



## Reading Room

*StarWars FanFiction*

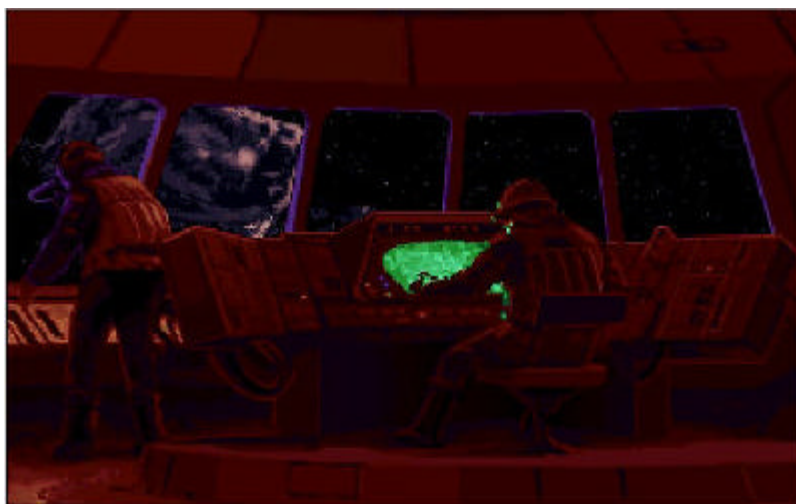
### **POV: Family Business**

**By Jim Lee & Michael Stauber**

This is actually an old POV written back in August 1995. It plays at a time when Raven was in Gold Squadron and Vyper was still part of the Empire and flying for the Black Knights. Back then in the POV "Stowaway on Board" Raven and Vyper had discovered that they were brothers. Raven and Rory helped Vyper to escape from the detention block of the ASD Happy Jack. In the wake of it we had the idea to write another POV together to elaborate a little on the fictional family background. Of course its not every day that a Rebel and an Imperial Officer fight together for a common cause. So lean back and enjoy this piece of history!

#### **[In the Communications Center, Comstock Base MB-G77]**

Lieutenant Glenn "StarDuster" Orlosky, Gold 5, entered the Comm Center. An ensign jumped up from a nearby console and escorted Gold's Intelligence Officer into the office of the Chief of Communications for Gold, Captain Jim "Raven" Lee, Gold 7.



"Glenn," Raven said on seeing his friend enter his office. "Good to see you. The scramblers your people at Intel Center installed are all operational and we've tested them using the relay to the CRS Independence."

StarDuster pressed the wall plate closing the door and looked out through the clear-steel window that allowed Raven to observe everything in the Comm Center. "We need to talk, Raven. Privately."

Raven pressed a button under his desk and the clear-steel instantly turned opaque. "Talk away," he grinned, waving StarDuster to a chair in the office.

Sitting down StarDuster took a small datacard out of his flightsuit. "Raven, I've already briefed Pivot on what I'm about to tell you. As you know, Lt. Commander Bink has had his Gamma Teams going over everything on this base with a fine toothed comb. The central computer at Command and Control has yielded a number of very interesting pieces of information but one thing we've found will be of personal interest to you." StarDuster slipped the datacard into the datapad on Raven's desk.

A file number appeared on the screen as StarDuster explained, "This base has been many years in the building and cost a fortune in money, men, and materials. The person behind it turns out has been financing the building of his private army by raiding the commerce of the Drift on and off for years."

Raven interrupted, "What exactly does this have to do with me personally?"

StarDuster took a deep breath and keyed in a specific reference. The screen updated and Raven began to read the display. "Raven, we've found the date, time, and logistical attack plan of the raid that wiped out your home colony here in the Drift," StarDuster continued. "Ka'jat, the pirate leader commanding the base here, was the person responsible for killing your family. And Intel has reason to believe he's still alive."

### **[Later in the ready room of the Central Command and Control Complex of Comstock Base...]**

Pivot looked at Raven who was sitting across from him. "Are you quite through?" Pivot asked when Raven finally ran down. "Look, Captain. Get this straight. You may NOT neglect your duties and take off across the galaxy looking for personal revenge. Apparently it has escaped your attention we have a war on, and personal needs are secondary. Your request is hereby denied, rejected, vetoed, and besides which the answer is no! Is that clear?"

Raven finally acknowledged his Commander, "Crystal, sir."

"Good. Now that we have that squared away I have an assignment for you. An Alliance military assignment." Pivot unlocked his safe and removed a single datacard. He dropped it in a slot in the conference table and a wall display activated. A picture of a man in an Imperial uniform appeared on the screen.

"Listen up Captain," Pivot began with a straight face. "This is one Martin Ka'jat. We found this vid in the central computer. We have no information regarding his Imperial military career if indeed he really was in the Imperial service at all. He was commanding this base during Operation Gold Strike, and to the best of our intelligence data he managed to escape the trap Storm concocted which wiped out the bulk of the fleeing pirate forces.

StarDuster speculates that Ka'jat had a secret escape route out of the Motherlode planned for himself and our security people are going crazy trying to find it. In any event, Ka'jat has knowledge about this base which makes him very dangerous to our security here.

The Alliance Council has issued a warrant for his arrest. I am assigning you to go out and find him." Pivot passed to Raven a small metal card edged with silver. "This is a 'carte blanc' arrest warrant. It means that you have the full authority of the Council to do whatever is necessary to find Ka'jat and take him into custody. 'Whatever' covers a lot of ground, try not to abuse the authority, please. But you will eliminate this threat to the security of Comstock Base. Understood?"

Raven was staggered by the sudden turn of events. "If Ka'jat opts not to be taken into custody?" he asked.

