



## Reading Room

*StarWars FanFiction*

### POV: Addiction

Dedicated to J.M.

By Peter "Iceman" Kovessy

#### [Outside the Nebulon B Frigate Joan d'Arc, in the Simak system]

"Docking operation is complete" the freighter reported over the comm. As the bulk freighter detached itself from the Frigate's belly, the starfighters which had been flying a loose escort around the starships moved to escort the freighter to it's jump point. These new supplies would enable the Joan to remain in deep space for the next little while.

Inside one of the escort ships, Lieutenant Peter 'Ice' Kovessy glanced at his mission clock and sighed. It had been a long and uneventful mission. Not that he was itching for a battle, but there was a limit of how many times one could circle a Frigate. It was it odd that he was escorting in a heavy assault B-Wing, but it gave the docking operation a bit more security with the twelve torpedoes, ready to launch in case a capital ship dropped in. Finally, after another fifteen minutes, the Freighter jumped to lightspeed, and White's exhausted pilots returned to the hangar.

#### [Aboard the Frigate Joan d'Arc]

After what seemed like an endless debriefing, Ice managed to stumble his way into his quarters and collapse into a chair. His cabin was rectangular in shape, with his desk at one end, and his oversized stereo in the other. A single bunk was pressed up against the wall in a corner so he could gaze through the glass window out into space. Besides that, the room was empty, save a few bookshelves that held the clutter which overflowed onto the hardwood floor. A few raggedy posters hung lifelessly on the walls, and the entire room managed to give off a warm tone via the colored light that filtered through a screen, placed around a single hanging bulb. Not feeling like doing anything, he switched on the radio on his stereo. After hearing about Empire Bonds and used speeders, the news finally came on.

"Negotiations between the Empire and the colony on Nicho VII have broken down" the Imperial announcer reported. Ice raised an eyebrow slightly. One of his best friends which he met in his 'commerce' days had chosen to live on Nicho VII. Although they didn't talk frequently anymore, their friendship had been a strong one, and Ice knew that whenever he had a problem, such as the time he was attempting to join White, when many doubted Ice, then a freighter pilot, was ready for White, Jason was always there to listen, and provide support. Ice turned his attention back to the radio.

"After their refusal of the Empire's generous relocation program, the colonists have mysteriously disappeared. While Imperial officials are baffled, mining equipment has been brought in to begin extracting

some of the many valuable resources on Nicho VII. In other news..."

Ice stood up and swore loudly. Everyone who had ever made contact with the Empire knew exactly what happens to those who 'disappear.' It was a mystery why they just didn't report that those who had not cooperated had been loaded into a transport and shipped off to a labor camp in the far reaches of the galaxy. It's not as if anyone could do a thing about it. Not yet, anyway.

He picked up the chair he had apparently knocked over in his rage, sat down, and thought where he had first met Jason. His father was in the midst of a long-term contract which involved inter-system shipping. They both preferred this arrangement, since they could both sleep in real beds on board a Class C Platform, as opposed to the make-shift bunks on their transport. However, at the same time, it did not pay much, so money was rather tight, even when many sacrifices were being made.

Over this period, Ice managed to meet a some of inhabitants which he hung out with during the day while his father was working. While it was true that he had good times with them at parties and so forth, he was not happy. No one in this group was particularly close with one another, thus, while considered popular, he did not have any real friends. At the same time, like many others his age, he had begun to experiment with drugs that were used and were readily available. He didn't think too seriously about any of the health risks, but he did worry about getting hooked, considering how little money he and his father had. He knew that they were plenty of scum around the station whose lively hood depends on getting people hooked and buying drugs for the rest of their lives. However, there was one drug, Amber, which while provided a great escape from reality, and did not seem addictive. So, whenever there was a little bit of money around, Ice would take it and he and his 'friends' would be able to escape from reality for a while. So, in his mind, he was not addicted to anything. His body said something completely different.

