

## Our Ship

Zekk looked in the bedroom mirror as he buttoned his jacket. He watched Elissa wrapping a gem studded wrap around her lekku. She only brought it out for special occasions. Zekk was very flattered. Little Henry sat on the floor next to her, thoroughly chewing on a plush TIE pilot. Now that he was teething, he was chewing on anything and everything in sight. Unfortunately, this meant that neither of them were sleeping well. He woke up regularly to nurse if he wasn't in pain. Elissa was visibly exhausted.

"Babe, can you get this top button under my neck?" said Zekk. Elissa walked up from behind and, reaching over his shoulders, slid the button into place under his jacket. Zekk's medals jingled, his lone Gold Star of the Empire shining against the light, as he put his boot on the chair to lace it, then straightened back up. She put her arms around Zekk's chest from behind. Zekk was far from tall, but Elissa was considerably shorter as her head only went up to his shoulders. She peeked around his arms to meet his gaze in the mirror.

"Stop being anxious. I can feel it," she said.

"I'm not anxi -- wait what?" Zekk said, turning around to look at her.

She rolled her eyes. "No, not like how you can feel it. But your anxiety is very palpable," she said.

"It's not anxiety. It's just...now I'm responsible for more than 11 people. I'm responsible for an entire battlegroup. Thousands upon thousands of crew, support personnel, and pilots. It's a huge responsibility," said Zekk.

"Mhm," said Elissa. She grabbed Zekk by the waist and turned him around to look him in the face, her lavender eyes standing out sharply against her blue skin. "And there's a reason Rapier picked you to do it."

"Good point," said Zekk. He looked across the bedroom at Henry, who was very engrossed in his TIE pilot doll. "C'mon babe, let's get him dressed."

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Zekk, Elissa, and Henry had moved into the Commodore's quarters last week. They were still unpacking. It was a spacious, 1500 square foot apartment with full laundry, kitchen, and two bedrooms, one of which they had turned into a nursery for Henry. Elissa had received special dispensation from the Fleet Commander to bring her son and travel with Zekk due to the heroics they both displayed at the Battle of Aurora during her attempted abduction. She had a small office space in the corner of their bedroom where she continued her research, and a full lab and staff near the hangar bay. Their living quarters was a stone's throw from the bridge, where Zekk could report in case of emergency.

Zekk had accepted the position several weeks ago and had spent the time preparing. His new uniform, complete with the gold piping of the admiralty, had been delivered. All that remained to be attached to it was his rank badge, but he had yet to receive his commission into the admiralty. That was to happen today.

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Inside Zekk's quarters, B-33R stood at the sink washing dishes. He had finally achieved the dream of his programming -- sort of. He longed to be the personal aide of the Commodore. He thought all this time he'd be running strategic analysis and calculations. Instead he washed dishes and vacuumed. Still, it was better than serving swill to imbecile stormtroopers. He still blamed them for the fall of the Empire. The buzzer at the door sounded.

"Beer, would you get that for me? We're almost ready!" Zekk shouted from the bedroom.

"Yes sir," said Beer. He sauntered over to answer the door. Seeing on the security cameras that it was Hav Antiel, he obediently opened the door. "Good morning, General."

"Good morning, Beer. Are they ready yet?" said Hav.

"The Terrik family shall be ready momentarily. Please, come in. Commander Firebreaker is here already. Shall I get you something?" said Beer, as he stepped aside to allow Hav entry.

"Just a water, please," said Hav. He sat down on the couch, out of habit as far as possible from Firebreaker's massive frame. Firebreaker, as stoic as ever, turned to meet Hav's gaze and nodded, before returning to watching pod racing on TV.

"I have last month's salary on this race," said Firebreaker.

"Which racer?" replied Hav.

"The Gungan one who is still sitting in the pit, whose droids are currently dismantling his engines," sighed Firebreaker. He leaned forward and sipped his water. After a while sitting there, Hav noticed something. No...he noticed a lack of something as Beer brought his water.

