

Talon ducked to avoid getting hit by a flying bottle as he walked into his squadron cantina. He sighed since as usual most of his pilots were drunker than a skunk. Duken was up dancing on one of the tables and BubbaX was over hitting on some of the female medics that frequented the place. Nick and Jag were sitting in one of the corners talking quietly, they were both still relatively new but had lots of potential. Yeah maybe his pilots were crazy and broke a lot of the rules but they were also the best.

Destavol beckoned him over to their usual table on the balcony overlooking the rest of the bar. With him sat two beautiful medics that he had been talking to for the better part of an hour.

“Hey Tal, this is Ashley and Marianne.”

Talon nodded in greeting as the two women smiled at him. With his long career in the Emperor’s Hammer he was pretty well known and picking up women was not difficult for him and therefore he got bored with most of them fairly quickly. Pulling up a chair he joined his friend and ignored the majority of the ensuing conversation. This is the first time his squadron had been able to relax in the past few weeks as they had been on mission after mission.

“Hey Tal you still with us?”

Turning back to the conversation he realized the three of them were all staring at him.

“What was that?”

“The girls were wanting to know if we could all go back to your room and have a drink since the boys are getting a little raucous.”

Talon looked down at his pilots and stifled a laugh. Duken was beginning to strip and BubbaX was covering his face from where the medic had slapped him. Jade sighed knowing how hard it would be to get his pilots to work tomorrow but he shrugged it off knowing they had earned it. Getting up from his chair he led the three through the obstacle course the Eagle Cantina had become and to the door. Seeing Savage by the door he stopped and told him to keep an eye on the boys since he was still marginally sober.

.....

Awaking the next morning to a splitting headache he was instantly aware of two things; first the empty bottle of vodka cradled in his left arm and the naked red head in his right. Talon shook his head trying to remember the girls name but was interrupted by a knock on his stateroom door. Sliding on his pants he answered it to find Colonel Hobbie waiting for him.

“The Admiral wants to see you in his office ASAP.”

Hobbie grimaced as he caught the smell of alcohol coming from Talon and left. Talon poured himself a cup of coffee and turned on the shower so it could heat up all the while wondering what his pilots did now that he was being called in for.

Twenty minutes later he was halfway sober and in a clean uniform. He had left Marianne on his bed since he had seen no point in waking her up. Seeing his XO, Krayt standing by the Commodore's office door he grimaced when he seen the look on his face.

“What happened Krayt?”

“Well after you left Colonel the pilots got a little rowdy and Destavol and BubbaX convinced the new pilots that they had to do something to be officially initiated into the squadron.”

Talon groaned. This wasn't going to be good.... especially with those two pilots involved.

“And what exactly did they have them do?”

“Well he had Nick and Jag as well as Kyron paint all of Knight's A-Wings bright pink and write, “Eagle is your daddy” on their view screens.”

Talon couldn't help but laugh but as soon as he pictured Astix's reaction he quickly stifled it. Sending Krayt to round up the squadron and get them to the ready room so they could drink some caf and sober up he walked into Astix's office. The look on Hobbie and Astix's face told him the whole story and he prepared for a good ass chewing. Astix looked like a thunder cloud ready to shoot lightning everywhere.

“Admiral before you say anything...”

“Stop right there Colonel. I am sick of you and your squadrons antics and frankly you are all about a hairs breadth away from being brought up on HCI charges for this little stunt.”

“Look Admiral, I don't condone what my pilots did last night but it is partly your fault. My pilots have been on mission after mission in the past two weeks with barely enough time to sleep let alone have any recreation time. All they did last night was blow off a lot of steam and even though I don't like how they did it was good for their morale. And frankly if Colonel Holu wasn't constantly antagonizing my pilots this probably wouldn't have happened in the first place.”

“I understand all this Colonel but you have to understand I have the Command Staff breathing down my neck especially with the fit Holu is throwing. I can't just let you guys get off scot free on this one.”

“I understand that Admiral and I already have my pilots assembled so I can speak with them. I plan on putting them on restrictions form the cantina for the next seven days until I feel they can control themselves and I am going to put Destavol and BubbaX on four days extra duty.”

This seemed to pacify Astix and he was dismissed soon there after. As he walked into the squadron briefing room he noticed none of his pilots would look him in the eyes, especially Destavol. He sighed because he didn't really want to punish his pilots. This was one of those few times he hated being a commander. He missed just being one of the guys but he had to keep some semblance of

structure to ensure his pilots would listen to him and follow orders. He got up to the podium and cleared his throat and all eyes were instantly on him.

