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FROM THE TRAINING OFFICE

Welcome to the Inaugural Issue of "Proceedings"!

Greetings, fellow members of The Emperor's Hammer, and welcome to the debut issue of "Proceedings" – our very own academic journal that delves into the intriguing realms of online gaming, strategy, and everything in between. As the Training Officer, it is my distinct pleasure to present to you the fruits of the intellectual endeavors of our club's brilliant minds. Our members have not merely played, but explored, analyzed, and dissected the very fabric of the gaming universe we collectively inhabit. "Proceedings" is the culmination of their insightful pursuits, a platform where ideas are shared, strategies are dissected, and the pulse of our community is felt.


Within these pages, you will find a diverse array of theses contributed by our dedicated members. Each piece is a testament to the passion and intellectual curiosity that defines The Emperor's Hammer. From tactical analyses to deep dives into the lore that breathes life into our favorite stories, our contributors have left no stone unturned.

Our aim with "Proceedings" is simple: to foster a community of thinkers and strategists, providing a space where ideas are celebrated, and knowledge is the currency of distinction. In these pages, you'll discover not only the expertise of our members but also the camaraderie that binds us as we collectively navigate the vast and ever-evolving landscapes of lore and academia.

As we embark on this academic journey together, let "Proceedings" be a source of knowledge, and a testament to the intellectual prowess that thrives within the ranks of The Emperor's Hammer. May these pages ignite curiosity, spark discussions, and forge connections that extend beyond our medals and ranks.

So, flip through these digital pages, dear reader, and immerse yourself in the wealth of insights that our community has to offer. This is the beginning of a new chapter for our community, and we can't wait to see where it takes us.

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THE TIE DEFENDER

THESIS FOR THE GRADUATE OF STARFIGHTER OPERATIONS

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11 MAY 2023

In this thesis I will be discussing one of the most iconic TIE variants in the Star Wars universe. The TIE Defender. I have chosen this craft, firstly due to my personal love for the craft, but also because of the huge difference between the Legends lore and the Official Canon lore surrounding this starfighter. I will be discussing its advantages and disadvantages; its ordinance and systems and it's uses and capabilities. Firstly, though, I will outline both the Legends and Canon lore for the craft.

TIE/D Defender, Legends Lore

"Imperial High Command decided that defender pilots would only be selected from TIE interceptor pilots who had flown at least twenty combat missions and survived. We're either the best pilots in the Imperial fleet or the luckiest."

—Rexler Brath

The TIE/D Defender, commonly known as the TIE Defender or T/D, was a high-performance TIE Series starfighter developed for the Imperial Navy by Sienar Fleet Systems in a project overseen by Grand Admiral Demetrius Zaarin shortly before the Battle of Endor. Representing a shift in starfighter design from previous TIE models, the ship featured a hyperdrive as well as deflector shields to allow it to operate independently of Imperial capital ships. The ship's speed and agility, combined with its arsenal of four laser cannons, two ion cannons, two warhead launchers and an optional tractor beam projector made it arguably the most advanced starfighter available at the time.

After Zaarin's failed coup against Emperor Palpatine, the renegade admiral attempted to gain control of the TIE Defender technology to give his forces a technological advantage over the Empire. The advanced starfighter also attracted the attention of other factions, including the Rebel Alliance and pirate groups. Imperial forces under the command of Grand Admiral Thrawn were ultimately able to prevent the spread of the technology and the starfighter played a major role in Thrawn's successful campaign against Zaarin.

Beyond the Zaarin campaign, the TIE Defender's high cost, together with political factors, kept it from achieving widespread use in the Empire and units were assigned only to the most elite pilots. The fighters participated in several other engagements during the Imperial era, including the Battle of Mygeeto and the Battle of Endor. Following the death of Emperor Palpatine at Endor, the TIE Defender continued to see limited use by Imperial forces. TIE Defenders saw action during Shadowspawn's campaign against the New Republic in 5 ABY and were used by the Republic's Rogue Squadron during a brief alliance with former Director of Imperial Intelligence Ysanne Isard

against Prince-Admiral Delak Krennel's Ciutric Hegemony in 9 ABY. The fighters participated in multiple battles during the Yuuzhan Vong War and continued to be used by the Imperial Remnant until at least 44 ABY.

"A logical advance for Imperial fighter design."

—Imperial propaganda

The above overview is taken from the Legends section of Wookieepedia and is a very concise history. Most of the information for the design and creation of the TIE Defender in Legends lore is based in and around the storyline for the Lucasarts game Star Wars: TIE Fighter, released in 1994. It saw various iterations and styling throughout other releases, until the 2012 book *The Essential Guide to Warfare* where it had its final Legends update.

TIE/D Defender, Canon Lore

"If they're actually building these in numbers, our pilots won't stand a chance."

"And neither will the Rebellion."

—Hera Syndulla and Kanan Jarrus

The TIE/d "Defender" Multi-Role Starfighter, also called the TIE/D Defender or simply the TIE Defender, was an advanced experimental TIE line starfighter manufactured by Sienar Fleet Systems for the Imperial Navy of the Galactic Empire. The starfighter was referred to as the TIE Defender project while under development. Unlike previous TIE models, the starfighter featured a hyperdrive as well as deflector shields, and was easily recognized by its three wings mounted around an aft section of the cockpit. These specifications made the fighter much more difficult to destroy than standard TIE fighters.

The TIE Defender was considered a fighter-bomber; it was armed with heavy cannons and missiles. The ship was introduced as a result of Grand Admiral Thrawn's new fighter initiative at the Imperial Factory on Lothal in the year 2 BBY, launched to deal with the growing rebel threat, and was supported by both Grand Moff Wilhuff Tarkin and Emperor Palpatine. It was developed from a prototype called the TIE Advanced x7. As the project was to be less expensive than Project Stardust, and due to the constant delays of Director Orson Callan Krennic, many Imperials started to consider using the fundings of Project Stardust for Thrawn's TIE/D Defender instead.

However, after Governor Arihnda Pryce destroyed Lothal's fuel depot to kill Jedi Knight Kanan Jarrus, the project was halted indefinitely. Additionally, the funding for the fighter line was ultimately reassigned for Project Stardust.

The TIE Defender would still see some use throughout the further Galactic Civil War. Following the battle at Jekara, several TIE Defenders were used by Dark Squadron under bounty hunter Beilert Valance. On the order of Vader, the squadron used their defenders to take out Admiral Tarl Sokoli aboard the *Forerunner II*. The fighters were available to Captain Kosh of the 68th Legion. At least one Defender flew during the Battle of Jakku and was destroyed, crashing into the Graveyard of Giants.

Although the TIE/D never saw widespread use during the Galactic Civil War, its nature was revived by First Order tacticians who saw it as a versatile attack craft to throw at New Republic forces. Many of its features were incorporated into the TIE/sf space superiority fighter, which were later refined in the TIE/vn space superiority fighter. In addition to using the Defenders' features in the TIE/sf and TIE/vn models, First Order officials revived the Imperial TIE Defender program and regarded the TIE/D as a versatile attack craft. Furthermore, the TIE Defender's hybrid nature as a fighter-bomber influenced the design of Kylo Ren's TIE silencer.

A customised TIE/D was used by Kiza, a former member of the Acolytes of the Beyond, in 21 ABY during her hunt to find Exegol.

"A new fighter? Difficult to see how one small ship will change much."

"Agent, victory and defeat are often determined by the smallest detail."

—ISB Agent Aleksandr Kallus and Grand Admiral Thrawn

The above overview is taken from the Canon section of Wookieepedia and is also a very concise history. Most of the information for the design and creation of the TIE Defender in Canon lore is based in and around the storyline for the Disney animated series *Star Wars: Rebels*, released in 2014. The TIE Defender also featured heavily in the EA game *Star Wars Squadrons*, released in 2020. It was released as the fifth and final fighter added to the Imperial faction as a later update to the game. It's advanced nature and difficulty to master was very apparent in the way in which it was coded, with only the best pilots able to fly it efficiently and with skill. However, it did not adhere to the accepted statistic block which is a consistent feature of both Legends and Canon. It is interesting to note that in Legends it was Thrawn that was responsible for the counter to the TIE Defender, whereas in Canon, Thrawn is the driving force in the design and creation of the craft.

The Legends statistic block, as used by the Emperor's Hammer Battle Centre is as follows:

"-Production Information-

Manufacturer: Sienar Fleet Systems

Line: TIE Series

Model: Twin Ion Engine Defender

Class: Starfighter

Cost: 300,000 credits (new) 80,000 credits (used)

Technical specifications: Length 9.2 meters

Maximum acceleration: 4,220 G, 21 MGLT/s

MGLT: 144 MGLT with all recharges set to maintenance level, 180 MGLT with tractor beam recharge fully redirected to engines.

