

Off the Record On the Outer Rim
KPN Troutrooper/Praetorious/Dominatus/Alvaak

Thosh Zeche: Good evening, and welcome to this edition of “Off the Record On the Outer Rim”. I’m your host, Thosh Zeche. Tonight, we discuss a first, an event so historic, one news outlet called it “the most important event in the Outer Rim since Skywalker took down the Death Star”. Just like Luke’s miracle shot, none on this panel ever believed this could, let alone would, happen. Pundits throughout the galaxy are eating quite a bit of gundark tonight. I speak, of course, of the resignation of one of, if not the most powerful warlords in the Outer Rim, Grand Admiral Ronin. A man...excuse me, a Chiss who possessed a wealth of intelligence, cunning, leadership, and, well, wealth, Ronin reinvigorated a band of disillusioned and disheveled Imperials after the Battle of Endor, and eventually turned them into one of the greatest threats to the New Republic. Most thought only his death or the complete destruction of his fleet would end Ronin’s long reign, but he fooled us all.

Zeche: His successor is none other than his Executive Officer, Sector Admiral Astatine. Anointed by Ronin several months ago as the heir to the SSSD *Sovereign*, Astatine is well-known through the Rim. He has served in several varied capacities within the Emperor’s Hammer fleet: from Training Officer to Deputy Grand Master to Executive Officer, Astatine has always performed superbly in his duties. However, it is his “extracurricular activities” that have landed the now-Grand Admiral in hot water: three different appearances before the High Court of Inquisitors, dozens of public incidents, and one mass defection due to perceived differences in leadership styles. Yet Ronin has absolute faith in his replacement.

Zeche: On our panel tonight we have three distinguished guests. First, a man who worked for many years in tandem with Grand Admirals Ronin and Astatine, a person without whom the Emperor’s Hammer fleet would not exist today, Sector Admiral Kawolski. Welcome, sir.

Kawolski: Thanks. Pleasure.

Zeche: Next, someone who has studied the Emperor’s Hammer fleet from afar, and now leads the Outer Rim’s most cohesive defense against the Emperor’s Hammer as Fleet Commander of the Rebel Squadrons, Rear Admiral Gavin Cantorph Kravis. Welcome to the show, Fleet Commander.

Kravis: Thank you for having me. By the way, we’d just like to say that we aren’t the rebels any more. We won.

Zeche: (*Chuckles*) Of course, of course. Finally, someone who worked with Astatine for several years before leading the largest mutiny in the history of the Emperor’s Hammer, Grand Master Firefox. Dark greetings to you.

Firefox: (*A silent bow of the head*).

Zeche: Excellent. Let's get started. I begin with you Kawolski. What do you see as the main reason Ronin chose Astatine over other qualified candidates, such as yourself?

Kawolski: Well, I can't speak for the other candidates, but personally, I had no interest in the job. I have other interests besides conquering the known universe. As for why Ronnie chose Ast, I'd have to say it's because Ast is the hardest worker in the EH. He practically ran the fleet for the past year as Ronin disengaged himself from the fleet. And finding hard-working command officers is quite difficult.

Kravis: Perhaps for the EH. We don't have that problem as we don't promote simply to rid ourselves of problem pilots.

Kawolski: Hey! Don't make me—

Zeche: Gentlemen, please. Let's stick to the topic at hand. Sector Admiral, what, in your opinion, are the largest obstacles that Astatine must overcome?

Kawolski: Hmm...well, there is a money issue; that is, a lot of people have their hands in the revenue pot, which, unfortunately, is shrinking daily. The SCO—er, Science Officer—for example, has several expensive projects running right now, none of which will ever be profitable. Not to mention several other COs who have huge staffs but little in the way of production. Ast needs to find a way to balance the budget, or at least stop the bleeding. Also, due to several factors, the size of the fleet is quite small. A couple subgroups—namely the BHG and the Fringe—are chock-full of members, but most subgroups are in need of some fresh blood.

Zeche: What about the fleet's perception of Astatine?

Kawolski: (*Shaking his head*) Not an issue—

Firefox: Oh really?

Kawolski: Look, just because you couldn't handle being loyal and obedient doesn't give you the right...sorry. I just get upset when talking to self-righteous slackers. As I was saying, the fleet's perception of Ast right now doesn't matter. They may not like him now, but if he leads the EH into a new era of prosperity, their feelings of him will change quickly. People say he's hard to work with, but what they don't say is that he's hard to work with because he demands so much out of you. Ast expects his COs to work as hard on every project as he does. Ronin, for all the greatness in him, never found the need to push his COs as hard as Ast does and will. Ronnie knew that it was time for some new blood in the FC's chair, and Ast, as we all know, is quite different from Ronin. I expect Ast will lead the EH to glory, at which point every EH'er will love him.

Zeche: Interesting. Speaking of a leader loved by his followers, Firefox, do you agree?

Firefox: Not in the least. I, and my fellow Dark Brothers, believe that Astatine will run the EH into the ground. Contrary to popular belief, we do not hate the Emperor's Hammer; we all served *loyally and honorably* until we realized that Astatine was sinking the fleet. Our anger was directed not at the average pilot, but at their leaders.

Complacency befell Ronin and megalomania befell Astatine. Since neither were going to change for anyone—least of all the fleet they led—we felt it best to leave. If nothing else, our defection opened the eyes of all EH'ers: we showed them that their leaders were not infallible and that they could choose how they wanted to reclaim the galaxy in the name of the Emperor. And, judging by the number of EH'ers who joined me then and continue to embrace our Dark ways, many have realized that Astatine is not the god Ronin would have you believe he is. Don't forget that Astatine also created many enemies within the EH on his way to Fleet Commander; tact and charisma are two traits that I possess and he does not. I believe that although the EH is the largest fleet in the Outer Rim, Astatine will have a difficult time convincing the fleet to embrace his ways and ideas.

