

Kote

By Valance Sinan

Some people in the more Naval inclined parts of the Mandalorian military get a chance to go out into the galaxy, to win kote, to fly at break-neck speed in fighter dogfights or stand at the helm of a mighty capital ship, the officers and pilots. Then there are others who don't, who stay around bases, waiting for something to happen and many among them grumbled that they hardly ever received any kote at all, the ground crews. Ruus'alor Ruusaar To'Kursh of the 2nd Akaata 1st Ol'Averde belonged to the latter group, and he felt the perceived lack of kote quite keenly. Ruusaar was a human man about 25 years of age from the planet of Abrion Major. He was tall and thin with dark hair and light skin. He was famed for being hot headed and jealous of the fighter and Capital ship pilots, though would be the very last to admit it. His jealousy came from the fact that he had flunked flight school by slacking off and generally being a shab'buir, which led to too much bitterness and a bit of denial on his part.

In spite of this, Ruusaar had created for himself a rather nice career in the military, or as good of a career an NCO on a ground crew could have, but lately things had taken a downturn. He had been reassigned. Usually this was not such a catastrophic thing, it happened to everyone in the military, but this time was special, he had been assigned to a new fighter base/lookout post on the world known as Exandros II, a dumpy little grassland world with no civilization to speak of, on the edge of the Kathol sector. This base's job was to refuel all the Mandalorian craft coming in and out, in other words, a dead end to any career. The base was very poorly equipped for quite some time, due to its remoteness and low importance.

Ruusaar stood on the landing pad with a gaggle of other technicians, engineers and various other personnel that were stationed on the base. He looked up with pride at their day's handiwork, a newly assembled and supplied above ground fuel tank. This behemoth was to be the base's temporary fuel storage container until they could replace it with a much safer and armored below ground fuel tank. The fuel tank was also the final addition to the initial base plan, the short-term goals, so it was a major mile marker in the history of the base. As the work shift ended, the Mandalorians filtered back to barracks or the recreation rooms, to spend the rest of their day as they pleased. Ruusaar jogged over to the non-commissioned officer recreational room, where he dropped himself into the nearest available chair and lit his pipe. He ached all over as a result of the day's labor in the high gravity levels of Exandros II in armor, and it didn't help his temper. His mood darkened even more when the conversation turned to the new fighter squadron that was scheduled to come in later that night. Ruusaar hated fighter pilots and all things connected to them, it was a mystery that he even worked on the ground team instead of transferring somewhere else away from the fighters and their pilots. So Ruusaar sat back in his chair and let the conversation float over him in waves.

"I hear they're right out of the academy and that this is their first assignment," said one human soldier in the room that Ruusaar had never met. "Yeah, they are, Strill squadron is one of our newest Y-wing units" quipped Ruus'alor Solyc Bakh, a Noghri NCO who shared a room in Barracks with Ruusaar and was his allit'vod in clan K'yiltek. "How do you think they'll do? I mean, is it wise having a completely green squadron in a fighter/bomber role?" replied the Human soldier. "There has been

debate over that, I personally think it isn't a good idea, due to the fact they have no experience guiding them and teaching them the tricks of the trade." replied Bakh. Ruusaar tired and on edge because of the combination of fatigue and his least favorite topic, suddenly couldn't take it any more and burst into the conversation "But who cares? I mean, the damned fly boys are just there to soak up the kote, to look pretty, skill doesn't matter for them!" he then spat bitterly on the ground in disgust. The whole bar became uncomfortably quiet, everybody looked at Ruusaar. Bakh gave him a stern glance and then spoke "Vod, we need to have a little talk, come with me." Bakh motioned Ruusaar towards the door with his claw.

