



Reading Room

StarWars FanFiction

POV: Flight of the Raiven

By Michael Rovardi

Raiven awoke with a start, sitting upright in the narrow bunk, the cry dying on his lips. He looked across to the chrono resting on his bedside table. The red digits stared balefully back at him. 02:12. *Damn*, he thought, *Third night in a row*.

Climbing out of bed, he visited the refresher and climbed into a shipboard jumpsuit, one of the flightsuit-style ones often worn by the off-duty pilots of the squadron. Michael "Raiven" Rovardi walked to the door, opened it and slipped quietly outside. He made his way along the corridors to the Strike Carrier Wolf's Lair's main hangar.

Pausing at the door, Raiven scanned the hangar deck for signs of life. The squadron's A- and B- Wing fighters were stored there, packed tightly and neatly into the limited hangar floorspace. One of the A Wings was being worked on by Drake's R2 droid, Ledner. Looking around, Ledner warbled a greeting to Raiven, who simply waved back. Crossing to the far corner of the hangar, Raiven looked up at the fighter hanging from the overhead racks. Partially hidden in the shadows of the ceiling, the TIE Advanced hung, battle scarred but intact. Ledner wheeled up behind Raiven and warbled once more, this time with an interrogative tone.

"I couldn't sleep", said Raiven, guessing at the meaning of the droid's question. Ledner warbled again.

"Sorry, shortie, I don't understand. We never used to fly with Astromechs, so I never learned to figure out what you guys talk about."

This time Raiven understood Ledner - a kind of electronic sigh - as he trundled back across the hangar bay towards one of the doors. A short time later, Raiven also left the hangar, heading forwards.

He walked into the Bomb Shelter - the Wolf's Lair's private - in fact, secret - bar, frequented by the squadron's pilots - expecting to find it deserted. Instead, he found two of his fellow pilots, Ibero and Drake, drinking at one of the tables.

"Hey, Raiven, come and join us", said Ibero, before Raiven could turn around and leave.

"I didn't expect anyone to be here at this time" replied Raiven, an unspoken question in his eyes.

"Well, the walls between cabins are pretty thin here, so when I heard Drake was still awake I offered to join him for a late drink", said Ibero without a hint of defensiveness. "What about you? Couldn't sleep?"

Raiven walked to the bar and helped himself to a glass of iced water.

"No Blue Stuff?" asked Drake, indicating the tall glasses from which he and Ibero were drinking.

Raiven smiled briefly. "Ever since I saw that stuff for the first time, I've been trying to figure out what it reminds me of. I worked it out yesterday. The hyperdrive on the Assault Gunboat used to run hot if it wasn't calibrated exactly, so we used to have to top up the coolant from time to time. The coolant looked just like that stuff you're drinking."

"In fact, I think it was ethanol based, too," he added mischievously.

Ibero and Drake looked at each other, then slowly pushed away their glasses. Ibero leaned forward.

"Nice try. Come on, you didn't answer my question."

Raiven made a face and drank some of his water.

"It's nothing, just a nightmare," he finally answered.

"The same one you've been having for the past three nights?" asked Drake.

Raiven stared at him. "How did you know about that?" he demanded.

Drake shrugged. "Ledner's seen you wandering about at all hours for the past couple of nights. I asked him to come and tell me if he saw you again. He mentioned seeing you in the hangar just now. I think he's actually quite worried about you"

"Damn mobile rubbish bin" muttered Raiven under his breath, but his heart wasn't in it. He looked across at Ibero. "And Ledner's beeping woke you up, right?"

"Sort of" replied Ibero "Are you going to tell us about it? Or are you going to just keep it bottled up inside?"

It had been a long three days without much sleep.

Raiven sighed. "OK, but for now, it goes no further, understood?"

Ibero and Drake nodded.

"You were both there when the Commander introduced me to the squadron last week, so you know the basics. That I was an Imperial pilot. That I defected to the Alliance. And that I helped out Solo last year."

Again, the other pilots nodded, wordlessly.

"I attended the Fighter Training College on Ogive IV, a subsidiary campus of the Imperial Academy itself, where I learned to fly most of the Imperial starfighters. I was there when Skywalker dropped a couple of Proton Torpedoes on the first Death Star at Yavin. Of course, as flight cadets, we weren't told that.

