

STAR WARS

Matron in Distress

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Fringes of Nancora
The *Godless Matron*
Hangar Esk

Cloistered from the noise and turmoil of the Lucrehulk's seedier locations, Lead Engineer Kieran Tachi set himself to the unending task of sealing the Matron's hull. Beneath his helmet, sound was lost somewhere between the cold vastness of nothing and the bumping music being filtered through his comlink, much to the chagrin of his fellow workers. It was all he could bring to keep his sanity, hearing stories of those driven mad from weeks of silence. Though others maintained theirs through idle conversation via comlink channels, Kieran found himself disinterested in discussion. All of those under him were torn from the same cloth - criminals, thieves and liars. Few of those would choose this assignment, instead wearing it as a crime sentence.

Kieran, on the other hand, was an honest man. At least, those were the words that he told himself for the sake of his son. Credits were meager for this line of work, affording little more than a shared accommodation in Chute Town. Still, it meant that Kieran had a home to return to without getting gunned down in the streets. He had obligations, Sorenn herself be damned if his son were to be left a street urchin at the hands of some crook.

"Kieran," his comlink buzzed, cutting off the Alderaanian magnum opus of some great musician lost during the Galactic Civil War.

He cursed his luck of being wrenched from this piece of lost art before the crescendo, "Yes, Kruk?"

"I'm brinin' out another slab for the outer hull. Turns out Tarc can't weld worth a damn. Could use a hand." the Gran on the other end grumbled. Kieran sighed, giving a spanner a final twist before disengaging the magna-gloves securing him to the inner hull. Sure, moving such large panels could be a task in and of itself, but working in zero-g meant that such items were weightless.

Testing the thrusters of his EVA suit for good measure, Kieran clicked his heels together once. With his boots disengaging from their magnetic locks, he was free to maneuver through the depressurized hull with the assistance of concentrated bursts of air from his EVA suit, nearing a Gran struggling to maneuver the flat metal sheet.

"Thanks," Kruk breathed through the comlink, "we'll meet with Tarc on the outside, through that hole." The Gran raised two of his six digits in indicative fashion towards a stout figure secured to the threshold. About the size of a Jawa, the Sullustan busied himself with a plasma torch, shooting molten slag back into the vessel as large, uneven welds formed glowing lines in his wake.

"Tarc!" Kieran shouted into the main channel, "Shut it down! I'd rather not burn through an enviro-suit before the shift is done."

Bemused, the Sullustan turned off the valve to his plasma torch, waving his coworkers along with his free hand.

Sith's spit. He's not even using magna-gloves, Kieran observed.

With the narrow passage devoid of molten debris, Kruk and Kieran moved the panel into position at the precipice leading into the nebulous unknown. Each rotation of staff, the sight of it alone caused at least one newcomer's stomach to turn; the knowledge that one misstep could send them to greet the vast blackness past the threshold.

It was a wonder that Tarc was still alive.

Between the deafening silence and the periodic comlink chatter, Kieran felt his heart beating in his chest. It was a claustrophobic sensation that one might experience in zero-g without the comfort of all their senses. On a standard rotation, Kieran guessed that the three had been at work on reinforcing the hull for a quarter of it. However, time was imperceptible in the void - at least until the EVA suit's warning indicators kicked in.

Humming to test his hearing, Kieran Tachi thumbed the comlink's controls on the side of his helmet, drawing him back into the blaring music at the height of a famous Smazzo hit. His hands worked of their own accord, drawing beads across the surface of the metal as he and his coworkers secured themselves to the outside of the *Matron's* hull. His attention drifted in and out of the music blasting out of his helmet's speakers, taking a few seconds in each minute to adjust the plasma torch's cable.

Bang.

His hand jolted, the plasma torch drawing a jagged, uneven bead with it.

Bang.

With a second shudder, his hand came down hard against the metallic surface. The plasma torch clattered against the hull, wrenched from his grip before floating into nothingness.

"Boss?" the Gran's gruff voice found his comlink channel, somehow audible above the music coursing through Kieran's helmet, "Tell me I'm getting space-crazy."

Kieran muted the Smazzo with a flick of a switch, "Where's Tarc?" was his answer. He could imagine the Gran's expression as both of the engineers scanned the *Matron's* exterior for signs of life.

"Boss..." Kruk stammered, matching Kieran's gaze to the small, humanoid form floating far from the comfort of the *Matron's* hull and its stockpile of functioning magna-gloves. Another tremor overcame the exterior of Hangar Esk, this time accompanied with the distant flares of ion torpedoes striking the adjoining compartments.

“Force, save us.”

Fringes of Nancora

Rose Squadron

Rose Squadron. The name held some weight in previous entanglements during the Nancora campaign, receiving a reputation for its flawless engagements at the hands of the *Skylla*'s best starfighter pilot.