Maximum atmospheric speed: 1,680 km/h

Manoeuvrability rating: 110 DPF

Engine unit: SFS P-sz9.7 twin ion engines (rated 230 KTU)

Hyperdrive rating: Class 2.0

Hyperdrive system: SFS ND9 hyperdrive motivator

Power plant: SFS I-s4d solar ionization reactor

Shielding: Forward/Rear projecting Novaldex deflector shield generators (rated 100 SBD)

Hull: Titanium hull with Quadanium steel solar panels (rated 14 RU)
Navigation system: SFS N-s6 Navcon
Avionics: SFS F-s5x flight avionics system
Armament: SFS L-s9.3 laser cannons (4), Borstel NK-3 medium ion cannons (2), SFS M-g-2 general-purpose warhead launchers (2), Standard load: concussion missiles or proton torpedoes, Tractor beam projector
Escape craft: Ejector seat
Crew: Pilot (1)
Passengers: None
Cargo capacity: 65 kilograms
Consumables: 1 week
Other systems: Wing-mounted manoeuvring jets
Usage Role(s): Space superiority fighter, Interceptor, Light bomber
There are a number of very minor alterations between the Legends and Canon statistical blocks. However, the major differences are in the TIE Defender's armament.
Armament: Wingtip L-s9.3 laser cannons (6), Chin-mounted L-s9.3 laser cannons (2), Warhead launchers (2), Standard load: Concussion missiles, CLL-3 Ion Torpedoes or Proton torpedoes, Tractor beam projector"

The advantages of the TIE Defender are clear, massive firepower, shields, hyperdrive and superior speed & manoeuvrability. The craft is more than a match for any Rebel or New Republic starfighter. We should also note that, as a light bomber, the TIE Defender can take on smaller capital ships & stations and assist with the assault on larger ones. The disadvantages are around the prohibitive cost of manufacture and difficulty of training pilots to a sufficient level.

When comparing the advantages of the TIE Defender to the four most popular Rebel Alliance starfighters, the RZ1 A-Wing, the T-65 X-Wing, the BTL Y-Wing and the A/SF-01 B-Wing, the base firepower of the TIE Defender outstrips all of the above with the only limiting factors being the payload of torpedoes carried by some and the ability to carry bombs of the bombers. When comparing the shielding the scenario is similar, with only the B-Wing matching the TIE Defender, the other three craft have a substantially lower shield rating. The hyperdrive system again is comparable between the TIE Defender and B-Wing, but the other three craft do have a slightly faster hyperdrive installed, however, it should be noted that the TIE Defender was not expected to operate for any long period of time away from its base of operations. Finally, and most notably the speed and manoeuvrability of the TIE Defender is far higher than all except the A-Wing, which matches the MGLT/s of the TIE Defender and accelerates slightly faster but is still slower and has a lower manoeuvrability rating.

Moving on to the disadvantages of the TIE Defender. By the same grounds of comparison, The TIE Defender is 80,000 credits more expensive than the most expensive Rebel Alliance craft, the B-Wing. In most cases the TIE Defender is twice the cost per unit or even more. Clearly displaying the cost as prohibitive for large scale manufacture. The difficulty of training pilots for the TIE Defender is a two-fold problem. The first coming directly from the previous point about cost. The second was the complexity of the selection and training process. Opportunities to train on the TIE

Defender were limited, only high-ranking ace TIE Interceptor pilots who had survived at least twenty combat missions, and whose loyalty to the Empire was undisputed, were selected, ensuring that only the best pilots flew the advanced starfighter. During the Galactic Civil War, Imperial pilots were required to gain a training certificate by flying the TIE Defender through an enclosed training course before proceeding to simulated combat missions. Having received a training certificate, TIE Defender pilots could then move onto the combat scenarios, some of which were based on historical sorties, designed to familiarise the pilot with the controls and handling of the starfighter before they entered actual combat.

In conclusion it is clear that the TIE Defender is an iconic Star Wars craft with a rich lore in both Canon and Legends and it has been a fan favourite in both iterations. I personally feel that the drawbacks or disadvantages of the craft, only lean into this lore and make it that bit more special in the eyes of its fans in the real world and the Imperial pilots in the lore itself. For the huge military machine of the Galactic Empire, that is famous for swarm tactics of “disposable” craft and pilots alike, to have a prohibitively expensive and elite craft is both alluring and interesting to research and discuss. The TIE Defender is, in my opinion, a wonderful craft in both aesthetics and technological design, which combined with the lore makes it categorically my favourite starfighter in the Star Wars universe.

Practical Scenario Briefing

Greetings Commander, what follows is the mission briefing for you and your squadron. The twelve of you will be piloting the advanced TIE/D Defender class starfighter with a standard payload of concussion missiles.

You will be escorting a convoy of three Gozanti-class transport cruisers, and you will be ambushed by three full squadrons of enemy craft, that's 12 A-Wings, 12 X-Wings and 12 Y-Wings. Describe how you will protect the convoy and how you will take on the assaulting fighters. You will also need to defend the Gozanti's from a MC40a light cruiser which will be targeting the Gozanti-class cruisers. The Rebels will want to capture the shipment for their own use, and so will be using ion torpedoes to disable the cruisers to facilitate capture. Use this to your advantage.

Resolution

The first thing for any commander to understand in this scenario is that the odds of survival, much less victory are very slim. This scenario is designed to test, not only the student's knowledge, but also their ability to read a situation and to understand the implications of their decisions. There are multiple ways to approach this scenario. Some are valid, some are not. Some would get good pilots killed and/or captured. Most would see the shipment captured.

The next thing for a commander to take into account is the fact that they will need to immediately take control of the situation and begin issuing orders. They would be the highest-ranking member of military personnel in situ and once under attack, it would become a military matter. The Gozanti captains would accept any orders given as per their Imperial training. Taking control of the situation means knowing your enemy. The Rebel Alliance needs all the supplies and

ships they can get. They will be out to capture the shipment in its entirety. The only craft they would be interested in removing from the equation would be the TIE Defenders, even then some Rebel leaders may have delusions about capture for infiltration purposes in later missions. The decisions made in the opening moments of the engagement and the actions taken will very much decide the outcome. A change of approach or non-committal will result in utter failure.

So it is that the Commander in this scenario will immediately raise comms to the entire convoy and announce that he is taking complete control of the mission. He would then issue the command to the Gozanti captains to break off and divert all power to their engines and plot a hyperspace jump to a predetermined safe rendezvous system. Imperial convoys would always have these kinds of failsafe procedures in place. This “break-off” order is not random either. The leading Gozanti would know to break “down” and to Port, with the second breaking “up” and to Starboard and the final Gozanti taking one of the two remaining available headings that would be the fastest route away from the heading of the MC40a. The orders given to the squadron of Defenders, would be for 2-3, 2-4, 3-1, 3-2, 3-3 and 3-4 to report verbally and make way to escort the breaking Gozanti cruisers. Two TIE Defenders each with their primary objective to take out incoming torpedoes and engage enemy bombers to disrupt their runs until their assigned Gozanti can make the jump to hyperspace. Splitting the squadron in half like this could be a risky venture but the Gozanti cruisers will not make it without help and two TIE Defenders working together will be more than a match for all except the most ace flight of Rebel pilots.

It should be noted at this point that the reason for my gambit is because the Rebel ambush is going to be aimed at attack, not defence.

The remaining six TIE Defenders will immediately launch a full-scale assault on the MC40a. This is likely to throw the Rebel plans into disarray as their attacking starfighters must decide whether to push their assault and lose their cruiser or double back in an attempt to defend it. Either option is good for the Imperial commander at this stage. Because it will either buy more time for the Gozanti cruisers to escape or leave the attack group unopposed on the MC40a.

The attack on the MC40a would have the same objective with or without enemy starfighter interference. The only difference would be if two of the six TIE Defenders would be attacking the MC40a or making dummy runs, only to come back around on each other's tailing attacker/s and vaporising them in a hail of laser fire. The objective is to get as close as possible to the MC40a, under its shields in fact so that any outside fire from enemy fighters can be ignored. The Attack group would skim the surface blasting any targets of opportunity but readying for a tight orbiting “bowtie” manoeuvre at the aft of the ship, where all TIE Defender's would fire everything they have, their full payload of concussion missiles and with all beam power directed to lasers full power laser volleys, into the main engine and thruster blocks of the MC40a. Destroying even one of these will severely damage the ship's ability to maintain target on even one of the Gozanti cruisers before they are able to escape. The follow through on the “bowtie” will then allow the TIE Defenders to hit the bridge of the MC40a with their ion cannons at full power, disabling the remaining ship systems for a good amount of time.