“Gentlemen you already know what I am going to say so I won’t say it. It’s going to take a week to regenerate the ass I had chewed off over your guys little escapades last night. Now I know not all of you are guilty but we fight and party as a squadron so you will accept the punishment as a squadron.”

He slowly swept his gaze around the room meeting each of his pilot’s eyes. To their credit none of them flinched and all seemed ready to redeem themselves. He looked at his newest pilots and decided he should put them at ease.

“Here is what you all will do since it is either this or you will have HCI charges brought up for what you did to Knight’s A-Wings, which I found hilarious but it was still wrong. Nick, Jag and Kyron, you will all help the Knight techs repaint the A-Wings. Destavol and BubbaX you are all on extra duty for the next four days and you will start by taking Max, Angelo and Savage and cleaning the Cantina since it’s off limits for the next week.”

He listened to the collective groan from his pilots and smiled. Having the cantina closed was almost worse than HCI charges as far as they were concerned. Leaving his pilots to their duties he went to his office.

.....

Destavol bent over to sweep up the broken beer bottle pieces and sighed. This month didn’t seem to be getting any better. He realized Talon had to do what he did to keep them out of worse trouble but knowing that didn’t make it any better. He looked over his shoulder and noticed Duken walking in with some of the Eagle tech crew and some of the female medics from sickbay. Curious as to what they were doing here he walked over to them.

“What’s up Duken?”

“They decided since they come in here all the time and they were partly responsible for the mess last night they would help clean up the place.”

Destavol smiled realizing how much faster they would get things done. Telling Duken not to tell Talon that they had gotten help they went back to work. Setting all the tables back up with their chairs, those that weren’t in pieces, and setting the holoprojector back up. Maybe this wouldn’t be as bad after all.

.....

Talon looked through his reports and was not happy. Apparently the New Republic had set up a forward base not to far from EH territory. This could only mean one thing; they were preparing to

engage us. According to the email he had received from Colonel Hobbie the Renegade task force would be tasked on infiltrating and eliminating the new rebel outpost before they built up too much strength. Intel was already trying to get as much information on enemy strengths and weaknesses as they could. Apparently Eagle and Razor squadron would move to the MC-40 Blackbird and head towards the rebel outpost masquerading as reinforcements from Coruscant. The mission was set to go off in seventy two hours so he decided not to tell his pilots until tomorrow so they could finish cleaning stuff up and have a little fun tonight before having to go back to work.

The following morning he found himself back at the podium in the briefing room looking at his pilots as they took their seats. He was slightly hung over again, the perks of being a commander and having his own liquor cabinet in his stateroom.

“All right guys here is what’s going down. As of tomorrow your new home will be the MC-40 Blackbird. Along with Razor squadron we will be heading out to infiltrate a new rebel outpost just outside EH space and eliminating it.”

The whole squadron groaned. Talon couldn’t really say he was happy about himself but he shrugged what could he do? Duken piped up as usual.

“So let me get this straight boss we have to ride on that junk heap and baby sit Razor squadron?”

“Yeah that’s about the gist of it. It gets more complicated then that since as usual we will be outnumbered. With the Warspite and Fear taskforces being tasked out on other missions right now our task force is spread pretty thin.”

The pilots began to file out to go pack whatever it was they wanted to bring with them and to leave messages for friends and family since as soon as they transferred to the Blackbird there would be no communications for security reasons. Destavol and Duken stayed behind and obviously had something they wanted to speak to him about. Destavol was the first one to speak up.

“Tal, I am not really happy about this situation. Our pilots are to green and there are other complications.”

“Like what Dest?” Talon didn’t really want to hear his Flight Leaders list of complaints right now but he decided to humor them.

“Well first of all I am uncomfortable with this situation with Krayt not to mention we haven’t got a replacement pilot for Sirik yet. And one MC-40 and two squadrons against the Force knows what? Don’t you think they have us a little undermanned?”

“First of all you and Krayt traded spots because of the length of time he was gone on leave. I needed someone who knew the situation and was up to date with what was going on with the pilots. Krayt will be put back into the flight leader position as soon as he has been resituated as to what is going on. Secondly there is nothing I can do about Sirik that decision was above my head. Duken, Angelo and Nick well just have to fly as a three-ship wingman element until I can get a replacement but with what I am hearing from the Flight Office I wouldn’t expect that any time

soon. And as far as being undermanned we are taking the Third Escort Division with us. The Citadel, Venom and Reaper are already being prepped for the mission.”