Once outside Bakh began lecturing Ruusaar "Ner'vod, we just can't have your attitude towards the pilots and your jealousy, it's not what vod do, it saps work ethic and it's just annoying, so as a friend I offer this advice: Keep your grudges and bitterness to yourself before you lose all credibility and respect in the eyes of your other vode! I know you don't think that being in the ground crew earns you much kote, but in truth, kote isn't just found in battle, you earn it by doing your duties and doing them well!" Before Ruusaar could react, Bakh began marching him over to an equipment shed behind the barracks, which stood several thousand metres away from the Landing pad and fuel tank. The shed held all the scanty emergency readiness supplies the base had "But while you mull what I told you over, I have a task that I need help with". When they reached the door, Bakh swiped a key card down the lock, the door clicked open and they both entered. Ruusaar grimaced "This is all the emergency supplies we have?" he asked looking at the trauma kit, two fire fighting suits with two tanks of fire smothering foam and two rescue cutters that comprised the contents of the shed. Bakh nodded "Yes, until the supply freighter arrives tomorrow, we only have this. Which brings me back to why we are here, we need to make a formal log of what we have and what we need." Bakh rolled his eyes and took out a data pad and sighed fatalistically "Where the hell to start?"

Several hours later night had fallen and they were done, with a neat list of needs stored in Bakh's pad. As Ruusaar left the shed, he heard the familiar whine of a Y-wing motor approaching the base "That'll be the Strills" he said to Bakh, who looked up "Aye, that'll be them" As they looked at the night sky, twelve pinpricks of light appeared and grew steadily larger as they flew towards the base landing pad. As they began their approach, three Y-wings broke off from formation and began performing aerial acrobatics and stunts, sometimes flying perilously close to the ground. "Damned fools!" exclaimed Bakh in his gravelly voice. "The shab'buir aren't used to this high gravity level! They'll crash!" As Bakh said this, two of the three fighters finished off their performance with a jerk upwards, all except one. The pilot, intent on outdoing his peers, flew towards the fuel tank at a high speed and almost brushing the ground. At the last second the pilot tried to pull up, a near-suicidal trick at the best of times, made impossible by the high speed he was flying at and the gravity level of Exandros II.

Ruusaar watched in rapt horror as the Y-wing ploughed into the fuel tank, igniting the contents, high-octane fighter fuel. The tank exploded with a noise that sounded like several bombs, the superheated fuel was spread everywhere, lighting many things on fire. Ruusaar was immediately thrown into the shed wall by the shockwave and knew no more. Ruusaar woke up to the sight of Bakh's helmeted face looking down at him "Are you all right vod?" Asked Bakh, who seemed to be unharmed. "Yeah, I feel okay, but not brilliant, I'm pretty badly bruised up." Replied Ruusaar. Bakh nodded "I'm a bit banged up too, but we have work to do!" Bakh gestured to the pile of the base's

rescue equipment that now lay just outside the shed's door, the shed itself was not that badly damaged because the barracks had shielded it from the worst of the shockwave, but it was very banged up all the same. They quickly donned the gear and raced towards the barracks.

The barrack's front was completely smashed in and destroyed, but the back looked like some people could have survived the blast without any major injuries. Inside the building they found a few people who were uninjured, having been in the barrack cellar working on communications equipment when the fuel tank exploded. Unfortunately, these seemed to be the only unharmed people on the base. As the night wore on, the rescuers found many seriously injured and dead vode strewn across the base grounds. The most depressing news came when they found the blackened and body of Alor'ad Cairn, the much beloved Gran CO of the base. Around dawn, Bakh assembled a team to go scrounge for parts to assemble a holocom with, so that emergency aid could be summoned.

The rest of the day was spent piling up the dead, trying to stabilize the seriously injured, a mostly futile task. Around noon, Bakh and his team assembled a holocom and managed to send an emergency message to the nearest Mandalorian fleet. The rescue ships arrived at dusk and began evacuating the survivors. Bakh and Ruusaar left on the third to last ship, the ship that would take them away from Exandros for what Ruusaar hoped would be forever. As they passed through the atmosphere Ruusaar turned to Bakh "I thought over our talk yesterday and the things you said, and they are all true. I came to realize this when we were leading the rescue efforts and sifting through the wreckage. I realized that kote is working to help your vode, that kote is much more than personal glory." Bakh nodded and then spoke "I'm glad to hear you understand, it would have been a sad thing to watch you go through life in bitter disappointment." Ruusaar spoke again "But if this is what it takes to win kote, I've had enough of it." Bakh chuckled at Ruusaar's words as the ship entered hyperspace, leaving the Exandros system behind.