. He ponders a moment looking at the skeletal parts of the unfinished Death Star.

He lands the shuttle in a clearing of the dense forest. As the biker scouts are unloading their speeder bikes they are all attacked by the native Ewoks, furry little primitive warriors with spears, knives, stone hammers, and arrows.

Two of the biker scouts zoom off at an incredible speed, zigzag between trees with lightning reflexes. Daxam stands on the ramp of the Lambda Shuttle. He shouts out to the fighting biker scouts. He

sees stormtroopers fighting rebels and Ewoks not far off. Even a pair of the two legged assault vehicles AT-ST's blasting away. "In or out! If you're staying link up with the platoons over there. That's an order!" He backs up the ramp shooting at rebels to give anyone cover that wants to escape with him. A speeder bikes explode killing the scouts. He looks over as the ramp closes. Four biker scouts made it inside. Three are dead.

Daxam runs to the cockpit. He leaps into the seat, strapping in. The black Imperial protocol droid Cinder says. "Captain Rad, Echo has programmed the hyperspace coordinates into the shuttle. As you commanded. The personal transactions have been completed as order, Captain." Cinder is strapped into the co-pilot's seat.

Echo warbles.

"We're leaving, R3." Captain Rad smiles.

Echo whistles again. Cinder translates as Daxam pilots the shuttle up out of the forest and away from the battle. Away from the war. "Captain Rad, Echo says to make up your mind. Is his name R3 or Echo?"

Daxam laughs as the shuttle flies upward though the blue sky and passes after white puffy clouds. "It's both Echo. Like I'm Daxam Rad. You're R3 Echo. How about that?"

R3 Echo tweets understanding. He is an R3-D3 military grade astromech unit. The short cylinder droid turns its clear dome head as if looking out at the approaching stars as they begin to reach the edge of the atmosphere.

The lone survivor biker scout staggers into the cockpit and takes a seat, strapping in. "Where are we going?" He sounds astonished.

"The Outer Rim." Daxam answers. "Away from this. The war is over. The Empire's going to lose it all here."

"You want to desert?" The biker scout asks. He points his blaster at Daxam.

"What's your name, trooper?" Daxam asks, indifferent to the blaster pointed at him.

"RM-2003". The biker scout answers.

"Open you eyes. The war is over. The Empire has lost." The shuttle enters spaces. The fire fight battle around the Death Star is flashing with lasers and explosions. "My name is Captain Daxam Rad. I outrank you, RM-2003."

"Coward." RM-2003 grunts. He lowers his blaster. "It's not over."

"I'm a survivor." He pulls his helmet off and tosses it into an empty seat next to him.

"Join the battle at the Death Star." RM-2003 says. "We are Imperial stormtroopers."

"I was born on Bakura. I'd like to go visit there again some day." Daxam says as he flies away from the battle.

RM-2003 raises the blaster again, pointing it at Daxam. "Join the battle."

And Daxam uses the Jedi mind trick to influence TM-2003. "You will hand me your blaster and tell me your name."

Cinder and Echo both observe RM-2003 closes, both programmed to protect their owner.

The biker scout hands Daxam the blaster. "I'm Talien Falconer."

"What planet did you come from?" Daxam asks.

"Corellia."

"That is a good world to be from culturally." Cinder offers. "They are known to have planetary loyalty to each other. More so than some planets like Coruscant or or destination, for example."

Daxam smiles. "Take off your helmet."

Talien does as he's told.

"You're younger than I expected. Fresh out of the academy?"

"Yes, Captain." Talien says. "This was my first actual combat mission."

"I've lost count." Daxam sounds regretful.

Echo whistles.

"Captain,". The black protocol droid translates. "R3 says we are ready to jump."

"Wait." Daxam holds his hand up. He can feel something a disturbance in the Force. Not just the soldiers dying and the emotions of battle, but others. He can feel the other Force users nearby. Darth Vader. Darth Sidious. Luke Skywalker. Others. Senator Leia Organa. The Royal Guard. Daxam speaks softly. "The Emperor and Darth Vader are dead."

"How do you know that?" Talien asks.

"I feel it. I am a Jedi." Daxam Rad explains.

"What did you do to my mind?" Talien sounds angry.

"I did what had to be done." Daxam answers.

With no warning they watch Darth Vader's Super-class Star Destroyer explode and not long later the new, incomplete Death Star explodes. Both Daxam and Talien watch in awe of the explosion.

"It's over." Daxam says with a finality to his tone, not using the Jedi mind trick. "We're leaving. Unless you'd prefer death or a rebel prison?"

"Where are we going?" Talien asks with defeat in his voice.

"Tatooine. A space port city called Mos Espa. Echo. Hyperdrive."

Starlings appear before them."

Daxam lands the the Imperial Shuttle in a rusted sandy hangar at the edge of the desert city of Mos Espa. Daxam and Talien haven't shared many words since the trip from Endor to Tatooine. Daxam did notice Talien seems to get along with the protocol droid. Maybe he just needed to talk. With a sigh he heads into the shuttles cargo storage area and begins to unload an Imperial speeder bike. He's not wearing anything that identifies him as an Imperial. Only a plain black flight suit with grey trim and a blaster hanging in a holster off his black belt. His lightsaber is tucked into a long thigh pocket of his flight suit. The suit helps protect him from the heat of the twin suns.

"Where are you going?" Talien asks. He is dressed in just the cloth and padding the goes under his biker scout armor.

"The war's over, Talien." Daxam gives a crooked smile. "I'm going into Mos Espa to have a few drinks, contemplate the future, bet on a few swoop races, and purchase some supplies. Is that okay, mom?"

Talien ignores the jab. "I'll come with you."

Daxam nods at another speeder bike. "The droids are going to guard the ship and dispose of our dead."

"Dispose of them."

"Maybe not the best term. They are having some monk take the bodies for proper funeral rights. I don't know the men. I've learned the truth about the Empire when it was too late. You do what you want." Daxam sits on his speeder bike.

"I understand. I'm coming with you." Talien sighs. "I don't have many options at the moment."

"I kept the armor and weapons of the dead scouts." Daxam confesses.

Talien nods and sits on a speeder bike.

"Enjoy yourself for a time." Daxam says. "I have to look up an old friend. Meet me at the swoop races in two hours. I'll buy you a drink, kid." Daxam tosses the younger biker scout a handful of credits.

"Alright." Talien agrees.

Both of them zip down the shuttle ramp and away on the speeder bikes. Echo has one of his extendable utility arms jacked into the shuttle controls and closes the ramp door behind them, locking it. If anyone tries to get in the ship the droids will message Daxam on his comlink.

Daxam walks the sand streets of the hustling old space port city making his way to a familiar cantina. Inside the light is dim. It takes a moment for his eyes to adjust. There is music playing and quite a few patrons. This place is frequented by scoundrels and slum. Smugglers. Space pirates. Bounty hunters. Mercenaries. Thieves. Fugitives. Gamblers. Assassins. Slavers. Aliens of all types.

He scans through the crowd and the smoke. There is alcohol and perfume in the air. A murmur of talk in many languages. Everyone paranoid or wary of everyone else. He sees the crown of horns. The Zabrak bounty hunter Kator Ekin. Alone at a booth. Daxam casually makes his way to the booth and sits across from him.

"Captain." Kator nods with an amused smile.

"Kator."

"Assignment complete." The distinguished Zabrak smirks.

"Good work." Daxam smiles. He has access to all Imperial Intelligence and undercover contacts throughout the galaxy from his years working espionage the past several years. He plans to take full advantage of that in his new role as a space pirate and smuggler.

"The table behind me." Kator says.

Captain Rad nods. "Are you a member of my crew?"

"You'll track my bounties as we smuggle?"

"Yes."

"I'm on your crew. Sounds like it might be fun for a change."

"Good." He stands and pats Kator's shoulder as he passes and heads back to the table of ragtag pilots sitting in awkward silence. Some of them having drinks. He sits at the table. "I'm Captain Daxam Rad. I understand you're all interested in a job and you know the kind of job I'm hiring for. Takes guts and skill. I am in need and I will pay well. If you're hired on you'll see the galaxy. So tell me who you are and why I should hire you."

"You asked us here, bub." A sharp tooth, devil horned, black skinned Devaronian grins. "I don't need to be here."

"But you came. Don't waste our time." Daxam says politely.

The devil man grunts. "Hm. I'm Vinge Xangel. Best pilot in the galaxy. My partners and I used to smuggle for Jabba the Hutt before he was killed by Han Solo's crew. To complicate things are ship was confiscated by Imperials. We were caught smuggling medical supplies to the Rebel Alliance."

"You chose the right side." Daxam comments.

"These are my partners Laris Oath and Arc Haband." A wolf an snarls a greeting. A grey green skinned Duros nods.

"I'm Gleek." A thin, young green skinned snout mouth Rodian gurgles in Basic. "I'm a pilot. I want to see the galaxy. I was born here in Mos Espa. I'm a computer linguist."

"A welcome skill." Daxam smiles.

Three short, stout pig faced Ugnaughts with silvery grey hair are huddle together. The only female of the three speaks up. "We are skilled mechanics and engineers. We can do some droid and computer work as well."

"Starship repairs and maintenance?"

"Of course." The Ugnaught smiles with pride.

"Your name?" Daxam asks.

She blushes. "Wrirda. My partners are Drupyd and Snozgonr." Both male Ugnaughts smiled. All three are dressed in work men's clothes. "We have our own tools." Wrirda adds.

"Alright. One more round of drinks here, bartender." He signals the green skin Aqualish then turns his attention back to his new crew and quietly claps his hands together. "If you all agree to follow my orders as Captain of the ship and starfighter squadron you're hired. We'll be leaving on soon." He slides a data pad across the table. "Meet me at this hangar. Bring your things. I don't know when or if we will be returning to Tattooine. I'll see you soon." Daxam walks away. He happy to take on two groups that already have a bond. He senses that he trusts them. Talien and Kator. It's a good start. Of course they'll be back to Tattooine. It's a smuggling hub.

He makes his way to the swoop races through the crowded streets of Mos Espa.

By the need of the evening and the swoop races Daxam has won enough money it's attracted attention of some local ruffians. A trio of green-grey skin Barabel thugs are following him. He's just collected his winnings and is walking toward a watering hole nearby to meet up with his new hires. Talien watched the races with him. The younger stormtrooper didn't place any bets but he couldn't hide getting caught up in excitement of the swoop races.

Talien is waiting with him with another group of new crew he hired at the swoop races. Having worked for Imperial Intelligence gave Daxam contacts all over the galaxy and Kator Ekin was not his only contact of Tattooine. He was friendly with a potbelly Toydarian with tiny fluttering wings named Drixle. Drixle is a gambler and information peddler, among other shady trades. Daxam has hired the Toydarian and two human pilots Drixle referred. Both humans. A young male native of Tattooine named Cyf Whitesun and a Corellian woman called Kire Tatus.

Daxam is thinking he is not going to make it to the rendezvous with his new crew members. The Barabels have spread out and each have a blaster in their hand. He can sense their excitement and the pending danger. One of the Barabel snarls something in a language Daxam doesn't understand. He turns slowly to face the trio. They all have their blasters pointed at him.

"I'm not a fair sport." One of the Barabel barks at Daxam. "We make this easy. Hand over all your credits and you live. Or we kill you and take the credits anyway."

The other two chuckle at that.

"You wouldn't know what to do with all the credits I have." Daxam smiles at the center Barabel who is doing the talking. "Listen. You're right. This doesn't have to be hard. I worked as a stormtrooper for many years in Imperial Intelligence. I'm a trained assassin. My profession was killing. Now lower your blasters and I will be on my way."

All three of the stout aliens exchange nervous glances. Then the apparent leader in the center puffs his courage back up. "Have it your way." He fires his blaster at Daxam Rad.

Faster than the eye catches there is a snap hiss and Daxam deflects the blast with his lightsaber. He hadn't even thought about it. Instinct simply took over. The Force took over. He doesn't want to kill them, but he does. He bats their own blaster bolts back at them. As they lay in the sand Daxam quickly hides his lightsaber and walks briskly away. Several bystanders watch in stunned awe. He feels guilt at their deaths. The Empire trained him not to feel guilt.

A few minutes later Daxam is at the watering hole, a little cafe of sorts that sells mostly water and a list of beverages. The short, chubby purplish skin Todarian with a hanging hook like nose and beady eyes sees Daxam walk in and smiles, waving him over to their table. Daxam can't help but grin. "Daxam Rad." Drixle says in his scruffy voice when he reaches their table. "I as beginning to think you were going to stand us up. Your friend Talien here has been telling us about the battle at Endor."

A young blond man with green eyes says, "Is it true? Was the Empire defeated?"

"It's true." Daxam takes a seat at the table, ordering a water from the albino white twi'lek waitress. He catches a mournful look from Talien Falconer across the table from him. "There are reports the Emperor and Darth Vader are dead."

"Wow." Cyf shakes his head in disbelief. "That must have been some star fight. I can't believe the Empire is gone."

The Corellian woman Kire Tatus also has green eyes and blonde hair. She looks like she could be Cyf's older sister. With a scowl she responds. "You don't look old enough to pilot a starfighter. Even if the Empire was defeated at Endor and the Emperor and Vader were killed that doesn't mean the Empire is gone. It's smaller now. It's backed in a corner. The Rebel Alliance the majority. The Empire the new minority. There will still be years of fighting. It will take time. One day the Empire will crumble."

"Hey I'm 18 and I've an ace with T-16 Skyhoppers." Cyf bites back. "I've been flying them since I was nine."

"Skyhoppers?" Kire nods with a grin and does her best to act impressed and not laugh. Daxam repressed a smile and Talien smirks.

"Boy." Drixle gets excited and his wings flutter, hovering him a couple of feet above his seat as he points a finger at Cyf.

"I'm Luke Skywalker's cousin." Cyf Whitesun brags. "My aunt Beru married his uncle Owen. I used to go to his moisture farm and play when I was a kid."

Kire laughs.

Talien asks, "No blood relation?"

Cyf blushes and sips his juice. "I can pilot a starfighter."

"I believe it, Cyf." Daxam says in a respectful voice. "That's why you're here."

"Alright, you are all officially on the payroll of the Solar Dreamer under myself, Captain Daxam Rad, former Imperial turned space pirate. A Zabrak friend of ours some land speeders and other supplies. Now we will proceed to the hanger where our shuttle awaits."

"Alright." Cyf grins.

"It's about time you and I get off this hot sand ball." Drixle says to the young Skyhopper pilot.

As they walk the night streets of Mos Espa together Talien speaks to Daxam quietly. "The Solar Dreamer? Payroll? A bounty hunter? Space pirates?"

Daxam smirks. "Kator has an old Z-95 Headhunter he'll be bringing in as a crew member."

"So." Talien says. "What about the other questions?"

"I bought another ship before the battle at Endor." Daxam explains. "I come from a wealthy Bakuran family. When my parents died I inherited all the family wealth." Daxam smiles.

"I see." Talien thinks it over.

"But I didn't use that money." Daxam continues. "I stole billions of Imperial credits when I was aboard the second Death Star for some time."

Talien pales. "We are dead men."

Daxam keeps smiling. "I bought a classic old Alderaan Blockade Runner with my own specified modifications."

Talien only looks at his feet.

The next morning Daxam is walking the streets of Mos Espa with Kator Ekin, Talien Falconer, Drixle, Echo, and Gleek. They are picking up last minute supplies and Daxam is hoping to run across another pilot or two for hire.

"Look at this beautiful specimen of female form." A loud voice heckles the passerby's and small gathering crowd. A Dug. They stand on their hands and use their hands as their feet. That's how Daxam's always thought of them. Not a pretty species by his taste.

Daxam, his crew, and the crowd look at the three pitiful young Twi'lek women in chains. They are huddled close together and appear frightened as their Lekku headtails tremble. Daxam can feel fear from two of them but anger from the third.

A chubby Rodin gurgles out. "300 credits."

"325!" A human man hollers.

Daxam uses the Force to amplify his voice. "One million credits."

The crowd, the slaves, and even the Dug slaver gasp.

"Sold. For one million credits." The Dug yells. He and Daxam walk toward each other as the astromech Echo and Talien follow Daxam saying, "What are you doing?"

Kator, Gleek, and Drixle follow Talien all chuckling.

"You made a worthwhile investment." The Dug slaver says.

"I hope so." Daxam says. He draws his blue white lightsaber with a snap hiss and kills the Dug. He turns to face the crowd. "Listen up. My name is Luke Skywalker. I'm a Jedi Knight. Anyone caught on in Mos Espa selling slaves will answer to me." He stalks away with his crew in tow.

"What was that all about?" Talien asks, glancing back to see the trio of chained Twi'leks following them along with a few curious onlookers.

"I don't like slavery." Daxam answers. Then louder, "Kator. Talien. Take care of our curious sand cats. Let the Twi'lek women come with me."

"Yes, Captain." Kator nods.

Talien shakes his head and follows the Zabrak bounty hunter back to discourage potential snitches.

Drixle, Gleek, Echo, and the three Twi'lek follow Daxam. "What are the last supplies we are picking up?" Drixle asks. He and the others are carrying bags of dozens of power cells, and other odds and ends.

"Starfighters." Daxam answers. "We'll have to go back to the hanger and take the Shuttle over to Mos Eisley. I have four A-wings waiting for me there. He looks back to the Twi'leks. "You are free to go."

"We have nowhere to go." The angry one says.

"Oh, I see." Daxam looks thoughtful. He smiles and says. "I would like to offer you all jobs as members of the crew of the Solar Dreamer. My name is Captain Daxam Rad."

"We don't want to be slaves." She says quietly.

"No, no. I would pay you wages. You have your freedom to do as you please. If you hire on I expect you to abide by ship rules and my orders." Daxam holds up his hands as a gesture of peace somehow.

The angry pale blue skin Twi'lek says, "My name is Ariana." Daxam notices she has pink eyes. He finds her attractive.

"I'm Cial Dasu." A green skin with matching eyes Twi'lek says. She indicates the third. "This is my twin sister Usha." Usha seems shy, almost hiding behind her twin. Her skin is bright red and her yellow eyes a strong contrast. She strokes one of her Lekku to calm herself.

"Good." Daxam says just as Kator and Talien return. "We're off to Mos Eisley."

"Mos Eisley?" Talien asks.

Former Imperial biker scout Talien Falconer stands in the hangar with Captain Daxam Rad and his new crew along with the speeder bikes and the two used land speeders Daxam bought. "It's going to

be a tight ride on the shuttle." Talien observes with annoyance. He feels swept up in Daxam's agenda and lost with the supposed defeat of the Empire. He looks around at the few other ships around the hanger, mostly junk ships pieced together from other ships. He looks at Daxam as Cyf and Gleek load the speeder bikes up the Shuttle ramp. "I need to have a word. Alone, Captain Rad." There is sarcasm when he emphasizes the title of captain.

"Very well." Daxam nods. He nods to the crew mulling about or working. "It's going to be a crowded ride to Mos Eisley. I apologize for that inconvenience. We will be dropping Talien, Gleek, Vinge, and Arc there to pilot the A-wing Starfighters to the Solar Dreamer." He noticed the three female Twi'leks give suspicious looks all around. Daxam can understand their wariness. Most slaves aren't set free.

Once everyone but Talien and Daxam are aboard the Lambda Shuttle Talien attacks with hushed venom laced words. "What in the Empire are you doing, Daxam? We're going to be executed as traitors to the Empire. Desertion was one thing, but steal those credits?" Talien shakes his head in disbelief and rests his hands on his hips. "This is not good. We will have Imperial Intelligence hunting us not to mention every bounty hunter in the galaxy. Besides the credits you've stole the Shuttle and the speeder bikes. All the weapons and armor. I will be considered an accomplice. They won't believe me. You may have signed my death warrant yourself. To top it off now this whole new crew you've hired are endanger for the same reasons. Is that fair to them. How many kiffing credits did you steal?"

"Hey." Daxam holds his hands out in mock surrender. "Don't worry. I'll take care of you and the crew. I was an Imperial Intelligence agent. How do you think I was able to pull everything off? How do you think I knew the Empire was losing the war?" He squeezes the younger Talien's shoulder reassuringly. "I took enough credits to get us set up. To buy the Blockade Runner and enough for a full squadron of starfighters." He grins. "With my intelligence contacts, the ships under my command, we stand to do very well in our new profession. It's true. Darth Vader and Sheev Palpatine are dead. We need a new line of work. Mostly smuggling. We have Kator Ekin with us. He's a bounty hunter. He can help with that. I want to hire a slicer too. It wouldn't hurt to have another bounty hunter or two."

"I don't get it." Talien leans back against the white grey metal hull of the Imperial Shuttle. "Why desert? Why steal the credits? How do you know none of the crew will turn us in?"

Daxam's lips become a tight line as he inhales sharply through his nostrils. "I've done my research. I know the crew are all anti-Empire." He looks at Talien like a scolding father. "I've given too many years of my life and loyalty to the Empire and its lies. I enlisted in the Academy because my parents were killed by rebels." He gives a smile of absurdity. "We were on the planet Stewjon when my parents were killed. I was always told it was rebels that killed them. I wanted to bring those rebels to justice."

Talien nods, speechless, enthralled by Daxam's words.

Daxam's voice becomes filled with a subtle sorrow. "I found the truth on a data pad. A holovid of the entire thing. Enough of it. My parents were killed by stormtroopers. The very thing I became. I

figured the Empire owes me some credits. No matter how many credits I take its not bring my parents back or my years of service to the great lie."

"You stole a lot of credits." Talien says softly.

"For all we know they think we were killed on Endor."

"For now." Talien agrees. "You world Imperial intelligence, you say. You know once they investigate the theft they will hunt us."

Daxam and Talien stand in silence together a moment. Neither one looking at the other. Daxam runs his hand through his very short hair. "Listen. Take one of the A-wings we pick up in Mos Eisley. You can return to the Empire. Say you stole the A-wing from the rebels. Or you can stick with me and be a pilot in the Solar Dreamer's escort squadron. Be space pirates." Daxam grins at the younger stormtrooper.

There is something about Captain Daxam Rad that inspires confidence. Talien is not blind to it. "I'm going to regret this. I'll take the A-wing to the Solar Dreamer."

"Good." Daxam shakes his hand. "If the Empire or any bounty hunters show up, we'll face them together. The Solar Dreamer is in a distant orbit, too far out to be easily spotted."

"You trust aliens and droids." Talien observes.

Daxam shrugs. "Echo and Cinder are great company. They are my friends. I learned the Palpatine's xenophobia and racist is an error in logic. I've met and seen many good people and soldiers over the years and many of them were not humans. The alien racism and slavery is one of the many flaws of what was the Empire."

Talien gives a thoughtful nod. "The Twi'lek women are pretty."

"Ha. There you go." Daxam chuckles. "Well. We have are work cut out for us."

Talien gives him a look begging elaboration.

"After Mos Eisley we get the Solar Dreamer prepped and everyone assigned their quarters and duties. It's been modified to run on a skeleton crew. Much of the piloting will be done aboard the command bridge with a pilot, co-pilot, and two droids. The Ugnaughts are going to keep her running. Then we head to Kessel to pick up a shipment of glitterstim and transport it to Ouros the Hutt in the Nal Hutta System."

"We're working for the Hutt crime syndicate?"

"You're working for me. I'm a freelance contractor. What do you say we get space bound?"

"Alright." Talien agrees.

The Super-class Star Destroyer the Eternity under the command of Clone War veteran Admiral Pirin and the Imperial I-class Star Destroyer under the command of Moff Stoan Meka are both in orbit over the Outer Rim world of Tattooine. Both commanders face each other's flickering blue-grey holograms in their private command chambers. Meka is seated in a command chair. Pirin stands stiff with his arms crossed.

"Recall your stormtroopers." Admiral Pirin says to Moff Meka in a stern, gruff tone. "Intelligence reports DR-1974 and RM-2003 have left the planet with a small group of rebels. Not in league with the Rebel Alliance. An independent group. These traitors and thieves will be executed."

"Very well." Moff Meka crosses his fingers before him. "I am employing bounty hunters. The Sullustan one. Stig, I believe is his name. He's proved effective in the past."

Pirin nods. "The Eternity has many bounty hunter contacts. We will set them all loose to hunt down the traitors. For morale if nothing else. They were my men." He shakes his head in a mix of embarrassment and anger. "Ming San the veteran Mandalorian is already aboard the Eternity."

"Excellent." Moff Meka smiles thinly.

"I knew Ming during the Clone Wars." Pirin offers. "There were quiet a few Mandalorians running around then. General Obi-wan Kenobi put an end to that. Ming impersonated Jango Fett to fetch a better price for his services. He was dishonor end by the other Mandalorians. I was at the battle of Geonosis when Jango Fett was killed by the Jedi Master Mace Windu."

"Your service to the Empire is impeccable and impressive." Meka says. "We must not let these rebels bring lawlessness to the galaxy."

"We will not." Admiral Pirin assures the younger man.

"I only met the Emperor once." Meka gives a thin smile. "But Darth Vader. I met him many more times than I would have preferred. We did not see eye to eye on military tactics. Of course, I never voiced that to him. He used the Force to choke the last commander of the Malignant."

Pirin cracks a smile just for a split second and composes himself. "The Emperor never told Darth Vader about the Eternity. Many things he wanted classified from Vader came through this ship."

"It is an impressive ship." Moff Meka says with envy. "Ah." Admiral Pirin watches Meka's hologram looking down at a computer screen. "My troops have returned. I see you've already sent the hyperspace coordinates. Time to go. See you a few light years from here."

After the communications connection has ended the slender Moff Meka remains in his private command chair, a smirk on his mouth. He dials a comlink. "Captain Zerl. Pull all files we have on Admiral Pirin and have them sent to my private command quarters."

"It will be done." A voice he knows well answers through the comlink.

"On second thought," Meka continues. "Include files on the Mandalorians Jango Fett and Ming San."

"Absolutely, sir."

The com goes silent. Moff Meka pours himself a glass of Corellian red wine. Since the deaths of Palpatine and Vader, and the defeat at Endor, the Empire is falling into shambles and chaos. It is clear no one is currently in charge of the Empire. Several Admirals, Moffs, Generals, and warlords have declared themselves in command of the Empire. More seem to be wandering aimless or continuing on with their duties as if nothing has changed. He knows about the temporary truce at Bakura with the Rebel Alliance answering an Imperial distress call to stop an invasion of that planet. The truce didn't last long and the Imperials there were defeated as well.

Stoen Meka has decided it is his time now. He will pull the Empire back together. They will consolidate Imperial power and return to crush the rebels. It is far from over. Admiral Pirin and the Imperial Intelligence operations of the Star Destroyer Eternity will be one of his most effective tools in accomplishing this.

He takes a tiny sip of the red wine, swishes it in his mouth, and whispers. "Emperor Meka." Emperor Stoen Meka. It has a nice ring to it. He smiles to himself.

Captain Daxam Rad stands aboard his new spacefaring vessel feeling a rush of accomplishment and pride. Standing on the command bridge of his heavily modified starship he gazes out at the magnificent twin Suns of the Tatoo System. The command bridge is spacious, except in the front it's been modified for minimum crew and maximum control to pilot the ship. It is a cockpit that can be sealed from

the remainder of the command bridge. He glances back at his new crew. Selected from Imperial intelligence records and a network of contacts he's developed over the passed three years.

The crew on the bridge operating computers and looking to Daxam for leadership: the veteran Zabrak bounty hunter Kator Ekin born on the wild world of Dathomir, he's been working with Daxam for three years now.

The trio of Twi'lek slaves he freed on Tatooine, he doesn't know much about them yet but is trusting his instincts bringing them aboard.

He is fond of the skinny, awkward green skin, black eyed, snout mouth Rodian called Gleek. Gleek is a Native of Tatooine, the same as Drixle and Cyf.

Drixle is the Toydarian. Drixle is an experienced ghost thief and an information broker of sorts.

The young Cyf Whitesun was an acquaintance of Drixle and Gleek. Daxam let him bring his old Skyhopper aboard the Solar Dreamer. The more vehicles and equipment at their disposal the better. Cyf is a hothead and overly anxious to become a famous hero or pirate or pilot, Daxam isn't quite sure what.

The black Imperial Death Star protocol droid Daxam has named Cinder. He had his memory wiped and his programming tweaked to encourage loyalty to Daxam. He's come to think of both Cinder and the other droid, Echo, as friends. Closer to him than anyone else.

Echo is the astromech he stole from Yavin 4 with Pirin no the others years ago. The little R3 unit has been with him ever since and is quite loyal and useful.

There are the three smugglers he brought on because they lost their ship. They say they lost the ship in a sabac game, but Daxam suspects that is a lie. But their skills as smugglers and pilots are a great asset to the Solar Dreamer. That is the Shistavanen wolf man Laris Oth. The hairless, stoic, green-grey skin, and red eyed Arc Haband. The devil looking pilot Vinge Xangel, always grinning showing off his sharp teeth. Dark skin, a pair of horns. He's always smirking like he's in on a joke no one else knows about. They have been smuggling for years.

The Corellian woman Kire Tatus, a former CorSec agent framed by the Black Sun for crimes she didn't commit. She is in hiding and was more than eager to join up.

His trio of pig faced Ugnaughts are the ships mechanics and engineers. They keep to themselves but love tinker work.

Then there is the former biker scout Talien Falconer. Talien complains often but Daxam has come to trust and rely on him. Their friendship is real.

And last, the two who were waiting aboard for them, a pair of Bimm named Roo and Scode. He'd met them during his service as an Imperial Intelligence agent a few years ago. They were keep the Solar

Dreamer in orbit awaiting Daxam arrival. He thinks of the mischievous furry critters as friends. They are agile, reliable assets to his new crew.

Very much a skeleton crew for a starship the size of the Solar Dreamer. The modifications give him a lot of freedom, being able to mostly pilot the vessel with a crew of four pilots in the added in cockpit, which was not a part of the original factory design. Daxam feels a certain satisfaction at the irony of being an Imperial defector and space pirating with the heavily modified CR90 Corvette, commonly nicknamed a Blockade Runner or an Alderaan Cruiser. The destruction of the rebel planet Alderaan being one on the Empire's most massive injustices. Millions dead in an instant with a single order from Grand Moff Tarkin.

Besides the added cockpit he had extra docking bay/storage hangars added, which took away several dozens crew quarters and other miscellaneous rooms. Things are moving along smoothly. An Imperial Shuttle, speeder bikes, land speeders, Katar's Z-95 Headhunter, Cyf Whitesun's Skyhopper, and four A-wing starfighters. The Bimm and Katar have been helping him set things in motion. The Bimm purchased a handful of medical droids, utility droids, and Gonk power droids from Jawas back on Tattooine.

Daxam gives a warm smile looking at his motley crew of the Solar Dreamer. This is his new family. Talien gives Daxam a questioning look. The short, wiry Bimm called Roo pokes Scode and they both smile at Captain Rad understanding full well why the former Imperial agent is happy. They are too. No more scavenging.

"Alright." Daxam nods at everyone. "Everyone take your stations. We're preparing to leave for Kessel."

"Yes, sir, Captain Rad." Vinge Xangel gives a devilish grin and everyone moves about.