By my calculations, this would all happen within the first few minutes and the Rebel forces should be left utterly vulnerable. Their cruiser has been hamstrung at the very least and Imperial casualties should be zero at this point. Now the squadron commander should assess the whereabouts of the Rebel fighters and focus the Y-Wings and X-Wings. The A-Wings are a nuisance, but their weapons cannot do enough to the Gozanti cruisers to prevent their escape now. The commander must advise his squadron to not get complacent. The mission is not over nor a success at this point. The Y-Wings will be easy to pick off for the TIE Defenders, but they must be careful of being outnumbered and ganged up on by X-Wings and A-Wings in the process. Keeping the squadron level-headed and operating as a unit to support each other will minimise casualties and increase efficiency.

At this stage, if there have been no unforeseen complications, the Gozanti cruisers will make the jump to the rendezvous with minimal damage sustained. The squadron commander must now make a final judgement call. Does the squadron stay and fight until the last Rebel craft is destroyed, risking more casualties and that the MC40a will likely regain system control soon and alert for reinforcements. Or does he switch attention to any A-Wings ahead of the squadron in the closest escape vector and punch through, taking out the fastest potential pursuers? Clearly the answer is the second option and that is what the commander should do. Order his squadron to take out as many A-Wings as possible whilst aiming for the escape vector. Then engage full throttle with shields set to fully aft. The squadron will still need to fly evasively but once coordinates are set and hyperspace jumps have been made to the rendezvous, the commander can review the performance of the survivors, as the report will have to be concise. I would expect a maximum of a 20% casualty rate of this engagement and all supplies intact if the above actions were followed.

I do not see another method for success or with such a low casualty rate in this scenario. I would of course be open to suggestions and further examples.

This concludes my thesis on the TIE Defender for the Graduate in Starfighter Operations. I hope the audience enjoys the read as much as I have enjoyed the research and writing of it. ■

THE E-WING: A FAILURE OF DESIGN OR A FAILURE OF ADOPTION?

THESIS FOR THE GRADUATE OF STARFIGHTER OPERATIONS

COLONEL [LOCKE SETZER](#)

6 OCTOBER 2023

Introduction

The natural lifecycle for a starfighter is development, prototype, production, deprecation, and decommission. A ship is designed, tested, used, and then eventually replaced with something better. In many cases, an successful older design may see a refresh or update that follows the same process, but in general, engineers (and the ship manufacturers that employ them) are more interested in pursuing new designs that either add something original, or edge out older designs with newer innovations and technologies.

This starfighter lifecycle was present and visible during the Galactic Civil War, whereby the Imperial Navy continually developed and produced newer and greater space superiority fighters: TIE Fighters were followed by TIE Interceptors, which in turn were followed by TIE Advanced, then TIE Defender. One can quibble at the specific designations of these ships, but any Imperial commander or pilot would leap for the latest and greatest of these ships if given an opportunity to choose for themselves.

For a time, the Rebellion operated in much the same way. Z-95s and Y-Wings were, when possible, phased out in favor of X-Wings, A-Wings, and B-Wings. As the Rebellion shifted to a more formal government structure (the so-called “New Republic”), they now had the resources of an established government, far beyond what they could have commanded when they were a simple uprising. A new starfighter, one backed by a new government that no longer had to rely on the auspicious of like-minded, rebellious engineers or corporations, should have been a clear and decisive improvement over anything in the New Republic fleet.

And yet, from almost the moment the E-Wing was introduced, it was considered anything but. Rejected by the most elite of pilots, considered a burden by others, the E-Wing received none of the fanfare that newer Rebel craft had received in the past. While it continues to be part of the New Republic Navy, it has ultimately been pushed aside in favor of newer X-Wing models. But why? Is it a failure of design, as many pilots indicated and reported to their superiors? Or is it a failure of adoption? Is it enough to simply be technologically superior, or must a craft also win over hearts and minds?

This dissertation will examine these questions in depth while also examining the impacts of public perception and opinion on technology adoption, placing the academic burden of truth on common assertions made about the E-Wing.

Development

The E-Wing was to be the first starfighter built by the New Republic, and for this task they turned to a trusted group, if not a known name. FreiTek, a company formed by the Incom design team that famously developed the X-Wing fighter and then defected to the Rebellion with their design, was given the monumental task of building a successor to their beloved creation.¹ The goal was to create a starfighter that would be an improvement upon the X-Wing in every conceivable way: faster, stronger, more powerful, with any weakness of the X-Wing addressed. A pair of FreiTek's own J8F fusial thrust engines were selected, promising speeds near equal to an A-Wing.^{2,3} A trio of Heavy Taim & Bak IX9 medium laser cannons promised a more powerful punch than what was available to an X-Wing, and the pair of proton torpedo launchers would be given a capacity of 16 proton torpedoes, nearly three times the capacity of a standard X-Wing.⁴ Its heavy armor was carefully balanced to still maintain phenomenal maneuverability, managing to make it both more durable and maneuverable than the craft it was intended to replace.⁵ Finally FreiTek opted to remove the famous S-Foil design of the X-Wing (in hopes of reducing production and maintenance costs), and eliminated the exposed R2 unit placement in favor of a concealed astromech droid placement within the fighter itself, relying on the latest and greatest astromech droid model from Industrial Automation, the R7-series.⁶

The latter choice would prove to be highly controversial: the E-Wing would initially only function using an R7, which was the only model with the technical capabilities to handle the complexity of E-Wing's internal systems and control units.⁷ FreiTek, a brand-new company made up of talented starfighter engineers, had a difficult enough task with crafting the first starfighter for the New Republic. Placing a requirement on the military that their starfighter could only function using Industrial Automation's latest (and most expensive) astromech droid series was perceived as a hidden cost at best and corporate collusion at worst. Whatever the reason, it was an immediate barrier to adoption for the New Republic Navy that was established before a single fighter had even left the production line.

Failure of Design

Complaints about the R7 were common, although whether it was due to the high cost of an R7 or the emotional impact of pilots being forced to discard their R2 and R5 droids in favor of a newer model is debatable. What is not debatable, however, is that the first E-Wing models launched with a serious defect. The laser cannons, already controversial among pilots (3 cannons being perceived as worse than 4 cannons, by simple math if not completely rational thinking) proved to have a serious flaw. The synthetic Tibana that powered the lasers was soon found to degrade at accelerated rates, immediately reducing the range and the effectiveness of the promised "fire-linked" laser cannons.⁸ A temporary fix involved tripling the power sent through the cannons' actuators, which increased the range, but left the craft open to an internal power overload.⁹

These problems occurred in the open, at the highly visible World Devastator assault of Mon Calamari - an inauspicious start for what was supposed to be the replacement of the beloved X-Wing.¹⁰ FreiTek would go on to correct these deficiencies, and even enable later models to interface

with older droids like the R2.¹¹ But the damage was done. Regardless of the fixes and corrections made by FreiTek to account for these issues, both perceived and real, the E-Wing suffered from a poor reputation. Freitek itself would disappear from public light, being absorbed by Incom when the Freitek founders were appointed as the new leaders of Incom.¹² The corporation once touted as the future of starfighter manufacturing was now simply a forgotten division of a larger company with a longer and more trustworthy history.¹³

The absorption of FreiTek into Incom helps to sell the story of a failed company producing a failed starfighter, but ignores the rather obvious issue that those running FreiTek effectively took over Incom entirely. The success of the XJ X-Wing, produced by Incom, also makes for a simple story, one that celebrates the return of quality to a beloved manufacturer. But this is also a fallacy: Incom, requiring a success and having no margin for error, simply produced an updated X-Wing, playing it as safe as possible, rather than trying to introduce any real innovation.

Performance issues at the World Devastator attack on Mon Calamari, well publicized and distributed among pilots, seem to also be more interested in telling a story than sharing facts. This story regularly leaves out two critical details. First, the E-Wings were deployed in a moment of emergency need, put on the galactic stage at a time before they had been fully vetted and tested. Second, perhaps being obvious, but not clearly repeated enough: the use of the E-Wing in defense of Mon Calamari against the World Devastators resulted in a victory. Whatever issues the ship may have had, it helped turn the tide of the battle. These are inconvenient facts, facts that do not easily align to a preconceived narrative. But facts are critical towards driving healthy starfighter development. In the case of the E-Wing, the design issues are well known. What is less often viewed with criticality is what role sentiment played in the adoption failure of the E-Wing, and whether or not the impact of these initial technical defects were in fact overblown.

Failure of Adoption

Without question, the E-Wing was rushed to production; early issues encountered by pilots were emblematic of pressure being put on Freitek by the New Republic to have an X-Wing replacement available as soon as possible.¹⁴ But how eager were pilots for a new starfighter to begin with? The X-Wing was beloved, not only for its quality as an all-around starfighter, but in the role it had played in toppling the Empire. Galaxy-wide, it was known that an X-Wing starfighter delivered the killing blow to the first Death Star. And whatever amalgamation of ships were used to ultimately destroy the second Death Star, it was widely-known that an X-Wing was present there as well. To describe it as iconic is an understatement. For existing pilots, an X-Wing may just as well have been a beloved friend or, as famed Jedi and X-Wing Luke Skywalker once described it, a “second skin”.¹⁵ For new recruits and soon-to-be pilots, it was the ship they had dreamed of flying, the starfighter of their heroes.

