

To Pick a Rose

[GJW XII Phase 1] Fiction - Multi-Objective Prompt - Objective #1

Halcyon Rokir Taldrya - Pin #43

Entil'Zha

Imperial Gozanti-class Cruiser

Outer Rim

The Dark Council will not be sending any vessels along, but I need eyes that I trust on the scene.

Evant Taelyan, Regent of the Brotherhood, stared out from the viewscreen as he finished his update. Looking back at him was his Praetor, Halcyon Rokir Taldrya, along with two of his allies, Kavis Varik and Tovar Daklan.

“Since when does the Dark Council sit something like this out?” Halcyon asked, leaning forward in his seat to stare back at Evant.

“The Grand Master was not as forthcoming with that information. The Clan will be facing off against the Collective on their own.”

Halcyon leaned back in his seat, his hands idly rubbing at the hairs on his chin as Kavis, the former First Order Intelligence Agent, filled the silence, “So you just want us to what, hyper in and watch the slugfest?”

That is what I wish for Halcyon to do, but I have other plans for your and Tovar, Evant responded, the beginnings of a small smile tugging at his lips.

Revenant

VCX-100 Light Freighter

Hyperspace

Tovar spun in his seat to look at Halcyon, while the blue lines of hyperspace glowed behind him. Like Varis he was also a former Intelligence Agent of the First Order, his strengths lying in flight and explosives, unlike his friend who was skilled in the art stealth and espionage.

“Your boss either really trusts our skills, or wants us all dead,” Tovar stated with a large smile on his face.

“Probably a bit of both,” Halcyon replied with a smaller smile of his own. He had known both Kavis and Tovar for a number of years, stretching back to before he joined the Dark Brotherhood. He trusted both with his life, and was supremely confident in their skills. “Evant is still young and very much holds onto

that Sith-ethos. He will do what he thinks will help him the most. He won't however throw away useful assets."

"Hooray for being useful," Varis said, with little enthusiasm in his voice. "I am getting way too old for this poodoo."

"At least you won't look as old if you keep colouring that hair of yours," Tovar said as he turned back to his controls, ignoring the glare that Kavis gave him, or the fact that his hand lingered over his blaster.

"Ok kids, to your places," Halcyon announced, his voice turning to what others called 'command mode'. Kavis immediately rose and began heading after, but Tovar was hesitant in relinquishing his seat.

"Are you sure that you and Sparks can handle *Revenant*?"

An indignant beep came from Sparks, Halcyon's R2 droid who was currently hooked into *Revenant*.

"Tovar..." Halcyon began, glaring at the pilot.

"Aye aye, sir!" Tovar stated with forced joviality, throwing in a sloppy salute as well before following Kavis out of the cockpit.

Halcyon sat on the pilot's chair, already familiar with its controls as he had flown numerous times with the duo previously. He confirmed with Sparks that all systems were nominal, before Tovar's voice floated in over the comlink.

We're strapped in and ready to go, Mr. Green.

Halcyon bit down on a retort, waiting five seconds before responding, "We should be out of hyperspace in a few moments. Have you turned your sensor jamming on?"

Aye aye, Captain. Shade's jamming system is online.

Shade, the VCX Auxiliary Starfighter attached to *Revenant*, had a powerful sensor jamming unit installed that allowed it to fly unnoticed by most vessels, but at the cost of weapons use. *Revenant* had a similar system up and running at the moment as well.

"Good," Halcyon continued, "as soon as we come out of hyperspace, you will undock and lose yourself in the ensuing battle. You will get Kavis down to Nancora, Kavis will get the information, and you will meet up with us here. We will be recording all aspects of the battle and hopefully both of our intel together will give us some useful insights into the Collective."

Evant had sent the small group as his personal eyes and ears when the Clans attack what is considered the stronghold of the Collective, Nancora. Kavis was given an additional mission; to use the cover of the

attack to land on Axio City, the main city of Nancora, and gather specific intel for the Regent's office. Halcyon would supervise and keep watch from *Revenant*, while Tovar would fly *Shade* to both deliver and extract Kavis. The mission itself was not any crazier than a dozen others that they had accomplished both together and separately.

Evant had also provided them with the exact timing of the Clan invasion, from his sources in Clan Scholae Palatinae. *Revenant* was to drop out just seconds after the Clan itself would have arrived.

"Coming out in three, two, one," Halcyon announced, as he pulled back on the hyperspace levers, his view suddenly filled with the combined might of the Clans of the Brotherhood arrayed before him. Moments later he felt *Revenant* shudder ever so slightly and *Shade* suddenly coming around in front

Heading out, Revenant. Cya soon.

"Good luck, *Shade*. *Revenant* out."