"Upon graduation, I was assigned to the ISD *Dominator*, where I served firstly as a Fighter pilot, then progressed my way through the ranks and the ships as the attrition thinned us out. Not just from contact with the Rebel Alliance, either. The Sepan civil war, the Zaarin and Harkov Incidents as part of the fleet under Thrawn. They all took their tolls. I flew all of the Imperial starfighters in service, plus a few you may or may not have heard of. My superiors obviously thought I showed promise, since I progressed quickly to command a flight, normally of TIE Advanceds.

"My flight - The Dark Stars, as we were known, - performed special ops, fighter cover for commando raids, etc., where our hyperdrive capability was useful. It was while we on such a mission that it happened."

Raiven got up and walked to the bar for a refill. This time, he selected and poured a small amount of Mannansk Vod'kar into his tumbler along with fresh ice cubes.

Ibero and Drake looked at each other, then Drake spoke up. "What happened?"

"It started innocuously enough. We were assigned a flight of Gunboats and ordered to make a recon pass at Nar Shadaa. The mission objectives were to ID and confirm the position of a convoy forming there. Strictly speaking, the system was neutral so we were going in simply to fly the flag. We were totally outgunned if the criminals and smugglers there decided to press the issue, but previous flights had shown no signs of trouble. After hooking up with the corvette group *Flashfire*, we went in, imitating a standard system patrol. The natives knew we wouldn't fire upon them first, but they also knew that to start a fight would be to invite a heavy Imperial presence in the system in the near future. This led to a tradition of insults, close passes and games of chicken between the Imperials and the various criminal elements there.

"We dropped in fairly close to the convoy, centred around an old Bulk Cruiser, the *Hired Gun*, and an old Corvette, the *Quick Cred* - obviously mercenary ships. The rest of the convoy consisted of a couple of bulk freighters, an old StarSeer Passenger Liner, some Modular Conveyors, and various Lambda class shuttles, light freighters and transports. The *Hired Gun* carried a squadron or two of R41 Starchasers and Z95 Headhunters, which scrambled to meet us and make sure we didn't interfere with the convoy. We probably could have taken them easily enough, but our orders were to not fire unless fired upon, and besides, we didn't need to get too close to complete our mission. After a couple of runs at each other, sending taunts and insults and pulling away at the last possible second, both sides backed off and we left the system to rendezvous with the Star Destroyer. We were joined there by the Interdictor *Restrainer*. Apparently we had fulfilled the mission objectives successfully, and we were ordered to take a couple of hours rest and prepare to fly again.



"Eight hours later we were ordered to our TIE Advanceds as the *Dominator* jumped through hyperspace. The mission was to interdict the convoy once it was safely out of the Nar Shadaa system, inspect it for contraband and capture any fugitives and materiel going to the Rebellion, without interference from the natives of Nar Shadaa.

"We arrived literally in the middle of nowhere, interstellar space with no systems or even comets nearby. Two squadrons of TIE fighters, Alpha and Beta, and one of Interceptors, Iota, were launched to provide fighter coverage for the mission, while Gunboat Group Rho were to disable any ships attempting to flee or resist. Transports Omega would deliver commandos to capture the ships. Our mission was to make fine scans of all craft using our enhanced sensors. The *Restrainer* powered up its grav field and the trap was set.

"Our intelligence was pretty good, as we were kept waiting for only a few minutes when the first convoy craft arrived. The *Hired Gun* was part of the second wave, just a few seconds later. They deployed their fighters, a squadron each of Z95 Headhunters and R41 Starchasers. We left the fighter sweep to Alpha, Beta and Iota and set about our own mission. As flight leader, my craft was set to receive the data from the entire

flight, and relay it back to the Star Destroyer. We split up and started IDing and inspecting ships. Most of the transports and shuttles had 2 or 3 blasters on board, standard for crew sidearms. The freighters and conveyors were carrying food, medical supplies and some construction equipment and shelters. One was carrying some kind of refined mineral. The passengers were mixed, men, women, children, and a few aliens. No contraband, illegal weapons caches or anything like that was found.