In other words, politicians may have been eager for the E-Wing to make its debut as a new symbol for a new generation, but the rank and file had no such desires. And why would they? X-Wings had served the Rebellion and New Republic well in their conquest of the galaxy. Why change what was working? That sort of thinking may be poison to a military force, allowing a navy to rest on past accomplishments without worrying about future challenges, but it is a mentality

that must be accounted for. Adoption is essential to the success of any technological roll out - it is not enough to simply be better, it must also be perceived as better.

The early technological troubles gave pilots of the New Republic the perception that they had been saddled with an inferior, unstable craft. Did it help that Rogue Squadron, the most decorated and known squadron in the New Republic, only flew E-Wings for one singular mission (at the Battle of Phaeda, mixed with more familiar A-Wings and B-Wings)?¹⁶ Likely not. And that was hardly the only high-profile rejection. An E-Wing and accompanying R7 was loaned to Luke Skywalker and his Jedi Academy, at some degree of political cost to his old commander, Admiral Ackbar.¹⁷ There is likely no greater, more respected figure in the Rebellion than the hero that destroyed the first Death Star - and some say was responsible for destroying the Emperor. And what did he do with his E-Wing? By all reports he deliberately crashed the ship (and its R7 co-pilot) into the sea.¹⁸ Would the Jedi have done so with his X-Wing and beloved R2 unit? Impossible. For the rank and file who heard of this store, what other perception could there be but that the E-Wing and its R7 co-pilot were substandard in the Jedi's eyes.

Perception at Home

Finally, it is worth considering the Infiltrator Wing's use of the E-Wing as well, and whether abandonment of the craft by the organization followed New Republic trends for strategic reasons, or for the Infiltrator Wing's own issues of perception. The E-Wing was brought to the Infiltrator Wing for use thanks to the dedication of a number of Emperor's Hammer officers, most notably then-Major General Dogger, who was most associated with the craft among the Infiltrator Wing members.¹⁹ Dogger would eventually rise to the rank of Admiral and be placed in charge of the Infiltrator Wing, before attempting to reform the Infiltrator Wing as its own organization, independent of the Emperor's Hammer, resulting in a splintering of the fleet.²⁰ Dogger and his E-Wings went with him to his new "Intruder Wing"; what has remained of the Infiltrator Wing since has not seen fit to use the E-Wing in any large capacity. Even today, pilots attempting to complete old simulator missions for the E-Wing are advised that use of an X-Wing in its place is "preferable".²¹

It is impossible to say whether the Infiltrator Wing's disuse of the craft stems from this defection, or from no longer having a practical need to use the ship when so much of the New Republic was also determined to stick with the common X-Wing when possible. Nevertheless, it is important to note that perception plays a powerful part in how a pilot views a ship, and this can in turn impact strategic decisions, not only in a corrupt Republic, but perhaps also within a military dictatorship such as the Emperor's Hammer.

Conclusion

There is no question that the E-Wing had a poor launch and roll-out. Nevertheless, the craft would go on to fight for decades on, a regular staple of the New Republic fleet, if not the symbol of a new generation that the New Republic hoped it would be.²² Its production would have ceased long before than if it had been an outright failure. Regardless, it is the X-Wing and its newer iterations that continue to serve as the standard bearer for the New Republic. When reviewing the

facts, however, it becomes clear that this decision may be far less based in strategic thinking, and more centered in emotional desires and prejudices. It represents a key weakness in the production decisions of the New Republic, one that has the potential to be capitalized upon, should perception be out of alignment with reality. But the Emperor's Hammer need only look at its own relationship with the very same ship to also realize that the Imperial Navy is not immune to adoption issues driven by emotional response either. In that way, perhaps, the E-Wing can still be considered a symbol; not of a glorious New Republic, but of the pitfalls of technological adoption when emotional considerations are grossly underestimated. ■

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THE INFINITE PROMISE OF KASHI MER (OR LOCKE SETZER'S QUEST FOR INFINITE LIFE AND/OR UNLIMITED POWER WITHOUT CONSEQUENCE)

THESIS FOR THE GRADUATE OF THE DARK ARTS

JUGGERNAUT [LOCKE SETZER](#)

17 OCTOBER 2023

I start to doze off in my chair.

Not a criminal offense, not at my age. Highly inappropriate though, when it's in the middle of a meeting with someone you've gone through some effort to see.

A voice continues to drone on, and I start to dream. I see the man I'm meeting today, but he's also flanked by a woman I met last week, and a Mon Calamari I met a month before. I only hear one voice, but they're all speaking, speaking as one.

"You're chasing ghosts." the voice says. "Legends. Tales mixed with half-truths and elaborate lies."

"Clearly, we're dealing with some misinformation..." I say, although I'm not sure if I'm speaking out loud or just in the dream.

"Legend!" the voice repeats again. It seems angry now. The figures loom larger. They start to merge into shadows, and then into one shadow, and now it's peering over me, opening its jaw as if to consume me, and says...

"Are you asleep?"

I open my eyes, and find myself face-to-face with the man I had been meeting with. Only now he appears to be flesh and blood, and seems to be snarling at me...

"Apologies, Mr. Visala. The trip was lengthy and... I feel like I've had this conversation a few times already."

Visala snorts at me, disgusted. "Apologies, Mr. Setzer, if I am boring you. But I am stating simple facts. The Kashi Mer talisman does not exist, and looking for it is a waste of your time. Just as simply talking about it is a waste of mine."

"I believe the meeting fee I have provided should serve as proper compensation for a conversation..."

Visala waves a hand, dismissively. "You know better than that. The fee is a mere precursor to the hope of future work. Instead you bring me children's fables mixed with flights of fancy. There's no work here."

“But what about the New Republic Intelligence reports about the incident on Jandoon?”

“New Republic Intelligence! Pah! Now there’s an oxymoron if I ever heard one! Honestly, Mr. Setzer, I had expected better of you. Much better. Your reputation isn’t what it once was, but honestly... You know as well as I that New Republic Intelligence is incompetent at best, willfully negligent at worst. The fact that this report is even common knowledge among men or our ilk tells you all you need to know about the quality of that agency. No, I doubt very much the Talisman was at Jandoon, nor do I believe there was a Dark Jedi present. Likely a man in a dark robe trying to purchase some illegal goods, no more.”

“Humor me, for a moment, Mr. Visala. Say there was an object there, of some value. Would you look for it on Jandoon, or track the robed figure?”

“Jandoon has been well scoured by other treasure hunters who can’t tell the difference between fact and fiction. Like yourself, apparently. The best hope would be that the fabled “Dark Jedi” escaped with it, just as the New Republic Intelligence report indicates... but twenty-six years is a long time for that trail to grow cold. And no one has heard of this figure since. Another phantom to chase, I think.”

I nod. It was the same conversation as all the rest. For a moment, I wonder if I am still dreaming, caught in a loop that will play over and over again until I wake up.

Visala promptly stands. “With that, I believe our business is concluded.” I shake his hand, as is custom. I notice the sideway glance he gives me as he walks out the door. That’s not custom, but has become normal for me. I worked as a trader for years, in-between stints of service with the Empire. I used to be the one to tell customers that what they wanted couldn’t be found. Now I am the customer. Most of my old contacts found that transition to be disturbing. I’m not sure that I blame them.

I have a few hours to kill before my next appointment. Remarkably, I’ve managed to schedule two for the same day, on the same planet. That’s fortunate - between my TIE Corps duties and Dark Brotherhood assignments, it might be another month or two before I could afford a sojourn like this. And while technically this particular mission was considered “Dark Brotherhood business”, it was business based on my own proposal... one that had so far failed to produce any results. If I didn’t get traction on this effort soon, the Dark Council would likely cancel the effort entirely. And who knows when I’d get another chance to go relic hunting?

I return to my ship, a modest cargo transport I’m borrowing from the fleet, in an effort to be inconspicuous. I look at my datapad. For a moment, I think about picking it up, to review some

reports or recent data. But this is supposed to be a Dark Brotherhood trip, so with that thought in mind, I decide to practice. I pick up a nearby hydrospanner and place it on the floor, in the center of the cargo bay. I take a few steps back, then sit down, cross-legged. I close my eyes and open myself to the Force.

There isn’t much there.

I try to pull the hydrospanner towards me. For a second, I think I feel it move, but then I open my eyes, and realize nothing's changed. I want it to come to my hand, now. I'm angry it won't. But it doesn't matter. I can't even muster a slow, sporadic approach. All it does is stay there, unmoving. Frustrated, I decide to push it away. The hydrospanner flies away, off to the other side of the cargo bay, making a clattering sound as it hits the wall.