Ice stood up and sat down at his desk. As a Lieutenant, he had little paperwork to deal with, so the desk had become another area for souvenirs that he had collected from his voyages around the galaxy. After rummaging around for a few minutes, he found the holo-album that he had been looking for. He started flipping through it until he arrived at section which started at around the same time he met Jason. He thought back to that time period, and remembered how easy-going those few months had been. In Jason, he had someone who he could have a good time with, but also talk to, something he couldn't do with his other 'friends.' At the same time, he stopped using Amber. After all, he used it primarily to escape from reality, and ever since he met Jason, reality was a good thing.

And now Jason was gone. Ice slowly changed out of his flight suit and lay on his bunk, staring at the ceiling. Despite how exhausted he was, he could not sleep. Frustrated, he threw on some clothes and went down to the Bomb Shelter, the secret bar for White Squadron's Pilots.

### **[Inside the Bomb Shelter]**

Upon entering, he noticed that Avery 'Foxfire' Schroeder, the XO of White Squadron, and unofficial bartender of the Bomb Shelter, was missing from her usual spot behind the bar. Never the less, he went over to the bar and made his drink himself. The White Lightning, introduced to him by Rooster, the S & R pilot for the CRS Liberty, was an incredibly strong drink, one that many other pilots drank out of depression. Ice had tried that before, but found that living with the headache that follows even more depressing. Today, however, he was having a drink out of the sake of having a drink. He looked around, and found that Stephan 'Psycho' Proud was talking to some members of the Training Wing. Looking for some company, Ice went over and joined them.

"Is it just me, or does the Tie Fighter seem to be making a comeback in Empire?" Perry 'Blitz' Stinson asked.

"It's you" DSC 'Arachnoid' piped in, drawing a chorus of chuckles from the rest. "What do you think, Psycho?" the cadet continued.

"Well, an Imperial pilot has to be pretty good before they are awarded a Tie Advanced, or even a Gunboat" Psycho said thoughtfully. "So perhaps the answer could be as elaborate as Alliance Strike Forces reducing Tie Advanced production, or as simple as more rookie Imperial pilots." By then, most of the pilots had politely acknowledged Ice's presence. Although he pretty much agreed with Psycho's explanation, Ice still expected at least one pilot to ask for his opinion. However, no such request came. Soon, the topic went to Escort Shuttles, and once again everyone pretty well voiced their opinions but Ice. He even tried to put in his

two cents, but no one seemed ready to listen. In disgust he drowned the rest of his drink and stormed out of the Bomb Shelter. Deep down he knew that none of the pilots meant any offense and just were engrossed in the debate, but he tried to use it as an excuse for being angry. It was just like before he had met Jason; he supposedly had friends, yet none of them were friendly.

Ice stormed into his quarters, angry as hell. He felt the drink starting to take its toll as he sat down at his desk and twice fumbled the holo-album as he tried to get it open. He started where he had had left off, and saw some of the images of the party he had thrown for Jason when he moved to Nicho VII. He remembered hearing Jason's reassuring voice, saying that the Empire had little interest in such a small planet, and that whenever Ice was having problems, come and visit.

"Guess the Empire had some interest in it after all" Ice said out loud. Jason probably knew of the risks the entire time, just to hurt Ice! Deep down, he knew that this was absurd, but at that point in time, he was looking for something to justify his anger, which was just masking his grief. In a fit of rage, he picked up the entire album and threw it across the room. He followed it with his eyes, as it ascended, reached its climax, then began to descend. As soon as it hit the ground, he watching a single yellowish-orange leaf fall out. Ice couldn't believe his eyes. He ran over and sniffed the leaf. No doubt about it. Amber. And like a fine wine, it only got better with age. It must have been put there during his pre-Jason days. Should he? He quickly checked his planner to make sure he wasn't scheduled for ops the next day. He wasn't.

