

Holocron Heist

Daleem High-Orbit

Kiast System

1300 Hours

The harsh darkness far above the pastoral landscape of Daleem was a lonely and somber place. The beautiful, vibrant, and well-preserved Vitali stronghold was a bastion of justice and tranquility within an ever more dangerous and complex sector of space. Most who glimpse the world from this vantage are either longing to make landfall or suppressing the bitterness of leaving such a paradise.

Not so for Tython Squadron. The darkness was a blessing. The darkness meant they had purpose and more importantly time. The absence of burning cities below or of silent debris in the vacuum of space was a welcomed reminder of what normalcy could and should be for these wayward veterans. And so, they flew, nine Quadjumpers against innumerable simulated scenarios and demonstrating synchronized maneuvers. Waiting, ever waiting, for the day training would conclude and they would be deemed worthy of protecting the Kiast System.

Three tiny formations, miniscule against the backdrop of lumbering freighters and passenger liners scurrying about the system, flew with the hunger of men and women looking to satiate an itch. They were getting better. They were becoming good. Three flights of Quadjumpers, the hope of a system and the retribution of a lost dream.

“Alpha Flight, loose formation, Tython-Five to high post, Tython-Six cover bandit low,” ordered Flight Leader Kasula Daegella. Instantly the two pilots obeyed the command, spreading out above and below Daegella’s Quadjumper. The tight line formation became a staggered diagonal in seconds, deftly avoiding the cluster of asteroids before rapidly reforming up and increasing velocity. Six more vessels followed in suit, executing the same maneuver.

“Asteroid field cleared, all fighters proceed to zone delta-rho-delta bearing two-two-eight,” Ethan Martes, Squadron Navigator declared, “Tython-Nine, assign targets at will.”

The squadron did as they were told, and took up position in a tightly coordinated dance of maneuvers and jockeying of position. Upon entering their designated zone the squadron Tactical Officer began scanning down the area, ready for the simulation about to be thrown their way. Incoming messages from Daleem alerted them of their simulation. “Tython, brace for impact.” Stated Mar Sul as he pulled up on the throttle. Massive holo projector feeds came to life in the distance, illuminating a hulking, ghostly apparition of a

Victory-II class Star Destroyer. And in an instant, dozens of tiny dots began to empty from the belly of the behemoth.

The Victory-II opened up with its turbo-laser batteries, lancing ephemeral lights beyond the squadron and into the blackness of space. Behind them, another holoprojection crackled to life, in the guise of a Nebulon-B frigate. Instinctually the flight leader's issues orders to form up and prepare to engage the incoming projections of TIE fighters. The battle had begun.

Central Cloister

Sky Breach Base

Daleem

Mauro Wynter sat next to Major Silvia Tanos and the newest members of Tython Squadron, Tyraal Bitshiver and Vanguard Ranarr Kul-Tarentae. The group was busy studying the displays in front of them, monitoring the progress of the simulation above Daleem. Wynter punched in a few commands on his display, and the training craft changed to the visage of B-wing Starfighters. Major Tanos' eyes widened.

"Three dozen TIES against a squadron of B-wings? They will get torn apart." She stated, the certainty of her voice belied her tactical knowledge.

Wynter nodded slowly and eyed Bitshiver who was intently following the conversation. "Indeed. But perhaps not. Let us see if Chrome and Mar Sul can figure this training scenario out. Firstly, the Nebulon-B has powerful frontal shields and dozens of anti-starfighter cannon. If they stay in close formation their superior firepower and shielding will have its effect on the TIEs. The enemy craft will not last long."

Tyraal perked up, ready to give his analysis. "Sir, you are forgetting the fact that the Vic-II can blast the Nebulon out of the sky." Major Tanos nodded in approval. Mauro chuckled softly to himself. "Perhaps. If she stands still. The Vic is slower than a Dewback. Hopefully Tython can work together and figure out what they should be doing."

The monitors registered several TIEs being slagged by the multitude of lasers firing from the frigate. "That is their chance. I hope they take it." Offered Mauro, watching with a new intensity. He smiled as the squadron formed up in a tight formation and increased speed, breaking off from the Nebulon-B which was now diving planet-side in an attempt to get below the firing arc of the much larger capital vessel. The TIEs did not give chase to the B-wings. "They took the bait." Stated Tanos, reluctantly.

