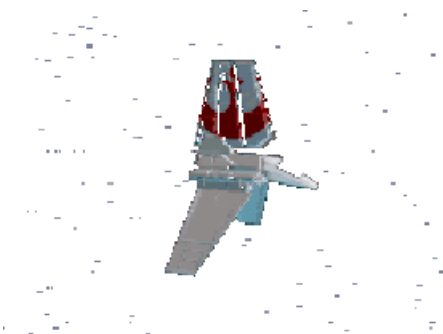




Reading Room

StarWars FanFiction **POV: Vyper's Sidetrip**

By Michael "Vyper" Stauber



The shuttle pilot checked his watch for the fifth time and cursed utterly. Not only had this trip been completely unscheduled catching him off-guard. No, the passenger was also late. Just out of boredom he ran through his preflight checklist again. Suddenly he heard footsteps on the cargo ramp and with a relieved sigh he put his noteputer down and turned around in his pilot seat. He shot an angry stare at what he expected to be another recruit fresh from the pilot proving ground and still wet behind his ears. In the dim light inside the shuttle he could only make out a tall figure in a black leather jumpsuit that held a large bag in one hand and something else in the other hand. On first glimpse he wasn't sure what that was, but when the passenger came closer he couldn't

decide what was more scary. The jumpsuit that still showed a darker area in the shape of the imperial crest on the left breast pocket, or the standard FE-MEK45 assault blaster of the Imperial Special Forces in the holster on the right hip of this stranger.

The pilot swallowed the angry greeting that he had prepared and watched his passenger with rising curiosity. When the stranger stepped a bit closer the pilot could make out his face for the first time. He guessed that the man was in his mid twenties. Despite his age the brown hair already seemed to be thinning out in the corners of his forehead. His eyes had the wary look of one who was constantly on the lookout for dangers, but his raised shoulders showed enough confidence to deal even with the unexpected.

Suddenly the passenger threw his bag into a corner of the cockpit and extended his right hand. The shuttle pilot hesitated a moment before he took it and was rewarded with a firm, but short grip. "Greetings, I'm Captain Vyper. I take it that you're the one who flies this crate to the Joan D'Arc?"

The pilot nodded and turned a switch on his instrument table to close the ramp. "Yeah, right. I'm Lt. Elliot and I hope you enjoy this ride. You're half an hour late."

Vyper slipped into the vacant copilot seat without invitation and fastened his seatbelts. Then he patted his blaster with his fingertips and said in a low voice: "Yeah, I know. I had to fetch my toy from the security detail which had it stored away for obvious reasons. Took them forever to find it and I didn't want to leave without it. Too many good memories, you know."

The pilot nodded while his fingers danced over the controls to fire up the engines. After asking the tower for clearance and all the way out of the Regis' hangar bay he added: "We don't see many of those here anyway, especially not when they're carried by people in imperial flightsuits."

Vyper chuckled and extended his feet as far as the cramped space in the cockpit allowed. He had to resist the reflex to put them on the rudder controls, though. "Yeah, right. To answer your unasked question, Lt. Elliot: Yes, I was with the Empire for a long while until I realized that I was flying for the wrong side and the wrong cause. I just finished my training with Red Squadron and answered all the questions that the security detail could come up with. That you don't see any guards accompanying me should be proof of my credibility, though."

Elliot shot a long stare over to Captain Vyper. "My remark wasn't intentioned as disrespect, Sir."

Vyper let out a long sigh. "I know. But I got too used to that. Heck, even my own brother started to question my motives." Vyper looked out of the side window and watched the FRG Regis that slowly vanished in the distance. Then he started to chuckle. "The curious thing is, though, as long as we were fighting for different sides we got along without any problems."

The shuttle pilot had already locked in the coordinates for their destination and engaged the hyperdrive. The stars elongated and they leaped into the higher dimensions that would engulf them as long as they traveled with a speed faster than the light of the stars until they would reach the first destination of their voyage.

"Your brother?", the pilot asked just to keep the conversation going. He did not have much to focus his attention on in the meantime anyways.

"Yeah, right. You've probably heard of him, or at least of his Alligator Rory. Raven from Corsair Squadron. While I served with the Black Knights of Alpha Wing we did some undercover jobs together and busted a mad Imperial scientist who did bio-weapon research in the Magean Drift."

Lt. Elliot blinked in disbelief and leaned forward. "The Black Knights? You're kidding. They're just a hoax and something to scare alliance children when they refuse to eat their spinach."

A wicked grin appeared on Vyper's face. "I wouldn't be so sure about that. The reward that Lord Vader set on my head is not for the speeding tickets I got while passing through Coruscant's orbit."

Before the pilot could ask more questions something unexpected happened. The constant humming sound of the engines suddenly flared up into a loud staccato of howls and the shuttle started to shiver and vibrate with growing force. Elliot's hands danced over the controls while Vyper's face grew longer. With a loud sound a panel on the roof of the cockpit popped open and a cloud of black smoke poured out of the gap. An instant later they dropped out of hyperspace. At the same time the sensors came back on line and a red light started to blink on the threat board between their seats. "Multiple hostile crafts on intercept course!", Elliot yelled and yanked the controls.