Halcyon watched *Shade* dive towards the Clan fleets, looking to lose itself in the midst of the other starfighters that had begun streaming out. Halcyon's gaze was suddenly thrown to his control board as it began blinking red and yelling up at him.

"Yes Sparks, I can see it too," Halcyon told his droid who had begun its own wailing. "We were all pretty sure this was going to be a trap. The interditors they've just set-up prove it."

Revenant, his console spoke up, *we have a problem.*

Rose Squadron Leader
T-70 X-wing Starfighter
Nancora Space

"Ok Roses, let's do a little pruning around here."

Emery Rose, leader of what she deemed the best squadron in the Collective, heard the various affirmatives ring out in her comlink. The noose for the Dark Brotherhood had been set, and they had all hypered into it. Her squadron were the first out of *Skylla*, the flagship of the Collective Fleet, their T-70 X-Wing starfighters roaring out to greet their "guests."

"On my mark...break!" Emery yelled out, letting the adrenaline fuel her excitement. A split-second before they would begin trading fire with the enemy, Rose Squadron broke off into flights of four with practiced ease, throwing off any Brotherhood tracking. All three flights turned on a dime, bringing them back to bare on the enemy starfighters and unleashed their first fusillade. All three flights weaved through each other, catching a number of starfighters in the cross-fire. Rose Squadron had drawn first blood.

“Ok boys and girls. Split and stake, now!”

Each flight split into pairs, Emery taking her partner deeper into the fray as the rest of the squadron focused on killing as many enemy starfighters as possible. Emery knew she was the best, and was promised she would face some true competition during the battle. There would be no Poe Dameron, but there would be Force users who needed their ego, and their lives, taken down.

As another starfighter exploded from her lasers, the fireball illuminated a craft that had eluded her vision previously. The black, boxy-craft weaved around vessels, but it was not firing, or seemed to be tracking any specific craft. A check of her sensors showed that nothing occupied that starfighter’s position.

“Rose Two, you see that box-with-wings?”

I see it boss, but my sensors sure don’t.

“Rose Eleven and Twelve, there’s a blacked-out starfighter coming across your two. You’ll need to eyeball it, but take it out. It’s not one of ours.”

Both pilots confirmed her orders, and she could see them turn their craft to intercept. She would love to know who was flying that thing, but they couldn’t have any unknowns flying around. She kept one eye on the odd-craft, and another on her sensors as she continued to pummel the opposition.

“Rose Eleven, what’s the hold-up?” she asked, still not seeing a fireball where it should be.

We can’t get a lock, boss! Whoever’s flying that thing knows what they’re doing.

“Fine, I’ll do it myself,” Emery growled as she quickly brought her fighter to a new heading and made for the mystery ship.

Revenant

VCX-100 Light Freighter

Nancora Space

Halcyon looked up, but could no longer see Shade with his naked eye. He instead delved into the Force, letting it fully wash over him as he stretched out to find the connection he had with his friends. It was a cacophony of noise, like trying to pick out a single voice in the middle of a full Cantina that had just turned into a firefight. He finally latched onto Tovar and Kavis’ presence, feeling the undercurrent of fear and anxiety that was held back by their years of experience. He also had a rough location of their vessel in the middle of the battle.

"*Ranger 4* is on its way", Halcyon responded back before turning to his droid. "Sparks, keep recording everything, but if a single vessel appears to notice you in any way then you put all of your power into the engines and run the other away. Understood?"

Sparks responded in the affirmative, before twittering a query that was familiar to Halcyon.

"I need you here and I am more comfortable in *Ranger 4* for this type of battle. Keep this ship safe, Sparks."

Halcyon ran after as well, making for the port docking hatch. He had brought his personal Tie Defender along for the trip, should the extra firepower be required. He grabbed his helmet on the way, quickly putting on the familiar TIE pilot's headpiece before opening the hatch and climbing into the cockpit at an awkward angle. Ensuring all hatches were closed and sealed behind him, he quickly started up the craft, the pinnacle of Imperial technology coming to life almost immediately. A quick system check told him everything was good to go.

"*Revenant*, release *Ranger 4*."

He felt the clamps release the starfighter, the ship already moving away from the larger vessel.

"Be right back, *Revenant*."

Sparks responded with an affirmative as Halcyon set his powerful starfighter to full throttle and threw himself into the fray.

Rose Squadron Leader
T-70 X-wing Starfighter
Nancora Space

Emery noticed the blip moments before it opened fire. Green death poured out of a Tie Defender that had come streaking in at full-throttle, the lasers expertly cutting through Rose 11 before two concussion missiles shot out faster than normal, catching Rose 12 completely off-guard. In seconds Emery had just watched two of her own, the best in the Fleet, get cut down with ease.

She managed to bite down on a scream, anger coursing through her.

"Nine and Ten, find that unknown starfighter and take it out. Two, Three and Four, on me. We're hunting that Defender."