I stand up slowly, retrieve the hydrospanner, return it to its place in the middle of the room, then return to my seat. And try again.

How force sensitive any member of the Dark Brotherhood is tends to be a secret. Power is implied far more than it is demonstrated. And I avoid demonstrating anything, at all costs. I am as far as you can be from any of the legends of great Force wielders, Sith, Jedi, or otherwise. And I would never have joined, if given a choice.

Not that you get a choice, not once the Dark Brotherhood knows you have the spark. However small that spark may be.

I try the same task again, and I fail in the same manner. This time, I stop myself from being frustrated, and just push the hydrospanner back to the center of the room. I'm not sure why I can push things without trouble, but whenever I try to pull something, or do anything that requires finesse... it's just not there. It doesn't listen. No matter how angry I get.

I can sense when people are near though. Used to think it was just an instinct, but now I know better. I immediately stand up and open the cargo bay doors before my early arrival has a chance to announce himself.

"Hello Rankin." I say, casually.

Rankin leaps back a bit, then extends his hand. "Should have known better than to try and surprise you."

I shake his hand, firmly. "Yes, you should." I guide him into the ship, then close the cargo bay doors behind me. Rankin takes a seat at the makeshift table I've set up. I sit across from him.

"So, are you going to tell me the same story as everyone else, or do you have something more substantial for me?"

Rankin reaches into his coat pocket, then places a data crystal on the table and slides it towards me. "I still owe you a favor."

"You owe me two favors." I remind him, pleasantly. Maybe a little too pleasantly.

Rankin shakes his head. "Just one now. There's an archeologist on Jandoon already working on this find. Looks like she's been at it for years. Made some progress, but needs money to keep her study going. That's your opening."

I wince. "I'm not operating with unlimited credits here. Not sure I have the means to fund an archeological dig that isn't going anywhere."

Rankin shrugs. “Not saying you have to fund it. Just saying, you have an opening. What you do with it... that’s your business.”

I open my mouth, in mock surprise. “Rankin, I feel like you’re suggesting I engage in some deceptive behavior... or worse.”

Rankin stands, leaving the data crystal on the table. “I don’t know what you engage in anymore Locke. That’s not my business, not anymore. But you’re down a favor. Agreed?”

For a moment, I can’t help but feel sad. There were no friends in this business, that’s true... but you did have associates you liked more than others. Maybe it wasn’t friendship, but it was something. But whatever it was that Rankin and I shared before, it was gone now. The person that stood before me now wasn’t a friendly associate, but a man who owed a debt. And wanted it paid.

I pick up the data crystal. “Agreed.”

With that, Rankin quickly leaves the ship. And before I even bother to read the data crystal, I head to the cockpit and begin making flight preparations.

It’s time to go to Jandoon.

My ship jumps into the Jandoon system, and I immediately plot a course towards the deserted world. I consult my ship sensors, looking for any other ships in the area. Nothing. No surprise there. Jandoon is a deserted world. A mystery world. Something devastated the planet, and its population, hundreds of years ago, but no one knows what did it for sure. It gained a bit of popularity, among certain crowds at least, a few years after Endor. All sorts of stories about hidden treasure, or big finds here. But that was decades ago. The consensus between treasure hunters and archeologists these days was there was nothing left to find. Any treasure worth selling had been taken. Any find worth studying had been spoiled.

I wouldn’t be surprised if my archeologist contact is the only person on the whole planet.

My ship reaches Jandoon’s atmosphere. I punch in the coordinates given to me by Rankin on the data crystal, and navigate my way towards the archeologist’s camp. I soon find my way to her small outpost and an open clearing, large enough for a ship three times the size of mine. Without concern for any defenses or traps, I land my ship in the middle of the clearing. Looking out the cockpit, I see a small woman exit a makeshift shelter and begin to approach my vehicle.

Acting time, I suppose.

I open my cargo bay doors and am immediately face-to-face with the archeologist, who doesn’t seem the least bit surprised to see me.

“It’s about time the University of Etai sent someone!” she says.

I smile. “I’m afraid there’s been a mistake.” I reply, my voice pitched a bit higher than usual. “I’m not a representative of the University. In fact, I have it on good authority that they’re quite done

with this little dig, and have no intention of sending anyone. No, I'm what you would call, a... private investor."

If the archeologist was thrown by my announcement, she doesn't show it. "How much... investment are we talking here?"

I laugh, arrogantly. "Oh, I think you'll find that depends entirely on the level of confidence I have with your particular find. Your correspondence to the University seems to indicate that you have everything well in hand. I would be very happy to invest considerably, if that statement proves to be accurate."

The archeologist crosses her arms.

"My name is..." I start to say, before being immediately cut off.

"I don't care what your name is. You're the investor. I'm the archeologist. We don't need any formalities beyond that. Now, how much do you know about the dig?"

I clear my throat. "I know you're looking for the Kashi Mer talisman. I know its legend, know its alleged role in the destruction of Kashi and its people, and the different tales passed down about what the talisman did and could do. I know it is said that it was once held by a force-wielder named Arden Lyn, and that it supposedly allowed her to return to life, 25 millenia after her alleged death. I know they say she lost it after her alleged revival, which I suppose is true, after a fashion. I know they say Palpatine held it until his death, which I believe is false. I know the New Republic believed it was being sold here, on this planet, to a Dark Jedi named Durrei, and that they believe he escaped with the relic. Your presence here, however, would indicate that

you disagree with that particular bit of information. So my turn for a question: why do you believe the artifact is still here?"

I look at the archeologist, who doesn't seem phased by my question. She's perhaps a bit taller than average, but has a typical build and appearance of someone who's spent their life digging in the dirt, with salt and pepper hair kept in a tight bun, wearing utilitarian clothes that clearly haven't been cleaned in days. Her arms are covered and her hands are gloved, which is unusual considering the heat. But otherwise, there's nothing particularly remarkable about this woman in front of me.

And yet I find myself immediately feeling nervous around her.

"What do you know about Durrei after acquiring the talisman?" she asks, returning my question with one of her own.

I smile smugly. "I know there are reports that he delivered the artifact to the so-called Supreme Commander Ennix Devian, and that Devian saw fit to betray him. In some tellings, the betrayal even involved the legendary Arden Lyn herself. But you clearly don't believe those tales, or you wouldn't be here."

“No I don’t.” she says. “And I have no reason to. There’s nothing substantial to tie Devian to the talisman. Nothing substantial to tie Durrei to Devian either, or anything really, after this world. All of it is hearsay and rumor, with Devian at the heart of it. A confirmed liar, braggart, and fool.”

I bow my head slightly, in acknowledgement. “And yet, some would say looking for any treasure on Jandoon is a fool’s errand. This place has been, by all accounts, completely picked over. Nothing left to find.”

The archeologist shakes her head. “Nothing left to find easily. Plenty of secrets though, for those willing to dig a little deeper.”

I raise an eyebrow. “Are you speaking... literally, or metaphorically?”

For the first time, the archeologist’s expression changes, her mouth forming the slightest of smiles.

“Follow me.”

We spend hours walking through jungles, navigating rough terrain and slipping through small caverns. I had assumed her campsite would be close to whatever find she had stumbled upon, but I realized my mistake quickly. Whatever she’s found, she’s being protective. Careful. Which makes me feel much better about my chances of actually acquiring the talisman.

We come across a number of collapsed stone structures, and the archeologist takes a seat. I exaggerate my exhaustion, breathing heavily, dabbing at my brow to embellish how sweaty I am.

She hands me a canteen of water, which I swipe greedily, and begin gulping more than I should. The archeologist appears completely unaffected. “Do you know where we are?” she asks. I look around. The collapsed stone structures are old, but the damage... more recent.

I hand the canteen back to her, then take a guess. “This is where the New Republic Intelligence agents fought with Durrei, yes? The last confirmed sighting, if you disregard the later reports as hearsay.”

The archeologist nods. “The agents were caught in a fight with his bodyguards and Durrei’s seller. Durrei fled, collapsing the structures nearby to mask his escape. Sounds of a shuttle were heard later, leading the agents to assume he escaped.”

I allow my breathing to return to a more normal pace. “An assumption you don’t share. Although I’ve yet to hear any concrete proof that would lead me to believe otherwise...”

Before I finish my sentence, the archeologist reaches into her satchel, and pulls out some kind of metal shard, then hands it to me.

“Do you know what this is?” she asks.

I do. It's ship debris, probably indistinguishable to most. But I'm still a pilot at heart, and I know every ship I've ever flown. I glide my hand down the center part, feeling the grooves of the metal.

"Debris from an Imperial Shuttle. Lambda-class."

The archeologist nods. "Not something I'd expect an investor to know."

I curse silently to myself. I just answered - I hadn't stopped to think whether the persona I was portraying should know the answer.