"By the time we had IDed most of the ships, with the exception of the Bulk Cruiser and the Corvette, the fighter squadrons had been eliminated, and the rest of the convoy had either halted and dropped their shields or been disabled. I set up for a high speed pass on the *Hired Gun* while DS3 made a pass on the *Quick Cred*. I made an inspection pass at 1.5m along the spine of the cruiser, evading the turbolaser fire with just a couple of hits. Then DS3 finished his pass and my computer signalled that an item had been discovered aboard the corvette: 'matching preset parameters LS', it said. A few seconds later, we were joined insystem by two new ships: the SSD *Executor* and the ISD *Avenger*. Vader himself had come. Although I didn't realise it at the time, the object discovered by my wingman was a lightsaber - I pulled the data from my ship's log afterwards to confirm it. Jedi. No wonder Vader was interested. The *Dominator* and the *Restrainer* were ordered to recover their fighters and commandos and leave the area immediately, the *Executor* would take charge of the operation from now. Even before the order was finished, the *Executor* and the *Avenger* opened fire on all the remaining operational but surrendered ships of the convoy with ion cannon, quickly disabling them all. The two warships, the *Hired Gun* and the *Quick Cred*, lasted a little longer but soon they were also disabled. Meanwhile, the *Dominator's* bays were busy trying to receive over 20 starfighters (apparently the convoy's fighter escort had taken a few Imperials with them) and 6 stormtrooper transports, so the TIE Advanceds and Assault Gunboats were ordered to jump under their own power back to the rendezvous point.

I was suspicious as to what was about to happen, so I ordered my wingmen to jump first while I stayed around to confirm their jumps had succeeded before leaving myself. The Gunboats went first, followed by the Dark Stars and then the *Restrainer*. Instead of following them, I set the computer to microjump about 20 light minutes along the route back to the rendezvous point. The *Dominator* must have followed me out. I arrived at my observation point, powered down most of my systems and waited. 21 minutes after initiating my microjump, my EM sensors started to receive data. An assault transport from the *Executor* docked with the *Quick Cred*, and then left a few minutes later. The old Corvette had been captured, and made it's into the the *Executor's* bay."

Raiven looked down at the glass in his hand. Empty again. He refilled it and continued the story.

"Then it began. The *Executor* opened fire with it's turbolasers on all of the ships. All of them. The transports carrying families. Men, women, children, gone in an eyeblink. The freighters, the conveyors, destroyed. The Liner, holed fore and aft and then vaporised. It was terrible. Then they opened fire on any escape pods that had ejected.

"I was horrified. I powered up my systems and microjumped back to the scene of the battle. There were debris and bodies everywhere. Of course, the massacre had begun 15 minutes before and had lasted around 5 minutes, so when I arrived the *Executor* and the *Avenger* were long gone.

"I realised at that point exactly what the Empire was and that it must be destroyed."

Raiven sat at the table and looked at Ibero and Drake. They were both horrified.

"Don't tell me," said Drake "You feel... responsible?... in some way. That you could have done something to help?"

Raiven nodded. "At first. And for a while afterwards. Then, one time I was reviewing the sensor logs it hit me. Firstly, if I'd stuck around - against a direct order - I would have been arrested, and considering Vader's personal flagship was there, they probably would have skipped the court-martial and gone straight to the execution. Secondly, even if I **had** stuck around, there was an SSD and an ISD. As callous as this sounds, there was nothing I could have done, except get myself killed along with the rest of the convoy."

"Exactly right," said Drake "I've seen too many pilots tear themselves up over incidents in the war they couldn't do anything about."

"What did you do next?" asked Ibero, quietly.

"I set a course for Nar Shadaa. Obviously, the Empire would never admit what had happened to the convoy - that's why the rest of the ships were wiped out - so there were no witnesses. I felt obligated to let the families of the people on the convoy know what really happened, or the Empire would just tell them the convoy had been lost in hyperspace or something.

"The Nav computer plotted a route via a Nav Buoy in the Kanchen Sector, so I set the coordinates and jumped. Forty minutes later the system signalled to prepare for reversion and I jumped back to realspace. Into the middle of a firefight. I found 2 Rebel Alliance A Wings mixing it up with 7 Gunboats, and the gunboats were winning. As I sped towards the furball, one of the A Wings bought it."

Ibero nodded sadly. "Wyvern. He'd only been with the squadron for less than a week. That recon mission was his first combat duty."

Raiven continued. "He'd managed to take out one of the Gunboats - judging by the floating wreckage - and as I watched, the other - I later discovered it was Solo - got another. But with 3 gunboats on his tail and another 3 coming towards him from one side, he was in trouble.

"I refused to sit by this time. I went to full throttle and closed in, and commed the lead gunboat. I asked him if he needed assistance.

"'No, we don't need any help' he replied.

