

## ***Operation Breakout***

Colonel Jeron Darkonis Astoris smiled upon seeing Castle Stormraven. It wasn't quite the same as his ancestral home on Tatooine, but without his parents there, it was a more than acceptable substitute. His birth name was now only a distant memory. Even his previous name before this one seemed far in the distance. At 42, the man had returned from a stint in the reserves of the Emperor's Hammer to join Beta Squadron. Previously the Logistics Officer, he had retired to focus on the rebuilding of the Astorian Kingdom as well as to shore up its fleet and assist the EH Fleet wherever possible. But with that done, and a boiling desire to get back into the cockpit on a more regular basis again, he decided to come out of the reserves and leave the Astorian Kingdom in the capable hands of his adopted sister, Mairin, the Princess Reagent. He didn't "have to be there to be the king" she'd always said. Although some part of the former "Obiwan", a call sign still retained among his friends, wanted to go back into the command world, the thrill of the space battle called louder. But now, his friends Grand Admiral William "Rapier" McVicar, now the Fleet Commander, and Stefan "Ronin" Alvaak had called him to a secret mission. Ronin had convinced his fellow FC that he trusted no one else to do it and besides, since the Astorian Kingdom was outwardly neutral, but secretly loyal to the EH, he knew his former CA:FC could pull off this stunt better than anyone. His sister greeted him as he stepped out of the cockpit of his TIE Defender.

"Don't you miss your fancy X-wing, brother?" she asked, knowing the answer already.

"Yeah, but I can't exactly fly it around the Minos Cluster without raising some level of suspicion can I? Never mind that now. Load the Mineracer into the Tissaya, and fire up the engines. "

"You're bringing the Tiss into the Minos cluster? Brave. And yet after you just mentioned not wanting to be sus... I suppose you've a reason to be so conspicuous as to bring a ship characteristically used by the New Republic into Empire territory even if it's you commanding it?" said the Princess.

"First of all, she's not all that conspicuous since she's lathered with AKF Fatigues, second of all, yes, I do have a plan. We're going to steal a squadron of T-70's for the IW from the shipyards at Greeop. I doubt highly they'll look too closely at an AKF ship since they still operate under the false assumption of our neutral position between the

Imperial Remnants and the New Republic. Dark money's been well laundered for years right under the NR's noses straight to the EH." the King's retort had something of a condescending tone that made his sister narrow her eyes.

"You're not going to try the stunt I think you're going to try if you get into a sticky situation are you? We haven't tested the motivator under those conditions, Jeron. It could go critical and fail. Theoretically isn't probably, after all." she replied with an eyebrow now raised in suspicion.

"Hopefully, Mai, I won't have to. If everything goes to plan they won't look that closely and think we're trying to help them upgrade more of their ships again. Just like when I stole those leftover Defenders for the Hammer. They never even asked when I told them we had technical difficulties and most of them exploded." Jeron smiled at the princess.

"Right, just... be careful. I had to rebuild you once, I don't want to do it again." she said referring ominously to his battle with Sirrus sixteen years ago that left him near death even if his nemesis was actually dead.

"I know, sis. If I have to do it, Astoria is one of the jump points I have programmed into the computer. And I have another trick up my sleeve. You'll see." he said, lazily walking up the ramp to the hugely modified MC-75's interior.

Jeron was happy to see that the dock master had loaded his TIE Defender into the main hangar right next to the Mineracer, his Vertigo Class X-wing. The all black T65-B was a step above the older Rebel Alliance staple. He had named it after his friend and fellow pilot Donitz's favorite activity after his disappearance. Walking up to the bridge, he saw his "trick" making final preparations to depart. His droid RC380 was a hybrid of a protocol droid and the HK series assassin droid that might have been the best navigator in the entire Remnant overall.

"RC, let's get this bad girl moving. Stefan and Raps will be expecting us soon."

"You know, sire, I happen to agree with Lady Astoris' assessment of.." Darkonis cut him off.

"Can it. As I said, I plan to not need to do it. And for the last time, stop calling me sire. Colonel is now fine."

“As you wish, Colonel.” the droid replied taking off and heading for the nav point to Aurora.