"Commander Firebreaker, did you bathe?" said Hav incredulously. He leaned forward and looked at Firebreaker's curly golden fur. "And comb your fur?"

Firebreaker nodded. "Wookiees often, as you humans say, 'clean up' for special formal occasions, especially when it involves other cultures. Miss Val'Asha combed my fur. By doing so, I bring honor to the Terrik family and to my own tribe by honoring my lifedebt to them."

"I...see," said Hav. "Well, you look very nice." Firebreaker nodded and mumbled something in Shirriwook.

Zekk and Elissa emerged from the bedroom. Zekk was wearing his full dress uniform and ever-present lightsaber. Elissa was wearing a form-fitting, single strap black dress that went to just above her ankles with matching heels and her gem studded lekku wrap. She was also wearing Henry in a wrap about her body and carrying a diaper bag, who was wearing a TIE pilot onesie and continuing to chew on his doll. Henry turned his head to look at Hav and gave him a drooling, two-toothed grin. Hav and Firebreaker stood up, turning off the TV.

"Morning buddy," said Zekk as he shook hands with Hav. Elissa gave him a hug. "Everyone ready to go?"

"Yep," said Hav. "Elissa, you look amazing. When are you going to make an honest woman out of her, Zekk?"

"I swear, Hav, if you ask me that question one more time, I'll make an honest woman out of you first," Zekk glared.

Elissa laughed. "I look like a bantha crapped on a Hutt, Hav, but you're sweet to say so," said Elissa. Zekk laughed, expecting no less from her. Hav was still getting used to her brusqueness, and raised his eyebrows.

Beer interjected as he brought a tray over to collect their drinks. "Sir, your stormtrooper escort is outside and your shuttle is ready to take you to the Sovereign."

They headed for the door and as they went into the hallway, their stormtrooper escort fell into formation around them. Now that Zekk was the Commodore of an infamous ship well known to the New Republic and enemies of the Empire, his security was a real concern. Assassinations and abductions of the command staff of key ships was not uncommon, and the Republic was nothing if not an illegitimate government full of terrorists willing to use any means to achieve their goals.

After some time and a few repulsorlift rides, they reached the hangar bay where Zekk's shuttle awaited. Zekk noted a group of pilots gathered around his shuttle as they approached. As Zekk drew closer, one of them nudged another and pointed.

"Ten-shun!" shouted their commander, Robert Hogan. "Sinners, fall in!" The squadron formed up alongside the ramp to the shuttle and saluted in unison. Hav, Zekk, and Firebreaker returned their salutes.

"Sir, with your permission, Sin Squadron would be honored to escort you to the Sovereign and bring you home safely," said Robert Hogan.

"I appreciate the gesture, Commander, but I believe Sin is currently scheduled for combat patrol, are you not? Security is always our top concern," replied Zekk.

"Rho Squadron is already in the air, Colonel," said Hav from behind him. Zekk turned to look at Hav then, slowly leaning to the side to look around his shuttle, looking out into the vacuum of space beyond the hangar's energy field. Sure enough, he could see TIE Interceptors on patrol. "General Frown authorized it."

Zekk smiled at his old squadron, looking out at the row of familiar faces. Coremy, Jack, Exar Kit, Dune Thrallick, Mordechi Wolfe, Rando and his itchy trigger finger, Sin's former commander Earnim Branet. Guys he had flown with, guys who had saved his life, and whose life he had saved. Elissa reached out and squeezed his hand, smiling up at him, touched by Sin's display for her man.

"Nothing would make me feel safer than a squadron of TIE Sinisters on my wing. Get to your ships, Sinners," said Zekk.

It was a good thing he said that when he did, because Sin was almost too eager to break attention. They broke for their ships before their commander could even dismiss them. Heading up the ramp, Zekk met his pilot at the landing. They saluted each other.