"Hell" he thought. It's not as if Jason was there to stop him, as he had before they became good friends. Ice quickly got to work, opening the few ventilation ducts his quarters had and searched for some rolling papers. Finally, he shredded the Amber and rolled it. He then sat for a moment, and just for a second he wondered just what the heck he was getting into. The feeling soon passed as he dug up a lighter. After lighting it, he lay back and watched the smoke slowly curl upwards. As time passed, everything around his became soft, and he himself began to feel light, as if a weight had been lifted from his soul. Afterwards, he fell into a deep sleep, with a scent of Amber still in the air.

"Wakey-wakey Lieutenant" Ice heard a gruff voice say. He opened his eyes only to see a large, ugly humanoid with a long blaster in his hand staring him in the face. Instinctively Ice jumped up and reached for where his sidearm would have been on his belt. Of course, it wasn't there, so he looked forward to size up his opponent. Ice blinked once, then twice, then realized that it was really just Charley, a member of the Joan d'Arc cleaning crew, and the 'blaster' was really just a mop.

"Sorry if I woke you, man. Just trying to do my job" Charley said as he began mopping the floor. "Hey, you have a party and not invite me?" he asked as he sniffed the air.

"No party" Ice mumbled as he stretched. "Just me." He looked at Charley and wondered if he would report him. "I doubt it" Ice thought to himself. Charley was less than a model employee, and the only reason he even had a job was that he did his work and didn't give anyone lip.

"Well, you know what?" Charley asked in a very nonchalant tone as he began to mop and pick up some of the stuff scattered around. "I know people who can get you this stuff at a great price" he finished, making reference to scent of Amber, which still remained.

"Who?" Ice asked in a relaxed voice. "I can't believe I'm carrying on a conversation with this guy!" Ice thought to himself in disgust as Charlie's body odor began to over take the smell of Amber.

"I don't know if he would appreciate that information being divulged" was Charlie's cocky response.

"Whatever" Ice said softly as he prepared to go into the bathroom and prepare for the day.

"Okay, okay" Charley said nervously. "You know that guy, Leuns? Works in the main hangar bay? He has connections and promised to give me a commission." He picked up an empty vase that was on a shelf. "Here, let me have this, and I'll give two leaves for it."

"Three" Ice replied. He knew that the vase wasn't worth half a leaf, and probably would have been thrown out if Ice ever got around to cleaning his quarters, but it appeared that Charley was too stupid to figure that out.

"Yeah, okay" Charley said excitedly, like a kid who just won a treat. "Wow, this is my first sale!"

"I would have never guessed!" Ice said with a sarcastic tone in his voice as he laced up his boots. After Charley left, Ice was ready to leave his quarters, but Flight Officer Jeffrey 'Hammer' Hayes appeared at his door first.

"Hey Ice, you missed the morning's briefing" Hammer said as he came into Ice's quarters.

"I didn't know that there was one" Ice replied, trying to keep some dignity.

"Well, it was optional, but most pilots were there anyway" Hammer said, and started to sniff the air. A cold sweat began to run down Ice's neck. "Anyway," Hammer continued. "You and I have ops the day after tomorrow. They say it will be a tough mission, so both Drake and Ibero will also be flying. A transport will come with a crew to repair a small crack in the d'Arc's hull. The problem is that convoy may have been infiltrated by Imp spies. You know, the classic 'disable the ship, board it and get it running again before anyone realizes what's happened.' We've done it a few times" Hammer chuckled. "So while the transport quickly fixes the crack, we need get rid of those ships that are really Imps, or there won't be a crack to fix. Vyper has rated this as a 'critical' mission, and if White Squad can't do it's job, than the Joan d'Arc is done for. The Command Wing feels that their expertise are better suited for handling the interpretation of the information we transmit, so they are remaining on board." Hammer sniffed the air again, his eyebrows starting to tighten. "Say," Hammer started.

"Here it comes" Ice nervously thought.

