"Alert, all pilots to battle stations. This is not a drill. All pilots to battle stations," the loud speaker in the pilot bunks blared. Kamjin rolled off the top bunk and dropped to the floor. Like most TIE Pilots while on duty he slept in his pressurized flight suit. As his feet touched the ground he broke into a sprint, grabbing his helmet from the rack as he exited the barrack.

He fell into the mass of other pilots racing towards the hangar bay. "Any idea what we're dropping into?" he asked the nearest pilot.

"No, the Sith are probably just seething to fight," Simus responded. Despite Kamjin's advancing age, he kept up with the group of younger pilots. His graying hair separated him from the gaggle of fresh faced pilots. For most of them this would be their first combat mission. He had spent time in elite squadrons before and while he knew he was skilled he couldn't help but think luck had kept him alive while so many of his fellow pilots over the decades had died.

As they burst through the corridor into the hangar the ready action pilots were already in their TIEs, massive cranes moving them into position to launch. Kamjin spotted the rest of his squadron and fell into ranks. The squadron commander stood at attention next to an imposing Sith Warlord. The Sith was younger than Kamjin, his short blonde hair and piercing green eyes were like a youthful reflection of Kamjin if his life had been blessed with access to the Force.

"Pilots, we are going to infiltrate the station above this moon. Fighter screen is expected to be heavy. You will fly cover for me as I board the station. I need two pilots to accompany me on the station," Thran said in a commanding voice.

"Simus. Kamjin. Step forward," their commander barked. Kamjin and Simus stepped out of ranks immediately and snapped to attention. "These two are your men, m'lord."

Thran looked over both of the pilots with an air of superiority and dismissiveness. A snort and a nod was the only acknowledgement that was given. "Very good, pilots to your ships! We're launching in five minutes," the commander said, clasping on his helmet and rushing to his ship. Kamjin, Simus, and the remainder of the squadron fell in in similar fashion. As he climbed the rickety metallic rollaway stairs to board his TIE Fighter, Kamjin couldn't help but feel a sense of dread about this mission. Something he couldn't put his finger on.

Dropping into the familiar cockpit, before the hatch was even sealed, he was flipping the various switches bringing the craft to life. The gentle trump of the twin ion engines set his mind at ease. Like crawling back into a warm bed after a nightmare he smiled as his friend came to life. "This is Blade Five, standing by," Kamjin said through the comm to hangar control.

"Acknowledged, Blade Five, launching commencing," came the curt response. The TIE shuddered as the launching clamp engaged, hoisting the ship into the air. Kamjin flicked the power converter to overcharge his cannons. He preferred a slower approach than speed with no punch. Over the comms he heard his companions chime in as they lined up in the launch conveyer. Kamjin watched the deck officer direct traffic, as he tightened his gloves.

Suddenly he saw the officer hit the deck. A sharply painted TIE Defender buzzed low to the hangar floor, skimming beneath the other TIEs waiting to launch. Kamjin had never seen such a blazen disregard for safety. Flipping over to a tight beam he punched in Simus's com frequency. "You don't think that's the Sith; do you?"

"It is, I saw him boarding that ship. He's talented if not reckless," Simus responded.

"Well, we're just going to have to be the sensible ones," Kamjin said, flipped back over to the main comm frequencies. "Blade Five, launching." The TIE Fighter screeched to life. Its engines flaring as it evacuated the hangar into the tempest around the station. Kamjin skated

the surface of the Star Destroyer for as long as he could, taking in the situation. The Star Destroyer had exited hyperspace above the station allowing it to rain down it's fighters upon the station. The station was nondescript, some relic from the age before the Empire came to power. Despite the age it was sending up enough flak into its airspace to keep most of the fighters from strafing it.

Kamjin's eyes darted against the bleak blackness of space and the sensors. There was an assortment of Rebellion era relics intermixed with the assortment of privateer fighters. He caught sight of the Sith's TIE Defender spinning wildly through space. *He must be pulling more G's than a normal Human could handle,* Kamjin thought as he watched. The Warlord's ship would stop suddenly behind a fighter, let loose a barrage of laser fight, then pivot hard in a new direction and zip off before a fighter could take a bead on him.