Captain Rad sits in the pilot seat inside the Solar Dreamers' cockpit. In the cockpit with him are his droids Echo and Cinder as well as the slender dark glossy eyed Rodian Gleek, and former scout trooper Talien Falconer. "Our maiden voyage." Captain Rad looks at Talien and Gleek. The. Pats the dome of his astromech Echo. "Take us to hyperspace, R3." The vision before them becomes a myriad of star lines. He watches with satisfaction. "Smuggling shouldn't be too difficult with the Empire crumbling and the Rebel Alliance bickering as they attempt to pull the Galaxy back together as a Republic."

"I hope you're right." Talien grunts.

R3 gives a high pitched whistle of agreement.

After a few hours Daxam dismisses Talien and Gleek. The Black Death Star protocol droid and the clear domed astromech sit silently with him staring out at the lines of stars. Daxam is deep in thought about the future. He put a lot of planning into leaving the Empire. Now he plans on building something. Something good. He just doesn't know what it is, but he feels the Force guiding him.

The cockpit door hisses open. Daxam looks over to see the three Twi'lek slaves he freed saunter in with expressions of opposition. They look like they are ready for a fight. He takes a calming breath. "How can I help you?"

The pale blue skin woman speaks. Her head tails gently move as she does so. "We have come to give ourselves to you, Captan Daxam Rad. We belong to you now." Her voice is filled with allure and all three women begin to disrobe.

Daxam looks Ariana up and down, blushing. A part of him desires her. Quickly shaking his head and chuckling, "Stop."

All three Twi'lek freeze and look at him confused by the Bakuran's rejection.

Daxam clears his throat. "When I said you are free I meant it. Put your clothes back on."

The women were not fully undressed but they cover themselves. Twi'lek women are often taken as slaves due to there unique beauty most aliens find attractive. The woman with pale blue skin asks, "We do not please you?" There is shame in her voice.

"No." Daxam says. "I mean, yes you do, but I'm pleased because you chose to join the crew of the Solar Dreamer of your own free will. I will pay you and you are welcome to stay as long as you do your jobs. But you are free to leave if that's what you'd prefer. I'd even be willing to take you to Ryloth. I've never been there."

The three Twi'lek have been quiet and kept to themselves since joining up. Ariana is the leader. The other two are twin sisters. Cial Dasu is the more abrasive of the two and has green skin. The younger twin has bright red skin and a timidness about her. Her skin is a vibrant bright red.

Ariana eyes him with suspicion. The other two look out at the star lines. The protocol droid watches in silence. Daxam relaxes in his seat. Ariana asks, "What exactly are our jobs, Captain Rad?"

He looks at her with a twinkle in his eye and a fluttering in his stomach. He is very attracted to her. Her inner strength magnifies her physical beauty. "We will all be taking care of each other. Everyone expected to do their part. I don't know what you talents are. We need ship maintenance, cooking, cleaning, things like that. I would like to train you as soldiers and pilots. Does that interest you?"

Their eyes light up.

Daxam is tickled inside. "I need starfighter pilots. The plan is to put together a squadron."

"I want to be a starfighter pilot." Usha says with her eyes wide in disbelief.

"Good." Daxam nods.

"What would you like us to do now?" Cial asks.

Daxam shrugs. "Get to know the ship. Settle into your quarters. Go talk to Drixle and he'll show you where we are storing the glitterstim we pick up at Kessel."

"Yes, sir, Captain Rad." Usha says with enthusiasm. Her and Cial turn to leave the cockpit.

"A moment alone, Captain?" Ariana asks as her Lekku slither over her shoulders.

Daxam arches an eyebrow. The cockpit door hisses shut with the departure of the twins. Ariana boldly takes a seat in a co-pilot chair. Her expression stern. "I don't know what your game is, Captain Rad. I don't know if I should trust you. Especially with you and Talien being stormtroopers. My instincts tell me to give you a chance. That you may be creating something special here."

Daxam purses his lips looking out at hyperspace. "Former stormtroopers, Ariana. I understand I must earn your trust. I don't have much to say about that. My actions will speak louder than words. I don't know about something special. I named her the Solar Dreamer because there is a dream." He affectionately taps a computer console.

She stares hard out at the star lines. Her voice is filled with desperation. "Captain Rad. There were more of my people taken as slaves. Our entire village was taken by Black Sun agents on Ryloth. Many were killed, but many are still on Tatooine if they haven't been sold off planet. If you rescue my people and return them to our home world I will always serve you, Captain Daxam."

"How many Twi'lek from your village are back on Tatooine?"

"At least fifty." Her eyes dart away from him. He senses her sorrow and strength.

He breathes hard through his nose and makes his lips into a tight line. "I'd like to train you to be a pilot assigned to the Solar Dreamer cockpit."

She looks at him with soft pink eyes trying to read his reaction. "I will."

Maintaining his tight lipped expression he responds. "After we deliver our shipment from Kessel to Nal Hutta we will free your people."

It is the first time he sees Ariana smile and the moment he realizes he may be in love with her. "Thank you."

Daxam nods. "The protocol droid is Cinder. The astromech is Echo. They're good friends of mine."

"Droids are your friends?"

He smirks. "Two of the best. Cinder."

"Yes, Captain Rad?" The black protocol droid responds with a more human sounding voice than Ariana had been expecting.

"Please begin teaching Ariana the basic operations of the cockpit."

Echo hoots, swiveling its dome in Ariana's direction.

"R3 says welcome aboard, Ariana." Cinder translates.

"Thank you." She says to the little droid.

"Shall we begin, Lady Ariana?" Cinder asks.

"I'm ready." Daxam notes the eagerness in the light blue skin Twi'lek's voice.

Captain Rad, his two droids, Gleek, Ariana, Talien, Vinge, Laris, Arc, Kator, and Cyf crowd the cockpit. There is a mixed feeling of excitement, nervousness, duty, and fear in the air. Captain Rad addresses them all. "We're coming out of hyperspace at the edge of the Kessel System. Kator Ekin will take out his Z-95 Headhunter. The four A-wing starfighters will be piloted by Cyf Whitesun, Arc Haband, Vinge Xangel, and Laris Oth. Talien Falconer will be piloting the Imperial Shuttle with Drixle, Roo, and Kire Tatus. The Solar Dreamer will then makes its way to the mining planet of Kessel and pick up our cargo. You six ships will be close by in case anything goes wrong. I want to be able to fight our way out."

"Expecting trouble?" Talien asks.

Rad's lips become a line. "No. But I've never done business with these Kessel rogues before and I'm cautious in dealing with the Hutt crime syndicate."

"The Hutts pay good credits though." Ariana rolls her eyes.

"I have plans." Rad defends. "Plans that require funding. I plan to follow through with my promise to you."

Ariana gives him a regretful nod.

Captain Rad continues. "Ariana, Scode, Usha, and Cial will be manning the Dreamer's turbo lasers. Just in case."

"Sounds easy." The furry wolffish Laris growls.

"Gleek, Echo, Cinder, and the Ugnaughts will supervise the loading on the glitterstim with me." Captain Rad explains.

"It will feel good to pilot again." The green-grey skin Duros says.

"You can say that again." Vinge gives a devilish grin.

The wolf man nods. "A-wings are fast."

"Wanna race?" Vinge asks.

Laris nods several times with his tongue out.

"As long as it doesn't interfere with our operation." Captain Rad tells the A-wing pilots.

Captain Rad stands with Gleek and the droids at his side as the trio Ugnaughts direct a group made up of human, Rodian, Bith, and Gamorean thugs load the metal crates of contraband. Rad is dressed in a simple yet pristine black flight suit. Gleek is wearing Imperial biker scout armor minus the helmet. They are both armed with blasters. Their contact is an Aqualish named Reffen. Reffen turned out to be the leader of a gang on Kessel that works for Ouros the Hutt. Reffen left his enforcers to oversee the work after a brief introduction to Captain Daxam Rad. Rad didn't like the Aqualish gangster.

"I am fairly certain the Wookies, Bith, and most of the humans are Kessel mine slaves." The black protocol droid tells Capt. Rad.

"I don't like slavers." Rad whispers to Gleek and the droids. "The sooner we're out of here the better." He watches more acutely. The Gamoreans are big, pig faced, green skinned barbarians. Brutes. They are rude, snorting at the sullen and quiet Wookies. Rad's eyes move over to Reffen's enforcers. He knows himself to be a decent judge of character and these two men seem dangerous. More so than the rest of the gang.

Cinder is perceptive. The black human shaped droid speaks quietly to his captain. "They are wearing Mandalorian armor."

Gleek whispers with apparent shock in his gurgling voice. "They are as powerful as Jedi."

"The Jedi are extinct." Daxam responds. Rad takes another look at their red and grey armor and jet packs. He walks over to the pair of Mandalorian warriors. Both mercenaries stiffen and rest their hands on their blasters as Daxam approaches. "Hi. I'm Captain Daxam Rad of the Solar Dreamer." He gives them half a smile.

"Zan Deth." One of the Mandalorians grunts through his helmet's voice filter. There is no friendliness in his tone.

"I'm Remic Xon." The other Mandalorian warrior says. Even through the voice filter Daxam can hear that Remic is the younger of the two.

"I'm surprised to see Mandalorians working for the Hutts." Daxam fishes.

"You are working for the Hutts." Deth responds with a finality to his tone. He does not wish to speak with Daxam.

"This is a temporary assignment." Remic nods. "We normally work as mercenaries for hire for war. Reffen is paying too well to pass this up."

"It's all for the credits." Daxam chuckles as a short, flap skin faced Sulkastan enters the shadowy hangar.

"Surg." Deth nods.

The pale grey-pink skinned Sullastan looks at Daxam and says in his gurgling voice and broken Basic, "Reffen asked me to let you know it's been a pleasure doing business. He appreciates your professionalism, Captain Rad."

"Thank you." Daxam gives a forced smile. His instincts are going crazy. He doesn't trust Reffen, Surg, the Hutts, or this Kessel gang. What has he gotten himself into? He left the Empire to strike out against tyranny, only to work for criminal tyrants?

"If all goes well," the hairless alien Surg warbles in Basic. "Ouros would like to make arrangements for a second shipment next month."

"That is possible." Daxam answers.

"I, myself, am a freelancer." Surg says with pride. "I'm a bounty hunter. I don't work for Reffen or Ouros, except to bring in bounties."

"I see." Daxam replies. From the corner of his eye he sees Gleek and the droids watching. The women are inside the Solar Dreamer at the turbo lasers ready to blow the place apart if they are double crossed in any way.

"You've met Zan Deth and Remic Xon?" Surg asks.

"I have."

"They hired me to take transport them." Surg shakes his head in mock sadness. "A bounty I have been tracking will be taking me off my current course. The Mandalorians seek passage and pay well."

Daxam eyes the Sullustan and the Mandalorians. "Where to?" He looks into the Crimson and grey helmet eye slits of Remic Xon.

"Naboo." The older Mandalorian answers before Remic has a chance. "The bounty hunter speaks truth. We will pay well. Are ship was confiscated by Imperials."

"I would expect you to work for me as members of the crew until we reach Naboo." Captain Rad says with authority. "We have two systems to visit before I can get you to Naboo."

Zan Deth gives a very slow nod to Daxam, as if sizing the former stormtrooper up. "We can help as crew. We're both skilled pilots and warriors. You will be safe with us aboard."

Daxam smirks. "We can iron out the details in hyperspace."

"You have our gratitude." Remic Xon says in a much more friendly and genuine voice than his counterpart.

"Surg. My friend." Daxam gives the shorter alien a half smile and puts his hands on his hips as he speaks. "I'm understaffed and I'd like to purchase the slaves loading the cargo from Reffen."

For a moment Surg's jaw drops. "Let me see." He walks away from them across the warehouse hangar speaking into a comlink to Reffen.

"Your Blockade Runner is much larger than others." Remic Xon notes. "If it were any bigger it wouldn't fit in this special hangar." The warehouse/hangar is large enough to house an Imperial a Star Destroyer in this desolate mining colony.

"A prototype." Daxam explains. "One of a kind. Alderaan, actually Bail Organa himself, had the starship commissioned to stand up against a Star Destroyer. A beginning any how. The line was to be the Liberty-class Alderaan Blockade Runner."

"It's still small next to Star Destroyer." Zan Deth comments.

Daxam shrugs. "It's enough space for our needs. Living quarters. Docking bays. Plenty of storage. Enough room to easily hold more than a full squadron of starfighters."

The Mandalorians exchange a subtle glance.

"You have a starfighter squadron?" Zan Deth asks.

"It's going to be expensive." Surg walks back over to them, loud and obnoxious.

"I'll pay." Daxam holds a gamblers face to not reveal how much he has in credits.

Sing shrugs. "Fine. Take them. A Wookie, the humans, and the Bith."

"Many thanks." Daxam smiles.

Back aboard the Solar Dreamer Captain Rad stands with Gleek, Cinder, and Echo before his new crew and passengers. Two Mandalorians and twenty-one slaves. The slaves: A Wookie named Hakua, three humans, and seventeen Bith. He looks down at his astromech. "R3 go to the bridge and program the hyperdrive for the Nal Hutta System." The droid rolls away on its tread feet. Daxam looks back over the new crew, studying them. They are gathered in the mess hall. Cinder is at his side to translate if necessary. "Hello everyone. Those of you I purchased from Reffen are now free. I am opposed to slavery. You have a choice. I will drop you at any planet on our itinerary or you can work for me as crew of the Solar Dreamer. The choice is yours. No strings attached. You want to leave? Leave. You want on the payroll? Stay. The choice is yours."

The Death Star protocol droid echoes his words from Basic into Bith and Wookie. Gleek, Ariana, Kator, Arc, and Talien stand with Captain Rad. The Captain looks around once more. "If you sign up you are given room and board. A flight suit, comlink, power cells, and a blaster. You are assigned a task and expected to follow orders. There is a chain of command. I'm at the top. This is a black ops military confederation." He grins. "Space pirates." He paces back and forth in front of the new potential crew. Laris, Vinge, the Ugnights, Cial, Usha, Cyf, and Kire wander in. Daxam nods and raises his voice unconsciously. "The Solar Dreamer is named so because I have a mission. My mission needs funding. Smuggling and bounty hunting will bring in those credits. The dream is as majestic as all the suns in the galaxy. Alien equality. Freedom of all sentient beings. Repairing the error that was the Empire. The mission is to hunt down slavers across the galaxy until there is no more slavery."

Everyone's eyes are wide. Gleek has tears in his eyes. Kire has her hand over her open mouth. Cyf grins. The room is silent for only a moment. The wookie Hakua raises his arms and roars and warbles shaking his fists. The twenty-one slaves cheer. Ariana, Usha, Cial, Vinge, and Arc clap there hands as the rest of the crew smiles. Everyone is swept away by the dream of Captain Rad. The Solar Dreamer. The Mandalorians look around not sure what to think.

Several of the slaves all speak at once in their native tongues. Cinder rocks back on his black metal heels and translates for Captain Rad. "All twenty-one slaves wish to join the crew."

Daxam nods. "Thank you, everyone. We take care of our own aboard the Solar Dreamer." The black protocol droid continues translating. Daxam goes on. "Second order of business." He turns to the Mandalorians. "Zan Deth and Remic Xon. After Nal Hutta we will be going to the Tatoo System to free a group of slaves. Twi'lek. I'd like to hire both of you since you will be along for the ride any how. We could use your experience."

Remic looks through his Mandalorian helmet visor at the older warrior who is standing stiff with his arms crossed. Zan gives a subtle nod. "We will assist in the battle."

"Stellar news." Daxam smiles. "Gleek and Cinder will take you to your assigned quarters and duties. Everyone is dismissed." He looks around the room as the crew begin to follow the skinny Rodian out of the mess hall. "Arc. Cyf. Kator. Talien. Stay please."

Once the room is empty save five Daxam says, "We need more starfighters. If we can purchase any whether it be Nal Hutta, Tatooine, or Naboo I'm interested."

"I have some ideas." The zabrak says.

"Good." Daxam nods.

"Captain Rad to the command center." A voice says over the ships comlink speaker.

Daxam answers on a hand held comlink from his pocket. "This is Captain Rad. On my way. Have R3 prepare me a manifest of the entire crew, passengers, and supplies."

"Yes, sir." The other voice answers.

Not long later Daxam is sitting in the pilot's chair in the large cockpit. He is accompanied by both his droids, Talien, Arc, Ariana, Kire, Kator, and Gleek. In front of them are the stars of Hutt space. Daxam addresses everyone. "R3 pull up a holo of my itinerary."

Before all of them a static image of data appears. Daxam explains. "I've promoted myself to Admiral. This is a list of the chain of command of the Solar Dreamer."

Everyone looks at the holo list scroll before them: Cadet, Ensign, Private, Corporal, Sergeant, Lieutenant, Captain, Commander, and Admiral.

"We're becoming a real military mercenary group." Talien shakes his head.

"That's Admiral Daxam Rad." Kator smirks.

"I'm promoting all of you to sergeant. Talien you are Lieutenant."

"Yes, Admiral." Lt. Talien Falconer smiles.

Another list scrolls by. "A copy of this list, and the chain of command will be put on a data pad with other instructions for all of you." It is a list of supplies and crew duties. "Now for the reason you're all here. We have some trouble. A pair of Imperial Star Destroyers."

"What?" Talien pales. Everyone appears concerned.

Gleek says, "The Star Destroyers have been identified as the Eternity and the Malignant. It appears they have not spotted us."

Daxam feels his stomach roll at the mention of his former ISD the Eternity. "They must be hunting us. Who is in command of the Malignant."

"I know it." Talien answers. "Moff Meka."

"I don't know him." Daxam says.

"He's a capable leader." Talien says. "Nothing to scoff at. He is a high ranking official from the planet Wukkar."

"Wonderful." Gleek groans.

"The Malignant has just launched a full squadron of TIE fighters." The black protocol droid informs them with a hint of panic in his electronic voice. "The Eternity has launched a full squadron of TIE Interceptors."

"So we have been spotted." Daxam says. He speaks into the Solar Dreamer's com alerting the entire ship. "This is Admiral Rad. Prepare for battle. All crew members to battle stations." He shuts off the comlink.

"Incoming message from a TIE Interceptor." Gleek tells them.

"Let it through." Daxam nods. He hears a familiar voice piloting the TIE Interceptor through the Solar Dreamer's com.

"This is stormtrooper TT-1145. Renegades Dr-1974 and RM-2003 are under arrest for desertion, theft and treason against the Empire. Surrender now. Or we will destroy you all now."

"Tractor beam." Gleek says from the co-pilot's seat.

Talien's face turns white with fear. Kire squeezes his hand.

Daxam speaks into the ship's com. "Barin. A moment to consider please."

"A moment." His former military intelligence companion answers.

Daxam silences the com. "Arc I need you leading Star Storm Squadron out against the Imperials."

Everyone looks shocked.

"You mean four A-wings and an old Headhunter against two dozen TIEs?" Talien scoffs.

"Lt. Falconer I need you aboard the Shuttle. Take four pilots. Echo has the coordinates and he'll be going with you. Picking up four modified TIE Fighters buried in a jungle on Yavin 4." He pats Echo R3 on his clear dome. The Solar Dreamer launches into hyperspace and Daxam smiles.

"You're a wild card." Gleek chuckles.

"I'm not a mad man." Daxam relaxes in the pilots chair. "You have your missions. The A-wings are flying escort."

Surg sits in his private office on the mining planet of Kessel doing credit accounting on a data pad. He's only a part-time bounty hunter. In truth he is the Major Domo of Reffen. They work for Ouro the Hutt but in reality are agents of the Black Sun criminal organization. Reffen is Kessel Sector Chief of the Black Sun. Standing before the Major Domo Surg is his Sullustan cousin, the old bounty hunter Stig. "They are on their way to Nal Hutta as expected." Surg doesn't look up from his number crunching.

"Ten percent finders fee." Stig sits in the chair across the desk from his cousin.

"That's fine." Surg is indifferent. "They are heavy armed. Our security forces spotted five starfighters accompanying the Solar Dreamer. With the slaves he bought he has to have a crew of at least fifty. He seemed a real military man."

"I'm working with Ming San." The huskies Sullustan bounty hunter grunts.

Surg frowns. Puts the data pad on the desk and looks up at his cousin. "The bounty on those missing stormtroopers is so high all the best bounty hunters are gunning for them. I know Zuckuss and 4-LOM are on the hunt."

"Ming's a Mandalorian." Sting argues.

"They have fifty men and six or more ships." Surg snaps.

"I'll get a crew together. " Stig says. "There will be plenty of credits to go around. Thanks for the heads up and the tail, cousin."

Surg waves him away.

Stig marches to his modified freighter. Ming's starfighter fits n the hold, but there isn't room for much else. He stomps up the ramp. His cousin so gets under his skin some times. But they stand a better chance working together to rise in the ranks of the Black Sun. He walks through the ship and sits in the cockpit next to a warrior in full Mandalorian armor. Blue and grey.

The Sullustan looks at the Mandalorian. "His ship has a tracker on it. We need to let him make his delivery to Ouro before we can take them. We needs to decide how to handle their numbers. More than fifty."

The Mandalorian nods. "Maybe we can hire some thugs on Nal Hutta."

"I'd rather hire scum I trust." Surg grunts.

"Who do you have in mind?"

"I've got a few ideas."

The three female twi'lek gather in Ariana's private quarters. Every crew member is assigned their own quarters. Granted they are small, cramped quarters, but the privacy is a luxury. The beds are comfortable. They have access to holo dramas. Food. Some of the crew play sabacc in the lounge. Ariana imagines it's better than was the Kessel slaves had.

"Do we trust Daxam Rad?" Cial asks the other two. The three grew up together on Ryloth.

Ariana's Lekku twitch at the mention of his name.

Usha giggles.

"He is handsome for a human." Cial winks at Ariana.

"Nonsense." Ariana blushes. "I hadn't noticed."

"So we trust him." Cial smiles and nudges her twin sister playfully.

"Why is he freeing slaves?" Ariana asks. "What's his angle?"

"We all heard his passionate speech. We know why he's freeing slaves." Usha smiles.

"I can't argue that." Cial says. "He thinks he's some kind of hero."

"No." Ariana pets one of her head tails. "He's trying to atone. To make amends. He was an Imperial stormtrooper. So was Talien."

"Funny they didn't strike out on their own until the Empire was defeated at Endor." Cial rolls her eyes.

"Do you think the Empire is defeated? Is it true?" Usha asks with hope in her voice.

"It's all over the holo net." Ariana answers. "The Emperor and Darth Vader are dead. Killed by some guy named Luke Skywalker. People say he's the last Jedi Knight."

Ariana grins. "It's not too late for Admiral Rad to join the Rebellion. The galaxy is a big place. The Empire has lost but it will be years before they quit fighting. But it will fall apart, kicking and screaming."

"Maybe that's the way it should be." Cial suggests. "Everything divided into sectors. Like the Corporate Sector. Think of it. The Imperial Sector. The Republic Sector. The Hapes Cluster. The Mandalorians. The cooperation of sectors will keep the galaxy safe."

"I think Talien is handsome for a human." Usha smiles.

"After Nal Hutta Daxam's agree to take down Borum Koth." Ariana announces.

The twins are speechless. Borum Koth is a cruel Falleen slaver. A Black Sun Sector chief. Things aren't always so secret on Tatooine.

"He's been expanding his territory and fighting in gang wars." Ariana tells them. "Ever since Jabba died all the crooks are fighting over the crumbs."

"We're going to free our people?" Usha clarifies.

"Yes." Ariana answers.

"We're Admiral Daxam Rad's soldiers." Cial slaps her fist into her palm.

"It's the Force." Usha says almost in a daze. "Bringing us together. Skywalker will teach us."

"What are you going on about, sister?" Cial shake Usha by the arm.

"I just felt it. The words came on their own."

"Skywalker?" Ariana asks.

"I don't know." Usha shrugs, suddenly losing confidence. "A Jedi for sure. I dreamed of it."

Ariana sighs and says, "Enough now. I'm tired. I want to get some sleep. I don't like the idea of being around Hutts. I want to be awake and sharp."

"Not a bad idea." Cial agrees.

The horned devil man named Vinge Xangel is standing before a mirror in the small quarters of his friend the Shistavanen wolf man Laris Oth. Vinge is admiring himself. In truth he is handsome by Devaronian standards. His eyes are a midnight black in contrast to his bright scarlet skin. He smiles at himself showing off a row of sharp teeth and touches the tip of a gold horn then takes a puff from his cigarra.

The pair, along with Arc Haband, have been working together for years. As Arc is the sullen, silent type; Vinge is the cocky, overconfident type. The wolf man is a balance between the two. Laris is closer to Vinge than Arc but the Shistavanen still calls Arc a friend. Laris often finds himself mediator between the Duros and Devaronian pilots.

"What do you think of 'Admiral' Rad?" Vinge turns away from the mirror to look at Laris.

Laris growls low and quiet in response. "Arc trusts him."

"I've noticed the Duros pickle has taken a shine to him."

"To be fair the Admiral has treated us fairly. I don't care if he's decided he's an Admiral instead of a Captain. He promote Arc to sergeant and leader of Star Storm Squadron." Laris points out.

"Interesting name and why choose Arc?" Vinge cringes at the thought of following Sgt. Arc Haband's orders. But Vinge is happy to be a member of the squadron and assigned his own A-wing. Star Storm Squadron has grown to ten starfighters: Kator's Old fashion Z-95 Headhunter, Kire Tatus' Y-wing, the four A-wings (piloted by Arc, Vinge, Laris, and Cyf), and the four modified TIE Fighter's Talien brought back from his retrieval mission. (The TIEs are assigned to Cial Dasu, Usha Dasu, a human slave from Kessel named Clave Jenil, and another Kessel slave, a Bith pilot named Dank Hoyos.)

"He could have chosen someone we don't know." Laris comments. "I feel better knowing Arc. I trust Arc. And I like my A-wing."

"He's a traitor to the Empire it's a huge bounty on his head." Vinge puffs his cigarra. "That is worrisome."

"Your cigarra's stink." Laris waves the smoke away from his face and curls his snout nose. "I don't mind the idea of freeing slaves and being smugglers. It will be nice to feel like one of the good guys for a change."

"I'm fine with a steady payroll." Vinge rubs his pointed chin. "The credits are good. I don't know how he's funding this whole operation. Thing is there will be fighting if we stay with Admiral Rad. Bounty hunters. Slavers. Maybe the Empire."

"Since when have you been afraid of a fight?" Laris chuckles, it sounds almost like a series of barks.

Vinge gives a long sigh nod sits in the single chair in Laris' living quarters. "Cyf said the slaver we're going up against is Borum Koth in Mos Gamos."

Laris gives a low rumble. "That will be a challenge. Be heard he is connected to the Black Sun."

Vinge nods. "A sector chief and a Falleen."

"We have two Mandalorians with us." Laris chuckles again.

"Bounty hunters. Smuggling. Slavers. The Empire. The Hutts. The Black Sun." Vinge laughs. "This will either be the shortest space pirate crew ever to exist..." His voice trails off.

Laris finishes for him. "Or we may be at the beginning of something special. Alderaan and the Death Stars are gone. The Empire is defeated. Jabba the Hutt is dead. Even Prince Xizor is dead. The galaxy is changing."

Daxam, Talien, Gleek, and Arc sit on the command bridge/large cockpit of the Solar Dreamer eating a meal together. The black Death Star protocol droid Cinder and the R3 unit astromech are monitoring the ship's controls. Before them is a wonderful vision of star lines. Their hyperspace vector is the Nal Hutta System.

"Tell me your story, Gleek." Daxam says as he enjoys the red sauce ribbit and a vegetable mush.

The young Rodian answers in his broken Basic. "There is not much to tell. My family has lived on Tattooine for three generations now. My father and I are both computer linguistics specialists. Computer systems are the family trade. I've known Cyf Whitesun and Drixle for years. They both lived in Mos Espa near me."

"I'd noticed your skill with computers." Daxam says. "One of your qualifications to be my first mate and co-pilot."

"Thank you, Admiral." Gleek seems genuinely proud. "I'm happy to be off Tattooine and see some of the galaxy. Cyf and I used to talk about exploring the galaxy someday. We'd sit up star gazing some times. The night is often a relief after the heat of the twin suns."

"I can imagine." Talien says.

They all eat in quiet again looking out at the white lines of hyperspace. Talien asks, "What's your story, Arc?"

Arc answers with a now expression on his smooth, hairless alien face. "I was a miner for a few years. I hated it." The others chuckle. "I met up with Laris and Vinge years ago. We've been smuggling ever since. Until we lost our ship to corrupt Imperials. We were stuck on that desert hell world until you pulled us off."

"We're glad to have you." Daxam smiles and takes another bite of the red sauced meat. He looks to Gleek. "Are you a splicer?"

Gleek looks at the Admiral, clearly nervous.

Daxam laughs hard. "Gleek. We are space pirates."

Gleek's mouth snout curves into a smile. "I can slice anything."

Echo blurts something.

Cinder translates. "Echo wants you to know he is grateful that you don't wipe our memory banks, Admiral Rad."

Rad responds. "I never will. I want crew members not droids."

"Thank you, Admiral." Cinder says with a hint of relief in his electronic voice.

Echo beeps and blurts again. Cinder translates. "Echo reports he received a response from Ouro the Hutt's contact last time we came out of hyperspace. Ouro has four starfighters to sell you. All Z-95 Headhunters."

Daxam's face brightens. "That's great news. When we land I want the Ugnaughts to look them over. If they are decent we need four more pilots for Star Storm Squadron." He rubs his chin, noticing he needs a shave. "When we reach Ouro's space station I want all starfighters prepped."

"I will make sure it is done, Admiral." Arc says.

"Thank you, Sergeant Haband." Daxam smiles. "Lieutenant Falconer. You are assigned training of all new recruits."

"I can train cadets." Talien nods.

He's happy, Daxam realizes. He's second in the chain of command. Assigned the Lambda-class Shuttle equipped with his own speeder bike and a spare. Drixle is his personal assistant. And if the crew's gossip is true, Lt. Talien Falconer is romantically involved with the Twi'lek woman Usha Dasu. He's skilled. He feels a value to the crew and knows he's an asset. Talien inexperience and loyalty to the Empire worried Daxam in the beginning but the kid is on board now.

"Gleek, the bridge is yours." Daxam says and stretches. "I'm taking a nap. Wake me when we've reached Nal Hutta."

"Yes, Admiral." Gleek nods.

"I think I'll do the same." Talien rises to follow Daxam out.

"I can sit with you awhile." Arc says to Gleek.

"I don't mind the company." Gleek nods.

"May I partake in the discussion, Sergeants?" Cinder asks.

Arc and Gleek look at each other and back at the protocol droid. "What's on your mind?" Gleek asks.

"I desire your companionship." The Death Star droid explains. "I wish to understand sentient beings on an experiential level. I and my partner, Echo R3, have been assigned as record keepers of the Solar Dreamer. But truly I enjoy the experience of friendship which thanks to our master Admiral Daxam Rad, we have both experienced friendship. Not something many droids know. I am friends with Daxam Rad, Echo, Talien Falconer, Kator Ekin, and Ariana."

"Do droids dream?" Arc asks.

"Not that I recall." Cinder answers.

The modified Blockade a Runner comes out of hyperspace nowhere near the populated world and moon, Nal Hutta and Nar Shaddaa. They are at the far edge of the solar system where Ouro the Hutt's secret space station orbits. The space station is a massive and magnificent piece of machinery. It is the size of a city.

