

The Adventures of Sin Squadron, Part I: The Gang Gets A New Commander

As the shuttle slowly dropped out of hyperspace, the pilot managed to lurch way too hard. Zekk felt his hungover stomach way too hard; he turned green as his stomach jumped up into his chest, then slowly settled back down. He picked up his duffel bag as the ISD Warrior came into view and hailed the shuttle. He walked over to the pilot.

“How long have you been flying this thing?” Zekk asked the pilot, who he was pretty sure just entered puberty.

“Just got my flight certification yesterday, sir!” he replied with the enthusiasm of someone who had never had their ship shot up.

Great, Zekk thought. No wonder the Republic is winning.

The shuttle proceeded to get landing clearance and the pilot brought it in – slowly, incredibly jerky, and landing backwards. As the hydraulics hissed and the ramp descended, Zekk quite literally ran off the shuttle.

He first noted the interior of the Warrior’s hangar bay, clean and polished to a fine, shiny hue. Assembled before him were 11 pilots, including the outgoing pilot, General Earnim Branet, who was stepping down to be a regular old pilot. Zekk threw a crisp salute and was returned in kind, before General Branet extended his hand.

“Welcome aboard, Lieutenant Colonel Terrik, to the ISD Warrior and to Sin Squadron. I have ordered the pilots to assemble to greet you. All the pilots have pitched in, too, to get you 50 credits towards the Warrior’s cantina. Your reputation precedes you,” said General Branet, smiling.

Zekk shook Earnim’s hand. “Thank you General,” he replied. Earnim fell into formation with his squadron as Zekk turned to address his squadron. “Listen up, pilots! I’m pretty easy to get along with. The one rule is that you do not disturb my drinking. And pick up all your crap off the floor of the squadron bunkroom so I don’t drunkenly trip over it on the way to my quarters!”

“Sir yes sir!” they all replied in unison.

“Now, who is the executive officer of this outfit? Step forward!”

A young pilot with a Lieutenant Commander’s rank board stepped forward. “Sir, I am, sir!”

“What’s your name, pilot?” Zekk said sternly.

“Sir, Lieutenant Commander Coremy Jertese, sir!” he replied, snapping a crisp salute.

“Lieutenant Commander Jertese, I take pride in running a squadron of top pilots. The best in the TIE Corps. We are high performing with high morale. Do you know why my squadrons always have high morale, Lieutenant Commander Jertese?” Zekk said, stepping up to him.

“Sir, no sir!” he replied robotically.

“Because my pilots always ended up hating their executive officer so much that they love me by comparison. Will that be an issue for you, pilot?” Zekk said, narrowing his eyes.

Coremy paled, but he did not waver. “Sir no sir!”

“Outstanding, pilot! Let’s get that started then. Lieutenant Commander Jertese, you will order one of our pilots to clean the Sin Squadron latrines from top to bottom with the finest toothbrushes the Empire has to offer. Is that understood?” Zekk replied with a very smug grin.

“Sir yes sir!” Coremy snapped another crisp salute and turned around. “Sublieutenant Cloud Striker, step forward!”

A man that looked way too old to be a Sublieutenant stepped forward. Zekk decided he would decipher that mystery later. He saluted. "Sir!"

"Sublieutenant Cloud Striker, you will take the commander's bags to his private quarters where you will then unpack for him. You will take possession of the commander's toothbrushes and proceed to clean the entire Sin Squadron head from top to bottom. You will then return them so that the commander does not know which toothbrushes were used to clean the head, and he will be forced to throw them all out! Do you understand, Sublieutenant?" Coremy said, as firmly and professionally as he could possibly muster.

Zekk watched not only his eyes but also the eyes of his entire squadron go wide. They did their very best to not snicker in formation by biting their lips. Zekk could only look at Coremy in awe as he turned around to face his commander.

"Sir, your orders will be carried out. Welcome to Sin Squadron," said Coremy, as he extended his hand. Zekk was flabbergasted.

"I'm impressed. Finally, I've found someone as petty as I am," Zekk said as he shook Coremy's hand. "Dismissed!" He grabbed Coremy by the shoulder. "Not you. You will be joining me for a drink. I'll buy."

The Adventures of Sin Squadron

Chapter II: The Gang Chats Up A Droid

Zekk sat inside the ISD Warrior's cantina, and had been there for a while now since he was off duty. The fleet had clearly spared no expense with its pilots' recreational activity. With a solid red oak bar and tables, dim lighting, and plush leather couches, the Warrior was clearly the favorite ship in the fleet. Vice Admiral Antiel went to great lengths to import the finest liquor from all over the galaxy.

Zekk squinted his eyes at the droid as it stood in front of him behind the bar, monotonously wiping down ale stained glasses. An aging, reprogrammed Imperial security droid, it had been retrofitted for bartending duty. With nobody else to talk to at the bar this evening, Zekk had been trying to engage it all evening in some small talk, to little avail. He looked down at the Corellian ale in his glass, then up at the six (or was that seven? He was starting to see double) empty ones in front of him, then back up at the droid.

"Look, all I'm saying is, the galaxy's economy benefited tremendously from Imperial rule. We are more efficient than the Republic was," Zekk said, as he pointed a wobbly finger at the droid.

"Of course, sir," the droid remarked.

"Emperor Palpatine's economic plan reduced unemployment on Alderaan, a Rebel hotbed, to zero percent! Zero!" said Zekk.

"Sir, that is because the Empire destroyed the planet. Was that part of the Empire's economic plan?" the droid remarked, its white optical sensors looking him up and down.

"That is fake news! What happened on Alderaan was an unfortunate mining accident, nothing more!" Zekk said defensively. "Furthermore!..." Zekk said, as he trailed off. The droid cocked its head to look at him. "Never mind, I forgot. Go ahead."

"Sir, that is illogical. Are you trying to imply that the complete destruction of an entire planet the size of Alderaan was due to a mining accident?" the droid said.

"Well...I...hmm. I never thought about it that way," Zekk mused. "However...that kind of sounds like Republic sympathizer talk. Are you sure you should be serving drinks?" Zekk looked down at his ale. How did his glass get empty? "How do I know you didn't spike this?"

“Sir, I am as supportive of the Empire as my programming allows me to be but to imply that an entire planet was destroyed in a mining accident is ludicrous and illogical. It was clearly the result of Imperial military action and no one disputes this,” replied the droid.

“I think your programming is a little off, but I’m going to go ahead and forget what you said. I only don’t want your memory wiped because I like the little curvy orange slices you serve with Jawa Juice,” Zekk said. He looked out through the glass, down at Aurora Prime as the ISD Warrior orbited it. It was beautiful. “How about that Leia Organa though? That’s a nice piece right there.” He poked the droid in the torso. “Eh? Eh?”

“Of course, sir. However, please do not touch me. My programming requires me to give you one warning when you reach across the bar. Should it happen again, I will be forced to break you in two,” said the droid.

Zekk was barely listening. “What is your designation, droid?”

“Sir, my designation is B-33R. I am an Imperial security droid reprogrammed for bartending protocol. Would you like another?” said the droid. Zekk liked this droid because droids didn’t usually cut him off. “Absolutely,” he replied. B-33R filled up his glass with more Corellian ale. “Don’t spike it this time. Wait, what? B-33R? Beer? Your designation is beer?”

If the droid were programmed to sigh, it would have. Zekk could hear it in his voice. “Yes sir. That was an attempt at humor by the organic who reprogrammed me.”

“That is pretty damn funny,” Zekk said. He heard a sharp hiss as the doors behind him opened, and in walked General Earnim Branet, sporting his newest and fanciest medal, the Gold Star of the Empire. Zekk let out a low whistle upon seeing and waved the general over.

“General, over here! Beer, this is my friend, General Branet. He is the former commander of Sin Squadron and from whom I assumed command. General, please tell Beer here exactly what happened to Alderaan. We were just having this discussion,” Zekk said. He pulled Earnim’s chair out for him. Earnim sat down and got comfortable. “Mining accident, wasn’t it?” he said.

Zekk whipped around to Beer and pointed a wobbly finger at the droid, his vision blurring and wobbling as that one finger became two. “I told you! I knew your programming was screwy. I’ll buy the General a beer to celebrate his new award.”

Beer was clearly considering defecting to the Republic at this point. Or he would have if his programming had allowed it. “Of course, sir.” Beer poured Earnim a glass of beer.

“General, it’s been fun. But I have to get going,” he said. He paid his tab and for Earnim’s beer as well, slapping the general on the back on the way out. Earnim just looked up at Beer as Zekk walked out and shrugged.

“You get used to him,” Earnim said. Beer went back to polishing a glass.

Zekk staggered quite slowly back to his private quarters, thinking this would be a terrible time for a Republic attack, although he did do his best flying in this condition...if he could find his Missile Boat. As a mouse droid crossed his path, he picked it up and drop kicked it down the hallway for absolutely no reason. He had only been here a week – not long enough for the mouse droids to rue his presence. He entered the Sin Squadron bunkroom, cackling silently in his head at the hideous pastels that he had painted it in. Most pilots were either reading, writing letters, or sleeping. A few weren’t to be found. But it was their downtime, so Zekk didn’t care. He staggered past into the commander’s private quarters and half-laid, half-fell on to his bunk.

He then quickly rolled over on his back. “Dammit,” he mumbled, and got up to go to the commander’s head. “I always forget.” He spread toothpaste on his toothbrush and started to brush his teeth. He got about 30 seconds in before he realized what the pilots had done with his toothbrush last week. He stopped, looked down, shrugged, and kept it up. His mouth had been worse places.

The Adventures of Sin Squadron Part III – The Gang Gets A New Wing Commander!

Zekk was lying face down in his bunk in his private quarters, coiled in a small nest of Ewok and Wookiee fur blankets and dreaming of busty Twi'lek women, when the intercom next to his bunk started to buzz. He hit the ignore button on it. He was off duty, and hungover. If he didn't hear the battle stations alarm or mayday call, he wasn't getting up. He heard some talking outside his quarters and, after a moment, the door hissed to open. Zekk didn't move.

