

Typhoon Squadron: Speaking into the Chaos

By Jagged Fell III

Lieutenant Jagged Fell was tired, so tired he felt it in his bones. Ever since the Fleet of the Emperor's Hammer had arrived at XC-50391 they had been ceaselessly searching the planet for signs of what happened to the Imperial colony that had once been here. For two whole weeks, Jagged and his fellow pilots had been flying one scouting flight after another. You forget how big most worlds are until you are tasked with searching all of it. Jagged had heard that they had found some stuff in the colony's main databanks but he was a pilot, and a very junior one at that, and was not privy to any details of the other squadrons' findings. All he knew was what Typhoon Squadron had found, and that was a big fat nothing. They had flown over this verdant world with its craggy mountains, lush valleys, glistening rivers, and undulating oceans searching from the skies for any signs of life. They saw no signs of any life, Imperial or alien, outside the original colony's perimeter. And within that boundary, nothing but empty buildings and abandoned machinery.

Jagged finished his last sensor sweep and turned his TIE Advanced towards the blue sky and the Imperial II Class Star Destroyer Challenge above in orbit. He punched his throttle to its maximum, loving the sensation of being shoved deeper into his pilot's couch. As he broke through the atmosphere and into the space beyond, the riotous colors of the Chaos shone through his ball cockpit view ports. And he hated it.

He had grown up on the Wild Space world of Nirauan, from which you could see the edges of the Chaos. Jagged had been born into the Empire of the Hand, which had been founded by the legendary Grand Admiral Mitth'raw'nuruodo, on the border between the Chaos and the Galaxy at large. Between the Empire and the multitude of alien nations within the Unknown Regions.

When he was a boy, the swirls of blues and greens, and the explosions of reds and yellows in the summer night sky had amazed him and made him dream of traveling the stars and nebulas on display. His love for the colors was only enhanced when his mother would take him on trips into the Chaos, all the way to the outer fringes of the Chiss Ascendancy, to her home. He would see all the alien species in the marketplaces and not feel out of place, something he rarely felt at home. But his love for the Chaos was forever tainted by the death of his mother.

Jagged shook his head to chase away the thoughts of his mother and vectored his fighter along the wedge line of the gleaming white arrowhead that was the ISDII Challenge. He backed off on his thrust as he crested over the prow of the ship and curved around to the belly of the mighty destroyer and into the hanger bay. He guided his TIE into its assigned docking cradle and power downed his fighter. He hoped that Typhoon Squadron would get a break soon, he was weary of flying over an empty world.

He was just leaving the pilots' ready room, planning on heading back to his berth to study for more Imperial University exams when he heard a loud voice call out behind him, "Hey, Blue!" Jagged gritted his teeth but tried to keep a neutral face as he turned, "General Master. Sir, I have asked you to not refer to me as Blue before."

"So you have, my apologies. It just slips out sometimes." He gave a wide grin, "You have to admit, it fits as a nickname. You haven't landed on a call sign yet, maybe I could convince you?"

"Not Blue. I have a history with that nickname, sir. Not something I want ever again."

"Not a problem. Again, no insult was intended. You just get back from 391?"

"Yes. I was heading to my bunk to get some rest. The tedium of sitting in that cockpit, watching the sensor readouts while the computer flies the ship just takes it out of me. I am a pilot. I want to fly, not watch data screens."

"I hear you. It really gets me down too. How about you come and have a drink with me? A number of the guys are all gathering in the breakroom to let off some steam."

"I don't know, sir. I was hoping to get some rest. You never know when the next patrol might get called."

"Oh come on. We both know you are heading back to your bunk to take yet more classes. Give it a break and come join us. You have been with us for what? Three weeks? We've hardly got to know you. Give the books a rest and have a drink. You never know, you might like it."

"Alright, sir," Jagged said resignedly. "Lead the way."

As they walked down the hall to the squadron break room Jagged reflected on how much he felt at home here. The polished durasteel deckplates and the Imperial grey walls, pocked with hatches and doorways, felt comfortable to him in a way that Nirauan never had. The architecture aboard the Challenge wasn't much different than the cool stone hallways of the academy on Nirauan, but there was life, an energy in the Fleet that just was missing on that world.

Jagged entered into the Wing X breakroom and wondered again at the dichotomy off the fleet. Here in the pilots' lair, there was the unmistakable Imperial order and neatness, but it was also filled with the collected accoutrements of the more than two dozen years that had passed since the squadron's founding. The walls were decorated with the trophies of past glories that the squadron had attained, and mementos to squadron pilots who were no longer here. Many had just moved on to

other positions in the fleet, or even into retirement. But not all the missing pilots had left so peacefully.

