

Imperial-II Star Destroyer *Hammer*, First Recon Division, *Emperor's Hammer* Strike Fleet. 30 ABY.

The following continues the events that took place in *Blurred Lines* #1.

-“*Well...*” Starfire tugged down his gaberwool tunic –“*That went well after all*”. He tried to break the silence as the other two along with him, headed straight into the turbolift where their CMDR was waiting on both the elevator and the group. Blackheart’s eyes turned to scowl the younger officer –“*Keep your...tastes to yourself*”. The man wanted to leave the incident behind. As any good drill officer, he couldn’t find the fun even on a Gungan circus. Once they met their CMDR, all of them silently entered the turbolift.

- “*I now fully understand why you stepped down*”, Araujo himself broke the silence staring at Pryde. –“*Actually, why you two stepped down*” deviating his look at Horus and tightening his lip. None of them replied but Pryde sighed heavily. CMDRship might look like a brilliant spot but it has a fair share of harsh realities and quite a lot of burden over those who dare taking on the job. Still, Pryde is one, if not the one, that lasted longer on the post – more than 6 years in one tour of duty and he had 3 ToDs. Araujo wanted to honor the man’s dedication to the squadron...*but at what price?* He wondered often.

Compared to the upper deck, this entry hallway had a triangle-shaped section and had a smaller height. Subtle ways to communicate you were on lower decks Araujo thought. –“*Follow me*”. He dryly addressed the rest.

As they walked down the corridor, the blast doors opened and two officers came in. COL Genie and LCM Hopfot were on their way back to the turbolift. Araujo rose an eyebrow. Pryde and Horus rose both. The well mannered, gracious Colonel received the group with a smile as they approached, came to a halt and saluted the CMDR of Lambda squadron with the other two returning the salutation. Horus was trying to hide his disdain and mildly embarrassment for the entire situation, Pryde was glad their brother in arms was free, Starfire just wanted to be dismissed and head to his quarters for some sleep and Araujo felt startled and relieved that Genie actually had the courtesy of doing the paperwork for him...somehow.

-“*Colonel, I presume you cleared Lieutenant Commander Hopfot’s situation?*”

-“*I just reported he actually enforced the safety of the ship in a...rather creative way*” replied Genie still with a faint smile. Genie had a knack for problem-solving, enough to be considered as a candidate for the ISB’s Surveillance branch back when there was an ISB Araujo thought. More often than not he actively supported Admiral Berkana in day-to-day operations. He could also be the closest thing to a Wing Commander with his active leadership amongst other CMDRs.

Araujo decided to have the courtesy to return the faint smile -“*I suppose I should thank you for clearing the incident*” he replied. *How embarrassing, now I owe you a favor*, he thought. He didn’t like to be on the recipient side of a favor as he knew he wasn’t sure if he could return the favor. *You can control what you do but you can’t control what others do, what others need and what others will ask you.*

Suddenly, he felt a vibration on his right leg. His datapad came with a notification and after pulling it off the pocket and check it, he decided he had to make a mental note or at least try to remember long enough till he was able to write it down on his datapad. *I can't jump all the way back home just to buy more eggs for my parents but I won't feel better unless I help them. I'll make a credits transfer later.* Taking care of his parents was a priority. He loved them but sometimes this restrained him from further action to the point of avoiding unnecessary risks to his life not just for tactical or strategic reasons, but to avoid suffering to his parents. He hated delivering bad news and the loss of a son is something he didn't want them to suffer. Possibly, the biggest hindrance in his life.

Genie interrupted his thoughts –*“No problem, I was with him and I'd have done the same, he just went ahead of me”*. Waving his right hand, almost casually dismissing this incident as unimportant. The man also clearly dispensed Hopfot some support with this gesture. Genie often interceded to solve differences among the pilot roster and sometimes between pilots and command. –*“We all would have done the same”* added Pryde with a look of acceptance. –*“Thank you sirs”* conceded Hopfot with a smile.

Araujo patted the man on his shoulder – *“You did nothing wrong in our humble opinion, but you know, the rules here...”*. Horus couldn't help but frown upon those rules. *You know the rules and so do I*, he mentally told Hopfot. His idea of a positive environment was one of constant drilling, that is, whenever they wouldn't be in action.

Turning their way back, the group headed back to the turbolift on their way out of the detention cell's deck.

The Hammer's lounge was Alpha's preferred place to hang out. Sure, the squadrons had their barracks, the FLs (now FL and SQXO) had their offices and the CMDR had his own office plus a small conference room where they convene. An armory, and a battle analysis holotable were also available for their assignments.

-*“Let's have some snacks”* Pryde said cheerfully, turning to look at Araujo for permission. Araujo looked back at Pryde, nodding approvingly. The men around him dispersed, moving towards the dispenser machine on the west wall, while Araujo headed towards a cuf dispenser next to it. This time, his comlink alerted him of an incoming transmission and he really hoped it wasn't trouble. Fortunately, it was Ty Seerlan, one of the latest pilots who joined the unit. Seerlan seemed a diligent man in Araujo's eyes, presenting a very decent activity on flight simulations. He warned he could be requesting a leave soon for personal reasons discussing them a bit, and wanted to notify his CMDR. Araujo acknowledged the information and appreciated the gesture. He was concerned the man would just retire as most recent recruits have done prior to the *long journey*. He turned off his comlink hoping for a quiet moment.

And then, trouble seemed to arise when the dispenser machine begun sparkling.

-*“Look at what you did!”*

-*“I didn't do anything, I just pushed this button!”*

*-“You broke it! Now we have to wait for the dispenser to be fixed. No more snacks!”*

Hopfot and Horus started an exchange in mere seconds. *–“Enough kids, enough!” Araujo yelled “What’s going on here? Can I have ten minutes of peace? This isn’t an arena. This is an Imperial Star Destroyer and I won’t accept fights between ...”*

He couldn’t even finish the sentence; the voice of Admiral Berkana could be heard across the ships comm-systems. *Now what? Aww sithspawn, please, please! No more trouble!* He mentally implored, staring in the direction of the speakers. The rest of the occupants on the lounge did the same; the room went silent as the ship Commodore spoke. Hopfot and Horus dropped their argument as if they were reprogrammed droids.

*-“This is Admiral Berkana. We have a new directive. Would Alpha and Lambda CMDRs please report to the bridge?”*

*- “Woo action!” cheerfully exclaimed Hopfot with Starfire joining the brief celebration –“Yeah woot!”*

*-“At last...” Horus added with a very faint smile.*

*-“But I don’t want to” said Pryde but nobody could tell whether the man was being ironic or not.*

*Araujo’s face was expressionlessly looking at nowhere. Maybe here’s when I die...*