"Sir?" a voice said. It was Lieutenant Jack Wynand. Jack walked over and shook him a little. "Sir?" "You are not a busty Twi'lek woman. Go away," Zekk said.

"Sir, you are wanted on the bridge," replied Jack.

"Tell them I'm off duty," Zekk said. "And tell Hav I don't have his money. He lost it fair and square. He's lucky he didn't lose his whole hand, honestly."

"Sir, it's a priority message from Vice Admiral Antiel. You are wanted urgently," said Jack.

Zekk sighed as dramatically as possible. Of course it is, he thought. He sat up in his bunk. "Thank you, Lieutenant, you may go," Zekk said.

"Sir!" said Jack, as he snapped a crisp salute and off he went. Zekk responded with the most half-assed salute possible as he stood up, checking to make sure he was presentable. For no reason he could figure out, he was already in his duty uniform. He looked over it carefully. It wasn't even wrinkled.

"Huh," Zekk said. He grabbed his lightsaber and clipped it to his belt, then went to the head to brush his teeth. He could taste the stale beer in his mouth. He looked at his toothbrushes.

I really should replace these, he thought.

He left the Sin bunkroom, saluting various pilots on the way out. It was a long walk from the barracks to the bridge, and it gave him time to think. Why was he getting a priority summons? Did he try to pick up on Hav's woman at the cantina? He had barely spent any time with the Commodore; he didn't know if he had a wife and family with him aboard the ship. Come to think of it, he didn't remember much of last night at all.

He got just a few hundred feet from the bridge when a mouse droid crossed his path. He snarled at his mortal enemy and drew his lightsaber, igniting it. The mouse droid chirped and skittered away in fear.

"Run, you little bastard!" he shouted, before putting his lightsaber away. He passed a couple Hammer's Fist troopers guarding the entrance to the bridge as he walked in, all the way up past the communication pits and to the head of the bridge where the Commodore waited.

"Sir! Lieutenant Colonel Terrik reporting as ordered!" he said, coming to attention and snapping a salute.

"At ease," replied Hav. Hav gestured to his feet, where a mouse droid sat. Zekk felt the hate building in him just looking at his mortal enemy. He noticed this particular mouse droid had a large dent in the side, and the black paint was scuffed off. "Do you recognize this mouse droid, Zekk?"

"I'm sorry, sir, I don't," Zekk replied. He genuinely didn't, but then again, there were large gaps in his daily memory, usually happening shortly after visiting the cantina. The commodore held out a hologram disc that he turned on, showing an image of Zekk drop-kicking a mouse droid down the hallway of the Warrior. Zekk swelled pride.

"Lieutenant Colonel Terrik, we have here security footage of you punting my personal, tricked out mouse droid down the hallway. You damaged his chassis and scuffed his paint," Hav said. Zekk's swelling quickly deflated. "Were you aware that this was my personal mouse droid?"

"No sir, I was not. I do apologize," Zekk replied.

"I think the reason you punted this mouse droid is because it was defenseless against your assaults, Lieutenant Colonel. There was nothing protecting it," replied Hav.

"Sir, that is not the reason. I assaulted the mouse droid because it is evil. They are worse than Rebels. They must all be destroyed," said Zekk, as firmly as if he were quoting scripture.

“Whatever the reason, I have now developed safeguards to protect my mouse droid. You aware, yes, that I have the authority to promote any and all officers of my ship up to the rank of General?” said Hav.

“Yes sir, I am,” replied Zekk, not sure where this is going.

“And you are aware, yes, that there is currently an opening for Wing Commander of Wing II?” questioned Hav.

“Yes sir, I am,” said Zekk. He still wasn’t sure where this was going, but it wasn’t going anywhere good.

“I have contacted the TIE Corps Flight Office on Aurora Prime and called in a favor from Fleet Admiral Pete Mitchell. Effective as of last night, my mouse droid was conscripted into the TIE Corps. After bribing the trainers aboard the Daedalus, Cadet Mouse Droid received his flight certification as was assigned to the ISD Warrior and promoted to Sublieutenant,” said Hav.

“Sir...” said Zekk, trying to stop this before it happened.

“Effective immediately, I am promoting Sublieutenant Mouse Droid to the rank of Colonel, and assigning him as Wing Commander of Wing II. Should you assault him in the future, you will be court martialed for assaulting a superior officer and conduct unbecoming an officer of the Imperial Navy. Furthermore, every time you are promoted, Colonel Mouse Droid will be too. When you are promoted to Colonel, we will promote him to General. If some day you become Commodore, he will be your battlegroup commander. We will also deduct from your pay the repairs necessary to repaint him and repair his chassis,” said Hav. He looked down at his droid. “Congratulations, Colonel Mouse Droid! Zekk, salute your new superior officer.”

“Sir...you can’t be serious,” replied Zekk.

“Salute Colonel Mouse Droid!” shouted Hav. Zekk threw the salute before he even knew he had done it. The droid chirped happily. Zekk looked at the droid, resisting every urge to crush him with the Force, before looking back up at Hav. “Sir, what will Colonel Mouse Droid do when I am someday the Fleet Commander?” said Zekk.

“Then you will personally place my mouse droid on the Imperial throne in Coruscant and hail him as Emperor,” said Hav. Zekk groaned. “You are dismissed!”

Zekk snapped a salute and spun away, stomping past the communication pits. He heard a couple of junior officers snickering.

It would be a shame if Colonel Mouse Droid were to suffer an unfortunate accident away from the security cameras, thought Zekk.

The Adventures of Sin Squadron Part IV – The Mouse Droid Strikes Back

Lieutenant Colonel Zekk Terrik always made a habit of doing a pre-inspection of his craft before heading out on a mission, so this time it did not seem particularly out of the ordinary. After inspecting the landing module and shield generators for proper functionality, he moved around to check the missile tubes next to the cockpit of his Missile Boat. After opening the latch, he carefully pulled down the cover and inspected the warheads, looking for dents or scratches or any possibility of malfunction. He then examined the tubes carefully, looking for any abrasions or dents that would cause the warhead to misfire. Everything looked good.

He looked around for the deck officer, and did not see him aside from a few maintenance droids and the mechanical crew loafing around. *Good*, Zekk thought. He activated the latch for his cockpit, and heard the hiss as it decompressed. The mouse droid in his seat squealed, and attempted to reverse away from him.

“Come here, punk!” Zekk growled, and punched Colonel Mouse Droid in its chassis, knocking it on its side. At that same time, Zekk’s comlink started to beep. He sighed.

“Zekk? Lieutenant Colonel Terrik, report!” said the Commodore’s voice over the intercom. He grumbled. He grabbed Colonel Mouse Droid with both hands and slammed him into the torpedo tubes,

denting the chassis and scraping the paint as he wiggled him in. Colonel Mouse Droid squealed. One of the maintenance droids, rotating in a circle to buff the hangar floor to a fine Imperial shine, got uncomfortably close. After repeated beeping, he finally picked his intercom off his flight suit.

“Sir?” replied Zekk.

“Have you seen Colonel Mouse Droid? He has not been seen in several days and I figure with your personal vendetta against him, you of all people would be intimately aware of his whereabouts,” came Hav’s tinny voice over the intercom.

Zekk depressed the push-to-talk button. “No sir. As I told you before, we have made our peace. I respect him as my superior officer.” He released the button and punched Colonel Mouse Droid hard, forcing him deep down into the torpedo tube so he was sitting directly on top of a concussion missile. “This is the end for you, my friend. Soon I will be Colonel!”

“Very good, Zekk. Do let me know if you see him. Have him report to my quarters,” Hav said.

Zekk slammed the torpedo tube shut. “Of course, sir.”

Zekk continued his visual inspection of his Missile Boat as the rest of Sin Squadron sauntered in. Laser cannons, shield generators, a visual inspection of the hull and all torpedo tubes, making sure the cockpit is firmly sealed. He noticed his pilots doing the same. He had trained them well.

They were a motley crew. Despite being the commander of Sin Squadron, one of the pilots outranked him – the former commander, General Earnim Branet. Among their ranks was Lieutenant Firebreaker Terrik, a Wookiee who had adopted Zekk’s surname after pledging a life debt to him, and followed him into the TIE Corps after Zekk saved his life during his civilian days. Many of them were seasoned combat veterans themselves – but they did have one green pilot. Lieutenant Kire Losco was about to go on his first combat mission; he had earned his promotion from Sublieutenant to Lieutenant largely by being an excellent cook and keeping the squadron head clean, so he had very little in the way of true combat experience.

He observed his executive officer, Commander Coremy Jertese, moving from craft to craft, visually verifying that the pilots had inspected everything. Zekk mused that Coremy would make a fine commander for Sin Squadron one day; indeed, he had already turned down the command of Theta Squadron in order to stay on with Sin Squadron. In Zekk’s opinion, Coremy was wasting his time, but he understood loyalty. Pilots come and go, but leadership qualities were truly rare.

Ever the professional, Coremy came up and snapped to attention. “Sir, I have verified that all pilots have visually inspected their crafts for defects and none were found. Sin Squadron is prepared for combat, sir,” he said.

“Very good, Commander. Signal covers up and let’s go,” said Zekk. A whirring sound, like wheels against metal, could be heard from Zekk’s craft, like a muffled buzzing sound against his torpedo tubes. It caught Coremy’s attention.

“Sir, did you inspect your craft?” said Coremy in a concerned voice.

“I did. Everything is fine. Give the signal, Commander,” Zekk said sternly.

Coremy saluted one final time and made the squadron signal for Covers Up and everyone donned their flight helmets and crawled in. Zekk hopped into his seat and the cockpit sealed itself, making a low hissing sound as the atmosphere was vented out and oxygen flowed in through his helmet. As commander, he was the first to be deployed as the hangar claws dropped his squadron into space. The hyper buoy, already sent to his craft by the ISD Warrior’s navigation office, appeared on the HUD in his cockpit. From now on, it was all business. No first names.

