



## Reading Room

*StarWars FanFiction*

### POV: Sympathy for the DARTH

**By Solo, Ibero, Rooster & Granite**

**Editor's note:** If you have been granted with the required security level, you may have read a certain report, stored in the New Republic Starfighter Command Archives, which code is..., well, as we said, if you have that security level, you can find out yourself. That report contains the official version for the engagement between Imperial and New Republic forces that took place in..., eeeh, you know, the security. Well, what really happened there is slightly different. The document you are about to read has been composed from Wolfshead Squadron's pilots conversation at their private lounge on the NRS Wolf's Den. They will never admit anything of this, so don't bother to check it out. We have tried to portray their exact words and expressions, so you may find non-standard uses of Basic language in some fragments (you can't expect an Iberyian or a Caldanian, for example, to talk like an Alderaanian or a Corellian). Enjoy.

#### [Wolf's Den, flight simulators room, some time ago]

"Do you really think we needed to use the intercom relay amplifier for this?"

Solo looked slightly worried as Sparks soldered the last wire to the electronic board.

"Sure, and besides; who's going to find out? It's only us pilots in the sim room anyway. This way we can play our own music while simming, and even broadcast it to the other pods!"

"Yeah, a small step for us but a giant leap for the alliance!" Solo replied with some irony.

"What if the captain finds out?"

"Who, Moose?"

"Naah, the real captain; Gen'yaa. She'll have us confined to dustmop wing™ for a month..."

"I told you not to worry, besides she never sets a foot near this place. No one will know!"

Sparks fastened the last panel and turned a switch, powering up the sim control board. The AI blooped happily, obviously glad to be online again and wondered if it could be of any service.

"Let's try this out now! Sparks, load the "Diplomatic summit at Sullust" scenario. I'll take the lead A-Wing and you'll be on my wing!"

The two pilots quickly readied the sims for the run, and as the hatch closed Solo pulled out a small disc from a pocket of his flight suit. "Let's see if this works" he muttered as he slid the disc into a slot cut in a shiny

new control module. He pressed the button marked "Play" and grinned as he heard the familiar intro.

<scratch, bleep> "Alright Solo! It sounds great!"

<squeak> "On my mark Sparks: three, two, one..."

Outside the sim-room, in every quarter, on the bridge, in the hangar, engine room, in every part of the large warship one could hear the music:

*"Please allow me to introduce myself; I'm a man of wealth and taste..."*

<scratch>"Sparks, control tells me there's someone at the door, shall we let them in?"

<Bleep, blop>"Naah, they can wait. Let's bag this Star Destroyer first."

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Vyper opened the canopy of his simulator, startled by the sudden irruption of music inside his cockpit, played at an insanely high volume.

"What in the hell is this??!" He shouted towards Ibero, who was coming out from his own pod with his face pale by the fright. Under his helmet, some new hairs had turned white.

"It sounds familiar to me!" The Iberyian pilot shouted back. "I think I heard it in a holo about vampires, but I may be mixing the songs!"

*"Please allow me to introduce myself; I'm a man of wealth and taste..."* The singer was saying. The instruments were not played by Bith or Ithorian musicians, that was for sure. They had to be a group of crazy Devaronian, or more probably Shistavanen.

"Whatever, I do like it!" Granite yelled, producing his Caldanian bagpipes from under his seat.

"Uh, oh, and I thought it couldn't become worse..." Joker said, although nobody could hear her against the music and the not less noisy bagpipes.

Vyper noticed a red light blinking above the door. Someone was trying to enter, but the safety locks were on. He moved towards the entrance, but Arachnoid was already there, trying to escape from the racket. When he managed to open the door with trembling hands, he ran into the communications droid, A-PD5. The strange looking protocol droid was shaking his head.

"I've tried to reduce the input volume in my audio receptors," it said, "but even at minimum level I'm getting my systems saturated!"

"Too bad for you," Arachnoid cried out, "but move out of the way, you big head!"

"I fear it is not better out of this facility, sir! That... music..." The droid spelt the word "music" with noticeable delay, as he had been performing a full search into his language database looking for a better word but so failing. "... is being heard in the whole ship!"

Ibero and Vyper had arrived to the door, while Joker was left behind, futilely trying to take the bagpipes from Granite's hands.

"Do you think that the Captain is aware of this?!" Vyper asked to the droid.

"There's no doubt about it, sir! The bridge is so far the worst place! The sound there has made it uninhabitable for humanoids! Only Lieutenant Vaiweehanen doesn't seem to be affected! He has got an unstoppable laugh attack, and he has broken two screens with the uncontrolled lashes of his lekkus! I had never seen such a behavior in a Twi'lek, if I may to point it out!"

"Lekkus?!" Vyper asked, although he repaired that the droid meant the Twi'lek's brain tails before Ibero answered. The Intelligence Officer looked back towards the simulator pods, noticing only two still closed.

"Whose are those two?!"

"Solo's and Sparks!" Moose informed while approaching the crowd. "I've been trying to manually open their units, but they have activated the "don't disturb" protocols!"

"If Captain Gen'yaa is coming this way," Arachnoid shouted, as everybody was being forced to do, "they are going to be in trouble...!"

"Not only they, sir!" A-PD5 interrupted. "The communications systems have been affected! I've tried to break the link, but whatever Officers Tengroth and Delinsky have done, it can't be fixed or corrected from the bridge! That is one of the reasons for me to come here, after checking out the source location!"