"I have many interests." I reply, unconvincingly. I hand back the piece of the debris to the archeologist, who takes it.

"I've taken you this far because I think you can help me. And I want you to know that I have a solid lead here, that I'm not chasing ghosts. But I won't go any further with you unless you drop the deception. I'll make it easy on you: I know who you are, Locke Setzer."

For a split moment, I consider protesting. Sticking with my story, claiming ignorance. But it'd be a waste, and it'd probably ruin any chance I had at following up on this lead.

"How do you know me?" I ask, dropping all voice affectations.

"Do you trust the people who told you about me?"

"I do."

She shrugs. "Maybe you shouldn't."

Something about that comment makes my skin crawl. I try to ignore it. Maybe Rankin set me up, but it doesn't matter now. What matters is the Talisman. And we are close to it.

I can feel it.

"What do you need from me? Money?"

The archeologist points towards the collapsed stone structures. "Getting that cleared would be a start. I've tried to work my way around it, but I haven't found a path yet. And... I think it would be helpful if we could walk through it. Take the same steps as Durrei... might give us a clue as to what happened. I'm sure this debris is from his shuttle, but it's all that I've found."

I approach the collapsed structures. They're big... bigger than anything I've ever tried to move. And yet... I feel something. When I reach for the Force, it usually feels like a faint trickle of power, and yet today... today it feels like more. Like a river.

I'm still not going to try to pull anything.

I muster all the anger I can, and push. Immediately, the larger stone structures topple backwards, while the smaller debris flies away, clearing the path. I look down at my hands, startled at what I've just done. And... if I'm being honest with myself, afraid.

The archeologist stands up and immediately steps backwards, placing her hands up. “Hey! No one said anything about you being a Jedi.”

“I’m not.” I reply, still in complete shock over what I’ve just done.

“...a Sith, then?” she asks.

I don’t respond. Instead I look towards the path, now mostly open, save a few large stones here or there.

“Let’s go.”

The path isn’t easy. We encounter more collapsed structures, forcing us to climb over them or squeeze through openings. I could try using the Force again to clear our way, but I’m still afraid of the power I tapped into before, and worried about inadvertently causing a collapse or some kind of cave in.

Finally, we reach a clearing... only to come face-to-face with an immediate drop-off. “End of the line.” I say.

The archeologist shakes her head. “There was a platform here, once. Not anymore. Look down.”

I take a glance down. It’s at least a hundred meter drop, maybe more. As far as I can see, there’s nothing down there but rock and rubble. Anyone looking at it would assume the same. And yet...

“This is where his shuttle was parked.” I observe. “Are you saying the cliff... collapsed? Under the weight of the shuttle?”

“Or the talisman.”

I shudder. “Why would he want to use the talisman to destroy himself?”

The archeologist looks down towards the rubble, her gaze distant. “He probably didn’t. But maybe he didn’t have a choice. Maybe the talisman is cursed.”

I sigh, then kick a pebble and watch it sail down, into the abyss. “That’d certainly make this effort a lost cause...”

The archeologist turns towards me. “Why? Don’t the Sith crave power, above all else?”

I lose sight of the pebble. “That’s what they say. Personally though, I don’t really see the appeal of craving something that will kill you. Might just be me though.”

I turn towards her. “I... was interested in the Kashi Mer talisman because I thought it was one of the few Sith artifacts that wouldn’t, you know, kill me, or poison my mind, or otherwise destroy the very core of my being. The stories are all over the place, and I don’t believe half of them, but... not one mentions anything about some secret cost. My theory... my theory was that the

Kashi people had paid the price. The death of their world... served as a power source. Something you could use without having to pay a price... so to speak.”

Neither of us says anything further, for a moment.

“That’s a terrible thought, when you think about it for a second.” the archeologist finally says, breaking the silence.

I shrug. “I never said it wasn’t. Didn’t say I wanted to duplicate it either. Just that... it was a theory.”

She places her left hand on my shoulder, comfortingly. Whatever fear she might have had of me before... I think it’s gone now.

“Let’s go back and get your ship.” she says. “It’s time to see what’s down there.”

Carefully, I lower my ship into the abyss. I’m fortunate that I opted for a smaller craft - anything bigger and we would have likely resorted to climbing gear. Once we’re close enough to the bottom, I put the ship into hover. The ground beneath is too rocky, too uneven, to land directly on it.

I open a cargo bay, then help the archeologist latch up a rope ladder. Slowly, the two of us descend the ladder, then carefully step onto a large pile of rubble.

Without speaking, we both start to dig through some of the rubble, using our hands. I move over a few rocks and quickly find some wiring. I turn towards the archeologist and see that she’s found another metal shard, similar to the one she already had. More shuttle parts.

There’s also a voice. Not the archeologist, not another person, but something else... something speaking directly in my mind. Something very faint, saying...

“..ring.. ssh... to... ”

“The talisman’s here!” I announce. “I can... hear it, I think...”

“What is it saying?” The archeologist’s voice is quiet, distant.

“I can’t tell! I need to get... closer I think.”

“Can you feel it?” she asks.

“I’m not sure.” I don’t just listen to it, I try to... feel where the voice is coming from.

“I think so.” I admit, unsure.

“Try to pull it towards you.” she suggests

“I can’t!” I wail, and in my anger I try to push the talisman forward, out through the rocks. Nothing. It refuses to move.

“You can’t do one thing the same way as another.” the archeologist advises. “It’s like trying to treat flying a TIE Fighter the same way you operate a gunner’s seat on a starship. It won’t work. You need to change your approach. Close your eyes. Let go.”

“Bring... ssh...”

I don’t even think about protesting. I close my eyes immediately. I feel where the talisman is. I want it. It should be mine. It should come to me! The anger boils in me, threatening to overflow.

I let it go.

I imagine the talisman. I see it in my mind. I think... I see a connection there. A thread. I pull on the thread, slightly. Knowledge begins to flow into my mind.

“Rankin didn’t betray me.” I say, eyes still closed.

“No.” the archeologist admits. “But he did a good job of telling you what I wanted you to know.” I keep pulling the thread, delicately, lightly, slowly.

“Bring... us...”

“You knew me before.” I say. “You served under Zaarin too.”

“He was a means to an end. But I did help him. And I did know everyone who served under him. I... never forget people. Individuals. Faces. Even when I want to. When I found out it was you that was making inquiries into the Talisman... I knew it was time.”

The thread feels... thicker now. Stronger. I continue to pull carefully. I need to be gentle. “Bring... us... to...”

“Why me?” I ask. “Why now, after all this time?”

“I had to be sure. Had to be careful. I know the stories they tell now, but they’re all wrong. Durrei was my student, not my lover. So loyal, so committed. But even he couldn’t resist the power. Even with my warnings, he didn’t listen. So it destroyed him. It’s for me alone, you see. I think that’s how Xendor wanted it.”

“Bring... us... to... her.”

There’s no more thread to pull. I grasp the prism shaped rock, floating above me, then open my eyes.

In my hands is the Kashi Merr talisman.

And standing in front of me is no archeologist. There never has been. Instead, I am face to face with Arden Lyn, Follower of Palawa, Member of the Legions of Lettow, Master of Teräs Käsi, and wielder of the Kashi Mer talisman, gifted to her by her lover, Xendor, the last known survivor of the Kashi Mer Dynasty.

Arden Lyn, who once used the talisman to cheat death and return to life, twenty-five hundred centuries after her death.

Life eternal. The very thing I desire most of all.

“Why me?” I ask again.

Arden Lyn takes a step towards me. “Because I needed someone with sensitivity to the Force. I’ve never had much without the talisman, and whatever I did have was gone after I was awakened. I needed someone I knew to be loyal, someone who would desire the talisman, but could resist its temptations. Someone who might crave power, but knew the risks, and knew when to walk away.”

Everything I have been trained for tells me to use the Talisman. I can feel its power, ready to burst, right under the surface. I want to claim it. I want to use it. I want to see my life unfold uninterrupted, become part of the ages, become an eternal walking among mortals. I want it all.

“Bring us to her... please...”

She takes another step forward, towards me. “In short... I needed... you.”

I close my eyes. I let myself feel the desire, the power, the longing. I feel it all and then I... let go. Let go of the desire, the power, and the gray prism in my hand.

I hear Arden Lyn catch it. I let out a breath. It occurs to me that I don’t know what will happen now. She is a creature of legend.

Things don’t usually work out well for mortals when they come face-to-face with legends.

I open my eyes. She holds the prism object in her hands for a moment, then delicately attaches it to a necklace. It rests perfectly, centered across her chest.

Where it always belonged, I think to myself.

“What will you do now?” I ask. “The legends... say you wanted to restore Xendor.”

She seems to smile, sadly though. “Once, yes. But this Talisman doesn’t have the power to restore the dead. It gave life back to me, but I wasn’t dead... not really. Suspended, I suppose you could say. Whether the Jedi that attacked me intended that or not, I don’t know. Doesn’t matter now. It won’t bring back anyone. It doesn’t have that kind of power... not even for me.”