“All wings, report in,” said Zekk.

Comms went briefly silent as the flights reported in to their leaders.

“Sir, Sin Flight 2 is good to go,” said Lieutenant Colonel Rando. Rando was a man of few words. This would likely be the only comms he made for the entire mission.

“Sir, Sin Flight 3 is good to go,” said Coremy.

Zekk assumed the spearhead of Sin Squadron as the flights formed up behind in. The members of Flight 1 flanked him. “Navigation, this is Sin Leader. We are good to go.”

Navigation crackled in over comms. “Copy, Sin Leader. Good luck. We’ll save a seat at the bar for you.”

“Save two for all my medals. Sin, you may hyper at will,” said Zekk. This was his favorite part of every mission. He pushed the lever forward as the hyperspace engine engaged. He was thrown back violently against his seat, but it only lasted for a half second as his body adjusted to the inertia. The background of stars around him disappeared, instead becoming long, thin points of light. If you were to view it from the bridge of the Warrior, as Vice Admiral Hav Antiel did, it would seem to you as if Sin Squadron simply vanished in the blink of an eye.

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After a while, the pinpoints of light from the stars shortened, and Sin Squadron dropped from hyperspace into realspace. Coming into view in front of Zekk was a small, hastily constructed platform, guarded by lazily circling or entirely parked Z-95 Headhunters or R-41 Starchasers. They had no chance. Pirates had been trying to set up space for either piracy or smuggling operations – or other far more illicit practices – in the Aurora Prime system for years. This kind of activity would not be tolerated in Emperor’s Hammer space. Sin Squadron was about to make that crystal clear.

Zekk activated his comm system. He visually verified the eleven other members of Sin Squadron were present before opening with the legally required warning that he knew was a waste of time. “Pirates and smugglers, you are in Emperor’s Hammer space. By order of the Fleet Commander, we demand that you stand down, surrender, and subject yourself to Imperial courts. Refusal to do so will result in hostile action,” said Zekk monotonously. Zekk knew this was a waste of time. Pirates and smugglers knew exactly what they were doing. It had never worked. Zekk switched to warheads. This was the perfect cover for Colonel Mouse Droid to meet his doom.

Sure enough, the pirate craft swung around and began to approach Sin Squadron. He saw craft depart from the rag-tag platform in front of him. Zekk targeted the nearest hostile craft and waited for them to creep into range. This was going to be a bloodbath. If these pirates could even afford missiles, he would be impressed.

“Sin squadron, engage. Show no mercy,” said Zekk over comms. He counted 15 Z-95s and 5 R-41s swinging to engage him. One Missile Boat was worth about 5 Z-95...this was not going to be pretty. Zekk slowly watched his targeting computer intently, eyes darting between it and the craft in front of him. He watched the R-41s break off from the main group to try to outflank.

“Flight 3, break off and engage the R-41s. They are trying to outflank us,” said Zekk.

“Copy, Sin Leader,” said Coremy. Zekk watched as the dots on his nav dishes swung away from the main group. The nearest Z-95 entered the targeting reticle within 2.5 kilometers and begin to blink yellow. Finally, he heard the loud tone from a confirmed lock.

“Goodbye, Colonel Mouse Droid,” Zekk mumbled as he fired. He heard a whirr, and a clunk as the missile misfired.

Son of a...., said Zekk in the cockpit. The lock tone in his cockpit continued to beep – Zekk spam pressed the trigger button, but heard nothing but the firing mechanism jamming and a loud, metallic bang from the torpedo tube. Somehow Colonel Mouse Droid had managed to orient himself within the tube to either block the warhead itself or jam the firing mechanism. Zekk slammed his fist down on the cockpit panel. The Z-95 was closing fast.

“My warheads are jammed. Cover me!” said Zekk.

“Copy Sin Leader,” came the unified chorus from the Sin ships behind him as he pushed forward hard on his stick, going into a steep dive as lasers blew through the area he just occupied. One Z-95, for whatever reason, decided to dive down to chase, exposing the broad side of his ship to quite literally everyone. He got a cockpit full of laser from Lieutenant Genie for this fatal mistake. A missile

from Major Wondra exploded along the wing of one, shearing it off. General Branet finished the job as the craft spun out of control.

As Zekk hit the steep dive, he fired again and again, attempting to jar Colonel Mouse Droid loose. At one point he thought he almost had it, until he heard an angry squeak from inside his torpedo tube and another loud bang. He came out of the dive and rolled hard, torpedo tubes squeaking with rage. A Z-95 got caught in the line of fire and Zekk blind fired his lasers. The loud, angry roar of a Wookiee pierced the comms as Lieutenant Firebreaker screamed in from side, racing through the explosion that his lasers caused. Zekk sighed, realizing this was going to be a lost cause. This mission was supposed to be the perfect cover for his assassination of Colonel Mouse Droid.

The concerned voice of his executive officer came over the comm. “Sir? Who are you evading? Everyone is dead,” said Coremy. Zekk scanned his radar dishes, seeing only friendly dots. Sin Squadron had indeed made short work of all the pirate craft. Rando and the rest of flight 2 were headed back to form up; even Lieutenant Losco had gotten his first kill today. They had suffered no losses today, which meant all the survivors drank for free today at the Warrior cantina.

“Err, sorry. This is what happens when I fly sober,” said Zekk. He could practically feel the Sin old timers nod over comms; this was old news to them. “Let’s make short work of that platform, guys.”

Minutes later the platform was a mix of floating rubble, aimlessly drifting through space. Sin Squadron headed for its nav buoy, and the long, thin points of light stretched to infinity as they jumped to hyperspace.

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Just like that, Sin Squadron simply appeared out of nowhere in front of the Warrior and began cycling to be picked up by the tractor beam. Hav had carefully searched the security recordings of the Warrior in an attempt to locate his missing mouse droid, to no avail. But he could not help noticing the timely coincidence of Colonel Mouse Droid’s disappearance with Zekk’s sudden affinity for being away from the Warrior as much as possible. He drummed his metallic fingers on the rim of the bridge’s viewport before making his down to the starfighter hangar bay.

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Zekk’s cockpit hissed as it decompressed, venting the atmosphere inside out into the hangar bay of the Warrior. He climbed out. Coremy was already standing by the side of his craft, ready to look into the torpedo tube. Zekk’s heart leapt into his throat.

“*Pilot don’t touch that torpedo tube!*” screamed Zekk, much louder than he had initially intended. Coremy took a step back in alarm. Zekk finished climbing out of his cockpit. “You know how you don’t sit on a man’s speeder bike? *Never* touch a man’s ship without his permission.”

“Of course, sir,” said Coremy. He hesitated for only half a beat, then spoke out of concern for his commander. “Sir, are you sure you did your pre-flight inspection before we took off? I know that I heard a loud sound coming from inside your torpedo tubes.”

“I conducted the inspection, Commander. I found no issues with the warhead firing mechanism,” said Zekk, which was the absolute truth. Unfortunately for him, Colonel Mouse Droid, likely detecting the fact that he was once again in artificial gravity, chose at this time to protest quite loudly – squeaking angrily, banging himself against the outside of the torpedo tube, and reversing loudly up and down against the warhead, threatening to set it up. Zekk knew the jig was up. Just as he went to open the torpedo hatch with a loud sigh, he heard a sudden, sharp bark from the deck officer.

“*Ten-shun!* Commodore on deck!”

All of Sin stiffened to attention like a well-oiled unit, flight helmets in their left hands and right hands up in salute. They had to do this and continue to maintain a straight face despite the increasingly louder mouse droid squeals and protests coming from inside Zekk’s ship.

Vice Admiral Hav Antiel approached Sin and returned their salutes.

Vice Admiral Hav put his metallic finger up to say something, opened his mouth, and stopped short. Simply happy to have his mouse droid back, he just threw his hands up in frustration and walked away after his mouse droid. Coremy turned to face his commander.

“Wow,” he mumbled. “You really pulled that one out of your ass, sir. You almost got him this time.”

“Got who, Coremy? I don’t know what you’re talking about. You are dismissed, pilots. Good hunting today,” said Zekk. Everyone dispersed. Zekk narrowed his eyes down the hallway Colonel Mouse Droid has escaped down. This was not over. Not by a long shot.

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Zekk had changed into his regular clothes and hung up his flight gear as he sauntered into the Warrior’s cantina. Some of his pilots were already there, and he waved to them, but they understood and respected the fact that their commander preferred to drink alone after combat. He took his usual seat at the left edge of the bar. B-33R, the Imperial bartending unit aboard the Warrior, made his way quickly over to Zekk.

“Good evening, sir. One Sinfire?” said Beer.

“That’s right, but make it a double,” said Zekk. Despite the fact that Zekk and Beer had gotten off to a rough start, Zekk spent enough time in the Warrior’s cantina that they quickly developed a bond rarely seen amongst man and droid. That, and they had a mutual hatred to share.

Beer slid the Sinfire across the table and Zekk took a long, greedy pull from it. Beer waited a few moments, washing a glass, before sitting around and leaning in.

“How did it go? Is he dead? Floating in the vacuum of space, sir?” said Beer eagerly.

“I wish. The little bastard jammed the torpedo’s firing mechanism. I don’t know how the hell he did it but I couldn’t fire my warheads for the entire duration of the engagement because the locking mechanism wouldn’t release. I almost got killed. I had to rely on my lasers, and a Missile Boat is woefully inadequate for laser combat. Luckily, we had the technological advantage, and the engagement didn’t last long,” said Zekk.

Beer straightened up. Zekk was never good at reading whatever droids were processing, much less whatever humans were processing. “Sir, did I not tell you that you should stuff him in with your countermeasures?”

Zekk’s eyes went wide and he choked on some of the Sinfire he was drinking. He started coughing hard. A couple tables looked over at him, but quickly ignored them when they realized it was just Zekk’s drunken antics. Zekk sputtered.