Pivot handed the datacard to Raven. "Kill him," he said simply. "You'll undertake your assignment starting immediately. Let Ash know what you'll need and I'll okay it. You have a meeting in 20 minutes, conference room 12 wherein StarDuster will brief you on everything we've got on Ka'jat, which is damn little. Captain, you are dismissed. May the Force be with you."

**[Aboard the Class M Freighter Tam'alon, in route to the Core Worlds...]**

Raven checked his course reviewing the celestial data coming in from the nava-computer. He double checked that the Tam'alon was sending a neutral transponder signal. Next, he reviewed the latest intelligence reports that StarDuster was able to collect on the movements of a particular group of Imperial pilots. Source 'Nugget' was finally able to come up with the most likely location for the particular person that Raven was now hunting. The last thing Raven did was to have the computer delete and scrub all information that related to the Alliance and Comstock Base. Only the information on Ka'jat was retained in the databanks.

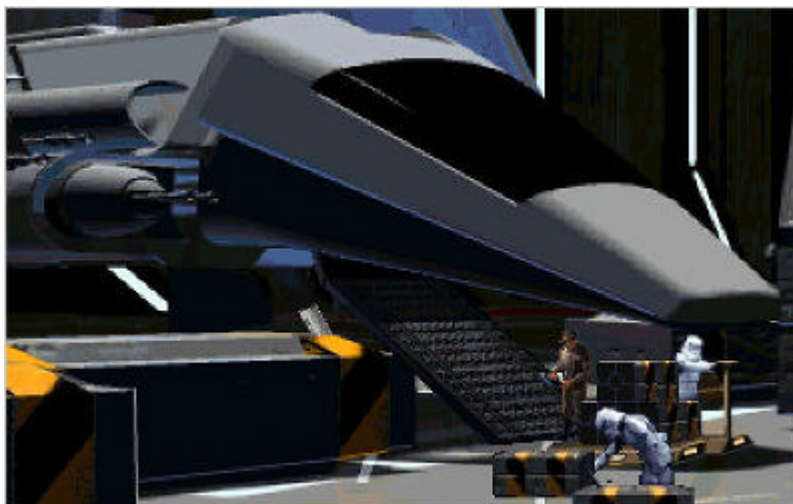
The computer beeped it's warning that reversion was occurring and the sublight engines were cut in as the unmarked freighter dropped out of hyperspace into the main shipping lanes of the Core worlds. As the starlines changed into pinpoints Raven settled back into the seat cushions and looked at the only other passenger on the ship, Gold Squadron's mascot, Rory. "Next stop, Coruscant," he said smiling. Rory's jaws parted slightly and a low hissing sound issued forth.

Pivot had been somewhat surprised, thought Raven, when he did not ask for any additional manpower from Gold Squad for this mission. Going after Ka'jat would be arduous and fraught with danger, and Raven figured only someone with a vested interest should be involved. Besides, despite Pivot's warnings, this was personal, very personal.

As they approached Coruscant Raven hailed a small cargo spaceport outside the Imperial City near the harbor. "This is the freighter Sulaco, requesting permission to land. Purpose is to refuel and take on crew. We're on a 24 hour layover then we space to meet a transfer shipment in orbit."

The spaceport cleared Raven's ship a few seconds later, "Roger Sulaco, you are cleared for docking bay LV-426. Set down and stand by for inspection."

As Raven initiated the landing sequence Rory disappeared into the ships ventilation system.

**[Several hours later, outside a small bar and grill near the docks...]**

Raven stepped out of the side door and started walking down the footpath behind the spacer bar where he had just finished his dinner. He could not seem to get used to having Imperial soldiers everywhere he looked. "Well," he thought to himself, "what did you expect on Coruscant?" It was evening and would soon be full dark. Raven worked his way towards the massive supply warehouses clustered near the bay through which moved spaceship parts and supplies for the Empire's war effort. He had been on the capital planet of the Empire for just over 6 hours.

Finally, he reached his destination, an alley running along the side of a warehouse just outside the security

perimeter. In the deepening gloom it was difficult to see but soon he found the ripped grating on an access shaft leading down under the warehouse. Raven sat down across from the grating and took a cheap bottle of liquor from his jacket and splashed some around where he was huddled. Anyone passing would think he was just a drunk spacer who had wandered off here to do his drinking alone.

An hour slipped by when Raven heard a scrapping sound across the alley. As he watched a long dark shape emerged from the grating. Raven looked around, making sure there was no one in sight. "Did you find him?" he asked.

Rory parted his jaws, displaying double rows of sharp teeth that gleamed faintly in the starlight. "Yessssssss," he hissed. "Heesssss near byyy."

The two figures moved off down the alley with Rory leading the way. They traveled about a half a klick then stopped. Raven surveyed the shipping offices that Rory indicated was where they'd find the man they were stalking. The front of the building faced the alley they were in. Down the street was a public transportation tube. Perfect. Their target should pass right by the alleyway on his way to the tube station. The street was well lit but nearly deserted at this hour.

Soon a figure in a midnight black uniform emerged from the building and stepped out into the empty street. Rory hissed deep in his throat. Raven moved deeper into the alley away from the street. "Fetch," he said softly to his scaly companion.

The figure in black crossed the street and as he stepped up onto the curb he heard a low hiss. Without hesitation he slipped his blaster into his hand and looked into the alley. He moved past the opening, stepping around the trash and debris that spilled from its dark interior and out onto the edge of the sidewalk. Suddenly, the trash churned and a dark green tail whipped out and knocked the man down. But he was very quick and snapped two shots off before he was slammed onto the pavement. Before he could regain his feet Rory had him pinned and the figure looked up into the alligators gaping maw.