Gathered in the breakroom was most of what Jagged privately thought of as the old guard. General Master went and collected a drink from General Jarek La'an who had been in conversation with Colonel Locke Setzer, the Squadron Executive Officer, and the Squadron Commander, Colonel Triji Boliv. The only old guard member missing was Jagged's flight leader, Major Prost Varsis.

It still messed with Jagged's understanding of rank structures by how in the Emperor's Hammer two generals could be reporting to a pair of colonels, but he was coming to accept it. In the TIE Corps, as in every other military organization, you progressed up the rank structure through years of service, performing your duty, and taking on command roles. But unlike any other military Jagged had ever heard of, a commander who felt his passions no longer had him desire to lead troops, but still wanted to serve the Emperor's Hand in bringing true peace to the galaxy, could step down from command and return to the ranks as a normal pilot. They would retain their rank and would continue to be addressed as such, but would report to their commanding officer just like any other Flight Member. At first it confused Jagged, but now he saw the wisdom in allowing those who wanted to serve, but no longer command, continue to make a contribution to the Fleet.

"Lieutenant Fell, so glad to see you in here," Colonel Boliv greeted him warmly, rising from the overstuffed, upholstered seat he had been reclining in around a low drinks table. It looked to Jagged that this was not their first round of drinks.

"Yeah, Fell. How long have you been with the squadron now? Three, four weeks? I was beginning to wonder if you knew where this place was," put in General La'an.

"Go easy on him, Jarek," laughed Colonel Setzer.

"Major Varsis showed me around on my first day, but I like to keep to myself, sir," replied Jagged. "I figured I could just take some time to get settled in and use my off-time to learn more about the Corps."

"Hey, that is all well and good and you do you, but I am glad to see you join us. And while we are here in the break room you can dispense with the sir's and stuff. Besides, what will you have to drink?" asked General La'an.

"I don't know if I will be able to not say sir, but I'll try, I guess. Is that Corellian Whiskey I see there?"

"Yes, Whyren's Reserve in fact."

"I'll take a glass of that, on the rocks. What were you all talking about when we got here, sir?"

Colonel Boliv chuckled. "After seeing you taking so many tests and passing nearly all of them on your first try, it is nice to see that you can struggle to learn some things. We were just remembering the old glory days when the squadron was young, and so were we. I first commanded this squadron over twenty years ago."

General Master, who looked more than a bit inebriated to Jagged, broke into Colonel Boliv's reminisce. "Hey, Lieutenant Jagged Fell the third, what brought you here? You must come from a family with money or power, or both, for them to have thought so much of the family name for you to be the third."

"Master! I said to lay off the new guy."

"It is alright Colonel Setzer, I am not offended. The funny thing is I am not really a third. My father just named me that to try and curry favor with his cousin who did have power and money."

"Where do you come from that your father's, cousin did you say, was in such a position of power that your father would pick his own child's name to try and carry favor?" General La'an quickly cut in to head off any comment from General Master.

"I grew up in what was called the Empire of the Hand, and my uncle, that is what I always called him growing up, was Baron Soontir Fel. He commanded the fighter corps of the Empire and was on the ruling counsel. Uncle Soontir had just had a son whom they had named Jagged so, of course my suck-up father thought by naming me Jagged he might gain favor with his more powerful cousin. It didn't really work, but Uncle Soontir never seemed to hold it against me."

"But why 'the third' then? You're not even really the second, but why not the second if he was trying to make points?" asked General Master reasonably.

"I'm not really sure," Jagged replied after taking a drink of his whiskey. "I think it was just my coward for a father didn't think he could get away with the second."

"You don't seem to think too highly of your father. I take it you didn't get along with him growing up?" asked Colonel Setzer.

"I was definitely closer to my mother, sir."

"There you go with that sir crap again," laughed General Master. "You still haven't answered my question though. It sounds like your family wasn't scraping the bottom of the barrel in your Empire of the Hand, so why did you come here? Why did you seek out the Emperor's Hammer?"

“Because I want to see the destruction of the Jedi and the New Republic that they support. The Hand were making peace with the New Republic, and the Jedi with them, and I could not stand idly by while that happened. I had heard that there was still a group that was loyal to the ideals of the Empire, and that they were the only force truly able to beat back the Republic. So, when I graduated from the Academy on Nirauan, I stole my TIE Defender and took off in search of those who might allow me to oppose the Jedi, not ally with them.”

