The polish of the deck cast mirrored streaks of light across the hangar. He thought for a moment he might even catch a glimpse of himself in black plating, but even the finest polish could not reflect the features of his face with acceptable fidelity. A well-maintained hangar was evidence of prepared and detail focused deck crew and the pureness of the floor’s shine indicated that the crew of the *Nightfall* were unparalleled in their ability to service and maintain the Iron Navy’s vessels. They’d refueled, serviced and prepared his personal shuttle in record time.

His green eyes traced the outline of the Lambda-class shuttle, silhouetted on a field of sparkling blue and white stars outside the hangar. *How beautiful.* He thought to himself.

It was that passionate respect for the simple beauty of a well-made spacecraft which had assisted in his appointment to his position. The crew chief would soon be with him to run though the pre-departure checklist.

Another business trip at the expressed request of the Regent had required a stop aboard the Nightfall, before venturing back into battle. Though an able warrior, the battles he had been fighting as of late had not been with lightsaber or blaster. Instead, they were taking place in boardrooms and at negotiation tables throughout the far reaches of the Galaxy. Securing manufacturing rights, establishing trade deals, recruiting new investors and all matter of enhancement of Arx Capital Exchange positions were his objectives. He’d quickly made a name for himself with the growing stack of spoils of his white-collar war. It was exhausting work, but for a man with his abilities, it suited him well. It was certainly more agreeable a post than the loads of clerical work which often piled up on the Regent’s desk. It required less fastidious review of hard item counts at the cost of being away from his wife.

Being on the move had a way of making people feel isolated, but he found a certain comfort knowing that the freedom of being among the stars were always just another hangar door. Real freedom, he thought, was best found behind the controls of a Starfighter in the vast openness of space. For those fleeting moments, man and machine melded into one and with that glorious fusion all his problems slipped away. He missed it greatly. The nature of his dealings had placed him more frequently in the passenger compartment of some shuttle. While the *Alium* was no TIE Defender, the Lambda-Class shuttle still offered a hint of that freedom.

The sound of light heel clicks on the deck broke his pensive state.

“Have our personal effects have already been put on board?” asked the tired voice of Jasmine.

“You’re getting better at minimizing your presence.” He remarked casually as he turned to face her.

“Your guidance on my meditation practices is yielding results, father. Is our luggage on board the *Alium* already?” she asked again.

He looked her up and down. She’d traded in her haggard clothes for robes of finer make and fitment. She had been taking in more than just the mysteries of the Dark Side of the Force from her ongoing tutelage. The pair had been inseparable for the last months. Something about bringing his daughter to meetings with the hard laboring people that ran the mines and shipyards had made him more relatable and trustworthy. She helped him sell an image and in time she had really begun to embody the role.

“Yes.” He replied, turning his eyes back to the folded wings of their craft.

 His eyes drifted past the shuttle to the TIE Fighters hanging from racks above the hangar floor. He could almost imagine himself running along the gantries and catwalks, securing the clasps of his helmet and the savoring exhilarating moment of silence that followed when the alarm claxons were filtered out by his flight helmets’ internal comms system. It was all a daydream, memories of a by-gone era; the romance of Age of Aces.

She stood next to him. Departure protocol and the intendant delays that came with them had been a regular part of their journeys together and both of them had become accustomed to the conversations they had in the periods of waiting before taking flight.

“You’re doing it again. It is just a ship, father. You’re looking at it like Emily looks at you.” She said, lifting her chin slightly so as to appear just a bit taller when she stood next to him.

“Someday, girl, you will know depth of emotion that I feel. You will know the joy and the fear of losing that feeling. ” He replied.

Her forced attempts to be proper failed there.

“You sound like you’re in love with a shuttle. Do you know how crazy you sound, laser-brains?” she said with a light chuckle.

The thought of strict discipline to correct her crossed his mind. *One hundred katas? No one thousand.* *No. Go easy on her this time, Thran.*

“That is not the craziest thing you’ve heard me say, my love.” Thran said with a smile.

“I suppose you’re right.” She replied.

She wanted to inquire further and her lips thought to move, but she paused. Since their reunion, she’d relished in every opportunity she’d been presented to get to know him better. He was far from a perfect father. After a lifetime of ignoring her existence, it would be easy to have nothing but resentment for him. Yet, he was continually showing effort to build their relationship. Like in most other aspects of his life, he was full of surprises. She knew better than to pry too far, lest she face his favorite disciplinary consequence; mandatory saber practice.

“Your thoughts betray you. Yet again...” he remarked, revealing the state of his intrusion into her mind.

“Perhaps, I wanted you to know what I was thinking...So that I may gain the pleasure of another of your lessons, father.” She said, the corner of her mouth turning up in the trademark sly Kast smirk.

“Excellent answer. Perhaps, my lessons are taking. But, if you want to learn to fly, my little flower, we’d better start that in a simulator.” He replied.

“Perhaps then a lesson history then is better suited for now, father.” She replied.

“You are tenacious, girl.” The Warlord replied.

“Yes, father, a trait acquired from your lessons, I am afraid. Perhaps you are too skilled a teacher...” Jasmine said, inching closer to him.