"Ich glaub mich tritt ein Pferd!" the prone figure cursed. "It's you! I'm afraid I'm out of Zwetschgenschknaps at the moment, my green friend."

Raven stepped out of the shadows and glanced around to see the street was still empty. He motioned for Rory to release his grip and he extended his hand to help the man up. "Herr Vyper, Black Knight 2, I presume," he said. Then he smiled, "Brother, we've just got to stop meeting like this."

Michael "Vyper" Stauber, member of the Imperial Black Knights, looked up at his brother and accepted his help as he stood up and brushed off his uniform. "Jim, I'm sure you'll understand if I say that I'm a bit surprised to see you. Especially here. Have you defected, should I shoot you, or did you have something else in mind."

"We have business to discuss brother mine," Raven said grimly. "Family business."

#### **[In a shielded compartment aboard the freighter Tam'alon...]**

Vyper cracked the cap off another bottle of Zwetschgenschknaps and topped off his glass. The balance of the bottle he poured into the gaping mouth of Rory, who was laying on his back under the table with his head propped up on a chair. "So this Ka'jat was the Schleimbeutel who ordered the attack that destroyed our family. How did you find this out?" Vyper asked his brother as he dropped the empty bottle into the gators mouth.

As Rory ground up the glass Raven replied simply, "During an Alliance operation." Raven was not about to compromise Alliance security even with his own brother. "Someone who knows our family history gave me a copy. I've managed to check Alliance Intel records and there is not much information on Ka'jat. But there is an indication that he may have been in the Imperial service. That's where you come in... I need to search the Imperial net for information on this guy."

Vyper opened another bottle and again split its contents with the alligator at his feet. "Ja sure," he shrugged. "And if I find out something about this person, what do you propose doing about it?"

Raven drained his own drink. "I propose that you and I go look Ka'jat up."

A smile crept across the face of the Black Knight. "Careful brother, you are thinking like an Imperial now not one of your bleeding heart Alliance rabble rousers."

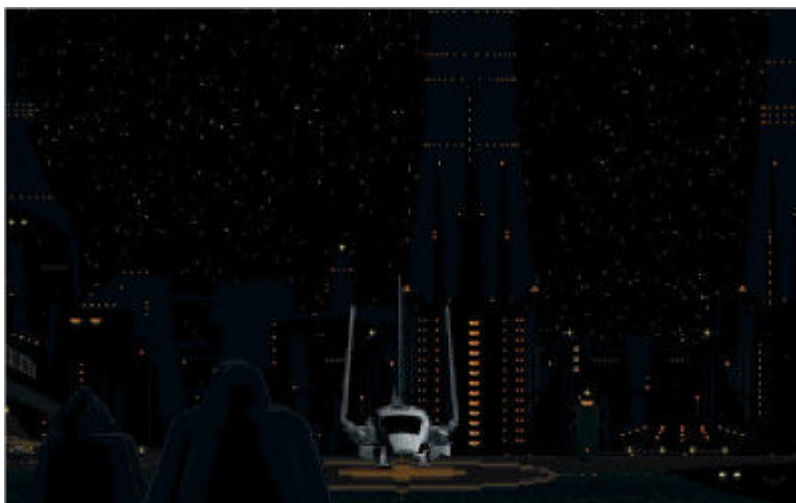
"Michael, don't try to work politics into this. For me this is very personal. Now are you in or out?" Raven asked.

Vyper thought about it. "I'm in. I'll have to contact my squadron and arrange for some leave. Then we'll need to check the Imperial records and see if we cannot get a lead on this Ka'jat. I'll go get on the comm-link and get things setup. Do you have room in your ship's hold for my fighter?"

"No problem," Raven said standing up. "Let's go."

### **[Later out on the landing pad...]**

Vyper prepared to release the coupler of the swing boom and gave Raven a curt nod. It took some effort to stow his black painted Tie Advanced into the Tam'alon/Sulaco's cargo hold, but the powerful exocrane, borrowed from the harbor motorpool allow them to move the smaller ship quickly and without arousing any suspicions.



He swung down from the exocrane and joined his brother. Raven pointed to the emblazoned sword painted on the each side of the T/A, as he hit the switch that closed the cargo bay doors. "I thought the Black Knight's crest featured a black horse or something like that," he said.

Vyper chuckled and slapped Raven on the back. "You're thinking of the Dark Riders. And I understand your fighter no longer has a red stripe down each side. You've been very busy as well it seems."

Raven gave Vyper a smile. "I see. Nice to know we've been trying to keep tabs on each other. A lot of things have changed since our last meeting aboard the Happy Jack. Right now though we need more information about Ka'jat and we need to lift in about six hours. Any ideas where to go to do our research?"

Vyper closed his eyes and gave some thought to the problem. Then he turned towards Raven and said, "Yes, I think I know where I can find anything that exists on our target. The Imperial Security Office is just a few blocks away. They should have access to any data on Ka'jat that still exists."

Raven nodded his head slowly in agreement. "Yeah, if you say so. Hmm, Imperial Security Office. Doesn't sound like a place where I'd want to spend any length of time."

Vyper chuckled, "You're safe in my company. Or as safe as anyone can be with the bozos in Security. Let us us go over there and have some fun. Trust me, you wouldn't want to miss it."

**[At the nearby offices of the district Imperial Security Bureau...]**

Two figures marched into the Imperial Security offices and breezed pass the front desk at the entrance without hesitation. They ignored the calls from the officer on duty and only a quad of stormtroopers in armor was able to stop their advance in front of turbolifts.