Daxam is in the pilot's seat, Gleek and Talien are in the chairs on either side of him. Echo is plugged into the Solar Dreamer's computer systems and Cinder is seated in a chair helping Echo pilot the ship with Gleek.

"This is Ouro's Control." A gruff voice comes over the com speaking in Huttese.

Cinder translates as the Admiral speaks. They are granted landing privileges and assigned a docking bay.

"Gleek." Daxam says. "When we leave the Nal Hutta System you can take two days rest and relaxation."

"Thank you." Gleek nods.

"Lt. Falconer and I are going down to oversee the unloading of the merchandise." Daxam says before leaving Gleek on the bridge with the droids.

Daxam, Kator, Laris, Vinge, Cyf, and Talien walk down the bridge together in partial stormtrooper armor repainted grey and carrying blasters. Many of the crew are unload the glitterstim down another ramp and passing it off the the round green pig faced Gamorreans. Ouro the Hutt is not present. They stand at the bottom of the ramp watching the cargo being moved. A group of guards made up of the rust faced Weequay, the squid faced Quarren, and a large reptilian Trandoshan. A clay like green skinned Barabel walks their direction accompanied by a pair of Weequay guards.

"That is Ouro's Major Domo. R'Dan Rhett." The seasoned bounty hunter Kator comments.

"Ouro extends his gratitude for the successful first shipment and looks forward to future merchandise." The ugly Barabel says in Huttese.

Daxam looks at the others, keeping his cool. He doesn't know the Hutt language and apparently neither do these guys. He's going to half to call Cinder down to translate.

A female Bith helping to carry cargo notices and walks over quickly offer her services. She translate what was said and continues speaking the Daxam. "My name is Troel Earta. I was a teacher and linguist before being taken to the Kessel mines for being a rebel sympathizer."

"Thank you, Troel." Daxam says in a calm, soft voice. "Please tell R'Dan it has been a pleasure doing business with Ouro."

The Barabel nods, handing Daxam a data stick with a passing look of suspicion. He says more. Troel translates. "Ouro has invited you to stay and enjoy the pleasures of his space station. Rest. Eat. Gamble. Refuel. Whatever you need. He has hotel suites for you Admiral Rad."

Thinking fast he decides it's not a bad idea. Let the crew stretch their feet and get supplies. "Sure, D'Ran. My crew could use a day off. However I would like to get the Z-95 Headhunters aboard my ship first though. We will stay a day."

The three Ugnaughts, the Wookiee, and a pair of Bith stay behind to guard the Solar Dreamer along with Echo and Kire Tatus on the bridge. Everyone else spreads out. Admiral Rad is with Lt. Falconer, Ariana, Usha, Kator, and Arc. They explore a market that is surprisingly crowded with quality merchandise and a diverse gathering of aliens. Humans are a minority.

After some time Daxam makes arrangements to purchase four repaired TIE Fighters from a Dug running a used starship lot.

Late in the evening they are just finishing loading Daxam's four new TIE Fighters aboard the Solar Dreamer when a pair of droids roll into the docking bay. They are all standing near a walking ramp. The droids stand up on three legs and blue force fields snap to life around them.

"Destroyer droids!" Kator yells diving for cover behind a stack of metal crates.

The droids open fire with two heavy repeating blasters as the rest of them run for cover. Daxam and Talien both shoot back with their blasters but it does nothing against the droids force fields. Behind the old Clone War era military droids two bounty hunters charge into the docking bay with their blasters blazing.

Kator and Daxam both recognize them as the veteran Mandalorian Ming San and the muscular Sullustan Stig, who is wearing optical enhancing goggles.

It's a stand off. Blaster fire and light smoke fill the air. The shooting goes back and forth between the two parties for several minutes. Finally a blaster bolt from one of the destroyer droids takes Arc in the shoulder and the Duros pilot drops to the ground, his blaster clattering out of his reach.

Ariana and Daxam are side by side behind a metal crate taking shots at the bounty hunters when they can. They see the downed Duros. For a moment the pair only look at each other. Daxam feels some kind of emotional electricity pass between them. He takes a deep breath. At that moment Ariana witnesses Daxam's warrior spirit. She sees the fearlessness in the Admiral's green eyes. Daxam can't explain it but he feels love for Ariana. He senses the love radiating from her. He thinks he is about to die. He smiles at her, thoroughly amused. "I love you."

Ariana's pink eyes widen, her Lekku move smoothly. With a snap hiss, Daxam Rad stands with his blaster in one hand and his blue-white lightsaber in the other batting away blaster bolts. He feels his consciousness fall into his Force enhanced combat sense.

"Jedi?" Ariana whispers unheard over the fighting.

The others watch the spectacle of Daxam whirling, dodging blaster bolts, blocking others with his lightsaber, and shooting back with his own blaster. Everyone is stunned by his prowess.

A sudden explosion rocks everyone and the Sullustan bounty hunter cries out in frustrated pain.

Daxam sees a second concussion grenade roll beneath the remaining destroyer droid. It explodes as it attempts to curl up and roll away from the grenade. Heavy blaster fire follows. Daxam continues fighting, spotting the armored Mandalorians Zan Deth and Remic Xon charging into the hangar firing repeating blasters at the remaining two bounty hunters.

Daxam leaps and twists through the air using the Force to enhance his jump. He lands, taking off Stig's blaster hand with his blue lightsaber. Stig shouts and staggers away.

Kator, Ariana, Usha, and Talien all stand pointing their blasters in Ming San's direction. "Don't even breath." Ariana growls. Kator chuckles.

"A Mandalorian." Zan Deth snarls walking toward Ming with Remic at his side.

"Who hired you?" Daxam asks Stig as the Sullustan tries to crawl away.

Ming San drops his weapons, then drops to his knees, placing his hands behind his head in surrender.

"It's an Imperial bounty." Stig groans. He looks at the rest of the crew present. "Any of you who help me bring them in, I will share the bounty. There are more than enough credits to go around. They only want Daxam and Talien." Stig stands.

Remic approaches and punches Stig in the face. "Traitors, the both of you." He glares at Ming San.

"You've always been a disgrace, Ming San." Zan Deth huffs.

"Fine." Ming says. His jet pack bursts to life launching him up and away from the Solar Dreamer crew members. The fire fight resumes but ends quickly as Ming soars out of the docking bay. Remic and Zan's jet packs light up and they pursue.

Outside the firefight between the Mandalorians is intense and vicious.

"Help Arc." Daxam shouts to Usha. She nods, dragging him up the ramp into the Solar Dreamer.

Zan Deth drops to the ground. His armor chest plate blackened and smoking. The Mandalorian warrior moans.

"Good thing we have plenty of bacta." Daxam says to no one in particular.

The body of Ming San clanks hard against the ground. Remic Xon lands gracefully on his feet over the dead Mandalorian. "Your disgrace is at an end." Remic says quietly.

"It's time to get out of this place." Daxam says to everyone. "There is likely more bounty hunters in a place like this."

"Wise words." Remic Xon nods his helmet. "We will take Ming San to be drifted in space." Zan Deth helps him pick the dead Mandalorian up off the docking bay floor.

Daxam nods. He looks to Talien. "Lt. Falconer. Get to the bridge and recall all crew. We're leaving now."

"Yes, Admiral." He jogs up the ramp.

The horned crowned Zabrak walks over to Stig, who is moaning and crawling away, and points his blaster at the Sullustan bounty hunter's head. Stig trembles. One of his goggles are cracked. "Kator. We used to be partners."

"Lucky." Kator whispers. "Stay away from this bounty."

"You being a might greedy." Stig hushes.

"I'm not taking the bounty." Kator replies. "I'm working for them. Get in my way and its business."

"I understand." Stig says.

Kator tilts his head in the direction of the Mandalorians going up the long ramp. "The have Mandalorians and they killed Ming San."

"I guess you're right." Stig nods.

"I'm going to stun you."

"Wait!"

There is a blue flash from Kator's blaster and Stig is unconscious. He turns watching everyone board the ship.

A few Bith wander in with Roo, Scode, and Sheed.

"Battle stations." Admiral Rad barks at them.

They all hustle into the ship glancing at the remains of the smoking destroyer droids.

Daxam feels frantic. He speaks into his personal comlink. "Talien, Ariana, Kator. To the command bridge."

Daxam, Talien, Ariana, Kator, Echo, Cinder, Gleek, and Remic Xon are on the command bridge/cockpit of the Solar Dreamer flying away from Ouro the Hutt's nameless space station. Echo is programming hyperspace coordinates for the Tatoo System. "I've heard Some major play Ros are hunting you two Imperial traitors." Kator says with acid in his tone.

"You knew what you were getting into when you started working with the ISB." Daxam argues.

Kator snaps back. "The Imperial Security Bureau didn't leave me many options."

"So what are you saying, Ekin?" Talien jumps into the argument.

"Maybe I'll turn you in myself." Kator barks at the young scout trooper.

"That's enough!" Ariana yells. Her Lekku move with anger. "Admiral Rad is our leader and employer. We all signed on to this militia. Mutiny gets you executed, Kator Ekin."

Kator snorts and shakes his head. He doesn't feel good about leaving his old partner behind.

"You have honor, Kator Ekin." Remic Xon says, removing his helmet for the first time in front of any of the crew. He has auburn curly hair, blue eyes, and a scar on his lip. Remic carries a discipline and experience beyond his age. "Where do you come from?"

Kator flushes. "I was born on Dathomir." He sees Stig on the docking bay floor with his hand missing in his mind's eye. "Are you a Jedi?" He stares at Daxam, his eyes haunted.

"Two Imperial Star Destroyers!" Gleek interrupts everyone.

"Hm. The Eternity and the Malignant." Cinder says.

Echo whistles.

"Be quiet, R3." Cinder huffs.

"Admiral Pirin and Moff Meka." Talien looks to Daxam.

"Full shields." Daxam says.

"Full shields." Gleek confirms.

"How are the hyperspace coordinates coming along, Echo?" Daxam asks with a calm voice.

Echo beeps and twitters in response.

A laser fires from the Eternity and shakes the Solar Dreamer.

"Another hit or two like that and we may be done for." Cinder says.

"They're sending a communication." Gleek says.

"Let it through." Daxam says.

"This is Moff Meka." A cold voice speaks through the starship's com system. "Daxam Rad and Talien Falconer. I order your surrender now. Or you will be destroyed. Turn yourselves over and we will release the rest of your crew."

"I doubt it." Daxam responds through the com. He looks down at his astromech with its utility arm jacked into the Solar Dreamer's computer systems. "Echo?"

"Echo?" Moff Meka sounds confused.

The astromech whistles with joy as the stars suddenly become white lines passing them by. The Solar Dreamer has made the jump to hyperspace.

"That was a close call." Ariana smiles at Daxam.

"Too close." Talien agrees.

Kator gives Remic Xon a meek look. "I apologize for my lack of faith. I didn't know Daxam is a Jedi. On my world the people are not fond of Jedi."

Daxam feels Kator's emotions radiating through the Force. He says to the seasoned Zabrak bounty hunter, "You're upset about something still."

Kator nods. "That Sullastan was... Is a friend."

"I see." Daxam nods. "Any chance he will come to work for us."

"It's unlikely." Kator admits.

"Is this going to be a problem?" Daxam asks, everyone else on the small command bridge paying close attention.

"No." Kator shakes his head. "We've all made our choices. I am a member of this crew."

Daxam gives a tight lipped smile. "Good." He looks around at everyone. "I'm not a Jedi."

"You carry a lightsaber?" Ariana asks.

Daxam nods. "It's a useful weapon."

"You wield it with the skill of a Jedi." The Mandalorian says with a certain amount of respect in his voice.

"I don't know what I am." Daxam almost whispers. "We're on our way to Tatooine. We loaded with moisture farms no supplies on Nal Hutta. Stolen from somewhere I imagine. We will sell them on the desert world and then free the Twi'lek slaves from Borum Koth. Gleek, the bridge is yours. Everyone else is dismissed." Daxam quickly leaves the command bridge cockpit.

Gleek, Echo, Cinder, and Remic stay on the bridge piloting the starship.

Moff Meka lets out a frustrated sigh. His uniform is as stiff as his posture. "Captain Zerl?" He looks at the younger officer seated at a computer console on the command bridge of the Star Destroyer the Malignant.

Captain Zerl has short black hair and a prominent nose. He suppresses a smile. "We succeeded in pinpointing their hyperspace vector. Assuming they don't change course they are heading toward the Tatoo System."

"We need an Interdictor." Meka announces with an edge to his voice.

Zerl doesn't know what to say. The rest of the bridge personal are equally silent. "Send a message to Admiral Pirin requesting an Interdictor."

"Yes, sir." Captain Zerl responds.

Not long later Moff Meka sits in his private chambers looking at the small blue-grey hologram of Admiral Pirin. Meka is eating dinner. They have been discussing things for some time.

Stoen Meka sighs. "The Empire is in disarray. There is no leadership. We must be that leadership, Admiral."

"The Empire needs a figurehead. It needs its heroes. It's Grand Moff Tarkin. It's Dark Lord of Sith, Darth Vader. It's wise Emperor Sheev Palpatine." Pirin agrees. "The surviving high ranking officers and politicians are fighting each other now more than the Rebels."

"Yes." Stoen Meka sips from a crystal glass filled with red Corellian wine. "Who would that be?"

"It's not me." Admiral Pirin admits. "I'm a soldier. All I know is military."

Meka feels unexpected relief. "I have reached out to some of the other Imperial leaders. They are willing to let me join them under their command. Each one I contacted. I know of four that are currently engaged in fighting each other."

"We will find the Emperor's heir." Admiral Pirin reassures. Pirin doesn't have any other starship's under his command due to his designation as one of many intelligence cells. "May I make some suggestions, Moff Meka."

"Of course." Meka sips his wine again, crossing his legs.

The hologram of Admiral Pirin standing at attention before the higher ranking officer flickers. "I suggest we select a system as our base of operations. A places to pool our resources and attempt to talk some sense into the other... Warlords."

"Bring my fleet in to one system." Meka considers the idea. "What system would you suggest?"

"Hoth." Admiral Pirin says with a stone face.

Meka blinks in surprise. "The rebel base?"

"The rebels chose it for a reason. It's a good location. Isolated. The terrain can be used to advantage. An unlimited water supply. Native animals for meat. Underground cave systems. The Rebels won't suspect it. There is a nearby asteroid field we can utilize." Pirin points out.

"Very well." Moff Meka nods.

"What does your fleet consist of?" Pirin asks.

Meka gives him a look as if a lines been crossed. Then changes his mind. Pirin is his only seriously skilled ally. "Four Imperial-class Star Destroyers. Six Dreadnaughts."

Admiral Pirin nods. "I can bring in Fleet Admiral Roel Brin. He has a Interdictor-class Star Destroyer called the Predator. Also four Gladiator-class Star Destroyers, three Venator-class Star Destroyers, six Aggressor-class Star Destroyers, and ten Victory-class Star Destroyers." Pirin smirks.

"Thirty-seven Star Destroyers." Moff Pirin smiles. "We have an Empire. I will order my ships to the Hoth System."

"I need ground bases established." Admiral Pirin says.

"I see."

"I have a contact of the military academy on Carida. I will have cadets transferred to Hoth. We transfer some instructors and beginning an academy on Hoth." Pirin suggests.

"I think we'll work well together." Moff Meka smiles. "I have the blue prints of Clone Wars era battle droids and clone templates. I say we split the fleet after a gathering at Hoth. The commander of every star destroyer present at a meeting on the Eternity. Then we split the fleet. Half at Hoth and half at Geonosis for the cloning and droid machinery."

"Yes, sir." Admiral Pirin smiles.

"You ready for Tatooine?" Kire Tatus taunts Talien in the mess hall.

Laris and Vinge are eating at a table and chuckle.

Cyf Whitesun sits quietly at a mother table with the the three Ugnaughts. Drupyd. Wrirda. Snozgarr. Drixle buzzes over another table with a tray in his hands.

"I can handle it." Talien laughs. "I'm a scout trooper. I can't wait to take my speeder bike out for a cruise through the desert. Wanna come along on the other bike? I'm taking the shuttle down."

Kire gives him a flirtation smile and bats her eyes. "What does that mean, scout trooper?"

"It means we'll be assaulting Borum Koth on the ground to get the slaves out and I'm inviting you to my assault team."

"Admiral." Talien speaks into his hand held comlink.

"Lieutenant Falconer." He answers.

He answers. "I've selected my assault team. Kire Tatus. Hakua. Drixle. Troel Earta. Dinger and Stinger."

"You get that, Cinder?" The Admiral sounds like he's not near the com.

Kire smirks.

"That's fine. Usha will be on your team too."

"Yes, sir."

Kire smiles at Talien. "Who are Stinger and Dinger."

Talien smiles. "My droids. Dinger is an astromech. A yellow R3 series. Stinger is a Viper series Imperial Probe Droid."

Cyf, Laris, and Vinge eavesdrop.

"Thanks, buddy." Drixle groans. "Taking me back to that hot dirt ball to fight a Black Sun slaver."

"Black Sun?" Talien asks. "Why would you think he's Black Sun. I thought Jabba the Hutt."

"He's Falleen." Drixle says. "He's a crook. That means he's Black Sun."

"That's pretty serious." Vinge says. "Like attacking the Hutt's. Or the Empire."

"These two stormtroopers don't know how to make friends." Laris growls.

"Drixle you're a good pilot and lookout. Good with the computer. I'll be leaving Dinger on the Shuttle with you." Talien says.

"That's not so bad." Drixle shrugs.

"We'll be taking the slaves back on the shuttle." Talien says. "Drixle and my droids will be flying the slaves to the Solar Dreamer on my shuttle."

"And you, my fellow Corellian," he smiles at Kite Tatus. "Imperial Intelligence records report you were a pilot in the Rebel Alliance. A good one. I think it's likely you're a spy for the Alliance now. But I'm not worried about that because you can see the good of our actions. Can your R5 astromech pilot your Y-wing to the surface for our evac?"

Kire's eyes widen. With a sharp inhale she collects herself. She is a spy for the Alliance but she is not going to admit it. She realizes if Talien or Daxam were still loyal to the Empire, or what's left of it, she'd be dead. To top it off she's witnessed the Empire and bounty hunters coming for both. She knows they are genuine in abandoning the Empire. She has been in contact with her Alliance handler making regular reports. She's now assessing whether or not she should suggest asking Daxam Rad to join the Alliance. "I flew my Y-wing against the Empire. The war is over."

"The war is over." Talien admits. "The fighting's not." He sits across from her, now eating. "I know you were with CorSec before joining the Rebel Alliance."

"I was a Corellian Security Officer." She picks at her food with a fork, some kind of synthetic orange and green vegetables. "I'm proud of my service with CorSec and with the Alliance. I'm proud of my Corellian heritage."

Talien nods, chewing. "I'm proud to be Corellian too."

"Here I thought you were flirting with me." Kire says dryly.

"Nah." Talien responds. "I'm with Usha. I want you on my team because you can fly and you are a professional soldier like the Admiral and myself. You know how to shoot. How to fight. How to investigate. Borum Koth is going to be a dangerous gang to confront."

"I'm honored to fight for something like the freedom of slaves." Kire states. "I came on not sure what to think of two former stormtroopers turned smugglers. What are the future plans of Admiral Daxam Rad? I get the feeling he's ready to take the remnants of the Empire, the Hutt syndicates, the Black Sun, and every criminal and injustice in the galaxy."

Talien nods in agreement. "He's an idealist. I think he's making amends for his service to the Empire. I'd didn't know him before the battle of Endor but we've been working together ever since."

"Have you ever considered joining the Alliance? They could use your operation to help set up th New Republic."

Talien chuckles. "The thought has never crossed my mind."

Talien leads his small assault team consisting of Drixle, Stinger, Dinger, Kire Tatus, Hakua, Usha Cial, and Troel Earta. At the last minute Daxam added Remic Xon to the team. Borum Koth's castle is a few kilometers outside of Mos Gamos. The Imperial Shuttle is hidden behind a tall sand dune. Talien, Kire, Usha, Hakua, Troel, and Remic are on speeder bikes moving in quickly. There are four speeder bikes in all. Talien and Usha together. Kire and Remic together. Hakua and Troel on there own bikes. They approach Borum Koth's castle from the south. The grey and black metallic speeder bikes kick up trails of sand dust as the zoom over the desert ground. Even being several kilometers out the speeder bikes make the trip short.

Talien, in full scout trooper armor, looks threw his helmet at the red sand castle before them. It's a relic from how long ago he can't determine. But it's a fortress nonetheless. Usha hugs him close the entire ride and it makes his heart and gut flutter. Talien notices that Kire and Remic were very friendly to each other on the shuttle trip planet side.

Admiral Rad flying in with Star Storm Squadron from the north. Not all the squadron. Only the TIE Fighters. He wants the Black Sun to think it's the Empire attacking. Seven TIE Fighters: Himself,

Roo and Scode the Bimms, Celloc the Bith, Cial Dasu of Ryloth, Clave Jenil of Coruscant, and Dank Hoyos the Bith.

To the east Talien spots stables housing riding lizards. There are a few other small buildings surrounding the castle area spread out several hundred meters. Talien's assault team is backup. Their objective is to pull the slaves out and get them back to the shuttle and Drixle. The battle has already begun. He can hear shouts and blaster fire. He reflexively clenches his jaw when he sees the battlefield chaos they are storming into.

The tall and wide front gate of the castle is open. The speeder bikes fly into the sand covered courtyard. The speeder bikes open fire on all types of Koth's gang. Gamorreans, Weeqay, Barabels, Aqualish, Quarren, and humans.

Overhead the TIE Fighters fly low, blasting the ground all around. Cyf Whitesun, Daxam Rad, Arc Haband, Kator Ekin, Dani Oros, and Zan Deth are wearing stormtrooper armor in a fire fight with a group of bounty hunters standing on a castle wall walkway. Talien's jaw drops. Boba Fett. Zuckuss. 4-LOM. Dengar. Bossk. Aurra Sing.

The arrival of the speeder bikes distract everyone enough that Admiral Rad is able to get the Twi'lek slaves rushing into the back of two speeder trucks. One of the Twi'lek fall, shot dead by a blaster bolt. Talien sees several dead Twi'lek among dead slavers.

Remic Xon leaves the speeder bike to Kire and jet packs up toward Boba Fett with a blaster in each hand firing repeatedly. Boba Fett dodges, firing up his jet pack and retaliating with a wrist flame thrower sending a cone of fire at the other Mandalorian.

Zan Deth charges blasting at the bounty hunters. Aurra blocks blast bolts. Bossk is hit in the thigh and drops. Dengar is grazed along his hip. And Zan Deth tackles both Zuckuss and 4-LOM at the same time.

The Wookiee, Hakua, leaps off his speeder bike with a blaster and vibro ax joins Zan Deth against the bounty hunters.

Daxam rolls a pair of thermal detonators once all the Twi'lek are loaded. One at the castle building entrance and the other at the courtyard of slavers. He's happy to see some Duros and Rodians among the slaves they are freeing.

Two explosions. It's devastating. Dozens of Borum Koth's guards and employees are dead. A castle wall is crumpled. The castle he loves. He's watching as the explosions shake the ground under his feet. The table before him is a holo of the entire castle grounds. He can see what everyone is doing. The Fallen's eyes tighten in rage. He speaks quietly into a comlink instructing his soldiers. These people will never live.

"Go!" Admiral Rad orders Cyf Whitesun and Dank Hoyos to drive away with the speeder trucks. They do so without question. A snap-hiss. Daxam turns around to face the rest of Borum's gang and the

bounty hunters with his lightsaber held in two hands, glowing blue against his white stormtrooper armor. Aurra Sing charges him with her own lightsaber. Their blades clash.

Unexpected by the crew of the Solar Dreamer and Borum Koth's gang, the eastern wall collapses with an explosion of rubble, dust, sand, and blaster fire. What looks like an entire platoon of stormtroopers and AT-ST walkers march in attacking everyone.

The entire crew of the Solar Dreamer assaulting the castle are staying in communication with each other through small comlinks. Daxam grunts his orders into his comlink. "Everyone pull out and make your escape. Repeat, full retreat back to the Solar Dreamer now!"

Everyone follows orders and begins to back out of the castle's courtyard, evading Black Sun, bounty hunter, and Imperial blaster bolts. Daxam notices the Boba Fett and Remic Xon are locked in a deadly dance of death. He senses something of Mandalorian honor in the fight between the two. Likewise, Hakua the Wookiee has just thrown Bossk, the wounded Trandoshan bounty hunter, bouncing across the hot sand and is staying close to Remic. Zan Deth is moving in on that battle too.

Daxam shoots a human gangster with his blaster and takes out the icky green-skinned and mean mugged Barabel with his blue lightsaber. He sees a reptilian alien in a long black robe and a dozen black-haired braids draping down his back, standing on a castle tower, overseeing the fighting. He senses amusement and anger radiating through the Force from the Falleen sector chief. Overhead, a dozen TIE Fighters attack Star Storm Squadron.

"This is getting out of hand." Daxam hears Talien, the younger scout trooper, say into his private comlink channel.

"Just get out of here." Daxam commands. "That's an order. I have things under control."

"Under control?" Talien responds.

"Go!" Daxam shouts with more zest than intended.

"Yes, Admiral." Talien says with a fire in his voice.

Daxam notices some of the bounty hunters are retreating. Zuckuss, 4-LOM, and Dengar. Bossk appears to be dead or unconscious.

"DR-1974! Look what you've done!" A stormtrooper shouts while firing his blaster at Daxam.

Daxam deflects the blaster bolts with his lightsaber. He recognizes the voice of his former superior Pirin. He thinks he must be out for revenge if he armored up and came to the surface in person.

"Traitor!" The stormtrooper shouts at him, and Daxam recognizes the voice as TT-1145. Even through their vocalizers, he knows their voices. They were all friends once. Or were they only fellow soldiers?

Daxam will think back to this fight and remember everything even though it's a jumble of havoc, damage, and death now. He inhales, feeling the Force flow through him. Is he a Jedi? Aurra Sing attacks with her lightsaber again. She was momentarily distracted by the arrival of the Imperials. His thought is at least the Black Sun is more likely to blame the Empire for this attack. He looks up again as he blasts at Aurra Sing, back stepping, and blocks more laser fire. He notices Borum Koth is no longer on the tower.

Daxam realizes the Imperials can't tell his soldiers from the Black Sun, so they are shooting at everyone. Over had the TIE Fighters dogfight as the two legged armored AT-ST's fire their tubolasers skyward.

"Follow me!" Daxam orders Remic Xon, Zan Deth, and Hakua. They do as they are ordered running out of the castle grounds. Hakua has recovered his speeder bike. Daxam jumps on the back of the bike as they speed away leaving a whirlwind of sand behind them. The pair of Mandalorians fly away with their jet packs. Boba Fett and the other bounty hunters have vanished.

"The shuttle is loaded." Drixle says into the assault teams comlinks.

The ground behind Borum Koth's castle opens up. At first it seems an planet quake but the sand slides off underground hangar doors and a dozen R-41 Starchaser fly out and the TIE Fighters continue to fight and Daxam's Star Storm Squadron try to exit without casualties. Cial Dasu watches it all as her TIE loops around a volley of laser bolts.

"TIE Bombers coming in," Cial says into her comlink as she watches their sudden appearance on the horizon. "Koth is launching two dozen starfighters." She watches as a dozen Kihraxz Assault Fighters follow the Starchasers. "I think the bombers are going to blow the castle."

"Star Storm get out of there. Let the Empire and the Black Sun fight it out." Daxam orders into the comlink.

"Affirmative." Cial answers. "Pull out Star Storm!"

"Shuttles lifting off." Drixle says over the com.

"Imps and Suns pursuing." Cial says into the com. "Four of each."

The ground trembles as the TIE Bombers destroy the castle of Borum Koth. The explosions send up black mushroom plumes of smoke. People from the nearby Mos Gamos see the black line in the sky and the fire works of the starfighters.

"We are leaving the atmosphere." Cial reports into her the comlink. "Still eight bogies in pursuit."

"We'll be joining you shortly." Daxam says as he stands with Hakua and Remic looking at an ARC-170 Starfighter. He hands a credit stick to a bald human in a docking bay in Mos Gamos. Another of Daxam's ISB connections. "I coming back for the speeder bike." He says to the man who nods nervously.

"On our way too." Kire says into the com.

"Star Destroyers." Gleek says into the com.

"No surprise." Daxam says as he climbs into the cockpit of the Clone Wars era starfighter. "This is a beauty."

"It is a good war ship." Remic says as he climbs into the co-pilot's seat and the Wookiee roars something as he sits in the gunner's chair. "No astromech." He points out the empty droid socket.

"We'll hook up echo once we're space bound." Daxam nods.

Daxam pilots the three man starfighter into the dogfight. He takes a quick assessment of the situation. Seven of his TIE Fighters. Four Imperial TIEs. Three R-41 Starchasers and a single Y-wing. He sees four A-wings and a Z-95 Headhunter come out of the Solar Dreamer to join the fight. He takes note of the Star Destroyers the Eternity and the Malignant as well as an unknown Interdictor. "Tractor beam as many of the enemy starfighters as you can, Cinder." Daxam says in the comlink as he flies into the thick of the space dogfight.

"Yes, Admiral." Cinder reports to the com.

"You're Blockade Runner has a tractor beam?" Remic sounds impressed.

"I like the feel of flying this beast." Daxam smiles as he opens fire on the enemy TIE Fighters.

"A dozen TIE Interceptors have just launched from one of the Star Destroyers." Gleek announces over the com.

"Is that you, traitor!" Admiral Pirin shouts into the open com channel to Daxam in the larger ARC-170. His TIE Fighter flies by firing. A laser his.

"Shields holding." Remic says.

Pirin's TIE swoops back around for another shot at the ARC-170. "He's locked on us." Remic says.

Hakua fires the funds but Pirin has been fighting since the Clone Wars. He spins avoiding Hakua's attack and continues to fire.

"I can't shake him." Daxam says in a calm voice, letting the Force flow into him and take the controls of the big starfighter.

Admiral Pirin's TIE-fighter explodes. Arc Haband flies next to him in one of the A-wings. "Looked liked you needed an assist." He says over the com.

Another A-wing flies escort on his other side. "In a starfighter like that you need an assist?" Vinge chuckles into the com.

"We need something to get pass the Interdictor." Daxam says into the Star Storm com channel. An Interdictor-class Star Destroyer has a gravity well that prevents ships from entering hyperspace.

"Everyone get out of here. Meet at the rendezvous point." Daxam says into the com. "Bring in the TIEs without hyperdrives, Gleek."

"Yes, Admiral." Gleek says.

"What are we doing?" Remic asks as the ARC-170 Starfighter turns toward the Interdictor.

"Attacking." Daxam smirks.

Hakua rumbles.

"It's crazy." Daxam agrees with the eh Wookie. "But it gets everyone else out of here so open up with those guns as soon as we're within range."

The Y-wing flies next to them firing at the Interdictor Star Destroyer with them. "Thanks, Kire. Now get out of here." Daxam orders.

"They have us in the gravity well." Remic tells Daxam, referring to the Interdictor.

"Look at that." Daxam smiles.

The Solar Dreamer and Star Storm Squadron vanish into hyperspace.

"You are an honorable man." Remic says.

Hakua warbles to them.

Remic translates. "He says he owes you a life debt."

"I know." Daxam says.