“Did...did you? I swear you said torpedo tubes,” said Zekk.

“No sir, I did not. As a former Imperial protocol droid, I contain an encyclopedic knowledge of Imperial craft in my memory banks, and I know for a fact that Missile Boat torpedo tubes, due to frequent use, have a tendency to malfunction unless they are kept in pristine condition. However, your countermeasures would not have this effect. Had you asked the mechanic crew to load up chaff countermeasures, you simply would have expended fire and flares out the back of your craft – and Colonel Mouse Droid with it,” said Beer. “There’s very little statistical probability of a countermeasure charge misfiring. And likely nobody would have even noticed what happened, as Colonel Mouse Droid almost certainly would have been vaporized immediately, sir.”

Zekk looked at Beer for a long time. He wanted to punch him, even though he knew he was right. In fact, that was why he wanted to punch him – *because* he was right. Zekk didn’t like it when people other than him were right. Instead, he pounded his Sinfire and slammed it down on the bar, then slammed his head down next to it in desperate frustration. He put a finger up. “One more double, please,” he mumbled from within his folded over arms.

“Very good, sir,” said Beer. He slid another a Sinfire across the bar at Zekk. “This one is on the house, sir. I understand your frustration. Having Colonel Mouse Droid removed from his position

benefits both of us in being able to move up or respective hierarchies. Being the Commodore's personal assistant and executive droid would benefit me greatly, and benefit you as well. Personally, sir, I am tired of serving alcoholic beverages to the dregs of the Imperial Remnant."

Zekk looked up, wounded.

"Except to the brave pilots of Sin Squadron, of course," said Beer. Zekk put his head back down on the bar, mollified for the moment. He mumbled from down on the bar.

"Well, we may yet get lucky. The plan almost fell apart as we landed – Hav was down on the hangar bay deck to congratulate us. I hadn't yet let Colonel Mouse Droid out of his little torpedo tube prison, but as soon as Hav let him out, he attacked me," said Zekk. Zekk rubbed his swollen nose, now properly bent back into place thanks to the cold, hard, efficient care of Imperial medical droids. "I'm pretty sure I managed to convince Hav that he snuck into my torpedo tubes when I went to take a leak and attempted to sabotage the warheads so they would misfire or even explode while I was out on mission. I'm not one hundred percent sure if Hav believed me, but I am going to press to have him court martialed for attempting to murder an officer of the Imperial Navy."

Beer nodded from across the bar. "Sir, has a droid ever been court martialed by the Imperial military? I am accessing the archives on Aurora Prime and see no such record."

Zekk shrugged. "I'm not sure it really matters. What we really need to try and do is sully Colonel Mouse Droid's good name, and maybe even get him demoted down to Major. As his superior officer, maybe I could even press for his transfer. In the meantime...well, we'll just have to come up with another plan. His good luck has to run out eventually."

Running a rag along a Sinfire glass from the other side of the bar, Beer nodded somberly.

The Adventures of Sin Squadron Part V: The Gang Gets New Ships

This edition of Adventures of Sin Squadron is dedicated to the brave pilots of Sin who won the 2020 TIE Corps Squadron (Re)Mobilization Competition. Even though we we started way behind we never quit, and now we are champions...

...And to Admiral Hav Antiel, former Commodore of the ISD Warrior, whose leadership drove us ever forward.

Zekk sat inside his craft in the ship's rack. Doing his usual pre-flight superstitions, he tapped his flight stick a couple times with his helmet and proceeded to do his usual pre-flight checks, ensuring that all life support and weapons systems were green. He thumped his helmet, realizing what a waste of time it was. He donned his flight helmet, and connected it to the life support systems. As squadron commander, he was always first to be let out by the ship's robotic arm. Today it would be in a shieldless TIE. He watched the lights change, counting down to green. Nearly twenty years he had been an Imperial pilot, and he never lost those pre-flight jitters – the sweaty palms, heart racing, and dry mouth were an ever present companion. He knew it was the adrenaline. He also knew that with Sin pilots and the Force as his allies, he would never fail.

The light turned green and he heard the robotic arm release. He had twenty years of timing down to perfection, and lurched his craft down and out of the hangar bay. He circled lazily, waiting for the rest of Sin to be deployed. Exactly ten kilometers away from his ship, another identical Imperial Star Destroyer began deploying 12 shieldless TIEs, the first few circling lazily, awaiting combat.

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High above Aurora Prime, the entire Emperor's Hammer Strike Fleet had gathered, as it did every rotation, for the fleet's war mobilization games. Down on the surface, in New Imperial City, the

remaining squadrons still in the mix to place in the competition had gathered in the TIE Corps Officers' Academy simulation chambers to witness this duel between Sin and Epsilon squadrons. Sin was winning the competition, but only barely. A victory by Epsilon would give them a tie; a victory by Sin would give them a championship. Twenty four simulation chambers were gathered on the floor, surrounded by a large auditorium and a screen three stories high showing the feeds from every ship, like the old cinemas did on Coruscant. On a floating podium like in the old Galactic Senate, the Command Staff of the Emperor's Hammer, with Grand Admiral Rapier, had gathered to watch this climactic battle of the fleet's wargames. Both squadrons had excelled everywhere – in the classroom, in tactics arenas, in mission command simulations. This was the final test of their mettle. The winning squadron had been promised a grand, but secret, prize.

In the stands were Imperials of every conceivable rank and walk of life – Admiral Hav Antiel among them, drumming his metal fingers nervously on his leg as he watched Sin Squadron deploy. Already on his way out the door, Admiral Antiel had recently tendered his resignation as Commodore of the ISD *Warrior* to take command of Rho Squadron aboard the *Warrior*, voluntarily demoting himself to Colonel. They were unfortunately still processing the paperwork, but Admiral Antiel now bore the ceremonial dagger of a member of the Grand Order of the Emperor for his efforts. Surrounding him were a motley crew of off-duty stormtroopers, cadets, pilots from other squadrons that had already been bounced from the competition – even the off-duty janitorial crew had gathered with some popcorn and Corellian ale for the fun.

It was time.

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“All wings report in,” Zekk said over the comms. Zekk gave it a moment while all the flight members reported in.

“Sir, flight 2 is good to go,” said Lieutenant Colonel Rando.

“Sir, flight 3 is good to go,” said Commander Jertese.

“Copy that, flight 1 is good to go. We are go to engage. For Sin!” said Zekk.

“For Sin!” came ten other voices and one Wookiee battle cry over the comms. Win or lose, he was extraordinarily proud to be at this point, and even more so to do it with Sin.

“All wings form up. Attack pattern mouse droid, go!” said Zekk. As he decelerated his craft in the center of the formation, Sin Squadron formed a long, horizontal line that slowly evolved into a flying V formation. The goal was to slam into an opposing squadron's formation from three sides, two diagonals and the center line, hoping to shatter their formation or destroy them right then and there. Sin relied on teamwork and communication more than their skill to get the job done.

Zekk watched his flight computer as Epsilon approached him. Five kilometers...four...three...the familiar feeling of adrenaline kicked in. There were no warheads in this competition. It was purely pilot versus pilot.

At that moment, Epsilon's commander realized too late that Sin's formations were not straight, but entirely crooked, with the flanks approaching his own much more rapidly. “Scatter! They're hitting the flanks! All craft scatter!”

It was too late for his flanks. Explosions happened all around him. On the screen above the simulation chambers, the feeds from each destroyed craft cut to black then disappeared from the screen. But Epsilon was the top squadron in the TIE Corps for a reason, and they locked Sin Squadron in a vicious turn war.

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Admiral Antiel watched the screen with a tentative feeling of excitement. This would be a great way to send him out of his Commodore position. The entire arena was on the edge of their seats – there were clearly fans of Sin and fans of Epsilon. Down on the simulation floor, pilots who had been destroyed got out and shook hands with each other before sitting down to watch the competition. Over time the gathering on the simulator floor increased until only four pilots were remaining – three pilots from Sin and one from Epsilon. On the screen showed readings of the conditions of each draft – all three Sin pilots had their hulls in critical condition, having taken blasts along their wings, while the remaining Epsilon pilot had his hull in the yellow. The remaining Epsilon pilot was none other than General Elwood – widely regarded as the greatest still serving pilot in the TIE Corps.

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Zekk wiped at the sweat forming on his brow, then immediately stupid because he was wearing a flight helmet. He had lost track of how long he had been locked in this turn war with General Elwood. His wrist hurt from making so many hard turns on his flight stick. Lieutenant Genie had managed to land a linked blast along one of Elwood's wings, but it hadn't been enough to destroy him. Rando, for all his skill, could not force him into making a fatal mistake. At that moment, Zekk could sense something. He knew it was the Force. He knew what to do.

"Genie, break away," said Zekk.

"Sir?" responded Genie, sounding very doubtful.

"I want you to break away to about half a klick, then come back. His sensor dish is damaged from your blast. He won't detect you leaving," said Zekk.

"Copy, Sin Leader," said Genie. Genie, continuing through his turn in the long turn war, simply kept going straight, away from the craft endlessly turning against each other trying to gain an advantage.

Zekk was right. Elwood continued in his turn war, but this time around only counted two TIEs as he passed. The little box above his targeting reticle turned green.

"Wha..." said Elwood, realizing what was happening before he even finished his sentence.

"Genie, pull up! Pull up!" screamed Zekk over comms.

But Sin Squadron had been flying together long enough to not even need to communicate anymore, and Genie was already on his way back. A single, double burst of laser sprayed across Elwood's cockpit, and all four screens went black.

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As Zekk's simulator chamber opened, a loud roar erupted across the auditorium. People were jumping up and down cheering. General Elwood got out of his simulator and slammed his helmet down inside, cracking it across the top ridge. The pilots of Sin had already formed mosh pit on the simulation floor. Zekk, Rando, and Genie readily joined. They jumped up and down, hugging, and spraying each other with bottles of champagne, until they collapsed in a heap on the floor. The pilots of Epsilon simply sat there, the only people in the auditorium not on their feet, watching the jubilation. During the celebration the floating podium of the Emperor's Hammer Command Staff docked into the lowest level, and Grand Admiral Rapier descended on to the floor of the simulation chamber.