"Welcome aboard, sir. I am Lieutenant Orosi. I will have the honor of taking you to and from your commissioning ceremony. Please make yourself comfortable. We are anticipating a smooth ride, especially with Sin following us," said the young lieutenant. Zekk and crew strapped themselves in and lifted off cleanly. Outside the viewports, the TIE Sinisters, in their jet black paneling, were still almost barely visible, only the dim red glow from their cockpits giving hint that they were ever there. Sitting next to Elissa, Zekk suddenly heard Henry grunt, and a loud rumble coming from his rear. The stench almost immediately became pervasive. Elissa leaned her head back against the paneling and groaned.

"This kid is a crap factory, I swear," said Elissa.

Firebreaker nodded. "His stench would fell the mightiest of ancient Wookiee warriors."

Zekk laughed, finding the whole thing amusing, and reached for him. "Here, give him to me," he said. Elissa unwrapped him and handed him to Zekk, a look of gratitude in her eyes as she didn't have to deal with it for once. Zekk rolled up his sleeves and got to work changing a diaper, placing Henry's borderline toxic waste into one of the bags they brought, and wiping him clean. Handing him back to Elissa, he looked around.

"Err, Lieutenant, where would you like me to put this?" Zekk inquired.

Lieutenant Orosi had already put his shirt over his nose in an attempt to block the smell. "Just put it in the airlock, sir, and I'll eject it. With any luck it will splatter on the window of the Hammer," he responded. Zekk did as instructed, then shut the door. Hearing the depressurization and a loud thump as the airlock light came on, Zekk nodded and returned to his seat as they approached the Sovereign.

The TIE Sinisters flanking the shuttle banked away as they entered the hangar, entering combat patrol around the ship as they waited for Zekk to return. Zekk absently

wished he could have had Orosi in his squadron, and considered retaining him as his personal shuttle pilot. He made a mental note of it. The guy could land a shuttle as cleanly as anyone he'd ever seen.

Zekk's party met another stormtrooper escort at the bottom of the ramp and headed to the auditorium hall. While this was typically an auditorium used by the Fleet Commander to address the Fleet or for command meetings, it was often used under capacity for things like commissionings. A stormtrooper flanking the entrance saluted, and Zekk returned the salute as they opened the door. On the dais were most of the big-shot admirals from the fleet – Vice Admiral John T. Clark and Admiral Miles Prower from the TIE Corps Command Staff, most of the assembled command staff of the fleet, and Grand Admiral Rapier in full dress uniform, his Medal of Honor shining brightly against the white of the uniform. Flanking him was the commander of the TIE Corps, Fleet Admiral Plif.

Zekk approached the dais. There were plenty of salutes all around, and introductions. Rapier even spent a few minutes holding Henry before Henry attempted to eat his Medal of Honor. Most of the admiralty finally got to meet Elissa, whom Zekk purposely kept out of military politics as she preferred to just keep to herself and do her research.

“Well, let’s get this show on the road. Are you ready, Zekk?” said Rapier.

Zekk nodded. “I am, sir.”

Rapier raised his hand above his head. “Everyone, please be quiet. Let’s get this ceremony started. Zekk, did you bring what you needed?”

Zekk nodded. “I did, sir. Elissa, give me that book from the bag,” Zekk said. Zekk was not a particularly religious person, but he was spiritual. Most commissionings happened on a religious text, but instead Zekk brought a specific book that had meaning to him. Elissa reached into her bag and removed a very old looking book. It was leather bound, with the spine slowly coming apart, and threading at the bottom. This was a journal Zekk kept at the very beginning of his Jedi training. In it, he had recorded his thoughts as he battled constantly between the Light and the Dark Side. His connection to all aspects of the Force him were dearer to him than any religious text. Elissa unwrapped Henry and Zekk gave him one more hug and kiss. Henry attempted to steal Zekk’s lightsaber.

“Hav, hold him for me, please,” said Elissa. She handed Henry to Hav, who still held Henry like he was made of glass. “Support for his neck, for crying out loud!”

“Oops, sorry,” said Hav. He cradled the base of Henry’s head as he held him up to see his father.

“Zekk, please place your left hand on the book and raise your right hand towards Elissa,” said Rapier. Zekk did so, looking Elissa straight in the eye. Neither one of them could contain their smile.

