

Morning Shift

Hanger Bay
Imperial Winter Palace
Judecca
Cocytus System

The rusted, beaten up metal locker clanged shut with an audible clang and a forceful kickback. This locker, like all the lockers reserved for the grounds crew, was decades old and in a serious need of lubricant, scrubbing with a wire brush, and a fresh spraying of paint. Budget cuts, allegedly, curtailed this maintenance duty for the past seven years that Zarnett Kilgru had been employed at this bastion of power and prestige. “Why the hell did I volunteer to swap shifts with Lyzzls?” asked Kilgru to himself.

It had been seven long years since the Falleen had been abandoned in Imperial space. His kind was an exotic novelty on Coruscant, let alone a seemingly unknown fringe system as Cocytus in a backwater of Hutt Space. To be sure he was lucky to be alive after running afoul of Black Sun. He had expected his family and friends to pay his way back to Falleen. He was comically wrong in this assumption.

Three Twi’Lek trudged into the locker room, as seemingly miserable as Zarnett. “Hey there fellas,” grumbled the Falleen in the most friendly tone he could muster so early on the morning of an ‘off ‘day. None of the Twi’Lek stirred a lekku in his direction. “These are my closest friends, probably” he muttered under his breath.

Finally dressed in his best fatigues and armed with a wrench and some hydraulic fluid in a pump-can, Zarnett forced himself off of the locker room bench and towards the entrance of the hanger bay. It had been an uneventful duty week, to be sure. The normal sorties had been launched and a few patrols were diverted but business as usual in the capital. Kilgru counted his blessings. He was alive, he had a dormitory room to store his scant belongings, and his novelty had given him some luster of prestige in the small and pitifully cheap circles he had been engaged with.

Kilgru, a former trader and broker for Black Sun had skills that could have enabled him to become something more than a cleaning person. Yet, his melancholy and morose disposition had always cast him in a poor mold within his own society. Had he the inclination to use his abilities and innate physiology to his benefit he would have more in his dreary life. But...floors needed to be scrubbed and maintenance schedules needed to be tended to.

It happened in a flash, as most things did in Zarnett’s life. The klaxons rang and the emergency lights flashed a vibrant strobe of color. The few duty mechanics rushed from the sides of the hanger and began operating the lifts and weight-handling machinery to position the ready fighters into position. The Falleen got out of the way of a rapidly taxing shuttle that needed to be moved and rushed forward to

help a young maintenance staffer push a broken down parts cart to the side. In no time a Tie fighter was raised from below and its trademark engines began to idle. In rapid succession five more lifts came to life and soon the empty, languishing hanger bay was awash in material, men, and spacecraft. Zarnett was once awed with this precision, clock-like procession of frantic activity as a fighter squadron came to life from the ether. Now...he wondered when his lunch break would be authorized.

Distractions came easily to the Falleen, yet once the cart had been moved his eyes trained on a pilot stumbling into the hanger, struggling to get his crash bag attached to his leg and fidgeting with his flight mask. More new pilots, it seemed, as the recent insurrections, wars, and pirate incursions had thinned the lines of military personnel stationed at the palace for front-line postings. Using his lanky and graceful form, Kilgru made it to the pilot, pulled his mask from his hands and affixed it to the pilot's face while balancing the crash bag so the pilot could maneuver it to his lap. Together they made it to the waiting cockpit and the pilot clambered in.

The first two fighters soared out of the hanger and began to gain altitude fast, Kilgru knew enough of tactics to know they would cover back around and wait for squadron mates to form up into flights before moving forward. The Falleen was too jaded to care how close the threat was or if these two small fighters would be enough to protect them below as more fighters taxied and prepared to launch.

Soon, more and more fighters had launched and the military personnel thinned while mechanics and duty personnel grew. The steady dance of logistical support in all of its glory held no luster in Kilgru's mind. And it was becoming closer to lunch time with every tick of the clock and every action that occurred within the hanger. The sooner all craft were launched the sooner he could clean up and go back to his dormitory. An emergency transmission came over the main telecomm requesting close air-support and rescue. Shortly, a gunship was raised and medics, mechanics, and soldiers scurried aboard. Zarnett looked on in curiosity as the excitement finally dawned on him and he smiled slightly, finally letting the adrenaline into his system. Odd, the Falleen physiology, he pondered.

One of the pilots removed her mask and yelled towards the assembled ground crew, "fighter and assault vehicles down we need some maintenance crew immediately!" The Falleen saw one of the Twi'Lek and a few humans near him. He knew his odds. The tall, green, reptilian form was always a distraction for others. His olive drab fatigues helped him blend in slightly as a faceless mass of scale and bone. He did what he could do. With the grace, force, and determination of a broken man Zarnett pushed the Twi'Lek forward. Stumbling forward, the gunners grabbed the pinkish Twi'Lek male and the vessel lurched forward slowly and then surely took to the skies. Soon the all clear was sounded. Even sooner the Falleen was sitting in the locker room, enjoying the bench, eating his lunch. It was supposed to be his day off. "What day isn't?" he pondered.