With blasters drawn the stormtroopers surrounded the duo. An officer arrived and pointed at them and snapped, "What do you think you're doing here?"

The smaller figure looked at the trooper with ill tempered contempt. "About time someone showed up to help us. Direct us to a suitable scan-net station. We don't have much time so get a move on before I'm forced to ask you for your ID number. The Empire can always use more troops in the spice mines of Kessel."

The officer shifted his stance and took a deep breath, while he looked at the two strangers with unease. "Ah, sirs," he said hesitatingly. "Do you have authorization?"

Vyper slipped his hand into his sleeve and pulled out what looked like a rolled piece of film. "Here," he said simply. The watch officer did not seem to know what to do. Vyper reached over and broke the seal on the edge of the film. "Pay attention," he barked.

The film separated and unfolded into an elaborately engraved perma-doc. "What is this..." the officer's voice faded away, as he read the few words on the document. His hands began to tremble. He turned the document around and extended it towards Vyper. He seemed to be having trouble talking and finally choked out, "Sir, if you would please confirm?"

Vyper pressed his thumb at the holographic seal at the bottom of the page. He waited a few seconds then removed his thumb. The officer then studied the seal with care. His face went even more pale as handed the document back and saluted. "Sir! How may we be of service?"

Vyper smiled and resealed the film. "Just point us in the direction of a scan-net terminal with full access to the Navy memory core. We'll also need to check the old Republic archives. Also, coffee and Gluehwein would be in order, I think."

The officer pointed down the corridor and snapped, "Sector 08/15 on Level Sub 4. Just follow me and I'll arrange everything for you." He rounded on the stormtroopers who seemed to be enjoying the watch officer's officer's discomfort, "Lieutenant, you and your men will be the escort detail for these gentlemen while they are here. See to their every need."

Raven couldn't help but to feel relieved as they finally entered the office assigned to them. It had obviously been hastily vacated and was very plush. As soon as the door closed shut and the stormtroopers mounted guard outside, Raven turned around and gave Vyper a curious look.

"That was some kind of authorization," he said pointedly.

Vyper smiled, as he unsealed the film again and handed it to his brother. "Nothin'. Really," he said with mock humility.

Raven turned the paper around and read the two lines of text below the well known imperial crest:

'Deny the carrier of this message nothing.

Darth Vader, Lord of the Sith'

Below the text was a verigrapbox showing the lines of a fading thumbprint, that matched the engraved lines of a thumbprint displayed in the holographic seal itself. Raven had heard about such documents. The Emperor was said to be the only one that issued them. They were supposedly impossible to falsify. But he had never seen one before.

He handed the perm-doc back to Vyper. "Pretty impressive. You could borrow a Star Destroyer with this. How did you come by something like that, if you don't mind me asking?"

Vyper accessed the computer and entered a search string. While the computer dugged through the vast Imperial database he leaned back in the uncomfortable chair and frowned slightly. "Well, since I don't think you'll call Vader up and turn me in, why not? Stiletto, a colleague of mine, and I went on a little errand for Lord Vader and he thought it would be a good idea to issue this authorization to us as the Empire can be a bit er, bureaucratic at times, shall we say. Sometimes it is difficult to get things done quickly. These types of documents usually destroy themselves shortly after the seal has been broken. It's a nice chemical trick, you know? We paid a small fortune to a slimy Grackah scientist to suppress the self-ignition. It has been quite useful from time to time... Ah, there it is, Ka'jat, Major, Imperial Navy."

The two brothers read carefully through the file and discovered what Raven already suspected, that Ka'jat is a native of the Magaen Drift. He had been in the old Republic Military as a strategic military planner. He rose up through the ranks quickly as the Empire was established and worked in the Imperial High Command as a battle planner. He was brilliant but was constantly exceeding his authority. After some unexplained events he was demoted when the Emperor decided that his loyalty could not be counted upon and assigned to a post in bio-weapons research. His research station was in a backwater system far removed from the Core worlds. While in bio-weapons Ka'jat was caught diverting men and material for his personal use and was court-martialed in one of the Empire's 'Star Chamber' sessions where an officer could be tried and convicted without even being aware of the charges brought against him. All research data and the entire research station were reportedly destroyed in some sort of 'accident' when the detail arrived to take Ka'jat into custody. Ka'jat was not found in the debris and was assumed to have escaped.

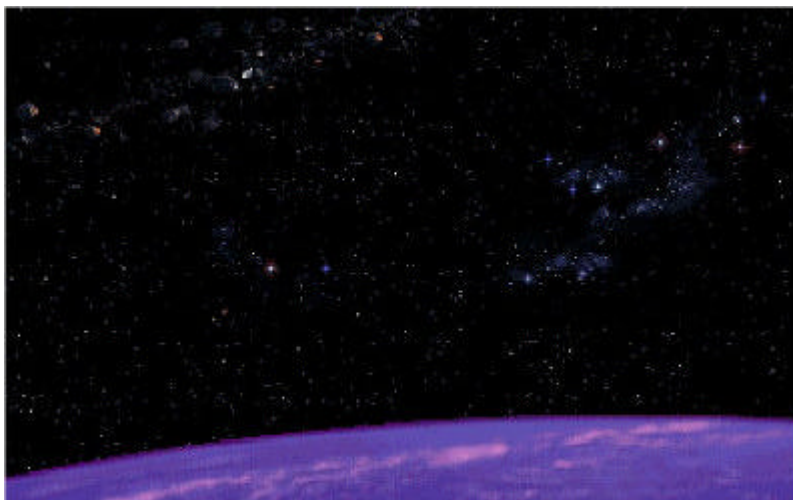
Raven shook his head. "That doesn't help us much. Isn't there anything more?"