### **Two Hours Later, Aurora Orbit**

“Where in Palpatine’s name is he?” Rapier asked, tapping his foot nervously.

“Patience, Rapier, most likely he’s grabbing an AKF cruiser or something to keep us inconspicuous. After all, we *are* stealing ships from Republic territory. Doesn’t work if we go in the Hammer or something, does it?” Ronin remained confident in his former CA’s abilities.

“Admiral Rapier, sir? There’s an MC-75 just out of hyperspace headed toward us, but it’s like no other MC-75 I’ve ever seen. Engines look bigger and it appears to have more gun placements than standard. Also, the identification marks are a pattern I’ve never seen before.” Colonel Stryker, newly minted as the first commander of the new IW stood with his arms crossed behind his back.

“Gotta be him, but let’s be safe. Colonel, order the ship to identify and transmit code clearance immediately.” the Fleet Commander said .

“Unidentified MC-75 you are entering Emperor’s Hammer controlled space, identify yourself and transmit the clearance code immediately or you will be fired upon.” the junior officer barked over the comms.

“The clearance code, Stryker, is my foot in your ass for not informing Rapier of the plan. And on that note, boys, meet the AKF Tissaya, first and so far only ship in the Argat Class of Anti Starfighter Cruisers.”

“I would just like to point out, that I knew you had a plan, Obi, but this is brilliant. Unlikely they’d suspect a thing!” Ronin was positively grinning with the excitement.

“We’ll see if it’s brilliant soon enough Stefan, get yourself, Raps and Stryker on board and we’ll be ready to jump to Greeop in a few hours. I can get you up to speed on the Tiss while we wait for the crews to load extra coaxium into the reactor core.” said the former Admiral.

“She’s a beauty that’s for sure, Darkonis.” Colonel Stryker said walking on to the bridge behind the two Grand Admirals and looking in nearly every direction.

“So this is what you’ve been doing all that time in the reserves? I thought you were busy being well... king.” Rapier retained his usual aura of inquisitive and careful consideration from having been the Security Officer.

“Well yes, normally we use this ship within the AKF Security Elite Corps, but I figured we would need a good solid cover. Considering the New Republic fleet doesn’t have a clue regarding the dark money stream I’ve been sending you guys for the last ten years I think it’s safe to say they still think I retain a neutral stance on the war. Anyway, I’ve redesigned the Tissaya from the standard MC-75 platform from the ground up. Added approximately 20 more turbolaser turrets, plus the entire weapons system is automated now. Can track an RZ-2 easily and cut it down before it has a chance to fire concussion missiles. The sublight engines can propel her to about the speed of a Raider, and she’s got a new more powerful hyperdrive motivator. Theoretically if we needed to get out of tight situation, she could manage lightspeed skipping.” Rapier perked up at that last feature and raised an eyebrow.

“Who in the name of Palpatine taught you to lightspeed skip, Jeron? And by the way I don’t like ‘theoretically’ when you’re referring to doing it with a ship nearly 1.5 times the size of a Raider.”

“For the lightspeed skipping, you can blame Donitz and Mell Kerrigan. As far as the theoretical ability to accomplish such a feat in a large ship, I don’t expect we will get into a situation where we’ll need to see just how possible it is. Even if we do, you are aware that RC is the best navigator in the Remnant, are you not?”

“He’s right Raps, RC380 is a phenomenal navigator. He’s gotten us out of tight situations before with some of our Alvaak missions back in the day.” Ronin said, defending his clansman.

“As you say, hopefully we will not encounter such... difficulties. Is this monstrosity of yours ready to go yet?”

“Yes, Grand Admiral, this readout here reports the maximum amount of coaxium loaded into the reactor and all weapons systems nominal. Plus something called PHB now

active, if I read this right.” Stryker had already taken it upon himself to sit at one of the multiple heads up display screens on the bridge.

“Parabolic Hull Barrier. It’s a secondary shield system, Stryker. Sits under the main shield and automatically tunes to maximum power if it goes down.”

Ronin perked up at the mention of the PHB, remembering it from when Jeron was PREX of the Corporate Division.