His two flight leaders seemed a little more at ease at this point so he sent them off to get prepared and to see to any issues his pilots may have. He went back to pack himself and wasn't in his room ten minutes before he had a knock at his door. Answering it he found Nick and Jag standing there. He ushered them in and shut the door.

“What can I do for you gentlemen?” He put enough tone in his voice to let them know it had better be important.

“Sorry to interrupt you sir but Nick and I are just a little nervous sir. We just don't want to fail you and we don't feel we have enough experience yet.”

Talon nodded. If he had a decided for every time he had a pilot come to him with this problem he could go on vacation to Corellia.

“Listen guys the fact that you are here worried about how well you do tells me that you will do fine. Just get out there, do what I tell you and let your training take over and you will be fine.”

Slightly reassured the two First Lieutenants left. Talon let the thought go through his head as he did every day at times like this... why didn't I stay in the reserves.

.....

The next day the squadron was in their cockpits and heading towards the Blackbird. As they landed in the docking bay they found that Razor was already on board and Captain Durrone was standing there waiting on them. Jumping down from his cockpit he stripped off his flight gloves and helmet and headed towards the junior commander.

“Welcome aboard the Blackbird Colonel.”

“Thank you Captain. I wish I could say I was happy to be here but we both know that would be a lie.”

Talon noticed Zeth looking at the lightsaber on his belt and cleared his throat.

“Colonel Hobbie told me to inform you that since you are the ranking officer on board you will be in command of the mission and to report in to him on a regular basis.”

“Thank you Captain. Right now I am heading to my room and have a drink. It's a three day hyperspace flight and I suggest everybody go and relax.

To be Continued...

Chapter 2

It was the Blackbird's second day in hyperspace and the cabin fever was beginning to show. On the way to the mess hall for breakfast that morning he had found Jag hogtied in front of his quarters with the word "Newbie" written on his forehead. Talon sighed, he was going to have to talk to Destavol, this stuff was getting out of hand. Pouring himself some Corellian whiskey he sat down on his bunk and cursed the MC-40's lack of amenities. He already missed his senior officers quarters on the Renegade but that was the life of a pilot for you. He was jarred from his thoughts by a knock on the door. He opened it to reveal the slim build of Major Poole, the captain of the Blackbird.

"Come on in Major. What can I do for you?"

Poole walked in with distaste evident in his every movement.

"I came to discuss your pilots actions on my ship Colonel. Do you know that Commander BubbaX and some of your other so called officers are down in my hanger bay having cargo sled races across the hanger floor?"

"No Major I was not aware of this but why does it matter?"

"Why does it matter? This is a warship not a playground."

Talon looked at Poole and tried to control his temper that was rapidly building to a crescendo. Using the Force to calm himself he looked the Major right in the eye.

"I will tell you exactly why it doesn't matter Major and I want you to listen up because I won't explain myself twice. First they aren't damaging any equipment. Secondly they are elite pilots flying into a mission where they are outnumbered, outgunned and could very possibly die. If they want to play strip poker on the bridge then by all means you better let them because I want them relaxed and ready to fly when we hit this rebel base. Do I make myself perfectly clear Major?"

"Crystal clear Colonel."

Talon watched as Poole stalked out of his stateroom and the door silently slid shut. He shook his head. Yeah maybe his pilots did need to tone down but he would be damned if he was going to be the one to tell them to do it when they were the ones putting their lives on the line everyday and he knew one thing was for sure, no by the book Major was going to tell him how to run his squadron. Downing the remainder of his whiskey, he opened his comm. and called Destavol, telling him to meet him in the gym and to bring his lightsaber. Picking up his black handled saber himself he left to go blow off some steam.

.....

In the mess hall Angelo, Nick and Max all sat having lunch and chatting about the usual mindless crap that pilots talk about. Nick started poking at his food with his fork.

“You call this food? I could load this tube steak in my X-Wing and use it as a proton torpedo.”

Angelo laughed. “And you could cook better I suppose?”

“That’s not the point. If they are going to pay us like ditch diggers they should be able to afford to feed us like kings.”

Apparently one of the cooks overheard the conversation and decided to be offended by it, as did his three buddies. The four cooks walked over to the pilots and the head cook who looked like a beer keg with a chef’s hat cleared his throat. Nick and Dante turned to look over his shoulder and Max who was on the opposite side of the table facing towards them turned pale. Dante looked up at the cooks.