After a few moments of celebration, both squadrons lined up to shake hands. They were enemies here in the simulation chamber, but out in the vacuum of space against the true enemy, they would gladly give their lives for each other. A couple of the more familiar members hugged each other. Out of all the squadrons in the TIE Corps, there was absolutely no shame in finishing in second place. After the handshake they shuffled off to their boarding rooms, finished with the competition and ready to depart back to the ISD *Hammer* for active duty.

Out of the corner of his eye, Zekk noticed Grand Admiral Rapier approaching his squadron. “*Ten-shun!*” he shouted. All of Sin stiffened like a board, and saluted their Fleet Commander. He returned their salute.

“At ease, Sin Squadron, and congratulations. Zekk, you have led your squadron with poise and grace, and I commend you. It isn’t easy to defeat Epsilon Squadron,” said Rapier.

“Thank you, sir. I couldn’t have done it without the rest of these guys. I owe them everything,” said Zekk.

“We know. And for that, we are ready to extend the grand prize to Sin Squadron. If you will all please follow me,” said Grand Admiral Rapier.

Flanking Rapier was the Commodore of the victorious squadron, and Zekk and Hav embraced, jumping up and down. Rapier chose to ignore the lack of military decorum, instead letting Sin Squadron revel in their victory.

Rapier led the pilots of Sin down a long hallway, with several twists in turn, to what Zekk knew was the Science Office’s hangar bay. He swiped a keycard that Zekk happened to notice no one else had. The doors whooshed open.

In front of Zekk sat twelve crafts that looked familiar, but at the same time they looked different. He looked at them in awe, marveling at the sleek angles and immaculate paint job. He hurriedly rushed out to touch them and inspect the craft. Grand Admiral Rapier came up behind him.

“Sir? This looks familiar,” said Zekk.

“It’s a repainted TIE Protector,” said Grand Admiral Rapier. Zekk finally knew where he had seen them. The TIE Protector was the personal combat craft of the Fleet Commander and the Fleet Commander only. Zekk studied the craft closely. It was painted sleek black, with sharp angles underneath and a long cockpit with red, glowing paneling. Everything had shined to a perfect hue by the flight team – the craft practically glistened.

“I don’t understand, sir,” said Zekk. “The TIE Protector is the most technologically advanced fighter we have, and only in use by yourself and the executive officer.”

“That was the case,” said Rapier. He paused. “Until now. We have produced a squadron of these craft to award to the winning squadron in the mobilization competition.”

Zekk’s jaw actually hit the floor. He hugged his craft’s wing, loving it so much, and he squeezed it until he thought he might actually crack the wing off. Rapier smiled behind him and the rest of his pilots, hearing the conversation, jumped up and down, whooping and hollering. Lieutenant Firebreaker let out an ear-shattering Wookiee war cry. Rando stood their stoically, taking stock of his new fighter, wondering how many New Republic pilots he could kill with it.

“We have tugs on their way to the ISD *Warrior* this moment to retrieve your missile boats and when you return home, these craft will be waiting for you. We have also changed your mission from long range support to deep space depredation. You will use these elite craft to go deep behind enemy lines and destroy valuable targets, as well as attack targets of opportunity. You will be the newest special operations squadron of the TIE Corps, and you have without a doubt proven yourself to be the finest squadron throughout the fleet. Inside each craft, in a box on the pilot’s seat, sits your Iron Star with Golden Wings, and allow me to personally extend to you my congratulations and that of the entire Command Staff. We may defeat the New Republic yet with your pilots flying these craft,” said Rapier. “And, with your approval, we would like to christen these new craft as the TIE Sinister.”

Zekk grinned wide, thinking that the perfect name. “Sir, it would be an honor to take the first TIE Sinister into combat. It would be an even greater honor to kill Republic pilots with it.”

Rapier and Zekk smiled at each other and Zekk threw a salute, which Rapier returned. Zekk then joined the pilots of Sin in the center of the hangar bay, where they had reformed the mosh pit. They also found multiple cases of Corellian ale in the cockpits of their craft. After not being seen for several days, the pilots of Sin were eventually carried to their boarding rooms by Hammer’s Fist stormtroopers after being found drunk in various New Imperial City allies by Hammer’s Fist military

police, trying to locate Twi'lek prostitutes while showing off their Golden Wings. During Sin's celebration, the new TIE Sinisters were ferried aboard the ISD *Warrior*, ready to leave a mark of fear in a whole new generation of New Republic pilots.

Adventures of Sin Squadron VI: The Gang's CMDR Gets Arrested

Lieutenant Colonel Zekk Terrik sat inside his cell in the military police brig. He was slumped with his back to the wall and head between his knees. He had a cot he could use, but the wall was a little better on his sore back. The events of last night were a bit hazy for him, but luckily, he was shown the security cameras in the hangar bay on Aurora Prime where the fight took place and that filled in a lot of the blanks for him.

He heard the metallic clank of a Hammer's Fist stormtrooper's boots as he marched up and down the hallway. The trooper passed his cell.

"Hey! Trooper!" said Zekk.

The trooper stopped, and momentarily considered just continuing to walk on, but it was his duty to tend to the prisoners' needs. "Yes sir?" he said out of necessity. Zekk could definitely hand it to the jailers; the place was clean and the troopers nothing but courteous.

"Do you know when I'm getting out of here? I was supposed to be back from liberty this morning," said Zekk.

"Don't worry, sir. I'm sure your CO will be by to pick you up momentarily," said the trooper with a sardonic chuckle. Zekk groaned as the trooper marched on, only making it a couple more steps before Zekk piped up again.

"Psst, hey. Come here, man. Why don't you just slip me that keycard and let me out? I won't tell anyone. In fact, I'll take you out. When are you off duty? I know a couple of places where we can find some beautiful, young Twi'lek women. They love the uniform," said Zekk.

The stormtrooper turned his head at Zekk's brazenly stupid comment. "Sir, how would I be able to sexually please a Twi'lek woman in my uniform?"

Zekk looked the trooper over, for the first time realizing how uncomfortable stormtrooper armor really looked. "Well...uhh...damn trooper, you got me there," he said. "But where there's a will, there's a way."

Zekk heard more footsteps down the corridor, and craned his neck to see them. The trooper stiffened to attention, indicating his superior officer was probably coming, but Zekk could sense two people coming. Colonel Hav Antiel appeared in front of the jail cell, with a very disappointed look on his face. The trooper's commanding officer slid a keycard, opening the jail cell.

"Lieutenant Colonel Terrik, you are being released from the brig and you are ordered to return to the ISD *Warrior* and report to your commanding officer. Colonel Antiel will escort you back to your ship. He has assured me you will not be a problem," said the trooper.

"Of course, Captain. Thank you," said Zekk. He stepped out of the jail cell, then looked back in before turning to the stormtroopers. "I just realized I never got my holonet call."

Hav shoved Zekk forward, less than gently. "Get going, jackass," said Hav. Zekk chuckled. They made it out of the base in silence, walking quietly back to the hangar where his shuttle awaited.

"Silvius is pissed. Did you really follow a Hammer pilot from the cantina to the hangar and jump them? That's low even for you," said Hav.

Zekk stood in front of Hav, his arms akimbo. "Whoa whoa, buddy. First off, calling those polished turds on the Hammer 'pilots' is a stretch. Secondly, they were spouting off racist crap about Wookiees. I can't let them talk about Firebreaker like that."

"You're supposed to report that sort of thing to their commanding officer," said Hav.

"Yeah, well, I reported it to my fist instead. Aren't you mad? Isn't your mother a Wookiee?" said Zekk, cocking his head.

Hav closed his eyes, very desperately attempting to find his inner peace right now. He patted Zekk on the giant bruise on his cheek as he walked by. "Hope you gave them one for me."

Zekk winced, his cheek throbbing. "You should see the other guy."

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Zekk had already been doing this for hours and could no longer keep focus as he stared out at the endless vacuum of space from his ship. To punish him for his misbehavior down on Aurora Prime, Zekk had been temporarily reassigned for one rotation to Tug Squadron. And, lucky for him, there had just been a fresh delivery, in the form of fifty separate containers, of all manner of sundries needed aboard both the Hammer and Warrior. Flying a tug was hardly difficult; he basically autopiloted the whole thing, and only vaguely paid attention to make sure he didn't crash into anything.

What was unfortunate was that this tug was apparently designed with Ewoks in mind, as he was so cramped in that the flight stick was pushed up against his shins. Fortunately, Sin Squadron was out on flight patrol at the moment, so he at least had someone to talk to. Unfortunately for Zekk, they were far more interested in buzzing him at very close range. A TIE Sinister blew over Zekk's head mere meters away, and he heard the loud guffaw of a Wookiee over the comm channels.

"I was sticking up for you, you know!" yelled Zekk. The laughter only got louder over comms. Zekk sighed, thoroughly uncomfortable, as he entered the Warrior's hangar bay to deliver whatever number container he was on. He lost count. He proceeded to autodock with the Warrior's clamp arm who would retrieve the container, generally manually operated by someone who flunked out of Platform Daedalus. "Tug One, please begin the docking procedure," said the voice on the line.

Zekk paused. That voice...he hadn't heard it much, but it sounded familiar. His eyebrows shot up. "Sir...is that you?" said Zekk.

"Yes Zekk, it is me. Once in a while I like to practice on the pneumatic controls. Got to make sure I stay sharp, you know," said Fleet Admiral Silvius. Zekk knew something was up. There's no way the Commodore of an Imperial Star Destroyer, let alone a Fleet Admiral, was going to be operating some little piddly control designed for starfighter school dropouts.

"Of course, sir," said Zekk. He docked very carefully, then heard a bump, whirr, and a loud slam. He watched the container he was attempting to transfer drift slowly back into the vacuum of space. Zekk also knew he did that transfer perfectly -- he had been a cargo pilot before the joining the Emperor's Hammer fleet, after all.

