**Modified Immobilizer 418 *Orthanc***

**Bridge**

“This is taking too long. If we wait much longer, the chance will be gone,” Omega sighed.

“Give Saskia just one more minute. We need that satellite’s feed dealt with. Besides, this the fastest way to Orron III. Plenty of potential targets are passing by,” Andrelious replied.

Andrelious’ plan was fairly simple. Saskia would slice one of Sphinxian Satellite Technologies tracking satellites. Once the satellite was disabled, the *Orthanc* could operate far more freely.

“It’s done! I’ve looped the existing data back around itself. It’ll just send the last thirty minutes of information over and over again,” Saskia declared, her voice as emotionless as always even over the crackly ship’s comm.

“Captain Kordoo, get the gravity well generators online!” Omega ordered. The Barabel nodded at one of the crew, who flipped a switch. The Interdictor powered up, projecting a large artificial mass shadow around itself.

“This is Dagger One hailing *Orthanc.* Ready and waiting for orders,” a voice that Andrelious knew as that of Captain Gavon Starfall broadcast.

“Dagger One, this is Mimosa-Inahj. Disable everything that enters if it’s not carrying a friendly IFF code. Then we’ll need cover while we make our boarding operation,” the Warlord commanded.

Sure enough, a YT-1300 emerged from hyperspace. Dagger’s pilots moved to intercept the Corellian freighter. Blue hyphens of ion cannon energy slammed into the YT-1300’s hull, quickly halting its engines as its systems failed.

**T-4a Lambda Shuttle *Courage 10***

As usual Andrelious had insisted on piloting the shuttle on its short journey to boarding the disabled enemy ship. Kooki sat in the co-pilot’s chair, but the Warlord didn’t need any assistance. The Alderaanian was there to assist with the boarding operation. The passenger section of the shuttle carried a dozen marines; Andrelious wasn’t about to take any chances.

Andrelious expertly manoeuvred the ship onto the YT-1300’s docking hatch, affording himself a self-congratulatory smile as he heard a soft clunk indicating that the docking operation was a success.

“Right. Have you ever been aboard a YT-1300 before?” the Warlord asked.

“Once or twice. I know where the quarters are,” Kooki replied matter-of-factly.

Andrelious rolled his eyes. “I won’t ask. Bear in mind that this model of ship is usually modified. Hopefully we’ll not face too much resistance, but be prepared for a fight,”

The Warlord rose to his feet and quickly moved through to the passenger area. The lead marine was already detailing to her team about how they were to proceed. She noticed Andrelious, but didn’t stop other than to offer a quick salute.

“Twelve marines and two Sith. They don’t stand a chance,” Kooki stated.

**YT-1300 *Favourite Son***

Six men and two women of various species crowded a corridor, armed with blasters, vibro-blades, and even a bowcaster.

The crew of the *Favourite Son* had been caught almost completely off-guard when an old Imperial Interdictor dragged them out of hyperspace. The situation was immediately made worse as an entire squadron of TIE Defenders attacked with their ion cannons, disabling the ship in short order. The crew had debated briefly about if fighting an enemy with the resources they’d displayed so far was futile, but in the end decided to gamble on knowing their ship’s layout well enough to give them a chance at fending off the boarders. They also knew that the nearby tracking satellite would have already sent a warning to Orron III. As long as they could hold the enemy boarding party off for a few minutes, Sphinxian Satellite Technologies could send help.

A crash indicated that the boarding party had managed to make their way into the ship. The crew held their nerve, waiting in the narrow corridor in the hope that any numerical advantage that their enemies possessed would be nullified by the room’s lack of width.

“Ok. You four. Secure the rear of the ship. The rest of you, proceed with caution. I can sense them nearby. They’re hoping we’re going to funnel through that corridor and pick us off as we approach. There doesn’t seem to be another way to the cockpit, so I want a smoke grenade thrown down there. If they can’t see us, they can’t shoot us,” a voice commanded.

“Hmm. Looks like they are Imperials. I could tell from that man’s accent,” one of the crew observed.

“Never mind that. How did he know where we were?” another questioned.