“Can I help you gentlemen?”

“Your friend here has a problem with our cooking so we decided to help him with it.”

“Now come on. Is this really necessary?”

“Pipe down shrimp, no ones talking to you.”

Dante looked at the cook sharply and something dangerous crossed his eyes. By this time Nick was standing up facing the group and obviously he decided there was no avoiding a fight so he might as well start it himself. Picking up his tray he slapped the big cook in the face with it as Dante jumped on another one. Max jumped over the table mumbling something about kicking Nick’s ass later and all hell broke loose...

.....

Talon and Destavol locked blades for the third time in the past five minutes again testing each other’s strength. Spinning on his foot Talon unlocked his blade and brought crashing down on Dest’s left flank. Parrying it easily the two continued to trade blows until both of them noticed about four women looking through the glass of the protected room watching them.

“Looks like we got an audience boss.”

“Yeah it sure does.”

Going on the offensive yet again, Talon drove Destavol across the room giving him no respite. Twenty minutes later both pretty tired, they shut down their weapons and left the room. The

women were still there commenting on how awesome the battle was and how good of shape the two seemed to be in. Ignoring the women for the most part Talon prepared to leave, but Dest being the greatest opportunist of all time asked if they would all like to go to the mess hall and get something to eat and then go to his room for drinks. Suppressing a sigh, Talon agreed to go along. As Talon entered the mess hall he just stood there with his mouth hanging open as he watched, as Max was bodily thrown half way across the mess hall. Two seconds after that he seen two people in the uniforms of cooks sprawled on the floor and Nick and Dante trading blows with two other cooks. Destavol walked in and started laughing and Talon glared at him. Dest immediately shut up and moved out of the way. Igniting his lightsaber he projected his voice.

“Unless you want me to join this party you had all better cease and desist immediately.”

Nick who was hanging in mid air by the barrel chested cook looked over at his commander and started to protest but stopped when he seen the look in his eyes. Dante who was engaged in kicking one guys ribs out the other side stopped and looked sheepish. Talon looked at the cooks.

“Get your buddies and get out of my mess hall. I’ll talk to your supervisor about this. Nick, Dante get Max and get to your quarters. You are restricted to them until we get back home. You guys are mistaking my relaxed attitude for weakness and getting out of control and I won’t have anymore of it. Understand?”

They all nodded their agreement and left the mess hall. Talon looked at Destavol and Dest thought he was going to rip someone’s head off.

“What do you say we skip the food and go straight to the drinking boss?”

.....

The next morning Talon awoke to his intercom going off.

“Colonel Jade please come to the bridge at your convenience.”

Sliding out of bed and nearly falling flat on his face as he tripped over empty beer bottles, Talon poured himself some coffee and got dressed. Arriving on the bridge twenty minutes later still mostly hung over, he was greeted by Major Poole.

“Colonel we will be arriving in system in two hours. I thought it best to inform you so you could prepare your squadrons.”

“Thank you Major. Let me know when we are thirty minutes out.”

“As ordered.”

Talon left the bridge and went to round up his pilots. It was going to be an interesting day.

To be continued...

Chapter 3

Talon picked up his comm. in his new office and called Captain Durrion to speak with him. He had been preparing himself mentally for the battle ahead. Considering they didn't even know what they were up against this was going to be a tall order for him to deliver, but of course that was nothing new to him or his squadron. But it was new to the Razor commander under his command and he decided it was time to talk to the junior officer. He heard a knock on his door and he called for the Razor to come in.

"Greetings Colonel. I assume it is almost time to go operational?"

"That it is Captain. In less than two hours as a matter of fact."

Talon gauged the young commander wondering if he would have any problems with the young man. He hoped not.

"Captain I will not disillusion you. We are probably going to be sorely outnumbered and I may call for you to do some very unorthodox things and I need you to execute without question. Do I make myself clear?"

"Perfectly Colonel. I understand you have a reputation for recklessness but I also know your reputation for getting the job done against overwhelming odds. Me and my squadron are at your disposal."

Talon looked at the Captain and could feel his sincerity through the Force and a huge weight seemed to fall off of him. One less thing he had to worry about in combat and in combat there was all too many things to worry about as it was.

"Alright Captain your dismissed. Go prep your squadron."

"Yes sir, see you soon."