"The communications systems have been affected??!!" Ibero repeated in disbelief.

"That is my second reason, sir!" We are broadcasting that... music... all over this planetary system!"

"Great. All Imperials less than five millions clicks from us are going to hear it." Vyper said, his tone barely high enough to be heard over the music. Joker had given up in her attempt to make Granite stop playing the bagpipes and had started to sing herself. The four men and the droid noticed that she actually knew the lyrics.

"Well, that is my third and last reason, and the only one that is keeping the Captain and her staff in the bridge! We have detected Imperial ships dropping out from hyperspace! Captain Gen'yaa and Commander Schroeder have tried to call you all, but evidently you have not heard your commlinks beep!" The four pilots looked at once to their respective devices. They were activated. Vyper took his and put it against his right ear, while covering the left one with his free hand. Moving the volume to highest level he was able to hear, not without difficulties, Foxfire's anguished voice.

"... your butts into motion and run to the main bay! We've got a whole fleet out there!!!!"

"We've got to move!" Vyper shouted, waving towards Joker and Granite, but they just saluted back."

"Arachnoid, take those two and go to your fighters NOW!"

"Aye-aye, but what about Solo and Sparks?"

"They will possibly miss the party they have started!" Moose finished.

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Granite was perhaps the only person unaffected by the deafening music blasting through the ship. This was due to the fact that to play Caldanian bagpipes, it first was essential to be able to ignore music totally. He didn't know what the awful tune was, but he found that "Tarlidal Dalra", an old piece about plague, suffering and war fitted rather well, though he occasionally got the notes right when Joker tried to grab the bagpipes.

He was surprised to find the bagpipes wrenched out of his hands by Arachnoid, who leaned over and yelled

in his ear.

"Get to your ship!"

"Whit? Gettler slipped?" replied the Caldanian in confusion.

Arachnoid swore unheard in frustration, then grabbed both Granite and Joker, shoved them together and yelled at them at full volume.

"IMPS!"

"HADN'T WE BETTER GET TO OUR SHIPS THEN?" yelled Joker at the top of her lungs.

"AYE, THE LASS IS RIGHT." thundered Granite "LET'S GO. COME ON, LAD." and with that, he and Joker rushed out of the room, an exasperated Arachnoid following.

The noise in the hangar was even worse. Rather than just the ship wide intercom, the music was coming out of the hangars loud PA system. Somehow it had even managed to get the scramble klaxon wailing in time. The bay was surrounded by a solid wall of sound, and inside they could see techs screaming and holding their heads in pain. Arachnoid and Joker plugged their ears and Granite started shaking a little.

"scuse me a minute" said the Caldanian unheard and he ran off down the corridor.

"What do you think, too much for him?" asked Arachnoid

"Might be he went off for some ear protectors." replied Joker "Hopefully he'll bring us some too. I'm not going in there like this."

A minute later Granite was back, carrying a large black bag.

"Where did you go?" asked Joker.

"Had tae go to the Armoury." replied Granite.

"What, have you got some kind of sound supressor down there?"

"Aye, you could say that." the two other pilots took an involuntary step back as Granite pulled an autocannon from the bag. Clutching the weapon tightly, Granite forced himself forward into the noise. He strode somewhat hesitantly into the middle of the bay, and activated the weapon. The whine as the barrel spun up went unnoticed, but the deafening roar as the gun fired momentarily cut through the music. Granite swung the autocannon around the bay, shooting high up the walls at anything that looked even vaguely like a speaker. In a few seconds the autocannon ran out of ammunition, but that was just as well, as nearly all the speakers had been destroyed. Nearly all. High up on one wall the large PA horn continued to blare out the god awful noise. Even over the music, Joker and Arachnoid could swear they heard Granite growl as he turned to face the one remaining noise source, throwing away his autocannon as he did so. Quick as a flash, Granites sabre appeared in his hand, and he hurled it overhand, embedding it deep in the PA system and cutting off the noise with a strangled squeak. The noise gone, Joker and Arachnoid walked over to where Granite stood still glowering and the broken speaker.

"I thought you liked that music?" said Arachnoid.

"I do," replied the caldanian "but there's such a thing as too much. Now lets go deal with the Imps."

"Hey Granite, you know the captains going to bill you for this damage, don't you?" said Joker

"Ye think I haven't worked that out yet?" replied Granite as he headed for his ship.

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With the "noise pollution" problem taken care of the pilots and hangar techs could proceed with their pre-flight checks of the starfighters. Arachnoid had just finished scrutinizing the hull of his A-Wing when Wolfshead CO, Foxfire, arrived with Cardinal and Sacart from the elevator. The music was barely audible here, but the "woohoo's" could be heard from the tiny elevator loudspeakers. Foxfire wondered why Granite was holding a large gun, but shrugged her shoulders, Granite always carried some item that could create utter chaos and destruction, whether it was his bagpipes or the Ewok Launcher™.

"Vyper, grab those pilots and get over here! I'll run the briefing while the warheads are being loaded.

With most of Wolfsheads pilots around her she quickly explained the situation.

"Because of Solo and Sparks ingenious tampering with the com-system we have a small imperial fleet chasing us. Where are the two misfits anyway?"

"They were still in the sim-pods when we left, there was no way we could get through to them!"