"I just answered 'Wrong.' and opened fire. The first gunboat took 3 quad bursts before he even realised what had happened and exploded a few moments later. The second took a couple of blasts before breaking off pursuit of the A Wing. The third gunboat was pretty ballsy, he kept up a stream of fire that weakened Solo's shields badly. I put a couple of quad bursts into him to make him turn away then left him for Solo. Unfortunately, this left my starboard side wide open to the approaching flight of gunships and I took 3 concussion missiles. Two of the missiles took down most of my shields and the backblast from the third finished them off and took out my two starboard-side cannon. I went evasive while I tried to rebuild my shields, and by that time Solo had turned to engage the gunboats. He took out the second of the first flight and one of the second before I reengaged with my secondary shields barely showing in the yellow range - a couple of shots' worth of protection at best. I finished off number 3 and engaged the second of the second flight with missiles while Solo concentrated on the remaining gunboat. He finished him off, but not before taking hits to the rear that knocked down his shields and damaged his fighter's systems. I finished off my gunboat and made a quick sweep of the area with my sensors. Nothing. I pulled alongside the A Wing, which was cruising at barely 40 MGLT, and contacted him on an open channel.

"He told me his name was Solo - I gave him my callsign - and he asked what was going on. I told him I was no longer in Imperial service and was happy to help. We surveyed the damage on our ships. Along with the cannon, my hull had taken a beating, and I had lost my Nav computer. My portside engine was redlining on most gauges and my aft shield generator had overloaded. Solo was in even worse condition. He'd lost hypercomm, his hyperdrive and one of his engines was operating at barely 30% capability.

"I suggested a deal. My hyperdrive was still functional since the hyperdrive controller - which stored the numbers immediately before and during the hyperjump - was intact. I could still hyperjump, but I would need the numbers calculating first. My hypercomm was working, so I could call for assistance for him if he would use his still-functional nav computer to calculate the numbers for a straight jump to Nar Shadaa.

"'Why don't you join us? You obviously don't like the Empire' Solo asked.

"I responded 'Perhaps later. I have something I need to do first.'

"We agreed, and while his nav computer worked on the numbers, I patched Solo into the hypercomm via the short-range system and he called for assistance. The response was fast. The Joan d'Arc promised to send a shuttle and escort within 10 minutes - she must have been close by - and be there herself within 20.

"I took the hyperspace jump coordinates and began my run to hyperspace.

"The Jump to Nar Shadaa took a couple of hours, and I came insystem without too much trouble. Despite

the damage, the TIE advanced easily outmanoeuvred and outran the two Z95s launched by Port Traffic control through the canyons of the city-moon.

"I put the TIE in for repairs, and took a... job... to pay for them"

"'Job'?" asked Drake, raising an eyebrow "Sounds... interesting"

Raiven shook his head ruefully. "That's a story for another time"

"What happened after you left Nar Shadaa?" asked Ibero, bringing them back to the subject in hand.

"I made some contacts on Nar Shadaa and, via the mercenary company that owned the Bulk Cruiser and the Corvette, I backtracked the convoy and the people who had hired the warships to provide protection against pirates, etc. Unfortunately, someone else had also made contacts - with the Empire - and I ended up having to outrun an Imperial Frigate - the *Malevolent* - on the way out."

"The repairs were fairly effective. The engine and shield generator were repaired, the hull patched, and a new nav computer - actually one from a Gunboat - was fitted. The destroyed laser cannon couldn't be replaced without questions being asked, but the techs had repaired the starboard - ventral cannon by scavenging the port - dorsal one for parts; it gave me the two ventral cannons for a fire pattern like an A Wing's. Still, I didn't really want to wander into serious trouble without more substantial repairs, so I took a fairly roundabout route to my destination."

"Which was where?" asked Drake.

"A little colony in the Obroan sector, by the name of Liant. The planet itself was fairly inhospitable, a small ice cube orbiting a cool red giant. According to the records, the colony based there had decided to relocate to other, warmer climes, a couple of years previously. They could only afford it when they discovered a rich vein of some mineral or another. They assembled the convoy, buying and hiring ships a few at a time to avoid drawing undue attention, and sending them to Nar Shadaa, where they would meet the mercenary escort for the rest of the trip. They took supplies, building equipment and so on, to make a new start at their new home.

"I arrived at Liant and settled into a series of survey orbits. The enhanced sensors on the TIE were intact, and I quickly discovered the colony buildings on the surface. The entry into the atmosphere was pretty gentle - it had to be, with the hull in that condition, and I set down on a snow covered landing pad. To my surprise, there were still lights on inside a couple of the buildings, one of which was the hangar. I came prepared, so I put on my cold weather gear - not easy inside a TIE cockpit - and walked over to the main entrance. I took my new toy - A Blastech A280S blaster rifle - just in case they weren't receptive to visitors. The buildings were largely subterranean, to preserve heat, I suppose. I made my way through deserted halls and darkened rooms towards the hangar. Most of the internal doors were left open, probably unpowered. Ascending a flight of stairs, I entered the hangar onto a second-floor balcony, and crouched behind a computer console.