Vyper shook his head. "Nein. But look here. There's a death bounty on his head that no one has managed to collect. Whew, ol' Palpatine looks pretty desperate. He'll lose a small fortune when somebody drags this bloody carcass in."

"That doesn't help us either. Wait! Does this file mention the location of the research station? The one, that is reported as destroyed?" asked Raven.

Vyper scrolled back through the information and cursed silently. "That's strange. It looks like the location of that facility has been deleted from the file. But if we cross-check the Star Chamber records there are references that indicate the men and material that Ka'jat was accused of redirecting were supposed to go to a system called Barrada-Nikto."

"Well, I had hoped to find something more useful. But Barrada-Nikto is better than nothing. Let's check it out." Raven hesitated for a moment and looked at Vyper. "That is, if you can get us outa here as easily as you got us in..."



The system of Barrada-Nikto was considered worthless by both the Empire and the Rebel Alliance. It consisted of three inhabited planets on the edge of Imperial held space with small scattered populations as the planetary conditions just barely supported human life. At the largest of these settlements, the freighter Tam'alon had touched down.

Vyper and Raven stood outside of the largest and most disreputable looking gambling establishment in the town. "We need to find out if Ka'jat is recruiting, trying to establish a new base here and this is a likely place for him to be doing it. You clear on our cover story," asked Vyper looking at his brother.

"No problem. We're a couple of unemployed mercs. That way we won't scare anyone off as too threatening but still look like we'd make decent cannon fodder for Ka'jats operation. Sheesh, of all the groups to have to pretend to be a part of..." Raven complained.

"Relax," Vyper said good-naturedly. "Remember our motto 'We don't take sides, no one wants us!'"

Laughing at Vyper's joke the two walked into the joint. After a few drinks at the bar they wandered into the gaming room and played sabbac for a while. Finally, as they were thinking they would have to call it a night, a figure at the table struck up a conversation and soon the three of them adjourned back to the bar where they took a booth in the back.

"My name is Ives," said their new companion as they settled in and ordered a round of drinks. "We don't get many mercs through here."

Vyper replied, "Well, we're a little hot around some of the inner systems right now. So my partner and I decided to clear out for awhile. Besides, business was slow."

Ives smiled, "Well, maybe you guys would like to find a little work around here?"

Looking up from his glass of blue stuff Raven said, "Maybe. Doesn't look like there's much action in this system. What have you got?"

"Oh, there's action all right. Someone with money and sense is building a base on a planetoid just outside this system. It's called Klat-Tu on the charts. We can use some pilots to run interference, maybe a little smuggling. You interested?"

"Sure," Vyper said. "Depending on the pay."

A shadow fell across the table as three big mean-looking men walked up to the booth. The largest one had a full beard and was missing his left eye, a scar cutting through his cheek from the empty socket to his jawline. "So you bozos are mercs, huh?" he said. "I don't like mercenaries. None of us likes mercenaries."

Raven looked up at the trio. They were all wearing blasters and one had a bat or club in his hand and was rhythmically tapping it against his leg. Smiling at the man who had spoken Raven said, "If you've come to ask my friend and I to peaceably leave this fine establishment you are too many for the task. If on the other hand you've come to throw us out bodily, well..."

Vyper cut in, "You are too few!" He then vaulted out of the booth and did a front flip landing behind the trio. He quickly side kicked the knee of one of the thugs and with a sickening crack the fellow went down.

Raven had ignited his drink from the candle on the table and threw it into the face of the man who had first spoken. Suddenly a blaster shot hit the table and the fight was on in earnest. Raven knocked over the table and everyone fell against the bar. This caused a chain reaction amongst the crowded bar patrons, and soon the room was ablaze with blaster fire, swinging fists, and flying furniture.

After some time things finally settled down. "Where's Ives?" called Raven surveying the wreckage. From across the room Vyper holstered his blaster. "I think he slipped out when the shooting started. A course of action that I suggest we adopt for ourselves."

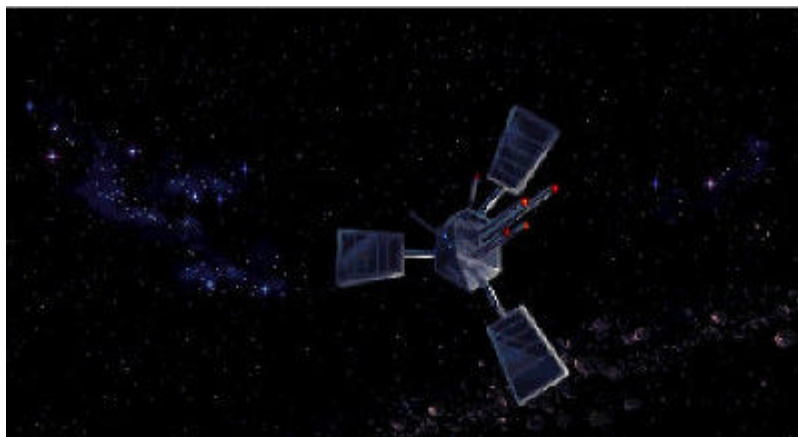
Later, the bartender was dragging bodies out of the joint as what passed for the local militia showed up. "We got a report of a disturbance here," said the constable. "What happened?"



The bartender looked at him with disgust. "Too late, as usual," he muttered. "With all the graft you collect you'd think we'd get a little better service." He sat down and wiped the blood and mess off his hands. "Fight," he explained finally. "Some patrons had a disagreement with two guys who said they were mercs."

The constable looked inside the club. "Space! Two mercs did all this?"