“Why do you hate the Jedi so much?” asked Colonel Boliv.

“They killed my mother.”

“How?” asked General La’an.

“Skywalker and a smuggler named Mara Jade came to the Empire looking for a ghost, but were scared of the power that they saw. So, they crashed a freighter into the main hangar complex on the base. My mother was doing a rotation as a quartermaster in the hangar that month.”

“I am sorry about that Jagged Fell the three, excuse me third,” consoled, a bit drunkenly, General Master. “Hey, wait. That is perfect. How about Three as your nickname?”

“Come on Master,” started Colonel Boliv.

“No, hear me out. You are a ‘third’ but in name only. You are assigned to the third flight of the squadron, and are in the third position. Three, three, three. It is perfect,” continued General Master, warming to the subject.

“I don’t know.”

“Think about it, you can’t deny it. It fits.” General Master sat back with a satisfied look on his face, like his logic and reasoning was unassailable.

Jagged did think about it. He had never really liked the affectation that his father had forced on him with his silly name, but his Imperial up-bringing had made him incapable of just dropping part of his name. It would be a way to reclaim this bit of himself, he thought.

“I like it. Sure, call me Three if you want, Master.”

“That’s the ticket!” beamed General Master, taking another long pull at his glass.

“Well, if you joined us to fight the Jedi and New Republic, you must not think too highly of what we have been up to lately, am I right?” asked Colonel Boliv.

“Flying over that empty world has not been the highlight of my year, no.”

“Well, good news for you then,” answered Colonel Boliv. “We are pulling out in the morning. The scouts on the ground found some mention of a way to travel through hyperspace here in the Chaos more efficiently than the jump-by-jump that we have been having to do. Some group called ‘navigators’ is supposed to be able to use their precognitive ability to see safe paths in hyperspace and plot them for the ship. High Admiral Plif has tasked all the Battlegroups to disperse and look for confirmation of this on nearby worlds.”

“I’ll drink to that!” exclaimed Colonel Setzer.

“Here, here!” the rest chimed in.

As they continued to talk around the table in the breakroom, Jagged thought he had possibly found a home that he could belong to. To be accepted in. He smiled to himself as the stories turned more and more ribald as the night wore on. Yes, he could really see himself liking it here.

Ten days later they finally arrived in an inhabited system. Jagged was ready to climb the walls with desire to feel space under him again. Simulator work was fine, but nothing compared to the real thing. He was even more excited that he would be flying a TIE Defender in the mission down to the planet. He liked the Defender, with its three pylons and six wings much better than the TIE Advanced he was normally assigned. Admiral Stryker had decided that, as they did not know what they would face down on the planet, the squadron should all be equipped with the Defenders. Its heavier shields and ion cannons were able to disable hostiles, rather than destroy them. They were on strict orders to not start a war out here. They were here to gather information and take it back to the rendezvous point, nothing more.

As Jagged descended down to the planet surface from the ISDII Challenge, which was in stationary orbit over the large trading post the sensors had picked up, he noticed this world was not as full of plant and wildlife as XC-50391 had been. The planet was beautiful in its own way though. Its rusty red and black rock cliffs overlooking small patches of green scabbling out life around the different streams and lakes he could see below had a wonderful majesty to them.

He was to fly top cover while Colonel Boliv and General Master landed to attempt to make contact with the alien populous on the surface. The Challenge had tried to make contact with anyone who was listening from orbit, but they had not received any reply that they could detect. So, the seasoned pilots of Typhoon Squadron had been tasked with making first contact on the planet.

The colonel and general were able to land without any trouble, but as they journeyed into the marketplace, they immediately ran into a problem that should have been anticipated. They had found plenty of sentient beings to ask questions of, but they could not understand any of the languages they heard around them. The miniaturized translation droids each pilot carried were also at a loss. As Colonel Boliv called up to Colonel Setzer to relay the problem to the Challenge, Jagged heard the words being spoken in the background.

“Colonel, this is Three. I recognize the language that they are speaking. It is called Taarja.”

“Lieutenant, are you saying you can understand what they are saying? The droids can’t make any sense of it.”

“My mother was from the Chaos and taught me several of the most common trade languages of the region. I would not say I am an expert. But I can make myself understood and can comprehend most of what is said to me.”

