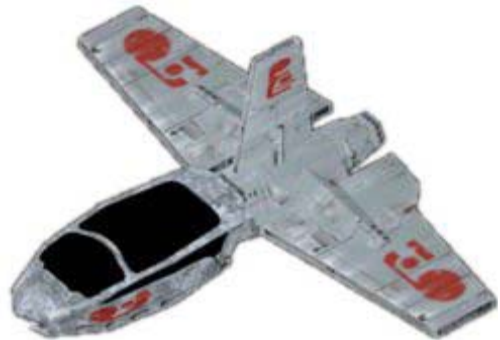


*Satunda, 13 Yelona, 1 ABY*

It was cold when Dory Menzane woke up. It was always cold in hell holes like this. Dory didn't like having to spend the night on space platforms, but sometimes you simply had no alternative. He had been delivering supplies to a junk dealer in the Ruani sector, and it was simply not possible to make the jump back to Agrass in one day. The distance was too great for his starfighter to make the jump.

Dory and his brother Kalen had been flying escort duty for one of their mother's cargo Corvettes, the *Axe Destiny*. Though the Corvette was armed, his mother preferred to send two escorts along. These were dangerous times. Dory remembered having a small, hidden family celebration when they heard rumours that the Empire's newest weapon had been destroyed by the struggling Rebel Alliance. Even if it was just a rumour, it was time to celebrate. Even though they all had a very hard time believing it was actually true, a superweapon that could destroy a planet in a single blast. But Kette, an old friend, had taken his ship to Alderaan to see for himself the planet was no longer there.

Reluctantly, Dory stood up, and put on his clothes. He grabbed his bag, and went out the door of his room, somewhere on the lower decks of the platform. He quickly made his way to the hangar bay, avoiding contact with the rag tag of aliens you usually found here. Some of them were smugglers, others were on the run, but mostly, they were all people you didn't want to get involved with. He made it to the hangar without running into any unfriendly visitors, and walked straight up to his old Pinook fighter. The fighter was old and battered, and had seen a lot of battle in its time. A few months ago, when his mother had bought the two Pinooks to replace the Toscans, he had tried to clean it up and restore some of the beauty it once had, but that had proven to be a very useless way to spend time. Instead he had just painted the family crest on the nose of the fighter, and painted his callsign below the canopy. Callsign was a big word of course, he'd never actually had one, but when he once suggested to his mother to not use their real names in comm traffic, she had agreed to the idea. Since then, in space he was no longer Dory Menzane, he was Yavrock.



"You ready to go home, little brother?" he heard a familiar voice say, as he felt a hand on his shoulder. Kalen had walked up behind him, and he hadn't even heard! He really needed to work on that. Such negligence could get you killed.

"As ready as I was the moment we set foot here. I wanna get out, and I'd rather do it now than in an hour."

Kalen nodded. He, too, was not fond of places like this. "I'll have a talk with Uncle Kendo," he said as he walked off. Dory watched him go. Kendo was a friend of their mother's, and captain of the three-man crew of their Corvette. He was in charge of the mission, and they couldn't really leave without him. Dory walked up to his fighter, and popped the canopy open. He climbed up onto the wing, and opened a small cargo hatch that his mother had custom-installed. He dumped his bag and sealed the hatch. He jumped off the wing, and walked around his fighter, checking

for problems, or things that were different from his inspection round the night before.

By the time he finished, Kalen, Kendo, and the other crewmembers of the *Axe Destiny* had walked in and were talking. When Kendo noticed Dory, he waved his hand, and Dory quickly ran over.

"Morning kid," Kendo began. "I was just telling Kalen here that we'll be home in five more jumps. Dreen here has made the hyperspace calculations for all, but we'll need some time to verify the calculations for the next leg everytime we go back to realspace. We wouldn't wanna be flying into no star on the way home." People chuckled. It sounded funny, but it was dreadfully real. One small error in the calculation, and you could pass too closely to a star, where its massive gravitational influence would just pull you out of hyperspace. If you were lucky, you'd be so close, or actually came back to realspace inside the star, so that you'd hardly know. A little less luck, and you'd be trapped well outside the star's corona, but well inside its gravity well, and you could spend the next four hours waiting until your ship finally was devoured by the star. Not something Dory was particularly looking forward too. There were no questions after the little briefing, and so everyone went on their way. Kalen and Dory nested themselves into their cockpits, while Kendo and his two crewmembers were ferried over to the *Axe Destiny*. By the time they started the Corvette's sublight engines, Dory and Kalen were flying loops around the station.

"*Axe Destiny* to Gewaro Control, request clearance for take off," came Kendo's voice over the radio. Dory turned his Pinook towards the Corvette and waited for the response. "*Axe Destiny*, you're cleared. Please proceed on vector two two niner delta until you reach five clicks, then you're cleared to jump."

Kendo confirmed, and Dory saw the Corvette slowly drift away from the space platform. When it cleared 50 meters, he could see the glow of the engines intensify, and the *Axe* slowly started to move forward. After a few seconds, it also started to climb above the platform and they were finally on their way.

"Kalen, Dory, we're transmitting the coordinates for the jumps now. Set up your nav computers for jump one, and confirm."

Dory watched his screens, and after a second or so, numbers started rolling. He punched some buttons on the console, and saw the nav computer download the first set of coordinates. Three seconds later, a light went green as the computer had locked the coordinates and configured the hyperdrive.

"Yavrock, confirm," he said, and almost at the same time Kalen also confirmed.

"Good," Kendo said. "Be ready, we jump in forty seconds."

Dory glanced through his canopy at the Corvette to his left. They were flying in formation, with the Corvette in the middle, Kalen on its left, and Dory on its right. He liked the slender forms of the Corvette, and hoped one day he would be captain of one himself. Then a buzz went off, and he hit the hyperspace lever. Just before the stars turned into starlines and he entered the well of light, he noticed the Corvette making the jump too.

Finally, they were on their way home.