



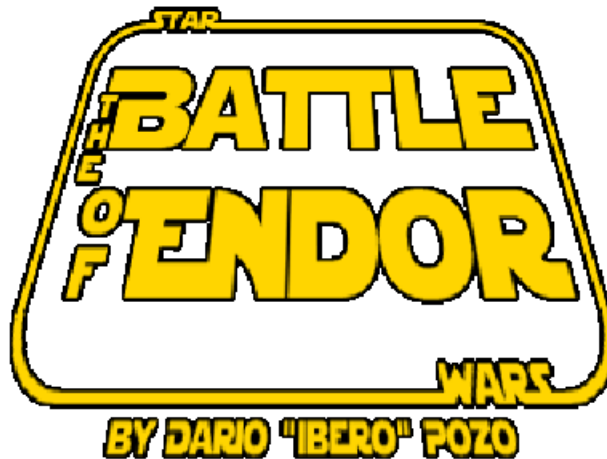
## Reading Room

*StarWars FanFiction*

### POV: The Battle of Endor

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#### [Rebel Fleet arriving to Endor's orbit]

The frightened voice could be heard on board all the Rebel ships.

"TIE Fighters! Hundreds of them!"

In less than a second the space was full of enemy fighters. Lieutenant Rolan Kazanna was as scared as the rest of the pilots watching the incredible wall of fire expand in front of them. No matter how many hours of training one could have behind, how many battles against the same foes survived, the fear was so far the strongest feeling in that moment. The only thought, shared by every sentient on board the Alliance ships, was *I'm dead*. Even before the TIEs could reach the Rebel fleet, the order in the formation was broken, each pilot trying to evade and engage the enemy at the same time. Rolan maneuvered by pure instinct, his X-Wing just barely escaping from colliding into a TIE interceptor and his own wingman by mere meters. The intercom was full of exclamations, making it almost impossible to understand the orders from the squadron leaders.

"There's too many of them!" An Y-Wing pilot cried out.

"Draw their fire away from the cruisers!" the order came from General Calrissian, on board the *Millennium Falcon*, an YT-1300 modified transport looking strange between the rest of the fighters.

*That's easier said than done!* Rolan thought while shooting over a TIE flying rapidly out of his sight, and failing. "Damn!"

There was no time to find his wingman, only to hope he was not too far. Several bright red dots on his right display showed that the same number of TIEs were on his tail. He looped his X-Wing desperately, trying to situate some of them where he could get a good aim. Three shots managed to connect with his rear deflectors before he was even able to evade them. The only good thing about fighting against so many adversaries was that they were always in risk of shooting down one of his own ships, and that was preventing the Imperial pilots from making full use of their superior fire power. Rolan inverted the turn he had started, and with the corner of his eye caught one of the TIEs maneuvering to get out of his comrades line of fire. The Imperial entered instead into Rolan's sight enough to be reached by the four lasers of the X-Wing.

"Eat this!" Rolan exclaimed while elevating his ship over the exploding TIE and its dangerous debris. The adrenaline load triggered out by the first wave of fear was invading his organism turning the desperation into a wild desire of killing before being killed. One of the remaining TIEs had flown directly into the dispersing rests of his wingman's ship, suffering serious damage from the collision with one of the pylons still attached to a section of solar panel, but Rolan never saw it. He broke his previous trajectory forcing the X-Wing into a hard dive, looking at his right display while compensating the punished rear shields with energy from his lasers.

During a short interval, the Rebel pilot could see the unfinished Death Star over his head, seeming vulnerable with her opened side, but untouchable while the deflector shield kept working. They had been told that the shield generator would be destroyed by the commandos there on Endor's Moon before they started their attack, but obviously they had failed. Rolan had seen two X-Wings disappear against the invisible wall, and a moment later the hell had begun. The Rebel fleet never finished their evasive maneuver. In front of them, the space was covered with what appeared to be the whole Imperial Fleet, although Rolan knew that was only one of their battle squadrons. The Rebel fleet was composed by four Calamarian Cruisers, lead by Admiral Ackbar's flagship *Home One*, some Nebulon-B frigates, a handful of Corellian corvettes, and every available transport with a laser battery installed. The fighter force had been organized in five groups, each one composed by three or four squadrons, taken from wherever the Alliance had been able to find one. Actually, the fleet that Mon Mothma and Admiral Ackbar had summoned on Sullust for this attack was more than a half of all the ships, crews and pilots the Rebellion had. The rest were now orbiting Mon Calamari, in an attempt to protect this world if the attack against the Death Star failed. Everybody knew that Mon Calamari would be the battle station's first target as soon as it was completed. The Emperor was decided to punish the Calamarians for their support to the Alliance, providing them with their best battle ships. Everybody also knew that if they failed, the forces left at Mon Calamari wouldn't have a chance against the Death Star.