“I thought you had decided that wouldn’t work... said it took up too much power.” said the Princeps, eyebrow still raised.

“On something like an ISD? Yes. But Mon Cal ships and their system redundancy allowed me to use less power, I was then able to modify some leftover ISD’s and such to use a modified system redundancy that’s even more efficient than that. Anyway, let’s get this mission moving.”

### **2.5 hours later Greeop Orbital Staging Platform**

The Tissaya exited hyperspace over the planet Greeop nearly 45 minutes ahead of schedule. Almost as if a gift, there was no patrol to meet it, merely a standard call for identification and inquiry of their purpose.

“Greeop OSP calling AKF Tissaya, Welcome Lord Astoris. Been awhile since we’ve seen Astorian colors on a ship. What can the New Republic do for you so far out here?” came the voice of the platform’s captain.

“Captain Draven. Always a pleasure. I’ve been instructed by Republic Spec Ops to refit a squadron of your T-70’s with some experimental Astorian technology. Classified of course beyond that.” came the reply of the Pilot King.

“Excellent, I suggest if it’s with you, that you hop in the Mineracer, and fly point. Never know when a random Imperial Remnant Strike Group will show up.” Darkonis didn’t waste any time.

“Ok folks. Here's my plan. As he suggested I'm going to fly point. RC, keep the engines hot and be ready for anything. If they suspect for a moment something isn't right, the the game is up. I'll hurry back and help you skip.”

“Yes, my... err sire, err... Jeron.”

*Later*

“This is taking too long, Obi.” said Ronin

“I concur, we should have been able to load 12 X-wings by now.” Rapier was as nervous as ever.

“I know, I'm worried too. RC, are the sensors picking up anything?” asked the Colonel.

“No sir... wait... Republic Strike Fleet dropping out of hyperspace 3.2 Klicks away” RC had a nervous tone to his voice

Jeron practically crashed the Mineracer into the hangar and then raced to the bridge.

“Time to go, we've got 'em all on board. RC, we'll need everything you have.”

“Obi... are you going to do what I think you're going to do? Because, I don't like theoretical possibilities. At all.” Rapier practically boiled with indignance.

“No choice, Raps. Gotta get out of here and fast.”

Darkonis sat down at the hyperspace controls. The first jump point would as discussed with his sister, be Astoria. He punched the engines and jumped into hyperspace hoping that they would withstand constant jumping and not catch on fire. A few minutes later he was in Astorian Space.

“Mai, the game is up. Cloak the fleet and wish me luck.”

“Be careful brother, please. I don’t want to watch you disintegrate.” the Princess Regent said.

“I will, Mai. Just remember what father always said. We play our best game under pressure.” the older Astoris said.

Rapier boiled with indignation again.

“Game?! Do you think traipsing around the Outer Rim, lightspeed skipping is a game, Darkonis?” It was the first time in quite a while that Rapier had used his newer name.

“Raps, calm. It was just a saying my adopted dad had about doing our best under pressure. I’m fully aware of the situation being nothing like a game.” the colonel tried to calm his old friend down. He was getting noticeably less adventurous as the FC.

“I swear, Obi, if you get me killed my force ghost will haunt you for the rest of your natural life.” the Grand Admiral replied.

“You seem confident that I’m not used to that already. I don’t think I’ve ever told you how much that problem already exists in my life. It’s ok, Bill. When this is all over, I’ll tell you all about my ‘ghosts’ “ the older officer could tell his friend wasn’t kidding and backed down a bit.

“Just... get us home. We need those T-70’s in drydock for retrofitting yesterday.”

The NR fleet followed quick suit out of hyperspace into the Astorian Kingdom’s space, although the planetside jamming systems and spacebound cloaking devices masked the presence of the fleet or the planet. Darkonis punched the engines again, this time aiming for the Diablo system. He knew full well that the system that once housed the HCI had a star that was well named. Solar storms were frequent.

“DAMN. Dropped into a solar storm. Hang on boys. RC, max the sublight engines and let’s get to the next jump before we get fried.”

“Jeron, you’re going to get us all killed. Even I’m worried now.” Ronin was nearly always confident in his former CA’s abilities but even he had to question if he could manage to get out of this one.