"The hangar itself was fairly large, and contained 3 ships - a Lambda class shuttle, a Corellian YT-2000 light freighter and a Modular Conveyor. About 20 people were walking around the ships, making what looked like preflight checks, last minute maintenance and so on. A further 15 or so people were loading the shuttle and freighter - the conveyor's angular containers were already attached and ready to go.

"I shouldered the rifle and walked down some steps, hands open in front of me. I was halfway down before they noticed me, and with shouts of 'freeze!' and 'stay where you are!', several drew their blasters. Activity in the hangar came to a halt and one, a thickset man with a black beard, walked forward, pointing his blaster if not at me, then in my general direction.

"'Who are you? What do you want?' He demanded.

"'Raiven. I'm sorry to startle you, but we need to talk. It's about the others.'

The bearded man seemed to consider this for a few seconds, then shrugged.

"'This way' said the man, 'Dayne, come with us. The rest of you, finish the loading.'

"Holstering his blaster, he pointed to a small office set in the wall. He seemed to have figured out that I wasn't hostile, probably because he could see my rifle slung over my shoulder and realised I could have easily opened fire from the catwalk in the hangar.

"What about the others? You mean the convoy?' He asked gruffly. A younger man with fair hair entered the office behind us and closed the old hinged-type door.

"I'm sorry. The convoy of your people left Nar Shadaa two weeks ago, and was intercepted by the Empire. As far as I know, there were no survivors.'

The man turned grey beneath his beard. The younger man, Dayne, spoke next, in a quiet voice. 'You're lying. Why would the Empire attack the convoy?'

"I wish I was' I replied, and took a datapad from my pocket containing a copy of the sensor logs of the attack. 'I was hoping that you could tell me why it happened'.

The bearded man took the datapad and activated it, while Dayne watched over his shoulder. After a minute or so, Dayne turned away in disgust and anguish, while the older man watched to the end of the recording. His knuckles turned white where he gripped the datapad.

"Why?' He whispered 'Why did they do this to us?' A thought seemed to occur to him 'and how did you find us?'

"I briefly explained the backtracking I did through the mercenary's records. The elder man grimaced. 'They decided that the convoy would prove to be a tempting target passing that close to the Hilnamm Drift for pirates to ignore, so they hired a couple of ships to help protect them.'

"Let's start from the beginning. Why weren't you part of the convoy?' I asked.

"Most of the colony decided to relocate and start a new mining colony. A few of us decided we'd had enough of mining and we were going to set up elsewhere in a different business. We used our share to buy the ships out there' - he gestured towards the hangar - 'and we're going to head for Mantoine when we're ready. I've had some experience with flying a freighter, so I've become the effective captain of our little fleet. Dayne here is a navigator, he's my second in command. My name is Prennay, by the way.' he added, almost almost as an afterthought.

"What was the last thing you heard from the convoy?' I asked. Dayne frowned, then answered 'One of the transports had some engine trouble. Rather than delay the convoy, the passengers were transferred to the mercenary's corvette and the transport turned over to the mercenaries as part of their payment. They transmitted a message just before they jumped from Nar Shadaa, telling us they were on schedule and that they'd contact us on Mantoine in a month or so.'

"Ah.' I said 'The corvette. As you can see, the Empire captured the corvette while it destroyed the rest of the convoy. Who were the passengers transferred from the transport?'

Dayne walked around to the office's desk and fired up the inbuilt computer. 'Let's see. The transport was the *Voyager VI*, crew of 4, 40 passengers.'

"Were any of them Jedi?' I asked, quietly. Both men looked up, startled. 'Of course not. What makes you think that?' asked Dayne.

"Because of this' I replied, leaning over and touching a button on the datapad. The display changed to show the sensor logs of the lightsaber detected aboard the *Quick Cred*.

"Lightsaber - Just a second. Dyla used to have one. Apparently, a distant relative was a Jedi - they were killed in the clone wars - and she inherited it. It didn't actually work, the lens was broken.' Then it dawned on him. 'Just a second. To detect this you must have been pretty close. You were there, weren't you? You're an Imperial!'