Rolan paled and cursed when the first identifications started to appear on the main screen, as his R2 unit was checking their readings against the fighter's database. It was not any squadron, but the most known and and dreaded of all them, the Death Squadron commanded by Darth Vader. The first name was that of his flagship, the Super Star Destroyer *Executor*, but it was soon followed by other not less famous names. The *Tyrant*, the *Chimaera*, the *Stalker*, the *Adjudicator*, the *Avenger*, the *Judicator*, the *Accuser*, the *Relentless* ...

Death Squadron was supposed to be chasing renegade Admiral Zaarin, under the temporary command of Grand Admiral Thrawn, but the Bothan spies had failed this time, or at least the information they had offered was old when they were able to reach their Alliance contacts. The Imperials didn't even need an Interdictor Cruiser to prevent the Rebel ships from abandoning the area. The gravity well created by Endor, which they had used to be taken out from hyperspace exactly over the Death Star, would be now a deadly trap for them. They only would reach a possible jump point cutting their way through the Imperial capital ships, now closing on them. The Death Star on one side, and Death Squadron on the other, they were surrounded by Death.

*That is, dead, we are already dead.*



After the first two minutes of confusion, the space was now a bit clearer and he was wondering why those big Star Destroyers were not participating in the battle. Just as he was deep into thought, a huge detonation impacted against his fighter, consuming almost all the shields power and throwing him spinning wildly. When he was able to recover the ship's control, Rolan realized that the Calamari Cruiser *Liberty* was not where she had been a moment ago.

"The Death Star is working!" was the shout in the intercom. Rolan had not been in the battle of Yavin. Although he was told that the first Death Star had destroyed the entire planet of Alderaan with a single shot, it was still hard to believe. A controller, the voice that of a Calamarian, kept calling the *Liberty*, hoping beyond any hope that there was an explanation for the cruiser's disappearance from the screens, as the terrible deflagration thousands of eyes had seen was less real than a mark on his console. Someone made him be quiet. Rolan discovered that he had been waiting for an answer to that call. A Calamari Cruiser MC80, 1200 meters long with its impressive weaponry, a crew of thousands of people and nothing remained of any of all that! The sweat ran cold from head to toe and only the instinct gave him the reflexes to continue evading the fire from the TIEs that were after him.

"For all the dead suns, look at that Corvette!"

It was almost impossible for the mind to conceive the *Liberty's* sudden destruction, but the Corellian Blockade Runner in front of him gave him a hint. The Corvette *Tannia* was one of the closest ships to the *Liberty* a second ago. Although it had not been directly hit, it had no chance to escape from the terrible explosion. The most of its hammerhead bridge had literally disappeared, leaving a black hole and some twisted rests from the lowest deck in its place. The still working engines were making the ship drift towards their flagship, the *Home One*.

"They will have to shoot at them..." Rolan muttered between his teeth, unable to move his eyes out of the doomed ship. None of the escape pods had been ejected, but if the safety mechanism had worked, the bulkheads would be sealed and part of the crew could still be alive.

"Tannia," he called. "This is Gray 21, can you copy me?" Imperial fighters kept shooting at him, taking more and more from his shields, but Rolan only could think of the people on board the Corvette. The *Liberty's* crew could not know what was about to happen to them, but those inside the *Tannia* did, and nobody was going to be able to help them.

"Twenty-One, this is Twenty-Two, resist a bit more, I'm coming!"

"Den?" That had been his wingman's voice. "The *Tannia*, they are heading towards *Home One*..."

"Forget the *Tannia*, you've got three squints on you tail and that's all you should worry about!"

"I know." Rolan had not ceased jinking erratically to evade the laser bolts constantly looking for his ship, but his eyes always returned to the Blockade Runner after every turn. They were barely at five hundred meters from the Home One, approaching obliquely its port side. At any moment now the big cruiser's gunners would be forced to open fire before the Corellian ship impacted against them.

"Rolan, break right *now!*" Rolan's wingman's voice screamed in his headphones.