There was no time to speculate as to how the *Favourite Son*’s crew had been discovered before a small silver device was hurled along the corridor. As it landed, thick acrid smoke started to billow from within, quickly filling the corridor.

“Just fire into the smoke!” the Captain ordered, already firing his own blaster through the cloud.

Two long strips of light, one crimson, one amethyst, waved around in the smoke, blocking a few of the blaster bolts in mid-air. Moments later, the two lights emerged from the cloud. The red one was held by a short, heavily built man, whilst its purple companion came with a taller, furious looking woman.

“Lightsabers! What kind of Imperials are we dealing with?” the Captain yelled.

“I am not a frakking Imperial!” Kooki snarled, plunging her lightsaber blade into the Captain’s midriff. Meanwhile, Andrelious dealt with another pair of enemies.

“Fall back! For your own sakes, fall back!” a Twi’lek female cried, starting to flee herself. Her escape was cut very short as Kooki caught up with her, slicing her legs clean off.

“Go and get those others, babe!” the Battlemaster demanded.

Andrelious nodded. “Right. You men, with me!”

As the Warlord gave chase, one of the marines approached Kooki.

“Begging pardon, ma’am? Two of my mates were hurt back there. Can you help me?” He asked.

“I’ll see what I can do, but don’t you have a field medic in your team?” the Alderaanian replied.

“Your husband hand-picked the squad. He didn’t want to waste a seat on one,” the marine explained.

Kooki chuckled. “Sounds about right. Don’t expect me to work miracles, Private, but I’ll get them back on their feet,”

**-x-**

Andrelious had cornered the last trio of crew members. They had backed away into the far wall of the main cargo hold, and were trying to crouch behind the boxes of cargo.

“One chance. If the three of you surrender and comply with my instructions, I will arrange for you to be safely transported away from the Orron system once we have completed our mission. Refuse, and I will have my men execute you on the spot. What’s it to be?” the Warlord hissed.

“The *Favourite Son* will not fall to you!” a man roared, bolting out from his makeshift hiding spot. He charged at Andrelious, trying to stab his vibro blade directly into the Sith’s stomach.

Andrelious looked incredibly unimpressed. With a simple gesture of his hand, he hurled his would be assailant across the room. The man hit the wall with enough force to break something, before dropping to the ground, still cursing at the Warlord as he landed.

The nearest marine pressed a blaster to the wounded man’s throat and squeezed the trigger.

“Good work, Private,” Andrelious stated.

The remaining two crew members, a Sullustan and a Human female, emerged from their hiding places, hands raised high in the air.

“We’re not happy about this, but we’re not stupid. If you’re still offering a chance to surrender, we’d like to take it,” the woman said. The Sullustan simply nodded in agreement.

“I’m not going to punish you for your friends’ lack of vision. Surrender accepted. Hand all your weapons and equipment to my men, then follow me,” Andrelious responded.

**-x-**

Andrelious lead his two prisoners, their arms now held in binders, towards the boarding hatch. Kooki was waiting nearby, with the Twi’lek female who she had crippled earlier secured on a stretcher.

“Jailia? Menb? I’m glad that the two of you survived, at least. It’s just us three. The rest were killed,” the Twi’lek sniffed.

“You will join them if you don’t shut up!” Kooki snapped. “You’ve done nothing but whine since I removed your legs!”

The leader of the marine group approached Andrelious. “Your wife patched a couple of my men up, but we still lost men in the initial firefight.Are we done here? We’re marines, not frakking pirates!”

“This phase of the mission is indeed complete, Sergeant. If I were you I’d get back to the shuttle and start preparing for the ground assault. You did well here, so I’ll let your objection to the assignment slide. This time,” the Warlord answered.

The Sergeant saluted the Sith and went off to gather her men and escort the prisoners onto the shuttle. Andrelious grabbed his comlink.

“*Orthanc*. This is Mimosa-Inahj. Enemy ship is secured,”

**Hangar**

**Modified Immobilizer 418 *Orthanc***

Saskia hadn’t wasted a moment’s time when the captured *Favourite Son* was tractored into the hangar. Though she had only just returned from her own mission, she had rushed straight into the YT-1300 and was quickly repairing its systems.