Over the past week, the name Emery Rose has become synonymous with an evacuation order in the Brotherhood's fleets. Even with favourable odds, all attempts at taking out the number-one mark had failed. That was until twelve standard hours ago, when a vessel identified as the leader's wingman collided with an A-wing during one of several skirmishes.

Red-tinted fingers danced along the controls of a T-70 X-wing as tactical readouts measured the trajectories of each laser cannon mounted to its wings. Against the backdrop of a crimson nebula, the *Godless Matron* stood out on the fringes of Nancora, far from the battle waging in its orbit. Formations of TIE fighters flocked from all directions - a minor nuisance, considering the damage sustained in the *Matron*'s main hangars from Rose Squadron's initial bombardment.

“TIEs incoming on vectors,” Rose Three informed via comlink, noting that the TIEs were nearing engagement distance.

Revenge was a dish best served where it would hurt most. The *Godless Matron* was among few targets of value in the Brotherhood's fleet, being the abode of a Dark Councillor and numerous resources that the Brotherhood no doubt found beneficial.

It was, after all, what Rose Two would have suggested.

A dazzling cascade of green-and-red bolts added splashes of colour to the surrounding battlefield. Yanking hard on the joystick of her T-70, Emery Rose cut above the rest of her squadron in unorthodox fashion. Likewise, each of the squadron's starfighters banked hard in opposite directions, extending the dogfight across a larger area.

“At this rate, some of those formations are going to need to break,” Rose Four chimed in. True to his word, several of the TIE fighters broke off and started chasing after the individual X-wings, leaving the Zabrak to deal with a mere half-squadron of TIE fighters breaking towards her.

The lead vessel burst into flames in an instant, the dome-like cockpit disintegrating while leaving the solar panels unscathed. Rotating in a half-corkscrew, Rose released a cannonade against the TIEs to either side, scoring direct hits against another of the

unshielded craft, which sustained just long enough for the enviro-suit wearing pilot to eject from the doomed starship.

Fringes of Nancora ***The Damsels' Distress***

"I think there's a misuse of the term 'pilot' somewhere. We're racers, occasional couriers and smugglers. Yet, we're your first choice in a **dogfight?**" Ysera commented to the holographic features of Morgan Sorenn.

"Aren't there TIEs for that?" Kasula added to a visibly disinterested Sorenn.

"Truth of the matter is," Morgan's voice came over the twins' headset comlinks, "I don't want to *win*. I want to see our best pilots against theirs - a clear message as competitors in..."

Tapping a nail against her lip, Morgan smiled, "Just think of it as a race. To the victor goes all the fame and fortune. Isn't that how it goes?" she finished, closing the connection before either of the Daegella twins had a chance to retort.

"I guess that settles it," Ysera exhaled.

"Let's go win that 'fame and fortune'" Kasula added with a grin.

Fringes of Nancora **Rose Squadron**

"Blazes!" Emery Rose half-exclaimed, half-squealed in delight. It wasn't often that a starship jumps straight from the Holonet to an active warzone. Embellished in recognizable logos of the Daegella sisters' sponsors from BlasTech to Incom, the tracing lines behind the *Damsels' Distress* faded as it entered realspace.

Careening towards the *Matron* in a ball of flame, the last of the TIE fighters left to challenge Rose met its end against the Lucrehulk. Basking in the moment, she didn't know whether to feel excited or disappointed in sitting across from the two holostars. On the other hand, she welcomed the challenge.

Two racing pilots versus me. It's almost a fair fight, for them.

Taken out of her musings with the sight of green laserfire, Rose maneuvered just in time to avoid a full salvo to the engines. Instead, the fuselage rocked as a single bolt scored the side of her vessel.

Sustaining minor damage, Rose banked the X-Wing to face the *Damsels' Distress* head-on. Though much larger in size, the VCX-100's shields managed to sustain most of the laserfire that was being directed towards it, matching their rival's ferocity with a barrage of its own.

Heart pounding in her chest, Rose launched into a maneuver reminiscent of her earlier encounter against the TIE fighters, spiralling around the *Damsels'* arc of emerald plasma that was aimed for her. The result was a marginal success, scoring far more hits on the freighter than its paint-clad hull would suggest and avoiding a collision course with the passing freighter.

Tick. Tick. Tick.

The one sound that all starfighter pilots feared most filled the fuselage of Emery Rose's T-70 X-Wing. Gasping for breath, she reached for the one instrument that could mean the difference between life and death, securing the latch of the breath mask to the front of her helmet.

Webs formed patterns across the glass of the cockpit, matching the pace at which she could feel her heart beating.

It all happened so fast. Some tell stories of pilots who go mad from the silence of being adrift for so long. Others claim that the only sounds to be heard is the rushing of one's blood, or the beating of one's heart. Rose was now certain that these stories were true as she floated into the vast nothingness with nothing to hear, save the beating of her own heart.