"Has Charley been in here? It smells awful!"

"Yeah" Ice smiled with relief. "The buffoon can't even mop and talk at the same time" he continued with a weak smile on his face, gesturing to a puddle on the floor. Hammer left to continue on some jobs that needed doing. Ice spent the next few hours roaming the d'Arc, not doing anything in particular, but trying to keep busy. When re returned to his quarters, he found a small package awaiting him on his desk. Knowing what it most likely was, he made sure the door was entirely closed and opened up the package. His assumption had been correct. In front of him lay three freshly cut Amber leaves. He began the process over again, shredding and then rolling one of the leaves. Upon finishing it, Ice once again fell into a deep sleep, and unfortunately once again awoke to Charlie's ugly face.

Ice began his day the same way he started the day before, going to the mess hall for breakfast, while everyone else was sitting down to lunch. He noticed that there was something different about everyone, as they all seemed uptight. It turned out that word of the mission had gotten out, and as Ice tried his hardest to enjoy his meal, everyone kept looking at him and whispering about how he was the one of the pilots flying \*the\* mission. Finally, it got to a point where Ice couldn't take it any longer, and quickly walked out of the mess hall. As he walked back to his quarters, he started to become nervous about the upcoming mission. It was not as if he had not faced death before, he just never had to be concerned about so many other's lives before, not when they knew exactly who was out there in the cockpit. As he raced down the hallways, he considered going to the Bomb Shelter, but decided that going back to his quarters would be a better choice. He was wrong.

As Ice lit his Amber, he realized that it was laced with something, most likely some sort of hallucinogen. He quickly put it out, as he was still under the impression that Amber was harmless and did not want to do anything he might regret later. However, it was too late, as he slipped into some sort of trance, where he saw himself from a third person's view, yet he still controlled his actions. With him was another figure. It took him a second, but he soon recognized it as Jason. Ice walked over and was about to talk to Jason, but Jason began before Ice had the chance.

"I thought you stopped doing this stuff?" Jason motioned with his hand towards the Amber smoke that had mysteriously filled the air. "You know how much I hate it. What kind of friend are you anyway?"

"What kind of friend am I?" Ice cried out in rage. "Who's the one who put themselves in the position to be captured by the Empire?" Ice continued, using the same argument he had used on himself the previous day. "You know how much a friend like you meant to me, and how much I depended on you" he continued, managing to say it without guilt as he thought back to all the times he had provided Jason with a place to stay, lent him money or did other favors for him. To him, it was the same old story of friendship. Ice had always been there for his friends, yet they always seemed to come up short when it counted. Slowly, Ice started to slip back into the real world. As he drifted away, Jason started to get fainter, and more inhuman, until he was nothing but a cold stranger.

Ice jumped up, cold with sweat. Realizing the time, he hurried about, as he knew that he needed to get ready for the day's mission. In the process, he flushed the remaining Amber leaf down the toilet, as he had no desire to share that experience again. Just before he left, Charley walked in.

"Morning Lieutenant!" he said in his normal awkward tone. Without even giving Ice a chance to respond, he continued on. "Say, you must almost be out of-" he immaturely looked around and continued, "the 'stuff.' Want some more?" he asked giddily.

"No thanks" Ice said affirmatively. "I've seen what kind of 'stuff' you provide, so I think I will discontinue using Amber. Now, if you'll excuse me, I have ops today."

"Just like that, huh?" Charley say in his now cocky tone, as he bobbed his head up and down. "What about withdrawal symptoms?"

"What withdrawal symptoms?" Ice replied, aggravated that he was being told off by a janitor. Not wanting to endure anymore of Charlie's ramblings, he reached for the door controls, but missed them completely.

