

30 ABY, ISDII Warrior, [REDACTED] System.

Jarion removed his flight helmet, casting it aside as he fell into his bunk. It had been another busy day with the Imperial Storm war games underway and the rigours of full time flight assignments with little down time had fatigued the Coruscanti. He rolled over onto his other side and closed his eyes tightly, almost imagining himself somewhere else.

“You calling it quits already, Helmet-head?” Mused Drake as he entered into the room next, heading towards his own section.

“Not at all, I just never thought I’d miss my bunk so much.” Groaned Jarion, keeping his eyes shut as Drake let out a verbal scoff. He could hear the bustle of the other members of Rho returning in from the hangar, but he didn’t wait to converse with any of them though as he shuffled over once more, quickly drifting off to sleep.

He surmised that only a short time had passed when he finally did wake up. Stretching his arms as he sat up, he looked over to see Drake and Lieutenant Griggs locked in a loud Pazaak match on the fire side of the room.

“Who’s buying us all a round this time, guys?” Asked the Mandalorian, lifting himself off the bunk and onto his feet.

It was now that he realised he’d forgotten to remove his life support system and weapon holster. He had been so tired that it the uncomfortable gear had not crossed his mind. But now that gravity acted on the equipment Jarion reached up to remove it, placing the pieces on his bunk.

The air in the room was tense, now that Jarion was paying more attention he noticed a few other pilots from the squadron were watching the game take place, like cadets during a lesson in advanced tactics back in IWATS. No one responded to him for a few moments until Captain Starfire cleared his voice, speaking up.

“So far it’s been a tie.” The man replied, swiftly shoving the pilot off the chair besides him for laughing at a terribly unintentional pun. Jarion moved over to the table, peering at the cards laid out in curiosity.

Drake’s current stack had come up to a solid twenty, with a ten, six and a four. Lieutenant Grigg’s on the other hand, had a five, two and another five. It was the formers turn to take a card, and with a tense second he flipped it over to reveal a one. Drake’s eyes glistened gleefully as Grigg’s went to take his turn, his card a disappointing ten, overrunning his chance to stay even.

“That’s how we do it in Skid Rho, ladies!” The Flight Leader boasted proudly, getting to his feet and kicking the metal table over with a loud crash and sending the cards and other effects flying. He swivelled round, pointing at Grigg’s and Jarion with each hand.

“It’s time to hit the bar, the rookie’s buyin!”

Jarion nodded, flashing an amused grin as the trio trudged out of the crew room and into the regimented corridors of the Star Destroyer. As they walked he could feel the aching of his joints, repetitive flight time in a TIE was neither a comfortable or gentle experience. But at least he was separated from the heavier parts of his attire. He was still dressed in his black

flight suit, the squad patch of Rho Squadron sitting proudly on his shoulder, and his own call sign; "Solus" spelt out on his chest in white.

Before long, the pilots had made their way to the shipboard cantina. Just looking at the place made the Lieutenant Commander's face soften, it was one of the few places he could truly relax when he was off duty, and that was alright as far as he was concerned.

As they entered the deck Jarion instantly spotted familiar faces from a variety of other squadrons, as well the men who were responsible for the upkeep on the starfighters, most notably were Lieutenant-Commander Genie and Lieutenant-Colonel Zek Terrik, debating the finer points of aerial manoeuvres.

"Go ahead then, Lieutenant." Said Drake as they reached the bar. As Grigg's placed the order with a dull looking man in uniform, Jarion went to pull out a cigarra from one of his pockets, placing the stick in his mouth and swiftly lighting it. Slowly letting the smoke drift across the bar as he exhaled.

"I'm surprised to see you drinking something other than that blue milk." Quipped the Mandalorian as the drinks were poured into glasses and slid over to each of the respective pilots.

"Well what do you think I'm doing after this." Replied the Captain, lifting his drink to the other two men. Jarion grinned as their glasses met and they started to drink, more rounds no doubt on the way.

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It was early the next morning when Jarion rolled out of his bunk on time for morning roll call. He could feel the bags under his eyes and the headache was more prominent than it had been the night before. He shrugged to himself, leaving little time to think about it as he proceeded to get dressed into a clean flight suit and begin to don his equipment once more. Whilst he did so, the Mandalorian shot a side glance towards his two drinking companions, and was satisfied to observe that they looked equally as done in.

Securing the last of his gear, Jarion picked up his shiny black helmet, making a semi-rude gesture to Drake as he passed him towards the hangar bay.

Roll call was nothing out of the ordinary; there were a few new faces in the squadron and as Jarion took a peek around he noticed he was surrounded by more fresh faced SL and LT's. He grinned as Colonel Antiel dismissed the formation, making a beeline for his TIE Interceptor before most of the other pilots had much of a chance to move.

He placed a hand besides the 'nose art' of an attractive (and moderately underdressed) Mandalorian female, muttering a few words of encouragement towards the day ahead. Taking a step back, Jarion began his pre-flight check of spacecraft, not expecting to find anything untoward but it was not like him to break the serious pre and post flight regulations like some of his more relaxed colleagues. Satisfied beside a minor scratch to his port sensors, he moved over towards the hatch, swiftly opening it and stepping inside the cramped vehicle.

He expertly fiddled his way around the cockpit, settling into his seat and plugging in his life support systems. The LCM also flipped his helmet on, flicking a few switches to start up his HUD and other computerised systems, taking out a data pad from besides his seat and beginning his run through of the checklist, giving his gyros time to calibrate.

When he was eventually satisfied, Jarion initiated the engine start up. He felt the whole vehicle come to life, the vibrations running through him as he placed a hand on the stick, his other moving to the throttle. He could hear the deep grumble of the Twin Ion Engine even through the sealed cockpit and the sound suppressors in his helmet and momentarily pondered how loud these things could be if he had no noise dampeners.

Pushing away any random or unnecessary thoughts, the Mandalorian played with his instruments until he was satisfied, activating his communication unit.

“Flight Two, status check?” Jarion asked, awaiting the word from the three other TIE’s behind him in the line.

“Rho Two-Two, status green.” Came one reply.

“Rho Two-Three, operational.” Said another.

“Rho Two-Four, ready for launch.” Replied the final pilot.

“Affirmative, Flight Two.” Said Jarion, looking out his cockpit windows to make sure the immediate area around him was clear. “Remember the briefing, and stick to the flight plan.”

Without any more words, the hangar lights flashed from red to green. Jarion was the first to go, his flight in tow. He lifted the stick back and pushed the throttle forward, the Interceptor screaming out of the launch bay and into the vast darkness of space. He grinned again, the adrenaline rushing through his body the same way it did every time he took off.

The mission had begun.