As the Captain left, Talon sighed. He was getting to old for this. Getting up he got ready to prepare his squadron as well as get ready for a performance of a life time. For the mission to succeed they had to convince the enemy that they were one of them so they could get close enough to do a lot of damage quickly. Surprise was the only way for them to survive this undertaking and it was up to him to get it for them.

.....

Destavol, Krayt and Duken were all sitting in the cafeteria drinking some coffee and trying to get rid of the alcohol in their system with some hot food. Destavol looked at Duken who had a real sour look on his face.

“What’s your problem?”

“I am just sick of this crap. The food sucks, this ship sucks and this mission is scaring the crap out of me.”

“Hey I understand your feelings but you have to remember two things. First the food sucks because we tried to beat the crap out of the cooks.”

This elicited a laugh from Krayt and some of the Razor’s who were sitting nearby.

“Secondly, Talon is in charge and he is not going to let anything happen to us if he can help it. We are the best squadron in the Infiltrator Wing and I have no doubt we will succeed.”

This seemed to reassure Duken and they all looked up suddenly when they heard their commander calling for them over the intercom. Getting up they flipped off the cooks as they walked out the door. As they filed into the squadron briefing room, BubbaX smiled at the junior Lieutenant who was bringing coffee around to the pilots. He had come so close to sleeping with the beautiful brunette last night and was undaunted by the fact that she actually liked Jag. Glaring at the young Lieutenant, him and everyone else turned their attention to Talon as he entered the room and took the podium. Taking out his notebook he prepared to take notes on what his commander was about to say and tried to shunt the young woman from his mind.

Max sat in his seat next to Kyron rubbing his eye where the cook had hit him the day before. The squadron had nicknamed him Cyclops and continued to rib him for it. He leaned over to Kyron and whispered.

“Do you think we will survive this mission?”

“It’s hard to say. It’s not going to be easy but we should be able to pull it off. Our ships are better maintained and we are better trained.”

Max hoped so; he didn’t want to die today. Sighing he turned his attention to his commanders briefing.

Talon looked out his assembled pilots and took a deep breath. The odds were he wouldn’t see all of them sitting here for the debriefing but that was a chance they all took every time they got in their cockpits. He wondered to himself if he was just as reckless as these young Lieutenants or if he had just gotten so used to risking his life it didn’t really matter to him anymore. Either proposition filled him with a slight chill.

“Alright gentlemen play time is officially over. We will be appearing in the Valc system on the edge of EH space in under an hour. The rebels have apparently set up shop on the planet of Valc VII. We still have no idea what the opposition will be so we are going to buy time by masquerading

as a reinforcement battle group reassigned from the rim. In the meantime I will be assessing their defenses and letting you all know what we have to do. Right now the main goal is to deceive them long enough to let our fleet get close enough to theirs to deliver a broadside out of surprise. If we are lucky we may be able to disable at least one of their capital ships before they realize what's happening. In the meantime, Razor squadron is to go to ground and destroy the rebels ground base while Eagle and the capital ships keep the base busy. Depending on the opposition we may destroy the entire fleet or we may have to withdraw, I can't tell you at this time. Just be ready to take orders from me and do what you have to do."

His pilots all looked at him with some fear but plenty of determination. But hell it wasn't an Eagle operation if they weren't a little scared. Major Poole called him and let him know he was thirty minutes out. Heading to the bridge he prepared for the performance he was about to do. Putting on the rebel officers uniform over his IW one he prepared for the conversation with the task forces commander.

The Blackbird and its escorts decanted from hyperspace right on top of the planet and formed up into a wedge formation with the Blackbird taking point. Looking at the sensors, Talon sighed. They were indeed heavily outnumbered. Out there waiting for them were two MC-40's, two modified Corvettes and one MC-80. The latter is what worried him the most the rest of the rebel fleet more or less matched his own but they didn't have anything to match the firepower of the MC-80 which called itself the Hoth Redemption. The comm. officer signaled to him that they were being hailed. Clearing his throat he gave the signal for the Lieutenant to put the call through. The face of an elderly rebel General appeared in front of him.

"Welcome to the middle of nowhere, I am General Atkins, might I ask who you are?"

"Hello General I am Colonel Draygo onboard the Rebel Pride. My task force has been sent to reinforce yours. We seek permission to join your fleet's formation."

The general eyed him suspiciously for a moment and seemed to try and gauge him. Talon put on an air of innocence and tried to play the part of the rebel commodore.