Foxfire grinned wickedly

"Well, they won't be there much longer, A-PD5 and Boradelis are working on that, and Captain Genyaa has sent a couple of guards as "escort"."

She continued,

"The captain has ordered us to find or punch a hole through the Imperial starfleet, and to hold off the imperials while the Den makes it through. She told me that if we die, she is going to court-martial every single one of us, so let's not, ok?"

All pilots nodded in approval of the brilliant plan; destroy imperial ships and don't die!

"Moose and Torpedo, you will lead a flight of B-Wings each. Vyper, you'll have the X-Wings and I'll provide cover in the A-Wings. Granite, is the Bannockburn prepped for fight?"

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Lt. Roo was enjoying a quiet evening aboard the Wolfshead SAR SHU "Compassion". She smiled grandly as she took a long sip from her large FT mug.

"Ah!" she remarked to herself. "I just \*love\* a quiet evening in space."

She sat back in her seat and prepared to return to the Wolfshead when a deafening blast interrupted her daydreaming.

"What in the name of..." she screamed as the sudden noise shocked her and the FT landed on her lap. She took quick control of her SHU and ignored the mess on her lap. Her approaching vessel indicator started flashing now. "Doggone it anyway! Why can't I just have \*one\* peaceful night in the sky?"

Rooster tried to radio the Wolfshead. When she didn't get a reply, she turned the SHU toward the nearest approaching blip and fired off a few rounds. The blip was gone. She aimed at the second nearest blip and fired. The blip grew brighter on her screen and her heart beat harder. She fired again. The blip continued to become brighter and the monitor was telling her that it was approaching her quickly.

Her right wing took a hit and her SHU shuddered. She fired again and the blip was gone. Roo was on full

alert, though she did realize that the deafening blast was gone and she could now hear the Wolfshead on her radio. "Wolfshead, this is the 'Compassion'. Do you copy? There is a small Imperial group headed our way. I got 2 but took a hit in the right wing. Need assistance. I repeat. I need assistance."

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Arachnoid pushed his throttle forward and raced out of the main bay, levelling the A-Wing besides Iceman's fighter. In front of them and slightly below, Hardrive was already paired with Foxfire. The main screen was filled with data about the enemy fleet composition. Two Nebulon-A Frigates, three Carrack Cruisers and a growing number of fighters, including a flight of TIE Bombers. "Is everybody as optimistic as I am?"

"No jokes, Nine, this is going to be serious." Foxfire said, her tone indicating she had fully adopted her Commander role. "All right, this is Wolfshead Leader, flight A is in space. All other groups report."

"This is Two." Vyper's voice sounded as self-controlled as usual. "Flight X is out, too. Locking S-Foils in attack position."

"This is Three, Honey." Moise reported. "Flight B is two in space and two more taking off."

"Why are those two delayed?"

"Let's say that Granite and Joker had a last... exchange of opinions before climbing their ships, but I see them coming now..." Moose interrupted himself when the on-board computer warned that a new transmission was being received on a friendly band.

"... Need assistance. I repeat. I need assistance."

"Have you all picked that? Rooster is in trouble!"

"I've traced a probable position for the Compassion, and maybe three unidentified ships, the size of an Assault Transport." Ibero informed. His X-Wing had the same standard sensor array and electronics than the rest of the flight, but the programs running on his computer and the interface with the R2 unit had suffered important modifications, allowing the astromech unit to make extrapolations from incomplete readings. "The Imps must be interfering her signal, but I think I have her at ten clicks. Transmitting now."

"Copy that." Vyper said as his computer confirmed the reception of the coordinates. They were coming from a different direction than the main body of the Imperial task force. "It seems that Rooster has run into their sneaky group. That is lucky for us, we wouldn't have noticed them otherwise."

"But not so lucky for her..." Sacart commented.

"All right, this is what we do." Foxfire said. "Flight A go cover the Compassion and take down the transports or whatever they are." Only the A-Wings would be fast enough as to reach the Search&Rescue shuttle before an Imperial gunner decided to have some practice on her. "Flights X and B continue with the original plan. Good luck all of you."

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### **[Wolf's Den's simulation room]**

"They will open now." Lieutenant Boradelis informed in her typical Calamarian grave tone.

"All right. You have permission to shoot at them, Lieutenant." Captain Gen'yaa's voice sounded on her wrist transmitter. She didn't seem to be joking.

Solo blinked when his canopy shut open without previous warning interrupting the simulation. Boradelis' fish-like eyes and A-PD5's photoreceptors were the first thing he noticed when his own eyes got used to the sudden illumination.

"What's going on?" Sparks asked from the near pod.

"Trouble." Boradelis said shaking her massive head. Cut that hellish music and I will quickly explain you what is happening, and \*why\* is happening."

"We did what?" Solo asked in disbelief barely thirty seconds later.

"You both are arrested." On of the guards behind Boradelis said. "Although it won't be for too long before the Imps or the Captain herself will kill you." The man's fierce glance showed clearly that he would gladly accomplish that order.

The two pilots obeyed and abandoned the pods, the guards' blasters menacingly aimed at them.

"Instead shooting at them," Boradelis said as she moved aside, "I'd force them to hear that music of them at the same volume they have given us."

"I'll suggest that to..." The same guard started to say, but interrupted himself to lift his blasted to Solo, who was turning towards the pod. "Hey, you...!"