The bartender lit a smoke and shook his head no. "I've seen mercenaries fight before. Whoever those two guys were they were definitely NOT mercs. I can tell you, these guys were good."



Vyper switched on his comm-link. "Raven, I've followed Ives to a compound up in the mountains above the town. The base may be out on Klat-Tu but I'll bet a stack of credits that Ka'jat is here."

On the Tam'alon just outside the Barrada-Nikto system Raven replied, "Roger. The base is here all right but it looks pretty beat up. They've got a number of work crews down on the surface and I can see what looks like some Skipray Blastboats under some cammo-nets but I'd say Ka'jat is going to be awhile getting this place operational. I'll leave a small spy satt in stationary orbit to keep an eye on things here. Now we just have to figure how to distract any support he may have while we move in on him."

"Leave that to me my brother," Vyper chuckled. "Leave that to me."

Vyper closed the channel and stowed his little communicator back into his pocket. It was too small for the kind of communicating he needed to do now. He took the ground transport they had 'liberated' and made the long trip back into town. Near the landing field he found what he was looking for, a public comm station. He paid for a booth and accessed the planetary comm-codes list and searched for several keywords. After a few seconds he found, what he was looking for: "Holoran Enterprises - Interplanetary Flower Delivery". He punched in the code and waited a few seconds as his call was routed through the public comm-net. The screen lit up but not with a face, just an elaborate company crest with flowers arranged below it. Music played in the background and a bored voice mumbled, "Flowers say it best... How may I help you?"

Vyper tried to remember the right countersign, finally the silly phrase came to mind and he said, "I need a bouquet of Coruscant Red Roses for a very special Calamarian friend with a green thumb. I wish immediate delivery and would like to speak to your best flower arranger."

He heard someone suddenly clear their throat and the music was immediately cut off. There was a barely audible pinging sound that Vyper knew meant that they had enabled a secured waveform and tracking program. They would pinpoint the origination point of this call within a few seconds and anyone listening would soon just hear a buzzing sound. The voice spoke again, this time sounding fully alert, even a bit edgy.

"I see, a special delivery you say," the unseen person said. "Are you already customer of our fine service?"

Vyper nodded toward the comm-both vid link, "Ja. My Service, er, customer number is IN-Alpha-Beta-Kappa-Two-6478 slash 93."

He heard the tapping sound of keys pressed on a keyboard in quick succession and after a few seconds the voice said, "Confirmed. I'll connect you with our, ah, flower arranger."

The screen went black and the logo disappeared. Vyper had waited almost seven minutes when suddenly a very familiar voice blared out of the speaker, "Where in the name of the seven hells are you and why should I care?"

Vyper smiled and he could almost imagine Vice Admiral Callahan's facial expression, as he shouted into the intercom mounted into his command chair on board the Imperial Star Destroyer Hyperion. "Nice to hear your voice again, Vice Admiral. It has been a while hasn't it?"

The Admiral laughed and suddenly the screen came back to life. Vyper noted that Callahan hadn't aged well. His hair was almost white now and his skin was wrinkled with many more lines than he remembered. But the fire in his eyes was still as bright as ever, a testimony to the strong will and the iron fist that Callahan was well known for. Callahan chuckled and groaned, "No, not you again, Vyper! I had hoped that our paths would never cross again. I worked too hard getting rid of you. Let me tell you, since your reposting we've had better luck with trainees fresh from the Academy surviving their first year aboard."

Vyper sighed and mumbled, "Ja, I can imagine. Surely, you don't hold a grudge because of the little distillery that I ran when I was under your command? It wasn't my fault when that dammed thing exploded and set fire to the cargo bay..."

The Vice Admiral laughed, "Yeah, I remember the incident very well." He paused for a second or two and said with a lower voice, "Oh well, we cannot live on past good times... let's make this short. Our 'service' reported, that you want an immediate special delivery? We're the closest capital ship to your position. Give me the details."

Vyper resisted an urge to inspect his fingernails. "I stumbled across a Rebel outpost on a small planetoid just outside the system I'm calling you from. It's called Klat-Tu on the stargharts. It was just a fluke that I found it at all. You'll love this... they're using an old abandoned Imperial station of some kind. Looks like they found it and decided we'd never look for them in one of our own unused installations. I think they plan on using this base as a staging area for covert operations given its location. I also think it would be a good idea to put this small rock to the torch. Finally, the town I'm in is crawling with Alliance agents. A couple of AT-ATs here might be in order."

Callahan pressed a couple of keys on his datapad and studied some data. After a few seconds he looked up again. "We'll jump in-system in two hours and twenty one minutes. The Rebels will never know what hit them. What is your situation?" he asked.

Vyper shrugged. "I'm actually on another mission entirely but this Rebel nest must be stamped out at once. My operation involves a site in the mountains north of the town here. I'll be out of the city limits before you arrive so feel free to attack as soon as you enter the system. Interdict any ships leaving this planet unless I clear them. That will help with my operation considerably."

Callahan handed a datacard to someone off screen. "Commander Readings, prepare the jump and go to yellow alert," he said.

Reaching out his hand, Vyper prepared to shut down the channel, but the Vice Admiral wasn't quite finished with him yet. "It's hard to imagine, that the two of us serve in the same Navy, but sometimes, only sometimes mind you, I actually wish that you were still under my command. That would give me the chance to repay you for some of the stunts you've pulled." The Vice Admiral's face lit up with a devilish smile. "Still doing those ship paint jobs for your squadmates? No, on second thought I don't want to know. Callahan out." The screen went blank.

