***Ton-Falk-*class Escort Carrier *Scoundrel’s Rest***

**Fringes of Dandoran system**

Once upon a time the ship now known as the *Scoundrel’s Rest* had served the Imperial Navy. It would have been crewed by dozens of strictly disciplined officers, and its large hangar bays filled with several squadrons of sleek TIE starfighters.

Now, however, the ship was home to the group that called itself the Tenixir Revenants, a loose alliance of various criminals that had broken free from the Severian Principate prison planet, Tenixir. Lately, however, the group was threatening to split into two. One would-be faction, the Expansionists, was considered the more moderate of the two due to their tendency to act with as little violence as possible. They had even been talking about eventually suing the Principate for peace.

The other faction, the Retributionists, were far more hard-line. They wanted to press on with a full-scale war against the Principate, unable or perhaps unwilling to forgive their enemies for locking them away on the secret prison planet.

As the conflict between the Revenants and the Principate continued, Darth Nehalem, the Grand Master of the Dark Brotherhood, decided to intervene. However, instead of offering to officially help the Principate, the Sith Lord simply authorised the Clans to side with whoever they pleased. It quickly transpired that, even at Clan level, different members were likely to choose different sides. The Principate had similarly become divided into two factions, the peaceful Harmonists and the more aggressive Restorationists. To the Retributionists, however, such a distinction did not matter: the Principate was an enemy that they wanted to exterminate.

A number of members of the Brotherhood, from virtually ever Clan, had quickly declared that they were throwing their lot in with the Retributionists. Among them, despite his time in Imperial service, was Andrelious J. Inahj.

“I still don’t understand why you’d go with these guys, Andrel,” Seraine Ténama said. She was still not too familiar with the short Human male, who had re-joined Taldryan a few months ago. What she did, know, however, is that Inahj didn’t usually tolerate the kind of people that the Retributionists were comprised of.

“It’s like this. The Principate are not Imperials. Not anymore. They brought back some of the worst elements of the Republic. They even restored the senate, for Palpatine’s sake!” Andrelious explained, his disdain for his new enemies clear.

“But aren’t the Retributionists no better than the Rebel Alliance were?” the Zeltron challenged.

“Not exactly. They’re not trying to convince the people of this galaxy that the Jedi weren’t what the Emperor made them out to be. The Rebel Alliance was nothing more than a group of senators who were angry that the Emperor exposed the Senate for the corrupt, useless mess that it was. It was never about freedom. It was always just about power. As it always has been. Power and money,” Inahj snapped.

The Taldryan Consul shrugged. It was pointless to argue with Andrelious, whose unyielding loyalty to the Empire, as it had been under Palpatine, made any kind of debate on politics impossible.

“Now remember, as long as we’re here, it’s not under Taldryan auspices. So as far as I’m concerned, right now you don’t get to pull rank on me, Miss Ténama,” Andrelious stated simply.

“That’s another thing. What are you going to do if you come across Appius and find he’s thrown his lot in with the Principate? He left the Caelus system before I did, so I think he’s already got himself involved somehow. I know you’ve got some kind of deal with him involving your family,” Seraine responded.

“We’ll have to hope that he’s backed the Expansionists, won’t we? At least then I only have to think he’s an idiot,” the Human answered, secretly hoping that his fellow Sith had indeed chosen not to align with the Principate.

The two Taldryanites walked into one of the ship’s briefing rooms, one of the few parts of the ship that still carried any sense of its Imperial past. Even then, several of the gathered beings were enjoying alcohol or smoking cigarras.

“Ah. Inahj. Now that you’re here, I can get this show on the road. Would you two like anything to drink?” a blue skinned Togruta sitting in the front row asked, having turned her head to regard the new arrivals. Andrelious recognised her as Rasha Howee, the nominal leader of the Retributionist faction.

“Something strong, if there’s anything left. I know that your people seem to enjoy a good drink. Or five,” Andrelious responded.

“The same,” Erinyes added simply.

“Slave! Come and serve my two esteemed guests!” the Togruta ordered.

To Andrelious’ surprise, the slave turned out to be a Human male with a depressed expression on his face. The Sith knew that the Retributionists were not against slavery, but the idea of an alien owning a Human was incredibly foreign to him. The man was dressed in nothing more than a small pair of shorts and a shock collar.

“I’ve found that military men make for decent slaves. They’re already used to taking orders. Of course, I still had to break you in, didn’t I, *Captain*?” Howee asked, her tone mocking the slave’s former status.

“He’s the Captain?” Inahj queried.

“Was. Now he’s one of our pleasure slaves. You’re more than welcome to one of them if you help us out here,” Rasha said.