"I was not aware of any reinforcements this soon Colonel."

"They pulled us off the rim patrol to help you, that is why we were able to get here so soon."

Atkins seemed to relax. "In that case welcome aboard. I will have my TAC officer shoot you the coordinates for where your fleet can mesh with mine."

Talon saluted, "As ordered sir, Pride out."

Talon sat back in the command chair and sighed. Looking at Poole he saw the look of approval in his eyes. He had pulled it off and now the hard part could commence. The comm. officer began calling off the vectors that the Redemption was sending him. Looking at the displays the vectors they were on had the Blackbird coming right alongside the Redemption and his escorts coming in to flank the two MC-40's. This would be good they would have a split second of surprise against

the biggest of their opposition. He told the comm. officer to give him a line to his fleet.

“Blackbird task force this is Colonel Jade. We will have a split second of surprise and in that time we are going to have to do as much damage as possible. Be on red alert and prepare to execute the second I give the word. Razor man your ships and prepare to go to ground on my command.”

He got a chorus of replies from his ship captains and once again the comm. officer said they were being hailed. He nodded to the Lieutenant and once again he found himself regarding General Atkins.

“What can I do for you General?”

“Colonel I like to talk to my subordinates face to face. I would like you to come over to the Redemption and have dinner with me.”

“As ordered General.”

As the visage of the General faded away Talon scowled. They had forced his hand and now it was time for things to get ugly. Opening his comm. he called his squadrons.

“Eagle and Razor man your ships. Also I need a transport from Burner squadron. We are going to make them think I am on the transport when the shooting starts.”

Tearing off the rebel uniform he put on his flight suit. Telling Poole that he had the bridge, he hurried towards the hangar bay and his waiting X-Wing. Once arrived he was satisfied to see that his astromech, Dragon, already had his preflight sequence done and he was ready to fly. He looked at his sensors; his ships were still not quite in position yet so he would have to buy more time.

“Eagles here is how we are going to do it. We are going to form up on the Burner shuttle as if we were an honor escort, once our ships are in position I will give the order and we will commence the attack. Razor you will exit on the backside of the Blackbird and slingshot around its hull. By the time you get on the other side the battle should be joined and you can go to ground.”

He got acknowledgements from his people and thus satisfied led his squadron out the hangar and formed up on the shuttle from Burner squadron. Watching as the Blackbird pulled alongside the Redemption he waited for the big ship to let its shields down for him to enter. He ordered his squadron to arm the heavy rockets he had standard issue in One Flight. As soon as the shields went down they were to go to attack position and dry fire the rockets pulling up hard as they did so. Finally the ship lowered their shields and Talon opened his comm.

“Colonel Jade to all ships...ATTACK.”

All around him turbolaser blasts and missile concussions went off against the lowered shields of the three Mon Cal cruisers. Just then Razor came flying around the Blackbird, making a quick decision he ordered Duken to take three flight and escort Captain Durrion to the ground. He felt warmth in him as he watched explosions from his squadrons and the Blackbird's missiles impacting on the big ships hull. That warmth quickly went to a cold chill as the shields went back

up and two squadrons of X-Wings and two squadrons of Y-Wings launched from the big ship.

“Eagle, S-Foils to attack position. Engage at will. Major Poole report.”

“Significant damage to all three Mon Cals sir. The Redemption’s engines are offline and we knocked out a lot of their portside turbolasers. The Citadel reports that one MC-40 is dead in space and the other is damaged. The two Modified Corvettes are moving to assist.”

“Excellent Major. Continue the offensive. Eagle we are going after the modified Corvettes. Captain Durrone report.”

“Base is pretty well destroyed sir, but we are under attack by six A-Wings. I really appreciate the escort.”

“Understood Captain, get up here when you’re clear and help the Blackbird turn this MC-80 into space dust.”

“As ordered”

Talon smiled, things were going well. His smile turned to a look of horror when he noticed Max had two X-Wings on his tail. He called for him to go evasive but it was too late. The rebels’ lasers tore through his pilot’s ship and turned a good pilot into a fireball. Talon went into a rage, swooping down on the X-Wings, he popped a proton torpedo off at point blank range and incinerated his pilot’s ship and then brought his lasers to bare on his wingman. Four quad lasers busted through the rebels cockpit opening his ship to vacuum and the ship continued to fly straight, the pilot dead but the ship still under power. He called for his squadron to report. Duken came over the comm.