*I'm good, but I'll never be that good,* Kamjin thought to himself. Not for the first time being jealous at the abilities of the Sith he had served since Palpatine was alive. With that thought, time had run out and Kamjin spun the TIE Fighter and dove into the fray. "Stave Four and Six, break," he said into the comm as he opened fire. Piercing green lasers spit out from beneath him shredding the fighters that had been pursuing his companions. He could hear the pings against his hull as he rocketed through the debris.

"Blade Five, bandit on your tail," Simus's voice rang through Kamjin's helmet. He snapped around and caught sight of the X-wing through his rear slats.

"I've got him Blade Four," he replied, as he pulled the TIE Fighter up into a split-S, catching the X-wing pilot by surprise. He could see the shocked look on his opponents face as his blasts melted through the canopy of the rebel fighter.

"Nice shooting, Blade Five," Simus called out over the comms.

"If you two are finished, I'm making my run," Thran's intimidating voice cut through their comms as his spinning TIE Defender cut a swath of destruction through the combat zone. Kamjin felt that sense of dread building in his gut. He hadn't felt this way since his first combat drop.

"Acknowledged, forming up on your five," Kamjin responded, as he flicked his power levels over to the engines. As the engines' hum increased he watched the power levels shift as he maneuvered into position. Simus formed up on Thran's seven and they prepared to ride the wave through the storm of battle.

What followed almost made Kamjin sick in his helmet. He'd been in hundreds of combat situations but Thran's didn't just defeat his enemies. He was gleeful in their torment. Precision shots that cracked the canopies and while the pilots struggled to pressurize their suits he'd flip around for the kill. He was more surgical than a droid disabling engines causing spin-outs leaving helpless pilots panicked as they spiraled into their friends before the resulting explosion consumed them all.

Except for dodging the anti-starfighter screen from the station Simus and Kamjin had relatively little to do as they approached the station. Thran bounced around like a Womprat dodging Tusken rifle fire taking out any ships that zeroed in on their approach. With a final spurt of laser fire he disabled the hangar controls moments before they breached the shield perimeter.

Whether it was skill or the Force, Thran leapt from his skidding TIE Defender, igniting his crimson blade as the TIE came to rest as if it was docked by hand. Kamjin and Simus had to

keep their hands on the stick to touchdown their ship. Popping the locks on the canopy they both emerged, blasters in hand, laying down suppression fire. Within moments the hangar was theirs.

"You two, get down here," Thran commanded with an annoyed tone.

"Ya, easy for you to say," Kamjin muttered as they began to climb down from their ships.

"What was that pilot?" Thran said. Kamjin had forgotten for a moment that Sith sometimes had amplified senses.

"Nothing, sir!" Kamjin snapped at attention. His carbine held across his chest in parade fashion. Thran stared into Kamjin's helmeted face. Whether he simply saw his reflection or was peering deeper into Kamjin's soul Kamjin couldn't tell.

"Good, very good. With me," Thran said, satisfied with whatever it was he saw. Kamjin and Simus moved towards the seal door from the hangar to the rest of the station. It didn't take them long to realize Thran wasn't with them. Looking around they saw Thran running his hand against the wall on the opposite side from them. Kamjin and Simus exchanged confused looks as the Sith pierced the wall with his lightsaber. Molten metal glowed amber as it slowly dripped from the cut the Sith was not making. The two pilots joined up with Thran.

"Sir?" Simus prompted, seeking an understanding of what was happening. Thran ignored him as he completed the impromptu door. Stepping back, Thran threw out his empty hand and the portion of the wall flew inward, revealing a cargo hold. Thran stepped through as if he was strolling through a park and hadn't just breached a secure room with a glowing rod of death.