"I hesitated for a fraction of a second. This seemed to confirm it for him, and he dived at me over the desk, yelling 'YOU BASTARD!'

"I sidestepped his dive and knocked him hard on the side of the head as he flew past. He landed in a heap, dazed. I turned to the bearded man as he drew his blaster once more. 'Hold your fire.' I said, and then told him what had happened, about the mission, the arrival of the *Executor*, the observation and the return to the site. He seemed to believe me when I told him that I was no longer with the Empire.

"'If you meant us harm, I don't think you would have just wandered in here the way you did, would you?' He holstered his blaster and helped Dayne onto his feet. 'Go and help finish the loading' He ordered, firmly. Dayne glowered at me as he stalked out, slamming the door behind him.

"'Look,' I said 'If I could find you, so could the Empire. When I left Nar Shadaa, an Imperial Frigate had just arrived. If they took a few hours to find out where you are, they could be on their way here right now. My fighter is faster in hyperspace than a frigate, and I assume they want to keep what happened to the convoy a secret, so they'll come themselves instead of contacting a closer ship. Still, I had to take a roundabout route to get here to avoid trouble, something they won't have to do. They could be here very soon. You need to leave here as soon as you can. And I suggest you don't go to Mantooine - they might be waiting for you there if they interrogated the passengers aboard the *Quick Cred*.'

"Prennay nodded thoughtfully and walked back out into the main hangar. 'Are we loaded yet?' He yelled. There was a chorus of affirmative replies. 'Then get your families aboard your assigned ships now. No arguments.' The rest of colonists did not argue, and most left the hangar, heading in the direction of the living quarters. Prennay turned to me. 'Thanks for the warning. What do you think happened to the passengers aboard the *Quick Cred*?'

"'I know the Empire' I replied 'They'll have interrogated them, then executed them. This Dyla and all her family will have been closely investigated to make sure they weren't Jedi or talented in the Force, and then killed as well. I really am sorry.'

"Prennay looked like he was about to throw up. 'What are you going to do now?' He asked.

"'I'm going back to my fighter. How long before you take off?'

"'Less than half an hour' replied Prennay, 'particularly if I start yelling at people'

"'I'll escort you out of the system' I told him. 'I want to see you safely away from here'

"By the time I returned to the TIE Advanced and got her started up, the lights had gone out in the living quarters, and a short while later the hangar doors slid ponderously open. The shuttle left first, followed by the modular conveyor and finally the YT-2000. The lights inside the hangar turned off and the doors slid shut. The sensors in the TIE showed the power reactor in the main building slowly shut down. I lifted off and followed the ships into space."

"I assume the Empire turned up and tried to ruin everyone's day?" Drake inquired.

Raiven nodded. "Yeah, it was pretty close for a while, too. We were halfway to their jump point - only about 15 minutes out - when the *Malevolent* jumped insystem, less than 15 clicks away. I contacted Prennay aboard the conveyor and told him to make best speed while I slowed down the Imperials.

"The Malevolent began launching fighters. First came a flight of 6 TIE fighters - Theta Group - apparently they had decided that was all that was required for the remaining colonists.

"I had spent the time escorting the colonist's ships charging my lasers and shields, so I was as ready as I could be considering the circumstances. Arming my two functional laser cannon and linking their fire, I dived in on the TIEs. Their sensors apparently had me tagged as a possible friendly, and I ignored the comm calls to identify myself. A couple of clicks out, they decided that I meant business and the formation broke and scattered. I selected the flight leader as my target and vaped him with two quick twin blasts. His wingman went the same way a few seconds later. I'm sure they definitely didn't tag me as a friendly after that. The other two elements had circled behind me but I broke hard to port and went evasive. They got a couple of hits on my forward shields as I came around for another pass. Theta 3 took a twin blast to the cockpit as I

dived past, and his wingman suffered damage and turned to return to the frigate. I couldn't press my advantage, though, as by that time Thetas 5 and 6 had looped behind me once more and were starting to pound on my shields. I ran towards the convoy, outdistancing the TIE fighters and turned for a head to head pass. There was enough shield energy to form a double front shield with a little left over to protect my aft. As the TIE bored in, I threw the Advanced into a Corellian Carousel - a looping, corkscrew approach that made me difficult to hit. The TIEs tried anyway, but I only took a few hits before levelling out and nailing Theta 6. TIE Fighters are manoeuvrable, but not as manoeuvrable as Advanceds. I out-turned Theta 5 and destroyed him.