"Oh dear. Looks like I slipped up trying to make that transfer. I really do need more practice. I think I'll need to be here all day until I'm an expert at it," said Silvius. Zekk groaned. "Lieutenant Colonel, would you mind turning your tug around and fetching that container for me? I do apologize."

Zekk slammed his fists repeatedly on the control panel. "Of course, sir, with pleasure." He turned his flight stick, feeling his tug handle like a pregnant yak. This was going to be a long rotation.

(Trying a slightly new writing topic – drama! Let me know how you guys like it.)

The Adventures of Sin Squadron, Part VII: The CMDR Gets Shore Leave

Zekk hung his duty uniform up in his private quarters and grabbed his lightsaber. He had finally been granted a 72 hour planetary leave, something he had not enjoyed in far too long. Sealing and locking his quarters, he wandered out into the main Sin bunkroom. Everybody was enjoying some downtime, except for Lieutenant Commander Firebreaker, who was also packing his bags to join Zekk. He smiled at his oldest friend.

“You ready?” said Zekk. Firebreaker nodded and grabbed his bowcaster, standing up. Zekk felt like he was looking up at the ceiling. Nearly 8 feet tall, Firebreaker was tall and immensely strong even by Wookiee standards. Zekk sniffed, smelling something cooking, and his eyes drifted to the kitchen area. Lieutenant Commander Jack Wynand stood there, slaving over some sort of meat, an intent look in his eyes as he basted it very carefully, then put it back in the oven. Over the weeks, Jack had sort of become Sin’s unofficial cook. Zekk could cook, but Jack could *cook*.

“Smells good, Jack. What are you cooking?” said Zekk.

“I’m trying to bake a tip-yip. We’ll see how it turns out. I may have to go back to Endor and shoot a few more during my next leave,” said Jack. He looked up from the oven. “I’ll save you some for when you guys get back.”

Firebreaker looked over at the pan. “Do you have an entire tip-yip? I don’t think one breast will work for me,” he said.

Jack looked to Zekk to translate the spoken Shirriwook. “He said he’s looking forward to it,” said Zekk. Jack nodded and slid the tip-yip back into the oven.

Captain Coremy Jertese looked up from his spot on his bunk where he was reading. “Taking off then, sir? Where you headed?”

“I am, Captain. Down to Aurora, to my usual spots. I’ll say hi to the girls for you,” said Zekk.

“No wonder you’re bringing Firebreaker. I would too. The red light district out there gets rougher every shore leave I get,” said Coremy. He paused for a moment, looking pensive. “Or maybe I’m just getting drunker every time.” Coremy mused on this as he went back to his spot.

Zekk and Firebreaker stepped out, bags packed, Firebreaker with his bowcaster, as they headed down the hallway. He looked up – way up – at Firebreaker. “I appreciate you doing this, buddy,” said Zekk.

“Of course, sir. I always wanted a little brother,” he said.

Zekk chuckled. “I think even if you had an older brother, he’d still be your little brother.”

Firebreaker made his usual half-snort, half-guffaw Wookiee laugh. “Very true, sir.”

They reached the hangar bay, where the regular shuttle between New Imperial City and the ISD *Warrior* sat docked, ready to go. He also spotted Colonel Hav Antiel, sitting on a cargo container near the shuttle in his duty uniform. Zekk mumbled to himself, his hopes for a stealthy shore leave dashed.

Hav hopped down off the cargo container. “I heard you’re going on shore leave for three rotations,” he said.

“You heard right. Remind me to schedule the logistics officer for airlock cleaning. It’d be a shame if he had an accident,” said Zekk.

“I notice you’re wearing civilian clothes...” said Hav, trailing off.

“Nothing gets past you, Colonel,” Zekk replied curtly.

Hav was silent for a beat. “Are you going to see her?”

Firebreaker looked down quickly, clutching his bowcaster. Zekk turned to him. “It’s fine, buddy. He already knows.” Zekk turned back to Hav. “Yeah, I am. Just keep it to yourself, please?” said Zekk.

“You know I will. Tell her hi for me. Wait! Hang on a second. I almost forgot,” said Hav. He hustled back to the cargo container he had been sitting on and took something off of it. Walking up to Zekk, he handed him a plush, stuffed TIE pilot. “It’s never too early to start thinking of the future, you know. Give this to her.”

Zekk was briefly touched, then started to laugh. He put it in his pack, and gave his friend a hug.

“Be safe down there, and stay discreet until you can figure out what to do. And Firebreaker, look after him will you?” said Hav.

Firebreaker looked down at Hav, as protective of Zekk as he had ever been. “You smell especially repulsive today, even for a human. Does your species never bathe?”

Hav looked to Zekk for a translation, spreading his hands out with the palms up. “He said he will,” said Zekk.

“That was an awful lot of sounds for so little to say,” said Hav.

Zekk was already walking up the ramp of shuttle. He turned around to face Hav, smiling, as he walked backwards. “What can I say? Shirriwook is a weird language,” he said, turning back around. “Hey! Is there any booze on this flight?!”

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After a very brief flight, the shuttle finally touched down on Aurora. Zekk had only managed to have one drink; Firebreaker had four, which nonetheless made nary a dent in his metabolism. As usual Zekk had lined up his shore leave with when his favorite deck officer was on duty, and they embraced. Zekk had setup a convenient relationship with Roger; Roger made sure Zekk’s TIE Sinister was conveniently full of all the contraband Sin needed to continue to be a high functioning unit, and Zekk made sure Roger received a handsome kickback, and that the laziest, most corrupt squad of the Hammer’s Fist was stationed here as security.

“Good to see you, Roger,” said Zekk. “How you been?” He noticed Roger was getting fatter. Zekk had been bringing down some of Jack’s cooking.

“Not bad, buddy. I see you took public transportation again. Need to borrow my speeder bike?” said Roger.

Zekk nodded and handed his friend a credit chip for deposit. “It’s like you were never here,” said Roger. Switching to Shirriwook, he said, “Good to see you too, Firebreaker. Have you been lifting weights?”

Firebreaker looked at his biceps approvingly. “Now that you mention it, I have. Last night I was benching the solar panel of a TIE Interceptor. I may switch to TIE Bombers for added weight,” he said.

A light went on in Zekk’s brain. “Firebreaker, did you put Hav’s panel back on?” he said.

Firebreaker thought for a moment, then nodded. “Yes, I did.”

“ALL the way?” said Zekk.

Firebreaker’s eyes went wide and he put his head in his paws. Zekk shrugged. “It’s fine,” said Zekk. “He was going to die eventually in that shieldless coffin. Can you believe they don’t even have air conditioning? C’mon, let’s go.”

They trudged outside, where Roger’s speeder bike was already fueled and waiting. As they loaded up, the bike’s antigrav repulsors noticeably sagged when Firebreaker sat down, but still maintained their height above the ground. Zekk turned it on, shifted gears, and they shot off into the night.

It was a long ride, and they didn’t talk much. Zekk was intent on getting there as fast as possible to maximize his time on the planet’s surface. They had arranged to meet at a hotel as far as possible from the fleet’s planetary headquarters, in a quiet, suburban residential district. After some time, they finally pulled up outside, and Zekk engaged the safety before they grabbed their bags. He put his cloak up, mostly because it made him feel better, as walking around with a nearly 8 foot tall Wookiee was bound to draw some stares. The front desk clerk nodded; he already knew Zekk and Firebreaker quite well. He stood up as Zekk walked up and plunked a couple of very heavy credit coins on the counter.

“Always a pleasure to not see you, Zekk. She’s in room 142,” he said. Zekk nodded; he knew the usual room. Zekk looked up at the surveillance camera as he entered the hallway. He immediately raised his hand, and sparks shot from the camera’s lens, and it grew limp. Thankfully, it would magically begin working once Zekk was safely away. He knocked on the door, and Firebreaker took up position behind him. The viewscreen turned on for a few seconds, with another cloaked figure on the other side peering just briefly into it before it turned off. The door hissed open, and the figure removed her hood.

“Zekk,” said the woman. A beautiful Twi’lek woman in civilian clothes was sitting, waiting for him.

“Elissa,” said Zekk. She stood up with noticeable difficulty; her belly was swollen. Zekk shot into the room, embracing her as tightly as he could, lifting her up off her feet. On the floor, folded up neatly, was the uniform of an Imperial science officer. When she lifted off her feet she kissed Zekk deeply. Firebreaker looked down the hallway a couple times before stepping in and shutting the door behind him.

Zekk sat her back down on the ground, and she quickly sat back on the bed. Zekk spent a moment studying her. Her skin was a deep blue, like the color of a twilight sky, with violet colored eyes. When she wasn't completely swollen with child she was quite voluptuous, which was admittedly how Zekk first noticed her at the bar. That and she was being endlessly harassed by some drunk Weequays; Zekk had managed to convince them at lightsaber point that they would have better luck with the Hutt women. She looked up at as he sat down next to her.

“Zekk, people are starting to ask questions. It's not exactly easy to hide anymore, and I work in starfighter R&D. I'm not supposed to be fraternizing with pilots. What do you want me to say?” she said nervously. Her lekku twitched, a nervous habit that Zekk had noticed and decided to find cute.

“I've been thinking about it. Look, I have a lot of connections. I know people within the fleet and down here, we can get you transferred to something a bit less military. I know you could do something like engineering, or robotics. Let me work on it, okay?” said Zekk.

She nodded, her lekku still nervously twitching. Zekk leaned in and kissed her; Firebreaker rolled his eyes. Zekk's eyes went wide mid-kiss. “Oh! That reminds me,” he said. He reached into his bag, pulling out an envelope and a small, stuffed TIE pilot. “Here's all my pay since we last saw each other. Oh! And I got promoted to Colonel, so there's going to be even more.”