The nimble Imperial craft scored several hits on the Nebulon-B's poorly shielded central axis, attempting to sever the vessel in two. Yet, many flickered out of existence as

the laser batteries scored crippling hits. The B-wings closed into attack formation on the Vic-II, launching their payloads of proton torpedoes.

“Sir, Chrome has ordered all craft to switch to ion cannons. They are trying to lock the Vic down.” Stated Tyraal.

The diagnostic displays recorded each hit. The proton torpedoes had caused moderate damage to several of the weapons platforms on the massive vessel, allowing the fighters to get in closer and target vital systems. “Tractor beams and forward propulsion have been damaged.” Offered Tanos.

Wynter smiled yet again. They all watched as the Nebulon-B maneuvered below the enemy ship and prepare to jump to light speed, its path no longer blocked and receiving little direct fire. Tanos and Bitshiver gave a small round of applause as Tython Squadron formed up and followed the Nebulon-B’s lead. Ranarr Kul-Tarentae nodded in approval.

“They did it, Commander. The Vic-II is incapacitated and the Nebulon-B is effecting its escape from the system.” Tanos stated, preparing to signal all fighters to return to base. She was cut off by the laughter of Tython Squadron’s leader. He rapidly keyed in a sequence of codes. A new holoprojector flickered to life.

“That isn’t fair,” Tanos laughed as well, “That isn’t fair at all.” They all stared wide-eyed at their displays. The shape of an Interdictor glowed menacingly as it too began to discharge TIE fighters. “Indeed, nothing in this life is fair. Let the training now begin.” Wynter turned and went to fetch a carafe of strong coffee.

Deep Space

Kiast System

0900 Hours

The squadron was deeply tired. They had lived in their cockpits for weeks. Early novelty and excitement had died off after repeated simulations of no-win scenarios and numerous missions that ended in nothingness. Boredom.

They had patrolled the commercial lanes entering and exiting the system. They had ran convoy duty for passenger liners between Daleem and Kiast. They had scrambled for sorties against merchants to check their cargos and passenger logs. Mainly, though, nothingness and boredom to stunt the nerves of the pilots.

Aaleeshah studied her console, scanning down transmission snippets and anomalies. Out on the empty side of the system, no lanes or orbital bodies, there should

have been nothing emanating. “Sky Breach, we have a coded transmission coming through. Stand by for transfer.”

The twelve Quadjumpers fanned out by flight, looking for anything in the vast bleakness of space. Junazee called it out first, “There is something out there.” They all studied their displays and fanned out carefully.

Ethan Martes clicked on his comms, “There, nine o clock high bearing two-seventy. There is an old smuggler’s route emanating from an asteroid field out that way.” His previous illicit activities clearly paying dividends for the team.

Their quandary was answered by the massive glow of engine fire burning to life in the distance. The hulk of a modified Gozanti-class cruiser lumbered forward, engines bleeding red to blue in preparation to jump.

“That’s a C-Roc...we don’t have much time to race her down,” Ethan added, Quadjumpers forming up in attack formation. Mar Sul provided an approach plan and site picture to buzz the vessel, hoping to divert it and disrupt the jump.

Chrome waved Mar Sul off, “Negative Mar, that thing is gonna cut and run we only have once chance to stop her. Alpha Flight, buzz her bridge and buy us a few seconds and keep her guns busy. Bravo and Charlie Flight, deploy tow cables. Aaleeshah, alert Sky Breach we are taking in a hostile tow. We have one chance to do this right. Going to need fancy coordination to bring that ugly beast in.”

Alpha Flight did as ordered, blasting by the helm of the C-Roc, forcing her to adjust her heading ever so slightly and reducing her speed. The two remaining flights formed up in precision-infiltration formation, nearly touching two abreast and three deep. “When we deploy, Jedi, going to need your help in a big way,” barked Chrome, “Lets see if this works.”