“Flattery will get you far. Perhaps it will even get you the answers you seek. You have freedom to ask what you will, just this once. I will suggest you exercise caution in your lines of question.” He replied, folding his hands to the small of his back.

“When did you learn to fly?” the girl asked, turning her gaze upwards towards him.

“I was about your age. Sixteen or so.” He responded.

“How did you get into flying? It seems like you’d have no necessity to learn yourself, why show the interest?” the teenager asked.

“Your grandfather always wanted to be a pilot. He wanted join the TIE Corps. When he went to the Academy, he displayed aptitudes in other fields required by the Empire. He never had the chance to become a pilot. But he always wrote about the desire in his journals. When I was a boy, I found his journals. It’s all I had of him. So, when I learned he wanted to be a pilot...Well, as foolish as it seemed, I was trying to help him to live out his dreams through me.” He said.

There was flash of deep sadness in his eyes, as if the electric green of his gaze had lost some of its luster. She caught a glimpse of it, for a moment. She hadn’t anticipated that he would be so forthcoming with his answer. She was expecting him to give her some long tale laced with lies or mistruths. His candor left her speechless.

“Shortly after I had been expelled from the school at Ertagette, I acquired a ship. It was a little puddlejumper. Slayn and Korpil. H2 mark 4 executive. It was old by the time it had come into my hands. Decent little shuttle, but had more problems than positives. Front buffer panels had an awful habit of just falling off.” He said, reminiscing.

“You acquired it, huh? Who’d you lift it from?” She asked guessing that the shuttle had not been acquired through the virtues of hard work and fiduciary responsibility.

There was more to that story than he was willing to share. If it had been such a forgettable vessel, he wouldn’t have remembered the make and model. Likewise, He wouldn’t have recalled the specific issues with the vessel. This would give her something particular that she could try to press out of him at a later date.

“Be cautious with your accusations, my love. I had, in short order, discovered that I had a certain proficiency behind the helm. I took to it like a cratsch to a Namana tree. It was as if I belonged there, behind the controls. I think it was, perhaps, the first time I felt as though there existed a place where I belonged.” He said with a smile.

“What happened to it?” she asked.

“Oh, I don’t remember.” He replied.

She looked at his eyes, to see if she could divine whether there was any honesty in that statement. She could not.

“Well, you don’t have it anymore, so what did you fly next?” the girl said, pressing him for more detail.

“After my first modeling contracts started to pay out, I wanted to chase that feeling again. So, I started buying some racing craft. Stripped down fighters, mostly. Z-95s, a Preybird, an I-7. I really fell in love when I was able to get my hands on my first TIE. I started with the base model...The purity of the controls, the skill required to fly them. They are beautiful in their simplicity. Once I started flying TIEs, I really felt as though I understood my father’s love for them.” he said.

“Thank you for sharing with me, father. One last question...How’d you get your Defender?” she asked.

“That is a story for another time, my love.” He said gesturing to the approaching deck officer with a nod of his head.

The officer’s uniform was well fitting and clean. His boots were polished to the same reflective quality as the hangar floors. His grey woolen cap sat balanced perfectly atop his head. He was the model of an Imperial officer, save the patch on his chest which replaced the Imperial Cog with the sigil of the Grand Master.

“Mi’lord Praetor, I do not mean to interrupt, but your shuttle is prepared for departure. If you will follow me, Sir. We’ll take you to meet the pilots.” The soldier said.

Their conversation had given Jasmine more insight into what her father loved. She stepped forward to the officer, placing a hand on his forearm.

“Lieutenant, that will not be necessary. My father has a terrible need to stretch his legs in the cockpit once again. A fine officer such as yourself understands that a pilot needs to fly, not be chauffeured.” She said, pressing mental suggestion into the man.

“Of course, miss. Let me just make some changes here.” The fair-haired man said with a smile.

His fingers danced along the datapad. A series of slightly audible blips and clicks indicated that the departure registry and pilot assignment list had been augmented. He stepped back, clicking his heels together and saluting.

“You’re cleared for departure, sir. Good luck and safe travels.” He said, before spinning on his heels and striding off the hangar deck.

The girl laid her hand out in front of her father, offering him the way to the waiting loading ramp. He looked at her suspiciously at first, before laying a hand on her shoulder. It was a small gesture, but it was filled with all the warmth of pride she could expect from him. Their continued journey together would only serve to strengthen their bond. She would venture, in the long periods of silence in the shuttle’s cockpit, to pry more truth about the man she’d come to idolize.

She was beginning to realize that while he had a tendency to be cruel at times, her own journey was beginning to parallel his. They had both been children that grew up without their father. She could connect with him through that absence in his soul, while simultaneously repairing the void in her own soul.

She smiled to herself and took up stride behind him, doing her best to mirror every one of his mannerisms. They boarded the shuttle, making their way up through the passenger bay. They secured their luggage and began the preflight check. In a matter of minutes, the Lambda shuttle lifted from the hangar floor. The landing gear actuated and the subtle rumble of the docking engines pushed the vessel into the vacuum of space. The whir of the shuttle’s s-foil wings signified had become a familiar sound. She kicked her feet up onto the cockpit’s command panel, prepared for him to take them once again into the blue silence of hyperspace.