She looked into the envelope, then shook her head and laughed. “How many Rebels did you have to kill for this, Zekk?” said Elissa. She was uncomfortable with violence, and uncomfortable with knowing that every time could be the last time she saw Zekk. “Not to mention the fact that, as a research scientist, I still make a lot more than you. Hell, I probably make more than your Commodore.”

Zekk chose to ignore that, handing her the little stuffed TIE pilot. “And this is from Hav. He says hi, and hopes you're doing well,” said Zekk. She smiled, and took it in her arms.

“Tell him I said hi,” said Elissa. She turned to Firebreaker. “And how are you? Thanks for keeping watch on Zekk. He needs to be kept in line when I'm not around.”

Firebreaker nodded, as it was his solemn duty. “You are Zekk's lifemate. You have produced offspring together. It is my duty and honor to protect the Terrik family,” said Firebreaker.

Zekk nodded to him. “I think you can go to your room now, bud,” said Zekk. “You will know if I need you.”

Firebreaker nodded and headed to the room across the hall to keep watch. Zekk and Elissa laid back on the bed together, turning on the Holonet to see what was on. As they laid there, Zekk put his hand on her belly, closing his eyes. The baby's brain was not fully developed within the Force yet, but he could feel it there. They had a connection that only a father and son could feel. He also felt...Zekk concentrated harder....

His eyes went wide. “Holy crap, it's a boy!” said Zekk.

Elissa raised an eyebrow. She had witnessed Zekk use the Force, but she was dubious about the fact that it was good for much more than telekinesis. “How do you know?”

Zekk furrowed his brow, unsure of how to explain it to her. He shrugged. “I just...know. It's hard to explain,” said Zekk. He had another thought, and turned on his elbow in the bed to face her.

“Hey, does this thing have lekku when it comes out? Or how does that work?”

The Adventures of Sin Squadron, Part VIII: Attack on Aurora!

Zekk opened the hangar bay door, helping Elissa Val'Asha walk slowly to the ramp. In his duty uniform, he made no effort to hide what unit he represented this time. Having called in a few favors, he secured a transfer for Elissa to the urban engineering department in New Imperial City. It was a bit different than what she was used to, but Zekk knew one thing – that she was intelligent, and would do fine. He didn't even bother to bring Firebreaker along for security this time. Zekk was, at this moment, taking her to meet the boys aboard the *Warrior* for a few days while her transfer finished processing.

Swollen with child, she walked (or perhaps waddled) to the ramp, with Zekk holding one arm to help her balance. Zekk noted, for the first time, that this was not the same pilot who dropped him off before. The pilot saluted. However, he looked crisp, young, and very Imperial.

“Good afternoon, Colonel. I regret to inform you that the pilot before me experienced a medical episode. I am here to ensure your safe return to the *Warrior*, sir,” said the young pilot.

Zekk returned the salute. “Very good then, Lieutenant. What happened to the pilot?”

“Some sort of seizure I believe, sir. He is being attended to now by the medical droids in Hangar 12, and I was told he would be okay,” said the pilot. He turned to Elissa. “May I get your bags, ma'am?”

Elissa nodded. “Yes, thank you Lieutenant,” she said. The pilot grabbed her bags and booked it up the ramp; Zekk and Elissa moved much slower up the ramp, the slight incline proving difficult for her. Once inside the cargo and passenger hold she took a seat, and Zekk buckled her in as she had some trouble twisting her body to reach the straps.

“Just in case you become overbalanced, you know,” said Zekk. Elissa glared at him, her violet eyes getting angry and her deep, twilight blue lekku twitching fiercely. Zekk responded with a smug smile of his own.

As the cargo shuttle lifted off, Zekk noticed the ascent and takeoff was very sloppy. A bit unbalanced, and the pilot did not accelerate gradually but rather quite hard, like someone learning to drive for the first time. Zekk shrugged it off, thinking the pilot was probably new or not quite rated for this sort of craft. Zekk wasn't exactly an elite cargo pilot himself.

It was just at that moment, a couple seconds before the explosion, that Zekk stood up, knowing something was wrong. Zekk felt the shockwave hit the ship first, making it list hard to starboard before the pilot straightened it out again. Zekk was standing, and had to grab a handhold to keep his balance. Elissa rocked forward hard; the restraints keeping her in place. Zekk and Elissa looked through the viewport in helpless horror; the hangar they had just left from had exploded into a giant fireball. They were already high up so the sound wasn't too deafening, but it could definitely be heard. Zekk couldn't do much from here. They would handle it from the ground, and he needed to make sure Elissa got to safety aboard the *Warrior*. This was likely something for the stormtroopers on the ground and Intelligence to handle. As they stood looking out the viewport at the fireball, Elissa reached out to grab his hand. Their eyes met; she was visibly shaken.

“Zekk, we missed that by minutes,” she said, her voice trembling.

“I wonder what happened. How did anyone get a bomb past the security? Now we have Rebel terrorism on our doorstep, it looks like,” said Zekk. As soon as he finished his sentence, a bomb at the hangar next to it and then behind it went off simultaneously. They had nearly left the atmosphere of Aurora, but it was easy to see the fireball, even from this high up. Zekk could only imagine the conflagration on the ground. This was already one of the worst terrorist attacks on Aurora. There would be countless dead. Zekk felt his heart hurting, and could feel their deaths in the Force. He wondered if Roger was okay. He turned to the pilot, up ahead in the cockpit.

“Pilot! What are you hearing on radio chatter? What's going on down there?” said Zekk. The pilot did not answer him, instead reaching across and tapping a button on the control panel. The several inches thick, solid steel partition that separated the cargo bay from the cockpit in cases of emergency sprang up, shutting Zekk and Elissa inside the cargo bay. But before the partition came up, Zekk couldn't help but notice the four Mon Calamari 80 Command Cruisers and their accompanying

battlegroups appearing out of hyperspace, not too far from the shuttle. Zekk's shuttle continued to fly straight at them, not turning or evading at all.

Suddenly, it all clicked for Zekk. His pilot hadn't suffered a seizure at all; he was probably dead in a janitorial closet somewhere. This was a Republic mole or Imperial traitor piloting the shuttle right now. It was likely the same person who had planted the bombs. They knew that large parts of the Emperor's Hammer fleet were out on wargames to prepare for the upcoming deployment to Bakura. But why here, on Aurora? It didn't make any sense. The Republic fleet couldn't hope to stand up against the whole fleet, not even what was still here. Unless more of the Republic fleet was going to join soon, Zekk was missing a piece to the puzzle. He knew Mon Calamari cruisers could pack around ten squadrons, which meant forty total that he knew of, but that still wouldn't be enough, especially not when reinforcements arrived. Unless annihilation wasn't their goal....

"Zekk! It's a trap!" screamed Elissa from the back of the cargo bay. That brought Zekk's mind back to the here and now. Suddenly, he channeled the Dark Side within him. His woman and his child were being threatened now, and he had never felt this kind of rage. He was pissed.

This pilot didn't know who he was pissing off.

Zekk's lightsaber sprang to his hand and ignited, and Zekk slammed the golden blade it into the steel, beginning to cut away at it. Zekk heard tons of laser blasts going on outside the ship; he wished he could see what was going on. Elissa, running up to him as fast as she could from the back, suddenly screeched to a halt. "Get back!" Zekk shouted. She didn't have Jedi training, and Zekk didn't want her anywhere near his lightsaber or near the steel when it fell through. Zekk heard a shout of fear as he began to cut away at the steel, moving slowly as it was several inches thick. *You better be scared, asshole*, thought Zekk as he cut away at it.

After what felt like forever, Zekk finally cut a perfect circle into the steel, enough to push on the plate hard until it fell down. He could perfectly see the controls from where he was and, with the Force, pushed the button to make the partition slide back down into the floor.

The pilot shouted again in fear, standing up to draw his blaster, but he wasn't nearly fast enough. Zekk ripped the blaster from his hands with the Force and, in one fell swoop, Zekk completely decapitated him. Zekk then kicked his head down the cargo bay like a soccer ball, but not before noting the incredulous look on the pilot's face as if he couldn't believe what just happened to him. Zekk didn't blame him.

Elissa shrieked as the head went flying past her, then turned her and gave Zekk a very curious stare. They had only known each other on a romantic level, and had only been a couple for a few months after meeting. They had never been in combat together, let alone any kind of danger. Elissa raised an eyebrow at Zekk with a newfound respect while Zekk was dragging the headless corpse out of the cockpit, leaving it slumped on the floor. Zekk took a seat in the pilot's chair, for the first time surveying the battlefield. No new Republic ships had engaged, but they had fully deployed their starfighters. The *Warrior* and its battlegroup had deployed everything it had. It was absolute chaos. There were starfighters everywhere Zekk looked. Zekk noted a flight of B-wings and two assault transports heading directly for him, just a few clicks away. Zekk shouted in alarm; there was no way this lumbering shuttle was going to outrun anything.

"Crap! Elissa, get over here! I need a copilot!" he shouted over his shoulder.

"Zekk, I don't know how to fly a damn shuttle! I can barely drive a speeder!" she shouted back, as she grudgingly took a seat.

"I don't need you to fly. I need you to work the controls. You're a starfighter R&D scientist, you ought to know these control panels like the back of your lekku. I don't," said Zekk.

Zekk started to bank away, but the stick was locked. He looked around in confusion. No matter what he did, it wouldn't budge. It was stuck on some kind of autopilot. Elissa hit the button to disengage the autopilot, but an alarm flashed on Zekk's display – *autopilot programming overridden*.

Zekk slammed his fist angrily on the HUD. He was screwed. Zekk hit the comms to hail the *Warrior* or anyone on an Imperial channel and got nothing but static.

“Override it manually, Zekk!” said Elissa.

Zekk looked at her helplessly, palms out. “I could do it on a TIE, I don’t even know where the bathroom is on this thing,” said Zekk.

Elissa got up in disgust and spun his chair around so his legs weren’t in the way, crawling in very uncomfortably under the steering column. Zekk spun his chair back around, watching Elissa crawl underneath. A metallic panel clattered to the floor and, after a minute or so, Zekk heard Elissa grunting, pulling on something.

