**DREAMS & CRYSTAL VISIONS**

G-IA Starfighter *Ruthless Rancor*

Kiast System

Asteroid Belt

0500Z Local Time

Mauro Wynter sat in the starboard pilot seat staring blankly at the control panel. The crew of the *Ruthless Rancor* were erstwhile fast asleep. Or as fast asleep as the assorted droids could manage sitting in their bunks. The sole exception was the Dathomiri beauty seated to Wynter’s port side.

It had been five years since Wynter had met her. Long, light blonde hair falling to her waist, wildly flowing as she ran. Porcelain skin without a blemish of age or affliction. The lithe, athletic build bemused by the ampler bust of a seductress. And the shock-collar attached to her neck and the whip clenched defiantly in her fist. Sylla Tanos was a beauty indeed.

She rocked side to side, uttering gasps and muted whispers. Not whispers, screams Wynter thought. Memories. Her sleep was always marred in this manner. After so many years together Mauro knew help for her was beyond his reach. Slowly, he shut his eyes and dreamed a simple wish of justice.

It was aboard an Imperial-class Star Destroyer he met her one day. The newly reported Lieutenant Wynter was assigned to “Administrative Functions” aboard the *Wraithe.* Administrative Functions. This was the benign term used to encapsulate prisoner control, the brig, and assorted illicit functions that the senior commanders and more devious of the officer cabal partook aboard the *Wraithe*. For the Dathomiri picket duty was a long and ponderous one devoid of much excitement or advancement. The only enrichment was in victimizing the powerful sorceresses know as Nightsisters living below.

While official Imperial policy was containment, often enough young girls were brought aboard. Sold or otherwise by the factious clans of Dathomir. A thriving brothel, unofficially known and only frequented by the few visiting Imperial high functionaries, had been a long secret of the ship. While never against slavery in practice or function, Lieutenant Wynter had never had to see its downside in such personal tones.

The *Wraithe* was not Wynter’s first Imperial posting. He had eight years of officer training and service behind him in the logistics and combat construction field. He had helped to build worlds and create infrastructure where there had been none. All for the benefit of extracting resources for the Empire of course, and the fact slowly cut Wynter deep inside. Despite this disaffection, he remained an ardent Imperialist. Until he saw her.

It was the tail end of his midsection watch. He looked up from his post as a commotion leading from a repulsor lift became louder and louder. The angelic beauty of the young Dathomiri was incongruous with the blood trickling across her face and the collar digging into her neck, buzzing the electric current into her flesh. He rose as she ran ever closer flanked by two black clad Naval troopers and a Major unknown to him. She nearly collapsed as she made it to his post.

Looking up at him with grey eyes and the blackest of irises as he grabbed her and steadied her fall, she said two words he would never remove from his soul. “Help me”. It was not a statement or an appeal for clemency. It was a wish that only the downtrodden and hopeless could claim. Lieutenant Wynter knew what this woman was and had a strong idea of why she was running. Officially, the practices that occurred with the ‘prisoners’ were strictly illegal and unlawful with Imperial Navy protocol.

“What is the meaning of this?” Wynter had asked of the Major who was dismissing his trailing troopers. The Major looked at him with obvious content, “What does it look like Lieutenant? Bringing this chattel back to where she belongs. We have customers to be entertained!” The derision in the use of Lieutenant was plain and meant to convey its purpose. The offending party was a superior and was to be obeyed.

The illegal activities on the *Wraithe* were not universal and a good many of the lower rank and file as well as junior officers felt them abhorrent. “Stand down Major, you are in violation of Naval Article five-five-three tack alpha-kilo. This prisoner is to be taken to medical at once and placed under guard by one of my men.” Mauro said with as much authority and force as he could. The Dathomiri still clung to him, never taking her wide eyes off of his face.

The Major laughed as he approached and kicked the woman. “Well, you clearly know you have violated an order by a senior officer and are under arrest by me. We will see who has more powerful friends among the Officers’ Mess if this comes to trial.”

Torn, but with the vindication of right on his side, Wynter refused and called in his sentries. “Major, you will not take this girl. I am calling in the Officer of the Watch immediately. Captain Tsulpa will have the make of this. Sentries, as the ranking officer of the Administrative Functions this prisoner falls under my jurisdiction and the Major’s order is unlawful.”

Fitfully, Mauro Wynter woke from his dream-like remembering. If only things had transpired in the way he dreamed. No, he had not stood up for the young Dathomiri. No, he was a coward bound to duty and following orders. The age-old crutch of the weak for evading culpability. It was in truth another two years until Sylla Tanos escaped the *Wraithe* with Lieutenant Wynter. The further abuse she had suffered was partly on his hands. His greatest wish since that fateful day was that he *had* intervened and exposed the corruption. True, it could have cost him his life and his career. True, it mattered little now.

He finally turned to his copilot and gently placed his hands on her, gently rocking her to rouse her from her anguished rest. With a start, she opened her eyes and lashed out at him with her arms. “I’m sorry, was I having a nightmare?” Tanos asked. Wynter looked her in the eyes as he felt tears well up in his own. “No, my dear, I was.”