Zeche: Harsh. So how do you see the Emperor's Hammer performing in the next few years?

Firefox: I'm not sure how one would quantify a fleet's "performance" except in territory acquired through violence. For that analysis, I refer you to my light side counterpart. I see the EH surviving the next few years, but definitely not thriving. As Kawolski described, the EH faces many internal issues. Solving those issues becomes doubly difficult with a leader who gains respect through fear.

Kawolski: If I may...

Zeche: Go ahead, sir.

Kawolski: Thanks. All leaders gain respect through fear. You, Firefox, earned the respect and loyalty of your followers by scaring them with horror stories of Ronin's and Ast's actions. Don't deny it; you scared your disciples with images of Ronin and Ast raping the DB for their own gain. Ast has, on occasion, forced people to respect him with thinly veiled threats. But then again, what commander hasn't walked down that easy path? I did, though most of the fleet never saw what went on behind my closed doors. Remember, I kicked our SCO out for insulting my home world on its darkest day without a trial, not to mention others who got on my bad side. What Astatine must learn is being more balanced: scaring people is fine, so long as every now and then, they are rewarded. Heck, in the past couple of weeks, Ast has been far more forgiving than he ever has before.

Zeche: Thank you both. Quite insightful. Firefox, what has been your group's response to Astatine's hiring?

Firefox: Some of our older members—specifically those who joined the revolution—noted the news, but we've moved on. What the EH wants to do is the EH's business, so long as it does not interfere with ours.

Zeche: Kravis, same question.

Kravis: Well, we've been a bit anxious, to be honest. Our strategists get nervous and edgy when something unforeseen happens, such as Ronin's resignation. We had Ronin fairly well analyzed and could predict his actions and responses with a high degree of certainty. Sure, Astatine has been in charge of the fleet for a while now, but we don't know what he plans on doing.

Zeche: Since you are in close contact with the Core and the New Republic government, have you heard any response to this news?

Kravis: I told some people and didn't get a response at all. The Core Worlds have their own issues and could care less what we do out here.

Zeche: Too true. What legacy does Ronin leave behind as it relates to the Rebel Squadrons?

Kravis: Hmmm...I'd say a varied legacy. Some found him to be obtuse and warmongering. Others, myself included, saw him as a role model for all fleet commanders. We certainly respected him tactically; there were days when we wish we had an ounce of his strategic cunning. Politically, that wasn't his area of expertise. He could come off as blunt and threatening—

Kawolski: Some might say the same about you.

Kravis: I'm sure some might. But we're talking about Ronin here. From our perspective, Ronin seemed to be capricious: sometimes he'd welcome our entreaties with open arms, other times he'd bar the door and lock the gate. But still, we never questioned his intelligence even when he questioned ours.

Zeche: Fascinating. Now we'll open up our comm channels for questions from our listeners. Hello, Nokk'i on Dar'Telis, you're on the air.

Nokk'i: Hi! My question is for Sector Admiral Kawolski. Do you know what Ronin plans on doing in his retirement?

Kawolski: I don't know specifics, but I hear he's gonna pursue some personal interests. He'll definitely keep an eye on the fleet, but he's basically bequeathed the fleet to Astatine.

Zeche: Thanks, Nokk'i. We go to Oelp in orbit around Antei.

Oelp: Long time listener, first time caller. Love the show, Thosh. Hey, Firefox, any chance the Dark Brotherhood will reconcile with—

Firefox: No. Let me clarify something: the Dark Brotherhood will never reconcile with the EH so long as Ronin or Astatine is in command. We sent several envoys a couple months after the Split, but all were received coldly, not to mention one that came back in a box. Relations with the EH are severed and shall be for the foreseeable future.

Oelp: What if Astatine resigns?

Firefox: We will have to see what kind of influence Astatine has after he leaves. If he appoints someone who thinks as he does in this matter, we will not waste our time trying to reconcile. If he appoints someone who is more open-minded, we might consider extending an olive branch.

Zeche: Another topic as I can feel the tension rise in the room. Moarty from somewhere in the Aranna system.

Moarty: Rear Admiral, could you elaborate on your personal feelings on Astatine?

Kravis: Sure, but there's really not much to say. From the few times I've talked with him, I know him to be a hard-working, competent, and capable leader, extremely loyal to the EH and the Imperial Ideal. But that's the extent of my knowledge of him. I don't know what he'll turn into, so I'm taking a wait-and-see approach before I make any further judgments of his actions and character.

Zeche: Could you clarify that, please.

Kravis: Gladly. We—and by “we”, I mean everyone in the galaxy—like to think that people are static, that the way they are now is the way they will forever be. This may be true of some soldiers, but commanding people changes a person. And commanding an entire fleet radically changes a person. I've known several fleet commanders in my time, seen a couple rise through the ranks even, and every one of them is a different man—or woman or hairy beast as the case may be. I know I've changed since taking over the reins 18 months ago. The job will change Astatine in ways none of us can predict. Right now, he's going through the “Personalization” stage, putting his stamp on every aspect of the fleet that he can. My sources tell me that the hallowed High Court of Inquisitors will not last much longer if Astatine has his way. Soon, he'll relax a little and slowly distance himself from his subordinates, just enough to remind them that they cannot relax but he can (if he so chooses). Will this quicken his trip to anger, or will it mellow him? I cannot say, which is why I plan on reserving my judgment until Astatine adapts to his new position.

Zeche: Well, that's all the time we have tonight. I'd like to thank my guests and you, our audience. Until next week, stay safe!