"We're caught in the tractor beam of that Super-class Star Destroyer instead of the Interdictor." Remic says.

"The Eternity." Daxam sounds grim. "I served the Empire on that ship for three years."

Kator Ekin comes out of hyperspace in the Carlac System on the Outer Rim. The planet Carlac is a small pale blue and white sphere in the distance. This is the emergency vector. This is the planet Admiral Rad chose for the rendezvous if everything turned to Sith spit, which it did.

The Zabrak bounty hunter watches as four A-wing Starfighters and a Y-wing blink out of hyperspace near him.

"Kator?" Kire Tatus says from her ship's com.

Kator says into his com to the others. "Yeah. It's me. Rad underestimated Borum Koth or he stirred the Black Sun's hornet's nest intentionally. The objective was a success. The extraction of the slaves. The wild card was the intervention of the Empire."

"I follow orders." Kire defends. "I've come to trust Admiral Rad."

"The Empire is becoming a thorn in our foot." Kator Ekin growls into the com as the Solar Dreamer comes out of hyperspace.

"I thought you were more loyal to Daxam than that." Kire accuses over the open com channel. All the crew present are listening. There is a moment of silence before the veteran bounty hunter responds.

"I like Rad." Kator sighs. "He's a good man. He pays well. I'm only concerned about the bathna fodder we seem to be in. I have survival instincts."

Gleek speaks over the com to everyone. "We will follow the Admiral's orders and remain here for ten standard days. We all agreed to the rules."

Talien Falconer pipes in the com channel. "This is your Lieutenant. I'm in charge until the Admiral gets here. Gleek is right. Daxam sacrificed himself to get us to freedom. We owe him the ten standard days. After that, anyone wants to leave I won't argue."

"He's aboard a Star Destroyer!" Kator exasperates. "He's not coming back."

"I've been or king with the Admiral long enough to give him the agreed upon ten standard days." Talien says with a finality in his tone.

"I second that." Ariana speaks into her comlink.

"Agreed." Gleek says from the large cockpit of the Solar Dreamer.

"Bring the starfighters in." Talien orders. "We will give the slaves the same offer Admiral Rad offers all the slaves he frees. Everyone else is free to take R & R on Carlac unless your duties interfere."

"What in space are we going to do on Carlac? It's a snow ball of a world." Kator bites out. "It's no better than the frozen waste world of Hoth."

"It's populated." Talien replies with annoyance. "There are cities on the surface."

"Fine." Kator growls. "I'm going planet side."

"Approved." Talien says.

Inside his Z-95 Headhunter Kator Ekin rolls his eyes.

Daxam looks out the window of the old ARC-170 starfighter. Rows of dozens of white and black armored stormtroopers armed with blasters stand outside on the floor of the Star Destroyers docking bay floor. There are a dozen TIE-Fighters, TIE Interceptors, AT-AT Walkers, a Lambda-class Shuttle, AT-ST Walkers, Speeder Bikes, and a VT-49 Decimator.

"Die fighting?" Remis asks.

"No." Daxam resigns. "We'll figure a way to escape."

Daxam Rad, in full stormtrooper armor; Remic Xon, in his Mandalorian armor, and the tall Wookiee, Hakua climb out of the old massive starfighter. Just as Daxam opens his mouth to speak several stormtroopers blast the trio of renegades.

"I am Captain Thon Wodros." A man dressed in the military garb of an Imperial officer stands on the bridge of the Star Destroyer the Eternity speaking to a hologram of Moff Meka. "I am next in chain of command after the deaths of the Admiral."

"I am Grand Moff Stoen Meka." The hologram says. "The ruler of what remains of the Empire. I official grant you command of that ship. "You will escort Fleet Admiral Roel Brin to the Hoth System. He has your orders. Dig in and build a military presence on the planet."

"Yes, Grand Moff Meka." Captain Wodros salutes. "We will leave immediately."

"Dismissed." Meka says and his hologram blinks off.

Daxam wakes in a detention cell of the Star Destroyer. He rubs his eyes realizing the stormtroopers had their blasters set on stun. It's no the first time he's been stunned before and it's never a pleasant feeling. He looks around the cell. There isn't much to use. He is still in his stormtrooper armor.

After several minutes the detention cell door hisses open and a pair of stormtroopers walk into the room. They both remove their helmets. It's TT-1145 and DN-1996. "Lanse. Barin. Come to torture and kill me yourselves?"

"No." Lanse Duskhunter answers. "Why did you desert?"

"We were like brothers." Barin almost whispers to Daxam.

"First tell me the Mandalorian and the Wookiee are okay." Daxam urges. "Tell me the truth."

"They haven't been interrogated yet." Lanse tells him.

"The data pad you found in my things." He knows the searched him. "Watch it. It's a holo of my parents being killed by Imperials. The Empire I joined and swore an oath to was to be a new order of justice and peace for the people. All we saw of it was injustice and violence. It was corrupt and rotten and you know as much as I do."

"We'll watch the holo." Lanse says.

Both stormtroopers leave the cell.

Daxam falls asleep waiting for whatever is going to happen, happen.

The door opens. Three armed stormtroopers stand there. "Get up, Daxam." Lanse's voice sounds through the vocalizer of his stormtrooper helmet. "I'm escorting you off this Star Destroyer. Months ask questions. There is no time. The Eternity will be entering hyperspace soon. If that happens you're not escaping."

"Understood."

"We're bringing your alien friends with." Barin says.

A short time later they are in the docking bay with the ARC-170. "This is XM-1947. Strom Vedes." Lanse orders. "We're taking that." He indicates the Decimator.

"Good." Daxam smiles beneath his helmet. "We need an astromech in the ARC-170."

"We're not taking the ARC-170. We're taking the Decimator." Barin growls.

"Put XM-1947 in the starfighter with the Wookiee and Mandalorian. I'll ride in the Decimator with you two."

Lanse groans. "Fine."

"You're letting him call the shots?"

"We're joining his organization aren't we?" Lanse asks.

"Are you?" Daxam chuckles. "If that's the case lets load up some of those speeder bikes. I assume the ISB's fully stocked the Decimator?"

"That's right." Lanse says.

"Here's your droid." Barin snaps as an astromech rolls in. He ordered it quietly on his comlink as soon as Daxam asked for it. They have high level security clearance. Clearance enough to clear out the docking bay and get approval to launch from the Star Destroyer.

Within fifteen minutes they are in hyperspace heading for the Carlac System.

Kana San stands in his red robes and armor watching the Decimator and three man starfighter leave the Eternity's docking bay moments before the Star Destroyer enters hyperspace for the Hoth System. No one else is present. DN-1996 had the area cleared. Both he and stormtrooper TT-1145 are high ranking ISB agents. They can call shots like this. If Admiral Pirin were still alone he would question it, no doubt.

The Imperial Royal Guard had undying, unquestioning loyalty to the Emperor. The Emperor is dead. His Empire is falling apart. Kana San does not have faith in Grand Moff Meka or any of the Imperials he gathered to rise to the occasion and bring Palpatine's dream of a new galactic order back to life. He does not deny his feelings. He mourns the Emperor. He feels sorrow at the defeat of the Empire. He is disgusted by the Alliance.

Force pike in his grip, Kana walks away with his crimson robes rustling silently. The time for mourning is at an end. It is time for dedication to a new mission. Emperor Palpatine was a Sith Lord. Darth Sidious. Darth Vader was also a Dark Lord of Sith. Also deceased. Kana San has been working regularly with the Sith Holocron of Exar Kun. Kana's Force skills are sharpening and expanding. In meditation he has made contact with the spirit of the long dead Exar Kun. Exar Kun's remains are on the moon Yavin 4 but the spirit knows no bounds.

He walks the sterile, grey and metallic halls of the Star Destroyer. Other Imperials stay out of his way. He sense their fear through the Force. He enjoys the power. It is time he complete his training as a Sith warrior. With the teachings of Exar Kun he will become a Sith Lord. He will initiate a new Sith order to create a new Sith Empire. No more hiding behind galactic politics. In the name of Darth Sidious this new empire will rise.

Back in his private quarters he sits at a computer console and accesses Imperial Security Bureau's encrypted files. The bounties on Daxam Rad and Talien Falconer have been lifted by Grand Moff Meka. This makes sense to Kana. He reads that the Black Sun has put a bounty out on the head of Daxam Rad. He failed to convince Borum Koth it was an Imperial raid. Kana realizes this must mean the Black Sun or

Borum Koth have at least one spy aboard either the Eternity or the Malignant. More likely the Eternity he decides.

The Royal Guard packs sparsely. He draws a lightsaber from beneath his robes and it ignites with a snap-hiss. The blade is as blood red as his robes. He admires the elegant weapon. Pressing the button on the lightsaber the laser blade vanishes.

Not long later Kana San is aboard a modified Decimator, like the one Daxam escaped in. This Decimator is modified to carry Kana's TIE Interceptor on the underside. Another modification is a bacta tank inside the starship. He also brings a black R5 series astromech and many supplies. He feels the irony. He is stealing and leaving much like the Imperial agent Rad did.

Aboard the Decimator in hyperspace heading for the Carlac System, Daxam sits on the bridge of the starship with his former friends and fellow troopers Barin Ander and Lanse Duskhunter. Daxam has just finished tell g them everything he's been up to since the Battle of Endor.

"We began to feel uncomfortable with the actions of the Empire after the slaughter of aliens on Coruscant. There was no reason to believe they were rebels. They weren't." Lanse speaks quietly. "We were ordered to kill everyone. Old and young. Deep beneath the spires of Imperial Center."

"We both missed every shot on purpose." Barin nods. "So did Strom."

Lanse nods agreement. "We were investigated. If Pirin hadn't received word you were on Tatooine we would have been reprimanded."

"You know the deal." Daxam smiles. "Join my crew and follow my orders. We are freedom fighters."

"We're joining." Lanse looks out at the star lines before him.

"Strom?" Daxam asks.

"He's in." Barin comments.

"Good." Daxam grins. "I'd like to set up a small headquarters on Carlac. This Decimator and the ARC-170 are now a part of the Solar Dreamer fleet. After that we'll be smuggling. If we find slaves, we free them."

"What are you, some kind of freedom fighters?" Barin asks.

"Rebels?" Lanse arches an eyebrow.

"No." Daxam looks thoughtful. "We are guardians of peace and justice."

"The Solar Dreamer." Lanse now looks just as thoughtful. "The dream of a sun."

"Solar guardians of peace and justice." Barin chuckles.

On the snowy planet of Carlac the crew of the Solar Dreamer is in the process of constructing a small outpost with storage, living quarters, repair facilities, medical facilities, weaponry, and recreational areas. The new and secrets headquarters of the Solar Dreamer space pirate crew. None of the freed slave have left the group yet, but several Twi'lek have asked to be returned to Ryloth, which the Admiral has agreed to do once they finish the small base. Everyone does their part. The Solar Dreamer is in a distant, inconspicuous orbit. The Lambda-class Shuttle, the Imperial Decimator, a Y-wing, and the ARC-170 are parked in the snow. The inhabitants of the world are unaware of the space pirates moving in.

Daxam and Kator stand on a snowy hill overlooking the bases construction. Daxam asked the Zabrak to take a walk with him. They stand in silence looking out at the other working crew members. Mist drifts from their mouths against the cold as Daxam breaks the silence and they speak. "I've been told you're not happy." Daxam looks Kator in the eye.

Kator chuckles. "Who told you that? Kire? Talien? I suppose it doesn't matter."

"How can I help?" Daxam asks.

Kator shakes his head. "How were you a stormtrooper? You're too kriffing soft."

"I care about my crew. I believe in my mission. I think of you as a friend."

Kator sighs. "You are such an idealist it's naive."

Daxam gives the older Zabrak bounty hunter a patient look.

"Fine." Kator mumbles. "The Sullustan bounty hunter used to be a partner. It felt wrong to betray him."

"I see." Daxam nods in understanding. "Any chance he would come work with us?"

Kator laughs. "No. Stig is scum. A real scoundrel. He's a criminal and wants to be."

"I see." Daxam rubs his chin, thoughtful.

"Now the Black Sun has a bounty on you. Just you, none of the rest of us." Kator says.

"You're free to leave." Daxam points out.

Kator sighs. "No. I want to stay on. You pay well. I would like to take my Headhunter back home to Dathomir to check on things."

"That's fine." Daxam gives a tiny smile. "Will you be coming back?"

Kator gives Daxam a measuring look. "Yes. Maybe some of your goodness will rub off on me."

"I sense something more?"

"I don't like Jedi." Kator admits. "They killed my tribe of Night Brothers when I was a child. Before the Clone Wars. The survivors were killed by the Empire years later. I was still young then."

"I see." Daxam says. "I empathize with that. You know my family was killed by the Empire."

Kator nods, a look of regret on his face. "We all suffer in some way."

"There are bad things in the galaxy, evil, the dark side of the Force. There are good things too. Things worth fighting for and preserving."

Kator nods.

"If you are returning from Dathomir I have a new assignment for you when you get back." Daxam says.

"What's that?"

"You're are only bounty hunter. A good one at that." Daxam pats Kator on the shoulder. "I'd like you to take on Troel Earta and Roo as apprentices. Teach them how to be bounty hunters."

"A Bith and a Bimm." Kator laughs.

"Yes."

"Alright." Kator says. "Give me two standard weeks."

Daxam nods. "We'll be smuggling for Ouro. I'll leave Troel, Roo, and some others to maintain our base of operations here on Carlac. Let me know when you're back?"

"I will." Kator nods.

A moment of quiet.

"I better get down there and supervise things." Daxam says and starts down the snowy hill.

"Daxam."

The Bakuran looks back at the Zabrak bounty hunter.

"Thank you, Admiral." Kator says.

Kator Ekin's Z-95 Headhunter pulls out of hyperspace near his home world Dathomir. He doesn't need the computer to navigate for him. He knows his way around this world. A few minutes later he is burning through the atmosphere over a blood red jungle.

He lands the starfighter in a clearing of the scarlet jungle. Climbs out and looks around. This is a dangerous jungle. The wild life is dangerous. He makes his way through a little used path, pushing back brush, having no choice but to leave a trail at times. Until he arrives at a cave at sunset. A fire flickers from inside the cave. The Zabrak steps inside.

A very old woman with white wispy hair and milky eyes sits before a fire. A stew burns on a cauldron. She smiles at the sight of the bounty hunter. A thousand wrinkles. "I knew you were coming." The old woman says.

"Hello, grandmother." Kator says to the witch. She is truly his great grandmother. They are the last of two tribes. One of Night Sisters and one of Night Brothers.

"You have found a Jedi." She sits back with a bowl of steaming stew. "Eat."

Kator dishes himself a bowl of stew. "He feels like an anomaly in the Force. I don't know how he learned to use the Force. He built a lightsaber. When he worked for the Empire I could feel the dark side within him. It's gone now."

"You are angry." She cackles.

He says nothing.

"Take this." Her skinny fingers hold out a Holocron.

Kator eyes it with fascination. Takes it. "A Holocron."

"A Sith Holocron." Grandmother Triva grins. "One of our people. Activate it. Meet your new teacher."

Kator is surprised. He holds the gem in his hand and focuses on it. After several moments it glows and a figure appears in the cloaked shadows. He looks around. His face hidden beneath the black hood. Only yellow burning eyes visible.

"This is your new apprentice." The old Dathomir witch Triva croaks at the dark figure.

"Kneel." The voice whispers.

Kator looks at his grandmother and back at the man of shadows and smirks.

The cloaked figure slips a metallic cylinder from its robes and there is a double snap-hiss. A double bladed lightsaber. The laser blades glowing bright red. "Kneel."

The figure shuts off the lightsaber, steps forward, and pushes back his hood. He is a mean looking Zabrak with all his skin tattooed in red and black designs. Kator hesitates and not only kneels but bows his head. "I am Darth Maul." The hologram says. "I am your teacher. I am your master."

"Yes, my master." Kator answers in his gruff voice.

"Rise, Darth Wrath." Darth Maul whispers.

The ancient Night Sister Triva cackles with delight.

Kator stands.

"Return to your Jedi, grandson." Triva hisses. "Watch him. Learn from him."

"The ways of the Sith is silent." Darth Maul whispers.

"One day you will face the Jedi Knight Daxam Rad." Triva says. "It is time for patience."

Some months later Admiral Daxam Rad is sitting in the command bridge of the Solar Dreamer. Gleek, Ariana, Cinder, Echo, and the Mandalorians are with him. They've just finished smuggling glitterstim and death sticks for Ouro the Hutt. "I'm sorry it's taken so long." Daxam says. "I've had Echo set a hyperdrive course for Naboo."

"We're glad for it." Zan Deth comments.

"We'll distant orbit. Talien will take the Death Wolf down to the surface. Lanse will bring the Grey Bird down." Talien has been assigned commander of the Decimator. He named it the Grey Wolf. He named the shuttle the Grey Bird. "Kire in her Y-wing and the four A-wings."

"Good." Zan says. "We are ready."

Kator storms into the bridge. "What in space are we smuggling?" He barks.

"A bantha herd." Daxam grins.

"That's what is smells like down in storage." Kator grumbles.

Everyone chuckles.

Daxam gets serious again. "What are we expecting on Naboo?"

"Your old friends." Zan Deth says. "The Black Sun."

"Wonderful." Kator hisses.

The Grey Wolf (Imperial Decimator): Talien Falconer, Stinger, Dinger, Drixle, Remic Xon, Usha Dasu

The Grey Bird (Imperial Shuttle): Daxam Rad, Zan Deth, Cinder, Echo, Cial Dasu, Vull Arton, B'lak Lomok

Y-wing: Kire Tatus, R5 Astromech

Four A-wings: Arc Haband, Vinge Xangel, Laris Oth, Cyf Whitesun

Two Z-95 Headhunters: Kator Ekin, Troel Earta

TIE Fighter: Roo

Seated in the Grey Bird, Admiral Rad is in the pilot's chair. The human slave freed from Borum Koth, Vull Arton. Echo is plugged into the shuttles computer system. The rest sit in the back together.

"What planet do you come from?" Daxam asks Vull. This is the first time they've flown together.

"Monor II, Admiral." Vull answers. "The Mid Rim."

"How did you end up at Mos Gamos?" Daxam inquires of his new employee.

"On a holiday transport. I was on vacation with my family when Black Sun pirates took the luxury yacht." Vull answers with a stone voice. "Many were killed."

"Your family?" Daxam asks.

Vull looks away from the Admiral, out at the stars of the Naboo System. "She was sold before you came and freed us. As was my daughter."

"Their names?"

"Fana and Propa." Vull answers.

"We will find her when this mission is over." Daxam promises.

"Unidentified starships, this is Naboo Security Force." A military voice sounds over the com of the Grey Bird.

"I am Shazam Marvel. This is the Grey Bird. The Decimator is registered as the Grey Wolf is my partner Talien. The starfighters are my pilots as well."

"What is your purpose for visiting Naboo?" The voice asks.

"Vacation." Daxam answers. "We need some rest."

"Where are you coming from?" The voice asks.

"Corellia." Daxam lies.

There is several minutes of radio silence.

"What is your port of destination?" The voice asks with no emotion.

"Blue Vein City." Daxam says.

"The Blue Vein is a war zone, sir. Gungans and Neimodians. Not a safe port."

"Even people at war need food and medical supplies. The citizens. I'm not here for the soldiers." Daxam explains.

"We are transmitting your landing coordinates to the perimeter of Blue Vein City, Grey Bird." The voice says.

"Thank you." Daxam says and clicks the com off.

"Finally here." The Mandalorian Zan Deth says behind Vull and Daxam.

Arc Haband the Duros pilot says on their private channel, "I don't get along with Neimodians." His A-wing flies in formation with the other three. Between the Decimator and Shuttle.

"He'll be cool as ice, Admiral." Vinge grins into his comlink from one of the A-wings.

"Admiral, Neimodians and Duros were once one people, but as they colonized the galaxy they split between two philosophies of life. Opposing philosophies." Cinder says to Daxam with their com mute. "The Neimodians were significant participants in the Clone Wars."

"Anything that has two Mandalorian warriors worried has me worried." Roo squeaks into his com from a TIE Fighter flying rearguard.

When they land at the Blue Vein space port there are a dozen yellow and silver N-1 Naboo Starfighters. A few freighters of various designs. A pair of X-wings. "Look at those old beauties." Remic Xon says, admiring the N-1 Starfighters.

Kire stands at the wide, tall hangar door letting the sun warm her. "Not as beautiful as that." Kire looks out at a lush forest next to a flowing river and mountains beyond. The city of Blue Vein is nestled along, hidden by the forest and mountains. "It's hard to believe there is a was going on here."

"I wouldn't mind living in a lace like this some day." Cyf Whitesun comments, looking out at the same view at Kire Tatus.

"They're at war." The wolf man Laris snarls.

Daxam speaks to everyone. "Drixle. I want you staying at the hangar here guarding the ships with the droids. Stay the Grey Wolf. Cinder and Echo in the shuttle. Doors locked. Be ready to come on the drop of a credit coin if I call for assist."

"Yes, sir, Admiral Rad." Drixle says in broken Basic. Daxam can sense his pride at being trusted with the responsibility.

A pair of human security officers in maroon and black uniforms eye Daxam's crew with suspicion, but go about their business. Daxam gives them a respectful nod then continues giving orders. Quieter. "Star Storm Squadron take a walk around. Stretch your legs. I need you flying perimeter in two standard hours. The rest of us will be riding in on bikes."

It doesn't take long for the crew to unload six Imperial speeder bikes and a pair of swoops Daxam bought in Mos Eisley. The Mandalorians ride the swoops.

Drixle grins with his nose hanging over his mouth as he watches the eight vehicles speed away and vanish at incredible speed. "Maybe I should ride one of those." He chuckles.

"I will suggest it to Admiral Rad." The black protocol droid says.

"Eh. Maybe." Drixle says. His small wings buzzing, keeping him about a meter off the floor. "Let's go play some Dejarik, my friend."

"Oh," Cinder says. "Echo R3 is a much better player than I am."

Drixle shrugs. "Want to play me?" The Toydarian winks down at the astromech.

Echo R3 whistles back an affirmative. The yellow R3 unit Dinger whistles a response. The Imperial probe droid, stinger hovers protectively behind it. Cinder translates. "Dinger challenges the winner."

"That's more like it." Drixle chuckles as he makes his way to the Decimator Grey Wolf with the four droids in tow.

"The Blue Vein is a relatively new port city." Zan Deth says. The eight crew sit on their bikes on a grassy hilltop overlooking the hustling, sprawling city. "Named for the river. Founded by human and Gungan alliance. The problems began when a group of Neimodians moved in. My resources tell me they are Black Sun. They've taken over the city. Naboo security forces don't come to the city. It's owned by the Black Sun Neimodians now. Only the Gungans fight back."

A trio of Gungan Warriors stand silent near Zan. Their expressions somber. Their ear fins drooping. "We are for thanking you for returning, Mandalorians, sir."

"These are the Gungan leaders. Craven Rana. Spanner Jor. Zerep Qaha."

"So we're here to dispense a little justice." Cyf Whitesun grins, resting his hand on a holstered blaster.

The veteran Mandalorian warrior gives a subtle nod and removes his helmet. Tears wet his eyes. "They have taken my wife Ember and my son Amar."

Daxam nods and speaks. "We will be moving in fast. His family is being held hostage. Our primary objective is to get Zan's family out safely. The Black Sun sector chief is a Neimodian named Baal Phonon. His chief enforcer is an Aqualish named Wisatt." Daxam holds out a data pad that projects a hologram of both the Black Sun Neimodian and Aqualish. "They've hired on Aqualish and Quarren mercenaries to fight the Gungans in the water."

"The Black Sun has a bounty on you now." Usha says, her headtails moving over her shoulders.

"The Imperial bounty didn't stop us." Talien comments with a grim look.

"Oh, by the stars." Usha's sister Cial moans. "Admiral I thought we were enemies of the Empire. Not the Black Sun. Either one is bad, bad news."

Daxam clenches his jaw and says, "I didn't plan on any of this. I want to do what's right and be the best person I can be. Zan and Remic are our friends."

"I know." Cial nods. "I want to help. I just don't like odds."

Daxam nods. "Star Storm will assault the compound as a distraction. We'll move in with the bees and get Zan family out. We're not here to join the local war." His data pad shows a hologram of the

compound that is Baal Phonon's base. It zooms in showing a map of the interior no the room in which the hostages are expected to be.

"Baal is an old Neimodian. He's been hiding out on Naboo since the clone wars." Zan Deth grunts.

"How did we not come here right away if they have Zan's family?" Talien asks with a hint of outrage.

"They didn't have his family until a few days ago." Remic Xon tells him calmly. "We didn't come here for war. We came here to retire."

"I came here to retire." Zan says. "My friend, Remic, came here for love."

Daxam senses Remic's emotions as distraught as Zan Deth's. He sense anger from Talien as well and fear from Usha.

Remic nods. His face hidden behind his armor helmet. "Sia Amidala. My fiancé."

"Amidala?" Talien arches an eyebrow. "Why does that name sound familiar?"

"She is related to former Senator Amidala of the Clone Wars." Daxam answers. "Her niece, I believe."

"Me, sir, think there is more to the story, yes." The oldest Gungan with aged spotted amphibious skin says.

Zan Deth tells the tale. "During the Jedi purge at the end of the Clone Wars, the Gungans hid a Jedi here. They protected the Jedi. Over time the Jedi went insane. A dark Jedi now. The Black Sun want the dark Jedi. They want to take the Gungans as slaves. They want to use the Blue Veins as a port for their criminal activities. They've been successful thus far."

"A Jedi?" Daxam wonders out loud.

"Dria Ihrke." The Gungan warrior Spanner says. "She is a Weequay. She is unstoppable."

"We have our own Jedi." Talien smiles at Daxam.

The human Vull Arton, freed from Koth's slavery, speaks up. "Why the assault? Why not sneak in and sneak the hostages out."

The Mandalorians and the Gungans seem to stand straighter and grip their weapons tighter at th question.

Daxam answers. "We're freeing more than the hostages. We're freeing the Gungans and taking out this Black Sun sector chief for good."

A male Twi'lek with blue skins and sharp teeth answers while petting one of his two head tails. He was freed Lang with Vull and all the slaves of Borum Koth back on Tatooine. His name is B'Lak Lamok, a leader among his people. "You are good at making powerful enemies, Admiral Rad. You are also good at making friends. You saved my people. I feel it my duty to help free the Gungans. It is an honor."

The three Gungans all nod thanks.

"I have Duskhunter negotiating with Naboo's security forces. I'm hoping they will join us, but we can't count on it." Daxam tells everyone. "It's time for the assault." He pulls out a comlink from a dark pocket. "Star Storm Leader initiate attack."

"Acknowledged." Arc Haband answers through the comlink.

Daxam revs up his speeder bike. "Let move out."

Eight starfighters led by Arc Haband in his A-wing fly by the Black Sun strong hold in the center of the city and lay down laser fire. A concussion missile from Kire's Y-wing blows a wall open surrounding the complex as she flies by. Her astromech tweets a cheer. The six speeder bikes and two swoops zoom in with their blasters firing at all the guards and thugs. Three dozen Gungan Warriors charge in led by Spanner, Craven, and Zerep.

"Into the main building!" Daxam shouts. The Mandalorians and Talien follow Daxam inside the duristeel compound.

"It's a trap!" Arc shouts into his com. "We have two dozen Starchasers and Kihraxz starfighters approaching. Looks like Borum Koth's mercs."

"Continue on." Daxam says calmly bring his speeder bike to a rest with the others. On a balcony above them stands the scaly reptilian Fallen known as Borum Koth. At his side the old Neimodian Baal Phonon. His thick, muscular Aqualish enforcer, Wisart. The Sullustan cousins Stig and Surg. A very old Weequay woman in dirty brown and tan robes, her hair a mess of thin braids. Between them bound by their wrists are Zan Deth's wife and son. Zan Deth's wife kisses Borum Koth on the cheek. He grins, whispers something to her, and let's his arm draped over her shoulders. She is a victim of Falleen emotion controlling pheromones.

"Welcome." Borum announces as dozens of Neimodian, human, Quarren, Aqualish, and Gamorreans circle around Daxam, Talien, Zan, and Remic. "You, Admiral Rad, have caused me much hardship no many credits. You've tarnished my reputation."

In the comlink Daxam hears, "This is Captain Ion of Naboo's security force. We are here to help."

"Much appreciated, Captain." They hear Arc say outside. A dozen N-1 starfighters join the dogfight outside. Everyone can here the whine of passing starfighters and laser fire.

"You will die today." Zan Deth snarls. His jet pack ignites, launching him off the speeder bike and up at the balcony.

Daxam's green lightsaber in hinges with a snap-hiss. The surround thugs attack with blaster fire. Daxam bats dozens of bolts away, taking out merc after merc. Talien and Remic begin circling, opening fire with their speeder bike's turbo lasers.

Wisart the big Aqualish attacks Zan. Zan flips him over the edge of the balcony. Stig and Surg attack him. Zan defeats them both, throwing them off the balcony. Baal backs away, fear evident on his face.

"I love you!" Ember screams at the Falleen who gives Zan a taunting grin as she embraces him. "Give up. You can't win."

Zan Deth's blaster bolt takes Borum square in the face. The reptilian alien had no time to react. He falls back onto the floor of the balcony with his face black and smoking.

Ember presses her body against her armored husband sobbing. He son stands with his had down, ashamed at being a prisoner. Zan squeezes his son's shoulder. The Neimodian flees out the back of the balcony.

"More Black Sun starfighters." Arc says over the comlink. "We're getting pounded out here."

"Drixle." Daxam says into his comlink while continuing to deflect blaster bolts. "Bring in both ships." The number of thugs, guards, and mercs is beginning to dwindle.

"On it." The Toydarian croaks into the com.

Suddenly the blaster bolt of a Quarren hits Remic's speeder bike. He dives and rolls as it explodes.

A concussion grenade goes off deepening everyone and knocking Talien off his speeder bike. Stig and Surg begin shooting at Talien. He shoots back.

The huge Aqualish dives at Daxam catching him by the waist. As both Daxam and Wisart hit the floor, Daxam cusses under his breath for not sensing the attack. He drops his lightsaber as they wrestle. Wisart. Is stronger than Daxam, overpowering the Jedi.

With a double snap-hiss on the balcony the old Weequay Jedi woman ignites two lightsabers. One in each hand. Both glow red. Ember screams at the sight of a crimson-white laser blade sticking through the Mandalorian's armor. Zan Deth drops to his knees. His last act is to raise a blaster in each hand firing at the dark Jedi, but Dria Ihrke easily block both attacks.

"No!" The young Amar Deth swings his bound hands as one fist attempting to hit his father's killer.

The rust and wrinkled skin of Dria seems to fake off as she dodges the young Mandalorian's attack, using the Force to push him off the balcony and across the large room. With her other hand her red lightsaber cuts down Ember Deth.

With that the dark Jedi leaps off the balcony and lands gracefully before Talien. Talien sees he, but fighting the Sullustan cousins he is quick enough to evade the old Weequay woman. One laser blade severs Talien's leg at the thigh, the other his arm at the elbow. Talien gasps in pain and shock before collapsing hard onto the floor. The Sullustans laugh and open fire on Remic Xon.

Remic has just finished with the Quarren and many of the thugs are fleeing. The building shakes from blaster fire. It sounds like war outside the compound.