The next phase of the mission called for sneaking past Sphinxian Satellite Technologies’ orbital defences. Capturing a ship like the *Favourite Son* was critical; it had the correct IFF codes and clearances.

After having the wounded Twi’lek taken to the *Orthanc*’s sickbay, Andrelious spoke to the other two prisoners. They quickly agreed to help the Sith after he promised them safety and rewards, and had even volunteered to help the Warlord pilot the *Favourite Son* to the Orron system.

“How do we know they’re not going to stab us in the back once we’re down?” Kooki questioned when the prisoners were out of earshot.

“People like that only care about two things. Money and saving their own hides. If they are stupid enough to try anything, they’ll satisfy neither,” Andrelious explained.

Saskia’s head appeared through the freighter’s hatch. “Ship’s ready to go! Am I coming?” she questioned.

“I don’t know why you’re asking. It’s not like you ever bother with your hair!” Kooki scoffed.

Andrelious sighed. Barbs between his wife and eldest daughter were commonplace. “C’mon, you two. We need to get going. The Consul wants results today,”

**Orron III**

**Orbit**

The *Favourite Son* flew with a smoothness that betrayed its age and state. A quick check of the ship’s systems confirmed that Saskia had done her usual flawless job with the repairs.

Orron III was not heavily defended, but several CSA were nonetheless on patrol. A pair of fighters approached the incoming vessel.

“YT-1300. Please identify yourself and state your intent,” one of the pilots broadcast.

“This is the *Favourite Son*. We’re enroute to Sphinxian Satellite Technologies. Please direct us to their landing facilities,” Kooki replied, faking a local accent. Andrelious smiled. His wife’s talent at disguising herself never ceased to amaze him.

“Please transmit your manifest and clearance codes, *Favourite Son*,”

“At least we won’t have to worry about running this time,” Saskia observed as her step-mother carried out the request.

“As long as you behave yourself, you mean. You know what you’re doing when we land,” the Warlord stated calmly, remembering the last mission to Orron III.

“*Favourite Son,* you are clear to proceed. Do you have your landing coordinates?”

**Orron III**

**Sphinxian Satellite Technologies HQ**

**Landing Zone**

Andrelious was surprised by how small the enemy facilities were. He couldn’t fathom how such an apparently small group were causing Clan Taldryan so many problems.

The *Favourite Son* took up roughly half of the landing facility. Aside from a pair of old Y-Wings, there were no other ships.

“Tell our two guests to start unloading the cargo. I don’t want anything to look out of place,” Kooki said to Andrelious.

The Warlord signalled to the two captured crew members to begin the unloading operation.

“This is taking a few more risks than I’d like. Did you forget that Saskia and I were almost caught last time? If they’ve got our faces on their syste-“ he began, but Kooki placed one of her fingers on his lips.

“Three things, babe. For one, both she and I are disguised. Two, she’s planning on wiping their system anyway, and three, look how small they are,” the Alderaanian explained.

“They can’t be this small. How could a group operating a pair of frakking wishbones be responsible for the trouble they’ve given us? This so called HQ is simply their front. That’s our mission. We need to find what else these people are operating and where it is,” Andrelious replied.

A man exited the building and approached Kooki. Andrelious was already moving back towards the ship; it was up to his wife to do the talking.

“You’re a little late. And where’s your Captain? I thought he kept a close eye on these operations,” the man stated gruffly.

“He’s not feeling very well today. He sent me and Verla here in his place. I’m his first mate, Hossa,” Kooki said.

The man screwed up his eyes and examined the two females closely. “He’s never mentioned either of you before. You new to his crew?”

“Something like that. Rather than question me, are we going to talk payment? And please would you do me the little courtesy of telling me *your* name,” ‘Hossa’ snapped.

“I was just a little caught out by not seeing the Captain! You can call me Brevvik. I’ll be dealing with your payment, as you’ve already assumed. Shall we, ladies?” Brevvik stated, stepping aside to allow Saskia and Kooki entry. Andrelious sniggered at the ‘ladies’ comment.