"By this time, the frigate realised they'd need some heavier hitters, so the next launch wave consisted of the remaining 6 fighters of Theta Squad and 6 Bombers, Phi Group. I evened out and recharged my shields, and attacked the bombers, still under the *Malevolent's* guns. The problem with the bombers were the stronger hulls - I needed to fly straight and level for a couple of firing/recharge cycles to be sure of killing each bomber, but the remainder of Theta flight weren't going to let me do that and live.

"I set the cannons for single fire and made a strafing pass across the formation hitting about half but not seriously, with Theta group in close pursuit. I suddenly cut my throttle and turned to the right, too quickly for Theta 9, who took four bolts through his portside solar panel. The braking caught the rest of the group by surprise as well, but that didn't stop them snapping off shots as they overshot, almost eliminating the remainder of my aft shields. I throttled back up and linked my lasers again, then took out Thetas 11 and 7 as the group split up and headed off in all directions.

"I turned my attention back to the bombers. They were almost 3 clicks away now, and far too close to the colonist's ships for my liking. I redirected some laser energy to the engines and chased after them. They must have thought that the fighters were keeping me busy because they weren't manoeuvring as I approached. Phi 5 took 3 twin blasts and disintegrated as I slowed down. Phi 4 went next, trying to break away, but too slowly. I fired a couple of blasts at Phi 1, forcing him to breakaway, and Phi 3, who ducked off to the side but kept up his run. Then the remaining fighters of Theta group caught up with us. They cleaved through my aft shields and took out the newly repaired generator with them, forcing me to break away. Their sensors must have told them that my shields had failed, as they got cocky. Theta 8 overshot me in a turn and paid the ultimate price. Thetas 10 and 12 stuck together as they tried to get behind me, but again, the Advanced's manoeuvrability showed and the fighters were damaged. That was enough, I simply needed them out of the way while I concentrated on the bombers. The remaining bombers were almost inside firing range of the conveyor. I activated my concussion missile launcher and tried for a lock on Phi 6. Locked. Fired. Five missiles left - I hadn't got any more on Nar Shadaa, since I thought they might bring too much attention with them. Phi 6 died in a fireball as I gained a lock on Phi 2. We fired at the same time, my missile and his torpedo. Before he could launch a second torp, my missile caught him and took him out. I was now under a click from the remaining bomber - Phi 3, who was hull damaged but still going - so I switched back to lasers and finished him off before he launched a second torpedo, after his first at the YT-2000 Freighter.

"I signalled Prennay to warn him about the torpedoes. 'We noticed' he replied, his voice tight. The conveyor and freighter opened up with their turret guns, and luckily the Corellian ship managed to shoot down their torpedo. The conveyor was not so lucky, and the torpedo struck the conveyor above the engines. 'Dammit!' came Prennay's yell over the intercom. 'We're hit but not bad. The shields will hold until hyperspace. 3 minutes!'

"I closed the gap with the ships as we ran to escape the planet's gravity well. I watched the sensors but only the blips of the damaged Imperials - plus the *Malevolent* - showed. I realised that the frigate had only launched 18 fighters in total, not the 24 that a Nebulon B normally carried. I was pondering this when 3 larger blips appeared from the *Malevolent's* hangar. Stormtrooper transports. I turned quickly to the nav computer and punched in a few numbers. My initial fears were unfounded - the transports could not reach the colonists before they jumped to hyperspace. *Unless, I realised, the colonists were delayed by something AHEAD of them!*

"I activated the comm 'Prennay! Turn 60 degrees to port and recalculate your jump point.'

"'That'll slow us down, add an extra minute to the jump runup' argued the captain from the Conveyor's bridge.

"'Trust me! There's someone coming in along our old path!' Prennay needed no further encouragement, and the convoy made the turn. I accelerated and shot towards the convoy's original jump point, recharging my

forward shields to full - my aft shields were still offline - and armed my missiles in linked mode. My instincts were right. 30 seconds before the convoy would have jumped, a flicker of pseudomotion announced the arrival of more Imperial forces - 3 Assault Gunboats - about 3 clicks away, at the convoy's original jump point. My mouth went dry as I realised they weren't just any Gunboats - they were the Dark Stars, my old flight."

Raiven looked up at Ibero and Drake.

"Your own wingmen?" said Ibero, quietly. "What did you do?"

"What could I do?" replied Raiven "I couldn't fire on them, not my friends - even if they were Imperials - without talking to them, telling them what had happened. I activated the commlink as I turned away from them. I originally intended to ambush the ambushers, to take down a few more Imperials before I left the system. It wasn't needed - the colonists were about a minute and a half from their jump point, and even the gunboats couldn't have caught them and disabled them fast enough to prevent them from jumping.