"The music!" Solo exclaimed looking at the man as if he must have reached his same conclusion on his own. "We can use it to take us out of this mess!"

"Of course yes!" Sparks jumped towards his pod and opened the board. The confused guards didn't know whether to shoot at them in that precise moment, or wait until knowing what they were up to.

"Can I ask what are you doing?" Boradelis asked.

"The music." Solo answered, while Sparks made new connections in the already half-dismounted pod. "We can shoot the music at the Imps."

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As the A-Wings peeled off to head for the stricken shuttle, a large black shape emerged out of space, trailing blue fire from it's engines.

"Foxfire, if it's all the same we you, I think I'd better go wi' the A-Wings." Foxfire sighed. Granite was flying that hybrid Blastboat of his. But it made sense. *Bannockburn's* SLAMs meant she could keep up with the A-Wings, and even out run them for a short time. The Skiprays heavy weapons would be very useful against the ships that were bugging Roo as well, if they were assault transports.

"All right Granite, stick with us."

"Way ahead of you, lass." Bannockburns ion drives abruptly flared bright red as Granite kicked in the SLAMs. Foxfire and the other A-Wings had to dump more power to their engines to keep up.

"Hey Foxfire," said Hardrive as the fighters raced towards their rendezvous. "Do you think Roo practices this 'damsel in distress' stuff?"

"No, I think it's just her own fault for piloting an unmaneuverable, poorly shielded virtually unarmed ship near war zones."

Meanwhile, Imp fighters were learning some respect for the 'virtually unarmed' shuttle, as Roo blasted another TIE fighter out of space. "That'll teach you to fly straight and level." muttered Roo as she swung the ship around to avoid the fire from an assault transport. The fighters were picking away at her shields, and the fire from the transports wasn't doing her any good. Normally, she'd have long since pushed the hyperdrive levers forwards, but not expecting to go anywhere, she hadn't logged any co-ordinates into the astrogation computer. It was chirping away happily at the moment, trying to find her a path to anywhere, but it was certainly taking its time. There was garbled traffic coming through on the squadron frequency, but nothing she could identify. She only hoped someone had heard her mayday. A TIE looped in behind her and sent a burst at the the Compassion, Roo yanked back hard on the stick, and the shuttles nose slowly came up, letting the lasers flash harmlessly between the ships wings. The TIE screamed in at her, intent on circling round for another pass, but Roo twitched the stick to the left, blocking its path. The TIE rapidly changed direction and headed away towards one of the transports. The size and weight of Roo's craft was one of the few advantages she had here. No TIE pilot would even consider a collision survivable. But even so, it was only a matter of time...

"There she is!" announced Iceman as he spotted the tell tale green laser flashes, and the occasional reply of orange.

"I'm reading three Assault Transports, and maybe half a dozen fighters."

"All right, A-Wings, form up on Roo. If anything looks like shooting at her, take it down. We're primarily fighter defense. Granite, do what you do best."

"Which is?"

"Cause as much destruction as you possibly can. I wan't those Imps to be as thoroughly annoyed and confused as Orris used to be."

A soft chuckle came back over the comm "Ah think Ah can handle that."

"Sithspawn! one of those AT's is trying to lock Roo up!" cried Iceman. Tough as the shuttle was, she wouldn't withstand a torpedo barrage, and didn't have a hope in hell of avoiding one.

"Everyone, protect the Compassion!"

A-Wings split up into wingman pairs, while Granite activated Bannockburns extra set of SLAMs. The system was highly unstable and shut down all the crafts beam weapons while it was operating, but for a few brief seconds, it made Bannockburn one of the fastest ships in space. And every Imperials worst nightmare come true.

Granite pointed the nose of his craft straight at the offending Imperial transport as the drives let rip. The velocity indicator quickly span up past the 300 MGLT mark as Bannockburn accelerated, the A-Wings following swiftly behind. The big ships hull creaked and groaned horribly under the excessive acceleration, and Granite kept one eye on the engine readout and one line on the range mater. The engine readout had gone straight into the red when the SLAMs were activated, but not quite far enough yet. Granite slowly counted the seconds while the range ticked down. He'd never run the ship full out for more than fifteen seconds. At twelve, the range to the assault transport was down to two point five clicks, and the proton torpedoes started to lock on. At thirteen he saw the flash of torpedoes being launched from the transport towards the Compassion, and at fourteen Granite simultaneously launched his own barrage and deactivated the drives. At the same time, the four A-Wings opened up with their own missiles on the torpedo barrage.

Roo saw the lock light flashing as she turned out of the firing run of another TIE. She turned her ship as hard as possible towards the torpedoes, hoping maybe she could know them down before they hit, but the shuttle was too slow, and too big a target. She saw the streaks of blue in the corner of the viewport, but knew she wouldn't be able to get her guns in line in time, but she tried anyway. She was rewarded by seeing orange streaks lance out, turning each of the torpedoes into a ball of light. Fractions of a second later she saw a larger explosion at their source. As she watched, four A-Wings swept past, firing into the group of TIEs that had been following her. In the distance, a familiar dark shape was silhouetted against the exploding transport.

"Damn, it's nice to have friends" she said with a smile as she turned her ship to help the A-Wings



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**[In the sim-room on board the Wolfs Den]**

"What do you mean: shoot music?" Lt. Boradelis exclaimed, her large eyes wide open in a sign of disbelief. Solo explained:

"By saturating their systems we can hope to confuse them enough to let us escape!"