This time the edge of desperation in Den's warning took him out of his trance. Without hesitation, Rolan did what he had been told. An explosion illuminated briefly his cockpit while his R2 unit beeped frantically. The translation scrolling on the screen informed that one of the TIE interceptors had been destroyed. He looked over his shoulder in time to see how one of the other two was hit by another ship, while the remaining one interrupted his attack menaced as he was by Den's X-Wing. He looked confounded at the source of that second shot. It had come from the *Tannia*. The deadly injured Corvette was moving away from *Home One*, two of her six laser batteries coming to life. Someone had been able to recover the control of the ship at the very last moment from the secondary bridge, although they didn't answer to the calls. They had probably lost the comms, but miraculously they had enough systems left for them to return to the fight. Rolan sighed in relief.

"Thanks a lot, Den!" He said seeing now in his display a green dot between the crowd of reds. "I just didn't know if you were near!"

"Yes, I'm here, but I don't think I can resist too much more. I'm seriously damaged here!"

His astromech was confirming that. Den's X-Wing had hull damage, and her shields were under fifteen percent. Rolan felt angry with himself. All this time Den had been doing his job, trying to keep Rolan's tail clean of enemies, but there was nobody to do the same for him. He had almost been killed, and that could happen soon, as new Imperial fighters were now trying to put him in their sights. The fear disappeared and a great determination took its place.

"Put your ship at my twelve o'clock and take the lead. Now I'll be your shadow while you recover some of your shields!"

"I wont *even* say no!" was Den's answer as he passed under Rolan's ship while sending all the weapons energy to the battered shields.

Another Rebel ship exploded under the Death Star's fire. General Calrissian was sustaining a frantic discussion with Admiral Ackbar, but it was hard to pay attention while fighting for your life. The last thing Rolan understood before they changed of frequency was "closer to the Star Destroyers." He shook his head. The Rebel numbers were quickly decreasing, although they were taking with them an even higher amount of Imperial fighters in return. Rolan was wondering how long they would be able to resist when Admiral Ackbar's voice was heard through all the fighters comm-links.

"Attack the Star Destroyers! We are going to engage them at close range."

He had heard perfectly the first time. To be at close range of a Star Destroyer seemed suicidal, but at the same time it was the only chance to evade the Death Star, because it couldn't shoot without risk for the Imperial capital ships. In the same way, the Star Destroyers' gunners would need to be extremely careful when shooting against the Rebel forces without damaging their own fighters or at least that was what Rolan believed. When the nearest Star Destroyer opened fire against Den and himself it destroyed one of the TIEs that was hunting them instead.

"Whoaaa, be careful, Den, those guys shoot first and ask questions later!"

There was no answer. The next laser bolt made Den's X-Wing explode in a million fragments.

"Noooooooooooo.....!" Rolan cried out. If Den had been behind him like he was moments ago, that ball of fire would had been his own ship. Den had saved him one more time, the last one.

Once again, there was no time to regret. Without even stopping to jink to evade the TIEs and the Star Destroyer's guns Rolan saw one X-Wing launching missiles against one of the towers containing the Destroyer's shield generators. He pulled the stick furiously, directing his fighter towards the other dome and selecting dual missiles. Only being very close to the target they would have a chance to hit it. Otherwise, the

powerful particle shields would deviate the warheads with easy. He waited until the tower was already filling all his front view, squeezed the fire button and maneuvered just in time to avoid crashing just after his missiles did. That tower surely had suffered some previous damages because it exploded immediately. The expansive way trapped two TIE Fighters and caused the loss of the rear shields of Rolan's X-Wing.

The Rebel pilot didn't even look back. He tried to compensate his rear shields with the front ones, but that was not much help at all. The good news was that he was momentarily free from any pursuing TIEs and he used those precious seconds to recharge his shields a bit. While doing so, he crossed with two B-Wings and an Y-Wing from Blue Group that were attacking the now unshielded Star Destroyer with all their torpedoes. The happy beeps from the R2 unit said what Rolan wanted to hear: one less Star Destroyer to worry about!

The Rebels' situation was more than desperate, but at least, they now had the initiative. Unable to do anything against the Death Star, the only possible objective were the Imperial capital ships. The Rebel cruisers were trying to put the Star Destroyers between them and the Death Star. The tactic was obtaining some success, because the shots from the huge station were now rare. However, the losses had been very severe and the superiority of the Imperial fleet was painfully clear.

But after a few minutes, a new hope came from Admiral Ackbar's voice.

"The shield is down! Commence attack on the Death Star's main reactor." *Three hurrahs for the commandos!* Rolan thought.

"We're on our way." this came from General Calrissian, Gold leader. "Red Group, Gold Group, all fighters follow me!"