Vyper adjusted the scanner on his side of the cockpit and let out a curse. "One Interdictor and two Frigates. And if that wasn't enough, they also have a full contingent of Eyeballs as well. Three of them at nine o'clock, four more on our six, watch out!"

"And seven straight ahead. Darn, we're dead meat." Elliot let go the throttle and reached for the radio.

Vyper grabbed the stick on his side of the cockpit and took over the controls. He banked the shuttle into a tight turn and not a moment too soon. Half a dozen fingers of green laser light streaked through the void where the shuttle would have been had he not changed their course. "Not so fast, my friend. They're not going to take prisoners anyways. Is this crate armed?"

Elliot shot him an angry glance. "Are you kidding? We can't run and we can't fight. Surrender is our only chance!"

Two Tie Fighters streaked past them as Vyper rolled out the shuttle which did build up speed although very slowly. He hadn't flown a shuttle in a long time, but he realized that it didn't behave as badly as the Gunboat did, which he was more than used to. But it was much slower than the Gunboat and he had to do something about that. He redirected all energy but 25% to the engines and firewalled the throttle. The Interdictor was now behind them and on their left side and most of the TieFighters were closing in from behind. The large sail of a Frigate suddenly filled the viewscreen and they already could make out the guntowers that trailed out to unleash their fiery beams on them. With growing horror Elliot watched Vyper as he jerked the controls and put the shuttle into a Wotan Weave that strained the gravity suspensors to their maximum. The sensors told Elliot that they had been locked on by four Eyeballs and the rest of them were closing fast. Additionally the Frigate in front of them would without doubt open fire in only a couple of seconds. A thought sneaked up in his mind and brought a cold realization to him: "They knew that you were coming, right?"

Vyper switched off all unnecessary systems to squeeze out more energy for the engines. "Probably, but I wouldn't bet on it. This sector has had a lot of pirate activity lately and this could be a routine mop up. Anyway, this better work 'cause we're running out of options. Stand by for a jump to lightspeed."

"Err ... Sir ... we're still in the Interdictors bubble! We can't!"

With an evil grin Vyper watched the laser beams of the Frigate pass by as he accelerated the spin of the shuttle and suddenly leaped around the corner of the Frigate's sail. Two erratic shots hit their fading shields but didn't do any serious damage while they raced along the frigates spine to it's engine section. Then the red light on the shuttles console suddenly went from red to yellow. At that moment he kicked in the hyperdrive and with a groaning sound they burst into the safety of hyperspace.

The quick jump took them only two light-years away and they performed a couple of other hasty jumps before he thought it safe to head for their intended destination. All the while Elliot had his hands grasping the edges of his armrest so hard that the skin turned white on his knuckles.

When Vyper engaged the auto-pilot he realized Elliot's trouble and said with an assuring tone in his voice: "Hey, calm down. We got away and we're totally safe here. The Empire has to look out for easier bait this time."

Elliot let out a long sigh and stretched his hands. "Easier bait? We are supposed to be dead. How come we got away from the Interdictor? Damned, I can't believe you took on a Frigate with an unarmed shuttle!"

Vyper scratched his nose and reached behind his seat and searched for something below and on the ground. "That was our only chance. The power plant of a Frigate generates a lot of energetic disturbances and directly in her propulsion wake is a small zone that disturbs the Interdictor's force field. The chance was slim and it had a lot to do with the right distance of the disturbance and where the source of the forcefield is. Learned that once when I flew with the Dark Riders and kicked Zaarin's butt in a long and bloody campaign."

Now it was Elliot's turn to chuckle. "I guess evading Interdictors is not the subject of flying lessons back on the Regis?"

Vyper grinned and pulled his bag on his knees and started to dig through it. "Nope. That's one of the things you learn when the dirt hits the fan. And remember one thing: Never give up easily and without a fight. If I had done that I'd still be rotting in a small cell on the ISD Happy Jack. Now that was an adventure, believe me. I realized too late that the Rebels had already taken over the ISD and unsuspectingly I flew right into the hangar. They locked me right into the brig, but with the help of Rory and a bottle of this stuff ...", he drew a silver flask out of his back, unscrewed it and took a small sip, "... I managed to escape."

He handed the bottle over to Elliot and drew a small card out of his bag before he put it back onto the floor.

"If you ever want to become a combat pilot yourself, then contact the man listed on this card. Just tell him

I've sent you and Snyder might give you a chance to earn your living." Then he removed the bottle from Elliot's mouth after he had taken more than one sip. "Heck, don't drink that much, you still need to fly us to the Joan d'Arc!"

Elliot laughed and leaned back in his seat. "Too bad. I could get used to having my own chauffeur."

Vyper grinned and took another sip of his Zwetschgenschnaps. "Too bad that this thing didn't have guns. This shuttle sure would look nice with all those kills painted on it's beam. Just imagine, two Frigates and an Interdictor."

Elliot turned white and stared at him. "Can I have another sip?"

THE END



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