Using the Force Daxam shoves the Aqualish away and back up to the balcony were the alien vanishes in smoke and haze.

The Weequay reminds Daxam of an ugly witch as she strolls arrogantly toward him with both her lightsaber a ready. Daxam holds his blue-white lightsaber out defensively. He shouts to Remic. "Get everyone out of here. This is Jedi business." There is no room for debate in Daxam's voice.

Remic nods loading both the unconscious Amar and Talien onto a speeder bike. "I'll come back."

Daxam is preoccupied with fending off the dark Jedi woman. Her thin black braids spin about as she attacks relentlessly. He is sweating. It takes all of his concentration to keep up with her. She is skilled with lightsabers. More so than Daxam. Her appearance is frightening. He sense the Force is strong in her. He senses the dark side. It reminds him of Exar Kun. Daxam doesn't know that he can defeat this woman.

A few thugs watch from hidden places. None have seen a Jedi before.

"Jedi." She hisses. "I am Jedi. You are nothing."

Daxam does respond but continues to fight hard.

Dria uses the Force to begin sending pebbles and junk from around the compound to attack him. She is creating a wind with the Force, sending dozens of projectiles at him. A piece of shrapnel impales his hip. Daxam grits his teeth against the pain. He has drowned out all the fighting out in the city and the starfighters overhead.

There is nothing but Daxam, this withered woman, and the Force. Her eyes glow a fiery yellow. Her leathery skin is cracked. Permanent scowl lines mark her face.

Daxam stops thinking. The Force guides his actions. He is one with the Force. There is no Daxam. Not the Force. He begins to have visions. Feeling hollow sorrow at the vision of the Weequay witch killing her own apprentice. He senses life all about the city. The water. The plants. The world alive. A glimpse of two Jedi fighting a Sith warrior. A Zabrak with black and red tattoos covering him. He seems his family on Bakura as a child. He sees his grandparents even though he never met them. He sees them as Jedi.

With a graceful flick of his wrist he knocks one of Dria's lightsabers from her grasp and it clatters to the floor. She cackles loudly and disarms him with her remaining lightsaber. Then with her hand she reaches out and uses the telekinesis of the Force to strangle Daxam. He coughs and chokes. Using the Force he moves both his lightsaber and hers with his mind. The red one blocks her killing stroke. The other sets her on the offensive and she loses concentration, releasing Daxam from her Force grip.

Daxam staggers backward. She uses the Force to push him off balance and he falls but concentrates. The two lightsabers spin through the air attack her. One burns her shoulder and she screams in rages. A bomb shakes the compound and the ceiling starts to collapse. Large chunks of durasteel and debris fall between them. The dark Jedi uses the opportunity to leap to the balcony and escape.

Daxam uses the Force to pull both lightsabers, ignites and hurls them to his open hands. He leaps up to the balcony, the Force lifting him and he chases her out the back. The same way the brutish Aqualish must have escaped. He makes it to the backside of the balcony which is open to the outdoors. He makes it just in time to witness the ceiling of the compound collapse and the Weequay Jedi escaping in a Starchaser starfighter.

In the air more Naboo starfighters fly in. More Gungan warriors climb out of the Blue Vein River. And it's over. Daxam pushes the switch on both lightsabers, turning them off. He watches as the N-1 starfighters and Star Storm Squadron chase off the last of the Black Sun starfighters. Looking out over the city plumes of smoke rise everywhere. They have won. But Daxam doesn't feel like they have won.

Daxam is escorted lane by a pair of Naboo Security Force Officers. A male no a female in deep orange and pale tan uniforms with blasters holstered on their hips. They are silent with non-threatening demeanor and well trained soldier's posture. They are in the capital city Theed, inside the Royal Palace. However, Daxam has a feeling they are not here to see the Queen. Back in Blue Vein City the Security Force requested he meet an agent discretely and politely. Having serve as an intelligence agent in the past Daxam understood and agreed to come along against the protests of the other Solar Guardians.

The Bakuran ex-stormtrooper gazes up at the murals on the tall walls of the long, wide halls. Peaceful, gorgeous landscapes and nature scenes. The floor is hard, smooth, and polished. An elegant palace. Old aristocrats. Old nobility. Reminds him somewhat of his childhood on Bakura.

The officers bring his to a pair of tall red-orange doors and stop. Th take up stoic sentinel positions on either side of the doors. The female says with no hint of emotion, "Go inside. You are expected."

Daxam holds back his smile. "Very well. I'll play." He strolls through the doors with a relaxed demeanor and both hands casually resting on the weapons hooked to his belt. A blaster and lightsaber.

The doors slid shut behind him with a blink of speed and quiet hiss. In front of him a woman in white face paint, long dark hair, and an elaborate, expensive dress. She is deep in thought studying a holographic star map hover over the table in front of her. She reaches a hand out pressing a switch n the table and the star system vanishes before Daxam is able to identify it.

He glances around taking everything in. A fine office of some sort. Most likely hers. She gives him a profession smile. "Daxam Rad of Bakura. I have a few friends from your home world."

Daxam shrugs. "I haven't been there in years."

"Nevertheless Naboo owes you our thanks for removing the Black Sun from Blue Vein. Their influences has been causing m headaches. Please, take a seat." She sits at the table across from him, flung her hands in her lap.

Daxam sits. "You're welcome."

"My name is Apolonia. Like you I works for Imperial intelligence before the battle of Endor. My place has always been here on Naboo. Important to the Empire because it was the home world of Emperor Sheev Palpatine." Her movements are graceful.

"I'm not with the Empire anymore."

"Nor am I." Apolonia smiles again. "Nor was I ever content with my Imperial service. Circumstances some times make choices for us in life."

"I can't judge you. I was an Imp."

She almost laughs. "I know a great deal about you, Daxam. You care for a drink?"

"No, thanks."

"I know you are telling me the truth. So much that you are no an enemy of the Empire. I know you and your friends masquerade as space pirates traveling the galaxy freeing slaves and smuggling to worlds in need of food, medical supplies, and generally helping the poor and unfortunate. Apparently you enjoy fighting slavers more than anything."

Daxam doesn't say anything. He hasn't decided what he thinks of her yet.

Apolonia continues. "I understand your mistrust. The Empire still has a small,bounty on you and the Black Sun has a slightly larger one. That is not why you are here. I'm not a bounty hunter. What I am is a string puller. I would like to become a benefactor of the Solar Guardians. Support your cause. Of course this is a complete black ops arrangement. Too many Imperial loyalist populate Naboo. I am offering you funding, intelligence reports, and a fully equipped squadron of starfighters and pilots. N-1 Starfighters. Astromechs included. All I ask in return is that you continue doing what you've already been doing and occasional run an errand for me."

"What sort of errands?" Daxam raises an eyebrow.

"Intelligence reports from you and raids on Imperial shipments whenever possible. I am a supporter of the New Republic. I also understand the advantage of your continued facade as space pirates."

Daxam chuckles. "Sounds too good to be true. You know what that usually means."

"That is not the case here. Your Imperial raids will be dangerous and it will most likely raise the bounty on your head."

"Why not join the Alliance?"

"Why haven't you?"

"It would blow my cover as a space pirate. Besides I'd probably make a lot of the Rebels uncomfortable."

"It would blow my covers as an Imperial agent." She smiles again. "I am a spy for the New Republic. And I do make some of the Rebels uncomfortable."

"How do I know I can trust you?"

"If you choose to accept you are free to end our business arrangement at any time. I can only give you my word."

Daxam scratches his chin mulling it over. His credit supply is not limitless, although he's created that illusion with the Solar Guardians, mostly through gambling and jobs they are hired for. His stolen Imperial credits are pretty much deleted. He could use the squadron. "You are in luck Apolonia. I happen to be looking for a squadron of starfighter pilots to hire." He winks at her.

"Thank you. I will not lie. I am in need of your aid. There are so many Imperial moles in Naboo's government I don't trust any more than a handful. I know you are capable. Your organization is becoming a galactic ghost story, an urban legend, the Solar Guardians. An impressive feat."

Daxam senses her sincerity with the Force. "I look forward to working together."

"As do I."

Daxam looks out the window of the Grey Bird as they fly away from the capital city of Theed. Once feared Imperials, then criminal smugglers, now heroes of slaves. The Queen of Naboo declared them allies of Naboo. She gave him a squadron of N-1 starfighters for freeing the Gungan and human city of Blue Vein. A generous reward. Remic Xon's wife to be is a member of that squadron of security force pilots. Sia Amidala.

"I don't understand what happened back there." Cial Dasu says quietly.

"We beat the Black Sun. We freed slaves. We lost Zan and Ember Deth." Daxam says while staring out at the green landscape and magnificent waterfalls.

"How is Talien?" The other Twi'lek B'Lak asks.

"A medical droid and bacta on the Grey Wolf." Daxam answers. "He will live."

The eight Star Storm fighters fly along the Grey Wolf and the Grey Bird as they begin to exit the atmosphere. All the starfighters have taken damage. They are accompanied by twelve N-1 starfighters. Their pilots are eight Gungans among them Spanner Jor, Craven Rana, and Zerep Qaha. Three humans: Captain Ion, Zahn Tymm, and Sia Amidala. A female Neimodian named Zeness Yoni.

Aboard the Decimator known as the Grey Wolf the beautiful Usha wipes tears from her eyes as she watches a medical droid operate on Tali. "He will always have a cybernetic arm and leg now, but at least he is alive." Drixle speaks softly at her side.

Remic Xon is piloting the Decimator with Amar Deth in the co-pilot's seat. Neither say anything as they watch the approaching black broken up by twinkling stars.

Months later Daxam Rad sits on the bridge of the Solar Dreamer with Gleek, Cinder, Echo, Lanse Duskhunter, and Ariana. He smiles. "I hear the Black Sun has doubled the bounty on me. The Imperial Remnant has opened a new bounty for all of us former stormtroopers."

"They won't catch us." Lanse smiles.

"That is my hope." Daxam says.

"Word is spreading." Ariana joins in the smiles. "People on Tatooine, Kessel, and Naboo are talking about a new organization called the Solar Guardians. They say they are a bunch of space pirates and smugglers that free slaves everywhere."

"Not a bad name." Gleek says.

"Not a bad reputation to have." Daxam smiles and looks out the window at the full fleet of what he is now calling the Solar Guardians. "Echo. Let's hit hyperspace. We have shipment of bantha to deliver."

"Bantha." Gleek shakes his head in disbelief.

Later, Daxam and Ariana lie in his bed together in their home on Carlac talking. "I love you, Ariana."

She kisses him. One of her lekku slides over his bare shoulder. "I love you, Daxam."

They lay holding each other quietly. "This is what it's all about." Daxam whispers. "This is what we fight for."

Ariana looks Daxam in the eyes and nods agreement.

"The Queen of Naboo asked to sponsor us. The Solar Guardians. Secretly. That is why she sent twelve from Naboo to join us. She supports our cause. Peace and justice. Freeing slaves. Smuggling supplies to people who need them."

"That is good news." Ariana smiles. "Maybe others will too. One day."

"Maybe." Daxam whispers, cuddles up with Ariana, and falls asleep in her arms.

Part Two: The Rise of the New Republic

12 ABY (12 years after the Battle of Yavin)

Daxam Rad comes out of hyperspace aboard the Grey Bird near the planet Bakura. His stomach stirs as he looks at the familiar globe. So many years have passed. Ariana, Gleek, Cinder, and Echo are aboard the shuttle with him.

"Your home world looks nothing like Ryloth." His wife touches his shoulder.

"A class system." Daxam says. "Royalty at the top. The poor at the bottom."

"Sounds like everywhere." Gleek says.

"Strong mining exports." Daxam says. "Did you hear about Talien?"

"What did he do now?" Ariana asks, her head tails moving over her shoulders.

"They were making a run to Carlac and Weequay space pirates used a gravity well to pull the Grey Wolf out of hyperspace. They won the day and flew away with two new Delta-class JV Shuttles."

"Ha." Gleek claps. "That sounds like Falconer."

"It does." Daxam stares out the window as the breach the atmosphere.

"Are you alright, my love?" Ariana asks

Daxam sighs and feels reassurance looking into her beautiful pink eyes. He can sense Gleek is concerned too. "No. We've been invited. We're going to meet with my uncle Count Renard Thenn at the Castle Thenn. Give me the controls Gleek."

Gleek leans back, relaxing, letting Daxam fly them in. A voice chimes in over the com system. "This is Bakura flight control. Identify yourself and purpose."

"A representative of Hpuse Thenn. Coded clearance. Vesnu."

The com is silent. Ariana and Gleek exchange a nervous glance.

The voice returns. "You are cleared for landing. Castle Thenn."

"Roger that." Daxam replies.

A few minutes later the Grey Bird approaches a huge castle built into the side of a mountain in the heart of the mountain range. It's tall with spiral towers reaching high into the sky.

"Secluded." Gleek notes.

"Secure and strategic." Ariana adds.

"Wealthy." Cinder says.

Echo R3 chirps.

"I grew up here. At least until my early teens." Daxam says.

"We've had very different childhoods." Ariana says with a hint of insecurity in her voice.

Daxam squeezes her hand. She looks into his green eyes. "I love you." He whispers.

She smiles and kisses his cheek.

"Yeah. You were a rich kid." Gleek jests.

Daxam flushes with embarrassment. He feels ashamed having grown up so privileged knowing Ariana was raised in poverty and Gleek barely above it.

The Grey Bird lands on a thick stone cliff sticking out of the mountain and castle. They step off the shuttle's ramp to be greeted by an older man and a woman younger than Daxam as well as a pair of golden armored guards carrying vibro-swords and blasters. The elder man's expression is stern. His regal manners match his rich attire. A cape flows behind him as he walks to greet them. "Daxam." He reaches out and shakes his hand.

"Uncle Renard." Daxam returns the handshake. "It is good to see you."

Ariana notes something simmering in Renard's eyes. Resentment? The younger woman's eyes are filled with excitement. Ariana feels a slight sting of jealousy.

"This is my wife Ariana." Daxam smiles. "My co-pilot Gleek and my droids, Echo and Cinder."

"A pleasure." Renard nods. "Faruza will take you to your old room. Your co-pilot will be housed down the hall in a guest room. We dine in one hour." He turns and walks away with the guards trailing him.

"It's great to see you, cousin!" Faruza Thenn cheers and hugs Daxam.

Daxam laughs and squeezes her in a bear hug. "You were waist high the last time I saw you. You're all grown up."

Faruza talks fast and a lot as she leads them, through the castle. "Here are your rooms. You must have done something father approves of or he wouldn't have summoned you."

"That would be nice." Daxam mumbles.

Later in the privacy of his old room Daxam lies on the bed feeling nostalgic nod missing his parents and brother. The droids are staying in Gleek's room. Ariana snuggles up to her husband. "I know something about this place pains you, Dax."

"I have mixed feelings." He admits. "It brings back many bittersweet memories. Uncle Renard did not approve when I enlisted in the Carida Academy. It became a more difficult subject when his son joined the Rebels and was killed fighting the Empire."

"Oh no." Ariana responds.

Fariza says, "He has been sour and forlorn since my aunt Eisor died."

"No one seems to escape this pain of this war torn galaxy. What was your cousin's name?"

"Malik Thenn." Daxam shudders. "Thank the Force we never crossed each other during the war."

Ariana holds him and they say nothing. They listen to each other breathe and find comfort in their touch.

After some time passes Ariana says, "You are a good man, Daxam."

Daxam kisses one of her Lekku. "It's about dinner time. Renard will be upset if we're late."

The dinner table is as long, expensive, old and elegant as the rest of the castle. The table is set with antique dishes, glasses, and silverware. The food is exotic and smells delightful. The wine is red Corellian.

The Count Renard Thenn is seated at the head of the table. Faruza and Gleek to his right. Daxam and Ariana to his left. "Forgive me for keeping your droids in the guest room. I've had a distaste for them ever since the Ssi-ruuvi Imperium's invasion and their inhuman entente the procedure."

"By the time I became aware Bakura was attacked it was over with." Daxam explains. "I would have come if I'd known."

"I know you would have." Faruza Thenn smiles at her cousin.

Count Thenn gives his nephew a hard glare. "I believe that. It was a trying time. All the people of Bakura suffered. The Ssi-ruuvi killed my wife."

Ariana can ad the unwarranted guilt in her husband's eyes. It breaks her heart to see him this way. He's always been the image of valor and strength. She's never seen him this vulnerable. She can picture the little boy he once was. She can also tell Gleek is unsettled by Daxam's sudden lack of confidence.

"Daxam." The Count stops eating. "I want you to know the past is in the past and that is where we shall leave it. People make mistakes. Even House Thenn." His eyes seem misty a moment. He sips the wine. "I've called you home with a purpose. I asked you to bring only reliable confidants." He eyes the Twi'lek and the Rodian.

"They are." Daxam assures us uncle.

Renard nods. "My castle is secure. Nothing said here leaves this table tonight."

"You have my word uncle."

Ariana and Gleek nod in agreement.

"As I said. The past is the past. We learn and walk forward. I want that very clear." The Count repeats. "You and my son fought on opposite sides of a war. You were ignorant of many facts. I will go so far as to say you were also a victim of the Empire." Renard Thenn's voice is commanding. "I am aware of many things. I have man regrets in my life. Distances myself from you. Your mother, my sister, Vesnu Thenn." He pauses. Everyone hangs on his every word. "I loved her dearly. I never approved of her marriage to your father. He being a miner. We owning the mine. Now I can't go back and tell them both how proud of them I am." His eyes mist up again. "They were rebel sympathizers. I know you've learned the truth of this now. I'm grateful of that. The Empire's lie held you hostage many years. You are my blood, Daxam."

Daxam struggles to maintain his composure. A single tear escapes and rolls down his cheek. He wipes it away quickly pretending it was never there.

Renard sighs with relief and takes another sip of the wine. "Being of nobility and stature here on Bakura we have relationships with other world's royalty. Worlds such as Naboo. I was contacted by an agent of Apolonia. I know you are not a space pirate. After my wife was killed and the invasion repelled myself and others became concerned with Bakura's military. I've become highly invested in the military defense of Bakura. I know you are the leader of the Solar Guardians. I also know you are supported in many ways by a loose confederation. Naboo's intelligence agency. The Moisture Farmers Guild of Tatooine. The Mining Guild of Mimban. Small groups of liberals on Ryloth, Rodia, Ithorian, and Clak'dor VII."

Daxam smiles. "And the tribes of Carlac and Endor."

Renard nods, sips his wine, and says. "That is impressive. The backing of ten planets. I expect nothing less of a member of House Thenn. We at this table are the last three."

"Ten planets?" Daxam asks.

Count Thenn clears his throat. "I will be the tenth planet. Or House Thenn and our mining and military corporations. You will be provided funding, intelligence, supplies, and a Bakuran-class Star Destroyer."

"Bakuran-class?" Daxam arches an eyebrow.

"Very secret." Count Thenn replies. "Bakura will never suffer an invasion again. In fact very few of the ships have been constructed yet. It think that speaks volumes of my support for you. The only thing I ask in return is that you do return home if Bakura is ever attacked."

"And to visit." Faruza adds.

"And to visit." The Count cracks a smile.

"I will." Daxam beams. " I will make House Thenn proud."

"Enough business." The Count nods to himself. "Let's enjoy this dinner."

Later in the evening Daxam and Ariana stand on the balcony of one of the castle,towers watching the sunset. His arm is around her waist. "Thank you for letting me see your home. I feel like I know a quiet part of you now that was hidden before."

Daxam smiles and kisses her. "It feels good to be forgiven by Uncle Renard. He was so angry when I enlisted in the Imperial Academy. My cousin. My parents. My brother. The Empire. It all seems a life time ago."

"I love you, Daxam."

"I love you, Ariana."

The sun is almost gone from the sky. "Does your uncle know your grandfather was the Jedi Jacen Raad?"

"I don't know." His arms are around her. "I suspect he does."

She touches his face with her hand.

"I'm going to assign Lanse to the Star Destroyer." Daxam decides aloud. "I want to spend a week on leave her before we return to Solar Guardian duty."

"I like that idea." Ariana laughs.

Admiral Daxam Rad looks over at his Twi'lek wife, Ariana. Her skin is a subtle pale blue, her head tails draped over her shoulders covering her chest. To her she is the most beautiful woman in the galaxy and he feels like he is the luckiest man in the galaxy. She notices his linger eyes and winks at him with a hint of a smirk as the look out at the stars and the forest green and blue moon of Endor.

They are aboard his flagship, the modified Alderaan Blockade Runner registered as the Solar Dreamer. Daxam has a colorful history. He is a former Imperial stormtrooper, TIE Fighter pilot, and ISB agent turned smuggling space pirate, liberator, and Jedi. On the command bridge, more aptly described as a very large cockpit, are green skin, black eyed Gleek the Rodian computer linguist/pilot/splicer, and Daxam's droids: the black Death Star protocol droid Cinder and the clear domed astromech Echo R3. They are in orbit around the moon. It has been many years since Daxam has been here. They have just winked out of hyperspace so the Ugnaught crew members can make repairs to the hyperdrive.

"It's been a decade since I've seen this world." Daxam says. Daxam is leader of a private organization founded by himself called the Solar Guardians. Their objective is to serve as guardians of peace and justice much like the Jedi Knights of the Old Republic. The Solar Guardians operate in secret and are funded by a clandestine coalition that supports their efforts in combating slavery and smuggling goods to people in need. They also track bounties, criminals only. As of today the small funding coalition is made up of Naboo, Carlac, Bakura, and the Moisture Farmers Guild on Tatooine.

"The day the Empire died." Gleek gurgles in Basic.

"They are still kicking and screaming. A long death." Ariana comments.

Daxam nods, admiring the planet before them.

"Admiral Rad." Cinder chimes in. "It will be required that we stay in orbit for some time to allow the Ugnaughts the proper time to repair the ships damage."

"I agree." Daxam smiles. Out the window they can see more ships of the Solar Guardian fleet. "It's fine. We're ahead of schedule. We can take a break."

Gleek chuckles with excitement. "It would be nice to stretch my legs."

Daxam smiles at his green skinned old friend. He's served as co-pilot for eight years now. Alternating with Ariana. That's how long Daxam has been a space pirate now. He trusts both of them with his life. Most of the long time crew. Something about the failed hyperdrive is bothering Daxam. He feels it in the Force. Even though Daxam serves the cause of peace and justice he still operates outside the laws of the New Republic and the Imperial Remnants. He fights for the people who suffer.

He still takes on jobs for Ouro the Hutt. His reason being continued infiltration of the Hutt criminal syndicate. He doesn't smuggle death sticks or glitterstim or illegal weapons for the Hutt anymore. Luckily, as fate would have it, Ouro the Hutt is an eccentric collector of exotic works of art and that is what Daxam provides for him on most occasions.

Daxam speaks into the com to the entire crew of the Solar Dreamer. "This is your Admiral. That beautiful world out there is the moon of Endor. We are in orbit around a moon of historic significance. The Empire died here." He pauses to let that sink in. "We've come here for ship maintenance. All non-engineering crew are free to take leave and visit the planets surface. The Grey Wolf, The Grey Bird, and the Star Streamer will be going planet side." He looks out the window at the Solar Wind. It is a Bakura-class Star Destroyer provided by the intelligence community of the Bakuran government. He's assigned his old former stormtrooper friend, Lanse Duskhunter, as commander of the Star Destroyer. Most of the Solar Guardians starfighters are carried aboard the Bakura-class Star Destroyer. The Star Streamer is under the command of Kire Tatus. The ship is a modified Y2-900 Freighter, modified enough to have her Y-wing attached to the aft.

He hears several of the crew of both the Solar Dreamer and the Solar Wind cheer and hoot. He smirks. He if find of everyone under his command. A small fleet, but nothing to scoff at. The latest mission they've taken for Ouro is half down. They picked up the merchandise on the planet Dathomir. They only need to make repairs and make the delivery. They were pursued by Imperials but evaded the hunt. There are still decade old bounties on Daxam and many of his crew contacted by both the Imperial Remnant and the Black Sun. Old news.

The merchandise... A large block of carbonite with two men hibernating in a frozen fight from many years ago, he guesses. Both men are alive and in hibernation.

"Are you going down to Endor?" Ariana asks her husband.

Daxam shrugs.

"I would like too." She smiles and touches his hand.

Daxam nods.

"Me too." Gleek's mouth snout curves into something resembling a smile.

"I wouldn't mind having a look around. We may be able to scavenge some things from the old war." Daxam muses.

"Yay!" Ariana shakes her fists in exaggerated joy.

Daxam smiles, his heart warm. He stands and kisses her forehead. "I'm going to meditate for a time. I'll come down planet side after."

"Alright, sweetie." Ariana pats his thigh.

Daxam makes his way toward his private quarters. All crew members say hello and nod or smile as he passes through the corridors. He is respected by the crew. They know he is genuine and cares for him. They know he used to be a stormtrooper. They know he is a Jedi. He always has a lightsaber hanging from both hips.

Once in his quarters he sits to meditate but ends up thinking instead. He started years ago thinking he simply had excellent combat training from the Empire and intuition. Later he had a Sith Holocron for a time and the dark lord of Sith, Exar Kun, taught him. Both Exar Kun's spirit and the hologram. He felt Exar Kun's destruction when Luke Skywalker and his new Jedi Academy defeated him. The Force works like fate in Daxam's mind. He rejected Exar Kun's teachings of the dark side of the Force and coincidentally found another Holocron. A Jedi Holocron. Now his teacher is the artificially intelligent hologram of a long dead Jedi named Kit Fisto. Another Jedi named Morg Cala is also programmed into the Holocron.

He uses the Holocron and both Kit Fisto and Morg Cala appear before him in their brown Jedi robes. Fisto fought during the Clone Wars and was killed by Darth Sidious. Morg Cala also fought during the Clone Wars and was killed during the Jedi purge. Kit is an Nautolan and Morg a three eyed Gran. Both stand serene and confident.

"I feel a disturbance in the Force." Daxam says to his master Kit Fisto.

Kit looks at him with solid black eyes and a mass of head tails. "I did not agree with your decision to go to Dathomir. The witches of Dathomir have always been of the dark side."

Daxam thinks back to the red planet of Dathomir. Most of the world's vegetation is scarlet. "I was a fool. I have learned who is in the carbonite block we retrieves. A Jedi named Hal Nico and a Sith named Darth Cyranos."

"I don't know this Darth Cyranos." Kit admits. The hologram puts its hands on its hips. "I knew Hal Nico. He was a Jedi Knight that fought beside both Morg and myself during the Clone Wars."

"I don't think I should deliver this block to Ouro the Hutt." Daxam says.

Morg nods agreement.

Kit says, "I don't approve of your dealings with the Hutts."

"I have plans to take down the Hutt syndicate." Daxam defends his actions.

Kit doesn't seem to react. He only looks at Daxam. His full black eyes seeming to peer through him.

Morg speaks. "I know the story. Darth Tyrannus attempted, many times, to break Darth Bane's rule of two. Darth Cyranos was one of his apprentices. When Darth Sidious discovered this he sent a Mandalorian posing as Jango Fett to kill Cyranos. It was unfortunate Hal was there. Darth Tyrannus was Count Dooku. Darth Cyranos was from the planet Alderaan."

Kit Fisto gives a sorrow filled smile. "Hal Nico came from the same world as Mace Windu. Haruun Kal."

Morg continues. "Darth Sidious then had Anakin Skywalker kill Darth Tyrannus. The man posing as Jango Fett hid the frozen force users on Dathomir once Count Dooku was dead and the Clone Wars ended. Ming San had to go into hiding for impersonating Jango Fett. Hiding from both Mandalorians and bounty hunters offended by what they perceived as an insult to the legacy of Jango Fett."

"I wonder how Ouro discovered this?" Daxam asks.

"That is a validate question." Kit responds.

"Thank you." Daxam gives a respectful smile. "I'm going down to Endor. I must think on this further." He smiles at Kit Fisto's AI holo. The amphibious alien Jedi saved Daxam from slipping to the dark side. He's grateful to have both Kit and Morg as teacher. He is more Kit's student than Morg. Morg is more the historian.

With that he joins a large portion of the crew and three ships to explore the forests of Endor.

A silent man in a long crimson robe covering matching armor stands in in a storage unit board the Solar Dreamer. He looks through a black visor at the oblong rectangle of carbonite. It's a very dark bronze and copper. He studies the two fighting figures. Reaching a red gloved hand out he caresses one of the screaming face, senses it's frozen rage. "A work of art." Kana San whispers. He was named Darth Maris by Exar Kun. He still has the Sith Holocron. When he felt the destruction of Exar Kun's spirit and was left only with the holographic Exar Kun Darth Maris chose his own name. Darth Havoc.

Darth Havoc is a stowaway aboard the Solar Dreamer. Armed with a force pike, vibro-blade, blaster, and lightsaber. Moving with no sound in the dark he steps to the small blinking computer console on the side of the carbonite block. It registers two life signs. These two have been frozen, locked in combat for three decades. "Poetic." Darth Havoc whispers.

Darth Havoc has lived on the fringes and in silent, blood red shadows since the death of his first master, Emperor Palpatine. Then Exar Kun was his master. He had hopes Grand Admiral Thrawn would restore the Empire and worked for him. He still watches Admiral Daala with slight hope. Now he is his own master. With his own agenda. With the weight of a Sith Empire on his shoulders. A dream so different from Daxam's dream. He has always kept tabs on Daxam Rad and he fellow traitors to the Empire since serving on the Star Destroyer Eternity.

Deep within Imperial Intelligence data he discovered why Ouro the Hutt wants this exotic piece. Darth Cyranos and a insignificant Jedi. Darth Cyranos is another of Darth Tyranus's many apprentices he attempted to train in secret, against the will of his own master, Darth Sidous, the one day Emperor. He hopes Cyranos will join him. If not, he will kill him.

Havoc presses the blinking buttons next to the life support display on the carbonite block. He takes a few steps back, watching with mild fascination as the carbonite glows red around the two fighting figures. In a thick, bitter mist both figures stumble out, wet and blind, gasping, perplexed.

The bronze skinned Hal Nico is on his knees, lightsaber in his hand. Tradition brown and tan Jedi robes slick with chemicals and sweat.

His opposite, Darth Cyranos, is dressed in a robe as black as starless space. He does not drop to his knees, but tries to blink his blindness away. Hibernation sickness. He also holds a lightsaber tightly in his grasp.

Havoc watches. Hal moans. At the sound the lightsaber of Cyranos hums to life. Hal's lightsaber sparks alive, rising quickly to his feet. Lightsaber held out in a defensive posture.

"I don't need me eyes to kill you." Cyranos coughs. Hiss mouth dry from not speaking in so long.

Darth Havoc s suddenly taken by awe as the Sith warrior and the Jedi knight begin to fight blind with their lightsabers. He sense their strength in the Force. With a free Cyranos sends a spider web of blue lightning arcing out from his fingertips. Havoc steps back to avoid it, igniting his own blood red lightsaber with a snap-hiss.

The pale blue Force lightning fries a computer system in the dark storage room and alarms sound throughout the entire starship. Red lights flash hypnotically. Darth Havoc smiles beneath his helmet. Hal Nico backs away from both Sith, sensing the presence of Havoc. Havoc continues only to watch. Another Force lightning bolt explodes from Cyranos and hits Hal Nico, who falls to the metal floor. His lightsaber shuts down and clatters against the floor at his side.