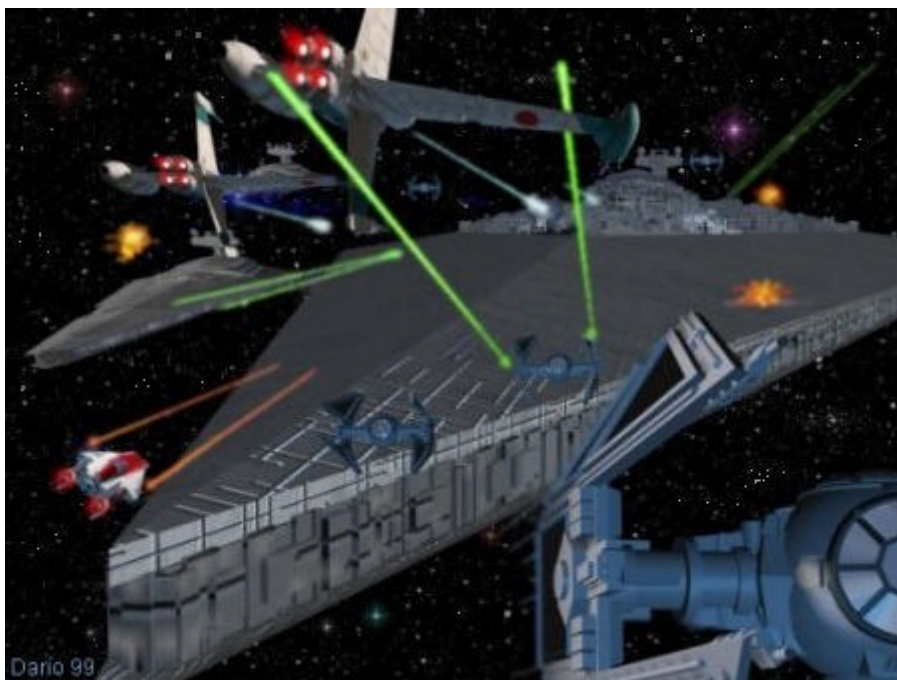
That left Green, Blue and Gray Groups to protect the remaining Cruisers and Frigates; and to avoid that most of the Imperial fighters would follow Red and Gold inside the Death Star. Rolan had lost contact with his squadron during the fight, as many other pilots. Green Leader, a commander called Arvel Crynyd who piloted an A-Wing, had taken the lead of the remaining fighters, barely a half of the initial force, hounding Death Squadron's Star Destroyers. Blue Leader had died in the first moments of the fight, and Gray Leader had fallen while helping to protect the medical Frigate, the *Redemption*. Rolan looked at his shields panel and felt better finding that he had recovered his primaries. Following Green Leader's instructions, he launched his X-Wing along with some other pilots against a significant group of TIEs that were leaving the battle to go after the *Millennium Falcon* and its escorts.

It was evident that the Imperials had not expected that the Death Star's protective shield could fail and the confusion was dominating their actions. While targeting a TIE Interceptor, Rolan thought that probably the orders had been given from the Death Star and whoever was at command, *-maybe it was true after all that the Emperor was there!*- now had a few things to think about with those ships penetrating in the heart of the battle station. The Rebel pilot concentrated on his job and shot down the Interceptor with several laser blasts. The squint smashed against the Death Star's surface, over which they were fighting now recklessly close. The unfinished structures, coming from inside the station through the wide areas where the hull plates had not been installed yet, were causing as many casualties as the laser shots from both sides. Rolan targeted another Interceptor and forced its pilot to miss the exhaustion port where the *Millennium Falcon* had penetrated half a minute ago. His R2 unit warned him that several ships, mostly shuttles and transports, were abandoning the Death Star.

"Hey, you guys!" A Rebel pilot said cheerfully, "It seems that they are evacuating!"

A wave of hope inundated the Rebels. They were now fighting with more intensity, if that was even possible.

"We've got to give those fighters more time!" Again the Admiral Ackbar's voice. "Concentrate all fire on the Super Star Destroyer."



Rolan had not seen a Super Star Destroyer until now. "A Death Star and a Super Star Destroyer the same day," the X-Wing pilot said to himself. "If I survive today, I'll have something to tell my grandchildren!" Some of the TIEs he was pursuing were changing their routes and running away. "It seems that nobody wants to be near the Death Star," Rolan heard someone to say. He turned his X-Wing to face the Executor, but a new threat made him change his mind. Four TIEs Advanced coming from the Death Star were joining the battle. They had to be part of the elite squadrons assigned to the battle station, or maybe they were the Emperor's personal escort. The fact was they were engaging the Rebel fighters that were heading to the colossal Super Star Destroyer.