As powerful and advanced as they were, Darkonis had to worry himself when he heard the engines whine and strain, pushed to their max, but Jeron ignored the criticisms. Seasoned as he was, he knew despite the worrying noises, the engines would hold, had to hold. His fathers had faith in him. All three of them. He watched as the strike fleet jumped in behind them traveling quickly enough to likely avoid the storm as well. *Next jump point. Into the Carrida System. Roundabout, but.. Gotta lose them.*

“How long till we can make the next jump RC, they’re closing fast and we’re running out of space to avoid these solar flares.”

“Sir, this storm is unusually severe. I must make precise calculations to avoid the worst flares. It’s going to take a few more moments to get the data from the computer.”

“RC does it look like you have a few more moments? If you can’t...” the colonel felt as though he’d gone back to his days of uncontrollable rage.

“My, my. You do have a situation here don’t you, old friend?” the voice made everyone on the bridge turn. It was Mell Kerrigan. The former TO had collaborated with Darkonis on the original plans for many of the AKF designs.

“Mell, I have two questions for you, one, how did you sneak aboard the ship unnoticed? And two, why did you sneak aboard the ship unnoticed?” asked Jeron smiling.

“To your first question... I believe you know the answer to that already. As to the second, I couldn’t leave my baby in the hands of this ancient relic of a navigator bot.” replied Kerrigan with an equally large smile on his own face. RC looked up but said nothing.

“Do you know why these storms are so unpredictable? I had them calculated as way less. If you have any ideas, I’m all ears.”

“Yes, Diablo has become unstable with the decay of the containment field. After all, we don’t use the HCl anymore, and Paladin never really did much for the upkeep of things like that as you know.” said the former TO



Darkonis almost sneered at the name, but he knew Mell was right. As it was, within a moment they were clear of the worst of the solar storm and reached the jump point to Carrida with no further issue. The Rebel strike fleet followed suit and cornered the Tiss again. Luckily, Darkonis had a plan here, knowing Beta was on patrol in the area.

“Doyon, you there? Time to run the gambit. “

“Roger, Jeron, we’re already on your tail, get ready to jump to Aurora, we’ll fly point. The Hammer, and the Challenge are on standby when you get there.” said the fellow Colonel and his Commander. Mell laughed hysterically at the thought of his old friend going back into squadron life in Beta.

“I figured you’d have gone for a proper squadron like Tempest or Sin... Beta, Obi? Really? “

“Well, Praetorian wasn’t available, and I didn’t actually want to do major prestige if I couldn’t go there. Beta was the least conspicuous squadron for me to jump back into.” Obi smiled.

“As you wish, Jeron. I just figured you’d... eh nevermind.” said Kerrigan.

“Just help me get this last jump done, we can talk about old times later.”

One last time, perhaps even for *the* last time, Jeron punched the Tiss into hyperspace. The engines acted almost as if they contained the spirit of his former lover and defiantly sneered at the strain, but they held. The gamble had paid off. With a sigh of relief, the warrior king pulled the MC-75 out of hyperspace into the Solorian system. Aurora Prime was mere clicks away. The strike fleet had followed but with Beta flying point and two of the EH’s most crowded ships looming, they turned tail not wanting a fight. Surprisingly, Rapier spoke up with a rare smile on his face.

“Jeron, I’m impressed. You’ve come a long way since you first returned. I would like to congratulate you with a drink at the pub.” Rapier offering him a drink was like getting an Order of the Renegade. It was so rare, that Darkonis had to pinch himself to make sure he wasn’t dreaming.

“Thanks, Raps. I’d like that. But I think we all deserve one. Not just me. Thanks for having some confidence, all of you.”

“I’m also impressed as usual, Obi. You continue to make me proud of the officer and tactician you’ve become. “ Ronin smiled at his friend and put a hand on his shoulder.

With that, the crew departed the TISSAYA, and Obi hopped in his TIE Defender. RC would bring her back to Astorian space and set her back to the defense fleet.

“You’re a pretty impressive engineer, Jeron. I wish you hadn’t lost it. We could have used you as PREX for a longer term.” said Ronin.