"Those withdrawal symptoms" Charley said over his shoulder, but just continued to mop. Ice, confused by what Charley had said, decided just to hurry down to the final briefing. He quickly found out what Charley meant, as his coordination was completely off. When the turbo lift was a few centimeters above the floor, he was unable to compensate and fell flat on his face. When he tried to enter the briefing room, he had to try three times to get the door open. And finally, when he tried to sit down, he sat on the edge of the chair, causing it to flip upwards and send him flying. And this was just on the way to the briefing.

He soon found out that his mind was still working fine, as he was able to understand the briefing and make thoughts on it. It was basically what Hammer had told him; a transport was coming in to fix the hull, and it was suspected that Imperial spies had taken over a number of the Corvettes that were providing it with escort. Once the convoy arrived, all craft were to be inspected as quickly as possible, and any Imperial ships had to be destroyed before they had a chance to transmit the Joan d'Arc's coordinates.

Ice left the briefing, worried about the possible effects of his 'withdrawal symptoms,' but managed to push them away, just the way he had been trying to push the away the nervousness about this mission. He climbed into his B-Wing prepared mentally, but a wreck physically. Just to climb up the ladder, he needed to call a member of the grounds crew over to give him a hand.

"Here Lieutenant, let me give you a hand" the crew member offered as he raced over after seeing Ice precariously hang from his ladder.

"Uh, thank you, Mr. um..." Ice looked over the crew member's uniform in search of a name. "Mr. Leuns." Ice's mind raced back, thinking where he had heard this name before. "Of course!" Ice thought. "Charlie's supplier!" He racked his brain for something to say to him, but Leuns cut him off.

"We'll talk later" he said with a cold smile, apparently knowing exactly who Ice was. Ice tried to shake it off, knowing he had more important things at hand. He attempted to do a pre-flight check, but with his bulky flight gloves further hampering his attempts, he decided that it was futile to even attempt. He leaned back, awaiting the tractor beam to take him away, deciding that whatever the grounds crew had given him in the way of his ship would have to be good enough. And after meeting one member of the grounds crew, he did not feel very confident.

Once the four pilots had safely launched, Ice found himself seriously regretting stepping foot in his ship. However, by now he realized that it was too late, as the convoy was expected any time know. To make matters worse, with their progress being carefully monitored by the Command Wing, all four B-Wings were expected to be in strict formation. He had already had several close encounters with Hammer, who was flying directly on his right in a line abreast formation. Drake and Ibero were then directly on Hammer's right. Three times he had been asked if he was okay, and three times he has responded that he was just a little nervous. However, as he felt that last little bit of Amber leaving his bloodstream, his condition worsened, and he began to have real problems controlling his fighter. He suddenly felt his hand jerk the stick to the left. Instinctively, he bent the stick back towards the right, trying to get back in formation, but over compensated and rammed into Hammer and full throttle. As he heard the magnificent explosions all around him, he reached below for the ejection systems and pulled hard as his pod released from the fiery wreckage of what used to be a B-Wing below him. However, a piece of his wing had managed to break off and, under the force of the explosion, flew straight into his pod. That last sound he heard before losing conciseness was

the report over the comm that the convoy had started to arrive.

Over the next few minutes, Ice drifted in and out of consciousness. One moment he was drifting in space, the next he was on board a shuttle. Finally, some time later, he awoke to see that he was inside sick bay on the d'Arc. He also saw Hammer, laying beside him, stunned, but okay. He also saw Foxfire, and Sherry 'Shok'wave' Krenzle, the Commanding Officer of White Squadron. He could tell the Shok'wave was angry, more angry than the time the Joan d'Arc had been without coffee for an entire week.

"Well?" Shok'wave asked very slowly, trying to control her rage. "Could one of you two please explain why two of our best fighters are now space debris?" Hammer searched for words, but Ice quickly jumped in, not wanting his friend to come under any more undeserved scrutiny.