“Andrelious would prefer to be the one in the collar. He likes a woman to tell him to jump. Gets a thrill when he asks ‘how high?’” Erinyes teased.

“Yes, alright, Miss Ténama, I don’t want the whole galaxy knowing about my sexual preferences. Humans don’t discuss that the same way that you Zeltrons seem to,” Andrelious answered, feeling his cheeks burning.

“Here are your drinks,” the slave announced, passing two containers filled with a bright red drink to Andrelious and Seraine.

“Slave, you forgot something. You forgot to thank my guests for letting you serve them,” Rasha hissed, pushing a button on a small device she was suddenly carrying. The slave cried out in pain as his shock collar activated.

“Now go and wait in my quarters, slave. If you disobey me again you’ll face 5 lashes!” the Togruta ordered.

The man shuffled away. Andrelious could sense that the slave was both deeply ashamed of his fate and held a great deal of resentment towards his captor.

“I wouldn’t feel sorry for him. He was typical of the Principate’s naval officers. And he actually thought Humans to be superior!” Howee laughed.

“Nevertheless, I suggest you don’t go much further. As much as you have him collared, he’s still a trained Imperial officer. As disgusting as his Principate is, they have not altered their training programs. He’s trained and he hates you. That is a dangerous combination. I just hope that slave collar is able to hold him,” Inahj warned.

“Anyway. That’s probably enough smalltalk. I was rather pleased when I saw you boarding this ship, Inahj. Legend has it that you fancy yourself in a cockpit. You’re mentioned on a couple of Principate intel documents as one of the pilots they’ve considered for recruitment,” the Pirate Leader declared.

“I helped them once or twice. Against the Collective. Those bastards would happily slaughter my children. They’ve already taken their mother…” Andrelious started trailing off as his mind was cast back to the last time he had seen Kooki alive. The last thing he wanted, or needed, was for the Alderaanian to return and start manipulating him again. As much as the children missed their mother, Andrelious was now free of her abusive and possessive behaviour and was able to make sure that his son and daughters could thrive.

Howee shrugged. “We’re not fighting the Collective, at least not yet. Perhaps once we’ve proven ourselves against the Principate we can consider other threats.”

“I thought you said we were done with the talking. You’re obviously after pilots,” Inahj said, beginning to become bored with how long the Togruta was taking to get to the point.

“I’ve identified a Principate ship that is currently taking part in the operation to get troops onto the surface of Dandoran. A Nebulon-B known as the *Liparus*. I don’t really have enough information to give you a proper briefing, but what I can give you is the full support of this ship’s starfighters. I’ll gather you saw them?” Rasha questioned.

“He was quite rude about them,” Erinyes interrupted.

“The Z-95 Headhunter is a heavily outdated model. Even the basic TIE Fighter outperforms it, and I expect your pilots won’t be as well trained as those of the Principate,” Andrelious stated curtly.

“It’s a good job I’ve got two squadrons of A-Wings, then, isn’t it? And I’ll be flying one of them myself. I don’t sit around looking pretty, I like to get my own hands dirty,” Howee said.

“Do we know how many enemy fighters we’re going up against? Or what type of fighters they’ll be flying?” Inahj questioned.

“According to my records, the *Liparus* doesn’t have its own fighter complement, but I’m expecting that they’ll send a distress call the moment we de-hyper. That means enemy TIE Defenders at the very least,” the Togruta explained.

Andrelious frowned. “A lone Nebulon-B with no fighter cover? Sounds like the perfect recipe for a trap. They’ve probably got one of their Star Destroyers hidden behind the planet. And if we’re particularly unlucky, they’ll bring the Interdictor along too. Or perhaps they’re waiting for us to launch and attack when we’re gone. I don’t like it. Not at all.”

“I’m having the *Scoundrel’s Nest* leave the area as soon as we’re clear of the hangar. I won’t send its new coordinates to the rest of our attack until we’ve dealt with the enemy Frigate. As for if they jump us, we’ll just have to make sure we’re not the easy prey they take us for,” Rasha responded.

“And what’s your role in this, Miss Ténama?” Andrelious demanded.

“I’m staying here. Somebody’s got to keep the party going, after all,” the Taldryan Consul answered matter-of-factly.

**Hangar Bay**

“Are you sure you won’t take one of the A-Wings?” a technician asked Andrelious.

“I am not flying that inferior Rebel model. It is slower, turns less well and it’s much less well armed,” the Sith replied, annoyed that the offer had even been made.

“Inferior it may be, but I’m still going to get more kills than you, Inahj. Would you care to make things a little more *interesting*?” Rasha asked with a wink.

“A wager? What did you have in mind?”

“Simple. If I get more kills, you give me that Defender. If you win, I’d offer you my personal A-Wing, but I don’t expect you’d want it,”

“*When* I win, I’ll think of a suitable prize. Can I trust you to keep your own score?” Andrelious questioned.