"Look what it did to the Den!" Sparks continued, "What do you say, A-PD5?"

The droid stood still for a fraction of a second, as if he was thinking.

"Affirmative, imperial systems are no better suited than ours to deal with this kind of... interference."

The Calamarian folded her arms across her chest, humming.

"Alright, but how are you going to pull it off? Transmitting from the 'Den might incapacitate our own fighters as well. Besides, the Imps are surely jamming us by now."

"That's why we're bringing this with us! Let's find a B-Wing, Solo!" Sparks replied as he yanked loose the board with the intercom relay amplifier. The sergeant immediately brought his weapon up, covering the two pilots.

"You are under strict orders not to leave the ship, in fact I'm taking you two to the Brig right now!"

"Easy sergeant!", Boradelis tried to calm down the situation, we're surrounded by enemy starships and these two might have a way out of here.

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Rooster smiled grandly as she saw her friends coming to her aid. A rogue thought crossed her mind and the smile turned to a grimace. "Gee, I sure hope they don't think that I'm always in trouble when I take the Compassion out for a spin." She clicked the intercom on as she watched the spectacular array of blaster fire coming from her friends. "It's beginning to look a lot like the old Emperor's birthday... everywhere I fly!" she sang into the mic. "Thanks for the help folks. We surely appreciate it."

Rooster's piloting abilities were known to be questionable. But one thing she knew for sure: she KNEW this shuttle. And she could manage the large and heavy Compassion admirably. A-wings were a different story. She preferred to not think about it.

"Roo, you got an incoming missile at your nine." Ibero warned. Rooster banked left hard and locked on the incoming missile. When it got into her firing range, she fired steadily at it until the indicator indicated that she hit it.

"Nice shot Roo!" Ibero shouted over the intercom.

"Thanks Ibero. Always a pleasure to be shot at while completing a routine run. Ya think they could leave me alone for just one nite? I mean, what's the deal here? Do I stick out in space so blatantly that I'm a beacon for the Imps? I always seem to have these problems. I really don't like this feeling of being the "damsel in distress". Heck, I wasn't even out there that far. I was still in our flight pattern!"

"I dunno Roo. I'd check this out with Vyper when you get back. But for now, we still have some work to finish.", Ibero commented.

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### **[Wolfs Den, the bridge]**

Lt. Vaiweehanen was picking himself up from the floor, still shaking with laughter. These pilot guys really went out of line sometimes, but this was hilarious he thought. Besides, he kind of enjoyed the music, it was... funky. Now that the blaring had stopped the rest of the bridge crew quickly took to their stations. Captain Genya'a scanned the crew.

"Battle stations, report!" She ordered, and was immediately followed by a chorus of acknowledgments. The ship seemed to be largely unharmed by the recent event, except one of the minor systems who complained about 'a headache'.

Suddenly, through heavy static, Vyper's voice was heard on the bridge.

<crackle> "...Den, we are... heavy fire! ... holding those A-Wings? ... support!" <kshhh>

"Commander, see if you can do something about the interference. We need to coordinate our efforts to get out of this mess!" Talina Gen'yaa motioned to her first officer, Commander Wumb, join efforts with the ship's intelligence officer.

### **[Space]**

The R2 unit squealed about yet another missile trying to acquire lock on the X-Wing, Vyper uttered a curse as he swung the ship around in an evasive pattern. Without the A-Wing support the X-Wings were hard pressed in trying to keep the B-Wings relatively free. Already he heard Moose's voice over the com:

<crackle>"Breaking off the attack, we need to clear space around here! B-Wings, form up in pairs and let's vape some TIE's!"

### **[Wolfs Den. The sim room]**

Boradelis saw a dangerous glare in Solo's eyes, but before he had the chance to stop him the Corellian had already gone into action.

"Hey sarge! Stormtrooper right behind you!"

The trooper lost his attention for a split second, which was all Solo needed. Lunging forward he tackled the soldier right above the knees, sending him crashing to the floor. After a short struggle the guard lay helpless as Sparks helped Solo tie him up.

"Sorry about this, sarge! I'll make it up to you, I promise!" Solo said as he stood up. Sparks gathered his tools and the customized electronics and took a long look at the chief engineer.

"Are you with us Lt.? You know that the Captain can have us court martialled for this, even if we pull it off."

The raspy reply came without hesitation,

"If you don't we're all dead."

"Right, let's find ourselves a B-Wing. Droid, look after the sarge will you. You can let him out in ten minutes."

Moments later the trio came into the hangar, it was relatively deserted now that most of the ships were out. Mar Hanniuska and a couple of her Verpine colleagues were hanging out in the workshop. Seeing Solo and Sparks stepping in she raised an eyebrow.

"Flight officers Tengroth and Delinsky, are you done playing DJ's now? Thought the captain would have had you two keel-hauled by now." Seeing a small bruise on Solo's face she added:

"Guess she tried, huh?"

"We want the B-Wing outside fully loaded, but we'll have the warheads emptied and replaced with these." Sparks showed a handful of receivers, the kind every starship in the galaxy used to relay internal ship communications (Macrosoft™). Mar's eyes glowed with anticipation,

"I think I know what you're up to, it's brilliant! Come on guys, let's go to work. Xssphit, you stay here in case the lady upstairs calls!"

