

JEC'S ESCAPE

Jec was running through the corridors. Running fast. Which is kind of normal, considering the sirens that were going off all around him. Jec was feeling a bit of a panic coming up. When he'd taken the job aboard a passenger liner, he'd expected easy money. Easy job, little work. How wrong he was. He was working double the hours he'd bargained for, the average passenger was a pain in the ass, and no one told him he had to pay for his own fare, quarters and food out of his paycheck. And now this.

He rounded a corner and smacked right into someone. Stumbling to the floor, he looked up into the face of one of the passengers. "Look where you're going you stupid cow," he blurted out. Without waiting for a response, he scrambled back onto his feet and resumed his run. The passenger was swearing loudly behind him. Something about reporting him to the Captain. Good luck with that.

Now Jec didn't know exactly what was going on, the announcement that had been made earlier had been barely audible because of the sirens and alarms going off. But this wasn't good. He jumped down a flight of stairs onto the third passenger deck. He looked around him, pondering which was the best way to go. He made a swift decision, and went right. Why hadn't he bothered studying the ship schematics when he was told to. Well, too late for that now.

Fortunately, he'd taken the right path as he came upon a large door. The symbol on the door was a circle with two people stick figures in it. Jec smiled. He grabbed his crew-pas and unlocked the door. He went in and shut the door behind him again. Something was wrong. For a moment, Jec freaked, but then he realized it was the silence. No sirens. He smiled. He walked down the corridor, until he found a large hatch marked 01. He looked at it, wondering if this was the right choice. Maybe he was over reacting.

An explosion somewhere on the ship shook the floor and almost made him lose his balance. He steadied himself against the hatch. Nope, definitely not over reacting. He hit a button and the hatch slid open. Jec stepped inside and looked around. The small room had 10 seats in it, all with safety belts installed. He closed the hatch, and sat down in the seat in the front. The one with the window looking into the vast darkness of space. The one that gave its occupant access to a small control panel. He sat down and strapped himself in. He closed his eyes and took a deep breath. Then he touched the large green square on the control panel.

For a moment, nothing seemed to happen. Then the escape pod was blown into space. The sudden acceleration pushed Jec back into his seat. Initially, the escape pod travelled in a straight line, but soon it started tumbling. Jec's fingers raced across the control panel, and he heard thrusters fire. A few seconds later, the escape pod stopped its barrel roll and Jec relaxed. He opened his eyes again.

In the distance he could see the shape of the luxury liner *Athropedis*. The huge passenger ship, capable of carrying over 20,000 passengers and a full crew of almost 800, was clearly visible. And burning. To its left, a large, grey hulk. Something Jec had never seen, but recognized instantly. An Imperial Star Destroyer. Jec's eyes opened wide. Green turbo laser fire strafed the passenger liner, and explosions were clearly visible, even at this distance.

"What the..." Jec mumbled to himself. His mind raced a million scenarios, but nothing he could come up with explained why the Empire was attacking a civilian ship. An unarmed civilian ship. And it sure didn't look like they were being neighborly, they seemed dead-set on destroying it, killing all 20,000 (excuse him, 20,800) people on board.

Well, minus 1 that is, Jec thought as he remembered he was out of the danger zone. For a minute or more, he was mesmerized by the sight playing out before his eyes. Then he realized he was far from out of the danger zone. The liner had the Star Destroyer occupied, but from the looks of it that would be taking a whole lot of time. He turned away and glanced back over his control panel. Once again, his fingers touched controls, and the escape pod slowly turned away from the battle, and towards a small green planet below. Jec had passed the planet dozens of times during his stay aboard the *Athropedis*, but he didn't know its name. He didn't even know if the planet had a name. He fired up the thrusters, and slowly the escape pod accelerated towards the planet. Jec hoped the natives were friendly.

A dark shape shot past him. At least, Jec thought he saw something in the corner of his eye. He looked up and looked around through the transparisteel window. He couldn't see much, just a few stars and darkness. But then a second shape shot over him, right through his field of vision. Jec frowned. It appeared to be a ball-shaped object between rectangular shapes. Two pricks of light seemed to indicate engines. A cold shiver ran down his spine as he guessed this was a TIE Fighter. The Empire's dreaded worker bee. It veered off and left his escape pod behind.

Getting slightly worried, Jec increased the pod's velocity. The sooner he was planetside, the better, he figured. The next moment, a green streak of light shot past him. Followed by a few more, before the TIE Fighter again overshot the escape pod. Getting more than slightly worried, Jec pushed the small thrusters on the escape pod to their limits. They were shooting at him. They were actually shooting at him. Some stupid Imperial TIE pilot was shooting at an escape pod!

Jec punched up the controls, and started flying an erratic pattern, in hope of evading the TIE's laser fire. In reality of course, the escape pod was making slow, deliberate course changes. After all, an escape pod isn't a starfighter, and so it's not designed to be flown in erratic patterns. It's actually designed not to do so, as it's primary function is to keep the passengers safe. Which means flying a very predictable pattern, not an erratic one.

Jec didn't realize this, as his slightly worried state of mind had grown into a full blown panic. In his mind, he was making the escape pod perform the most outrageous maneuvers, to prevent the TIE pilot to get a solid lock on him. In his mind, he would outfly the Imperial, until he entered atmosphere. TIE Fighters weren't designed for atmospheric flight, it wouldn't be able to follow him. Would it?

Jec would never find out how wrong he was. The TIE pilot, annoyed at himself for having to make a second run at shooting down an escape pod, was determined not to miss again. If his squad mates were to learn his first attack run produced a volley of near misses and not a single hit, he'd be the laughing stock of the *Indomitable*. And so he took his time.

Jec saw another green laserbolt shoot past him. The second shot, he never saw. It slashed into the rear of the escape pod, tearing the metal hull and breaking the vacuum seals. The third laser bolt tore through the cockpit, and through Jec as well. By the time the fourth laser bolt hit the escape pod, it was already in the process of vaporizing in a small explosion. The pursuing TIE Fighter made a sharp turn, and headed back towards the *Indomitable*. Job done.