"I think I can" Ice interrupted, prompting Foxfire and Shok'wave to turn their attention to him. Ice's mind was racing, searching for the right words. He closed his eyes and said the only thing he could. "When I was flying that escort mission a few days ago, I had my sensors as coarse as possible, so I could detect any incoming ships as soon as possible" he lied. "I forgot to turn them back, so the sensors said that I had more room to maneuver around than I actually did."

"Oh" Shok'wave nodded. "So, you decided to completely disregard your pre-flight checks, and forget to manually look out your window? I don't even expect a member of the training wing to make that mistake." There was a considerable silence after her last sentence, but Ice felt the need to say something.

"How did the mission go?" he asked, trying to ease the mood.

"We're still here now, aren't we?" Shok'wave replied coldly, and stormed out of sickbay. Foxfire, started to go after, but quickly turned back in sympathy.

"It turned out that only two of the Corvettes had been boarded by the Imperials" she said briskly. "Ibero and Drake managed to make short work of them before they had a chance to communicate with reinforcements." With that, she turned and raced after Shok'wave. The Medic Droid, who had been waiting at the other end of the room, came over to see the patients. He looked at Hammer's chart, and motioned for him to go. Hammer then left without a word. The droid then came over to talk to Ice.

"Excuse me sir, but there is an issue I need to talk to you about" he said in his usual monotone voice. "There were traces of a drug in your bloodstream that, when reaching a low level, produce withdrawal symptoms similar to those you exhibited in flight."

"Nah" Ice responded, patting the droid on the shoulder. "I was just nervous and couldn't compensate for the sensor error" he continued with his lie.

"Yes sir" the droid answered. "You are free to go." Ice stood up and left the sickbay. As he entered the hallway, he was greeted by Flight Officer Michael 'Torpedo' Steinberg, White Squadron's Tactical Officer.

"Walk with me" he told Ice as they made their way to the turbolift. Once inside, alone, Torpedo began to explain himself. "I watched you get on your fighter. Or should I say, try to get on?" Ice just stared ahead. "Then I carefully watched you in flight. That wasn't nervousness; that was someone going cold turkey on Amber." Ice resisted the urge to look at him in shock, but continued to stare ahead. Luckily, he had managed to control his awkwardness, as he knew it wouldn't help his cause. "Anyway" Torpedo continued as they stepped onto the main flight deck and headed for Ice's A-Wing. "Until you get your life back in order, I think it would be best if you didn't fly." With that, Torpedo picked up a tool box and began to remove some critical parts of the engines.

"You can't do this!" Ice cried out in bewilderment.

"Oh, please, if you feel you are being treated unfairly, be my guest and report it to Shok'wave" Torpedo replied, not even pausing or looking up from his work. "There, all finished. You now need this wire" he said as he held up a wire, "to start moving your ship. And I know for a fact that there are no extras on the d'Arc. So, when you are recuperated, I'll reinstall it for you" he smiled and put the wire away. He turned his back to Ice and started talking to someone Ice didn't recognize. Ice turned to his once proud A-Wing, now just a useless bucket of bolts. He has been shown up by superior officers before, but he wasn't going to let this one just go. Not this time, not now.

"You know, Torpedo" Ice said loudly, through clenched teeth. "If you are going to ruin my ship, then at least do a decent job" he sneered. With that, he opened up the canopy and kicked the CMD in with all his might. It shattered, prompting everyone to turn their heads. "Won't need this either" he sarcastically commented as he slammed his boot into the shield indicator. At this point, he was unaware why he was doing any of this, yet he felt like he was somehow hurting Torpedo, so he continued. As a final blow, he prepared to smash the ELS panel, but his body's craving for Amber started to take effect, and he missed the panel completely. Instead, he kicked a small hatch, about an inch squared, bent it, and caused it to fall off it's hinges. Curious, he ignored the crowd that had started to gather, and reached inside, thinking back to his training, where he learned every inch of each starfighter. He then remembered, slightly disappointed, that it was little more than a small storage compartment. Some pilots had used the area for storing a good luck charm, but Ice had never believed in that. He was about to storm off, when he noticed a glimmer coming from inside. He reached inside and withdrew a small chain, with a glimmering Alliance symbol attached. Ice immediately knew where this had come from. On the day that he had become a full fledged member of the Alliance, Jason had managed to send this to him as sort of a graduation gift. He turned it over in his hand, and read the inscription: "I always trusted you to do the right thing, and if you feel that the Alliance is the right way to go, then it must be the right thing." Ice read in his head. "The right thing?" he asked himself. For a second, he just knelt there, thinking about that verse. Then the rage, fueled by his craving for Amber, slowly crept back, and he stormed out of the hangar. Just as he was about to exit, Leuns stepped in his path.