### [In space]

"Lasers out, need help!"

"I'm on it!" Ibero didn't wait for the targeting computer to calculate a firing solution, his quad lasers fired once and the rays impacted on the unshielded imperial fighter making it blow up instantly. All the X- and B-Wings were now tied up in a giant furball, with waves of TIE's replacing their fallen comrades. The bombers were getting through and had already launched a volley of torpedoes at the rebel frigate.

Vyper dumped all energy into his engines as he raced towards the streaks of blue heading for the 'Den, "just a liiittle closer" he thought as his finger flexed the trigger.

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"Aaaaaaaarrrrrrrrggggggghhhhhhh!!!" The two men shouted at once, cramped to fit in a cockpit designed for only one pilot. The first thing they saw when Solo, sitting on Sparks' laps, was able to take the B-Wing out of the main bay, was a barrage of proton torpedoes coming directly against them, and something spitting fire after the warheads. Solo squeezed the trigger by pure instinct and the laser cannons came to life. There was a big explosion, and the B-Wing was in the middle of it.

"This is Two," Vyper said, "are you all right, whoever?" The signal emitted by the B-Wing belonged to one of the reserves. The chances were it was being piloted by one of the Verpins, or even by Lt. Hanniuska.

"Solo and Sparks here..." Solo's voice answered. "We are fine, I think, although this ship is going to need a good paint job."

"Are you both in there?" Vyper asked in astonishment.

"Long story." Sparks snorted. It was a good thing that Hanniuska had recalibrated the acceleration compensator, so he did not feel all Solo's weight in the turns, but breathing was a different problem. "We need to get closer to their capital ships, and then we may be able to do something to make our way out of this mess."

"Closer to the caps... Four, can you help me over here?"

"I'll do my best, Two." Ibero replied. "I'm a bit busy right now, but I'll check my agenda for the next thirty seconds."

"I say we try the two Nebulon-A." Solo proposed. "They are bigger targets, and we don't know how accurate our shots will be."

"It should be enough." Sparks said, while working on his partner's back over a connections array."

"Ooouuuuuggggghhhh!!!"

"Sorry, that was my micro-welder. It can't be so terrible."

"Can't be? Next time you pilot and I play with micro -welders on \*your\* back!"

"Do you think you guys will make it to the target?" Vyper asked. The B-Wing's flight was a bit too erratic for his taste.

"We'll do just if... Watch out!"

"It's mine!" Ibero's voice sounded. The TIE Fighter heading straight towards them lost its right solar panel and flew away spinning out of control. Vyper vaped his wingmen, before he had a chance to take his revenge on Ibero's X-Wing. Most of the squad, including Moose's and Torpedo's flights of B-Wings were trying to open a corridor for Solo and Sparks, but it was closing over them really fast.

"Two klicks to the first frigate, and three point five to the second one." Vyper informed. "Is this close enough?"

"What do you think, mate?" Sparks asked.

"I've been training a lot. All ready back there?"

"As ready as it's going to be. Cross your fingers when you shoot."

"Fingers crossed and... First volley, two on the first frigate! Locking on the other one..."

"All right, Wolfies," Sparks said through the intercom. "for your own safety, don't tune the Imperial frequencies, I repeat, don't tune the Imperial frequencies!"

"Why not?" Granite wondered while maneuvering his Bannockburn for a new pass on the two surviving assault transports. Foxtire's group was doing a good work with their TIE escort, and Rooster was as safe as she could expect to be flying a so crippled shuttle. Sparks' warning was too a temptation for the Caldanian as to ignore it. He performed an auto-scan on the Imperial frequencies, and soon the codified chat of the Imperial pilots filled his headphones."

"Don't understand. Are they going to say any inconvenience we should not hear, not even encrypted?"

Suddenly, the Imperial's voices were overpowered by something infinitely stronger, overwhelming and free of codification.

"Yeaaaaaaaahhhhhhhh, that's it, let's rock!!!!!"

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### **[Wolfs Den, the bridge]**

"Five seconds to torpedo impact... three, two, one, brace brace brace!" The young officer kept his eyes on the display in front of him as he held on to the railing. The warship shook when the explosives impacted on what was left of the shields. Captain Geny'aa didn't even flinch, the Bothan female barked out her orders,

"Tell the gunners to wake up! The shields are not going to survive another barrage like this one! What's the

status on those frigates and cruisers?"

"Captain, we're picking up a strange signal coming from the imperial frigates!"

"Put it on the speakers!" <greatly reduced noise level>...please to meet you, hope you guessed my na... The intelligence officer quickly switched off the transmission when he saw the glare from the Sullustan first officer.

"Guess we know now what those two morons in the B-Wing were up to!"

"Captain, the imperials have stopped firing, they seem to have a communication breakdown."

"What ever Solo and Sparks did, it seems to work. I just might not court martial them if we can get out of this mess. And you should feel lucky too, I'd have you charged with helping escaped felons!" That last part was addressed to the chief engineer, Boradelis. The Calamarian didn't respond, but she lowered her forehead in an expression of challenge. The Twi'lek navO quickly intervened, "Captain, I have a safe hyperspace jump courseplotted out! Shall I relay the coordinates to the fighters?"