"This is Gray 21..." Rolan said into the intercom, "I have four TIE Advanced incoming... No, there are four more! Can someone help?"

"This is Gray 15," a female voice answered. "I'm with you."

"Ok, take the four that are just arriving and I'll do my best with the rest." Rolan replied

"Sure!" Gray 15 said, with a tone of confidence that would sound strange in someone who was engaging four TIEs Advanced alone, but the feeling was common in that moment in all the Rebel pilots, forgetting the fear and desperation of just some minutes ago.

Rolan didn't bother to target a TIE in particular, he shot repeatedly against all the group, buying more speed with some of the shields energy. He didn't shoot down any of the TIEs, but he got his first objective, to force them to break their attack against the B-Wings that were pounding the Super Star Destroyer. An A-Wing appeared from somewhere and managed to destroy one of the touched TIEs. R2 identified the A-Wing as Green Leader.

"Good job, Twenty One!" Commander Arvel Crynyd said. "I've lost most of my group. Help me to keep these bandits away from our Bombers and perhaps we'll be able to call it a day."

"Roger, Leader. R2, target the one with the lower shields!" Rolan ordered to his astromech. He moved against the fighter selected by the droid, trying not to worry about the one who was now at his tail. He saw briefly the white and red A-Wing continuing the chase of the one who was attacking the B-Wings. And almost out of his vision field he caught a glimpse of new ships closing on the courageous pilot.

"Be careful, Green Leader!" Rolan warned. "You've got three more after your tail!"



**[Battle in Endor's Moon's orbit]**

Effectively, from the second group of TIEs Advanced, Gray 15 had forced one to stay behind, engaging him now into a close dogfight. But the other three were now threatening Green Leader. There was nothing Rolan could do but warn him, because he had his own problems. The TIE he was targeting was resulting to be a really tough adversary, what was not a surprise. Only the best among the Imperial pilots were given the opportunity to pilot an Advanced, or an Avenger, as they called them. He constantly escaped from his sight, outmaneuvering his X-Wing again and again. The one on his six had almost left him without rear shields. That was the same thing as not having any shields at all, since Rolan had directed all energy to that zone.

The anguished cry from Green leader distracted him momentarily. He risked a quick look, and that was enough: The A-Wing was falling... spinning towards the Super Star Destroyer's bridge. Rolan wondered why Green Leader did not use his ejectable seat to abandon his deadly wounded fighter. Perhaps he was badly injured, too, but then Rolan understood. His R2 unit informed him that the Imperial ship's shields were down, the last tower destroyed by the fire from two A-Wings. Commander Arvel Crynyd wanted to be sure that his ship would crash exactly against the command section of the Executor.

Rolan couldn't keep looking. The last laser blast from the TIE Advanced had collapsed his X-Wing's rear shields and caused also hull damage. The astromech whistled terrified beeps and some of the cockpit instruments exploded, the fried components producing a rain of sparks over him. Rolan disengaged the other TIE and maneuvered like a crazy to evade his pursuer before he finished him off, while the fire extinction mechanism started up. Rolan was very surprised when the Imperial pilot made a bad move that put himself just in the middle of his sight. Rolan shot without a doubt, weakening the TIE Advanced's shields and then saw what probably had made its pilot's distraction.

The Super Star Destroyer, with her bridge in flames, was falling directly over the Death Star like an arrow of fire. The giant battle ship's forward section penetrated deeply into the space station's structure, hull plates twisting and melting as they were made of paper instead of layers of titanium and the best durasteel, and finally the Executor exploded and burned from bow to stern like an eight kilometers long torch.

"Uauuuu, I never thought I would see something like that!" Gray 15 exclaimed. She had finally shot down her TIE Advanced. "All right, you follow after that TIE, and I'll catch up with his partner!"

"Roger, Fifteen!" Rolan answered while continuing shooting against the Imperial fighter, decided to take the best use from the other pilot's fail.

Around them, both fleets keep maneuvering the one around the other, their laser batteries and warhead launchers looking for the enemy ships' weakest spots. The Imperials were advancing to cover the position that the Executor had left, in an attempt to prevent any Rebel ship from escaping. The three Calamarian Cruisers still in combat penetrated into Death squadron's formation, trying to keep at least one of the Star Destroyers between them and the Death Star, and forcing them to be extremely cautious: every missed shot would probably hit one of their ships. The smaller ships, like Frigates and Corvettes, helped the Cruisers as best as they could, but even with the loss of their flagship, the Imperial fleet was superior. Some minutes more, and everything would be over, but there were no news from the Millennium Falcon and the fighters that were trying to find and destroy the Death Star's core reactor. Once more, the giant battle station was turning around its axis, looking for a new target.