“Colonel we lost Kyron but the X-Wings are neutralized. The Y-Wings are heading for the Reaper and Citadel.”

Talon shunted the pain of losing two of his pilots aside and had his squadron regroup and go after the Y-Wings. With three flight back with them they made short work of the Bones. The two MC-40’s were dead in space and he turned just in time to watch the Redemption explode into millions of fragments. Major Poole came over the comm.

“Sir, we managed to cause a reactor overload in the ship. Its explosion has temporarily crippled us but we should be able to fix the damage enough to get us back home.”

“Good job Major.”

Talon watched as the two Corvettes ran to hyperspace and disappeared. After thirty minutes of pitched battle and losing two pilots and having two of his capital ships crippled they had won. He hoped the victory was worth the casualties.

“Eagles come about its time to go home.”

To be continued...

Chapter 4

Talon awoke from another nightmare of watching his wingman's X-Wing blown apart at Valc VII. He found himself tangled in his sheets soaked in his own sweat. Taking a deep breath and using the Force to calm himself and regulate his breathing, he slowly got out of his bed and tried to erase the images of the recent battle from his mind. He noticed the time on the chrono by his bed and swore, he was supposed to meet Hobbie in his office twenty minutes ago. Slipping on his duty uniform, he headed for his wing commander's office.

Hobbie watched as Talon entered his office and was amazed at how bad his star commander looked. He was dirty and unshaven with bags beneath his eyes and his uniform was wrinkled. He was tempted to ask who this imposter was and what he had done with Colonel Jade.

"Have a seat Tal. You look like you have been shot out of a missile tube and bounced off a cruiser's shields."

"Why thank you Hobbie that makes me feel so much better about myself. How are you today? Developing into a bigger asshole I see."

Hobbie bit his tongue, knowing that Talon was doing his best to suppress his shame and need for revenge over his dead pilots. Taking a deep breath and leaning back in his seat he thought how best to keep his friend from killing someone.

"War is ugly Tal, bad things happen and good people die. There is nothing you can do about it and the pilots and officers in your squadron need you to keep that air of invincibility that you always have had. It's what keeps them going and following your orders. What happened at Valc was partly my fault. I couldn't get you a bigger strike force but that's the way of war, you follow orders and you bleed and die."

Talon seemed to absorb these words and only seemed half convinced but he did sit up straighter in chair and his shoulders came out of a slump he probably didn't even realize they had. Hobbie almost smiled. Same old Talon, stubborn to the end.

"Now you have three new pilots to replace the squadron losses. One is an old friend and the other two are greener than Corellian grass. Go clean yourself up and greet your new pilots. We don't have replacement X-Wings yet so Eagle won't have anything more than patrol duty for the next two weeks."

Talon stood up and saluted and exited the office. Hobbie sighed, men like him and Talon were

becoming way to few and far between and the stress that they endured would break normal men.

.....

Showered, shaved and in a clean and pressed uniform, Talon sat behind his desk and regarded the three officers in front of him. One was an old friend that he did indeed know well.

“Good to see you again Major Blackheart.”

“And you as well Colonel. I heard of your feat at Valc VII. Quite impressive.”

Talon tried to hide the pain in his eyes at the mention of that nightmare but replied, “Thank you Major.”

He regarded the other two pilots, Lieutenants, one female and one male. They both had exemplary records during their training. He opened his comm. and called in his two flight leaders. Once they arrived he introduced them to their new pilots.

“Duken, Destavol I would appreciate if you would show Lieutenant Tyche and SaBinring to their new rooms and introduce them to the other pilots. Major I would like you to stay and speak to me for a moment.”

Destavol and Duken left with the new pilots and Horus took a seat regarding his new commander. Blackheart was an old friend and had been one of his pilots in a previous squadron.

“Horus you don’t know how glad I am to have another senior officer under my command. I don’t have the patience to handle these young Lieutenant and Commanders anymore.”

Horus laughed and said he understood what he meant. Standing up and straightening his uniform he requested his leave to go unpack his things and check out the Dive, the name chosen for their cantina. Granting him leave, Talon stood up himself and decided to head back to his stateroom and have a drink himself.

.....

Duken looked at Destavol as they walked behind the two new pilots and elbowed him in the side.

“Oww. What was that for?”

“Quit looking at her ass. She hasn’t been in the squadron twenty four hours and you already thinking about having sex with her.”