“Are you saying I can’t be trusted? And it’s not like you Sith types are well known for their honesty. I wouldn’t be surprised if you even cheat when you play kiddy sabacc with your children!” Rasha snapped back.

“To be fair, they cheat too. And the game’s normally spoilt when Mostynn wants to make the cards fly again, and…”

“I hope you’re this quick to think up an excuse when I show you up in my oh so inferior A-Wing!” Howee teased, clambering into her cockpit before Andrelious could come up with a suitable retort.

Andrelious sighed and headed towards his TIE Defender.

*The game is on, Miss Howee!*

**-x-**

On launching Andrelious realised he wasn’t the only member of the Brotherhood who was taking part in the mission. Among the Z-95s and A-Wings was an unusual design of fighter, whose pilot, an Umbaran called Corvin Rootai, usually served Clan Plagueis. On being asked exactly what he was flying he had informed Inahj that the design was from his home planet.

The presence of other members of the Brotherhood didn’t do much to ease Andrelious’ nerves. The vast majority of his allies were flying inferior starfighters, and most would not have received training of any kind, let alone to the standard that the Severian Principate was able to provide.

“All wings, this is *Lady Blue*. Be ready to jump to hyperspace on my mark,” Rasha ordered.

As he typically did, Andrelious gazed at the picture of his children that was affixed to the side of his targeting computer.

The stars became streaks of light as Inahj entered hyperspace. With the destination so near, the hyperjump took little over a second to complete.

As he returned to realspace, Andrelious targeted the only large vessel in the area, immediately identifying it as a Nebulon-B Frigate.

“Target confirmed. Nebulon-B Frigate *Liparus*. Sensors detecting a number of starfighters and a pair of troop transports also in the area,” Inahj announced.

“Incoming ships, this is the Frigate *Liparus*. If you proceed on your current course we will have no choice but to consider you hostile. This will be your only warning,” a core-accented voice declared.

“This is Commander Inahj of Clan Taldryan to all Principate allied vessels. I may know some of you, I may have even fought alongside you. That is why I’m giving all of you one chance to withdraw from this area. If you choose to stay, I will treat you as an enemy,” Andrelious said.

“Sir, this is Captain Orainn. Why are you attacking our fellow Imperials? Many of your so-called allies would have sympathised with the Rebellion,” a female voice questioned.

Crysenia Orainn was a fairly new arrival to Clan Taldryan, but Andrelious had quickly come to respect the woman, who had in the past also served in the Imperial Navy. He’d had a feeling that she would side with the Principate, but was hoping that he’d not find himself in direct combat against her.

“Captain, get out of here. Now. The Principate are not Imperials anymore. Don’t fall for their lies, they’ve turned their backs on too much of what made the Empire what it was. Do not let it be them that you die for,” Inahj responded.

“Their military seems Imperial enough to me. I’m afraid I’m going to have to insist that it is you who backs down, sir. You are flying with a poorly equipped band of criminals. I am flying with properly trained and equipped military men and women. You must know how this will end,” Crysenia shot back.

“Then I am sorry, Crysenia,” Andrelious began, using his fellow Taldryanite’s first name to convey that his regret was genuine, “but it appears that you and I are now enemies,”

“*Liparus* to all allied pilots. You are cleared to attack the Revenant fighters. No prisoners,”

Andrelious couldn’t help but smirk at the last part of the enemy commander’s order. He and the other Brotherhood pilots who had backed the Retributionists were likely the only people who *HADN’T* previously been prisoners of the Principate. The whole point of the Tenixir Revenants, especially the Retributionists, was to take vengeance on the Principate for locking them away on a secret prison world, even denying that such a planet existed.

“Everyone pick a target. Let’s get this finished swiftly and brutally. I’m missing too many drinks already!” Rasha ordered.

The enemy starfighters defending the *Liparus* consisted of half a dozen TIE Defenders, likely piloted by volunteers from the Brotherhood, a single First Order era TIE Interceptor, and two squadrons of standard TIE Fighters. Andrelious wondered briefly where the TIEs had come from, but had no time to ponder that mystery as he was already coming under attack.

The Sith expertly twisted his flight yoke, easily evading a pair of enemy TIE Fighters. With a well-honed combination of the Force and years of experience, he was soon on the tail of one of them and made no mistake as he fired his laser cannons, immediately dissolving the hostile TIE into little more than a cloud of burning gas and debris.