#### **[Two hours, twenty one minutes and fifteen seconds later...]**

A lone Imperial Star Destroyer dropped silently out of hyperspace. The sleek wedge shaped behemoth slid past the edge of the system and into an approach to the third planet. Wave after wave of TIE bombers emerged from its massive hangar bay and headed towards a small planetoid at the edge of the system. Within thirty minutes the first bombing run began. There were no warnings and the Skiprays were caught on

the ground and death and destruction was assured as the only way off the planetoid was destroyed in the first onslaught. In the cold embrace of the void no one could hear the death cries of Ka'jats followers.

Assault Transports hovered above the planetoid waiting for the bombers to finish their work. They would set down and their stormtroopers would inspect the remains of the installation and make sure nothing of any use to the Rebels remained.

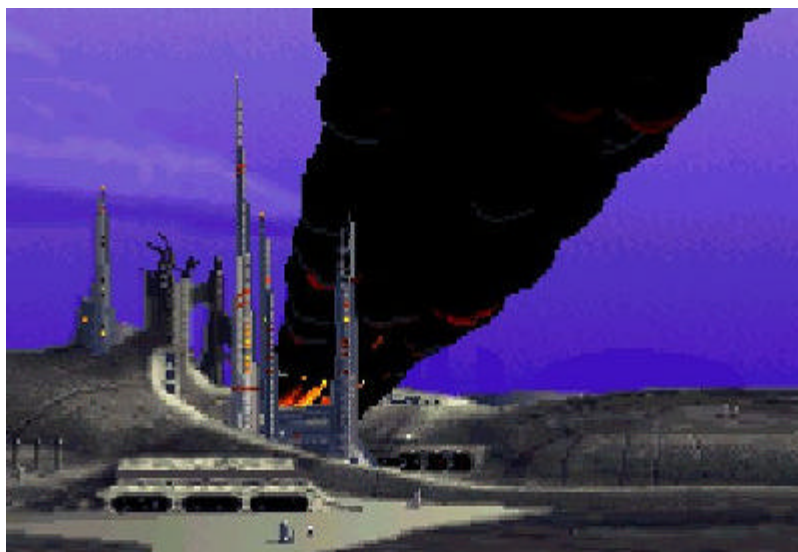
Almost a million kilometers away Vyper and Raven studied the passive sensor array and followed the progress of the Imperial interdiction. Their screens were tuned to the spy satts that Raven had put into orbit above both the planetoid and the planet they were now on.

Raven's face showed some unease as he watched the gigantic Star Destroyer come into orbit above them, but Vyper felt totally comfortable with this familiar sight. As the Imperial ship slowed into position and again disgorged smaller ships. TIE Interceptors, GUNs, and TRNs quickly took up positions around the equator and poles. Nothing could leave the atmosphere without being seen by watchful Imperial gunners. Next they saw the ground assault forces start their descent.

"Fahr zur Hoelle, Ka'jat," Vyper said with glee. "This is to pay you back for your treachery to the Imperium and for the slaughter of so many innocent people. Feel the WRATH of the Empire!"

After a moments silence Raven suddenly burst into uncontrolled laughter. Vyper stared at him and asked solemnly, "You see something funny out there?"

Raven got himself under control with some difficulty. "Nothing out there. It's you. Well, you and me, I guess. You know this is the first time in my life that I had an Imperial Officer at hand when I needed one. To say nothing of one who can deliver 'WRATH' on such short notice..."



Raven checked the long range scanner pulling in the spy satt feed from the small monitor orbiting Klat-Tu. He could see the TIE bombers making yet another run on the old Imperial station. The work crews had been devastated in the first attacks. The landing field was gone, marked only by the burning hulks of the once sleek Skipray Blastboats. "Looks like your friends caught them asleep on the ground," Raven said to Vyper, who sat in the freighters pilot's chair. "They're starting another bombing run... not that one is needed. I don't think Ka'jat can count on any help from his base or from town. Let's move out."

Vyper initiated the lift off sequence and the freighter rose up out of the canyon where they had been waiting. "They're just being meticulous. Standard Imperial policy, your tax dollars at work... you would rather they be sloppy?" Vyper replied easily. "We are coming up on the outskirts of the town."

The Tam'alon was running without lights and in the dark they could see the town on the horizon burning in

many places. "It looks like Callahan's assault troops have landed," Vyper commented. "That should account for Ives and any other operatives that Ka'jat may have in the town. Now we just need to make sure that Ka'jat himself does not escape."

Raven looked out the front viewport, towards the mountain peaks that hid the compound where the object of their quest would be found. "He's not going to get out this time. With the Imperial ships overhead and all his support cut off he is alone out here. If he has a ship and risks running the blockade we'll follow him out and you can take him in your fighter."

"We should know soon," Vyper said. He cut in the vertical repulsors and the huge freighter settled down into the main courtyard of the secluded compound. The scanners searched the open space and showed no life forms. "Can't get any readings inside the main residence. It's shielded."

The two brothers left the freighter and approached the main entrance. Just as they reached the door it slid open. "A trap," said Raven.

Vyper unholstered his blaster and took a thermal detonator from his jacket pocket. "I should certainly hope so," he said smiling at his brother. Together they entered the dark residence of Martin Ka'jat.

Raven checked his hand scanner. "No energy readings," he said softly. "Watch for tripwires."

Vyper tossed his head and a filter shield dropped down from his helmet over his eyes. "No wires, no beams. The floor looks solid enough." They worked their way into the residence. The place was larger than it looked from the outside. There were several large skeletons arrayed in display cases in several of the rooms. Carefully they searched each room talking to each other only as necessary.