Destavol put on one of those innocent-hurt expressions that Duken suspected he learned from Talon. But he stopped checking her out and guided them into the Dive. Duken led the two Lieutenants over where the rest of the pilots were sitting while Destavol went to get some drinks.

“Guys this is Lieutenant Tyche and SaBinring, they are our newest pilots...so play nice.”

“Yay, fresh meat.” BubbaX quipped.

“Can Tyche be my roommate?” Jag asked hopefully.

“Can it you clowns. And I don’t want any more initiations... Holu is still complaining about last time and you know Talon hasn’t been in the best of moods lately.”

The pilots all sobered up at the mention of their commander’s mental state. But they soon livened up and started buying rounds for the new pilots. They were giddy with their success and survival of the last mission despite the loss of their friends.

.....

Talon lay on his bed sipping on a vodka bottle and flipping his commander’s star between his fingers when he heard a knock on his door. He yelled for them to come in without looking at the door. He had already sensed Destavol and Duken through the Force.

“What do you guys want?”

“We thought you might want to join us at the Dive. We are throwing a party for the newbies. You outta see it they are so drunk that Horus is dancing with BubbaX.”

Destavol was worried about his commander. He had only seen Talon like this a few times and it always seemed to lead to disaster. Him and Duken had decided trying to get him out of his room was the best course of action. Talon pointed to his vodka bottle and shook his head all the while playing with his position badge.

“Sorry guys, I have my best friend Mr. Smirnoff here keeping me plenty of company but thanks for the offer.”

“Come on Tal, you got to get out of your room for awhile get some fresh air.”

Talon looked at his subordinates and sighed. He knew they were right, that sitting here brooding wasn’t going to do him any good but his stubbornness was making it difficult.

“Alright, lets go.”

They had been in the bar maybe thirty minutes having a good time when Outsider and some of his buddies entered the cantina. They looked like they were looking for trouble and Talon decided they found the right person. Outsider strode over to where he was sitting and looked down with that smug look that seemed forever imprinted on his face.

“Well hello Jade, how good to see you looking in such fit condition.”

“What do you want Stiener?” The menace in Talon’s tone left no room for debate on his disposition towards the other and attracted his pilot’s attention. All of a sudden the cantina got real quiet.

“I am coming out of reserves, planning on taking command of Black. I thought I would stop by and let you know I plan on making you and your squadron look as pathetic as they really are.”

That was all it took in Talon’s current state. Using telekinesis the table went flying and so did Outsider after Talon’s fist hit him in the jaw and with that all hell broke loose as Steiner’s friends and Eagle pilots pounced on each other.

An hour later Talon woke up on a bed in the brig, his pilots all laying on the floor in the cell with him. He sighed; he was really getting to old for this.

To be continued...

Chapter 5

Twenty-four hours later he was back in his stateroom dressing in a clean uniform when he heard a knock on his door and he turned around calling for them to enter. Hobbie walked into the door and took in the mess that was Talon's stateroom. Looking at his old friend, he noticed that Talon was sober for the first time in ages and had that old fire back in his eyes, which was a good thing cause he was going to need when he learned of the mission he was about to embark on.

"Eagle squadron has a new assignment."

Talon's eyes instantly came alert and focused on Hobbie as his wish finally came true.... he was sick of patrol duty.

"What you got for me Hobs?"

"Well the New Republic has seen fit to hire smugglers and pirates to hit the EH as much as possible to disrupt our activities and keep those same groups from attacking the Rebellion. One of the largest groups, the Black Vipers, which have their very own Imperial Star Destroyer is working near the Karana sector. The Eagle's will infiltrate and destroy the group and their ISD."

Talon just stared at Hobbie as he comprehended all the things that briefing entailed. Hobbie wanted him to infiltrate a group of a couple thousand people with 11 pilots and destroy an ISD with no support.

"Would you like Luke Skywalker's head on a silver platter too? That should be just about as hard."

"I know this won't be easy but the command staff is confident that you can do it in light of your actions at Valc VII."

"Yeah and did the command staff take into consideration I lost two pilots in that fiasco? Yeah I didn't think so."

Hobbie just looked at him and Talon sighed. It was time to get back in the saddle and do his job.

Destavol and Nick traded glances as their commander entered the briefing room. He didn't look happy at all.

"What do you think is going on Dest?"

"I have no idea kid but Talon is obviously not happy."

Talon took the podium and eyed all his pilots individually, all looked ready to move on and tackle anything...he smiled slightly in approval. Clearing his throat he went on with the briefing.