"They can't shoot now without blowing out their own ships!" A Captain commented, his tone suggesting he didn't discard that the Imperials could sacrifice one or more of their Destroyers in order to finish with the Alliance ships. The dreadful super-laser was now in fire position.

"We are not their target." Someone else answered. "It keeps moving..."

"Endor's Moon!" Other voice exclaimed. "It's Endor's Moon what they are about to destroy!"

Rolan felt a shiver. After loosing the shield generator, they had decided to shoot at the moon and kill the commandos, along with the troops that had failed protecting the installations and all other presence of life. He felt terribly impotent. There was nothing they could do to avoid one more world was destroyed by the Empire in a blow, without a second thought. How could anybody serve this kind of evilness? His R2 unit sent a warning. New fighters were coming to help the TIE Advanced he was chasing, but he ignored them. If he was going to die, at least this pilot would be gone with him. No, this one was not going to celebrate Endor's Moon's destruction nor anything else. His last blast took pieces of hull away near its port ion engine, and the

TIE Advanced reduced noticeably its speed.

He had no time to finish the job, though. An urgent order interrupted any other consideration.

"All ships, this is Home One" A Calamarian voice came through. "Move away from the Death Star! Right now!"

Rolan felt his heart jump. That could only mean that Red and Gold groups had reached their objective. The Second Death Star was about to explode, and everything in several kilometers around it would be disintegrated. He grinned.

"R2, direct all the energy you can find to the engines!" The X-Wing skipped at front and raced towards the escaping cruisers. Probably the TIEs Advanced's pilots interpreted correctly the meaning behind the Rebel fighters retreat as they didn't try to pursue them. Instead, they broke towards the core of the Imperial fleet. Only a handful of fighters, Rebels and Imperials, had exited the Death Star so far, but it seemed that part of the group was still inside. If they had succeeded, Home One's powerful sensors must have detected the beginning of the destruction of the battle station's main reactor, that was the only explanation for the order. Nevertheless, the Death Star kept its rotation and nothing happened. Soon Endor's Moon would be at fire range.

And then he saw them. Two green signals were there had been no one. The ships piloted by Gold and Red Leaders, General Calrissian and Commander Antilles, were caught briefly by his rear sensors. As he was looking the screen went black and there was no time to think any more.



At his back, the Death Star exploded like a supernova, taking with her all the ships that were not far enough, including the Star Destroyer Valient, which was probably waiting to detect the Emperor's shuttle between the last ships escaping. When the expansive wave ceased, the X-Wing's rear sensors started to work again. For Rolan's relief, only the same two green signals remained. Under them, Endor's Moon blue sphere continued undisturbed its slow orbit around its mother planet.

"Yeeeeeehaaaaaahhhh!!!" The intercom was saturated with similar victory shouts. No matter what happened now. Even if the Rebel fleet was destroyed to the last ship, they had won. Others would follow the fight, and if it was confirmed that the Emperor was on board its creature, the Empire was facing the beginning of its end.

That thought had reached the enemy, too, and its effect was terrible on their morale. The surviving Imperial ships seemed to doubt whether to continue the fight or not, but evidently there was nobody at command of the fleet and each captain was deciding what to do with his vessel. The Rebel forces were too weakened at that moment, but Admiral Ackbar noticed the confusion on the Imperial side and made his decision.



"All ships..." he ordered using the general frequency, "launch a last attack against the Star Destroyer's engines where the shields are the weakest. Every ship we destroy today won't be back against us the next time!"

Gold Leader acknowledged the order and took the lead of the remaining fighters. His ship had lost its sensor plate and its hull was completely scorched, but General Calrissian insisted that the Millennium Falcon would resist. Commander Antilles and the other three survivors of Rogue Squadron formed with the Corellian freighter.

"All right, people, we're going for the last round." Calrissian's retaliating voice was heard. "Those of you with any warhead in store have a last chance to give them a good use. Then help to keep the enemy fighters away from our cruisers as best as you can!"

Rolan's X-Wing was in really bad shape, but he had four proton torpedoes left to use. He joined the group heading to the Illustrious, which lectures indicated it was already seriously damaged. He decided to contribute with his torpedoes, but being careful not to get in range of the powerful Star Destroyer's guns. He obtained a lock on the central thruster and launched the warheads at medium range. He watched the blue streaks flying away towards its target and dedicated a second to ask his astromech for a damage report. He was not comforted with what he saw. His R2 unit said that there was no way to repair the shields generator, so he couldn't do anything more against the Star Destroyer without committing suicide.