I nod, suddenly feeling relief, for some reason.

“What will you do now?” I ask again.

“Return to Kashi. See the Talisman... destroyed. Release the souls... or whatever is left, living inside of it.”

“What will happen to you?”

“I don’t know.” Arden Lyn admits. “Perhaps nothing. Perhaps death. But... it’s time. The memory of Kashi has all but passed. Time to let go.”

“Do you... need a ride?” I ask, far more impudently than I intended.

She smiles at me, genuinely, and suddenly I feel like I’m beginning to understand why Xendor might have bequeathed his greatest legacy to this person.

“I do.” she says

We leave Jandoon, with our destination set towards Kashi. And another adventure. —

When I finally return to the Shadow Academy, I fill out my report as best I can. I explain what I found, and detail how I located it. I don’t mention an archeologist. I tell everyone this was a solo find, based on my own work and research. I say that the talisman was destroyed. I bring back some of its ashes as proof. Others investigate, verify what they can of my story. The facts are accepted. The rest is assumed to be true.

I reach out, towards my datapad, and pull it towards me. It drifts gently, into my hand. I make the final updates to my report, and sign it.

Another legend, entered into the record, with the truth left only to those that lived it. ■

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FLIGHT AND DARK

ONE PILOT'S EXPLORATION INTO THE USE OF FORCE POWERS DURING STARFIGHTER COMBAT

THESIS FOR THE GRADUATE OF THE DARK ARTS

MAJOR [KEBLAOMEGA](#)

10 DECEMBER 2023

Introduction

The ISD-II Hammer dropped out of hyperspace into a new sector of the unknown regions. Watching the unfamiliar stars settle into place from his cabin's viewport, Major Keblaomega stared for a moment, exhaled, then looked back down at the text on his datapad. Since learning of his Force sensitivity shortly after the arrival of the new Beta Squadron commander, Lieutenant Colonel Honsou, Kebla had been dedicating all of his spare time to studying texts from the Shadow Academy.

In addition to being a new Apprentice in the Dark Brotherhood, he was an elite pilot of the TIE Corps and had always been determined to improve his starfighter combat beyond his previous limits. As such, he had carefully collected texts, teachings, and even legends regarding the use of Force abilities during space combat.

"When certain Dark Jedi or Jedi focus, and they are in tune with the Force, their reaction speed may be increased. This is partially due to anticipating the near future through the Force, but it can be even more than this. The strongest among the Dark Jedi are able focus to such a degree that time itself may seem to slow down, allowing increased reflexes to a degree that seems supernatural to those around them."

He considered the text. He had long recognized that while in a dogfight he could at times relax his mind, focus on the moment, and seem to understand the flow of battle well enough to anticipate his opponents' next movements even before they had given any visible clue. He had suspected this ability was due to flight experience alone, but perhaps this was indicative of his connection to the Force, just not yet honed through knowledge and training. He powered down his datapad, stood up, and left toward the hangar.

Part 1- Force Reflex

Flight 2 of Beta Squadron departed to scout out the sector to which they had just arrived. Kebla was leading a subgroup of Flight 2, with veteran pilot Captain Wildfire and the newest Beta Squadron member, Lieutenant "Faze" Altaca. The two veterans were helping to train the young lieutenant, and currently all three were flying TIE Interceptors rather than their squadron's standard bombers. Kebla was able to fly his personal craft, a red custom TIE Interceptor.

Mounted inside the cockpit was a Sith amulet. The first instance during which Kebla knowingly used the Force was after a brief premonition that had ultimately led him to finding the amulet inside an ancient starfighter. Prior to disabling the starfighter, he had seen the ship move in quick, unpredictable, unnatural motions that seemed to defy the laws of physics. After taking it into his own possession, Kebla had eventually decided to mount it inside his own cockpit. In the months since then, he could vaguely sense a power from the amulet but had never seen any objective indication that it held any such power.

"Observe and pay attention to the timing: shunt to engines, boost, pause just a bit before dropping the boost to start drifting, then shunt back to lasers," Kebla instructed Faze, then demonstrated. As he drifted, he kept his TIE aimed at a small asteroid and fired several lasers into the rock, not missing despite his craft's rotation. "See how my weapons remain almost fully charged despite my high drifting speed."

"Fantastic!" Lieutenant Faze exclaimed, authentically excited to have something new to practice. Kebla suddenly stopped the lesson as he let his drift end.

"Someone is there."

"My sensors don't show anything," Wildfire spoke, looking at his screen.

"Behind that large rock." A few seconds later, a pair of A-wings appeared on their sensors, flying fast from behind one of the larger asteroids.

"Identify yourselves," Wildfire spoke over comms to the pair. No response. As they approached the TIEs at high speed, it became apparent that the A-wings were heavily modified: with six laser cannons rather than two, and a single ion cannon mounted underneath. Kebla also noticed a small protruding module along the back between the thrusters which he suspected may be an auxiliary power module to augment the craft's energy output.

"Pirates. Ready to engage."

Inhaling, Kebla prepared for the engagement, trying to intuit rather than rationalize what to expect from the unknown capabilities of the craft. As he exhaled, he suddenly knew.

"What is that?" Faze shouted, as Kebla was already adjusting his reticle onto the projectile. A missile, somehow masked from their sensors, was cruising towards Faze. As Kebla focused, time seemed to slow down around him, and he was able to very carefully aim, fire, and intercept the missile before it reached its target. He had intercepted projectiles before, but never had it seemed so simple to aim so precisely, without his targeting computer, and to use a single shot to destroy it. He smiled at his growing abilities, as Faze and Wildfire each picked a target and obliterated them.

"Let's head back and report in. We have no idea how many pirates there are in this region."

Part 2 - Telekinesis

"Another basic ability of Dark Jedi is to move distant objects using only the power of the Force. This can be performed by reaching out mentally, sensing the exact location of an object and its presence in the Force, then willing it to move in a desired direction. This can be very difficult during spaceflight, as the quickly changing relative positions of objects across vast distances and at high velocities can make precise location sensing and manipulation of an object much more difficult than for a nearby, stationary target".

As Kebla, Wildfire, and Faze journeyed back towards the ISD-II Hammer, two more A-wings approached at incredible speed.

"Watch this!" Faze enthusiastically shouted through comms as he boosted to the side of one of the enemies, drifted, and shunted his power to weapons. Kebla couldn't help but grin. The young lieutenant was a natural pilot, a quick learner, and confident, but that didn't stop him from being eager to impress a couple of veterans like Kebla and Wildfire. Kebla was briefly reminded of his own son, missing for many years, as he thought about the lieutenant, so eager to demonstrate his progress.

His smile faded as Kebla again began to sense another disturbance from the missile banks of one of the A-wings. He knew the missile had just left the ship as he calculated how quickly he could redirect his aim again at the projectile. Not quickly enough, he knew, as he started to turn his craft towards the missile and towards Faze.

He closed his eyes, reached out and quickly tried to feel the exact velocity and position of the missile. It was nearly to his subordinate's craft when Kebla opened his eyes, now sensing firmly where the projectile was along its course. He shoved it with all the power of his mind. And as he finished turning his craft towards the enemy he was just in time to witness the spectacle with his eyes: he saw the missile lunge to the side, missing Faze. It went right past its intended target and instead flew harmlessly off into the void. His own ship's lasers finally in position to fire, Kebla quickly dispatched the A-wing before it could fire a second shot.

"Whew!" Faze exclaimed, sounding as if he really didn't understand how close to death he had just come. Appreciating what had just happened, a wave of fear, then relief, and finally anger passed through Kebla's mind as he imagined the outcome if he had not successfully redirected the missile.

Arriving back at the Hammer, the trio flew into the hangar and proceeded immediately to the briefing room.

Part 3 - Mind Trick

"A Dark Jedi or Jedi can use the Force to influence the minds of other beings. The most common use of this is to augment powers of persuasion by manipulating others' minds to be more open to suggestion by vocal commands. However, users may also be able to affect targets without voice manipulation,

implanting false sensory perceptions into the target's mind which may then affect their behavior. While a Jedi may use this only to avoid conflict, a Dark Jedi is free to unlock the true potential of this ability."

"Further scouting of the surrounding systems has led to several attacks by this group of pirates. We suspect they have a base of operations on some nearby planet, but our analysis of their patterns suggest that they exclusively use these modified A-wings and have no capital ships or other craft in their fleet," Rear Admiral Genie relayed to the squadron commanders and executive officers of Battlegroup I. "They seem mostly to travel in pairs. To clear our way through this sector, we will be dispatching several flight groups to systems where pirate presence has been high. You will pilot fighters and interceptors with the goal of eradicating any groups of pirates found."