**Meeting Room**

Saskia quietly tapped commands into her datapad as Kooki and Brevvik discussed payment for the latest shipment. The Battlelord briefly wondered why a small company such as Sphinxian Satellite Technologies needed food deliveries on the scale, but guessed that it was down to the fact that she was seeing only a very small part of their actual size, much as her father had surmised. As the Cirran scanned the company’s systems, she found numerous clues that suggested that Andrelious was spot on.

*I just need a bit of time and I can get these files to dad.* Saskia thought.

*How long? I can’t stall Brevvik forever.* Kooki responded.

*About three more minutes. They’ve protected their files with a stronger encryption than I’d expected*.

The Alderaanian flicked her hair slightly to indicate that she understood. “So, Brevvik, it’s getting a little harder for us to source the things you need. And if you want us to start providing the *other* cargo you asked for, we’ll want an extra fifty percent. Per shipment,” she said.

“Fifty percent? Forget it. I don’t need you that much. Plenty of our other suppliers are happily working for an extra twenty. I can probably push to twenty-five, but I’d expect you to start being a little more efficient!” Brevvik replied.

Kooki screwed her face up as if Brevvik had insulted her. “Don’t think we need *you* either. There’s plenty of work in this galaxy without us risking our lives to act as your frakking gun runners. Fourty-five. That’s the lowest I’m prepared to go,” she hissed.

With a subtle raise of an eyebrow, Saskia signalled she was in. Sure enough, a small red light on a nearby camera went out.

“Twenty-five. And don’t think about backing out. Your captain gave me his word. I’d hate to have to report the *Favourite Son* for smuggling!” Brevvik threatened.

“You won’t be doing anything like that,” Kooki snapped. Reaching into her boot, the Battlemaster extracted her blaster. Moments later, she had pressed its barrel to Brevvik’s chest and pulled the trigger. She and Saskia were already leaving the room as her target dropped to his knees, struggling for breath.

“It’s done! Let’s get out of here!” Kooki commanded, running straight up the *Favourite Son*’s boarding ramp. Andrelious had sensed his wife’s approach and ordered his two ‘helpers’ onboard, so all the Warlord needed to do was engage the repulsorlifts.

“So what did you find out?” the former Imperial questioned.

“You weren’t wrong about their little HQ being nothing more than a front. Turns out they’re old friends of the local Rebel Alliance. For whatever reason the Republic abandoned them. Nowadays they’re just a large group of pirates. Recently had a change of leader, though, which probably explains why they’re coming after Taldryan,” Saskia explained.

“If you knew all of that, why didn’t you say anything?” Kooki asked crossly.

“You didn’t ask,” the Cirran responded.

“We need to get back to the fleet as soon as possible. We don’t want to miss the action, do we?” Andrelious asked.

Kooki frowned. “Speak for yourself! They’re not bucketheads, so I don’t really care!”

**Bakura-class Star Destroyer *Relentless***

**War Room**

The summit of Taldryan, accompanied by many of the Navy’s top brass, sat around a large holotable. The device showed the entirety of Battlegroup II, as well as several of the enemy’s suspected fleet strength.

“According to the information we received from our intelligence operation, Sphinxian Satellite Technologies operate a sizable fleet of old Rebel Alliance type ships. We can expect to go up against several Nebulon-B Frigates. This shouldn’t be too much of a problem for our fleet, Consul,” Raif Sexton declared.

“I don’t want any mistakes, Admiral. If Darth Pravus continues as he has been, we’re going to need our fleet very soon. Make sure you keep losses to a minimum here,” Keirdagh ordered.

“That’s the plan, Consul. My staff and I have come up with a plan to thin the numbers out a little before we even start,” the Admiral answered.

“Let’s hear it!” Omega interjected.

“The ship that we captured previously is known to the enemy’s fleet as one of their regular suppliers. So we’re sending it in with a special delivery,” Sexton explained.

“What kind of a special delivery?” Seyda queried, watching the holographic representation of the *Favourite Son* head towards the nearest enemy frigate.

“We’ve filled a standard supply crate with powerful explosives. It’ll be enough to blow a ship of that size apart before they’ve even had a chance to realise what’s going on,” the Admiral continued.

“Subtle.” Howlader observed.