Instead, he thought he could help attacking some of the TIE fighters that were approaching, and have yet a chance to survive. He chose a group of three and fired with quad lasers, destroying one and managing to evade the fire from the other two just by luck. Surely they had orders to defend the threatened Star Destroyer, because none of them engaged him and continued the route towards the big ship. But they were too late. The Illustrious broke in two parts at the middle of her hull, erupting in a chain of explosions.

The combined fire from the Rebel capital ships and the remaining fighters destroyed two more Star Destroyers, the Accuser and the Aggressor, in less than a minute. The new Imperial flagship after the destruction of the Executor was the Chimaera. Although showing important damage on the main superstructure, it was offering the highest opposition, along with the Judicator and the Relentless. Unknown by the Rebels, the second in command, Captain Gilad Pellaeon, had taken the command when his captain died, but his attempts of leading Death Squadron's counterattack were not receiving the needed support. The destruction of the Accuser and the Aggressor had made the final decision from other captains. Ignoring Pellaeon's orders as those given by a subordinate, they had their ships moving away from Endor and racing towards the closest exit point from the system. That caused a commotion amongst the Imperial fighter squadrons. Only the TIE Advanced had hyperspace capabilities. Without their home ships, those pilots on board a standard TIE Fighter or an Interceptor would be trapped in the system. Dozens of fighters abandoned the combat and directed towards their Star Destroyers, disobeying as well the orders of continuing the battle. Some of them were killed in the attempt, but most managed to reach their destination: there were no enough Rebel fighters to pursue them all.

Realizing that the battle was definitely lost, Captain Pellaeon ordered the Chimaera to retreat, and followed the escaping Destroyers along with the last survivors of their fleet. Admiral Ackbar understood that there was no need to force their luck, with the Rebel fleet as reduced as it was. That last attack had granted the destruction of three Star Destroyers, a great reward, but a Rebel Calamarian Cruiser had fallen in the fight and the two surviving Cruisers, the Home One and the Independence, had received severe punishment, without even mentioning the lost fighters.

"All ships, interrupt the prosecution of the Imperial forces." Admiral Ackbar ordered. "This is enough for today."

Rolan greeted this order in silence and closed his eyes, in a pray to whoever was hearing. His X-Wing was flying yet almost by a miracle.

Everybody on board the Rebel flagship was celebrating. Only Admiral Ackbar stayed far from the crowds of excited officers and technicians. He leaned back on his command chair, looking through the viewscreen with his eyes humid, even for a Calamarian. Although they had obtained a great victory, probably the greatest one the Alliance had ever known, he couldn't help but think of all the people that had been lost under his command. Only on board the Liberty and the Rebel Hope they had been several thousands... Nevertheless, now it was time to do all that was possible for those who were still alive.

"Launch all available shuttles. Look for ejected pilots and make prisoners of the Imperial's. All fighters, identify all the ships that have escaped from the Death Star but have not jumped to hyperspace. We can't discard that the Emperor is in one of them..."

"You heard the orders R2!" Rolan said. His astromech beeped in answer.

The few B-Wings and Y-Wings that had survived the battle were having an easier job disabling transports carrying Imperial troops and workers. Several freighters and utility vehicles were being piloted for prisoners that had managed to evade in the confusion of the Death Star's last moments. Cheerings were heard in the intercom every time a new pilot was found alive. A couple of A-Wings inspected the remainings of the Imperial vessels, looking for all that could be salvaged. They soon had good news to report. The Star Destroyer Adjudicator, which had been disabled and abandoned by its crew, could be repaired and put back into service. Furthermore, one of the last fallen, the Accuser, although badly damaged, might be recoverable if they were able to tow it to Mon Calamari's shipyards along with some pieces from the other three Destroyers that the Imperials had lost. The Calamarian engineers were crossing bets with the Sullustans about whether they would be able or not to make a complete Star Destroyer from what remained from four of them.

Rolan flew carefully between the wreckage, looking for small ships that could be hidden behind the bigger pieces. Ten kilometers away from Home One's position, he spotted a Corellian Corvette receiving assistance. He opened his mouth in surprise. He didn't need to look at his screen to identify it. The absence of most of the forward section made him know beyond any doubt that the Tannia had managed to survive to the battle. Rolan smiled. More than a miracle had been made today.