Finally, Raven stopped. "A small power source was just activated at the end of this hall. Looks like someone just turned on a light." They made their way to the double doors and Raven drew his blaster. Just as Vyper was about to place the detonator on the door it opened and a voice called to them, "Come in gentlemen, come in."

Slipping into the room they found themselves facing a large desk. Sitting behind it was a short dark stocky figure with his hands folded in front of him. There was a lamp shining down on the desktop leaving the man's face in shadows. "Hello. I Martin Ka'jat am. I for you can do what?" asked the man at the desk.

Raven spoke first, "Martin Ka'jat, an Alliance warrant for your arrest I have."

"Ah, from the Drift you are." Ka'jat sighed and dropping the accent of the Drift replied, "Still you did not use the dialect as you searched my house looking for me. Yes, I was able to hear you both quite well, so let's just drop the accent. I use it only when I want those around me to underestimate my intelligence. And I don't think that will profit me with you two. Now Alliance you say?" questioned Ka'jat looking at Raven. "The sky above this worthless planet is full of Imperial warships and you threaten me with an Alliance warrant?"

Vyper emitted a short evil sounding laugh, "If it makes any difference there is death mark on you issued by the Imperial High Command. I am empowered to, if you'll excuse my choice of words, 'execute' that order."

There was a huge skull of some animal mounted on the wall. Raven was staring at it. "Ah," said Ka'jat ignoring Vyper's threat. "I see you are admiring some of my handiwork. I once did quite a bit with that species in the Imperial bio-weapons station that your forces are so effectively bombing even as we speak. Notice the double rows of teeth. They can cut through ceramic armor like a hot knife through butter. Magnificent creatures really. And amazingly intelligent, but completely uncontrollable as it turned out. Alas, we had an accident that coincided with some small disagreement that I had with that same Imperial High Command your companion mentioned a moment ago. Several of my creatures got loose and in the confusion I was able to ah, shall we say, relocate? I understand that the station had to be destroyed and all the creatures killed. I had planned to rebuild that station but you seem intent on dissuading me from doing that. Which brings us back to all this effort you are expending to arrest me. Most impressive. I had no idea that the Imperium still wanted me so badly."

"We have something a little more recent in mind," stated Raven. "You destroyed several colonies in the Magaen Drift. One of them was ours."

"Ah, REVENGE!" Ka'jat crowed. "Now there is a motive I understand completely. Most admirable. Ah, the Drift. Yes, so much time and energy spent there. Well," he said fixing Raven with a steely glare. "Your Alliance shall not retain possession of what is mine in the Drift for long my young friend. There will be a reckoning, be assured. As to the ancient history of your colony, it was expedient, simply that. I needed the equipment, supplies, and raw materials and so I took them. They could have given me what I wanted but the fools resisted and so I destroyed them. Should I show remorse? I think not. Now let's talk reality shall we? I know enough about both the Empire and the Alliance to be invaluable to either side. So as much as I might hate to disappoint you, I'm afraid that there will be no consequences for my actions of so long ago.

Now, down to the business at hand. There are Imperial ships above us and as luck would have it my own transport is out of commission at present. You, Imperial," Ka'jat said looking directly at Vyper. "You will take me to your force commander and I shall discuss with him the services I am prepared to offer the Empire at this time."

Raven and Vyper hesitated and looked at each other. The interaction was not lost on Ka'jat, "Ah, so you do represent different sides after all. I thought you might. So, do you two fight each other now? I cannot go with you both, so you will have to work it out between yourselves."

The two brothers watched each other for several heartbeats. "We've decided," said Vyper. Both Raven and Vyper opened fire with their blasters. Bolt after bolt of raw energy tore into Ka'jat. Smoke began to fill the room and still they fired, their blasters growing hot in their hands. Ka'jats body jerked and flopped in the chair chair finally falling face forward onto the desk. Sparks began to flash around the holes in Ka'jats chest.

Raven stopped shooting as did his brother. He turned the body over and looked at it in the light. "Damn! This is a droid covered with bio-synth flesh! We've been tricked." In the stillness they could hear the repulsor lifts of the Tam'alon revving up outside. "He's in our ship!"

Vyper and Raven started out of the office when they heard laughter coming from the desk. Walking around behind it they saw a small comm-link speaker. "Sorry to disappoint you, my young adversaries, but my ship really is damaged and so I am obliged to borrow yours. The cheap theatrics worked quite well, did they not?"

Vyper swore, "If he gets past the interdiction we'll never find him. He's beat us."

"No, I don't think so," said Raven looking again at the skull on the wall. "Rory is aboard the Tam'alon."

Looking up at the wall, Vyper studied the skull carefully. "Mein Gott! This is a... is a..." Vyper trailed off in shock.

"Exactly. This is the same species as your new found drinking buddy. Some of Ka'jats creatures must have truly escaped," Raven mused.

The speaker came to life again. A loud hissing was heard then Ka'jats voice... "No, NO, NO! You were all destroyed! Aggrhhhh, get it off me, get it off me! Help! Aieeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeee!" The speaker went silent.

Seconds ticked by. Finally, Raven took out his comm-link and flipped it on. "Raven to Tam'alon. Rory, don't leave the atmosphere. Bring the ship back and pick us up." Turning to Vyper he said, "Let's get out of here. Can we drop you anywhere?"

Vyper sat down on the edge of the desk, "No, just unload my fighter. I'll escort you out of the system and then catch a ride with the Imperial ships when they pull out." Vyper had a thoughtful look, "Can Rory pilot that freighter all right by himself?"

"I have it on good authority that he's amazingly intelligent," replied Raven looking once more at the skull on the wall.

**[End of <POV> Family Business]**



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