She never waited for their responses as she red-lined her engines and gunned for the craft that had killed her squad.

Ranger 4
TIE/D Defender
Nancora Space

Halcyon could feel his fighter buck under him, both of his hands fighting the controls as he pivoted back around. He had already stressed the engines to reach *Shade* in time, and now the rest of his craft was telling him “no more.”

“Just a little more,” he whispered to himself as he saw two more fighters making runs at *Shade*. His own senses began yelling at him before his fighter did, his hands already turning the craft into a death spiral as a T-70 starfighter came close to getting him full-on. His shields took a glancing blow, but held, as three more fighters made a run at him.

He yanked back, *Ranger 4* quickly pulling up and showing off its maneuverability as the X-Wings fought to keep up. Gritting his teeth he forced the controls down, changing the fighter’s direction on a dime. The Force filled his presence, keeping him conscious as he fought through crushing gravitational forces that threatened to break him, finally easing out as he head straight for *Shade*.

“Lichtor Five,” he sent to *Shade*, hoping Tovar received and remembered the comment. He saw that he did as *Shade* suddenly turned, weaving itself into position. Two X-Wings were converging on its position from opposite angles. Halcyon knew that the other X-Wings were right behind him, lining up their shots. He kept his flight plan erratically straight, ensuring no target lock could be achieved, but still managing to keep in the general direction he needed.

He held it all in his head. He saw them all at once, the X-Wings ahead of him, behind him and *Shade*. Time slowed. He quick-fired two concussion missiles, both weapons speeding forward with no target in mind. Two more images appeared in his mind, their path straight-forward. With a *push* they both suddenly veered in opposite directions.

Time snapped back to normal. The two X-Wings heading for *Shade* suddenly bloomed into spectacular fireballs as the missiles found their mark without ever having targeted either craft specifically. *Shade* weaved out of the fray, throwing itself into the heart of the overall dogfight as it attempted to lose itself again¹, and Halcyon suddenly found himself thrown forward as the lasers from one of the other X-Wings found their mark.

I am getting too old for this, Halcyon thought as he fought both his fighter and his exhaustion.

His comm crackled to life, an unfamiliar voice crackling to life, *You’ve killed four of my own. Who in the hell are you, before I bring your pathetic ass down?*

¹ Their story continues in [GJW XII Event Long] Combat Writing - Collective Strike

In his younger days when he was a simple pilot he was sure he would have come back with a snappy response, or something that at least sounded good in his head. He instead allowed his anger to once more take hold, matching what he felt from the pilot on the other side of the comm.

“Screw you,” was all he could say as he shunted his shield energy into his engines, ignoring the screams of his own vessel.

He came back around, ruby-lasers flashing before his vision. He closed his eyes, delving back inside himself. His hands had decades of experience, knowing what each vibration of the control-yoke told them. His mind saw space, but filled only with four other X-Wings. He sped into them, a solar-panel grazed ever so slightly, but managing to stay on the rest of his vessel. Somewhere in the recesses of his mind he heard the warnings, but they were somewhere else at the moment.

His starfighter danced on the head of a pin, as it moved and swayed to the beat of the enemy fire. There was a woman somewhere screaming at him. There were curses he had heard before, but most he had no clue what they said or what language they were in. His own lasers found their mark, bringing the total down to three. There was another new sound inside his craft as he brought the total down to two. Another string of cursing, and another volley of green fire spewing from his craft.

There were now one.

Halcyon came back to himself, feeling the sweat drenching him inside his suit. He shook from the exertion. The last starfighter was still out there. She was younger than him, and she was damn good. He had the Force. Without it he would have died long ago.

He was about to turn off the comlink to quiet the shrieking at the other end when a burst of droid-chatter suddenly exploded out of it.

“Sparks!” Halcyon shouted.

“Who in the seven hells is Sparks you worthless piece of Sithscum,” the other woman said, as she lined up another shot, but her own anger had focused her too much on the vessel in front of her and not the ship that came swooping out of the dark. The *Revenant* was still running with its sensor jamming on, and so rather than weapons it used itself and rammed the X-Wing.

The X-Wing must have noticed it at the last second, trying to push her fighter away. The *Revenant* still caught two of its wings, shearing them clean off. The X-wing spun away, no longer able to control itself as it flew erratically into the fray of other ships.

“No Sparks, leave it be,” Halcyon said as he responded to a sudden query from his droid. “We’re done here. Shade escaped and that’s all that matters.”

The droid twittered an affirmative as *Revenant* lined itself up and reattached itself to *Ranger 4*.

“Glad you always listen to my orders,” Halcyon said, hearing the droid laughing in its own way. “Now, try to get back to safety without causing more troubles. I’ll be up shortly.”