Hanger Bay Delta-Seven

Sky Breach Orbital Platform

Daleem Mesosphere

1300 Hours

Commander Wynter and Major Tanos ran to Tython Squadron’s hanger, barely outpacing a tactical team of security forces. The radio transmissions were odd to say the least. They entered the hanger to see the massive frame of a C-Roc cruiser barely clearing the ceiling and the Quadjumpers parked neatly against the bulkhead. The pilots stood in ranks, beaming ear to ear.

Major Tanos got to the pilots first, “That was entirely out of line. You had no orders to engage a fleeing smuggling ship. You were unarmed and flying tugs. This is outrageous!” Wynter was taken slightly aback by the woman’s tone. “Fancy flying be damned, you are lucky none of you got killed.”

Mar Sul, Chrome, and Aaleeshah stepped forward, as did the Flight Leaders. It was Mar Sul who spoke, “Major, we had a viable plan and actionable intelligence showing encoded transmissions were headed across the system. We had to act.”

It was Wynter’s turn to browbeat his pilots, “Indeed, but by doing so you jeopardized all of the pilots and their craft for an unknown benefit.” The pilots all stepped back into line, as Wynter and Tanos followed the security team to inspect the C-Roc’s cargo hold. Minutes later they came back out, appearing stunned. “Aaleeshah, were you able to analyze those transmissions?”

The blue skinned Togruta stepped forward. “Commander, yes sir. I was able to verify two transmissions were sent out when we came into vicinity of the unknown craft. One was sent out of the system. Another came directly to....Sky Breach Base.”

Wynter nodded and pulled Major Tanos aside. “Lock down this hanger and get the Director and Executor on the horn. They will want to know a smuggling vessel loaded with military contraband sent coded transmissions to someone here at Sky Breach before we pounced on them. Oh, and we need to see what we can do about the contraband...I think we can put it to good use.”

Commander’s Office

Sky Breach Base

Later

Director Maximus Alvinus and Executor Len Iode sat incredulously at the small, ornate, ciderwood conference table. Commander Wynter and Major Tanos had spent the remainder of the afternoon and early evening using the Central Cloister’s advanced computers and data analysis capabilities to track and modulate the coded transmissions from *Raxanna’s Remorse*. The impounded C-Roc cruiser had slipped into the Kias System from an unknown vector and had remained hidden for some time transmitting coded missives.

Wynter allowed Major Tanos to explain the specifics. The vessel was crewed by a skeleton team of advanced droids and slaver circuits. Korroth and Aaleeshah had been working non stop to try to figure out just where the vessel was being controlled from. The

only information they could as yet glean from the droid brain navigation was that Arx was a preprogrammed destination.

“In so many words, Major, the Iron Throne may have smugglers working for them that know ways in and out of our system, and better yet they may have infiltration teams working for them within Sky Breach itself?” asked Director Alvinus.

Len Iode’s face perked up a slight tick. “Sir, you are forgetting that the cargo vessel was moving advanced weaponry and starfighter craft with no escort and no sentients. That is equally puzzling. What was the ship’s purpose, and to what end?”

“We need to know those things as well, Iode. The who and the why are just as important as the destination and origination. For the time being we must put our forces on alert and bolster security measures at the vectors into Kiast. If we lock down Sky Breach it will alert the collaborators that we are on their tale, forcing them to ground. No, we must act as all is normal within these walls. Commander, is your team ready to do some investigative work and earn their commissioning? I can see from their fancy flying they are good in the cockpit but what about with a blaster?” asked Alvinus.

Tanos and Wynter looked at each other for a split second, not wanting to divulge that they had spent as yet no time training the squadron for ground tactics and infiltration. *Too much time in the air, and still no ships.* Wynter pushed the thought aside. “Sir, with the equipment in the Cloister and the current manpower at my disposal we can certainly take lead and run this to ground. However, sir, I believe it is time to ask for some assistance. Our team has been flying training craft for weeks now and have shown they can do the near impossible. This contraband capture has been great for morale, but they still are not commissioned and still are flying Quadjumpers. We need dedicated fighters. We are lucky no one died in that stunt with the C-Roc.”