"This is Da-. This is Raiven. Is that you, Jylarn?' I asked.

"Raiven! You Traitorous Bastard! Why are you helping these rebel terrorists?" replied my ex-wingman.

"You can't believe everything the Empire tells you' I said, and tight-beamed my sensor logs of the massacre to him. 'You'll know what to do.'

"The TIE Advanced is a hell of a lot faster than the Gunboat, particularly if you shunt laser energy into the engines, which I did. The Dark Stars decided that I was a better target than the "Rebel Terrorists" and tried to give chase, so I led them away at an angle to the colonist's path.

"The Colonists jumped safely into hyperspace while I led the Dark Stars safely away. As the numbers for my jump were being calculated, Jylarn commed me again.

"You won't get away, Raiven. I'll hunt you down myself if I have to.'

"Apparently he'd either not had a chance to look at the sensor logs, or he simply didn't believe they were genuine.

"I left a short time later, on a random heading. I sat, alone, on the edges of the Liant system, and thought for a while, about my life, my direction. I knew the Empire needed to be stopped - and soon - and so I headed back to Nar Shadaa.

There, I made contact the Rebel Alliance and joined up. While they were checking my story - the sensor logs and a probe sent to the wreckage of the massacre convinced them I was telling the truth, as did the battle at Liant - we received news of the victory at Endor. I remember thinking, *I wish I'd seen the light earlier, I knew I could've helped the Alliance there*, but I also realised that the fight wasn't over. I was glad Vader was killed. I was also pleased that the crew of the *Executor* paid for the atrocity at the convoy, until I realised I was condemning a quarter of a million souls when most of the blame probably rested higher up the chain of command.

"I think you know the rest. I went through training - fairly shortened, for obvious reasons - and I was assigned to Green Squadron, operating in the Farlax sector off the CRS *Katarina*. When I heard about the formation of Wolfshead Squadron from White Squadron and saw Solo's name, I did some research and thought I might be able to contribute, so I put in for a transfer. Foxfire must have accepted, since I was transferred here last week."

Raiven finished off the rest of his drink and looked at his chrono. 04:23.

"When is the anniversary, then?" asked Ibero, guessing correctly the reason for the onset of the nightmares.

"Next week" said Raiven. "Last year, I had the nightmares for a week each side, and intermittently for a further month. I think it's time I got some sleep," Heading for the door, he looked around and saw his squadmates rise from the table. "Thanks for listening."

When he had left, Ibero turned to Drake. "Well, at least he's got it out of his system" he said to the Arrebac-born pilot.

"I think we'd better turn in as well." replied Drake "Or the commander will roast us over a slow fire for falling asleep on duty. He looked at knuckles on his right hand, still slightly red.

"How the hell do you sleep so deeply, anyway? A torp could have hit the hull and you wouldn't have heard it. Next time, YOU keep an eye on the guy with the problems, and I'LL sleep like a log till you decide to step in."

[The Following Day, 09:04]

Foxfire stormed along the corridor into "pilot's country" - the corridor containing most of the squadron's pilot's rooms. Ahead of her, one of the doors opened, revealing a slightly dishevelled-looking Ibero.

"Where the hell is Raiven? He was due on duty an hour ago. Only a week since he joined the squadron and already he's oversleeping." She asked, angrily.

"He's got a good excuse, commander" replied the Iberyan pilot, yawning. "And I'm sure it won't happen again"

Foxfire looked at Ibero, her eyes narrowing. "He told you about the convoy, didn't he?" she asked, her voice softer now.

Ibero knew the commander too well to be surprised.

"Yeah. Me and Drake cornered him about it last night. This is probably been the first decent sleep the poor bastard's had all week. I'll pull his shift, he can do mine this afternoon."

Foxfire considered this for a second, then nodded and turned to walk away.

"Commander, how did you know about Raiven? Did the NRI tell you?" asked Ibero, his curiosity getting the better of him.

Foxfire turned and smiled slightly. "Not directly." she said, cryptically. "But their computer security can be... well... lax, sometimes. I like to know about **all** the variables in any equation."

Ibero shook his head, half in admiration, half in exasperation, and followed his commander towards the hangar.

THE END



Did you like this story? If so, then please send a message to **Raiven**. He would be happy to receive any feedback.

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Last update of this page: 30 Jul 2001