“Yeah, well. I guess it was part of my destiny right? Let’s all go get that drink. And maybe some good tapas besides. I’m pretty peckish.”

Rapier, Ronin, Doyon, Mell and Stryker hit the pub and discussed the events. None of them had the audacity to believe that this would be the last time they got so bold. But they all agreed, better planning would be used so as not to stir up suspicion. Jeron looked at his friends. For the first time since returning, he felt welcome again. Like he was free of his past. It felt liberating.

“About those ghosts, Raps. It’s mom, dad, Xar, and... Sirrus. I know. Why him? I think all of them are trying to assure me that I didn’t fail them.” Jeron had a grim look on his face.

“Why would you have failed your nemesis?” asked Rapier

“Because I couldn’t convince him how mercilessly he was used.”

-End

### **Dramatis Personae**

Colonel Jeron Darkonis Astoris- Former Logistics Officer, and King of the Astorian Kingdom. Jeron has left retirement and the Astorian Kingdom in the capable hands of his adopted sister, Mairin Astoris, feeling an itch to be back in the cockpit after years of desk work and running his kingdom while funneling dark money to the EH.

Grand Admiral Stefan “Ronin” Alvaak- Former Fleet Commander, now Princeps of the Emperor’s Hammer. Ronin serves as a father figure, mentor and staunch defender of Jeron. Ronin has the utmost confidence in his former CA and constantly vouches for his tactical prowess and ingenuity.

Grand Admiral William “Rapier” McVicar- Current Fleet Commander and friend of Jeron. Rapier often disagrees with the former LO’s maverick style, even though it always results in a positive outcome. The former SO believes that his friend’s maverick style got him into trouble in the first place and often reminds him of the dangers of not going by the book. He nevertheless has a modicum of confidence in the abilities of the Colonel.

Colonel Stryker- Newly minted Commander of Firebird Squadron, he joins the mission to ensure he can get some T-70's for the growing reborn IW. Stryker holds the former LO in high respect.

Colonel Doyon- Beta Squadron commander and Jeron’s good friend. Doyon is very much aware that Darkonis’ presence in Beta serves as an inspiration to the younger less seasoned pilots and appreciates his skill and leadership ability.

Princess Regent Mairin “Mai” Astoris- Jeron's adopted sister and fiercest friend, the former Krath High Priestess will do anything to protect her brother if it means sacrificing herself. She takes care of her niece and nephew while their father is back in the cockpit with the EH.

Mell Kerrigan- Former TO and one of Jeron’s best friends. Although in different squadrons, they have flown many missions together and after returning to Astoria to rebuild the AKF fleet, Mell designed many of the AKF’s most advanced ships using hybrid technology from both Imperial and New Republic designs.

RC380- Jeron Darkonis’ personal protocol and navigation droid. Easily the best navigator the galaxy has ever seen since L9 of the Millennium Falcon, RC380 is far more timid than her as well as having annoying tendencies toward being entirely too formal with his master. Though, he is a staunch defender of his master and will go to any length to see him succeed.

### **Ships appearing in the story:**

ISD Hammer- Home to Beta Squadron, Jeron's current assignment as Flight Leader 3. The Hammer is well known as one of the most staunch defenders of the EH Strike Fleet and has a proud history.

ISD Challenge- Another ship with a proud history, the ship is regarded as carrying some of the most legendary pilots in EH history.

AKF Tissaya- The de facto flagship of the Astorian Kingdom Defense Fleet, the first and only Argat Class Anti-Starfighter Cruiser is a redesigned MC-75 from the ground up. With its higher number of turbolaser turrets and the ability to autonomously track targets, it is every bit as fierce as the woman it's named for. The ship also carries a highly advanced hyperdrive motivator theoretically capable of lightspeed skipping and reaching .57 past lightspeed. The hyperdrive engines are capable of traveling a parsec in less than an hour.

Mineracer- Jeron's Vertigo Class X-wing. Named after the favorite activity of one of Jeron's greatest mentors and friends, the Mineracer contains the Parabolic Hull Barrier, as well as the powerful Vertigo Cannon. It is also painted pitch black and has a small radar cross section and a cloaking device along with heavily modified engines.