Executor Len scowled somewhat, it was in poor taste to ask so brazenly of a superior. Director Alvinus belied none of the same thinking, and sent a smile to his Chiss counterpart. “Perhaps it is my old friend. They have done well in training, and now we see Tython is needed. Our space lanes are exposed and we indeed may have enemies in our midst. I will talk to our Consul and see what OEF may be able to pry loose. In the meantime, you have several commendations for me to sign?”

Major Tanos placed a docket on the desk, pushing it towards the Executor and Director. “Yes, everyone in Tython Squadron has proven to be an adequate to spectacular pilot, and their teamwork has allowed them to rise above even crack front-line units. But

these three have proven themselves admirably throughout this basic training cycle and were instrumental in their own right in capturing the *Raxanna's Remorse*.”

Alvinus read the dispatches and nodded approvingly. Very well, please give my regards and thanks for their performance. They are hereby entitled to the title of Trainee Ace and upon commissioning of the unit may wear a half chevron on their helmets...once we get them helmets...and ships...dismissed you two. I will let you know about your ships once you get us some leads on our insider threat.”

VT-49 Retribution
Arx High Orbit
Arx System

The silence on the bridge of the *Retribution* was deafening for the crew. The makeshift assemblage was as makeshift as the mission itself. *Perhaps this indeed was a trap*, thought Commander Wynter. He knew what the rest of the team thought.

From the moment the transmission came in from Plagueis territory opinions were divided. Normally, Plagueis was an erstwhile supporter of the Iron Throne against the Resistance. Why, now, would they send an intermediary offering assistance? The timing felt too perfect and the intentions too plain. With victory in the recent war with the Collective, Odan-Urr had gained much. Trust and knowing one's enemies from allies was not one advantage, however.

Yet, despite it all, Wynter trusted the voice on the other edge of the communication. He had known Raider Laren Uscot from mercenary circles and smugglers' networks. Uscot too had some fragmentary information of the smuggling and gunrunning flowing through Kiasat and was willing to trade, for a price of course. And so Wynter was on his personal vessel, without orders or authorization, and a handful of his squadron.

He had brought Zeline, Ranarr, and Tyraal because they were Jedi. But, also because they were new enough not to cause any rupture of morale if they ended up not making it back from this mission. And so Zeline and Tyraal sat inside the laser cannon mounts on the ventral and dorsal sides of the vessel as Ranarr sat with Major Tanos and Commander Wynter at the helm.

The *Retribution's* stealth mode was activated, forcing her to sit helpless against the silhouette of the Star Destroyer *Paladin*. They waited for the right moment, for the right transport. Fighter escorts were very minimal here at the heart of the Iron Throne, with a fleet of capital ships creating a cordon around the planets of the system. They would have just enough time to make their mark and get out alive, perhaps.

“There, the cache is inside that shuttle.” stated Ranarr. Major Tanos barked an order for Tyraal and Zeline to be ready on their laser cannons and to call out a target of the two TIE fighters that leisurely followed the shuttle. Wynter armed the torpedo launches as Tanos

primed the engine and donned her helmet. "All personnel seal up." ordered Wynter. The hatchway opened less than a foot, and cabin pressure and oxygen began to bleed from the cockpit.

The *Retribution* shot onward, her superior speed impressively on display. Wynter breathed heavily as he saw the first few flights of intercept fighters launching from the Paladin and support vessels ringing the planet lumbering towards them. "Fire on Ranarr's mark!" barked Wynter. Within an instant two concussion missiles launched from the VT-49. The deadly birds of prey easily detonated on impact with the shuttle, shredding debris languidly expanding outward. What the shockwave did not destroy, the laser fire from the two young Jedi did.

"I've got it...close the hatch in mark five." Ranarr offered from hi commlink. On queue, the ramp closed shut as a small container was pulled inside by clever use of the Force. Major Tanos feverishly handled the vessel as it approached hyperspace vector eta-gamma-rho. In an instant, their vision was warped by the dazzling white and blues of the lightspeed jump. "Easy as pie." Tyraal cheered from the topside cannon.

Wynter shook his head, wondering if perhaps this was too easy. "Perhaps. Perhaps not. Major, set a course for Nar Shaada, we have a transaction to finish up before we return home. I hope for his health, that Laren has kept his word."