"Hey, uh, Lieutenant, that's a nice necklace" he said with a grin that sent shivers down Ice's spine.

"How much can I get for it?" Ice asked, cutting to the chase. As he spoke, he felt his hand start to shake. He looked around. Most people had gone back to whatever jobs they had been working on.

"Well..." Leuns started to reply, as his eyes gleamed at the dangling treasure. Before he could continue, however, strong gloved hands gripped both of them over their mouths and dragged them behind a looming B-Wing, where they paused briefly in the shadows. Waiting for them were Shok'wave and the Commanding Officer of the d'Arc, Captain Raine Orris.

"If you don't want to make a bigger dope of yourselves, than shut up!" Shok'wave hissed at them. Without another word, she pushed a panel in the corner of the wall aside, about six feet in height and the two guards, prisoners and Commanders entered, single file, as that was all that the passageway allowed. As they snaked around, Ice lost al sense of where they were. Finally, just as he thought they might be completely lost, a panel was pushed aside and light flooded in. As they filed out of the tunnel, Ice recognized where they were as Shok'wave's ready room. She nodded to the security officers, who then took Leuns away. She then took a seat behind her desk, and beckoned for Ice to have a seat. Orris leant on Shok'wave's desk, and addressed Ice.

"Lieutenant, we have been tracking Leuns and his narcotic dealings for some time now. This has been a very private investigation, as Commander Krenzel, nor I, knew exactly who he was dealing with. This, as you can imagine, limited how close we could get to him. Anyway, the bottom line is this: you help us a little and when we go public with Leuns, we claim that everything from the starfighter collision to your personal demolition derby was all an act to get close to him for us." The Captain paused to let the words sink in. He stood up straight and towered over Ice in his chair. "You've been as asset to the Alliance, Lieutenant. I would hate to see all that thrown away because of a few bad days." He paused again. "Do we have a deal?"

Ice was hitting the peak of his withdrawal symptoms. He knew that agreeing to this would mean the end of his supplier.

"I always trusted you to do the right thing"

"Yes" Ice said painfully.

"I'll contact you when they need your testimony" the Captain replied. With that, he nodded and left the room. Shok'wave followed him out with her eyes. Once the door closed she picked up a datapad and gestured towards Ice with it.

"I take it that you have heard the news about Nicho VII?" Shok'wave asked slowly. Ice very solemnly nodded as he continued to stare at the desk in shame. "Lieutenant, I care about my pilots, and I think that this may have affected you more deeply than you may think. I don't exactly know how you have been handling this and I don't really want to know from what I've seen, but I think that you need help. Seriously. I have arranged a shuttle to rendezvous with the d'Arc. You can either take that shuttle to the medical Frigate

Salvation to get help or you can take it to a civilian planet and turn in your commission." She stood up and looked at him. "Do the right thing." Ice suddenly looked up, only to see a smile start to appear on Shok'wave's face. Ice gently returned the smile and nodded. "I think you will feel much better when you come back" she said as Ice prepared to leave.

"I already do" Ice said firmly, gripping the chain which still remained in his hand. He headed out into the hallway, with a new perspective on reality.

## THE END



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Last update of this page: 30 Jul 2001