His thoughts were interrupted by his R2 unit's excited whistles. He headed to the coordinates where the droid had detected an Imperial ship, and soon he saw a lonely Lambda Class shuttle directing towards the Rebel cruisers. He took an interception course and used the fighter's sensors to investigate her. It seemed that it was occupied by only the pilot. Rolan put his X-Wing on the shuttle's tail and made a call through a standard frequency.



"Imperial shuttle, stop your engines and identify yourself at once, or you will be destroyed!"

"Take it easy, pilot..." the answer came while the shuttle reduced her speed. "This is Commander Skywalker."

This was a surprise for Rolan. Just before taking off, he had been told that Commander Skywalker would not fly with Rogue Squadron. He had decided instead to go with General Solo and his group down to Endor's Moon. He might have stolen the shuttle there, but judging by the route he had been following, it seemed more probable that he had parted from the Death Star. There was no way to be sure, unless...

"Wait a minute while I check that out, sir." Rolan said with caution, thinking as fast as he could. "R2, can you take a reading of his vital parameters at this distance?"

He almost smiled when the translation of his droid's indignant answer appeared on the screen. Of course I can.

"All right, just do so and check them with Redemption's database." A voice could be easily reproduced, having a reference of the original, and Rolan would have bet six months of salary that the Imps had everything to be had about the man who destroyed their first Death Star. Brain activity pattern, though, was a lot harder to mask. Rolan knew that Skywalker had been treated on board the Redemption more or less a year ago, so they had to keep a record. After a few seconds, the droid had a positive confirmation.

He relaxed and move his finger out of the trigger. "My apologies, Commander Skywalker." Rolan said with evident joy and only a hint of embarrassment. "This is Lieutenant Rolan Kazanna, Gray 21. I will escort you to the Home One, sir."

"Thank you, Lieutenant." Skywalker replied. Exhaustion could be heard in his voice.

Rolan transmitted to the Home One his position and who the pilot of the shuttle he was escorting was. Everybody on board the flagship was glad to hear the good news. General Solo had contacted the Home One some minutes earlier and reported that Commander Skywalker was not with them. At that time nobody had really known if he was still alive. Admiral Ackbar asked to speak with him personally. Rolan decided not to miss a single word of that conversation.

"Commander Skywalker, this is Admiral Ackbar. It seems that you are coming from the Death Star. Is this correct?"

"Yes, Admiral."

"That I thought. Do you have any news about the Emperor?" Rolan had not talked too much with Calamarian people, but he easily detected the anxiety in the Admiral's voice. Anxiety he plainly shared while he waited for the answer.

"Yes, Admiral." Rolan kept his breath. "The Emperor is dead. Darth Vader killed him prior to his own death."

Nobody said a word during the next few seconds. That was incredible from all points of view, but who was going to doubt Commander Skywalker's words?

"I suppose you have many things to tell, Commander Skywalker..." Admiral Ackbar said at last, "but we can wait to hear it until you are on board. After that, I'll provide you with transportation to Endor's Moon. I celebrate to inform you that Princess Leia Organa and Captain Solo are all right."

"I know. Thank you, Admiral." Skywalker said.

Rolan was tempted to ask him what he had meant with that "I know", but he did not. He must have contacted with Solo's group just before being detected by his X-Wing's sensors. They made the rest of the short travel to the Home One in silence. He saw some of the rescue shuttles boarding the cruiser, and thought of Den, his lost friend and wingman, in this order. There was no way for Den to be amongst the rescued ones. He and his X-Wing had been vaped in front of his eyes. The rest of Gray Group, six X-Wings from the 48 that left the Home One what seemed an eternity ago, joined with him before reaching the Calamari Cruiser's bay. The pilot on his right saluted him. Rolan recognized Gray 15, the only other survivor from their squadron. Now he had a chance to know her better, he thought bitterly. How many losses in one day, although it was probably a little price for what they had gotten. Some hours later, and all the pilots would join at the ship's lounge, to mourn their comrades in the only way they knew. They would remember the anecdotes, the places where they had been, old combats, and many of them would finish sinking pain and sadness under a good measure of their favorite beverage, or whatever they could find behind the lounge's bar. They had done that before, and unavoidably they would do it again. They were fighter pilots.

Rolan thought of what he had just heard. The rumor would spread throughout the fleet long before any official news were offered. He had been there, so people would make him repeat every word dozens of times every five minutes. That was good. The death of so many comrades and friends had not been for

nothing. The Emperor was dead with his Death Star, and a new horizon of hope stretched in front of the tired warriors. Could it be that the Rebel Alliance becomes some day, not too far in the future, the New Republic?

## THE END



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