“You know, last time you were down there, you got pregn--” said Zekk, but Elissa cut him off before he got that one out.

“Shut up, Zekk!” yelled Elissa curtly. With a furious tug, Elissa yanked on a pile of wires, and a small box came out. She stood up, smugly, and angrily threw that down the hallway to join the pilot’s head. As soon as the box was ripped from the steering column, Zekk felt the rudder almost drop out of the ship, and the steering column dropped way back. Zekk grabbed it, successfully banking away from the incoming B-wing flight to buy himself some time. Before Zekk could even activate comms again, they crackled to life.

“Shuttle *Liberty*! Shuttle *Liberty*! Do you read?” said a voice from the *Warrior*. Zekk immediately punched the button to respond.

“Mayday, mayday, mayday. This is Shuttle *Liberty*. We have had an attempted hijacking onboard, but it has been foiled. We are under attack by B-wings and have assault transports closing in, we need *immediate* assistance,” said Zekk. Zekk could hear a voice on the other end of the comms.

“Give me that damn headset! Zekk! Do you have Elissa Val’Asha onboard? We last heard she was departing from hangar 12,” said Fleet Admiral Silvius. Zekk looked to Elissa, then back to the comms.

“Uhh yes sir...why?” said Zekk, extremely confused.

“Zekk, we’ve known there’s a Republic spy in Aurora for some time, just not who. We figured it out too late. Did you notice it was *really* easy to get Elissa transferred? We were trying to flush the mole out. Do you even know who you have on that ship?” said Silvius.

Zekk looked to Elissa, who was looking down into her lap.

“Elissa?” said Zekk. She wouldn’t look up.

“Zekk, that isn’t just some starfighter R&D researcher you have onboard. Elissa Val’Asha is the chief R&D scientist for every top secret weapons project the Emperor’s Hammer has!” shouted Silvius. “Zekk, this isn’t an attack. It’s an abduction. You *must* get her to safety!”

Zekk went pale as he looked in the rear viewfinder of the B-wings closing in. He turned to Elissa, who was even more pale than him. She put her head in her hands. “You lied to me!” he yelled at her.

“No I didn’t! I just didn’t tell you the whole truth!” said Elissa, pleadingly, her eyes welling with tears. “I love you, Zekk, and I didn’t want what we have to end, especially not with a child in the picture now. Who the hell do you think designed your ship? The cupholder was my idea, you know.”

Zekk put a finger up, trying his best to be mad at her. He slammed his fists back down on the controls, making Elissa jump. “We’ll argue later, let’s get to safety first,” said Zekk. He hit the comms again. “That spy is dead now, sir. We are on our way back to the *Warrior*, but we need some help.”

Elissa took control of the shields, dumping all energy from lasers to engines as she reverted shields fully aft.

“May the Force be with you, Zekk. Help is on the way,” said Silvius. Zekk smiled. Zekk had never been fully Sith; he was definitely Gray. He was more Imperial than evil, and didn’t have that cruel streak that many Sith were known for. He borrowed a little bit from both schools of thought.

Knowing the Force was his ally definitely comforted him, and he knew just what to do. He switched to Imperial wide fleet comms.

“Mayday mayday mayday, this is Shuttle *Liberty*. We have had an attempted hijacking onboard that has been foiled. I am currently transporting a high value target and am in distress, request immediate assistance,” said Zekk. A private hail came in almost immediately.

“Zekk? What the hell are you doing on a shuttle?” said Colonel Hav Antiel. “Making a few cargo runs?” Hav chuckled over the line.

“Hav my friend, I know you love to hear the sound of your own voice but I’m in a lot of trouble. I have Elissa onboard, and she’s not who you think she is. She’s a high value target, and the chief weapons scientist for the Emperor’s Hammer. Our pilot was killed, and some other pilot took his place,” said Zekk. He paused for a moment, his voice cracking. “Hav, they’re trying to kidnap her.”

Zekk heard the hail immediately end. On the fleet-wide comms, Hav was all business. “Copy that, Shuttle *Liberty*. Rho Squadron is on its way. Flight 3, form up along side Shuttle *Liberty* and escort it back to the *Warrior*. Flights 1 and 2, on me. We are going to position ourselves in between the *Liberty* and their attackers. We have to draw their fire away from the *Liberty*,” said Hav.

Eleven voices came back in unison. “Sir yes sir!”

“Flight 3! If that shuttle does not land on the *Warrior*, you better not either! Is that understood?” said Hav.

“Sir yes sir!” said Flight 3 in unison.

Lieutenant Commander Acetiepilot chimed in on his own. “We will not fail you or Zekk, sir,” he said.

“And for goodness sake, someone scramble Sin Squa--” said Zekk, but he stopped mid-sentence as he looked at his display.

New fighter alert, 12 TIE Sinisters entering the area at 10 km.

“Never mind,” said Zekk. He paused for a second, deep in thought. “Wait a minute! Who the hell is flying my ship?!”

“Yeeeeeeeeeeeeehawwwwwwwww!” came a screech over the comms. Zekk recoiled from how loud it was. “I’ve always wanted to fly one of these things!”

Zekk and Elissa looked at each other in disbelief. Everyone knew who that was.

“Fleet Admiral Plif, sir?” said Zekk.

“Sin Squadron is here to the rescue, *Liberty*. Sin, engage those capital ships! Force the snubfighters to retreat and defend them!”

“Copy, Command One,” said Sin in unison. Zekk and Elissa both smiled as they heard a roar of Wookiee rage over the comms. Their commander and their fleet was in very real danger for the first time in a while. Sin was all business today.

Zekk felt laser blasts on his aft as the shields absorbed it, hissing loudly. In his rear viewfinder, Zekk noted a lone A-wing, one of the Republic’s fastest ships, had broken away from the main engagement and was trying to get around the *Liberty*. Zekk banked into it, knowing his hull could absorb a good slam much more than the A-wing could, but the pilot wasn’t fooled, and banked away.

The pilot also wasn’t paying attention, as he banked right into the boys of Rho Flight 3. Their lasers hit home and a loud explosion was felt behind the *Liberty* as the A-wing spun away into the vacuum of space.

“Colonel Terrik, sir, Rho Flight 3 has arrived to escort you and your lovely lady back to the *Warrior*,” said Acetiepilot. Zekk looked out the side, seeing two TIE Interceptors on each side flying in escort formation.

For years afterward, the Republic quick strike and attempted abduction was discussed heavily in starfighter tactics academies. The heroism of the men and women of Rho that day was lauded. Rho Squadron was specially honored in a ceremony after the battle with medals attesting to their heroism

and bravery, with a couple of promotions for Sublieutenants Chatter and Epicedion, who both scored their first kills that day.

The ships of Rho broke on the B-wing formation, punching through it like paper. They scattered like Jawas when you turn on a light, leaving their assault transports, with their lone turrets, completely unescorted. By then the men of Kappa Squadron were already in range, and their rockets devastated the assault transports as they tried to flee.

Seeing that the mission objective was now hopeless, the Republic cruisers turned to flee. Sin Squadron had already left one crippled and disabled, floating hopelessly in orbit around Aurora. Lieutenant Colonel Rando was single handedly pursuing a retreating frigate. Appearing suddenly out of hyperspace and directly in their path of retreat was the SSSD *Sovereign*, dwarfing all three cruisers at once by several magnitudes. There would be no escape today.

“Attention all forces, this is Grand Admiral Rapier of the *Sovereign*. I have arrived to take command of the battle. Republic forces, stand down. You will not escape, and Miss Val’Asha will be safely onboard the *Warrior* momentarily. Several more battlegroups are en route, although apparently all we need are the pilots of Rho and Sin today. Good work, pilots,” said Rapier. Before Rapier even finished his sentence, the *Hammer*, *Challenge*, *Colossus*, and *Grey Wolf* and their respective battlegroups appeared to flank the *Sovereign*. The SSD *Avenger* appeared shortly thereafter to reinforce the *Warrior*. The Republic cruisers, seeing the futility of it all, issued the order to stand down, and fighters returned to their ships. Imperial forces remained on patrol for the time being as the Republic cruisers powered down and prepared to receive boarding parties.

When the *Liberty* finally touched down on the *Warrior*, Zekk put his head down on the controls in relief. Elissa jumped up, hugging him and kissing him, before looking at him apprehensively at first.

“Look, Zekk, I was going to tell you. But I wasn’t ready to deal with all the crap that followed, and I was too afraid to lose you,” she said.

Zekk put a finger up to her lips. “I’m not worried about it, so stop. I understand why you did what you did, so let’s not break our heads over it. Come on, let’s go meet Sin Squadron...and, well, I guess we have to meet Rho Squadron now, too,” said Zekk.

As the ramp of the shuttle went down, it was apparently moving far too slow for Firebreaker, who grabbed it and forcefully slammed it to the hangar floor. His bowcaster was already out.

“Zekk! Elissa! Are you okay? Are you out? I have a medical droid here with me,” said Firebreaker. Zekk put his hands up to calm Firebreaker, laughing.

“Calm down, friend. I’m fine. Not even a medical droid can save the poor bastard in the cargo bay, though,” said Zekk.

As they left the hangar bay, Elissa put her arm around her swollen stomach. “Zekk, you mind if we do that meetup over lunch? I’m starving. Oh, and I have to pee. Where’s the refresher?”

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In the days afterwards, both Sin and Rho were honored for their pivotal roles in diffusing the attack on Aurora. The devastation on the planet was great, with an entire hangar facility ruined and significant loss of life. Roger was not one of the survivors.

Zekk was rewarded for his heroism by having his relationship with Elissa blessed by the Fleet Commander. Elissa received a formal reprimand, which ultimately meant nothing, for fraternizing with members of the TIE Corps, and was allowed to return to starfighter R&D on Aurora. A week after the battle, Elissa gave birth to a boy.

The baby did not have lekku, if you were wondering.