Much faster and more efficiently than expected crew members of the Solar Dreamer spill into the stargaze room armed with holstered blasters and fire extinguishers. The first to enter the room is a female Bith. She lets out a squeak of surprise and pain as Darth Havoc's lightsaber impales her chest. "Stay with me, Darth Cyranos." He says in a menacing tone.

"Yes." Cyranos grins, sensing the dark side in Darth Havoc.

The crew is taken by surprise. They were not expecting to have been boarded. They did not know Sith still exist. They did not know they were walking into a slaughter. "No." Hal says, using the Force to pull his lightsaber to his hand. He is weak from the hibernation sickness and the Force lightning. He reaches out, feeling all the life forms around him through the Force. The rage of Cyranos. The hate and deceit of Havoc. The fear and confusion of the crew as they are cut down one after the other.

Hal hears the blaster fire and knows the two Sith are batting the blaster bolts back with their lightsabers. The crew members never stood a chance. Hal uses the Force to push the carbonite block at the Sith warriors.

Both leap out of the way. Havoc is more acrobatic and lands gracefully on his feet with another killing blow to a crew member. He is now fighting with the red lightsaber in one hand and a blaster in the other. "Stay with me, Cyranos. I will lead you to freedom and a new galaxy."

The Jedi Hal Nico hears the scream and death cries of many as he crouches defensively holding his blue-white glowing lightsaber out before him. He wants to help, sensing outward with the Force. He feels the pain and fear of death of all that fall before the Sith. He finds himself backed into a dark corner shivering. He hears the fighting move away from him, outside of the room he is in. It becomes more and more distant. Hal tries to calm himself, breathing slow, reorientation himself. The last thing he remembers is fighting Darth Cyranos on the witch world of Dathomir. He and his padawan learner succeeded in tracking down the mysterious apprentice of Count Dooku, only to be ambushed by a Mandalorian in blue and silvery-grey armor. Then came a long, long slumber and awakening to this chaos. Tears wet his eyes as he remembers his padawan being killed by Cyranos. He must gather his sense and contact the Jedi Counsel on Coruscant.

He doesn't want to kill anyone innocent. He shuts off his lightsaber and places his hands on his head in surrender and waits. His lightsaber hooked to his belt.

The former Imperial Guard fights his way through the crew still aboard the Solar Dreamer with Darth Cyranos at his side. "We are almost to the docking bay. We will take one of their ships and be gone."

"Yes." Darth Cyranos hisses.

As they move things become quieter as there are less and less crew members alive to stop them. They kill everyone who tries to get in their way. The alarm continues its monotonous blaring. "This way." Darth Havoc instructs. "We're taking this ship. I've already programmed the hyperdrive. My own astromech is inside." They climb into the Y-wing. Havoc in the pilot's seat. Cyranos in the gunner's seat. His astromech is a black R5 model.

The Y-wing flies out of the Solar Dreamer and vanishes into hyperspace before the Bakura-class Star Destroyer has a chance to question anything.

A short time later Admiral Daxam Rad is back aboard the Solar Dreamer with Ariana, Gleek, and Cinder at his side. He stands solemn in a medical room aboard the ship. Seventeen of his crew are dead on tables before them, covered in white sheets. His heart is filled with sorrow. He shakes his head and wipes tears from his eyes before they fall. "Ouro is not going to be happy."

"No he's not." Ariana agrees.

"Let's go speak with our prisoner." Daxam almost whispers.

The sturdy Y-wing comes out of hyperspace near a rust red planet. "How is your vision?" Darth Havoc asks the other Sith.

"Blurry." He answers.

"The hibernation sickness will take a few days to wear off. Once we're on the planet's surface you can meditate again. Heal yourself."

"Where are we?" Cyranos asks. He has been in a Force trance healing the hibernation sickness.

"Geonosis." Havoc says.

"I know the world."

"It's a dead world now." Havoc explains. "Nearly dead. The inhabitants killed off by the Empire. The only thing on this world now is mine. You've been in hibernation for thirty-two years if my data is accurate. The Clone Wars are long over. The Separatists lost. Supreme Chancellor Palpatine became Emperor Palpatine. Under his majestic rule the old Republic became the Empire. Your master, Darth Tyrannus was killed by the Jedi Anakin Skywalker. Anakin joined Palpatine as his apprentice. He became Darth Vader and together they wiped out the Jedi. Nearly. Jedi are very rare now. I know of only a few. Daxam Rad, who I rescued you from. Hal Nico. And Anakin Skywalker's son, Luke. Luke is a part of the New Republic. He has founded his own Jedi Academy, called the Jedi Praxeum. Which has defeated the Empire. Darth Sidious and Darth Vader are dead. Most of the people you knew are likely dead. Too make a very long and complicated story short."

For a moment Darth Cyranos is speechless processing this sudden time shifting shock. Havoc smirks beneath his helmet. The Y-wing flies into an open docking bay hidden inside an orange-red mountain of rock. They climb out of the starfighter together. Havoc removes his helmet. The black astromech follows them as they walk. "Welcome to my home. I've been living here for eight years. My birth name is Kana San. I'm a Mandalorian warrior who served Darth Sidious as a Royal Guard. My father was the Mandalorian hired to kill you."

"Why have you saved me?" Darth Cyranos asks with suspicion clear in his voice.

"We have a new Empire to build." Havoc explains. "A Sith Empire. Darth Bane's rule of two nearly wiped out the Sith. Anakin brought balance to the Force by nearly wiping out the Jedi. The pendulum swings. It is time for the Sith to rise again. My master was the spirit of a dark lord of Sith known as Exar Kun. Most of my servants here are droids. I have constructed a Sith Temple in this mountain. I will take you there to meet Darth Thade and my apprentice. We would like you to join us."

Together Havoc in his flowing red robes and Cyranos in his black robes ascend a long spiral of stairs into a large circular dim room with a high ceiling and candles flickering, creating myriad of whispering shadows. Dark robe figures are gathered in a circle, seeming deep in meditation. Darth Havoc takes a seat on a golden gem-encrusted throne and elaborate crimson cushion at one end of the circle. He gestures for Cyranos to take a seat at his side.

As soon as both men are seated all the meditating Sith open their yellow burning eyes looking to their leader. "Greetings, my acolytes."

"Master." All present whisper in unison.

"This is the Sith of old I spoke of." Darth Havoc announces. "I would like you all to introduce yourselves to our guest."

An old, wrinkled, leathery Weequay woman grins. "I am Darth Thade. Former Jedi Dria Ihrke."

"I know you." Darth Cyranos whispers.

The withered witch of a woman nods with a soft cackle.

"Darth Naga." A masked Tuskan Raider hisses.

"Our Sith Order. Two are absent." Darth Havoc smiles. "Will join us?"

"I will." Darth Cyranos grins diabolically.

Admiral Rad sits on a thick log. The tree fell years ago. He is surrounded by a beautiful green living forest of Endor. The sounds of wildlife are all around. Not far away the Decimator is parked in a clearing. In orbit above his Ugnaughts are working on the Solar's Dreamer's hyperdrive. He's hired on a dozen more Ugnaughts since he started out eight years ago. They are hard workers and great engineers, electricians, and mechanics.

Rad gazes into the eyes of the brown robed man standing in the grass before him. A combination of meditation and bacta quickened the hibernation sickness recovery.

A Jedi Knight stands before him with calm and collected demeanor. He's a handsome man with bronze skin, penetrating brown eyes, and thick black hair. He is a man who has literally just been released from a time capsule. He is a time traveler so to speak. "My name is Hal Nico of the planet Haruun Kal. I am a former student of Mace Windu. My padawan learner was a young girl named Soria of the Mon Calamari. She was killed by Darth Cyranos."

Daxam nods. "Please tell me more."

"I sense the goodness in your heart." Hal almost smiles. "I know you are a Jedi. I must return to Coruscant and report the existence of Darth Cyranos to the Jedi Council."

Daxam looks down at the grass for a moment and then back up at Hal. "That won't be necessary. You have been hibernating in carbonite for thirty-two years. The Clone Wars are long over. The Jedi Council is no more. The Jedi are all but gone."

"That seems impossible." Hal is struggling, but finds his calm center in the Force. "I sense your honesty. How do you know these things?"

"It will take time for you to catch up on everything that has happened." Daxam gives an empathetic smile. "I can't imagine having to cope with this. I know what happened because my teacher is a Jedi named Kit Fisto. Sort of. Kit and Morg. They teach me through a Holocron."

"I know Kit Fisto."

"He is dead." Daxam explains. "Supreme Chancellor Palpatine was a Sith Lord. He took a Jedi named Anakin Skywalker as his apprentice. Together they ordered the great Jedi purge. The old Republic became the Empire. Eight years ago the Emperor and Darth Vader, the Empire, was finally defeated. The New Republic is a new galactic government. Still finding its way. The only other Jedi I know of is Luke Skywalker. The son of Anakin. He has founded a new Jedi order. So I've heard. I've never met the man or any of his new Jedi."

"I want to say you are insane." Hal Nico sits on the same long, thick fallen tree as Daxam. "But I know you speak truth."

There is a rustling in the brush. "Come out, little one." Daxam says.

From her hiding place beneath a bush a short, furry bear-like alien steps forth with a stone-tipped spear in hand, pointed defensively at the Jedi. She tilts her head to one side.

"An Ewok." Daxam comments as his eyes widen.

"I sense it too." Hal smiles. "She is Force sensitive."

"I feel it." Daxam agrees.

The Ewok wobbles over and sits between the Jedi, speaking in a chirping language neither understand.

"This has all happened for a reason." Hal says. "The Force has brought us together for a reason."

"What reason?" Daxam asks.

Hal closes his eyes reaching out to the Force for several moments. When he opens his eyes he says, "Your dream."

"My dream?"

"The Solar Guardians. The Solar Dreamer. You became a Jedi not because any Jedi sought you out, but because the Force willed you into being a Jedi." There seems a light in Hal's voice. "I think we are to bring back the Jedi as much as Skywalker."

"I can't imagine it." Daxam admits. "I have 99 problems. Ouro the Hutt not getting his prize for one. The Black Sun and the Imperial Remnant have bounties on myself and many of my crew."

"99 problems?" Hal arches an eyebrow.

"I'm exaggerating." Daxam chuckles.

"I sensed many of your crew are sensitive to the Force, Daxam." Hal says. "Without realizing it you have been gathering future Jedi around you. Your ethics are those of the Jedi. And this young lady is to be my new apprentice."

The Ewok nods and chirps, patting Hal on his hand.

"You're serious?" Daxam sounds astonished. It's happening fast but he sense it's truth.

"We must begin training them immediately." Hal says. "We must track Darth Cyranos and this of dark lord of Sith. Please. Let us return to your ship and gather are padawan learners. We have a dream to fulfill."

"Alright." Daxam stands and they both begin walking toward the Decimator.

"Come along, little one." Hal smiles down to the Ewok, who follows filled with an innocent curiosity.

Admiral Rad stands before a blazing fire with most of the Solar Guardians gathered round the massive funeral pyre as their crew mates burn. It is night. Many Ewoks watched from a distance. Friends of the Ewok Hal Nico befriended. He and several others spoke solemn words for the murdered crew. It pains him when someone dies under his command. He has gathered all these people together and feels the weight of that responsibility. These are his people. He brought them a dream they believe in. Their deaths will not be for nothing. His wife, Ariana squeezes his hand. He looks up at the night stars and squeezes back tears.

The next day Daxam is back aboard the Solar Dreamer in orbit over Endor. The time lost Jedi Hal Nico and a select few are seated around a smooth, black and silver metal table. Arc Haband. Kator Ekin. The Ewok they recently met. Her name is Taree of Ganshee tribe. The droids Cinder and Echo R3. Cinder has been translating for the Ewok. Also present are Sheed the Squib, an Ithorian named Wamwei, Hakua the Wookiee, a young male Falleen named Fendar, Cyf Whitesun, and Jubah Noor the Gungan.

Daxam makes eye contact with everyone before addressing them. "You all know of our Jedi here, Hal Nico, and his story. Vaguely." He motions toward the Jedi. "I'm sure you're all aware people call me a Jedi. I know you've all seen my lightsabers."

Everyone acknowledges with nods, silent, curious, wondering.

"I have been meditating for a long night." Daxam tells them. "It's true. I am a Jedi. Now that Hal has joined us it's become clear to me that the Force is guiding us. I didn't choose this. I didn't choose you for this. You have been chosen by the Force and if you silence your minds and listen to your hearts I believe you know it to be true. It is not random chance. You've been brought together to become Jedi. All of you are sensitive to the Force. For those of you interested in this new turn the Solar Guardians have taken we will be setting up a new base here on Endor near Taree's village. A Jedi temple. Hal Nico will be training you. I will when I can. My priority will be dealing with Darth Cyranos, his crimson friend, and Ouro the Hutt."

Everyone is quiet.

"Taree's people have agreed to let us stay." Hal Nico says.

Taree agrees in her native tongue.

"I already feel at home on this moon." The hammer head Ithorian says.

Hakua growls in agreement.

"You think I can be a Jedi?" Cyf Whitesun gasps, running his hand through his blond hair.

"Yes." Daxam answers with no room for dispute.

"That's fine." The Zabrak scowls. "But I'll be coming with you, Admiral."

"As will I." Arc eyes Kator.

"I would like to come with you as well." Fendar says.

"That's enough." Daxam orders. "The rest of you will be staying here to begin your training. I will teach you three in hyperspace. Cyf I want you to take your Skyhopper and A-wing to Endor. I will be leaving Talien in charge with the Grey Bird. Take the two swoops off the Dreamer as well and as many supplies as you will need for at least a standard month. The Ewoks will teach us to live in their forests. We will be leaving as soon as the hyperdrive is repaired."

Everyone nods their understanding and agreement.

"Good." Daxam plays with controls on a datapad built into the tabletop. He clicks a button and speaks into the com channel open to all the Solar Guardians and intercom speakers in both the Solar Dreamer and the Solar Wind. "This is your Admiral. We will be leaving a scouting party on Endor." With that the Solar Guardians have small hidden headquarters on Endor, Naboo, Tatooine, Carlac, and Bakura. "Everyone is aware of situation and the tragedy we've experienced. It's been a long haul serving together and I appreciate everyone of you. We are a family. After an analysis of the security cams Gleek was able to determine or red robed killer stowed away when we were on Dathomir. I am sending a small task force to investigate Dathomir again. The Solar Wind will be returning to Carlac and the Grey Wolf & Star Streamer will be going to Naboo. We have duties to fulfill. It is business as usual. When the hyperdrive is functioning I will be leading the hunt for the killers in the Solar Dreamer. We will bring them to justice."

Cheers can be heard from crew members through the small comlink in the tabletop. "Thank you for your service and dedication. I'm proud of everyone of you. Admiral Rad, signing off." He looks up at his future Jedi. Cyf's face is filled with excitement. Daxam says, "We are in a heap of trouble with Ouro the Hutt. That will be a problem. This will likely put an end to our infiltration of the Hutt syndicate. Everyone to work. Dismissed."

Daxam stands to leave the room. Hal Nico watches him with a newfound respect for the man.

Everyone files out of the room. Kator stops and speaks to Daxam. "You know we're with you, Rad." The horned crowned Zabrak bounty hunter says. Besides Hal, who does not appear his true age, Kator is the oldest member of the crew.

"I know, old friend." Daxam says. "Walk with me." The droids and Hal Nico follow as well as they make their way to the bridge where Gleek and Ariana are currently piloting the Solar Dreamer. "I want you to lead the investigation on Dathomir with a squad of starfighters. I will join you there when the ship is repaired. I'd prefer sooner than later. I'd like you to leave as soon as possible."

"I'd be honored, Admiral." Kator grins.

"Echo R3. Please compile a list of all known members of the former Imperial Royal Guard for me and all known information on their current whereabouts."

Echo warbles an affirmative response.

"How long until the Solar Dreamer is ready?" Kator asks.

"Cinder?" Daxam asks.

The black protocol droid responds with sophistication. "The stowaway saboteur was thorough. It may be a week."

"I see." Daxam nods thoughtfully as they all step into the command cockpit joining Gleek and Ariana.

"Hi, love." She smiles at her husband.

He smiles back. "Kator the task force will consist of yourself, Laris Oth, Vinge Xangel, and Troel Earta. I want discretion. No one knows your on the planet."

"Understood, Admiral." Kator smirks. "We'll leave now."

"May the Force be with you." Daxam says.

"And you." Kator nods and leave the bridge.

Ariana says to Daxam, "Some of the crew stumbled onto an old and abandoned Imperial military outpost on the moon. It's not far from the Ewok village. They say they've found a mother load of supplies including weapons, stormtrooper armor, and a few AT-STs."

Daxam speaks into the Solar Dreamer's com. A private channel. "Talien."

The com is silent static for a moment.

"Daxam." Talien.'s voice sounds tinny through the comlink.

"I'm leaving you in command on Endor with your ship. The Jedi and the Ewoks are your responsibility until I get back. There is an Imperial outpost that needs salvaging. I'll have Echo send you the details."

"Sounds like a nice vacation." Daxam can hear Talien's smile in his response.

"Thanks, buddy. Usha can stay too. I'm signing off."

"Roger, that." Talien responds. Usha Falconer, formerly Usha Cial is married to the cyborg Talien Falconer.

"Cinder I have my orders ready for Kire and Remic. Please transmit." Daxam sighs leans back in a co-pilot seat.

"Yes, Admiral." The protocol droid responds.

Hal sits with the rest of them and looks out at the moon before them. "Admiral Rad. You told me the state of the galaxy. It is a place I no longer know. It will take time. I'm grateful for the rescue, even if it wasn't your intent. So many things have changed. I believe this Luke Skywalker has good intentions. However I can not rely on him alone to restore the Jedi. How can he preserve teachings he's never known? My suggestion is we leave his Jedi Academy alone for the time being. Maybe it will become something different than what existed before. A New Jedi Order. This is a good thing. I sense it. We will train and be ready if Skywalker fails. No when you locate Darth Cyranos I will be with you to face him."

"Luke Skywalker is a legend," Ariana says. "He is one of the heroes of the rebellion against the Empire."

"I feel the Force has brought us together like you say, Hal." Daxam is thoughtful. "It's not a coincidence this many potential Jedi came together. They came to learn from us. This is clear to me. The Solar Guardians are a galactic myth and for now they will remain so. Including the Jedi among us."

Two Z-95 Headhunters and a pair of A-wings, four starfighters in all, appear out of hyperspace not far from the red planet of Dathomir, the witches world. Kator is field commander of the investigation. He and his former bounty hunter apprentice are piloting the Headhunters. The Headhunters are precursors to the X-wing starfighter. Troel Earta is a female Bith in the other Headhunter. She was trained by Kator in bounty hunting but works n her own not, sometimes partnering with Kator's other former student, the Bimm known as Roo. Laris and Vinge are in the A-wings, much faster and agile starfighters, but not as armored as the old Headhunters.

"It is a beautiful world." Troel comments through their com channel.

"Beautiful and vicious." Kator responds. "My home world."

"I did not know that." Troel says.

"Not many do." Kator shrugs as he speaks. "It doesn't matter."

"What is the plan, my friends?" The wolf man Laris growls low into the com.

"Back to the ruins of the Temple of Scarlet Night." Kator answers. "See what we can dig up on the identity of the red killer and his or her whereabouts. I have a contact near there. She may have some helpful information for us."

"Copy that." Laris snarls.

"The place gave me the creeps the first time we were here." The devil man Vinge says.

"Follow my lead planet side." Kator orders.

All three pilots comply. "I didn't care much for the place either Laris growls."

"It is an ancient temple of the Nightsisters of Dathomir. A tribe of witches. Now the people of Dathomir believe it is a haunted and cursed place." Kator smirks.

"I don't think I disagree." Troel speaks softly over their com channel.

"Back to the Blood Jungle." Laris growls.

"An apt name." Kator explains. "Many tribes have fought and died in this jungle."

The four starfighters land in a small clearing of the Blood Jungle. The trees, the leaves, even the grass are all shades of red. The sun is just setting on this side of the world, a magnificent glowing half circle on the horizon. The four alien pilots climb out of their ships and make their way to a narrow, little used path into the jungle. They've all been here before. The path leads to the temple ruins. Laris keeps a clawed and furry hand resting on his holstered blaster. They are wearing grey flight suits of the Solar Guardians, kind of an amalgam of a black TIE Fighter pilot's suit and the orange and white of the New Republic pilots.

"I thought we were going to meet your contact first?" The female Both asks. At the same time she notices the Devaronian's black eyes run over her and becomes self-conscious of the tight fit flight suit revealing her feminine curves. He smiles at her. She ignores him.

"We are." Kator answers. "She's off the beaten path. Not far."

"You didn't mention that the first time we were here?" Laris growls low.

"There was no reason to disturb her." Kator replies, leading their procession. They walk in silence through the blood red jungle for another standard twenty minutes, give or take, and Kator leads them away from the path.

"I don't want to get lost in this place." Vinge says to Kator.

"We won't." Laris says. "I can sniff our way back to the ships."

Kator smirks at Laris.

Troel looks back at the path. It is getting dark. She touches her blaster for comfort.

After walking only a short while longer they arrive at a small hut made of leathery reptilian skin and thick, sturdy dead branches. A small glow comes from a fire inside the hut. They smell smoke and cooking.

"You three wait out here." Kator orders.

"Why?" Laris growls, growing suspicious.

Kator's head snaps back to glare at Laris. Anger clearly simmering in his eyes. Vinge and Troel exchange a nervous glance. "She's an old woman. I respect her privacy." Kator explains, seeming to calm himself. He points back in the direction they just came from. "Set up a camp about ten meters back. We'll spend the night here before continuing on to the temple. I'll be back soon enough."

"You're in charge." Vinge grins and shrugs, patting his old wolf friend Laris on the shoulder.

"I am." Kator grunts and turns back to the hut, disappearing inside a short moment later.

The other three backtrack to set up camp. "Strange behavior." Laris growls very low.

"Yes." Vinge whispers, glancing back at the hut. "Kator has never been a friendly fellow. Before joining up with the Admiral I here he was quite a vicious one."

Troel looks back at the hut. She whispers to the other pilots. "Something is not right."

"Agreed." Laris nods.

"I'll protect you, sweetheart." Vinge grins and winks at the female Bith.

"I don't need protecting."

Inside the humid, rank hut, Kator Ekin unconsciously plays with one of his crown horns. An old woman is cooking herbs, meat, and red vegetables in a cauldron. Her shoulders are permanently hunched and she appears ancient with a thousand wrinkles and hair so thin she is nearly bald. Her neck skin sags loosely. If she was ever pretty it was at least a century ago. She moves as if in pain. Her dark, misty blind eyes look at the aging Zabrak bounty hunter she has known all his life.

"Kator Ekin." She whispers. She seems to be able to see with her milky blind eyes.

"Grandmother Triva." Kator bows his head. As a child she was called his great-great grandmother, yet the Zabrak suspects her to be a much older unnatural age. "The Jedi Daxam sent me back."

"I know." Her voice is something between a hiss and whisper. "It was meant to be. I foresaw your return."

Kator says nothing. He can feel the Force radiate from her like a aura.

"Son of Dathomir." She smiles revealing only two teeth remaining. "The man he seeks is the red one."

"Darth Havoc." The veteran Zabrak bounty hunter says quietly. "Kana San. The Royal Guard. The Mandalorian warrior. Son of Ming San. Our master."

"You came to Dathomir knowing already what the Jedi seeks." Triva cackles quietly.

"I don't want the others to here this talk." Kator mumbles.

"They will hear only what I wish them to hear, grandson." Triva says, pouring him and herself wood bowls of her steaming stew. "I have a sphere of silence surrounding us."

"What do I tell the Jedi?"

"We are the night side of the Force." She answers. "Your time of hiding in the shadows has reached an end. You have your Holocron."

Kator holds out a small red pyramid jewel in his palm. "Always."

"Your lightsaber?"

"I have it."

"You are a Sith warrior. Enter the temple. Return a Dark Lord of Sith."

"And the Jedi?"

"It is time to kill them all. You will tell the Jedi the one they seek is on Geonosis. Return to your enemies. And may the night be with you."

Kator nods. "Thank you, grandmother."

Kator returns to the other three Solar Guardian pilots. A sullen, brooding expression. They have a small camp set up with bedrolls and glow sticks, eating rations, drinking water. Kator sits down on his own bedroll without a word.

After some time in silence the female Bith asks them all, "Do you think it's safe to camp out here away from our ships?"

Kator shrugs. "No. The wild life of Dathomir can be vicious. We will sleep in shifts. Go to the temple tomorrow and head back to Endor."

"Any news from you contact?" Troel asks her former bounty hunting teacher.

Kator finishes chewing a bite of a nutrition bar and shakes his head. "She knew nothing. Hopefully we'll find some clue as to who the red cloaked man was and where he might have taken Darth Cyranos."

Troel nods. The others say nothing.

The night is uneventful. The four starfighter pilots rise with the sun, eat a light breakfast and get back on the trail to the ruins. All around them the red jungle is alive with noise and scampering. "It is a very beautiful jungle." Laris snarls. "Kator, my friend. I get the feeling something is going on here with you and this world."

Kator sighs. "Only memories. Ghosts of what was. My childhood. I am the last of my tribe. Emperor Palpatine sent Imperial Inquistors and stormtroopers. I escaped with an outlander. A bounty hunter who showed mercy and took me under his tutelage. Once I had dreams of retiring and living old my last days here on Dathomir. Maybe marry and start a new tribe in memory of my family. Now all I desire is to hunt until my days are at an end. I wish to die a glorious death."

"We're your people Jedi?" Troel asks.

"No." Kator answers indifferently. "Our sister tribe were witches strong in the Force. Not the men. On Dathomir the women rule."

"I like that idea." Troel attempts to lighten the mood.

"Can you use the Force?" Laris asks.

"Of course not." Kator chuckles. He points ahead. "The temple. You three wait here. I'm going in alone. It is a sacred site to my people. It shouldn't be long." He stops in his tracks. "In fact, return to the ships. That's an order."

Laris, Vinge, and Troel exchange looks of shock and misunderstanding. "Are you sure?" Troel asks. "It may be dangerous."

"Yes." The Zabrak bounty hunter responds. "Please allow me this peace. I will be back with the answers we seek."

Troel nods, feeling something is wrong.

Vinge grins and shrugs. "Comlink us if you need anything."

The three walk back. Troel looks over her shoulder more than once at her former teacher.

Once they are out of earshot Laris growls low. "Something is going on. Kator has always been a grouch but he is clearly bothered by something."

Troel nods. "I agree." She rests her hand on her blaster again for comfort.

"We've been Solar Guardians for a decade together." Vinge says. "I trust him. This world brings him painful memories. Let him have his moment so we can get back to the Solar Dreamer."

Laris and Troel both nod agreement and continue back to the four starfighters. As they walk the bald headed Bith says softly, "His contact. I think she must be the only other survivor of his tribe."

Vinge and Laris both digest the idea. "Let's just get back to the ships." Vinge says, for once not smiling.

Kator approaches the entrance to the circular Temple of Crimson Night. He thinks to himself it seems the will of the Force. The Crimson. Darth Havoc of the Crimson Guard. The small triangular Holocron of Darth Maul in his palm. The ruins are crumbling in places, but for the most part structurally sound. It is made of red rocks. He enters the open doorway and activates the Holocron.

A hologram of the long deceased Darth Maul appears with a snarl. "Darth Daath."

"Master." Kator kneels.

"The Jedi returns you to this place." Darth Maul says, walking further into the shadows of the temple.

"Yes." Kator follows the ghostly tattooed Zabrak.

"It is the will of the Force." Maul whispers. "There is something still here for you. There." He points to a circle brick in the wall. "Remove it."

Kator steps forward. He uses the Force to tug the red stone away from the way, gently setting it on the stone floor. After that he uses the Force to levitate a long silver object from the hole. A sword. Kator's eyes widen as the hilt of the sword finds his grasp. "I sense the power of this sword. What is it, master?"

"Your new weapon." Darth Maul grins. "An ancient Sith sword. They were used before lightsabers. It is a symbol of our coming. The Sith of Kana San."

Troel, Laris, and Vinge all sit around the starfighters looking bored. There is a sudden thunderous crashing moving toward them from the trees. It is the sound of breaking wood and the primal roar of some large beast. All three pilots leap to their feet with blasters drawn and eyes wide, alert, soldier pilots. Solar Guardians.

"Some terrible creatures." Laris snarls. He sets his blaster to kill. "Look out!" He howls, dives sideways and rolls through dark red weeds and brush.

Troel and Vinge jump to the opposite side of the camp just as one of the A-wing crashes down hard between them. Smashing the starfighter and their camp. The metal is bent, dented, and ripped. The cockpit shell shattered.

Laris moves with canine reflexes, his sharp teeth bared. Laser bolts fly from his blaster at three massive vaguely humanoid figures rush through the red trees and shadows toward them. Each blaster bolt scores a hit yet the monsters hardly notice. They seem annoyed and more angry. One of the leathery reptile link beast carries the other A-wing, tearing at it without abandon, in a frenzy. The third pounds the wing of one of the Z-95 Headhunters into the ground. The three ships are clearly destroyed beyond repair.

"Rancors!" Vinge yells.

Troel gasps at the sight of a blood coated silver blade suddenly sticking out of the Devaronian's chest. A long blade through the heart. Their eyes lock. Vinge's perplexed grin will haunt the female Bith the rest of her days. His black eyes blink and his smile fades and his life ebbs away.

Behind Vinge Xangel the Zabrak bounty hunter turned Sith withdraws the sword and watches the horned alien drop dead to the jungle floor.

"I've always wanted to slap that grin off his ugly face." Kator gives Troel a cold, blood thirsty smirk.

Troel points her blaster at the bounty hunter but hesitates. The rancor a move closer.

The Shistavanen does not hesitate as one of the mighty Rancors bends another hunk of A-wing hull metal. A scone Rancor stomps on the other A-wing. Laris opens fire on Kator.

With Force enhanced reflexes and years of fighting experience, Kator bats the blaster bolts away like nothing. The laser fire does not harm the sword blade at all. Troel fires at him as well. Kator swings, knocking her own blaster bolt back at her and hitting her shoulder. She stumbles and yelps in pain but does not fall.

"Run!" Laris yells, still shooting at Kator, he makes his way toward Troel's side.

"Kill them!" Kator shouts to the Rancors.

Laris and Troel run into the jungle night.

The Rancors give chase. Using the Force to strengthen his leap, Kator lands on the back of one, near its head. He rides it as a mount, Lang the charge into the red jungle after them.

Laris and Troel flee as fast as their legs will take carry them. Laris is faster. Troel is wounded. The slobbering behemoths gain on them. The old man's heart drops to his gut as he sees the dark temple before them. The Temple of Scarlet Night. The ruins of the Night Sisters. Dathomir witches. The place they found the block of carbonite he never suspected would initiate their doom.

The pair of Solar Guardians don't take time to think. They dash into the blackness of an open archway. A rancor smashes its fists into the side of the temple, shaking it to its foundation. Dust swirls everywhere inside the temple. Another Rancor pounds the temple ruins.

"Stop, you idiot beast!" Kator shouts.