Sexton nodded. “Once we’ve detonated the bomb, we’ll hyper in and surround the enemy. The *Orthanc*’s gravity well generators will keep them from escaping. If the intel is accurate, we’ll easily have enough firepower against what’s left. Especially once we get the starfighter wings launched,”

“I will coordinate our ships, Admiral Sexton. Time to put this plan into action,” Keirdagh declared.

**YT-1300 *Favourite Son***

Lieutenants Erbat Smilov and Jalia Werskab had been chosen for the unenviable task of delivering the bomb. The plan was to get in, unload, and get out, all as fast as possible to allow for one of Taldryan’s ships to recover the *Favourite Son*, but Smilov was sceptical.

“All those frakking Jedi and they send us on this mission. Guess they think it’s suicide too!” Erbat scoffed.

“Suicide or not, we signed up for this kind of mission. Besides, as I’ve told before, they’re mostly Sith, not Jedi,” Werksab answered.

Smilov pulled the ship out of hyperspace. Before them was a group of older, smaller capital ships, mostly Nebulon-B Frigates. The fleet was large enough to cause problems, but certainly not too big to pose a major threat. A threesome of A-Wings was on patrol – one peeled off and bore down on the *Favourite Son*.

“Azure Three to approaching transport. Please state your destination and intent,”

Werksab activated the comm. “This is the *Favourite Son.* We have a priority cargo for your fleet. We need to make it quick! We’ve just escaped an ambush from a local Imperial group!”

Smilov looked at his partner in surprise. Making up an ambush hadn’t been part of the plan, but he knew Werksab well. Her knack for thinking of things on the fly earned her both reward and reprimand, depending on the situation.

“*Favourite Son,* please head to the *Sphinx’s Bite*. What are you carrying, anyway?” Azure Three queried.

“Weapons. That’s why the Imps were so interested in us!” Werksab continued.

“Very well, proceed as quickly as possible to the *Sphinx’s Bite,”*

**Nebulon-B Frigate *Spinx’s Bite***

**Hangar**

There wasn’t much room in the Frigate’s hangar. Most of what was available was already taken up by a squadron and a half of A-Wings, whilst the area reserved for cargo deliveries had apparently been designed with a smaller class of ship in mind. It was only thanks to Smilov’s excellent piloting that they had fit the *Favourite Son* in at all.

“Get the crates off as soon as possible!” Smilov screamed. The bomb they were carrying did not have a display, but its timer was linked to the computers of the *Favourite Son*. Those computers now read that there was exactly one minute before detonation.

The plan called for the bomb to be unloaded with twenty seconds to go, at which point the Taldryan fleet would arrive. Admiral Sexton was banking on that the enemy would be too busy scrambling to notice anything amiss, but if anything was even slightly mistimed, the whole operation was at risk.

Lieutenant Werksab opened the hatch and started to push the crate down the hatch. Two nearby guards spotted her and moved aside to allow the woman access to the hangar.

“Heard some Imps are after ya. Can’t be fun,” one said.

“We heard they’re after you as well. Still, these new weapons should sort things out,” Werksab replied.

“Jalia, come on! We’ve not got long!” Smilov called.

A loud klaxon sounded through the hangar.

“Action stations! I’m afraid I can’t let you leave, Miss. Safety protocol Esk-7 dictates to keep all civilian traffic grounded until the situation is resolved.

“We’ll be fine!” Werksab snapped, turning and sprinting into the ship. “Punch it, Erbat!”

Smilov launched at full speed, with such a jolt that it knocked his colleague to the floor. The *Favourite Son’s* engines groaned a little at such strain, but pushed the ship clear of the hangar. A split second later, the unloaded bomb detonated, engulfing the *Sphinx’s Bite* in a fireball that also torched the back of the Corellian ship.

The Taldryan fleet had begun firing at the enemy. The *Orthanc* sat behind the *Relentless*, its gravity well generators active and preventing their prey from escaping. The various fighter squadrons were launching and engaging the Sphinxian Satellite Technologies fighters. All in all, the scene was chaos, but it soon became clear that Taldryan were dominating. Their fighters moved in almost perfect unison with each other, whilst the capital ships arranged themselves into the optimum firing pattern no matter what the enemy fleet did.

Soon, Sphinxian Satellite Technologies would be little more than a memory.