The captain looked up,

"Helm, bring us out of here. Tell the fighters to withdraw as soon as they can, we need to pick up the damaged shuttle before making the jump."

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### **[S&R Shuttle Compassion]**

Rooster had received the instructions about not tuning the Imperial freqs., and wondered as the rest of the pilots what that was all about, when suddenly the enemy pilots seemed to become crazy, to be drunk, or both at once. The two surviving assault transports crashed violently, one of them exploding immediately, while two TIE fighters did the same in front of her.

"For all the stars... what's going on???"

The astonished Lumi noticed that not only the Imperials had lost sanity. Granite's Bannockburn was about to be caught between the two colliding transports, as the pilot had flown through the narrow space in the middle just an instant before, spinning almost out of control and shooting with his cannons linked. An Imperial fighter disappeared in a ball of fire as the modified Blastboat crossed in its trajectory. Rooster could not appreciate if Granite had shot down the TIE or just ran into it.

"Whatever they are doing is working!" Foxfire's voice said in her speakers. "What's your status, Roo?"

"Could be worse. The ship tends to turn starboard, what makes me think the etheric rudder is damaged, but if I keep both hands on the yoke I can manage it and you probably won't notice the difference with my usual piloting style. The sub-light engine is working close to eighty percent, but I've lost the hyperdrive..."

"Great. Fly as fast as you can towards the Wolf's Den and we'll cover you."

"Copy that." Rooster was already driving the Compassion in that direction.

"Flight A, this is Leader, we are coming back to the Wolf's Den. Don't let any fighter get close to the Compassion."

"It seems they have trouble enough just to fly straight." Hardrive chuckled.

"Sure, but we don't know how much time they'll take to recover of whatever Solo and Sparks have done."

"I have a slight idea about what it is that..."

"Leader, this is Eight." Iceman said. "There is something wrong about Granite."

"Are these supposed to be news?" Arachnoid said.

"Eleven, this is Leader." Foxfire called ignoring Arachnoid's comment, although she fully subscribed it. "Are you copying?"

Nothing.

"Eleven?"

The *Bannockburn* kept flying in an unpredictable pattern, good if it were under the fire of a capital ship, but this was not the case. The Caldanian pilot had to be suffering the same sickness than the Imperial pilots, although he seemed to be enjoying it. Another TIE exploded and the Blastboat crossed through the cloud of flamed gases turning it into an almost perfect ring. Definitely, Granite was having fun.

"Oh, just so perfect." Foxfire gave up. "We can't do anything about Granite, and we better move away from him. I don't know if he notice the difference between us and the Imps. We are coming back with the Compassion, all right?"

The rest of the pilots acknowledged the order and turned towards their mothership.

### **[Space around the Wolf's Den]**

"Wolfshead Squad, this is Lieutenant Vaiweehanen." The voice of the Twi'lek officer reached every fighter. "New coordinates are being uploaded to your navigation computers. As soon as we recover the Compassion you are to jump at your discretion."

"Copy that, Wolf's Den." Vyper acknowledged. "What is your estimation of the time until the Compassion arrival?"

"Two minutes if nothing else happens." Vyper thought the Twi'lek had broken into laughter, but the line was closed before he could be sure. He made a mental shrug and took a look at the situation around him. The Imperial lines were a complete disorder, although many of the enemy fighters had returned individually to combat, even in a disorganized way. They surely had cut their communications before their heads exploded under the burst of Solo's and Sparks' gift. He had no doubt that many of them had been left temporary deaf anyway.

"Three, this is Two." He called. "What do you think we can do now?"

"We have some torps remaining." Moose answered. "It would be a shame not to use them to increase their problems a bit."

"My opinion, too. All right, you've got one last pass on the closest Frigate. I think there is room for the Wolf's Den to escape, but it's better to be sure."

"Roger that. OK, boys, link your computers with mine. I want you to launch your warheads on my mark..."

"This is Ten." Solo said. "What are we supposed to do?"

"Keep the music on."

**[Wolf's Den's bridge]**

Captain Talina Gen'yaa shook her head. Things were easier when she only had to worry about her own ship, the spy Corvette "Curious Cat", and a crew composed in its greater part by Bothans. She had imagined that all these human pilots were going to cause trouble, but they were leaving behind her wildest expectations. Now she fully understood Captain Orris' wide smile the only time they met, when Wolfshead Squadron was transferred to her new ship...

Her second in command, Captain Wumb, interrupted her thoughts.

"The Compassion has just landed in the main bay." The Sullustan informed. "We are ready to jump."

"Very well. Order to energize the hyperdrives and let's get out of here. Ah, and tell the forward gunners to aim at that Nebulon-A. With some luck, will leave a disabled capital ship at our back." She turned to look again at the viewscreen, while Wumb followed her instructions. Her expression was serious and concentrated, but there was a bright of amusement in her cold blue eyes. Her orders were to investigate traces of Imperial presence in this sector. They had not only accomplished that mission successfully, but sustained a battle in numeric inferiority and damaged the enemy fleet without suffering any considerable losses in return. Actually, if they were able to disable that Frigate, the Imperials were going to be trapped in this area for some time, perhaps enough for the High Command to send a task force to finish the job. Yes, she was going to score some points off what had seemed to be a complete disaster. Perhaps she would not arrest any pilot today.

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**[Space, outside the Wolfs Den]**

Foxtire keyed the comm as soon as she saw the Compassion settle on the hangar floor,

"All flights, the Compassion is safely delivered home, let's clear the area."