Rasha Howee, meanwhile, had decided she would take on the TIE/BA Interceptor, having deemed it to be the biggest threat. She had already seen it cut down three of her Z-95s and the safety of her fellow Revenants, many of whom she’d known for quite some time, was always going to take priority over the bet she’d had with Andrelious. She’d been worried that her new ally was going to flake out when it turned out one of the enemy pilots shared both a Brotherhood Clan and an Imperial background with Inahj, but, when Andrelious took his first kill, she felt more secure as it was clear the Sith’s hatred for the Principate rivalled her own.

Andrelious destroyed another TIE Fighter and decided it was time to go for the more dangerous targets. He picked the nearest TIE Defender and started to engage it in a turning war, the loop becoming ever tighter as its pilot did everything they could to escape Inahj’s targeting systems, which had been upgraded beyond the specs of a regular TIE Defender.

*You don’t get away that easily!* Andrelious thought to himself as he pushed a flickering red button. The button, another after-market addition that the former Imperial had made to his Defender, activated a laser turret that could track the targeted enemy with extreme accuracy, giving Inahj even more firepower on what was already an incredibly potent starfighter. In this case the turret was exactly the kind of edge that Andrelious needed.

“Whoever’s in that Interceptor knows what they’re doing!” Rasha complained as she continued to attempt to get behind the First Order designed vessel. According to her targeting system the ship she was having so much trouble with was called *Nova Rider*.

One of the enemy TIE Defenders managed to get a jump on Andrelious and get directly behind the Sith. His shields absorbed an entire salvo of laser fire, but Inahj didn’t rate his chances of surviving another direct hit. He redirected some power to his engines, allowing him a burst of speed that was enough to shake the tailing enemy off.

Meanwhile, Rasha was trying every trick she knew to get the better of the pilot of the *Nova Rider*. She fiddled with her power settings, but whatever she tried her target seemed to have the better of her and stayed just out of the A-Wing’s sights.

“You having trouble with that one?” Andrelious teased.

“At least I didn’t just go for the easy ones first!” Rasha retorted.

When the break Howee needed came, it was not in a way she had expected. One of the Principate TIEs, under heavy fire from a pair of Z-95s, banked almost straight into the *Nova Rider*, forcing its pilot into a desperate manoeuvre to avoid a deadly collision. Rasha was straight onto the chance. With lightning fast reflexes she steered her A-Wing and let fly with its lasers. The attack was enough to pierce through her target’s shields and crack the rear of the fuselage.

“Ok, I have to admit, that was pretty well done,” Inahj commented.

*Nova Rider* started to spin away, flames spewing from its damaged engines. Its pilot was fighting what was likely a losing battle against their own starfighter. Rasha was about to put them out of their misery when she came under attack herself, from a TIE Defender flanked by two TIE Fighters.

Andrelious spotted his ally was in trouble. He again redirected extra power to his engines, allowing him to close in on the trio of TIEs that were trying to shoot Rasha down. As he got closer, he realised that the manoeuvres the other TIE Defender were making were familiar to him.

He was closing in on Crysenia Orainn.

For a member of Taldryan to find themselves on the other side of a conflict to another member of Taldryan was unheard of, even in the many years that the Clan had existed. Taldryan had always prided itself on being ‘a Brotherhood within a Brotherhood’.

But now, it looked like Andrelious J. Inahj was going to put an end to all of that.

Inahj was far too busy trying to get into position behind his clanmate to care about such things. His mission was to destroy the *Liparus*, and right now, Orainn was just another enemy pilot to be eliminated. If she did manage to eject and survive the encounter, there would likely be consequences for Andrelious, but they would have to wait.

Andrelious moved into position and fired three salvos of laser cannons at his target. The first were enough to strip Crysenia of her shields, the second almost completely ripping her ship apart. The Sith was sure he sensed the woman successfully bailing out as the third set of six lasers finished her TIE Defender off.

“We need to go for the Frigate NOW!” Howee commanded.

Z-95 Headhunters and A-Wings were not usually effective against larger ships, but enough Revenant pilots had survived that the *Liparus* did not last long as it was hit by a series of proton torpedoes and heavy rockets. The warheads were aimed to hit the Frigate along the narrow middle section that linked the engines and command centre to the rest of the ship, and, as the shields buckled under pressure, the hull started to give way. Fire started to engulf parts of the hull, only making the situation even worse for the Principate vessel.

“Target is critically damaged. That’s what we came to do!” Rasha announced. “Sending jump coordinates for the *Nest!*”

Andrelious and his surviving allies all hyperspaced away, the *Scoundrel’s Nest* having moved to the fringes of a neighbouring star system. Their mission was complete, the Frigate *Liparus* was neutralised.

But how much damage had Andrelious done by shooting down a fellow Taldryanite?

That would remain to be seen. Andrelious had already decided that he was not going to inform Erinyes of the identity of one of his kills.

But he was sure that one day, she would find out.

*FIN*