After receiving their instructions, Major Keblaomega and his flight group, this time including Lieutenant Commander Decoy Tango and Lieutenant Faze, departed in TIE Interceptors and flew to an adjacent system. Kebla was glad to continue offering tutelage to the young lieutenant. A small planet covered in green ice formations met their view as they scanned their sensors for any craft.

Several minutes later, they found not two but eight A-wings a short distance away.

"They haven't seen us yet," Decoy Tango whispered quietly into comms, as though if he spoke any louder they would risk detection. "We're outnumbered. I know we're capable pilots, but is it worth the risk?"

Kebla considered their options. He watched as the enemy group flew two-by-two in formation. Closing his eyes, he reached out to feel the presence of the enemy pilots. He could sense their minds: their greed, their hostility - chatting about their recent spoils and civilian murders - and their arrogance. He focused on the two pilots at the back of the formation. He could sense the weakness of their minds. And he could almost see what they were seeing, almost feel their hands on their ships' controls. He sensed their intentions. And embracing his own aggression, Kebla focused harder.

Simultaneously, the two A-wings in the back of the formation opened fire. The two craft immediately in front of them exploded into flames. A few seconds later, another A-wing further ahead was similarly torn apart by laser blasts, as the remaining pirates quickly turned around and raised their shields.

Dumbstruck, it was a few moments before Faze spoke. "Three against five? I'll take those odds!" Kebla smiled again as they moved in to destroy the rest.

Part 4 - Augmented Movement

"Dark Jedi and Jedi often use the Force to augment their movement, whether increasing their speed while running or increasing their height while jumping. They may also slow their movement while falling to minimize harm." Contemplating this text, Kebla was very interested in the possibilities. He considered how this might be used during spaceflight.

He remembered again the prior encounter when he fought against an enemy starfighter that was utilizing the power of the Sith amulet now in his own ship. As he fought the opponent in a dogfight, he

saw the ship move suddenly and unexpectedly in ways that appeared impossible. To avoid his laser fire, the ship seemed to drift instantly in different directions against the expected momentum. Could this "multi-drifting" be something he himself could learn to control?

As Kebla and Faze cruised above the rocky planetary rings of a gas giant further into the sector, continuing their search for pirates, Kebla thought he saw a strange glimmer within his ship. His eyes were drawn to the Sith amulet. He had secured the amulet to the cockpit of his Interceptor after obtaining it, though he wasn't entirely sure why he had done so. Though he could feel a strange power from the amulet, he didn't pretend to understand it and had never knowingly tapped into whatever power it held.

His thoughts were interrupted by his alarming sensors. Two enemies appeared, then quickly four more, then ten more.

"We've got trouble!" Faze exclaimed. Decoy Tango was away, having gone back to report in to the rest of the squadron, and would not be back for some time. But even if he had been there, they would still be definitively outgunned.

"Follow my lead," Kebla calmly stated and prepared to position himself to attack the two nearest enemies. But it was too late. A moment later, he sensed the barrage of missiles but there were far too many to intercept. He instinctively dove to avoid them, approaching nearer to the rocky rings around the planet. "DIVE!!", he shouted to Faze, and reached out through the Force to his wingman, desperately trying to help him avoid the barrage, somehow.

Faze didn't even have time to scream before his craft was torn apart by explosions, hit by no fewer than four missiles.

Kebla's normally calm mind gave way to fury. He didn't have time to think. He knew he couldn't maneuver in the tightly-spaced rocks of the planetary rings. But he had to.

Despite his racing-thoughts and intense anger, time seemed to slow. He quickly dodged between one rock, then another, then another. But still another rock appeared impossible to avoid. Using the Force to feel the entire mass of his TIE, Kebla pushed his own craft with his mind. The amulet glimmered with an unsettling yellow light.

With an impossible movement, his Interceptor seemed to lunge straight upwards, quickly drifting to avoid the rock. A few moments later, his craft flew up out of the rings and behind the opposing force. Between their surprise at his unexpected return from certain rocky death and the incredible speed with which he seemed to move and fire, the entire enemy force was annihilated before they could fully react.

Flying back to meet up with the squadron, Kebla thought he saw another yellow glimmer. However this time it was not from the amulet, but instead seemed to have been the reflection of his own eyes in the ship's viewport. But he could not dwell on this, being entirely focused on his anger at the pirates that had taken the young lieutenant.

Part 5 - Battle Meditation

"It has been said that certain Dark Jedi are powerful enough that they can turn the tide of a battle through their willpower and use of the Force alone. With enough concentration, they can improve the unspoken coordination and the resolve of their allies, while simultaneously weakening that of their enemies." Perhaps this would be possible to employ even from the cockpit, Kebla thought as he read the text.

"We've found them". The room of pilots, already mostly silent after having learned of the loss of Lieutenant Faze, became even quieter with Rear Admiral Genie's words. "While they come from this planet," he said motioning to the holoprojection of a small, desert planet, "their base of operations is a short hyperspace jump away, in deep space, near this navpoint. We now also know that their numbers... far exceed our initial estimations. We will be heavily outnumbered. But we must destroy them utterly so that we can safely move the Hammer and proceed through this sector to meet the rest of the fleet."

Though still largely silent, the serious mood and determination of the pilots in the briefing room was palpable. Major Keblaomega in particular appeared to be quietly concentrating on something beyond the briefing. He wasn't sure if the others in the squadron were as enraged as he was by the loss of Faze, but he could feel that their resolve was as strong as his own to crush these pirates.

As the squadron marched to their fighters, Lieutenant Colonel Honsou nodded to Kebla. "Use it." Though this was all Honsou said to him, Kebla felt that his squadron commander understood something beyond what he himself did. Kebla nodded back.

As the ships flew out of the hangar and into formation, they seemed to move as one. Beyond the usual precision and skill of TIE Corps pilots, something seemed to be driving their coordination well beyond the ordinary. Kebla felt through the Force some idea of what was coming.

Part 6 - Energy Manipulation and Force Lightning

"It is well known that some Dark Jedi and Jedi can use the Force to manipulate raw energy: to create lightning, or to unleash destructive blasts, or even to freeze blaster bolts in mid-air, for example. This is usually done directly from the user's being, or at least in close proximity. But it is possible that this can be performed remotely, even during starfighter combat. Legends tell of a Jedi Master during the Clone Wars who could focus energy while in her starfighter and release it in shockwaves towards nearby enemy craft. She could even, it is told, summon lightning-like energy to overload and destroy nearby enemy droid starfighters." Kebla reflected on this incredible power. Jedi would be limited to wasting such potential only against droids. But a Dark Jedi, on the other hand...

The TIEs approached the navpoint, about 60 ships altogether. The desert planet from the briefing appeared small and distant, but there was nothing else to look at but stars. After a few minutes, their sensors detected the bulk of the pirate force. Over 200 modified A-wings appeared in the distance. Not

long after, the pirates had detected the TIEs as well and moved to attack, confident in their numerical advantage.

“For Faze” Kebla said quietly over comms. The squadron moved in to attack as one. The battle was furious. TIE Interceptors and TIE Fighters drifted between the A-wings and hundreds of their sensor-masked missiles, red and green lasers erupting from seemingly every direction. The skills and coordination of Beta Squadron quickly overwhelmed the pirates, who began to panic as their numbers were cut by a quarter, then soon by half. As Kebla watched one A-wing explode from his peripheral vision, he was already aiming, then firing, at the next. Over and over, with each enemy’s destruction, he felt immense satisfaction in taking revenge against his enemies.

When most of the pirates had been destroyed, one remaining group of 12 A-wings were flying close together and clearly preparing for escape. Upon noticing this, Kebla embraced his anger and flew, alone, directly towards the group from the side. He drifted into their sights, facing them head-on, silently informing them that they couldn’t escape.

As the group of pirates began to take aim at his TIE, Kebla focused, then screamed. Now unmistakable, a yellow glow emanated from the Sith amulet in his cockpit, while a similar light again appeared in Kebla’s eyes. Blue electricity suddenly seemed to spark from each of the A-wings’ auxiliary power modules. Within a second, the electricity expanded and erupted in an arc around each craft, even connecting arcs of energy between some of the closer craft. A few seconds later, all 12 A-wings exploded simultaneously.

The amulet stopped glowing, but a bit of the unsettling yellow light remained in Kebla’s eyes after that moment.

Epilogue

Following the decimation of the pirate forces, the ISD-II Hammer jumped through the sector and rejoined the main fleet. Though he kept it installed in his Interceptor, Kebla never saw the amulet manifest such power ever again. And it would be many months before he himself was able use even a fraction of as much Force power as he had done during the battle against the pirates.

But Kebla nonetheless intensified his studies into the Dark Side of the Force even more from then on. And he spent as much time in the flight simulator as he always had, endlessly honing his flight skills with or without the Force. He was determined never to lose another pilot again, no matter what it may take. ■

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