All three Rancors back away with their heads down, whimpering at their masters scolding. It's too late. The temple walls begin to crumble inward. In a matter of seconds the entire ancient structure

collapses in on itself echoing through the jungle, disturbing Dathomir's nocturnal animals, sending up a mushroom cloud of dust into the night sky as Kator and the trio of Rancors back away.

Kator is not happy. He doesn't think they survived. Even if they survived they are buried. Md if by some miracle they climb out of the rubble and debris, their ships are destroyed. They would be stranded on the planet Dathomir. They will not survive Dathomir in the unlikely event they survived the cave in.

"It is done." Kator says quietly staring at the rubble in thought. After a moment he sheaths his ancient Sith sword and commands the Rancors. "Take me back to my ship." He must return to Admiral Rad with the sad news.

Buried inside what was once the Temple of Crimson Night Laris and Troel sit with their backs to a stone wall, listening, hating only the sound of their own breathing. Troel falls asleep. Later she wakes to the same darkness, not knowing how much time has passed. The air is thick with dust and difficult to breath.

"Those were terrifying creatures." She whispers, blindly taking a slip of water from her canteen.

"We must find our way out of here if we are to live through this." Laris growls low.

Troel sense the sorrow in his voice. She knows Laris and Vinge have been best friends for many years. "I'm sorry Vinge was killed." She whispers, touching his bicep in the dark.

"How is your wound?" Laris ignores her statement.

"It hurts, but I'll live."

"Good. We have to get out of here and report to the Admiral."

"Our starfighters are destroyed." Troel laments. Her eyes have adjusted to the darkness enough to make out a silhouette of Laris and his pointed ear tips.

"We can do this." Laris growls. "We have too. And we will. I can smell the air from outside. We will dig our way out. From what I saw even if we can't fly out of here there is enough left of the ships that I may be able to rig together a com system to at least warn Daxam."

"I can feel a breeze." Troel nods.

Usha looks beautiful with her bright red skin contrasting with the bright greens and wood brown trees all around them. Her lekku dangle midway down her back, relaxed. She is seated on an old Imperial speeder bike looking out at the swamp before them. The massive forest at her back. The diminutive furry female Ewok known as Taree is in the seat behind her. Gleek's green antennae twitch as he looks over the area as well. Arc's red eyes observe as well. Cinder, the black protocol droid as well. They are all on speeder bikes.

The ground is covered in a consistent dirty scum green floating on the surface of the water. Tall slim trees reach up high out of the water. Many of the trees are dead and leafless. Many are still marked with black scorch marks. From fire or more likely blaster bolts.

The grey-green hairless Duros climbs off his speeder bike. "I don't think this murky water as shallow as it appears." His big red eyes blink.

The Ewok coos and chirps something in her language. Cinder translates. "Taree says this swamp is haunted and her people stay away from it. She says we should stay away too."

Gleek shakes his head and gurgles in Basic from his snout mouth. "We are here to scavenge. The Admiral thinks there are likely equipment, supplies, maybe even weapons left over from the Battle of Endor."

"We know that, Gleek." Usha stands at the water's edge. "The speeder bikes should hover over the water without any trouble."

"That's true." Gleek agrees. Sitting back on his speeder bike.

Arc closes his eyes and concentrates. Both Jedi, Daxam and Hal, have been teaching him meditation techniques. He reaches out his mind feeling with the Force. "It's not far. Follow me." With that his speeder bike zooms over the surface of the water leaving rippling waves and spray in his wake. The other three speeder bikes follow, zig zagging between trees. Not a few minutes later they park near an old Imperial military outpost. It's overgrown with moss and vines and signs of rust. The small base is sealed shut tight.

Gleek steps cautiously to the door and takes out a small pack of tools. "I can slice this system. Shouldn't take long to get the doors open."

"It appears to have been sealed for years." The protocol droid observes.

"I think you're right." Usha smirks. The Ewok stays close to her side. Higher up than they can see they hear some kind of flying creatures singing to each other. Some kind of birds. Many trees are too tall to see the tops.

"Eureka." Gleek chortles. The thick durasteel hiss open and a cloud of dust nearly explodes outward. Gleek covers his snout and coughs dust particles.

"Yikes." Usha smiles and draws her blaster. "Let's see what the old Imps left us."

The group walk into the dark military outpost together. As they do so overhead lights flicker on. "Motion sensors." Arc remarks. "It appears the systems are still operational."

"Stay together." Gleek orders. His blaster is in his hand too.

After walking cautiously, exploring hallways and more doors they step into a large high ceiling room. "Look at that!" Usha squeals.

"A small docking bay." Arc whispers.

Before them are a pair of TIE Interceptors and a pair of AT-ST Imperial Walkers, covered in thick dust. "Rad's gong to be happy." Gleek nods, looking over the vehicles.

"Over here." Cinder walks to another room. "A medical facility. Bacta tanks. Medpacs. Fully stocked."

"In here." Arc says, standing in the door way of another room. "Stormtrooper armor and weapons."

"We hit the jackpot." Usha slaps Gleek on his skinny shoulder. The Rodian rolls his eyes.

The brown fuzzy Ewok speaks to them all in her native tongue while Cinder translates. "My people are the Ganshee Tribe. We follow the ways of the tree spirits. Our shaman, Coso Nee, tells us to stay away from the swamp. It is haunted and bad people live in the swamps. Enemies of the Ganshee. We should not stay."

Gleek takes out a comlink and speaks into it. "Admiral Rad."

There is a moment of static silence.

"Gleek." The Admiral reasons. "What's the report."

"Positive. Two Interceptors and two AT-ST Walkers. Medical supplies. Weapons. Armor. Even well preserved rations. It appears the outpost was abandoned and no one ever came back."

"Great news, pal." Daxam says through the comlink. "I'll send some crew to help collect everything."

"Roger that." Gleek says.

Later that night after the Solar Guardian on Endor have just finished dinner the Jedi Knight Hal Nico smiles at Admiral Rad. "I invite you to take a walk with me, Admiral. Bring along Arc, Cinder, and Taree."

Ariana and Daxam share a look. With only his eyes, Daxam assures his wife everything is alright. She gives a subtle nod. "I could use a walk." He gives a friendly smile to the bronze skinned Jedi Hal.

"I wouldn't mind stretching my legs either." The bright eyed Duros agrees.

As they walk away from the camp and through the forest of old trees. The sun begins to set causing long shadows to cast across the elder trees. "I've rarely seen trees this tall, thick, and healthy." Daxam comments, enjoying the view. He inhales deeply through his nostrils. "And fresh air."

The short furry Ewok chirps in her language. The black plated protocol droid Cinder interprets. "Taree saves her village is not far from here. Her people will be afraid of us, but she knows we are good people."

"Thank you." Daxam kneels down and shakes the Ewok's paw like hand. "I know you people are a good hearted people."

"Thank you for accompanying me." Hal Nico says, tightening the tan sash around his brown Jedi robe. "I have thought and sense long on this and I know the Force brought us all together. Daxam has done what I never thought possible." His eyes are filled with respect for the former stormtrooper. "You have become a Jedi Knight without a Jedi teacher. In fact you became a Jedi Knight even having been first introduced to the Force by way of the Sith."

Cinder's voice softly echoes Hal's word in Ewokese to Taree.

Hal Nico continues. "You have created a clandestine group of heroes, truly. The Solar Guardians, even with most of the crew not being Force sensitive, you all live by something very close to the Jedi code. Serving, protecting, bringing peace and justice to the galaxy as best you can. I would like to start a

Jedi academy here on Endor. Taree has spoken with her tribe's shaman and they are willing to take us in. We will live among the treetops."

Taree chirps cheerfully.

"And who are these future Jedi?" Daxam asks peacefully excited.

"We've already touched on this some." Hal answers. "Arc Haband. Taree. You, Daxam. Cyf Whitesun. Sheed. Kator Ekin. Wamwei. Hakua. Fendar."

"I didn't learn to be a Jedi alone." Daxam admits. "I have a pair of Jedi Holocrons. I thought they were one, but they split in two. The Holocrons of Kit Fisto and Morg."

Hal nods. "Those are very important devices we must preserve and protect."

"We've accepted this." The green-grey skinned, red eyed Duros grumbles.

Taree points to the stars and coos.

"Yes." Hal Nico gives her a warm smile. His hands folded beneath his robe. "You will travel the stars one day."

Daxam speaks up as they continue their stroll through the thick and darkening forest. "The sabotage to the Solar Dreamer proves to be mor extensive than we originally detected. A myriad of engineering breakdowns. The Ugnaughts found detonators and thankfully deactivated them before the ship was blow apart. It's going to take longer than anticipated to repair everything. I support this new Jedi academy here on Endor. However, I will not be able to stay here at all times. I have responsibilities to Naboo, Carlac, Tatooine, and Bakura. I'm concerned about the four pilots I sent to Dathomir. We should have heard something from them by now."

Hal nods. "Daxam Rad. You are a full Jedi Knight. I expect you to continue with your duties. I expect you to take an apprentice. The Falleen."

"Fendar?" Daxam arches an eyebrow.

"He needs your direction more than mine." Hal responds.

Daxam nods. "Let's return to camp. I think things are settled. This moon, Endor is now a part of the Solar Guardian's coalition, as long as Taree's people agree to it."

The next day Daxam addresses many of the Solar Guardians gathered at a camp on the surface. It is late afternoon. Taree, Daxam, Cinder, Hakua, and Hal visits the Ganshee tribe in the morning. They have agreed to take in the Jedi Hal Nico and his students. Daxam has just finished explaining that to everyone. Those not on the surface are present via holograms. Daxam continues. "So we will have a permanent station at the former Imperial outpost in the swamp, besides the Ganshee tribe, who are now under the protection of the Ganshee tribe and any other Ewok tribes that agree to join. Taree tells us their chief and shaman will be speaking with other tribes." He takes a moment to think about this. He realizes the irony of what he has created with his former Imperial intelligence connections. The Solar Guardians and the unofficial Solar Confederation. A military organization funded by a secret network. A bases on several worlds. Tatooine. Naboo. Bakura. Carlac. Mimban. And now the moon of Endor. Now Jedi. He feels better than he ever has before. His heart is glowing inside. With warmth, love, and the Force. "Everyone knows their assignments. I have faith in all of you. We are like family we've been together so long. We've grown together. In closing, I will be leading a mission to Dathomir. We haven't heard from our four pilots and they are long over due. I'll be taking a shuttle. The Grey Bird. Cinder. Echo. Fendar. Gleek. Harkon."

Remic Xon's hologram speaks up. "Let me take my Decimator."

Daxam shakes his head. "I need to do this. We'll be fine."

Several days later a Z-95 Headhunter lands in the opening at the heart of the Blood Jungle on Dathomir. Even before the starfighter pilot landed he spotted the wreckage of the two A-wings and a Z-95 Headhunter. The ships are shredded and torn to bits. Several trees in the area broken like twigs. The young man climbs out of his ship and immediately notices large bipedal animal tracks and other humanoid tracks. He kneels down and places one hand flat on the ground and reaches out sensing with the Force.

He is a young, radical Jedi named Kyp Durrone. Opening eyes he sets blood and feels the dark side all around him. He has been staying near the core world's, keeping an eye on the Imperial remnants. He came across an intelligence report, almost by mistake, or the will of the Force. A forgotten self-proclaimed warlord named Grand Moff Meka was seeing an ancient relic of this witches world. At the same time a criminal named Ouro the Hutt sought the same relic. The Hutt hired a space pirate named Daxam Rad to retrieve the mystery item.

With a snap-hiss Kyp's lightsaber ignites, sensing the presence of two sentient beings hiding in the red leaf brush nearby. He sense their fear and determination. "Come out." He commands.

A defeated looking male Shistavanen and wounded female Bith both in dark flight suits emerge with blasters in their hands.

"I assume you are some of Daxam Rad's space pirates." Kyp smirks.

"Yes." The wolf man growls low, not threatening. "We were trapped inside the collapsed ruins of the Temple of Crimson Night. Betrayed by one of our own."

"Will you help us?" The Bith woman asks sincerely.

Kyp laughs. Still holding his lightsaber out defensively. He eyes their blasters. "You're criminals. Why would I help you."

The Bith woman holsters her blaster. Her shoulder is bandaged. "Not everything is as it seems."

The wolf man puts his blaster away and gives an indifferent grunt. "We are pilots making a living. Nothing more."

"What are your names?" Kyp asks, still holding his lightsaber between himself and the pair of pilots.

"I am Laris Oth." The Shistavanen grumbles.

"Troel Earta." The delicate Bith woman answers.

"What happened here?" Kyp asks.

"Are you a Jedi?" Laris asks.

Kyp scowls thoughtfully at the dirty pilots. "I am."

"Then we can trust you." Troel says softly. "I know the lightsaber is the elegant weapon of the Jedi."

"Hm." Kyp Durrion still holds his ignited saber before him. "Many people don't believe the Jedi are real. Many people who do believe think they are gone."

"Luke Skywalker lives." Troel says. "He is a Jedi Master."

"How do you know?" Kyp shuts his lightsaber off.

"Daxam told a us." Troel says.

"And you believe him?" Kyp smirks.

"Yes." The Bith answers faithfully. "Admiral Daxam Rad is a great man. We have served him for years. He is not what people think."

"Oh, I'm sure." Kyp nods sarcastically. "Don't lie to me. I know what he is. A former stormtrooper and an Imperial intelligence agent. If he is an Imperial he is no friend of mine."

Laris flares with retrained, defensive anger. "Daxam deserted the Empire. He's a freedom fighter. We travel the galaxy fighting the Hutt Syndicate and the Black Sun. We fight slavery everywhere Daxam can find it. The space pirate thing is our cover."

Kyp leans back against his starfighter, crossing his arms. He is caught off guard. He sense no deceit. But that could mean nothing. But slavery touches a nerve. Kyp Durrone was once a slave in the Kessel mines freed by his friend Han Solo. "If you want my help and trust let's start by telling me what happened here."

Troel intercedes, the calm Laris needs. She reaches out and squeezes his clawed hand and diplomatically speaks to the fiery young Jedi Knight. "Rancors destroyed our ships and killed our friend, Vinge Xangel. Another pilot. We were sent here on a mission by Admiral Rad. I don't know why Kator betrayed us."

"Who is Kator?" Kyp sounds curious.

"An old Zabrak. A skilled bounty hunter." Laris growls, releasing Troel's hand. "He was one of us. He killed my best friend Vinge and I want to kill him."

"Calm." Troel says to Laris. To Kyp she says, "We don't know why Kator tried to kill us. We have to warn Admiral Rad before it's too late."

Kyp nods. "What was your mission? The relic. Ouro the Hutt hired you to find?"

Troel shakes her head. "We already retrieved the relic. We were attacked by someone. Sabotaged. An unknown assassin in cloaked in red. We came here to find clues as to the identity of the assassin."

"What was the relic? Where is it?" Kyp's voice rises with excitement.

"The relic was a block of carbonite." Troel explains. "Two men were frozen inside of it. The red assassin freed them. One of the carbonite men joined the assassin and they murdered seventeen of our crew. They escaped and they are dangerous. They sabotaged the Admiral's starship. The Solar Dreamer. Our mission is to find out who he is and stop him. Both men are evil."

"Are they working with the Zabrak bounty hunter?" Kyp Durrone asks them.

Both Laris and Troel share an illuminated moment. Laris howls with anger. "He served with us for more than a decade! Has he always been a lie?" He is asking Troel, ignoring Kyp.

The sorrow on her and Laris's faces touches Kyp. He tightens his lips thinking. "Let's go save your friend. The infamous space pirate, Admiral Rad."

Admiral Rad sits in the pilot's seat of the Grey Bird staring out at the star ones of hyperspace, deep in thought. The Death Star protocol droid Cinder, the astromech R3 Echo, the skinny Rodian co-pilot and computer splicer Gleek, and two new Solar Guardians, the big reptilian Trandoshan Harkon and the sly reptilian Falleen Fendar are aboard the ship with him. The course is set for Dathomir. R3 is jacked into the computer system. His clear dome head turns silently, observing his owner, Daxam. Cinder is in another seat arguing with Echo. Their argument startles Daxam from his contemplating and he laughs.

"I'm sure everything will be fine on Dathomir." Cinder huffs at the astromech. "You are simply programmed to be a pessimist."

Daxam grins. He stopped wiping their memories long ago. He's learn droids begin to develop their own personalities and traits that way. Coming very close to artificial intelligence, if not achieving it. The astromech twitters and tweets rapidly.

"Rude and immature." Cinder crosses his arms haughtily.

Gleek is in a seat next to Daxam. The star ones reflecting in his black eyes. "Do you think they are alright?"

"Kator and the others are skilled pilots and soldiers." Daxam says, his smile gone. "I hope so, old friend."

"What are we going to do about Ouro?" Gleek asks, his mouth snout quivering.

"I'm tired of dealing with that slimy slug." Daxam clenches his jaw. "We're long overdue in ending our business relationship with him."

Gleek's eyes widen.

Daxam glances back at Harkon and Fendar. They are playing a quiet, focused game of Dejarik. The little holographic creatures fight each other on the back and white checkered tabletop. He looks back to Gleek. "I'm considering blowing up is space station."

Daxam stares out the front of the Grey Bird again. It's a new day. The star lines mesmerize. He thinks about his wife Ariana. Her last words to him were, "I feel you when you hold me." They haven't announced to the rest of the Solar Guardians that she is pregnant. "I love you, Ariana." He whispers.

R3 warbles confused.

Daxam sighs and places a hand on the droid's dome. "I'm only star dreaming, my friend."

Fendar and Harkon are sleeping in the back of the shuttle. Gleek joins Daxam and R3, having just woke up himself. "Dathomir isn't much farther."

"It's not." Daxam agrees.

Gleek studies Daxam a moment. "What's troubling you, Dax?"

Daxam smirks. "My offspring."

Gleek's black eyes widen and his antennae stand. "What?"

"Ariana is pregnant." Daxam beams.

"That is joyous news!" Gleek chuckles with genuine happiness. "Congratulations, my old friend."

"Thank you."

"The second generation of Solar Guardians." Gleek's mouth snout curves into a smile.

"I don't know about that." Daxam arches his eyebrow.

"This means I better protect your Bakuran butt and get you home to Ariana."

"Home." Daxam smiles thinking of Endor. "I think the forest moon would not be a bad place to raise a little one. When are you and Gledek going to have one of the second generation? He jests.

Gleek flinches with embarrassment. "What do you mean? Gledek?"

Daxam laughs. "Everyone know your secret, my friend."

"Really?" Gleek shakes his head with embarrassment. "I didn't want a personal relationship to interfere with my duties." Gledek is a female Rodian that joined the crew a few years ago.

"I'm married. Gleek, you have my full permission to have a relationship. Not that you need it. A lot of the crew have girlfriends, wives, husbands, family." Daxam gives Gleek a warm smile.

Daxam looks back out at the star lines of hyperspace and finds himself deep in thought again. It seems more important than ever to return to Ariana. Maybe it's time to retire as leader of the Solar Guardians. Settle on Endor with Ariana. Maybe turn over leadership to Talien or Remic or Lanse. Any of them would make good leaders. They already are. Maybe Kire. He is light years away from Ariana. Anything could happen. He could die. He's never worried about that before. Not that he's ever wanted to die. He's just never feared death before and now he does. For the child inside of Ariana. His beautiful, sassy, strong wife.

"I have a bad feeling about this." Daxam admits to Gleek. He sense a disturbance in the Force.

"What is it?" Gleek's familiar bubbly vibrating voice asks.

"I'm not sure." Changing the subject Daxam says, "We have a supply shipment due in Mos Espa."

"I miss the place." Gleek admits. "I'd like to introduce Gledek to my family. Show her where I grew up."

"You dirty dog." Daxam smiles again. "Tatooine always brings fond memories."

"You can take a leave of absence." Daxam offers. "Spend some time there with Gledek and your family. You've earned it. You deserve it."

"I'd like to bring my father some Corellian wine." Gleek says. "His favorite."

"Bring him a crate." Daxam nods.

Echo whistles and bleeps as Cinder wanders into the cockpit.

"Technically we are property of the Admiral, R3." The black protocol droid responds to the astromech with annoyance in his voice.

Echo R3 warbles sarcastically.

"You are the rudest droid I've ever met." Cinder huffs.

"We are about to exit of hyperspace." Gleek announces.

"Harkon! Fendar!" Daxam hollers toward the back of the shuttle. "Rise and shine. We're at our destination point." He then looks over the shuttle's computer systems. "Very close."

The too reptilian aliens join them in the cabin just as they come out of hyperspace. Harkon is a full head taller and thicker than Fendar. The stars become twinkling diamonds in the sky. They all study the crimson world before them. The red planet of Dathomir.

"It's a primitive world." Cinder informs them. "Low technology. Tribal cultures rules by Dathomir witches. Females are the dominant gender. Zabrak colonized long ago and mate with the indigenous people. The tribes do not mingle beyond mating rituals. The planet's population has significantly decline over the years. During the Clone Wars and the rise of the Empire."

"It's a pretty world." Fendar hisses.

"Bah." Harkon grumbles.

"A dangerous, untamed world." Daxam warns them. "Don't let your guard down for a moment nice we're on the surface. Rancors and other wild, carnivorous beasts are native to this bloody planet."

R3 tweets a question.

"Set a landing course for the Temple of Scarlet Night, R3." Daxam replies with his voice taking on a suddenly official tone. The tone of Admiral Rad.

The young Jedi Knight Kyp Durrion leads the wounded pilots Troel and Laris toward the Temple of the Scarlet Night. Laris and Troel both have their blasters in hand. The sun is still up but will be setting soon. "I told you we shouldn't go near the temple." Laris growls quiet.

"Sh." Kyp hushes. His expression excitement at the sight of the recently collapsed ruins.

"I thought Jedi wise." Laris growls low.

Around the rubble of the ruins three large, monstrous Rancors circle in a bored stupor, snooping and sniffing. One of the bipedal monsters is on its belly peering an eye into a hole. A second is on its back snoring and drooling down the side of one craggily cheek. All three beasts have rough germ-brown skin. Jagged, crooked sharp teeth. Clawed thick fingernails. The thirds is circling, gnawing on what looks to be a bloody limb of some unknown creature.

Kyp whispers to the bulbous headed Bith and the wolf man pilot. "I swear I spotted a ship on the far side of these ruins. We can't all fit in my starfighter. The ship is very close to this mess. We have to take out the Rancors to get to it."

"What kind of ship is it?" Troel asks.

"I didn't recognize the design." Kyp admits. "Similar to an A-wing. A kind of rust red-brown color. Let's move." With a snap-hiss Kyp's violet-white lightsaber burns to life. It is a lightsaber that once belong to the failed Jedi Gantoris from the Jedi Academy on Yavin 4. He some times thinks of Gantoris when he holds the laser sword in his hand. It is a good reminder. Both Gantoris and Kyp fell to the dark side under the sway of the Dark Lord of Sith, Exar Kun. Only Kyp returned from the dark side with the help of Jedi Master Luke Skywalker. Gantoris was not so fortunate. He died at the hands of the Sith Lord's spirit.

Two of the Rancors massive round heads whip toward the sound of Kyp's ignited lightsaber to see the bold young Jedi stroll forward in a confident battle ready stance. Behind Kyp Laris and Troel both have their blaster pointing at the Rancors. The Rancors roar with rage. The sleeping rancor stirs, groggy, not sitting up but eyeing the situation.

The larger of the pair of monsters charge the three. Both Laris and Troel open fire. Each targeting a different Rancor. The blaster bolts seem to hurt the creatures, but they don't stop them.

The Jedi gracefully runs up the side of a leaning, dead red tree and leaps through the air, landing on the back of the charging Rancor, burying the lightsaber to it's hilt in the monsters head, burning through flesh and bone.

The smaller Rancor becomes the focus of the Solar Guardians blaster bolts and it staggers back toting in frustration and pain. The formerly sleeping Rancor lumbers in their direction. Troel and Laris spread out. Laris catches the groggy Rancor with a blaster bolt to th eye. It slaps itself in the face and throws a slab of stone that was once a part of the temple at the Shistavanen pilot. Laris jumps and rolls to avoid the stone. He winces in pain.

As the large Rancor falls dead to the ground Kyp keeps his balance with ease and steps off the monstrous corpse while at the say time raising his hand and uses the Force to push one eyed Rancor back so hard it hits a thick tree trunk which cracks loudly. It stands, dizzy, as Kyp continues to utilize his telekinetic mastery of the Force. With his violet lightsaber in one hand, he other hand pulls the broken

tree trunk forward, stabbing the Rancor in the back. It howls in denial of its death and falls forward face down on the soft ground.

Troel and Laris don't let up blaster fire. The blaster of Laris stops. "Power cell died!" He growls, throwing it down and holding out his clawed hands to attack. Troel continues to fire and the third Rancor falls dead before Laris needs to use his claws.

Kyp looks around with a coy grin. "That wasn't too difficult."

Troel looks at him with wide eyed exasperation. He is not like the only Jedi she knows, Admiral Daxam Rad.

"That was tense." Laris growls at the young, brash Jedi with a toothy sneer of admiration.

"Now..." Kyp begins to say, interrupted by low roar of a starship overhead. All three look up to see an Imperial Lambda-class shuttle folding up its wings and landing in the clearing. "Imperials!" Kyp raises his lightsaber ready to continue on fighting.

"No!" Troel shouts to him as the ship touches down. "It's the Grey Bird. One of our ships."

Kyp looks back and forth between them, hesitant.

The wolf man pilot growls at Kyp Durrone. "We have stolen quite a few ships from the Empire."

"What's left of the Empire." Troel nods her bald, milk white head.

"Admiral Rad sent help." Laris says. "He's loyal like that."

"Good." Kyp shuts off his lightsaber and tucks it away.

A moment later the young Jedi watches a motley crew of pilots in generic black and grey flight suits matching Troel and Laris suits step down the shuttle ramp. A human. A skinny Rodian. A muscular Trandoshan. A black protocol droid. A slender Falleen. And an astromech. He can tell the man pilot is their leader.

"More space pirates?" Kyp calls out to the newcomers.

Ignoring the comment, the human says, "Troel. Laris. Are you alright?"

"Yes." The female Bith answers with obvious mourning in her tone.

The Trandoshan, Falleen, and Rodian eye Kyp with caution. Their hands resting on holstered blasters.

The human nods. "Kator and Vinge?"

Kyp notices wrinkles near the edges of the man's eyes. He can't guess the man's age, but admits to himself he's a handsome, dashing sort of space pirate.

"Vinge is dead." Laris howls with tears in his eyes.

The Rodian pipes in. "We saw the starfighters. Or what was left of them."

The human leader's face is overwhelmed with concern. "What happened?"

Troel answers. "Kator betrayed us. He killed Vinge. He tried to kill us. Left us for dead in the collapsed temple. He is a Force user. He used Rancors to attack us and crush the temple. I'm assuming he left in his Headhunter back to Endor."

"Oh, no." The protocol droid laments. "He has been a Solar Guardian since the beginning."

"Cinder." The human holds up a hand and eyes Kyp as if seeing him for the first time. "Who is this."

"Kyp Durrion." Laris growls. "He's a good kid. Helped us out. We may have died if he didn't show up."

"I can speak for myself." Kyp says. "I'm a Jedi Knight investigating space pirates working for Ouro the Hutt and after the same prize as an Imperial Moff."

"I'm Admiral Daxam Rad." The human announces, studying the younger man. "Leader of the Solar Guardians and also a Jedi Knight."

Kyp huffs. "Skywalker was the last Jedi. I don't believe you. My intel says you're nothing more than a space pirate. I came here to stop you."

"Then why did you help my crew?" Rad challenges.

"They needed it." Kyp smiles.

Daxam stands silent for a moment studying Kyp. A Jedi. Trained by Luke Skywalker. He's heard of what he did with the Sun Crusher. His personal war against what's left of the Empire. He thinks about Kator Ekin. The bounty hunter has been his friend for years. Since Daxam was still an Imperial. How could he have betrayed them? Not just betray them but murder Vinge Xangel and attempt the same of Troel and Laris. He's a Force user. Daxam closes his eyes and reaches into his heart. And the Force tells him Kator is a dark sider.

Daxam opens his eyes. "Let's have a look at the starfighter over there." He begins walking in the direction Kyp had been fighting toward with the others. They'd seen it from the Grey Bird. "Kyp Durrion. Do you want to join our hunt for these dark side users?"

"Yes." Kyp answers quietly. Everyone walking together.

They come upon the old starfighter several dozen meters from the temple ruins. It is have covered in red and violet weeds. " I don't recognize it."

"Me either." Gleek says.

Echo R3 bleeps and pings and whistles rapidly.

Cinder translates. "Echo says it's an old Jedi starfighter. From the Old Republic. The Clone Wars."

"Really?" Kyp sounds fascinated.

"Let's get it cleaned up." Daxam says. "If it's salvageable I want it in the fleet."

"Yes, Admiral." The big Trandoshan and the Falleen climb over and begun clearing vegetation away.

"R3, help them." Daxam says. "Everyone else back to the shuttle."

As they walk back to the shuttle Kyp explains, "I usually stick to the core. Hunting Sith seems more important than Imperials. The Sith gave birth to the Empire."

"It did." Daxam nods agreement. "Now you know we're not space pirates. I trust you not to blow out cover. Besides hunting down Kator Ekin and Darth Cyranos we will be moving against Ouro the Hutt soon. Our primary missions are to fight slavery and supply colonies in need. We have discrete benefactors. If the galaxy knew what we really do, it would make doing it more difficult."

"I see." Kyp nods.

"Cyranos was a Sith frozen in the carbonite and he killed seventeen of my crew." Daxam says. He looks to Laris and Troel. "Did you find what you were looking for?"

"Yes." Troel informs him. "The saboteur was a former Imperial Royal Guard named Kana San." She holds out a data card. "Everything is on here. I retrieved it after Ekin left."

"What is it?" Kyp asks.

"I left a recording device when we took the carbonite from the temple." Daxam explains.

"There is more." Laris growls. "Kator is also in league with a Nightsister who lives nearby and Kana San was assigned to the Star Destroyer the Eternity."

Daxam stops in his tracks. His world is spinning out of control. Ghosts from the past. Kana San was the Royal Guard on the same Star Destroyer as Daxam for a few years. "Let's get a hyper wave transmission to all the Solar Guardians warning them about Kator Ekin."

The Grey Bird's wings unfold as it rises preparing to depart Dathomir. From the shadows of the red jungle trees withered Triva watches it float away with a snarl on her face.

The Jedi starfighter was functional. Echo and Fendar are piloting it. Taking a leap of faith, Kyp is letting Laris pilot his Z-95 because he wants to be on the shuttle to learn more about Admiral Daxam Rad and the Solar Guardians. He's not afraid of them. Kyp is not a modest Jedi.

"Where is the Jedi that was frozen?" Kyp asks Daxam. They are seated together in the cockpit with Cinder and Gleek. Harkon and Troel are in the back of the shuttle.

"Hal Nice. He's alive and well on Endor." Daxam says. "Cinder. Set a course for Tatooine. Send out orders. Talien and Remic hunting Kator Ekin. Kill him. Barin and Kire hunting Kana San and Darth Cyranos. Do not engage. Have Lanse meet us in the Tatoo System."

"Yes, Admiral." The Death Star protocol droid moves to the controls. The other pilots are reflections in his big oval black mirror eyes.