“Colonel Zekk Terrik, do you solemnly swear to support and defend the Galactic Empire and Emperor’s Hammer Strike Fleet against all enemies, foreign and domestic, that you will bear true faith and allegiance to the same, that you will obey all lawful orders from the officers appointed over you, and that you will, if needed, give your life in defense of your men, your ship, and your Empire?” said Rapier.

“I do,” said Zekk.

“So help you?” replied Grand Admiral Rapier.

“So help me,” replied Zekk, biting his lip as he watched Elissa’s eyes sparkle.

“Then by the power vested in me by the Galactic Empire and the military authority of Aurora Prime, I hereby grant you a commission into the admiralty of the Emperor’s Hammer Strike Fleet, and elevate you to the rank of Rear Admiral and Commodore of the ISD Warrior,” replied Rapier. He stuck out his hand. “Congratulations, Rear Admiral Terrik.”

Zekk got exactly one pump into the handshake before being literally glomped by Elissa. Luckily, she was short, and only staggered him a couple steps as he picked her up to hug her. Out of nowhere a champagne cork hit Zekk in the side of the head and most of the admirals proceeded to shower him with it. Commander Firebreaker let out a Wookiee roar that shook the room and made a couple stormtroopers poke their heads in to make sure everything was okay.

I'm glad I have two of these uniforms, thought Zekk. I just had this one cleaned.

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There was a small reception after the ceremony with the rest of the admiralty after the commissioning, lasting right around an hour. These were always typically brief, as a lot of them had much work to do. After the ceremony, Zekk boarded the shuttle for the flight back to the Warrior, wearing his Rear Admiral's rank badge this time. Lieutenant Orosi saluted as Zekk entered the sitting area.

"Welcome aboard, Rear Admiral. It is my honor to return you to your ship," he said.

Zekk returned the salute. "Thank you, Lieutenant. I will contact your commanding officer after this, I would love to have you put on retainer as my personal shuttle pilot," Zekk replied.

Lieutenant Orosi took his seat as he responded. "I would love that, thank you sir," Orosi replied. He leaned into the comms, making an all-channel hail across the fleet. "Attention all, this is shuttle Eagle aboard the Sovereign. We are now transporting the Commodore of the Warrior, our IFF code will now read as Warrior One."

Zekk heard the familiar voice of Commander Hogan over the comms. "Copy that, Warrior One. Sin Squadron is right outside your door," he replied.

Zekk felt pretty safe with an entire squadron TIE Sinisters flanking his shuttle, and rightfully so, the flight was uneventful. As Zekk returned to the Warrior's area of space, he looked out the window at his battlegroup, at all the ships under his charge. In his head, he was already calculating plans for changes. Elissa nudged him.

"What are you thinking about?" she said. Zekk turned and looked at her. He smiled. He had the rest of this rotation off to spend with his family. His job officially started tomorrow.

"Nothing. Just living in the moment," said Zekk.

As Warrior One descended into the hangar bay and lowered its ramp, Zekk's stormtrooper escort met him in the hangar bay. Firebreaker turned to Zekk. "Sir, with your permission, I'd prefer to join Rho out on patrol," he said.

"As you wish, Commander," said Zekk. The three of them watched Firebreaker run off, before Elissa turned back to the group.

"I'm going to get Henry down for a nap, he's had a big day. Hav, will you join us for dinner tonight? Jack is making roast leg of tauntaun for the family," she said.

Hav nodded. "Sure, I'd love that."

"We'll see you at about 18:00, if that works?" said Zekk. Hav nodded again. Elissa gave him a hug and a kiss on the cheek, and she left with Henry for the Commodore's quarters. Zekk watched her walk away.

"Hey, Zekk," said Hav from behind. Zekk turned his head to a very serious look from Hav. "You take care of my ship and my men. This is where the action gets real now," said Hav, with a very stoic look on his face.

Zekk couldn't help but laugh as he put his hand on Hav's shoulders. "It's our ship, buddy. And our men. Don't forget that. I'll see you at dinner," said Zekk. He ran off to catch up with Elissa.