Kamjin and Simus followed in perfect breach formation. They scanned the room with their carbines and illuminated their tactical lights. The room was a typical cargo room. Crates were stacked along most of the walls with rows of boxes and assorted equipment on shelves. Before Kamjin could start taking in any markings for what was contained within, Thran had already begun ripping things off the shelves.

"Sir, if you tell us what you're looking for we could help search," Kamjin said.

"I don't need your help. Watch the doors," Thran snapped back.

"Roger," Kamjin said, trying to keep the creeping disgust from tainting his voice. He tightened his grip and hoisted his carbine higher, settling it nicely into his shoulder. While the alarm klaxons blared so far there had been no signs of resistance. Either the station crew were trying to evacuate or were too busy trying to keep the rest of the assault from getting closer to deal with the three of them. Kamjin didn't like it. There should be some response by now.

"Ah, here it is!" Thran exclaimed, cutting the tension in the room. "It doesn't look so impressive." He was holding a dagger. With the exception of the dirty emerald gem on the pommel it looked like any other ornate dagger. Its guard seemed shaped like a familiar symbol but Kamjin couldn't quite place it. The gold inlay was beautiful but didn't seem to add any function.

"Sir, we came for a dagger?" Simus asked.

"Did we come for a dagger," Thran said mockingly. "Mind your business and watch the door." This time, as if Thran's rage had willed conflict to the area, a squad of soldiers burst into the hangar. Spotting the gaping hole in the wall they began to lay down suppressive fire. Kamjin and Simus crouched by the opening, peeking out quickly to squeeze off a few rounds before ducking back behind the cover.

"Sir, if you're going to do something, now is the time," Kamjin said, sticking his blaster into the hole and firing wildly.

"What does it do? How does it work?" Thran said out loud. Kamjin had the sickenly feeling that he was talking to the dagger itself.

"Sir, it's just a blade, we could use you and your lightsaber," Simus said, oblivious to Thran's distraction.

"What's that…oh, I see. So that's how it is. Are you sure?" Thran continued. His eyes were glazed over. In a mechanical, stuttering, step, he advanced on the two pinned down TIE Pilots.

"Sir, if you can take point we'll push them back," Simus said, letting loose another spray of fire.

"Yes, of course," Thran said, reaching out with his free hand and lifting the TIE Pilot off the ground. Before Simus had time to do anything other than struggle, the blade had been buried into his heart. Slicing clean through his chest piece the blade struck smoother than even the Lightsaber.

Kamjin looked over following his latest blast and saw his friend bleeding out on the Warlord's blade. Rage built up inside him and a resistance to the status quo that had never been there. A gut-retching scream escaped his mouth as he screamed, "No!" He turned his blaster on the Sith and fired. The blaster bolts were batted away effortlessly by the Sith's lightsaber. Kamjin rushed blindly at the Sith, enough was enough. They couldn't just kill his friend. Not like this. Not here. Not for a worthless old blade.

Thran was no more bothered by Kamjin than a Gundark by a fly. "Oh, that's not enough," Thran said as he removed the blade from Simus's chest. The blood disappeared into the blade as the emerald pommel glowed and picked up a reddish hue. Kamjin brought the butt of the carbine down onto Thran's temple. The Sith turned with the blow, absorbing the impact but not staggering backwards. Kamjin turned to bring the barrel under the Sith's chin to finish the job but he felt his body fail him. The blaster dropped from his hands as he reached down to his gut to find the hilt of the dagger had been buried into him.

His mind couldn't fathom what was happening. That shouldn't be there, he thought. Trembling he tried to raise his hands to choke the life from the Sith. His hands struggled to find their grasp on his neck as his own blood had made his gloves slick.

"Hmm, there's more fight in you than your companion. In another life, perhaps you could have been my apprentice if you had been blessed with the Force. As it is, you're just another stepping stone in my own ascension," Thran said. As he withdrew the blade he pushed Kamjin's lifeless body to the ground.

"Ah, that makes you happy," Thran said to the blade. "Let's see if we can make you happier."