The Imperial Shuttle lands in a Mos Espa docking bay. They step off the shuttle's ramp and exit the hangar into the sandy streets of the desert city attracting the attention of the ragtag citizens and common nomadic space travelers. The city is friendly to gamblers, smugglers, bounty hunters, mercenaries, thieves, and all your basic galactic scum. Hutt syndicate territory. The citizens are generally poor folks and scavengers.

A dozen stormtroopers armed with blaster rifles march in the out of the hangar. They are followed by the black cloaked Darth Havoc and Darth Cyranos. The Sith Lord's faces are hidden beneath hoods.

Havoc wears red Imperial Guard armor beneath his robes. Cyranos wears ancient ceremonial Sith armor beneath his.

Still more step out of the hangar and into the street, causing the multitude of diverse alien races to stay away or stare in fear. More stormtroopers. The vicious old Darth Thade follows. The female Weequay wears a permanent scowl etched into the wrinkles of her leathery skin. Her black braids hang halfway down her back.

Darth Havoc speaks softly to some of the stormtroopers. A trio stand guard outside the Imperial shuttle. The rest of the stormtroopers stand outside the hangar, making it clear no one is allowed inside. Any unlucky spacer that may have parked their ship in the hangar is regretting it.

The three Sith walk the dusty street together. Silent. Deadly. Hidden above the planet in a wide orbit is the Star Destroyer of Grand Moff Meka.

Light years away in the audience chamber of the large, sluggish Ouro the Hutt's city-sized space station the grotesque crime lord lounges on a hover sled. He eats bright blue frog like creature from a bowl of murky liquid. The little animals squeal and fail to squirm away as he swallows them whole, drooling and licking his lips with a swollen tongue. Ouro is an old Hutt and never leaves the safety of his old space station that nomadically travels the Nal Hutta System, never leaving it.

Ouro's giant eyes focus on the youthful Iktotchi bounty hunter before him. Thick tan horns point down on both sides of his head. The bounty hunter is wearing amalgam armor and a jet pack. A blaster rifle slung over one shoulder, a blaster pistol holstered at his waist, a vibroblade strapped to his thigh, and a belt of various grenades hang diagonally across his chest. He is not the first bounty hunter to accept Ouro's bounty of Daxam Rad.

"Cilrej Zal." The Hutt bellows. "I trust you will not let me down."

The Iktotchi shakes his head with a frown. "I will succeed." Cilrej's secret is that this is his first bounty.

"I want Daxam dead." Ouro snarls. "I've been betrayed."

"It's true." A Bothan with tall pointed ears and a long fur beard nods. "Daxam is a spy planning to bring down not only you but the entire Hutt syndicate. The fool believes he can do it." The Bothan is a bounty hunter named Balten'yah with connections to the famous Bothan network.

"There will be a bonus for every single one of his crew you kill." Ouro bellows.

"It will be done." The Bothan promises with a bow.

Balten'yah and Cilrej Zal March out to their modified B-wing. Cilrej is a whiz mechanic and added a holding cage to the starfighter large enough to hold an ordinary sized humanoid.

The B-wing blasts away from the space station and disappears into hyperspace.

Kator Ekin's Z-95 Headhunter blinks out of hyperspace in the Tatoo System. He looks at the twin suns with his own eyes glowing with yellow burning hate and lust. He is a Sith. He is the dark side. There has been a Sith awakening. He can feel Triva back on his home world of Dathomir.

The Grey Bird, Kyp's Z-95 Headhunter, and the old Jedi starfighter land in a docking hangar on the opposite side of Mos Espa as Darth Havoc and his followers. Ignorant of their presence in the city. Daxam tells Cinder and Echo to stay with the ships and keep them locked down. Daxam Rad, Kyp Durrion, Laris Oth, Troel Earta, Gleek, Harkon, and Fendar looking like a tough band of seven magnificent spacers.

As they walk, Daxam says, "Talien and Remic will be meeting us at a cantina not far from here."

"I thought Lanse was tracking Kator." Laris growls.

Daxam nods to the wolf man. "He is."

They continue walking. "Why don't you ask me to tell Jedi Master Skywalker about you?" Kyp asks Daxam with concern in his voice. "Your story is astounding. You became a Jedi on your own. You've founded an academy of your own. You have a Jedi from the Old Republic among you."

"Hal Nico." Daxam says. "He was an apprentice of the famous Mace Windu. Not that anyone remembers the Jedi. First, I don't want to blow our cover as space pirates. Second, why not let Skywalker have his Jedi Praxeum. See if it becomes what the Galaxy needs. A public face of the Jedi. If he fails, we will be here. I sense some day we will meet. His Jedi and the Solar Guardians. If the Force wills it. Now let him walk his path. Let us walk ours."

A Sullustan bounty with a robotic hand steps out of the shadows watching Daxam Rad and his friends walk pass. He wipes sand dust from his vision enhancing goggles. Stig is happy to collect the bounty on Daxam. A lot of Hutt credits.

"It's him." A second rough looking Sullustan steps beside his cousin.

"Blasters on kill." Stig says to Surg. "The bounty isn't much less if he's dead."

Surg lets out a faint gurgling chuckle.

The Sith have returned from a short trip to the desert accompanied by Darth Naga, the Tuskan Raider. "You people are a mighty people." Darth Havoc hisses. It is the will of the dark side you are with us. We shall elevate your people to rule with us." Once again wandering the streets of Mos Espa. There reasons unknown. Darth Havoc stops.

Darth Cyranos says, "I sense it too."

A drooping faced Sullustan gurgles in restrained anger. Stig says, "Daxam!" Surg is at his side, both have there blasters pointing at Daxam.

"Looks like we're tracking the same bounty, Stig." Kator Ekin yells from a doorway with a Sith sword in one hand and a blaster in the other.

Above them the young Iktotchi bounty hunter and his Bothan partner stand on the rooftops. Both pointing their blasters at Daxam and his friends. "We'll make plenty splitting this bounty." He shouts.

Everything happens fast.

The four Sith lightsaber snap-hiss, surprising everyone. It is the most unlikely of standoff. Sith, Solar Guardians, Jedi, and bounty hunters crossing paths by chance. Or the will of the Force.

Darth Havoc gives a devilish grin. He whispers in his comlink.

"How about we all talk this over." Daxam suggests.

People scuttle away from the confrontation.

"Kill them all!" Darth Havoc says

"I think not!" Hal Nico runs forward with his lightsaber out. Remic Xon, Arc Haband, Lanse Duskhunter, Cyf Whitesun, and Talien Falconer charge up the street attacking. Talien's bionic leg is not covered. He enjoys showing it off.

"Sith spit!" Stig cusses. Stig, Surg, Cilrej, and Balten'yah open fire at Daxm's group.

Daxam and Kyp's lightsabers ignite, battling away blaster bolts as the other Solar Guardians spray out drawing their blasters and returning fire.

Darth Cyranos turns and his lightsaber connects with Hal Nico's. "Let's finished what we started, Jedi scum."

Kator rolls out into the street shooting and swinging his Sith sword.

The street is lit up with the chaos of blaster fire as the stormtroopers charge into one end of the street. On the center of it all is Jedi versus Sith. Lightsabers spark and hiss and clash. Darth Havoc. Darth Thade. Darth Cyranos. Darth Naga. Kator Ekin. Daxam Rad. Hal Nico. Kyp Durrone. Arc Haband with his newly constructed lightsaber.

All hell breaks loose. The people of Mos Eisley will talk about this moment for years to come.

Several minutes of intense battle pass. The surrounding buildings are covered in black scorch marks from blaster bolts. Chunks of wall ricochet off. Dust and sand are kicked up like a small storm. Stormtroopers are killed. Arc Haband cries out as a blaster bolt hits his shoulder and Darth Thade's lightsaber grazes his other shoulder. Arc falls to the ground. Kyp's lightsaber blocks Thade's killing stroke.

Kator and Daxam are locked in a heated dance of laser saber and Sith sword. Equally as personal as Nico and Cyranos. Darth Havoc makes his way toward the Solar Guardians.

From above the inexperienced bounty hunter takes his lucky shot. A stun bolt takes Daxam Rad square in the back.

"Traitor!" Laris roars with a blaster in each hand and Troel fire and eager at his side. The blaster fire prevents Kator from him from killing the unconscious Admiral Daxam Rad.

"Mine." Cilrej swoops down with his jet pack scooping up Daxam. He and his Bothan partner retreat with their prey. The Sullustan cousins follow them.

"No way!" Cyf screams opening fire at the fleeing bounty hunters with Lanse and Talien.

Darth Cyranos creates a whirlwind of sand and debris attacking everyone. "You will die like your apprentice. By my hand."

Hal Nico stumbles away and chunks of sandstone fly at him.

Blue lightning arcs from Darth Havoc's hands striking Hal. Kyp lunges forward, scooping up Arc's lightsaber, he uses one to block the Force lightning and the other to strike at Cyranos.

Suddenly reinforcements arrive. The brave Twi'lek Cial Dasu leads dozens of Solar Guardians into the street opening fire on the Sith and stormtroopers.

"We leave." Darth Havoc hisses.

Kyp Durrton stands catching his breath. A dead stormtrooper at his feet.

Darth Havoc looks back, throwing his lightsaber, guiding it with the Force. The laser blade impales the Twi'lek leader. Cial gasps, looking shocked at the lightsaber in her chest. The blaster drops from her hand landing next to more dead Solar Guardians on the sand street. The lightsaber spins through the air returning to Havoc's grasp as he retreats.

"We need to get to the ships!" Talien shouts. "They have Admiral Rad! They have Daxam! Move! Move! Move!"

All the Solar Guardians runs to their ships in different hangars. Kyp looks at the carnage they are leaving behind. Dozens of dead stormtroopers and Solar Guardians. A few bystanders. Some of the buildings collapsed during the fighting. His lips make a tight line. Determined, he makes the decision to get to his starfighter and stay with the Solar Guardians until the rescue Daxam Rad.

Talien is shouting in a comlink as he runs to a hangar with Lanse, Cyf, and Hal. Remic is carrying the unconscious Duros Jedi. "There is an Imperial Star Destroyer exchanging fire with your ship, Lanse."

"Wonderful." Lanse Duskhunter grumbles.

Aboard the Solar Dreamer in a briefing room. A pregnant Ariana Rad. Kyp Durrón. Hal Nico. Talien Falconer. Remic Xon. Usha Dasu Falconer. Sia Amidala Xon. Gleek. Cinder. Echo. Dinger. Drixle. Cyf Whitesun. Laris Oth. Troel Earta. Arc Haband. Lanse Duskhunter.

"We're going to Nal Hutta to rescue Daxam. End of story." Ariana tells them. She is outwardly calm, inside she is full of fear.

"I'm coming with." Kyp pipes in.

"Kire Tatus, Barin Ander, and Strom Vedes report they have located the Sith headquarters on Geonosis." Lanse Duskhunter points out. "There is a battle droid and starfighter factory there. We have to destroy it. We have to stop the Sith."

"Easier done when the Admiral is with us." Talien advises.

"We all want him back." Usha says. She is heartbroken over the loss of her sister.

"We lost a lot of Solar Guardians on Tatooine." Ariana says with fire in her voice. "Call in all the Solar Guardians to rendezvous at the edge of the Nal Hutta System. Ouro the Hutt is over. From there we head straight to Geonosis and strike hard and fast. Everything we have."

"I can contact Luke Skywalker." Kyp offers.

"We don't have time for that." Ariana replies. "This is our war."

Kyp raises both eyebrows and shrugs. "Okay. I'm still in."

"You're welcome with us." Hal pats Kyp's shoulder. "I sense the Force is very strong with you. If a bit brash." He smiles.

Kyp smirks. "I get by."

The Solar Dreamer comes out of hyperspace at the furthest edge of the Nal Hutta System. It's officially the Y'Toub System, but not many call it that. Ariana is commanding officer. Gleek, Cinder, and Echo aboard the command bridge with her. They see the other Solar Guardians ships already waiting.

Hal Nico is commanding the Grey Bird. With an assault team. The ramp opens and they step out into one of the space station's many docking bays.

Captain Kire Tatus commanding her modified Y2-900 Freighter. She calls the ship the Solar Streamer.

Lieutenant Captain Talien Falconer commanding the Grey Wolf, his modified VT-49 Imperial Decimator, flanked by Usha in her modified grey TIE Fighter, Sia in her N-1 starfighter, and two Delta-class JV-7 shuttles.

Captain Barin Ander aboard his modified J-type 327 Nubian starship, aka the Silver Wolf.

Captain Lanse Duskhunter with a Bakuran-class Star Destroyer called the Solar Wind.

Captain Strom Vedes commanding a modified Imperial Landing Craft, Sentinel-class. Named the Solar Wolf.

"All starfighters deploy." Ariana speaks into the Solar Guardians private com channel. Her voice is dead calm. Off the com she says to the Rodian co-pilot, "This is the first time all the Solar Guardians have been called together. My husband's reckoning."

Gleek's eyes widen. "What a sight to behold."

The entire Solar Guardian fleet together for the first time. Two missions. And flying in formations before them all starfighter squadrons. Star Storm Squadron. Night Squadron. Nova Squadron. Grey Squadron. Silver Squadron. Wolf Squadron. Black Squadron. Nebula Squadron. Carlac Squadron.

12 A-wings starfighters.

10 Z-95 Headhunters starfighters.

18 N-1 Naboo starfighters.

6 TIE Interceptors.

5 TIE Defenders.

6 TIE Fighters.

3 modified TIE Fighters.

6 Y-wing starfighters.

8 B-wing starfighters.

4 E-wing starfighters.

12 R-41 Starchaser starfighters.

12 Kihraxz Assault Fighters.

1 Jedi starfighter.

"We're moving in and surrounding Ouro the Hutt's space station." Ariana commands. "Ouro surrenders Admiral Daxam Rad or we destroy the station."

"Copy that."

"Roger that."

Several voices acknowledge the order and all the ships set course for the Hutt's base of operations. Within minutes they have the city-sized space station surrounded. Ariana glares at a holo of the fat slug Ouro the Hutt in the command bridge of the Solar Dreamer. "Release Daxam Rad or we will destroy you station, Ouro."

The Hutt laughs, rolls of fat jiggle in the grey-blue hologram. He speaks in Huttese. Cinder translating. "Daxam Rad owes me many credits for losing my prize."

"We can reimburse you the credits." Ariana says, her prehensile head tails moving with anger.

"It is more than than, Twi'lek." The Hutt chuckles. "A Hutt is no fool. My eyes and ears see and hear everything that happens in the galaxy. I know the Jedi was freed from the carbonite. I know that Admiral Daxam Rad and his space pirates are truly the ridiculous and mysterious Solar Guardians. Attack my station and I will launch every ship here against you. Destroy the station and the traitor Daxam Rad will be executed."

"It took you twelve years to discover that?" Ariana challenges. "How do you know we don't have assassins in your court at this very moment?"

"You're bluffing." Ouro replies, no longer restraining his bitterness. He will be a laughing stock if the other Hutts know he was tricked for so many years. "And if you destroy my home Daxam Rad will die with me." He growls and shouts. "Die!"

The holo image blinks off.

Echo R3 buzzes and whistles.

"Dozens of shops are launching from the station!" Gleek announces.

"Attack formations!" Ariana shouts into the Solar Guardians private com channel.

Before them a motley crew of myriad designs of starfighters and modified freighters beginning advancing and firing blasters and turbo lasers. From Ariana's estimation they are about evenly matched. The space station itself begins firing at them. Ariana says into the com system, "Solar Dreamer and Solar Wind concentrate fire on the station. Everyone else take out their ships."

"Copy that." Captain Lanse Duskhunter responds aboard the Star Destroyer known as the Solar Wind.

Hal Nico and a group of robed beings with their faces hidden by hoods approach the entrance to Ouro the Hutt's audience chamber. Two Gamorrean guards stand at the doors with vibro-axes in hand. Hal waved his hand with the Jedi mind trick. "You will let us pass. Lay down your weapons and leave the station."

The Gamorreans nod, set their weapons down, and walk away.

Jedi Knight Hal Nico's blue lightsaber sizzles to life and he stabs the long laser blade into the locked metal door. "Prepare yourselves." He says as the door glows red, metal melting away. "May the Force be with you all."

"I am one with the Force. The Force is with me." The red-eyed Duros says as he and the other Jedi ignite their sabers. Rebellious Kyp Durrón. The Ewok Taree. Young, blond Cyf Whitesun. A long-eared Gungan named Jubah Noor. Sheed the Squib. The hammerhead Wamwei. Hakua the Wookiee. Fendar the Falleen. And two non-Jedi, the armored Mandalorians Remic Xon and Amar Deth.

On the nearly dead world of Geonosis Darth Havoc is seated in a chair of what has become his throne room. The Sith are discussing what their not moves will be. It is not a debate. Darth Havoc is the dominant one, and the former Kana San senses the jealousy and envy of Darth Cyranos. They are all seated around a glossy black table before him.

Darth Cyranos. Darth Thade. Darth Naga. Grand Moff Meka. The Nightsister Triva. The Nightbrother Kator Ekin.

"We will maintain our presence on Geonosis." Darth Havoc speaks softly, his face hidden behind the crimson helmet and black visor. "The droid army will aid in building a new Sith Dynasty. A new golden age of Sith. Triva will unite the tribes of Dathomir. Darth Thade and Darth Naga will make a home of the former Rebel Alliance Echo Base in the Hoth System. A Sith temple will be constructed on both worlds. That will become our Sith Praexium. Our academy to rival our enemy Luke Skywalker and his Jedi. You will take a platoon of droids with you."

"Yes, my master." Both the Weequay and Tuskan Raider Sith nod and speak in unison.

Darth Havoc slowly makes eye contact with all of them before continuing. "I will begin the Sith search aboard Grand Moff Meka's Star Destroyer the Malignant."

Old Meka gives a curt nod. A sour expression on his face.

"What of the Jedi Hal Nico and Daxam Rad?" Darth Cyranos asks.

"We will assassinate them in due time." Darth Havoc replies coolly. "Now we have enough droids and ships to take over a planet. Something remote. Something our enemies the New Republic, the Imperial Remnant, the Black Sun, and the Hutt Syndicate will not notice. Any suggestions?"

The walls of Ouro the Hutt's audience chamber are a sick gold coated with humidity, mildew, and mold of various ill shades. The odor is rank. The floor is ankle deep in murky water. Daxam Rad is change to a wall by ankles and wrists in a laser cage above the water. He is displayed as a trophy and warning. He is wide awake and smiling.

The Jedi and Mandalorians rush into the room. Ouro the Hutt bellows. "Kill them! Kill them all!"

The entire space station quakes from heavy tubolasers cannons, concussion missiles, and proton torpedo's from the Solar Dreamer and the Solar Wind.

Gamorean guards, various criminals of all species charge in defense of the Hutt. Smugglers, mercenaries, slavers, gamblers, bounty hunters, and regular employees of Ouro.

Kyp Durrone kills two of the green pig faced Gamoreans with a pair of swipes with his purple lightsaber. They squeal and fall with a splash to the floor.

Spotting the weapon on Ouro's repulsion lift, Arc Haband uses Force telekinesis to pull Faxam's lightsaber through the air to his hand. He ignites it and blocks blaster bolts with both lightsabers losing himself to the Force.

Hal Nico slices through the control panel next to Daxam's laser cage and uses the Force to mentally rip the chains from the stone, moss covered wall. Daxam lands gracefully on his feet with a smirk.

"You can't win!" Ouro screams. "You will not escape my armada!"

Arc tosses Daxam his lightsaber. With a snap-hiss the blade ignites. He notices Hal kneeling before the dead Gungan Jedi. Daxam didn't see who shot him. Using the Force to propel himself Daxam lunges through the stench and impales Ouro the Hutt on top of his smooth, blubbery head.

Ouro's eyes widen in horror. The Hutt slumps forward, dead. Seeing this, his guards begin to retreat.

"The Hutt's won't forget this." Kyp says. "They'll hunt the Solar Dreamers now."

Daxam nods. "I know."

Hal Nico stands as his comlink buzzes to life. They hear Ariana's voice. "I don't know what just happened but Ouro's ships are retreating into hyperspace."

"Mission accomplished." Hal replies into the comlink, then hands it to Daxam.

Hakua carries the dead Gungan Jedi.

"My love." Daxam says into the comlink.

"Get your rear end out of there." Ariana replies. "We over did it. Echo says the whole station is going to blow."

Daxam can hear the emotion in her voice. "On our way."

"Let's go." Kyp jogs to the door, lightsaber still lit up.

A few days later the Solar Guardian fleet is still together. Admiral Rad is on the surface of the moon inside there former Imperial Outpost Base in the swamp. All the Solar Guardians in orbit see the image of Rad as a hologram aboard their ships. He clears his throat before speaking.

"This is Admiral Daxam Rad of the Solar Guardians. First and foremost I thank each and everyone of you for my brave and daring rescue from Ouro the Hutt. I am in your debt. I am proud to be a Solar Guardian. I like to think we've done our part to make the galaxy a better place. We sacrificed much in the Nal Hutta battle. The death of Jedi Padawan Jubah Noor and twenty percent of our starfighters. Yet we are victorious and we honor those who died fighting for our ideals. We will continue that fight. Tonight on the moon's surface we will hold funeral rights for those who gave their lives."

Daxam remains silent a moment. Looks down. And looks back up at all those he knows are watching him, depending on him. "Tomorrow we continue that fight against tyranny. Tomorrow we leave for Geonosis to battle Darth Cyranos, Moff Meka, and Kana San. They have a large factory there constructing a droid army and starfighters to match. We must destroy the factory and bring the Sith to justice. The fleet stays together. May the Force be with you."

The fleet comes out of hyperspace above the orange-red dead planet of Geonosis. Daxam, Gleek, Ariana, Cinder, Echo, and Fendar are aboard the command bridge of the Solar Dreamer. "Launch all starfighters. Target the droid factory at the assigned coordinates." Daxam smiles at Gleek and Ariana. "Fire at will."

"There is a Star Destroyer in the vicinity." Gleek informs Daxam. "The Malignant."

"Moff Meka." Ariana says.

Daxam nods and speaks into the com. "The Solar Dreamer is engaging the Star Destroyer. All Solar Guardians stay on task until the factory is destroyed."

The Solar Dreamer and the Malignant begin to exchange fire as the rest of the Solar Guardians and Kyp Durrion attack the factory on the planet's surface. All the ships except the Solar Wind have to enter the atmosphere of Geonosis to attack.

"We're evenly matched." Gleek says.

"Admiral Rad." Kire Tatus addresses him over the com channel. "The Jedi Knight Hal Nico boarded the Malignant with an astromech and the Dathomir Jedi Starfighter."

"What is space?" Daxam pounds a fist on the armrest of his chair. Over the com he responds. "Copy that, Tatus."

"We can't destroy the Malignant with Hal aboard it." Cinder points out, sounding worried for a droid.

Daxam closes his eyes, feeling, sensing. "Darth Cyranos is aboard the Malignant." He opens his eyes. "Let's take out its shields and pound it with ion cannons. Once the ship is disabled we'll board it."

"We'll need half the crew of the Solar Dreamer and the Solar Wind to take the crew of the Malignant." Ariana says.

Daxam nods silently.

"Where are my Star Destroyers?" Darth Havoc's voice rises with anger and announce. He stands on the bridge with his hands made into fists. Grand Moff Meka and Darth Cyranos stand with him.

Meka looks up from a flat holo. Worry in his expression. "They have abandoned us to Admiral Daala."

"Traitors!" Darth Havoc shouts. "How can they follow that woman? I have a clear path to conquest!"

"Daala has a talent for inspiring Imperials." Meka hesitates.

"No." Havoc sounds calm. Together they watch out the window viewer at the surface of the planet below. Tiny explosions are visible from space. "Report from the surface." Havoc looks back at a bridge officer.

The man replies with a nervous twitch. "Lord Havoc. There is no response."

"They are destroyed." Meka shakes his head in defeat. "There was not enough ground defense for this kind of attack. Our strength was in our secrecy." He runs a hand through his greying hair, stress apparent in his voice.

Darth Cyranos smirks. Havoc sees it. The Malignant trembles from the Solar Dreamer's turbo laser cannons.

"Destroy that ship!" Havoc screams. "Launch a squadron of TIE Fighters."

"Just one?" Cyranos ask.

Darth Havoc glares at him from beneath his red helmet.

The door to the command bridge hisses open. Hal Nico steps in, shrugs off his brown robe, and thumbs the control on his lightsaber. It burns to life. "Cyranos."

Darth Havoc grins beneath his helmet. "Take him, Darth Cyranos."

Cyranos snarls. His lip trembles and curls in anger. "Jedi." His lightsaber snaps to life.

"Prove yourself to me." Darth Havoc crosses his arms.

Meka and a few of the bridge crew step back.

Hal Nico and Cyranos advance, circling each other with the lightsabers. Darth Cyranos strikes first. His blade is blocked with his laser saber.

"Whoa." Gleek shouts as the Solar Dreamer shutters under the attacks of the Star Destroyer Malignant.

Echo R3 whistles in alarm.

"Oh no, are you sure, Echo?" Cinder asks.

R3 beeps an affirmative.

"What is it?" Fendar asks from behind the others.

Ariana, Daxam, and Gleek share a mournful glance. Daxam speaks into the internal com system of the ship. "This is Admiral Rad. Emergency evacuation. All crew to escape pods. I repeat all crew vacate the ship."

"Are you serious?" The Jedi Padawan Fendar sounds frightened.

Daxam nods. "R3 put the ship on autopilot. As much as is possible. Set a course to ram the Malignant. Then get to an escape pod."

"Are you serious?" Fendar repeats.

"Let's get off the ship." Daxam sounds sad.

"What about Hal?" Her hand rests on her large pregnant stomach. She is due to have twin babies any day now.

Daxam sighs. "We can't let Cyranos live. I know he's aboard that ship. I sense Kana San as well. We can end this threat to the galaxy now."

Ariana nods in forlorn understanding. "May the Force be with you, Hal Nico."

"Wow." Kyp Durrone says from his Z-95 Headhunter watching the factories on Geonosis explode. They are completely destroyed. A few starfighters came out to fight, but the Solar Wind blow up the hangar before more than a handful escaped. He smiles and guns his starfighter toward space, exiting the atmosphere along with dozens of other Solar Guardian ships.

"Oh no." Captain Duskhunter says on the bridge of the Bakuran-class Star Destroyer watching the Solar Dreamer collide with the Malignant. It grazes one side, the Malignant barely survives. It is heavily damaged and retreating. The Solar Dreamer explodes in the silence of space. He speaks into the Solar

Dreamer's secret com channel. "All Solar Guardians. This is Captain Duskhunter. The Solar Dreamer is gone. I repeat. The Solar Dreamer is destroyed. Everyone rescue the escape pods. The factories are gone. Rescue all escape pods."

Aboard an escape pod the command bridge crew watch the Solar Dreamer explode. R3 made it aboard their escape pod before the ship was destroyed. Daxam sighs. His comlink blurbs static. "Admiral Rad!"

"This is Rad." Daxam says. "We're alright, Captain Tatus."

"Admiral." She continues. "Hal's astromech sent the coordinates of the Malignant's hyperspace course. Hal brought a tracker on board."

"Send the data to the Grey Wolf, Kire." Daxam says. "Talien pick us up."

Hal Nico's face drips with sweat. His lightsaber sticks through Darth Cyranos heart. The ship groans and feels like it's going to flip. Everyone falls and slides across the floor except Darth Havoc, who catches a railing. The corpse of Cyranos flops against a window. Before the ship levels out Hal is hit with blue lightning arcing from Havoc's fingertips.

Hal Nico drops his lightsaber and collapses, twitching into unconsciousness.

"Shields are gone!" Meka shouts. "We're barely together!"

"Coordinates Order 13." Darth Havoc says and moments later it disappears into hyperspace.

Back on the Endor moon base of the Solar Guardians the entire fleet is still together. Daxam and many of the crew are staying with Taree's tribe discussing their future over a fire in the night.

"That's crazy talk." Talien says, slapping his bionic leg. An Ewok is curiously inspecting it.

"You are not leaving me behind." Ariana crosses her arms frowning.

"Hal Nico is still alive. I can feel him. He's in pain. Hal saved me from Ouro the Hutt. I can't abandon him." Daxam says with sincerity.

"Into the unknown regions?" Kire asks. "You may never return. I don't know of anyone who has."

"I will return." Something in Daxam's voice convinces all the Solar Guardians and Ewoks present he is speaking the truth. He has become a legend to the Solar Guardians.

"I wish I could go with, but my fight with the Empire isn't over." Kyp speaks more timid than what is normal.

"I'm going with you." Talien blurts.

"Me to." Gleek says.

"No." Daxam gives them all a warm smile. "I have a plan. Talien take this to Count Thenn on Bakura. Discretely. I'm leaving you in command of the Solar Guardians."

"Me?" Talien pales.

"Yes. I trust you to do it. I trust many of you but you are my decision. You've been with me the longest. Besides I'm taking the Grey Wolf from you."

"Oh." Talien has mixed feelings. The Grey Wolf has become his home. At the say time he's beginning to beam with pride at the idea of leading the Solar Guardians.

"Lanse," Daxam continues. "You'll becoming with me. Talien will assume command of the Solar Wind. I'm also taking the two Delta-class shuttles. The Grey Wolf is modified to carry two starfighters. I'll be taking a Y-wing and an A-wing."

Everyone nods, silent, uncomfortable, afraid and hopeful of the future.

"The crew coming with me." Daxam explains. "Lanse Duskhunter. My wife, Ariana. Gleek. Fendar. Echo. Cinder. Laris Oth. Troel Earta. Cyf Whitesun. Gledek. Harkon. Medical droids Doc and Creed. Astromech Howler. The droids Amber and Goose. Ember and Amar Deth. That's everyone. No

room for discussion. We leave in the morning. From now on begin taking your orders from Lieutenant Falconer."

Everyone is stunned and finishes the nights dinner quietly.

The morning.

"It's a beautiful sunrise." Daxam says, looking out at the horizon through trees near a clearing the great forest.

Remic Xon, Kire Tatus, and Talien Falconer are with him. "I know you two will support Talien." He hugs each one in turn. The other ships are in orbit already. "I'll be back."

They watch him walk to the boarding ramp of the Decimator. He turns back and smiles at them. "May the Force be with you. Always."

Epilogue

Lieutenant Falconer sits at an elegant dining table with his wife, Usha and his friends Srixle the Toydarian and Remic Xon the Mandalorian warrior. At the head of the table is the regal Count Thenn, at his right his daughter. Talien followed Daxam's instructions and brought the data chip to the Count of Bakura. The Count has accepted Falconer on Daxam's word as leader of the Solar Guardians and will continue to sponsor them.

"All of you were selected by Lieutenant Falconer's predecessor Admiral Daxam Rad. My nephew." Count Thenn says with authority. "An invitation to join the Solar Guardians. Employment and purpose if you except. Let me introduce everyone. The mercenary Dash Rendar. The smuggler Mazzic. The Wookiee bounty hunter Snooth. Former Alliance intelligence agent Scarlet Hark. Jedi Knight Rillao and her son, the pilot Tigris. And Jedi Knight Callista."

"This ought to be interesting." The middle aged blond Dash Rendar gives a lopsided grin.

To be continued in the Solar Guardians during the New Jedi Order Era...