"Nice you could make it, A-flight!" Moose replied with some sarcasm, "We could use some fighter suppression if we're to snuggle up close to that frigate, you know! These interceptor pilots are no cannon fodder.. watch it 17, you got company!"

"Can't shake him.. <scratch, screech> ..epons out!" Sacart was struggling wildly with the controls, trying to keep the battered fighter out of the line of fire. Suddenly the hail of green bolts stopped, glancing back over his shoulder Sacart saw the interceptor explode and one of the A-Wings narrowly evading the debris.

"Yahooo! You're all clear now, better make that jump for hyperspace and head for home!" Arachnoid waved his fighter twice before heading off in search of a new target.

The rest of the B-Wings formed up with the X-Wings flanking them, the accurate fire from the A-Wings kept the imperial fighters off their back for the time being.

"On my mark, 3, 2, 1, mark!" Moose pressed the trigger and watched as the torpedoes whizzed away at their intended target. There was a chorus of acknowledgments as the other pilots unloaded their warheads on the frigate.

With communication blocked by Rolling Asteroids "Sympathy for the Darth", the gunners on the imperial frigate had no way of coordinating their efforts to stop the attack. Their individual marksmanship was admirable but didn't do much to change the fate of their ship. While her interior shook with the steady beat of drums and "woohoo's", the shields finally collapsed. Not that many of her crew noticed it, most of them were struck with panic, struggling to keep their sanity.

"Wolfs Den, this is One. You have a clear hyperspace jump lane!" switching over to squadron frequency Foxtire continued, "Alright, the B-Wings will jump first. Moose, you're clear! We'll cover you, not that there is

any serious need for it. X-Wings and A-Wings, jump at your own discretion. And can someone get our two friends in the odd B-Wing to jump too?"

Solo and Sparks were rocking away in their rather cramped cockpit,

"Hey Solo! Look what I found tucked away behind the seat!" Sparks held up a bottle filled with brownish liquid in front of Solo's visor.

"Looks like Granite has used the cockpit as a secret Malt stash, is there a bagpipe back there too?"

Sparks crawled back best he could, accidentally hitting a lever causing the B-Wings large wing to start spinning. A TIE fighter venturing a little close to the rebel ship accidentally got swatted.

"Nope, nothing else back here except the bottle."

"That's ok, we've got some music here anyway!" Solo said turning up the volume some more while evading incoming battery fire from one of the Strike Cruisers. Sparks had a look around, checking the positions of the other ships.

"Solo, looks like the others are leaving! Don't you think we should too? The 'Den is about to jump and the others are on their way. Looks like they've managed to disable one of the frigates too. Wait, Granite's left! His ship is moving in the strangest way... it's...rocking!"

Solo checked the in-flight map with some difficulty, trying to get Sparks' knee out of the way,

"Looks like we should get a move on, we have the jump coordinates from the 'Den. What do you say we turn off the music, hail Granite and get out of here. I wanna get into hyperspace really soon, we're about to have some company." He nodded towards the map where several groups of TIE fighter icons were converging on their position.

"Ok Solo, I'll hail Bannockburn." Sparks quickly turned down the volume, and switched on the radio, "Granite, Sparks here! Let's move out, the others have already left this party"

"Awww! Just when things were goin' really well for once!"

Just as Solo was getting ready to hit the hyperspace lever, Sparks cried out: "Stop! Give me just a few more seconds, I have an idea!"

Sparks was working quickly trying to use a portable fuel cell as a power source for the comm relay amplifier, Solo caught on and started readying the small airlock normally used to jettison garbage.

"Hey guys! What are we waiting for?" Granite eyed the lone B-Wing, the music had stopped and he was worried about the imperials getting their act together before they had the chance to jump, time was running out as he heard the usual coded chatter start again on the imperial frequencies.

### **[Inside the B-Wing]**

"Ready?"

"Sure, let's go!" Sparks switched on the record player again and jettisoned it through the airlock. "That ought to cover our escape! Sorry about your record though..."

Solo grinned and hit the hyperspace lever. As the stars stretched out into lines of light he heard the distinct sound of a liquor bottle being unscrewed, his grin got even wider; this hyperspace jump was going to be just great. Granite followed moments after, jubilating at the complete chaos they had left behind.



**[Later, on the Wolfs Den]**

The elevator door hissed open and the two pilots staggered out, obviously terribly hung over. They flinched from the stare they got from their CO, Foxfire.

"Ah, there you are, how nice of you to come!" The Bothan's voice was sweet but she couldn't hide the irony. Solo felt sweat trickle down his forehead, "I was just explaining to Commander Schroeder here the importance of following Alliance navy regulations, you know; *like radio silence when on a mission!*"

Captain Gen'yaa almost shouted out the last part of the sentence. She managed to compose herself before continuing, "I would have you court martialed for jeopardizing my crew, but since you were resourceful enough to "adjust" the situation I will let you go, for now."

She said, with quite a smile and a glance at Foxfire,

"However, I think that your commanding officer have something to say, maybe you want to take it outside?"

All Sparks could think of was how good he knew Foxfire was at handling the crowbar.

"Solo, Sparks, I truly think you deserve this: You will be transferred to Dustmop Wing™ for a period of two weeks, effective immediately!"

## THE END



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