“Get on down here and get talking with these people then, that’s an order.”

“On my way.”

As Jagged approached the colonel and general after he had landed, he saw that they were trying to communicate to some aliens who were about 2 meters tall, with light pink skin. The aliens had big chests and hip bulges with a feathery head crest.

“Good, you are here Lieutenant. Please explain to them who we are and why we have come here,” said Colonel Boliv as Jagged came into the merchant’s stall.

“Yes, sir,” said Jagged as he turned to the aliens and began in Taarja. “My name is Jagged Fell, of the Emperor’s Hammer. May I ask what your name is?”

“My name is Vinor Ctharcelw of the Paccosh and this is my companion, Jafan Vancil,” the alien nearly whinnied in response. “We can see that your craft are unknown to us. And we have never heard of a Nation in all the Chaos who call themselves the Emperor’s Hammer. An aggressive name. What has brought you to this world?”

“We are journeying from Lesser Space and are in search of members of our group that have gone missing. We have lost many days and weeks traveling through hyperspace and have heard tale of a group known as Navigators who could aid our ability to search for our missing comrades. Would you have any knowledge of such a people?”

Ctharcelw looked at Jagged with confusion, or maybe bewilderment. “How could you have traveled this far into the Chaos and not know of the Navigator’s and their

guild? They are not a people, but an alliance of beings for hire that can guide you through the turmoil of hyperspace.”

Meanwhile, in orbit things were about to get complicated. The ISDII Challenge and her companion ship the MC90 Mon Calamari Starcruiser Renegade, were holding station when an alert came from the sensor station.

“Admiral, I have a large group of unknown ships coming around the far side of the planet on a direct course for us.”

“Have they responded to any of our hails?” asked Admiral Stryker.

“No, and they are coming in fast.”

“Let’s not take any chances. Signal battle stations and get Tempest Squadron deployed.”

“The alien force has just closed to within five kilometers off our port, still no response to our attempts to communicate.”

“Weapons officer, put a warning shot across the nose of the lead ship. I want them to pull back while we figure out how to open a dialog with them,” ordered Admiral Stryker.

Two mistakes were made. First, the weapons officer did not select an ion cannon for his warning shot, but the closest battery to the incoming ship. Which happened to be a heavy turbolaser, the most powerful of the Challenge’s formidable weaponry options. Second, just as the weapons officer loosed his salvo, the first flight of Tempest Squadron emerged from the hangar. This caused the unknown craft to shy up and away from the Challenge, right into the shot from the turbolaser. The unknown craft disintegrated in a brief, but sizable fireball.

“Weapons officer! I said to fire a warning shot, not destroy them!” shouted Admiral Stryker.

“I did, sir! The ship must have turned into the shot at the last moment!” pleaded the horrified weapons officer.

“Sir, all the unknown ships have powered up their weapons and are maneuvering towards us and the Renegade,” the sensor officer called out.

“Launch all fighters! I did not want a fight but we will not lose one that has come for us.”

The battle was quick and intense. When the engagement was done ten of the fighters of Battlegroup III had been destroyed. But thankfully, all their pilots had managed to eject from their stricken craft in time and had been recovered before exposure had done any lasting damage to any of them. The unknown ships however, had all been destroyed and no survivors had been discovered.

“I have a bad feeling about this,” said Admiral Stryker quietly to himself as he looked out at the wreckage before his ships.

Cries of alarm from the crowd in the market drew the pilots’ attention up to the battle unfolding above them, visible in the clear arid air.

“I have a bad feeling about this,” muttered General Master as he looked upon what seemed to him to be a decent sized light fight. This definitely wasn’t in the plan as he had heard it this morning.

“What have you done!” exclaimed Vinor Ctharcelw. “Please say those ships above us are not with you!”

“They are our command ships and the rest of our force, what is wrong? I know they would not have fired first unless they had been threatened,” responded Jagged, thinking that the ships in combat with the Challenge and her fighters must be some extremely foolish pirates of some kind or the other.

“This is an outpost world of the Vak Combine. That was a patrol from their garrison on the far side of the planet. They were likely investigating reports of an unknown force over the city. You do not know what you have unleashed. The Vak are incredibly slow to decisions, needing to gather all the thought-lines before taking action. Likely why you had reported no replies to your messages from orbit. But, if any of their species is killed, they perceive it as an attack on them all. When one is killed they will turn on their attacker in all-out war. You have just made an enemy of the whole of the Vak Combine.”

“Colonel! We have a problem.”